

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Our Eternal Covenant Isn't Obsolete



Centuries of tragic Jew-hatred is documented in *The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism* by Malcolm Hay and *Constantine's Sword* by James Carrol. These two books are replete with historical evidence and explore the dark and horrific role the Christian Church played in promoting anti-Semitism.

Regrettably, the New Testament contains several passages that fueled Jew-hatred. The accusations that “*the Jews killed*

Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 2: 14-15) and that the Jews are “*children of the Devil*” (John 8:44) were especially devastating. Additionally, Hebrews 8:9-13 was cited as proof that God had “*rejected*” the Jewish people, made the Torah [Covenant] “*obsolete*” and replaced it with the New Covenant.

Today, many Christians recognize the irony of these accusations and acknowledge that they contradict the Jewish bible. It is inexplicable that God would refer to circumcision—the most guarded Jewish ritual—as an “*everlasting covenant*” (Genesis 17:13), only to be rejected by the New Testament (Galatians 5:2). Furthermore, rather than calling the Jews “*children of the devil*,” the Torah repeatedly refers to them as the children of God, as it says, “*Israel is My son, My firstborn*” (Exodus 4:22).

The church taught that the demonization of Jews was the consequence of their disobedience and “*inability to fulfill the Torah*,” which caused God to reject them. Once again, many theologians acknowledge that this line of reasoning contradicts the Torah. For instance, when describing the obligation to follow the Torah and its laws we are told, “*what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach ... it is very near to you in your mouth, and in your heart so that you may do it*” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

In addition to saying that observing the Torah is within our grasp, the Torah provides the commandment of repentance [return-תשובה] as the means to rectify our mistakes. This commandment demonstrates that God does not expect perfection. Rather, God wants us to strive to be holy.

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One of the most spiritual statements in Judaism appears in this week's Torah portion, *Kedoshim* (Leviticus 19:1–20:27). With the words, “*Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy*” (Leviticus 19:2), we are instructed to emulate God by controlling and elevating our animal desires. In this way, we achieve true spiritual oneness with God.

This week's Torah portion also describes one of the most important ways to be holy. God instructs us to sanctify ourselves by controlling our most base animal instinct, an indiscriminate and uncontrolled sex urge. The most well-known sexual prohibition forbids adultery and this commandment has a spiritual counterpart.

The prophet Hosea compares the Jewish people's relationship with God to a marriage, saying, “*I will betroth you to Me forever, I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion*” (Hosea 2:19-21). The words righteousness and justice allude to the Torah, which is our marriage contract with God. Following the Torah demonstrates our loyalty to God.

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On the other hand, someone who commits adultery and is unfaithful to one's spouse creates animosity and separation. Idolatry is compared to adultery because worshiping something other than God breaks our covenant relationship with Him. Jeremiah states this clearly, *"They broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord"* (Jeremiah 31:32).

A careful reading of Jeremiah's words teaches that despite the Jew's infidelity, God remains a faithful husband to them. This idea is consistent with God's repeated promise, *"I will not violate My covenant"* (Psalms 89:34) or *"I will not break my covenant"* (Leviticus 26:44). In this spiritual marriage, we are the only party who can break the covenant if we are unfaithful. However, we can always restore the covenant relationship through sincere repentance, as it says, *"If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored"* (Job 22:23).

We will no longer have an urge to be "unfaithful" to God.

However, in the messianic age, we will rise to an even higher relationship. God will transform our inclination to do evil [centered in our heart—Genesis 6:5] into holiness. We will no longer desire to be "unfaithful" to God. Jeremiah refers to this as a New Covenant with the words, *"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel... I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people"* (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

This New Covenant will not replace the original. Instead, it will renew and enhance the original so that even the Jewish people will not be able to break it, This is because God will intervene and transform our heart, as it states, *"I will give you a new heart ... and cause you to follow My laws and carefully keep My ordinances and do them"* (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Missionaries regularly refer to the New Testament as the New Covenant that superseded the "Old Testament." However, a glaring discrepancy refutes this claim. When the New Testament quotes Jeremiah 31:32, it mistranslates the words *"I was a husband."* Instead of saying that God remained a "husband" [בעלתי—*ba'alti*] to the Jewish people, the New Testament says that God *"turned away from [rejected] them"* (Hebrews 8:9).

This negative implication contradicted the Torah and was inserted to give the impression that God has rejected the Jews. As the author of Hebrews says, *"By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear"* (Hebrews 8:13).

As Mark Twain's short essay "Concerning the Jews" points out, history has confirmed that the Jewish people's spiritual connection with God is eternal. King Solomon makes a beautiful allusion to connection when he compares the soul of a Jew to a flame, saying that *"The soul of man is the candle of God"* (Proverbs 20:27). This idea is significant because the flame of Judaism is compared to the fire burning on the Altar that will never go out, as it says, *"a perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the Altar"* (Leviticus 6:6). Judaism provides timeless lessons because the Torah is eternal and not obsolete.

Shabbat Shalom,

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