

YOU'RE A JEWISH BABY BOOMER

Now
What?

The
Chosen 
People



Are we ready for what is next?

THIS ENTIRE ISSUE OF

The Chosen People newsletter is dedicated to Jewish Baby Boomers.

Who are we? The more general category of “Baby Boomers” refers to those born between 1946 and 1964.

According to many demographic studies, this amounts to about one-third of the current population of the United States. Within this group, there are a large number of Jewish people—like me.

Our generation has seen more than its share of changes.

Have you ever tried to explain to your children and grandchildren what it’s like to watch a television program in black and white, or listen to a phonograph record? It simply seems to be beyond their ability to grasp.

Our generation saw the first man on the moon, the beginning and end of the Cold War, the globalization of travel, the creation and popularization of the Internet, the ubiquity of cell phones and significant increases in lifespan. I’d better stop this list now, because otherwise it might continue for another twenty or thirty pages.

Jewish Baby Boomers have a particular burden to shoulder. We grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust, haunted by the inconceivable loss of the six million murdered in the Nazi genocide. Many of us lost close relatives, although we had never met them. But we also lived to see the creation of the modern state of Israel—a source of pride and excitement that helped form our Jewish identity.

My Own Story

My personal story is typical of my fellow Jewish Boomers. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents had immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe, and I was born in Brooklyn in 1952. When I was younger, my family was more traditionally religious. But as I grew older and moved from the borough of Queens in New York City to New Jersey, we became less and less observant, although my grandparents and a few others in the family remained strongly religious.

Although being Jewish was very important to us, and we observed the holidays and other traditions—still, I would not say that our faith was alive and active. My parents sent me to a very Orthodox Hebrew school where I learned to read Hebrew, recited the prayers, studied Jewish history and religion, and prepared for my Bar Mitzvah. But even though I attended Jewish summer camps and most of my friends were Jewish, the Jewish religion became less and less meaningful to me personally. I do not remember hearing a lot about God or having a personal relationship with God. So as the years went by, I became less interested in religious Judaism.

I looked to others for guidance and inspiration. I listened to the Beatles, advanced to Bob Dylan, and even went to Woodstock—though like many of my fellow Boomers, it’s hard for me to remember what happened there! As you may recall, these were turbulent times of racial unrest, war in Vietnam, and the rise of drug use. For those of us who were not particularly religious, it was really hard to find a moral compass.

After quickly dropping out of college, I travelled to California and joined tens of thousands of other New York Jewish Baby Boomers searching for “something.” Although none of us knew particularly what we were looking for, we just knew that we were missing it!

We wanted something we thought was profoundly spiritual. Where could we turn?

Christianity was, of course, out of the question for us; we were the post-Holocaust generation whose relatives had been killed by “Christians.” Yet by the same token, most of us were alienated from Jewish religious life and from the synagogue by then.

I started reading books about Hinduism and Buddhism. Eastern thought seemed to be more spiritual than Judaism, and certainly far less threatening than considering Christianity. But although they were exotic and fascinating, they did not truly satisfy my soul’s deepest questions.

Then something happened. My two best Jewish friends from New York met some very authentic and dynamic “born again” Christians who told them about Jesus. It was not long before they both became believers in Jesus the Messiah and started to tell me about what they found. They claimed that you could indeed be Jewish and believe in Jesus.

My curiosity grew. When I saw that my friends’ lives had changed, observed the peace and joy they had, and realized that they were obviously still Jewish, this new option became very attractive to me.

I began reading the New Testament, though I felt guilty turning every page. As a Jew, I knew that this was not a book I should read. It was the book that, at least in my mind, had inspired “Christians” to persecute and slaughter my ancestors. As I kept reading, I found that Jesus—or as we call him in Hebrew, Yeshua—was an amazing and inspiring person. I loved what he said and what he did. I also understood that he was Jewish, and was not trying to start a new religion or become less Jewish. In fact, in many ways he was trying to return us to the Jewish religion God originally intended in the Old Testament, even as the prophets had done before him. He reminded us that religion is not primarily about rules and regulations or about joining religious institutions; instead, it’s all about our relationship with the creator—the one who made us.

I eventually became a follower of Messiah Yeshua. I guess that makes me a Jewish Baby Boomer Yeshua-follower! I was particularly moved by the words of the ancient prophet Isaiah, who wrote in Isaiah chapter 53:6,

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

The prophet was speaking about Jesus—and the one who went astray was me!

Finally, one day I read the words that Yeshua spoke in Matthew chapter 11:28,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

I realized I needed some rest from my search, and I found that rest—that Shalom—in the Jewish Messiah.

As you might imagine, my family was not thrilled with my decision to become a follower of Yeshua. But over time, most of them understood that I was not rejecting who I was as a Jew, but simply affirming that Yeshua was the Jewish Messiah.

What’s Next?

I believe that there are many Jewish Baby Boomers still searching for that profound spiritual meaning they yearned for when they were younger. My generation is searching more, but with a difference. Life has become more serious, and many of us face—or know we will soon face—health issues both for ourselves and our aging parents. I believe that the search for meaning by Jewish Baby Boomers is intensifying as we ponder our own mortality. We need to honestly ask ourselves, “Have I ever found what I was looking for?” And if the answer is a very deep and honest NO...then please keep reading. I hope that this publication will help you.

If you are not yet a follower of Yeshua—and perhaps this is even the first time you are reading about this topic—please try to keep an open mind. One of the most wonderful traits that I believe our generation has developed is a commitment to lifelong learning. So, please read what follows, consider it, and allow God to speak to you. Perhaps you will find what you have been looking for all these years.

And when you find him, you will probably discover that it was not you who found the Messiah—but the Messiah who searched for and found you.



Mitch

P.S. You can watch a video version of my story by visiting chosenpeople.com/story.



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FIVE

THINGS THEY NEVER TOLD US

5 about Booming

N “NOBODY TOLD ME IT WOULD be like this.” This is a repeated sentiment among many Baby Boomers, including a sizable Jewish Boomer population. As Boomers enter a new phase in life, they face some new challenges. As Bob Dylan, voice of the Boomer

generation, says, “How does it feel, to be on your own with no direction home, like a complete unknown.”

Baby Boomers came of age in an era of unprecedented American growth and prosperity. The previous generation had encountered tremendous economic despair and then fought valiantly to ensure freedom. Jewish Boomers are the first generation to grow up in a world wrestling not only with the horror of nuclear weapons, but also of the specifically Jewish horror of the Holocaust. Yet Jewish Boomers are also the first to know and enjoy the unifying effect of the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel.

The sixties, a decade shaped by political and cultural revolution with the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War, defines this generation. The Boomers sought to make the world a better place by challenging the status quo, calling for peace and standing against both prejudice and injustice. Despite pursuing an idyllic world, many Baby Boomers now face difficulties they did not expect. These five areas illustrate the present challenges of the Boomer generation.

First, aging Baby Boomers must now help their even more aged parents cope with deteriorating health and the prospect of dying. There is a flip side to modern medicine. Although it can prolong life, in many instances it cannot restore a thriving life. The declining years offer a bittersweet opportunity. For those who have experienced conflict with parents, the chance to help them provides a truly healing experience. Extending love and comfort to a dying parent is a human duty that enlarges one’s spirit and develops a level of maturity not previously known. Making peace with aging parents can bring comfort in the midst of grief.

Second, many Baby Boomers now face the sobering difficulties of parenting maturing children. They have spent the last few decades guiding their children through the academic, social and physical changes that occur from grade school through college. Their children are now ready to “leave the nest” and begin families of their own. While it is rewarding to help one’s child reach new levels of independence, Boomers struggle with the loneliness of an “empty nest,” because they have poured their lives into their children. The “empty nest” forces individuals to rediscover both themselves and their spouse. Both men and women are often unprepared for the emotional stress caused by children leaving the home.

Third, many Boomers are now encountering the emotional and financial stress of retirement. Retirement creates emotional strain due to the close relationship between one’s identity and his or her career, and this upheaval in self-image results in insecurity. Retirement also brings significant financial challenges. With longer life expectancy, the length of



retirement is growing, causing financial stress when planning for a longer retirement. The recent economic crisis compounds this problem, because many Baby Boomers are now looking at depleted retirement accounts.

Fourth, Boomers, now between the ages of 49 and 67, are experiencing various health concerns of their own, which create financial pressure due to rapidly rising health costs. Health issues contribute to emotional pain as many

Boomers discover they are unable to physically do what they could previously. Although Boomers will live longer, recent studies indicate this generation is not healthier than previous generations. Many Boomers find it difficult to make the necessary lifestyle changes.

Finally, as Boomers deal with various health challenges, they face their own mortality. This recognition of human frailty has led many Jewish Boomers to

think about both eternity and their relationship to God and to Judaism. While Judaism teaches there is an afterlife, it does not provide certainty on where one goes after death (Berakot 28b). Jesus, on the other hand, promises his followers certainty of eternal life (John 11:25-26; 1 John 5:13). In every generation, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, provides hope. He infuses life with meaning and gives comfort to those facing their own frailty.

In this changing world, increasing numbers of Jewish Baby Boomers are investigating this path—a path that has been far more strictly forbidden to previous Jewish generations.

This path begins nowhere other than with our own Hebrew Scriptures and in God's covenant promises to our people.

■ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob loves you and created you for a purpose—to love God, enjoy the world he created and to live in harmony with others.

■ God provided a way for men and women to be restored and forgiven in order to experience Shalom again.

■ Who is this Messiah? Yeshua—Jesus of Nazareth—the Prince of Shalom and Jewish Messiah for all!

■ Yeshua fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53, died for our sins, rose from the dead and offers the gift of forgiveness and new life to all who ask.

GENESIS 1:27 – *So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.*

PSALM 8:4-5 – *What are mere mortals, that you concern yourself with them, humans, that you watch over them with such care? You made him but little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor.**

GENESIS 3:22-23 – *Adonai, God, said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, to prevent his putting out his hand and taking also from the tree of life, eating, and living forever— ” therefore Adonai, God, sent him out of the garden of Eden to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.*

* verses 5-6 in Complete Jewish Bible

ISAIAH 53:5-6 – *But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet Adonai laid on him the guilt of all of us.*

ISAIAH 9:6 – *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; dominion will rest on his shoulders, and he will be given the name Pele-Yo‘etz El Gibbor Avi-‘Ad Sar-Shalom [Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace].**

* verse 5 in Complete Jewish Bible

ISAIAH 53:11 – *After this ordeal, he will see satisfaction. “By his knowing [pain and sacrifice], my righteous servant makes many righteous; it is for their sins that he suffers.*

JOHN 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life.*

All scriptures taken from the Complete Jewish Bible translation.

If you are ready—pray this prayer and you will experience Shalom as never before.

God of Israel, I believe Yeshua is the Messiah and that he died for my sin and rose from the dead so that I can have Shalom. I accept him as my Messiah...Amen!



SHOLEM ASCH AND THE

Jewish Jesus

A

ALTHOUGH HIS FAME HAS

now all but vanished, Sholem Asch (1880–1957) was among the most popular Jewish writers in the world for over three decades, beginning in the early twentieth century.

Asch, writing in Yiddish, authored

plays, short stories and lengthy novels about Jewish history that were translated into Polish, German, English and other languages from almost the beginning of his career. Championed by Abraham Cahan, the authoritarian editor of the widely-read Jewish Daily Forward, Asch developed an enormously devoted Yiddish readership who loved his depictions of Jewish life.

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN

a Jewish home in Brooklyn, New York. My family attended synagogue a few times a year, and we celebrated all the traditional Jewish feasts and festivals. I was raised to believe that Jewish people were chosen and had the one and only God, and that all Gentiles were Christians and had Jesus.

When I was 34 years old, I met a believer who introduced me to my Jewish Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). I asked him, “Why, after all these years, are you the only person that ever introduced me to or explained to me about Jesus and my salvation? Why, as a Jew, do I not believe in the Jewish Messiah?” It became clear to me that I was being provoked to jealousy. I wanted the peace that only Jesus provided, salvation from sin, and to spend eternity with God. In 1984 I accepted Jesus as my Messiah—and that wonderful,

faithful believer, named Ron, became my husband in 1985.

Over the next couple of years I read the Bible, attended church, listened to Christian radio, and read Christian books; yet I was not sharing the message of Yeshua with my Jewish family. I was fearful they would reject me and think I was a traitor.

I spent a lot of time in prayer, and as I was reading the Holy Scriptures it felt like a veil was being lifted from my eyes. God, through his Holy Spirit, revealed himself to me in a very real and personal way. My “head knowledge” became heart knowledge, and I was no longer fearful. My desire, passion and purpose became sharing the good news of Yeshua with my Jewish family and friends. Just before Ron and I helped start our first Messianic congregation in 1991, my Jewish mother received Yeshua on her deathbed. My Jewish father accepted Yeshua a few years later. Praise the Lord!

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

– Romans 1:16

Story from Eileen B.

In 1939, however, Asch stunned the Jewish world by publishing a historical novel that dealt with a topic quite different from his previous works in that genre. It was *Der Man fun Natseres* or, in its best-selling English translation, *The Nazarene*—a full-length treatment of the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah.

Although the New Testament was by no means a new topic, Asch's approach to the subject matter was startling in that it represented a determined effort to put the "Jewish" back into Jesus. Years ahead of the modern Messianic movement of Jewish believers in Jesus and its emphasis on the Jewish roots of

the Gospel, Asch's Jesus was *Yeshua*, his Mary was *Miriam*, and all the familiar sites of the New Testament had their Hebrew names restored. In its English translation, *The Nazarene* became a blockbuster bestseller.

It was a different story in the Jewish world. Cahan, who from the beginning had opposed Asch's decision to tackle this project, orchestrated a two-year campaign of character assassination against his former favorite writer. Spearheaded by Cahan's virulent attacks, Asch was labeled everything from a traitor to his people to an agent of the Vatican.

What was all the uproar about? One thing important to remember is that in today's world, the Jewishness of Jesus

and the Jewish context of his life and ministry are settled facts. Even the assertion that the Gospel itself is an essentially Jewish message is slowly gaining traction in the Jewish world. This was far from the case in 1939, when the world trembled on the threshold of war and Asch's Yiddish readership in Europe was about to be annihilated.

In his time, however, Asch was a pioneer. He dared to give the world a Jewish Messiah from the New Testament. For this he paid a price—he was reviled and vilified by many of his peers. But like the Messiah of whom he wrote, his message is being vindicated.

I ENTERED QUEENS COLLEGE

in New York City during an era of unrest, great causes and peace movements. I wanted to change the world, so I set my sights on becoming a lawyer—but God had other plans for me.

I was a nice Jewish boy who went to Hebrew school and became Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13. However, I enjoyed cutting class and spending my days in Manhattan's museums and parks, as well as the movie theaters in Times Square. When my parents learned how I was passing my time during the day, they sent me to military school, where they hoped I might learn discipline.

It was there that I was first introduced to Christianity. One Sunday, as some of my

classmates were returning from church, they stopped me in the hall. "Hey, Jew, did you know that you and your family killed Christ?" I didn't know what to say, but I came to realize in a very small way what my mother experienced in Nazi Germany before her family fled. Like most of us from a Jewish background, a giant wall against Christianity was erected in my mind and heart.

During one summer break from college, someone broke through that wall. It was during a trip on which I wanted get a taste of the "real world." I had become disillusioned with my early ideals about changing the world. I had tried drugs, explored Eastern philosophies, the occult and mysticism, seeking the truth about life—but all those paths were fruitless and lifeless. I was traveling cross-country, but not really expecting to find anything.

In Wisconsin, I ran into "Jesus People" who shared with me that Jesus was Jewish. This was a revelation for

me. These people knew more about my ancestors than I did, and had an incredible love for the Jewish people. They explained the "story" of God and why he sent the Messiah. This Jewish Messiah, they said, was the only hope for a dying world.

By the time I returned to school, I asked God to show me if Jesus was the Messiah, not really expecting an answer. During that semester, one thing after another—both in my studies and in a myriad of other things that came across my path—helped me to understand that God is real and that Jesus is indeed the Jewish Messiah. I came to understand that he came to pay for our sins with his death, and rose again to prove that he had taken them away.

Since I came to faith, I have experienced a peace and joy and an understanding of what life is about. I am now involved in what my heart had longed for all those years ago—changing the world.



THE SEARCH FOR A VANISHING PAST

Jewish Boomers & “Der Alter Heim”

IF YOU, LIKE ME, ARE A JEWISH BABY BOOMER,
I bet that you can relate to the following:

If your parents spoke Yiddish around you, it was only when they wanted you not to understand what they were talking about. As a boy, the longest speech I ever heard in Yiddish was during one Passover when my Uncle Sam, who rarely ever spoke at all and whose English was broken almost beyond recognition, gushed forth with a veritable torrent of Yiddish speech after he had drained the fourth cup.

It is said that 75% of American Jews have a relative who began life in America on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Most of us have at least one grandparent who was born in *der alter heim* (“our old home”) somewhere in eastern Europe and who landed at Ellis Island. For many of us, the connection is more intense. In my case, my late father was born in Romania—although he was carried to America at the age of two in 1922, the youngest of seven children. Although he had no memories of the old country, my childhood was filled with the unfamiliar smells and tastes of the old world homes of my aunts and uncles on that side of the family (my mother’s relatives had emigrated in the 1880s).

If I attempted to quiz them about life in pre-World War II Europe, something strange happened. They mostly closed up like clams, seemingly having no interest in remembering. Either that, or it was simply too painful to remember a culture that was literally annihilated in less than ten years.

So, like many other Jewish Americans, there was an enormous gap in my understanding of my background. I decided that if I could not find out more about my immediate family, then I would try to learn about Eastern European Jewish culture. The first task I was determined to tackle was learning Yiddish.

For the past eight years, this has become my passion, for it has opened up a world of such delightful variety and profound depth that I cannot rightly describe it in any language. How wrong we were to think that our Eastern European forebears were merely the scruffy, bewildered, poverty-stricken newcomers we so often imagine. The treasure trove of Yiddish literature, film and journalism that has been preserved is a testimony of the vitality of this vanished world. It is there for us to retrieve, at least to some degree.

One thing I found, to my great surprise, is that many of the Yiddish writers, artists and journalists that flourished in Europe had no compunction about engaging with the dominant Christian world around them. Their varied response not only to Christian culture, but specifically to the Christian faith, makes for fascinating reading.

Our nostalgia for *der alter heim* calls to us for a reason. We want to know the soil from which we sprang. We feel intuitively that such knowledge is an essential part of our identity—and perhaps it is. But it is far more important, whether we are Jewish or not, to find assurance in the destination towards which we are moving.

I am Jewish and want to know more about Yeshua (Jesus). Please send me the FREE book, *Isaiah 53 Explained*. 3135UJ

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