

One of the most disturbing questions gnawing at the edges of Jewish consciousness is “Where was God when the six million died?” The horrors of the Holocaust—from gut-wrenching images to mind-boggling numbers of those slaughtered continue to haunt the imaginations of religious as well as secular Jewish people around the world.

Surveys demonstrate that the greatest common point of Jewish identity is with the tragedy of the Shoah.* But despite the myriad of Jewish institutions that investigate, chronicle and explore the depths and meaning of this dark chapter of history, the answer to the question “Where was God?” eludes most who pursue it. Despite millions of books and scholarly papers, hundreds of films and a treasure trove of artistic renderings, the Holocaust remains the great enigma of Jewish experience.

Tragically, many Jews have concluded that the Holocaust teaches us there is no God, or worse, if He exists He is a monster or an impotent irrelevancy. From Israel to America, Jewish atheism and agnosticism outstrips Jewish orthodoxy by a long shot. No doubt many factors contribute to this fact, but certainly the Holocaust is near if not at the top of the list.

Perhaps the greatest voice for this Jewish angst is that of Elie Weisel, a survivor, scholar and prolific author. In his heart-wrenching memoir, “Night,” Wiesel tells the story of an execution he and the prisoners were forced to witness as two men and a boy were mounted on chairs with the hangman’s noose around their necks. At a signal from the guards, the chairs were kicked out from beneath their feet and the ropes snapped. The men died instantly as the fall broke their necks, but the boy, small and emaciated, flailed about, gasping desperately

for breath. As the crowd gasped in horror, Weisel heard someone cry out, “Where is God? Where is God?” In that moment Weisel realized that for him, God was dying in the image of that young boy struggling to breathe until his very last. It was too horrible to imagine that a loving God could allow such evil. It was easier to conclude that God was dead.

I have deep empathy for those who endured these horrors, yet the story Weisel so poignantly described connects me to a different image and meaning. As I think of the boy struggling and dying between two men I can’t help but envision another Jew, Jesus, as He suffered and died on the cross between two thieves.** As the crowd gathered around that scene outside of Jerusalem, it was Jesus who asked the searing question: “My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?”

Herein lies a biblical perspective on the question—or for some, the accusation—where is God when such atrocities are committed?

Jesus, the Son of God, became human because God wanted to identify with His lost and suffering creation. He lived a holy, innocent and undefiled life, and then willingly took upon Himself God’s judgment for the sin of all humanity. That judgment caused God to turn away, in

Where was God?



David Brickner
Executive Director,
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“Though the Holocaust evokes the darkest despair even to the depths of our being, God still has a message of hope”.



that moment, from the son He loved. Jesus knew the answer to His own question on the cross before He ever asked it. In fact, the question refers back to the cry of the prophet-king David, who predicted this event as it's recorded in Psalm 22.

That moment in history—when Jesus was alone with the sin of the world—was the central act of God's redemptive power. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). And because of this amazing eternal truth, He is still present in our suffering today, to identify, to suffer with and to provide help, hope and meaning to those who still suffer.

So Where was God when the six million died? God was mourning over the dead, the persecuted, and grieved by those persecutors whose minds were scrambled with the lust for power. God was suffering along with every humiliation and each act of violence. The answer to the question is not snappy, nor is it smug and self-satisfied. It is hard to understand and harder to explain. But it has to do with love that is really love.

God created human beings to receive His love and to be able to give love in return. Love must always be a choice. God made us with the power to choose love, to choose humility and righteousness and peace . . . but in our pride, the human race has chosen to ignore God's rightful place, and often even His existence. That choice

consistently leads to other bad choices, some more hideous than others. And we become victims of these choices, whether they are our own, or as in the case of the Nazis, other peoples'.

There was a set of historical decisions that permitted the evil of the Third Reich to prosper. Decisions to look the other way, to care too little to see if rumors of the atrocities were true, to look upon the misery of fellow human beings as “someone else's business”—all these choices had a part in the unspeakable horrors. Like Cain, much of the world collectively shrugged and retorted, “Am I my brother's keeper?” God mourns over the depraved choices of human beings, but He never violates a person's right to decide.

And we ask, Where was God? He was right there all along. God has been present through all our sufferings. He was in the boxcars, the ghettos, the concentration camps, yes, even in the showers and the ovens. We believe that as God was present with us, so was Jesus. And He still is there today identifying with His suffering people.

This year, Resurrection Sunday falls on April 20 and Yom Ha Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, is one week later, April 27. The proximity of these two dates reminds us of the power of the cross to speak to the deepest questions of life. Yeshua suffers along with His people and He alone is able to lift our eyes to see beyond human suffering to the greater purposes of a loving God. There is a resurrection to those who cry out to Him. We must believe that and trust Him and lovingly point others to this powerful truth. Though the Holocaust evokes the darkest despair even to the depths

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of our being, God still has a message of hope.

Our Jewish people need to know that the horrific sufferings inflicted by the Nazi regime on humanity is not, as Hitler so insidiously implied, the outgrowth of Christ's teachings. To the contrary, Jesus was not afraid to enter into the pain and sufferings of others in order to offer the hope of life with God. The God of Israel cared enough to send Yeshua of Nazareth, Jesus—to die, willingly, as the atonement for our sin, as the prophet Isaiah foretold.

We believe that Yeshua rose from death, as He Himself predicted He would, and as King David also predicted centuries before. We believe that beyond this earthly life, God promises us that sorrow and tears will cease for all who trust in Him.

“...Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”
(Psalm 30:5)

There is no better time to meet people where they are and offer that hope, that joy, that amazing new life in Jesus.

*Hebrew for catastrophe, and by popular use, The Holocaust of WWII.

** This is not to say the men in Weisel's story were in any way criminals; it was the execution of three people and the particular innocence of the boy that brought Calvary to mind.



BITS from the BRANCHES

WHEN YOU WORK ON SHABBAT

Arielle Randle reports from Chicago.

“My husband David and I had two Jews for Jesus associate staff (students) Isaiah Ascher and Shmuly Abramson staying with us, as well as my sister, Simone and another young Jewish believer named Tirzah. We decided to bring everyone along with us to visit a local synagogue for Shabbat. We expected a huge service where we would just blend in, but instead, our group turned out to be a third of the attenders in this discussion-style service! In the meantime, someone I’d met while handing out tracts wrote to me on Facebook asking what David and I were doing for Shabbat. I told him we were visiting this synagogue—and he actually showed up at there too, to meet with us!

“During the discussion on the parsha (weekly Bible reading) some of the older people were telling us younger ones how Judaism is all about being rebellious and thinking for yourself, the way that Moses did in Egypt. I honestly couldn’t help it; the opportunity was too perfect to miss—so I started talking about how we were Jewish believers in Jesus. I said that while some people might find this rebellious, really it’s all about thinking for yourself and not letting the majority tell you what to believe or how to be Jewish. I think they all nearly fell out of their chairs!

“Once they got over their shock, they were really nice and asked us to come volunteer with them and attend various events. They even asked Shmuly to come back and speak at one of their events! Now we have an unexpected open door to get to know people in this Jewish community. I am already planning to go to a film they are screening.

“After the service we all came back to our apartment for a big Shabbat dinner, including the guy we’d met on the streets, a Jewish believer in Jesus who has been out of fellowship for a long time. It was great to connect with him—he stayed for several hours talking with David. It turned out to be quite an exciting Shabbat!”



A NEW SONG OF ASAF

Tel Aviv. Nataly Bearshtein visited us in Sydney a couple years back, but now from Israel she reports, “Months ago, my husband Alex and I began meeting with Asaf, a guy in his 30s. We met while handing out gospel literature at a Barbara Streisand concert. Asaf told us he



believed some kind of supreme power controls the world, but he did not believe in a personal God at all. Yet he was searching for answers to many questions. During one of our meetings with him, we gave him a book called **A Lawyer’s Case for God** as well as a copy of the New Testament. Alex shared his testimony and we prayed for God to soften Asaf’s heart.

“We stopped meeting with this young man for two months because we were busy with the Behold Your God Negev campaign, but we kept in touch by phone. After the campaign, Asaf said he had read the two books and really wanted to meet with us again.

“When we met, I realized that sitting in front of me was a different person, not the same lost guy I remembered, but a guy who was getting answers to his questions, and was very happy with them. Asaf confirmed this when he told us that now he is sure that God exists, and that His Messiah, Jesus, came to take away our sins. During our time together he prayed to receive Jesus with tears of joy in his eyes. I thank God for giving us the opportunity to participate in these wonderful moments and see people come to the Kingdom of Heaven.”

*Not their real names

GOOD JEW BECOMES GIVER OF LIFE: WE FIRST MET AT CHURCH



Sydney. Rahel Landrum reports. “My husband Mark and I got to know Karen* through a Christian friend who invited her to hear Mark speak at her church. Karen came, and after the service, was interested to hear more from us. Mark and I have been taking turns visiting her since she lives nearly an hour away. When we first began seeing her, she used to say that Yeshua was a good Jew, nothing more. Since then, she has made great progress, and recently confessed her belief that Yeshua was more than a man, that he was God in the flesh. On our last visit, after I shared with her again that Yeshua died for our sins, she said she believes we need to pay for our own wrongdoings. I affirmed her sense of responsibility for her own mistakes, and pointed out that owning up to our sin (and making restitution where that is possible) is not the same as pay-

ing the full penalty for our sin. The Bible tells us the penalty for our sin is to be separated from God; the penalty for our sin is death. But the gift of forgiveness we have through Yeshua is that He paid that penalty for us so that we could spend eternity in the presence of God, the Giver of Life.

“I went on to describe what it means being in the presence of God forever: love, light, goodness, warmth, belonging to His family, acceptance—as opposed to paying the penalty for our own sin, which means being apart from God’s presence and all that is good forever. Karen thought for a moment and then told me that she wants to spend eternity with God. I asked if there were any reason she would not accept Yeshua’s payment for her sins and His forgiveness. She said there was no reason, and she prayed with me to receive Him. Praise the Lord!

We are about to cross the road!

IT'S MOVING TIME

Bob Mendelsohn
Regional Director
JFJ AustralAsia

Last month we wrote you that the 'cloud was moving' a la Jewish people in the Wilderness, and we weren't sure where it was going. After 9 plus years in our Bondi Junction location, our Jews for Jesus Book shop and office were evicted along with residents and business people from several adjacent buildings. The owners are constructing a new high rise beginning in April with demolition set to begin before you receive this newsletter. It all happened so fast.

We asked you to pray and many did, and many rang and wondered where we were going. We wondered also. And finally we signed a lease on a property 40 metres away, and almost right across the street on Oxford Street. God is good! By the time you receive this, we will have begun setting up there and by next month we should have some great photos to show you.

For now, rejoice with us, and pray about what you might give to help us set up a great shop to honor Messiah. We've crossed the road and of note is that approximately 6 times as many people walk on that side (the south side) as previously. That kind of exposure is great for conversation and for drop ins. And we expect the same kind of response from the Jewish community now as has been happening.

We are hoping to secure a big coffee machine and some baristas who want to serve God in serving customers (this may be an amazing new ministry) as well as our regular activities of evangelism, sales of Judaica, books, CDs, DVDs, clothing and so much more. We still have over 750 products available and we expect to find new customers and our old ones to find us easily.

Thanks for your support. Next month we'll send out a general appeal letter for all our mail list to donate to the brick and mortar that the new shop is, but this news is going only to those who have attended events with us or donated in the past. You already are part of our team. Thanks, dear friends, and let us cross the road together!

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JEWES FOR JESUS™





A harrowing escape

by *Stewart Weinisch*

They say there is a first time for everything, and that was certainly the case when an elderly Jewish man called our Manhattan office to say he wanted to become a Catholic. When I asked what he meant, Erwin explained that he wanted to believe in the one that the Jewish priest told him about in the Catholic church—the church where he and his sister had hidden from the Nazis.* Erwin was only a child when the Nazis forced him and his family into the Warsaw ghetto in 1942. He saw everyone in his family killed, except for an older sister, Sonia. “God was watching over me” was his continual refrain for many years.

He and Sonia found shelter in a church; the priest was a Jewish man who was preaching about Yeshua (Jesus) in Yiddish. He also was sheltering many other Jews throughout the church.

When Erwin was twelve years old, the Nazis bombed the church but the bomb turned out to be a dud. The SS officer said they’d be back the following day. Sure enough, the next day the sirens began to wail and everyone ran in all directions. It was a false alarm. However, when Erwin and his sister returned to the church, they witnessed the priest being gunned down in cold blood. That began a harrowing period of continual running and hiding. Erwin and his sister went for ten days with no food and only drops of water. They spent four days in an underground sewerage line. They

were hidden and protected by various Christians.

Finally, one of their protectors gave them a map to freedom. They were directed to a path through the woods, which they were to follow until they reached a set of train tracks. On the other side of the tracks, freedom waited—but to avoid being seen, they would need to dive under the slow moving train. On the way, they met a small boy who had been separated from another group that was trying to escape the same way. Sonia and Erwin took the boy along with them.

When they reached the tracks, Sonia went first and crossed successfully. Erwin went next, but half way across the tracks he stopped, urging the boy to hurry or the Nazis would see him. Finally the boy dove beneath the train, but he was run over and died in Erwin’s arms. There was nothing Erwin could do but finish crossing. He and Sonia escaped, and in 1949 they were brought to the United States.

In the 50s and 60s Erwin worked for his uncle as a furrier—the same furrier; I discovered, that I’d worked for in the 70’s! Which brings me back to our all too brief time together.

When Erwin said he wanted to believe in the one that the Jewish priest had told him about, I told him about my Jesus. “Yes,” he said, “this is the same one.” He knew that he was dying and he associated Jesus with redemption and protection. After making sure he understood

the gospel, I led Erwin in a prayer to receive Jesus. Then I visited him in person the next day.

Erwin wanted to tell his story to the various holocaust agencies and I made numerous calls on his behalf—but not one person was willing to make a trip to come speak with him. But even more than telling his own story, Erwin’s greatest desire was to sing praises to Yeshua in a house of worship.

Sadly, over the next couple of months Erwin was in and out of hospitals, and then I could no longer reach him. I made many calls and personally visited the home where he’d been staying to no avail. I had contact with a high level social worker in NYC who looked into Erwin’s disappearance but was unable to find anything.

I wish that Erwin’s story of survival and redemption could have been made available to millions—but I’m glad we can share it with you and hope that you will share it with others. And I wish that Erwin had been well enough for me to bring him to a local congregation where he could sing praises to Yeshua as he longed to do. But I know that he has all eternity to sing those praises in the very presence of Jesus, who not only helped him escape the Nazis, but rescued him from sin and death.

*Surprisingly, there was a significant number of Jews who trusted in Jesus—including Catholics and Protestants—in the Warsaw ghetto.

Messianic Resources

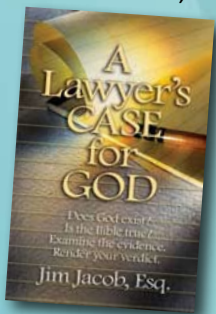
Featured resources for your learning, celebrating, and growth

A Lawyer's Case for God

Offers insight into vital issues about faith, life, and the afterlife.

Writing popular apologetics requires simplification and readable presentations which do not distort the evidence. Jim has written a worthy contribution to popular apologetics that fulfills these criteria.

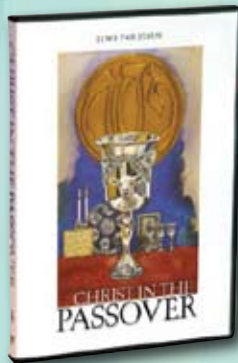
Price: \$13



Christ in the Passover DVD

This month we celebrate Passover from the 4th for 8 days. Enjoy watching the family and David Brickner learn about Yeshua in the Jewish festival. We celebrate from 14 April on

Price: \$24



Last Jew of Rotterdam book

This riveting true story interweaves the journeys of Ernest and Elisabeth Casuto from the horror of the Holocaust to salvation in Jesus the Messiah. Also a love story! **Price: \$17**



Never Forget CD

Music of the Liberated Wailing Wall. When "never again" gives way to the Gospel, we won't forget our God!



Price: \$24

Survivor Stories DVD

There is not one answer to the question, "Where was God?" Here are 7 answers. Real testimonies. Real Jews. Real answers.

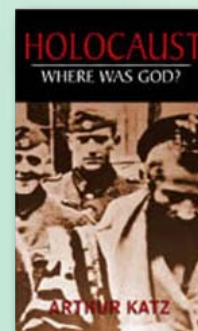
Price: \$29



The Holocaust, where was God?

Jewish believer Art Katz' thesis is that the Holocaust is judgment by God on the Jewish people for living as if there were no God. A powerful consideration.

Price: \$18



Myrrh candle

An exotic biblical resin was used in purification, anointing oil and in burial spices. **Price: \$29**



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