

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **Brit Hadasha: Why Yeshua is the Messiah**

The *Tanakh*—that is, the Old Testament—speaks of an individual known as the Messiah, an anointed son of David, who will make atonement for the sins of Israel, be a light to the nations, gather all of Israel back to the land, and eventually usher in world peace. While in the past some Jewish people have offered a few candidates for this position—perhaps most notably *Bar Kochba* who led a failed revolt against the Romans in 132-135 A.D.—most religious Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come and fulfill these prophecies.

Christians and Messianics, on the other hand, believe that this individual has already come. We believe that Yeshua, who is more commonly known by the name Jesus, fulfilled many of the prophecies concerning the Messiah and will return again to fulfill the rest.

For a fuller explanation of the two phases of the Messiah’s work as detailed in the *TANAKH*, please see our teachings, *Does the Old Testament Teach a “Second Coming” of Messiah?* and *The 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Day*.

For now, we’re going to focus on giving 3 basic reasons why we can know for sure that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel.

#### **1) The New Testament**

The first and most obvious evidence we have that Yeshua is the Messiah is that it’s what the *Brit Chadashah*—that is, the New Testament—clearly teaches. Over and over the New Testament authors write about how Yeshua emphatically declared Himself to be the Messiah in places like Mark 14:62. They wrote about how they all came to believe that He was the Messiah through His teachings, ministry, and eventually His death and resurrection. They wrote about how Yeshua opened their eyes to see the truth of the Gospel written throughout the *TANAKH*.

#### **Luke 24:44-48**

“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that

everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”

The original Jewish followers of Yeshua came to believe so strongly that Yeshua is the Messiah that an entire Messianic Movement emerged from this belief and is now the largest religion in the world.

The question is, can we trust the authors of the New Testament? Is there any reason to believe that they would lie or distort the truth about this person Yeshua? Theologian Dr. William Lane Craig writes in his book, *On Guard*:

*“No modern scholar thinks of the gospels as bald-faced lies, the result of a massive conspiracy. The only places you find such conspiracy theories are on atheist Web sites and in sensationalist books and movies. When you read the pages of the New Testament, there’s no doubt that these people sincerely believed in the truth of what they proclaimed.”*

Dr. William Lane Craig, “On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision”

There’s simply no reason to believe that the New Testament authors would have made up their information in their writings. They truly believed that what they wrote was the truth. Any suggestion to the contrary is outright dismissed by the world of New Testament scholarship.

One objection to the New Testament is that the stories about Yeshua were exaggerated and mythologized as they were passed on over the decades. We can’t test the accuracy of the New Testament on the assumption that the original facts about Yeshua were lost between the time of the events to when those events were written down. This is known as the “legend hypothesis.”

But according to scholars, one major problem with the legend hypothesis is that the time gap between the events of the New Testament and when they were written down is just too short for legendary tendencies to blot out the historical facts.

Greco-Roman historian, A. N. Sherwin-White, says that the ancient writings of the Greek historian, Herodotus, who lived between 484 – 425 BC, help us learn the rate at which legend accumulates. He writes:

*“Herodotus enables us to test the tempo of myth-making, and the tests suggest that even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core of the oral tradition.”*

A.N. Sherwin-White, “Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament,” pg. 190

To offer some perspective, the two earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written down more than 400 years after his death, and yet historians still have the utmost confidence in their reliability. While there is some debate concerning when the gospels were written, there’s no question that they were certainly completed before the close of the first century and written by eyewitnesses or under the guidance of eyewitnesses to the events they describe. Thus, the possibility that myth had crept into the accounts to make them untrustworthy simply isn’t reasonable.

This leads into the second reason why Yeshua is the Messiah.

## 2) The Resurrection

The New Testament describes a miraculous historical event that confirms Yeshua's claim to be the Messiah of Israel. Yeshua was crucified by the Roman authorities of his day, then three days later God raised Him from the dead, thus vindicating Yeshua's Messianic claims by divine miracle. That's why the New Testament says:

### Acts 17:31

**“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”**

So how do we know that the resurrection of Yeshua actually happened? Dr. William Lane Craig argues that there are four historical facts that are best explained by the resurrection of Yeshua. And these facts are recognized by the vast majority of New Testament historians. Those facts are:

- 1) After Yeshua's crucifixion, He was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea
- 2) Yeshua's tomb was found empty by a group of His women followers
- 3) On separate occasions, different individuals and groups saw appearances of Yeshua alive after His death
- 4) The original disciples suddenly came to believe in the resurrection of Yeshua

Dr. William Lane Craig, “Does God Exist?,” [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)

Regarding the first fact, this is significant for several reasons. First, it means that the location of Yeshua's burial site was known to everyone in the area—believers, unbelievers, and enemies alike. Thus, the disciples couldn't have proclaimed the resurrection in Jerusalem had Yeshua's tomb not been found empty. Furthermore, the details of the account of Yeshua's burial make it highly unlikely that the authors would have fabricated the event. As Dr. William Lane Craig argues:

*“As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention. There was strong resentment against the Jewish leadership for their role in the condemnation of Jesus (1 Thess. 2:15). It is therefore highly improbable that Christians would invent a member of the court that condemned Jesus who honors Jesus by giving him a proper burial instead of allowing him to be dispatched as a common criminal.”*

Dr. William Lane Craig, “The Resurrection of Jesus,” [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)

The second fact is significant for several reasons as well. To name just a couple, the fact that the gospels describe women discovering the empty tomb lends support to the authenticity of the account. According to first century Jewish historian Josephus and other sources, the testimony of women was regarded as untrustworthy in the ancient world—so much so that it couldn't even be admitted into the Jewish court:

*“But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex”*

-Josephus, Antiquities, 4:8.15

“Any evidence which a woman [gives] is not valid (to offer)...”  
-Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 1.8c

Since, in the ancient world, the testimony of women was regarded as less trustworthy than that of a man's, we could assume that a later myth would have made male disciples the ones to find Yeshua's empty tomb. Thus, the fact that it was indeed women who had first discovered Yeshua's empty tomb shows that it is highly unlikely that the ancient writers fabricated the account. As historian N.T. Wright explains:

*“As historians we are obliged to comment that if these stories had been made up five years later, let alone thirty, forty, or fifty years later, they would never had had Mary Magdalene in this role. To put Mary there is, from the point of view of Christian apologists wanting to explain to a skeptical audience that Jesus really did rise from the dead, like shooting themselves in the foot. But to us as historians this kind of thing is gold dust. The early Christians would never, never have made this up.”*

N.T. Wright, “There is a God,” pg. 207

Second, the original objection to the claim that Yeshua rose from the dead was that His disciples had stolen Yeshua's body:

### **Matthew 28:13**

“While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”

This indicates that even the very enemies of the early followers of Yeshua affirm the fact that the tomb was indeed found empty.

Regarding the third fact, how do we know that the disciples really did see appearances of the risen Messiah after His Crucifixion? How do we know they weren't just making things up?

You could argue that these accounts were made up later. But that is unlikely since this fact is established in very early tradition and creeds. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul preserved an early creed that gives a list of witnesses to whom Yeshua appeared after His resurrection.

### **1 Corinthians 15:**

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: The Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”

Most scholars believe that this list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15 goes back to within three years of the Shavuot-Pentecost event in Acts 2. The reason is that it is fewer than 50 words and written in a Mnemonic structure with parallelism, which indicates that it was an early creed for the purpose of

catechizing new disciples since it was easy to memorize.

Furthermore, the phrase, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,” is a Rabbinic statement of a teacher passing what he was taught on to his students, indicating that Paul was quoting from an old tradition that most likely goes back to the disciples themselves. The fact that these appearances of Yeshua were such an early tradition, dated within five years of Yeshua’s death, rules out the possibility that the accounts of Yeshua’s post-mortem appearances were mere legends made up later.

Some have argued that those who saw appearances of Yeshua were merely hallucinating, but that is highly unlikely since the appearances happen in group settings. Group hallucinations in which the entire group sees the same thing are extremely rare if they ever happen at all. In an email to Dr. Michael Licona, Psychologist Dr. Gary Sibcy says:

*“I have surveyed the professional literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books) written by psychologists, psychiatrists, and other relevant healthcare professionals during the past two decades and have yet to find a single documented case of a group hallucination, an event for which more than one person purportedly shared in a visual or other sensory perception where there was clearly no referent.”*

Dr. Michael Licona, “The Resurrection of Jesus,” pg. 484

Thus, it seems the best explanation for the historical fact of individuals and groups seeing appearances of Yeshua after His crucifixion is that God did indeed raise Yeshua from the dead.

This conclusion is all the more obvious when we consider the 4<sup>th</sup> fact: That the original disciples suddenly came to believe in the resurrection of Yeshua—so much so that they were willing to be tortured and killed for that belief. As N.T. Wright says:

*“That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him.”*

N.T. Wright, “The New Unimproved Jesus,” Christianity Today (September 13, 1993), pg. 26

That being the case, the only reasonable conclusion we can draw from these facts is that Yeshua was who He claimed to be, the Messiah of Israel, and God Himself performed a divine miracle backing up Yeshua’s claims.

Now let’s go to our third reason for why Yeshua is the Messiah:

### **3) The Old Testament**

Not only is the fact of Yeshua being the Messiah clearly outlined in the *Brit Chadashah* Scriptures, but it is also proven in the *TANAKH*.

When we read the *TANAKH*, everything seems to be culminating to the revelation of Messiah. This is hinted at in the very beginning of the Bible. You have Adam and Eve in the garden. Everything is perfect, but there’s one rule—they are not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The serpent shows up, convinces Adam and Eve to disobey God’s command and eat from the tree. And

through that act of rebellion, sin, evil, death, and suffering enter into the world. Thus, this serpent is portrayed as the source of evil and death, which exists in our world even to today.

However, in the midst of this event, God makes a promise:

### **Genesis 3:15**

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

So we see that God promised that one day someone will come in the future—a son of Eve—and He’s going to crush the serpent’s head, essentially conquering the very source of evil and death. Yet, this future hero will be wounded while defeating evil—the serpent will bruise his heel.

This story picks back up in Genesis 12 when God calls Abram and tells him that his descendants will be a blessing to all the nations of the world.

### **Genesis 12:1-3**

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So God singles out Abram in order that, through his descendants, He will restore peace and blessing to the world. God’s plan is to use Abraham’s descendants to reach the nations. That is why, in Exodus 19:6, Israel is called a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They would function as priests to the nations, teaching them about the God of Israel so that the nations would draw near to God.

As we continue along in this story, we see that one of Abraham’s descendants is singled out—Judah. Genesis 49:10 prophesies that one of Judah’s descendants will be a king, “and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

As we know, a king did come from the tribe of Judah by the name of David. And again, in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, God singles out one of David’s descendants to be the one to carry out the mission of restoring peace and blessing to the world. This is where we get the concept of the Messiah being an anointed son of David who will one day rule forever.

However, none of David’s sons end up fulfilling this promise. They all sin, they all die, and eventually Israel is exiled from the land. We reach this point in the *TANAKH* where there are no more kings of Israel to fulfill God’s promise. And it seems that all hope is lost. However, during the Babylonian exile there are several prophets, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, who kept talking about this coming king.

Among these prophecies about this coming king are some interesting passages about a figure that has come to be known as “the suffering servant.” This figure fulfills the very mission and destiny of Israel—Abraham’s descendants—by being a light to the nations:

### **Isaiah 42:5-7**

“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

Who is this servant? While most Jewish tradition thinks the servant is Israel as a nation, there is some Jewish tradition that says the servant is the Messiah. Does the text give us any indication which is correct? Let's continue reading.

### **Isaiah 49:1-3**

“Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’”

Some people might be tempted to stop right here and say, “There it is! The suffering servant is clearly identified as Israel, not the Messiah!” But if we keep reading, we see something interesting.

### **Isaiah 49:4-5**

“But I said, ‘I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and in vanity; yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God.’ And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to Him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength.”

So here we see a distinction between this servant of Isaiah and Israel even though the servant is referred to as Israel! So how do we reconcile this?

The best way to clear this up is to view this servant as a representative of Israel who fulfills the mission of Israel.

Think of an Olympic athlete from the United States. The athlete represents the entire nation. And whenever an individual athlete wins some sort of gold medal, all the headlines read, “The U.S. wins the gold medal,” since the athlete represents the nation.

Another analogy would be that of a king or a ruler of a nation representing the nation. When President Trump pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, all the headlines read, “The U.S. pulls out of the Paris Climate Agreement,” since the leadership of the United States represents the entire nation.

It's the same case with the suffering servant of Isaiah. Since this individual fulfills the mission of Israel as a representative, he is called Israel.

As we examine this passage, it appears that this servant feels that he has failed in his mission to His own people, Israel. If we read this in light of Yeshua, we can see how it could fit. It's been 2,000 years since Yeshua's first coming and still the majority of the Jewish people haven't received Him. But let's see what God says in the next verse:

### **Isaiah 49:6**

“He says: ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

So YHWH says of this servant that His ministry to His own people, Israel, is too small a thing. God's



plan is that this servant would be a light to the nations and bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Who do we know that fits this picture? The obvious answer is Yeshua. We've seen the fruit of Yeshua's ministry and how it's touched the nations. Billions of people around the world have drawn near to the God of Israel through Yeshua's ministry.

When we take these passages along with Isaiah 52:13 – Isaiah 53:12, an even clearer picture develops. This is what we have in Scripture concerning the servant of Isaiah:

- He will be an individual within Israel (49:4-5)
- He will fulfill Israel's calling to be a light to the nations (42:1-7)
- He appears at first to have failed at gathering all of Israel back to God (49:4-5)
- He will suffer greatly before being highly exalted (52:13-15)
- He would be innocent, yet suffer as a "guilt offering" for the sins of Israel and the world (53:9-10)
- From his suffering comes healing and peace for all people (53:4-8)
- He "poured out His soul to death," yet lives on to make intercession for the transgressors (53:11-12)

So the *TANAKH* ends with this cliff-hanger: One day a king will come and fulfill all of these prophecies. And as we clearly see in the New Testament, this mission is fulfilled in Yeshua. He comes the first time to accomplish the first phase of Messianic prophecy through His priestly work by making atonement for sin and will come again to complete the second phase.

But wait! There's more! The *TANAKH* actually gives us a timeline for when the first phase of Messianic prophecy must be accomplished. When we turn to Daniel 9, this is taking place towards the end of the Babylonian exile. Daniel is praying and asking God for mercy and pleading with Him to restore Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Then the messenger of the Lord, Gabriel, comes to Daniel says this:

#### **Daniel 9:24-27**

*"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed."*

So the first thing to understand is that when this passage speaks of "weeks," it is speaking of a week of seven years. Virtually all Bible commentators are in agreement that the expression "70 weeks" is speaking of a time period of 490 years.

So a simple, straight-forward approach to viewing this passage is that there is period of 490 years within which these 6 things must happen: "finish the transgression, put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal both vision and prophet, and anoint a most holy place." This is such an important prophecy that it eclipsed Daniel's prayer concerning the return from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.



So why is this prophecy significant? Because it gives us a timetable for when this particular phase of the Messiah's work must be completed—namely, before the Second Temple was destroyed. The passage says that there will be a coming of an “anointed one”—that is, Messiah—and that he will be “cut off,” which is a phrase used in the Bible, such as in Exodus 31:14, to describe execution. Then, “the city and the sanctuary” will be destroyed. Most Bible scholars agree that the prophecy of “the city and the sanctuary” being destroyed was fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

So the prophecy states that sometime after the Messiah would be cut off, or executed, Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed again. Thus, the Messiah had to come and fulfill His work of atoning for iniquity, bringing in everlasting righteousness, etc., and then be executed prior to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The only possible candidate that fits this picture is Yeshua.

Those are only three reasons out of many, but we believe they are sufficient to confidently declare that Yeshua is, in fact, the Messiah of Israel.

We hope that this teaching has blessed you; and remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

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