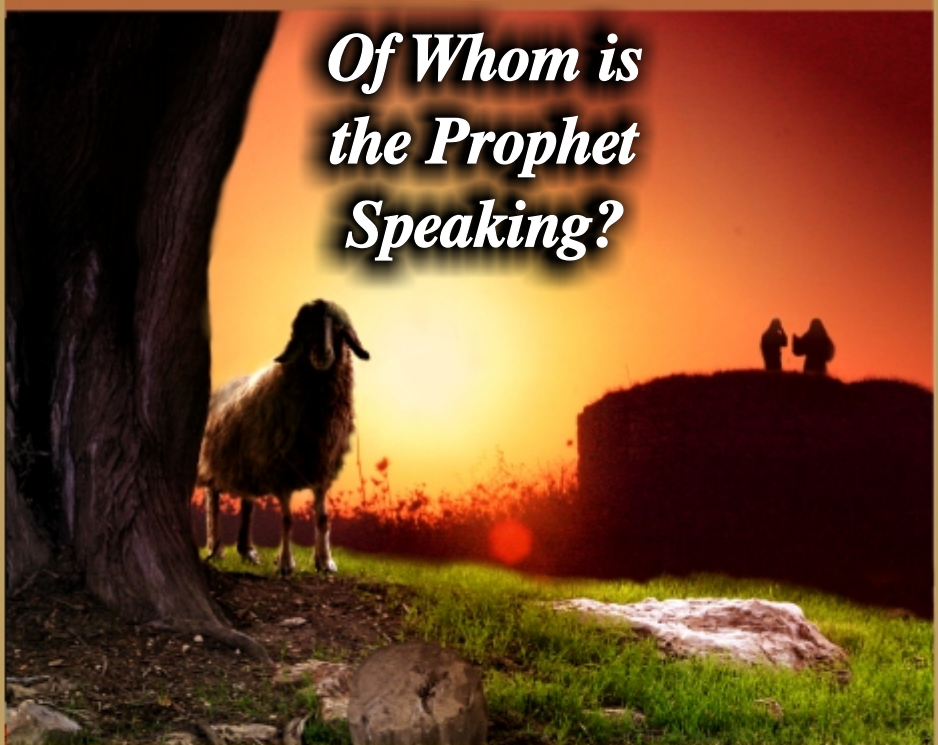
MISHKAN | A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE | Issue 43 / 2005

ISAIAH 53

Of Whom is the Prophet Speaking?



MISHKAN

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General Editor: Kai Kjær-Hansen

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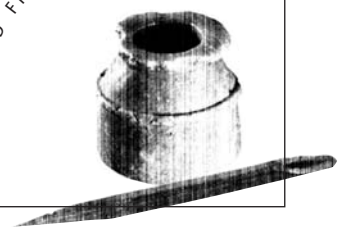
A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



"Who Is the Prophet Talking About?"

By **Kai Kjær-Hansen**

In the New Testament, this question is asked by an Ethiopian eunuch on his way back from a visit to Jerusalem – most likely a few years after the death of Jesus (Acts 8:34). He is sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah 53. The question is clarified by the words: "Is he talking about himself or someone else?" Philip answers his question by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus, based on Isaiah 53 (vv. 7-8).

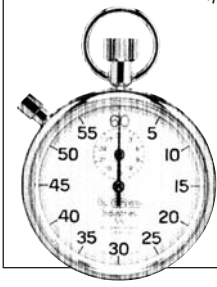
What Philip proclaimed to the treasurer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, is what was proclaimed to *all* in the early church. Jesus is the suffering servant of the Lord, of whom the God of Israel is speaking through Isaiah the prophet. It is exactly this servant that God has made Kyrios, the Lord. The hymn in Philippians 2 also alludes to Isaiah 53.

But not even Isaiah 53 can stand alone. It is not altogether correct to talk about "Isaiah 53." The so-called fourth song about the servant of the Lord begins in Isaiah 52:13. Even more important is that the whole section, beginning in chapter 40 and ending with chapter 55, was of great significance to the early church – not only Isaiah 53. And most important is that Jesus himself was greatly influenced by chapters 40-55. As the servant of the Lord he fulfils God's appointed plan of redemption – for Israel, yes, and for the nations.

In this issue of *Mishkan* the theme articles relate to Isaiah 53. How has Isaiah 53 been understood through the ages, and how do we use the chapter today?

When the question "Who is the prophet talking about?" is asked, it needs to be answered theologically; but neither can the work of theology stand alone.

Based on Isaiah 53, Philip *proclaimed* the gospel of Jesus Christ.



A CURRENT ISSUE

The Downfall

By **Kai Kjær-Hansen**

Oliver Hirschbiegel's film *Der Untergang – The Downfall* in English – is a controversial film about the downfall of The Third Reich. Most of the action is played out in the fuehrer's bunker under the Reich Chancellory in Berlin in April 1945, and paints an intimate portrait of Adolf Hitler and his staff.

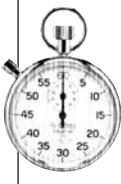
How does one depict one of the most demonic figures of modern history? And is it at all possible to make a film about Hitler and his final days without sentimentalizing and humanizing the Nazis – or at least some of them – so that we feel a certain sympathy for them and Hitler?

In other words, is Hitler best portrayed through a (continued) demonization of him? Or is the demonic element in him best expressed through his humanization? Or, as the German newspaper "Bild" asked: "Is it permissible to portray a monster as a human being?"

After having seen the film, I for one am not in doubt. It is exactly because Hitler is humanized, as he is in the film, that it is possible to insist that the Nazis' atrocities were committed by *human beings* and not by some demon from a different world. This makes the film much more relevant and existential.

Hitler is occasionally shown with likeable, human features, even if he never does become likeable. He treats the young Traudl Junge with understanding and kindness when, in 1942, she applies for the position of his private secretary, although for sheer nervousness she makes many typing errors when the dictator dictates. He is seen with one of the Goebbels children on his knee – but he is not shown as the country's loving father figure. He is a despot, a man broken in body and mind, a man who has completely lost his sense of reality and who orders his generals to fight against the advancing Red Army with armies that no longer exist.

The humanization of Hitler does not relativize the cruelty of his and Nazism's ideology and acts. Instead they are thrown into sharp relief. He is a human who acts in an inhuman way – with no room for compassion. In one of the last scenes in the film he is seen sitting at the dinner table with his staff, telling them that he has never shown any empathy for weak persons. Here Hitler is shown to be possessed, if you will, by another person, namely Friedrich Nietzsche. The strong person has a right



to sacrifice the weak – even the civilian population. Personal honor is more important than the life of the people. His downfall must also be the people's downfall, for in the final analysis the people alone are responsible for their own fate since they failed him.

In a way it is easier to deal with Hitler the demon than Hitler the human being, as he is described in the film. A young Dane, Carsten Stage, has seen this clearly:

> The Nazi leader was, in short, a human being who did inhuman things … If we view Hitler as a diabolical figure from a different world, we can keep him at arm's length, but when we see a smiling Hitler at ease with his secretaries, he comes too close. He is too much like us. We cannot keep him at a distance.

In this way *The Downfall* helps to remind us, as Carsten Stage also says, that "there will always be inhuman monsters as long as there are human beings." And we might add that even if we deal with extremes in the case of Hitler and Nazism, there is still evil in the world that needs to be fought. And the question suggests itself: Could such evil come from us?

Traudl Junge, who died of old age in 2002 and whose memoirs are one of the sources for the film, is given the last word in the film in an interview. Here she speaks about the guilt which has haunted her all through life; a person is never too young to be guilty.

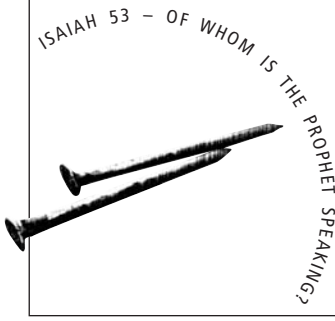
Never have I seen a movie audience leave the cinema so quietly. I saw the film late Easter Sunday – after having celebrated the resurrection of Christ. What a contrast between Hitler's despotic power and Jesus' self-sacrificing service *for the people* – a sacrifice that meant death for Jesus but life for the people.

It is never too late to remember. The memory of the cruelties committed by people under the Third Reich must be kept alive. *The Downfall* helps us to do this. But the memory of the complicity of a major part of the Christian church must not be glossed over either. No one involved in Jewish evangelism today can avoid this painful memory.

And speaking of the downfall of the Third Reich sixty years ago, we must also call to mind Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who belonged to the minority in the Protestant church that fought against the nazification of the church. He was charged with high treason for having taken part in a conspiracy against the regime, and on April 9, 1945 Bonhoeffer and other conspirators were executed, three weeks before Hitler took his own life on April 30.

When the 39-year-old Bonhoeffer was led away to be executed, he said something like this: "This is the end – but for me it is the beginning of life."

What a contrast to the apocalyptic atmosphere in the bunker under the Reich Chancellory in Berlin, April 1945.



The Identity of the Servant of Isaiah 53

in Ancient and Modern Jewish – and Biblical – Interpretation

By **Andrew H. Bartelt**

Isaiah 53 (52:13-53:12) is well known as one of the most poetic and profound portraits of the suffering servant Messiah. At the same time it also remains at the heart of one of the most controversial interpretive issues of Jewish-Christian understanding and dialog. The problem is at least as old as the question of the Ethiopian officer, "Of whom is the prophet speaking, himself or someone else?" (Acts 8:34). The answer was not obvious, as the previous exchange had indicated, "How should I be able [to understand] unless someone shows me the way?" (vv. 30-31). It was for such a moment that Philip the evangelist had been sent. He opened his mouth, and "beginning from this writing, he proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him" (v. 35, literally "he 'good-news-ed' Jesus to him").

This essay seeks to make a modest contribution to the interpretive issues of Isaiah 53, specifically the identification of the suffering servant there portrayed so poignantly and prophetically, and above all to see from there a clear connection to the person and work of Yeshua, the Messiah. Like many problems in Biblical interpretation, this one is at the same time simple and complex. Somewhat like a jigsaw puzzle, the picture on the cover of the box can be so clear and striking that one does not even consider the small little lines that separate the individual pieces. Upon closer inspection of the contents of the box, however, one is quickly confronted with the difficulties of moving from the particularities of individual texts to the picture of Jesus as the suffering servant and even Son of God, whose innocent death won forgiveness for the sake of all others and whose resurrection seals us in God's new life.

What is just as important to such a confession of fundamental Christian faith, especially in the context of Jewish evangelism, is that this should be also a fundamental confession of *Jewish* faith, of Israelite monotheism or what is technically called in scholarly circles "Yahwism." That is to say that the prophetic message not only of Isaiah but also of all prophecies that anticipated God's messianic age is fully and fundamentally Jewish, grounded in the "First Testament's" witness to God's plan of salvation for all people, first to the Jew and also to the Greek.

It is a basic principle of sound biblical interpretation that texts are to be read and heard from within their own historical setting. The interpreter

dare not superimpose meaning upon a text, but needs to read it on its own terms and in its own times. All too often, in my opinion, Christians can too easily be accused of appearing to read Christ "into" the Old Testament, when in fact the messiah – the *Jewish* messiah – should be read "out" of the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, I would argue that a "messianic" reading of a text such as Isaiah 53 is the most logical and coherent interpretation from within the context of both the book of Isaiah and the historical setting of ancient Israel.

That is also to say that "Christianity" ("messianism") is directly connected to the theology of the Hebrew Bible. Its roots as a "Jewish movement" place its origins within the tradition, the trajectory, and the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures. Christianity is not something completely new or different, nor is it something that has either altered or provided an alternative to the theology of the First Testament. It is not a parallel track of salvation for non-Jewish ethnicities. Nor is it a replacement for or even conversion from God's plan of salvation "before Christ." It is, rather, the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation from the beginning, a plan of salvation which, also from the beginning, had as its goal the salvation of all families of the earth, a salvation which was always, ever, and only to be accomplished by God's grace – and grace alone – through the work of the one, true God come to earth by entering into His own creation and accomplishing salvation by the sacrificial forgiveness of sins. This is not simply the fundamental truth of Christianity; it is the fundamental truth of the Hebrew Bible.

All too often Christians can too easily be accused of appearing to read Christ "into" the Old Testament, when in fact the messiah – the *Jewish* messiah – should be read "out" of the Hebrew Scriptures

Concerning the specific topic at hand – and like our jigsaw puzzle – the identification of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 is at the same time both simple and complex. A plain reading of the text would suggest an individual whose innocent and unjustified suffering is somehow related to the corporate and collective fate of others. This servant is both singular and representative of a larger corporate whole. Indeed, the tension between the servant's identity as "individual" and/or "corporate" lies at the heart of the complexities of identification from the earliest interpretations until the present day.

Simply put, contemporary interpretations of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 are, to the best of my investigation, generally focused on corporate or collective Israel as a people. Three general reasons stand out. First, this has been the dominant Jewish interpretation since at least the Middle Ages (propounded by Rashi and both David and Jacob Kimchi). Secondly, contemporary mainline Christian scholarship, especially under the rise of historical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has in large part abandoned the messianic view and has itself recognized the legitimacy of understanding the servant as corporate Israel or as a historic individual such as a "second" Isaiah. Thirdly, the social and political

events of the twentieth century have provided overwhelming historical evidence that "Israel" continues to have as its mission the role of God's suffering servant, who through death and resilience remains God's agent for good in the world.

Complexities

The question of the history of interpretation of Isaiah 53 and the interpretation of the suffering servant, however, is as complex as the pieces in the puzzle box. Whether it need or ought to be so is another matter, but history has shown that the question of the Ethiopian officer was certainly not unique to him. The problem can be approached several ways. The question of the servant in Isaiah 53, while itself a focused question that has received different answers throughout history, is not unrelated to the interpretation of the four servant songs as a group, which in turn is related to the theme of the servant within the larger literary context of Isaiah.

Concerning the latter point, it was Bernhard Duhm that ushered in the modern era of scholarly Isaiah research within his groundbreaking commentary in 1892.[1] Duhm isolated the four poems as distinct and discrete units (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) that, on the one hand, can be isolated from the larger literary context, but on the other, have to be considered together. Thus it has been assumed that the identity of the servant is related to the same theme in the other poems, possibly including also Isaiah 61:1-6, which has gained some acceptance as a fifth servant song, even though it falls outside the traditional boundaries of "second Isaiah."

If one considers these poems as a group, then certainly the question of identity posed in 49:1-6 is key. Here the servant is clearly identified as Israel, yet in the following verses he is an individual either within or outside of Israel who has a specific mission *to* Israel. More than that, since it is "too little a thing" to have a mission only to the house of Israel, the mission of the servant is to become a light to the nations, so that God's salvation may reach "to the end of the earth" (49:6).

Furthermore, one might also consider the numerous references to God's servant in the larger context of Isaiah, beyond the four servant songs. In fact, recent scholarship has brought significant challenges to the isolation and segregation of poems as proposed by Duhm. For example, in 41:8, the servant is identified as the people of Israel, who is blind (e.g., 42:19, a theme already proposed in Isaiah 6 as "this people who sees and sees but does not see," etc.), but who, as the chosen of YHWH, will be His witnesses to the only Savior (43:10f.).

So who is the servant, not just in Isaiah 53 but also within the literary context of the book of Isaiah? Israel? One with a mission to Israel? A

1 Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1892).

prophet? The messiah himself? Or someone – anyone – else? In his study of especially the modern issues, Christopher North (1948) discusses at least twenty-one specific candidates that have been proposed.[2] They are easily grouped into three or four general categories: historical-individual, mythological, corporate, and messianic, all of which have been reflected in the history of interpretation over the centuries. Significant for our purposes is the overlap between Jewish and Christian views.

Early Jewish Interpretations

We begin a brief survey of Jewish interpretations within the "First" Testament itself. We have already noted the commentary provided by the context of Isaiah in general as well as the specific texts of the other servant songs. In 42:1-4, the servant seems clearly to be an individual on whom God's spirit has been placed, whose mission is to bring forth justice (Hebrew, *mishpat*) to the nations. In the verses that follow (42:5-9), he is a "covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness." Allusions to Isaiah 9, 11, and 61 seem obvious. As already observed, Isaiah 49:1-6 identifies the servant as both Israel (49: 3) and an individual formed in the womb "to restore Jacob and to gather Israel" (49:5). In 50:4-11, the servant is a disciple of the Lord God, whose instruction has provided courage in the face of mocking and spitting.

Read in order, the songs portray the fate of the servant as a progression from quiet and humble confidence about a successful mission (42:2-4) to one whose effectiveness as a "sharpened sword" or "polished arrow" of the Lord is hidden in an apparent lack of success. Isaiah 49:7 even speaks of one who was "despised and abhorred by a nation," yet "kings will see and arise, princes will see and bow down." In 50:4-9, the servant suffers personal rejection and physical abuse. In the fourth song (52:13 – 53:12), the servant is more than despised and rejected: he is cut off from the land of the living and assigned a grave with the wicked.

In fact, the poetic structure of this last poem moves in five stanzas from exultation to humiliation and back to exultation. The chiastic structure is confirmed by numerous word repetitions, perhaps the most notable of which is the use of the word servant *(ᶜebed*) only in the first and last stanza.[3] What is particularly striking about the chiastic structure is that the account of the servant's death is not at the climactic mid-point but in the fourth of the five stanzas. The middle stanza is that which articulates the purpose of his suffering: 53:4-6, particularly verse 5, "he was pierced for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

2 Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

3 Paul R. Raabe, "The Effect of Repetition in the Suffering Servant Song." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, no. 103 (1984), 77-81.

Moving beyond the great vision of Isaiah itself, it has been suggested that the prophecy of the messianic king in Zechariah 9:9 utilizes vocabulary similar to Isaiah 53. The king is "righteous" (Isa 53:11) and "lowly" (Isa 53:7). However, the king figure in Zechariah 9 is clearly triumphant and victorious without any suggestion of suffering, vicarious or otherwise.

A final intertextual reference from within the Old Testament itself might be Daniel 12:3, where "those who are wise" recalls the same verb as Isaiah 52:13. And the assertion that the righteous servant "will make many to be righteous" in Isaiah 53:11 may well underlie the statement that those who are wise in Daniel 12 will "cause the many to be righteous" (literal translation). If so, then the community of the righteous was perceived to be a manifestation of the suffering servant and "Isaiah 53 was then understood as the fate of those who are teachers of the law in a time of violent opposition preceding the end of things."[4]

This understanding of the "righteous ones" appears also in the Wisdom of Solomon, an apocryphal book from the 1st century BCE. Any number of specific individuals, from Moses to Rabbi Akiva, have been suggested by interpreters as the "righteous one." On the other hand, various citations from the servant songs in the parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 7-71, from about the turn of the era) suggest connections between the servant and the messianic son of man, who is described as the elect one, the righteous one, a light for the Gentiles, whose mission is hidden but revealed to the elect, and who is exalted before the kings and the mighty. Conspicuous by its absence in all these interpretations, however, is any reference to suffering, unless one considers Zechariah 12:10 and the "one whom they have pierced."

The First Millennium

Nevertheless, it was this individual and/or messianic interpretation that came to dominate Jewish understandings of the suffering servant from the pre-Christian period through the Middle Ages. Already in the 2nd-5th century Targum ascribed to Jonathan Ben Uzziel,[5] the servant is clearly identified with the royal, victorious Messiah. What is striking, however, is that all references to suffering are transferred to others: sometimes to Israel, sometimes to other peoples. For example, verse 53:7 is rendered, "the mighty of the peoples he will deliver up as a lamb to the slaughter..."

Clear lines of thought are difficult to trace during the first centuries C.E., although traditions similar to that of *Tg. Jonathan* seem to underlie most references to Isaiah 53. There seem to be occasional allusions to a

4 North, 7, quoting Dalman.

5 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan developed in two stages, the first in Israel 70-200 C.E., the second in Babylon 200-500 C.E.: See P.V. McCracker Flesher in J. Neusner, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 616-18.

suffering messiah, but it could well be that this became part of the tradition of Messiah ben Joseph as opposed to Messiah ben David. The origin of the two-messiah tradition is obscure, appearing in the Babylonian Talmud and possibly going back to the late second century C.E. It is pointed out, however, that while Messiah ben Joseph was, in fact, to be slain, his role was that of a political messiah and not one whose death had any sacrificial and certainly no vicarious effect. On the other hand, Messiah ben David suffers, but does not die. Connections between the messianic servant and either of these messiahs is tenuous but may well lie in the background. And of course the absence of Isaiah 53 from the Haftorah lectionary has created a strong and suspicious argument from silence, but it is still an argument from silence.

The Second Millennium

If the individual or messianic interpretation did hold sway for more or less the first millennium C.E., then the so-called collective interpretation has dominated the second millennium. There is one reference in Origen's *Contra Celsum* citing the reply of his "Jewish opponent" that the predictions of Isaiah 53 "bore reference to the whole people regarded as one individual as being in a state of dispersion and suffering, in order that many proselytes might be gained..."[6] But it was not until the Middle Ages, specifically the twelfth century, that this interpretation became dominant under the influence of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Joseph and David Kimchi. The forces behind this shift are not completely clear, but it is generally assumed that much had to do with a reaction against the messianic interpretation of Christianity, what Risto Santala has called that "evasive move."

One reason seems to be the rise of a more rigorous approach to Jewish exegetical method, which no longer allowed references to suffering to be so easily re-interpreted or allegorized. This method also followed a more coherent and unified approach, so that the references to the servant were related to the more general context in Isaiah. In this regard, the collective Israel viewpoint made the most sense and of course was very compatible with Jewish history and self-identity. One example of such closer attention to the text itself focuses on the difficulty of 53:8-9, where it was argued that the Hebrew word *lamo* at the end of verse 8 should be read as plural ("for them"). Along with the awkward plural suffix on *bemotaw* ("in his deaths,") in verse 9, these plural forms were used as evidence to indicate that the servant is more than a single individual.[7]

6 Quoted in North, 17.

7 The text is difficult, and its translation remains a crux. First, the form *lamo* is not necessarily plural (cf. Isa 44:15, and E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), p. 302, note 3. Further, the Septuagint reads "into death" (presumably from *lammawet* not *lamo*) in v. 8 and also "in the place of his death" in v. 9, which appears to be based on a text as found in the Dead Sea Qumran scroll (which reads *bwmtw*).

This collective interpretation has generally held its dominance into the modern and contemporary era, but one should at least note a third general category of interpretation, that of specific historical individuals. Candidates include the prophet Isaiah himself or his unnamed disciples, Jeremiah, King Hezekiah, King Josiah, even King Jehoiachin, all of whom were certainly servants of God, whether or not they died for the cause and certainly whether or not their life and death had an atoning sacrificial element. Such theories are certainly supported by modern Christian interpretations, which, as already noted, have also suggested any number of specific individuals.

Representative of a contemporary Jewish view within this category of individualistic interpretations is Julian Morgenstern, who relates the servant to a member of the Davidic line who is put to death but whose posterity will succeed in the divine purpose.[8] Morgenstern's own candidate is an otherwise unidentified and unknown royal prisoner who was released from prison in Babylon along with King Jehoiachin, and then put to death in the Babylonian ritual of the dying and rising god. According to this hypothesis, Jehoiachin was the one spared, receiving the substitutionary benefit of his fellow prisoner's life, with the result that the captive king was raised out of prison and treated with royal favor (see II Kgs 25:27-30).

Such an individualistic interpretation is also supported by *The Jewish Encyclopedia,*[9] which takes a less specific and even idealized view. Referring to the servant songs in general and Isaiah 53 in particular, it is noted that "the descriptions in them of the attitudes and conduct of the *ʿebd YHWH* seem to be idealizations of the character of an individual rather than of the whole of Israel."

Nevertheless, the collective interpretation has been the dominant view of the last two centuries. Representative is M.H. Segal in his *Introduction to the Bible,*[10] who, according to Loewe,[11] essentially ignores the implication that the servant was killed and instead interprets him as "standing for Israel in its career of vicarious suffering for the peoples of the world," the "continuity of which Segal explicitly recognizes as running from the Babylonia exile through later Jewish history."[12] Loewe notes that Segal goes on to qualify that the servant is really the righteous minority within Israel, "which alone can muster sufficient spiritual resolve to be capable of discharging Israel's divine mission of God-consciousness and justice throughout the world."

8 Julian Morgenstern, "The Suffering Servant—A New Solution," *Vetus Testamentum,* no 11 (1961), 292-320, idem, "Two Additional Notes to 'The Suffering Servant—A New Solution'," *Vetus Testamentum*, no 13 (1963), 321-332.

9 "Servant of God" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1912), vol. xi, 204.

10 *Mevo' Ha-Miqra'* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1950), II, 334ff.

11 S.R. Driver and N.A. Neubauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters II* (New York: KTAV, 1969).

12 So summarized by Loewe in his prolegomenon to the Driver-Neubauer volume, 13.

Similar is the treatment of the Isaiah passages by Abraham Heschel in *The Prophets* (1962). Amidst an elegant and profound discourse on suffering in the world, Heschel concludes that the same Israel who "has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa 40:2) is, in fact, "the suffering servant of the Lord."[13]

Summary of Interpretations

In sum, we note three major categories of Jewish interpretation: the messianic, predominantly without an implication of personal suffering or death; the collective or corporate Israel view, whether Israel as a whole or as a righteous minority within Israel; and a historical individual, which shares at least the singular, individualistic interpretation of the messiah but applies to a historical person or personage without messianic implications. As already noted, modern non-Jewish biblical scholarship has followed very similar lines. In fact, within the broader scholarly academy today the messianic view has all but been abandoned except by more conservative interpretations. This is predominantly a result of historical-critical approaches that focus on the immediate context of prophecy, therefore applying the servant motif in Isaiah to the specific historical events of the prophet's day, more typically that of the so-called second Isaiah in the Babylonian exile and anticipation of the revitalization and restoration of Israel under Cyrus.

The Text Itself: Interpretive Problems and Solutions

With such a summary of interpretations offering some background to the problems and issues, it is perhaps more helpful to engage in a close reading of the canonical text itself, both the specific passage of Isaiah 53 and its literary context in Isaiah. Concerning translational issues, it is worth noting that questions of interpretation do not significantly turn on such matters. There is some argumentation based on grammar or morphology (such as the *bemotaw* in verse 9 noted above), but the translation and basic meaning is generally clear to all. Whoever the servant is, it is clear that he will suffer disfigurement and rejection, that this prophetic message would appear to many as unbelievable, that he would suffer humbly and quietly even unto death, that somehow this suffering was recognized as a guilt offering for others, and that the entire ordeal was according to God's will and would result in long life and making many righteous.

Apart from the natural and relatively obvious implication that the servant is here described as an individual person, the collective interpretation must deal with at least the following issues: (a) according to verse 8, he was stricken "for the transgression of my people." How can the servant as Israel be stricken for "my people" Israel? (b) who are the

13 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 149.

"we" referenced in vv 1, 2, 4-6? (c) the suffering ends in death, not in the individual deaths of individuals within the nation, but as the death of the servant himself; and (d) somehow the suffering and death places "on him the iniquity of us all."

On the other hand, it must be admitted that within the larger literary context, the servant seems to be identified with corporate Israel. Within Isaiah 53, however, the evidence clearly points in the direction of an individual servant. To argue that these views are mutually exclusive would only suggest some significant inconsistencies in the prophecy as a whole.

In my view, there is something to be gained by taking seriously – and at face value – the multi-faceted identification of the servant that we have already noted in chapter 49, as one called both Israel and a messenger to Israel. This dual identification is suggested by the British scholar H.H. Rowley: "the servant is at once Israel and an individual, who both represents the whole community and carries to its supreme point the mission of the nation, while calling the whole people to enter into that mission, so that it shall be its mission and not merely his... The servant is Israel today and tomorrow; but Israel may be all or a few or one of its members."[14]

We have already seen a certain progression in the description of the servant throughout the four servant songs. Whether one believes these are discrete literary units or not, there is a sense in which the understanding of the servant moves from corporate Israel to a particular individual, presumably within Israel. The transition begins in 49:5, is further elaborated with the first person pronouns in 50:4ff, including a description of one who offers "my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard …" In Isaiah 53 the mission of the servant to Israel is further described in terms of one who may well be part of the people but nevertheless suffers for the people. The connection between this corporate and individual description continues on beyond Isaiah 53 as well. Although the terminology of "servant" is not used, chapter 60 certainly speaks of the reflective glory of God upon His people, even as chapter 61 speaks of an individual.

That the true Messiah is one who can claim to be both Israel and a specific individual within Israel is precisely the key in seeing in Jesus of Nazareth the messianic role of being all Israel "reduced to one"

This interplay between God's people as a whole and the expectation of a single individual as a messianic messenger to Israel (and, I would add, *through* Israel to all nations) is a significant theme throughout the Hebrew Bible. Moses writes of a great prophet "like Moses" who is to come. Candidates appear throughout Old Testament history, but none fully fills the prophetic description. Similarly, Isaiah speaks of a royal figure of the house and lineage of David, who is

14 H.H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London, SCM Press, 1956), 142. So noted also by Heschel, 149.

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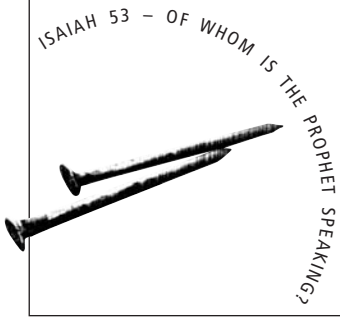
to come and establish justice and righteousness once for all (7:14, 9: 1-6, 11:1-16). The descriptions of this anointed king (i.e., messiah) blur the line between history as we know it and a new age in a new creation (when, for example, paradise is restored and the wolf will lie down with the lamb). In biblical eschatology this is the new age of the new heavens and the new earth beyond space and time, that final reign of God to which the earthly kingdom of God is the beachhead, the first fruits, the breaking into time of God's eternal realm and reign.

The remarkable assertion of both John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth is that this messianic kingdom of God has come near. That the true Messiah is one who can claim to be both Israel and a specific individual within Israel and with a mission to Israel, and then through Israel to be a light to all nations, is precisely the key in seeing in Jesus of Nazareth the messianic role of being all Israel "reduced to one," as it were. He is the sum total of what Israel was and is to be, that corporate yet individual person in space and time who embodies God's people as God's person, and who carries out God's plan of salvation for all.

That such a plan of salvation included the vicarious suffering and death of this servant is precisely the message of Isaiah 53. Before he goes to that death, however, this Yeshua recapitulates the history of Israel, even going to Egypt and returning to the promised land, delivering Torah on the mountain, asserting the divine power of Adonai as Creator and Lord of creation, causing the land to drip sweet wine at Cana, identifying twelve who would become the "tribal leaders" of this "new Israel" (better stated, "fulfilled Israel" or Israel brought to its ultimate goal and purpose), making the blind to see and the lame to walk, and otherwise establishing the beachhead of the new creation according to Isaiah 35. Then this Messiah takes all Israel, and with him all humanity, to the cross.

But the story does not end there. Though assigned a grave with the wicked and the rich in his death, though he had done no violence nor was there any deceit in his mouth, though it was the purpose and desire of Adonai to crush him, his life has become a guilt offering, and he will see his offspring and prolong his days. This is the will of Adonai that now has prospered in His hand. Or, to quote Peter at the Feast of Weeks, understood as the fulfillment of the promised new age foretold by the prophet Joel, "God has made this Yeshua both Lord (*kurios*, Adonai) and His Messiah!" Indeed, the kingdom of God has more than come near. The Kingdom of God, which is the full and final fulfillment of the kingdom of David, has come; the will of the LORD has prospered in His hand! And thus our messiah, lord, and rabbi taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven."



The Despised Messiah and His Despised People

By **Risto Santala**

The Reality of Being Mocked and Despised

Once in Hamburg I bought a book called *The Journey Through the Last Act*.[1] It described the journey of the German political prisoner Isa Vermehren to the concentration camps in Ravensbrück, Buchenwald and Dachau. It illuminated what it meant for a human being to be mocked and despised. The worst thing was not the hunger, the cold, the fear, the pain, or the hatred that they confronted, but the beatings and the strikes that were directed *at the face.* It broke the soul to become mutilated and deformed. For a woman it meant the loss of her personality. In Greek the word *prosoopon,* face, corresponds also to *person.* The loss of human dignity, humiliation, and dehumanization strip a person's willpower and hope. This I saw in "the last act" of Isa Vermehren. Jesus was also mocked and roughly handled. He was blindfolded and hit in the face. This *colafix* game imported from Greece had become a children's favorite: one player had his head covered with a hood and the others made him guess who had touched him. The soldiers played it in a most brutal way!

In Isaiah 52:14 - 53:3 we read something similar about the suffering Servant of the Lord. "His *appearance* was so *disfigured* beyond that of any man and his *form* marred beyond human likeness" - "He had *no form nor comeliness* and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" - "He was *despised* and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was *despised*, and we esteemed him not." While the outward appearance usually is important to us, the suffering Servant was not going to be esteemed by his own people. In Phillipians 2:7 we read about the Messiah that he "made himself of no reputation" (emptied himself) and "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself" (KJV). This is the meaning of the concept "despised."

The Hebrew text of Isaiah 53:3 uses the expression *hadal ishim*, which

1 Isa Vermehren, *Reise durch den letzten Akt; Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, Dachau: eine Frau berichtet* (Hamburg Rowohlt, 1979).

means that "he ceased to be human" – a kind of dehumanization, similar to the experience of the concentration camps. The Hebrew concept *mishat* ("disfigured," 52:14) has also many nuances of meaning: deteriorated, spoiled, polluted, degraded, corrupted, marred, and even maimed. No wonder that the people are "hiding their faces from him." In a rabbinic source it is explained thus: "his appearance is so ugly that no one can stand to look at him."[2]

The word *nagua* – "stricken" of Isaiah 53:3 – has led to the cryptic name of the Messiah, the *Hivrah* or "leper." There is a special section in the Talmud, *Nega'im,* concerned with the identification and isolation of leprosy. The Aramaic word *hivrah* originally meant "white" and then later "leper," as this disease at a certain stage in its development forms something like a white film on the skin. As the Messiah, *Hivrah* identifies with the fate of the sick person. The Talmud ponders the question how the Messiah will be known. Elijah then gives his answer: he is at the Roman gates (where the Christians are), "and what is the sign by which he may be known?" "He will be sitting with the poor and the sick, and all those whom he frees he binds at the same time; he will free one and he will bind the other."[3] The Messiah takes care of degraded and unworthy people. In Hebrews 12 there is advice for the afflicted: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame!" In Isaiah 63:9 we read: "In all their affliction he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them." For some rabbis, *Malakh hapanim* – "the Angel of his Face" – in this verse is the Messiah. And one of them states that "he is in the task given by God, and always when Israel is afflicted, even he is distressed."[4] This is the spiritual message of the suffering Servant also in Isaiah 53.

The Theological Dilemma

The dominant theology tends to question whether early Jewish tradition can justify the understanding of Isaiah 53 as a Messianic prediction. If not, then this early use of Isaiah 53 cannot support the Christian understanding of the chapter. The New Testament, however, frequently interprets Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus (see e.g. Matt 8:17, Luke 22:37, Acts 8:32, or 1 Pet 2:22-25).

As an example, I turn to the Finnish scholar Antti Laato, who writes: "The early Jewish tradition *has never* emphasized that the Servant of Isaiah 53 would be the Messiah who suffers and dies for the sin of his people"; "the similar Christian tradition of the atoning death *has never* been linked with the Messiah in the ancient Jewish texts"; and "the interpretation of Isaiah 53 about the vicarious sufferings and death of the

2 *Mikraoth Gedoloth,* Mezudat David to Isaiah 53:3.
3 *Talmud Sanhedrin* 97b.
4 *Mikraoth Gedoloth* according to Rashi.

Messiah *has never even* fit the Jewish interpretative horizon of the text"; "As a conclusion we can find, that *the only sure (?) interpretation*, which is to be found in the texts from the time of the Second Temple about Isaiah 53 is, that the fate of its Servant speaks of suffering righteous people."[5]

This theological dilemma among conservative scholars is confusing. First, they forget that the New Testament writings are treated in Israel as Jewish literature that is earlier than the rabbinic sources. Second, it shows the shortcomings of Christian theologians both in their understanding of Jewish thinking and in their own reasoning. Third, they forget Jewish self-censorship, which closes the door to those who are not able to read the Rashi script and medieval Jewish commentaries.

Some Jewish scholars do not share the impression of this chapter described above. Joel E. Rembaum writes: "The commentators of the Middle Ages generally wrote comprehensive and systematic commentaries on the complete Bible or on complete books or sections. Thus, a commentary on the book of Isaiah would automatically include a treatment of chapter 53 … Most of the ancient Jewish sources treat only selected segments of Isaiah 53 and reflect no interest in seeking a unifying concept for the entire passage … It is reasonable to view this relative silence as a form of Jewish self-censorship in the face of the Christian emphasis on the Christological meaning of such passages and as an attempt to control Messianic movements and speculation among Jews."[6]

In this light it will be helpful to see the whole "horizon" of this matter in smaller units. From a wider perspective there is a threefold message: Isaiah 53 has a spiritual dimension which concerns all believers, Christians as well as Jews. It can be applied also to the despised people of Israel. But the traditional interpretation about the sufferings of the Messiah (or another individual) is still the strongest in Jewish literature. One should distinguish between early Jewish literature such as the Septuagint, Qumran, and the New Testament on one side and the later rabbinic interpretations, beginning from the Talmudic period, on the other.

Isaiah 53 in a Wider Spectrum

The main question is whether this chapter speaks of an individual, or rather collectively of a nation, Israel. In later Jewish tradition it is emphasized that Isaiah 53 would be best interpreted collectively. The collective understanding is mainly based on verse 8, in which we read, *"He was stricken for the transgression of my people."* The Hebrew phrase for

5 "The Sacrifice and Forgiveness," in Finnish, *Iustitia* 16/2002 (Helsinki), 184, 124.

6 Joel E. Rembaum, "Jewish Exegetical Tradition Regarding Isaiah 53," University of Judaism, *HTR* 75:3 (1982), 291. He adds: "However, Urbach demonstrates how complex the rabbinic reaction to Messianic speculations was and how an anti-Christian polemical motive cannot be assumed to be an ever-present factor in the rabbinic thinking on this matter" (referring to E.E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs,* Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975, 649-692).

"he," *lamo,* can be understood either as plural, "they," or singular, "he." The whole chapter presents, however, a contrast between him and us: "He was despised and rejected," "he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow," "he was wounded for our transgressions," and "he was bruised for our iniquities," etc. If we interpret the word *lamo* as plural, as Laato does, it would mean that Israel was "stricken" because of their own transgressions – a horrible thing that easily leads to sidetracks!

The first clue to cracking this hard nut can be found in an exegetical comparison of the oldest OT texts. The Septuagint offers only one alternative: "because of the iniquities of my people *he was led to death.*" The text of Isaiah 53:8 in the scrolls from Qumran Cave I is almost the same as the Masoretic text. The expression "my people" is here rendered as *"his people,"* and the word for "was stricken" is, in the text of Qumran, *nogea* – "is stricken," which literally means "touches upon" or "concerns" him. All the other corresponding verses in the Qumran text speak about "him" and "us" as in the Masoretic text.

A specific tradition links the suffering Servant with Ephraim the son of Joseph. In Jeremiah 31:9 and 20 he is called "my firstborn" and "my dear child." From early rabbinic writings this figure is seen as a suffering Messiah. In Jewish tradition the discussion about Ephraim the son of Joseph is always linked with Zechariah 12:9-14 and 13:6-7. We read there about him "whom they have pierced" and mourn for, as one mourns for an only son, and they are asking, "what are these wounds on your breast" (in Hebrew *bein yadekhah*, "between your hands"). Regarding the words "they will look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech 12: 10), the *Mikraoth Gedoloth* explains that Rashi, Radak (David ben Kimchi) and Ibn Ezra relate it to the Messiah, Ephraim son of Joseph. The Talmud agrees with this interpretation. For the rabbis, the story about Ephraim serves the traditional individual understanding of Isaiah 53. Scholars often attribute the tradition about the suffering and dying Messiah son of Joseph to the second century C.E., and see the development of this tradition as a reaction to the fate of bar Kochba.

The Talmud contains a tradition regarding the history of this son of Joseph, according to which the "sons" of Ephraim attempted to invade Canaan prematurely and met their deaths in the struggle.[7] However, in this particular tradition the Messiah, Ephraim the son of Joseph, did not suffer vicariously – he died in the battlefield, so the description of Isaiah 53 does not fit.

The view of an individual Messiah is controversial. Joseph Klausner states that even though "we can find many prophecies from the prophetic age in which there are unquestionable references to the hoped-for deliverance, in all this there is not a single hint to a Messiah's person."[8] He then narrows his claim to the time of the tannaim (the rabbis of the

7 *Sanhedrin* 92b.

8 Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel,* 2nd Hebrew edition (Jerusalem: 1927), 133-135 and 142.

Mishnah, 70-200 C.E.), and adds that Christians tried to omit the national fulfillment of the Messianic expectation, preserving only its spiritual nature: "The Tannaitic period did not even know the suffering Messiah." On the first century rabbis he said that, "they certainly believed in the possibility of a coming deliverance, but without any personal savior."[9] The concept of the "Son of Man," in his opinion, also refers to the nation of Israel. Klausner's attitudes may be explained through his dependence on the philosopher Ahad Ha-Am, who anticipated the establishment of a prosperous welfare state on earth.

Late rabbinic exegesis about the suffering Servant as a nation was gradually received as the common and accepted interpretation. We should, however, remember that in Jewish exegesis later sources often have more weight than earlier traditions, although they have to be argued with talmudic maxims. The old Jewish interpretations of the Messiah as Ephraim the son of Joseph, or the people of Israel, had apparently become two types of "evasive moves" to avoid the Christian understanding of the suffering Servant.

Even educational textbooks in the Israeli school system present the popular explanation that Isaiah 53 speaks of the people of Israel, who have suffered on behalf of the other nations *in order to atone for their sins*. The prescriptions for the atoning sacrifices state, however, that the sacrifice should be without blemish.[10]

Isaiah 52:13-15 contains the most shocking paradox in the history of redemption: "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him – his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness." The Targum comments on this verse, saying that "this is how my servant the Messiah will act wisely." On the other hand, it interprets the following verses as referring to Israel. *Midrash Tanhuma* (from the ninth century) and the later *Yalkut Shimeoni* say that "this is the King, the Messiah, who will rise and be greatly exalted, higher than Abraham, greater than Moses, above the worshiping angels." Radak, for his part, concludes that "this chapter depicts Israel in its dispersion." Rabbi Elia de Vidas, who was active in Safed in Palestine in the 16th century, says: "Thus the Messiah suffered on account of our sins, and was wounded; He who does not wish the Messiah to be wounded for our transgressions may choose himself to suffer and carry his own sins."[11]

The well-known Rabbi Moses Alshekh, who lived in Safed in the late 16th century, wrote on Isaiah 53: "Our ancient Sages have preserved for us the witness of tradition that this refers to the Messiah. For this reason we too, following them, should consider the subject of this prophecy to be

9 Klausner, 258 etc.
10 Pinchas E. Lapide, "Jesus in Israeli School Books," *Journal of Ecum. Stud.* X, 1973.
11 A. Lukyn Williams, *Christian Evidences for Jewish People* (London: 1911), 169-172.

David, the Messiah, who will appear in this way."[12] In this sense, however, rabbinic exegesis of various periods does not reveal a real consensus.

Early Interpretation of Isaiah 53 in Talmud, Midrash and Zohar

The Zohar relates Isaiah 53 to the Messiah in numerous pages.[13] It refers often to Simeon Bar Yohai and his son Eleazar, from the tannaitic period between 150 and 200 C.E. Bar Yohai was the student of rabbi Akiba before 135 C.E. On many issues they built on a commonly accepted tradition. Joachim Jeremias insisted that Palestinian Jewry of the Second Temple period saw the messianic motif in Isaiah 53.[14] Rabbinic messianic expectation thus often included a wider range of ideas than today's theological scholars provide.

Even *Midrash Ruth* speaks about Isaiah 53 in the context of the Messianic banquet. It repeats four times that one who eats the piece of bread in this world will eat it also "in the Messianic age and in the World to Come." This *pat lehem*, the morsel, is "the bread of the kingdom," because the Messiah "will rain down manna" upon his people. And when Boaz said, "Dip your morsel in the vinegar," this refers to the sufferings of the Messiah, because it is written in Isaiah 53:5, "he was wounded because of our transgressions." This tradition is attributed to R. Jonathan (between 135 and 170 C.E.). Myron Bialik Lerner summarizes his view of the New Testament tradition in his Hebrew doctoral thesis on Midrash Ruth: "The Gospels are seemingly reflecting the same old mode of eloquence which was commonly used in the first Christian century or after it. A similar style in the original layer of Midrash Ruth seems to indicate that we have there a sermon from the period of Tannaim."[15]

The Talmud touches indirectly upon Isaiah 53, as we have seen when it speaks about the cryptic name of the Messiah: *Hivrah*, or "leper." Thus, both the early midrashim and the Talmud associate messianic expectation with Isaiah 53.

The Zohar tradition offers its own messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53. According to the Zohar, the Messiah owned a cottage in the Garden of Eden called the "bird's nest," and when he lifted up his eyes and saw that "the patriarchs entered into the Temple of God, which had been destroyed" and that "Rachel had tears on her cheeks," "then he raised his voice and wept so much that the Garden shook and all the righteous

12 Alexander McCaul, Hebrew article on Isaiah 53 (London: 1899), 22.
13 See Risto Santala, *The Midrash of the Messiah* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 2003), 107-110.
14 Joachim Jeremias, *The Servant of God*. Edited together with W. Zimmerli (London: SCM Press, 1965).
15 Myron B. Lerner, "Agadat Ruth umidrash Ruth Rabbah" (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1971), 156.

who were there with him lamented and wept with him."[16] This mention of Paradise refers to the realm of death.

There is also a discussion in *Midrash Exodus Rabba,* par. 12, related to this "Paradise": at the same time that Israel was building the Temple, the Holy One commanded his angels to make "a booth in Paradise for the youth whose name is Metatron,[17] so that he might transmit the souls of the righteous to God in order *to atone for the sins of Israel* committed in their dispersal."

The Zohar received a place of honor beside the Talmud in both Eastern and Western Judaism. It mirrors the inner movements in the heart of Judaism. The Zohar speaks on Isaiah 53 as follows: "The departed souls will arrive and tell the Messiah (about their lives), and when they describe to him the sufferings which Israel is undergoing in her dispersion, that they are guilty because they do not wish to know their LORD, he will raise up his voice and weep on behalf of those who are guilty of this, as it is written: 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.' … There is a castle in the Garden which is called the 'house of the sick.' In that day the Messiah will enter into that castle and will shout, 'May all the sickness and pains of Israel come upon me!' and they will come. If he did not relieve Israel's pains and take them upon himself, no-one would be able to suffer on behalf of Israel's oppression, of which it is written in the Torah: And it is written: 'In truth, he did bear our sicknesses.'"[18]

Thus, both the Zohar and the Talmud depict the Messiah as a preexistent figure (already there in the Garden of Eden) who shares and carries the sufferings and even the sins of Israel in her dispersion. "There he calls for all the diseases and pains and sufferings of Israel, bidding them settle on himself, which they do. And were it not that he thus eases the burden from Israel, taking it on himself, no one could endure the sufferings meted out to Israel in *expiation* on account of their neglect of the Torah. So Scripture says; 'Surely our diseases he did bear.'"[19]

After this description the Zohar states: "As long as Israel were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them from mankind until the time when a man quits this world and receives his punishment."

16 There are about 9 pages in the Zohar ("Sullam" exposition, Section 2, Shemoth 8a), where this story and Isaiah 53 are mentioned. See also Section 2, Shemoth 212a and Section 1, page 140a.

17 The concept of "Metatron" appears 38 times in the Zohar. It is one of the many pseudonyms for the Messiah. Rabbi Akiba relates 9 names to him, eg. the Prince of Countenance, the Prince of Angels, the Prince of Glory, etc. His numeric value is, in gematria, the same as that of Shaddai, the Almighty. He records the good deeds of Israel before God. According to Midrash Ruth, "Elijah records it and the Messiah and the Holy One, blessed be He, subscribe their seal to it." See Santala, *The Midrash of the Messiah,* 148-160.

18 Soncino Zohar, Shemoth, Section 2, page 212a.

19 The official translation of Soncino uses the word "expiation" here.

Isaiah 53 is also quoted in the Zohar without mentioning the word Messiah, relating the sufferings to a righteous believer: "God finds delight in the righteous, He brings upon them sufferings, as it is written: 'Yet it pleased the LORD to crush him by disease' (53:10)" (Section I, page 140a). "When God desires to give healing to the world He smites one righteous man among them with disease and suffering, and through him gives healing to all, as it is written, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities and with his stripes we are healed'" (Section III, page 218a).

All this indicates that the suffering Servant in Jewish literature refers to the nation of Israel, to the person of the Messiah, and to the lot of the righteous man in this world. The idea of the atoning death of the Messiah is often included in these interpretations. The New Testament interpretation of Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus may indicate that this chapter was already treated messianically at least by some Jews.

As we noted earlier, Rashi, Radak, and Ibn Ezra all saw Ephraim the son of Joseph in Isaiah 53. In fact, although Rashi (1040-1105) applied the suffering Servant of the Lord to the Jewish nation, there were also other modes of interpretation among the sages. The explanation of Rashi was rejected as unsatisfactory by Maimonides. According to R. Mosheh Cohen Iben Crispin of Cordoba (fourteenth century), Rashi "distorted the passage from its natural meaning," and in truth it was given by God as a description of the Messiah himself. In Rashi's interpretation "the doors of the literal interpretation of this parashah were shut in their face."[20]

Isaiah 53 in Jewish Liturgy

Isaiah 53 has been totally omitted from the reading of the prophets in the synagogue service. In *Yalkut Makhiri* there is a note in brackets relating to Isaiah 53 that "here is missing a little of the matter."[21]

However, on the Day of Atonement Isaiah 53 is sometimes mentioned in Jewish prayers. The special prayer book for the feast days, *Mahzor Rabbah*, contains a remarkable prayer by Rabbi Eleazar Qallir.[22] The prayer begins, "At that time, before the creation, he already set up the oasis and the Yinnon"; the word *neveh* – "oasis" – refers to the Temple, and *Yinnon* to the Branch, the Messiah (cf. the Hebrew text of Psalm 72: 17). The main body of the prayer reads as follows: "Then, before the creation, he already set up the Temple and the Messiah (cf. above) – the Messiah our Righteousness has turned away from us, we are shaken, and can find no-one who can justify us. The yoke of our sins and our transgressions is a burden to us; and he was wounded for our transgressions, he suffered on his shoulders our iniquities; there is forgiveness for our

20 David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 2000), 13.
21 *Yalkut Makhiri* (only in Hebrew; Jerusalem: 1924), 197.
22 According to Aharon Mirsk in his Hebrew book *Reshith ha-piut* (Jerusalem: 1968), 87, Eleazar Qallir lived in the 6th century C.E.

sins. In his wounds we are healed; it is time to create forever *a new creation*. Send him back from the *circles*, bring him back from *Seir*, so that we might hear him *in Lebanon a second time* through *Yinnon*. He is our God, our Father, our King, he is our Savior and he will liberate and redeem us *for a second time* and let us hear of his grace *a second time* in everyone's sight, as it is said: 'I will save you *at the end* as at the beginning so that I will be your God.'"

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This prayer, which is couched in somewhat enigmatic language, says that the "Messiah our Righteousness" has turned away from his people. Although the person praying is thoroughly shaken, he recognizes that the Messiah has already carried his burdens. Therefore, forgiveness is to be found through the fulfillment of Isaiah 53. In this way a "new creation" is effected. The idea of the "circle" is set out by the prayer book itself as meaning "the circles of the earth." "Seir" is a secret name for Rome, the center of Christianity, in which, according to the Talmud, the Messiah sits "with the poor and the sick." "Lebanon" means the Temple, which "whitens" the people's sins by their sacrifices, as its root *laban* is the equivalent of "white." The one praying repeats that God will save his people a "second time."

In conclusion, we may say that rabbinic Messianic expectation includes a wider range of thought than commonly accepted. For us, and for all who are despised, it is sufficient to remember this: "Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows"!

The Individual Interpretation of the Servant

By **Torleif Elgvin**

The aim of this study is twofold: To demonstrate (1) that the Servant of Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 53 belongs to a biblical tradition of faithful individuals in a unique relationship with God, and (2) that these passages are interpreted in the same way in texts written between the Old and the New Testaments. These points provide a meaningful background for later Jewish interpretations of this Servant as a messianic figure, including the NT interpretation of Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

From the medieval period on the main Jewish interpretation of the Servant is collective: the Servant is the people of Israel. This line of thought has received heavy support in modern critical scholarship. But until the end of the rabbinic period, Isaiah 50 and 53 were understood as referring to an individual figure or a small group of individuals.

In the third servant song the Servant is identified with Israel: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (49:3). In this song, the Servant's role is to bring the people of Israel back to the Lord (vv 4, 6), so it seems strained to identify the servant with the people. Could 'Israel' be a later addition to the original text of the prophet? 'Israel' is indeed lacking in (only) one of the medieval Hebrew manuscripts of Isaiah, and with many interpreters[1] I have sympathy for this solution. It seems strange that the prophet would call the servant 'Israel,' when this short song twice describes his role as bringing Israel back to the Lord. Further, 'Israel' has no synonym (such as Jacob or Jeshurun) at its side, as would be expected in the style of Second Isaiah (Isa. 40–55).

On the other hand, both the Septuagint translation (made in the early 2nd century BC, our copies are much later) and the great Isaiah scroll from Qumran (from the late 2nd century BC) preserve the word 'Israel' in v 3. So if the word 'Israel' was not there from the beginning, it soon found its way into the texts being copied. Most interpreters do see the word as original in the text; it has been suggested that 'Israel' should be regarded in v 3 as an honorific name conveyed to an individual Servant.[2]

1 Among them Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (London: SCM, 1968), 219.
2 C.R. North, *The Second Isaiah. Introduction, Translation and Commentary to Chapters XL–LV* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 187-8.

It has been noted that the Servant portrayed in these four songs has both collective and individual characteristics. If he is an individual, he encompasses traits ascribed to the people of Israel in other biblical texts. Figures that mediate between the people and God, such as priest, prophet, and (messianic) king represent their people and can be seen as incorporating that people when they stand before the Lord. If the prophet had an individual Servant in mind, this line of tradition explains the "people-of-Israel-traits" in the description. If, however, the prophet really was designating the people as the Servant of YHWH, we understand why later Jewish exegetes take these songs as descriptions of a messianic figure or unique individual.

I am convinced that the four servant songs, even when they are seen only from an OT perspective, are best understood as songs about an individual, called by God into a unique role. If I am wrong (and the prophet indeed had the people in mind), this is no blow against my Christian faith or the NT interpretation. NT writers often consciously ascribe new meanings to OT texts, and at times they ascribe double meanings to their base texts.[3]

If the prophet was thinking collectively, Jesus and NT authors would have good reason to see these songs as describing central traits of the end-time figure sent by God to bring redemption. Such were the terms of Jewish exegesis in this period.

A Prophet and Mediator Like Moses

Gerhard von Rad has provided key insights to the understanding of the servant songs in Second Isaiah (42:1-4/5-7; 49:1-6/7-9; 50:4-9/10-11; 52:13-53:11).[4] The "instructed tongue" and "listening ear" (50:4-5) are characteristics of a prophet, the type of person that receives revelation from God and then passes this word on "to sustain the weary." But the singer has a more continuous "on-line-connection" with God than other prophets, who often had to wait for a word from the Lord. The sword-like mouth (49:2) belongs to the image of a prophet. The trials of the singer in 50:4-9 and ch 53 remind us of the confessions of Jeremiah, the suffering prophet. In all four songs there are only one or two kingly predicates, and the ruling role of the king is absent. The main theme of the songs is proclamation, intercession, and suffering, key functions for Israelite prophets. Before Second Isaiah (this anonymous prophet knew Cyrus by name and ministered in Babylon between 550 and 540) there is no tradition in Israel of a suffering king.

3 As Matthew does in 2:15: as God once called his son Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Hos 11:1; Exod 4:22), so will he now call his messianic son into a similar exodus, to lead God's people from bondage to redemption (in Isa 43:16-19 Second Isaiah interprets the Exodus in a similar fashion).

4 For the following, see The Message of the Prophets, 218-28.

Von Rad acknowledges that early on the Servant was understood as the people of Israel, as seen in the addition 'Israel' in 49:3 and the Septuagint's interpretative rendering of 42:1 as "Jacob my servant, whom I receive; Israel my chosen one, my soul delights in him."[5] As the prophet in other verses (41:8; 42:19 - a blind and deaf servant; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48: 20) designates the people God's servant, this interpretation was close at hand for early interpreters of the Servant in the four songs. But the fact that "the boundaries between the two ideas are fluid at certain points … must not obscure or veil the fact that the Servant is a person entrusted with a prophetic mission to the whole world."[6]

Jeremiah's suffering and dialogue with God played a part in Second Isaiah's vision of the prophetic servant. Sentences from one of Jeremiah's confessions are taken up in Isaiah 53. Jeremiah 11:19, "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter … they had plotted against me, saying, 'Let us destroy the tree and its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living,'" recurs in Isaiah 53:7-8. Our anonymous prophet can also have used experiences from his own dialogue with God in his description of the Servant.

But the best perspective gives the understanding of the Servant as a prophet like Moses. In Deuteronomy Moses is repeatedly designated 'the servant of the Lord,' and he is the prototype of the prophets (18: 15-18). He acts as mediator and messenger between Israel and God, and between God and Israel. He struggles with God, suffers, and at the last dies vicariously for the sins of his people (Deut 3:23-27; 4:21-22; 5:26-27; 9:7-29). According to Exodus 32:30-35, Moses offers his life as atonement for the people's sin with the golden calf. Moses is the one who shares out to the tribes their inheritance, and the new servant shall raise up the broken tribes of Jacob and restore the remnant (Isa 49:5-6, 8). "Does not this message actually demand the foretelling – as anti-type – of a prophetic mediator who is to be greater than Moses in the same degree as the new Exodus is to outdo the old?"[7] To the image of Moses in Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy our prophetic voice adds the significance of the coming mediator for the world. So far von Rad, who had a better perception of these songs than many critical scholars in the generation to follow.

the fact that "the boundaries between the two ideas are fluid at certain points must not obscure or veil the fact that the Servant is a person entrusted with a prophetic mission to the whole world"

In the Babylonian exile God sends a prophet to his broken and disillusioned people. Through his prophetic word (Isa 40-55) God wants to create history, to change the heart and will of the exiled and send them

5 Which demonstrates a collective understanding of the first song, not necessarily of the other three.

6 von Rad, op.cit., 226.

7 von Rad, op.cit., 227.

back to build Zion anew (55:10-13). And then the exilic prophet is given a vision of a coming prophet, a mediator who will fulfill the role and ministry of Moses. For the author or 'stage producer' of the vivid scenes in these four songs, the Servant is no kingly messiah. He is a prophet who at one point will be exalted like a king (or like Moses), and he will bring the atonement for the people's sin that was not (or no longer) realized by the priestly sacrificial service in the temple.

The Leader Who Stands in the Gap Between God's Wrath and the People

Two post-exilic texts supplement this picture as they build on the tradition of the servant songs.[8] Jeremiah 30:20-22 may be a later addition (by another anonymous interpreter) to Jeremiah's prophecies of salvation to the exiled and doomed people: a "mighty one, a ruler" will rise from the midst of the people. "'And I will bring him near, he will come close to me, for who is he that dares to pawn his heart as he comes close to me?' declares the Lord" (translation mine). "To pawn his heart" means to stake one's life.[9] "I will bring him near" can also be translated (or later interpreted) "I will sacrifice him," as the root *qarab* in the causative carries the meaning "bring near" or "sacrifice" (as one approaches God). A leader and ruler is described who is willing to stake his life before God, as Moses once did (Exod 32). This leader is not called king, perhaps because of the failure of the last kings of Judah. Verse 22 describes the fruit of the deed of this mighty leader, "So you will be my people, and I will be your God" – a renewed covenantal relation between the Lord and his people Israel.

We proceed to Zechariah 13:7-10, one of the last prophetic texts to find its way into the Hebrew Bible, a text that adds new revelatory information to Isaiah 50 and 53 as well as Jeremiah 30. The Lord shouts out, "Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my companion! Strike[10] the shepherd, so that the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones" (translation mine). The shepherd is best understood as the royal leader of the people, the coming son of David (cf. 2 Sam 5:2; Ezek 34:23-24).[11] In biblical imagery the awakening and striking of the sword indicates death for this man who is God's companion and shepherd of the people. According to this text (as in Jer 30), the fate of the shepherd will lead to a renewed covenantal re-

8 For the following see Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), the chapter "The Messiah" (I have used the German original, *Zur biblischen Theologie.* Alttestamentliche Vorträge, 1977).

9 Koehler/Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 877.

10 "Strike" is the same verb as in Isa 53:4, "stricken by God."

11 Without the vowels added by the medieval Masoretes, "my shepherd" is more easily read as "my dear friend," as the Septuagint read the same word used for Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28. 2nd century Qumranites probably read "my dear friend" in both cases (see the last stanza in the Self-Glorification Hymn below). This leader is thus addressed by God as "my dear friend," "my companion," and called "the shepherd."

lationship. After the purification and refinement of the people, "they will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say 'The Lord is our God.'"

The last verse makes it clear that this passage interprets and adds to Jeremiah 30:20-22. In Jeremiah 30, the leader stakes his life before the face of God, but nothing is said of the outcome (Moses was not allowed to sacrifice himself, Exod 32:32-34). The Zechariah text adds to what had so far been revealed. In the purification of his people in the last days, a son of David will die by the hand of God. God's hand will also strike the sheep, the small ones. From all this renewed Israel will rise and be acceptable to their God. According to Mark 14:27/Matthew 26:31, Jesus saw his and his disciples' destiny as a fulfillment of this scripture (which combines the images of the Servant *and* the royal messiah).

Jeremiah 30 and Zechariah 13 show how the Servant of Isaiah 50 and 53 could be interpreted by later biblical voices. The servant who takes upon himself the infirmities and sorrows of his people may be no other than the end-time son of David, the mighty one who will stake his life in a clash with God's burning anger. While the 6th century author of Isaiah 40-55 and his listeners perceived the Servant as a future prophetic figure, later messengers had received more light from above and could use facets from these texts to describe the ordeal of a coming *royal* servant of God. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (2nd-5th century AD) interprets (the first half of) Jeremiah 30:21 as referring to the royal messiah.[12]

Readings from Qumran: a Priestly Teacher Who Brings Atonement

Three texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls draw upon the servant songs in their description of an individual priestly figure.[13] In the first we probably encounter the patriarch Levi who "prophesies" to his sons about a future priest. This poetic vision may stem from *c.*200 BC; it is in Aramaic and was probably authored before the establishment of the Qumran community.

> [God will give him w]isdom.
> He will bring atonement for all the children of his generation
> and will be sent to all the children of his [people].
> His word is like a word of the heavens,
> his teaching according to the will of God.

12 "a) Their king shall be anointed from them, b) their Messiah shall be revealed from among them; c) and I will bring them near, and they shall assemble to minister to me. d) For who is he whose heart delights to draw near to minister to me, says the Lord?" The targumist may have found a royal Messiah with priestly functions too heavy, and therefore interpreted c) and d) as the people. In the Septuagint textual tradition he found support for a plural verb in c) [different from the Masoretic Hebrew text], which leads to a collective interpretation also of d).

13 The first two texts will be discussed more broadly in the next issue of Mishkan, a topical issue on Qumran. For these two texts I bring my own translation, while the Thanksgiving Hymns are quoted from Garcia Martinez and Tigchelaar's Study Edition.

His eternal sun will shine,
its fire spring forth to the all the ends of the earth,
above the darkness it will shine.
Then, darkness will vanish from the earth,
gloom from the dry land.

They will utter many words against him,
and an abundance of [lie]s.
They will invent stories about him,
and utter everything dishonorable against him.
Evil will change his generation […],
it will support deceit and violence.
In his days the people will go astray and be bewildered.
4Q541Apocryphon of Levi, frg. 11

The first stanza records the unique teaching role of this servant, which will lead to a renewal of the earth (cf. Isa 42:4; 49:6). As a priest he will bring atoning sacrifices before God (but probably not sacrifice himself). The second stanza describes the persecution and mocking he will experience from his own people (cf. Isa 49:7 and the last two servant songs). This poem envisages a (high) priest of the last days with a redeeming role for the world. Different from Jeremiah 30 and Zechariah 13, the servant songs here give flavor to a description of a priest, not a royal ruler.

The second text is called the Self-Glorification Hymn.

[The Most High has given me] eternal [honor],
and a mighty throne in the council of the godlike ones.
The kings of the East shall not be seated there,
their princes will not [be allowed to enter].
No one can compare with my glory,
no one is exalted like me,
no one approaches my seat.
For I reside in the heavenly abode,
… I am counted with the godlike ones,
and my dwelling is in the holy congregation.
Fleshly desire is not mine,
[for] all precious things are given to me
by the glory of [God] in the holy dwelling.

Who was despised for my sake?
And who can be compared to my glory?
Who will return like sailors to tell [what they have seen]?
Who has born [all] afflictions like me?
Who has suffered evil like me? – No one.
I have listened to teaching,
it cannot compare [to mine].
Who will counter when I open [my mouth]?

And who can resist the flow of my lips?
Who will confront me
and compare his judgement with mine?

I am the friend of the King
and companion of the holy angels.
With me no one can compare,
for among the godlike ones is my position,
I am glorified among the sons of the King,
the purest and finest gold belongs to me.
4Q491c frg. 1

This song is preserved in three copies of the Qumran community's *Thanksgiving Hymns*, and slightly differently in this fourth scroll. The text describes a priestly figure with an earthly teaching ministry without parallel. He has borne great affliction, and is symbolically elevated to the heavenly council of God. Perhaps an Essene author described his hope for a priest in the last days, using the priestly founder of his movement, the Teacher of Righteousness, as a model. After the stanzas quoted here, some fragmentary lines refer to the coming of the royal messiah, which may be related to the priestly ministry of the "friend of the King."

The psalm reminds us of the NT proclamation that Jesus is elevated to the throne of God. Like the previous text, it casts light on Hebrews' proclamation of Jesus as the ultimate High Priest with a unique ministry before God.

Third we will trace a section of the *Thanksgiving Hymns* for allusions to the servant songs. The middle section of this large scroll from Cave 1 once existed independently. This section contains a group of "Teacher hymns." These psalms reflect the experience of a self-conscious teacher who has experienced trials and persecution, but nevertheless conveys illumination from above to his community. The psalms were probably authored by the "founding father" of the community; some of them may later have been ascribed to him. This founder was a Jerusalem priest of the mid-2nd century, who in other texts is called the Teacher of Righteousness. The singer, in his address to God, calls himself "your servant" (XVII 11), and sees his fate in the light of biblical lamentations as well as the servant songs.

[I will proclaim in the assembly of the] simple ones the judgments
of my afflictions (IX 33)
– stricken by God … and afflicted (Isa 53:4)
I became a trap for offenders, but healing for all who turn away
from offence (X 8-9)
– by his wounds we were healed (Isa 53:5)
You have revealed yourself to me with perfect light (XII 6)
– After the suffering of his soul, he will see light and be satisfied
(Isa 53:11)
I was rejected by them, they did not esteem me (XII 8)

– he was rejected by men, we esteemed him not (Isa 53:3)
When I lean on you, I remain resolute and rise above those who scorn me (XII 22)
– my servant will be raised and lifted up (Isa 52:13)
My spirit kept firmly in the face of affliction (XII 36)
– yet we considered him stricken by God … and afflicted (Isa 53:4)
Through me you have enlightened the face of the many (XII 27)
– by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify the many (Isa 53:11)
You have … made my tongue like that of your disciples (XV 10)
– The Lord YHWH has given me the tongue of disciples (Isa 50:4)
to straighten my steps … to walk before You in the region of the [livi]ng (XV 14)
– for he was cut off from the land of the living (Isa 53:8)
You made me a fountain in dry ground …
the trees of life at the secret fountain … shall make a shoot grow (XVI 4, 6)
– He grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground (Isa 53:2)
my residence is with the sick, my heart knows afflictions (XVI 26-27)
– we considered him … afflicted (Isa 53: 4)
My spirit hides with the dead, for my life has gone down to the pit (XVI 29)
– For he was cut off from the land of the living (Isa 53:8)
the voice of my disciple-tongue … shall sustain the weary with a word (XVI 36)
– has given me the tongue of disciples, to know to sustain the weary with a word (Isa 50:4)

There are cases where second temple authors freely allude to biblical texts without at all seeing a "prophetic connection" to their own times and lives. But the above evidence points to a clear connection: this teacher (and his community after him) saw his life and calling as an embodiment of the image in the servant songs. He read these texts as prophecies of an individual – a teacher to be sent by God to restore his people, but who would experience suffering and trials from antagonists within the nation. These "Teacher hymns" may have inspired a later follower to write the Self-Glorification Hymn, where he used his own Teacher as a prototype of the divinely ordained Priest of the end-times.

We have seen that five Israelite texts (from the 5th-2nd centuries) interpret the Servant as an individual figure with a divinely appointed role leading to renewal and redemption. Among them, two late biblical texts wait for a messianic son of David who will stake his life in his encounter with God. The texts preserved at Qumran read the servant songs into their times as referring to a priest and teacher, not a royal messiah.

These five texts (as well as later rabbinic interpretations) should provide a *crux interpretum* for modern scholars who deny the individual interpre-

tation of the servant songs. Were all the early interpreters such poor readers?

These texts do not prove that New Testament authors are right in claiming that Jesus is the Suffering Servant. But they show that early Jewish Christian interpreters were in good Jewish company when they proclaimed their conviction that an individual from Nazareth represents the fulfillment of the servant songs, and that he is ordained by God to bring redemption.

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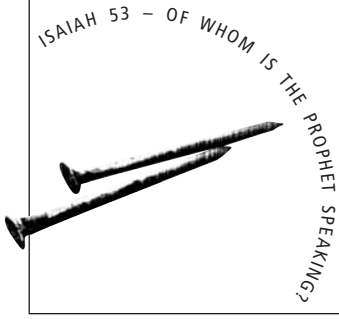
In the gospels Jesus is, to a large extent, seen as a prophet. Proclamation, teaching, and miracles belong to the office of the prophet, not to the job description of a royal messiah. This picture fits well with the first interpretation of the servant songs offered above.[14]

The Hebrew Bible contains a variety of prophecies on the coming redemption. The main figure on the stage is the Lord. As Christian readers, we should acknowledge that only some prophecies refer to a secondary character, a messiah or redemptive figure. In addition, this group of texts has various emphases, so those who waited for the salvation of Israel might have wondered: "How will you fulfil your promises, Lord; which of them will you choose to implement?" Talmudic rabbis have pondered this same question.

> (In a discussion on the time of the Messiah) Rabbi Joshua contrasted two scriptures: "See, one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" (Dan 7:13), while it is written, "See, your king comes to you, righteous and bringing salvation, humble and riding on a donkey" (Zech 9:9). [How could both scriptures apply to the Messiah?] – If the people of Israel is deemed worthy, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven. If not, he has to come humbly, riding on a donkey.
> *b.Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a*

14 See J.J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), in particular pp. 204-14.



The Use of Isaiah 53 in Jewish Evangelism

By **Mitch Glaser**

The use of Isaiah 53 in Jewish evangelism is a topic about which I have firsthand knowledge, as it was one of the passages God used to show me that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel. Even after 30 years of interacting with this passage as a Jewish believer, teacher, and missionary, I cannot help but be overwhelmed at times as I recall how I felt after reading and understanding the chapter for the first time. Isaiah 53 seemed so clearly to point to Jesus, I assumed that my Hebrew teachers and rabbi had been intentionally ignoring it. There had been an Isaiah 53 "cover-up."

Many believers today share that opinion. Some think Isaiah 53 is intentionally left out of the weekly Haftarah portions read in the synagogue. This is possible but not probable, since many other chapters have been omitted as well.

I no longer believe there was a conspiracy to keep this chapter from the Jewish people. Sincere Jewish scholars have wrestled with Isaiah 53 and have chosen not to interpret this passage as being a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. There have perhaps been some uncertain scholars who chose not to pursue this possibility because of the potentially severe social penalties they might suffer within the Jewish community.

The plain fact is that not everyone who reads Isaiah 53 sees its Messianic fulfillment with the clarity you and I do. We must allow people space for the work of the Holy Spirit. I have discovered over the years that although Isaiah 53 clearly points to the Messiah and his work, this is not self-evident to those in whom the Holy Spirit is not working. I learned this the hard way.

I was raised in a Jewish home in the 1970s, and discovered Jesus to be the Messiah after I had moved out of my parents' home to live in California. I returned to New Jersey months later, on fire for the Lord and excited to begin attending Bible college. I explained my decision to my parents with no small amount of dread.

Their response was as bad as I had feared. Though they disagreed on whom to blame for my decision, they agreed that I had to leave the house. They informed me that I was not permitted to speak to my grandparents, neighbors or sisters about my beliefs. My mother also prohibited

bringing crosses into the house, going to church, and reading the New Testament.

What does all of this have to do with Isaiah 53? That memorable evening, allegedly to be my last at home, I asked my mother if I could show her why I believed Jesus was the Messiah. I read her Isaiah 53, fully expecting her to see the prophet's reference to Jesus. I expected that she would repent and accept Jesus as her Messiah, leading the way for the salvation of the rest of my family.

Instead, by verse 7, my mother had fallen asleep. I woke her up and asked if I could keep reading. She sort of nodded in a sleepy stupor and I finished the passage. When complete, I asked, "So what do you think?"

She said, "I told you not to read the New Testament to me."

Though that might seem like a strange statement, it's not. Most Jewish people are unfamiliar with the Bible, and even those who are familiar with the Torah would still find Isaiah foreign, particularly in North America.

I responded to her by saying, "Mom, that's our Bible. Isaiah is a Jewish prophet."

Her response to me was, "I don't care. Don't ever bring this up to me again."

My mom is typical of many Jewish people. Isaiah 53, is, in my estimation, as clear an Old Testament prophecy of the Person and work of Messiah as there is in the entirety of Scripture. However, unless the Lord is working in the heart of a Jewish person, as he did in the life of the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip read this passage in the early chapters of the Book of Acts, then even Isaiah 53 will not produce the desired evangelistic result.

I am not, therefore, going to offer an expository study of this passage, nor argue its traditional Jewish interpretation. Rather, I want to identify the current utilization of this chapter in Jewish evangelism, provide some analysis of it, and make suggestions as to how Isaiah 53 may be used in Jewish evangelism in the days ahead.

The Messianic Interpretation of Isaiah 53

There are numerous references and allusions to Isaiah 53 and its fulfillment in the person and work of the Messiah in the New Testament. First, it is clear that New Testament writers understood that Jesus was both a historical person, born in lowliness (Matt 2:1; Luke 1-2), and Divine (Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8, etc.). As Isaiah prophesied, they record that Jesus was innocent (John 8:6), despised and rejected by men, and was unjustly executed as a felon (Luke 23:13-15). They emphasize that he suffered voluntarily (John 10:7; Gal 2:20), and in obedience, humility, and silence (Matt 27:12, 14; Phil 2:8; 1 Pet 2:3). The New Testament writers allude to Isaiah in explaining the motivations of Jesus' suffering: out of love for others (Luke 23:34); in order to fulfill the Divine plan and will (Eph 3: 1); and to provide a redemptive intervention leading to the justification of the evildoer from his sin (1 Cor 1:30; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Jesus' suffering was

vicarious (1 Pet 2:24). Finally, like Isaiah's Suffering Servant, Jesus suffered to the point of death (Matt 27:50), which gave way to his resurrection (1 Cor 15:4) and ascension to heaven. Now he is highly exalted, sitting at the right hand of God (Phil 2:9-11).[1]

It should be clear that all the difficulties entailed by other interpretations disappear when the passage is applied to Jesus of Nazareth, for he (and, we may say parenthetically, he alone) meets all the demands of the details of this magnificent prophetic psalm.

Historical Influence of Isaiah 53 on Jewish Evangelism

The Messianic implications of this chapter were recognized by the early church fathers. The interpretation of the book formed a point of some early debate between Jewish and Christian leaders, evidenced in the dialogue between Justin Martyr and Rabbi Trypho. The Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was also a main feature of medieval debates.

The fact that Messianic Jews and Gentile Christian leaders were utilizing Isaiah 53 from an early date in their evangelistic preaching is also evident from various rabbinic sources, including the Mishna and Gemara.

A number of rabbinic interpreters make reference to the death of the Messiah by referring to Isaiah 53 and, as we will hear in other papers, the modern-day Lubavitch movement has recognized that Isaiah 53 does refer to a dying and rising Savior. However, they teach that fulfillment of the text can be found in Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the deceased Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Traditional Uses of Isaiah 53 in Jewish Evangelism

Jewish missions have traditionally utilized Isaiah 53 in three distinct ways. More than any other passage of Scripture, Isaiah 53 has very often been used as a Scripture portion without explanation. In other words, tracts, booklets, etc., have been produced, which have simply written out the chapter as a stand-alone passage, whether it was done in Hebrew, English, Yiddish, French, Russian, Arabic, etc. In other words, the Jewish missions and missionaries to the Jewish people have sometimes simply produced the Isaiah 53 portion for distribution to Jewish people.

The second way this chapter has been used has been with explanation.

The third way Isaiah 53 has been utilized is in part, as a series of proof texts demonstrating the truth of Jesus as Messiah.

In addition to this, I would like to mention two or three formats in

1 "The Fourth Isaianic Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-Isaiah 53:12). A Majestic Prediction of the Suffering Messiah and a Powerful Aid in Jewish Evangelism," presented at the *To The Jew First in the New Millennium Conference,* First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Florida, Saturday, February 10, 2001, by Dr. Robert Raymond, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology, Knox Theological Seminary.

which Isaiah 53 has been utilized. The chapter has found its way into evangelistic books, booklets, tracts, the Internet, and into art and music.

My focus here is to survey the utilization of Isaiah 53 in our current day. I apologize for limiting my research to North American sources or to those non-North American sources that have been translated into English. This does not suggest that I believe sources in other languages do not exist or that they are inferior or superior. I am a North American and believe that I would do best to represent the material in my own language group. Further research and papers reflecting on the use of Isaiah 53 in other language groups would be invaluable – especially as we seek to maximize the utilization of this great text in Jewish evangelism.

The Use of Isaiah 53 as a Scripture Portion

Most missions to the Jews have printed versions of Isaiah 53 to be used in distribution to Jewish people. The mission I represent, Chosen People Ministries, has done this for many years and in many languages, including both Hebrew and Yiddish. More than any other single passage of Scripture, Isaiah 53 has lent itself to be used as a portion of Scripture for evangelism.

The Use of Isaiah 53 as Part of a Proof Text Argument

This is perhaps the most common use of Isaiah 53. The text is used along with many other Old Testament passages to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah and that he had to die and rise for our sins. Sometimes the passages are simply listed and at other times they are explained.

Chosen People Ministries produces a few tracts and booklets where Isaiah 53 is included. Many other ministries do the same and perhaps this is the most common context for the use of Isaiah 53 in Jewish missions.

However, there are more substantial and contemporary uses of Isaiah 53 as one of a series of texts used to present the person and work of Messiah from an Old Testament, prophetic perspective.

Risto Santala takes this approach in his book *The Messiah in the Old Testament in Light of Rabbinical Writings*. From the title it is obvious that he also intends to relate our Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 to rabbinic material.

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum presents similar argumentation in the book *Jesus Was A Jew*, although Fruchtenbaum gives more space to the Messianic Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 than Santala, who handles a broad array of Old Testament texts in his book.

Dr. Michael Brown's book *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, especially volume 3, presents Isaiah 53 in an evangelistic manner to Jewish people who do not yet know the Lord.

These three books are evangelistic in nature. Historically, this has been the most common approach to utilizing Isaiah 53 for Jewish evangelism. The passage is usually linked with other texts that present the case for the Messiah from the Old Testament and, in the more sophisticated approaches, the rabbinic material is included for reflection.

Another book, *The Death of Messiah*, edited by Kai Kjær-Hansen, contains essays on this subject. These, however, are directed to the faithful rather than to those who are not yet believers. However, *The Death of Messiah* does reflect on the Jewish sources far more than most books designed for believers.

Dr. Walter Kaiser's book *The Messiah in the Old Testament* takes a similar approach, and includes Isaiah 53 as one of the passages pointing to the Messiahship of Jesus from the Old Testament.

There are also other books and pamphlets[2] which utilize Isaiah 53 along with other texts from the Old Testament, but they might not be geared towards presenting the Gospel to the unbelieving Jewish person.

Entire Books Produced on Isaiah 53

This is perhaps the least used way in which Isaiah 53 is "packaged" for evangelistic use. In fact, Sanford Mills, a missionary with Chosen People Ministries in the mid-twentieth century, penned one of the only books written from this perspective, *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Isaiah 53*. From the title itself, it is obvious that the book needs updating! One can also seriously question whether or not it is evangelistic in nature or written for believers.

Another book recently republished by Keren Ahvah Meshihit in Jerusalem updates David Baron's book *Rays of Messiah's Glory*. Again, this book would only be evangelistic for the most sincere and thoughtful seeker. However, both books will equip the believer for what is the most common use of Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53 on the Web

In researching the use of Isaiah 53 on the web, it became clear that the web contains many different sources of information on Isaiah 53, but they are simply the usual written materials in a new and electronic format. A simple *Google* search will reveal a plethora of sites and uses of the chapter on the web. In addition, both anti-missionaries and evangelicals frequently use and debate the passage in chat rooms and on bulletin boards.

In Music

Isaiah 53 has been the heart of some contemporary Messianic songs. Marty Goetz, LAMB, the Liberated Wailing Wall, Israelight, Kol Simcha and many others have written songs based on this magnificent passage of Scripture. The popular contemporary Christian song "Our God Reigns" is also based upon Isaiah 53.

2 David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001). Shmuel Boteach, *The Wolf Shall Lie with the Lamb* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993). Arthur W. Kac, *The Messianic Hope* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975). Dr. David L. Cooper, *The Messianic Series* (Biblical Research Society, 1961).

In Personal Witness

Undoubtedly, the most common way in which Isaiah 53 is used in our present day outreach to Jewish people is through our verbal witness. And without having formal survey information to demonstrate this as true, I believe that Isaiah 53 is the Messianic passage most well known and well used by both Jewish and Gentile believers. This is the text that most believers believe provides the clearest presentation of the person and work of Messiah in the Old Testament. And, at least in the mind of most believers, it is the easiest way to show a Jewish person that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel predicted by the Old Testament.

The Polemical Use of Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53 has great value for Jewish evangelism and does far more than demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah whose person and work are predicted in this passage. There are at least three major ways in which Isaiah 53 has been and will continue to be used in Jewish evangelism.

1. Isaiah 53 presents the details of the atonement

It is through Isaiah 53 that we understand much of what transpires at the Cross. The Apostle Paul articulates this clearly in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where he writes, "For he had made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The chapter describes our sin and need for atonement better than any other passage of the Hebrew Scriptures. The sheer details regarding the Atonement in Isaiah 53 make it invaluable for Jewish evangelism.

2. Isaiah 53 demonstrates the accuracy of biblical prophecy

Isaiah 53 not only teaches us about the details of the Atonement, but the chapter also can be used to show a person how the details revealed in Isaiah 53 were perfectly fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Fulfilled prophecy is always a powerful polemic, even for the most secular Jews and Gentiles. Sometimes these marginally religious people know quite a bit about the life of Jesus the Messiah and are able to relate the prophecy to what they know. Often, recognizing that these prophecies are true, in such detail, can drive a secular person to belief in the inspiration of the Bible. Isaiah 53 has done that for many; this is my personal testimony and that of others.

3. Isaiah 53 is a witness to the Jewishness of the gospel

All Jews know that the Old Testament is a Jewish book. That does not mean that most Jewish people today have even read it. In fact, many have not. But it does mean that Jewish people associate the Old Testament with the Jewish religion and the Jewish faith. Therefore, if Jesus is predicted as Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures and this can be seen and accepted, then clearly belief in Jesus is not a New Testament/Gentile invention but rather something quite Jewish.

Isaiah 53 can be a great help in working with a more open Jewish person to demonstrate the Jewishness of the Gospel. One can see that what we are preaching is not simply a New Testament doctrine, but truth concerning the Messiah found in the Hebrew Scriptures and beautifully fleshed out in the person of Yeshua.

The Major Points of Argumentation

Most books, tracts and pamphlets that refer to Isaiah 53 are written in response to the usual rabbinic refutation of our Messianic interpretation of this chapter. For most rabbis, Isaiah 53 refers to the suffering and survival of the nation of Israel, who has borne the sins of the Gentile nations.

There have been many excellent responses to this age-old rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 53 by both Jews and Gentiles. Generally, these scholars and commentators argue along similar lines.

The following lists a few of the more usual arguments.[3]

First of all, it is argued by Evangelical commentators that this particular servant does not refer to the nation of Israel but rather to an individual. They make their case in the following ways:

1. Israel is not an innocent sufferer

Israel as a nation was sinful as previously described in the preceding chapters of the Book of Isaiah, especially chapters 1 and 5.

2. Israel is not a silent sufferer

Many excellent arguments have been made to demonstrate that the Jewish people have never been silent sufferers. Even when the Holocaust is used as an illustration of Israel's suffering without complaint, it can be equally demonstrated that the Jewish people had well-organized resistance movements and only suffered silently when they were unaware of the horror and actuality of the final solution.

3. Israel never died

It is evident that Israel has never died and that the nation has continued

3 Fredrick Aston, in his book *The Challenge of the Ages* (Wilmington, Delware: Great Christian Books, Inc., 1977), summarizes the arguments in the following manner:

1. The Servant is portrayed as: Divine; a human person (52:14, 53:2-3); an innocent, sinless sufferer (53:4,5, 8d, 9c-d, 12d); a voluntary sufferer (53:7a); an obedient, humble, silent sufferer (53:7).
2. His suffering: springs from his love for sinners, including his executioners who act in ignorance (53:4c-d,7,12); fulfills the Divine intentional will and purpose (53:10); deals with sin and all of its aspects (53:12, 5); is vicarious, substitutionary (53:8b, 5a-b, 6c, 8-9d, 10b, 11d, 12e); is redemptive in spirit and in nature (53:5c-d, 11d); ends in his death (53:8a, c-d, 10a, 12c); leads to his being buried with the rich (53:9-10); gives way to his resurrection (53:10b-d, 11); leads the straying people for whom he died to confession and repentance (53:4-6); As his redemptive work, in implementing a Divine plan in which suffering, humiliation, and death are central, he inaugurates a fruitful and victorious life for endless ages (53:10c-d, 11a-b, 12a-b).

throughout all of these years to maintain a distinct national existence. Some would state that the nation of Israel died, in a sense, during the Holocaust, and therefore the resurrection passage (Isaiah 53:10-12) is fulfilled in the rebirth of the modern State of Israel. But one would be hard pressed to make this argument with any cogency, as the passage would then have to be interpreted allegorically or symbolically, and the language does not warrant this particular method of interpretation.

4. The text points to the suffering of an individual

Arnold Fruchtenbaum and, to some degree, Michael Brown develop the theme of redemptive suffering in the rabbinic tradition, specifically focusing on traditions related to the suffering of Messiah, son of Joseph. The next step in this line of argumentation is to demonstrate that the Messiah, son of Joseph, and Messiah, son of David, are actually one person, Yeshua the Messiah.

5. The language makes it impossible for Israel to be the subject

Perhaps the strongest argument against Isaiah 53 being a reference to the nation of Israel is found in verse 8. In this verse the Prophet describes the one who would suffer as being "cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due." The Hebrew for "cut off" clearly refers to the death of the individual and, if taken literally, clearly refers to an individual person dying for the sins of the Jewish people (Isaiah's people).

Therefore, it is fair to ask the question, "How can Israel be killed on behalf of Israel?" The answer quite obviously is that this is impossible, and that the one who is being "cut off" is distinct from the one from whom they are being cut off.

Summary of the Arguments

Once again, many other arguments can be made to demonstrate that the traditional Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 as a reference to the nation of Israel is simply not an accurate interpretation. Rather, it is an interpretation driven by history, culture, and politics, and not by the text.

The current Lubavitch interpretation of Isaiah 53 as being personal, not national, and fulfilled in the life and death of Menachem Schneerson, should be viewed as a contemporary anomaly. It is a minority position. Of course, presenting the Gospel to a Lubavitcher would demand a more unusual argumentation regarding Isaiah 53. The Messianic/Evangelical evangelist would have to demonstrate why Menachem Schneerson does not fulfill the prophecy.

The More Contemporary Objections to Isaiah 53

However, in the everyday, down-to-earth typical witnessing conversations with Jewish people, the primary objection to our Messianic interpreta-

tion of Isaiah 53 is no longer the argument that Isaiah's servant is actually Israel. Unfortunately, almost every single piece of literature on Isaiah 53 written by evangelicals attempts to demonstrate that Jesus, rather than the nation of Israel, is the fulfillment of the prophecy. Since most Jewish people are not Lubavitch, Hasidic, or Orthodox, arguing that Isaiah 53 is not fulfilled by the nation of Israel or in the death of Menachem Schneerson is still not really the heart of our contemporary debate with the majority of the Jewish community.

The true contemporary objections to Isaiah 53 – and the ones that most of us as field missionaries have had to work through carefully with Jewish people who are interested in the Gospel – lie in other areas. I will attempt to list these as succinctly as possible.

1. Most Jewish people today are unfamiliar with this text

Most Jewish people have never studied Isaiah 53. It is not simply because Isaiah 53 is left out of the Haftorah readings, but because most Jewish people do not attend synagogue and so even if Isaiah 53 were read as part of the cyclical reading portions, they would still not hear it because they are not in synagogue. Even if a Jewish person goes to synagogue and hears the reading of the Torah each week, he will usually not study the Prophets in any great detail.

2. Most Jewish people today are unfamiliar with the Prophet Isaiah

Not only are most contemporary Jewish people unfamiliar with the writings of Isaiah or Chapter 53 in particular, but also many Jewish people do not even know who Isaiah really was. I think I can safely say that, in the United States, most Jewish people would recognize Isaiah as the first name of a professional athlete sooner than they would recognize the Statesman Prophet of Biblical literature.

3. Most Jewish people today do not believe in Biblical prophecy

Contemporary Jewish people would not actually believe that the Jewish prophets of the Bible were inspired by God and were able to peer into the future with any kind of accuracy. This is somewhat ironic, because many modern-day Jewish people have no qualms about reading Nostradamus and believing that there is something to his prophecies, or even believing that tarot cards or astrology can somehow tell the future. Still, the contents of Biblical prophecy are unknown to most secular Jews.

Most contemporary Jewish people do not believe prophecy and have never studied it. Therefore, when we present the chapter to a modern Jewish person, we need to remember that we must first explain the nature of Biblical prophecy. This is a major objection that needs to be overcome with patient, step-by-step explanations with our usually very bright Jewish friends. We must understand that, though they are intelligent, their knowledge of Biblical prophecy is quite shallow.

4. Most Jewish people today do not believe in sin

Perhaps this is obvious, but it is good to state it clearly. For example, there are many Gospel tracts and presentations, from the "L'Chaim" booklet to the "Four Spiritual Laws" and the "Romans Road," which presume the reader has some concept of the holiness of God, man's sin, and the impact of that sin upon his relationship with God. Of course, many of the people to whom we are speaking do not believe in God, nor in sin.

We must recognize that although Isaiah 53 might be a very clear prophecy of the atoning death of Messiah, most Jewish people do not even believe in the personal nature of sin and its impact, and do not sense a need for atonement.

5. Most Jewish people today do not understand atonement

The message of Isaiah 53 is not simply that Jesus is the Messiah, but that he died as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. Most Jewish people today do not believe in sin and, if they did, it is doubtful they will believe that atonement made on their behalf by someone else is possible. This is a very large obstacle in presenting Isaiah 53 to a modern Jewish person.

Most Jewish people believe as most people in general believe: that what we accomplish in this life, we accomplish for ourselves. They do not believe that a sacrifice, much less the death of another human being, is able to help an individual find personal redemption.

6. Most Jewish people today detest the idea of animal sacrifice

It is almost impossible to understand this chapter without knowing and taking seriously the Jewish sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus chapters 1 through 5. We claim, based on Isaiah 53, that Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice, but most modern Jews believe that animal sacrifice is barbaric and unnecessary.

7. Most Jewish people are horrified by the idea of human sacrifice

The Bible – the Hebrew Scriptures – clearly teaches that human sacrifice is sin. In fact, there is a human sacrifice that the Bible claims to be allowable and proper. The clearest description of this sacrifice is found in Isaiah 53.

Imagine reading Isaiah 53 without believing this; without accepting that the chapter refers to the Messiah and His death for humanity. Imagine having someone try to convince you that human sacrifice is justifiable. How would you really feel about the notion that God would sacrifice a human being on behalf of your sin? This is repugnant to Jewish people today. Yet we ask our people to embrace what they find repulsive – the notion that God would kill one human being for the sake of another human being, through our interpretation of Isaiah 53.

8. Most Jewish people today do not believe in the Incarnation

Most evangelicals, when presenting the Gospel to a modern-day Jewish person through Isaiah 53, are not even aware of the degree to which the Incarnation is foundational to our usual polemic.

It is clear to us from the text of Isaiah 53 that the sacrifice would have to be purely innocent – and there is only One who is perfect, and that is God Himself. Certainly when linked with Isaiah 7:14, 9:6, 7, etc., Isaiah 53 is undergirded by the doctrine of the Incarnation.

If the idea of human sacrifice is repugnant to Jewish people today, one can only imagine how a Jewish person feels upon hearing that Isaiah 53 is all about God taking on flesh and dying as a human being. This will take some persuasion and sensitivity.

9. Most Jewish people today do not believe in the depravity of man

Judaism does not teach the doctrine of the depravity of man. Even concepts expressed as they are in verse 6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned each one to his own way and the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all upon Him…" are irreconcilable with traditional Jewish beliefs. The idea that Isaiah 53 refers to God becoming a man and dying for the sins of the Jewish people only makes sense if one accepts the doctrines of human depravity and original sin.

In our presentation of Isaiah 53, we usually take it for granted that Jewish people, and modern Jewish people in particular, accept these beliefs. But this is not true at all. In fact, most modern Jews believe in the goodness of man. Perhaps this is a distilled version of the traditional Jewish understanding of the constant war between the evil inclination (*yetzer ha-ra*) and good inclination (*yetzer ha-tov*).

In the minds of most Jewish people today who are interested in finding forgiveness of sin and desire redemption, repentance is the only action that is needed. We are perfectly capable of engineering our own salvation through turning to God from our sin and moral failures.

Why then, a modern Jewish person might ask, would God take on flesh and die a horrible death for our sin when we do not believe we are beyond securing our own redemption? This is the question we need to answer before we present the truths of Isaiah 53. Too often, we are giving answers to unasked questions and we are not answering the obvious questions asked by modern-day Jewish people.

The belief in the innate goodness of man is one of the more significant objections that contemporary Jewish people have to the traditional Messianic evangelical Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53. If we are innately good and only in need of repentance, then why do we need the substitutionary atonement described in Isaiah 53?

10. Most Jewish people today do not believe in the need for sacrificial blood

Throughout the centuries, from *Hazak Emunah* to the trite and superficial presentations of Tovia Singer, the teaching that sacrificial blood is necessary for atonement has been challenged within Judaism. What else would one expect in light of the destruction of the Temple?

Most modern Jews would look at the issue of blood being required for the forgiveness of sin and experience waves of revulsion.

It simply does not make any sense to the contemporary Jewish mind that blood has anything to do with atonement for sin. This is a fundamental reason as to why Jewish people today would reject our presentation of the Gospel through Isaiah 53. Most modern Jews would agree that blood is unnecessary for forgiveness. The modern secular Jew believes the very notion is simply barbaric.

Many of our tracts utilize this argumentation without arguing for the assumption. The L'Chaim tract, the Chosen People Ministries tract "Why Did Messiah Have to Die," and many others take almost an entire belief system for granted on the part of those who are being reached.

We must develop a polemic that first responds to these underlying concerns and then we should seek to present the majestic truths taught in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

11. Most Jewish people today do not believe in the resurrection

Most modern contemporary Jews are anti-supernaturalists and do not believe in any kind of resurrection from the dead. Therefore, if we are saying that the clearest proof that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus in fulfillment of Isaiah 53 is that he rose from the dead, we must realize that this is generally unconvincing to a modern Jewish person.

When we state that Menachem Schneerson cannot possibly be the Messiah because he did not rise from the dead, we might make some sense to Lubavitch Hasidim, though they would disagree; but to a modern contemporary Jewish person, the very idea of resurrection is nonsense.

Overcoming Modern Obstacles to Isaiah 53

It is a common *faux pas* to think that the main reason why Jewish people do not accept Isaiah 53 as pointing to Jesus is because the passage is interpreted by the rabbis as being fulfilled by the nation of Israel. That is an objection that religious Jews might have, but most modern Jews are not religious and their objections, only a few of which were covered, are varied. We must be careful that we do not simply ignore modern-day Jewish presuppositions in our zeal to prove that Isaiah 53 refers to Jesus.

It is also tempting to simply see the situation as hopeless and not bother presenting Isaiah 53 to our contemporary Jewish community. However, the Word of God does have power and never returns void, and if a modern Jewish person would take Isaiah 53 seriously, it might lead him or her to begin taking other aspects of Biblical truth more seriously.

This text should be presented even to the most secular Jewish person. Most Jewish people in North America and Europe have some understanding of the Christmas story. Most Jewish people know a little about the life and death of Jesus, and if it is presented well they might be able to see Yeshua in Isaiah 53.

Presenting Isaiah 53 to a modern or secular Jewish person is also an excellent way to begin introducing them to a number of these very serious theological concepts, such as sin, the Holiness of God, the nature and

need for Atonement, the Depravity of Man and the Resurrection. It might take a while for modern Jewish people to wrestle with these new ideas, but if well presented, wrestle they will!

We must respect Jewish people. This means that we must speak to our people about Yeshua in terms that can be understood. We need to know what they commonly understand about God, the Bible, and the major doctrines of the faith. These are the things we usually take for granted as being accepted and understood by the very people we hope to reach when we use Isaiah 53.

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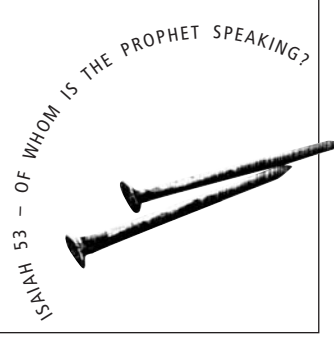
We recognize the power of Isaiah 53 for the work of Jewish evangelism. But to meet the challenge of Jewish evangelism today, we must begin to develop a more contemporary argumentation for the books, booklets, tracts and electronic media we hope to employ. We should make sure to present clearly the most basic issues regarding God, his holiness, our sin, the concept of atonement and need for the Messiah – and so many other issues – in ways that truly resonate with the minds and spirits of those whom we are attempting to reach.

This is and always has been our challenge: to preach the Good News in a way that communicates. We must find ways to wrestle with our fellow Jews in the world of ideas so that these basic concepts are understood. And to do this we must begin with our minds and our message rooted in Scripture, but we must also take into consideration the starting point of our hearers.

Within this invigorated framework, then, Isaiah 53 could be presented in a way that actually makes sense to a Jewish person today.

A Resurrected King Messiah:

The Struggle Within Chabad and Orthodox Judaism



By **Jim Melnick**

"WE WANT MOSHIACH NOW!" is a bumper-sticker that hangs over my office door. It has hung there for many years, long before the death of the seventh and last leader of the Chabad Lubavitch Hasidic movement, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson. It reminds me of the need to pray for the Lubavitchers, of their deep messianic longing, and of my own longing for the Day when our true Messiah shall return to this world.

It also takes me back to an incident that occurred more than twenty years ago at Lubavitch World Headquarters in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, when I led a group of young people to scout out the neighborhood. We had prayed for the opportunity to be able to share the Gospel with at least one person. God answered that prayer in a way we weren't expecting. Despite my attempt to avoid any sort of confrontation, an elderly Lubavitch man spied a tract with some Hebrew written on it in the hand of one of our team members, grabbed it, looked at it in disgust, then ripped it into shreds and spat. In seconds, a sea of Lubavitchers gathered and a full-scale riot seemed underway. People were screaming, hitting and cursing. Suddenly I yelled out: "Is this how you fulfill the Law of Moses? Is this what your Rebbe teaches you to do – attack people in the street?"[1]

At that comment, someone shouted, "Be quiet! He is talking about the Rebbe." Suddenly the crowd quieted down. The Lord gave me the words to speak in that incredible moment. As I looked into many young Lubavitch faces, some hostile but others very curious, I said, "We see your signs everywhere that proclaim, 'We Want Moshiach Now!' We want Him, too," I added. "But we believe that He has come already, and it is a *mitzvah* for us to come here and speak to you words from your prophets about Him." It was a scene and an opportunity that I shall never forget.

In our ministry in Chicago in the late 1970s and early '80s, Lubavitchers were always our chief rivals for the attention of Jewish immigrants from

1 I also described this scene in another paper regarding general outreach to the Hasidim that may be of interest to readers. It is entitled, "The Hasidim: The Last Frontier of Jewish Missions?" (Joint paper, *Booklet - 15 August 1999*, The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, Sixth International Conference, New York, 1999), pp. 214-224.

the former Soviet Union, many of whom came out of an atheistic background but were open spiritually. The Lubavitchers opposed us at every opportunity.

Though most Russian Jews respect the Lubavitchers for their pro-Jewish and pro-Israel activism and are thankful for any help they receive from them, the majority of Russian Jews have not embraced their precepts and in fact are repulsed by the strictures of Orthodox Judaism. Nevertheless, there is a Chabad Lubavitch presence in most large and many smaller Russian Jewish communities around the world.[2] We had a major incident in our ministry some years ago, when a Russian Jewish teenager in Chicago who had professed faith in Jesus was spirited away by local rabbis to Lubavitchers in New York for "deprogramming." They did everything they could to try to get him to deny the faith.

We found out that he had been taken to New York and was under the control of a Lubavitch group. The young man escaped, but that is another story. The whole incident was a major turning point in our ministry. I began to study their theology and methods. From that day forward, the Chabad-Lubavitch movement has been on my missionary and spiritual radar screen – "beloved enemies," to paraphrase Romans 11:28.

The Pervasive Influence of Chabad-Lubavitch

The Lubavitch Hasidic sect was founded by Rebbe Schneur Zalman (1745-1813). Its roots extend back to the Russian Empire before the Communist Revolution and the town of Lubavitch in what is present-day Belarus (White Russia).[3]

Chabad Lubavitch influence upon world Jewry remains very pervasive in our day. According to the official Chabad website, there are more than 3,300 Lubavitch-related institutions worldwide and "a workforce that numbers in the tens of thousands."[4] Part of that force includes

2 There has been an explosive growth in the Chabad-Lubavitch presence in the former Soviet Union. According to Sue Fishkoff, by January 2002, "Chabad had full-time emissaries in ...cities across Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltics, and Central Asia…" (Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*, Random House, 2004, Chapter 1, see http://www.wnyc.org/books/35151).

3 See the official Chabad website for more historical background on the movement, specifically, www.chabad.org/global/about/article.asp?AID=36226. Rabbi Zalman's main volume, the *Tanya*, forms the foundation of Lubavitch theology. "CHABAD" is an acrostic that stands for: Ch*ochmah* (wisdom), B*inah* (understanding), and D*aat* (knowledge) – forming what author Tzvi Rabinowicz calls an "intellectual Hasidism." See Tzvi Rabinowicz, "Habad - the Global Lamplighters," *Hasidism in Israel: A History of the Hasidic Movement and Its Masters in the Holy Land* (Jason Aronson, Inc.: 2000), p. 72. The movement was previously known simply as "Chabad" until the sect moved to the town of Lubavitch (City of Love), where it "continued to be the seat of the movement until 1916." (Lis Harris, *Holy Days* (1985), pp. 97-98). For background on the thought of the various Lubavitch rebbes, see Chaim Dalfin, *The Seven Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbes* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998).

4 See "About Chabad Lubavitch" on Chabad.org at http://www.chabad.org/generic.asp?aid=36226, October, 2004.

the so-called *shlichim* (or *shluchim* – "emissaries"),[5] committed veteran Chabadnik "missionaries" of sorts scattered throughout the world. By one account, there are some 3,800 emissary couples in 61 countries.[6] The sect is estimated to have an annual worldwide operating budget approaching $1 billion.[7] Most workers in Jewish evangelical ministry cannot be involved in outreach or ministry for very long without having some contact with Lubavitch influence in one form or another.

Strong Opponents

Opposition to Lubavitch theology within Judaism is nothing new. It goes back to the sect's founding, when anti-Hasidic *mitnagdim* conspired to have Rabbi Zalman arrested and thrown into a Russian Tsarist prison. However, the messianic fervor surrounding the Rebbe certainly accentuated that opposition in the modern era. A 1988 article quoted then 92-year old Rabbi Eliezer Schach, a Torah scholar in Israel, who denounced Schneerson as "the madman who sits in New York and drives the whole world crazy."[8] The Satmar Hasidim of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, who are virulently anti-Zionist (they believe that only the Messiah should establish the state of Israel), have been particularly strong opponents of Lubavitch within the Hasidic world, where antagonisms run deep at many levels. In his fascinating book, *Boychiks in the Hood: Travels in the Hasidic Underground*, author Robert Eisenberg says that Satmars will ordinarily marry other Satmars, or perhaps Hungarian Hasidim, or "occasionally even other non-Hungarian Hasidim, *but never Lubavitchers*"[9] (emphasis added). They are viewed in general by the Satmars as "damaged goods, idolaters" because of their beliefs concerning Schneerson, at least according to this account.[10]

At the time of Schneerson's death, perhaps his greatest rival in the

5 Unpublished report (2004), "From the 770 to a Grave in Queens," recalling the tenth anniversary of Schneerson's death and discussing the Chabad-Lubavitch movement (for more information, contact Chutzpahnik.org, PO Box 5501, Falmouth, VA 22403). See also Dan Pine, "Writer gets inside to recount Chabad movement," *Jewish Bulletin News of Northern California*, May 23, 2003, http://www.jewishsf.com/bk030523/sb24.shtml.

6 Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch.* Random House Books: 2004, Chapter 1.

7 Sue Fishkoff , "Chabad Today: The Lubavitcher Hasidic movement continues to grow, influence extending far beyond Jewish Orthodoxy," MyJewishLearning.com (2003), http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history_community/Jewish_World_Today/Denominations/ChabadToday.htm. According to Tzvi Rabinowicz, a chronicler of Hasidism writing in 2000, Lubavitch institutions at that time were found in more than 35 countries (Tzvi Rabinowicz, *Hasidism in Israel: A History of the Hasidic Movement and Its Masters in the Holy Land*, Jason Aronson, Inc.: 2000, pp. 76-77).

8 Glenn Frankel, "Brooklyn Rabbi a Power in Israel," *The Washington Post*, November 23, 1988, p. A16.

9 Robert Eisenberg, *Boychiks in the Hood: Travels in the Hasidic Underground* (HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 14-15.

10 Eisenberg, pp. 14-15.

ultra-Orthodox Jewish world, the Satmar Rebbe, said: "Now we have to wait for the real Messiah."[11]

Messianic Pretensions While Still Alive

One observer has said, "When the Rebbe was alive, just about every Lubavitcher…was confident he was the messiah."[12] The messianic fervor surrounding him seemed to reach greater and greater heights. As far as I know, Schneerson himself did little or nothing to explicitly rebuke or officially discourage this activity. The groundwork for everything that followed was laid during his lifetime.

There were all sorts of stories and hints derived from various incidents associated with Schneerson's alleged messiahship while he was still alive. One example from an unofficial Lubavitcher messianist website suffices. It promotes a book that includes a section entitled, "The Rebbe Approves our Acceptance of Him As King Moshiach."[13] It says that Schneerson approvingly received a tambourine in 1992 that had these words written in Hebrew: *"Yechi Adoneinu, Moreinu V'Rabeinu, Melech HaMoshiach, L'Olam Va'ed,"*[14] thereby not denying his messiahship. In another incident that reportedly occurred later that year following his stroke, the Rebbe was brought to a window overlooking the main sanctuary at 770 Eastern Parkway. The Lubavitchers began singing the full version of *'Yechi'* in his presence, essentially declaring him to be the Messiah. Such singing reportedly continued on numerous other occasions, apparently with Schneerson's tacit endorsement .[15]

However, did Schneerson himself ever proclaim anything definitive about himself?[16] Eliot Klayman may be quite correct in observing that

11 Cited in Robert Eisenberg, *Boychiks in the Hood: Travels in the Hasidic Underground* (HarperSanFrancisco: 1995), p. 232. This amazing travelogue also provides insights on many other Hasidic groups.

12 Jonathan Mahler, "Waiting for the Messiah of Eastern Parkway," *New York Times Magazine* (September 21, 2003), p. 45. As one Orthodox Jewish book puts it, "it was no secret that towards the end of the Rebbe's life his followers declared him to be Moshiach." Gil Student, *Can the Rebbe Be Moshiach? Proofs from Gemara, Midrash and Rambam that the Rebbe cannot be Moshiach* (Universal Publishers, 2002), p. 4.

13 "The Rebbe As Moshiach - Based on Torah Sources, Chassidim Proclaim to the Lubavitcher Rebbe 'Long Live Our Master, Our Teacher, Our Rebbe, King Moshiach Forever and Ever!'" (4th edition, 1998) Moshiach.net, http://www.moshiach.net/blind/itmotrw.htm#The%20Rebbe%20Approves. One of the chapters in this book is entitled, "The Rebbe Told us That He is Moshiach."

14 Ibid., op. cit. The *Yechi* phrase means: "May our Master, Teacher and Rabbi, the King Messiah, Live Forever!" See also Eliot Klayman, "Does the Lubavitch Rebbe Fit the Festinger Model? Toward a Quantifiable Approach to the Measurement of Failed Prophecy," *The Messianic Outreach* (Autumn 2004), p. 8.

15 "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism," http://www.moshiachlisten.com/history.html.

16 As Joel Marcus says in his article, "The Once and Future Messiah in Early Christianity and Chabad," *New Testament Studies* 46, 2000 (Cambridge University Press), Schneerson "never explicitly said anything like 'I am the Messiah'" (p. 392, footnote 51). While the Marcus article has a great deal of useful information, I must also point out that I strongly disagree with his primary thesis and the applicability of his examples, through which he tries to construct an analogy between Chabad messianic pretensions about Schneerson and early Christianity.

"Schneerson probably expected to be the Messiah."[17] It is clear he thought the advent of Messiah was imminent: "Everything that is necessary to bring about the Redemption has been accomplished. There is no valid explanation for the continuation of the exile."[18]

Did the Rebbe ever order his followers to cease from endless proclamations about his alleged "messiahship"? There is nothing authoritative that I have been able to find to clinch the discussion. There does not appear to be evidence that he ever sought to seriously restrain various followers from essentially proclaiming him to be Messiah if they chose to do so; however, at the same time he did not seek to "be identified as Moshiach on a *public* scale."[19]

Isaiah 53: The Suffering Messiah (Messiah ben Yosef) and King Messiah – Melekh Moshiach (Messiah ben David)

While he was still suffering from a stroke in 1992, many of the Rebbe's followers began – amazingly – to apply Isaiah 53 and its description of the Suffering Messiah to Schneerson.[20] This was astounding, given that the modern Jewish view and position hold that Isaiah 53 does not apply to a Person, but rather to the nation of Israel.[21] However, this modern-day Jewish position that refuses to apply Isaiah 53 to a Person fails on numerous logical points alone.[22] Everyone involved in Jewish evangelism knows how powerful the Isaiah 53 passage is in pointing to Yeshua.

With respect to Schneerson at that time, with every slight change in his condition his followers would be seized with messianic fervor, hoping that he would be healed and that the appearance of Messiah was imminent. When he died, some of his followers even "proclaimed in writing that his death was an atonement for us, in keeping with the traditional

17 Klayman, "Does the Lubavitch Rebbe Fit the Festinger Model?...," *The Messianic Outreach* (Autumn 2004), p. 8. Joel Marcus concludes the same thing: "It seems likely that, despite the absence of explicit statements proclaiming himself to be Messiah, the Rebbe did think he was" (Marcus, op. cit., p. 392).

18 See Marcus, op. cit., p. 392 and footnote 47, citing Rabbi Eliyahu Touger (translator), *Sound the Great Shofar: Essays on the Imminence of the Redemption, Adapted from Addresses of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson Shlita* (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1992), p. 108.

19 "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism," www.moshiachlisten.com/history.html (2003).

20 Michael L. Brown, op. cit., p. 228. See also, for example, the public Jewish Mailing List on the Internet at: http://shamash.org/listarchives/mail-jewish/volume14/v14n23 (Vol. 14, No. 23, July 14, 1994). One posting says: "While the Rebbe was sick, Chabad activists used to quote verses from Isaiah 53, a chapter they felt explained the suffering the Rebbe was going through. Personally, I was appalled at the similarity to Christian theology, having always understood that chapter as talking about Am Yisrael [the people of Israel], but at least their interpretation was a plausible one..."

21 This is obviously an attempt to push people away from the view that Isaiah 53 describes Jesus. However, there are various older scholarly Jewish interpretations of Isaiah 53 that do apply the passage to the Person of Messiah.

22 Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Volume Two, Theological Objections (Baker Books: 2000), Section 3.23, "Jews don't believe in a suffering Messiah," pp. 220-231.

teaching that the death of the righteous atones…"[23] The parallels to the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53 were startling.

Going to the *Ohel*

Schneerson died on June 12, 1994, the seventh in the line of the Hasidic dynasty, leaving no successor. He was buried in Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, New York, near other Lubavitch luminaries from the past. The gravesite has become a shrine, with thousands of prayers placed on small sheets of paper cast into the burial area, based on a custom practiced by some Hasidim. Prayer requests are even faxed or e-mailed from around the world to a Lubavitch building nearby so that they can be cast upon the grave.[24] I have taken various missions teams to this site (the *ohel*) to show the contrast between our risen Lord and the grave of a dead non-messiah. Thus far we have conducted no evangelism when going to the *ohel*. I have instead used it as a great learning opportunity. Going there fills me with compassion for these sheep without a shepherd. Their "shepherd" is dead, and, though many of them believe otherwise, he is not coming back to lead them to the Promised Land. It is heartbreaking to see how their hearts long so for redemption, yet they turn away from the One Who came to give it to them.

Initial Reactions to Schneerson's Death

When Schneerson died in 1994, the Lubavitcher Hasidim were plunged into crisis.[25] Suddenly, the movement was in a situation very similar to the Breslover Hasidim (also known as the Bratslavers), the so-called *Toite Hasidim* (the "dead Hasidim") who lost their rebbe, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, in 1810 at the age of 41 with no successor.[26] The Breslovers gather

23 Michael L. Brown, op. cit., p. 228.

24 Besides the near adoration shown toward Schneerson specifically by some Lubavitchers, this is also an element of the Hasidic tradition of making pilgrimages to the gravesites of rebbes and other revered Hasids. This practice is called *"kayver Tzaddikim."*

25 See, for example, the article by Rebecca Segall, "Holy Daze," *Village Voice* (September 30-October 6, 1998), www.rickross.com/references/lubavitch/lubavitch5.html, regarding what occurred among some Lubavitch youth following Schneerson's death. Segall writes of disenchanted Lubavitch youth, the use of drugs, a post-Schneerson "lack of focus" among some young people, and related problems. There was even a new sect started by a young Lubavitcher named Shaul Shimon Deutsch, who called himself or became known as the "Rebbe of Liozna." He set up shop in Boro Park and reportedly has had influence over about a hundred people (Segall, op. cit). There is even of group of so-called "X-Lubavitchers." They have established a website at www.xlubi.com as a "virtual village for the worldwide community" of former Lubavitchers. The site proclaims itself as an alternative to Chabad-Lubavitch, saying that if a person in the Lubavitch movement is having difficulties, "you're not alone, many great, lovely and very normal people have had problems with the whole Lubavitch system…" The site says that it has been around for some four years. It appears that it may have been established sometime in 2000.

26 See Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Until the Mashiach: Rabbi Nachman's Biography: An Annotated Chronology* (Jerusalem/NewYork: Breslov Research Institute, 1985).

annually from all over the world each Rosh Hashanah to visit Nachman's grave in the town of Uman, Ukraine.[27]

At the time of Schneerson's death some of us hoped that great opportunities for the Gospel witness might soon break out among the Lubavitchers. That continues to be our prayer and hope.

One faction of Lubavitchers soon began positing that Schneerson would rise from the dead as the Messiah. This was so remarkable that my good friend Avi Snyder of Jews for Jesus quickly responded with a Gospel tract entitled "Are the Lubavitch Chassids Becoming 'Jews for Jesus'?"[28]

Several years passed. The view among many Lubavitchers that Schneerson, though dead, was still the Messiah continued. In 1998, one Lubavitch group placed a full-page ad in *The New York Times* proclaiming – in the present tense – that Schneerson was born "to change the world in which we live and lead it to the ultimate redemption as predicted by the prophets…the Rebbe *is* a source of help and hope to hundreds of thousands….Moshiach's presence and achievements *are* already manifest. The complete redemption and transformation of the world *is imminent*…"[29] (emphasis added).

On the tenth anniversary of his death comments on the official Chabad website were nearly as effusive: "We wondered at his ability to negotiate a peace between the extremes of heaven and earth, self and other, spirit and matter."[30]

Lubavitch Belief in Reincarnation (Gilgul), Histalkus and Hisgalus

Lubavitch views on reincarnation (*gilgul*) also frame the beliefs of those who think that Schneerson could be the Moshiach. This goes to a central part of Chabad-Lubavitch teaching. Schneerson himself taught that the souls of some Jews were reincarnated in order to "rectify their lack of performance of some of the 613 *mitzvos* in their previous incarnations."[31] Chabad-Lubavitch belief in *gilgul* is based on the Zohar, which teaches that souls descend from the so-called World of Souls and that their descent to this world may occur more than once.[32] There is also the view that "one person may possess two people's souls" and some believe that

27 See Robert Eisenberg, *Boychiks in the Hood: Travels in the Hasidic Underground* (1985), Chapter 5, "Uman, Uman, Rosh Hashanah."

28 Avi Snyder, Jews for Jesus Booklet: "Are the Lubavitch Chassids Becoming 'Jews for Jesus'?"

29 Full-page Lubavitch ad for Rebbe Schneerson's birthday, appearing in *The New York Times*, April 8, 1998, p. A18.

30 Baila Olidort, "Ten Years Later," http://www.chabad.org/library/article.asp?AID=144906.

31 Eternal Joy - Volume 3. "A Guide To Shidduchim & Marriage." Based On The Teachings Of The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, "Married Life And Shalom Bayis" (date unknown) http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/eternal-joy-3/08.htm.

32 Rabbi Nissan Dovid Dubov, *To Live and Live Again: An Overview of Techiyas Hameisim* (Based on the Classical Sources and on the Teachings of Chabad Chassidism), Chapter 4, "Reincarnation," at http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/to-live-and-live-again/05.htm.

Schneerson possessed or shared his father-in-law's soul.[33] The concept of "*histalkus*" is another view forming Lubavitch beliefs. "Histalkus" (passing, ascent) in Hasidic theology refers to a *tzaddik*'s passing from death to life. Schneerson taught a great deal about the *histalkus* of his father-in-law, the former Rebbe.[34] Finally, there is the concept of *"hisgalus"* (revelation). This refers to the Rebbe allegedly becoming more fully "revealed" as the Messiah. One extreme messianist group maintains that if they can convince enough rabbis that their views are grounded in *halacha*, that then this will help bring about "the *hisgalus* of the Rebbe…"[35]

Kfar Chabad and the Lubavitch Messianists in Eretz Yisrael

In October 2002, I visited the Lubavitch settlement of Kfar Chabad in Israel. In 1992, the community of Kfar Chabad erected a house precisely similar to Rebbe Schneerson's then residence in Brooklyn (at 770 Eastern Parkway), in the hopes that Schneerson would come to Israel. He never did. When asked why, Schneerson is said to have replied that "he would never be allowed to leave the promised land once he had set foot in it."[36] There is a strong Jewish tradition that the true Messiah, once having set foot on the holy soil of Eretz Yisrael, can never leave the Land until He sets up the Messianic Kingdom. Thus, Schneerson had set himself up for the paradoxical situation that he could not visit Israel without setting in motion an even greater worldwide clamor among his followers that the redemption ("Geulah") of the world was imminent.[37]

Most needed no incentive – as is clearly evident from their actions following his death. If Schneerson had actually gone to Israel during his lifetime, it would have been a development of epic proportions in the Hasidic world and in the history of the Jewish state. And because of that, he was probably right – his followers would never have allowed him to leave. Nevertheless, while Schneerson was still alive, he - who never set foot in Israel - could bring down Israeli coalition governments if he thought it necessary.

It is fascinating to see the role played by Kfar Chabad today. They

33 Eliot Klayman, "Does the Lubavitch Rebbe Fit the Festinger Model?…," *The Messianic Outreach* (Autumn 2004), p. 8.

34 "Talks by the Lubavitcher Rebbe," Vol. 3, Tishrei-Teves, 5711, located at http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/proceeding-together-3/14.htm.

35 "When the Rabbanim understand, the 'Man on the Street' will accept it," Beis Moshiach, http://www.beismoshiach.org/Moshiach/moshiach330.htm, published interview with Rabbi Yoram Ulman (Sydney, Australia).

36 Tzvi Rabinowicz, "Habad - the Global Lamplighters," *Hasidism in Israel*, op. cit., p. 80.

37 Marcus (2000), citing Joseph Dan's book, *Apocalypse Then and Now* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2000), p. 317, says: "Another good example of the 'not yet' element in the Rebbe's messianic thinking comes from Joseph Dan, who speculates that the reason the Rebbe never visited Israel…was his and his followers' conviction that his coming to the Holy Land would inaugurate the final redemption." (Joel Marcus, "The Once and Future Messiah…," op. cit., p. 385).

have a Russian language website, www.moshiach.ru, called "Vremya Moshiakha" ("Time of the Moshiach") that displays this phrase: "May our Master, Teacher and the Rebbe King Moshiach live forever!"

The Kfar Chabad settlement is also one of the main centers for the messianist strain within the Chabad Lubavitch movement in Israel. Another is the Chabad school system in the city of Safed. However, not all Lubavitch institutions in Israel are considered "messianist." According to a letter from a rabbi published in *The Jewish Press* in March 2002, "there are at least another six or seven big Chabad schools in Israel that are not controlled by Messianists."[38]

Recent Controversies Within Chabad-Lubavitch

The view that Schneerson might be resurrected from the dead as the Messiah has ignited a storm of controversy within the Orthodox Jewish world. Some Lubavitch elements are considered to have gone beyond the "pale of orthodoxy" as far as Orthodox Judaism is concerned. An Orthodox Jewish scholar named David Berger has led the charge in this effort with his book entitled, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*.[39] The more extreme messianist followers of Schneerson are dubbed *Moshiachistin* (or *Moshichistim*[40]). Some within Orthodox Judaism accused the *Moshiachistin* of heresy.[41] The movement is also referred to as "Lubavitch meshichism,"[42] and its followers are also called the *Meshichistim.*[43] One reviewer of the Berger book, David Singer, director of research at the American Jewish Committee, said that Berger "excoriates the Lubavitcher messianists as vile heretics, accusing them of undermining classic Jewish teaching about the messiah and facilitating Christian missionizing of the Jews."[44] Singer adds that Berger's tone is "one of barely controlled hysteria."[45]

Without question, Berger's book and comments created a firestorm and a major counter-response among many Lubavitchers and their defenders, including a book by Rabbi Chaim Dalfin called *Attack on Lubavitch:*

38 Letters to *The Jewish Press*, "Mashiach Controversy: Readers Respond," March 13, 2002. Subtitle: "Enemy of Lubavitch," letter via e-mail (Rabbi Yosef Piekarski), http://www.jewishpress.com/news_article_print.asp?article=965. Another letter in that series, under the subtitle: "Messianic Belief Not a Case of *Avodah Zorah*" says: "Even if you don't agree with the ideology that the Rebbe is Mashiach, there are still enough sources within Yiddishkeit that legitimize this opinion…" (Binyamin Hoen).

39 David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001).

40 Tzvi Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 82.

41 Rabbi Chaim Rapoport, *The Messiah Problem: Berger, the Angel, and the Scandal of Reckless Indiscrimination* (Ilford, UK: 2002), p. 108.

42 Gil Student, *Can the Rebbe Be Moshiach?* (Universal Publishers, 2002), p. 2.

43 "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism," http://moshiachlisten.com/history.html (2003).

44 David Singer, "The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Heresy Hunter," *First Things*, May 2003, No. 133, pp. 42-49. Also found on OrthodoxyToday.org at: http://orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/SingerHeresyHunter.shtml.

45 David Singer, op. cit.

A Response.[46] Dalfin cited the opinion of Professor Aviezer Ravitzky, chairman of the department of Jewish philosophy at Hebrew University, concerning the view of some Lubavitchers that Schneerson might be resurrected as the Messiah: "…those inside Lubavitch who wait for their rebbe to return from the dead and redeem the world may be foolish, but by no means is this expectation heretical or antithetical to Judaism."[47] Another rabbi who is critical of some within the Lubavitch movement for pushing the doctrine of Schneerson's messiahship ("a vocal faction"[48] he says), nevertheless wrote the following: "Does this mean to say that I agree with Berger, in principle, that the notion of a resurrected Messiah is in reality a definite error…? Absolutely not!"[49]

One Lubavitch view says that "there are indications that Mashiach could possibly be a righteous individual who has already lived and died and will then be resurrected as Mashiach."[50]

This is indeed an amazing development! It is also very clear that many non-Lubavitch Orthodox Jews (though not necessarily agreeing that Schneerson can still be the Messiah) nevertheless believe that the Lubavitch messianists are entitled to their views and that they remain welcome within Orthodox Judaism's ranks.

However, Berger sees this as a terrible problem that threatens Judaism's very core. As David Singer observes, Berger sees "Christianity and Lubavitch messianism [as] parallel phenomena."[51] Berger attacks as "indifference" the fact that greater numbers of Orthodox Jews do not join with him in condemning the ongoing Schneerson-as-messiah movement within Chabad. But it is hard to say that Orthodox Jews have been "indifferent" to the issue when Berger was able to get the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA),[52] the largest Orthodox rabbinical group of its kind in the world, to pass a one sentence resolution (said to be authored by Berger)[53] against Lubavitch messianism. The resolution, passed in June 1996, said that "there is not and has never been a place in Judaism for the belief that Mashiach ben David [Messiah son of David] will begin his

46 Rabbi Chaim Dalfin, *Attack on Lubavitch: a Response* (Brooklyn, New York: Jewish Enrichment Press, Spring 2002), p. 11. See also http://www.jewishinfo.org/attack.htm.

47 Rabbi Chaim Dalfin, *Attack on Lubavitch: a Response* (Spring 2002), op. cit., p. 25.

48 Rabbi Chaim Rapoport, *The Messiah Problem,* op. cit., p. 36. Rabbi Rapoport asserts that "most Lubavitchers no longer believe that the Rebbe is the Messiah" (p. 41).

49 Rabbi Chaim Rapoport, *The Messiah Problem,* op. cit., p. 108.

50 Rabbi Nissan Dovid Dubov, *To Live and Love Again: An Overview of Techiyas Hameisim* (Based on the Classical Sources and on the Teachings of Chabad Chassidism), Chapter 6, "When Will the Resurrection Take Place?" http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/to-live-and-live-again/07.htm.

51 David Singer, "The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Heresy Hunter," *First Things,* op. cit.

52 According to its website, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) is made up of nearly 1,000 ordained rabbis. It was established in 1935 "to advance the cause and the voice of Torah and the rabbinic tradition by promoting the welfare, interests, and professionalism of Orthodox rabbis all around the world" (http://www.rabbis.org/about_us.cfm).

53 Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "1,000 Orthodox rabbis reject claim rebbe was Messiah," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *J* (Jewish news weekly of Northern California), www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/3912/format/html/displaystory.html.

Messianic Mission only to experience death, burial and resurrection before completing it."[54] Though this resolution would appear to be quite devastating to the Lubavitch messianist movement, its bite was largely eviscerated soon after when the highly respected halachic scholar Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik of Yeshiva University (where Berger himself was ordained) rebuked the RCA resolution as follows: "The belief held by many in Lubavitch…that the Rebbe can still be Moshiach…cannot be dismissed as a belief that is outside the pale of Orthodoxy."[55] Berger admitted that Soloveichik's letter hit like a "thunder-bolt," but he sought to discredit its impact by claiming that it was written under duress when the rabbi was infirm.[56] Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, who has extensively critiqued Berger's book, wrote that he contacted Rabbi Soloveichik's family about the matter. They told him that Soloveichik "regarded the attribution of messiahship to the deceased Rebbe as a *shtut* (folly) but definitely not heretical."[57]

Berger has not been content to merely denounce Lubavitch messianists. He has called for "the dismissal of Lubavitcher messianists currently holding positions in the Orthodox community as congregational rabbis, Jewish educators, ritual slaughterers, or religious scribes."[58]

It is also fascinating to delve deeper into Berger's own background. As already mentioned, he is an ordained rabbi from Yeshiva University (1967) and also holds a PhD in Jewish History from Columbia University (1970).[59] He is also the author of one of the best-known anti-missionary books, *Jews and 'Jewish Christianity*,' published in 1978.[60] Thus, he is probably well-equipped – given his long struggles against the faith of Messianic Jewish believers in Yeshua - to see the "dangers" inherent (from an Orthodox Jewish standpoint) in the Lubavitch messianist position that the Messiah could be one who is resurrected! Indeed, as Rabbi Schochet puts it in his critique of *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference,* Berger is deeply concerned that "'one of the defining characteristics of Judaism in a Christian world will have been erased' by the possibility of a resurrected messiah…"[61] That statement speaks for itself.

Berger plans to publish a Hebrew language update to his controversial

54 Debra Cohen, op. cit.

55 See Review Essay by Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, "The Professor, Messiah and Scandal of Calumnies," a review of Berger's book. Cited in Shmais.com at: http://www.shmais.com/printchabad.cfm?ID=279.

56 Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, op. cit.

57 Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, op. cit.

58 David Singer, op. cit.

59 This information is from Berger's online curriculum vitae.

60 *Jews and 'Jewish Christianity'* (by David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod, Ktav, 1978). This was reprinted in 2002 by Jews for Judaism as *Jews and 'Jewish Christianity': A Jewish Response to the Missionary Challenge.* A Russian translation of the original book was published in 1991.

61 Rabbi Schochet, op. cit., citing Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (Berger, pp. 31 and 35).

book.[62] For Berger, the threat posed by Lubavitch messianist beliefs (and perpetuated by those who have failed to exclude them from the Jewish "pale of Orthodoxy") has by no means abated.

The Operational Side of Chabad Lubavitch and the "Big Tent"

It is important to differentiate some of the various strands within the movement since Schneerson's death. There is the *official* position of Chabad Lubavitch, which must of necessity be more restrained and *orthodox* (with respect to traditional Hasidic views and Orthodox Judaism), and then there are the unofficial, more extreme, and less restrained views within the movement.[63] Certainly not all Lubavitchers believe that Schneerson could still be Moshiach, but many do. These remain welcome under the Lubavitch "big tent." Berger reportedly believes that a "large segment – almost certainly a substantial majority" hold this view.[64] However, there are no hard statistics one way or the other, merely anecdotal and subjective views on the matter.[65]

An article entitled "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism" goes further in assessing differences between the messianist and non-messianist camps. It defines the messianist (or Meshichist) camp as those who will recite "*Yechi*" when it is said after prayers, and the Anti-Meshichists as those who will not.[66] One messianist group, known as the "Tzfatim," named after the city of Safed, a famous Hasidic stronghold in Israel, is said to be rather abrasive. They are reportedly obsessed with saying *'Yechi'* during services, while a contingent has reportedly "taken hold of the day to day functions in the main sanctuary at 770 Eastern Parkway."[67] When the Rebbe's chair is brought out, this group is said to clear a path, known as the *"shvil,"* for the Rebbe to supposedly cross.[68] Given the intensity of these feelings, it is not surprising that disagreements between the different factions could lead to violence. In December, 2004, nine people were arrested in a scuffle outside 770 Eastern Parkway over a plaque. It had the words "of blessed memory" in reference to Schneerson, which some

62 According to Berger's curriculum vitae, this updated Hebrew version of the book is due to be published in 2005. This updated version will be called, *The Rebbe King Messiah, the Scandal of Indifference, and the Threat to the Jewish Faith.*

63 Rabbi Schochet says that even Berger admits that "the official leadership of Lubavitch… [is] decidedly non-messianist" (Schochet, op. cit.).

64 David Singer, "The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Heresy Hunter," *First Things,* op. cit.

65 Eliot Klayman takes the view that "the bulk are messianists who cling to the hope of the return of their Messiah" (Klayman, Eliot, "Does the Lubavitch Rebbe Fit the Festinger Model?…," *The Messianic Outreach,* Autumn 2004, p. 11).

66 "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism," on http://www.moshiachlisten.com/history.html (2003).

67 "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism," op. cit.

68 "A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism," op. cit.

Lubavitchers (who don't believe he's really dead) took great offense to, resulting in a scuffle.[69]

Speaking of the "big tent," the huge worldwide effort needed just to keep the Lubavitch empire running and expanding must also be noted. This is the operational side of the sect, which goes forward despite theological disputes. Of the estimated $1 billion worldwide annual budget, the Israeli diamond and real estate billionaire magnate Lev Leviev, a Lubavitcher born in Uzbekistan, is believed to give "at least" $30 million to Lubavitch causes each year, according to *Forbes.*[70]

The influence of Chabad Lubavitch, which had seemed to reach its zenith under Schneerson's leadership, has continued to expand since his death, reaching out to Jews of all types in the effort to bring about their goal of worldwide redemption. This messianic impulse remains the guiding force of the movement today (with or without the Rebbe). It depends upon more and more Jews doing *mitzvot* to allegedly bring about redemption through deeds and to thus usher in both Moshiach and the Messianic Age. That includes a sympathetic view toward fellow Lubavitchers and most other Jews, regardless of their views.

The fact that the Rebbe himself did not explicitly condemn his more enthusiastic messianist supporters while he was alive (and in some cases seemed to encourage their behavior by his tacit acceptance) supports the messianists' position in their quest to strongly press their views. If the Rebbe did not condemn or hinder them while he was alive, who within Chabad has the authority to condemn them now? Thus, the "big tent" within Chabad Lubavitch is likely to continue, despite Berger's and others' efforts.

"Presumptive Moshiach" versus the "Halachic Moshiach"

Going back to the Berger critique, we must consider the very significant aspect of Jewish theology that differentiates between the concepts of the "Presumptive" versus the "Halachic" Moshiach. This issue goes to the heart of the controversy over Schneerson and the question of orthodoxy. This is a key aspect to consider not only for understanding what is happening within Chabad Lubavitch but also for our Gospel witness to the Hasidim and Orthodox Jews in general.

According to the traditional Jewish view, until the Messiah is revealed various candidates could be considered to be the "Presumptive Moshiach." This concept is also in line with the Orthodox Jewish view that

69 Melissa Grace, "Cuff 9 in rabbi row," *New York Daily News*, December 16, 2004, http://www.rickross.com/reference/lubavitch/lubavitch31.html.

70 Phyllis Berman and Lea Goldman, "Cracked De Beers," *Forbes*, September 15, 2003, http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2003/0915/108_print.html.

Moshiach could be present in any generation. Belief in reincarnation in some Hasidic and Lubavitch theology also plays into this concept.[71]

The guiding definition of who the Messiah can be according to Orthodox Judaism goes directly back to Maimonides ("the Rambam"), the rabbi whose works and influence still define "orthodoxy." His full name was Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204). According to Maimonides, the "Halachic Moshiach" must "meet the criteria of building the Temple and gathering the dispersed of Israel."[72] For an excellent summary of Maimonides' views of the Messiah, see Elliot Klayman's article, "A Composite of the Characteristics of Messiah: A Maimonidean View" in the journal *The Messianic Outreach.*[73] The Maimonidean distinctions concerning Messiah are a two-tiered approach. If the candidate meets "tier one" qualifications (a "Presumptive Moshiach"), he is said to have "messiah potential."[74] This concept comes from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, where he wrote that a candidate meeting these qualifications is *presumed* to be Messiah.[75] If a candidate also meets the requirements of "tier two," he then is proclaimed as "King Messiah" according to the Maimonidean view.[76] This is also expressed as the *chezkat Mashiach* (a validly potential Mashiach) versus the *Mashiach vadai* (the "actualized Messiah").[77]

Maimonides set up what he considered to be a rational, step-by-step procedure for determining who was Moshiach. He believed that "there have been *messiah potentials* throughout the ages, but that the *messiah certain* had not arisen as yet."[78]

Some Orthodox Jews believe that a reading of Maimonides leads to the inescapable conclusion "that even a legitimately 'presumed Messiah' who passed away before completing his mission must be seen as a righteous king who is clearly *not* the 'halachic Messiah.'"[79] But others do not, and therein lays the crux of the matter. As one rabbi states: "when some

71 See Lis Harris, *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), pp. 89-98. The issue of reincarnation is also currently addressed prominently on the Chabad website. See "What's the Story with Reincarnation?" at http://www.chabad.org/magazine/article.asp?AID=209444.

72 Dalfin, op. cit., p. 28.

73 Elliot Klayman, "A Composite of the Characteristics of Messiah: A Maimonidean View," *The Messianic Outreach* journal, Issue on "Millenarianism," Vol. 23:3, Spring 2004, pp. 3-12.

74 Klayman, op. cit., pp. 7-8. "Tier one" Maimonidean qualifications for Messiah are summarized by Klayman as including: Davidic lineage, one who studies Torah and does *mitzvot* according to both the Oral and Written Torah, one who "reinstates widespread Torah observance" and who "fights battles for the Lord."

75 The citation provided by Klayman (op. cit., p. 11) can be found in *Maimonides' Mishneh Torah* (Yad Ha-Hazakah), abridged, Phillip Birnbaum, ed. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1944), p. 327.

76 Klayman, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

77 Review Essay by Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, "The Professor, Messiah and Scandal of Calumnies," a review of Berger's book. Cited in Shmais.com at http://www.shmais.com/printchabad.cfm?ID=279.

78 Klayman, op. cit., p. 8.

79 Rapoport, op. cit., p. 41.

Lubavitchers say the Rebbe is Mashiach, they mean, in Rambam's words, the presumptive Mashiach…."[80] Rabbi Dalfin, cited earlier, in arguing with Berger on whether there could be a Presumptive Moshiach who returned from the dead, says that Berger "argues that Mashiach cannot begin his work, pass on, and then come back to be the definite Mashiach." In response, Dalfin says, "I will mention just a few sources supporting the idea that the presumptive Mashiach could begin his job, disappear, and then come back as the definite Mashiach in order to complete his mission through the rebuilding of the Temple and gathering of the dispersed Jews."[81] Dalfin cites Rashi's view of Daniel 12:12 and concludes, "Clearly the verse says that the idea of Mashiach being present, then disappearing and finally coming back as the final redeemer is an acceptable Jewish concept!"[82]

I believe this current controversy provides an extraordinary development for evangelical missions to the Lubavitchers specifically and to other Hasidim and Orthodox Jews in general. The New Testament view of Messiah in all its power and fulfillment cannot be squeezed into a Maimonidean framework whose *a priori* conception began with a rejection of Jesus as Messiah. Nevertheless, we should become very familiar with these concepts and phraseology, since they will be very useful in our Gospel witness to Orthodox Jews. We should also use the phrases, "the definite Moshiach," "Melekh Moshiach," and so forth in our descriptions of Yeshua, the One Who has purchased our Redemption (our Geulah) and Who is coming again in Glory as our Righteous King (our Melekh Moshiach and *Moshiach Certain!*).

The whole controversy over Schneerson and whether the Moshiach can be one who is resurrected from the dead presents us with unprecedented opportunities. We can use this as the basis for reaching some Jewish seekers. Those who are truly seeking Truth may next be led to examine the Person of Yeshua and what is said about Him in both the *Tanakh* and the *Brit Chadasha*.

How Do We Reach Them? HOPE (Hasidic Outreach Partnership for Evangelism)

Several of us founded HOPE (Hasidic Outreach Partnership for Evangelism), in January 2002, as an evangelical outreach to the Hasidim, including the Lubavitch Hasidim. The chief goal of HOPE is to bring together evangelical ministries and workers from around the world into a group that can concentrate resources and prayer on specifically reaching these groups with the Gospel. We welcome input and participation by other believ-

80 Dalfin, op. cit., p. 28.
81 Dalfin, op. cit., p. 103.
82 Dalfin, op. cit., p. 105.

ers in building this network of ministries and mutual goals.[83] For now, our meetings have been held in New York, but we would like to expand that network to other parts of the world in the future. We also have "virtual meetings" and phone conferences from time to time which others could join in to participate in this ministry.

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A number of websites also contribute to this overall goal. These include Chutzpahnik.org (www.chutzpahnik.org), where Jewish seekers can read materials in Yiddish and English, and a wonderful new website called "UgotChutzpah" (www.ugotchutzpah.com) that has many different types of material available. There is also the very significant *Orthodox Jewish Bible* and the *Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadashah.* These are available online at the website of Artists for Israel International (www.afii.org). We also mail them, as well as Yiddish New Testaments, to Jewish seekers and to those in ministry, based on availability.

There is also very exciting news about various individual Hasidic Jews coming to the Lord. Obviously, these testimonies and situations are very sensitive and cannot be publicly shared. Please pray for these believers. The process of integrating some of them into reaching other Hasidim with the Gospel has already begun. In one case, a Jewish believer who is growing in the Lord (and who still lives in a Hasidic Jewish community) wrote a tract that others distributed. That tract created a powerful and lively reaction in the Hasidic community where it was distributed. We also hear stories from various parts of the world about other secret believers in Jesus as the Messiah in various Hasidic communities. All these cannot be confirmed, but the Lord knows His own, wherever they are. We would hope to find ways to reach out to them and to encourage them.

Taken together, these are amazing developments within the Orthodox Jewish world. They provide us with tremendous opportunities in seeking to reach these communities with the Good News of the one and only True Messiah, Yeshua HaMashaich, Jesus of Nazareth. Please join us in praying for these opportunities and in echoing the prayer of the Apostle Paul in Romans: *"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation"* (Rom 10:1).

83 To contact us at HOPE, please send an e-mail to either Moshiachiscoming@juno.com or info@chutzpahnik.org, or write to: Chutzpahnik.org, PO Box 5501, Falmouth, VA 22403 USA or "Chutzpah!" c/o PO Box 5470, Lansing, IL 60438 USA. Artists for Israel International can be contacted at: AFII, PO Box 2056, New York, NY 10163-2056 USA or via www.afii.org.

Peculiarities of Translating the NT into Hebrew[1]

By **Ray Pritz**

Vernacular Hebrew was resurrected in Israel about a hundred years ago, primarily through the efforts of Eliezer Ben Yehuda. While modern Hebrew uses the same alphabet (or Alefbet) and basic vocabulary as biblical Hebrew, it is a hybrid of old and new.

On the one hand, for example, an Israeli would very naturally say of someone who hesitates to make a decision that he *poseah 'al shte hase'ipim* (hops on two branches), without being fully aware that he is quoting the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 18:21). On the other hand, modern Hebrew contains many words borrowed or adapted from European languages, for example *telefon*.

An Israeli with a high school education is able to read most of the Bible (the "Old Testament") in the original Hebrew with complete understanding. Israeli children learn their Alefbet in the first grade, and in the second grade they read the entire book of Genesis in the original Hebrew with a high degree of comprehension. In Jewish religious schools today, as in Jesus' time, boys learn to read the Bible at age five, beginning with the book of Leviticus.

Jesus' Words in Hebrew

When Israelis read the words of Jesus in Hebrew, they often have an advantage over someone reading in another language. While the Hebrew version is still a translation, the Greek text from which the Hebrew is translated is full of Hebraisms, which are inherently more comprehensible to the Hebrew-speaker.

Perhaps I can illustrate what I mean with an example. On a visit to Japan, the widow of John Steinbeck was greeted by an admirer who told her he loved her husband's books, especially *The Angry Raisins*. A person who heard this comment and was familiar with American literature would have no trouble restoring the proper title, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Their success would have been due to their knowledge of the literary background as well as the language of the original.

1 Most of the material in this article previously appeared in *Jerusalem Perspective*, Issues 28, 29, and 31.

Hebraisms in the Greek Gospels exist in part because at least some of Jesus' recorded sayings were originally spoken in Hebrew. No matter what language the original biographies of Jesus were written in, the words of Jesus as we read them in Greek are a translation. The Greek has preserved a good deal of the original Semitic flavor of Jesus' words, and in many cases has even conveyed word-for-word renderings of Hebrew idioms which make little sense in Greek or any other non-Semitic language. When translated to Hebrew, these idioms make sense and sound natural to one whose mother tongue is Hebrew.

Hebrew New Testaments

In 1969, the Bible Society in Israel began preparing the first translation of the full New Testament into modern Hebrew. A basic text was prepared by an Israeli translator, and this was closely checked by a committee of local scholars who were qualified in both Greek and Hebrew.

The New Testament had already been translated into Hebrew over ninety times. The most famous pre-modern-Hebrew translation was completed in 1877 (four years before Ben Yehuda immigrated to Palestine) by Franz Delitzsch, a German scholar of Jewish descent. He used his extensive knowledge of biblical and post-biblical Hebrew to produce a translation in the kind of Hebrew that developed after the period of the Hebrew Scriptures. This translation went through a number of revisions, both by Delitzsch himself and by others after his death.

Many phrases that Delitzsch reconstructed in his translation were current in Jesus' time, but today's Hebrew-speaker benefits from them only if he is a student of his own language, or if those phrases still have the same meaning in modern Hebrew. The Bible Society published its modern Hebrew version of the New Testament in 1976, and it has gradually become the most widely used version in Israel. The translators of the United Bible Societies (UBS) version opted for understandable current Hebrew at the expense of preserving archaic original phrases. The modern translators had an advantage over Delitzsch in that they knew not only the Greek and old Hebrew as he did, but also the evolved Hebrew used by today's readers.

Because Delitzsch translated before Hebrew was reborn, some of his renderings are obscure or even misleading. Delitzsch could not have known, for example, that the word he used to describe the Messiah in Hebrews 8:6, *sarsur* (mediator), would become the modern Hebrew word for gigolo or pimp. The translators of the modern Hebrew version frequently were able to preserve phrases close to Jesus' original words while staying within the boundaries of language that carries the same meaning today.

The Holy Spirit in the Hebrew New Testament

Several challenges face anyone seeking to translate the New Testament into Hebrew. One of these has to do with the gender of the Holy Spirit.

Gender is a highly important part of the grammar of many languages, and one must know a noun's gender in order to use the correct form of its modifiers.

Masculine, feminine, and neuter genders exist in English, but the designations are usually intrinsically obvious. For example, mother, sister, aunt, and cow are feminine, while father, brother, uncle, and bull are masculine. There are a few exceptions, and one may refer in English to a ship, a country, or the moon as "she," but it is more a matter of personification than rules of grammar. Hebrew differs from English in that there is only masculine and feminine. Grammatically, nothing can be an "it" in Hebrew but always must be a "he" or a "she."

Plural Endings

The plural form of a Hebrew noun will usually tell you its gender. Masculine nouns generally receive the masculine plural ending *IM*, as in *banIM* (sons) or *'etsIM* (trees), while feminine nouns generally receive the feminine plural ending *OT*, as in *banOT* (daughters) or *britOT* (covenants). However, there are plenty of exceptions: for example, the plural of father is *'avOT*, while the plural for woman is *nashIM*.

To make things a bit more complicated, some words can be either gender in the Bible, such as *shemesh* (sun), *derech* (way), *kerem* (vineyard), *khatser* (courtyard), and *ruakh* (wind or spirit).

It is this last word, *ruakh*, which caused some lengthy discussions among the editors of the Bible Societies' annotated Hebrew New Testament (1991). The 1976 translation of UBS had followed general usage in treating *ruakh* as a feminine noun. This, of course, meant calling the Holy Spirit "she" in many places where the Greek New Testament says "it," since the Greek word for spirit or wind, *pneuma*, is neuter.

Holy Spirit as "She"?

For theological rather than linguistic reasons, some members of the committee were disturbed at referring to the Spirit of God as "she" in Hebrew. They argued that since the Bible consistently speaks of God as "he," the Spirit of God should be referred to in the same gender. The ambivalent gender of the word *ruakh* in Biblical Hebrew would allow this.

In response to the suggestion to render the gender of *ruakh* as masculine, research was done in several areas, one of which was modern Hebrew usage. All dictionaries of modern Hebrew agree that *ruakh* is a feminine noun, although they do not relate to the specific problem of *ruakh 'elohim* (the Spirit of God) or *ruakh hakodesh* (the Holy Spirit).

The committee then went to the Hebrew Scriptures, where it was found that *ruakh* in general usage is treated as both masculine and feminine. In fact, in one particularly interesting verse, 1 Kings 19:11, the wind which Elijah saw at Horeb is described as *ruakh gedolah vekhazak*, "a great and powerful wind," using one feminine and one masculine adjective to modify it.

The more important question, however, was how the Hebrew Scriptures

refer to the Spirit of God. Most references to the Holy Spirit give no indication of gender, since the word *ruakh* appears as an object with no modifiers, as in Psalm 51:13, "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me." However, in more than thirty places in the Hebrew Bible the gender of God's Spirit is indicated. It is feminine in about eighty percent of the cases.

It was decided that the modern Hebrew translation of the New Testament should not try to improve on the grammar — or the theology — of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Spirit of God therefore remains in the feminine gender.

The Divine Name in the Hebrew New Testament

God has a personal name: *YHVH*. Like Semitic names in general, it was intended to reflect something of the bearer's character. *YHVH* is related to the root *h-v-h*, "to be," and reflects God's eternity and timelessness.

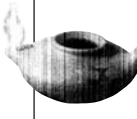
The name of the God of Israel contained power and was used with reverence. The third commandment said it was not to be "taken in vain," which meant that people were not to swear falsely by God's name. However, this commandment came to be interpreted in its narrowest sense, and somewhere between the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C. and the third century A.D., people stopped using the name at all when speaking.

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (the so-called Septuagint, or LXX) in the third century B.C., God's name, sometimes called the tetragrammaton, was often substituted by the Greek word *kurios*, which means "Lord." This causes a slight complication when we read, because there is already a word for Lord in Hebrew, which is sometimes applied to God either in its singular form, *'adon*, or as a plural with the first person singular pronominal suffix, *'adonai*, Lord (literally "my lords").[2] Thus it is not always possible in the LXX to tell whether the original underlying Hebrew referring to God was the tetragrammaton, *'adonai*, or some other word.

Greek to Hebrew

This does not present a problem when translating the New Testament into most languages: translators just use the word for "lord." However, in the Hebrew translation of the New Testament it was necessary to decide at each appearance of *kurios* whether to render *'adonai* or *YHVH* or something else. Where the name occurs in a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures, the decision is simple enough. In a passage such as Matthew 22:44, the modern Hebrew New Testament returns to the original of Psalm 110:1 and reads, "*ne'um YHVH* (by tradition read as *'adonai*) *l'adoni*," where English translations have rendered, "The LORD said to my Lord."

2 The plural of *'adon* is *'adonim*. The regular plural with first person singular pronominal suffix is *'adonai*, my lords. In the Masoretic text, when God is intended and not "my lords," the word is pointed (one exception out of 425 occurrences, *'adonai* in Judges 13:8).



Notice in the above example that Matthew is quoting words which Jesus spoke to an audience. Would Jesus or anyone else in the New Testament have actually pronounced the Divine Name? The answer must be no. However, the translators felt justified in leaving the original wording of the Psalm, even though Jesus would have spoken the words "*ne'um 'adonai l'adoni*," substituting '*adonai* for the tetragrammaton. In this case they were copying from the original Psalm rather than quoting the actual words which came out of Jesus' mouth.[3]

Other instances where God is spoken of in direct speech are in the words of Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah in Luke 1:28, 46, 68. In all of these cases the first edition of the modern Hebrew New Testament used *YHVH* to translate *kurios*, although the three speakers would have said '*adonai*, as will the modern reader.

Hebrew to Greek

The LXX translators, who tended to be fairly literal in their translating, had been faced with the converse problem: how could they distinguish between '*adonai* and *YHVH* in their Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible? The solution they generally seem to have settled on was to render '*adonai* as *ho kurios* (the Lord), and *YHVH* as simply *kurios* without the definite article. This was done without distinction as to whether the passage was direct speech or narrative. The LXX was translated over a period of several generations, and this rule was not followed consistently by its various translators.

It is interesting to note that the Greek of the New Testament also has both forms, *kurios* and *ho kurios*, sometimes even coming side by side (e.g., Lk 1:9, 11; 1:25, 28, 32; 1:45, 46). To make things more complicated, the form of *kurios* without the definite article is occasionally used of Jesus, as in Luke 2:11 ("…is born [a] savior, who is Messiah, [the] Lord").[4]

Modern Hebrew Translations

The first edition of the UBS Hebrew New Testament, with a few exceptions, had used the LXX practice as a guideline by rendering *ho kurios* as '*adonai*, and *kurios* without the definite article as *YHVH*. However, some members of the editorial committee called this into question. First of all, the distinction would not be clear to modern readers, to whom it might seem strange to find the tetragrammaton being used in direct speech.

3 The Greek text of Matthew here uses the word *kurios* twice. The Septuagint used the word *kurios* to translate thirteen different Hebrew words. Therefore, when translating back into Hebrew we can choose which of those words is more appropriate to the context and situation. If *YHVH* is used, the modern Israeli reader will still say "'*adonai*." Today, as in the time of Jesus, it is permitted when copying Scripture to write the tetragrammaton even though one does not pronounce it.

4 Two seventh-century Latin manuscripts of the New Testament (b and r^1) change "Lord" in Luke 2:11 into the genitive, that is, "…who is Messiah of [the] Lord," a more Hebraic expression (i.e., *Meshiakh YHVH*).

Secondly, modern Israeli readers will say *'adonai* when they encounter *YHVH* in the text.

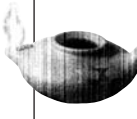
To aid in making the decision, we asked a number of Israelis with good academic command of Hebrew whether the translation should maintain *YHVH* or substitute instead an abbreviation such as *H'* or ", both of which are common in Hebrew literature and are read as *'adonai* or *ha-shem*, "the name." Opinions were divided, although most were in favor of maintaining *YHVH,* except in direct speech. Some of these argued that to use *H'* or " would give the impression that the New Testament is just another secular book with less sanctity than the Hebrew Bible.

Those who argued against using *YHVH* said that it has simply never been done in texts other than the Hebrew Bible, from ancient times until today. Additionally, they said, more Israelis would be likely to read the New Testament if it did not contain the divine name. The first of these objections is contrary to the evidence: the divine name is found in non-biblical material in the Dead Sea Scrolls and especially in the Temple Scroll. The second objection is not at all certain. Those Israelis who are interested in reading the New Testament probably will not be put off by the appearance of the tetragrammaton. Those who refuse to read the New Testament do so because of objections to Jesus and Paul and the history of "Christian" treatment of Jews; changing *YHVH* to *H'* or " would make no difference to them.

It was decided to abandon the LXX solution and treat each case on its own merits. Each one of the more than three hundred occurrences of *kurios* in the New Testament had to be checked in its context. Where direct speech was involved, it could be translated by *ha'adon* (the Lord), *'adonai*, or even *'elohim* (God), as the LXX translators themselves had sometimes done (in the reverse direction, of course). The one exception to this is where the speaker is quoting a verse from the Hebrew Bible that includes the tetragrammaton. In these cases, as in the example from Matthew 22:44 cited above, *YHVH* has been retained. In narrative sections, *YHVH* has been left in the translation in almost every case. Some of the cases in the Gospels are in fact stock phrases in which the divine name of God is normal. Among these are *mal'ach YHVH* (the angel of the Lord), *yom YHVH* (the day of the Lord), *yad YHVH* (the hand of the Lord), and *kevod YHVH* (the glory of the Lord). Here the Hebrew New Testament has preserved the familiar phrase.

Difficult Decisions

Some places needed a decision bordering on the theological to determine how to translate *kurios*. What should be done, for example, in a situation like Luke 19:31, 34: "You shall say 'The Lord needs it'"? Was the owner to understand that "the Lord" needed the colt or that "the LORD" needed it? In the modern Hebrew translation it would be possible to render *kurios* as either *ha'adon* (the Lord) or as *'adonai* (the LORD). English translations generally do not have to make such a decision because they use the distinctive LORD only in the Hebrew Scriptures. The modern Hebrew transla-



tors decided to use *ha'adon*, leaving open the interpretation that Jesus, the disciples' master, needed the colt. Translation sometimes unavoidably involves interpretation, and in this case the interpretation could have gone either way.

Or, to take a similar example, how are we to understand the words of Jesus in Mark 5:19: "Go home to your family and tell them what *ho kurios* has done for you"? The first Hebrew New Testament edition used *YHVH*, but it need not have been so unequivocal, since Jesus would not have pronounced the divine name. It is clear that Jesus said either *'adonai* or *ha'adon*. To render *kurios* here as *'adonai* would lose the ambiguity. It is better to stay with *ha'adon*, which could have been understood by the newly-healed demoniac (as well as by today's readers) to refer either to the LORD or to Jesus. Judging from verse 20, the ex-demoniac may have understood the latter, because he went out to proclaim in the Decapolis "how much Jesus had done for him."

As a general rule it was decided that the modern Hebrew New Testament would stay with *'adon* (Lord) or *'adonai* (LORD) for *kurios* rather than use the tetragrammaton, *YHVH*. The exceptions to this are those quotations from the Hebrew Bible in which *YHVH* appears in the original. Other minor exceptions also can be found in places where the context seemed to demand using *YHVH* (for example, Rev 19:6).

Quotations from the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament

Another area that sometimes presents a difficulty unique to a Hebrew translation of the New Testament is when there is a quotation from the Old Testament. Most such quotations are given to us in the Greek of the LXX, and most of the time the LXX rendering is close to the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

In many cases, however, there are obvious differences between the LXX version and the Hebrew version. A translation in another language, such as English, can place the quotation in a special font to indicate that this is a quotation, and the reader has no way to know whether it is a quote from the LXX or from the Masoretic Hebrew Text or perhaps neither one.

The UBS translation indicates quotations with a bold font. Unlike other languages, it was felt to be inappropriate to use this font for quotations that differed from the familiar Masoretic Text. This limitation created situations where phrases or sentences are in quotation marks but not in the typeface indicating a quotation (and consequently no cross reference given in the margin), other situations where a sentence is a mix of bold and regular typeface, and still others where only one word (e.g., Rom 11: 4) or even one letter (Rom 3:17) is left unbolded.

A few examples (out of many dozens possible) will have to suffice.

The second quote in the New Testament (Matt 2:6, following the LXX) begins with the words "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah," where the Masoretic Text of Micah 5:1 reads, "And you, Bethlehem, Ephratah."

Zechariah 13:7 in the Masoretic version has "Strike (second person masculine singular) the shepherd…," while the quotation in Matthew 26:31 has "I will strike…." This is different from the LXX version, which has second person plural.

Luke 7:27: "Behold I send my messenger before you, and he will prepare your way before you." Malachi 3:1: "Behold I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."

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But, someone might ask, why not simply take the quotations from the version of the Hebrew text familiar to the readers? The rule that generally guides Bible translators is "translate the text in front of you." This means, for example, that the translator should not change what he finds in one gospel to make it the same as the parallel passage in another gospel. In the same way, where the manuscript tradition of the New Testament gives us a quotation from the Old Testament that is clearly different, it should not be "harmonized." To use the OT text when the NT quotation has something else would essentially be to change the NT text, something which a translator is not permitted to do.

Two Hebrew New Testaments – a Survey

By **Lisa Loden**

The Hebrew language New Testament exists today in a number of translations and editions. Two of these translations are widely used among members of the Hebrew speaking Messianic congregations in Israel.

The older translation, called the Delitzsch translation after the translator, Franz Julius Delitzsch, first appeared in 1877 and has gone into 16 editions, the most recent of which is the Negev Version, 2003.[1] The language of the Delitzsch translation is archaic and is a combination of biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew.[2] This translation is based on the textus receptus, is a literal translation, and strives to be faithful to the original Greek.

The modern translation undertaken by the United Bible Society in Israel was first published in 1976, and is the work of Joseph Atzmon with a translation committee involved in the final product. To date there have been two revisions. Although there were two earlier modern translations of the New Testament into Hebrew, both done by Catholic scholars, this is the only translation to have gained widespread popularity.[3] Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew are not easily accessible to many speakers of modern Hebrew since the styles and grammars differ significantly. Although Joseph Atzmon worked extensively with Greek scholars, his translation was from an English text.[4] The translation was done according to functional equivalents rather than strict adherence to the original Greek wording.

A short questionnaire concerning the use of these two different Hebrew translations of the New Testament was sent out via an email network of Messianic leaders in the Israeli congregations. Of the approximately 80 members of the network, 26 responded. The respondents were from 20 different congregations and represented a broad range of congregations, both geographically and theologically. A number of the congregations have multiple leadership, and five of these congregations

1 Gershon Nerel, "The 'Flagship' of Hebrew New Testaments: a Recent Revision by Israeli Messianic Jews," *Mishkan* 41 (2004), 49-56.
2 Nerel, 50.
3 Ray Pritz, "Bible Translation and Publication," *Mishkan* 29 (1998), 45.
4 Pritz, 45.

sent more than one response. The purpose of the survey was to assess the use of the two most widely used translations both in public meetings and in the personal lives of the leaders.

Survey Results

The survey consisted of five questions as follows:

1. Does your congregation read publicly from the Bible Society translation of the New Testament (modern Hebrew)?
2. Does your congregation read publicly from the Delitzsch translation of the New Testament?
3. Which translation of the New Testament do you prefer to study from? The Bible Society Translation, the Delitzsch translation, or both?
4. Do you personally read from the Delitzsch translation of the New Testament?
5. Do you personally read from the Bible Society Translation of the New Testament?

Congregational Use of the Two Translations

Of the 20 congregations who responded to the survey, 16 answered that they read publicly from the modern translation and 4 answered that they do not. This indicates that 80% of the congregations surveyed read publicly from the modern translation while 20% of those surveyed do not.

Eleven of the congregations (55%) indicated that they read publicly from the Delitzsch translation and nine (45%) answered that they do not. More congregations use the modern translation in public worship than those using the Delitzsch. These figures indicate that 35% of the congregations use both translations in public readings.

Individual Use of the Two Translations

The survey questioned the use of the translations for reading and for studying. Of the 27 respondents, 14 (52%) read from the Delitzsch translation and 13 (48%) do not. For the modern translation, the responses were very different: 20 (74%) responded that they do read from the modern translation, and 7 (26%) responded that they do not.

The responses to the question concerning the use of the translations for study show that 22.3% of those surveyed use the Delitzsch translation for study, 37% use the modern translation, 37% use both translations, and 3.7% (one respondent) use another translation, the Zelikson translation which is archaic and poetic in style. In total, 59.3% of those surveyed use the Delitzsch and 74% use the modern translation for study.

	Delitzsch	Modern	Both	Other
Congregational Public Use	55%	80%	35%	
Individual Use/Reading	52%	74%	26%	
Individual Use/Study	22.3% (only)	37% (only)	37%	3.7%

Additional Comments

A number of the respondents to the questionnaire added personal comments. These are interesting in that they indicate a respect for the Delitzsch translation for personal use even when it is not used publicly in the congregation.

> *Yes, (I personally read from the Bible Society Translation of the New Testament) but only because it happens to be in the Hebrew/English Bible that I often use out of convenience. I wish it were reprinted with Delitzsch.*

One of the pastors of a large congregation with many Russian-speaking immigrants answered the question about congregational use of the modern translation as follows:

> *Yes (we use the modern translation), but not because we prefer it. The modern translation is the only one but we are not satisfied with it in many areas. For immigrants the supposedly biblical Hebrew of Delitzsch does not flow.*

Another pastor who is also a Bible publisher and publishes both translations says,

> *… all the requests for the New Testament that I receive from students are for the Delitzsch translation.*

The modern translation is valued because it is easier to read.

> *I use the modern version because 1) it communicates better to the hearer when I am preaching, and 2) as a non Sabra [native Israeli], it helps to continue to use a version for my own good which is closer to modern usage. However, I very much think that the modern version needs to be edited because there are many mistakes in it. Delitzsch seems much more accurate.*

One of the non-native Hebrew speaking pastors says,

> *I seldom (personally read from the Delitzsch translation), just for study, not for reading or devotions, just to compare words. I (personally read from the UBS translation) even though I found out the translation is not always accurate and lacks depth, but it is easier to new immigrants and to me.*

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One respondent said that although his congregation used both translations, he used neither,

> *I use only the Zelikson translation. I think he is the best of all in Hebrew. I also teach from it.*

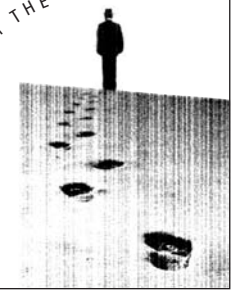
Only one comment indicated a preference for the modern translation. The respondent added that he used both translations for study.

Conclusions

The survey shows that both the modern translation by the Bible Society and the older translation by Delitzsch are very much used by the congregations and individual pastors and leaders. The modern translation is more popular but there is widespread appreciation for the Delitzsch translation.

In a survey that targeted leaders of congregations, it is difficult to extrapolate the numbers to the members of the congregations. However, since the survey also focused on congregational use of the translations, it can safely be assumed that the results would in general apply to the broader framework of individual members of the congregations.

PEOPLE FROM THE PAST



Alexander McCaul (1799–1863):

The Doyen of 19th Century British Jewish Missions

By **Jorge Quiñónez**

Introduction

From my study of the history of 19th century Jewish missions, two individuals stand out as central figures in the Jewish missionary establishment of these times. The first is Franz Delitzsch (i.e., the German Bible commentator, missionary teacher, scholar and Hebrew translator of the NT) about whom much has already been written, both in the form of a biography and multiple articles. The other is Alexander McCaul about whom next to nothing has been written in over a century. McCaul is a critical figure in the history of Jewish missions during the first half of 19th century Europe.

McCaul was the writer of the controversial *Old Paths*, arguably the most influential and important work relating to the Jewish-Christian controversy or debate since Raymond Martin's magnum opus from the 13th century, *Pugio Fidei* (Latin "Daggers of Faith"). McCaul was also one of the main leaders of the pioneering "London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews" (or "London Jews' Society"; hereafter LJS, for short) who led it for several decades in its formative years during which it was the largest and most important Jewish missionary organization in the world. He was a Hebraist and in his early years a missionary in Poland who witnessed the nascent Hasidic movement. In this paper, I intend to describe McCaul's life from his beginnings in Ireland continuing through his years in the LJS as a missionary in Poland and his return to England to continue working as one of LJS's most influential missionaries. Attention will also be given to various aspects of his personal life and literary and scholarly career.

Early Life

McCaul was born in Ireland on May 16, 1799, to a Protestant family.[1] He was a childhood prodigy. At the age of 12, he met the academic qualifications to enter Trinity College. However, university officials refused to let

1 Joseph B. McCaul, Canon Jelf, & Charles Braddy, *A Memorial Sketch of the Rev. Alexander McCaul, D.D. Rector of St. Magnus, and Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis, Kings College, London* (London: Rivingtons, 1863), 1.

him enroll because of his young age. He had to wait three years before they allowed him to enter Trinity College. By this time he already acquired French, Latin, and Greek (several years later Hebrew and German). In 1819, McCaul graduated with his B.A. and continued on with a fellowship studying astronomy and mathematics.[2]

Lewis Way

Around 1820, McCaul was struck by a sermon he heard by an LJS preacher, Lewis Way, an ardent Christian Zionist and premillennialist, that completely changed the course of his life. McCaul decided to devote himself completely to Jewish missions.[3] Notable about Way was that he was a very wealthy man, a key LJS leader and its major financial supporter. During this time, McCaul moved to Hampshire, England, to stay with Way at his large mansion estate, Stanstead Park. They were close friends by now and shared very similar views on Jewish missions and later on Christian Zionism.[4] McCaul was now preparing for the ministry and working for the LJS.[5]

Several years earlier, during 1817 and 1818, Way had visited Continental Europe, in part to study the viability of basing missionaries in major cities and locales which had large Jewish populations,[6] i.e., spreading the Christian Gospel to the Jewish masses. During these travels, Way met with Czar Alexander I of Russia who was sympathetic to Way's intentions. After 1818, the LJS sent out several Jewish believers in Jesus (JBJ) of eastern European background as their first missionaries.[7] Regarding these non-English missionaries Kochav perceptively notes:

> Unfortunately, very few Englishmen were willing to risk death, usually by disease, to travel abroad to work as missionaries. The English societies had to rely on the recruitment of young Protestant trainees from Germany in order to fulfill their needs for missionaries to send abroad.[8]

Way's earlier fact-finding travels and earlier missionaries had laid the ground for the LJS to send its first native-born missionary abroad: The 22-year-old McCaul who was going to be one of those "very few Englishmen willing to risk death."

2 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 1-2.
3 "Abstract of the Fifty-sixth Report," *Jewish Intelligence* (June 1, 1864), 157-58.
4 See Alexander McCaul, *New Testament Evidence to Prove that the Jews are to be Restored to the Land of Israel* (London: B. Wertheim, 1835).
5 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 3.
6 W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, 1908), 95.
7 Gidney, *History of the London Society*, 95-96.
8 Sarah Kochav, "'Beginning at Jerusalem': the Mission to the Jews and English Evangelical Eschatology" in *With Eyes toward Zion, V: Jerusalem in the Mind of the Western World, 1800-1948* (Yehoshua Ben-Arieh & Moshe Davis, eds.; Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 95.

Missionary Life in Poland

Way and the LJS were interested in Poland because it was situated in the Pale of Settlement, a region that had the largest Jewish population in the world, numbering several million. The Pale was a territory that encompassed present-day Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Byelorussia and parts of western Russia. It had been created several decades earlier by the Russian monarchy, motivated by anti-Semitic reasons, for the sole purpose of having a region for Jews to live in apart from the Christian population.[9] In 1821, Poland was under Russian control, and before McCaul could properly operate there, he needed their authorization. His visited the Czar in St. Petersburg in order to obtain this permission,[10] and that same summer McCaul settled in Poland at the Pale's western side.

During this time, the zealous McCaul discreetly distributed nearly 900 missionary tracts in one week and had about 400 Jews visit him at his lodgings.[11] According to Gidney, McCaul was doing so well that the LJS sent several other missionaries to join him to help him distribute missionary literature.[12] Between 1821 and 1823, McCaul made several trips (that probably became annual) back and forth to England from Poland for a variety of reasons. He was ordained at Gloucester Cathedral by Bishop Ryder as a deacon in the Anglican Church in late December, 1822, and the following year became a full priest. He married Mary Crosthwaite of Virgemont, Dublin, in April 1823.[13]

He returned to Warsaw, Poland, as the head of the LJS Jewish Mission in Poland and as the spiritual leader of its English residents. In his daily missionary dealings with the Jewish population, he had to quickly learn Yiddish, improve his Hebrew and his familiarity with Jewish religious writings (e.g., the Talmud). Elizabeth Finn, McCaul's eldest daughter, comments that her "father took very great pains to become thoroughly acquainted with the Jewish character and mode of life. He found that among them learning was everything and wealth nothing."[14] McCaul, the one-time child prodigy, took his job extremely seriously. Finn states,

> My father was resolved to become proficient in the Hebrew language and learning; in order to become familiar with the Law of Moses and the cursive writing in Hebrew [i.e., Rashi script], which is different from the square characters that we see in printed books or

9 "The Pale of Settlement." [visited: Nov. 5, 2004]. Online: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/pale.html.
10 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 3.
11 Gidney, *History of the London Society*, 96.
12 Gidney, *History of the London Society*, 96.
13 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 4; "In Memoriam. Mary McCaul," *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* (Sept., 1893), 141-42; Elizabeth Anne McCaul Finn, *Reminiscences of Mrs. Finn* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scot, 1929), 20-21.
14 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 21.

> in Rolls of the Law [Sefer Torah], he wrote out the whole of the five Books eight times with his own hand.[15]

After five years in Warsaw, McCaul began the first of several major missionary literary projects that would employ everything he learned during his years in Poland. This first project was a Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible (with the help of local JBJs) that began in 1826 with the publication of Genesis, the entire Pentateuch in 1829, and finally the whole Hebrew Bible by 1830.[16]

Family life must have been very interesting, if not challenging, for the McCauls. Most of the McCauls' children were born and raised for the first years of their lives in Warsaw.[17] They had at least three daughters and four sons (at least one son and a daughter did not survive early childhood), and were apparently educated at home.[18] McCaul was such a Hebrew-phile[19] that he was teaching Hebrew to his children before the age of five, perhaps following the tradition of how Hasidim also taught Hebrew to their sons (not daughters) at an early age. Later in life he even wrote a Hebrew primer for children.[20] Finn states that at the age of three, she was being tutored in Hebrew by a rabbi (a JBJ) named Avrohom.[21] Being a missionary with a family was difficult. At times, McCaul would leave them for weeks at a time on his missionary travels that would take him to the various Jewish towns around the Pale of Settlement.[22] When in Warsaw, McCaul and another missionary, named Becker, would reserve Shabbat afternoons "to receiving Jewish visitors who came to discuss religious subjects with them."[23]

McCaul's son Joseph commented, "the Polish mission-field was as yet a virgin soil. Jews came in crowds to listen and to discuss the doctrines of Christianity."[24] It is not too difficult to imagine McCaul entering a *shtetl* (Yiddish "village") and speaking Yiddish to people. He was probably the first British subject they ever met. As a missionary he was preaching, handing out Bibles and tracts, and discussing scriptural issues relating to Messianic prophecy. Sometimes the arrival of McCaul and his missionary colleagues was understandably met with much hostility from the local Jewish population, which probably meant no one spoke to them. On other occasions, the opposite response was the case as in one visit around

15 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 22.
16 Gidney, *History of the London Society*, 151-52.
17 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 9, 14.
18 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 9, 14.
19 Alexander McCaul, *An Apology for the Study of Hebrew and Rabbinical Literature* (London: Wertheim, Aldine Chambers, 1844).
20 Alexander McCaul, *A Hebrew Primer: Intended as an Introduction to the Spelling and Reading of Hebrew with the Points Compiled for the Use of Children and Beginners* (London: Aylott, 1851).
21 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 10-11.
22 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 5.
23 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 23.
24 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 4.

1824 to Lublin (in current day eastern Poland), the "Polish Jerusalem," which was an important center of Jewish learning.

In his journeys around the Pale of Settlement, McCaul was eyewitness to the nascent Hasidic movement and its leaders. Seven years after he returned from Poland, he recalled that on one occasion he saw "one of the most famous of these Tsaddikim, the Tsaddik of Medziboze [Medzhibozh],[25] or Mezbesh [Mezbizh]."[26] Medzhibozh (in current day Ukraine) was the birthplace of the founder of the Hasidic movement, the *Besht* (*Ba'al Shem Tov*, i.e., Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer, 1700-1760). Discussing McCaul's encounter with Tsaddikim of the time, an Israeli scholar on the subject states, "The Zadik of Medziboz is R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt."[27]

Under McCaul's leadership, the LJS Mission station in Warsaw flourished. In 1829, the LJS decided to establish another mission station outside of Warsaw in the city of Lublin. It would be run by several other LJS missionaries. McCaul continued to work in Warsaw until 1831 when he finally returned to England with his family after having spent a decade among the Hasidim. Moreover, after having to read and understand the writings of the rabbis and speak Yiddish on practically a daily basis for ten years, he was coming home as one of the leading experts in all of England on Hasidic Judaism, its language and writings.[28]

England: the LJS and the *Old Paths*

McCaul and his family settled in Palestine Place that was the LJS complex in London. His first order of business was to help improve the LJS' economic status by collecting funds by preaching all over England.[29] His daughter comments:

> We settled down in London in the year 1831. My father took an active part in making the condition of the Jewish people known to people in England. They knew very little about it, and they cared less. He visited almost all parts of England and roused a good deal of enthusiasm. Adjoining the house in which we lived was the valuable Hebrew and Rabbinical Library which Mr. Lewis Way had founded. This was my father's delight. There was a door between our sitting-room and the library room where he spent a good deal of time. Before long he made many Jewish acquaintances and then started what he called "conferences." A room was hired in Aldermanbury as being near the Jewish quarter. Thither my father, Reichardt, and

25 Modern English spelling is Medzhibozh or Medzibezh. Polish spelling is Międzybórz.
26 Alexander McCaul, *Sketches of Judaism and the Jews* (London: B. Wertheim, 1838), 23.
27 David Assaf, "Apostate or Saint? In the Footsteps of Moshe, the Son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady," Zion 65 (2000), 479 (entire article 453–515), Hebrew. My thanks to Dr. Assaf for pointing out his study as it related to McCaul.
28 Gidney, *History of the London Society,* 159.
29 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 9.

> Alexander, used to go every Saturday evening to meet any who came to discuss religious subjects. [30]

These gatherings at Aldermanbury occurred during the winters of 1832 and 1833. McCaul's son would recall:

> Debates of the most absorbing interest were of weekly occurrence, in which Mr. M'Caul, the Rev. M. S. Alexander… and many others, took a prominent part, until at last the Jewish authorities took so much alarm, and opposition of so acrimonious a nature, that, threats of personal violence having been resorted to, it was deemed advisable to adjourn the conferences…. On the following Saturday, however, the first number of Mr. M'Caul's "Old Paths" appeared and was distributed broadcast [sic] over the Jewish quarter in London…. For sixty successive weeks a fresh number of the "Old Paths" appeared on each succeeding Saturday.[31]

The "Old Paths" weekly tracts appeared in 1833 and 1834. Eventually they would be collected and appear as the extremely controversial *The Old Paths* in 1837.[32] For its time, *The Old Paths* was a scathing critique of the Oral Law or how rabbinic Judaism differed from the religion of the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew translation[33] of *The Old Paths* that appeared in 1839 elicited various responses from the Jewish community.[34] It was translated into many languages (Dutch, German, Yiddish, French, Hebrew, etc.), and tens of thousands of copies were published in the first few years.[35] Such was McCaul's highly anti-rabbinic work that the leader of the Russian *Haskalah*, Rabbi Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788-1860), expended great energies in repudiating McCaul in his own works *Zerubbavel* and *Ahiyah Shiloni haHozeh*.[36] *The Old Paths* fell out of favor with the LJS by the very early 20th century due to the fact that many Jews no longer lived in the *shtetl* and had gone through the Enlightenment (the *Haskalah*), which required a different and newer type of missionary literature. It would not be unreasonable to say that *The Old Paths* was among the most influential and popular (or unpopular) Jewish missionary works in the past several centuries.

30 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 24.

31 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 10.

32 *The Old Paths or, A Comparison of the Principles and Doctrines of Modern Judaism with the Religion of Moses and the Prophets* (London: Duncan, 1837).

33 *Netivot Olam yekhalkhel erekh ha-ikkarim veha-yesodot shel dat ha-yahadut neged* torat *Moshe ve-ha-nevi'im* (London, Printed by A. Macintosh, 1839). [Translated into Hebrew by Stanislaus Hoga.]

34 E.g., see Judah Middleman & Marcus Heinrich Bresslau, *Paths of Truth Being a Defence of the Talmudic Traditions Against the Attacks in the "Old Paths" by the Rev. Dr. M'Caul* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1847).

35 Gidney, *History of the London Society*,160.

36 Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Ahiyah Shiloni haHozeh* (Leipzig: C.W. Vollrath, 1864); ibid., *Zerubbavel: al yado yosed hekhal* (Varsha, 1864).

Besides *The Old Paths*, there are several other works that McCaul composed during this time (1835-1838) that are of some interest in the history of Jewish missions and the Jewish-Christian controversy. He translated Rabbi David Kimchi's Zechariah commentary into English along with his own commentary,[37] and later works[38] would try to demonstrate how the medieval Jewish commentators would develop different interpretations that were not in agreement with Christian interpretation, e.g., that the angel mentioned in Zechariah is the Messiah or Malachi's "Angel of the Covenant." It is notable that many of his shorter works (mainly tracts) were translated into Hebrew and Yiddish by JBJ missionaries.

The Jerusalem Bishopric

Two important translation projects bore fruit in 1837. In both cases, McCaul was collaborating with others in the LJS. The two projects were the Hebrew translation of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and the LJS Hebrew translation of the NT.[39] This NT translation, according to Thompson, "remained the standard translation for half a century"[40] until the advent of Delitzsch's and Salkinson's translations. Once the BCP was available in Hebrew in 1837, McCaul along with others in the LJS would say the BCP liturgy in Hebrew during either Friday night services[41] in the Palestine Place library or Sunday services[42] in the Episcopal Jews' Chapel, also at Palestine Place. Here the future bishop of Jerusalem, Michael Solomon Alexander,[43] first employed it before he eventually continued to use it at Christ Church in Jerusalem five years later.

In 1841, the Jerusalem Bishopric was established with Alexander, an LJS missionary, at its head. Its history has been retold multiple times and for this reason I refrain from re-summarizing it. (For an excellent recounting read the article by Stransky.[44]) However, one aspect relevant to this discussion on McCaul is the fact that the Jerusalem Bishop position was initially offered to him and that he declined it, preferring to have someone of Jewish descent in its seat. This explains why Alexander got the job. What is not so well known is how McCaul arrived at this decision. In McCaul's sermon, preached on the consecration of Alexander as Bishop of Jerusalem in November 7, 1841, about a month before he left by

37 *Rabbi David Kimchi's Commentary upon the Prophecies of Zechariah* (London: James Duncan, 1836-1837).

38 *The Doctrine and Interpretation of the Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah* (London: LJS, 1851).

39 See Pinchas E. Lapide's remarks in *Hebrew in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 78-82.

40 A. E. Thompson, *A Century of Jewish Missions* (NY: Revell, 1902), 98.

41 Finn, *Reminiscences*, 25.

42 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch,* 11.

43 E.g., see Brian Taylor, "Alexander's Apostasy / First Steps to Jerusalem" in Diana Wood, ed., *Christianity and Judaism: Papers Read at the 1991 Summer Meeting and the 1992 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 363-71.

44 Thomas Stransky, "Origins of Western Christian Missions in Jerusalem and the Holy Land" in *With Eyes toward Zion* (Ben-Arieh & Davis, eds), 146-47 (entire article 137-54).

ship for his new position, McCaul spelled out some of his reasons for favoring a Jewish individual for the position:

> The Gospel dispensation … the glory … the covenants, and the giving of the law, and service of God, and the promises … belong in the first place to the Jews: that the Church, in its original type, both root and stem, is Jewish … For all these reasons … the appointment of a bishop to seek after the scattered tribes of Israel, and to execute the duties of an apostle to the circumcision, would … be one worthy of the Church, and warranted by the New Testament.[45]

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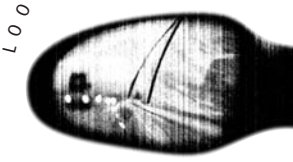
McCaul felt a strong scriptural impetus for Jerusalem's Christian leader to be Jewish. After the departure of Alexander to Jerusalem, McCaul took over the Professorship of Hebrew and Rabbinical Literature at King's College in London, a position that Alexander had previously occupied in 1841. The year before, in 1840, McCaul was appointed the first Principal of the Hebrew College for the training of LJS missionaries.[46]

Conclusion

McCaul continued to write and work for the LJS. In 1854 he was appointed Vice-President of the LJS. He died November 13, 1863, at the age of 64. Gidney stated that "of all the members of Gentile missionary staff throughout the hundred years of its [referring to the LJS] existence, he was *facile princeps* [Latin "easily the first"], in scholarship, in learning, in power and influence."[47] I would agree with Gidney's assessment: Based on McCaul's accomplishments, I would not doubt that during his times, he was the most important non-Jewish missionary in the LJS establishment. It is hoped that future studies can take into account some of his own personal papers housed in the wealth of material in the LJS archives located in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England.

45 *A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of Lambeth Palace, at the Consecration of the Lord Bishop of the United Church of England and Ireland in Jerusalem, on Sunday, November 7, 1841* (London: B. Wertheim, 1841), 12-13.
46 McCaul et al., *Memorial Sketch*, 13.
47 Gidney, *History of the London Society*, 330.



Looking Back

By **Erwin Kolb**

I was born in Bay City, Michigan, into a Lutheran German community, and grew up there until I went off to Lutheran boarding high school in nearby Saginaw, Michigan. I was preparing to enter the ministry and graduated from Concordia College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and then Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, with two years out for military service in the United States Marine Corps. I was ordained in 1949 and served 14 years as pastor at four different Lutheran churches in southern Illinois. I was then called to teach and serve as Dean of Chapel at Concordia Teacher's College, Seward, Nebraska. I continued graduate studies on a part-time basis and eventually earned a Master's and a Doctor of Theology degree from Concordia Seminary.

In 1972 I was called to serve as the Executive Secretary of Evangelism for The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), whose headquarters was in St. Louis, Missouri, and served there until my retirement in 1989.

Regarding those years, I do not remember having a Jewish friend or know of anyone who admitted to being Jewish. When I heard the word "Jew" I thought of those Jews in the New Testament – the good ones who followed Jesus and the nasty ones who encouraged his death.

Main Inspiration for Involvement in Jewish Evangelism

My involvement with Jewish evangelism began in 1973, when, at the request of St. Luke Lutheran Congregation in Philadelphia, our national convention passed a resolution that the LCMS staff should prepare guidelines and materials to help individuals, congregations, and Districts to witness to Jewish people. The assignment was given to the Evangelism Department, which I headed. Rev. Bruce Lieske, who was the pastor of St. Luke congregation in Philadelphia and had worked with a staff person of what is now Chosen People's Ministries, became my main advisor and inspiration.

The first step was to find people who were interested and had experience in Jewish outreach. We searched and advertised, and then gathered a group to give us suggestions and ideas. Out of that two-day meeting a Task Force on Witnessing to Jewish People was appointed, with Lieske serving as chairman and me as the staff person. At that point I had no

choice but to be involved in Jewish evangelism, and quickly learned a great deal about the history and customs of the Jewish people. I soon came to appreciate and love the Jewish people and was eager to be involved in any way that I could to help share the gospel with them.

That Task Force encouraged and inspired me. Other encouragement came from Moishe Rosen of Jews for Jesus and some of his staff. Rosen invited me to spend a week with his entire staff, including all the field missionaries. I led a Bible study and shared what Lutherans believe, thus enabling his missionaries to be sensitive when speaking in Lutheran congregations. I met Steve Cohen, who is both Lutheran and Jewish. We soon invited him to become part of our Task Force, which he did until he left the Jews for Jesus organization and moved to St. Louis to start a Lutheran Jewish mission agency called "Apple of His Eye." Years later the Task Force was absorbed into that ministry.

Support and learning also came from other mission societies involved in Jewish evangelism. In my office I was responsible for all evangelism, and as such I attended the Lausanne Consultation on Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 and the follow up consultation in Pattaya, Thailand. While there I helped to formulate the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism in 1980.

Meanwhile Lieske also started a faith-based Jewish mission agency called Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism, with headquarters in Orlando, Florida. Their primary aim was to serve the eastern and southern congregations of the Missouri Synod in the United States.

Ups and Downs in Ministry

The "Ups" came from both inside and outside the Missouri Synod. Within the Synod there was always strong encouragement from congregations and leaders who saw the need to reach Jewish people with the Good News of Jesus Christ, as well as from Jewish believers in the Synod. As our work became more visible within our circles, more and more Jewish believers surfaced.

The "Downs" also came from both within and outside the church. Outside the church, it was primarily the national Jewish organizations. The American Jewish Committee somehow heard about the Synod's resolution and our Task Force, and wanted to talk to us. The Task Force agreed to meet with AJC director Rabbi Rudin, in a meeting that we agreed would be "off the record." But Rudin betrayed us and sent a skewed news release to the largest St. Louis newspaper, accusing us of anti-Semitism and organizing a campaign to target Jews for conversion. We had assured him that we were not "targeting" Jews, but including them in the great commission our Lord had given us to share the gospel with all people.

The Anti-Defamation League also objected. Its director, Rabbi Tannenbaum, wrote to the president of the Missouri Synod complaining about what he called our anti-Semitic campaign. Of course this stirred up the local Jewish community, and even other churches, to object to what

we were doing. This bad publicity, which labeled us as anti-Semitic, was picked up by other newspapers and reached many Missouri Synod pastors and congregations. They began to object that we were spoiling the good relationship that they had with local rabbis and the Jewish community. They were comfortable with the two-covenant concept, which many other church bodies and some other Lutherans advocated. It's easy to say that Jews have their own covenant with God and we have ours.

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Another problem that we constantly confronted within the church was the priority of funds for mission and ministry. Missouri Synod has always had an emphasis on college and seminary programs and a history of a strong mission program, primarily through missionaries in other countries. When the national decision-makers had to set priorities on the allocation of funds, education and missions were top priorities. Many of them had difficulty seeing the need for us to use some of those funds for personal evangelism, especially for reaching Jewish people. So the Task Force on Witnessing to Jewish people was always short of funds. The publishing arm of the Missouri Synod had the same difficulty, and could not see any profit in publishing material for this purpose.

The Challenge to the Messianic Movement and Jewish Evangelism

I believe that the challenge to the Messianic Movement and to Jewish evangelism is the same challenge St. Paul faced in the first century. Not only did he have to convince Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised by the prophets, but he had to convince them that this salvation also included gentiles. Then he had to convince gentiles that the Jewish Messiah was for them, and that both Jewish and gentile believers formed one church – the holy, Christian church. Paul stresses in passages like Ephesians 3:13-18 that God, through Jesus, has "made the two one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility," and in Ephesians 4:4-6 that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

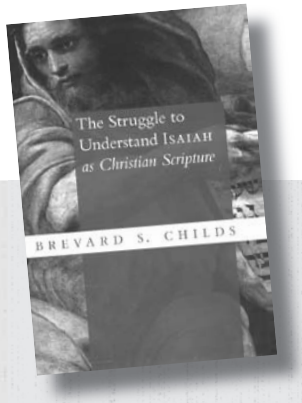
Books by the author:

How to Respond to Judaism, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1990, rev. ed. 1996.
A Witness Primer, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1986.
A Prayer Primer, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1982.

The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture

Brevard Childs is best known for his emphasis on the canon as the context in which Scripture must be interpreted. His position may be described as moderately-critical rather than evangelical. In this new volume, Childs brings us a historical review of hermeneutical attempts to relate the Old and New Testaments, using Isaiah as an example case. He covers the entire swath from the Septuagint to contemporary post-modern interpreters. His essential thesis is that despite the variety of approaches, there has been a "family resemblance" in the church's exegetical tradition, which he summarizes in the final chapter as sharing these characteristics: a recognition of the authority of Scripture; an acknowledgement that there is both a literal and a spiritual aspect to the Scripture; a conviction that Christian scripture consists of both an Old and a New Testament; an awareness that Scripture is comprised of both divine and simultaneously human authorship; a confession that the content (of both Testaments) is essentially Christological; a manifestation of interest in the nature of history.

Some might think these conclusions "obvious." But the key point Childs makes is that they have been consistent throughout the history of Christian exegesis. On the one hand, there is a certain "mythology" held by many evangelicals. According to this mythology, after the apostolic period, the church succumbed to a variety of false hermeneutical approaches such as allegory, hidden meanings, multiple senses, and so on. Not until the Reformation on did the Protestant church recover the historical-grammatical method as the proper way to understand Scripture, and now all is well. Childs shows that the story is by no means as simple as that. On the other hand, post-modern interpreters break with the history of exegetical "family resemblance" and deny any fixed meaning to the text, and moreover tell us that the Old Testament must be interpreted "on its own terms," that is, without any overtly Christian reading. Childs here takes sharp issue with Walter Brueggemann, for whom any Christian meaning in the Old Testament is a "preemptive reading" that "fails to respect Jewish readers"



The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture

Brevard S. Childs
532 pages
Grand Rapids, MI;
Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004

(p. 294). Childs is well aware of the history of Christian anti-Semitism and certainly believes that a meaningful dialogue is possible. Nevertheless, he writes, "It is simply theologically unacceptable for Christians to argue that the church's appeal to the Old Testament as a witness to Jesus Christ must be repudiated because of an offense caused to Jews."

This is not a book for the average lay person, who will quickly get lost in much of the terminology and style of discussion. In fact, without actually knowing the texts of the exegetes in question, the book tends to read rather abstractly. It is as though one were to read a commentary without having read the Bible first. It seems to me that this book would best function as a seminary text in a history of interpretation course, with guided readings that illustrate what Childs is saying. The average church person would be better served by the small but packed volume by Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible? The History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues* (Zondervan, 1987), which addresses some of the same issues.

Richard Robinson