

MISHIKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

CONTENTS

“O Land, Land, Land, hear the word of the Lord” Editorial	1
One Land, Two Peoples — How Many States? Colin Chapman	4
Eretz Israel: Whose Land? Johannes Gerloff.....	16
The Land of Israel in Scripture Chaim Urbach	22
Messianic Judaism and the Theology of the Land David Miller.....	31
Jerusalem, the Holy City? Ray Pritz.....	39
The Borders of the Land of Israel according to Ezekiel Louis Goldberg.....	44
Early Christian Zionists and the Return to the Land Kelvin Crombie.....	49
Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold Gershon Nerel.....	64
Messianic Believers and the Land of Israel — a Survey Bodil F. Skjott.....	72
Aliyah — Why or Why Not? Various authors.....	82
From the Israeli Press Sean Osborne	90
Books Received	93



MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

**“THE MESSIANIC JEWISH MOVEMENT
AND THE LAND”**

ISSUE 26 / 1997

General Editor: Kai Kjær-Hansen

United Christian Council in Israel · Jerusalem

All Rights Reserved.

For permissions please contact mishkan@pascheinstitute.org
For subscriptions and back issues visit www.mishkanstore.org

“O Land, Land, Land, hear the word of the Lord”

Editorial

“Lot also had sheep, goats, and cattle, as well as his own family and servants. And so there was not enough pasture land for the two of them to stay together, because they had too many animals. So quarrels broke out between the men who took care of Abram’s animals and those who took care of Lot’s animals. (At that time the Canaanites and Perizzites were still living in the Land.) Then Abram said to Lot, ‘We are relatives, and your men and my men shouldn’t be quarreling. So let’s separate. Choose any part of the land you want. You go one way, and I’ll go the other’” (Gen 13:5-9).

From almost the first moment that the Land provides the backdrop for the stage of Scripture, it is the object of conflict. There is not enough room. People — members of the same family — fight over space, they fight over water, they negotiate.

If we turn to the other end of the Book, the picture is the same. The second to last reference to the Land is in Revelation 16:16: Armageddon. And the final time it is mentioned, the Land is still the focus of conflict: “Satan will bring them all [Gog and Magog] together for battle, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. They spread out over the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people and the city that he loves. But fire came down from heaven and destroyed them” (Rev 20:8-9).

Conflict. Conquest. Death. Destruction. It only ends when the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven: “He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared” (Rev 21.4). This new city has walls, but in clear contrast to the old it has no gates: rather than coming to fight there, “the peoples of the world will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their wealth into it” (Rev 21:24).

This issue of *Mishkan* is dedicated to the timely and sensitive issue of the Land of Israel. What place do the Land and its most famous city hold in the hearts and theology of believers? Where does theology leave off and politics begin?

Colin Chapman leads off with several challenges: Has the intervention of the Messiah into history not changed anything? In the light of Jesus’ coming, where should the Christian’s priorities be? Are Christian Zionists being consistent in their use of Scripture?

Johannes Gerloff and Chaim Urbach provide us with a scriptural overview of the question, “To whom does the Land belong?” David Miller and Ray Pritz suggest that we, as believers, may need to change our perspective when discussing with each other or with unbelievers questions of the importance of the Land. This is followed by a study by Louis Goldberg of how the prophet Ezekiel foresaw the status of the Land and its borders in his vision of the latter days.

Two historical articles are on hopefully non-controversial ground. Kelvin Crombie overviews

the attitudes of the London Jews Society to the Land of Israel in the century and a half before the founding of the Jewish state. Supplementing this is Gershon Nerel's study contrasting the work and views of two Messianic Jewish leaders and thinkers in the generation before 1948. In both articles the reader will be struck by the difficulty of formulating a clear, consistent, and unified theology regarding events which are still unfolding.

We all tend to gravitate to people who think like we do. At a conference or after-service fellowship we naturally find ourselves talking to those who agree with us. When we enter a bookshop, chances are that we will pick up a book we have already read or one on a subject about which we already know a lot. For this issue the editors initiated a survey of the opinions of believers in Israel on various subjects related to the Land. Opinion polls help remind us that not everyone thinks like we do. Even as we formulated the questions for this poll, we thought we knew fairly well how people would respond. I am happy to report that we were often proved wrong. We hope that you too will find the results enlightening.

We round off this special issue with six short responses by Jewish believers to the question, "Why did you (or, did you not) make Aliyah?" Three of these live in Israel and tell why they came, and three others explain why they are still living in the Diaspora.

For this issue the editors have tried to find authors who would present a broad spectrum of opinions and to keep that spectrum as balanced as possible. If you read all of the articles in this issue and find yourself saying "Amen" to some and being angered by others, then we have probably succeeded. As editors we do not necessarily agree with all of the authors (nor with each other for that matter) on all of these issues.

It goes without saying that each author is attempting to present the "biblical" view of things. This is not to be taken lightly. These are sincere, educated people of faith. They read the Bible just as much as you do. They have not set out to deceive or mislead but to present what they understand to be the teaching of the Bible on a difficult issue. Even where we cannot agree, even where we feel that an author has totally misread or ignored an important biblical doctrine, we have a dominical imperative to love and respect each other.

In one area we are already aware that there is something missing. We had hoped to receive a contribution from a prominent Arab Christian leader on the theology of the Land, but it did not arrive in time for this issue. We still hope to include it in the next. Since we expect that there will be some animated responses to some of the material in this issue, we invite you to contact us. If appropriate, we could print some of your reactions in a future issue of *Mishkan*.

Ray Pritz

Copyright Ray Pritz, All Rights Reserved

One Land, Two Peoples —

How Many States?

Colin Chapman¹

The title of this paper² deliberately focuses on the political context in which, at the beginning of 1997, Christians are called to work out their theology and at the same time to make hard political choices. We can never do our theology in a vacuum!

Let me therefore begin with some comments about the present context and about my own assumptions:

1. The fundamental political question at the heart of this debate has been this: What are we as Christians to think of a situation in which two peoples lay claim to the same piece of land for different reasons? But if for many years the basic political question has revolved around the conflict of two nationalisms, at this particular point in time it needs to be focused more sharply: Do we believe the Israeli government should resist Palestinian aspirations for statehood and maintain direct or indirect control over the Occupied Territories at all costs? Or do we believe that in the interests of human rights Palestinian claims to peoplehood and nationhood need to be heard by Israel and the rest of the world and allowed to find expression in terms of land and statehood?

2. The fundamental theological question for Christians at the heart of this debate is this: Does possession of Israel by Jewish people today and the existence of a Jewish State have profound theological significance in the economy of God? Or should we believe that this understanding of the Land is inconsistent with the Gospel proclaimed by, and summed up in, the person of Jesus Christ? Do we have good biblical and theological reasons for giving whole-hearted support to the Zionist vision? Or should we be more or less critical about this ideology?

3. I hope we can acknowledge in a forum like this that the divide is not between evangelicals and fundamentalists on the one hand and liberals and radicals on the other. Approaches to prophecy are, of course, highly relevant, since pre-millennialists almost certainly find themselves on one side of the fence, and a-millennialists on the other. But as one who is critical of Christian Zionism, I hold a view of the authority of Scripture which is not essentially different from that of many Christian Zionists. We differ regarding the interpretation of Scripture, not over our view of its inspiration.

I personally speak as an evangelical — admittedly of a particular brand, being both British and Anglican. I do not believe, for example, as some of my Christian friends believe, that the idea of a Chosen People was self-delusion on the part of the Jews in Old Testament times. I do not

¹ Colin Chapman is presently serving as the Principal of CMS Training College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, England.

² The article is a revised version of a paper first given at a Theological Symposium of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU) in Washington, DC, February 7, 1994.

believe that God could never have intended the Children of Israel to occupy the Land, and that most of the Old Testament is therefore a huge embarrassment to Christians in the 20th century.

4. I need to be open about the personal agenda that I myself bring to the subject. I wrote the book *Whose Promised Land?*³ in Beirut in the early 80ies, after years of trying to work out what the Palestinian problem was all about, and to grapple with the understanding of many Western Christians, which did not seem to fit the facts of history or experience. Some reactions to the book were hostile. I have not forgotten, for example, the comment of one American Jewish Christian who said to my face, "I regard you as an enemy of the Jewish people." But other Christians seemed to read the book with a sense of relief. "I'd always felt uneasy," said a friend of mine, "about the strongly one-sided pro-Jewish and pro-Israel teaching of so many Christians, but couldn't put my finger on the reasons for my unease."

I continue to engage in debate, sometimes in public, with my Zionist Christian friends in Britain. But I also continue to be deeply concerned about the mission of the Church to people of all faiths and races in the countries of the Middle East. My time in Egypt and Lebanon and my study of Islam have forced me to recognize the enormous stumbling block created in the minds of Muslims all over the world by the apparently blind and unthinking Christian support of Zionism and the policies of Israel.

I come to the subject of the Land, therefore, with a set of questions that are probably very different from those of someone whose main interest is eschatology. My questions have to do with human rights, with Judaism and Islam, with the survival of Christianity in the Middle East, and with the mission of the churches in and around the Land.

In this context and with this starting-point, I want to attempt in this paper to do three things:

- (1) state some of the basic hermeneutical principles which have guided me in my thinking;
- (2) draw attention to some newer writing in this area; and
- (3) respond to some of the criticisms which have been leveled against the approach that I have adopted.

I want to do this by elaborating a series of ten propositions, each of which can stand on its own, but also forms a vital link in the chain of the argument.

The Abrahamic Covenant

A people requires a land, and there is something special about the relationship between peoplehood and land in the case of the Jews, since the promises given to Abraham concerning the Land were intimately bound up with the promises concerning the nation, the covenant relationship and blessing for all peoples of the world (Gen 12:1-3; 17:1-8).

Any Christian interpretation of the divine right to the Land promised in Genesis, therefore, cannot be separated from our interpretation of other strands in the covenant promise. As Christians we have no difficulty in believing that the promises concerning the nation, the relationship between God and his people and the blessing for all peoples of the earth find their deepest fulfillment in the coming of Christ, who blesses people of all nations by drawing them into a covenant relationship with God as members of a holy nation (e.g 1 Pet 2:9-10). But if these

³ Lion Publishing, 1983 and 1992.

three strands of the one covenant find their fulfillment in Christ in his Church, how can we put the promise concerning the Land into a totally different category and say that while these three promises can legitimately be given a spiritual interpretation by Christians, the promise about the Land requires a literal interpretation?

Christian Zionists say to me: "But why can't we have it both ways?" Why can we not have an interpretation which is both literal and spiritual? Even if it is right to give a spiritual interpretation to the promise about the Land, as the writer of Hebrews does, this need not necessarily preclude a literal interpretation. Cannot the promise relate to the inheritance of all Christian believers, but also to the divine covenant which gives to the Jews a divine right of ownership for all time?

Part of my answer would be that the insistence on a literal fulfillment could be a double-edged weapon. God promised that the Aaronic priesthood would continue "forever" (1 Chr 23:13). Has he fulfilled that promise literally? The Old Testament promises that a descendant of David will sit on his throne "forever" (2 Sam 7:12-16). Has that promise been fulfilled literally?

My first proposition, therefore, is that the four strands of the Abrahamic covenant constitute a kind of package, a "package deal," and need to be taken closely together.

The Promises of Return

The Prophets are full of predictions of the return to the Land, and Ezra and Nehemiah describe several stages of the return after the Exile. The recent return of Jews to the Land in the last 100 years has been as peaceful as the return of Jews to the Land after the Babylonian Captivity. But there are significant differences. These modern Jews were not returning to their ancestral homes in the same way as the exiles were (Ezra 2:70). The returning exiles expected to have "aliens," non-Israelites, living alongside them with full rights of inheritance (Ezek 47:21-23). And events since 1880 taken as a whole have more in common with Joshua's Conquest than with the peaceful return after the Exile. This makes it hard for me as a 20th-century Christian to see the recent return as a repetition of the sixth-century BC return and therefore as a further stage in the fulfillment of the same prophecies.

A further problem I have in identifying the recent return with the sixth-century return revolves around the question of repentance. Moses speaks of God banishing his people from the Land because of disobedience, but restoring them to the Land after repentance: "when you and your children return to the Lord your God ... then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from the nations where he scattered you ... He will bring you to the Land." (Deut 30:1-5)

In books relating to the exile and the return, Daniel and Nehemiah are given as examples of people who express genuine repentance and confess the sins of the people (e.g. Dan 9:1-19; Neh 1:4-11). Thus when God brings the remnant back to the Land, he does so in accordance with the conditions described in Deuteronomy. The people confess their sins corporately at a later stage after the return (e.g. Ezra 10:1-4; Neh 9:1-37). But before the return, a significant number of individuals have expressed repentance on behalf of the people.

My Jewish-Christian friends in Israel who live constantly in the atmosphere of Ezekiel 33-39 say to me: "The Jews have returned in unbelief, but repentance and belief will follow their return" I can see something like this in Ezekiel, although there the cleansing and the resettling seem to go

together: "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt" (Ezek 36:33). And in Deuteronomy repentance is the condition of return.

If the temple was destroyed in 70 AD and Jews exiled from the Land, as Jesus taught, as a judgment for their failure to recognize him as Messiah (Luke 19:41-44), the repentance required in the terms of Deuteronomy 30 would, from a Christian perspective, mean recognition of Jesus as Messiah as a condition of return. Peter on the Day of Pentecost could say "this is that which was spoken of by the prophet" (Acts 2:16). But I have great difficulty in putting the return in the 19th and 20th centuries in the same category as the return in the sixth century. There are far too many significant differences!

The Kingdom of God

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as the fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament (e.g. Mark 1:15). If there is any one single over-arching concept in the teaching of Jesus it is surely the coming of the kingdom of God. I have to confess that I found lectures about the kingdom of God at Seminary singularly unexciting. It has taken me years to grasp the simple point that the Kingdom of God which began to come in the person of Jesus was the real and essential fulfillment of all the promises in the Old Testament covenants and all the prophecies about God's action to bless Israel and the nations.

If this is true, what would be a genuinely Christian interpretation today of verses like Psalm 102:12-17?

But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever... You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favour to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; Her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory'.

When Jesus said, "The time has come," he must have understood that the time that the prophets and the psalmist had spoken of had at last come. Using the language of Psalm 102, therefore, the coming of the Kingdom meant that the appointed time had come for God to "arise and have compassion on Zion," "to show favour to her," "to rebuild Zion and appear in his glory."

In other words, if Jesus related God's compassion for Zion in a special way with the coming of the Kingdom, I find it difficult as a Christian today to relate his compassion for Zion with the whole of the Zionist vision.

I have often been accused of subscribing to so-called "Replacement Theology"⁴ But I do not believe that the Church has "taken the place of Israel." While New Testament writers give the Church titles reserved for Israel in the Old Testament, they do not describe the Church as "the New Israel." Gentiles are grafted into Israel (Rom 11:17-24), which is thereby transformed to become the "one new humanity" (Eph 2:15). Unlike some of my Arab and Western Christian friends, I still believe there is something special about the Jewish people. "They are loved on account of the patriarchs" (Rom 11:28). But I also believe that the fulfillment of all that was promised to Abraham and his descendants is found in the Kingdom of God which came in Jesus.

⁴ As for example in the review of *Whose Promised Land?* in *Mishkan* 1 (1984), pp 58-62.

So when Christians agree with Jews who see their return to the Land as the fulfillment of prophecy, I suspect it may in many cases make it harder, not easier, for Jews to see Jesus as Messiah. If I pray for Jews as Paul did in Romans 10:1, I will long for them to be able to make the connection between the hopes of the Old Testament which are summed up in the words of Zechariah, “The Lord, will be king over the whole earth.” (Zech 14:9) and the claim of Jesus, “the Kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15).

The Land in the Teaching of Jesus

Teaching about the Land is conspicuous by its absence in the teaching of Jesus. W.D. Davies in his magisterial work, *The Gospel and the Land*, finds four verses in the Gospels where there is a very indirect reference to the Land, and only one explicit reference. This is in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:5), where Jesus is quoting from Psalm 37.11: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit” not “the world” or “the earth,” but “the land.” The meek, the humble, the poor in spirit, says Jesus, will inherit the Promised Land, and enter the Kingdom of God. Davies quotes a rabbi who said in effect, “If you are saying grace before a meal and forget to thank God for the Land, it doesn't count as a proper grace.”⁵ He goes on to argue that since the Land was such a fundamental part of Judaism at the time of Christ, Jesus relative silence must have been deliberate.

I have to say that I have not found many of my Christian Zionist friends engaging Davies' argument, which is so well summed up in these eloquent words:

In the last resort this study drives us to one point: the person of a Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord only to die accursed on a cross and so to pollute the Land, and by that act and its consequences to shatter the geographic dimension of the religion of his fathers. Like everything else, the Land also in the New Testament drives us to ponder the mystery of Jesus, the Christ, who by his cross and resurrection broke not only the bonds of death for early Christians but also the bonds of the Land.⁶

It is also worth pointing out in this context that like several of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem as a judgement on the Jewish people (Luke 19:41-44). But unlike them he did not predict a return to the Land (Mark 13:1-36; Matt 24:1-51; Luke 21:5-36). Instead he predicted the coming of the Kingdom of God in terms drawn from Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days to receive his kingly authority (Matt 24:30-31, Luke 21:25-28 cf Dan 7:13-14). It cannot be an accident that Jesus had so little to say specifically about the Land.

The Turning Point for the Disciples

Luke 24:13-49 and Acts 1: 1-8 seem to mark the turning point in the thinking of the disciples concerning the Land, the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. Until this point they must have been thinking in the same terms as other Jews of the first century. They had looked forward to God's decisive intervention in history which would restore political sovereignty to the Jews, enabling

⁵ W.D. Davies, *The Gospel & the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*, (University of California Press, 1974), p. 68.

⁶ W.D. Davies, p. 375.

them to live in peace and obey the Law in the Promised Land. This is the idea reflected in the words of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). It must also have been the idea in the minds of the disciples when, during the period between the resurrection and the ascension, they asked, “Lord, is this the time when you are to establish once again the sovereignty of Israel?” (Acts 1:6 NEB). It was John Calvin who commented pointedly, “there are as many mistakes in this question as there are words.”

The Christian Zionist interpretation of Jesus’ reply (Acts 1:7-8) is that he accepted fully the idea that the Jews would one day re-gain their independence as a sovereign state in the Land, but that he was simply correcting their ideas about the timing of it all. I suggest that the other possible interpretation is far more convincing, because it is much more consistent with the rest of the New Testament: Jesus was not only challenging their ideas about the timing, but trying to correct the very idea itself. When he went on to speak about the coming of the Spirit and about their witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, he was trying to give them a new understanding of the Kingdom of God that was not limited either to the Land or to the chosen people.

The Land in the Teaching of the Apostles

The Apostles seem to have ceased to believe that the establishment of a Jewish state had any significance for the Kingdom of God. Unlike Jewish teachers they had nothing to say about the theological significance of the Land in the Kingdom of God, and used Old Testament language concerning the Land in new ways.

I am sometimes accused at this point of building an argument on silence. My response is that this is not really an argument from silence, since there are several examples of New Testament writers who use vocabulary related to the Land but give it new meaning. Paul speaks of “the word of his grace, which can give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Peter speaks about “an inheritance” which, unlike the Land, “can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Pet 1:4). Hebrews 4:1-13 interprets the theme of the Land for Jewish Christians. And the climax of the letter comes in 12:22: “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem” The main argument of Hebrews is well summed up in a recent paper by Chris Wright as follows:

Hebrews' affirmations of what "we have" are surprisingly comprehensive. We have the Land, described as the "rest" into which we have entered through Christ, in a way which even Joshua did not achieve for Israel (3:12-4.11); we have a High Priest (4.14, 8:1, 10:21) and an Altar (13:10); we have a hope, which in the context refers to the reality of the covenant made with Abraham (6:13-20). We enter into the Holy Place, so we have the reality of the tabernacle and temple (10:19). We have come to Mt. Zion (12:22) and we are receiving a kingdom, in line with Haggai 2:6 (12:28). Indeed according to Hebrews (13:14), the only thing which we do not have is an earthly, territorial city! ⁷

There is no suggestion that the Apostles believed that the Jewish people still had a divine right

⁷ *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, edited by P.W.L Walker (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992), p. 18-19.

to the Land, or that Jewish possession of the Land would be an important part of God's plan for the world. "The penny had dropped," as we say in England; they had at last got the point!

Jesus and the Hopes of Israel

To see the Jewish state today as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises and prophecies, or even as a sign of God's faithfulness, seems to me to misunderstand the nature of the Kingdom which came in Jesus and to ignore the teaching of Jesus concerning the judgement explained in the Eschatological Discourses. Although the New Testament writers were not addressing the kind of political questions which we face today, we cannot ignore their theology of the Kingdom when we have to address political questions which they did not have to face.

My fundamental disagreement with Christian Zionists is that they do not seem to me to take seriously enough the question: "What difference did the coming of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus make to traditional Jewish hopes and expectations about the Land and the People?" If they address the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles on these subjects at all, they seem to interpret the Old Testament today as if the coming of Jesus made little or no difference to these particular aspects of the hopes of first-century Judaism. They seem to read the Old Testament with the spectacles worn by the first disciples before the resurrection and their encounters with the risen Christ, as if the coming of the kingdom in Jesus simply meant a postponement of Jewish hopes for restoration, rather than the fulfillment of these hopes in the Messiah and the Messianic Community.

The Future of the Jewish People

Paul looks forward to a more glorious future for the Jewish people (Rom 9-11). But when he says "And so all Israel will be saved," he can hardly mean that at some time in the future all the Jews alive at that time will be saved, since this would contradict his earlier statement that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (9:6). And there is no suggestion that the future salvation of "Israel" is related in any way to the Land. Paul's silence about the Land does not suggest that he still held on to his traditional Jewish theology of the Land, but rather that he had modified it very considerably.

This is the conclusion of Kenneth Bailey in an unpublished paper on "St Paul's Understanding of the Territorial Promise of God to Abraham (Romans 4:13 in its historical/theological context)". He points out that in his reference to the promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 17, Paul speaks of the promise that Abraham and his descendents "should inherit"— not the land, but — "the world" (*kosmos*). After showing how these promises were interpreted in the inter-testamental period, Bailey concludes: "For Paul, the 'children of Abraham' are those Jews and gentiles who through faith in Christ have been made righteous. The 'land' becomes the 'world' (*kosmos*), which is the inheritance of the righteous."

Is Paul twisting Scripture? Is he deliberately playing with the text, when he substitutes *kosmos* "world" or "universe" for "land"? Bailey believes that Paul is simply giving us a distinctively Christian interpretation of promises about the Land. Once again Davies sums up so beautifully the thinking of Paul: "In the Christological logic of Paul, the land, like the Law,

particular and provisional, had become irrelevant.”⁸

Zionism and Christian Zionism

If Luke related "the redemption of Jerusalem" and the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25, 38; 21:28; 24:21) to the life and ministry of Jesus, it is hard to see how Christians today can use the same terminology to interpret the significance of Zionism. Books written by Christian Zionists are full of expressions like: "the restoration of Israel," "the redemption of Jerusalem," "the restoration of the Jews," "The rebirth, regeneration or renewal of the Nation." These expressions are all based on Old Testament prophecy which looks forward to the restoration of the nation after the Exile; and it is perfectly understandable that Jews should have kept hopes like these alive as they longed for a new return after their centuries-long Diaspora. But I have great difficulty understanding how Christian Zionists can use the same terminology without any qualification whatever, and without recognizing that Luke at least believed that "the redemption of Jerusalem" and "the consolation of Israel" had already been accomplished in Christ.

The response of some Christian Zionists is to say that we are limiting God if we say that if an Old Testament promise or prophecy is fulfilled in a spiritual way, it cannot also be fulfilled in a literal way. But if Jesus really was and is the New Temple, as he claimed to be, and if we have seen the Shekinah glory of God resting not on a restored temple but on the Word made flesh (John 1:14 and 2:20-22), how can Christians ever even contemplate the rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem?

If the Old Testament vision of water welling up from the temple in Jerusalem and flowing down to the Dead Sea (found with variations in Ezek 47:1-12; Joel 3:18-20; and Zech 14: 8-9) is related by Jesus to the giving of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39), I find it very hard to believe that these same passages can also be related to Israeli irrigation schemes on the West Bank. I was astonished to hear this interpretation expounded some years ago by an evangelical Arab pastor in Amman, Jordan. Likewise you shouldn't use expressions like the "Redemption of Israel" for the events of the last 100 years when that expression has been used to describe the incarnation and the atonement!

Prophecy and the Ethical Teaching of the Old Testament

While we recognize that a people requires a land, and that Jews will want to use Old Testament language to express their hopes for the future, the more Jews (and Christians) appeal to Scripture to undergird and justify Zionism, the more they must ask for Zionism to be judged by all of the ethical and eschatological teaching of the Old Testament.

I hope it is obvious by now that, while I can understand why Jews (both religious and secular) will use the Old Testament as the basis of their Zionism, I simply don't understand how Christians can use the Old Testament in the same way to affirm that it gives the Jews the title deeds to the Land for all time. But if I were to agree with this use of the Old Testament, I would want to press home the implications of this approach by arguing as follows: "If you use part of the Old

⁸ W.D. Davies, p. 179.

Testament this way, are you not putting yourself under the judgment of the whole? If you look to Genesis to claim the promise of the Land, what about Exodus and the commandments not to steal, kill or covet? If you believe in the predictive element of prophecy, what about the prophetic concern for justice? Is not the present Israeli government's policy of Judaizing East Jerusalem a 20th-century parallel to Ahab stealing Naboth's vineyard? Where are the Elijahs among the Christian Zionists who are prepared to speak a prophetic word to the Ahabs in Israel today? If you believe in the vision of a restored Zion, can you show us where is the blessing of the nations in all of this? Is it to be seen in the exporting of Israeli technology to Africa? And tell me what has the suppression of the Intifada done to the soul of Israel and of Judaism? Is this the fulfillment of all those wonderful visions put forward by generations of Zionists so full of biblical terminology?

I believe, in short, that we have a right to say to Zionists, both Jewish and Christian, "The stronger you press your claim to the Land on the basis of Scripture, the more you must expect and even invite the whole world to judge what the Jews have done in the Land by the moral and spiritual standards found in those same Scriptures. You have no grounds for accusing us of double standards, complaining that we judge the State of Israel by higher standards than we use to judge the Arabs!"

I end with two appeals:

1. Can we not continue and intensify the dialogue between Christian Zionists and non-Zionists?

I personally cannot share many of the basic assumptions of Christian Zionism, because I believe they are based on a flawed exegesis of Scripture, partly because they seem to me to lead in practice to disastrous political and human consequences.

I suspect that the case against Christian Zionists has been expressed more strongly in recent years than the case supporting them, and it has been supported by new scholarship, as for example, in the excellent volume of papers in *Jerusalem, Past and Present in the Purposes of God*.⁹ Can work of this quality be matched by Christian Zionists, or are they simply — dare I say — repeating the same old arguments that have been put forward in the past?

2. Can we not move on to address other issues as well?

I am sad that the agenda for biblical interpretation in these areas has for so long revolved largely around questions about the fulfillment of prophecy and divine rights to live in the Land. I fear that we will need to go on with this discussion for many years to come, since assumptions about the way the Old Testament should be interpreted are so deeply ingrained in the minds of Christians all over the world. But if we are not careful, we may find that we are addressing old questions and old agendas at a time when everything is changing as a result of the peace process. The goalposts are moving!

What I am appealing for, therefore, is that instead of asking, "How, if at all, has this been justified?" we come to our Scriptures with a new set of questions like these:

— What do our Scriptures say about human rights, and about the status of minorities?

⁹ Edited by P.W.L. Walker, (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992).

— How can we develop a critique of Islamic fundamentalism that is both sympathetic and rigorous?

— Can we give our minds to the question of Jerusalem and try to work out a political formula for a city of peace, a formula which enables two peoples and three faiths to live side by side with mutual respect and recognition?

— Is there a prophetic word to the Palestinians that can help them in their task of nation-building? Is there a word about styles of leadership, about integrity, and about the kind of pluralism which safeguards the rights of minorities?

— How in the midst of all that is happening in the Middle East can we help Jews to see Jesus of Nazareth as Daniel's Son of Man and Isaiah's Suffering Servant? How can we help Muslims to see what is distinctive in the way Jesus responded to blindness, perversity, injustice and violence, and by so doing inaugurated the Kingly rule of God on earth?

“Is there another word from the Lord” (Jer 37:17) — for a new and changing situation?

Copyright Colin Chapman, All Rights Reserved

Eretz Israel: Whose Land?

Johannes Gerloff¹⁰

At the start of his explanation of the book of Genesis — a commentary still printed in many Jewish Bible editions today — Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki (1040-1105), who taught in Troyes, France and Worms, Germany, and who is one of the most influential rabbinical authorities of all times, asks:

The Torah, which is the Law book of Israel, should have commenced with the verse (from Exodus 12:2) “This month shall be unto you the first of the months” which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation?

We find the answer in Psalm 111:6, which says that God declared “the power of His works,” i.e. the account of the Creation, to his people in order to give them “the heritage of the nations.”

For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, “You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan¹¹,” Israel may reply to them, “All the earth¹² belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave [the land] to [the Gentile nations], and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us.”¹³

Indeed, under Joshua the Israelites of Old Testament times conquered the Promised Land by force. The whole Bible bears witness to the fact that Israel was never perceived to be the indigenous people of the land of Canaan. And the prophet Zephaniah, a contemporary of King Josiah, addresses at least the coastal plain as “Canaan, land of the Philistines” (Zeph 2:5).¹⁴

Consequently, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not call themselves “rightful owners” of the Land, but rather “foreigners and guests” — and especially so in their encounters with the “old-established locals” whom they found there upon their arrival.¹⁵

It was already in the desert — before Israel even entered the land — that the Lord declared

¹⁰ Johannes Gerloff (M.C.S., Regent College) works currently as German Liaison at the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem.

¹¹ According to Deut 7:1 these are “the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you.”

¹² The Hebrew *eretz*, like the Greek *gee*, signifies the “earth” as well as the “land” or the “country.” The appropriate translation has to be concluded from the context. Sometimes two or even all three meanings can be applicable.

¹³ Rashi quotes in this instance Rabbi Isaac whose words are transmitted in the Midrash Yalkut to Exod 12:2.

¹⁴ As original inhabitants of the land of Canaan the Bible mentions the tribes of the Amalekites, Amorites, Anakites, Geshurites, Girgashites, Girsites, Hittites, Hivites, Jebusites, Kadmonites, Canaanites, Kenasites, Kenites, Perizzites and Refaites who were expelled or exterminated by the Israelites.

¹⁵ See for this especially Gen 23:4; 28:4, but also Gen 17:8; 20:1; 21:23,34; 26:3,4; 36:7; 37:1. Further Exod 6:4; 1 Chr 16:19; 29:15; Pss 39:13; 105:12; 119:19, as well as Acts 7:5 and Heb 11:8-10.

through Moses that they would be “strangers and sojourners” in the Promised Land. Furthermore, they had no right to sell this Land, because the living God says bluntly: “This land is mine!” (Lev 25:23). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has created everything. Therefore “the earth and all its fullness” is his property.¹⁶

And this is especially true for the tiny strip of land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, “for which the Lord your God cares” — according to Scripture in explicit contrast to Egypt — “from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year” (Deut 11:12).

The Lord laments for “the dearly beloved of My soul” when it is destroyed (Jer 12:7), and is zealous for “His land” when the time for its restoration has come (Joel 2:18). Eretz Israel, the “Land of Israel,” which is actually also its name in New Testament times, against all political facts of the time (Matt 2:20,21), belongs exclusively to the living God,¹⁷ and he gives it to whom he wills. This is strongly emphasized in Jeremiah 27:5, where Nebuchadnezzar’s right to rule is questioned.¹⁸

For a limited time God left “His Land” in gentile hands, because “the iniquity of the Amorites [was] not yet complete” (Gen 15:16), or because the Jewish people had provoked God’s wrath, or, to name an example from the New Testament, because “the times of the Gentiles are [not yet] fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

However, throughout the whole of the Old Testament revelation we find an all-pervasive theme in God’s promise of the Land to Abraham: “I give to you and your descendants after you this Land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan” (Gen 17:8).

And those “descendants” of Abraham with whom God established his covenant, and to whom he gave as part of it the promise of the Land, are not all those who are of his blood. When Abraham asked: “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” (Gen 17:18), the Lord replied:

No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him (Gen 17:19).

According to God’s instructions, the Patriarch sent away all the other sons from Isaac his son for he “gave all that he had (materially as well as spiritually) to Isaac” (Genesis 25:5-6) — including the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, the only plot of land which Abraham “bought for money” from “the people of the Land,” “signing a deed and sealing it” in the presence of witnesses.¹⁹ And God again and again confirmed his covenant with Abraham’s descendants through Isaac and Jacob right up to New Testament times.²⁰

Since the time of the patriarchs Israel sought to acquire the land which was promised to her

¹⁶ Pss 24:1; 50:12; 89:11. The New Testament time and again confirms this in Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21; Acts 4:24; 14:15; 1 Cor 10:26; Heb 1:10; Rev 10:6; 14:7. Acts 17:26 even emphasizes on this ground the Creator’s right to determine the peoples’ “preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.”

¹⁷ Pss 10:16; 85:2; Isa 8:8; 14:2,25; Jer 2:7; 16:18; Ezek 38:16; Hos 9:3; Joel 1:6; 4:2.

¹⁸ Compare also 2 Chr 20:6-7.

¹⁹ Compare Gen 23:1-20 and Jer 32:44, which outlines a legally incontestable contract for sale.

²⁰ Gen 26:2-4; 28:4,13; 35:12; Exod 6:2-4,8; Neh 9:8; Ps 105:8-11. See Rom 9:6-13 where the Apostle Paul mentions Isaac’s and Jacob’s election as proof of God’s freedom of action in his salvation history. Further Romans 11:1 and verse 29, where the apostle emphasizes explicitly in view of that part of the Jewish people who does not recognize Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

by God in a “legally acceptable” way.²¹ How much Israel would have liked to prove to the world as well as to herself that she is the “rightful owner” of the Promised Land.

God, however, seems to insist on giving the Land to whom he wills — freely, out of grace as is his character, without any human merit — and insists that there is no even seemingly rightful owner of the Land of Israel except himself. The people of Israel had to accept: “I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.” (Josh 24:13; compare Deut 6:10-11.)

And the Psalmist has no choice but to confess:

They did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, nor did their own arm save them; but it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your countenance, because you favored them (Ps 44:4).

The Lord entrusted to Israel — not to Ishmael! — “His Land” as an “inheritance”²² — i.e., not as freely disposable property.

The administration of a heritage, however, has obligations, as we see in the story of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-3). A patrimony cannot be sold, and cannot at all be misused as an object for bargaining — not even for the salvation of one’s own life.

Together with the promise of the Land, Abraham received the obligation to walk in the Land, i.e. to get to know it (Gen 13:17), and “to inherit” it.²³ This means not so much to take over “proprietary rights” as it is a duty and a mandate, which becomes clear when we consider that the Levites did not receive an “inheritance in the Land” because the Lord is their “inheritance.”²⁴ The Levites received the place they needed to live, but were otherwise free of the “responsibility to inherit” in order to serve the Lord in the temple.

When God entrusts his Land to men, he expects that it will be inherited, developed, built up, preserved and also defended. The idea of a land “that flows with milk and honey” signifies a potential which has to be developed by hard work under the blessing of God, as we see from the context of Isaiah 7:22, in which “All who remain in the Land will eat curds and honey” after the judgment. Similarly Deuteronomy 11:10-17 emphasizes the significance of the labor of the inhabitants, as well as God’s attention, for the yield of the Land.

Israel’s Possession of the Land and Her Relationship with God

Israel’s possession of Land always presupposed a living relationship with her God. Together with the promise of the Land and the guarantee, “You shall inherit their Land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey” the Lord immediately affirms, “I am the Lord

²¹ Next to the above mentioned example of the acquisition of the cave of Machpelah in Hebron compare Gen 33:19 which describes how Jacob “bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money” in the vicinity of Shechem, today’s Nablus in Samaria.

²² Deut 12:10; 1 Kgs 8:36; 1 Chr 16:18; 2 Chr 6:27; Pss 135:12; 136:21-22; Jer 3:18, Acts 13:19.

²³ *Ierishtah*, Gen 15:7; the same in Gen 28:4; compare further Exod 6:8.

²⁴ Compare also Num 18:20-21; Deut 12:12; Josh 14:4 and Josh 21.

your God, who has separated you from the peoples” (Lev 20:24).

Israel’s possession of the promised Land is inseparably connected to her relationship with God. Therefore, right after the exodus from Egypt, “not one of these men of this evil generation” was allowed even “to see that good Land,” except for Joshua and Caleb (Deut 1:35) who had trusted the word of God. Only “the upright will dwell in the Land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the Land, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.”²⁵ God’s promise is not to just everybody who is of the blood line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but whosoever “puts his trust in Me shall possess the Land, and shall inherit My holy mountain” (Isa 57:13b).

Under this condition there is even a future for the original inhabitants in God’s Land:

And it shall be, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, ‘As the Lord lives,’ as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people (Jer 12:16).

The Jewish people on the other hand has to consider:

If you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God (Deut 8:19-20).

One might be tempted to summarize this idea with the words of the Apostle Paul: “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham... and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:7,29).

Throughout the millenia Israel has experienced in terrible ways “that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord your God and not to fear him” (Jeremiah 2:19), but instead to adapt to the way of thinking and the way of life of the gentile nations.

If today the whole world accuses Israel, saying, “You are robbers, because you took this Land by force,” Jews who want to be faithful to their God, to his Word, and to their calling, have no choice but to put all their trust in the Lord and answer in accordance with his will: “The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!” (1 Kgs 21:3).

The New Testament focuses in many instances on a new creation, a “new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13), a “New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2), a new society in which people “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt 22:30), and a new “spiritual body” being raised in glory, power, incorruption and immortality (1 Cor 15:42-44,53-54). Likewise the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the patriarchs and their wives as having desired “a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Heb 11:16).

This perspective is given specifically as the basis of a greater hope that goes beyond the mortal “body of the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11), beyond the “Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children” (Gal 4:25), beyond the earth that “will be burned up” and the heavens which “will pass away with a great noise” (2 Pet 3:10), and also beyond a society and a country that is marked by sin, strife, territorial dispute, terror and suffering.

²⁵ Prov 2:21-22; compare Pss 25:12-13; 37; Prov 10:30; Isa 1:19.

Since New Testament times this emphasis on a new creation has been misunderstood in many different ways and times as justification for a so-called “spiritual” interpretation dissolving the literal understanding of Scripture and consequently disregarding the biblical instructions concerning the earth, the human body, the society and also God’s plan with the Land and people of Israel. Fulfillment of Scripture, however, does not imply necessarily its re-interpretation contrary to its original, literal meaning, as Jesus himself emphasizes:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled (Matt 5:18).

Copyright Johannes Gerloff, All Rights Reserved

The Land of Israel in Scripture

Chaim Urbach²⁶

In the following article we shall relate to the issue of the land of Israel in Scripture under two operating assumptions:

1. Scripture should be viewed through a literal hermeneutic, unless the context and the genre clearly demand a figurative interpretation (e.g. the harlot Babylon in Rev 17-18).

2. God's particular relationship with Israel is on-going and will continue into the end of time. It is based on the unconditional and permanent covenant established with Abraham and confirmed/expanded through a number of other covenants.

Addressing the first assumption is beyond the scope of this paper. The second, however, is inextricably woven into our topic — our view of this covenant to a large extent determines the interpretive grid through which we view the land of Israel. Specifically, if God's unique covenant relationship with the people of Israel has ceased, then the claim of Israel to the land has little scriptural support. We will later examine this broader subject of Israel's relationship with God.

The Giving of the Title Deed to Israel's Founding Father

Scripture states that the ultimate owner of the land of Israel is the Lord (Lev 25:23) and that he alone can give the land to whomever he wishes. The right to the land was given to Abraham and his descendants (beginning with Isaac and Jacob) as a by-product of Abraham's covenant relationship with God. This relationship was initiated by God when he called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and journey to the land of promise (Gen 12:1-3). Two key episodes mark the formal establishment of this covenant relationship with Abraham (Gen 15:1-21; 17:1-11), and after his passing, that relationship was re-affirmed with Isaac and Jacob (Gen 26:3; 28:13; 35:10-12).

At first, Abraham's right to the land of Canaan was promised in general terms (Gen 12:7, 13:15), but when Abraham asked God for confirmation of that promise, the Lord graciously complied with the formal establishment of a covenant (Gen 15:8-21). God used a custom of the time — the "cutting of a covenant," (*karath berit*) to state formally that he was committing himself to ensure that Abraham's descendants would possess the land of Canaan. In this ceremony, the two covenanting parties walked between animal pieces, in effect stating, "May I be destroyed as these animals are, if I break the terms of this covenant."²⁷

God spelled out the boundaries of the land Israel was to possess (Gen 15:18-21), although

²⁶ Chaim Urbach is a congregational leader of Congregation Yeshuat Tsion in Denver CO. He has his M.A. in New Testament Studies from Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary.

²⁷ KARATH and BARAH, by Elmer B. Smick, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* [TWOT], eds. R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

Israel rarely did (under David and Solomon, I Kgs 5:14; 8:65). This is one of several lists of boundary points given in the Tanach (e.g. Exod 23:31; Num 34:1-12; Josh 15:1-4; Ezek 47:15-20; 48:1-28). In each case there is a somewhat different emphasis and different boundary points, but the general outlines of the land are consistent:

1. The Euphrates ("the great river") is indisputable as the eastern boundary of the land.
2. The western boundary is not as definite — "the river [or brook] of Egypt" has been applied by most scholars to the Wadi el Arish, a small stream southwest of the Gaza strip.²⁸ However, it is possible that as counterweight to the eastern "great river," the "river of Egypt" may be the Nile.²⁹
3. The northern and the southern boundaries are defined by the ten Canaanite tribes that dwelled in the land, from the southern Negev to the Galilee and beyond to Sidon (Gen 10:19).

Implications of the Abrahamic Covenant — Unconditional and Eternal

What made the covenant between God and Abraham unusual was the fact that only one party — God's presence (symbolized by the smoking firepot with the blazing torch) passed between the animal pieces. Abraham did not walk between the animal pieces as he had fallen into a "deep and disturbing sleep," and saw the completion of the covenant ceremony in a vision. The message was clear — in this covenant, the Lord was obligating himself to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. This covenant was based on God's faithfulness and omnipotence, not on Abraham's compliance.

W. Gunther Plaut states that in Abraham's day, it was unheard of that deity would enter into an unconditional agreement with a mere mortal.

Unlike the pagan deities whose universes were unpredictable and erratic, God shows himself, in the covenant between the pieces to be an *El Ne-eman* — a God who is both dependable and trustworthy.³⁰

Genesis chapter 17 is another key passage where the covenant is developed. There is a passing reference to Abraham's obedience (17:9-10) but it is clear that this is merely an outward sign of the covenant (circumcision) rather than on-going obligations of the covenant. The obedience of Abraham was not a condition of the covenant but rather his response inside a religious relationship.³¹

In this passage, the covenant relationship between God and Abraham is presented as unconditional but now also as eternal. The promise of the land was spelled out in absolute terms — the duration of Israel's possession of the land was to be in perpetuity (17:7-8). The eternal nature of the Abrahamic covenant is confirmed in one of the Lord's declarations to Moses (Exod 6:8). God declares that his commitment to give the land to Abraham was validated with "an

²⁸ e.g. *The Book of Numbers*, by Timothy R. Ashley, NICOT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

²⁹ See NAHAR, by R. Laird Harris in *TWOT*, vol. 2.

³⁰ *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. Gunther Plaut, (New York: UHAC, 1981), p. 113.

³¹ "Covenant, [OT]", J. Arthur Thompson, in *International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia [ISBE]*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

uplifted hand.” This is a clear reference to an oath pronounced with a raised hand (Deut 32:40). Elsewhere in Scripture the Lord adds finality to a promise by attaching an oath to it. The writer of Hebrews affirms that whenever God swore upon an oath, his promise was (and is) immutable (Heb 3:11, 4:3, 6:17). The Lord speaking through Ezekiel states that since he swore with an uplifted hand that the rebels would not enter the land of promise, that entire generation died in the desert (Ezek 20:15).

The Relationship with Israel Developed through another Covenant

At Mount Sinai, Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God corporately (Exod 19:3-7). Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, this covenant lists numerous conditions for Israel to abide by (e.g. Exod 20:2-17; Lev 18:1-20:21) and the benefits or penalties which will come depending on their observance of the terms (e.g. Lev 26:1-46).

The promise of the land carries over into this covenant from the Abrahamic covenant. Two of the major benefits spelled out in the covenant involve the land: taking possession of the land and prospering in the land. God reminded Israel that their ability to possess the land had nothing to do with their military superiority or their righteousness (Deut 7:1, 9:4). The people of Israel were able to take possession of the land simply because of his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Since he had given Israel the title deed to the land, the Lord brought his power to bear and saw to it that the Canaanites were routed (Exod 23:23,31; 33:2; 34:23; Deut 12:29). Another factor played a major part in the subjugation of the Canaanites — they were not willing to repent of their gross idolatry (Gen 15:16; Deut 9:4) and because of that they brought God's judgment upon themselves.

Prospering in the land was also conditional on Israel's obedience. Otherwise, they would come under the curses inherent in the covenant. The Lord warned Israel that if they ever turned away from following him and pursued the pagan idols, he would bring upon them the curses spelled out in the Torah. The terminal step in this process of chastisement and punishment was expulsion from the land and dispersion among the nations of the earth (Lev 26:14-15,24, 32-34). The sin of Israel symbolically defiled the land, as did the sins of the Canaanites (Lev 18:24-28), with the result that the land "vomited out the Israelites," as it previously did the Canaanites (Lev 18:24-28).

Did the fact that the land spewed out the Israelites as it did the Canaanites mean that Israel's tenure in the land was permanently over as was the case with the Canaanites? Both groups sinned grievously and were punished severely because of their sin, but that is as far as the similarities go. In a larger sense God's covenant relationship with Israel provided for spiritual restoration and return to the land. God did not have a permanent relationship with the Canaanites. Was restoration to the land dependent on the nation's repentance? Repentance was an essential part of the process of which God has always been the initiator. That's why the outcome was never in doubt.

The nature of God's covenant with Israel provides the major difference between the ultimate fate of the Canaanites and the Israelites. The covenant established at Mount Sinai was not a simple commercial transaction between two equal partners. Much research has been done in the past several decades to demonstrate that the Mosaic covenant fits the pattern of ancient (mostly

Hittite) near-eastern suzerainty treaties, between a king and his subjects.³² D.F. Estes adds some insights from the Greek:

The choice of Greek diatheke in the LXX [Septuagint] to render Hebrew b'rit seems to have been occasioned by a recognition that the covenant which God makes with men is not fully mutual as would be implied in syntheke, the word commonly used for covenant.³³

These insights need to be integrated into a study of the blessings and curses built into the Mosaic covenant and the prophetic passages where the Lord pronounces judgment on his people.

Passages that Speak about "Rejection" and Scriptural Passages that Provide Balance

There are a number of passages that suggest that God's anger at Israel became so severe that he determined to repudiate his covenant with the nation: "God ... will destroy you from the face of the land" (Deut 6:15), "I will remove Judah also from my presence ... and will reject Jerusalem" (2 Kgs 23:27). This is especially vivid when the Lord states that Manasseh did more evil than the Amorites (2 Kgs 21:10-12). "I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish. ... I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance" (2 Kgs 21:13-14).

Isaiah gives the Lord's commentary on this scenario (54:6-8). There are several insights that need to be drawn from this passage:

1. God's abandonment of Israel was always a temporary measure of discipline meted out in response to his people's sin.
2. The Lord's compassion towards Israel is not merely a transitory emotion but is based on his covenant love, flowing out of his immutable character trait of faithfulness.³⁴ This is re-enforced with unambiguous language in the statement of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-37), where God's covenant relationship with Israel is described as being as permanent as the existence of the universe.
3. The Lord identifies himself as Israel's redeemer — the burden of keeping the covenant assumes the restoring activity of the Almighty in Israel's life.

The Restoration of Israel to its Land Predicted

Perhaps the clearest statement of God's commitment to restore Israel is found in Ezekiel 36:25-35. Here we find the restoration of the people to their land and to their God intertwined. There are several principles to be discerned:

1. The restoration of the people to their land and to their God are tightly intertwined (36:28). This holistic approach has been God's modus operandi from the beginning of his relationship with Israel (Gen 15:1-7; 17:1-8; Lev 25:38). When the process of restoration is complete, Israel will prosper in its land and be in right relationship with God (Ezek 36:33-38; 37:12-15). This is

³² See the review in "Covenant," by J. Guhrt, in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (DNTT) vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

³³ Covenant, [NT], D.F. Estes, in *ISBE*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1979.

³⁴ CHESED", R. Laird Harris, in *TWOT*, vol. 1.

consistent with the rest of the prophetic predictions of Israel in the land after its various wars are concluded (Isa 2:2-4; Zech 14:16).

2. The initiative for the restoration comes from God (Ezek 36:25-27; 37:23). As God brings his power to bear upon his people, repentance is the natural outflow ("then you will loathe," 36:31).

3. God's ultimate purpose for this program of restoration is the vindication of his character as a faithful, covenant-keeping God (36:22,36). Otherwise, He will be seen as a God like other gods, who lacks the moral rectitude or the power to keep his promises to his subjects. Until Israel is restored to its land and its God, God's reputation will be questionable in the eyes of the pagans. Moses appealed to this sentiment when he interceded on behalf of his rebellious charges at Kadesh Barnea (Num 14:13). Feinberg sums it up well,

In place of the former profanation of His name [hillul ha-shem] the Lord will see to it that His glorious name is sanctified [kiddush ha-shem] when His character is made evident to the world, especially in and through those who are in covenant relationship to him.³⁵

4. By anyone's definition, these prophecies for the restoration of Israel have not been fulfilled — the entire nation of Israel is not in its land and the vast majority are alienated from their God (Ezek 20:42; 37:21).

The Place of the Land in Messiah's Teaching

The right of Jewish people to possess the land of Israel is much easier to establish in the Tanach. In the New Covenant, the spotlight seems to shift, particularly in Yeshua's teaching, from God's dealing with the nation of Israel to his work among the nations. Yeshua seems to re-interpret the covenant promises and broadens them to include believers of all nations.³⁶

It is true that our Messiah took prophetic passages referring to the nation of Israel and re-interpreted them to apply to his life and ministry. Luke (24:25-27, 44-45) records that Yeshua taught his disciples to interpret Scripture through a Messiah-centered hermeneutical grid (see also John 5:39). We find this embodied in the term "fulfill" (pleroo), as used by the Gospel writers, especially Matthew. For instance, Matthew (2:18) states that Jeremiah's prophecy (31:15) was fulfilled by the slaughtering of the innocent babies in Bethlehem. He clearly does not invalidate the earlier (partial) fulfillment as the people of Judah passed through Ramah on their way to Babylon (Jer 40:1). In other words, when the New Testament applies prophetic passages to Yeshua's life, it does not suggest that these prophetic passages are emptied of their other (original) meanings.³⁷

A case in point is the use of the term "my servant" by Isaiah to refer to several different people or groups of groups: Isaiah (20:3), Eliakim (22:20), David (37:35). This is particularly true

³⁵ *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, (Chicago: Moody, 1969), pp. 208-209.

³⁶ See Colin Chapman, *Whose promised Land?* (Lion Publishing, Batavia, Ill, 1983), especially pp.127-129, commenting on Matt 8:10-12.

³⁷ R. Schippers, "Pleroo," in vol 1, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

in Isaiah's Servant Songs where we see the Lord's servant (Israel) and the Lord's servant (Messiah) set out distinctly from each other (e.g. the nation of Israel [41:8-9; 43:10-12; 44:1-2; 44:21; 45:4], and the Messiah [42:1; 49:3,6; 52:13-53:12]).

There are several other aspects that need to be considered to balance out the picture:

1. Yeshua's teaching, particularly when addressed to the religious establishment, was delivered with a sharp edge to it. Since Yeshua's ministry was directed to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," (Matt 15:24), it is easy to see that his comments were offered in the mode of "in-house criticism." As John the Baptist did before him (Luke 3:8), Yeshua sought to deflate the smugness and self-righteousness associated with their being part of the covenant.

2. Yeshua was very conscious of his role as the last in a long line of prophets sent to warn Israel of its apostasy. In the synagogue in Nazareth, he referred to Elijah and Elisha's prophetic ministries during Israel's worst episodes of Baal worship (Luke 4:24-26). Yeshua's reference suggested two parallels:

a. Israel was just as spiritually bankrupt in his day as in Elijah and Elisha's day. This was reflected by their idolatry and rejection of the prophets.

b. Part of God's judgment on Israel in both periods included his sending messengers to minister to the gentiles rather than the needy people of Israel. Yeshua's message was not lost on his audience, who tried to kill him.³⁸

3. Yeshua pronounces judgment on Israel for its persistent rejection of his prophetic message (Luke 19:42-44; Matt 23:34-24:2). This judgment bears many similarities to that pronounced upon Israel during the period immediately prior to the destruction of the first temple (II Kgs 13:23; 24:1-4). Yet the Lord expresses a great deal of tenderness toward his people (Matt 23:36-37). The scene of Yeshua weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) reminds us of Jeremiah weeping as he contemplates the impending doom of his people (8:21-9:1).

4. Yeshua seems to avoid discussing Israel's future when the opportunity presents itself, trying to get his disciples to look outward, beyond their provincial horizons.

5. Finally, in Yeshua's words of judgment (Matt 23:38-39), there is a kernel of hope for Israel's restoration. Yes, Jerusalem will be left desolate and the temple will be destroyed, but Yeshua looks to the day when his people will welcome him as their Messiah, as is predicted in Zechariah 12:10. The phrase, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" is a quotation from Psalm 118:26, setting the welcoming scene in a specifically Jewish context rather than a general acceptance of him as judge (as is the case in Phil 2:9-11).³⁹

The Place of the Land in the New Testament

In the rest of the New Testament, the future of the land of Israel seems to receive even less attention. With one major exception (Rom 11), the larger issue of Israel's future does not get much more attention. Does that mean that the fate of Israel has been absorbed into God's greater plans

³⁸ I.H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC, (Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 1978), p. 188; also, Leon Morris, *Luke*, TNTC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 118-119.

³⁹ D.A. Carson, "Matthew," in *EBC*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 487-488.

for mankind?⁴⁰

Why does the land of Israel, so prominent in the Tanach, receive so little attention in the New Covenant?

1. Scripture addresses needs as they come up. For instance, the issue of giving received much attention in the Torah. With the exception of one occasion, when the Diaspora churches took up a collection to meet the need of the Jerusalem church (II Cor 8-9), the subject of giving was not discussed at length in the New Testament. The teaching of Scripture about Israel (the land and the people) can likewise be viewed as "occasional" (fitting the need of the moment). Much attention has been given to the place of Israel in God's program (e.g. Isa 2:2-4; Jer 31:31-37; Ezek 37:12-14; Zech 14:16-18, etc.).

In the epistle to the Romans (chapter 11), Paul is weighed down by a heavy burden. He, the apostle to the gentiles, is confronted with the arrogance and ignorance of his gentile brothers about Israel. Because a majority of the nation has rejected Yeshua as Messiah, the gentiles assume that God has reciprocated and rejected them. The prospect that God could have rejected his people is unthinkable — he asks a rhetorical question (11:1) which expects a "no" answer and then re-states it (11:2) affirming that "God did not reject his people."⁴¹ Paul reaffirms Israel's place in God's heart, despite its present-day disobedience. At the end of the chapter (11:29) he states that God's dealing with Israel is a model of how he deals with all his people. "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

Paul does not specifically address the issue of Israel's land because the land was an integral part of God's covenant relationship with Israel. As we have seen in the beginnings of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:1-21), likewise the prophets portray the nation of Israel, restored to its God and to its land (Ezek 37:12-14).

2. There is another principle that is reiterated in the New Testament, underlying God's commitment to give the land of Israel to the people of Israel. As Paul states in II Timothy (2:13), once God makes a commitment, he is honor bound to uphold it — it would go against his nature to break it and it would ruin his reputation as a God who keeps his word (Ezek 36:22-23). A classic example of this principle is found when Moses interceded on behalf of his people after the rebellion of Israel at Kadesh Barnea (Num 14:4). There he appealed to the Lord's need to maintain his reputation as a faithful God: "the nations. . . will say, 'The Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath,'" (Num 14:15-16). The Lord relented from his anger to destroy the entire nation and forgave them.

Summary

1. The land of Israel (Canaan) was promised as a perpetual inheritance for the people of Israel. They were given the title deed through the unconditional covenant instituted between God and Abraham (Gen 15:18-21).

2. The land of Israel was not up for grabs as a result of the Mosaic covenant. Part of the

⁴⁰ Chapman, p. 152.

⁴¹ J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), pp. 634-636.

punishment (curses) spelled out in the Torah was the expulsion of the people of Israel from its land, if and when they turned against God. Yet even then, God made provision for restoration — the expulsion was intended as a temporary disciplinary measure. The Babylonian exile and the return of the exiles illustrated these principles governing Israel's relationship to the land.

3. The prophets predicted the return to the land and a fuller restoration of Israel to its God. As was the case in the Torah, spiritual restoration and physical blessings (e.g. the land) are inextricably linked. The New Covenant passages (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-27 etc.) portray a nation that is restored to its God, as well as living in its land.

Yeshua and his apostles re-interpreted the prophetic passages. Yet while these passages are fulfilled in his life and ministry, they do not invalidate God's commitment to Israel — to do so would mean that God no longer keeps his commitments. Our security as believers would then be non-existent. When the New Testament does address Israel's fate, the teaching in Scripture is unequivocal — "God has not rejected his people (and has not invalidated his promises of the land to the people of Israel)" (Rom 11:1-2).

Copyright Chaim Urbach, All Rights Reserved

Messianic Judaism and the Theology of the Land

David Miller⁴²

The history of the Jewish people begins with the call of Abraham: “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.’” From that time the national and spiritual history of the Jewish people has been inseparably linked with the land of promise. Throughout the ages the Jewish people have believed that their presence in the land was a result of God's faithfulness to the covenant which he made with Abraham, and when they have been dispersed from the land they have been confident that this same faithfulness would someday restore them.

The Covenant with Abraham

The covenant which God made with Abraham was unconditional, irrevocable, and confirmed with an oath. The obedience of Abram to the call of God to leave Ur eventually brought about the making of the covenant between the portions in which God promised the land of Canaan to Abram: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.’” This covenant is then reaffirmed in Genesis 17:1-8 in which God promises Abram that he shall be the father of many nations and that his name from henceforth will be Abraham. Concerning the land and the irrevocable nature of the promise God says, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” The descendants of Abraham were called upon to keep the covenant by practicing circumcision. However, this practice is not specified as a condition to a conditional covenant, but rather as the expected act of obedience in response to an unconditional covenant which God in his sovereignty had already made. The covenant of the Mosaic Law which came afterwards in no way nullified or affected the unconditional, irrevocable promise made to Abraham. The Apostle Paul states that “the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void” (Gal 3:17) The writer of the Book of Hebrews also affirms the unbreakable nature of these promises of God to Abraham, “For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having

⁴²David Miller is an Israeli tour guide. For several years he and his family have lived in Kenya, where David teaches in a Bible school.

patiently endured, obtained the promise” (Heb 6:13-15).

All the promises of God to Abraham were made as a result of a covenant relationship which God established with him and his descendants, a covenant which was repeated and confirmed, and which the writers of the New Testament re-affirm. The promise that Abram would become Abraham, the father of many nations through the promised seed, the Messiah, cannot be separated from the promise of the land to Abraham's descendants, for both of these promises were made as a result of one covenant relationship. One who claims that God's promises to Israel concerning the land are no longer valid must also claim, therefore, that the promises concerning the promised seed, the Messiah, are invalid, for all these promises are part of one covenant.

The New Covenant which was made with the House of Israel does not come to modify or replace the Abrahamic Covenant. Rather, it was given to replace the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant, unlike the Abrahamic Covenant, was conditional, and, indeed, was broken by the people of Israel. The New Covenant is God's replacement for the broken Mosaic Covenant:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord (Jer 31:31-32).

The Mosaic Covenant, which was broken, made provision for the holy priesthood for Israel. As a result of the New Covenant this priesthood passes to all believers, Jew and gentile. As the Mosaic Covenant did not in any way nullify the Abrahamic Covenant, so too the New Covenant in no way affects the provisions and promises of God's covenant with Abraham, including the promises concerning the land.

Possessing the Land: Perspective from the Torah

God gave the land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the result of an unconditional covenant, yet he later commands these same descendants that it is their responsibility to take possession of that which has been given to them. Failure to do so was seen as an act of rebellion. Failure even in part, the failure of totally driving out all of the prior inhabitants of Canaan, is cited as a serious breach of the command of God likely to cause serious problems in the future for the Israelites.

The Key to Possession: Obedience to God's Righteous Law

The danger of not driving out all the inhabitants did not derive from the failure of driving them out per se, but rather from the resultant temptation to cease to love and obey the Lord:

Therefore be very steadfast to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow down yourselves to them, but cleave to the Lord your God as you have done to this day (Josh 23:6-8).

The Israelites were warned that mixing with the surrounding nations would lead them into temptation to idolatry and disobedience, and it is the sins of idolatry and disobedience which

could eventually lead to ejection from the land which God had promised.

The means by which the descendants of Abraham are to possess the land is not by insistence on the land itself, but by insistence on righteousness: "And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you" (Deut 4:1). In fact, we can make an even stronger statement. Disobedience to God's statutes and ordinances guarantees that possession of the promised land will be delayed:

But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for all of these abominations the men of the land did, who were before you, so that the land became defiled); lest the land vomit you out, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you (Lev 18:26-30).

The Example of Abraham

Abraham found himself in a situation in which insistence on righteousness conflicted directly with God's promise that he and his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. When conflict arose between his shepherds and the shepherds of Lot, Abraham was forced to choose between taking a sacrificial stand for righteousness and taking an adamant stand for the land which God had promised him. Abraham could have informed Lot that he would have to depart, seeing as the land had been promised by God to Abraham, and therefore was rightfully his. Abraham did not do that. Rather, he chose to validate the promise of the land by taking a stand for righteousness which involved personal sacrifice. He gave Lot the choice of the best of the land knowing that by this righteous act God himself would look after Abraham's own interests.

In light of complete scriptural revelation we would say that Abraham chose to carry the cross rather than insist on his own God-given rights. The result is known: The land is still promised to the descendants of Abraham and Abraham himself is known as the friend of God. In this act we see a principle of God: even when God gives a promise we must be willing to die to that promise, if necessary, in order to ultimately receive it back. Failure to do so makes an idol of the promise. Abraham gave Lot total freedom to take whatever part he wanted of the land which God had promised to him, yet ultimately it is the descendants of Abraham who will indeed inherit the promise. Abraham had to offer up Isaac in order to ultimately receive him back and insure the fulfillment of God's promises to him. Jesus had to die on the cross to be raised to the promised eternal life. A person must die to self in order to eternally find one's self. And concerning the land, God may call the people of Israel to die to the promise in order to receive it back, just as Abraham did with Lot. Failure to do so would be an act of idolatry, whereby the land itself becomes a god and therefore an idol.

The land is not an end in itself. The gift of the land is to provide a venue whereby God's people can be separated unto him and glorify him:

But I have said to you, "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. "I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples" (Lev 20:24).

Since the land is not an end in itself, possession of the land is not an ultimate goal. It is a means to a greater end, which is the salvation and sanctification of a nation, holy unto God.

Through this holy nation a world in darkness has to come to see God's light.

Historical Perspective: The Prophets and Beyond

Throughout history Israel has felt the threat of the surrounding nations; the geographical setting of the land and the political dynamic of the Near East have ensured that the threat from enemies is never far. The Old Testament historical period is a record of the ongoing ebb and flow of the Israelites' threatened position and their response to it. The people of Israel reacted as any people would by building a military capable of meeting the challenge. While a strong military was essential it was by no means the solution to the problem, for "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zach 4:6).

The history of The First Temple period bears out this truth. The united kingdom split in the end of the tenth century BCE resulting in the formation of two greatly weakened smaller kingdoms. By the middle of the eighth century, however, both of these kingdoms had obtained political, military, and economic strength of almost unprecedented proportions. King Uzziah in the south reigned for 52 years, and his record of military and political achievements is extremely impressive. He restored Elath to Judean control, thus opening trade options to North Africa and the East. He devastated the Arab raiders and the Ammonites to the East. Uzziah fortified Jerusalem and the Negev. He strengthened the army and equipped it with weapons of the highest technology of the day, with siege engines. In addition to all this he and his son Jotham, did what was right in the sight of the Lord.

Yet it is in this very period that we have the ministries of Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, all of whom prophesy severe chastening and judgment to come upon the kingdom of Judah, in addition to the coming destruction upon the northern kingdom of Israel. The reason for this coming judgment at the hand of the Assyrians is given at the very end of the list of Uzziah's accomplishments. In 2 Chronicles 26 we read that Jotham, Uzziah's son, also did what was right in the Lord's sight, "But the people still followed corrupt practices." It is because of this corruption and unrighteousness that God eventually judges and scatters both Israel and Judah.

Perhaps the clearest picture of the moral and spiritual condition of this period is given by the prophet Amos. Amos decries the abominable sins of the surrounding gentile nations of Damascus, Moab, Gaza, and others, and proclaims the judgment which will follow as a result. Then to the people of Judah he says,

For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, after which their fathers walked. So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem (Amos 2:4-5).

Amos utters these words at the very peak of this period of military, political, and economic strength forged by Uzziah. The prophet proclaims that this strength will not prevent judgment because of the prevalence of wickedness:

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. ... Therefore thus says the Lord God: "An adversary shall surround the land, and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds

shall be plundered (Amos 3:1-2,11).

Later in chapter six, Amos graphically describes the ease, security, and wealth which the northern kingdom, Israel, had managed to acquire for itself,

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come! ... Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music; who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (Amos 6:1-6).

There is a sense of security in the military, political and economic standing of the nation, yet the prophet proclaims that coming judgment is certain, and it is certain because there is no perception of the true spiritual and moral condition of the nation. There is no grieving over the ruin of Joseph. The ruin being referred to here is spiritual and moral decay, not physical destruction, for the Assyrian conquest has not yet occurred. In fact, quite the contrary. A few verses later Amos writes the following:

But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood — you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, “Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?” For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel,’ says the Lord, the God of hosts; and they shall oppress you from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of the Arabah (Amos 6:12b-14).

The full meaning of these verses is not immediately obvious, for the prophet is making a play on words. While “Lo-debar” in Hebrew means “nothing,” it also was the name of a town on the East Bank of the Jordan river, on the important trade route, the King's Highway. While “Karnaim” in Hebrew means “horns,” a symbol of might and power, it, too, was a town on the King's Highway on the plateau east of the Jordan River. With this understanding the prophet's message becomes clear. With military strength not known to Israel and Judah since the days of David's kingdom they had managed to gain control of all the strategic trade routes in the region, including the King's Highway. As a result they had become wealthy and, so they believed, secure. Yet security in the land is not based upon the military and political fortitude to hold the land; it is based on righteousness. Israel had turned righteousness into wormwood, or bitterness. And therefore, in spite of the unprecedented strength, destruction was sure to come.

In the eighth century BCE we see the truth graphically demonstrated that possession of the land is not a function of Israel's efforts to hold the land, but rather a function of Israel's obedience to the moral commandments of God. We see the outworking of the principle promised in the Torah: failure to do righteousness, such as to care for the poor, to uplift the oppressed, and to love the stranger in the land ultimately will result in the land being taken away.

The Second Temple Period

Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of this period, but in considering a Messianic Jewish perspective on the question of the land at least brief consideration is essential. After roughly a century of self rule under the Hasmonean dynasty the land of Israel came under subjugation of the Roman empire in 64 BCE. As time progressed so did the anticipation for a messianic deliverer.

The coming of the Son of David who will restore the Davidic kingdom to rule and reign in righteousness absorbed the thoughts of many. The belief of many was that Messiah would come to rid the land of the hated oppressor, of Rome, and to establish full, independent possession of the land, as promised to Abraham. Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth, probably held to these same misunderstandings concerning Messiah and his function even as he, inspired by the Holy Spirit, uttered his prophecy:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear (Luke 1:68-74).

Jesus' teaching on the topic of the land is highlighted by this backdrop of widespread expectation for a messianic deliverance from wicked Rome. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of Jesus' ministry on this topic is his virtual silence. While the hope and attention of the nation is focused on deliverance from Rome, the Messiah himself says almost nothing. Yet he does not totally ignore the issue. As is often his custom, Jesus quotes a brief passage of scripture from the Old Testament with an eye toward its meaning in its greater context. He says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." In so doing he is quoting Psalm 37:11 which appears in the following context:

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land. Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look well at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity (Ps 37:8-11).

There is no clearer commentary in all of Scripture on the means by which God's people are to possess the land. Jesus says little on the topic, but what he says is sufficient. The meek, like Abraham, shall inherit the land. God will see to it.

Conclusion: The Land and the Messianic Community Today

In this article we have seen how God has promised the land to the descendants of Abraham in order that they might be sanctified and separate unto God, that they might keep his commandments and be a light to his truth. We have seen that possession of the land is not a goal within itself, but rather a venue in which this calling of God may be lived out. When this calling to obedience and righteousness is being fulfilled, possession of the land is guaranteed, and when it is not being fulfilled, judgment possibly leading to expulsion from the land is also guaranteed. Abraham has provided an example of how God would have his people relate to questions of conflict concerning the land, should they arise. The history of the First and Second Temple Period reveals the tragic results of failure to be obedient to God in his moral, social and spiritual requirements.

In light of recent political developments the question of the land has become of burning interest among the Jewish people as a whole, including the Messianic community. This community, who believe in the whole Bible, the Book of the Covenants, would do well to

remember that the battle over the land ultimately is not a political battle at all, but a spiritual one. When possession of the land is threatened the nation of Israel is being called to repent of disobedience and rebellion to God in failing to keep his moral and spiritual dictates. The Messianic community can and should have a prophetic voice to the nation, but that cannot be so long as the community remains entangled in the political side of the question. So long as Israel remains in rebellion and in the moral filth and unrighteousness that results from such rebellion, Israel's possession of the land is endangered.

Copyright David Miller, All Rights Reserved

Jerusalem, the Holy City?

Ray Pritz⁴³

In 1996 Jews and Christians celebrated the 3000th anniversary of the city of Jerusalem. Coincidentally or not so coincidentally the same year was the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus by the reckoning of most scholars. In this article I propose to consider the idea of the holiness of Jerusalem for Christians in light of the teaching of the New Testament.

First of all, it will be helpful to note the place of Jerusalem in New Testament faith. If frequency of appearance is any indication of importance (and it would be risky to assume that it is), then the city is of no greater importance to those who receive only the Tanach, the Old Testament, than it is for those of us who have also the New Testament. The relative frequency of the mention of Jerusalem is roughly the same in both testaments. The meaninglessness of this statement must, of course, immediately be admitted, since the Old Testament and the New Testament are of equal authority for the Christian Church.

Indeed, while it is true that Jerusalem-based events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are of primary importance, there are Old Testament events which have great significance for Christians. One need only think of perhaps the first mention of the place, in Genesis 22, when Abraham is called by God to take his son to “the land of Moriah” and to offer him up there as a sacrifice. For whom is this event more significant, for those who accept the New Testament or for those who receive only the Tanach? Christians for their part have traditionally seen here a foreshadowing of God's intention to offer up his own son in Jerusalem, and even the resurrection of the Messiah on the third day may be hinted at here (compare Gen 22:4 with Heb 11:17-19).

The Jerusalem events during the lives of David and Solomon and later kings are of great importance for Christians. For some even greater significance attaches to Tanach passages in which Jerusalem figures into events of the last days. The coming of the Messiah to the city in Ezekiel 43 and 44 and his recognition there by his Jewish brothers (Zech 12 and 24), are among those end-time events foretold in the Old Testament which continue to form the hopes and mold the prayers of generations of New Testament believers.

But, of course, it is the events in which Jesus was involved in Jerusalem which occupy first place in the theology of the New Testament. It was there that Jesus died and rose again, ascended and poured out the Holy Spirit.

This brings us to consider the nature of holy sites. Is a physical place ever intrinsically holy? It is true that the Bible speaks of “holy ground” (e.g. Exod 3:5; Josh 5:15), but in every instance the ground was holy because at that moment God was present there. It would be difficult to show

⁴³Ray Pritz has his Ph.D. on Nazarene Jewish Christianity from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He presently serves as the coordinator of Hebrew language programs at the Caspari Center for Jewish and Biblical Studies in Jerusalem.

that some place became holy and remained so even after God had finished a specific action there.

In this regard we may consider the places in the Bible where Jerusalem is referred to as the “holy city.” There are five such places in the Old Testament and six in the New Testament. For the purposes of this study, we will examine the New Testament references, two of which occur in the gospel of Matthew, and four in the book of Revelation. Considering first the Apocalypse, the references are Rev 11:2; 21:2,11; and 22:19. The first thing we notice is that at least the last three of the references are to the heavenly Jerusalem, not to the earthly city at all. While Rev 11:2 does seem to refer to the earthly Jerusalem, there are other considerations here to which we will return presently. Generally, when the phrase “holy city” is used in Revelation, it does not refer to Jerusalem below.

In Matthew 4:5 we read that the devil took Jesus to “the holy city” and dared him to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple. This story may have seemed strange to some of us who wondered how the two of them did not gather a crowd standing in such a prominent place. Of course, the phrase “pinnacle of the Temple” may not refer to the Temple building itself but rather to the southwest corner of the Temple Mount overlooking the Kidron Valley. Even this, however, would seem a highly unlikely place to stand and have a theological discussion about jumping. And to stand on the top of the Temple itself would have been quite out of the question; it was constructed in such a way that even the pigeons could not roost there. So where were they standing?

The other Matthew reference is in 27:52-53, the strange story about an event which accompanied Jesus' resurrection:

The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

How strange it must have been in Jerusalem to see saints of old walking around in the streets! And yet no other source, in the New Testament or elsewhere, even hints that such a thing happened. Here, surely, was one of the most unusual events in the history of the later Second Temple Period. People must have talked about it for weeks afterward. And yet neither Josephus nor the sea of Talmudic literature knows anything about it. What if, just to speculate, Matthew's “holy city” is the same as that mentioned in the latter chapters of Revelation? Paul tells us that Jesus led many out of the captivity of death and ascended into heaven (cf Eph 4:8-10). Perhaps those resurrected saints appeared to many in the *heavenly* Jerusalem. Twelve times in his gospel Matthew uses the name Jerusalem. Why did he not do so in these two instances? Was it just a matter of style, or was he aware that the physical city of Jerusalem should not be in focus in these two stories?

After the book of Acts contemporary Jerusalem is referred to only eight times in the rest of the New Testament. All but two of these come in narrative passages, in other words in places where the city figures as part of the story. The first non-narrative reference is Gal 4:22-26:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is

Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

Galatians is one of the earliest writings of the New Testament, and yet already here we find a de-emphasis of the significance of the earthly Jerusalem. Far from an affectionate recollection of the city of David, the city where Paul had been educated, here we have a highly unflattering likeness of Jerusalem, made even less flattering by being juxtaposed with the Jerusalem above.

The second non-narrative reference comes in Rev 11:8: "Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Here in a late book of the New Testament the de-emphasis, one might even say delegitimation, of the earthly Jerusalem is even stronger than it was in Galatians. While Jerusalem is not named, one is left in no doubt that the city which the psalmist called "the joy of the whole earth" is now consigned to the category of those places where wickedness reigned and from which God's people had to escape.

Nowhere in the New Testament will one find the kind of praise of the city which periodically finds expression in the Old Testament. The closest thing to a pilgrimage is Paul's rush to return in time for the feast of Shavuot (Acts 20:16). But it is clear from the wider context that Paul has other motives for returning than just to visit the city where sacred events had occurred.

The New Testament emphasis is not on tourist sites, nor on pilgrimages where one can "walk today where Jesus walked." Quite the contrary. There seems to be an almost conscious turning of the back on the city. Hear the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God ... All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country— a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them ... You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Heb 11:8-10,13-16; 12:18-24; 13:11-14)

Here the back is turned: Let us leave the city gate behind us; he suffered outside it. This city will not endure; let us forget it and go out to the real object of our journey, to the one who died. The city we are looking for is not to be found on this earth.

We may recall the words of the angel to the women on the morning after Jesus' resurrection:

Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him" (Matt 28:5-7).

The angel does indeed invite the women to come and see the place where Jesus had lain. But this is not an invitation to tour, to be able to say "I saw the place." They are invited to verify that Jesus has risen from the dead. They have come not to see the place but to see Jesus. Consistent with that end, they are instructed to leave the "holy site" and go to where Jesus is. What they see at the tomb gives them a message for others: "He has risen from the dead, and here is where you can find him."

Here we find the true value of holy sites, whether Jerusalem or any other. We would submit that no physical place is intrinsically holy. However, a visit to Jerusalem can be a vital experience for a New Testament believer, and one with strong spiritual aspects. It can and should reaffirm and strengthen one's faith, and it should give an impetus to share with others the message of the risen Messiah.

Copyright Ray Pritz, All Rights Reserved

The Borders of the Land of Israel

According to Ezekiel

Louis Goldberg⁴⁴

Ezekiel's role as a prophet was a fascinating one, predicting a future for Israel, but our concern is with the prophet's declaration of the land of Israel and its borders. Of special interest is how these borders figure in today's negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. Obviously, this is an area of diverse opinion which requires tolerance in considering the different views.

To What Time Period Does Ezekiel's Prophecy Refer?

Some of the prophet's promises relate to a return to the land after a prescribed time in Babylon, but the scope of his statements quickly expands to the time when all Israel will accept its Messiah and live within enlarged borders. The time frame of Ezekiel's prophecy will be based on decisions made by the leadership of Israel about their Messiah that will lead either to an earlier or later fulfillment of Ezekiel's promises.

As Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin, they were faced with the choice of accepting him as their rightful redeemer and king, or saying, "no." Had they chosen to accept him, God would have honored their decision, and the kingdom in all its fullness could have occurred after the resurrection of Jesus and the judgment of the nations.

Though people can now enjoy the totality of spiritual blessings, at some future time, when Israel will finally respond to the claims of Yeshua the Messiah as both Redeemer and King, the nation will enter into the fullness of the kingdom blessings. These spiritual and physical blessings include a guarantee of a land as articulated in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:18) and expounded further by Ezekiel in his description of the borders of the land of Israel.

Ezekiel's Prophecies of Israel's Borders

While many opinions exist regarding Ezekiel's prophecy concerning the land and its borders, a literal interpretation will be provided first and then other views will be mentioned at the end of this article.

Identifying the various points of the Northern boundary as they are described in Ezekiel 47:15-16 is somewhat difficult because of sites not easily recognized today, but it will not be our intent to treat their location exhaustively. The boundary is said to run from the Mediterranean

⁴⁴ Louis Goldberg (Th.D.) is the author of biblical commentaries and books on Judaism and Messianic Jews. He is presently a Scholar in Residence with Jews for Jesus in New York.

“past Lebo Hamath to Zedad,” which can be difficult to place: Do we interpret Lebo Hamath to be (1) a specific city, or (2), “the entrance of Hamath”? Our position is to accept the former suggestion.⁴⁵ Aharoni makes the point:

Lebo was an important city on the border of the kingdom of Hamath and is to be identified with Lebweh situated on one of the sources of the Orontes north of Ba'albek. The Hebrew phrase, ‘entrance to Lebo’ might be interpreted linguistically as ‘entrance to Hamath’.⁴⁶

Aharoni has further support from a number of Egyptian sources that Lebo Hamath refers to a specific city on the Orontes River. Since Ezekiel indicated that most of the tribes must be located west of Jordan, a more extended northern border allows for an area that will accommodate all the tribes and Aharoni's suggestions allow for this possibility. Others seem to agree.⁴⁷

The next point Ezekiel mentioned is Zedad, and Aharoni again suggests it as the village of Sadad east of Sirion (Anti-Lebanon), near the Damascus-Homs highway, 35 miles northeast of Lebweh. Zedad is situated on the edge of the desert and the next two likely places after it are the two desert oases east of Zedad, Hawarin (Ziphron) and Qaryatein (Hazarenan).⁴⁸ The prophet finally declared that the northern boundary extends “from the sea to Hazar Enan” (Ezek 47:17).

The northernmost point of the eastern boundary is Hazar Enan (Ezek 47:18). Moses had also mentioned it (Num 34:10), but the Israelite occupation never included it. During the reign of David, the territory extended to Damascus and parts of the Beq'a, but in the Messianic kingdom Israel will have all that God promised. The eastern border runs from Hazar Enan, to “between Hauran and Damascus” (Ezek 47:17), which includes more than the present Golan. Hauran is the region east of the Jordan, roughly in the area of the Bashan. The line runs between Mt. Hauran and Damascus but does include parts of the Hauran area. The line then drops to the Yarmuk river and from there runs west to the Jordan and then turns south. The line proceeds “Along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel, to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar” (Ezekiel 47:18). The NIV follows the Septuagint but the Masoretic text indicates: “land of Israel: with the Jordan as a boundary, you shall measure down to the Eastern Sea,” thereby omitting the word “Tamar” in this verse, although it is mentioned in verse 19. Tamar means the (place of) Palm(s) and Fisch states that the “Targum identifies it with Jericho which is called *the city of Palm trees* (Deut 34:4); others consider it to be Hazazon Tamar (Genesis 14:7), another name for En-gedi.”⁴⁹ However,

⁴⁵ If one takes the latter possibility, then the line runs in from the Mediterranean along the Litani River to the southern end of the Beq'a Valley, between the mountains of Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon, moving in the direction toward Hamath. The towns of Zedad, Berothah and Sibram could possibly be located in the Beq'a Valley (John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel, An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), p. 281; and Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ezekiel 20-48*, 29 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), p. 280, 281).

⁴⁶ Yohanan Aharoni, *The Moabites*, 83, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, A.F. Rainey, tr. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979, 2nd ed.), p. 72.

⁴⁷ Roland DeVaux, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Y. Aharoni, p. 73.

⁴⁹ S. Fisch, *Ezekiel* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 328.

these two points are too far north to begin the southern line.

Aharoni links the Ezekiel Tamar with “the modern 'Ain Husb, 20 miles south-west of the Dead Sea”⁵⁰ which is the more likely spot for the southeast point of the eastern boundary.

The southern boundary (Ezek 47:19) runs “from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah Kadesh, then along the Wadi [of Egypt] to the Great Sea” (Ezekiel 47:19). The mention of Meribath-Kadesh (Num 27:14) reminds us of Moses' bitter disappointment when Israel refused to enter the Promised Land. Interestingly, the southern boundary runs through this very area and in a day when Israel is in right relationship to God, people will be joyful when they finally occupy this very area for the glory of God. Once the southern line comes to the Wadi (or Brook of Egypt, not the Nile River), the boundary then runs generally northwestward to the Mediterranean.

The western boundary of the land of Israel in the Messianic kingdom is “the Great Sea ... to a point opposite Lebo Hamath. This will be the west boundary” (Ezek 47:20).

We note from the map that some 50-60 miles (83-99 kilometers) are allotted for the distance from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River while the north-south dimension is close to 300 miles (500 kilometers).

Israel's Present Border and Negotiation with the Palestinian Arabs

A comparison of Ezekiel's boundaries of a Messianic kingdom and Israel's present borders indicates major differences. Israel today holds an upside down triangular piece of land in the south, or Negev, down to Eilat on the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba; part of this southern portion is included in Ezekiel's prophecy.

The West Bank, where many Palestinian Arabs live, is most certainly included in Ezekiel's boundaries, but Israel's borders today demonstrate how the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea is divided between Israeli and Arab peoples. Northern Israel today is drastically smaller than what Ezekiel envisions: The Northern boundary begins at the Mediterranean at a point just south of the city of Tyre and runs eastward and then turns north and eastward to include a small pan-handle between the Lebanese border to the west and Syria's line on the east. The line then turns south in a demilitarized area, to the Yarmuk River, and swings east to just below the Sea of Galilee at the Jordan River.

Can Ezekiel's borders legitimately be used as the guide for present day negotiations with the Palestinian Arabs? Religious Jewish people and others on the political right, thinking in terms of (1) what Israel once occupied under David (the West and East Banks as well as the Golan), and of (2) all God had promised, particularly through Ezekiel, desire to hold on to what lands are today in Israel's possession, the West Bank and Golan Heights, the “Greater Israel.”

But other Israeli Jewish people would not agree. The pressing question remains: What does one do with the Arab peoples? Extremists, such as the late Rabbi Kahane, favored a complete expulsion of all Arab peoples from the West Bank and the Golan, insisting that “there is plenty of room in the Middle East for other Arab Nations to resettle them within their own boundaries.” But most Israeli Jewish people would recoil at such a cavalier suggestion, finding such a solution unacceptable. And, would other Arab nations in the Middle East accept Palestinians on their soil?

⁵⁰ Y. Aharoni, p. 70.

Would the Palestinians ever entertain these designs?

Should the Jewish state include what is known as the West Bank, where the Israeli government controls the territory and peoples upon it? What of the Golan Heights? Can the Ezekiel borders be the means for negotiations with Syria? Thorny questions still remain at this writing.

How Will Ezekiel's Borders Be Achieved?

While no timetable will be conjectured concerning Ezekiel's borders, the most important factors are the conditions that must be met by Israel before these borders can be a reality.

One particular phrase occurs more than 50 times throughout the book of Ezekiel: "Then you will know that I am the Lord." In the day when Israel will enjoy a covenant of peace (Ezek 34:25), "They will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezek 34:30); in the day when God's servant David will be king over the nation, God declares, "I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy and my sanctuary is among them forever" (Ezek 37:27,28). To a nation that knows the Lord, God says: "You are to divide it (the land) equally among them. Because I swore with uplifted hand to give it to your forefathers, this land will become your inheritance" (Ezek 47:14).

Such a set of conditions marks the reason why *all* of the land which God has provided cannot be a current concern for negotiation. Some Israelis lay claim to the land now, but it will only be a reality when everyone in Israel undergoes the experience of having their heart of stone removed and a heart of flesh implanted in them (Ezek 36:26).

But exactly how will this change of an entire nation take place? Here we perhaps consider some of the most difficult and painful passages in Scripture. Ezekiel himself describes the invasion of the land by a powerblock from the north, consisting of a number of nations. Persia or Iran (Ezek 38:5), along with other fundamentalist Arabs who will wish to see harm done to Israel, and some of the peoples of what was once the Soviet Union in "the far north" (Ezek 38:15) will take part in this attack, causing the loss of much life within the land.

This writer has always agonized that such events need to take place before Israel will experience its fullness in a kingdom of peace. But before a final peace will ever come to the land of Israel, or over the entire earth, an entire generation of Israelis, in the midst of a frightful pressures, must call upon the Lord in their land. Only then will He answer them (Zech 13:9), when the Spirit of God is poured out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then, looking upon the deliverer who comes in response to their cry, they recognize him as "the pierced one," and begin to mourn for him and grieve bitterly (see Zech 12:10). Then, and only then, will Israel take title to all the land God promised through His prophet Ezekiel.

Copyright Louis Goldberg, All Rights Reserved

Early Christian Zionists: The London Jews Society and the Return to the Land

Kelvin Crombie⁵¹

To examine the question of the attitudes of Jewish Missions towards Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) prior to 1948 I have decided to analyze, albeit rather inconclusively, the initial Jewish mission, the London Jews Society/Churches Ministry among Jewish People, as a case model. The theme will then be traced through the 140 years of the organization's existence until 1948.

Origins of Interest in Modern Jewish Missions

The period 1789-1815 transformed Europe, the world and the evangelical movement. The beginning point was the French Revolution. "Several months after its outbreak," wrote the late Professor Meir Verete, "Englishmen began to hear and read that it was this great event that heralded the end of the generations and the impending advent of the kingdom of Christ." A number of evangelicals had been influenced by the writings of the Puritans and others, including the Frenchman Pierre Jurieu, about the fulfillment of the prophecies in the latter days and in particular the restoration of Israel to her land. Jurieu, for instance, wrote in 1687 of a future great revolution in France, the result being that the Jewish people "shall be gathered together in their own land."⁵²

Numerous evangelical writers indeed saw the French Revolution as the beginning point of latter days. Subsequent events in France and indeed throughout Europe, especially relating to the diminishing power of the Catholic Church, seemed to confirm them in this belief. The belief system of this growing movement was best summarized by the writings of a baptist minister in London, named James Bicheno. In 1792 he published a book entitled *The Signs of the Times* in which he provided a framework for seeing the fulfillment of the prophecies, especially from Revelation and Daniel, within the context of the present events in Europe and more particularly in France. But Bicheno and his contemporaries had one great disadvantage: they were all Dissenters, non-Anglicans, not part of the establishment. The establishment therefore set about refuting all wild speculation. The *Evangelical Magazine* in October 1793 published an article, which warned against too much interest in wild speculation, but also insisted those were significant times and that there was a responsibility to see the gospel proclaimed.⁵³

Throughout Britain evangelicals were imbued with this call to understand the signs of the

⁵¹ Kelvin Crombie is the author of *For the Love of Zion*. He has lived in Jerusalem for many years and worked as the manager for Christ Church Guest House in Jerusalem. He recently moved back to Australia.

⁵² Peter Jurieu, *The Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies* (London, 1687), p. 3.

⁵³ *Evangelical Magazine* (London, October 1793).

times. Interest grew, resulting in the formation of numerous evangelical missionary societies over the following decade, including the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, the London Missionary Society in 1795, the Church Missionary Society in 1799 and the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804.

Awakened Interest in the Jewish People

There seems little doubt that the awakened evangelical interest and concern for the Jewish people was strongly attached to the concept of Israel's restoration. As the French Revolution had been a starting point for the evangelistic thrust, so Napoleon's invasion of the Levant in 1798/99 further enhanced this interest in the Jewish people. The letter of an Italian Jewish man, calling upon the Jewish people to take the opportunity offered to them by the French expedition and return to their homeland, appeared in the French paper *La decade philosophique, litteraire et politique*. It later appeared in the *Courier* newspaper in London on June 19, 1799, and was followed by the influential *St. James Chronicle* and *The Gospel Magazine*.

In April 1799 Napoleon, while stranded at the walls of Acre, defeated a large Turkish force near Mount Tabor. He then issued one of his customary proclamations, but this time called upon the exiled Israelites to return to their ancient homeland. Such announcements further excited those prophecy-oriented evangelicals in Britain who were looking for the restoration of Israel to be followed by the return of Jesus.⁵⁴

Joseph Frey and Jewish Evangelism

In 1801 Joseph Frey, a German-born Hebrew Christian, came to London from Berlin to train with the London Missionary Society for missionary service overseas. He subsequently began a work amongst the Jewish people in London's east end. From 1805 till 1808 he labored, albeit with little progress. He saw the need to apply more of a textualized approach. The parent organization disagreed, so in 1809 Frey and several supporters set up their own society, the London Jews Society — the LJS.⁵⁵

This fledgling society quickly developed into a major institution. I propose this was due to the strong interest then prevalent in evangelical circles pertaining to the return of Israel to its land. But such a large interest, however, brought with it immediate dangers: On what foundation would the organization exist, or which particular prophetic viewpoint would be adopted? Thus the LJS had no choice but to proclaim, as it did in 1810, its emphasis upon evangelization:

A charge of enthusiasm has been made by some persons concerning the views of the Society; and it has been asserted that your Committee are influenced by foolish and Utopian expectations. Your Committee have already expressed their sentiments in respect of the present circumstances and events of the world. They certainly consider the occurrences of a few years past as peculiarly awful and surprising, and are aroused to exertion by the signs of the times. Nevertheless, they are not determined to any measures which they adopt by visionary and uncertain calculations. *They wish to*

⁵⁴ *Moniteur Universel*, Paris, May 22, 1799. Quoted in Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews and the Sanhedrin* (London, 1979), p. 24.

⁵⁵ The full name was *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*.

distinguish between the restoration of Israel to their own country, and the conversion of Israel to Christianity. If nothing peculiar appeared in the aspect of the times — if neither Jews nor Christians believed the future restoration of Israel — if no exposition of prophecy had awakened attention or excited expectation in men's minds — if it were possible to place things as they stood many centuries ago — still your Committee would urge the importance and propriety of establishing a Jewish Mission. They cannot conceive any just reason why the Jews should be wholly neglected, and no means employed for their conversion.⁵⁶

Evangelism and Prophecy

This tension between evangelism and restorationism is often evidenced by a cursory reading through the writings and periodicals of the London Jews Society. Numerous pages were devoted to the history and traditions of the Jewish people; previous efforts at evangelism, approaches to evangelism, etc. But many articles, albeit sometimes not fully endorsed by the Society, spoke about the restoration of Israel to its land. And then there were the occasional articles which emphasized the opposite view.

One of the foremost protagonists of Jewish evangelism and restoration to Eretz Israel was Lewis Way.⁵⁷ In fact Way met on several occasions with the Russian Czar Alexander and discussed these issues with him. As a consequence Way was invited to address the assembled European heads of state at the Peace Conference held in Aix la Chapelle in 1818.

Following the completion of the Napoleonic Wars any political activity in the Eastern Mediterranean was viewed by the pro-Jewish evangelicals as signs of Israel's impending restoration. Invariably calls for Israel's restoration to the land were synonymous with calls to increase efforts at evangelism. The decade 1832-1842 was especially significant as far as Israel's restoration was concerned. The writings of the LJS/CMJ often carried articles concerning these signs of the times, while such sentiments were often boisterously echoed at the Annual General Meetings held every May. Many prominent speakers, including Lord Shaftesbury and other respected evangelical leaders, called for increased efforts at evangelism, and increased efforts by the British Government to assist with Israel's restoration.

The fall of Acre to the mostly British force in November 1840 aroused the pro-Jewish evangelicals. The LJS/CMJ wrote in February 1841:

The course of events of late, in Syria, has been attentively attached by all those who are anxiously looking for the restoration of Israel, and awaiting the fulfillment of the sure word of prophecy ... It is true, that the Jewish nation were in no degree involved in the cause of contention, and formed no part of the elements in contention; but who shall say what is the hidden meaning and intention of the array of emphatic events which has lately passed before our eyes in the East? ... assuredly the time is approaching when Jerusalem shall cease to be trodden down by the Gentiles.

⁵⁶ *Report of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews* (London, 1810), p. 23. Italics mine.

⁵⁷ For a fuller account of this amazing man please read A.W. Stirling, *The Ways of Yesterday*; W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, 1809-1908*; and K. Crombie, *For The Love of Zion*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).

The same article goes on to quote, in a positive-sounding mood, an editorial from the *Times*, which wrote: “Let the four Allied Powers now publish to the four quarters of the world their determination to restore the Jews from all nations to the Holy Land.”⁵⁸

Such interest only increased and many firmly expected the Jewish people to be restored to Eretz Israel under British protection. But opposition from the other European powers, and from Turkey itself, was just too strong. In fact Britain, through its effervescent Foreign Secretary Palmerston (related by marriage to Shaftesbury, the unofficial leader of the LJS/CMJ), officially proposed such to the Turkish Government — acting upon information relayed to him by Shaftesbury that (1) the Jewish people were ready for such a move, and (2) this was the wish of a large and influential group of evangelical Christians in Britain.⁵⁹

When the proposed restoration failed, the pro-Jewish evangelicals’ attention became focused upon the visit to Britain of the Chevalier de Bunsen, official representative of the King of Prussia. Frederick William IV desired an alliance with Britain, and as both nations had assisted Turkey in the war of 1840, the King proposed the formation of a British/Prussian agreement centered upon Palestine. Of all the King’s proposals, only one, the establishment of a Protestant Bishopric in Jerusalem, was successful. But such a proposal brought to the fore the issues associated with the concept of the Jewish restoration to its homeland. It was in effect the first serious major controversy over the issue within the established church. Such an issue brought the issue of the connection of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel onto the ecclesiastical table. It fronted pro-Jewish evangelicals against pro-Rome High Churchmen. It ultimately saw John Henry Newman defect from the Anglican to the Roman Church.

Concerning the consecration of the first Protestant Bishop, former rabbi Michael Solomon Alexander, the LJS/CMJ wrote,

For the first time after the lapse of many, many centuries, an apostle to the circumcision, himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews, destined for the land of Israel, and appointed for the holy city, received his commission ... the consecration of a Jewish Christian to be a shepherd unto Israel is an event, unheard of since the day that Jerusalem was delivered to be trodden down of the Gentiles, and forms an era in the history both of the Jewish nation and the Christian Church ... What the friends of Israel longed, and prayed, and laboured for, was not simply the conversion of a few individuals, but the resuscitation of the Jewish people, the resurrection of the Jewish Church.⁶⁰

Attitudes towards the First Aliyah and Zionist Movement

The LJS/CMJ upheld its goals in the 40 years after Bishop Alexander arrived in Palestine. They shared the gospel as best they could and supported the future fuller physical restoration of Israel to its country. But until 1882 the actual numbers of Jewish immigrants to Eretz Israel were negligible. All that changed in 1882 with the beginnings of the first Aliyah or immigration.

The LJS/CMJ clearly viewed the new Zionist movement in a positive light, dedicating seven

⁵⁸ *Jewish Intelligence*, February 1841. London, pp. 34-35.

⁵⁹ Palmerston to Ponsonby. Foreign Office (F.O.) 78/390, no 134. Quoted in A. Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*. vol 1, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁰ *Jewish Intelligence*, December 1841, pp. 390-391.

pages to the proceedings of the First Zionist Congress at Basle in 1897. Its article, entitled *Palestine for the Jews — The Zionist Conference*, began:

The Zionist Congress — whose ulterior object is the acquisition of Palestine, and its conversion into a Jewish State and which met at Basle on August 29-31, appears to have kindled a considerable amount of enthusiasm in Jewish circles, *and has been watched with sympathetic interest by Christians who have the welfare of Jews at heart.*⁶¹

And again they wrote of the Zionist movement in 1902:

Zionism is a new power in the world and has come to stay. Its object is the arrangement of the national future of the Jews. *Consciously or unconsciously, Zionists are working out GOD'S purposes for His ancient people, namely their return to the land of their forefathers.* The proceedings of the Fifth Zionist Congress ... may be regarded as another step in the onward march of events.⁶²

And at this historic juncture, the LJS/CMJ received some support from the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, George Popham Blyth, who wrote a three-page pamphlet entitled *The Jews and their Claim* in 1897. Blyth wrote,

It is difficult to overrate the urgency of work which concerns the Jews at the present day. It is indeed important that the Church should realise this, the most vital of Eastern questions. The return of the Jews to the Land that is theirs, (and which, the Turks have owned, is GOD'S Land in their trust), present such startling figures as arrest attention ... And what are we, the mere handful that is here, that we should be able to reclaim from amongst them the "*Church of the Hebrews?*" But if, in the work of the Anglican Church in Palestine, (at present alone permitted to take up Jewish Missions), there can be formed a congregation purely of believing Jews, may it not powerfully affect the future of their nation in that inevitable day when they shall study the claims of Christianity in their own land.⁶³

The Period of the First World War

During the First World War the British missionaries were ousted from Palestine and the Society had difficulty maintaining contact with its local workers there. But as the Anzac⁶⁴ and British forces made progress into the country from March 1917, interest abounded. And then came the Balfour Declaration, which was, according to the LJS/CMJ an epoch-making announcement. They wrote:

With one step the Jewish cause has made a great bound forward. For centuries the Jew has been down-trodden, dispersed, hated and unloved by all the nations. For 2000 years now the Jew has suffered as no other nation on the earth's surface in his restless wanderings. Wherever he has gone he has been ill-treated, but now there is at least a prospect of his settling down once again in his own country, and of becoming in the eyes of men a Nation among the Nations, in place of being a wanderer in every clime. He is now to have a home for himself in his God-given land. The day of his

⁶¹ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, October 1897, p. 154. Italics mine.

⁶² *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, February 1902, p. B. Italics mine.

⁶³ Blyth, G.F. Popham, *The Jews and the Claim*, Jerusalem Epiphany, 1897.

⁶⁴ Acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

exile is to be ended.⁶⁵

The Society, although recognizing the movement back to Jewish homeland as significant, nevertheless recognized that such a movement would cause serious problems for the cause of Jewish missions. "It stands to reason," the same editorial continued, "that if a people is organized, they are better able to cope with those forces that work amongst them, which they do not like."

Granting of the Mandate

The positive attitude of the LJS/CMJ to the return of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel continued with the granting of the Mandate to Britain in 1920. Under the heading *Our Mandate*, the LJS/CMJ clearly stated their own mandate to bring the gospel to the Jewish people "not only in the Near East but throughout the whole Jewish Mission field." They continued:

As citizens of the Empire we are concerned with the political responsibilities entrusted to Great Britain in Palestine and Mesopotamia, and are thankful beyond measure that, in the Providence of God, our nation has been chosen for preparing the Holy Land for the great future that lies before it ... We regard the incorporating of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 in the Peace Treaty with Turkey, not so much as opening up hopes of a settlement of the Jewish problem, which has baffled so many of the statesmen of Europe, or even as affording the persecuted Jews in Russia and Poland security of life and property on their migration to Palestine, but as one of the most wonderful instances on record of the working out of God's promises to that nation that He loves with an everlasting love.

With Arab nationalist opposition in 1920 (the Nebi Musa riot) and 1921 (May Day riots) opposition mounted within Parliamentary circles for Britain to accept the Mandate. Under the title *Shall Britain Leave Palestine?* the LJS/CMJ wrote in April 1922:

Of all the many races connected with the Holy Land in its long history one race stands out pre-eminently as the great means of blessing to the whole world.

We believe we find in this revelation a promise that the land shall be restored to this race, and that once again blessing shall come to the world through the Jews.

Our part, as Christians, must be to see that as they return to the land, they are met by a true revelation of God's love to them and purposes for them, not that in selfishness they may merely rebuild a national home, but that once again they may become the means, through which blessing may come to the world.⁶⁶

Such sentiments of enthusiasm were, however, not completely endorsed by the Anglican Church in British Palestine. *The Zionist Review*⁶⁷ in its November 1923 edition wrote concerning the sentiments which the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Rennie MacInnes, made at the annual meeting of the Jerusalem and the East Mission⁶⁸, and stated in the *Times* of October 10, 1923. The *Times* stated that Dr. MacInnes said of Zionism:

⁶⁵ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, December 1917, p. 129.

⁶⁶ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, April 1922, p. 51.

⁶⁷ *The Zionist Review*, London, November 1923, vol. II. no 7, p. 67.

⁶⁸ Established by Bishop Blyth in 1887 in reaction to the unsympathetic attitude of the two evangelical missionary societies, LJS/CMJ and CMS, to his more High Church leanings.

There was a fixed, bitter opposition on the part of the whole of the natives of Palestine, Moslem and Christian, and a large number of the Orthodox Jews, to the Zionists, and the policy of the British Government that had fathered it... The Christian people at first had welcomed the Zionist Movement with enthusiasm, as a direct fulfillment of prophecy. Now, five years after the Balfour Proclamation, Zionism had not given them one lofty or noble thought, nor one ideal even of the old Judaism, nor given anything new or old, that had advanced morally, intellectually, or spiritually the position of the people of Palestine.⁶⁹

The Zionist Review spokesman was upset and concerned about these comments of the head of the Anglican Church. But they were not made in a vacuum. Not only had the war provided opportunities for the Jewish nationalist movement, it also provided openings for the Arab nationalist awakening. And Arab nationalism was not confined to the Moslem Arabs — the Christians were as actively involved as they could be. In fact the origins of the movement are traced to Christian Arabs in the previous century! And in 1923, the majority of the Anglicans within the Anglican diocese of the Middle East were Arabs. These comments summarize the beginnings of an increasingly difficult situation facing LJS/CMJ. On one hand they were dedicated to the Jewish people — and even of the return to their promised land — while on the other hand they were part of the progressively Arab Anglican diocese.

Problems During the Mandate

While conditions were relatively stable within Palestine the LJS/CMJ was not called upon to endorse its position concerning Zionism and the Jewish return to Eretz Israel. Once serious problems began, however, and especially as the interests of Britain were affected, the LJS/CMJ found itself very much caught between a rock and a hard place. The enemies of Zion increased their activity.

The next period of adversity, following Nebi Musa and the May Day riots, were the pogroms of 1929. There is no real need to expand upon the causes of the pogroms, apart from stating that a little bit of Jewish aggravation was apparent in the Western Wall controversy, but the Moslem reaction far surpassed any warranted response. It was a calculated attempt to injure the Jewish community. Yet the British authorities thought otherwise.⁷⁰ The *Passfield White Paper* censured the Jewish community and imposed restrictions upon Jewish immigration and land purchases. This was a serious blow to the Zionist initiative, especially as Nazism and Fascism were now rearing their ugly heads in Europe. The LJS/CMJ wrote in response:

It is impossible to follow political reasoning and therefore it is incomprehensible to us why the official interpretation of Jewish National Home should not have been made clear a long time ago ...
In the midst of the turmoil, all of us who hold dear the objects of the Society, can take comfort in

⁶⁹ *Times*, October 10, 1923.

⁷⁰ One marvelous outcome of this horrific occurrence was the role played by numerous evangelical missionaries, both LJS/CMJ and others. On several occasions they placed themselves in vulnerable places in order to assist the beleaguered Jewish populations. Also of note was the prayerful response of General William Dobbie (later Governor of Malta during World War Two, uncle of Orde Wingate and father of Colonel Orde Dobbie) who was rushed from Egypt with meagre forces, but managed to quickly move them around so as to engender the impression that there were more forces than there really were.

the knowledge that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land is assured as in the purposes of Almighty God for the World. Time has no meaning to Him, the hindrances and obstacles of men are always utterly powerless against those purposes.⁷¹

Despite the censure of the *Passfield White Paper*, there was a relaxation in the restrictions in 1933 when, following the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party to power in Germany, thousands of German Jews headed towards Palestine. Their arrival caused another backlash from the Arab community which provoked yet more debate in Britain over the Mandate and Britain's policies there. Again the haters of Zion found a platform to voice their antagonism towards the Jewish people. And again the LJS/CMJ came out in support of the Jewish people. They wrote in December 1933:

Considerable feeling has been aroused throughout the Arab world, although the connection of the so-called "Arab" of Palestine with the people of the Hedjaz or Irak, must be very loose indeed. Some pure-blooded Arabs there may be in Palestine, but these are very few compared with the mixed race of ancient Canaanitish descent popularly styled "Arab." It may well be, as is frequently suggested, that this "Arab" cry is a convenient slogan with which to rally a Pan-Islamic crusade. A Jewish state in Palestine is the only obstacle to an Arab state stretching from Persia to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Great Britain has helped to build and secure three Arab kingdoms, covering many thousands of square miles. It can hardly be regarded as an injustice if she seeks to secure for a homeless race equal rights with the Arab in a little land no bigger than Yorkshire. It is altogether ignored by British sympathizers with Arab claims that Palestine is the property of the Jew by the title deeds bestowed by the highest authority the Christian recognizes (Genesis xiii. 15; xv 18; xvii. 8). The Jew, moreover, has been domiciled in the land and exercised paramount authority over it for a longer period than any other people.⁷²

The crisis of 1933 passed, but erupted again in 1936, when following further large Jewish migration, the Arab Higher Committee imposed a general strike which paralyzed much of the economy. The British Government later sent out another Royal Commission. Again the LJS/CMJ expressed its solid position concerning the restoration of Israel. But this time it gave equal weight to the need for a suitable solution to be found for all the peoples of the land to live in harmony. It seems that when recognizing the divine ceding of the land to the Jewish people there needed to be some workable solution for the Jew and Arab to live together. But this sentiment somewhat contradicted that which they stated in 1933, whereby they recognized that the existence of a Jewish presence in Palestine contradicted Pan-Islamic ambitions. They wrote in July 1936:

But for the future we must recognize that, whatever our likes or dislikes, there will be a large Jewish community in Palestine. I think the terms of the Mandate necessitate this, however much re-interpretation there may be in the future of the meaning of the phrase 'national home.' And those who study their Bibles, believing that the prophecies with regard to the Jewish people mean something have not all been fulfilled in the past, are agreed that it seems to be in line with God's inscrutable plans that Palestine is to be the centre of Jewish national life in the future. This is accepted by all, and not merely by those who run to death some pet theory with regard to prophecy.

What is not so clear is the question as to whether it is possible for Jews and Arabs to live

⁷¹ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, December 1930, Editorial.

⁷² *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, December 1933, p. 147.

harmoniously in the same country. There are some of us who are still optimistic on this score, and believe that some expedient may yet be discovered for the harmonizing of two diverse elements, *provided that a right proportion is jealously guarded.*⁷³

In that same year the LJS/CMJ sent their own Commission to Palestine following a request by the Anglican Bishop, to determine how best to organize its work among the expanding Jewish population. The Commission's report said the position of a Jewish mission in Eretz Israel was now much more difficult:

So bitter is the Nationalist antagonism to the Hebrew Christian that he is made an outcast, not simply from the Synagogue, but also from the economic life of the country ... No Jewish employer will employ a Jewish proselyte, and a boycott will even be proclaimed against European firms who have such an one on their staff. Not the least of the charges preferred by the Jews against our Lord, is that His teaching cuts at the very heart of their Nationalism — that Gospel which is universal in its appeal is fundamentally antagonistic to their racial privileges.⁷⁴

This statement reveals the increasing hardship now being faced by Hebrew Christians/Messianic Jews, especially as it pertains to the Nationalist Zionist population. Such a predicament increased over the following decade as the nationalist camp itself fragmented, and groups vied for control over the Jewish community. The Hebrew Christian, despite his/her commitment to the restoration to Eretz Israel, was likely to be ostracized, although there were exceptions to this general rule.

The Commission's Report also introduced the growing isolation which the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jews experienced within the Church:

Nor is it only from Jews that opposition comes. Within the Church itself political agitation and economic jealousy are sometimes apparent. The Arab Christian shares with his fellow-countryman the hatred of and antagonism to the Jew as an intruder and an invader.⁷⁵

This situation too escalated over the following decade, as Arab nationalist opposition to Zionism grew, and into which sections, often vocal, of the indigenous, including the Anglican, church became involved. All such situations only further complicated the position of the LJS/CMJ.

The Peel Commission released its findings in 1937 — and recommended a form of partition of Eretz Israel (west of the Jordan River that is) — roughly one third of that area becoming Jewish, the other 2/3 remaining Arab. In response the LJS/CMJ expressed its view that the title deeds of the Jewish people take in an area much larger than that now bestowed upon them:

Our view is that the title deeds of the land are in the Book (Genesis xiii. 15; xvii. 8; xv. 18). The last passage gives the extent in territory — “From the river of Egypt to the great river the river Euphrates,” and the other two give the extent in time of ownership ‘for ever and ever’ and for “an everlasting possession.” In God's purpose the land has belonged to the people since the days of Abraham. Though it is true that the profligacy of any particular heir or heirs may interrupt

⁷³ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*. July 1936, p. 75.

⁷⁴ The Report of the Commission to Palestine, 1936. Bodleian Library Dept. CMJ, section 56, p. 5-6.

⁷⁵ The Report of the Commission to Palestine, p. 12.

enjoyment of the heritage it cannot break the entail. The property still belongs to the family.⁷⁶

With the refusal of the Arab Higher Committee to accept the Partition proposal (formulated at a Pan-Arab Congress in Syria in September 1937) the situation deteriorated badly. So bad in fact that the welfare of Hebrew Christians and other evangelicals attending the LJS/CMJ centre at Christ Church inside Jaffa Gate was threatened when Arab rebels gained control over the Old City in 1938.

The overall situation became even more ominous as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were encouraging this wave of anti-British/anti-Zionist sentiment. The British Government was now becoming embroiled in a very delicate predicament — whether to further antagonize the Arabs and send them into the awaiting arms of the Germans and Italians, or whether to appease the Arabs and alienate the Jewish community. Deliberations were called for in London in 1939 (the *Round Table Talks*), and the resultant *MacDonald White Paper* all but rescinded the original promises of the Balfour Declaration. It was a bitter pill to swallow for the Jewish community — and the supporters of restorationism.

One Jewish group, the *Irgun*, the military wing of the Revisionist Zionist movement, retaliated aggressively. Other Jewish citizens demonstrated in Tel Aviv and other centres. The LJS/CMJ representative at the Jerusalem Girl's College wrote that the Land Sales Restriction Act was “a real test of the spirit of friendship existing between the Jewesses and Arab girls, and also between the staff and the girls as the demonstrations were anti-British.”⁷⁷

The Second World War

The beginning of the World War simmered down the growing schism between the Jewish community and the British authorities. For the time being virtual harmony existed, with the exception of some extremists on both sides. LJS/CMJ, like the rest of the missionary community, carried on its work as best they could in the trying circumstances. They too entered into the new reality confronting them. Tens of thousands of soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and Poland, as well as Free French, inundated Palestine. And when the Axis threatened, from North Africa, through Greece and Crete or from Syria, the missionaries, like the Jewish community, waited anxiously.

A rise in the number of anti-British acts increased after 1943. This in turn exacerbated tensions between the British authorities and the Jewish community, although only a small group was responsible. The majority of the Jewish community assisted the Allied and British war effort to the best of its ability. The LJS/CMJ defended the country's Jewish community from unfair criticism leveled after acts of terrorism. “There are abominable crimes being committed by Englishmen in this country to-day,” they wrote in 1944, “but no-one dreams of branding the English people as a whole with the disgrace of these misdeeds.” And again, “although the Jewish population of Palestine is not much more than 500,000, it has contributed 30,000 volunteers to the

⁷⁶ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, August 1937, p. 85.

⁷⁷ *Bread Cast Upon the Waters*. London 1939-40, p. 48.

British Army or, in other words, six per cent.’⁷⁸ That clearly outweighed the meager Arab contribution.

But it was the news of the systematic destruction of the European Jewish community which stirred up LJS/CMJ most. On one occasion in 1945, it wrote:

In the darkest hour of England’s stern and deadly struggle some of us never doubted the certainty of the destruction of Nazi Germany ... The nation or system that seeks to destroy the Jew is pulling down the roof of its house upon its own head. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome (in earlier days), Czarist Russia, Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy ... have all suffered the same fate, but the Jew survives and outlives them all.

[Do not] seek to explain it by any other cause than that which God proclaimed to Abraham: “I will curse him that curseth thee” (Genesis 12:3) ...and to Jeremiah: “I will punish all them that oppress them.” (Jer 30:20).

Until 1948

Naturally there was an anti-gentile sentiment prevailing in the Jewish community following the War, especially among those survivors of the death camps who managed to enter Palestine. It was in *Christian* Europe that 6,000,000 Jewish people were exterminated. And this sentiment only increased once official British opposition to the flow of survivors increased.

From 1945 until 1948 the relationship between the Jewish community of Palestine and the British authorities deteriorated steadily until it ended up in an open conflict. In fact it was a three way conflict involving the British, the Jewish community and Arabs. It was only inevitable that many innocents would be affected and implicated. Two such groups were the Hebrew Christians/Messianic Jews, especially those attached in some way or form with the British and with Arab Christians, and the British missionaries. LJS/CMJ were caught in the crossfire, both literally and metaphorically, as never before. Its situation deteriorated daily, especially when British civilians were being targeted in retaliation for acts by the authorities against the Jewish community. In response to this situation the British authorities ordered an evacuation of all British dependents, code-named *Operation Polly* in 1947. One LJS/CMJ missionary Roger Allison, relieved that his wife Gwen could remain, wrote:

We were all immensely relieved that our own Society ... left the important decision about staying or departing to the discretion of its agents in the Field ... I believe that CMJ’s commitment to the Jewish people played an overriding role in such a policy of trust.’⁷⁹

Various Jewish groups periodically hauled away Hebrew Christians associated with British institutions on suspicion of spying.⁸⁰ And to further complicate matters, Hebrew Christians walking in Arab areas were liable to be taken hostage and beaten because they were Jews.⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, May 1944, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Jewish Missionary News*, March 1949, p. 44.

⁸⁰ R. Allison, *Journey to Jerusalem* (St. Leonards-on-Sea, 1988) page 35. and Hugh Jones to C.H. Gill, 6 May 1947, Bodleian Library dept. CMJ, c. 218.

⁸¹ Such happened to Ursula Nehab as she entered Jaffa Gate to attend Christ Church. Her ordeal at the

In fact the Arab Higher Committee issued identity cards to all non-Jews in the Old City. Meanwhile in the Jewish sector of Jerusalem:

Everyone under forty was required to register for national service and those who had registered were given cards to this effect. Anyone found in the street without such a registration card was liable to “arrest” and was forbidden to eat in cafes or restaurants. Hebrew Christians who offered for national service were turned down and therefore possessed no registration card and so their position was made intolerable.⁸²

The pressure upon the British missionary societies, especially LJS/CMJ, and the Hebrew Christians, was strong during the last months before the end of the Mandate. In fact it grew to such an extent that many Hebrew Christians/Messianic Jews felt their lives would be in danger once the British authorities pulled out. Accordingly LJS/CMJ and other missionary societies involved with the Jewish people met and after having gained approval from the Colonial Office and High Commissioner concerning entrance visas, *Operation Mercy* went into effect. Those Hebrew Christians to enter Britain would thereafter become the responsibility of the various missionary societies and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance. The evacuation was completed in early May 1948.

This action has been criticized in recent years, although those involved deemed it imperative at the time. As far as the LJS/CMJ was concerned its involvement could be construed as a reversal even betrayal, of its traditional commitment towards the Messianic movement and body in Eretz Israel. Nevertheless, according to several who were involved, the pervading concern was for the safety of many of the people.⁸³ One argument raised by those who disagree with this “reverse Exodus” is that there was little apparent discrimination against those Hebrew Christians who did remain after the State of Israel was proclaimed. Gershon Nerel summarizes this predicament:

Messianic Jews in Mandatory Palestine, including those who held firm Zionist aspirations, had to put their national views to practical test in 1948. A mass evacuation of Hebrew Christians from the Land was organized. The main reason for that was the uncertainty concerning their future in a Jewish State. Most of them left the country before the State of Israel was proclaimed. However, about half a dozen Zionists among them refused to leave. When war broke out, they joined Jewish troops, fighting for independence. They felt that this was the right time to identify practically with their brethren.⁸⁴

hands of the Arab Higher Committee thankfully concluded positively.

⁸² Jones to Gill, 6 April, 1948, Bodleian Library dept. CMJ. C 218.

⁸³ Ursula Jones (nee Nehab) and Ronald Adeney, both of whom were involved in one form or another. Ursula Nehab later married Hugh Jones and lived for many years as wife of the LJS/CMJ Israel director until his untimely death in 1964. Adeney resided in Israel from 1947 almost until recent times.

⁸⁴ Gershon Nerel *Messianic Jews and the Modern Zionist Movement*. In *Israel and Yeshua*, Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies. Jerusalem, 1993, p. 81.

Conclusion

References are hard to find in those closing months of the Mandate period concerning LJS/CMJ's position and viewpoint of the troubles in Palestine. In one sense it was as if the reality that this was the period of fulfillment of much of the expectations and prayers of the Society throughout nearly 140 years, the time of actual birthing, was just too overwhelming. And on top of this, one has the feeling that throughout this 140-year period, although not always endorsing the views of the Government, the LJS/CMJ maintained an attitude that Jewish restoration and British imperialism went hand in hand, one complementing the other. And then all of a sudden this utopian relationship had gone foul. The restored Israel was actually *fighting* Britain. No doubt there was confusion and disappointment, coupled with hopeful expectation.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, despite the fact that there was little in the way of a clear authoritative statement in May 1948, there is much within the previous 140-year period to reveal that this Society had established a very clear, uncompromising attitude concerning the connection between the Jewish people and their restoration to Eretz Israel. Although not the subject of this paper, it is very clear that this attitude of favor towards Israel's restoration *did* play a significant role in helping establish Israel in its homeland. Our hope, and prayer, is that this historical connection will continue well into the future, and that the LJS/CMJ can uphold its unique heritage.

Copyright Kelvin Crombie, All Rights Reserved

⁸⁵ See H. Hurnard, *Watchman on the Walls*. (London, 1960).

Zion in the Theology of Leon Averbuch and Shabbetai Rohold

Gershon Nerel⁸⁶

Eretz-Israel, the Land of Israel, increasingly attracted the interest of Jewish believers in Yeshua during the period between the two World Wars. Jewish believers in Yeshua, who we shall refer to as JBY. Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBT) who were at that time called Hebrew Christians, often posed challenges to the various issues concerning the physical restoration of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland.⁸⁷

In the Jewish Diaspora or Dispersion, as well as in Eretz-Israel, JBY vigorously spoke and wrote about their attitudes towards the ideas and activities of the secular Zionist movement. Some of them openly and systematically supported the national revival of the Jewish people within the feasible framework of Herzlian Zionism. At the same time, however, others disregarded or opposed political Zionism — arguing that the Zionists created a “replacement ideology” which undermined the divine plan for the spiritual salvation of the Jewish People.⁸⁸

In other words, pre-eminent leaders in various assemblies of JBY expressed their “Theology of the Land” — either being in favor of “making Aliyah” (immigration) to the Promised Land, and even settling there in a unique colony of JBY, or by ignoring and even opposing the notion of “Aliyah.” This, because in principle they saw in territorial nationalism a dangerous substitute for the cosmopolitan ideal of a spiritual pilgrimage on this earth towards a heavenly realm. Furthermore, Israel's national and territorial restoration, according to them, would come only together with the spiritual restoration of the whole world.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Gershon Nerel is the Israel Secretary for the International Messianic Jewish Alliance. He received his Ph.D. on “Messianic Jewish Self-identity in Eretz-Israel, 1917-1967” from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁸⁷ Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew, The Life of Leon Levison, 1881-1936* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press, 1989), esp. pp. 186-212. Richard Cadbury, *Nine Thousand Miles in the Track of the Jew* (London & Edinburgh: Marshall Bros., 1923), esp. pp. 8-23. “Zion — Sole Solution for Israel” *The Hebrew Christian (=HC)*, vol. viii, April 1935 - January 1936, pp. 19-21. Mark, Kagan, “Palestine and the Jew To-Day in the Light of Scripture”, in: *HC*, vol. v, 1933, pp. 177-182; Jacob Peltz, “Report on Palestine Relief”, in: *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly (=HCAQ)*, vol. xiv, 1930:22- 25.

⁸⁸ Abram Poljak, *The Cross in the Star of David*, translated from the German: *Das Kreuz im Davidstern*, 2nd ed. (London: The Jewish Christian Community Press, 1938), pp. 59-87. Gershon, Nerel, “Attitudes of Messianic Jews (Hebrew Christians) towards Zionism, 1866-1948”, [Hebrew] in: *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1993), Division B, Vol. ii, *The World Union of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem 1994), pp. 115-122.

⁸⁹ Joseph Zamir, “Litkumata shel Malchut Israel” [To the Restoration of Israel's Kingdom], (Hebrew Supplement) in: *Der Weg*, [Yiddish], Warsaw, vol. viii, no. 1, January-February 1934, pp. 9-15, and no. 2, March-April 1934, pp. 10-14; Israel Sarna, “Where?” [Yiddish], in: *Der Weg*, vol. xi, Nov.-Dec. 1937, pp. 1-

In this article we shall briefly examine the above mentioned topic as reflected in the writings of two influential JBY: Leon Averbuch from Romania and Shabbetai Rohold from Mandatory Palestine. Both leaders were greatly appreciated worldwide, and can be regarded as representatives of two differing approaches towards the modern Jewish resettlement in the Land of Zion.

Leon (Lev-Yakovitch) Averbuch (1885-1941)

For more than 20 years (1918-1940)⁹⁰ Leon Averbuch labored in Kishinev (Chisinau), Bessarabia, under Romanian regime, aiming successfully to renovate and develop a Messianic Jewish congregation in this town.⁹¹ The original congregation of "Messianic Jews Sons of the New Covenant," which was founded in Kishinev by Joseph Rabinowitz in 1885 and disintegrated in 1899, following the death of Rabinowitz. For more than one decade (1928-1940) Averbuch was the leader of an independent congregation of JBY in Kishinev, and he became the editor of its bi-monthly organ called *Hamevaser Tov* ("The Announcer of Good Tidings").⁹²

On both ideological and practical levels Averbuch strongly suspected that the message of Herzlian Zionism stood as a serious threat to the proclamation and influence of Yeshua's message. Thus, for example, in an article called "Two Graves," published in *Hamevaser Tov* in relation to the 30th memorial date of Theodor Herzl's death (Yahr-Zeit)⁹³ Averbuch found a special opportunity to criticize Zionism. In his view, within the Jewish world Herzl was over-venerated, getting excessive respect and honor without any proportion. Against Jewry's widely accepted notion that "Herzl discovered the right diagnosis and the perfect remedy for the Jewish problem: Eretz-Israel, earthly Zion," Averbuch raised a warning as to the possible creation of a false religion and having a false messiah.⁹⁴

Averbuch's criticism focused on the personality cult which emerged in Jewry around Herzl's image and the fact that the Bible, Old & New Testaments, was not central enough in Herzl's thought and practice. Therefore, he argued that Jewry spent and lost too much energy upon

3; Samuel Schor, "Growing Opposition to the Restoration to Palestine", in: *HC*, vol. iv, 1931, pp. 154-158.

⁹⁰ L. Averbuch., "Report — Third International Hebrew Christian Conference, held at High Leigh, 1931", in: *HC*, vol iv, 1931: 112. Kai *Kjtr*-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement. The Herzl of Jewish Christianity* (Edinburgh/Grand Rapids: The Handsel Press/ Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), pp. 209-229. In an article published recently we find additional new first-hand information about Averbuch, see: Gabe, Eric, "The Messianic Work in Kishineff" in *HC*, vol. LXX, 1997: 29-30. Gabe corrects some details given by Solheim and later quoted by *Kjtr*-Hansen.

⁹¹ Magne Solheim, "Jewish Missions in Romania", in: *Mishkan*, no. 14, 1991, pp. 35-37. In this article the name 'Averbruch' needs to be corrected.

⁹² Based on Isaiah 52:7. *Hamevaser Tov*, called "Binevestitorul" in Romanian, was published at the same time in three languages: Yiddish, Romanian and Russian. It first appeared in 1924. A special edition was published in 1934 to celebrate the regular and unceasing appearance of the three versions of the magazine for ten years.

⁹³ On the 20th of the Jewish month of Tammuz. The other tomb which Averbuch referred to was that of the Hebrew national poet Hayim Nachman Bialik. Averbuch's approach in this article to this second grave, however, will not be discussed here.

⁹⁴ Lev Averbuch, "Zwei Kevarim" (Two Graves), Yiddish, in: *Hamevaser Tov*, vol. xi, no. 7-8, 1934, pp. 7-8.

Herzl's humanistic Zionism — at the expense of drawing Jewry's attention to the spiritual solution provided by Yeshua's truth — first and utmost the cure of the human soul. As he criticized the idea of "trust in a human being that has no power in himself" which he found in Herzlian Zionism, Averbuch pointed out that any national hope for Israel was primarily in the Messianic "Corner Stone": Yeshua.

It is clearly observed that with such an approach Averbuch repeatedly expressed the basic attitude of Joseph Rabinowitz towards secular Zionism. Namely, both Rabinowitz and Averbuch disregarded Herzl's ideas and declared that Zionism, proclaiming immigration to Eretz-Israel, became a stumbling block on the track leading to the real solution for the Jewish problem. In Kishinev it was still well remembered what Rabinowitz said about this issue: "In the hands of Yeshua is found the key to the Holy Land."⁹⁵ Averbuch in his lifetime pronounced the same statement.

Thus, for example, just before the elections to the 19th Zionist Congress, planned to be held in August-September 1935 in Luzern, Switzerland, Averbuch published in *Hamevaser Tov* a one-page public notice where he wrote:

Jewish brothers! We give you an advice: ...we, Messianic Jews, want to say as once Joshua the son of Nun had said: 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15)... The key of Eretz-Israel and of the happiness of all peoples is in the hand of Yeshua Hamashiah.⁹⁶

Averbuch directly and sharply contrasted the secular ideology of Herzl with his political solution for the Jewish people on the one hand, with the hope and leadership of Yeshua — the real and true "Shepherd of Israel" and the "Light of the Nations" on the other. Thus, according to Averbuch, only in Yeshua is found the real cure and medicine for the maladies and pessimistic situation of the Jews. In his mind, Herzl misled the Jewish people from remaining under the "Wings of the Shekhinah," the Divine Presence,⁹⁷ and therefore directed Israel to other ideas than those found in the Word of God.

Against this background it is clearly understood why Averbuch, in his many articles which appeared in *Hamevaser Tov*, nowhere did he recommend to the members of his Kishinev congregation to leave the Diaspora and prepare themselves to make "Aliyah." For Averbuch, Herzl and Zionism no doubt became a serious and growing menace to the work of witnessing to the Jews about Yeshua — and focusing on faith in the kingdom of Heaven. Thus, for example, Averbuch stated that the ultimate goal for Judaism is to get out from the "Diaspora of sin" and repent.⁹⁸ For him, as the belief in secular Zionism so quickly spread within Jewry, it became a form of a new "religious faith" which pushed away spiritual faith in the Bible and destroyed the

⁹⁵ *Kjir*-Hansen, p. 117 and especially pp. 122-126.

⁹⁶ "Zu di Wahlen zum 19 Zionistischen Kangress un zum Welt Kangress", Yiddish, ("To the Elections of the 19th Zionist Congress and to the World Congress"), in: *Hamevaser Tov*, vol. xii, no. 7-8, 1935, p. 11.

⁹⁷ "Zwei Kevarim", loc. cit., p. 8. Cf. David Baron, "Hamagid Mereshit Achrit", Hebrew, (A Divine Forecast of Jewish History), Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel, London 1927, pp. 13-19.

⁹⁸ Lev Averbuch, "Vuhin Geht das Yidentum?", Yiddish, ("Where is Judaism Going?"), in: *Hamevaser Tov*, Kishinev, vol. xi, no. 7-8, 1934, p. 4.

soul-strength of the nation.⁹⁹

Therefore Jewry, according to Averbuch, should not search for new roads of salvation within Zionism and its human wisdom, but rather should discover the old way to God which leads to eternity.¹⁰⁰ Then, when all Israel will repent and find God and His prophets, and acknowledge the Messiah who appeared in the Second Temple period, it will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Only then will Israel become a blessing among the nations (goyim) and be instrumental in bringing all the "Goyim" under the wings of the Shekhinah¹⁰¹. From this it is crystal-clear that Averbuch held the view that basically JBY need to remain in the Diaspora in order to become highly useful in the world's salvation.¹⁰² Zion, therefore, within a designated territorial context had no practical meaning for Averbuch. Consequently he opposed a key concept in Herzlian Zionism: the annihilation of the Diaspora and the solution of the Jewish problem by massive immigration to Eretz-Israel.¹⁰³

Averbuch's focus on the centrality of the heavenly and spiritual Jerusalem is also found in his booklet "Zion's-Lieder" ("Songs of Zion"). In this hymnal which includes 29 hymns, most of them written by Leon and some by his wife Miriam,¹⁰⁴ we could expect to find reference also to earthly Zion. However, Zion, in the sense of Eretz-Israel being the Jewish Homeland, is absolutely absent. As the title of the hymnal immediately indicates, Zion is placed as the focus of attention, but obviously this is the heavenly and allegorical Zion and not the earthly one.

Furthermore, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, on the first page of "Zion's Lieder" Averbuch wrote three quotations from Scripture to clarify exactly which "Zion" he was referring to: "Zion where God dwells" (Ps 9:11); "The everlasting joy of the redeemed in Zion" (Isa. 51:10-11); and "The city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). In Averbuch's theology secular Zionism had to be systematically bypassed as a major solution to the Jewish problem. In his eyes Zionism became a power too magnetic for the Jewish masses. It actually presented a competitive force which hindered and endangered the progress of Yeshua's spiritual message as found in the Bible.

In historical retrospect we realize that Averbuch was de-facto an anti-Zionist who found in

⁹⁹ Lev Averbuch, "Vuhin Geht das Yidentum?", (a).

¹⁰⁰ Averbuch based this on Jeremiah 6:16: "Thus says the Lord, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls'. But they said, 'We will not walk in it'". NASB, "Vuhin Geht das Yidentum", (b).

¹⁰¹ Lev Averbuch, "Vuhin Geht das Yidentum?". Similar views were also expressed in Warsaw, Poland, in the Messianic Jewish Congregation established there by Joseph Emmanuel Landsman. Cf. Jacob Jocz, "Mi Natan Limshisa Ya'akov?". Yiddish, ("Who gave Jacob up for spoil?"), in: *Der Weg*, vol. xi, no. 6, November-December 1937, pp. 4-6; Jacob Jocz, "Vuhin?", Yiddish, (Where to?), *Der Weg*, vol. xiii, no. 4, July-August 1939, pp. 1-3.

¹⁰² This Averbuch based on Psalm 96:3: "Tell of His glory among the nation, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples", NASB. "Vuhin Geht das Yidentum?", in: *Hamevaser Tov*, vol. xi, no. 7-8, 1934, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Almost in every issue of the magazine *Hamevaser Tov*, Averbuch continued to advertise for his readers a small booklet called "Zionism without Zion" (in Yiddish), written by Prof. Martzinkovsky, where political Zionism was criticized. Concerning the close relations between Averbuch and Martzinkovsky see: Eric Gabe, "The Hebrew Christian Movement in Kishineff", in: *HC*, vol. LXII, no. 2, 1989, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰⁴ Lev Yakovitch Averbuch, *Zion's Lieder*, (Yiddish), Chishinau, 2nd ed. 1931.

the ideas and activities of Herzlian Zionism a 'casus belli' which justified public opposition. In his writings Averbuch constantly confronted Herzlian Zionism — for the sake of protecting and advancing the cause and survival of Yeshua's message. Averbuch was wholeheartedly convinced that he had to counter-attract the Jews to Yeshua. No wonder that nowhere in his writings do we find the slightest recommendation to make Aliyah to Eretz-Israel.

Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold (1876-1931)

Shabbetai Rohold was born in Ottoman Jerusalem into a rabbinical family, and embraced faith in Yeshua when he was around the age of 20. Following the breaking of family ties, Rohold moved to Scotland where he became a missionary to the Jews. In 1908 Rohold was invited to Canada where he was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. In June 1913 he opened a "Hebrew Christian Synagogue" in Toronto.¹⁰⁵

In 1914, together with Elias Newman he started to labor to found the "Hebrew Christian Alliance of America," and in 1915 was unanimously elected President. Later he became the first editor of the American Alliance magazine, "The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly." However, his heart and mind remained in his homeland and he looked for opportunities to return there. On September 24, 1920, Shabbetai and his wife Belle-Petrie left for Eretz-Israel to take up missionary work in Haifa under the auspices of the "British Jews Society."¹⁰⁶ In Haifa Rohold advanced and developed "The Mount Carmel Bible School," where lectures were given in Hebrew, English and German, and the teaching was extended also to Safed.¹⁰⁷

From Haifa Rohold travelled extensively throughout the country. He was particularly excited to meet the new immigrants and speak to them. Rohold was most enthusiastic about the activities of Zionist settlers in the Land and the spreading of their colonies. Thus, for example, in one of his letters to England Rohold wrote:

On our way we passed Benjaminah. The changes in this new colony were most wonderful. This is going to be also a garden city on a smaller scale than Tel-Aviv, but it is in more fertile and lovelier surroundings. Then we came to Atlitt and we saw hundreds of the Zionist-Hallutzim (Pioneers), draining the land, and building a large plant for making salt, etc. etc. All along the line we saw new settlements, bright young men and women working hard to build up Zion.¹⁰⁸

These prosperous Jewish settlers and their colonies meant for Rohold the visible revival of the "Dry Bones" (Ezekiel 37). In most places where he visited and spoke, he envisaged the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision of 'The Valley of the Dry Bones' becoming alive in their ancient

¹⁰⁵ Jacob Gartenhaus, *Famous Hebrew Christians*, IBJM (Tennessee: Baker Book, Chattanooga, 1979), pp. 153-158; Robert Winer, *The Calling . The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, 1915-1990*. (Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, 1990), pp. 7-19, 85-93.

¹⁰⁶ Elias Newman, "There is a Prince and a Great Man Fallen This Day in Israel", in: *HCAQ*, VOL. XVI, April-June 1931, pp. 4-8.

¹⁰⁷ William Christie, "The Mount Carmel Bible School and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance", in: *HC*, vol. iii, 1930, pp. 21-23.

¹⁰⁸ S.B. Rohold, "News from Palestine", in: *The Friend of Israel and Time of the End*, vol. xxiii, no. 92, November 1922, p. 8.

Land according to prophecy. It was obvious to him that the 'dry bones' came together under the direction of secular Zionism, paving the way for the Holy Spirit to enter their hearts and change their minds.

Wherever Rohold saw the white tent camps of the Zionist-Halutzim they reminded him of the "Israelitish camps" in the wilderness, "But oh, what a different spirit, all of them full of hope, zeal and hard work."¹⁰⁹ Rohold realized that active Herzlian Zionism had become an essential phase, a preliminary stage in God's divine plan to gather the Jews into the Promised Land, reunite the "dry bones," and then, the second great happening would be their spiritual redemption through Yeshua.

At the first International Hebrew Christian Conference, held in London in 1925, Rohold represented Palestine and its JBY, and at an open session he read a most enthusiastic and impressive paper. He spoke of a "new epoch" in Eretz-Israel, where the new immigrants, the Zionist Halutzim, adopted Hebrew as their national language and urged Jewry to awaken from its long and deep sleep. He viewed these Zionist forerunners of Israel's spiritual awakening as "the returning remnant."

Furthermore, the Zionist Hebrew University of Jerusalem, solemnly inaugurated in the same year, was the highlight of Rohold's speech. Rohold was personally invited by Zionist leaders to participate in the official opening of the University on Mount Scopus, where Lord Balfour was the guest speaker. Shabbetai Benjamin confessed in the London Conference that he was affected and carried away by the Zionist enthusiasm that prevailed on that occasion. For him, the Zionist Halutzim were "no mere crowd of sightseers — these were people possessed of a definite purpose and stirred by a high ideal!"¹¹⁰ However, at the same conference Rohold also stated that: "I protest against anybody thinking I would advocate going to Zionism without holding the bloodstained banner of the Cross."¹¹¹ In other words, also for him Zionism was just a tool in the hands of the Almighty to further His prophetic plans with Israel. As in the times of Cyrus the Persian, God used extraneous forces to accomplish His will.

Therefore Rohold found no theological reasons to ignore or attack secular Zionism. With no hesitation he identified with the Jewish immigration to the Land and encouraged and supported the "Aliyah" process. Herzlian Zionism was in his understanding an inevitable Prelude, the "key to the front-gate," used by the hands of the firstnewcomers to the Land. Later the second "key" shall be used, the "key to the house itself," Yeshua who will generate the national spiritual revival towards building a spiritual Zion.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ S.B. Rohold. For further information see also my dissertation (Hebrew): "Messianic Jews in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967) — Trends and Changes in Shaping Self Identity", unpublished, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, October 1996, pp. 79-80.

¹¹⁰ S.B. Rohold, "The Jews in Palestine", in: *Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference*, held at Islington, London, 5th-12th September 1925, The International Hebrew Christian Alliance (London & Edinburgh: Marshall bros., 1925), pp. 11-28.

¹¹¹ S.B. Rohold, "The Jews in Palestine", p. 126.

¹¹² S.B. Rohold, "The Holy Land: Its People and Present Conditions," in: *HC*, vol. i, no. 3, October 1928, pp. 150-152.

One, Two or More “Keys” to Eretz-Israel?

Leon Averbuch, following Joseph Rabinowitz, believed that the Jews, scattered throughout the world, would solve their problems in their Promised Land only after their national acceptance of Yeshua. For Averbuch, only one "key" existed to solving the difficulties of the “Golah,” the Diaspora, and Zionism was not a part of this.

Shabbetai Rohold, however, expressed the view that a system of “two keys” had to operate towards the national and spiritual redemption of Israel: first the secular “key,” via the Zionist movement, and then the second “key,” the work of the Spirit.

Yet it is interesting to mention that beyond these two approaches we also hear of those who believe that there exist other “keys” to the Holy Land. One of these ideas is the concept that the Shoah, the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews under the Nazi regime, was another “key” which eventually drove the Jews to their Land. Namely, that "the Shoah was the Golgotha of the Jews" — and it actually "forced" the national restoration of the Jews in Eretz-Israel.¹¹³

These questions are still bothering us today, towards the end of the both present century and the present millennium. What shall we learn from history?

Copyright Gershon Nerel, All Rights Reserved

¹¹³ Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den, The Life of Oswald Rufeisen*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1990), pp. 169-171.

Messianic Believers and the Land of Israel — a Survey

Bodil F. Skjøtt¹¹⁴

For this issue of *Mishkan* the editors agreed that it would be valuable to have a sampling of the opinions of believers in the land regarding Bible teaching and some current issues on the subject of the Land of Israel. A survey was devised comprising about 20 questions which can be divided into five general categories:

What does the Bible teach about the Land of Israel and the Jewish people?

Questions regarding the return of the Jews to the Land.

The proper boundaries of the Land.

Questions relating to fellowship with Palestinians.

Questions relating to Palestinians and the Land.

The questionnaire was administered to 94 respondents, mostly by telephone, some in person.

Most of the questions were presented in the form of statements and the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree to each statement on a scale ranging from one to five. The mid-point (3) presented the “not sure” option. While it would take too much space to include all of the statements here, a sampling follows:

In the Bible God clearly promises the Land to the Jewish people.

Promises of the Land to the Jewish people in the Bible are properly understood as being valid forever.

The possession of the Land by the Jewish people was an important part of the teachings of Jesus.

The gospel is incomplete without a clear statement of the right of the Jewish people to the Land.

The Bible clearly defines the boundaries of the Land as they should be in our time [“final boundaries” should include all of Judea and Samaria, the Golan Heights, areas to the east of the Jordan River].

Zionism is God’s tool to fulfill prophecies in the end times.

The Jewish people will never be exiled from the Land again.

¹¹⁴ Bodil F. Skjøtt holds an M.A. of Divinity from the University of Aarhus, Denmark. She is presently working with the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies in Jerusalem .

When the Jews return to the Land they should have the right to remove other nations who are living in the Land at the time.

Unity in the Messiah with Palestinian fellow-believers is more important than how much land either people possesses.

For the purpose of the data analyses most questions were collapsed into three categories: agree, not sure and disagree.¹¹⁵

Every survey includes demographic information about the respondents. We asked for background information on age, gender and education. We also determined whether the respondent had at least one Jewish parent, where he/she was born, service in the Israel Defense Forces, place of residence, any position of leadership in the congregation, and how he/she voted in the latest election.

Ninety-four is a small number for a survey. However, this represents a significant proportion of the total number of members of Messianic congregations in Israel. What follows is our assessment of the results of the survey.

Demographic Survey

The results of the demographic survey show that an equal number of men and women have participated and also that the number of persons from the different age groups was evenly spread, except for the youngest group, under 18 years of age. This age bracket was almost entirely omitted, mostly because of the character and the subject of the survey.

Area of Residence and Political Affiliation

For the analyses, we grouped “place of residence” into three main areas: Jerusalem, including also Mevasseret Zion; the West Bank, including Maale Adumim; and “all other places.” Groups one and three were equally represented and account for about 90 percent of the respondents, while the remaining 10 percent are from the West Bank area. Considering the Messianic community in the country as a whole, the Jerusalem area is probably over-represented in the survey. The analyses generally showed no significant relationship between a respondent’s place of residence and the way specific questions were answered. The exception to this comes when political affiliation is brought into the picture.

Overall the Messianic community in Israel voted exactly like the rest of the population, with equal numbers voting for the right and for the left. However, if the question of political affiliation is compared to area of residence we see that two-thirds of those living in the Jerusalem area voted for the right compared to only 12 percent of those from the “all other areas.” Perhaps not surprisingly, 100 percent of those living in the West Bank area voted for the right. If we are correct in assuming that Jerusalem is over-represented in the survey, then these figures, if

¹¹⁵ The data analyses were performed with the assistance of Dr. Gabriel Horenczyk from the School of Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The contact with Dr. Horenczyk was made possible through the help of Salim Munayer, who also gave us advice and technical assistance at the preliminary stage of setting up the survey.

accurate, actually show the Messianic community in Israel to be politically left of center. On the other hand, in questions pertaining to the borders of the land a clear majority of respondents expressed opinions which are usually identified more with the political right. This difference between what Messianic believers think about borders and how they voted seems to suggest that the issue of borders was not decisive in determining their vote.

Civil Status

About three quarters of those responding have at least one Jewish parent. It is doubtful that this figure gives an accurate picture of the makeup of Messianic congregations.¹¹⁶ An even higher number, 83 percent, are citizens of the State of Israel. About half were born in Israel, and if we add to this those who have lived in the country for more than 20 years, we get a figure just below 70 percent. Of the remaining 30 percent the majority have lived in Israel for more than five but less than 20 years. This figure of the percentage of those born in the country is demographically very close to published national statistics.

A little more than half have served in the Israel Defence Forces, and a similar number have a formal education of more than 12 years but less than 15. Almost 40% completed more than 15 years of formal education, and four completed more than 20 years.

Position in the Congregation

The majority of those polled do not hold any position of leadership or ministry in their congregation; about one fifth are involved in the leadership of their congregations in some form, either as pastor, elder, Sabbath school teacher, or youth worker. A surprisingly high 20 percent said they have no affiliation with a specific congregation. While this finding was only a by-product of the survey, it is a statistic which should occupy the attention of responsible leadership in the body of Messiah in Israel.

The Land and the Teaching of the Bible

The questions in this first composite category dealt with the promises of the land, whether they are valid forever, and the importance of possession of the land in the teachings of Jesus and the gospel. When we view this category as a whole, the majority agrees with the statements that the promises are for the Jewish people, are indeed valid forever, and that this was an important part of the teaching of Jesus. However, when we take a closer look at the result, we see that 95 percent are of the opinion that the Bible clearly promises the land to the Jewish people, while only 20 percent agree that this was an essential part of Jesus' teaching. Also, only one out of every five sees the gospel as incomplete without a clear statement of the right of the Jewish people to the land. This suggests that most people within the Messianic community make a distinction between what is stated in the Bible about the land and what is essential to the teaching of Jesus. The eternal

¹¹⁶ The survey was conducted mostly among members of Hebrew-speaking congregations. A few members of English-speaking congregations were polled. It is possible that a similar survey will be conducted sometime in the future among Arab congregations in the West Bank.

validity of the promises of the land to the Jewish people is not questioned, but neither is it regarded as an essential element of the gospel.

About half of those asked said that their views about the land had changed after they became a believer. Of these 90 percent had become *more* convinced that the land belongs to the Jewish people. These will no doubt be surprised to learn that one in ten actually became less sure that the land belongs to the Jews after they came to faith in Jesus. Most indicated that the main factor contributing to this change of views was “personal study of the Bible.”

When we cross-tabulate this category with demographic features such as area of residence, number of Jewish parents, gender, or IDF service, the picture does not differ significantly from the overall result. Only when analysed by party affiliation can a small difference be noticed. Those who voted to the left are less willing to say that the promises are valid forever and more willing to agree that Arabs are included in the promises made to Abraham “and your seed.”

The Return of the Jews to the Land

This category deals with (1) how one views Zionism and (2) the connection between the return to the land and the coming of the Jewish people to faith in Jesus. The overall result indicates that most do not see Zionism as just a secular movement but rather as a necessary instrument in the fulfillment of prophecies and in God’s program to bring the Jewish people to faith in Jesus. However, the category of “not sure” is much larger in this section than in the previous one, including 20 percent of the male respondents and 25 percent of the women. It is also worth noting that 62 percent of women believers would agree that Zionism is God’s tool to fulfill prophecies, whereas the figure among male respondents is as high as 72 percent.

The number of those who agree that the Jewish people will never again be exiled from the land is significantly lower, 57 percent, and here fully one-third were not sure enough to express an opinion. This means that even though Zionism is perceived by the majority as being used by God today, not all of these will then draw the conclusion that never again can there be an exile from the land. About one in twelve disagrees with the statement, “The Jewish people will never be exiled from the land again.” Put another way, 43 percent of Messianic believers in Israel are not sure that there will never be another exile!

When we cross-tabulate the results in this category with demographic factors, the picture is altered in only two areas: those who hold a right-wing political view and those whose area of residence is the West Bank are more inclined to affirm Zionism as a divine tool.

The Boundaries of the Land

The third grouping of questions deals with the geographical areas which are to be included within the final boundaries of the land and asks if the Bible clearly defines the borders of the land for our time. As many as 76 percent of those expressing an opinion hold that Judea and Samaria should be part of the State of Israel. With regard to the Golan Heights, the figure drops to 59 percent. Those who believe that the areas to the east of the Jordan River should be included make up as many as 49 percent. This is a surprisingly high figure, especially when we consider recent

developments with Israel's neighbor to the east. Since no major political party today is advocating the "East Bank" option, this response is a clear indication that opinions of the respondents are influenced by something other than politics. We might naturally expect this opinion-making factor to be the Scriptures. However, in response to the statement that the Bible clearly defines borders, only 50 percent agree, while 26 percent are "not sure." This may indicate a certain amount of confused thinking on the part of Israeli believers. It is possible that respondents were making a distinction between borders today and end-time borders, agreeing that the latter are clearly defined by the Bible, but less sure that borders are well-defined for today. (From this one might deduce that most respondents are not sure that we are living in the end times.)

In this category demographic factors seem to be related to the pattern of responses. Those who have at least one Jewish parent are more inclined to confirm that the indicated areas are to be included in the final boundaries, and the same is true for those whose political affiliation is to the right of center. Among those who immigrated, the Europe/America immigrants are more likely to agree that the areas mentioned should be included than those who came from Eastern Europe and Russia. Having served in the army makes no difference in the response to these questions. Interestingly enough, however, age does seem to be a factor in what opinion a person holds: the younger the respondent, the less likely she/he is to agree to the wider borders.

Related to the question of borders is question 18, which states that Messianic Jews should see it as their religious duty to live in Judea and Samaria. For various reasons it was decided to analyze the responses to this question separately. A large overall majority (86 percent) do not think that Messianic Jews have any such obligation. Even among those respondents who actually live in Judea and Samaria, only one in five sees it as a religious duty. In the Jerusalem area only 9 percent think that believers should settle in Judea and Samaria.

The Land and Fellowship with Palestinian Believers

This category includes only two questions. One states that there should be more fellowship between Jewish and Palestinian believers, the second that spiritual unity with Palestinian believers is more important than how much land is possessed by either people. A clear majority agrees with both statements, as many as 94 percent stating that there should be more fellowship between the two groups, and 85 percent believing fellowship to be more important than land.

When considering the demographic issues, the results in each case differ little from the overall result. Whether we look at place of birth, Jewish parents, political party or even area of residence, the picture remains the same. Only when it comes to those who have served in the IDF is there a slight tendency towards being less inclined to fellowship. The difference is not big enough, however, to be statistically significant.

Palestinians and the Land

The questions in the final category pertain to the political rights of Palestinians, asking whether Arabs have the right to remain in the land, whether Jews have the right to remove other nations from the land, and whether or not Palestinian refugees have a right to return to the land. The overall result here is quite different from the results in the previous category concerning

fellowship. A significant majority agrees that Arab families who have lived in the land for many generations have as much right as Jews to remain in the land and that the Jews upon return do not have the right to remove any nations already living in the land. However, close to 50 percent disagree that Palestinian refugees should be granted the right to return to the land in which they or their family once lived.

As might have been expected, those on the political right are less inclined to agree to the right of the Palestinians to a share of the land.

When and by Whom is the “Not Sure” Preferred?

One of the significant findings of this survey, in the opinion of the editors, is that believers feel a great deal of uncertainty about these matters. As indicated above, in questions regarding borders about one third (on average) remained uncertain. The same is true also for questions concerning rights of Palestinians. Looking at the total number of answers according to age, we find a significantly higher number in the younger age-group likely to prefer the “not sure” answer. Is this an indication that the younger generation of the Messianic community is less opinionated, or that they have not taken an active interest in the issues addressed in the survey?

When we take a closer look at the final results, we find that the option “not sure” in general was preferred more often by women than by men. This is especially true with regard to questions concerning Zionism and the return to the land. Women are also less certain on issues related to the place of the land in the teaching of Jesus, and to what extent the gospel is incomplete if it does not also declare that the land belongs to the Jews. In the last case 23 percent of the women said “not sure” compared to only five percent among the men. It would be interesting to know if this reticence to state a clear position is gender specific in the wider populace or is a factor somehow of Messianic identity. The data from this survey are inconclusive as to the role of women within the Messianic movement.

Interestingly, a lower percentage of women said “not sure” to the statement on fellowship with Palestinian believers, opting for more fellowship. But when asked if Arabs have the same right to stay in the land as do Jews, a similarly low number were not sure, while the number of women who disagreed was higher.

The composite category that got the highest percentage of “not sure” was that of the boundaries of the land, with as many as 41 percent unsure as to whether Israel’s final boundaries should include areas east of the Jordan River. A significantly high number are also uncertain as to whether the Bible defines the boundaries of the land today. Here there is no difference between male and female respondents.

Questions that Received a Definite Answer

There are two categories in which a strong agreement with the statements is expressed. One concerns the biblical teaching on the promises of the land. There is very little uncertainty or disagreement with the statements that the Bible teaches that the land is for the Jewish people forever. However, almost as many are prepared to say that Arabs with a long tradition in the land have the same right as Jews to stay. Here people were not asked about their understanding of

Scripture but rather of their opinion on who can live in the land. One wonders if those polled distinguish between *ownership* of the land and the *right to live* there. Unfortunately, this question was not asked.

There was little doubt among the respondents concerning fellowship with Palestinian believers. As many as 85 percent believe fellowship to be more important than land. However, an equally high number of men are also of the opinion that the borders of the land are supposed to include Judea and Samaria, where a major part of the Palestinian believers live. Presumably, in order to achieve greater fellowship, someone is going to have to back down on the question of ownership of Judea and Samaria/West Bank.

If found in Israeli society generally, these two responses might be interpreted as support for the peace process with accommodation towards a sharing of the land on the one hand, but a forceful claim to ownership of at least the area of the West Bank on the other. Within the Messianic community both desires are often held by the same persons, although for different reasons and perhaps also with different priorities. The inconsistent responses to these two questions only demonstrate again the difficult task facing political negotiators.

Conclusion

It comes as no surprise that a clear majority understand the teaching of the Bible to be saying that the land is promised to the Jewish people and that this promise is valid forever, not just for a limited time or until a certain time. This did not, however, necessarily make people vote for a party whose clearly stated political program was to hold on to all the land now under Israeli control.

The same certainty was not expressed as to how the Bible defines the borders of the land in our time. Fully half do not agree that the Bible speaks clearly at all on this issue, and only one out of every four perceives the Bible to be clear here.

When we look at both political affiliation and the priority given to fellowship with Palestinian believers, we see that issues concerning the land are only one point on the agenda, and not necessarily the most important one. The difference between how those polled see the Bible's teaching on the borders for our time and what the final boundaries will be indicates a lack of clarity regarding what is right and what is wrong, what should be included and what not. Here in particular things are evidently not so straightforward as some would have us believe. The certainty with which the Bible speaks is not easily translated into a clear understanding of the present political situation in which we all have to act and react. At the very least the results of this survey serve as a warning against strong and uncompromising views. It seems clear that many within Israel's Messianic community heed this warning.

We noted that there is clear agreement as to what the Bible teaches about the promises of the land but an almost equal disagreement as to the importance of the land in Jesus' teaching. It is possible to understand this in two ways: (1) The biblical teaching on the land is clear. If it was present at all in the teaching of Jesus it did not play a prominent role. But that is not significant for how we understand the teaching of the Bible today, because Jesus did not negate nor nullify the promises. (2) The biblical teaching on the land is clear. The issue was not important to Jesus and seems almost absent from his teaching. We should look at the question through the teachings

of Jesus and not put emphasis on issues that Jesus did not speak about, perhaps even avoided. The survey shows that the tendency within the Messianic community is to choose the first option.

Based on the survey results one can draw other general conclusions not necessarily pertaining to the issue of the land. They in turn raise other questions. The majority of those who preferred the “not sure” options were found among the women and among the younger generation. Does this say anything about the leadership type and style in the congregations? Does it perhaps indicate that these groups, women and young people, are generally left out of the decision-making process and are, therefore, more hesitant to express definite opinions on “spiritual” matters? It was not considered important for the specific issues of the survey to make cross tabulations between position in the congregation and gender or age. Had we done so, we would have found that leadership positions are generally held by men above age 35. Is the “not sure” answer preferred by those who want to be more cautious with regard to questions of the land? If so, it could reflect that women and younger people are more ready to admit that the issue is a complex one. What does this in turn say about shared responsibilities and leadership training within the congregations?

The relatively large number of those not affiliated with a specific congregation should also send a warning signal. Why are there so many uncommitted floaters, and what should be done to bring these into fellowship?

One needs to be careful not to draw too far-reaching conclusions based only on statistics. We realize that many factors were not included in this preliminary survey and that this necessarily limits what overall conclusions can be drawn. We are aware that when other factors are considered, or with a wider sampling of the Messianic community the picture could change. Nevertheless, the results clearly complement the topic in this issue of *Mishkan*. We hope the picture which the survey gives of the Messianic community in Israel will also serve as a tool for positive and constructive self-evaluation and will provide direction and inspiration for the building up of that community.

Copyright Bodil F. Skjøtt, All Rights Reserved

Aliyah — Why or Why Not?

Related to the question of the theology of the Land is the question of Aliyah: Should all Jews — and perhaps more specifically, all Jewish believers in Yeshua — reside in Israel? If one insists that the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people, does it then follow that all Jews are obliged to occupy the Jewish homeland?

Mishkan has asked six different people to give a personal account of their decision to move or not to move to Israel. We hope to provoke thought and perhaps shed light on this highly relevant question that, until now, has escaped definitive answer.

Return to the Land

Ritti Katz

I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them (Amos 9:14).

This promise, along with many many others in the word of God, was the motivating force behind our decision to immigrate to Israel. As an affirmation to our desire God saw fit to bring my husband, myself and our two small children back to Israel in 1992.

Prior to our marriage both my husband and I had desired to be part of the regathering of the exiles. Our faith in Yeshua the Messiah served to strengthen our interest in and determination to live according to our Jewish roots. Nevertheless, the difficulties we faced were enormous. Upon arriving in Israel I was pregnant and spoke no Hebrew. I also had two small children to care for. My husband was unable to find suitable work in his field and our finances were limited.

Five years later we find ourselves relatively well established. Both of us have made career changes. The two small children with whom we arrived speak fluent Hebrew and two younger children have been born here in Jerusalem.

We left behind aging parents, other close family and friends, comfort, familiarity and relative competence. We exchanged it for a great deal of uncertainty. But we left in obedience to God, who has sustained us, strengthened us and brought us to this time.

For his faithfulness and abundant blessings, we are grateful.

Why I Came to Israel

Milton Maimon

For me, 7 March 1997 marked one year as an Israeli citizen. I am 67 years old and a retired United States Air Force Master Sergeant. What brought my wife and me to Israel? Very simply put, it was our love for Israel and her people.

We had visited Israel four times in the past. The first visit was for a month at Neve Ilan in 1980. We were innocent tourists and the Lord protected us from our own mistakes, such as driving through Ramallah at night (not recommended) and walking through a mine field on the Golan (never recommended).

We returned to the Jerusalem area in 1986 for another month and did more exploring. I walked through the old quarter of Hebron on my own and visited with some Arabs. On the third trip, we brought our granddaughter and niece and stayed in Arad. We had the dubious honor of being stoned as we drove through Hebron. We had traveled all over Israel. We missed it when we weren't here and we talked often of "making Aliyah." In 1995 we came back, this time to the Tel Aviv area and spent quite a bit of time with our Israeli friends. After that trip we decided it was now or never, so we visited the *shaliach* and made formal preparations to move to Israel permanently.

I believe we came here with a realistic view of Israel. We are Zionists, but with no illusions. We were well aware of the crazy "dodge-'em" traffic, the bureaucracy, all the extra charges and taxes involved in living here. We had lived outside the US before. We had a fairly good idea of the political situation. For years we have subscribed to the only English newspaper available here, the *Jerusalem Post*. We also knew it would not be easy to learn a new language at our age.

So why did we leave the land of plenty and comfort and exchange it for a land with major problems and enemy people living within its borders? A place of car alarms and pollution, a place where we wake up in the middle of the night conjugating Hebrew verbs and ask, "Why are we punishing ourselves?"

The answer is: Because we love Israel, we love the directness and unabashed curiosity of the people. "Where do you doven? How much is your retirement pay? Why did you leave America?" etc.

We love being part of this Land; it is ours and the problems are no longer theirs, but ours, too. We love the history and archaeology of this place and because we know a bit of the future (from the Bible) we have chosen to be part of it. Here we are living on the cutting edge of history in the making.

Personally safety was never a factor to consider. The Lord protected me during the Vietnam War and on numerous other occasions. I also feel we have something to offer Israel, something which is in short supply, a message of hope and encouragement.

I am enjoying Israel and meeting new friends from all over the world. Each day brings new challenges to face. We have determined to face them with a sense of humor and the help of God. Actually, maybe I did not choose Israel. Maybe it chose me.

Why I Made Aliyah

K.W.

My reasons for making Aliyah 12 years ago were not really so spiritually or zionistically motivated, but as the years have passed this essence which was more passive in the early years has since strengthened.

I was a discontented 20 year old looking with a futile hope for work during years of an

English recession. With immediate prospects looking very bleak I decided to travel. A few months before I left Britain I discovered that I was Jewish. This discovery came only after I had already purchased my plane ticket.

Upon arriving in Israel, one of the first things that I wanted to do was turn around and fly straight back to London. I was not impressed and had no warm feelings towards the place. As the months passed I read a lot about Israel, Zionism and Judaism. I began to tentatively see myself as a tiny part of the modern day puzzle called Israel. I felt good here, developed close friends, didn't really struggle much with Hebrew, felt a new challenge, new purposes. The thrill, excitement, pain and frustration of adapting to a new culture, adopting a renewed identity was somehow too good to miss. In hindsight I think I can say that God moves in mysterious ways.

Messianic Believers and a Return to the Land — a Perspective

Avi Snyder

In 1991, shortly before my family and I relocated to what was still the Soviet Union, I visited the pastor of a supporting congregation to tell him about our impending move. "Can you guess where we're going?" I asked him.

— "Far away?" he ventured.

— "Far away," I agreed.

— He smiled, then blurted out, "Israel."

— "Not quite. Odessa, on the Black Sea."

His face reflected the same excitement that I felt in my heart.

— "The Soviet Union," he mused. Then he looked pensive. "You know, I've read that Israel hopes to open her doors to more and more Russian Jews in the next few years. In fact, Israel hopes to absorb half a million before '93 or '94."

"That's why we want to move to the Soviet Union," I said. "We know our people are going to leave. Wouldn't it be nice if they came into the Land with the gospel in their hearts?"

From the very beginning, our move to the Soviet Union involved a two-fold plan: to communicate the gospel, and to contribute toward the establishment of a new generation of Messianic witnesses who might be used beyond the borders of the former USSR.

Let us start with a two-fold premise: God wants to see our people saved; and God has not revoked his plan to use our people as instruments in the cause of world evangelization. Jewish believers in Yeshua must see themselves as significant players in the fulfillment of both aspects of this plan. And the question of Aliyah must be assessed from the vantage point of how we fit into the fulfillment of that mission.

We know from Scripture that God will regather his ancient people to Israel, and we know that many of our people will come to faith in Yeshua after that relocation has taken place. And so we read, for example, in Ezekiel: "For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own Land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean (Ezek 36:24-25). Since God has always chosen to use people as the principle agents of communicating the gospel, we can assume that the repentance of our people within the Land will involve the vibrant testimony of indigenous Jewish believers and Messianic believers who

have made Aliyah.

At the same time, Scripture also indicates with equal clarity that a significant number of our people will repent *before* they return to Israel. In fact, many of the earliest promises in Scripture that speak of our return to Israel identify repentance as a precondition to that return.

Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse ... and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice ... that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you (Deut 30:1-3; cf. Lev 26:40-45 and Deut 4:29-31).

The fact that many of our people will repent in the lands of our exile argues for the presence of — and the need for — Messianic witnesses in these places as well.

And so, we see the need for at least two types of Messianic witnesses; those who immigrate now; and those who remain outside the Land in order to bring the gospel to those who are destined to repent and then return at a later time.

Not long ago, I was discussing the question of Aliyah with some of the Jews for Jesus staff in our Moscow branch. All of the post-Soviet staff members were born in the republics of the former USSR, and therefore, all of them look perhaps more fervently upon the present opportunities to emigrate to other lands. As we talked about possible ministry opportunities to Israel, I heard someone sigh,

— “All my life I dreamed of living in Israel.”

— “Maybe you will,” I said.

Her answer surprised me. “No, I won't,” she said without a hint of pretension. “Some have to stay here, preach the gospel, and die.”

Some must return and make Aliyah now; some must remain and preach the gospel to those who will repent in the diaspora and return later.

But there is a third arena that mustn't be overlooked, and that is the pan-geographic venue in which Yeshua wants to use Jewish believers as witnesses to the world. God has not rescinded his original directive to go out — to penetrate the nations and preach the gospel. Indeed, it is only as believers in Yeshua that we can fulfill our commission as a kingdom of priests to the peoples of the world, proclaiming the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Should Messianic believers make Aliyah? There must be a Messianic voice in Israel, so that our people there may hear and believe. There must be a Messianic testimony in the diaspora as well so Jews there may believe. That witness will be strengthened by Messianic believers immigrating and being a testimony to unbelieving Israel, along with voices of Sabras who know the Lord and boldly proclaim his truth. There must be a Messianic voice among the peoples of the world, for we were created to proclaim, but not to ourselves alone. In the final analysis, the question of Aliyah for the Messianic believer is a matter of strategy and mission and calling. Where we live and when we move must be determined by an understanding of how God wants us to serve the cause of bringing the gospel to our people so that our people may bring the gospel to the world.

Why I Didn't Make Aliyah

Stan Telchin

Should all Jewish believers move to Israel? That's a good question. Let me tell you how I answered it for myself. My wife Ethel and I visited Israel for the first time in May 1973. We thought it would be great to have a double celebration: the 25th anniversary of the State and our 25th wedding anniversary. It was a joyous and wonderful experience.

Two years later, on 3 July 1975, I received Jesus as Lord of my life. One year later, in April 1976, we visited Israel for the first time as believers. It was an even more joyous and wonderful experience. God met us in a powerful way in Israel and the Bible came alive for us. Six months later we returned to Israel for yet another visit. But this wasn't going to be a sight-seeing tour. Now we wanted to seek the Lord's will for our family. Did he want *us* to make Aliyah? Did he want *our family* to return to the Jewish homeland? I had read Jeremiah 16:15 and Isaiah 11:11 and the other Scriptures which spoke about the return of the Jewish people to their land, and I wanted to know if *we* were to be part of that group.

At that time, I was 51 years of age, my wife was 50 and my daughters were 23 and 19. Every one of us was wonderfully saved and we were ready to make the move to Israel if this was God's will for us. But we didn't want our decision to be based on the "romance" of moving to Israel. We didn't want to make an emotional decision. If I were to leave my business and we were to leave the home we had worked so hard to acquire, we wanted our decision to be based upon God's will.

I remember how I reviewed with my wife the various ways in which God speaks to his children: through the Word, by a dream or a vision; through a word of prophecy or a sign, by the inner witness, through open doors, etc. I remember reading that the way in which God normally speaks to us is through the inner witness. And so every day during those weeks in Israel, we prayed. We prayed and we talked to other believers in Israel. And the more I prayed, the less of an inner witness I had that we were to make this move. I was too old to start a new career, too young to retire, and there was so much work to be done in the United States where my age and experience could be put to immediate use. Happily, my wife came to the same conclusion.

Now, exactly 20 years after I made the decision not to make Aliyah, I can see that I made the right decision. I know it in my inner man, but I also can see it in the fruit of my service to the Lord over these years. My book *Betrayed!* is now in 20 languages and many thousands of people came to the Lord after reading it. Further, I served as a pastor for 14 wonderful years and was able to make a major contribution to the lives of the people in my congregation. Then there were the many television and radio broadcasts that became available to me in which I shared the gospel. Who knows how many millions of people were touched by them? And now, in just a few weeks, my new book will be released. It's entitled "*Abandoned: God's Will For The Jewish People And the Church*," and I pray that it, too, will meet with favor around the world.

You might ask: "Couldn't you have written those books from Israel? Couldn't you have served as a pastor in Israel?" To be totally honest, I must say that all things are possible with God. But I didn't have the inner witness that I was to make Aliyah, and so I stayed where I was

planted and did what my hands found to do.

Am I willing to make Aliyah today? Of course. But once again, that decision will have to be based upon God's will for my life. And so I will continue to look to him for instructions every day.

But now back to our subject: Should *all* Jewish believers make Aliyah? I recognize that there are strong opinions and feelings on this subject. But I also know that God has not called me to declare his will for *all* Jewish believers. Instead he continually reminds me that he is in charge. He is the One who gives out the assignments. He organizes the timetables. And he is the same yesterday, today and forever.

If any Jewish believers want to know if they should make Aliyah, I recommend that they follow the practice I followed. It is one which never fails and which brings with it total peace.

Returning to the Land

Larry Rich

The believer's calling is to seek to know and to do the will of God. As members of the household of faith we are drawn to seek first the kingdom of God and to fulfill the role God has assigned to us.

This is not necessarily the same for each person. A significant example of this is the Apostle Paul. As what might be called the ultimate Jew (Phil 3:5-6), he nonetheless was sent to the gentiles (Acts 22:18,21). He traveled into the gentile world as far as Rome (Acts 28:14) with a goal of reaching Spain (Rom 15:24,28).

Although Paul was fully equipped to minister to the Jewish community in Israel, God's calling to him was to go elsewhere. It was not a matter of circumstances; it was a matter of fulfilling God's purpose for him.

Nor was Paul the only Jew called to minister outside the Land. Indeed, the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) sent Jewish believers into all the world to proclaim The Good News. Were it not for these Jews leaving the Land, multitudes would not have heard of the Savior.

As far as God's long term program is concerned, the Land of Israel is the focus of his purposes (Gen 17:8). Indeed God will bring Jews into Eretz Israel from the four corners of the earth (Isa 11:12). At the end of this age world wide Jewry will be in Israel.

But what about now? I believe it to be a matter of divine leading, based on each person's direction from God. Circumstance will be considered — family, health, training, ability, etc., and yet ultimately the question is, "What is God's will for me?"

One consideration also is the sizable Jewish community in North America. Although the Jewish population in Israel has grown — chiefly through Russian immigration — there remain, nonetheless, a large number of Jews in North America. There needs to be, therefore, an important ministry presence among these people.

A danger often subtle in its manifestation is that of overemphasizing Israel to the neglect of the Lord himself; our focus must be more on *God's* Land rather than on God's *land*. This in effect is similar to saying that we must put greater emphasis on the Giver than on the gift.

For myself, I have not felt a sense of God's calling on my life to live in Israel. This does not

mean it could never be, but at this point in time that has not happened. Like others we must seek to live in the will of God and be faithful in our daily lives to his calling.

Copyright belongs to the authors, All Rights Reserved