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Reaching Jewish People  
for Jesus

March 2023

# Glimpses of Heaven from the Jewish Bible

by Ruth Rosen\*

Ask a Jewish friend, “If you were to die, on what basis would you be allowed into heaven?” and you might well receive a blank stare. Many Jewish people have only a “maybe” belief in any kind of life after death—even that. Modern Judaism emphasizes doing good in this world, which is its own reward. Rather than a literal life after death, the hope is to live on through our accomplishments, our children, and in the memories of others. If there is a heaven, many reason, God will welcome those who have done their best. And yet there are hints of heaven in the Jewish Bible. Maybe that is why Jewish people who are more religious do hold a belief in life after death.<sup>1</sup>

**“People need to see that God is real, and that knowing Him is life changing and life giving.”**

The medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides included a statement about the resurrection as one of his “Principles of Faith,”<sup>2</sup> which have become a kind of credo for Orthodox Jews. Even so, there isn’t really a unified Orthodox Jewish position on exactly what is required to enter into eternal life, or on what basis people would be excluded.

What Does This Mean for Sharing Our Faith with Jewish People?

Jewish people are no different from others, inasmuch as all people need to see that God is real, and that knowing Him is life changing and life giving. That’s a good place to start, as the thought of eternity with an unknown God is

unlikely to ignite hope. But while the hope of heaven isn’t necessarily a good starting place, it becomes meaningful within the context of God’s reality, His goodness, our alienation from Him, and the lengths to which He went to restore a relationship with us.

While most Jewish people you are likely to meet probably do not rely on the Hebrew Scriptures for guidance, if a Jewish person wanted to consider the possibility of eternal life, it would make sense to explore it in a Jewish context. Each of the following passages shows that the belief in heaven—though more fully unpacked in the New Testament—has some basis in Jewish Scripture. This may come as a welcome surprise to many. The following passages are only a sample of the hopes and hints of eternal life offered in the Jewish Bible.

## The Living Redeemer

**For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!**

**(Job 19:25–27)**

Many take this as a reference to resurrection, including

key commentators in the history of the church. Others think Job is picturing his vindication during his own lifetime. One thing is clear: Job considers God his “Redeemer,” or in Hebrew, *go’el*. Commentator John Walton writes: “The job of the *go’el* is to recover losses and to salvage the dignity of one who has suffered loss.”<sup>3</sup>

Whether Job was thinking of this life or the next, this passage shows that the Jewish Bible supports the idea of a Redeemer who vindicates or justifies us because of what He has done, and who enables us to be received by God the Father. Job speaks of seeing God for himself, and the thought not only offers him hope in the midst of suffering, but creates great longing.

### The Joy-Producing Presence

**For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let our holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

**(Psalm 16:10–11)**

David expected to be freed from the grave (Sheol). He trusted that God would not abandon him, and that death would not be the end of their relationship. This hope makes him “glad”; he “rejoices” (Psalm 16:9), has “life” and “joy,” and he looks forward to “pleasures forevermore”—all in the context of an intimate relationship with God.

The New Testament indicates that David was not speaking of himself, but of the coming Messiah (see Acts 2:22–39 and Acts 13:30–37). It seems that David had confidence in life beyond the grave because he had confidence in God and in God’s promised Redeemer.

### The Glorious Forever

**You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**

**(Psalm 73:24–26)**

This psalm by Asaph includes the hope of being with God beyond this lifetime. One commentator said, “This mounting experience of salvation, ‘grasped, guided, glorified,’ is a humble counterpart to the great theological sequence of Romans 8:29 [and following], which spans the work of God from its hidden beginning, ‘whom he foreknew,’ to the same consummation as here, ‘he also glorified.’”<sup>4</sup>

While we often think of salvation and eternal life as being spared from hell, it’s important to remember that the object of salvation is to forever enjoy God. The best way to look forward to heaven is to cultivate an ever-deepening love for, and enjoyment of, God throughout our lives here and now. Let your Jewish friends know that you understand

that the hope of heaven proves more genuine when it positively impacts us today—in an ever deepening, life-changing relationship with God.

### The Purpose of Eternity

**He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.**  
**(Ecclesiastes 3:11)**

Ecclesiastes is a wonderful book because it lets people know that someone much wiser than we are understood just how we feel about the frustrations and temporary nature of life “under the sun.” However, the author (whom many believe to be King Solomon) also understood that life is more than what we see “under the sun.” He mentions God as maker, giver, and judge throughout the book. In chapter 3, verse 11, we have a clue as to what God wants for us, and why the experiences of life and death cause feelings of meaninglessness.

**“God has seen to it that we long for more than our mortal lives can offer.”**

People may differ about exactly what it means for God to put eternity in our hearts, but one thing is certain: God has seen to it that we long for more than our mortal lives can offer. The entire book of Ecclesiastes shows that no matter what we do to try to create some kind of heaven on earth, it will never work. The above passage makes sense of people’s fear of death as far more than a survival instinct. At our core, we sense that we were meant for eternity. The question then becomes, “Do we want eternity with or without God?” The countless ways that we say “no” to God’s rightful rule in our lives make us unfit to spend eternity with Him—because heaven is where we find eternal purpose in enjoying Him as the wonderful, rightful King that He is. If your friend can see that we all desire to co-opt His place in our lives, you can explain that this is what separates us from God. That’s why Jesus came—and through Him, the hope of heaven, hinted at in the Jewish Bible, can be ours.

\*Portions of this article, including the footnoted quotes, were taken from Rich Robinson’s article, “Hopes, Hints, and Historical Examples of God’s Power Over Death,” published in our newsletter in March 2016.

### Endnotes

1. For more on this topic, see Louis Jacobs, n.d., “Jewish Resurrection of the Dead,” *My Jewish Learning*, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-resurrection-of-the-dead/>.
2. Moses Maimonides, “Thirteen Principles of the Faith” (12th century), [www.sacred-texts.com/jud/spb/spb11.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/spb/spb11.htm).
3. John H. Walton, “Job,” in *NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012)*.
4. Derek Kidner, “Psalm 73–150” in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014)*, 292.

# Purim and the God of Providence

by Dan Sered\*



**T**his year Jewish people all over the world celebrate the feast of Purim at sundown on March 6. Purim commemorates the dramatic rescue of the Jewish people found in the book of Esther—a book in which **God’s name is not mentioned, not even once.** And as we read this story, it may seem to unfold as a series of coincidences.

Vashti decides not to go to the banquet, and so she is removed as queen. And then out of hundreds or maybe even thousands of young women conscripted into the beauty pageant to determine who the new queen will be, Esther, a Jewish woman, is chosen. What a “coincidence”! But we know it wasn’t—God had raised her up for such a time as this (Esther 4:14).

Then Mordecai is sitting outside of the city gate, and by lucky “coincidence,” he overhears and exposes a plot by two guards to murder the king. Then later, the king realizes that he has never done anything for the man who saved his life—all because he couldn’t sleep. And on and on the story goes.

After so many “coincidences,” you can imagine standing inside the palace as you see Haman—who hated Mordecai and wanted to destroy him and all

his people—hanging on his own gallows. Maybe the onlookers are saying to each other, “Wow! These Jews are really lucky people!”

But none of it was luck. **The book of Esther tells us that our God is a God of providence.** He’s the almighty God who watches over and protects His own people. For God said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (2 Timothy 2:13).

I look around at what is happening in this world—war, pain, sickness, and suffering—and it’s easy to feel at times that God is absent. But He is not. **Even when His name is not mentioned, God is with us. He is with you if you belong to Him through Messiah Jesus. He is present, not only in the obvious turns of events, but also in little ways that might seem to some like “lucky coincidences.”** Not only that, but He can

use you in unexpected ways to accomplish His purposes, just as He did with Mordechai and Esther.

So next time you hear someone comment, “That was a lucky coincidence,” you might think of it as a divine opportunity to put in a good word about the God of Providence who cares, and is often at work in the most unexpected ways.

*\*Dan Sered is one of our chief operating officers. He oversees our teams in Europe, Israel, South Africa, and Australia.*



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# Richard Wants to Thank You for Praying for Him!

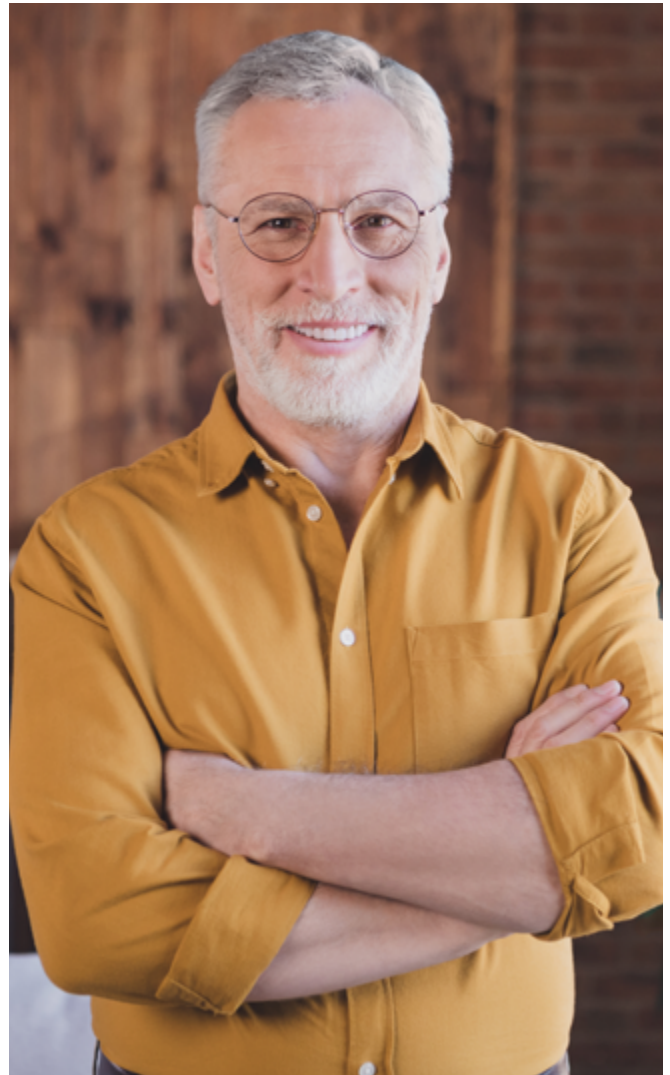
In 2021 we asked you to pray for Richard, a retired Jewish law professor who was looking for a deeper connection to God. He'd come to our website and Emmanuel Mebasser followed up with him by telephone and email. Here is an update from Emmanuel:

"Richard was willing to meet with me a few times over the past year, but at one point he wrote, 'After much study, soul searching, and prayer, I still have reservations about whether Jesus has fulfilled all of the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. And I simply have not felt the connection that I think is necessary for me to accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.' Though disappointed, I continued praying for him, and I know some of you were also praying.

"Fast-forward to December 2022: Richard emailed me that he now believes Jesus is the Messiah! I set up a video call and rejoiced as Richard explained that as he continued reading the New Testament, he saw enough evidence to realize that Jesus is our Messiah.

"Richard was excited about his new faith and grateful for my witness to him, but when he said, 'The credit goes to you,' I explained that only God's grace allows us to believe and receive Jesus—and I told him that I have been asking our friends to pray for him to receive that grace. Richard said to give YOU a special 'thanks' for your part in his new faith! He wants to continue to meet and to attend our online Scripture study. Please keep praying for Richard and for his wife, who is not yet a believer."

*Names are changed to protect privacy.*



**We are increasing our communications, so if you would like to receive our monthly news electronically, along with bonus stories, prayer requests, and Bible resources, simply write to [jfj@jewsforjesus.org](mailto:jfj@jewsforjesus.org) and ask to hear from Jews for Jesus in the US if you'd like, via email.**

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# QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

By **Bob Mendelsohn**  
National Director, Australia

## QUESTION

**Jewish people are the smartest people I know. I grew up with many in my neighbourhood and they seemed to top our class at school. At our church, the pastor and his team all seem to teach the Bible in a way that anyone can understand it. They break it down, one verse and sometimes, one word, at a time. I'm not sure they use the Hebrew to convince us, but they also bring that language in to support a lesson they are making. It seems to make the argument clear and I wonder how I can do that also with my former classmates if I ever go to a reunion or even see them when we are at the shops. Does what my pastor do work? And if it does, why don't they already believe like we do?**

*---An Eastern suburbs supporter*

## ANSWER

Thanks for writing and for supporting and for thinking about sharing what we all believe with your Jewish mates. You ask a couple of great questions. Does it 'work' to teach the Bible line-by-line? Sure! If someone already believes the Bible is an informing book. Here's what I mean. "Let us turn to Isaiah chapter..." might work at church and for those who hold the Scriptures to be authoritative and for today and for themselves. However, if someone doesn't believe the Bible, or in God, or that God has anything to say to us in the 21st century, then a lesson from our book might be seen as imposing or irrelevant. The information in the Book of Books IS relevant and does impose on all of us, but citing the text is

not usually useful in Jewish evangelism. Perhaps using different language to say the information might be helpful. For instance, rather than "The wages of sin is death" maybe try, "When people do wrong things, there seems to be a just penalty." Things like that. Sometimes take the Bible language out of the formula and speak to their hearts. (I'm not saying the language of the Bible is wrong or never to be used.) Your second question is even more relevant. Why don't smart people believe? They should see the sense and the information and accept it like  $2+2=4$ ! But Bible information is not like school; it's revelatory and "in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God" (1 Cor. 1.21) Even Yeshua prayed (Matt. 11.25) "You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." He even talked about the purpose of parables, not to make things understood, "I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matt. 13.13) In other words, to hide from 'the wise' and to extend God's words to the humble. That's where revelation meets information.

So pray and pray, and keep praying for your Jewish mates, that humility and 'ears to hear' will be theirs. Each of us on staff, in Australia and around the globe are believers because someone prayed for us. And someone spoke to us. And God opened our ears and our hearts. God help you in your witnessing for Him.



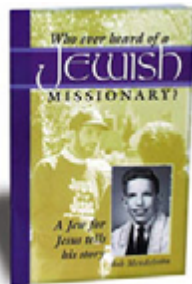
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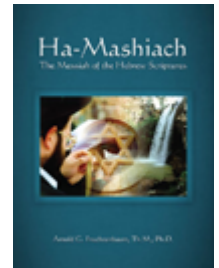
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