Ron Cantor

Seven Proofs the Book of John is not Antisemitic—

though it sometimes feels that way!

Seven Proofs the Book of John is not Antisemitic—

though it sometimes feels that way!

Table Of Contents

Introduction 04

The phrase "The Jews" 06

Judean vs. Galilean 08

Don't be so Negative 09

Israelite 10

Your father is the Devil 11

A Family Squabble 15

The Jews loved Jesus 18

Introduction

There are many claims that the Jewish apostle, John, was actually an antisemite by the time he wrote his gospel. New Testament scholar Eldon Jay Epp claimed in 1975 that,

> The attitude toward the Jews that finds expression in ... the Gospel of John coacted with the extraordinary popularity of that gospel so as to encourage and to buttress anti-Semitic sentiments among Christians from the second century C.E. until the present time. *This leads to the conclusion that the Fourth Gospel, more than any other book in the canonical body of Christian writings, is responsible for the frequent anti-Semitic expressions by Christians* during the past eighteen or nineteen centuries, and particularly for the unfortunate and still existent characterization of the Jewish people by some Christians as 'Christ-killers.'[1]

Rich Barlow, in reviewing The Courageous Gospel, by Robert Hill, writes,

> [John's] gospel also is *laced with anti-Semitism*, referring to Jesus' enemies, clamoring for his execution, simply as "the Jews." Hill notes that at the time it was written, John's community of Jesus-following Jews was being expelled from their synagogues, as Judaism and Christianity finally [split] into separate religions. Hill … says it's essential that "the tragic history of anti-Semitism in Christianity, and some of it is connected to the Gospel of John, is rooted up and understood, that John is understood, in its particular context."[2]

Messianic Scholar Jen Rosner talks about how John became a "go-to place" for antisemitic theology, and it "played out in very destructive ways. The Gospel of John is taken at face value to be this horribly antisemitic document. So then, antisemites…can say, 'Look, [Jew hatred is] in the New Testament.'"

Below are seven points to dispel the idea that John and his Gospel are antisemitic. Hill is most likely correct that John and his Messianic community had finally been driven out from the synagogue. But they are not forsaking their Jewishness, even if highlighting the deep divide between them and their

---

[1] E. J. Epp, "Anti-Semitism and the Popularity of the Fourth Gospel in Christianity," *Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis 22* (1975) 35

[2] https://www.bu.edu/articles/2013/beauty-and-anti-semitism-the-gospel-of-john/

Pharisaical brothers. John does not mention any other sects of Judaism except the Pharisees because, at the time of his writing, more than a decade after the destruction of Jerusalem, the only two sects of Judaism that survived were Pharisaical Judaism and Messianic Judaism.[3] The Zealot movement was destroyed by Rome. And the Sadducees ceased to exist.[4] The Essenes also disappeared around this time. If this was intentional, it was because, for his community that was dealing with rejection from the larger Jewish world—now exclusively pharisaical Judaism—the other groups were irrelevant, obsolete.

The 19th *Blessing* was a *Curse!*

I maintain that his audience was primarily Jewish and was dealing with the results of the 19th benediction. This was a prayer added to the Amidah, the central prayer of Jewish liturgy, prayed three times a day, that was inserted much later to weed out heretics. But not just your garden variety heretics, heretics, also *Notzrim*. Notzrim is thought to be the name that Jewish Jesus followers took for themselves.[5] For a Messianic Jew in the synagogue to pray this prayer, he would be calling down a curse upon himself. This way, Messianic Jews were pushed out of the synagogue. There is a lot of scholarly debate regarding the veracity of this view, but I believe it to be accurate.

So it is against this backdrop, Jewish believers being separated from the Jewish synagogue, that John decides to write down his account of walking with the Messiah—his best friend. Many scholars believe this was the beginning of the *parting of the ways,* but where they err, in my opinion, is in viewing it as a parting of the ways between Christians and Jews, when in fact, it was between Jews and Jews.

You have to see John, a significant Jewish leader, writing to his community of Jewish believers who are being persecuted by Pharisaical Jews. Some were no doubt turning their back on their faith as they understood the cultural repercussions of being kicked out of the synagogue. This is one reason

---

[3] Yochanan Ben Zakkai received permission from, soon to be emperor Vespasian to reform in Yavne, in southern Judea. There, he contributed greatly to codification of the Oral Law in what is known as the Mishnah. The (missing the ref number) Messianic Jews had fled as the Romans surrounded the city, remembering Yeshua's words from Luke 21:20. For more, see https://www.roncantor.com/post/audio-message-the-fascinating-history-of-the-first-messianic-jews

[4] "Their lives and political authority were so intimately bound up with Temple worship that after Roman legions destroyed the Temple, the Sadducees ceased to exist as a group, and mention of them quickly disappeared from history." https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sadducee

[5] For more info on Notzrim, see https://www.roncantor.com/post/was-matthew-a-false-prophet

that Hebrews was written—to encourage the Jewish believers not to reject their faith.

As a young Messianic Jew, I remember going to Brooklyn to meet with two rabbis. They told me I could have everything that I had found in Yeshua, in a Judaism without him. I desperately wanted them to be correct. As I walked around the Orthodox area of Brooklyn, and I saw the pizza guys wearing a kippa, I wanted to be part of them. I was tired of being rejected. I had become a laughingstock to my parents' friends. If only I could return to Richmond as an Orthodox Jew, I would win their respect. I would no longer be seen as a traitor or unstable. Of course, I concluded that I had found *the Pearl of great price,* and I would not trade him for anything. I understood the pressures that John's community was under.

John writes his testimony to encourage his community that they have indeed found the truth. He frames the argument between the Jewish Jesus and his exclusively Jewish followers and the Pharisees. John never dreamed that less than a century later, people would reframe the argument, as Christian versus Jew, God versus the Devil, truth versus lies, and then be used later as a proof text for persecution, coerced conversions, expulsion, and ultimately genocide.

So, let's once and for all dissect the heart of *John the beloved* and his testimony of his best friend and Messiah, Yeshua.

1. The phrase "The Jews"

Did John, an observant Galilean Jew, present Yeshua as an antisemite, as someone who hated his people? A careful reading with *first-century Jewish lenses* would suggest not. Still, reading today, one cannot help but feel that John is being more than a little ill-mannered with his constant reference to *"the Jews" (see the last paragraph on point six).*

Heard in modern ears, it can sound like your typical antisemitic trope.

- *The Jews* control the media.
- *The Jews* control the banking system.
- *The Jews* are responsible for communism.

The author of an article I read about ten years ago entitled "Jesus and the Jews" used the phrase *"the Jews"* over fifty times. Mostly, he is referring to the

small group of men who brought Yeshua to Pilate. But let's examine who "the Jews" actually were.

John 18:12 makes it clear that it was not *"the Jews"* who brought Yeshua to Pilate, but "Jewish officials," "officers of the Jews," or the "Temple guards," just to quote a few modern translations.

The problem with the way the phrase "the Jews" sounds today is that it feeds into antisemitic claims that *all of the Jews, for all time,* were involved in Jesus's death. It is true that in the Greek, John, at certain times, simply writes the phrase "the Jews" (John 18:14; 19:7, 12), or *ho Ioudaioi* in Greek, but there can be no doubt that he is referring to the Jewish leadership. In fact, at least 14 modern English translations[6], such as the NIV, TLV, CJB, and NET, translate those passages using the phrase "the Jewish Leaders" as opposed to "the Jews" even though they know that the Greek says, "the Jews." How can they be so bold?

Take a look at John 18:14: "Now it was Caiaphas who advised *the Jews* that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (NKJV). In this passage, it states clearly that Caiaphas was speaking to "the Jews"; he advised, "the Jews." However, if we turn back a few pages, we can actually peer into this conversation:

> Then the *chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin*…. Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:47, 49-50).[7]

So "the Jews" of John 18 and 19 are clearly *the Jewish leaders*, not the Jewish population.

Let's look at John 9—the healing of the blind man.

> *The Jews* did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of

[6] https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/John%2018:14

[7] While Caiaphas was speaking prophetically, his understanding of what he was saying was that it would be "better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation to perish," was about the Romans seeing Yeshua as a revolutionary. In times past, and as the future would testify, Rome would be ruthless in dealing with revolutionaries. This was his concern.

> *the Jews*; for *the Jews* had already agreed that anyone who confessed Yeshua to be the Messiah would be *put out of the synagogue*. (John 9:18-22)

Who are "the Jews" here? The blind man was Jewish. His parents were Jewish. Jesus was Jewish and all of his followers, including John, who was taking notes, were Jewish. And the resisters were Jewish. In fact, everyone we see in the entire book, except for John 4 in Samaria, John 12 (though these were probably Greek-speaking Jews since they came to worship in Jerusalem for Passover), and the Romans at the end of the story, is Jewish.

It is quite easy to determine to whom John is referring when he says *the Jews* here. They are the ones with the power to "*put out of the synagogue*" (see also 12:42) those who followed Yeshua. And that would be the *local* synagogue, or at most, the Jerusalem region, as most scholars agree, this took place at or very close to the Temple. But it would not include the Galilee and certainly not the millions of Jews scattered abroad who had never even heard of the Galilean Rabbi.

> "The Jews" is, then, a term used of a group of *Jewish leaders* who exercise great authority among their compatriots and are especially hostile to Jesus and his disciples. A recent study of the gospels' use of *Ioudaioi (Jews)* confirms the view that when it is used in a peculiarly Johannine sense, that is, not with reference to Judeans or to Jewish customs, feasts, and so forth, it refers to certain authorities rather than to the people as a whole.[8]

2. Judean vs. Galilean

The land of Israel was separated into three regions: Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Yeshua and His disciples were Galilean, not Judean. The Samaritan woman refers to Jesus as a Jew—the same word for Judaean. Possibly, because she did not realize he was Galilean. Keep in mind he spent some years in Bethlehem before moving to Nazareth after coming out of Egypt. It's possible he had a Judean accent.

While technically, both the Judeans and the Galileans were *Jews*, there was tension between the two groups. Galilean Jews were more passionate about

[8] https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/cbaa_seminar/Smith.htm

the land of Israel; hence there was a high number of Zealots in the region. The Pharisees were more concerned with the legal aspects of the Torah, both written and oral. The latter, who were regular critics of Yeshua, were mostly Judean. The word for Judean and Jew is the same: Yehudi.

Ironically, it's not dissimilar from the tension between modern Orthodox sects and Messianic Jews. Messianic Jews tend to be much more passionate about the land of Israel, while most Orthodox Jewish movements resisted Zionism and the re-formation of the nation of Israel. Judaism, the religion, was enough.

When Mark records: "The Pharisees and all the *Jews* do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders," he probably means *Judeans*. It means Jews as opposed to Judeans; it would include Yeshua and his disciples—which in context, it didn't. However, Dr. David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible* translates this: "For the Pharisees and indeed all the *Judeans*..." Both the Dictionary of Biblical Languages (DBL) and Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG), highly respected biblical Greek dictionaries, confirm that *Ioudaios* can mean either Jew or Judean, obviously depending on context.

Given the fact that the Galileans were not as obsessed with the ritual or liturgical aspects of Judaism, this makes sense. And we can see why John may have used this term when he was in Jerusalem, as he is a Galilean.

Stern translates *Ioudaios* 55 times[9] in John as Judean(s), not Jew(s). For instance, in John 1:19, was it *the Jews* from Jerusalem who sent Levites and priests to check out Yeshua, or was it the Judeans? Judeans make much sense, as they were sending them *from Judea to the Galilee.*

3. Don't be so Negative

Not all references to *the Jews* are negative in John:

- "Salvation is from the Jews" (4:22).
- "Many people (all Jews) believed in Yeshua" (2:23).
- "Many Jews believed Yeshua was a prophet or even the Messiah" (7:40-41).

---

9 https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?qs_version=CJB&quicksearch=judean&begin=50&end=50

- "And in that place many (Jews) believed in Jesus, after the Hannukah confrontation (10:42).
- John reports that after Yeshua raised Lazarus from the dead, "many of *the Jews* … believed in him" (11:45).
- "…a large crowd of *Jews* found out that Jesus was [in Bethany] and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" (12:9-11). The chief priests (not *all Israel*) "made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him, many of *the Jews* were going over to Jesus and believing in him." Without understanding the nuance, it could appear that *the Jews* wanted to kill Lazarus because *the Jews* were following Jesus. But of course, that is not what it says.
- The Pharisees lament, "Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (12:19). Clearly, the whole world is hyperbole, referring to Judeans in Jerusalem at the time—a very large number of *the Jews* loved Jesus!

John's Jesus is clearly Jewish:

> John's Gospel portrays the Jewish Jesus, who travels to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals, blesses the bread (in a Jewish way) before sharing with others, and in other ways leads a recognizably Jewish way of life.[10] I think there's no arguing that in the beginning, both Jesus and his followers, and this extended on into the [new Messianic community] as it was developing after Jesus's death, were Jewish, and they functioned within a Jewish framework.[11]

4. Israelite

Giving more credence to the idea that John associated *Ioudaios* with Judea as a region is his use of Israel. John's referral to all the people as Israel could be the way that we use the phrase *Jewish people* today:

> [John's] occasional use of "Israel" and "Israelite" *always indicates a favorable bias*. The words appear a total of five times: Twice, incipient

[10] Adele Reinhartz, lectures on "Jesus: Bad Jew or Good Jew?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ehwMlHsuuc

[11] Adele Reinhartz, The Gospel of John and the "Parting of the Ways," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-PLMQlnFRgs

> believers hail Jesus as "King of Israel" (1:49; 12:13), and John the Baptist declares that his mission is for Jesus to be "revealed to Israel" (1:31). Also, Jesus declares that Nathanael is "truly an Israelite in whom is no guile" (1:47) and refers to Nicodemus as "the teacher of Israel" (3:10).[12]

How could one who is antisemitic have such a favorable view of Israel or Israelites? And keep in mind that the usage in John of *Israelite* would not be the same as *Israeli* today, a citizen of the state of Israel. At the time, the Romans controlled the region. In context, *Israelite* clearly refers to someone serving the God of Israel. This further strengthens the hypothesis that when John speaks negatively of *the Jew*s, he was referring exclusively to the group of Judean Jewish leaders aggressively opposing Jesus.

Remember, it was this small group of leaders who brought Jesus to Pilate and demanded he be crucified. So yes, the animosity between them was very real. But you must see John as appealing to the *am Ha'aretz* (the people of the Land), whom we will see below, loved Yeshua, to not follow in the hypocrisy of this small group, the Pharisees, roughly 6,000[13] out of more than one 1,000,000 Jews in all of Israel, but to follow the true Jewish Messiah. It should be noted that just in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, the number of Messianic Jews numbered in the tens of thousands (Acts 21:20), far outnumbering the powerful Pharisees.

5. Your father is the Devil

No passage has been used more greatly as a proof text to portray Jews as irreparably devilish than John 8:44.

> You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

Jewish voices see this language as problematic, to say the least:

---

12 https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/cbaa_seminar/townsend.htm

13 "Josephus (37 – c. 100 CE), believed by many historians to be a Pharisee, estimated the total Pharisee population before the fall of the Second Temple to be around 6,000." Wikipedia, with citation, *Antiquities of the Jews, 17.42*

"The Jews willfully sought to kill Christ because they are not of God but of the Devil. Thus, in the New Testament itself, we already have a theological form of diabolizing the Jews, which would later be greatly expanded by the church fathers."[14]

Nevertheless, one must not ignore the bloody consequences of anti-Jewish sections in the New Testament, no matter if they had been part of a polemic debate or not—these texts will never be a haven of charity.[15]

And antisemites have used it to justify portraying every Jew, tainted with demonic blood, as devilish in every way.

St. Jerome (and don't forget the St. stands for Saint!) said of the Jews:

"Saint Jerome, who vilified the synagogue in almost identical terms: "If you call it a brothel, a den of vice, the Devil's refuge, Satan's fortress, a place to deprave the soul… you are still saying less than it deserves."[16]

John T. Earnest, who claimed to be devoutly Christian, referenced John 8:44 in his manifesto before committing his act of terrorism against a Jewish synagogue in Poway, California, killing one and injuring three. He wrote, "To my brothers in Christ of all races. Be strong. Although *the Jew who is inspired by demons and Satan* will attempt to corrupt your soul with the sin and perversion he spews—remember that you are secure in Christ."

In the Middle Ages, the Jew was constantly compared to the devil. "The billy goat, the devil's favorite animal and a symbol of Satanic lechery for the Middle Ages, was particularly associated with the Jew. The notorious image of the Judensau (Jews' pig) suckling her Jewish offspring in the presence of the devil"[17] was quite popular.

(A sculpture of this *Judensau* with Jews suckling at the sow's teat while a Jewish man feeds at the animal's anus is shockingly still erected at Martin Luther's church in Wittenberg, Germany.)

---

[14] Robert Wistrich, Random House New York, Apple Books

[15] Klaus S. Davidowicz, "The Demonization of Judaism" in Comprehending and Confronting Antisemitism, eds. Armin Lange Kerstin Mayerhofer, Dina Porat, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, (De Gruter) , 300.

[16] Ibid. Wistrich.

[17] Ibid. Wistrich.

And Islam was more than willing to continue to promote this most racist of defamations. "Associating Jews with the Devil, while common in Christianity since antiquity, is widespread in contemporary Islamic polemics against Jews, although it was rare in early Islam."[18]

What do we make of this? All this is based on the words of Jesus!

As I began to go into graduate studies, one of the first things I had to come to grips with about the Bible is the exaggerated hyperbolic language that is used not only in the Hebrew Bible but by the gospel writers, Paul, and even Jesus himself. No, it does not mean they are breaking the commandment against bearing false witness against your neighbor—it was an accepted style of communication in first century Near Eastern culture. As a 21st century westerner who tends to be very literal, I struggled with this at first, but there are dozens of

[18] Armin Lange, Kerstin Mayerhofer, Dina Porat, Lawrence H. Schiffman , "General Introduction—An End to Antisemitism!" in Comprehending and Confronting Antisemitism, eds. Armin Lange Kerstin Mayerhofer, Dina Porat, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, (De Gruter), 8.

examples of exaggerated language in the Bible,[19] and that's okay. To the culture to whom it was written, that was acceptable.

History affirms that Caiaphas was a corrupt high priest in bed with hypocritical Pharisees, just as today there are pastors and preachers who are living in sin and getting rich off the donations of common people. In line with the style of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus rebukes them, just like Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Elijah would have. Even this contemporary *non-Messianic* rabbi sees it in this light.

> Like the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Jesus can be seen as the conscience of Israel... In his confrontation with the leaders of the nation, Jesus echoed the words of the prophets by denouncing hypocrisy and injustice... As a prophetic figure, this image of Jesus should be recognizable to all Jews. —Rabbi and theologian Dan Cohn-Sherbok

There is nothing antisemitic about prophetically confronting sin, abuse, and hypocrisy in Israel, any more than it would be anti-Christian to expose a corrupt minister. Was it anti-Christian to shine the light on the abuses of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart? Neither was it anti-Jewish for them to confront their corrupt leaders. Sadly, every community must deal with some corruption.

As for using such strong language, it was also in line with acceptable, even if strong, communication of the first century. In his debate with Rabbi Shmuley Boteach on whether or not the New Testament is antisemitic, Dr. Michael Brown argued:

> Catholic professor Urban C. von Wahlde said this, "There are almost identical parallels between the language of Johns gospels and the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls, where rival Jewish groups are characterized as "sons of darkness" and "sons of the pit who are under the dominion of Satan and do his works." We must learn to listen to these statements with first-century ears, not twentieth-century ones."

And the fact is, everyone born from Adam is a son of the devil in some sense. That is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, who humbled himself and came to Yeshua looking for answers, "You must be *born from above*" (John 3:3). You

[19] Jesus tells his followers to hate their family members (Luke 14:26), and to cut off their hands and gouge out their eyes if they cause them to stumble (Matt. 5:29-30). Paul wishes that the Judaizers, who were urging the Galatians to be circumcised and become Jews to be saved, to go even further and emasculate themselves. (Gal. 5:12) And clearly the stars will not fall to earth, but that is language to emphasize cataclysmic activity in the skies. Revelation 14:20 seems to say that Israel (1,600 stadia is about the length of Israel) will be covered in blood up to a horse's bridle. Clearly, it points to a very bloody battle.

were born once, into sin, through Adam. Now, through Yeshua, you will be born again, spiritually, and become a true child of God.[20]

If these were debates between other Jews, other Muslim leaders, or even within Christianity, one would clearly see it as an interfamily argument—even if intense by all standards. Jesus cannot be seen here as antisemitic. It is simply impossible because he and all of his followers were Jews. One could label him anti-Pharisee (though I would not), but they were just a tiny fraction of the Jewish population in 1st century Israel.

Let me give you an example in U.S. politics. Have we not seen leaders inside the same party attack each other, even viciously? Do we then take those words and use them as a proof text to label everybody in the party a devil or say there worthy of death?

But in our situation, the argument was recast, not as two Jewish groups having a disagreement, but as the one true Church of God condemning those devilish Jews. That is how many Christians have read the book of John for almost two thousand years, and it certainly is how white supremacy groups read John today. In order to understand John, one must become a 1st century Jew, not someone from the 20th century trying to understand them through what we think is acceptable communication—particularly in our *woke* culture.

6. A Family Squabble

It is important to look at the book of John as an intrafamily disagreement. If you're not Jewish, and you're constantly seeing this confrontation between Jesus and his followers and "the Jews," it is easy to come away thinking that the New Testament is antisemitic. But if we come to that conclusion, then we would have to conclude that Jewish groups are also antisemitic, which they clearly are not.

Different Jewish groups, not only in the 1st century but even today, particularly the more religious ones, are quite colorful and aggressive in the way that they attack each other. Jesus and his followers confronting the Pharisees is

[20] For point six, I relied heavily on Dr. Michael Brown's presentation in his debate with Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EazONRsqIME

no different than to Jewish sects today confronting each other. Brown claims in his debate with Rabbi Boteach:

> The conflicts and disagreements we read about are largely inside the family. Just like conflicts between Satmar and Lubavitch (Chasidim [Orthodox Jews] in New York). In years past, when they attacked and condemned each other in the strongest of terms, were they being anti-Semitic?

Of course, he's asking rhetorically, and the answer is no. Brown then asks, when the Jewish Josephus branded the Sacarii, a particularly lethal group within the Zealot movement, as "imposters and brigands, salves, the dregs of society and the bastard scum of the nation (a view held by many in Jerusalem regarding this group that would bring down Jerusalem and the temple by challenging the Romans)," if he was being antisemitic? In other words, there are a plethora of intrafamily debates that became quite heated going all the way back to Moses, stretching into modern times, but because the Jesus movement ended up being almost an entirely Gentile movement within two centuries, theologians wrongly saw it as Christians versus Jew debate, rather than Jews confronting Jews. Brown says that if we put back on our first-century glasses and see the confrontations in context, the charge of antisemitism is diffused.

Go back into the prophets. Read the words of Jeremiah against those who would not hear him. Read the words of Isaiah as he described *all the Jewish people of his day*, not just a few Pharisees in Jerusalem.

> Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things … they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts of violence mark their ways. (Is. 59:2-5)

Certainly, we would not conclude that Isaiah was antisemitic, despite the fact that this is just a small sampling of the very harsh words written not only through the prophets but Moses himself (Deut. 28). The same God who spoke these harsh words also spoke hundreds of promises of restoration for the Jewish people and confirmed his covenant of love towards them over and over (Jer. 31:35-37).

A year after coming to faith, I met with Rabbi Shochet. He was dishonest and was even willing to kidnap Jewish believers to deprogram them. I used to jokingly call him the *butcher* (Shochet means butcher in Hebrew). We met for four hours until 2:00 AM one night.

On another occasion, my parents took me to meet two rabbis, Scott and Yehuda, in Brooklyn. They were different but also not honest with me. They spoke like Christians, using Christian lingo to make me think that I could have everything I found in Yeshua in traditional Judaism without him. Scott tried to manipulate me by telling me that if I would come and spend time *alone* with them in Brooklyn, they would tell my father that I had a real experience with God. It was all a ruse to get me to deny my faith.

In speaking with them, I might have very harsh words. But in speaking *about them to you*—I would tell you that my heart breaks for them. I understand why they did what they did, and like Saul of Tarsus, they thought they were doing a service for God. I can say without a doubt that I love them—deeply. But I am also angry. *Our quarrel is within the Jewish family.*

When we birthed Shelanu TV—the first Messianic Hebrew-speaking cable channel in history—we were opposed by the Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem. They pressured the government to pull our channel. We issued a press release as Messianic Jewish citizens of Israel, saying they had no right to deny us our freedom of speech, religion, or expression. But we were also very careful, in a way that John could not understand.

John did not realize that Jew-haters (or Jesus-loving Christians) would be reading his words centuries later. He did not know he was writing the Bible! But we knew that people around the world would read our press releases. So we went out of our way to make sure that we were not too aggressive, lest we give antisemites a reason to rejoice.

When they finally pressured the cable company to drop our station because they knew it would be illegal for them to simply pull our channel, we chose not to sue but to forgive (and we relaunched that day online!). But if I were John, before the Internet, before I understood that the Messianic message would spread to every nation of the world, that my words would be read by people for centuries, maybe we would have sued. But the last thing we wanted to do was to cause Christians around the world to be angry with Israel—for the actions of a few religious leaders and a few politicians—just like in the book of John! The average Israeli really had no problem with our obscure cable channel.

I think that if John understood how people outside the family would perceive his words, he would've written differently. But God in his sovereignty allowed it to come forth as it did.

7. The Jews loved Jesus

It would have been strange for those who flocked to hear Him teach—many of whom were healed—to suddenly call for His execution. Scripture makes it clear that a very large number of Jews followed Yeshua, even some high-profile leaders like Nicodemus, who not only sought him out to question him (John 3) but along with another Jewish man, asked for his corpse, to give him a proper Jewish burial (John 19:38-42).

> When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth… (Matthew 21:10-11 NKJV).
>
> Many of the people believed in him and said, 'When the Messiah comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?" (John 7:31 NKJV).
>
> Nevertheless, *even among the [Jewish] rulers,* many believed on him…" (John 12:42 NKJV).

John records it was the leaders who shouted for Him to be crucified. "As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'" (John 19:6).

In the other accounts, where it mentions the crowd joining in, it seems clear they were manipulated by the leaders. As Matthew writes, "But the chief priests and the elders *persuaded the crowd* to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed" (Matt. 27:20). We are not told the means by which they persuaded the crowd, but bribery would have been the common resource of the time. (They had paid witnesses to turn in false evidence at the trial the day before.) Clearly, this *persuaded crowd* did not represent the people of Israel, as there were approximately 100,000 Jews living in Jerusalem, and because it was Passover, there could have been upward of another 500,000 visitors in Jerusalem at that time. Do you really think there were 600,000 Jews at Pilate's Jerusalem Palace? Most of them had no idea who the rabbi from Nazareth was.

Conclusion

Some may find this paper nitpicky. Hopefully, it will be lifesaving. How many Jews have been killed in the name of Christianity for the sin of deicide? How many Christian pontificators throughout the centuries twisted the words of the Jewish John as a pretext for persecuting "the Jews"?

The real Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). He longed for the day that his own brothers would recognize him as Messiah (Matt. 23:37-39), even as Joseph's brothers finally recognized him as their savior. While there is no question that Messiah's ultimate goal was to reach the nations, it would be a grave mistake to miss His love and compassion for his own physical brothers. As one of the first Messianic Jews put it at the end of the 19th century, Joseph Rabinowitz, Jesus is the elder brother of the Jews.

Paul in Romans 9 is willing to trade his salvation if only his fellow Israelites would believe in this Yeshua. And then he calls upon Gentile believers all over the world to do their utmost, through acts of kindness and the grace-filled preaching of the Word, to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 10:14-15, 11:11, 12). May it happen in our lifetime.