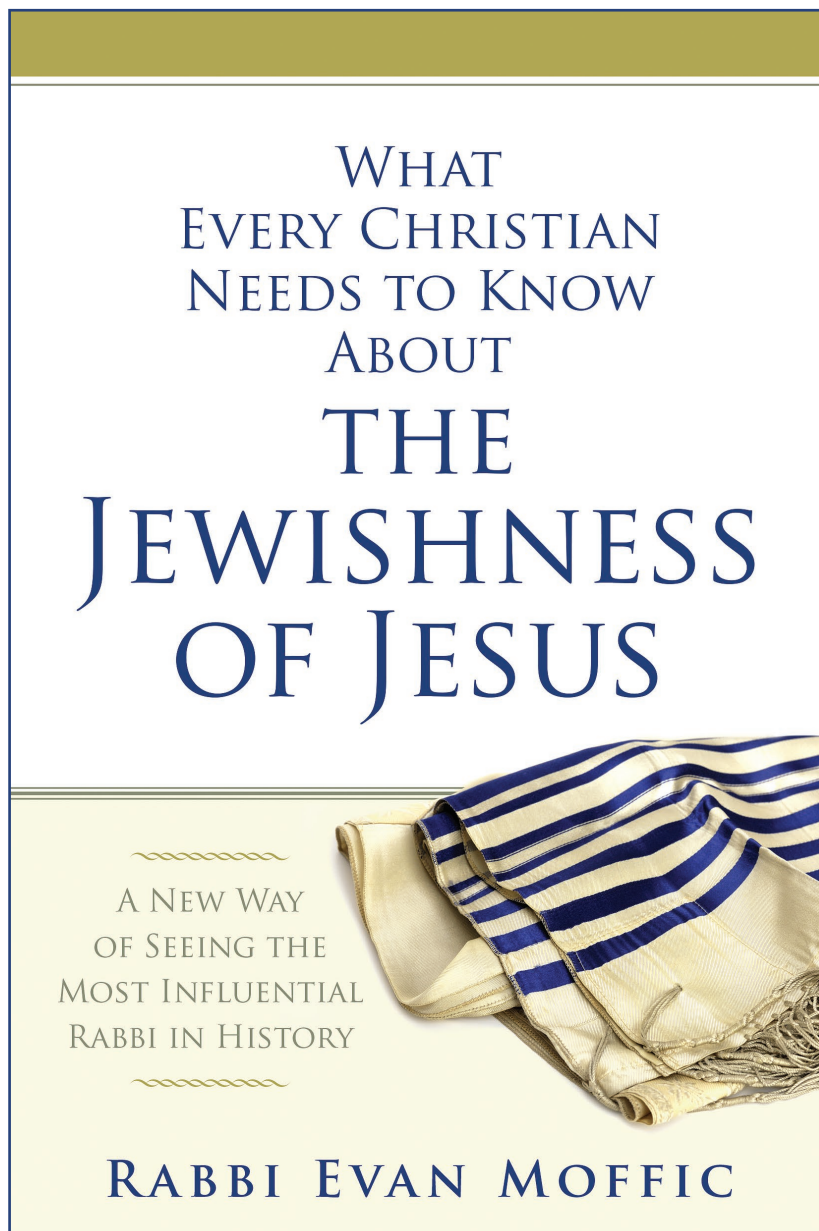


Online Reader's Guide



Introduction

Rabbi Evan Moffic invites us to look at the life of Jesus as a Jewish life, seeking to uncover Christianity's Jewish roots. He believes that when Christians come to appreciate the Jewishness of Jesus, they have the opportunity to see Judaism as a living tradition. With this book he seeks to approach learning with cooperation and friendship rather than from a place of confrontation, with the goal that participants might deepen their own faith.

1. *Rabbi Moffic sees himself as a guide for Christians and Jews through the landscape of first-century Judaism. What does he mean? Why does he believe that the best guide through this landscape is someone who is a Jewish native?*
2. *The Reverend Lillian Daniel suggests that Christians of today have become too caught up on right beliefs rather than right action. How do you respond? Which is more important to you and why?*
3. *Why does Daniel contend that a return to Christianity's Jewish roots might serve as a corrective?*
4. *Moffic explains that he wrote this book because he was both frustrated and hopeful. What are the reasons for his frustration? What are the sources of his hope?*
5. *What are your own hopes and expectations for this book study?*

Chapter 1 A Humble Birth

Chapter 1 approaches the story of Jesus's birth with an eye to exploring some of the hidden depths that may be masked by its very familiarity. A close examination reveals that every part of Jesus's birth narrative echoes parts of the Hebrew Bible. The chapter examines the role of hospitality in faithfully serving God, as well as how it functions in opening persons to experiencing the miracles of everyday life. In considering Jesus's circumcision, we learn that male circumcision is a critical marker of Jewish identity and a symbol of the covenant. We explore this understanding of covenant as a relationship between God and the people, touching on (1) God's promises to Abraham and (2) the second covenant with Moses and the people at Sinai. There is also the likelihood that Jesus considered his life connected to both covenants through his circumcision. Rabbi Moffic points out the voice of Prophetic Judaism that emphasized the importance of spirit-driven action and ritual—a rich Jewish background on which Jesus and his followers drew.

- 1. One of the cardinal rules of biblical interpretation, we are told, is that the Bible does not include unnecessary details. In the light of that rule, Rabbi Moffic encourages us to consider what message the emphasis on Jesus's birthplace is meant to convey. What details about the birth of Moses in Egypt are paralleled in the account of Jesus's birth? In what ways do the midwives who delivered Moses serve as models for us? What are the parallels with the story of the biblical King David?*
- 2. Were you surprised to read that the most direct biblical parallel to the story of Jesus's birth is the story of the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah? Why? What parallels to Abraham and Sarah's story does Rabbi Moffic note?*
- 3. We are introduced to Jewish legends surrounding the angels' announcement to Abraham. Describe what happens when the visitors arrive at the tent of Abraham and Sarah.*
- 4. Abraham is having a prophetic conversation with God while standing in the entrance to his tent. Yet the Jewish sages concluded the following: "Greater is hospitality than receiving the divine presence." What does this mean? Abraham did not*

know the identity of the three men approaching his tent. How does Moffic define Abraham's greatness?

- 5. The actions of Mary and Joseph, says Moffic, could be described in a similar way to those of Abraham. What actions of Mary and Joseph demonstrated an openness to receiving the divine presence? What was the function of the wise men?*
- 6. In relating the story of his visit to two sets of new parents in the hospital, Moffic notes that the couples represent two perspectives that, although not mutually exclusive, convey two different approaches to life. He suggests that the Bible urges us to embrace the second perspective. Reflect on and respond to the questions the rabbi poses: How can we open ourselves up more to the miracles of life? How can we be more like Abraham and Sarah and Joseph and Mary? Who are the angels we need to welcome into our tents? What are the gifts we need to give and receive?*
- 7. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised. Moffic suggests that understanding the significance of circumcision in Jewish tradition gives us a greater depth of understanding of Jesus's teachings on salvation. How?*
- 8. Discuss the twofold covenant God made with the people—first with Abraham and later at Mount Sinai. What does each signify? How is the life of Jesus connected to each?*
- 9. Jesus's circumcision is the source of the apostle Paul's emphasis on the difference between law and spirit or, put another way, between the circumcision of the flesh and the circumcision of the heart. How does this understanding redefine what it means to be Jewish? How is it connected to Prophetic Judaism?*

Chapter 2

An Unexpected Turn

In chapter 2, we begin exploring the journeys of Jesus's life and in the process start to uncover the tensions between home and exile revealed there. Rabbi Moffic helps us identify connections between Matthew's narrative of the flight into Egypt and the Old Testament, beginning with the significance of the names Joseph, Mary, and Jesus and how they relate to characters and events associated with the Hebrew people in Egypt and with the Exodus. Then we are confronted with the question of why the Bible wants us to hear the story of the Exodus in the story of the flight into Egypt, and the chapter presents lessons we are meant to learn. In addition to the parallels between Jesus and Moses, the chapter explores in depth a profound connection and a number of parallels with the Old Testament's Joseph, which would have resonated with first-century Jews. We are also presented with the relevance of Old Testament figures, especially Joseph, for contemporary Jews and Christians alike.

We then turn to Luke's Gospel for the account of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, an occasion that may have marked his Bar Mitzvah. The rabbi suggests that Luke's account may serve the purpose of establishing that the lifestyle of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph was typical of that of first-century families in Nazareth. The account also establishes Jesus as a rabbi.

1. Chapter 2 begins with a quote from Martin Buber: "All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware."¹ Describe a time when some truth emerged for you out of an unexpected twist in life's path. What was revealed to you about God's purposes for you?
2. Rabbi Moffic presents for the reader the connection to the Old Testament of the names Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. What is the significance of the genealogy with which Matthew opens? Describe how each name is connected to Old Testament characters and their narratives.

3. *Moffic suggests that the Bible wants us to hear the story of the Exodus in the story of the flight into Egypt. What examples of suffering in the Old Testament account does he cite? He notes that the redeeming of Israel could not happen without some experience of pain and suffering. How do you respond to that? Do you think suffering must always be a prerequisite for redemption?*
4. *Describe the parallels Moffic notes between Jesus and Joseph. What is the significance of each of the following:*
- *The number 30*
 - *Being beloved by one's father*
 - *The connection between prophecy, faith, and feeding*
 - *"The son of Joseph" and the "Day of the Lord"*
 - *Sanctifying "the name of God"*

Of those discussed in the chapter, which parallel resonates the most with you?

5. *In discussing the relevance of this story for us today, Moffic speaks of Joseph as a model for how to successfully integrate and live within two cultures. How did Caesarius of Arles interpret Joseph's coat of many colors?*
6. *What does Luke's account of the twelve-year-old Jesus suggest about Joseph and Mary's role in Jesus's education and about the lifestyle they led as a typical Jewish family?*
7. *What is the case for calling Jesus a rabbi? How does this title help us understand what Moffic calls the "choreography" of his life?*
8. *Rabbi Moffic observes that in contrast to the Roman culture, whose ideal type was a warrior, Jesus was an exemplar of the Jewish ideal of scholar. If you had to choose an ideal type that exemplifies our contemporary culture, what would it be? Do you view this ideal type as positive or negative? How does it shape the way you live out your faith?*
9. *The Rabbi includes a personal observation about how the elders in his synagogue became his mentors and teachers in the Jewish community, noting that the same thing may have been happening in the Temple for Jesus. In what way do you think you serve as a mentor in the faith for younger persons? To what degree is your own life a living example of what Scripture teaches? Where do you come up short?*

Chapter 3

Entering the Waters

Chapter 3 presents Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist, a profoundly significant event steeped in Jewish tradition. We explore the ancient roots of baptism in the Jewish practice of ritual immersion and its evolution in some Jewish sects by the first century. John the Baptist, seen by some as the successor of Elijah the prophet, drew upon and expanded the practice. We examine his connections with other key Old Testament characters in addition to Elijah the prophet. For contemporary readers, understanding the meaning of baptism in ancient Judaism helps us see why we encounter this story so early in the Gospels. We also examine the different expectations Jews of the time had for the role of the Messiah. Finally, we reflect on the symbolism and significance of water, the physical and spiritual truths it embodies, and how Jesus's immersion in living waters begins a new phase in his life.

- 1. How would you describe the Jewish concept of immersing oneself in a mikveh in order to gain ritual purity? What are some sources of impurity? In what ways did it mark major life transitions?*
- 2. In Jewish tradition, water represents life and Torah. In what ways can you compare water with the Torah?*
- 3. John the Baptist was seen by some to be the successor, or even the reincarnation, of Elijah the prophet. What are some parallels between John and that prophet? What is the significance of the wilderness in Jewish thought? How does it play into the narratives of John and Elijah? How did John fulfill the role of precursor to the Messiah?*
- 4. With what other Old Testament figures could John be compared? How does he represent the connection between the Old and New Testaments?*
- 5. In the description of the Jewish references in the account of Jesus's baptism, we read that God describes Jesus as "my Son." Rabbi Moffic comments that this description of Jesus would have made sense as a biblical echo, not necessarily as a biological statement. What does he mean by this?*

6. *Rabbi Moffic quotes a contemporary rabbi who said, “When I pray, I speak to God. When I study, God speaks to me.”² Do you believe God still literally speaks to people? How and in what circumstances have you experienced the voice of God speaking to you?*
7. *The Talmud teaches that parents need to teach their child at least three things: Torah, a trade, and how to swim. How does the Rabbi explain this? If you had to choose three things a parent should convey to a child about faith and life, what would they be?*
8. *Times of conflict heighten messianic expectations, and John the Baptist and Jesus help us understand the different expectations first-century Jews had for the role of Messiah. Describe the two contrasting expectations for the transformation of the world and the coming of God’s kingdom.*
9. *Jews call the life-giving power of water the Shekinah, or the living presence of God, where Christians may call this the Holy Spirit. When have you felt the life-giving power of water?*
10. *Moffic observes that in the first century, people did not simply visit a baptizer and leave, rather they made regular return visits. The mikveh is still used in this way. He suggests that this perspective might enhance Christian perspective as well. How have you experienced baptism—your own or one you have observed— as both momentarily overwhelming and eternally transforming? When has a renewal of baptism functioned in this way for you?*

Chapter 4 Surviving a Wilderness of Temptations

Chapter 4 explores the spiritual tests Jesus faced in the wilderness following his baptism by John the Baptist, revealing that the way he faces these tests reflects his predecessors and draws from rich Jewish tradition and imagery. God's role as initiator of testing points up the meaning of faith in biblical Judaism. Matthew's account of the testing seeks to connect Jesus with the ancient Jewish patriarchs and people. We first explore the location of Jesus's testing: the wilderness, a place that lays bare our utter dependency. We are introduced to fasting and what it signifies for Jews. Then the chapter delves into the Jewish understanding of Satan, the devil, as an adversarial force who tests God. We explore with Rabbi Moffic the three tests Jesus experienced, with their echoes in the life of Moses and in Deuteronomy, a book Jesus quoted more than any other. In conclusion, we discover the role of angels as we examine the testing of Abraham.

- 1. Rabbi Moffic observes that God initiates both the testing of Job and of Jesus in the wilderness, reflecting the testing of Abraham in Genesis. How does he suggest God uses testing? In Judaism, what is the meaning of faith, and how does it relate to their understanding of the purpose of testing? How do you respond? Do you believe God tests people, and if so, why?*
- 2. What is the key difference between Matthew and Job in terms of testing?*
- 3. In chapter 2 we learned something about the significance of the wilderness. Here we encounter the understanding that wilderness is a place of utter dependency. What do you identify as wilderness experiences in your own life? What risks were involved? What has been revealed to you through these experiences about where your loyalties lie?*
- 4. Most Jews fast on Yom Kippur so that in giving up something, they can experience gratitude for what God has given us. Moffic reveals that in the light-headedness of fasting, he has experienced a heightened spiritual awareness*

of God's reality. When, if ever, have you experienced something similar while fasting? Other than food, from what other experiences or practices might you fast in order to heighten your awareness of God?

- 5. How do you define faith? Is it an instantaneous, all-or-nothing decision? A process requiring patience and persistence? Or something else?*
- 6. In Jewish thought, Satan, or the devil, is an adversarial force called HaSatan (most likely an angel) who tests God. In response to the question of why the Old Testament would depict an angel serving as Satan, what explanation do the sages in the Talmud offer? How does Hershey Friedman explain the more mainstream first-century view?*
- 7. Describe the tests presented to Jesus as well as the parallels to Moses that would have immediately come to mind for first-century Jews. What are the similarities between Moses and Jesus? What differences do you see, and what do they communicate about Jesus?*
- 8. Moffic observes that he has come to see the book of Deuteronomy as strikingly modern, a text he considers especially relevant to Christians today. What reasons does he cite for this view?*
- 9. Define midrash and summarize the midrash that explores the testing of Abraham. How is Satan's role in this midrash similar to the role in Jesus's testing? What is the role of the angel in the midrash and the gospel account?*
- 10. The Hebrew word for angel is malach, which also means messenger. Think about times in your life when you have felt tested by circumstances. Who or what have served as messengers of affirmation and encouragement for you?*

Chapter 5

Calling the Disciples

In chapter 5 we are reminded that had it not been for his disciples, we would know nothing about Jesus. We discover that Jewish tradition gives us a new way to examine who Jesus is and how he drew disciples to himself, for the rabbinic culture in which he lived was focused on creating and training disciples. Using the example of Abraham, we explore what was involved in choosing to be a disciple, in which the disciple becomes a student of the master's way of life. We discover that Jesus taught using the rabbinic method of question and answer, and we examine the role that stories—parables—played in his teachings. Rabbi Moffic also helps us understand the sacrifice involved in becoming a disciple. He leads us to examine how the sacrifice of Jesus's disciples and those of other rabbis were both similar and different, focusing on differing understandings of the kingdom of heaven.

1. *Rabbi Moffic observes: "A disciple is more than a student. A disciple is a link between the past, present, and future." What does he mean by this? What are the implications for those who call themselves disciples of Christ today, and what is our responsibility to Christ's community, the church? What are the "family heirlooms" of the church, and how do we communicate their values?*
2. *Rabbis sought persons imbued with ruach Elohim. How did Jewish sages define the term? What would you add to that definition if you were in search of persons with that quality today?*
3. *The rabbi-disciple relationship was reciprocal; each had expectations of the other. If we are seeking to be the link between past, present, and future, what qualities would you think a younger generation of disciples should be expecting to find in you?*
4. *Jesus offered his disciples a sacred purpose and recognized his disciples' unique gifts. Rabbi Moffic offers two examples from the Talmud in illustration. Reflect on your own unique gifts, however humble they may seem to you. How are you, or could you be, using them to serve God?*

5. *Moffic notes that, like the decision the fishers made to follow Jesus, some of the most critical decisions in life are made in an instant. When have you made such a decision? What were the ramifications of that decision?*
6. *Rabbi Moffic uses Abraham as the model for the complete trust a disciple must have. He notes that when he answered God's call, Abraham became the first Jewish disciple. Describe the implications of Abraham's decision to respond. In your own life of faith, what familiar "gods" are you called to leave behind in order to trust God's call?*
7. *The distinctive teaching style of the rabbis that was new to the first-century Jews used questions in order to discern, with the process of answering the question often more important than the answer. In what ways did Jesus's style of questioning differ from the rabbis? Why?*
8. *Describe the parable about why parables work, with the two characters, Truth and Story. What examples from Jesus's parables can you think of that function in this way? How do you use stories in your family's life to communicate what is important to you?*
9. *Becoming a disciple involved the choice to give up a comfortable life and risk a journey into the unknown, involving sacrifice. Relate the story Akiba told about the rabbinic response to the Roman soldier's question. Now complete the concluding sentence: "A fish cannot live without water just as a Christian and Christianity cannot live without _____."*
10. *The disciples of Jesus, we are told, sacrificed themselves for a belief in the realization of the kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God. Describe the concept of the "Day of the Lord," which first-century Jews would have connected to the kingdom of heaven.*
11. *What view did rabbinic Judaism hold about the role of Rome? How did this differ from the apocalyptic point of view in the Christian Bible? In what ways did Jesus draw from each tradition, and how did he depart from rabbinic Judaism in viewing the kingdom of heaven?*

Chapter 6

Do You Believe in Miracles?

In chapter 6, we use the lens of first-century Jewish life to examine miracles and learn how to see the miracles in our own lives. In Mark 1, Jesus incurred the wrath of the scribes when he healed the man possessed by an evil spirit. In the story of Honi the Circlemaker and in the Jewish legend of the baker and the sexton, we get clues to the roots of the power that drive miracles as well as the relationship between faith and miracles. In the healing of Simon's mother-in-law on the Sabbath, we explore beyond a surface reading of the story to discover a surprising insight about the Pharisees and an indication of Jesus's special concern for women. In the story of Hanina Ben Dosa, we are introduced to a parallel between the ways Jesus and the Pharisees healed. We explore two serious problems with a simplistic view of miracles as a way of proving God's power. Rabbi Moffic suggests that we consider another function for miracles as a way that God teaches us to live as human beings. Using the examples of the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Moffic presents us with a third way to view miracles illuminated by Jewish tradition and wisdom, one beyond the usual approaches.

1. *Rabbi Moffic suggests that first-century Jews understood miracles in much the same way we do. What does he tell us about the nature of miracles and about what they do? What is your understanding of miracles?*
2. *He relates the story of Jesus's healing of the man possessed by an evil spirit, found in Mark 1. What deeper purpose does he suggest is often overlooked? Why does he label Jesus as a rebellious rabbi?*
3. *Summarize the story of Honi the Circlemaker, a possible contemporary of Jesus. What does this story suggest is the source of power of miracle workers? What does the legend of the sexton and the baker tell us about the relationship between faith and miracles?*
4. *In discussing the story of Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law, Rabbi Moffic observes that Jesus heals in the same way*

that the Pharisees of the time did. What parallels does he note with the Talmudic story of Hanina Ben Dosa? What is the significance of Jesus's use of the term "daughter of Abraham"?

- 5. Moffic observes that even people of faith are guilty of misusing miracle claims. In what ways? Have you ever been guilty of doing so?*
- 6. What problems does Moffic cite with subscribing to the "God as a cosmic weight lifter" understanding of miracles? What does he suggest is the natural function of supernatural events?*
- 7. Moffic presents two schools of thought among those who write positively about miracles today: first, that miracles do continue to happen, and second, that miracles are all a matter of perspective. He proposes a third authentic way grounded in Jewish tradition and wisdom. What is it? How does he demonstrate what this way means through his examples of the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade and the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah? To which of the three schools of thought about miracles do you subscribe?*
- 8. "Miracles depend on God, but they begin with us." What examples could you give from your own life to support this assertion?*

Chapter 7

Finding Honey on the Page

In chapter 7, Rabbi Moffic invites us to test the often-held assumption that Jesus sought to abandon Old Testament and Talmudic law in favor of grace and love. Rather, he asks us to consider how Jesus wove together strands of biblical and rabbinic Judaism in innovative ways, offering us new questions about faith and life. He presents two schools of biblical interpretation: Rabbi Hillel, a more liberal constitutional scholar, and Rabbi Shammai, a strict constructionist, and asserts that Jesus most closely resembles Hillel. We examine Jesus's teaching on the Great Commandment as an example of the similarities between Hillel and Jesus. We discover the enduring lesson that persons are valued over procedure. In considering the rabbinic teaching method of asking questions, we consider the idea that those open-ended questions that shape behavior resonate more than those that simply elicit information. We are presented with the question Jesus posed to his disciples when they were frightened by the storm on the Sea of Galilee, comparing it with the similar debate between Moses and the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness. Rabbi Moffic returns to consider anew a concept touched on in previous chapters: the understanding that faith is trusting in a relationship. Asking the right questions, he observes, can remind us of why a relationship matters and reignite our faith as well.

1. *Chapter 7 opens with a description of a lovely ritual traditional Jews enact when children receive their first Bibles at age three. Like the honey on a young child's tongue, says Rabbi Moffic, the Torah is the strongest, sweetest nourishment we have. In your own life, how would you describe the words of the Bible?*
2. *In the story about a Roman who asks both Shammai and Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot, Moffic suggests that this story highlights a core difference between Shammai and Hillel. What is that difference?*
3. *In Jewish tradition, and in the words of the first part of the*

Great Commandment where Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, how is love defined? How do Jews demonstrate love for God? In contrast, Moffic observes that the second sentence of the Commandment speaks to our feelings rather than our actions. What examples can you give that reflect the understanding that doing loving actions is a broader response than refraining from hateful ones?

- 4. Moffic observes that in the account of the woman taken in adultery, Jesus's answer to the legal experts reflects both Shammai and Hillel. In what ways? What does this answer reveal about Jesus's understanding of the law? About how he views persons?*
- 5. We read that Hillel is best remembered for a series of self-evaluative questions he asks in the Talmud. Reflect on those questions, and discuss how these questions, or similar ones, shape behavior.*
- 6. The concerns of both the frightened disciples on the Sea of Galilee and the complaining Israelites in the Sinai wilderness seem warranted. Yet both Moses and Jesus seem exasperated by their followers' lack of faith. Though some would say these followers failed a test of faith, Moffic suggests a different answer. What is it?*
- 7. In chapter 4 we considered the meaning of faith, noting that the Hebrew word translated as "faith" really means "faithfulness." Here we explore how faithfulness is lived out in relationship. What is your understanding of faith? Is it rooted in a belief system or in trust in someone rather than in something?*
- 8. Moffic illustrates the meaning of faith by using examples of the relationships we enter into with friends and with our spouses or partners. Drawing on Martin Buber's description of all real life as meeting, how does he describe faith in God? In your experience, what happens to a relationship when one stops meeting the other? In what ways do you sustain your relationship with God through your words and deeds?*

Chapter 8

The Shema

Of the many prayers that shape the Jewish imagination, none is more central than the Shema, the focus of chapter 8. The chapter introduces the nature of prayer in Judaism as a core part of religious life. We learn that Jews often see the Shema as the essential description of Judaism because of its coherent statement of monotheism. Building on the previous chapter's discussion of relationship, Rabbi Moffic presents the Shema as being about honoring the relationship between God and God's people and its pivotal role in establishing the authority for all other commandments. He suggests that Jesus cites the Shema to remind us what prayer means and what it asks us to do. He then guides us in an exploration of the significance of each phrase of this prayer: hearing God's word; building community with one another; experiencing the unity of God and the urgency to restore the world to wholeness; and mining the deeper layers of meaning in the imperative to love God with all one's heart, soul, and strength. Finally, to increase Christians' understanding of the meaning of the Shema, Rabbi Moffic makes an intriguing proposal of a way to think about the three kinds of love of God.

- 1. If the Shema establishes not only a relationship to God but also a way of seeing the world, what are the implications for us as we live in and interact with humankind and all creation?*
- 2. Rabbi Moffic reminds us that Jacob received a new name, Israel, meaning "one who wrestles with God." As a spiritual descendant of Jacob, when has your prayer life encompassed wrestling with God? Moffic suggests that communal worship is not the setting for "wrestling with God." Do you agree? Why or why not?*
- 3. Moffic discusses in depth what it means to say that God is one. What implications of this affirmation resonate most strongly for you?*
- 4. Where do you perceive a discord between the world as it*

is and the world as a place where all creation experiences shalom? How do you respond to the idea that every time we pray and act according to God's will, we gather a spark of God?

- 5. Moffic presents us with a clue arising from the unusual feature of the Hebrew word for heart. What is the possible reason for the extra letter? How have you experienced loving God as you moved through a loss or despair?*
- 6. Akiba believed that the most sacred book in the Bible was the Song of Songs. Why? How did he bear witness in his own life and death to the meaning of loving with all the soul? Moffic observes that we love God with all our souls when we are ready to die for the sake of God's truth. Do you agree? What, if anything, would you be ready to die for?*
- 7. The rabbis interpreted the phrase "with all your strength" as meaning your financial resources. Moffic observes that, taken to extremes, this teaching can be quite dangerous. Why? How did the rabbis creatively address this danger, and what deeper lesson does the story of the donkey teach?*
- 8. To increase the meaning of the Shema, Rabbi Moffic has an intriguing suggestion for Christians about how to think about the three kinds of love of God. What is it, and how does he explain it? What do you think about this way of thinking?*

Chapter 9

The Lord's Prayer

In chapter 9, we explore how a new understanding of the Lord's Prayer can bring us into a more intimate relationship with God. As in the previous chapter, Rabbi Moffic leads us in an exploration of each phrase. We examine the shift in metaphor from God as ruler to God as father. We explore the significance of the sanctity of God's name. We return to a consideration of the idea of God's kingdom and its connection to the Jewish idea of the *olam ha-bah*, the world to come. We consider questions of the connection between God's will and our free will. We examine the pray-er's petitions, beginning with the layers of possible meaning in asking for daily bread. We explore the transformative power of debt forgiveness in a community and ancient Judaism's systems for debt forgiveness, built around Sabbath, as well as the tension between justice and mercy. We look at the request that God refrain from testing us, and we add to our understanding of covenant in examining the questions of testing God and of the power of the good inclination on channeling the evil. Finally we consider the power of prayer to shape us over time so that we can serve God.

1. *What does Rabbi Moffic suggest is the reason for the appearance of the term "father in heaven" and what does it communicate about how we view God? Why does the rabbi disavow the idea that Jesus introduced the phrase "our father" to invite the disciples into a more intimate relationship with God?*
2. *Why can it be said that the use of "our Father" is a political statement?*
3. *When we pray to uphold the holiness of God's name, what are the implications of this part of the prayer for the way that we live?*
4. *Moffic reminds us that the "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven" appears frequently in the New Testament, and notes that the rabbis referred instead to the *olam ha-bah*, the world to come. Discuss Judaism's*

understanding of the afterlife and of the soul.

5. *Discuss the questions Moffic poses about God's will and free will. What did the priests believe about it? In contrast, what was the view of the Pharisees?*
6. *In chapter 1, Moffic noted the cardinal rule of interpretation: every word matters. What three explanations does the rabbi suggest for the redundancy in "give us this day our daily bread?" Which resonates the most for you?*
7. *How does the Jewish concept of Sabbath extend to forgiveness of debts, and how is it connected to restorative righteousness? If we substitute the word transgressions for debts what additional meaning is revealed?*
8. *Moffic observes that tests and temptations go together and that in praying the phrase "Lead us not into temptation," we are asking God to refrain from testing us. Do you believe God tests us? What about Satan? In discussing Abraham's testing, what does Moffic mean when he says that what seems like a test of God is a lesson for us? Have you ever, like Lot, considered yourself above temptation? What was the danger to Lot? What is the danger to us?*
9. *Sages note that the sixth day of creation is called "very good" and is special because the evil inclination was created that day. Why would that be considered good? Do you agree or disagree?*
10. *Summarize former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's comparison of the impact of prayer with the impact of water on rock. How have you experienced prayer as a force gradually shaping the core of your being? If prayer is not a regular part of your life, how can you strengthen its impact?*

Chapter 10 The Last Days

Those who wrote and reflected on the death of Jesus understood the last moments of his life as fulfilling Jewish hopes and teachings. In order to put ourselves in the shoes of Jesus's followers, chapter 10 invites us to explore the framework through which they understood Jesus's life and death, and more specifically, to seek to make sense of Jesus's last words by looking at them as a Jewish affirmation of faith. To do so, Rabbi Moffic guides us in an exploration of the source of those words: Psalm 22. We explore Jesus's cry as a testimony to God's presence. First we examine the significance of the three days that separate Jesus's death and resurrection as an echo of the story of the prophet Jonah in the belly of the whale. We consider resurrection and its connection to the influential image in Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. We see how, from the perspective of the witnesses to the resurrection, Jesus was the first in the walk toward redemption and freedom from Rome. We explore how the unifying figure of King David was linked in Jewish tradition with the Messiah and resurrection. We discover the expansion of the meaning of the Messiah by Jesus's followers to include not just Jews but all people, ultimately leading to the creation of a separate religion.

1. *At Passover, Jews are meant to imagine themselves in the shoes of the ancient Israelites. In the same way, Rabbi Moffic invites us to put ourselves in the shoes of Jesus's followers at the crucifixion and at the tomb. Through the eyes of imagination, answer the following: What were they feeling? What did they experience? What drove their reactions, their cries, their prayers?*
2. *In analyzing Jesus's question from the cross, Moffic asserts that we can make sense of it if we consider it a question emerging out of intimate love. In the light of the source of the question (Psalm 22), what does he mean?*
3. *He asserts that faith can feel a tension without resolving it. Do you agree or disagree? Why?*

4. *Rabbi Moffic says the more powerfully we feel the presence of God the more passionately we will protest when injustice and wickedness seem to triumph. How do you respond? When has this been your experience?*
5. *Moffic cites Jesus's words in Matthew that reference the story of the prophet Jonah. In a Midrash on this text, the sages speculate about the identity of the king of Nineveh. What is their surprising conclusion, and what is its significance?*
6. *A Catholic priest explained to Moffic as to why the Friday of Holy Week is called Good Friday. Does this explanation make sense to you? If not, how would you explain it?*
7. *What is restoration eschatology, and why did its message resonate with first-century Jews? In our contemporary context, what would you hope to see restored? What do you identify that is in need of transformation?*
8. *Discuss the linguistic and historical clues Moffic cites that point to the significance for Jesus's followers of the prophecy of the valley of dry bones.*
9. *Jews of the first century yearned for a unifying figure who would restore spiritual solidarity and unity. What parallels does Moffic note to David, the figure echoed most frequently in Jesus's death? What does the rabbi see as equivalent to the Temple that symbolizes God's presence on earth?*
10. *Regardless of whether our understanding of resurrection is individual or communal, Rabbi Moffic asserts that we can find spiritual nourishment in the idea that God conquers death. How do you respond?*

Chapter 11

Five Rabbis Explain Jesus

In chapter 11, we explore the question of what Jews believe about Jesus, a complex question to which, as H. L. Mencken is said to have responded, there is usually an answer that is “clear, simple, and wrong.” Rabbi Moffic notes that whereas scholars and historians give us a critical and detailed picture of the context in which Jesus lived and taught, it is rabbis who can give us a better picture of his spirituality. In this final chapter, Moffic presents several contrasting perspectives of rabbis whom he has found the most persuasive and compelling. Orthodox Rabbi Shmuley Boteach argues that, for the Jews of the first century, Jesus was a political hero not a spiritual one. Muslim scholar of Christianity Reza Aslan presents a more nuanced argument in which Jesus was a radical in both the political and religious realms. In embracing a new expression of the idea of a two-stage arrival of the Messiah, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg suggests that Jesus was a “failed Messiah.”³ The late Rabbi Byron Sherwin calls Jesus the Joseph Messiah—the Messiah of the first stage of messianic redemption. The Jewish mystic Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi views Jesus as a *tzadik*, a righteous leader who served as a bridge between his community and God. Many Reformed rabbis, Rabbi Emil Hirsch among them, sought to place Jesus in the pantheon of Jewish prophets or teachers.

1. *The view of Orthodox Rabbi Shmuley Boteach that Jesus was a political leader was extended by Muslim scholar of Christianity Reza Aslan, who argues that Jesus was a member of the Zealots. What was the twofold political purpose of this sect? In the light of that understanding, how would one interpret Jesus’s teachings on the kingdom of heaven?*
2. *What is Rabbi Moffic’s critique of this view of Jesus as national hero and zealot? What does he suggest is the importance of understanding that Jesus’s teachings spoke to people surrounded by competing ideologies?*

3. *Rabbi Moffic reviews for us the concept of the Messiah that first- and second-century followers of Jesus embraced as well as how Jewish thinking changed as Christianity developed into a separate religion. Describe the expectation that the arrival of the Messiah would unfold in two stages.*
4. *Rabbi Yitz Greenberg calls Jesus the “failed Messiah,” but Moffic assures us this is not meant to be pejorative. What does Greenberg mean by the use of this term? How did the late Rabbi Byron Sherwin extend and expand the logic of Greenberg’s argument, and what makes his position controversial?*
5. *Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi refers to Jesus as Torah Incarnate. What does he mean, and why does he believe that viewing Jesus as Messiah undercuts Jesus’s profound message for Christians and Jews alike?*
6. *In his discussion on Schachter-Shalomi’s views, Rabbi Moffic asserts that part of the beauty of this approach is that it emphasizes action over theology. He suggests that it is not what we believe about Jesus that is most important. Rather it is about how Jesus’s life and death affect our own. What is most important to you in gaining spiritual insights—dogma or what Jesus’s life can teach you? Why?*
7. *What is the significance of the Hasidic teaching praising the man who prays with his prayer book open backward?*
8. *Moffic observes that aside from the divinity of Jesus, Paul’s teachings would have been perfectly acceptable to many modern Jews. Emil Hirsch argued for the consideration of Jesus alongside other prophets. What was problematic about his proposal at the time he made it? In today’s relatively less oppressive environment for Judaism, what teachings does Moffic suggest might be the most meaningful for contemporary Jews?*
9. *In Rabbi Moffic’s introduction to the book, he expresses the hope that the book can serve as a bridge between the pulpit and the pew. As a reader, what hopes did you have as you began this study?*

10. *In the epilogue, he speaks of hoping that viewing Jesus's life as a Jew opens up new ways of appreciating and growing closer to him, and of living and teaching a message of life and hope in a world wracked by violence and indifference. How have your expectations for the study been met? In what ways have you been challenged?*

Notes

1. Martin Buber, *The Legend of Baal-Shem*, 1995 ed. (New York: Schocken, 1955), 36.
2. Attributed to the late Rabbi Louis Finkelstein.
3. See Shaul Magid, “The New Jewish Reclamation of Jesus in Late Twentieth-Century America,” in Zev Garber, ed., *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation* (Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2011), 358–82.