

MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE



Jerusalem

MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

“MESSIANIC JEWS AND ACADEMIC WORK”

ISSUE 27 / 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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Kai Kjaer-Hansen	1
Foundations of the Modern Messianic Jewish Movement Ruth L. Fleischer	4
"Messianic Jews" in Eretz Israel (1917-1967) Gershon Nerel	11
Messianic Jewish Congregations in North America Jeffery S. Wasserman	26
The Making of a Tradition: Jewish Christianity Bülend Senay	36
Inner-biblical Perspectives on Messianic Prophecy Michael Rydelnik	43
Dissertation Re-visited 13 Years later Fenton Ward	58
Jews on Mission: An Introduction to the (New) Jewish Universalists Kai Kjær-Hansen	62
The Earth is the Lord's: Land, Theology, and the Bible Naim Ateek	75
Letter to Mishkan Tsvi Sadan	81
Book Review: <i>The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting</i> (Irina Levinskaya) Kai Kjaer-Hansen	85

Messianic Jews and Academic Work

Editorial

This issue of Mishkan focuses mainly on academic work about and by Messianic believers. The contributions give a glimpse of some of the academic work which has been done in recent years and, in some cases, is still being done.

It holds positive implications for the future that people both involved in Jewish evangelism and with a mind to engage in academic study invest resources on scholarly works related to Jewish evangelism and Messianic believers. It is true that there is often some honor attached to an academic dissertation but this has, as a rule, been preceded by a time of deprivation — particularly for one's family. This can often be witnessed in the prefaces of these dissertations. Allow me to quote from Irina Livinskaya's book, which is reviewed in this issue of Mishkan. Her acknowledgments conclude with these words:

"I am especially grateful to my mother and to my husband who showed much patience and accepted with understanding my physical absence from St. Petersburg for long periods, and then my spiritual absence despite my physical presence in St. Petersburg, while I was writing this book."

Sad to say, there are still people among Jesus-believing Jews and gentiles alike who not only regard academic work on faith matters with a considerable amount of scepticism but even consider it dangerous to one's faith. But even as it is true that it is not a sin to be a Jew, it is also not a sin to have been given a good brain — whether Jewish or gentile — and then use that brain in the service of the gospel.

In my imagination I can still see the young Israeli Messianic student in front of me. Early this year she informed the board of a foreign mission society, which was visiting Israel, about the evangelical student work in Israel. Unprompted she told us that in her Messianic congregation she did not receive much support and understanding of her wish to start an academic career. On the contrary, she felt that some members of her congregation thought that she was entering a dangerous road.

When I heard this, I recognized the attitude I confronted when I grew up many years ago in Denmark — an attitude which hinders the hopeful learner.

It is true that academic work with the Bible has sometimes resulted in the biblical message being mangled. But academic work has also increased our insight. And if we consider the situation in Europe in the last third of the previous century, names like Delitzsch, Strack, Dalman — all people who were involved in Jewish evangelism — indicate that we are not dealing with anti-intellectual persons. Consider names like J. Lichtenstein at the Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig, or A. Edersheim in England — to name a few.

It is quite a different matter that there are believers with an academic education in responsible positions which they hold precisely because of their academic training who during working hours use their brains but switch them off concerning matters of faith and fellowship.

It is difficult to find justification for this form of anti-intellectualism in the Bible.

In Shema Israel it is said: "And you shall love YHWH your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole might" (Deut 6:5). In Mishna Ber 9:5 "... with your whole might" is explained to mean: "with your whole property." The Hebrew word for "property" is mammon. Therefore, you shall love God with all that you have. It is a command to place all one's property and resources at God's disposal.

I understand this to include the brain and its activity! And regardless of how the Greek text should be understood in relation to the Hebrew original, I am grateful for the conclusion reached by the scribe who came to Jesus and engaged him in a discussion about the first and the greatest of the commandments: "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:32-33).

Jesus said to this scribe: "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

In academic work we are all on the way. What is self-evident needs to be substantiated and critical questions must be asked. Academic work on Messianic believers or the Messianic movement of yesterday gives us a better understanding of today's situation. Perhaps it is even possible to learn from history so that we avoid repeating its mistakes.

In my own academic work I have been enriched by being in close contact with the Messianic movement. I have also been challenged existentially, which is how it should be. It goes without saying that in a study of the contemporary Messianic movement as well as in an examination of the "Jewish Christianity" of the past it is not acceptable in an academic dissertation for a gentile to sneer "Jewish!"

I am looking forward to Messianic believers grappling with church history and the first-century christological disputes, for example. What the result will be I cannot say, naturally. But it will likewise not be acceptable in an academic dissertation if a Jew dismisses a viewpoint by sneering "Gentile!" Argumentation is a *sine qua non*.

In academic work you are — as in life — always on the way. We do not desire a situation in which Jewish evangelism is reserved for academics. But a lack of appreciation for scholarship in exchange for perceived "godliness" is equally unwanted.

No one can do everything. We need each other. Ignorance and stupidity are not a prerequisite for faith!

Kai Kjær-Hansen

Copyright Kai Kjær-Hansen, All Rights Reserved

Foundations of the Modern Messianic Jewish Movement

Ruth I. Fleischer¹

From my observation, it appears that many of those involved in the Messianic Jewish movement genuinely believe that it has its modern origins in events dating from the late 1960's. This is not so much arrogance as ignorance, ignorance of the ways in which God works, plans, and prepares, and ignorance of their own history.

In the Scriptures we read that King David served his own generation. We may believe that the events of the present far exceed in importance the events of the past. But even if this is true, the best each individual can do is to follow in the footsteps of Melech David — we must be faithful to serve our own generation. This, I believe is what those who have gone before us have done. As the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes in chapter 12, verse 1

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

While this passage refers to biblical heroes and heroines, it may also apply to more recent patriarchs and matriarchs. As we look at the pioneers of the last 150 years, we see men and women of vision and fortitude. These individuals could not, perhaps, see as far ahead as the 1990's, but many discerned the hand of God in the organizations which came into being during the 19th and early 20th century. Some looked ahead to Messianic congregations and Jewish believers with a clear Jewish identity, while others simply did what they were called to do, enlarging the tent of the Jewish expression of faith in Jesus through their activities, testimony and example.

Mission Background

In 1809, as the century of great missions began, The London Society for the Promotion of Christianity Amongst the Jews (now CMJ) was founded. Mission organizations whose sole purpose was the presentation of the Gospel to Jewish people sprang up. Their field of endeavor was any town or city in which Jews might reside, not only in their own countries but throughout the world.

Jewish believers, although few in number, began to initiate their own fellowship societies: Children of Abraham (under the imprimatur of the LSPCJ), founded in 1813; the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Great Britain established in 1866; The Hebrew Christian Prayer Union

¹ Ruth I. Fleischer holds a Ph.D. in Ecclesiastical History from University of London. She directs YESHUA Ministries and Conferences, and leads the London Messianic Congregation. The material in this article was taken from her book, *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses*.

founded in the UK in 1882, with branches in the USA, Germany, Norway, Russia, Palestine and Romania,² the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America in 1915; the International Hebrew Christian Alliance and other national alliances in 1927.

Spiritual concern for the Jewish people blossomed. For the first time (1814-1817) a viable translation of the New Testament was made into Hebrew.³ By the turn of the century, the entire Bible was available in both Yiddish and Ladino.⁴ These translations, along with others, were distributed to Jewish people who had never previously read the Bible. The LSPCJ alone had been the means of introducing the Old Testament into a great many Jewish schools where previously only the Talmud had been read. Thousands, and even tens of thousands of Jews had heard the Gospel for the first time.⁵

The result was that Jewish people in Russia, Germany, Poland, Africa, the Ottoman Empire, India and China, as well as in Western Europe and North America were made aware of the teaching that Yeshua is the promised Messiah. Thousands and even tens of thousands of Jewish people may have come to believe.

Why is there so little evidence of these numbers a century later?

There is little doubt that the known results of Missions to the Jews ... will be found to be quite as great as in any other missionary cause ... Many years ago the Church Times (August 17th 1883) said, 'There is reason to believe that there is no family of the human race which, on the whole ... yields more converts to Christianity.' This is certainly not less true now, although not conspicuously evident, because when a Jew becomes a Christian he is absorbed into the Church, and is lost sight of as a Jewish convert.⁶

There are notable examples of Jewish people who became believers in the Messiah. Michael Solomon Alexander was chosen as the first Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem. Bishop Samuel Isaac Schereschewsky was an early missionary to China and translated the Bible into Mandarin and other dialects. David Mendel-August Neander was a church historian. Alfred Edersheim was widely known as an author and scholar. Bernard Bettleheim went as a missionary to Japan, while Isidor Lowenthal became a missionary to Afghanistan. Joseph Wolff traveled throughout the Middle East giving out Bibles and sharing the Messiah with Jewish people from North Africa to Afghanistan.⁷

Theological, doctrinal, and organizational issues arose over the very nature and future of Jewish "converts," perhaps because of those Jewish believers who did not follow the generally accepted pattern of conversion, baptism and assimilation. Joseph Rabinowitz is the best known,

² W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews*, (London: LSPCJ, 1906), p. 424.

³ Gidney, 55-56.

⁴ Gidney, 173.

⁵ Gidney, 144.

⁶ Gidney, 625.

⁷ Henry Einspruch (ed.), *When Jews Face Christ*, "A Modern Missionary to an Ancient People" (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1932), pp. 69-78, 92-110, 171-182.

but there were others.

Rabbi Isaac Lichtenstein of Tapio Szele, northern Hungary, came to faith in Jesus by reading a Bible thrown 30 years earlier into a corner of his library. After gradually introducing the teachings of the New Testament to his people, he openly proclaimed Jesus "the true Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel."⁸ Although he was attacked and persecuted, he continued as district rabbi, declaring he "had found in the New Testament the *true Judaism*, and would ... preach it in the synagogue."⁹ Various churches and missions heard of him and sought his services, but he replied to all:

I will remain among my own nation. I love Christ, I believe in the New Testament; but I am not drawn to join Christendom. . . . I will remain among my brethren, as a watchman from within, to warn them and plead with them to behold Jesus the true glory of Israel.¹⁰

Rabbi Abraham Jacob Schwartzberg of Poland came to faith in 1828 by reading a New Testament given to him by a missionary for the LSPCJ. He declared:

The Jews often think that persons are baptized in order to escape reproach, or to live in Christian quarters of the city, or to walk in the Saxon Garden (from which Polish Jews were excluded), but I will show them that none of these things move me. I am a Jew still — formerly I was an unbelieving Jew, but now I am a believing Jew, and whatever inconvenience or reproach may result, I wish to bear it with my brethren.¹¹

Some Jewish believers retained Jewish customs, kept traditional dietary laws, and followed the feasts and festivals of Israel. This caused many questions within established churches regarding conformity and Christian "orthodoxy" among Jewish "converts." Jewish and gentile Christians discussed the problems and possibilities of a "Hebrew Christian church," but believed that the obstacles to such were insurmountable. Mission societies commonly held regular services for Jewish believers as a sort of "half-way" measure to meet unique ethnic and sociological needs, but it was thought that, eventually, these would be unnecessary.

Jewish Missions and their Unique Impact

By 1930, there were more than 45 denominational and non-denominational mission societies with approximately 600 missionaries stationed all over the world. Several of these are particularly good examples of missionary perspective and organization.

Independent Missions in the United States — the ABMJ

A number of years after he came to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, Rabbi Leopold Cohn founded the American Board of Missions to the Jews. Herman Centz, who knew Cohn intimately, wrote of him:

⁸ Einspruch, 59.

⁹ Einspruch, 61.

¹⁰ Einspruch. 62-63

¹¹ Gidney, 222.

For the former Rabbi there was only one calling in life ... to serve God, and only one thing worth doing ... to make known the way of God's salvation in Jesus the Messiah ... To secure a platform for the proclamation of the Gospel he opened a little mission in Brownsville (Brooklyn). Being a man of practical sense, he devoted himself not alone to preach, but also to the alleviation of the many practical needs of immigrant Jews who were then crowding into New York by the thousands.¹²

Cohn had attempted to work within the framework of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, but found little concern and an unwillingness (stemming from both theological and financial reasons) to support his ministry adequately. In 1916, he resigned from the Society and made his mission completely independent. His son, Joseph Hoffman Cohn, liked to say that the mission belongs to all its supporters.

Leopold had strong Jewish roots. Although he became a member of the local Baptist church, he continued to follow Torah and to keep the biblical feasts:

He followed the method introduced by Paul, 'to the Jew I became as a Jew.' Pork he would not touch, and it was not allowed at any time in our home. And so with the forbidden animals of the Bible, and the creatures of the waters. The mosaic law was adhered to. When it came to the time of Passover, we kept the feast in our home.¹³

Cohn established a work which offered English classes, mother's assistance, children's activities, meetings and literature in Yiddish, and a Hebrew Christian congregation with a statement of faith modeled after that of Maimonides. In 1937, the year of Leopold Cohn's death, Centz wrote:

From the vantage point of the great work built up by Dr. Cohn, with its almost world-wide influence and ramifications, with the Hebrew Christian Church that exists and thrives at its home base, and with the thousands of people won to faith in Jesus the Messiah through the ministry and example of this man of God, we can see how all this had its inception in his own outreach after God and in his refusal to believe that the promises made of old to the fathers were only a myth.¹⁴

The Church's Ministry amongst the Jews — Warsaw, Poland

CMJ mission stations were organized after a particular pattern common to other UK and European Jewish works as well. A worker was dispatched from "home" to assume direction of the work. He would over-see several "local" coalporteurs and evangelists, usually Jewish believers. Most interaction with Jewish people was conducted by the indigenous workers, while the director planned activities and administered the program and finances of the mission. Often he was called upon to serve as chaplain for the local British (or other national) community, including governmental and military officials.

This was the sort of scene which greeted young Martin Parsons, fresh from teaching in a

¹² H.B. Centz, "A Modern Missionary to an Ancient People", in *When Jews Face Christ*, Henry Einspruch (ed.), pp.162-163.

¹³ Joseph Hoffman Cohn, *I Have Fought a Good Fight*, (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1953), p. 201.

¹⁴ H.B. Centz, "A Modern Missionary to an Ancient People", p. 170.

theological college, when he arrived in Warsaw 1935. He had met Harry Ellison, a leader in the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, and had been challenged and encouraged to apply to CMJ. The most urgent need was for someone to succeed Pastor Joseph Landsman in Warsaw. Parsons had a "classical" and a theological education, but he had no background in Judaism, no knowledge of Hebrew, Polish or Yiddish. CMJ had no missionary training program, and the only advice he received was to "take a warm coat."¹⁵

Upon arrival, he was taken to the new Jewish mission building near the university. It contained classrooms, office and chapel, and missionary apartments. Already in residence were two Irish ladies who taught the English classes.

Five Jewish believers worked as evangelists, distributing literature, giving the message at the Yiddish service each Shabbat, tending the reading room, and traveling in summer to out-lying areas to evangelize. They also edited two bimonthly magazines (Yiddish and Hebrew). Among these workers were Jocz and his two sons, Jacob (who became an outstanding scholar and theologian) and Paul (after the war, a missionary under Friends of Israel Society in California).¹⁶

According to Parsons, one of the unique accomplishments of the missionaries during this period was the cooperation between the various Jewish missions in Warsaw. These included Gitlin of ABMJ, Sendyk of Mildmay Mission, and Miss Christoffersen of the American European Mission. A Bible school, organized as a united undertaking during this time, although small and under-financed, managed to train 12 students.

PC USA, Chicago

The Presbyterian Church USA work among the Jewish people, begun before 1900, began to blossom in the 1920's. "Peniel," in Chicago, was directed by David and Esther Bronstein. The Bronsteins offered a community program commensurate with local needs. On Friday evenings, David led an open discussion on religious topics. An English and citizenship class for adults was held two nights each week. Peniel offered Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, athletic programs (a gymnasium was added in 1925), story and craft sessions, and special clubs for believing children. A "Mother's Party" one Saturday each month, was conducted by Esther in Yiddish, with a Bible study, singing and "refreshments." Free dental care was available.

In 1943, it was estimated that nearly 50,000 people yearly visited Peniel Center. Peniel also had a camp in Saugatuck, Michigan, to which young people, mothers with young children, and members of the First Hebrew Christian Church of Chicago were invited each summer.¹⁷

The First Hebrew Christian Church was established because of the attrition rate among Jews won to Messiah through Peniel. It began in 1934 with a petition to the local Presbytery signed by 41 people. David Bronstein Jr. wrote:

The church has proved to be a united testimony to both Jew and Gentile. ... Many Jews do not believe that a Jew can become a sincere Christian. The majority of Gentiles do not believe that a Jew can be converted. Then they come to a service and witness a great number of Jews worshipping ...

¹⁵ Martin Parsons, in an Interview, May 1990.

¹⁶ Martin Parsons, in an Interview, and Paul Jocz (Yates) in an Interview, January 1991.

¹⁷ David Bronstein, Jr., *Peniel Portrait*, (Chicago, 1943), pp. 16-19, 22-24, 27-35, 51-61.

their Saviour, prejudice is melted.... As a testimony to the Jew, the church has developed also as a very fine agency for reaching the Jews for Christ. Jewish missions are sponsored by Gentiles. The Jew Christian missionary is looked upon by the Jews as traitor to his race, who has hired himself out to the Gentiles. ... Their explanation is that the Gentiles pay a great sum to the missionary for each convert. Reaching the Jew through the First Hebrew Christian Church eliminates these objections. It is a group of Jews who believe in Christ and do not break away from the Jewish people. ¹⁸

The Impact and Effect of Jewish Missions Before 1945

It has been written of these missions and those who led them:

Their aim was not to convert Jews to a creed, but to bring as many as possible into a living relationship with God, in Christ, and to testify to both Jews and Christians that Christ and Israel are still inseparable; that Christ is still to be 'the King of the Jews,' and that the Jewish nation is in a peculiar sense "His own."¹⁹

What were the lasting effects of Jewish missions in the first half of the 20th century? Jewish missions and believers in Germany and throughout Eastern Europe perished with other Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Some who were won to faith through these missions survived and became leaders, missionaries, and writers in the USA and Israel. The accomplishments of these works, and those in the USA, created a background against which succeeding programs of outreach might be judged. The individual leaders and workers produced by them were their legacy to the future. These were the men and women who laid the foundations upon which others would build ministries and congregations in the last half of the 20th century.

Copyright Ruth I. Fleischer, All Rights Reserved

¹⁸ Bronstein, 66-67.

¹⁹ Hugh Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity*, (London, 1936), p. 213.

“Messianic Jews” in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967) Trends and Changes in Shaping Self Identity

Gershon Nerel²⁰

The aim of my dissertation is to portray and analyze an unknown phenomenon in the Land of Israel in the 20th century, namely the emergence and development of "Messianic Jewish" self-identity. By "Messianic Jews" I refer to Jews who voluntarily decided to embrace faith in Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth as Son of God, personal Redeemer and Messiah. The New Testament, along with the Old, became for them an integral part of Holy Scripture. The uniqueness of this segment of Israeli society — which in Mandatory Palestine numbered about 250 persons and roughly 500 around 1967 — was that they insisted on not being regarded as "converts to Christianity," but rather as "Completed Jews" or "Fulfilled Jews." Thus they emphasized attachment to their Jewish heritage and Jewish national characteristics. Simultaneously, therefore, they strongly opposed assimilation within gentile Christian society.

The chronological scope of this research is set between the years 1917 and 1967, an eventful period of 50 years, significantly marked by the transition of Jerusalem from one political hegemony to another: from its capture in 1917 from the Ottoman Muslim Empire by the British Christian Empire, to the reunification of the City in 1967 by the Israelis. Since Jerusalem always had a particular place in Old and New Testament exegesis, it also naturally held a central place within the contextualizing views of Messianic Jews.

Within the time spectrum of these two events in 1917 and 1967, representing two salient "crossroads," one finds a most formative half-century within which modern Messianic Jewish thought in Eretz-Israel was shaped. In fact, Messianic Jewish hermeneutics of biblical prophecy had as its focus both Jerusalem and the people and land of Israel at one and the same time. The Messianic Jews viewed and interpreted not only regional affairs in the Middle East, but also sought to trace prominent eschatological happenings within a world perspective and history.

Complexity of Nomenclature

When examining the terminology used in Messianic Jewish circles, it becomes clear that they rejected any approach which might have classified them as "Christians" per se. Even the term "Hebrew Christians," and especially within an Eretz-Israel connotation, was not always accepted.

²⁰ 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.

The author wishes to thank Prof. Gedalyahu G. Stroumsa for his supervision of this dissertation.

As Jews who followed the Messiah of the New Testament, they preferred to be called simply "Messianic Jews."

In Mandatory Palestine, however, we do not find a uniform definition or term used by Jewish believers in Jesus (JBJ) for their own self-identity. Most of those who were mainly connected to English-speaking churches and missionary societies, like the Anglican "Church Mission to Jews" and American "Christian & Missionary Alliance," did use among themselves the term "Hebrew Christian." This term was well-known within the Anglo-Saxon Protestant world since the 19th century.

However, more than semantic difficulties arose when the term "Hebrew Christian" was used in Eretz-Israel. "Hebrew Christian" conveyed mixed meanings when translated into colloquial Hebrew within a Hebrew-speaking milieu. JBJ were aware of the fact that the title "Hebrew Christian" was often understood as meaning complete separation from anything connected to Jewishness or a Judaic background, while this was not their intention in using the term.

JBJ expressed clear aspirations for restoring for themselves an archaic and authentic Hebraic nationality. This "archaic nationality" was found actually in the first century AD and related to the first JBJ in Jerusalem. Furthermore, modern JBJ did not at all wish — like many among the supporters of secular Zionism — to detach themselves from literal biblical prophecy and biblical spirituality. On the contrary, they dropped the prefix "Hebrew" and replaced it with the term "Jew" in order to be more related to the conventional Jewish world. In the Eretz-Israel milieu a term like "Messianic Jew" enabled JBJ to identify themselves with both modern Jewish nationality and "Biblical Judaism" (as distinct from "Rabbinical Judaism").

By the adoption of the term "Messianic Jews," JBJ in Eretz-Israel also rejected the term "Jewish Christians" or "Judeo-Christians." The difficulty they faced was mainly with the proper noun "Christian," especially when it was translated into Hebrew — *Notzri*. They strongly rejected any possible equation between themselves and gentile Christianity as manifested in church history. The majority of JBJ consented to define themselves as "Messianic Jews" especially following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. In America, however, this happened only in 1975. ("Messianic Jews" was only officially adopted in May 1997 at an international conference in Mexico).

References to "Hebrew Catholics"

From a theological perspective, a basic similarity is found between Messianic Jewish belief and various Protestant Evangelical teachings based on the New Testament alongside the Old. Yet at the same time when relating to JBJ, we need to point also to another group: Jews, who following their baptism within the Roman Catholic Church, preferred to call themselves "Hebrew Catholics." Most of these "Hebrew Catholics," however, would object to being called "Messianic Jews," and prefer to be known as *Notzrim* ("Christians"). Such differences of terminology do not reflect merely semantic preference. The acceptance of the term "Christian" by Hebrew Catholics manifested a clear universalistic approach, a policy of integration into the Catholic Church. Some of them even aspire to become an approved and "quasi-independent branch" within the Universal Catholic Church. The Messianic Jews, however, by rejecting the use of the Hebrew term for Christian wished to express their disconnection from the gentile Church's history of the past

nearly 2000 years. They rejected the term “Notzri” because it was linked to anti-Jewish Christian history. However, most JBJ endeavored to restore a historical and genuine self-identity as Jewish followers of Jesus. Although they identified themselves with the first-century JBJ, they still were divided in principle on how to shape and manifest such an identity vis-a-vis Synagogue and Church alike. In the context of the historical divisions between Catholics and Protestants, it became obvious that Messianic Jews would constantly differentiate themselves from "Hebrew Catholics" — and vice versa. Such a dissimilarity was quite evident, although each group openly struggled against the assimilation of its members into the institutional gentile churches. In fact, both groups also denounced traditional Christian anti-semitism, and insisted on maintaining a unique status, as Jews, among all other followers of Jesus, especially in still being part of the biblical "Chosen People."

Hebrew Catholic thought in our context is basically being contrasted with Messianic Jewish ideology as a "methodological mechanism," in order to better comprehend and more precisely elaborate the features adopted and promulgated by Messianic Jews. In other words, in this dissertation I do not intend to perform a systematic comparison between "Messianic Jews" and "Hebrew Catholics." Rather, I refer to "Hebrew Catholics" as "exploration group" thereby illuminating specific issues which required additional examination of themes related to Messianic Jews.

Striving for Corporate Emancipation

Chapters II and III of the dissertation present the attitudes of Messianic Jews towards establishing their own corporate institutions on a local-national level with strong” "territorial roots." Their efforts in this direction naturally reflected their theological thinking, especially when they came to define those persons who would qualify to join their circles officially. These two chapters are divided on the one hand between the period of the three decades of British Mandate in Palestine, and on the other hand the first two decades of the State of Israel. Basically, Messianic Jews in Mandatory Palestine were part and parcel of the Protestant missionary organizations located in central towns like Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Safed and Tiberias. A constant tendency was found among them to leave these gentile institutions, and even to avoid the use of traditional theological terminology; e.g., to drop the word "church" and to use instead terms like "assembly" or "alliance."

No doubt the factor of ongoing Hebraization within their circles, as in the society surrounding them — such as the daily use and indigenization of the Hebrew language — influenced their way of thinking. One notes a growing awareness of the need to develop a genuine Messianic Jewish mentality to distinguish themselves from any characteristics or customs that would gentelize them and cause them to lose their Jewish heritage and identity.

The outcome of this tendency was that JBJ constantly attempted to develop new forms of grouping by themselves in order to better express, as well as maintain, their unique identity. Thus, they insisted on shaping a distinct Jewish identity and "Jewish theology," which embraced the belief in Jesus as Son of God within their own phraseology — and this without necessarily accepting traditional church creeds and articles of faith. Therefore, they also faced difficulties and misunderstandings, particularly with those expatriate Christian missionaries who were ministering

in the Land. Many gentile Christians could only with difficulty grasp such "separatist" or even so-called "self-exalting" Jewish believers in Jesus.

Thus, for example, a special attempt to establish an independent Messianic Jewish congregation can be traced in Jerusalem between the years 1925-1929. Although in English they still called themselves "Hebrew Christians," to be understood by their supporters, in colloquial Hebrew and in Hebrew texts they used the term "*Yehudim Meshichim*" ("Messianic Jews"). The founders of this congregation were two Jews, Hyman Jacobs and Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, and a Norwegian missionary, Dr. Arne Jonsen. Jonsen and Jacobs published a statement of principles to serve almost as an enlarged creed or manifesto. This proclaimed their aspirations to restore the original and national entity of JBJ as described in the New Testament. By this they expressed strong awareness of their need to observe the Jewish national customs and Holy Days originating in the Old Testament, particularly performing the act of circumcision and observing the Sabbath day and the feast of Passover.

There were heavy pressures exerted on them from their gentile Mission Boards overseas. The supporters of Jonsen in Oslo and the board of the "Chicago Hebrew Mission" in the USA that supported Jacobs compelled them to keep Sunday and the Sabbath as two days for divine worship. The Sabbath was not to remain the single day for their weekly worship. Theological pressure was also put upon the leadership of this congregation, and they were accused of being "Judaizers" who experimented at keeping only the Sabbath Day or stressing the observance of Jewish festivals according to the Jewish calendar.

Pressures of this kind, followed also by financial and personal inducements, finally blocked any possibility for such a revolutionary congregation, which at the same time was regarded, in a dialectical way, as a "reactionary congregation." Therefore, this first attempt to form an independent Messianic Jewish congregation in 20th century Jerusalem did not survive more than four years.

Both Jacobs and Jonsen were obliged to face investigators who came to Palestine to learn about their "Judaizing" tendencies. At last Jonsen had to leave the country and Jacobs became an itinerant evangelist in Palestine. Ben-Meir, who returned from "Moody Bible Institute" in Chicago after studying there between the years 1927-1931, found the congregation disintegrated. He then occupied himself with fresh attempts to found larger territorial organizations of JBJ covering Palestine and the Middle East, having in mind the biblical boundaries of the Promised Land. Thus, the solution of Ben-Meir, and Jacobs as well, for shaping a genuine Messianic Jewish self-identity in Eretz-Israel was transferred from the local level to the wider regional level. They also had great hopes of crystalizing such an identity through cooperation with the "International Hebrew Christian Alliance" (IHCA) founded in London in 1925.

In 1931 the first regional grouping founded by Messianic Jews was named in English - for their gentile constituency - "The Hebrew Christian Fellowship of Palestine." However, in their internal Hebrew texts they used the term "Messianic Jews." In principle, their theological goal was to achieve an interdenominational fellowship without any kind of subordination to the traditional churches and mission organizations in Palestine. Among their proclaimed aims, just the principal ones are mentioned: "...To unite Messianic Jews in Palestine and Syria; to establish and support urban branches; to witness corporately both to Synagogue and Church concerning the

fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope in Jesus; to introduce Jewish thought to gentile Christians and the Gospel to Jews; to cooperate with the IHCA." They also bypassed any controversial issues, like demanding baptism for stipulating membership, in order to provide a wide common ground for as many of them as possible to join their "Fellowship."

In 1933 the "Fellowship" changed its official title and adopted a new name: "The Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East." The requirements for admission to the "Fellowship/Alliance" were as follows: "Expression in public of faith in Messiah Jesus as personal Savior and Lord; belief in the divinity of Messiah Jesus; belief in his sacrificial death and resurrection; acceptance of the Old and New Testaments as the word of God and as the rule for their faith and lives." However, neither the issue of the trinity nor the topic of baptism was mentioned as a stipulation for membership in that organization. Again, the reason for that was the desire to present the broadest theological spectrum as a possible doctrinal basis in order to permit maximal membership.

Abram Poljak was another active and influential personality among Messianic Jewish circles in Mandatory Palestine. In one of his early books titled "The Cross in the Star of David," he endeavored to launch a unique world movement that would crystalize a clear and solid identity for those Jews who believe in Jesus. However, instead of focusing on a special Eretz-Israeli Messianic Jewish identity, Poljak ended up mainly in English and German-speaking countries where he promulgated the idea of reciprocal coexistence between Jews and Christians through regular dialogue between them. Just like other leaders, such as Morris Sigel, Pauline Rose, Jacobs and Ben-Meir, Poljak was struggling to create a corporate witness of JBJ in the Land. Like his colleagues, Poljak emphasized the need to institutionalize these activities. He implemented this mainly through publishing various articles in his magazine "Jerusalem."

Insecurity Among Jewish Believers in Jesus

Not every Jewish believer in Jesus in Mandatory Eretz-Israel was willing to expose himself in public as such. A few dozens of so-called "Nicodemus Jews" (see John 3:1-2) tried to keep secret their belief in Jesus and for decades lived in this context with an underground mentality. Their main fear was that they would not be tolerated by normative Jewish society, and dreaded the possibility of jeopardizing their positions at work and even being stigmatized as "traitors." Later, within the State of Israel, the phenomenon of "Nicodemus Jews" did not disappear. Alongside those who publicly declared their faith in Jesus, many others endeavored to remain in the shadows. While examining the relationship between the "open" and the "closed" groups of JBJ, it became evident that they were characterized by constant tensions. Usually the former strongly criticized the latter as being "fainthearted" and "opportunistic."

When the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end in 1948, the Jerusalem Anglican ecclesiastical authorities raised the issue of the future of JBJ when the Jewish State would become a fait accompli. Their major concern related to those JBJ who were linked to the "double British enemy," namely, the British missionaries and the British government. Therefore, "Operation Mercy" (or "Operation Grace," as it was also termed) was launched to evacuate from the country all "Hebrew Christians" who preferred not to remain within the anticipated new Jewish State.

The operation was organized as a kind of "spiritual Dunkirk," transferring about 80 persons

to Liverpool in England. Most probably, a strong motivation behind this operation was in the association of ideas relating to a modern equivalent of the first century Jerusalem community "Exodus" to Pella in Trans-Jordan shortly before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

The First Decade in the State of Israel

However, not all JBJ left the country in 1947-48. Only a few remained, among them were Shlomo Ostrovsky, Abram Poljak, Pauline Rose, Moshe Ben-Meir and Hayim Joseph Haimoff. As a result of this operation, a profound disunity was created among "Palestinian" JBJ. The majority followed the gentile ecclesiastical policy; namely, that JBJ should gradually assimilate within the non-Jewish church society. The minority aspired to shape and maintain a unique identity within Jewish society as an integral segment within the Jewish state. No doubt this difference of outlook was rooted in the theological education and thought of individuals who had key positions within JBJ circles.

A major consequence of "Operation Mercy" was that with the departure of those evacuees in 1948, a community of JBJ in Eretz-Israel ceased to exist, and a new situation emerged. "Operation Mercy" caused generation discontinuity and also interrupted the sequence of "group overlap," i.e., caused the disintegration of local fellowships and actually produced a clear distinction between gentile church identity on the one hand and national congregation identity on the other.

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a new era began in the history of JBJ in the Land. Those very few who remained, reinforced by new JBJ who moved into the Land during the massive *aliya* (immigration) waves of the 1950s and 1960s, together formed a new foundation for local believers. They worked strongly to eliminate their minority status within the expatriate minorities of churches and missions in Israel. In fact, gradually they did become an independent self-determined ideological minority.

Various efforts were made to establish their own independent fellowships in Israel. Thus, for example, the "Union of Messianic Jews" was founded already in 1950, and later it was replaced by the "Israeli Messianic Jewish Alliance" organized in 1954. However, both the "Union" and the "Alliance" were disbanded after a few years, mainly because of personal and theological disagreements. A central issue in those conflicts was whether to permit, on the one hand, the involvement of non-Jewish Christians, e.g. from the local missions and churches, and on the other hand, the involvement of representatives from organizations like the IHCA.

After the Israeli "Union" and the "Alliance" had collapsed and disappeared in the 1950s, an organization was formed by Hebrew Catholics in 1957 and it still exists. "The Society of St. James" and its constitution were approved as a unique "branch" within the Roman church, and was actually incorporated into the Diocese of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Hebrew Catholic members in this "Society," on the one hand, adopted both a Hebrew translation of the Latin Rite and subordinated themselves to the Catholic hierarchy, yet on the other hand, they still hoped to renew the original "primitive" Jerusalem influence of JBJ within the universal church.

While among the supporters of the "Society" one finds Hebrew Catholics like Daniel Oswald Rufeisen, Bruno Hussar and Rina Geftman, one also finds opposition to it within the same circles. The Carmelite monk Elias Friedman, of Jewish origin, for example, opposes the Society in

principle for legitimizing assimilation of JBJ within the gentile church. This, according to Friedman, comes "without developing an autonomous Jewish identity of JBJ, and without preserving their unique election and apostolate."

Another attempt to establish a genuine congregation for expressing the self-determination of Messianic Jews in Israel was through the official registration of the "Israeli Messianic Assembly — Jerusalem Assembly." Although this entity was nominally registered with the Ministry of Interior in 1958, in practice it did not become, as was initially intended, a national body representing the consensus of Messianic Jews in Israel. De facto, this assembly functioned mainly as a local congregation in Jerusalem. The founders of this assembly, among whom were Ze'ev (Shlomo) Kofsmann, Eva Kronhaus, and Rachel Grinberg, explicitly expressed their desire that through their Assembly they would revive and restore characteristics of the first-century Jerusalem congregation of JBJ.

Thus they actually wished to bridge a gap of almost 2000 years of history and mentality. In their theology, and particularly in Christological definitions, most of them deliberately preferred to avoid reference to any traditional ecclesiastical creed. Thus, they refused to adopt any "creed," such as the "Apostle's Creed," the "Nicene Creed" and the "Athanasian Creed." However, they were aware of the fact that obviously their non-Jewish Christian brothers in faith, both in Israel and abroad, did expect them to do so.

Nevertheless, they insisted on using New Testament terminology exclusively, without mentioning, for example, the concept of the "trinity" in the formal text of an approved creed. In other words, they were convinced that when coming to Christological definitions, the use of the Hebrew language would naturally make a substantial difference. Thus, for example, within the one concept of "Messiah," they argued that the divinity as well as the humanity of the Savior were reflected.

Liturgical Thought and Practice

In the fourth chapter of the dissertation, dealing with liturgical thought and practice, two major topics are discussed: the celebration of feasts and rituals, and hymnology. Keeping the Jewish Sabbath had a special significance for them; Sunday observance was treated by Messianic Jews as "unbiblical." Hebrew Catholics, however, still kept the Sunday liturgy as the rule within the Latin Church. Some JBJ, however, also discussed among themselves whether to formulate a particular "Messianic Sabbath Liturgy," including special prayers connected with lighting two Sabbath candles, as practiced in many Jewish homes. Persons like Poljak and Ben-Meir initiated a unique "Sabbath Jesus Liturgy," combining Jewish traditions and biblical texts in order to find some common ground with normative Judaism. Others, however, like Hayim Haimoff (who in the early 1970s changed his family name to Bar-David), rejected such tendencies by arguing that liturgies of this kind are extrabiblical and therefore irrelevant for JBJ.

The Feasts of Passover and Easter were also discussed, yet other Biblical festivals such as Rosh Hashana (New Year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Succot (Tabernacles) or Shavuot (Pentecost) were not mentioned in writings of JBJ as often. While Hebrew Catholics celebrated mainly Easter according to the church calendar always on Sundays, Messianic Jews almost unanimously held to the concept that Passover should be celebrated only according to the biblical

calendar. Ben-Meir even elaborated a text of "A Messianic Jewish Hagadah," incorporating into it verses both from the standard Jewish traditional Hagadah and the New Testament. Furthermore, the celebration of the Jewish Passover also provided Messianic Jews with a unique opportunity to justify the practice of the "Lord's Supper" by using only "matza," the unleavened bread.

In contrast to Hebrew Catholics, Messianic Jews rejected the doctrine of "transubstantiation" and celebrated the "Lord's Supper" basically as a symbolic act of remembrance. They argued that this reflected a New Testament theology and not merely a common gentile Protestant theology.

As to the feast of Christmas, most Messianic Jews, although they celebrated Christmas, did not attribute particular importance to December 25, but rather focused on celebrating the message and act of incarnation. Unlike Hebrew Catholics who followed the Latin Christmas ritual without dispute, among Messianic Jews one could find both those who justified the practice of a Christmas tree decoration, and others who only emphasized the preaching of an edifying Christmas message accompanied by Christmas carols. Systematically they also disapproved of the traditional gentile custom of Santa Claus. In many JBJ circles, Chanuka, however, was also celebrated alongside Christmas. Individuals like Ben-Meir emphasized the importance of correlating the two feasts in order to link Christmas to the Jewish national aspect of the feast of Chanuka. Haimoff (Bar-David), however, ignored not only the feast of Chanuka but also the feast of Purim as irrelevant to the "Messianic Programme." He emphasized the New Testament perspective only in hermeneutics and liturgy of JBJ.

The hymns that were sung in services of Messianic Jews during the years 1917-1967 were usually traditional church liturgical hymns, translated from English and German into Hebrew. Most of the translation work was done by Moshe Ben-Meir, who also privately published three Hebrew hymnals, among them "Shirat Yeshurun" which included some of his original hymns in Hebrew. De facto, their hymnal corpus in Hebrew actually presented a special kind of creed, focusing on the issue of salvation based on the Messiah's birth, teaching, crucifixion, resurrection and second coming.

Thus, on the one hand, most JBJ aspired to detach themselves from traditional gentile hermeneutics and theological creedal formulas; on the other hand, the adoption of traditional Church hymns translated into Hebrew, caused no difficulty or menace vis-a-vis their identity.

Attitudes towards the Return of the Jews to Zion

The fifth and last chapter of the dissertation deals with the topic of "Theological Approaches towards the Return to Zion and Zionism." Following the parable of Jesus about the "blossoming fig tree," (Matt. 24:32) JBJ like Ben-Meir, Ostrovsky, Haimoff and Kofsmann often preached that the interpretation of this parable lies with the national restoration of Israel to her ancient homeland. Such persons considered their own times, and the 20th century as a whole, as the predestined period for the fulfillment of biblical prophecy regarding the return of Jews worldwide to Eretz-Israel. Furthermore, they also taught that Israel's restoration to its Promised Land had eschatological implications, and that the ingathering of the Jews and the establishment of a sovereign state would precede the second coming of the Messiah. Then Messiah's millennial kingdom would be established on earth — with Jerusalem as its capital.

Among Hebrew Catholics as well, and especially those represented by Elias Friedman and

Daniel Oswald Rufeisen, the notion prevailed that the return of the Jews to Zion had theological significance. In such a renewed national context they taught that JBJ had a unique calling and vocation, and should be regarded as the real "remnant of Israel" that would become a "spiritual nucleus" bridging "Synagogue" and "Church," and even a spearhead for combatting idolatrous and apostate theologies that had infiltrated the "Ecclesia ex Gentibus."

Friedman, however, did not expect all Jews to return to the Land, but only a small minority while the majority would remain outside Israel. Both Rufeisen and Friedman did point out, as against the traditional Catholic position, that the Jewish nation remained the "Elect Nation" according to God's plan, which still has a unique universal mission to influence the gentiles. Friedman even used the term "Catholic Zionism" as an ideology dealing with "Hebrew Catholics" belonging to a revived "Hebrew branch of the Church" — with no less spiritual authority than the first apostles in Jerusalem.

Thus, "Catholic Zionism" would mean that the Holy Land becomes the "National Vatican City for Israel." Therefore, in Friedman's mind, "Catholic Zionism" vis-a-vis secular Zionism would enable the "spiritual nucleus" of Hebrew Catholics in the Land both to "purify apostate Christendom" and to attract and influence the rest of the Jews and motivate them to turn to Jesus. The two Ratisbonne brothers Alphonse and Theodore, according to Friedman, were the forerunners of "Herzlian Zionism" in the Land.

However, for both Friedman and Rufeisen it was clear that the resurrection of Jesus symbolically prefigured the national restoration of the Jews in Eretz-Israel. The analogy they made between the *Shoah* (Holocaust) and Golgotha was obvious: just as Jesus suffered the agony of crucifixion and death and rose from the dead after three days, so the Jews were restored to their sovereign state three years after they suffered the agony of the "Shoah" and under a death sentence from Nazi persecutors seeking to implement "the final solution."

The Verdict of the Supreme Court

The formal denial of Rufeisen's Jewishness according to the "Law of Return" by a verdict of the Israeli Supreme Court in 1962 led to various reactions within JBJ circles. Rufeisen himself started a campaign to obtain recognition of his Jewishness within the Catholic Church as a Hebrew Christian. For this, he relied upon the Jewishness of the early church, and proclaimed that he and those in his status were the direct heirs of the original Jewish church. His Zionism concentrated on identifying with "Jewish Christianity" in Eretz-Israel.

However, his conservative opponent, Elias Friedman, supported the verdict of the Supreme Court, saying that Rufeisen had indeed lost his Jewish identity and should be regarded as a "Christian Israelite." Yet both Friedman and Rufeisen strongly objected to the total assimilation and disappearance of JBJ within the Catholic Church as had been the case throughout church history. Reacting to the same verdict, Ben-Meir and Haimoff argued that Rufeisen represented to the Supreme Court the traditionally despised figure of the "converted Jew," especially when he was wearing his friar's brown robe. However, both Ben-Meir and Haimoff used this opportunity to encourage JBJ in the Land to focus on their Jewish identity and strengthen it. Thus they thought it imperative that JBJ become totally independent from "churchianity" and detach themselves from church customs and hermeneutics, limiting the dispute between themselves as

BJJ and normative Jewish society to one single issue: the crucified and risen Messiah and Son of God.

In other words, in all other matters except faith in the blood atonement of the Messiah and Son of God, they wished to formulate a biblical way of exegesis that would neutralize accusations against them as having become traitors to their Jewish heritage. Keeping the Jewish Sabbath and Feasts, as well as practicing circumcision, expressed for them the central and authentic Hebraic-Jewish national features of their faith.

Attempts to Establish Settlements

On the agenda of JBJ in Eretz-Israel we also find various attempts to found colonies of their own. Thus, for example, in the 1920s a small hen-farm was established near Motza in the Judean Hills near Jerusalem. Then in the 1930s the IHCA planned to establish a unique Hebrew Christian Colony near Gaza where 2000 dunams were purchased for this purpose. There was also another option to purchase land near Acre (Akko). All these attempts failed. Notwithstanding these failures, we may point out the prophetic motives of the participants in attempting such settlement projects in order to be practically involved in the process of Jewish restoration and colonization of the Land. By trying to establish their own settlements they actually labored to present a Messianic Jewish alternative to the dominant prototype of secular Zionism.

Outside mainstream JBJ, the settlement called "Ir Ovot," founded in 1966 by Simcha Pearlmuter in the Arava in the Negev, still exists. In fact, this is a "one person" settlement, limited to the wife and children of Pearlmuter. Also called "K'far Yeshua," it became better known because of archaeological excavations in the region which led to the unearthing of the biblical town of "Tamar." It did not, however, significantly affect the local Israeli body of JBJ, but remained exclusively the residence of one man and a part of his family. Pearlmuter strongly criticized the New Testament as pagan and idolatrous literature. For him, Jesus was only the suffering and "potential" Messiah, and was far from being the Son of God or having any divine attributes.

Eschatological Implications of the Six-Day War

The Israeli victory in the 1967 Six-Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem were soon interpreted by JBJ as a significant "sign of the times" preceding the second coming of Jesus and the establishment of his millennial kingdom in Zion. Ben-Meir, Poljak, Ostrovsky, Haimoff and Kofsmann repeatedly taught that full Jewish hegemony in Jerusalem meant the end of the "times of the gentiles" (*Kairoi Ethnon*), and that gentile global spiritual leadership would begin to be replaced by JBJ.

Furthermore, Jerusalem's reunification symbolized for them the approach of the satanic Antichrist who would rule the world. In their chiliastic hermeneutics, such JBJ considered the Six-Day War as also preceding the eschatological battle of Gog and Magog which would introduce Messiah Yeshua's millennial reign in Zion over the whole world. Jerusalem would then become the center of the world, and God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be completely fulfilled.

In the wake of these end-time speculations, leaders like Ben-Meir and Haimoff also stressed that JBJ should serve in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) as loyal citizens of the State, and if competent, even as officers. Thus, in comparison to the situation in 1948 when most JBJ fled the country, in June 1967 many of them participated in the fighting on various fronts. Thus, their "Messianic Zionism" in 1967 was not merely a theoretical and "heavenly Zionism," but a practical one as well.

Actually, those few like Ostrovsky, Haimoff and Ben-Meir who did not join the exodus of JBJ from the Land in 1948 raised a new generation of JBJ in Israel which developed a strong patriotic Zionism as part of their eschatological theology. Zionism, therefore, was not "courted" by JBJ as a pragmatic or opportunistic ideology, "a tool for achieving legitimation by normative Jewish circles," but was rather grasped as an imminent component of their theology. Thus, considering those who held to the concept of a "heavenly Zion" only, as well as those who found a unique balance between their loyalty to both "earthly" and "heavenly" Zion, we find that the beliefs of both groups were rooted in their diverse understanding and applications of biblical prophecy.

BJJ: A "Menace" or a Challenge for the Christian Churches?

Almost unanimously JBJ in the Land denounced and rejected the doctrine of "Replacement Theology," namely that the universal church became the "true Israel," inheriting all biblical promises given to physical Israel. JBJ insisted that theologically the Jews as a people still remain unique as an elect nation in a divine plan. Therefore, they argued, because they have a sense of belonging to their nation, they represent the "first fruits," the avant guard, who should introduce authentic Messianic exegesis and practice to the world. However, while expressing such reformatory tendencies, JBJ also claimed that they do remain a vital organ in the cosmopolitan Body of Messiah. In fact, almost all JBJ in the Land stressed the dispensational interpretation that the historical phase of the "fulfillment of the gentiles" (Rom. 11:25) had arrived. Consequently the end-time position of JBJ should be manifested not only locally in Eretz-Israel but throughout the universal church.

In writings of JBJ we find a profound desire not to become "gentilized" by any terminology or by any other inducement from non-Jewish followers of Jesus. Yet at the same time, they were compelled quite often to reject accusations from gentile circles that they had, so to speak, some hidden or even apparent intentions to "judaize" the gentile Christians through their "Jewish inclinations." De facto, those accusations reflected gentile-Christian suspicions that JBJ had planned on purpose to regain "theological hegemony" over gentiles, as it was in the first century.

In reaction to attempts to create independent corporate entities of JBJ, as well as a unique Messianic Jewish orientation, leaders among the churches and missionary organizations in Israel decried them as manifesting renewed tendencies of "Judaizing" the gentiles who belonged to the universal body of believers in Jesus. Furthermore, fears were also expressed in the same circles in reaction to the possibility of having a modern Jewish-Israeli Protestant "Bishop" in Jerusalem. The "menace of JBJ" was grasped as they would raise claims towards renewing a theological hegemony on grounds of spiritual primogeniture. Such a development, so non-Jewish church leaders reasoned, would undermine the traditional theological authority and prestige of the

existing gentile ecclesiastical leadership. An independent and authoritative Jewish bishopric, sitting on the See of James, the brother of Jesus, in Jerusalem, could decrease and even overthrow gentile spiritual prerogatives not only in the Holy Land but in the global Christian milieu as well.

Epilogue

In summary, this research is a first attempt to draw a comprehensive mapping of the history and theology of JBJ in Eretz-Israel during the lifetime of two generations. These generations witnessed the British regime over Palestine followed by the establishment of the State of Israel. The following conclusions are clear:

1) In Mandatory Palestine there was a minimum of interaction between the Jewish mainstream and the small minority of JBJ, which also lived as a minority within a minority among the missionary circles. This tendency, however, was basically changed after the establishment of the State. In Israel JBJ initiated their integration within Jewish society.

2) JBJ developed a strong sense of the need to prevent their total social, cultural and theological assimilation within gentile circles. They rejected the "gentilization" tendencies which prevailed in the past.

3) JBJ focused on bridging the psychological gaps between themselves and the first-century Jerusalem disciples of Jesus as recorded in the Book of Acts in the New Testament. Their strong consciousness of historical affinity with the first disciples of Jesus strongly shaped their identity. However, this "restoration tendency" was not uniform but rather had a diversity of expressions.

4) JBJ almost unanimously accepted the canonical Holy Scriptures comprising the Old and New Testaments as a "fait accompli," and made no attempts to canonize new texts. On the other hand, they insisted on their right to provide new and independent scriptural interpretations, mainly as a community rooted in the Hebrew language. The revival of the Hebrew language in their circles has given momentum to new tendencies among them to redefine theologies and even historical creeds.

5) Their attempts to achieve organizational independence from missions and historical churches in the Land, as for example within their home-fellowships, contributed to their success in shaping their collective self-identity. However, such developments were visible mainly after the Six-Day War. Through such organizational developments, we may regard the intellectual and social history of JBJ in Eretz-Israel in terms of a movement, and not only in terms of theoretical ideology.

6) It should also be noted that JBJ usually were not deterred by threats which their opponents made against them that they were "corrupt missionaries." In their declared statements and writings as well as their deeds, most of them constantly emphasized that they have a civil right and a natural human right to share their faith with others. They actually ignored social and legal pressures to cease from the open dissemination of their beliefs. Responding to traditional rabbinic attacks against them, they often claimed that they have in conscience the obligation to "maintain a candlestick of witness" for Jesus, even if they were de-legitimized by normative Judaism.

7) The topic of the present dissertation is not an "esoteric" issue. As it is wide open to anyone interested in messianic patterns of thought and practice, it provides much material for drawing historical, theological and social comparisons between JBJ and other messianic groups past and

present. Thus, for example, future scholarly comparisons between JBJ and "Chabad" messianic thought might reveal new dimensions that researchers have not considered until now.

Copyright Gershon Nerel, All Rights Reserved

Messianic Jewish Congregations – A North American Expression

Jeffrey S. Wasserman²¹

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide an account of the historical development and current status of Messianic Jewish congregations in America and Israel. My goal in field research was to access and analyze Messianic congregational life. Other studies have addressed the issues of Jewish-Christian identity, the theology particular to the movement, and its historical development. My concern was to probe the function of Messianic congregations as culturally indigenous expressions of the Messianic Jewish faith. My work focuses in three areas:

1. Fellowship: It is my intent to analyze and document how these congregations provide a sense of community for their members. How do the members relate to one another? How do they individually and corporately relate to the larger Christian community, the unbelieving community and the Jewish community?

2. Discipleship: How do these congregations function to provide an environment for personal spiritual development and growth? What opportunities exist for discipleship? How satisfying has this experience been from the perspective of the members and leaders?

3. Evangelism: How effective have efforts at outreach been to the Jewish community? Is this cultural approach working from an evangelistic standpoint? What are the differences in approach and response in religiously and culturally distinct contexts of America and Israel?

The answers to these lines of inquiry in Israel and America are compared and contrasted to see how Messianic Judaism “works” for its adherents. Does it provide satisfaction as a religious experience? How does this differ in the American and Israeli context?

I have endeavored to describe modern Messianic Judaism for what it is. I look neither to affirm nor discredit it, but rather give a phenomenological description of Messianic Judaism and discover the self-understanding of Messianic congregations.

“The History and Theology of Messianic Judaism” traces the disappearance of the Jewish leadership and cultural hegemony which marked the first generation of the church. It deals with the events leading up to and surrounding the Bar Kochba revolt in the second century, at which time the Jewish Church ceased to exist as a visible historical entity.²² In it we note isolated evidences of Jewish belief in Jesus up to the latter half of the 19th century, at which time Jewish-Christian congregational identity began to reemerge. Attention is given to the necessary

²¹ Jeffrey S. Wasserman has his Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, USA. He is a Jewish believer and a Baptist missionary, teaching at the Baptist Seminary in Singapore.

²² Sociologist Rodney Stark suggests that Jewish Christianity continued to flourish and have significant impact on gentile Christianity for several centuries after Bar Kochba. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 49-71.

theological development that parallels these historical moments.

“An Emerging Identity” focuses on Messianic congregations as indigenous expressions of the Christian faith in a Jewish cultural setting. It touches on charismatic and non-charismatic worship styles, celebration of Jewish holidays, use of Hebrew liturgy, Sabbath observance, kosher food laws, and Jewish education for children and adults. This section considers the numerous Messianic umbrella organizations which seek to promote various elements of Jewish identity.

The Law of Moses is an important issue for Messianic Jews. Some congregations only allow observance of the Mosaic Law as part of their Christian liberty. Other fellowships see Torah observance as mandatory for Jewish believers and for gentile believers who participate in Messianic congregations. We focus on the role of modern day “Judaizers” in the light of this controversy.

“The American Expression” chronicles and analyzes the Messianic experience of participants in interviews held at the 1996 Jews for Jesus Ingathering in Delavan, Wisconsin and the 1997 Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism in Philadelphia. Since these interviews were free-flowing, with the participants encouraged to tell their own stories, it was impossible to forecast what the content would be; but the focus was upon fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism. I interviewed individuals who represented geographically distinct congregations. I then placed these data in an interpretive framework, along with the information gathered from congregational surveys and visits to congregations in Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco.

The material for “The Israeli Expression” comes out of my research trip to Israel in January 1997. I conducted 18 interviews with leaders from several of the 50 Israeli Messianic congregations. I observed communal life and interviewed and participated in corporate worship in order to understand how Messianic congregations function in fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism.

For the purposes of this article, I have abstracted elements of my research into the North American expression of Messianic congregational life. Those interested in my complete findings may refer to my dissertation to be published in the fall of 1997.

Congregational Life

In November 1996, I mailed written survey forms (Appendix I) to 200 addresses of known Messianic congregations in the United States and Canada. Ten survey forms were returned for incorrect addresses and 62 were completed and returned by congregational leaders. The purpose of the survey was to provide a statistical base for an analysis of Messianic congregational fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism.²³ Not all of the survey forms were completely filled out

²³ Jews for Jesus conducted a survey in 1982 of 8,000 Messianic Jews from which they received 1014 responses. This data was compared with statistics for the general American Jewish population. Mitch Glaser and Beverly Ross Jamison, “Jewish Believer Survey: Demographic, Social and Spiritual Profiles of Jews who Believe in Jesus,” a statistical report, Jews for Jesus, August 1983. Jews for Jesus surveyed another 5,000 Messianic Jews from 1986 to 1991. I examined a representative sample of 300 of them in San Francisco, 20-22 February 1997.

Another survey was done in 1984 to compare the effectiveness of evangelistic effort by Messianic congregations with gentile churches. Fenton M. Ward, “The Implications of Rabbinic Thought for Jewish Evangelism in the Southern Baptist Churches” (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984), pp. 301-6.

and often there were multiple responses by one congregation to the same question.²⁴ In the data cited here, I have tabulated all of their responses. Where there was no reply, I assumed that the respondents were unable or unwilling to respond.²⁵

Of the congregations surveyed, three were missions of other churches, 12 were started by denominational or mission agencies, 31 by groups of individuals, and 11 by the current congregational leader. Only one congregation was founded before 1970, with four founded in the 1970's, 13 from 1981-85, 11 from 1986-90, 23 from 1991-95, and five since 1996. Most meet for worship on the Jewish Sabbath, 30 on Friday evenings and 47 on Saturday mornings. For the most part, smaller congregations (40 participants and less) have the largest attendance on Friday evenings, while the larger congregations have the greatest attendance on Saturday mornings. Only 10 congregations had Wednesday evening meetings and only one congregation met on Sunday mornings. Other midweek meetings included prayer meetings, Israeli dance classes, Hebrew lessons, and home fellowship groups. Most congregations meet on borrowed or rented church premises, while 10 owned or leased their own buildings.

Table 1.—Meeting Times, Attendance, and Locations

Time	Average Attendance										
	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-75	76-100	101-150	151-250	250+
Fri. pm	1	2	5	6	2	2	3	2	2	3	3
Sat. am	1	2	2	5	3	6	5	6	2	5	1
Sun. am									1		
Sun. pm			1								
Wed. pm	1	2	5		2	1	1				1
Other	3	4	7	2	1	1	2				

Michael Schiffman surveyed 50 Messianic congregations in person and by mail in 1987. Michael Harris Schiffman, "Communicating Yeshua to the Jewish People: A Study of Variable Factors which May Influence Growth in Messianic Jewish Congregations" (D.Min. thesis, Ashland Theological Seminary, 1988). A 1992 update is available in Michael Schiffman, *The Return of the Remnant: The Rebirth of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer Messianic Publishers, 1992, 1996), pp. 161-70.

²⁴ Nearly every survey participant checked at least two of the multiple choice responses concerning observance of the Mosaic Law.

²⁵ This was particularly evident in the responses to my question about the number of Jewish "converts." This is a sensitive issue for Messianic Jews. Many crossed out the word "convert" and substituted "completed" or "fulfilled Jew." A few offered no answer to the question after having edited the phrasing. Others offered ambiguous answers such as "many" or "a number." In these cases, I had no choice but to presume that they had no statistical data to cite.

Location	Fri. pm	Sat. am	Sun. am	Sun. pm	Wed. pm	Other
Own Building	11	10		1	4	8
Another Church	15	22			1	6
Public Premises	1	3	1		2	2
Private Home	3	2		1	3	4

Respondents in 45 congregations believe that their congregations are growing, while 17 were concerned about declining attendance. Survey data showed that 38 were maintaining slow but steady growth in the number of “committed members” with 12 decreasing significantly over the last five to 10 years.

Table 2.—Number of Committed Members in Congregations

Number of Members												
1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-100	101-150	151-200	201-250	251+
1	8	2	12	11	4	4	4	6	3	2	1	1
Number of Congregations												

A total of 58 congregations reported total committed membership of 3111, 40 percent of whom are Jewish by background. The congregational leaders of 31 congregations claimed a Jewish upbringing, though only 11 were Conservative or Orthodox.²⁶ The backgrounds of the Jewish members are nine percent Orthodox Jewish, 22 percent Conservative Jewish, 31 percent Reform Jewish, 34 percent secular, and four percent second generation Messianic Jews.²⁷ Most couples are mixed marriages with one Jewish and one gentile partner. Only a very few members (less than one percent) maintained membership in a traditional Jewish synagogue.

The survey indicated a pattern of congregational polity equally divided between the traditional American “pastoral” model and a “plurality of elders” modeled after the synagogue. Most leaders take the title of “Pastor” or “Rabbi,”²⁸ with others who have not had ministerial

²⁶ The significance of this is that two-thirds of Jewish congregational leaders had little Jewish religious schooling in childhood. This means that 47 of 58 congregational leaders were schooled in Judaism *after* their Messianic conversion experiences. Most of their understanding of Judaism has come from Messianic study courses provided by the Messianic Jewish Assemblies of America and the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations.

²⁷ This compares favorably with most estimates of Jewish diversity. Jacob Neusner, ed. *World Religions in America: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), p. 170.

²⁸ The title “Rabbi” is problematic for Messianic Jews in their relationship with the larger Jewish

training preferring “Congregational Leader.” Of the 56 congregational leaders who listed their ages, 41 are older than 40 years of age.²⁹ Half of the congregations have part-time or bivocational ministers, and 21 congregations have others who minister under the authority of the Pastor/Rabbi.

In an effort to return to a genuine Jewishness in their faith in Yeshua, many Messianic congregations have espoused Torah observance as essential for the Messianic Jew.

Table 3.—Positions on Torah Observance

What is your position on:	Observing the Mosaic Law?	Keeping the Sabbath?	Keeping Kosher?
Permissible as part of Christian liberty	35	32	34
Mandatory for Jewish believers	8	14	9
Recommended for Jewish believers	33	33	29
Recommended for gentile believers	19	19	24

These data indicate the importance of Torah observance for Messianic Jews. Half of the congregations surveyed asserted that not only was observance of elements of the Mosaic Law permissible and recommended for Messianic Jews, but between 13 percent and 23 percent thought it mandatory. Advocates cite effective discipleship as the outcome of Torah observance. Their position is that while Torah observance is not necessary for salvation according the Romans 3:20 and Galatians 3:23-25, it is enjoined upon Jews throughout all generations.

Most Messianic Jews exempt gentile believers from Mosaic regulations, even those gentiles who are members of Messianic congregations. They base this on their understanding of the ruling of the Jerusalem council of believers in Acts 15:22-29.

In congregations that emphasize Torah observance, training in righteous living, instruction in godly behavior, and spiritual growth come first of all from the Law. There are those who go even farther in asserting the importance of the Law in discipleship. They insist that the Oral Tradition concerning the Law contained in the Talmud is necessary for godly living.

Disagreement over just what “Torah” means exacerbates the controversy. Positions include

community. There are no Jewish authorities who recognize them as such. Indeed, historically, when ordained Jewish rabbis have become believers in Jesus, they have been stripped of their ordination. Jews for Judaism, “Meeting the Challenge: Hebrew Christians and the Jewish Community” [Online], available <http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/webdocs/-challenge.html>, 16 May 1997.

None of the survey respondents indicated that they had ever been ordained according to rabbinic tradition. Furthermore, few have any ministerial training at all. Only 16 have a Masters degree in religion or ministry. 14 have only a high school education.

²⁹ This explains something of the influence of the counter-culture of the 1960’s and the Jesus Movement.

the five scrolls of the Pentateuch, the 613 commandments given through Moses in the Pentateuch which are ceremonial, legal, and sacrificial in nature, the entire Old Testament, Talmudic traditions, and Jewish customs. Various proponents of Torah observance include the Sabbath and circumcision, both of which predate the Sinai covenant. In addition, there are varying understandings of the Greek *nomos*, translated “law” in the New Testament. Some see this as only referring to legalism in religious observance.

Some Messianic Jews value the Mosaic Law for an understanding of their Jewish heritage and an aid to living out a believing Jewish lifestyle. However, many are concerned that overemphasis of Law leads to “rebuilding the wall of partition” between Jewish and gentile believers. Advocates of Torah observance counter that observance does not erect a partition because Jews and gentiles are forever equal before God. This leaves Messianic Jews free to keep the Torah without erecting an artificial division. The difference is then a matter of separate function for Jewish and gentile believers.

Discipleship

Theological arguments aside, it is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of Torah-observant congregations in the discipleship of their members. Survey responses echoed a concern for a stronger commitment to discipleship in observant and non-observant congregations alike.

My surveys indicate that American Messianic Jewish congregations struggle with discipleship. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are uniformly unsuccessful in evangelism. Others have noted that healthy disciples make effective witnesses. Robert Coleman suggests that the key to the success of the evangelistic strategy of Jesus and the early church was discipleship:

While ministering to the crowds, He [Jesus] concentrated upon making disciples who would become workers in His harvest. As the number of disciples grew, He selected twelve especially to be with Him. . . . He came to save mankind, but while here, He spent more time with a handful of disciples than with everyone else in the world.

As the community of faith rapidly expanded, believers regularly met together in their homes, building relationships much like the disciples had with Jesus. . . . With the conversion of Paul, . . . churches were planted across the Mediterranean world. Yet amid his evangelism, he does not neglect training some persons to reproduce his ministry . . . constantly lifting up the vision of reproducing workers. . . . [This pattern holds] true throughout history whenever/wherever there has been dynamic, long-term church growth. Disciple multiplication is basic to world evangelization.³⁰

The converse is also true. Unhealthy disciples, those whose spiritual growth is impaired by inadequate teaching, are inactive and ineffective in convincing others of the truth claims that they espouse.³¹ American Messianic congregations are consistently unsuccessful in attracting Jewish converts. Schiffman’s 1988 survey showed that 47 percent of Messianic congregations saw

³⁰ Robert Coleman, “Encouraging a Vision for Discipleship in the Local Church and Pastor,” in *NACIE 94: Equipping for Evangelism*, ed. Charles G. Ward (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1996), pp. 925-26.

³¹ John Fischer, “Theological Education and Jewish Evangelism,” *Bulletin of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism* (August 1991), pp. 242-46. Fischer relates successful Jewish evangelism to education and the development of leadership in Messianic congregations.

themselves as only slightly effective or not effective in reaching Jewish family members.³² He notes that the adoption of “Jewish cultural elements in worship seem to have little value in outreach.”³³ Data from the 1986-1991 Jews for Jesus “Jewish Believer Survey” support this observation. Analysis of a sample of 300 of 5000 surveys showed that only four percent of believing Jews were evangelized by Messianic congregations. Schiffman’s 1987 survey indicated that only two percent of American Messianic believers had come to faith as a result of Messianic congregational evangelistic activity.³⁴ Respondents to my own surveys indicated a total of less than 300 Jewish converts as a direct result of evangelistic outreach of 62 congregations. Only half of these have continued attending the congregations that evangelized them.

Special Jewish holiday celebrations are the most effective evangelistic activities according to respondents. Most congregations record a steady flow of new visitors each month, but few indicated significant evangelistic results from them.

Table 4: Average Number of Visitors Each Month

Visitors	0-3	4-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-50	50+
Congregations	10	10	19	6	4	7	4	1

Some Messianic congregations presume that their simple existence is a significant element in establishing a witness to the Jewish community. Some respondents indicated a hope that eventually the Jewish community would take positive notice of faith in Yeshua as a viable option for Jews, a fourth or fifth branch of Judaism. Recent expressions of anti-Messianic Jewish sentiments by leaders of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League and “Jews for Judaism” make this recognition unlikely.

Hebrew Christianity is not a form of Judaism and its members, even if they are of Jewish birth, cannot be considered members of the Jewish community.³⁵

Recent Southern Baptist efforts to promote Jewish evangelism have provoked a negative response toward Messianic Jewish congregations. Rabbi Leon Klenicki of the Anti-Defamation League refuses dialogue with Messianic Jews:

I think that [Messianic Jewish existence] is completely out of place and an insult to me as a Jewish person. I’m not criticizing them, but I don’t want them in the dialogue [between Southern Baptists and Jews] because they are not Jewish and they are not Christian. And they are playing a very confusing theological game.³⁶

³² Schiffman, *Return of the Remnant*, 150.

³³ Schiffman, *Return of the Remnant*, 157.

³⁴ Schiffman, *Return of the Remnant*, 163.

³⁵ Jews for Judaism, “Meeting the Challenge: Hebrew Christians and the Jewish Community” [Online], available <http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/webdocs/challenge.html>, 16 May 1997.

³⁶ Richard Ostling, “Spreading the Gospel” [Online], available at

Klenicki's point is that the Messianic Jewish claim is illogical. They are no longer authentically Jewish (according to Jewish tradition) and refuse to be called "Christians."

Survey data indicate that gentiles attracted to Messianic doctrine and worship style account for much of the membership growth of Messianic congregations. These gentiles do not observe inconsistency with traditional Jewish practice because, for the most part, they are wholly ignorant of it. Some of the most enthusiastic proponents of American Messianic congregational expression have been gentiles.³⁷

Those congregations which have sought to be "more Jewish" without resorting to extreme applications of Torah observance or developing an exclusive mindset, have had better success in reaching other Jews. Rather than attempting a total recreation of New Testament congregational existence without connection to 1900 years of church history, they have accommodated 20th century Evangelicalism to contemporary American Jewish life. This ethnically-oriented approach makes future integration of Jewish converts into the mainstream of American church life possible. In the same way, it makes it possible to attract Messianic Jews from traditional churches to Messianic congregations and offers a culturally homogeneous venue for Jews to explore faith in Yeshua.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum suggests that an approach that preserves the unity of Jews and gentiles in the Body of Messiah is more effective in attracting unbelieving and believing Jews alike:

The main problem with a Hebrew Christian church, however, is that it goes against the biblical ideal of gentile and Jewish believers worshipping and functioning together in the local church... Establishing Hebrew Christian churches is not the solution to the problem. By and large the attempts have been few and not very successful. Even Hebrew Christian churches in cities have not been able to attract most Hebrew Christians of those cities.³⁸

His proposal is the establishment of Messianic Jewish fellowships in and between local churches or ethnically oriented Jewish churches.³⁹

Traditional Protestant Evangelical churches have been far more successful in Jewish evangelism than Messianic congregations. The apostle Paul saw gentile salvation as God's primary method for Jewish evangelism (Rom 11:11). That his perception was correct is born out by current statistics. Of the estimated 50,000 to 60,000 believing Jews in North America, only 5,000 to 6,000 are involved in Messianic congregations.⁴⁰ In my survey 98 percent of the Jewish

http://www1.pbs.org/newshour/bb/religion/jews_5-14.html, 16 May 1997.

³⁷ Two of the seminal works on Messianic congregations were authored by gentiles. See James Milton Hutchens, "A Case for Messianic Judaism" (D. Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1974) and Phillip E. Gobel, *Everything You Need to Know to Grow a Messianic Synagogue* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1974).

³⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History, and Philosophy* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983), p. 94.

³⁹ Fruchtenbaum, 96-98. Fruchtenbaum is not totally opposed to independent and free-standing Messianic congregations. His Ariel Ministries has helped to plant and disciple Messianic congregations in numerous localities. His objection is to congregations which become exclusive in their Jewish orientation, forsaking and demeaning traditional gentile churches.

⁴⁰ David Brickner of Jews for Jesus postulates a number between 50,000 and 75,000. Some estimates are as high as 100,000. Carol Harris-Shapiro, "Syncretism of Struggle: The Case of Messianic Judaism" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1992), p. 41. Harris-Shapiro concluded that there were at the most 6,000

members of Messianic congregations were brought to faith by gentile Christians.

Conclusion

In my concluding chapter, I examine issues of obfuscation of identity of Messianic Jews with other Jews, gentiles masquerading as Jews, and the refusal to acknowledge Christian connections. These issues affect the perception of Messianic Judaism by the Jewish community and influence the success of evangelistic efforts. I further examine the genuineness of the North American expression of Messianic Judaism and its effectiveness in fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism, as well as the impact of Messianic Judaism on the gentile church. Special attention is given to the issue of indigenous cultural expression, especially to both the commonalities and differences in the American and Israeli experiences. The issue of evangelistic outreach and congregational assimilation is most significant. How successful are these congregations in proclaiming Jesus as the Jewish Messiah to other Jews? For Israeli Jews to worship with a Jewish liturgy and flavor is only natural. Is the Messianic congregation an effective contextualization of the gospel message for Israeli Jews? Is the American expression as effective in its intercourse with American Jewry? How do the contexts differ? What social, cultural, and contextual factors contribute to “congregational success”?

Copyright Jeffrey S. Wasserman, All Rights Reserved

Messianic Jews in Messianic congregations in 1992. My surveys recorded 1,297 Jews in 62 congregations. By extrapolation the number would be 5,000 to 6,000 in 200 congregations.

The Making of a Tradition: Jewish Christianity

Bülend Senay

Some say it cannot exist, but it does. Jewish Christianity exists. The movement of Jews who accept the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and assert their right to live as Jews even seems to be growing. Richard Harvey, one of the leading figures of British Jewish Christian tradition, tells his reader an anecdote in his autobiography. When he went to visit a synagogue, the rabbi asked him his religious background, and when he said that he was a Jewish Christian, he was most amused to be told “I’m sorry, you don’t exist.”

Any study about contemporary Jewish Christianity should not be intended as an addition to the already existing battery of theories concerning the rise or emergence of new religious movements. In other words what is important in studying a religious movement, in our case Jewish Christianity, is not what is typical or atypical about contemporary Jewish Christianity vis-à-vis other religious movements. On the other hand, one can admit that it can be typical of the lot. If there is any one shortcoming in works on the “new” religious movements, it is their tendency to treat the members of these groups as one homogeneous lump of frustrated humanity. All of these criticisms have been levelled by Jewish sociologists and historians about Jewish Christians. One needs to take the movement in its own universe, and try to see what it creates and responds to for its members or followers. Our concern therefore has been with the “insides” of this religious group/movement: how religious ideas and behavior patterns become established in members’ lives, how people change as a result of their participation in the movement, and how social and religious criteria determine status within the group. Since our research is about a living movement rather than just about doctrine or theology, the overall aim has been to explore one century of the Jewish Christian movement which has emerged in the British socio-religious scene through “small group formation” in order to re-figure the past (early Jewish Christianity) and re-construct it as a tradition to suit their current purposes. Therefore it attempts to see their effort to establish themselves as “a continuing tradition from the past” in the light of *concept of tradition*.

Modern Study of Early Jewish Christianity

One can say that modern study of Jewish Christianity began with F.C. Baur in 1830. We know little of the history of the purely Jewish-Christian Church of the first decade, save that it grew rapidly in Syria and that all its members were devoted Jews. But for all its obscurity to us, this seems to be the vital creative period of Christian history. As C. Rowland points out in his *Christian Origins*. we know from other early Christian sources that Jewish Christianity had a significant life of its own for a considerable period.

Despite the obscure beginning, Harnack, for example, said that the original Church of Jerusalem was Jewish Christian and that in Palestine it was a majority group. If we compare

Harnack with Baur, we see that both apply the name “Jewish Christian” to the same group of Christians. Harnack, however, accepted more than one Jewish-Christian community (Ebionites, Nazarenes, Elchasaite). Jewish Christianity is, to be sure, a complex thing. It is found both in a Palestinian as well as a Hellenistic environment and was subject to various influences. According to D.G. Dix, the Jewish-Christian church formulated neither the doctrine of the Trinity, nor that of the Incarnation. In another direction, too,

that purely Jewish Christian first decade made all the difference to the future. Christianity emerged upon the world not as a Clergy administering rites without doctrine to any man they could attract, like the oriental cults; nor as a bundle of intellectual opinions for discussion, like Greek philosophy.

It presented itself primarily as a life (“The Way”) — a life which was divinely “ordered” in all aspects, religious, moral, and social, a life which could only be lived in its reality in “Covenant” with God. This was what the early Christians, namely Jewish Christians, believed in. The “New Covenant” was “in the Messiah.” What distinguished Jewish Christians from and amid their fellows was that “in the Messiah Jesus” they were now in his “New Covenant” with God, and the old Israel was not. Despite the historical fact that early Jewish Christians were the followers of the disciples of Jesus, they were marginalized as heretics by the later Pauline churches. According to historical sources, a continuing anti-Pauline form of Jewish Christianity accepted Jesus as Messiah but not as divine.

From what we understand from the literature it follows that the study of Jewish Christianity is still worthwhile. It is not possible in this article to pursue a full scale reconstruction of the Jewish Christian phenomenon as evidenced in the writings of the Church Fathers, edicts of Church Councils, liturgies, anathemas and other genres of literature, but it is apparent that there is a wealth of prima facie evidence for Jewish Christianity.

All in all, from Baur to Sanders the overall thesis on Christian origins was clear: Christianity very quickly distanced itself from its distinctively Jewish matrix and from a characteristically Jewish Jesus; and it is in this distanced form that Christianity developed and became what it is.

Jewish Christians Today

Although we know that there have always been individual Jewish Christians or small groups, it was in 1866, the first known Hebrew Christian Alliance of Great Britain was organized in London with branches in several European countries, and in the United States, in 1882. These organizations had the combined effect of encouraging Jewish believers in Jesus to consider themselves a community with a unique identity and of bringing them together. Things have changed dramatically since the beginning of the century up to the 1960s. In the USA the Young Hebrew Christian Alliance was established in 1965. Many Jewish people came to faith in Jesus from the late 1960s onward. The exact number is not known. The Jewish community in the USA, UK, and in Europe awoke to find young Jews in increasing numbers involved in cults like the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon and the Hari Krishna, or mission groups like Jews for Jesus and the “Jesus People.” The discovery was made that even Reform (Liberal) Judaism did not offer young people what they were seeking. Some Jewish young people returned to Orthodoxy while others rejected Judaism as irrelevant to the 20th century.

We are not giving the full history of the movement, but historically speaking, there are two different groups of Jewish believers in Jesus, a reality reflected in the terms usually used by each group. These two terms are, on the one hand, “Hebrew Christian” or “Jewish Christian,” and on the other hand, “Messianic Jews.” In the early 1970s there was a clash between traditional “Hebrew Christians” and “Messianic Jews” which was more than a matter of semantics. A Hebrew/Jewish Christian, who insists on this term, believes it to be of fundamental importance to let it be known that he/she is a Christian, happily identified with the term and with the worldwide (gentile dominated) church, and further, that he/she is Jewish by ethnic origin, not gentile. A Messianic Jew, who insists on this term, believes it to be of fundamental importance to let it be known that he/she is a Jewish person and that he/she is a special type of Jew, one who is a disciple of Jesus, rather than belonging to Orthodox or reform ideologies, etc.

Hebrew Christians traditionally join local church congregations (whether by choice or direction). Messianic Jewish groups and congregations, on the other hand, are firmly committed to a search for “indigenous” expression of theology, worship and lifestyle for Jewish believers within the whole church. In fact, Messianic Jews questioned the very nature and application of church practices and in many cases found them to be less biblically-based than practices within Judaism. In other words, contemporary Messianic Judaism emerged from the Hebrew Christian movement, which was initially a Protestant oriented missionary effort of the 19th and 20th centuries. Its goal was to join new Jewish converts to existing gentile churches. This changed dramatically in the 60’s and 70’s first in the USA and then in the UK in the 80s. They tended to call themselves Messianic Jews, reflecting their belief that Jews who accept Yeshua/Jesus as their Messiah are in fact returning to “true Judaism.” There are small Catholic Hebrew Christian groups as well. Instead of calling themselves Christians the Messianic Jewish missionaries say they are practising a more evolved kind of Judaism — and that’s what enrages Jews most. There have been, and are acts of vandalism against Jewish Christians, especially Jews for Jesus missionaries.

As for keeping Jewish practices our 1996-97 survey conducted among the members of BMJA (British Messianic Jewish Alliance) and MJAGB (Messianic Jewish Alliance of Great Britain) in the UK shows that approximately 60 percent of BMJA members continue to light Shabbat candles, but all in all only 36 percent of the respondents say that they keep Jewish practices.

The survey also shows that while only 9.3 percent of BMJA respondents go to Messianic Jewish Congregations, the level of attendance in Messianic Congregations among MJAGB members seem to be higher with 27.3 percent. The rest (a majority) appear to be attending local churches. A small number of Jewish Christians attend both synagogue and a fellowship, and even a local church which might mean that his fellow Jews do not yet know that he/she is a Messianic Jew.

While most of BMJA members are economically in the middle and upper-middle class, MJAGB respondents have relatively a lower level of income.

Another aspect of both BMJA and MJAGB membership is that most of the members are in their 40-50s or over. This might say something about the future of the “tradition”.

The Making of Tradition

Sociologically speaking, Jewish Christianity is a tradition reconstructed through small group formation. This reconstruction is, in other words, a “tradition-making” as a means of making sense of the world which is, in social theory, the hermeneutic aspect of tradition. It is, at the same time, “formation of identity” as a way of creating a sense of belonging which is the identity aspect of tradition (Thompson, 1996; Luke, 1996). There are two types of identity formation which are relevant here — what we may call “self-identity” and “collective identity.” Self-identity refers to the sense of oneself as an individual endowed with certain characteristics and potential, as an individual situated on a certain life-trajectory. Collective identity refers to the sense of oneself as a member of a social group which has a history of its own and a collective fate. What is the relevance of tradition to these two types of identity formation? As sets of assumptions, beliefs and patterns of behavior handed down from the past, traditions provide some of the symbolic materials for the formation of identity at the individual and the collective level. One way to understand tradition is to view it as a set of background assumptions taken for granted by individuals in the conduct of their daily lives, and transmitted by them from one generation to the next. In this respect, tradition is an interpretative scheme, a framework for understanding the world.

Conclusion

From the theological perspective, one might ask, for example, whether Jewish Christians might have a distinctive role to play in interreligious dialogue, whereas from the sociological perspective, the question is how they can be pictured as a religious group that experiences a crisis of identity as they attempt to live out their faith in Jesus and try to reconstruct it as tradition in a community of gentile believers. The former question (that subsumes the concept of “Abrahamic Trialogue” in terms of the role of the Jewish Christianity in interreligious dialogue) leads us to the concept of historical “continuity of divine revelation” that manifests itself through “human construction of traditions.” The latter has probed the setting of small group formation taking place as a ground for “re-constructing the tradition of the past” (early Jewish Christians).

The theological core of the question of the future course of Jewish Christianity as well as the Jewish-Christian relationship is to be found in the Christian doctrine of discontinuity and supersessionism — the teaching of the election of Christianity. The fact is that the concept of discontinuity, while offensive to Jews, is at least coherent for Christians themselves to be able to claim that there is no salvation outside the church. On the other hand to admit a “continuity” involves an element of mystery that requires considerable sophistication to accept. It seems that it is this sophistication that religious believers, Jewish Christian or other, need to ponder.

What about the future of contemporary Jewish Christianity? Who knows the answer? Richard Harvey says in his unpublished MA research, “if reality is to a large extent socially constructed, then the *weltanschauung* of a continuing Jewish Christianity is vital to our understanding of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.”

Copyright Bülend Senay, All Rights Reserved

Inner-biblical Perspectives on Messianic Prophecy

Michael Rydelnik⁴¹

It is commonly believed in some scholarly circles that there was no clear messianic idea in Israel until the post-exilic period⁴² or even until the second century BC.⁴³ J. H. Charlesworth states, “I am convinced, Jewish messianology developed out of the crisis and hope of the non-messianic Maccabean wars of the second century BCE.”⁴⁴ This would lead to the conclusion that Old Testament texts which have historically been interpreted as messianic, even by the New Testament, should not be viewed as messianic in their original intention. Thus, Juel views the apostolic messianic identification of Old Testament texts as “a creative exegetical enterprise.”⁴⁵

However, this approach to messianic texts assumes that the Old Testament did not read itself in a messianic way. The following article will explore three passages from the Torah⁴⁶ (Gen 49:8-12; Num 24:14-19; and Deut 18:15-19) and demonstrate that later Old Testament writers viewed these earlier Old Testament texts as messianic. The point of this discussion is to show that the Old Testament considered itself a messianic book.

Genesis 49:8-12

The context of this prophecy is the blessing of Jacob over his sons before he died. Jacob established an eschatological perspective in 49:1 when he stated that he would tell what will happen “in the last days.”⁴⁷ In 49:1-7, the three older brothers were described as unqualified to

⁴¹ Michael Rydelnik is professor of Jewish Studies and Bible at the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. He earned his Master’s degree from Dallas Theological Seminary and his doctorate from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

⁴² Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, (Oxford: Blackwell 1959), p. 17.

⁴³ Joachim Becker, *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1977), pp. 50, 87.

⁴⁴ James H. Charlesworth, “From Messianology to Christology”, in *The Messiah*. ed. James H. Charlesworth, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p.13.

⁴⁶ Both Wolf in Herbert Wolf, *An introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, (Chicago: Moody 1991), pp. 141-48 and Archer in Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament introduction*, (Chicago: Moody 1964), pp. 212-23 defend Mosaic authorship and a mid-fifteenth century BC date for the Exodus. This would require that the Pentateuch be dated by the end of the fifteenth century BC.

⁴⁷ Some English translations render this phrase “in the days to come” (NAS, NIV) as if it refers to future events and not the end times. While this may be possible, the literal rendering “the end of days” or “the last days” is certainly more common. According to BDB it is “a prophetic phrase denoting the final period of the history so far as the speaker’s perspective reaches; the sense thus varies with the context, but it often = the ideal or Messianic future.” (BDB, 31)

receive the birthright because of their previous sinful behavior. Reuben was disqualified because he lacked sexual control, sleeping with his father's concubine (Gen 35:22). Simeon and Levi were disqualified because they lacked control of their tempers, being overzealous in their vengeance for Dinah's rape (Gen 34:29-35).

The contents of the prophecy about Judah refers to his pre-eminence (v. 8), his power (v. 9) and the future King who is to come from his tribe (vv. 10-12). The most controversial aspect of this prophecy is the identification of "Shiloh" for which there are four main views:

1) Shiloh is a place name.⁴⁸ This position holds that Judah's conquest of Canaan is in view. It would translate the phrase "until he comes to Shiloh" referring to the Israelite worship center. The problem with this interpretation is that the Masoretic text consistently distinguishes the spelling of the place name "Shiloh" (*SHILW*, *SHYLW*, *SHILOH*) from the word "shiloh" (*SHYLOH*) in Genesis 49:10 (BDB, 1017-18).

2) Shiloh is a proper name of the Messiah. This is the view of the Talmud in Sanhedrin 98b which answers the question of what the Messiah's name is by saying, "Shiloh is his name, as it is said, 'Until Shiloh come'." It is also the view of the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan ("until that time that King Messiah shall come"),⁴⁹ and the Qumran community ("until the coming of the Messiah of Righteousness").⁵⁰

3) Shiloh means "his son." This was the view of Calvin who saw the derivation of the word as *SHYL*(child) and H for the possessive pronoun W (his). Thus, the scepter would not depart from Judah until Judah's son came. As desirable as this view may be, unfortunately *SHYL* does not mean "son," making the view unacceptable.⁵¹

4) Shiloh is a word meaning "which belongs to him." This view is sustained by accepting the variant reading *SHILOH* instead of *SHYLOH*.⁵² According to this view, *SHILOH* is a compound word from SH, the shortened form of the relative particle *ASHER* ("which, whose"), L ("belonging to"), and the suffix H for W ("him"). The critical apparatus of BHS cites multiple Masoretic manuscripts which read SHLH.⁵³ The primary objection to this view is that it is unattested in the Pentateuch and was generally used only in later Hebrew.⁵⁴

Although all four views have difficulties, the fourth has inter-textual support from Ezekiel 21:32 (English 21:27). Barnes states that "perhaps the oldest extant reference to the *SHILOH* passage is the parallel phraseology to be found in the book of Ezekiel."⁵⁵ The passage in Ezekiel substantiates two ideas: First, it affirms the rendering of *SHYLOH* as "to whom it belongs."

⁴⁸ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1891), p. 51.

⁴⁹ Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: an Aramaic Interpretation*, (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (New York: Viking, 1958), p. 401.

⁵¹ Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), pp. 173-74.

⁵² Walter C. Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 51.

⁵³ Kaiser states that there are thirty-eight manuscripts supporting this reading (Kaiser, 51).

⁵⁴ William H. Barnes, *A Text-critical and Historical Examination of the "Shiloh" reference in the Blessing of Judah, Genesis 49:8-12*, (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1974), p. 43.

⁵⁵ Barnes, 42.

Second, it confirms that Genesis 49:10 is a messianic prophecy.

In Ezekiel 21:29-32, God addresses Zedekiah typically (as head of the Davidic house) about his sins. God tells him to “remove the turban, and take off the crown” (Ezek 21:31) to picture the loss of his kingship and the overthrow of the kingly line.⁵⁶ Using a triple repetition (“ruin, ruin, ruin”) to express a strong superlative, God announces the temporary overthrow of the Davidic line “until He comes whose right (*MISHPAT*) it is” (Ezek 21:32).

There are essentially two interpretations of this phrase, one which views Nebuchadnezzar as the referent, and the other which identifies the phrase with the Messiah. The interpretation hinges on the meaning of the word *MISHPAT*. The first, non-Messianic view, takes *MISHPAT* to mean “judgment/punishment.” Therefore, the phrase refers to the one who will execute judgment on Judah, namely, Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. This position is supported in two ways: First, it is argued that the translation of the word *MISHPAT* must be understood in light of its use in Ezekiel 23:24b where it plainly means judgment.⁵⁷ Secondly, the context of Ezekiel 21:32 is all judgment and it would be unlikely for this verse to include a promise of restoration. Moran writes,

And finally, it seems most improbable that in a context in which everything speaks of ruin and destruction, both before and after, in one short phrase of two words we should have a promise of restoration: such a *volte face* is without parallel in Ezekiel.⁵⁸

The second interpretation takes *MISHPAT* to mean “justice/just” and views the phrase as a promise of restoration by the Messiah. The defense of the messianic interpretation of Ezekiel 21:32 is as follows:

1) Although *MISHPAT* frequently means “judgment/punishment” in Ezekiel (Ezek 5:8; 16:38; 23:24, 45; 39:21) it can also mean “justice/just” (Ezek 18:5, 8, 19, 21, 27; 22:29; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9).

2) It is possible for Ezekiel to give a promise of restoration within an oracle of judgment, indeed as he did in Ezekiel 17:22-24. In fact, a promise of restoration after judgment fits with the theology of the book of Ezekiel.⁵⁹

3) Ezekiel 21:32 is an inter-textual allusion to Gen 49:10, which describes one who would defeat Israel’s enemies and bring blessing to his people. However, since the last kings of Judah were evil and not qualified to fulfill this promise, the nation would have to wait for another one who had the right. Thus, Von Rad writes,

⁵⁶ It is better to view the words “turban” and “crown” as a synonymous parallelism, referring to royalty, rather than to take the turban to refer to priesthood and the crown to refer to kingship. John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1969), p. 164 and Charles Dyer, *Ezekiel*, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 1225-1322, (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1985), p.1269.

⁵⁷ W.L. Moran, “Gen. 49:10 and Its Use in Ez.21:32”, in *Biblica* 39 (1958): pp. 405-25, pp. 422-23; Walther, Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, chapters 1-24*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 447.

⁵⁸ Moran, 419.

⁵⁹ Chien-Kuo Paul Lai, *Jacob’s Blessing on Judah (Genesis 49:8-12) with the Hebrew Old Testament: A study of In-textual, Inner-textual, and Inter-textual Interpretation*, (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), pp. 309-10.

Even the grievous harm done to the royal office by those who had last worn the crown did not vitiate the prophet's hope that Yaweh would redeem the promise attached to the throne of David, 'until he comes whose right it is' (Ezek 21:32).⁶⁰

In light of these arguments, it is best to view Ezekiel 21:32 as a prophecy of the Messianic hope in the midst of judgment. Thus, Ezekiel's message was that "the line of David would not be restored till the righteous, God-appointed King would come."⁶¹

Since the phrase used in Ezekiel 21:32 is "a definite reference to Genesis 49:10," Ezekiel was using the earlier messianic passage in his context to stress that "kingship ... would be removed in judgment but returned ultimately in the Messiah's coming in accord with Genesis 49:10."⁶²

This inter-textual reference to Genesis 49:10 demonstrates that *SHYLOH* does indeed mean "which belongs to him." Furthermore, it establishes that Genesis 49:10 is a messianic prophecy. As Barnes states, "that Ezekiel confirms the Messianic interpretation in his allusion to Genesis 49:10 in Ezekiel 21:32 alone should be sufficient to substantiate this view for anyone who holds to the Divine inspiration and unity of Scripture."⁶³

Numbers 24:14-19

Numbers 24:14-19, the fourth and last of Balaam's oracles, foretells Israel's hegemony over both Moab and Edom. It begins with Balaam telling Balak, King of Moab, the subject of the oracle, namely, what Israel will do to Moab in the last days (24:14). After affirming that this oracle is derived from a vision of God, Balaam places the fulfillment of the prophecy in the distant future ("I see him but not now; I behold him but not near.") (24:17a). After declaring that a star and scepter shall come from Israel that will crush Moab and take possession of Edom, Balaam states that Israel will perform valiantly and one from Jacob shall have dominion (24:17b-19).

At issue here is whether or not this is a messianic prediction. After considering the interpretive options, the inter-textual evidence will be examined.

The Interpretive Options

1) The first option takes the star and scepter to refer corporately to the nation of Israel. This view is based on the context, in which Balaam declares that the oracle concerns what the people of Israel will do to Moab. Furthermore, it speaks of Israel (the nation) performing valiantly.

Although it is true that the passage does describe the actions of Israel, it does so in conjunction with an individual at the nation's head. The terms star and scepter form a

⁶⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 2:235.

⁶¹ Dyer, 1969.

⁶² Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, in *The expositor's Bible commentary*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gabelein, 737-996, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 845.

⁶³ Barnes, 96. Fishbane also sees Zech 9:9: "Behold your king will come to you, triumphant, his victory won, humble, riding on an ass, the foal of a she-ass" as an inter-textual reference to Gen 49:10-11. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical interpretation in ancient Israel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), pp 501-02. If he is correct, this would be another direct and clear messianic prophecy which interpreted Gen 49:8-12 messianically.

synonymous parallelism, referring to a royal figure.⁶⁴ This one is the leader of Israel and represents the whole nation. Therefore, the prophecy as a whole may be about the actions of Israel the nation, but it still refers to an individual, and a royal one at that.

2) The second option takes the star and scepter to refer to the historical figure of David (or even his kingly line). Hengstenberg argues for this position as do others.⁶⁵ The view is substantiated by the victories of David over Moab (2 Sam 8:2) and Edom (2 Sam 9:14). Thus, it is maintained that the prophecy does indeed speak of a future king, but that it is not the messianic King.⁶⁶

Asserted against this view is that Moab and Edom later won their freedom, making David's victories only temporary.⁶⁷ Furthermore, prophets writing many years after David, saw the subjugation of these nations as still future (Isa 11:14; 15:1-16:14; 34:5-17; Jer 48-49; Ezek 25:8-14; Amos 2:1-3; 9:11-12; Zeph 2:8-11; Obad 1-21).

3) The third view is that the star and scepter refer directly to the Messiah. This is the view of the ancient Targums,⁶⁸ the Midrash Rabbah (Devarim 1:20), and church fathers such as Justin Martyr and Athanasius.⁶⁹

In support of the messianic view, it appears that the text itself calls for an eschatological reading. By declaring that the prophecy refers to "the last days" and by seeing the King in the far distant future ("but not now ... but not near"), the passage demands an eschatological reading. Keil states, "By the 'end of days,' both here and everywhere else, we are to understand the Messianic era."⁷⁰

Moreover, the prophecy refers not to temporary setbacks to Moab and Edom but to Israel's ultimate victory to be achieved under the Messiah. As Kaiser states, "This portion mainly depicts what will take place at the second advent of Messiah. He will literally clean house of all evil and all opposition to his rule and reign."⁷¹

It is argued that the phrase "in the last days" is ambiguous and need not refer to eschatological times.⁷² However, the phrase generally does refer to the end of days and some

⁶⁴ C.F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, vol.1, in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1:3:192.

⁶⁵ E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1847; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970; page references are to reprint edition), pp. 34-37; Timothy R. Ashley, *The book of Numbers*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1993), pp. 500-03; Rashi, "Bamidbar", in *The Metsudah Chumash/Rashi Vol. IV*, (Hoboken: Ktav, 1995), p. 338; J.H.Hertz (ed), *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (London: Soncino Press, 1937), pp. 679-80; Van Groningen, 244.

⁶⁶ Wenham agrees that David is spoken of here. Nevertheless, he also affirms that David foreshadows the Messiah as a type. Gordon Wenham, *Numbers: an introduction & commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1981), p.178-79.

⁶⁷ Keil, 1:3:194.

⁶⁸ Levey, 21-27.

⁶⁹ Cited in Ronald B. Allen, *Numbers*, in *The expositors' Bible commentary*, Vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gabelein, 655-1008, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 911.

⁷⁰ Keil 1980, 1:3:199.

⁷¹ Kaiser, 57.

⁷² Ashley, 99.

justification within the text or context should spur an alternate rendering, not just a presupposition that it could not be so. Based on the careful reading of the text itself, the messianic interpretation of Numbers 24:14-19 seems most appropriate. Furthermore, this interpretation is confirmed by the intertextual reference to the passage in Amos 9:11-12.

The Inter-Textual Considerations

The key passage that sheds light on Numbers 24:14-19 is Amos 9:11-12. Amos' prophetic ministry took place in the middle of the eighth century BC.⁷³ If Moses wrote the Torah about 1400 BC, then Amos wrote about 650 years later. His perspective was decidedly post-Davidic and his message was essentially judgment. At the close of the book, a prophecy of hope is added despite the message of judgment (9:11-12). This offer of consolation looks ahead to the eschatological period ("in that day")⁷⁴ when the Davidic dynasty would no longer be functioning.

Amos promises that God will raise up the fallen booth of David. This is not just a promise of a restored dynasty but of the coming of the son of David, the Messianic King. Kaiser correctly argues that the interpretation of this passage rests on the suffixes of three words in Amos 9:11, although they are not usually translated literally.

The feminine plural suffix ("*their* broken places") refers to the two kingdoms that had been divided since the days of Rehoboam. God will unite the nation once again under their Messianic king. The masculine singular suffix ("*his* ruins") refers to David (not his booth, which is feminine). Since David is dead, Kaiser points out that this "must refer to that 'second David,' mentioned in Hosea 3:5. God will raise up from the ashes of 'destruction' the new David, even Christ, the Messiah." The feminine suffix ("build *it*") refers to the fallen booth, or the Davidic dynasty, that will be restored under the Messiah.⁷⁵ The messianic expectation of Amos 9:11 is clear.

Amos also declares God's purpose in raising up David's dilapidated booth: "so that they may possess the remnant of Edom, even all the nations that bear my name" (9:12). Interestingly, the mention of possessing the remnant of Edom is a transparent inter-textual reference to Numbers 24:18.⁷⁶ Kaiser concurs when he writes, "the verb 'to possess' is deliberately chosen, for it preserves the prophecy made by Balaam in Numbers 24:17-18."⁷⁷ Keil also notes the inter-textual reference when he writes, "*YRSHW*, to take possession of, is chosen with reference to the prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:18), that Edom should be the possession of Israel."⁷⁸

The point of this inter-textual reference is plain. As Sailhamer states, "The eschatology of Amos is the same as that of the Pentateuch. The future Davidic king will rule victoriously over

⁷³ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, (Chicago: Moody 1986), pp. 59-60.

⁷⁴ Kaiser, 145.

⁷⁵ Kaiser, 145.

⁷⁶ John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: a Canonical Approach*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 250-51.

⁷⁷ Kaiser, 148.

⁷⁸ Keil 1980, 10:1:332.

Israel's enemies and establish his eternal kingdom.”⁷⁹ The reference by this later prophet to the very words found in the Mosaic Torah confirms that Amos read the fourth Balaam oracle as a messianic prophecy.⁸⁰

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 contains God's promise that He will raise up a prophet like Moses that the people of Israel are to heed. The issue to be addressed here is whether or not this passage refers to the Messiah when it speaks of a prophet like Moses.⁸¹ After surveying the common interpretive approaches to Deuteronomy 18:15-19, the inner-textual interpretation of the passage will be examined to demonstrate the messianic nature of the passage.

The Interpretive Approaches

There are essentially four ways that interpreters have approached this text.⁸²

1) The first interpretation is the direct, non-messianic view. This approach, held by some medieval Jewish interpreters, takes the coming prophet to be a particular future prophet but not the Messiah. According to McCaul, Abarbanel held that Jeremiah was the prophet like Moses, while Ibn Ezra and Bechai applied the prophecy to Joshua.⁸³

Although these interpretations try to make good sense of the singular noun *NAVI*, McCaul rejects them both. He objects to Jeremiah being the referent because Moses was a prophet of deliverance, whereas Jeremiah was a prophet of doom. McCaul also rejects Joshua as the referent because Joshua was not like Moses in mediation nor direct revelation.⁸⁴ Additionally, it should be noted that in Deuteronomy 34, immediately after the description of Joshua (Deut 34:9), the writer says no prophet had arisen like Moses (Deut 34:10), obviously disqualifying Joshua as the referent.

2) The second interpretation is the collective, non-messianic view which holds that the institution of the office of prophet is in view. This position is based on taking the singular *NAVI* as a collective noun and is defended as follows:⁸⁵

a) The wider context (Deut 16-18) describes the offices of king and priest so it is not likely

⁷⁹ Sailhamer, 251.

⁸⁰ Acts 15:16-21 quotes Amos 9:12 to support the idea that gentiles would share in God's kingdom and therefore they need not convert to Judaism first. Acts quotes the Septuagint rendering, which read Edom as "humanity" which reflects the meaning of Amos 9:12. For a more detailed discussion of this use of the Old Testament in the New as it relates to contextuality, see Sailhamer's discussion in *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (1995), pp. 248-52.

⁸¹ Yoon-Hee Kim has written "*The Prophet like Moses*": *Deut 18:15-22 Reexamined within the Context of the Pentateuch and in Light of the Final Shape of the TaNaK* (1995), an excellent dissertation evaluating the various options and arguing for the direct messianic interpretation.

⁸² Despite her extensive research, Kim only interacts with the direct messianic, collective non-messianic, and collective messianic views. She does not deal with the direct, non-messianic view.

⁸³ Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus*, (London: Unwin), p. 146.

⁸⁴ McCaul, p. 146-47.

⁸⁵ This is a summary of the arguments for and against this view, as found in Kim (Kim, 89-94).

that the prophet would be an individual but rather an order or office.

b) The nearer context of Deuteronomy 18:9-14, which prohibits pagan divination, contrasts with 18:15-19, thus the text's intent appears to be a prophetic order.

c) The discussion of the false prophet in Deuteronomy 18:20-22, clearly a collective noun, assumes a reference to the preceding true prophet. Hence, they both must be collective.

In response to these arguments, the following may be stated:

a) The wider context makes it most fitting for Deuteronomy 18:15-19 to refer to the Messiah, as the head of all offices and authorities.

b) The nearer context of rejecting pagan divination would contrast with the Messiah who would be the perfect revelation of God.⁸⁶

c) The discussion of false prophets in 18:20-22 is indeed consistent with an individual prophet in 18:15-19. This is seen in two ways. First, the particle *ACH* in 18:20 is an adversative that is short of a full antithesis and can best be translated as *however*. Thus, this paragraph is not intended "to show an equal antithetical relationship between the prophet in vv. 15-19 and the prophet in vv. 20-22."⁸⁷ A close examination of the text demonstrates that what is being contrasted is that the prophet like Moses will speak in God's name, whereas false prophets will only presume to do so.⁸⁸

The second point about these two paragraphs is that the word *NAVI'* does not have the definite article in vv. 15-19, but it is used with the article in 20-22. This is a small but significant difference. When *NAVI'* is used without the article in vv. 15-19, it is a simple singular defined by being "like Moses,"⁸⁹ a category not normative for all prophets (cf. Num 12:6-8). However, when *NAVI'* is used with the definite article in vv. 20-22, it is a "generic use of the article."⁹⁰ Thus, the prophet in vv. 20-22 refers to a generic idea, of any false prophet. Kim accurately notes the significance of this minor difference in usage when she states,

By this slight change of form of the word, the text clearly wants to make a distinction between the two terms and does not present an antithetical relationship between true prophets versus false prophets. Rather it focuses on the false prophets who would misuse either God's name or God's message.⁹¹

On the basis of the above discussion, the collective, non-messianic view is not demanded by the context of the prophecy.

3) The third interpretation is the collective, messianic view. It seeks to accommodate both the collective and the messianic views at the same time. This position is generally maintained by those who feel that the context argues for a collective idea in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 but also

⁸⁶ Kim, 91-92.

⁸⁷ Kim, 246.

⁸⁸ Kim, 246-47

⁸⁹ Although a king (*MELECH*) in 17:15 is also singular, it may be taken as a collective and not as a simple singular, because it is not defined by the phrase "like Moses" as in Deut 18:15, 18 (Kim, 1995, p. 248).

⁹⁰ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An introduction to Biblical Hebrew syntax*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1990), p. 13.5.1f.

⁹¹ Kim, 248.

recognize that the New Testament sees the Messiah as the fulfillment of the prophecy (cf. Acts 3:20-23; 7:37-38). This view argues that Deuteronomy 18:15-19 refers to the establishment of the prophetic order which find its ultimate culmination in the Messiah. This is the view of the majority of interpreters.

The essential problem with this view is that it is unclear what the biblical writer intended. It is unlikely that he intended a double or progressive fulfillment. It suffers because without the attempt to harmonize with the New Testament, this interpretation would never be attempted.⁹²

4) The fourth interpretation is the direct, messianic view. This posits that “the prophet like Moses” refers exclusively to the Messiah. This interpretation was affirmed by some conservative, mostly older, commentators. This view is defended as follows:⁹³

a) The singular use of *NAVI*, with singular suffixes points to a specific individual. Generally, when the collective sense is intended it is common to interchange singular and plural forms.⁹⁴ Although it is acknowledged that Deuteronomy 17 uses *MELECH* in a collective sense, it is maintained that no specific individual is meant, because there is only one king at a time. Therefore, the collective use of *MELECH* does not require *NAVI* to be used in identical fashion.⁹⁵

b) The prophet is compared to a single, exalted individual: Moses. Hence, the fulfillment must be a single, exalted individual.

c) In the history of the Old Testament period, no ordinary prophet exercised the legislative, executive, priestly or mediatorial authority that Moses did.

d) The prophet who is like Moses had to be so special an individual that only the Messiah could fulfill the qualifications (Num 12:6-8; Deut 34:10).

e) Other Pentateuchal messianic passages (e.g. Gen 49:10; Num 24:17-19) provide a broader context which allows for Deuteronomy 18:15-19 to be messianic.

f) The New Testament confirms that Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is messianic (Acts 3:20-23; 7:37-38).

Having surveyed the interpretive positions, it is necessary to examine how the Old Testament itself viewed Deuteronomy 18:15-19. In so doing, it will become apparent that many years after Moses gave this prophecy to Israel, the Old Testament itself continued to look for a Moses-like eschatological prophet.

The Inner-Textual Considerations

There are two passages that give inner-textual insight into the meaning of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, one written by Moses himself and the other by a writer at a much later date. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Numbers 12:6-8: The first inner-textual support for the messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is found in Numbers 12:6-8. This passage is significant because it defines

⁹² Kim, 97.

⁹³ This is a summary of the arguments found in Kim, 87-89.

⁹⁴ Delitzsch 1891, p. 61.

⁹⁵ Kim, 88.

what is meant by a prophet like Moses. The context of this passage lays the foundation for understanding Moses' uniqueness. In Numbers 11:16-30, the story is told of God establishing the 70 elders of Israel and confirming them by giving them the Spirit which Moses had (11:17) and allowing them to prophesy as Moses did (11:25).⁹⁶ In Numbers 12:1-5, the account of Aaron and Miriam speaking against Moses is reported. Their complaint was that God also spoke through them as prophets and not solely through Moses. The report of God's defense of Moses is reported in Numbers 12:6-8, where God delineates the uniqueness of Moses as a prophet. The text recounts God's words from the pillar of cloud, as follows:

Hear now my words: If there is a prophet of the Lord among you, I will make myself known to him with visions and I will speak with him in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses, in all my house, he is faithful. Face to face⁹⁷ I speak with him, even openly and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord; so why were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

The point is very clear. Despite the proliferation of prophecy to the elders and to Miriam and Aaron, Moses remained unique as God's prophet and servant. This was so because God spoke directly with Moses and not with other prophets.

Numbers 12:6-8 establishes a significant inner-textual foundation for interpreting Deuteronomy 18:15-19 by explaining what is meant by "a prophet like Moses." Whoever that prophet would be, he would be required to speak to God face to face.

Deuteronomy 34:10-12: The second inner-textual support for the messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is found in Deuteronomy 34:10-12. This passage is significant because it establishes that many years after the death of Moses, at the close of the prophetic period, the prophet like Moses had not yet come. Thus, Israel was to continue to look for an eschatological figure who would fulfill the prophecy of the prophet like Moses.

Before examining the words of Deuteronomy 34, it is essential to examine when they were written. Deuteronomy 33-34 form an appendix to the Torah which Moses had written. That it was written after Moses' death is apparent from Deuteronomy 33:1. This verse introduces the poetic blessing of Moses as that with which Moses blessed Israel "before his death." Although the poem was originally written by Moses, it was obviously recorded here by someone other than Moses after his death.⁹⁸ Although it has been conjectured that Joshua wrote these words down,⁹⁹ the clues in the text point to a much later writer.

First, in Deuteronomy 33:1, Moses is called "the man of God," whereas before he was called

⁹⁶ Prior to Moses, Abraham was also considered a prophet (cf. Gen 20:7).

⁹⁷ The phrase literally means "mouth to mouth" but is idiomatic for "face to face", William L. Holladay (ed.), *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament based upon the lexical work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 289.

⁹⁸ Earl S. Kalland, Deuteronomy, in *The Expositors's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gabelein, 3-235, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 219.

⁹⁹ Rashi understood the phrase "before his death" to mean "close to his death" leading to the conclusion that Moses wrote this before he died. (Rashi 1950, p. 317). When discussing the account of Moses' death in Deut 34:5, Rashi speculates that Moses may have written "so Moses died there" before he actually died. However, he concludes that Moses wrote until Deut 34:4 and Joshua wrote from 34:5 until the end. The evidence points to a much later writer.

“the Lord’s servant.” The phrase “the man of God” is not used elsewhere in the Pentateuch but it is used to describe prophets at a later time. This leads Sailhamer to conclude that in Deuteronomy 33:1 “the words of Moses are presented as those of ancient prophet. Moses is thus viewed as a dead prophet.”¹⁰⁰

Secondly, when recounting the death and burial of Moses in Deuteronomy 34:5-6, the text states, “But no man knows his burial place to this day.” It appears that it has been so long since Moses was buried that no one in Israel remembered the location of his grave. Moreover, the phrase “to this day” demands that it has been a significant passage of time (far more than would be appropriate if Joshua were the writer).

Thirdly, Deuteronomy 34:10 contains the clause, “no prophet like Moses ever arose in Israel,” which appears to assume that the end of prophecy has come. Although some versions translate the clause, “Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses,” (NIV, NASV) meaning that no Moses-like prophet has yet come, this is not syntactically plausible.¹⁰¹ Sailhamer aptly summarizes the significance of this, when he writes:

The passage should be read in a conclusive sense, “no prophet ever came,” and thus removing the possibility of a historical fulfillment sometime in Israel’s past. As it stands, Deuteronomy 34:10 assumes that prophecy, or at least the office of prophecy, had already ceased and that a prophet like Moses never arose.¹⁰² It is worthwhile to note here that the concept of the cessation of prophecy was part and parcel with the concept of the closing of the Old Testament Canon.¹⁰³

On the basis of the above evidence, it is safe to say that Deuteronomy 33-34 was added to the Mosaic Torah as part of its final canonical redaction. Some older, conservative commentators have conjectured the writer of this section to be Ezra.¹⁰⁴

Regardless of who actually wrote these chapters, they are significant because this appendix provides the keys for interpreting the Pentateuch in general and Deuteronomy 18:15-19 in particular. Reflecting a perspective offered most likely 1000 years after the original prophecy was given, Deuteronomy 34:10-12 provides an inspired understanding of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

Deuteronomy 34:10 reads, “No prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD

¹⁰⁰ Sailhamer, 244.

¹⁰¹ This is the conclusion of Sailhamer based on the work of Blenkinsopp in *Prophecy and Canon*. He quotes Blenkinsopp as follows, “in all instances where this particular construction occurs in the Hebrew Bible [’OD L’ O with the past tense] it never means ‘not yet’ with the implication ‘it hasn’t happened yet but it will later.’ Following attested usage it must on the contrary be translated ‘never again,’ ‘never since,’ or ‘no longer’ with no limitation of time unless expressly stated” (Sailhamer, p. 247).

¹⁰² Sailhamer goes on to state that this “does not remove the possibility of future fulfillment.” Thus, at the end of the prophetic period, “the prophet which the Lord promised to send, never arose, the implication being that God would still send him in the future” (Sailhamer, 247-48).

¹⁰³ Sailhamer, 247-48.

¹⁰⁴ McCaul, 147; David Baron, *Rays of Messiah’s Glory*, (London: Wheeler & Wheeler, 1886), p. 183; Max Reich, *The Messianic Hope of Israel*, (Chicago: Moody, 1945, 2nd ed.), p. 36. Although none of them defend their conjecture, it is feasible on the basis of Ezra 7:10, which literally reads, “For Ezra had set his heart to search the Law of the Lord, and to *make it* and to teach his statutes and judgments in Israel.” Perhaps Ezra did play a role in the final shaping of the Pentateuch, as a scribe and writer of inspired Scripture.

knew face to face,” plainly alluding to the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15-19. In doing so, it seems that the writer understands the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 as still lying in the future and not the past. Since the giving of the original prophecy by Moses, many prophets had arisen in Israel. However, the writer of Deuteronomy 34:10 plainly says that there has been no historical fulfillment because none of them have been like Moses. None have communicated with God “face to face.”

Kim clearly states the point of this discussion when she writes,

the final paragraph of Deuteronomy 34:10ff. should be read looking at the history of Israel’s prophecy retrospectively. Its final analysis after viewing all the historical prophets, including Elijah, is that the ‘prophet like Moses’ never came, therefore it automatically turns to the future for the fulfillment of it. He is yet to come!¹⁰⁵

To summarize what has been presented in this discussion of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, it was promised that the Lord would send a prophet like Moses. This has been understood various ways, each view being noted for strengths and weaknesses. However it was posited that the key to understanding the promise of a prophet like Moses is to see how the Old Testament itself interpreted it. Moses himself recorded one clue in Numbers 12:6-8, describing that which made him a unique prophet, namely, speaking to God face to face. Whoever the prophet like Moses would be, he would be required to speak to God in the same way, face to face. Deuteronomy 34:10-12, a passage apparently written near the end of the close of the Canon, views Israel’s history of prophets retrospectively and states that the prophet like Moses never came. Israel is now to look to the future when God will send a new “Moses” who will speak to God face to face. Thus, the Old Testament itself reads the prophecy of a prophet like Moses eschatologically, closing the Torah by pointing Israel to the future Messiah.

Conclusion

This article on inner-Biblical perspectives examined three passages from the Pentateuch. Each one was viewed as a messianic prophecy by later biblical writers. Although I examined only three isolated passages and not every potentially messianic passage, the point was to show that later Old Testament authors did indeed consider earlier passages to be messianic. Not only does the New Testament read the Old Testament in a messianic fashion, the Old Testament itself did so, paving the way for the New Testament

Copyright Michael Rydelnik, All Rights Reserved.

¹⁰⁵ Kim, 280.

Dissertation Re-visited — 13 Years Later

Fenton Ward¹⁰⁶

In the summer of 1977 I faced a dilemma. I was 40 and a new seminary graduate who had earlier sold his business and entered the ministry in mid-life — but that wasn't the dilemma. My wife and I had just arrived in a suburb of Los Angeles to begin a congregation that would attempt to reach the Jewish members of that community. The dilemma was that I had a sense of God's mandate to do so, but didn't have a clue as to how to go about it. The task contained three major obstacles — all of which we were naive. First, it is a risky business to begin a new congregation under the best of conditions. Second, it is more difficult in an established community than in a new sub-division, and last, it is even more difficult where that established community is heavily Jewish. Praise God, we didn't know then what we know now. Otherwise, we might have turned around and fled.

Initially, we were blessed by sharing a facility — and a common concern for reaching Jewish people — with two missionaries of the American Board of Missions to the Jews. This couple became two of our first church members. In that early stage, our initial Jewish members came more from their efforts than mine. Within the first year two things occurred. The congregation began to develop its own capacity to do Jewish outreach and the ABMJ moved its work to a new area. As a small but growing congregation, we were about 20 percent Jewish with the balance from a mix of non-Jewish cultures and nationalities. (From its inception, Tarzana Baptist Chapel was a multi-ethnic congregation with a Jewish flavor, rather than a Messianic synagogue.)

With a growing number of new Jewish believers, however, new questions needed to be answered. What was the role of Jewish people within the Body of Christ? Was there any uniqueness for the Jew as opposed to those of other cultures? What were their assumptions? How did they process information? Was our message being impeded by our assumptions? These and other practical questions needed solutions and it seemed a return to seminary ought to be the best source for answers. That was only partially so, but it did give a format for inquiry. Thus, my work toward a Doctorate of Ministry at Fuller began.

Early on, I found that so few people address the question of how Jewish people are reached that there were limited academic resources. Worse, in some cases the few resources gave oversimplistic solutions derived from faulty research. With titles which promised much and content that delivered little, I found most dealt with what they expected from a theoretical view, rather than what they had actually experienced. I also discovered that the profile of the average Jew had little to do with those I met on the street. Material concentrated on the religious Orthodox Jew, which I found to be less than five percent of the actual Jewish population. (Happily, that has

¹⁰⁶ Fenton Ward holds a M.Div. and a Ph.D. from Fuller School of World Mission, California. He is the founder of Project Ingrafting, a ministry seeking to equip churches and individuals to reach the Jewish people. For this issue the Mishkan editorial board asked him to reflect on his dissertation work 13 years go in light of his present ministry.

improved in the last 20 years, though we still are prone to gloss over difficulties and “put a good face” on our results — which warps research.) The result of that pilgrimage was that I added a dissertation — “The Implications of Rabbinic Thought for Jewish Evangelism by Southern Baptists” — to the resource pool. (Judgment as to its value will have to be made by others, though I hope it is more practical than theoretical.)

The dissertation became a record of my attempt to get a true picture of the arena I was entering. It soon became apparent that the general perceptions of Rabbinic Judaism held by both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians were flawed. Both tended to portray Rabbinic Judaism with the same romanticism shown Catholicism in the 1940's Bing Crosby movies which featured him as a lovable priest.

The vast majority of non-Jewish Christians just assumed that the average synagogue attendee believed exactly what they believed — except that they hadn't discovered that Jesus was the Messiah. Jewish believers often seemed equally naive about what Rabbinic Judaism actually taught. The heart-tug of many was the same as that of the earlier English Puritans. They, too, sought to purify their culture's religion of its waywardness. In these cases, I often found the naive hope that somehow Rabbinic Judaism could be “purified” into a Jewish Christianity. Since Baptists sprang from the Separatists (who gave up on the Church of England) this seemed to me to be the wrong focus. More properly (in my view) was the goal of reintroducing biblically based Jewish traditions back into Christianity.

Faced with the discovery that my 15,000,000 member denomination was almost universally ignorant of this area, I sought to address them, rather than Jewish mission groups or Messianic Synagogues. The dissertation initially deals with the conflicts between Rabbinic Judaism and Southern Baptist theology — which is just about everything except ethics. That's followed by a historic section on the development of rabbinic thought, rabbinic polemics against the initial Jewish Church, and its apologetics in the gentile world. Last, I presented a denominational strategy to re-awaken Southern Baptists to their obligation to seek to reach Jewish people. (We did that in the 30's and 40's before we were told it was anti-Semitic.)

A few years later, I wrote *What to Say When They Say, "I'm Jewish"* in an attempt to help non-Jewish individuals share their faith with Jewish friends.

I continued as a pastor for the first decade of my ministry, leading a international body with a priority on Jewish evangelism. In those years, I came to adopt two views which are minority views at best. I'm more convinced of their validity now, however, than when they first dawned on me.

The first view — generally unpopular with pastors — is that the “church” is made up of two equal entities — the mission task group and the local congregation. Most pastors, at least of my denomination (Southern Baptist), only see the local congregation in the word “church.” They view mission task groups as secondary in authority and subordinate to the local congregation. I'm convinced that the mission task group and local congregation are two sides of the same “church” coin and that where each is weak the other is strong. For example, congregations are weak in evangelizing outside of their own circle of influence, but strong in nurture. Mission task groups are strong in penetration evangelism but weak in nurture. (Admitting there are a few exceptions, the general rule is still that left on their own, congregations don't reach outside their homogeneous

group and mission task groups don't develop mature believers.)

The second view — almost seen as a heresy — is that the homogeneous congregation is a surrender to the natural carnal tendencies in all of us. Like heaven will be, I suspect that the heterogeneous congregation with a proportionate Jewish membership is God's preferred model. Congregations with specific ethnic or cultural identities risk an elitist attitude and at times may even be racist. If this is so, then the Messianic Synagogue — as a congregational model — is best neither for the Jew nor the non-Jew. With Messianic Synagogues, specifically, there is the added risk of teaching Leviticus (which is good) at the expense of avoiding Galatians and Hebrews (which is bad.) Neither is the standard church, oblivious to its roots in sacrificial Judaism, best for either, for that matter. What then, should be sought? Full and practical answers to that question have occupied my second decade of ministry as a missionary.

As I begin a third decade of ministry, I continue to hammer away — within my own small sphere — at the indifference of congregations to their Jewish prospects. Too often, they are quite willing to relinquish that responsibility to Jews for Jesus or some other mission group. They often are equally happy to see those saved become part of a Messianic synagogue so they won't have to make any cultural adjustments. Sadly, many in the Messianic synagogue movement are equally unwilling to face any cultural discomfort. The practical result — conscious or not — is to require the same cultural disrobing of non-Jews that they complain about in what they generally label as the gentile church. Somehow our congregations must become less ethnically distinguishable and more known for their mutual commitment to truth across cultural lines. Each believer must come to have a greater identification with believers of other groups than non-believers of his own. Each must be willing to jettison those cultural distinctives which inhibit evangelism, blur the gospel, or decrease the uniqueness of faith in Yeshua as the only source of salvation. After all, Jesus didn't say “When they see you are a Jewish (or Anglo, or Hispanic) congregation, the lost of that ethnic group will know you are my disciples.” Rather he said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you (all believers across cultural lines) love one another.”

Copyright Fenton Ward, All Rights Reserved

Jews on Mission: An Introduction to the (New) Jewish Universalists

Kai Kjær-Hansen¹⁰⁷

The theme “Jews on Mission” is *not* one about Messianic Jews — or Jesus-believing Jews — and their mission. By “Jews on Mission” this paper refers to Jews who do not believe in Jesus but who very boldly advocate active mission or outreach among gentiles.

These (new) Jewish universalists challenge the Jewish community and undermine a number of prevalent Jewish ideas about Jews and their mission. Even if it is not their intention, Jewish universalists also complicate a number of prevalent arguments against Christian or Messianic Jewish mission — irrespective of whether these arguments are advocated by Jews or Christians.

Consequently study of Jewish universalists is warranted for those involved in Jewish evangelism. I shall allow their spokesmen to express their views in rather long quotations below.

The (New) Jewish Universalists

I bracket *new* in front of “Jewish universalists” because even in our time there have already been tentative beginnings of Jewish outreach among gentiles. Best known is the Reform movement’s then-leader Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who in 1978 called for U.S. Jews to reach out to unchurched gentiles. He repeated his appeal in 1993. Rabbi Stephen Lerner, head of the Center for Conversion to Judaism, and a handful of other Conservative rabbis are also said to have “published articles or founded shortlived organizations expounding the same cause” since the 1950s.¹⁰⁸

In 1982 Rabbi Daniel F. Polish says about Schindler’s call for outreach in 1978, that the violent attacks from Orthodox spokesmen and leaders of the so-called “secular” community made Schindler modify his viewpoints. “Interestingly, as Schindler clarified his statement, it seemed to recede further and further from being a program of active outreach to non-Jews,” Polish maintains. “Rabbi Schindler calls upon rabbis to be less emphatic in discouraging those who express the desire to undertake such conversion, this especially in the case where an ‘unchurched’ person is marrying a Jew.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Kai Kjær-Hansen has his Ph.D. on Studies in the Name of Jesus. He is the author of several books on Jewish evangelism and the Messianic Jewish movement. Presently he serves as International Coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).

¹⁰⁸ *The Jerusalem Report*, Jerusalem, February 20, 1997:30.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel F. Polish, “Contemporary Jewish Attitudes to Mission and Conversion”, in: Martin A. Cohen and Helga Croner (eds.): *Christian Mission - Jewish Mission*, (New York, Stimulus Foundation: 1982), 151.

Jews do not engage in mission

It is often said that Judaism does not engage in mission. To some degree this is true today. For the Jewish universalist, this absence of active Jewish mission exposes an internal Jewish problem. It is quite a different matter for the Jews who are active in the Jewish-Christian dialogue: the fact that Jews do *not* engage in mission can be used in the ongoing dialogue. They hold that the Jewish “virtue” of not engaging in mission among Christians ought to inspire Christians to a parallel “virtue.” The underlying message from Jewish quarters is quite clear: “Keep your hands off us. We lost enough Jews during the Holocaust.” And this plea is supported by Christians who can be heard to say this, for example: Jewish evangelism is “die Endlösung der Judenfrage mit anderen Mitteln” - the final solution to the Jewish question by other means.¹¹⁰

The basic attitude to Christian mission in the leading dialogue between Jews and Christians was well-expressed in the magazine *Christians and Israel* in connection with the reactions to the resolution which the Southern Baptist Convention passed in the summer of 1996. Here it is said: “The above-cited Baptist resolution is clearly not in the spirit of our time: the spirit of interfaith respect, cooperation and dialogue.”

And it goes on to say: “implicitly or explicitly, it has been recognized in enlightened Christian circles that dialogue and evangelization cannot peacefully coexist.”¹¹¹

Reactions to the Southern Baptists were prompt, even if their resolution did not really contain anything new. It is my guess that dialogue theologians — Jewish as well as Christian — will meet the Jewish universalists with deafening silence. What the Jewish universalists say is certainly not “in the spirit of our time.” as this has been defined by dialogue theologians. But it is in the spirit of people of genuine conviction and faith who want to share with other people what good they themselves have received. For that reason the Jewish universalists and their mission must be welcomed. At long last there are Jews who dare leave their defensive attitude and who proudly and fearlessly dare say that since Jews find Judaism so attractive a religion, it must also be attractive for non-Jews, as all people are created in God’s image.

The Jewish universalists are people of determination, people who do not lay down their arms before the battle and ask for mercy, people who do not lie down and allow others to walk over them, people who want to fight for their cause. In short: When it comes to missionary zeal, Jewish universalists are equal to advocates of Christian/Messianic Jewish mission. The time is past when Jews would accept the role of the underdog.

In this connection the following quotation of a Jewish universalist is worth noting:

The cultic and Christian efforts prompted a defensive response against the conversionary overtures in the Jewish community. The increase in acceptance of conversion can in this sense in part be seen as an ironic acceptance of the aim (but not the tactics) of those whom they saw as posing a religious

¹¹⁰ Heinz Kremers, *Judenmission heute? Von der Judenmission zur brüderlichen Solidarität und zum ökumenischen Dialog*, Neunkirschen-Vluyn, Neukirschener Verlag: 1979), 31. Cf also my paper: “Jewish Evangelism in Post-Holocaust Europe”, *Eleventh North American LCJE Meeting, New York 11-13 April, 1994*.

¹¹¹ *Christian and Israel - A Quarterly Publication From Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, Vol. V. No.4, Autumn 1996:1.

threat; welcoming converts became a way of fighting religious fire with religious fire.¹¹²

Harold M. Schulweis' outreach

It is refreshing to hear about Jews who go in for active mission among “unchurched” people, which in the USA also include nominal Christians. Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, Los Angeles, is a man in whom the media recently have taken a great interest. In Vince Beiser’s words: “one of the most prominent and charismatic Conservative rabbis in America has launched an effort to get Jews to stop concentrating on intermarried couples, and instead start showcasing Judaism to *all* gentiles looking for a new religious path.”¹¹³ In the same magazine Schulweis is quoted for the following in November 1996:

I want to make clear ... that my approach is not opportunistic. I do not see converts as replacements for Jews lost to the Holocaust or to assimilation. These people are on a spiritual quest. They are not, as a rule, motivated by a wish to marry a specific Jewish spouse. They are attracted to a tradition that encourages question-asking, that does not burden people with inherited culpability (in the guise of the doctrine of Original Sin), and that values deeds and words, not just blind faith.¹¹⁴

I must admit that I do not fully recognize myself as a Christian in Schulweis’ description. I too value question-asking, deeds and words and, admittedly, I am convinced of the truth of the doctrine of original sin; I think that I see original sin manifest itself far too often in my own life and sometimes also in the lives of others! But let us leave that alone.

In his essay “Open the Doors” in *The Jerusalem Report* Schulweis writes, “Many of the unchurched or disillusioned are seeking everywhere for alternative paths to spirituality — in ashrams, mosques, cults — everywhere but Judaism.”¹¹⁵

These are the kind of people to whom Schulweis wants to offer Judaism. For all men are created in God’s image. Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad hasidism in the 18th century, contends that the souls of gentiles “emanate from unclean husks that contain no good whatever.” Schulweis in his essay terms these “xenophobic thoughts,” and also contends that these thoughts are expressed by Yehuda Halevi, the Maharal and the Zohar. Schulweis goes strongly against Orthodox rabbi and philosopher Michael Wyschograd, who in the book “The Body of Faith” (1993) argues that Judaism is a “carnal election.” According to Schulweis, Wyschograd argues that God chose to elect a biological people, that remains elect even when it sins. Jews, in short, are corporally chosen. About this Schulweis says in his essay:

That these voices are accepted as the prevailing judgment of Judaism means, in my view, that we must not only actively seek out those who would convert, but also educate native-born Jews so that they have a truer understanding of what Judaism advocates.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Lawrence J. Epstein, *The Theory and Practice of Welcoming Converts to Judaism: Jewish Universalism*; Book 2 on Epstein’s Home Page on the World Wide Web <<http://members.tripod.com/~epst>>. 16 February, 1997, I was visitor no. 5,963.

¹¹³ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:30.

¹¹⁴ *The Jerusalem Report*, November 14, 1996:4.

¹¹⁵ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997: 32-34. Quote from p. 32.

¹¹⁶ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997: 32-34. Quote from p. 33.

Schulweis does not think that outreach to unchurched people compromises inreach to Jews. “Outreach has taken nothing from inreach,” he says with a reference to his own congregation which has a *keruv* (outreach) commission. That Judaism for a long period of time has not missionized is not due to a Jewish prohibition. The first convert to Judaism was Abraham. Jewish history includes many proselytes. Christianity, not Judaism, forbade Judaism to missionize. But, says Schulweis:

We are not living in the fourth century under Roman sovereignty. We need a new vocabulary and a new self-understanding of Jewish purpose and a renewal of our witness to those who seek. Ours is a unique faith that rejects the notion that there is only one way to God, one truth and one way to salvation. No rabbinic sage would declare as did the church father Cyprian “extra ecclesium nula salus” [extra ecclesiam nulla salus!] - outside of the Church no one is saved. In Judaism there is nothing to be saved, and no supernatural original sin to be supernaturally atoned for. In Judaism, you don’t have to be Jewish to love God or to be loved by God. Precisely for that reason, Judaism is attractive to non-Jews.

Schulweis ends his essay on a cautionary note: “Whatever message the Jewish community gives to unchurched potential converts must be forthright ... I do not encourage them to become Jewish for ulterior motives — to please the Jewish partner or appease the Jewish partner.” And he ends:

I address them as men and women created in the God’s image who have something of great importance to gain in identifying with His Jewish people and with Judaism, and who have much to contribute to the quality of Jewish life. The end of *keruv* is not to be dissolved or absorbed but to be enriched. We need a new vocabulary and a new way to speak to the stranger in our midst. The language must be persuasive, and must be informed by love of God, Judaism and humanity.¹¹⁷

Lawrence J. Epstein’s Jewish Universalism

Before we consider some reactions to Schulweis’ outreach program and draw some conclusions, we shall devote our attention to the group around Lawrence Epstein and the Jewish universalists, as they call themselves. I have visited Epstein’s home page on the internet.¹¹⁸ Although it is first of all probably aimed at cases of intermarriage, Epstein is all on Schulweis’ side. In the interview in *The Jerusalem Report* he says:

There are an increasing number of gentiles who are not romantically attached to a Jewish partner but who are in search of meaning in their lives and find Judaism appealing ... Schulweis’ efforts deserve to be applauded and, most of all, emulated.¹¹⁹

Some quotations from Epstein’s Home Page can give us an idea of what the (new) Jewish universalists stand for. Epstein writes in the beginning of Book 1:¹²⁰

Jewish universalism is a term I suggest be used to designate a religious interpretation of Judaism in

¹¹⁷ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997; the last quotations from pp. 33-34.

¹¹⁸ “Conversion to Judaism”; Epstein’s Home Page on the World Wide Web; see note 5 above.

¹¹⁹ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:35.

¹²⁰ Cf. note 5 above. Part I: “The Theory of Jewish Universalism”; Part II: “The History of Jewish Universalism”; Part III: Under Construction.

which welcoming converts is seen as central to the Jewish enterprise in history. The theory of Jewish universalism I propose and will describe holds that God created the entire universe as a single entity, that all people were created for a common moral purpose, and that God chose the Jews to convey a moral message to all humanity so that redemption available to all people through God might occur. Part of the moral message delivered by the Jews was that Judaism, though not religiously required, was available to all people and that Jewish people has the religious obligation, as embedded in their covenantal agreement with God, to offer Judaism to the world and welcome converts.

And from the introduction of Book 2:

From the point of view of Jewish universalism, an analysis of the willingness and ability of the Jews to perform their divinely-mandated conversionary mission forms the basis of understanding the meaning of Jewish history.

The strong words “divinely-mandated conversionary mission” cannot but sharpen our interest. Allow me to bring to the fore some features from section I. “Mission” in Book 1:

The idea of religious mission is that the entire Jewish people, divinely chosen, having freely accepted an agreement with God that included missionary obligations, has the spiritual vocation to bear witness to Judaism, to bring God’s universal moral message to all humanity by offering their faith, and to welcome converts who accept the particularities of the moral message.

They take exception to missionary work which includes “force, threats of force, and bribery as well as a variety of insistent, intrusive, deceitful, or unwanted attempts at persuasion.” One has to guess whom (in Jewish evangelism) they have in mind when they say: “Some contemporary examples of such intrusive efforts include accosting strangers in public, going house-to-house to seek converts, or demeaning the religious legitimacy of other faiths.” It is said that the “Jewish concept is opposed to any coercive, deceptive, or intrusive conversionary methods” (cf. my comments below).

Passive and active witnessing

For the Jewish universalist it is a sign of “a morality of powerlessness,” to engage solely in passive witnessing:

Jewish universalists draw a distinction between the belief that at the end of time non-Jews will come to God and so it is not necessary to do anything now (passive witnessing), and having such a belief coupled with a continuing belief in the covenantal obligation to act now to offer Judaism to non-Jews rather than just wait (active witnessing).

The passive witnessing is due to historical circumstances of persecution. But now delay is no longer morally tenable. “Jewish universalists agree that historical conditions today allow for an active mission,” after which it is said:

Jewish universalism does not dismiss passive witnessing; indeed, it embraces all witnessing, claiming only that passive witnessing is, by itself, insufficient. Jews must surely wait, hope, and pray for the coming of the messiah, but such passivity makes for an insufficient Jewish present. Waiting ignores the necessary tasks to be completed now, so that a messianic redemption could complete, rather than replace, human efforts.

Offering Judaism

The signals in this section are also refreshingly clear:

There is a crucial difference between ‘offering’ Judaism and explaining it. In the case of explaining, Jews wished pagans and other non-Jews to remain as they were, but simply to have a fuller understanding of the Jewish way of life. In ‘offering,’ a Jew wished to provide Judaism as an alternative. Sometimes the distinction was hard to make because ‘offering’ began with ‘explaining,’ but ‘offering’ clearly is the correct word, because the Jewish motive was to make the non-Jew know that Judaism was available as a religious alternative.

This “offering” of Judaism is seen as a consequence of the prophetic vision of mission. It can even be contended: “Welcoming converts provides a touchstone to judge how effectively Jews are performing their mission.” And: “The faith God offered to the Jews contains a universal moral message. God offered the same Torah given to the Jews to other nations, all of which refused. God didn’t prepare a separate Torah for the Jews.” A number of biblical persons are then brought to the fore: Abraham (“a Jew by belief not birth”), Moses (“seen as a model of a Jewish missionary”), Ruth (“probably the most famous convert in the Bible”), the prophet Jeremiah (“a prophet to the nations”).

“Offering” and activities

The following activities (from the Greco-Roman period) are stressed: (1) relying on God; (2) creating missionary literature; (3) using the synagogue; (4) personally approaching potential converts; (5) assimilating non-Jews who lived among the Jewish people; and (6) marriage.¹²¹

Point (4) is explained this way in Book 2:

There is mixed evidence about whether or not there were ever any organized Jewish “missionaries.” In general, however, Judaism did not have a need to create a specific missionary occupation in the way it is commonly understood because, as the occupation warranted, all individual Jews would spread the religion.

Is conversion to Judaism required or desirable?

It is argued that it is not required for gentiles to become Jewish to achieve salvation, or to be considered righteous. But the question is posed: “Is it sufficient to convert the world to morality rather than, specifically, to Judaism?” The answer is also clear:

The answer, of course, is that it may be sufficient and desirable, but it is not ideal. The crucial

¹²¹ The activities mentioned are also highlighted by Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles. Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). He finds that the contemporary Jewish “positive attitude toward, and acceptance of, proselytes is to be methodically distinguished from aggressive missionary activity among the Gentiles”, p.48. Peder Borgen argues that McKnight ought to draw more attention to the extrovert and active efforts which Jews would sometimes engage in, among these: force, coercion and violence; cf. Peder Borgen, “Militant proselytisme og misjon” [Militant Proselytism and Mission] in: R. Hvalvik and H. Kvalbein (eds.), *Ad Acta: Studier til Apostlenes gjerninger og urkristendommens historie*, (Oslo, 1994), 9-26. Nevertheless, Borgen finds (p.10) that McKnight modifies his main thesis in his conclusion where he says, “Although there is some evidence for conversion through literature and missionaries, the predominant means of conversion appear to have been the life of individual Jewish citizens,” p.117.

missionary questions are: how can Jews help make righteous people out of non-righteous, more righteous people out of the minimally righteous, and the most righteous possible out of the more righteous? To make the world as righteous as it can be is to make it as Jewish as possible, for Jewish adherence to Judaism implies that Jews believe that their religion expresses the most central and complete religious truth and the most thorough and accurate moral guidelines, and that other faiths are only partially true and morally complete.

Welcoming converts

The few negative remarks in the Talmud against welcoming gentiles must mostly be attributed to historical circumstances. The Talmud and other Jewish religious texts, it is contended, “supported what Jews actually did: they gave gentiles the opportunity to embrace Judaism.” The section “Mission” ends with the following:

The specific inclusion of welcoming converts as a central focus of the missionary task is important because such an inclusion gives Jews a means to evaluate their success in carrying out their mission. While a mission is a general statement about Judaism’s corporate intentions, it is necessary to list goals. Goals are the specific means by which the mission is to be achieved. Offering Judaism and welcoming converts are the goals of the Jewish mission. Therefore, measuring the number of converts is one central way of seeing whether the missionary objective has been met. Without a specific measure, it would be impossible for Jews to determine if, in fact, they were succeeding with their mission. Activity is sometimes confused with achievement. Without a measurable means of evaluation, the mission itself becomes hopelessly abstract, unable to define itself, unable, most importantly to engage in the self-evaluation necessary to determine if the covenantal obligations are being met. Measuring the number of converts, that is, allows Jews to determine if they have been following their Divine mandate.

Of course, there are other aspects besides the quantity of converts that determine the mission’s success. The quality of converts is, for instance, vitally important. Additionally, the efforts to offer Judaism should be assessed in ways supplementary to the accounting of converts. Still, the number of people who actually convert is a crucial criterion in determining the mission’s success.

I must say that Lawrence J. Epstein presents his case well, indeed so well that I can only recommend others to visit his “Conversion to Judaism” home page on the World Wide Web <<http://members.tripod.com/~epst>>.

Reactions

I have not yet seen any reactions or comments to Schulweis’ views from Christians. There have been quite a few from the Jewish community, many of them negative. The most negative have come from the Orthodox Movement — not surprising since they unanimously advocate passive witnessing. It is interesting in itself to follow the internal Jewish discussion on the mission of Judaism. I think we can learn something! Jews who are against Christian/Messianic Jewish mission should also be able to learn something or draw some conclusions from this. It is this last thing which interests me most here.

I do not imagine that all Jewry as if with a snap of the fingers will change its views on mission, i.e. mission which Judaism engages in, with the result that it will again become actively

missionizing, as it was earlier, e.g. in the Greco-Roman period.¹²² What Schulweis' and Epstein's (new) Jewish universalists stand for is at this time a minority view in the Jewish world.¹²³ I do not know if Schulweis and Epstein have expressed any *principles* concerning Christian/Messianic Jewish mission. I do not know if they are willing to grant us the same right to engage in mission among Jews, as they are perfectly entitled to among unchurched people. But it is the only logical consequence of their view. It is not least for this reason that their views are relevant for us who are involved in Jewish evangelism. And for the same reason their views become a dangerous threat for the majority of Jewry, who have objected to Christian/Messianic Jewish mission among Jews.

Let me show you a few examples of how Schulweis and Epstein advocate views which, in my opinion, undermine the criticism levelled against Christian/Messianic Jewish mission.

1) David Rosen, an Orthodox rabbi and the Anti-Defamation League's co-liaison with the Vatican, has realized the danger of Schulweis' viewpoint. He says that "Jews have insisted that it's 'presumptuous and insulting' to tell people their current religion is inadequate." And then notice the following:

Relations with Christian groups, especially the Catholic Church, are founded on the commitment that they won't proselytize to us, says Rosen. If a Jewish campaign to convert non-Jews gained momentum — which Rosen considers unlikely — and if it pulled in not only the unchurched but affiliated Christians, Jews in Eastern Europe or parts of Latin America might face 'a great deal of discomfort. Their argument against proselytizing in their midst would be much weaker.'¹²⁴

What is David Rosen actually saying? Something like this: Schulweis, can't you see that you are undermining all that we Jews have achieved in the Jewish-Christian dialogue? We have struck a good bargain: we have promised each other not to missionize to each other. But now you come along saying that we Jews want to engage in mission. Can't you see that we stand to lose one of our best arguments against Christian mission to our people?

I must refrain from going further into this subject. My point is that if Schulweis' and the Jewish universalists' views prevail, they will not be applauded by Christian dialogue theologians. For their views involve a blunt renunciation of the principal ideas of the dialogue theology of the last decades. If the Jewish universalists are right, it will be the end of dialogue theology as such.

2) As already mentioned, Schulweis' outreach aims at *all* gentiles looking for a new religious path, not just for gentiles in cases of intermarriage. By taking this stance he clearly distances himself from people in own ranks in the Conservative Movement. For example Ismar Schorsch, the Chancellor of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary and "one of the most prominent leaders of Conservative Judaism," finds Schulweis' message "offensive." "The superiority of Judaism lies in the fact that it doesn't try to sell itself," says Schorsch. But reporter Vince Beiser observes shrewdly in his interview: "But in case of intermarriage, the Conservative movement's

¹²² Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmud*, (New York, KTAV, 1968) is still a principal work. Cf. Scott McKnight's book in note 13 above.

¹²³ I have not been in a position to check possible differences of emphasis between Schulweis and Epstein but I note that Epstein backs up Schulweis' outreach; cf. *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:35.

¹²⁴ *The Jerusalem Report*. February 20, 1997:35.

position is that the non-Jewish partner should be encouraged to convert.” The question is, in other words, if Schorsch does not hereby reveal an inconsistency. Ismar Schorsch replies:

There we are concerned about unity in the household, about making sure that the children will grow up Jewish ... So there the outreach is an effort to retain the Jewish partner and the child of that intermarriage. It’s not meant to go after people who aren’t in our orbit. Interfaith partners have come into our orbit.”¹²⁵

This statement is interesting. “Interfaith partners have come into the Jewish orbit,” Schorsch says. True enough. That is the way matters stand in a Jewish perspective. But it is equally true — of course — that Jewish partners have come into the Christian orbit. This is the way matters stand, seen in a Christian perspective. Therefore if it is legitimate from a Conservative Jewish position that the non-Jewish partner should be encouraged to convert, then it must also be legitimate from a Christian/Messianic Jewish position to endeavor to prompt the Jewish partner to become a Jesus-believer. You cannot have your cake and eat it too.

That the Conservative movement through their outreach wins a gentile partner in an intermarriage over to Judaism is not something which fills me with delight, but I recognize their right to do it and I do not question their intentions or motives. When Jews through Jewish evangelism are won to faith in Jesus, there is also no joy among Jews because of that, but they ought to recognize our right to evangelize. Generally speaking, this is not what happens, on the contrary they cast doubt on our methods. If Ismar Schorsch is unwilling to draw the conclusion — and he certainly does not do it in the above-mentioned interview — I will do it: If one recommends outreach to gentile partners, one should also grant others the right to outreach to Jewish partners, i.e. grant Christians/Messianic Jews the right to outreach at least in cases of intermarriage. But further, if one has accepted outreach in cases of intermarriages, the logical conclusion is a general acceptance of outreach.

Perhaps we who are involved in Jewish evangelism have been inattentive. Somehow the Jewish party in this controversy has succeeded in presenting the matter in such a way that it seems to be all right with outreach to non-Jewish partners in cases of intermarriage, but wrong with a Christian/Messianic Jewish outreach to Jews — even in cases of intermarriage.

This leads me to some considerations concerning the number of persons won for Judaism and Christianity/Messianic Judaism respectively.

3) According to Epstein there are now 200,000 Jews by Choice in the USA. In “An open letter to Jews by Choice” on his Home Page the introduction says:

“Dear Friends,

We who were born Jewish need you. There are about 200,000 of you out there. One of every 37 American Jews is a Jew by Choice rather than a Jew by birth.”

According to *The Jerusalem Report* (20.02.1997:30) this number is increased by 5000 per year in the USA. And: “by some estimates, converts will comprise nearly 10 percent of the U.S. Jewish population by the year 2010.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *The Jerusalem Report*. February 20, 1997:34.

¹²⁶ *The Jerusalem Report*. February 20, 1997: 30.

I do not know how many Jews become “Christian” in the USA every year but I doubt that the number is 5000. However, I have no reliable data about this.

In the case of Israel I am not quite up-to-date either, but nevertheless on firmer ground. “In 1992, 740 people managed to convert to Judaism in Israel; in 1991, 593 people,” writes Yossi Klein Halevi in 1993.¹²⁷ I must admit that I cannot by any stretch of imagination think that the same number of Jews in Israel came to believe in Jesus in those same years.

If the numbers given by Jewish universalists are reliable in the case of the USA, it is certainly relevant to ask who “lost” most? I cannot substantiate my answer but it would seem that Jewish mission to non-Jews can present greater numbers than Jewish evangelism. In any case the information from the Jewish universalists about the number of converts questions the truth of the myth that Judaism will lose an enormous number of Jews due to Christian/Messianic Jewish mission. When that is said, it is presumably a fact that both parties lose most, not to mission by the other party, but to secularization.

4) One of Schulweis’ supporters is Reform Rabbi James Rudin, who on several occasions has spoken out against LCJE.¹²⁸ This is how *The Jerusalem Report* describes his reaction to Schulweis’ outreach program:

As long as he sticks to encouraging the curious, without stepping over the line into aggressive proselytizing, Reform Rabbi James Rudin, interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, is all for it. “I predict in 10 years we’ll be wondering why we didn’t start this a long time ago.”¹²⁹

Rudin’s statement is also interesting. He is trying to maintain a balance, unsuccessfully, as I see it, because he uses ambiguous terms. Certainly “encouraging the curious” as well as “aggressive proselytizing” are very subjective concepts. What some people see as “encouraging the curious” is for others active stimulating of seekers, and what some call “aggressive proselytizing” is for others the most natural thing of all: namely, face to face with a fellow human being who like oneself is created in the image of God, to ask that person if he or she has considered that Judaism or Jesus could be the answer to their lives.

The important thing is: if Rudin acknowledges these words, then it conveys his acceptance in principle of Jewish mission. The consequence of this acceptance in principle of mission to non-Jews must be acceptance of Christian/Messianic Jewish mission among Jews. When that is noted, we can go on to discuss methods since both parties — Jewish universalists and Christians/Messianic Jews — recognize that there are methods which should not be used.

This important question is, however, one I shall have to leave here. But having looked at Epstein’s Home Page I have a feeling that it will be rather easy to demonstrate that such differences as there might be between his methods and the ones we in Jewish evangelism generally use are not differences in nature but rather differences in degree. There is, however, one thing that I must say.

As mentioned above, Epstein contends that the Jewish concept of mission “is opposed to any

¹²⁷ *The Jerusalem Report*, May 20, 1993:11.

¹²⁸ Cf. e.g. my article “So Far Judaism Is the Victor”, *LCJE Bulletin*, no. 32, May 1993:2.

¹²⁹ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:32+35.

coercive, deceptive, or intrusive conversionary methods.” Being a Christian I can say some similar things about Christian/Messianic Jewish mission, but with a few additions on the question of having an *intrusive* attitude. This is a very elastic and subjective thing. And it is questionable whether the Israelite prophets who are mentioned in support of modern Jewish mission were not more *intrusive* than even the most “aggressive” Christian/Messianic Jewish witnesses are today. And: We Christians are the first to admit — and to dissociate ourselves from — the fact that down through history the church has forcibly Christianized Jews. But history can also produce examples of Jewish people who, when they had the political power to do so, forcibly Judaized other people.¹³⁰ As Denmark’s former Chief Rabbi Bent Melchior said in a farewell interview in the Jewish community’s magazine: “in its origin Judaism was missionizing, something from which we have not always acquitted ourselves so well.”¹³¹ I wish that the Jewish universalists had themselves have expressed such a self-evaluation.

Summing up

Harold Schulweis, Lawrence J. Epstein and other (new) Jewish universalists are convinced that they are under a divine obligation. They believe that Judaism is relevant for *all* people, and they actively struggle to present their views — even if they do *not* believe that Judaism is the only way to salvation for all people.

We also have what we consider a divine obligation. We believe that the message about Jesus is relevant for *all* people and we will continue to present this view.

When Jews who do *not* believe that Judaism is the only way to salvation for everybody nevertheless feel called upon to engage in mission to non-Jews, how much more must not we who believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation feel called upon to share the riches of the gospel — with everybody, Jews as well as non-Jews!

Everyone should be able to understand this conclusion — even if they cannot rejoice in Jewish evangelism.

Copyright Kai Kjær-Hansen, All Rights Reserved

¹³⁰ Peder Borgen (cf. note 13 above) draws attention to a number of instances from Josephus’ writings of use of force and violence in connection with forcible Judaization, e.g. *Antiquitates* 13.257-258; 13.318-319; 14.75-76, 88; 15.253-254.

¹³¹ *Jædisk Orientering*, Copenhagen, June/July 1996:7.

The Earth is the Lord's: Land, Theology, and the Bible

Naim Ateek¹³²

Undoubtedly, the most crucial aspect in the political conflict over Palestine is that of the land. This is the bottom line of the conflict. The whole peace process is very much dependent on the land question. To whom does the land belong? Does it belong to the Jewish people or to the Palestinians? How can their claims be reconciled? Is peace possible between them? As people of faith the answer to these questions and many others depends on one's theology of land.

At its inception the Zionist movement was not religious. Most of the Zionist fathers were not interested in religion. In fact, religious Jews at the time were anti-Zionist. Subsequently and due to a number of historical and political factors most of them were won over to Zionism. Since 1967, there has been a shift in Zionism from secular to more religious. Today the strongest and most ardent Zionists are religious. For many Zionists today, the religious argument for Zionism has become the most convincing. It uses religious language and bases itself on the biblical promises regarding the land. A theology of land has become mandatory as a result. On it depends the future of peace in the region. This is especially true when one considers that Jewish religious parties are a strong component of the present Israeli government.

The Centrality of Christ

Although many Christians might differ in their understanding of revelation and inspiration, they believe that the Holy Spirit was active in guiding the writers as they recorded the story of salvation which God accomplished in Jesus Christ. In other words, there is a crescendo in the biblical books that reaches its climax in the coming of Christ. From this perspective, the biblical material is not viewed in a horizontal way as having the same authority and the same theological or spiritual value. What God has done in Christ for the redemption of the world is more authoritative and has greater value for the believer.

The heart of the Bible is, therefore, Jesus Christ. From a Christian perspective Christ stands at the center of history. History is the story of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ to bring justice, healing, peace, salvation and liberation to all. Apart from Christ, this world is an enigma. Christians can understand the meaning of history when they view it through what God has purposed for it in Christ. The Old Testament is very much a part of that background. However, it cannot stand on its own nor can it be understood apart from the New Testament. It cannot be fully comprehended apart from its completion and fulfillment in Christ. In fact, without the New Testament, many parts of the Old Testament are, in today's language, Zionist and racist. Without

¹³² Naim Ateek is the director of Sabeel, Liberation Theology Center and author of the book *Justice, and only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*.

Christ, the Old Testament is not only incomplete, it can be, in some of its parts, a very dangerous document that calls for ethnic cleansing and can produce fanatical actions by fanatical people. We value the Old Testament because of Christ. On its own, it is not sufficient for salvation.

For me as a Christian, Christ is the heart of the Bible and he is its hermeneutic. He is the criterion for its interpretation and understanding. As a Christian I cannot begin my study of the Bible from Genesis. I must begin with what God in Christ has done and then move into the Old Testament in order to understand the background of the faith. As I do this, I find that the outcome was not precisely what some of the Old Testament writers envisage. What God did for the world in Christ far exceeded the best that the prophets predicted and anticipated. The best illustration is the resurrection of Christ. It is possible to discover certain hints of the resurrection here and there in the Old Testament as the early church did, but the event itself far exceeded anything that they had imagined. It was God's great surprise.

In other words, in order to understand any issue in the Bible, I have to understand it in light of its fulfillment in Christ. For example, if I want to study the topic of chosenness or election, my point of departure is Christ and the New Testament. What the New Testament teaches about election becomes authoritative for me, because in Christ, I have received the full picture. What was said of election before Christ might be interesting for study but if it differs from its point of completion in Christ, it cannot be authoritative for me. I will adopt and embrace the New Testament version because it is the completed and fulfilled version. From this foundational understanding of the centrality of Christ, let me go on to reflect on the issue of the land.

A Theology of the Land

It is clear to me from the Synoptic Gospels that Christ was interested in the issue of the Kingdom of God and not the land. In fact it is interesting to point out that in the Old Testament the word or words designating the land appear more than 1600 times while in the New Testament less than 50 times. At the same time, the expressions "the kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of heaven" are frequently on the lips of Jesus and are recorded more than 100 times in the Synoptics. The concept of the kingdom in the New Testament is the counterpart to the concept of the land in the Old Testament with one major difference — a consistent stress on the inclusive nature of God's kingdom. It does not differentiate between gender, race, or ethnicity. It is for all the world and all peoples. Jesus practiced what he preached in his attitude to Jews, Romans, Greeks, Canaanites and Phoenicians as well as to men and women. The New Testament has abundant illustrations to attest to this (Matt. 8:5-13; 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 17:11-19; John 4:4-42).

Jesus did not appear to be interested in the issue of the land. In fact he always tried to stretch his disciples' understanding away from a narrow understanding of God and the land. He always tried to shatter any narrow nationalism which they exhibited (Matt.15:21-28; Luke 9:51-56; 24:13-27; Acts 1:6-8). The whole spirit of the ministry of Christ in the Gospels puts us on a different ground from that of the Old Testament. Ethnocentricity is opposed, ethnic arrogance is challenged, and any superior feeling is discouraged and shattered (Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19; Matt. 20:1-16).

According to Luke 24:13-33, even after the resurrection, when the two disciples on the road

to Emmaus said to him that they “had hoped that he [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel,” Jesus started to help them understand the Scriptures: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (24:27). Jesus Christ is the clue and the focus, not Israel. In him the redemption of Israel as well as other people has been accomplished.

In the Gospel of John, *all* those who believe in Jesus Christ have become children of God, “who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). It is no more the law which Moses gave to the children of Israel, but rather God’s grace given through Christ to all the world. “God so loved the world ...” (John 3:16) — not only the children of Israel nor *Eretz Israel*. Theologically neither Jerusalem nor Gerizim are any longer important. “God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

At every point and turn, the focus now is not on one land (the land of Israel) or one people (the Jewish people) but on what God will do or, indeed, is doing for the whole world and for all the people of the world in Christ. The land of Palestine is only the launching pad for God’s activity in and for the world. That is why in the early church, the land of Palestine was not perceived as theologically important (Walker. *Holy City, Holy Places?* Clarendon, 1990).

The focus was on Christ and the importance of preaching the Gospel to the world. It was only after the fourth century that the land began to be perceived as holy and Christian pilgrimages to the land ensued. Indeed, for the early church, the destruction of the temple was an indication of the disappearance of the old order, the old covenant and the dawning of the new. For the early Christians it reflected the displeasure of God with those Jews who did not accept the Messiahship of Jesus. Christ has replaced the temple and the believers in Christ have become themselves temples of the Holy Spirit of God (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 6:19; 3:16). Faith in Christ has shattered the importance of any geography and can no longer be limited to one locale.

This same basic theology is present in almost every one of the New Testament writings. God’s purposes for the world have been revealed in Christ and they are inclusive of all people. Any narrow understanding of God or the land is shunned. One of the most telling examples is Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7. Stephen drove home the fact that the temple did not represent the original plan of God. God had given instructions for the tabernacle which was not bound to any one geographic location and symbolized the universal presence of God (7:44). Solomon was permitted later to build the temple, but when it was dedicated, God made it clear that he would not be limited to it (7:48-50). God never limited himself to one land. No one land as such was holy. It is not the land nor the temple, it is Christ.

The New Testament then reinterprets the promises of the land in light of Christ. So Paul in Romans 4:13 says something very revolutionary, “For the promise that he (Abraham) would inherit the world (cosmos) did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” No where in the Old Testament was such a promise specifically given to Abraham. Paul understands the promise in light of the coming of Christ. Christ is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) and in his coming he brought salvation and redemption for the whole world. In light of their universal fulfillment in Christ, the narrow Old Testament promises regarding the land take on a very transitory and provisional meaning. They

are time-bound and in view of their completion in Christ become theologically obsolete.

The New Testament does not only reinterpret the Old Testament, it de-zionizes it. One can illustrate this by comparing, for example, what Jesus said in John 1:51 and its corollary in Genesis 28:12-14. In the latter passage, we read, “And he (Jacob) dreamed that there was a ladder set upon the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring ...” In John Jesus says to Nathaniel, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” Jacob’s ladder was set on the earth. The land was seen as important and the promise to inherit the land was reiterated to Jacob. In John it is no more the land that is important. It is replaced by Jesus the Christ. The angels in John are ascending and descending not on the land but on the Son of Man. I believe this represents a definite attempt at de-zionizing the faith. It is no more Israel or the land. It is Jesus Christ.

There is plenty of Zionist material in the Old Testament where the land is exclusively claimed and the Jewish people are glorified and set above others, and where non-Jews are despised. The New Testament shatters this exclusivity at every turn. One of the classic examples is found in Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth according to Luke chapter 4:16-30. Jesus read from Isaiah 61. I believe he intentionally stopped where he did to omit all the Zionist material against other nations, namely, “vengeance of our God” (vs. 2b), “strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; but you shall be called priests of the Lord ... you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory (vss. 5-6). That kind of racism has no place in the kingdom of God. Jesus’ reference to the widow of Sidon and to Naaman the Syrian expressed clearly where God stood in his concern and love for all lands and people.

It is in light of this theology that centers around Christ that we can then evaluate the Old Testament concept of land. It moves from a generally exclusive theology in the Pentateuch to a more inclusive one after the exile. Yet within the exclusive material it is possible to find some gems breaking through and reflecting a more inclusive view. For example, Leviticus 25:23 is one of them, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.” Psalm 24:1 is another, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it”

It is only after the exile that one begins to see a gradual shift for a more inclusive understanding of God and the land. The experience of exile must have stretched the people’s understanding of God. One of the most exciting books in the Old Testament that reflects this inclusive theology is the book of Jonah. The story must have been written by a Jewish liberation theologian who was rebelling against the traditional view of God and the land. It is clear in the book that God’s care is shown to people other than Jews, even to the most hated enemy, the Assyrians, and to a land other than the land of Israel.

In this movement towards inclusivity, Ezekiel 47:21-23 reflects a new realism where the land belongs to both the returning Israelites from exile as well as the people who were already living in the land. Although the vocabulary used is discriminatory by calling the people of the land “aliens,” its theology is far more advanced than the language which is found in some parts of the

Torah where the people of the land must be totally exterminated (Num. 21:1-3, 31-35; 33:51-52; Deut. 7:1-2, 22-24). Undoubtedly, the experience of exile forced them to understand God more universally and become much more open to other people. Yet within the writings of these post-exilic prophets, one can still find a good amount of material which reflects a very exclusive theology of land. However, the shift to a more inclusive theology had started. It is picked up again in the New Testament and finds its truest and clearest expressions in Christ and his inclusive concept of the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

What are the implications of an inclusive theology of land for peace? Simply put, it is this: The land of Palestine/Israel is part of God's world. It belongs to God. God is its creator and owner as God is the maker and owner of the whole world. Today, God has placed on it both Palestinians and Jews. They must share it under God and become good stewards of it. It does not belong to either of them exclusively. They must share it equitably and live as good neighbors with one another. Both nations must do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Once the demands of justice have been satisfied, a good measure of peace will be achieved and security will be enjoyed by all throughout the land. "For the effect of justice will be peace, and the result of righteousness, security and trust forever" (Isa 32:17).

Copyright Naim Ateek, All Rights Reserved

Letter to *Mishkan*:

The Jews, the Land, and the Redemption of the World: A Response to Issue 26

As long as we see the idea of “Zion” only
as one of the nationalistic ideas,
we do not know its real significance.

Martin Buber

Having the vantage point of reading the last issue (26) of *Mishkan* which dealt with the Land, it was clear that perhaps one of the most important angles to the subject was not touched upon. While it seems that most, if not all, the authors agree that the Jewish people do have a future, it was not at all clear for what purpose they have a future. This lack of clarity is most evident in Chapman’s article. On the one hand Chapman believes “that the fulfillment of all that was promised to Abraham and his descendants is found in the Kingdom of God which came in Jesus.”¹³³ On the other hand he agrees with Paul and “looks forward to a more glorious future for the Jewish people.”¹³⁴ However, if all the promises were already fulfilled, what is the purpose for the existence of the Jewish people? Furthermore, how are the Jewish people to be preserved for this “glorious future” as a unique and recognizable group of people?

It seems to me that it is not enough to say that God promised the Land to Abraham and his descendants and therefore it is theirs as Gerloff, Urbach and Miller assert.¹³⁵ We should be able to provide some kind of an explanation as to why there is a need for the existence of the Jewish people, an explanation that will go beyond ethnocentricity and a struggle over territory.

What then, is the purpose of the Jewish people? It is to bring salvation to all of humanity. This is why the promise given to Abraham and his descendants is irrevocable. To revoke the promise to literal Israel is to revoke the very notion that God intends to redeem humanity. This is why Obadiah can affirm the promise given to the Jews in concrete terms:

Then those of the Negev will inherit the mountain of Esau, and those of the Shephelah the Philistine plain; also, they will inherit the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, and Benjamin will inherit Gilead. And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath. And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will inherit the cities of the Negev. The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord’s.¹³⁶ (Obad vss. 19-21)

¹³³ Colin Chapman, “One Land, Two People – How many States” in, *MISHKAN* no. 22, 1/1997, p. 9.

¹³⁴ *MISHKAN*, p. 12.

¹³⁵ *MISHKAN*, pp. 18, 22, 31.

¹³⁶ English translations (KJV, NIV, NASB) use the word “possess” instead of “inherit.”

While the word “possess” suggests a more violent and active role on the part of Israel, “inherit” indicates to a more passive entrance into a land given to them.

The Significance of the Presence of the Jews in the Land

For centuries, scattered around the world, Jews prayed and waited patiently for the day when they would return to the land of their fathers. For them, the land was not a mere geographical location that provided sustenance and allows for national existence. Returning to the land was viewed as a redemptive act, a fulfillment of prophecy, the dawning of the messianic age, a time in which “the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Just as the exodus from Egypt was viewed as redemption, not immigration, so the returning of the Jews once again to their land will be their redemption. It was this hope that, more than anything else, kept the Jewish people alive.

The redemptive act of God is to establish his people once again in Zion. This hope, contrary to what one may think, is not ethnocentric. The return of the Jews to their land means salvation for them and for the whole world as was understood, for example, from the words of Isaiah.

As the waters covers the sea.
Then it will come about in that day
That the nations will resort to the root of Jesse (Isa. 11:9, 10)

Even an artificial look at this verse demands the conclusion that for the word of God to go out of Zion, Israel needs to be restored in Zion. Only the restoration of Israel back in its land will allow for the word (gospel) to go out of Jerusalem to the rest of the world. Once the word is spread out, the world will begin to seek the root of Jesse — the Messiah. The picture that emerges therefore, is that the redemption of world is linked to the redemption of Israel and the redemption of Israel is linked to the land. In other words, “The world cannot be redeemed but through the redemption of Israel, and Israel cannot be redeemed except by reuniting with its land.”¹³⁷

The redemption of the world therefore, depends upon the willingness of the gentiles to recognize the place of the Jews in that process and the willingness of the Jews to share their blessing with the gentiles. Taking the Hagadah as an example, since Passover is after all the feast of redemption, at the very beginning of the “Seder,” the Passover ceremony, the participants invite everyone, Jew and gentile, to join in the celebration:

This is the bread of affliction
All who hunger, let them come and eat:
All who are in need, let them come and celebrate the Passover.

The invitation of the gentiles to dine with the Jews on the eve of redemption receives much emphasis in the New Testament. The Book of Acts, For example, unfolds the nature of this invitation. From Jerusalem, from Zion, to the end of the earth, the gospel is preached and gentiles are coming to the knowledge of God through Jesus the Messiah, the root of Jesse. The word was going out that gentiles are now invited to have fellowship with the people of God and enjoy their blessing. The point of it all is that no invitation could have been sent out to the world to come into the kingdom of God unless there was a Jewish state from which it could be issued. After all, Jesus could only be revealed the Messiah in Judea, the same land that was promised to Abraham and his

¹³⁷ Martin Buber, *Bein Am Le'artzo* [Between People to their Land], 2nd ed., (Tel Aviv/Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1984), 86.

descendants. Only in the context of the temple, the priests, the feasts, the synagogue, could the ministry of Jesus be understood and fulfilled. In the same way, Jesus' victorious return will make sense only in the context of a Jewish presence in the Land. Jesus will not return to Rome but to Zion, to Bethany,¹³⁸ the same place from where he departed. As it was written: "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives."¹³⁹

Accordingly, rather than doubt and question the link between the Jews and the land, humanity should view it as a blessing for itself as well. In a simplistic way, and as irritating as it may sound, it can be said that what is good for the Jews is also good for humanity. The well being of the Palestinians, as well as the whole of humanity, depends upon the well being of the Jewish people in their land. To recognize this, the Arabs (and the Jews) need to recognize the dual nature of modern Israel. It is secular and sacred at the same time because:

The people of Israel gathered into a state that is like any other state – nothing more and nothing less – and this is a legitimate, and a necessary thing. The nation was founded by the people which God called them to be a nation 'unlike the rest of the nations' but 'for the sake of all nations,' for the purpose of his plan for universal redemption."¹⁴⁰

The question of the Land will not be settled through political schemes and theological maneuvers. The bitter struggle over the Land will be resolved only through submission to the divine will. It took a lot of humility for the Syrian Chief of Staff, Naaman, to kneel down before a Jewish prophet, but once he did war ceased.¹⁴¹ It can be said that this kind of scenario is totally unrealistic and therefore not sensible. Yet it must be borne in mind that this kind of solution was totally unrealistic at the time of Elisha, but it happened nonetheless.

Disregard of the prophetic dimension of the Jewish presence in the Promised Land will only widen the circle of violence in this region. What may seem to be a tribal feud over turf may well develop into a world war, when nations come to believe that the Jews did rob the Land from its indigenous people — thus preparing the way for the war of Armageddon.

Tsvi Sadan

Copyright Tsvi Sadan, All Rights Reserved

¹³⁸ Luke 24: 50-51. Bhqania, Beit Hananiah (Heb.), a village that was located on the Mount of Olives. See Michael Avi-Yonah, *Geographia Historit shel Eretz Israel* [Historical Geography of Palestine: From the End of the Babylonian Exile up to the Arab Conquest], 4th ed., (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1984), p. 105.

¹³⁹ Zech. 14: 4.

¹⁴⁰ Aaron J. M. Lustiger, "God's Silence," a lecture given at Tel Aviv University, on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, 1995.

¹⁴¹ 2 Kings 5, 6.

The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting

Irina Levinskaya

**Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids,
Michigan, & The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1993ff.**

Reviewed by Kai Kjær-Hansen

In Mishkan no. 24, 1/1996, pp. 78-84 there was a favorable review of the first four volumes of the series: *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*. Of the planned six volumes volume five has now appeared, written by Irina Levinskaya, a young Russian scholar, who is a lecturer in early Christian history at St. Petersburg University. The sixth and last volume in the series will focus on the Book of Acts in its theological setting.

In part one Irina Levinskaya deals with “Diaspora Jews, Proselytes and God-fearers.” Several themes with relevance for readers of Mishkan are treated.

Let me mention one example: Taking her starting point in Luke’s description of Timothy’s circumcision in Acts 16:1-3, Levinskaya concludes that it is “reasonable to suppose that it was in the Diaspora that the matrilineal principle first emerged and became widespread, probably not without some influence from Roman legislation. According to Roman law, children follow the status of the mother in case of marriage between a citizen and a non-citizen, a marriage which was treated as valid but not legal. This principle of defining ethnic Jewish identity along matrilineal lines was registered by Luke in his story of Timothy’s circumcision” (p. 17).

And with reference to the four places in the New Testament where proselytes are mentioned (Matt 23:15; Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43) Levinskaya reaches the conclusion that “the sources from the first century do not support the view that there was large scale Jewish missionary activity” (p. 49).

Part two contains an examination of the epigraphic material in important centers where the gospel was preached in the first century: Antioch, Macedonia, Achaia and Rome. Levinskaya finds that the available material supports the picture obtained from the Books of Acts, but then she adds in her conclusion: “By the time we reach Rome, the climax of the Book of Acts, the general pattern is clear, though it must be acknowledged that much of the evidence we would like to have is not available, and it is not always easy to identify specific Jewish inscriptions.”

Although there may be material in parts of the book — not least in the three appendices — which non-specialists may want to skip, there is no denying that Levinskaya has presented important epigraphic material which is unavoidable for the New Testament scholar. In that context it is not important whether the reader agrees on all theological matters with the historian Levinskaya.

And then we look forward to the last volume of the series on Theology in The Book of Acts.

Books Received

Evans, Craig A. and Peter W. Flint

Eschatology, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Grand Rapids, Mn: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp XII, 176. \$ 20.00

Kopciowski, Elias

Praying with the Jewish Tradition. Grand Rapids, Mn: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp 121.

Longenecker , Richard N.

The Road from Damascus. The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry. Grand Rapids, Mn: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp XVI, 253. \$25.00

Wright, N.T.

What Saint Paul Really Said. Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity? Grand Rapids, Mn: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp 192. \$14.00.

Wright, N.T.

The Lord and His Prayer. Grand Rapids, Mn: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp 96. \$ 8.00.

Copyright Kai Kjær-Hansen, All Rights Reserved