

*The
Body of
Messiah*



MISHKAN

■ A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE ■

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Introduction

Dear readers,

We are happy to present this year's second online issue of *Mishkan*.

In this issue you can read about supersessionism and Messianic Judaism, the identity of the church and the body of Messiah. We also ask, "How Jewish should the Messianic movement be?"

And as always, you will find book reviews and reflections on life in Israel.

We at the Caspari Center wish you a Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year 2016, each according to his or her choice and tradition.

God bless you and give you light to chase away the darkness.

Happy reading!

Caspari Center Staff

Jerusalem, December 2015

“Supersessionism and Messianic Judaism”: A response to Matthew Levering

Fr. Antoine Lévy

There are certainly madmen who deny the importance of the ongoing dialogue between the Catholic Church and the different religious currents that characterize contemporary Judaism. It is common knowledge that churches are full of madmen. If I am one of them—a possibility which a number of people around me would probably consider worth contemplating—my madness is of a different kind. I do regard it as vital that the Catholic Church be given a chance to reach a better understanding of a people and a religious tradition she has repeatedly debased, if not openly discriminated against, in the course of centuries, quite forgetting the fact that she inherited everything—including her God—from it. I know what it has taken and still takes for the representatives of traditional Judaism to respond to the invitation to further the dialogue with the church. I am thoroughly impressed by their courage. I am also deeply appreciative of the effort of Catholic theologians to become familiar with the inner logic of the Jewish religious attitude, so that they might tackle divisive issues with both a great respect for Judaism and a renewed sense of their Catholic identity. There is hardly any doubt that Matthew Levering is one of the most remarkable examples of such theologians, as the collection of essays published under the title *Jewish Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom* unambiguously demonstrates.¹ This being said, the book contains a chapter which strikes me as highly questionable. Since I find the matter at stake to be of utmost importance for the Catholic Church, I would like to launch a discussion about it. The fact is that Levering, in trying to preserve the chances of a dialogue with Judaism which, after the Second Vatican Council’s *Nostra Aetate*, has become somehow “traditional,” deems it necessary to discard the chance of opening a different kind of dialogue with Judaism, or rather with a different kind of Judaism—namely, Messianic Judaism. In order to do that, Levering takes issue with the ideas brought forward by Mark Kinzer, who is quite certainly the most conspicuous and original figure in Jewish Messianic theology to date.

One can regard the idea that a Jew can remain faithful to his or her Jewish identity while acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel as the founding statement of Messianic Judaism. Accordingly, the fact that for a Christian corporate body such as the Catholic Church, the dialogue with traditional Judaism and the dialogue with Messianic Judaism rest on two mutually exclusive sets of axioms is hardly a disputable one. The condition for the first dialogue is that she will respect her partner’s rejection of the very stone upon which she is built; that is, the claim that Jesus Christ happened to be the Messiah that Israel had been and still is expecting. The first part of the chapter I am examining here aims at showing that such a dialogue is possible. As expounded by Levering (pp. 14–22, 44–45), David Novak’s understanding of “mild supersessionism” implies for each partner the commitment not only to recognize the other’s existence, but also to value it from

¹ Continuum, New York: 2010.

one's own theological standpoint, while firmly keeping to one's conviction of being granted access to a superior truth. This "mild supersessionism" simultaneously dismisses the Catholic tradition of radical supersessionism, which sees the survival of Judaism as devoid of religious justification, and the Jewish trends towards a counter-supersessionism that denies any theological relevance to Christianity in spite of its historical Jewish roots. With Messianic Judaism, however, it is no longer a matter of determining how close to each other two partners who disagree on the essential can come. The issue is about identifying what still separates two partners who agree on the essential.

In principle, it is difficult to see why the Catholic Church should not be allowed to engage simultaneously in the two types of dialogue. The fact that she is involved in a dialogue with the Protestant world does not prevent her from pursuing a dialogue with the Byzantine Orthodox Church, although the dogmatic and ecclesiological claims made by Protestants and Orthodox Christians are often strictly incompatible. True, the Catholic Church may not, for instance, acknowledge two mutually exclusive Protestant entities as equally representative of the Protestant world simultaneously. Just as for national governments immersed in the subtle practice of foreign politics, a willingness on the side of the Catholic Church to conduct a dialogue with a particular group of non-Catholics implies recognition that these constitute a more genuine expression of the corporate body they stand for than other groups with which they are in theological disagreement. But what if the dissenting groups do not claim to share the faith of those who are already acknowledged by the Holy See? What if they stand for a faith which is substantially and explicitly different from the others? The Catholic Church can pursue—and is actually pursuing—separate dialogues with different, mutually disagreeing, factions of the Protestant world, such as the Lutherans and the Calvinists or the Pentecostals, without any of these denominations taking exception to such a policy.

Accordingly, if the reaction of the Jewish traditional world to the possibility of the Catholic Church opening a serious dialogue with Messianic Judaism is hostile to such an extent that it leads a Catholic theologian such as Levering to argue in favor of discarding it, I believe this has to do with Jewish idiosyncrasy. Jewish religious authorities have a long historical experience of being responsible for a nation, and not only for a specific creed. For just under two millennia, they have fought so that the members of this nation, scattered throughout Christian Europe and elsewhere, might be granted the right to live like normal citizens while disagreeing on the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. The claim of a number of bio-ethnic Jews to remain Jews while accepting these tenets appears to inflict a mortal blow to the notion that granting the right of Jews to live as Jews implies respecting their refusal of Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. In the course of European history, campaigns of forced conversions have drawn on the denial of the equation between Jewish identity and the refusal of Yeshua's Messiahhood. As the argument ran, being born a Jew was not a sufficient reason not to be faced with the supreme necessity of accepting Christian faith. However, there is little likelihood that in modern secular societies an official recognition of Messianic Judaism by the Catholic Church would entail a process of discrimination towards non-Messianic Jews. In actual fact, the only risk that such recognition would present to the survival of the Jewish nation has to do with suppressing the barriers that held it apart from a huge corporate body of Jesus believers. This is by no means a minor danger. Indeed, as history shows abundantly, the worst threat to Jewish survival is not discrimination, but integration or assimilation. What then about the claim of Messianic Judaism (MJ) to form a separate and distinctive body of *Jewish* Yeshua believers? True, for a number of reasons, this is perhaps the least satisfactory aspect of MJ in its present-day form.

Be that as it may, while nothing is more understandable than the rejection of the Messianic venture by Jews who do not believe in Yeshua, whether a Catholic theologian should endorse such

a rejection appears to be a much more controversial matter. The logical premises on which the Catholic Church must decide whether to conduct a separate dialogue with Messianic Jews are obviously different from those which traditional Jews apply in order to delegitimize Messianic Judaism. In addition, the Catholic Church is not bound to sacrifice her intimate convictions in order to preserve the chances of pursuing a dialogue with some specific religious entity, as legitimate as this dialogue might be. Accordingly, there must be serious reasons to decline engaging in a dialogue with Messianic Judaism from a Catholic point of view. What could they be? Matthew Levering is a Gentile theologian who contends that the Catholic Church should endorse the anti-Messianic attitude of traditional Jews. Let a theologian of Jewish descent be allowed to highlight the significance of the encounter between the Catholic Church and Messianic Judaism in spite of the criticism leveled against it by traditional Judaism.

The relative density of Levering's argument does not prevent it from being fairly easy to summarize. To cut it as short as possible, MJ is no longer Jewish, so that it may not be seen as representing a Jewish entity, while it is not yet Christian, since it clings to an understanding of the law which must be rejected by Christianity. Ergo, MJ as such is—*horribile dictu*—a non-existent entity. Spinoza might have called it an illusory mode of the finite understanding. The Catholic Church knows of a simpler notion, although Levering refrains from using it; namely, that of heresy. Of course, there is nothing more ordinary than the Catholic Church engaging in dialogue with heretics, providing it is really worth it (please take a Dominican brother's word on this!). However, what would be the point of opening a dialogue with a religious group which, not satisfied with being seen as heretical from a Catholic point of view, is equally seen as such by the authorities of the nation they claim to represent?

Paradoxically, it is at this point that one comes to realize what paramount significance such a dialogue *could* have from the point of view of the Catholic Church. Indeed, is it not precisely the fact that these Jews are seen by traditional Jewish authorities as heretics even as they claim to represent the "enlightened" part of the Jewish nation, a sign that from a Catholic perspective there might be more to say about them than that they are the n-variation on the theme of Judaizing heresies? To put it more distinctly, does it not pertain to the founding and most specific awareness of the Catholic Church that she might identify in those Jews who are rejected by their religious peers the first fruits of the "restoration" of Israel prophesied by St. Paul in chapter 11 of his Epistle to the Romans (cf. vv. 11–12)? From a formal point of view, the question that needs to be addressed is as follows: On what grounds should the Catholic Church deny to MJ the right to identify with a living eschatological sign foretelling the "re-integration" of all of Israel? After all, Novak can, from a traditionally Jewish perspective, assign the encounter between Christians and Jews to a point beyond history; that is, to the ultimate revelation that will seal its end. It remains as a fact that this Jewish perspective does not agree with that of St. Paul. If, together with Paul, we place the end of time from this—our—side of history (*olam ha-ze* and not *olam ha-ba*), we come across a very different picture of the role of Jews in God's design. The revelatory mission entrusted to Jews no longer seems to hang somewhere in the air, *tel qu'en lui-même l'éternité le change*, from the moment of the destruction of the temple to the very end of history.² At least from a Catholic standpoint, one cannot rule out the possibility of a reversal of cosmic proportions occurring in the course of human history, namely, the spontaneous and totally free—for the first or rather the second time in history—coming of Jews to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel.

² Levering rightly points out that conceiving the end of history as the ultimate revelation of Messiahhood to both Christians and Jews is true from a Jewish perspective but not from a Christian one (p. 24). Of course, one could elaborate further on this concept from a Christian point of view, but this is not our topic here.

Unsurprisingly, the criteria for a legitimate recognition of MJ that can be derived from Romans 11 are precisely those which need to be questioned according to Levering. First, MJ must be recognized as a Jewish phenomenon, otherwise it would not be seen as foretelling the reintegration of Israel. Second, it should be acknowledged as abiding by the teaching of Christ—otherwise it would fail to announce the “re-acceptance” of true faith. Allow me therefore to question the questions of Levering, as I first turn to examine why MJ does not deserve to be called Jewish, and then why it is not worthy of the true Christian name either.

No Longer Jewish?

Levering prudently does not make the claim that no traditional rabbi would make: namely that Messianic Jews cease to be Jews from the moment they accept Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel (pp. 24, 25). As should be common knowledge, a Jew remains a Jew even if he or she becomes the worst possible kind of Jew. If I am not mistaken, what Levering sees as problematic is not the Jewish identity of Messianic Jews, but their claim to represent the Jewish nation. How could those who are considered heretics by authorities whom the Catholic Church ordinarily considers the legitimate representatives of Judaism be acknowledged by the Catholic Church as the legitimate representatives of the Jewish nation without *ipso facto* this leading her to stop considering traditional Jewish authorities as the legitimate representatives of Judaism?³ Levering makes clear that what is at stake here is much more than a problem of “church politics.” According to him, the intimate self-contradiction of MJ lurks behind this quandary. Indeed the very traditional authorities MJ draws upon in order to nourish its doctrine and ascertain its legitimacy seem to condemn it as heretical and illegitimate (cf. p. 43). Meanwhile, provided *via reductionis ad absurdum* that MJ is right, and traditional Judaism errs when it condemns it, then traditional Judaism is illegitimate (cf. pp. 30, 44, 46). But if traditional Judaism is illegitimate, the whole survival of Israel, as secured by traditional Judaism, is a mistake. The conclusion is that MJ, being incapable of granting any positive value to the survival of the Jewish nation, falls prey to the very threat it claims to challenge—that is, supersessionism in its most radical, “un-mild” form (cf. p. 26).

As I will explain, I do not think that Levering’s critique bears scrutiny. At this point, however, it is important to realize that even if this critique were to be found relevant, it would not prevent the Catholic Church from acknowledging the significance of a dialogue with MJ from her own—Paulinian, as I have argued—perspective. In actual fact, a Jew does not need to be in agreement with rabbinic authorities or with “Judaism” as a body of religious doctrine distinct from Christianity or Islam, in order to speak authoritatively on behalf of the Jewish nation.⁴ Why, indeed, should challenging Judaism for the sake of the Jewish nation be necessarily un-Jewish? Would, for example, Levering refuse the epithet of Jewish to a socialist movement like the Bund or the present-day Labor Party of Israel on the grounds that these movements have been promoting a fairly different concept of Jewish life and values than Hassidic rabbis do? Judaism, as defined above, is in itself only one—homogeneous only to the most superficial eyes!—interpretation among many others regarding the goal and purpose of Jewish existence. I would personally add that it, from this point of view, is as incomplete as the others. This does not mean that Judaism as we know it stands

³ Cf. p. 25: “How could Christians continue to dialogue respectfully with Jews whom Christians deny can even be trusted to understand what belongs to Rabbinic Judaism qua Rabbinic Judaism?”

⁴ Accusing MJ of depriving non-Messianic authorities and together with them “living Judaism” of the right to represent Judaism, as Levering hints (p. 25), does not make sense. If Judaism is this religious communal thinking which dismisses the teaching of Yeshua, MJ does not claim to speak on behalf of living Judaism. It speaks on behalf of the living Jewish nation, which is something very different. Rabbis would be surprised to hear that someone like Golda Meir spoke on behalf of “living Judaism.”

for the only *religious* interpretation of Jewish destiny. The Bible tells of numerous prophets who have challenged the religious establishment in the name of Israel's divine calling. From a Catholic point of view, Jesus Christ might be the last, but he is by no means seen to be the least. Jesus spoke to Jews about the accomplishment of their religious calling as Jews in a way that openly challenged the judgment of the religious authorities of his time. He did so precisely because none of these authorities could have denied him the right to be counted as a Jew. Each and every Jew has the right to speak on behalf of the calling of the Jewish nation. Of course, present-day Judaism is very different from what it used to be in the days of Jesus. Still, why should it be considered as more authoritative on this issue than its ancestor of 2,000 years ago? Why should a Jewish disciple of Yeshua be less entitled to speak on behalf of the religious calling of the Jewish nation now than 2,000 years ago? For what reason should the denial of Yeshua's Messiahhood by a number of Jewish authorities be seen more favorably by the church now than 2,000 years ago? If the church believes that Christ is a Jew whose teaching was primarily addressed to the Jewish nation, there is no reason why she should refrain from granting to those Jews who have recently come to consider Yeshua's teaching as true, the right to speak on behalf of their nation's divine calling.

This being said, I consider Levering's view, according to which MJ would be quintessentially incapable of developing a positive and coherent relationship to the "non-Messianic" rabbinic tradition (as if the rabbinic tradition could be non-messianic!), as misleading. If historically the development of this tradition implies the deliberate omission of Yeshua's teaching, this tradition does not draw its substance from such a rejection—nor was it born from it, contrary to a commonly spread opinion among Christians. What then about the Pharisees of the time of Jesus? What about the great schools of Shammai and Hillel, the flourishing of which is coeval to the Jesus movement in Palestine? It is not anti-Christian apologetics that made mishnaic and hence talmudic wisdom traditions evolve out of the reflection of the Pharisees on the law and the temple. It is the destruction of the temple and the experience of exile. Subsequently if, on the one hand, the teaching of Yeshua is really in line with the Torah of Moses and the tradition of Israel, and on the other hand, what we understand by rabbinic tradition is the attempt to draw from the Torah of Moses and the tradition of Israel the elements that will keep the nation spiritually alive in a time of *galut*, why should there be an inbuilt incompatibility between the two traditions? Are Christian Gentile exegetes the only ones allowed to compare the two traditions and marvel at the inner convergences of all sorts they are led to discover between them (cf. p. 29)? Does this become a futile and deceitful intellectual exercise only at the moment Jewish followers of Yeshua decide to practice it?

Still, let us assume the worst on the content and number of coded anti-Christian passages in the Talmud. After all, we no longer run the risk of seeing—in the Western world at least—Jewish religious literature burnt at the stake. I would ask Levering how these passages compare with the content and number of anti-Jewish passages in the writings of the fathers of the church. If post-Holocaust Christian theologians can still delight at the reading of the Fathers, it is because they have learned to focus on the essential—the positive teaching of the Fathers—while leaving aside what they regard as accidental, such as the Fathers' regular and maddening anti-Jewish fits. Why would Jewish followers of Yeshua be forbidden to adopt a similar attitude when they study the Talmud or practice the *mitzvot* that derive from such study? Claiming with Kinzer that the explicit "no" of Jewish authorities to the teaching of Yeshua hides an unconscious but ontological "yes" of the Jewish tradition to this teaching does not go together with a systematic distortion of the literal meaning of this tradition, in spite of what Levering contends (pp. 42–44). This "no" pertains to a totally different register than the "yes," which I take to mean an inner openness of the Jewish tradition to the substance of Yeshua's teaching, as both draw on an identical transcendent source.

In actual fact, one could go so far as to claim that the purpose of this exoteric "no" is to hide the esoteric "yes" from intellectual sight. This is not only about checking Gentiles who are always keen on spreading their faith, but about preventing Jews from getting freely acquainted with the Christian tradition. Once again, preserving the chances of Jewish survival, threatened at times by discrimination and at times by assimilation, has always been the primary concern of Jewish religious authorities.

At this point, we come across the second type of criticism leveled by Levering at MJ. Actually, it seems to contradict the first. Levering is no longer blaming MJ for falling away from traditional Judaism, but for being unduly influenced by it. The Catholic Church should not grant official recognition to those who, while claiming to follow Yeshua, distort its soundest interpretation by emphasizing the importance of Jewish learning and practice.

Not Yet Christian?

From a Catholic point of view, there is nothing less original than the way Levering relates to the claim that, when it comes to Jews, the recognition of Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel does not imply the abrogation of Torah-faithfulness and practice, including the way they are dealt with in post-biblical and rabbinic Judaism. Since the Council of Elvira (305), the church has seen, in the will of her Jewish members to keep to their Jewish customs, the indication that they had not fully or really welcomed the radically new and transforming message of the Gospels. It would not be fair here to bring to mind the various anti-Jewish persecutions that this traditional stance has produced in the course of European history. A Catholic theologian can hold to a truth conveyed by church tradition while being— usually in a tacit mode—grateful to the modern secular state for banning religious discrimination. Levering views Kinzer's "bilateral ecclesiology" as a perfect illustration of the disastrous ecclesiological consequences entailed by the Judaizing interpretation of Yeshua's teaching. The distinction between Jewish and Gentile members of the church, as a logical consequence of the Jews' "Torah obligation," restores the "wall of hatred" between the two components of mankind that was meant to be abolished once and for all by the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Eph. 2:13–16).

In spite of Levering's denials, I believe the logic of the position he advocates implies supersessionism in its most radical form. Of course the church welcomes the survival of the Jewish nation. She goes as far as to acknowledge the enduring value of the first covenant after the second. If she, notwithstanding, keeps praying in the manner of Paul for the conversion of all of Israel—no matter how difficult it is for traditional Jews involved in dialogue with Christians to cope with this decision—this means that she wishes Jews to join the body formed by the disciples of Christ, a body which she substantially identifies with herself. However, if Jews that join this body have no other option than to abandon all the customs that distinguish them from their Gentile counterparts, this means that the church has always—since this prayer is consubstantial to her very existence—longed for the moment when the Jewish nation, having lost all possibility of cultivating an idiosyncratic form of presence in her midst, will have ceased to exist.⁵ Or does the church in reality

⁵ Is the fact that Jews are welcome to participate in the sacramental life of the church sufficient to dismiss the accusation of supersessionism (p. 39)? Indeed, is it not wonderful that those to whom the whole tradition of the church is indebted are allowed to take part in it, just as if they were decent human beings? No matter how difficult I find it, I will refrain from ironizing further. At any rate, the idea that the Jewish nation has a place in the church, because its members are welcome to join it, is little more than a play on words. How can the Jewish nation as such have a place in the church if Jews, in order to become members of the church, are expected to abandon all the elements that characterize their membership in the Jewish nation? If nothing subsists of what produces the awareness of being a member of a nation once chosen by God (circumcision, *kashrut*, Jewish feasts, etc.), how could the Jewish nation subsist as a nation in the church?

want the opposite of what she prays for? When she prays for the conversion of Israel, does she mean that the Jews should never come to the knowledge of the true Messiah of Israel, so that they will be able to survive as a nation? From what Levering writes, the enduring value of the first covenant does appear as a second-best option which is called to recede with the integration of Jews into the second. The only difference I see between Levering and radical Christian supersessionism is the resignation to the likelihood that this will never happen before the Parousia. In one way or another, sooner or much later, the election of believers in Christ is to replace the election of the Jewish nation in the Torah received by Moses.

I wonder why it seems that the cultivation of Jewish idiosyncrasy in the church cannot be perceived otherwise than as a slap on the face of the novelty and fullness of Christ's revelation. One does not see as an offense to Christianity that Maronite Christians hold to their customs instead of vanishing in the mass constituted by the adepts of the Latin rite. However, when it comes to the nation from which the church has received everything that she has, a nation which is acknowledged as being the beneficiary of a divine election distinct from all others, the striving towards idiosyncrasy of those who claim to share the faith of all the genuine disciples of Christ becomes a crime. Of course there is little doubt, at least from a theological point of view, that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is about something different than the variety of cultures and ethnic identities. It is precisely about a distinction that has no other basis than a theological one. Still, *qui magis potest et minus potest*. Why are theologians so keen on minimizing the difference that theology makes? I might be mistaken, but it seems to me that the problem lies in the inequality associated with the distinction Jews/Gentiles, something with which the modern mind is particularly uncomfortable. Even Levi-Strauss would find it difficult to argue that a Gentile is "differently chosen" by the God of the first covenant. A Gentile is simply *not chosen*, by contrast with a Jew, and this "non-chosenness" is what defines him or her. However, the good news of the Good News is that Gentiles are now chosen in Christ and thus integrated into the people that God chose for his own. Still, one wonders how the calling of Christ could truly re-establish the balance between the two elections if, in order to respond to it, Jews needed to give up their own calling. The uniformity that goes around under the guise of equality rather warrants the de facto monopoly of Gentiles in the church.

In the most conventional manner conceivable, Levering tries to establish that the cultivation of Jewish idiosyncrasy would go against the gospel because the teaching of Yeshua is meant to free those who follow it from the law. However, can one simply continue to equate the concept of Torah, as it emerges from 2,000 years of post-biblical Jewish tradition, with what Paul means when he writes about the curse of the *nomos*? Jews who, not content with having become disciples of Yeshua, thought that by obeying to the prescriptions of the law they would gain some advantage over Gentiles when it came to personal salvation, set themselves under the harsh judgment of the law, thus reducing to naught the judgment of mercy associated with the sacrifice of Christ (Gal. 5:2–4). As far as I know, however, no Messianic Jew has ever claimed that circumcision or *kashrut* was needed for personal salvation. If Messianic Jews keep Jewish observances, it is with reference to the way Jewish observances are kept in traditional postbiblical Judaism. When a Jew makes *t'shuva* and decides to bear the yoke of the Torah, he or she does it out of love for the God of Israel. If the fear of not observing *mitzvot* is not rooted in this love for God which comes as a response to the choice of Israel by God, it has no redeeming value whatsoever. Just like traditional Jews, Messianic Jews do not practice *mitzvot* because they think that this practice, taken in itself, "saves" them individually. For traditional Jews, redemption is a messianic event on the horizon of history which concerns the nation as nation. The hope that the observance of *mitzvot* will help to "hasten" this event is the hope of an individual to contribute to the spiritual welfare of the nation, not the hope

to avoid personal punishment for rejecting an act of unilateral divine mercy which has not occurred yet. As for Messianic Jews, who believe that this act of mercy has already occurred in the course of history, they do not practice *mitzvot* on the grounds that this practice saves them the way Christ does. They would not be genuine disciples of Yeshua if they did. They practice them because they believe that these *mitzvot* are saved or preserved in Christ, together with the whole heritage of Israel. From this point of view, they have nothing to do with the Judaizing disciples whom Paul wrestles with in his epistles.⁶

True, Kinzer sometimes speaks the language of religious obligation regarding "church-Jews" or Messianic Jews (cf. p. 41). However, I believe Kinzer would agree with the idea that these Jews are not obligated to do so on the grounds of salvation (how could Gentiles be saved if Jewish practice was a necessary element of salvation?), but on the grounds of their Jewish identity and memory which hinge upon the first covenant. For these Jews, the certainty of salvation in Yeshua does not suppress the significance of *mitzvot*. On the contrary, this certainty gives them the freedom to choose the way of *mitzvot* as the mode in which they will live the covenant sealed in Christ's sacrifice. They will not experience this covenant as Gentiles; that is, as that through which they become incorporated into the people of God. They will experience this covenant as Jews; that is, as that through which the promises made to Abraham, their forefathers, and their fathers come to their fulfillment. From this point of view, those disciples of Yeshua who carry the Torah of Israel do not "stand under" the Torah, as if they would be judged by it or as if their salvation depended upon it (Gal. 3:15–16, 28). It is the survival of Israel, not its salvation, which hangs upon the observance of Messianic Jews in the body of Christ.

This spirit of freedom, rooted in the certainty of the salvation of God in Christ, is manifest in the way the first apostolic generations spontaneously integrated Jewish observances into their new faith. Paul is certainly the greatest theoretician of such "freedom" in Christ. Of course, circumcision and uncircumcision count for nothing when it comes to salvation (1 Cor. 7:9; Gal. 5:11–12; 6:16–15). But if uncircumcision cancelled henceforth circumcision, how could it count for nothing? I do not know of a passage in the epistles where Paul would argue that the novelty of Christ's salvation demands that everybody in the church should be left uncircumcised. However, what Paul saw clearly was that *unlike the distinction between Jews and Gentiles*, the principle of communion within the body *had to do with what mattered* from the point of view of salvation. As such, the commandment of communion was to take precedence over the decision to observe Jewish *mitzvot*.

⁶ Levering (p. 38) refers to the position of St. Thomas Aquinas who, himself drawing on St. Augustine, argues that after the first apostolic generations, Christians sin mortally when they display signs of the enduring relevance of the first covenant (*Summa Theologiae*, q. 104, q. 1, a. 4). Giving up those signs is in itself the sign that Jews have understood that the sacrifice of Christ accomplishes once and for all the purpose of the precepts of the first covenant. Conversely, keeping those signs is a sign that the value of Christ's sacrifice is not fully acknowledged. What Levering fails to mention is the fact that no Messianic Jew would dispute the belief that the sacrifice of Christ relates to the sacrifices of the temple as the perfect relates to the imperfect, the advent of the perfect rendering the imperfect obsolete. Contrary to the long-standing accusation against Marranos, Messianic Jews are not fake Christians who would secretly deny the redemptive value of Christ's sacrifice. What MJ contends is that this sacrifice does not render the covenant itself between God and the Jewish nation obsolete. If I am not mistaken, St. Paul (Rom. 9; 4) and the fathers of the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, par. 16; *Nostra Aetate*, par. 4) hold a similar opinion. Accordingly, if the signs that characterize membership in the Jewish nation do not express a faith that denies the fullness of Christ's sacrifice, but refer to the belief that the fullness of this sacrifice includes the preservation of the first covenant, I cannot see why their display by Jewish disciples of Christ should be counted as a mortal sin any longer. The problem has to do with the meaning that the church attributes to those signs, not with their intrinsic meaning. In actual fact, this meaning is identical in traditional Judaism and MJ. These signs indicate the unbroken covenant between Jews and God, no matter what happened in the course of history—a position which is now clearly endorsed by the Catholic Church.

This in some way anti-halachic halacha was totally unknown—and remains unknown—to traditional Judaism. Accordingly, when Paul scolds Peter on the grounds that, being a Jew, he behaves as a Gentile (Gal. 2:14), this is not to be understood as if Peter led a Gentile lifestyle (why would he “fear” the Jewish members of the church to the effect of withdrawing from meals taken with Gentiles in that case?), but that, being the head of the church, he needed sometimes—most probably, often—to suspend his personal Jewish observance in order to deal with the Gentile members of the church. Paul gave himself as an example of such flexibility for the sake of communion (1 Cor. 9:20–21). Indeed, how could Paul have wanted Gentiles to be granted the right to live as Gentiles if the right of Jews to live as Jews had not been universally acknowledged in the church?

In the so-called “incident of Antioch,” the object of Paul’s rebuke was not *kashrut* but, just as in the case of circumcision, the idea that the *kashrut* of Jewish members of the church was worthier, more “salvific,” than the absence of *kashrut* among her Gentile members. In actual fact, was this not the most obvious interpretation of Peter’s tendency to shun meals with the “Greeks”? True, Peter had to infringe *kashrut* in this case, especially due to the fact that he had a special responsibility when it came to implementing the principle of communion in the early church: “Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15). But why should we think that this principle applies only in favor of the Gentile part of the church? Could one conceive of a “Greek” being hosted by a “Jewish” community of disciples and ordering them to renounce *kashrut* for his sake? This would have been rightly understood as no less an infringement of the *koinonia* principle (1 Cor. 10:23–24). Thus, destroying the “wall of hatred” between Jews and Greeks in the living body of Yeshua does not mean getting rid of the Jewish component of the body. The communion of Gentiles among themselves is no longer the communion between Gentiles and Jews. There are no longer “Jews and Greeks . . . in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), just as there are no longer men and women, masters and slaves in him. These distinctions remain, but they no longer mark some inequality in relationship to salvation. What the principle of communion means therefore is *a mutual acceptance* between Gentiles and Jews, notwithstanding the different manners in which the two communities follow Yeshua. Nothing more than a Jew sharing the meals of a Gentile, or a Gentile abiding by the laws of *kashrut* in a Jewish community, could manifest this mutual acceptance, rooted in the common conviction that salvation stems from the sacrifice of Christ and only from it.

The objection that Levering levels at the analogy between the communion between man and woman within the bonds of marriage and the communion between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ is symptomatic of his misreading of Kinzer’s bilateral ecclesiology. According to this analogy, it is not the church, *pace* Levering, which enters into communion with Jews (p. 35). This would indeed render the “bride of Christ” absurdly twofold: a whole cannot be simultaneously a part of itself. However, may I respectfully ask Levering if it has ever occurred to him that the church was not to be identified with her Gentile component? The communion in Christ between Gentiles and Jews, which is the formal object of Kinzer’s bilateral ecclesiology, is not the communion in Christ between the church and Jews. True, Kinzer emphasizes the fact that, by becoming members of the church, Jews create a bridge between her and the wider Jewish nation. However, this is a bridge between an entity that accepts the Messiahhood of Christ and an entity that rejects it. The bridge-builders are the members of a nation who simultaneously accept Christ’s Messiahhood. There would be no point in building a bridge if the two sides were already in communion. Besides, supposing that by some turn of fortune or misfortune—depending on what side of the bridge one stands on—the whole Jewish nation was one day to become part of the body of Christ, the communion that would result in this body would be a communion between Jews and Gentiles, not

between Jews and the church. The relationship of a Jewish member of the church to the church will remain a relationship of communion of faith, exactly as that of a Gentile member. How could the relationship of a member of the church to the church ever become a relationship of communion to a foreign body? Is this not a sheer *contradictio in adjecto*? True, in the hypothesis of the mutual inclusion between Israel and the church, a formal distinction would subsist between the church and the Jewish nation, since the entity to which the new covenant gave birth is founded on the election of faith, whereas the entity that stems from the first covenant is founded on the election of a nation. By way of parenthesis, this is why Kinzer finds such relevance in Frank Rozenzweig's speculations on the Star of David: they provide a model to conceive the mutual inclusion of the church and Israel. However, even then, claiming that the church would rest on the communion between Jews and the church would be as relevant as claiming that she would rest on the communion between France and the church, were all the French to become Catholics again (*utinam!*).

Via reductionis ad absurdum now, does the idea that the communion between Jews and Gentiles is a founding dimension of the church entail, as Levering contends, that the true body of the Messiah does not subsist in the present-day Catholic Church (pp. 40–42)? Moreover, does it entail that the church would not have been entitled at any point in history to represent this true body? As noted by Levering, Kinzer acknowledges that the Gentile *ekklesia* preserved the "essential message" inherent to biblical revelation (p. 40). Notwithstanding Levering's *interpretatio maligna* of Kinzer's way of formulating this message, claiming that the Gentile church has been faithful to biblical revelation implies that the church's teaching on the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the other basic truths of her faith is in line with the message conveyed in this collection of sacred books, the core of which has to do with the election of a nation called Israel.

Does Kinzer's idea—which was, by the way, also shared by such a highly respected Catholic theologian as Dom Lambert Beauduin—that a schism between the church and the living part of the biblical Israel took place at an early stage of Christian history, leave us with no other option than to radically question the self-awareness of the church as being faithful to the teaching of Yeshua?

First of all, the notion of schism implies that a part wrongly separates from the whole. If the church is the whole composed of Jews and Gentiles, as Kinzer argues, the schismatics are, strictly speaking, those who separate from the church—a number of Jews in this case—and not the church. This remains true even if the church is to blame for having caused and nourished the schism, because of her inability or her unwillingness to secure a place for the biblical Israel in her midst. Second, it is true to say that a schism which is not based on a heresy weakens the church, as it makes it more difficult for her to display visibly the mystery which subsists in her core invisibly. If I believed that the fact of the schism between the church of Rome and the churches of the Byzantine East implied the unfaithfulness of the church of Rome, I would not be a Catholic. If I believed that the churches of the Byzantine East were guilty of heresy, I would not pray for the recovery of the unity between them and the church of Rome. The fact that the leaders of the church often showed themselves to be ill-advised does not entail that their conviction that the church was faithful to the teaching of Christ as well as constantly blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit was misguided or deceived. Otherwise the church, speaking through the voice of the most solemn magisterium of the late Pope John Paul II, would not have publicly repented for the numerous sins of her children, including the most pre-eminent ones. What matters is that, in spite of the sins and misunderstandings of her leadership, the church has, as argued by Kinzer, always managed to convey the "essential message" of God's revelation. An ever-increasing understanding of the truth contained in this "essential message" is the reason for the church's ever-increasing understanding of the ways in which this "essential message" has been distorted over the course of centuries.

Revisiting the anti-Judaizing legislation of past centuries would certainly be less of a strain for Catholic theologians than showing that the decisions of the Council of Trent did not target Martin Luther's quintessential insights regarding faith and sacraments. As far as I can see, Kinzer does not dispute the claim of the Catholic Church to be called the "new Israel," understood as Israel according to the Spirit of God (p. 41). What he advocates is that, in order to fully or visibly deserve to be called such, the church should grant recognition and space to the members of the old but still kicking (and how!) Israel according to the flesh. As a theologian who is not less Catholic than Levering for being at the same time Jewish, I cannot but give my whole support to Mark Kinzer's request.

My conclusion is that, contrary to what Levering writes, the way Kinzer interprets the teaching of Paul and the terms he uses to define his bilateral ecclesiology do not inflict a lethal blow to a purely Catholic understanding of the fundamental connection between Scripture and ecclesiology. There is nothing anti-Catholic, let alone anti-Christian, in the idea that Jewish followers of Yeshua should be granted recognition and space within the Catholic Church. What becomes, then, of the reasons that would justify a refusal to engage in a dialogue with MJ on the part of the Catholic Church? If, on the one hand, Messianic Jews are Jews from a Jewish perspective and if, on the other hand, they are not heretics from a Catholic point of view, I cannot find the slightest reason that would prevent the Catholic Church from identifying them with the first-fruits of Israel's re-integration prophesied by Paul. After all, why should the 2,000 years of uninterrupted prayer by the church in favor of the illumination of the Jewish nation be left without any sort of outcome? Messianic Jews do not need to be saints to be acknowledged and welcomed as this eschatological sign. They do not even need to be part of a homogeneous religious body. They simply need to be what they say they are and, after due examination, what I believe them to be. How could the Catholic Church shy away from opening and furthering a theological dialogue with MJ in these circumstances? Of course, neither side can expect such steps to be welcomed by the authorities of traditional Judaism, no matter the love that they both feel for the tradition that these authorities rightfully represent. However, the Catholic Church knows the story of an innocent voice silenced because it disturbed the humdrum consensus of official religious and political authorities: "And though Herod and Pilate had been enemies before, they were reconciled that same day" (Luke 23:12). I am not convinced there is a sure way to avoid repeating the errors of history, but it is certainly one's duty to try.

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The Identity of the Church: The Body of the Messiah

Daniel C. Juster

The historical theology of many streams of the church was, for the most part, in unity with their understanding of the church as a third race (dating from as early as the second century), a new people of God and neither Jew nor Gentile. The church was understood to be composed of people who had been Jews and Gentiles, but were no longer Jews or Gentiles. The identity of the church was also described as the New and True Israel that had replaced the old ethnic Israel, which had been finally rejected by God due to their rejection of Messiah.

It is easy to see how various texts were used to support this understanding. Second Corinthians 5:17 states that those who are in the Messiah are a new creation. Today, some interpret this to say that when one is in the Messiah, they enter a new creation. We read that in the Messiah, “There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]” (Gal. 3:28, NIV 1984 used throughout). Of course, the passage also states that there is neither male nor female, and the church never taught the elimination of the distinction between the sexes. Yet we can understand how the church understood these texts. Ephesians was especially important in forming this definition. With regard to the relationship of Jew and Gentile, Ephesians 2:14–16 states, “He has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.” So also we read in Ephesians 4:4, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith and one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Other texts also seem to support this idea of a third race, with the term *genus tertium* mentioned by Tertullian and taken up again in the 19th century by Adolf Harnack. This was described as a new, unified people of God, in which the old distinctions of ethnicity are no longer valued. First Corinthians 12:12 states, “The Body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body, so it is with Christ.” Verse 13 continues, “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” We can quote other texts, such as Peter noting that all believers are a chosen nation and are being built into a spiritual house made up of living stones (1 Pet. 2:4–5).

The language of analogy and metaphor is used to describe spiritual realities. We have to be careful to not over-press analogies and metaphors into literal distortion. Analogies and metaphors transcend the univocal literal meaning that can be derived from these literary devices. However, we do need to say in what way these statements of unity—one body, a spiritual building, a new man, etc.—are to be unpacked. Are they to be taken as literally ending the role of ethnic Israel? Or that ethnic distinctions are of no continuing value? Is the “no difference” between Jew and Gentile—or male and female—in regard to all things, or just in regard to salvation and positional spiritual status with God (Eph. 2:6: “Seated us with him in the heavenly realms”)? Others have pointed out that we, Jew and Gentile, and male and female, are the same in certain—but not all—regards. So it is only with regard to salvation in the Messiah and spiritual status that we are the same, and indeed we

are one body. However, other texts make it clear that on other levels in God's working with nations and ethnic peoples, there is still an important distinction and purpose for Israel and other distinctive peoples. The other texts of Scripture use other analogies and metaphors, and present teaching more in line with the emphases of the Hebrew Bible on the everlasting role of ethnic Israel in God's plan of world redemption and in the age to come. The nature of the relationship of Israel and the church, the body of Messiah comprising Jew and Gentile, is multifaceted and multi-layered. The greatest danger is to over-simplify the Scriptures and to ignore the weight of texts that do not fit into a favored view or to twist these texts to fit.

Indeed, there are texts that lead to a profoundly different theology than the third race interpretation of historical theology. These texts lead to a very different definition of the church than the third race/new Israel definition.

To look at this different definition of the church, I will present other texts that qualify the "one new man" theology of Ephesians.

The Kingdom Theology of the Synoptic Gospels

The preaching ministry of Yeshua in Mark and Matthew begins with the announcement of the kingdom of God: "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). This is the good news. Since the publication of George Ladd's book on the subject,¹ the evangelical world has more and more understood the gospel as preached by Yeshua as the invitation into the kingdom of God. The text is interpreted to say that with the coming of Yeshua, "The kingdom of God is available to you." With the coming of Yeshua, the kingdom of God has broken into this world. The last days (eschatological time) have begun. Thus the ministry of Yeshua—in his teaching, his signs and wonders, and ultimately in his resurrection—is understood as the manifestation of the kingdom, the age to come. This is, I believe, the majority understanding in scholarship today. This understanding of the kingdom is yielding more and more insight.

Thus N. T. Wright understands the Sermon on the Mount as teaching the Torah, and applying it, as is fitting for the age of kingdom in-breaking. The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 are understood in a new way. The poor are not blessed because they are poor, and the mourning are not blessed because they are grieving. Rather, the in-breaking of the kingdom brings a great reversal.² The poor are no longer determined by their poverty, and those who mourn are lifted out of their grief. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. This interpretation was foundational to the discipleship writings of Dallas Willard, who brilliantly popularized the scholarship.³

One of the most central parallel passages for this interpretation of the Gospels is found in Luke 7 and Matthew 11. John the Immerser sends disciples to Yeshua to ask if he is the One, the Messiah, or if another is to be expected. This confusion about Yeshua could be the result of the doubts John experienced in his imprisonment. It did not look to him like the kingdom had, or was about to, come. Yeshua's answer is most instructive:

Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me. (Luke 7:22–23)

¹ George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 2.

² N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 288–89.

³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 100–101.

These are the signs of the presence of the kingdom. Yes, Yeshua is the Messiah and the kingdom has come, but in a partial way. It comes in a way of growing, spreading, expanding, and developing. It comes and advances in an unexpected way. One can miss it and be offended.

I believe that Yeshua's teaching on the privilege of John in the same context brings out the truth with greater clarity. John is the greatest born of woman in the pre-kingdom time, but the "least in the kingdom of God is greater than John." Certainly this does not mean they have greater character! It means that to be part of the kingdom that has now dawned is a greater privilege than even John received. John was the bridge, but not part of the privilege of Yeshua's disciples and those who will be added to them.

The parables of Matthew 13 explain the nature of the kingdom with greater detail and clarity. The kingdom has come; it began as a mustard seed but will grow to be the greatest plant in the garden (the world?). It spreads through the sowing of the seed of the Word. Wheat and tares will grow together until a final harvest into judgment, when those who are evil will be separated from those who are good. Entering into the kingdom is the pearl of great price and the buried treasure that makes the field of extraordinary value.

The resurrection of Yeshua and the pouring out of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Shavuot) provide us with another great kingdom advance. Thus another aspect of the age to come, the Spirit poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28–30), has begun to be fulfilled.

Understanding the kingdom of God is grounded in two orientations. First we look to the past, to the history of Israel, and see the kind of nation that God was seeking to establish. We look to the best of the rule of David and the early reign of Solomon for a picture of the kingdom in one nation that was a light drawing others to the truth about God. Then we look to the future and the prophetic picture of what will be. That future is an even greater key to understanding the New Covenant scriptures. Indeed, in that age to come, the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the poor are delivered into an abundance that permeates all nations, but especially the nation of Israel. The law of God will be written upon the heart (Ezek. 36:24ff.; Jer. 31:31ff.).

However, the greatest picture of the age to come is an international picture. David's greater Son, the King/Messiah, rules from Jerusalem. The nations beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will no longer learn war (Isa. 2). Israel and the nations will be one under the rule of the Messiah. The extent of his dominion and the duration of his rule will be without limit. The knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas (Isa. 11:9). The prophetic picture is repeated again and again; the nations will come to the light of the Messiah, or the light of Israel's witness (Isa. 42:4; 49:6–7; 60:3).

The synoptic gospels all present a defense, an apologetic, that Yeshua is the Messiah and the kingdom has come, a defense originally delivered in oral form for Jewish people going back to the preaching and teaching of Peter.⁴ Yes, Yeshua is the Messiah and the kingdom really did come, but not in the way that was expected and not all at once. The proof is the signs and wonders of his ministry and his resurrection from the dead. This case is extended in the book of Acts, an extension of the Gospel of Luke. In Acts 2, the outpouring of the Spirit is just one more proof that Yeshua is the Messiah and that the kingdom has come, has broken into this age.

This brings me to speak about how the New Testament interprets the influx of the Gentiles who respond to the message of the gospel. Acts 15 is a key passage for our interpretation; the Book of Acts as a whole is crucial as an interpretive key for the theology of Jews and Gentiles in the body

⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 155–81, especially 179.

of Messiah. As I. Howard Marshall pointed out, the Book of Acts is a book of theology, not just descriptive history.⁵

The immediate question in Acts 15 concerns whether or not Gentiles need to be circumcised and keep the Torah of Moses to be saved (v. 1). However, the answer given to this question has enormous implications for the nature of the *ecclesia* that is formed in Yeshua. I use *ecclesia*, though a Greek term, to transcend the connotations associated with the word *church*. I could also use Hebrew, the *kehilah* of Yeshua.

The testimonies of Peter and Paul point to the signs and wonders that were part of the Gentiles coming to faith. Indeed, the gift of the Holy Spirit proven by such manifestations was evidence that God had accepted the Gentiles by faith in Yeshua without circumcision. This was so in Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius, was continued in the Antioch congregational situation, and then was repeated in the mission of Paul.

Circumcision and keeping the whole of the law would be required if salvation meant joining and assimilating into ethnic Israel. However, not circumcising showed an acceptance of people from the nations without them becoming Jews. How then are we to understand the expansion of the people of God and the inclusion of Gentiles, those of the other nations?

At first glance, the response of Jacob (James), the leader of the Jerusalem congregation, is curious. He quotes a passage from Amos 9 that is millennial in its original context. In a Septuagint version, which some think is the better reading, Jacob states,

Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written,

“After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
that the remnant of men may
seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear
my name,
says the Lord, who does these things”
that have been known for ages. (Acts 15:14–18)

Jacob's view is that God is taking a people for himself from the Gentiles, not that he is taking some people and converting them to be Jews or to be part of a third race. His quotation of Amos looks toward the *eschaton*, the final things, the last age, when Israel and the nations are one under the rule of the Messiah. So let's look at the quote from Amos with greater focus.

Jacob's argument fits the whole context of the Synoptic Gospels. If the kingdom has come, has broken into this world, as proven by the signs and wonders of Yeshua and the apostles and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then another aspect of the kingdom would also be fitting. That other aspect is the coming of the Gentiles to submit to the government of David. Though Yeshua does not yet rule on an earthly throne in Jerusalem, he has begun to rule and is seated at the right hand of God. The prophets speak in multiple places about the conversion of the nations, their coming to the

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Luke, Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). Marshall argues that Luke purposes to show the relationship of one people who maintain unity with the distinction of Jew and Gentile.

light of the Messiah. He is a light to the nations, a banner for the peoples, and brings God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Gentile inclusion without conversion to Judaism is the picture of the prophets, and this is now already taking place. However, there is still the "not yet" of the full turning of the nations to the God of Israel.⁶ The Amos text is seen as already beginning to happen. The Tent of David is the re-establishment of the Davidic covenant, and the gathering is coming under his rule, under the covering of his tent. The coming in of the Gentiles is another evidence that Yeshua is the Messiah and the kingdom has broken into this age.

This orientation is clear in several texts where the Gentiles do not become Jews and the Jews and Gentiles do not become a third race together. For example, Romans 15 provides us with this very important text:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing hymns to your name."

Again it says,

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
the Gentiles will hope in him." (vv. 8–12)

The Pauline use of these texts, when we translate the word *Gentiles* from the Greek to *nations*, shows us the promise in clear terms. Israel and the nations are destined to become one under the rule of the Messiah. However, at the present time, even now, we see Jews and Gentiles (those from the nations) as one in the Messiah. They are an eschatological foreshadowing of the age to come. They show the age to come as already demonstrating itself in the present age.

The perspective in Revelation 21 is very similar. After describing the New Jerusalem as having foundation stones with the names of the 12 apostles, and on the gates were the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, we read, "The glory of the nations will be brought into it" (v. 26).

The picture seems to be that every nation or *ethnos* has its own distinct glory to be brought into the New Jerusalem. This would then help us to make sense of Revelation 7, where the 144,000 would represent the Messianic Jews, and those from all nations represent the Gentiles. The idea

⁶ Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 5–7, 81–82, 147–48, 158, 160–62. He argues that the New Testament reflects the debate between the school of Shammai, where salvation was only possible to those who converted to Judaism, and the school of Hillel, which taught that people from the nations could find salvation by commitment to God and following universal law. He sees the distinction between universal law and Jewish law as already understood in the school of Hillel.

that both groups are the same but with different symbolism does not fit as naturally as seeing them as two groups that are part of the people of God.⁷

The most important classic text using the analogy of the olive tree also preserves unity with distinctions. The olive tree represents the people of God. The people of God are, for the most part, the Jewish people until the gospel goes out to the Gentiles. Romans brings out these distinctions.

1. The nations are portrayed as wild olive trees. Those saved from them were cut from those trees and grafted into the cultivated olive tree.
2. The only cultivated nation is the Jewish olive tree.
3. The Jews and Gentiles both share in the nourishing sap from the olive root.

The Jewish people are the natural branches, but some are broken off. We should not assume that the broken off branches are simply the ones who have not received Yeshua. That issue at the time of Paul's writing was still being worked out. It was known among faithful Jews that some were unfaithful, and Paul addresses that in Romans 2. However, God is able to graft these broken off branches back into the olive tree. The wild branches are branches from the nations and still represent those nations, or are the saved remnant from their nations just as the Jewish followers of Yeshua are the saved remnant of their nation (Rom. 11:5). The Jewish followers of Yeshua are the offering of the first fruits that brings sanctification to the rest of their nation, Israel (Rom. 11:16). So the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, remain elect and chosen.

Unity with distinction is maintained. The Acts 15 decision not to require the specifics of Jewish responsibility for Gentiles, including circumcision and other specific markers of Jewish identity (which the New Perspective Pauline theology interprets as the "works of the law"), does not release the Jewish believers in Yeshua from this specific Jewish covenant responsibility. Acts 21 clarifies the implications of the Acts 15 council for Jewish believers in Yeshua when Jacob enjoins Paul to offer sacrifices for the completion of Nazarite vows for four men. Paul had taken such a vow and completed the time period for the vow according to Acts 18:18. Paul's public offering was made so that everyone would know that Paul walked in an orderly way, keeping the Torah. The implication here is that Jews are called to keep the specifics of Jewish covenant responsibility. Paul easily complies with the request of Jacob. It does seem to be the purpose of Luke to show the unity with distinctions of Jew and Gentile in the Messianic movement.

First Corinthians 7 enjoins continued distinction between Jew and Gentile in the body of the Messiah:

This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. . . . Each should remain in the situation he was in when God called him. (vv. 17–18, 20)⁸

Galatians 5 fits the same pattern of teaching. The Gentiles are enjoined not to receive circumcision. If one does, "he is obligated to obey the whole law" (v. 3). However, by clear implication, since a Jew is so circumcised, he is so obligated. This necessarily leads to a distinction in ways of life.

⁷ David Frankfurter, commentary on the Book of Revelation, in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 476; R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress Press, 1996), 169–71.

⁸ David Rudolph, "Messianic Judaism in Antiquity and in the Modern Period," in David Rudolph and Joel Willitts, *Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 23–24.

Ephesians 2 provides us with a different description that can be interpreted in a way that coheres with what we have written to this point. The pagan past of the Gentiles is presented in stark terms. They were “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope in the world” (v. 12). But now the wall of partition has been broken down; the wall of separation in the temple is used figuratively as a barrier, since it divided the court of the Gentiles from the court of the women and then the inner court that only Jewish men could enter. From this, God has created one new humanity. This should not be taken as a third race but as the newness of life shared by Jew and Gentile that makes us one people together in the Messiah. This transcends race while maintaining distinctions of ethnic calling. So Paul states that they are “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (v. 19). It is analogous to the unity of male and female in marriage.

The RSV provides a helpful interpretive translation, stating that the Gentiles have become part of the commonwealth of Israel. The idea is that the Gentiles are in some sense part of an expanded Israel, since they are bonded to Israel by their bonding to the King of Israel and the saved remnant of Israel. This does not do away with their ethnic identities that represent those nations before God. This is why the word *commonwealth* is so helpful. They do not become Jews, though a Jew lives within them. They do not replace Israel either as part of a third race or in any other way. Yet there is an expanded Israel in a broad sense, as the people of God, and Gentiles share in its priestly calling.⁹

In conclusion, with this reading, we see that Israel is part of the identity of the *ecclesia* and that the *ecclesia* is part of the identity of Israel. These identities are still to be discovered by some. So what is the *ecclesia*? It is all who are in Yeshua, but it is also those from the nations who have been bonded to the Messianic Jewish remnant and thereby connected or bonded to or united with Israel for the sake of world redemption. This bonding takes place through being united with the King of Israel, Yeshua, who brings Jew and Gentile together and into connection to the nation of Israel. The destiny of the church is tied to the destiny of Israel; it is a joint destiny. The destiny of Israel is also tied to the destiny of the church. The people from the other nations who are joined to the body are also joined to the heritage of the Jewish people as their spiritual ancestry. Therefore, we could say in short that *the church is those from the nations who have joined themselves to Israel, the Jewish people, and its destiny for the sake of the redemption of the world*. Of course, their first joining to Israel is with the saved remnant of Israel and its King. However, we should see what Mark Kinzer calls an “Israel-Christology,” whereby there is no separation between being joined to the King of Israel and Israel, since Israel and its King are corporately one.¹⁰

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⁹ Mark Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), Kindle loc. 1276–92, 3900–49; Daniel Juster, *Growing to Maturity* (Rockville: Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, 1982, 1985), 221–23; idem., *Jewish Roots* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2013), 57–58; and *The Irrevocable Calling* (Clarksville: Lederer, 2007), 44, 46–47. All of these books argue for this type of definition. Note that Kinzer’s is the most comprehensive response to the Catholic Church on these issues.

¹⁰ Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*, Kindle loc. 2336–75, 2482.

How Jewish Should the Messianic Movement Be?

S. H. R. Ben-Haim

This title was not meant to be provocative, but instead to ask a genuine question that at times is common among the Messianic Jewish community. I believe that this question is founded in the complicated position that many Jewish followers of Yeshua find themselves in. They are trying to figure out whether they are grounded in the Jewish world or are members of a global community of Yeshua-followers, the majority of whom are not Jewish.

I believe the question posits within itself a number of problems that we need to delve into. And hopefully we will find various opportunities to move forward and make what, in my opinion, would be progress toward the full redemption and *tikkun olam* (fixing of the world) in which we are to play a part.

Part of the question that needs to be addressed, first of all, is whom the term Messianic refers to: a group of Jews, or non-Jews? Is the term a reference to all followers of the Messiah, Jew and non-Jew combined, or is it primarily a term referring to Jewish followers of the Messiah?

If we refer to Jewish followers of the Messiah, do we include Jews of all streams with an expectation of the Messiah, or only those who believe that Yeshua is the Messiah?

When we say Jewish, do we mean those who practice Judaism or some other definition? And how does that relate to being Israeli? Even at the time of the founding of the State of Israel, there was a debate as to the nature of this Jewish State: was it to be a national or religious state? The founders made a compromise in the Declaration of Independence, referring to *Tzur Yisrael*—the Rock of Israel. This rock is seen both as the bedrock upon which Israel is built and the rock that traveled through the desert with the sons of Israel and provided the needed sustenance. It is fascinating to note that Shaul/Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10 about this rock and identifies it as the Messiah. So in the declaration of the State of Israel, we find that both the secular and the religious point back to the Messianic calling of the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

One person, in response to the question at hand, said, “How wet should water be, or how human should a person be?”

Rabbi Mark Kinzer writes about the definition of Messianic Jews in *The Nature of Messianic Judaism*.¹

If we are trying to build a Messianic community, I believe that we have no choice but to labor to assure that it will indeed be a Jewish community. We cannot build such communities apart from the wider Jewish community. We need to aim to build together with the rest of our people. The restoration of the Jewish people that we read of in Ezekiel 36 and 37 should be our goal. This requires working toward not just the building of Messianic community, but toward the overall unification of the Jewish people in the land of Israel, following the commandments in fidelity to HASHEM and learning the ways of Messiah.

¹ Mark Kinzer, *The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species* (West Hartford: Hashivenu Archives, 2000).

Many Messianic Jews fear the term Judaism, as they think of stereotypical images of Hasidic or Lithuanian Jews dressed in 18th-century Eastern European clothing. They believe that this is the lone flavor of Judaism and find many reasons to distance themselves from it. These same Messianic Jews ignore the development of additional streams within Judaism—Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist—each of which carries a responsibility for the rest of the Jewish people. I find these misunderstandings to be most unfortunate on two counts. First, I believe we should not fear Judaism or our people, as this leads to us distancing ourselves from fellow Jews regardless of their lifestyle and level of observance. We should be prepared to be stretched as we learn to walk in greater Torah observance and see others also walking forward, while not coming to the same conclusions at this time. And second, I believe that as we find our place as a Messianic Jewish community within Judaism, we need to humbly learn about the variety of opinions and interpretations that have existed among our people in times of old and in these modern times. Mark Kinzer says about Judaism:

Judaism is not a religious artifact from biblical times but a dynamic way of life embodied in and transmitted by a living community. The abstract affirmation of Judaism has no meaning unless it is expressed as a practical affirmation of the actual religious tradition of the Jewish people. If one denies the legitimacy of historical Judaism, one in effect asserts that the divine purpose for the Jewish people found in the New Testament has been definitively thwarted.²

Another very deep writer, Rosemary Ruether, states clearly:

Judaism was never a religion of “legalism,” but a religion of revealed commandments which seeks thereby to concretize God’s presence in everyday life. For Judaism, there can be no such antithesis of law and grace, letter and spirit, for the Torah is itself God’s gift and mediates the presence of the Spirit.³

Tfilah (prayer) is one of the most central tenets of Judaism; it is carried out as a collective as we pray from the Siddur, the book of Jewish prayer. This allows Jews of all walks of life and even those speaking different languages to come and pray in unity. This has been a vital tool to keep the Jewish people bound together even as we were spread out to the ends of the Earth. It has also served as a focal point for our hope for restoration to the land and full redemption, as we prayed three times for this restoration. To some Jewish followers of Yeshua, the Siddur seems restrictive or dry. They believe that the book allows for no flexibility or the changes necessary to adapt to changing times. While there is an element of truth to the fact that the Siddur has provided continuity over the centuries, it has also provided a vital tool for our people to engage both with times of calamity that have struck our people and times of joy that have lifted our people up. In today’s Siddur, one will find prayers of remembrance for the Holocaust and prayers of thanks for the establishment of the State of Israel. There are even unique prayers for the return of captive soldiers and for blessing a woman who has given birth to a child. Daniel Sperber writes:

We see that our liturgy has always been evolving. There was never a fixed text or a *tefillat keva* (a set liturgy) in which everything was fully formed so that no further

² Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 215.

³ Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 241.

changes could be introduced. Surely this is the meaning of R. Shimon's statement in *Pirkei Avot* 2:13, "When you pray, do not make your prayer in a fixed form (al taas tefillatecha keva), but [a plea for] mercies and supplications before the Lord."⁴

It seems that an order of prayer was a very ancient custom among the Jewish people. In the Mishnah (*Tamid* 5:1) there is a passage that shows that even while the temple still stood, the priests had a daily custom to go a special place in the courtyard and recite a number of fixed blessings following the morning sacrifice.⁵

Is our Jewishness ethnic or religious? Is "religious" a curse word? It seems that in ancient times as much as today, there was conflict between those who leaned toward a more nationalistic identity and those who sought a more religious identity. It is taught that the students of Rabbi Akiva were divided between those who favored the Festival of Passover (when we remember the forming of the nation through the Exodus from Egypt) and those who favored the Festival of Shavuot (seen as the spiritual event in which the sons of Israel receive and take upon themselves the Torah). The truth is that we are commanded to celebrate both and to make the connection real through the counting of the Omer. In modern times, the discussion continues between those who send their young ones to the military to build up the nation state and those who send their young ones to yeshiva to study Torah.

What does Jewish space look like for this Messianic community? The Messianic community carries with it a deeply rooted identity as a people that has continued to exist despite a very long exile. This people has always, despite its wanderings in the nations, been drawn back to a certain piece of real estate that HASHEM promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. So this Jewish space has a gravitational center.

Some may be asking just how important the commandments can be, and what relevance they have for us in the modern world. We are warned in the Torah about a term called *avonot avoteichem* (עוונות אבותיכם): the sins of the fathers will afflict us if we do not repent from those sins. Some will say that those commands only applied while we were in the land, or possibly that in a Messianic context they only applied before the Messiah came and now we have been freed from them.

I believe this is an important thing for us to contemplate. We as a people, and sometimes as followers of Yeshua, have rejected the Torah and continued in that rejection of our fathers. This is something that has the potential to continue to cause generational damage in our lives. As Jewish followers of Yeshua, we speak of aiming to walk in holiness and faithfulness to HASHEM, and I believe a central outworking of this is fidelity to his Torah. We need to take action and not follow the ways of our fathers in the area of sin. So this Jewish space has both commandments and a heritage we have received from our fathers.

I would encourage us all to pray and to seek his face as to the areas in which we need to be cleansed of the past. I believe it is clear here that if we are casual toward the past, this is a continuation of the casualness of our fathers. We need to take action in order to walk in faithfulness.

Our communities are continually under scrutiny by both the Jewish and the Christian communities. I believe it is important that our position be very clear: We are creating Jewish space in which Jewish life can thrive! A Jew should be at home in our communities and a Christian should feel like a guest. These guests will feel that they are among those who care deeply for them and are jointly following the Messiah, but all the same they are guests. A Jew, on the other hand, should

⁴ Daniel Sperber, *On Challenges in Jewish Liturgy* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2010), 24, 25.

⁵ Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 76, 77.

feel that he is at home in our communities. Our liturgy should follow the liturgical outline that the majority of the people of Israel have preserved and follow. We should have a place in which fellow Jews feel comfortable to come and pray and say the Mourner's Kaddish with fellow Jews. This is also important for the people in our communities, so that they will feel able to join in prayer with fellow Jews in other communities and feel at home there as well. It is also important to note that the "borders" between the Jewish people and non-Jewish followers of Yeshua should not be impenetrable; instead, like in the other streams of Judaism, there must exist a way for those people from the nations who feel called to join the Jewish people to do so by way of conversion. A strong Messianic community must have in place a conversion process similar to those of the other streams of Judaism. For an example, see the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council's "The Case for Conversion: Welcoming Non-Jews into Messianic Jewish Space."⁶

I believe this requires a conscious and intentional decision to build up such communities. Feeling at home is greatly affected by the extent to which we feel accustomed to or were trained up in a certain way. If we train our people to pray in unique ways that are different from the way the rest of our people pray, we will be creating an environment that fellow Jews will not feel at home in. By the same token, our people will also find it difficult to join in prayer with fellow Jews at work, school, in the military, or elsewhere. They will struggle to feel at home with the liturgy and will find it more difficult to enter into the joy of prayer together with fellow Jews.

Throughout the ages, many Jews who have come to find the Jewish Messiah have quickly left, been banished from, or plain forgotten the liturgy and customs they were raised with in relation to prayer and following the commandments that the Almighty gave to our people. This has meant that they no longer prayed in Jewish ways. Later, this path has led to them raising children who also felt distant from Jewish prayer, and it became easier for them to choose to draw near to other followers of the Messiah who are not Jewish. This is a tragedy in a very real sense, as I believe it leads to Jewish followers of the Messiah not living in covenantal fidelity to the Almighty and to the calling we have to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. How can we possibly fulfill this calling while not living Jewishly? Indeed, the question of whether Jewish followers of Yeshua should lead Torah observant lives has within it more than a grain of supersessionism. It questions the legitimacy of the present and future calling of the Jewish people to be an *am segulah*—a separate and called people.

This tragedy is compounded by the twin messages that we give out:

1. To the Jewish world, we say that our Jewishness is at best a side issue and not central to our commitment to the Almighty. At the same time, we also profess to have been given a unique revelation from the Almighty about the significance of the Jewish people and our calling as followers of the Messiah.

2. To the Christian world, this serves to promote the mistaken supersessionist reading of Scripture, in which the Jewish people are no longer eternal. Instead, G-d's covenant with the Jewish people has passed away, and the church has replaced this people and receives the promises made to it. We as Jews have a responsibility to teach that neither the Jewish people nor the covenant made with them are able to pass away, but instead the Jewish people are eternally betrothed to the Almighty. The church cannot take the place of the Jewish people, nor should it desire to take that place. While at times the Jewish people go through periods of reproof, this in no way means that another has taken their place. The church, by the mercies of the Almighty, has been able through the Messiah to draw near to the commonwealth of Israel, but do not become Jews—nor do they replace the Jewish people.

⁶ <http://ourrabbis.org/main/articles/on-conversion-mainmenu-32> [accessed July 8, 2015].

Another danger lurking for Messianic Jews is the tendency to look at Jewish life as merely a manmade tradition that has been passed down by our fathers. Unfortunately, this may cause us to give up elements of this tradition when we find it either difficult to practice or hard to understand. This, in turn, can lead to a situation in which we enter into error, as we no longer follow the Almighty with the intent and conviction we are called to. Jewish life is not just something that our people have passed down from generation to generation; it is an issue of faithfulness to the Almighty, who commands us in Leviticus 26 that we are to “walk in his statutes and to guard and do his commands.” In this world, it is not politically correct to speak of commands. But, if we take this approach, we are denying the control and the place of the Almighty in the world. We must recognize that he continues to expect us to be faithful to the commandments he has given our people, and desires us to keep them so that we can follow in his paths.

Jewish life should not be a burden upon the Messianic movement, but instead should be a central facet of who we are as a people. We should be a movement that works as a catalyst to encourage all Jews, whichever stream they belong to, to practice Jewish life. If a fellow Jew meets us and asks us to help him put up a *mezuzah* or learn how to lay *tefillin*, we should be there to assist him. We should be a community that can provide assistance if, at the Western Wall, we see a fellow Jew struggling to lay his *tefillin* or find his way through the Siddur. It is important that we fully internalize the need to provide this assistance not out of outreach expediency for our own internal purposes but instead to be an encouragement for our people as a whole who are drawing near to HASHEM in fulfillment of the prophecies of Ezekiel of old. If, while on our army base or in school or the market, we are asked to help complete a *minyan*, we should desire to fulfill this responsibility to our people to live with true *arvut hadadit*—interconnected responsibility one for another.

I do not believe that we can detach Jewish life from Judaism. Judaism is the chain that carries our people and protects our people through the ages: from Sinai, into the land, out to the dispersion, and then back into the land in our times. Judaism is not single faceted, as we are aiming to show in this article, but instead is a multifaceted community of faith which has known through the ages to interpret the Torah for the age it is practiced in. This community of faith is one in which the Messiah has always been present, even if at times he is hidden at the very center of this faith. While a great many Jews have had difficulty recognizing Yeshua as the Messiah at this core, they nonetheless have had an expectation and a faith that the restoration heralded by the Messiah for our people and this land is a part of the restoration of our people to HASHEM.

This Jewish space that we are building will be following in the ways of the Master as we put into practice this obedience to G-d through covenantal fidelity. We are led to understand from the gospel writings that Yeshua the Messiah wore *tefillin* and *tzizit*. Therefore I find it difficult to understand why it is hard for the Jewish men in Messianic communities to connect with this commandment and tradition of the fathers and the Master. One very important time of training and guiding into observance is the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This coming of age and taking on of the commandments, along with the laying of *tefillin* and the *tallit/tzizit* (especially for boys) can be seen to be modeled by the Messiah in a proto-Bar Mitzvah fashion. We read in Luke 2 about his coming up to Jerusalem for the festival and staying and studying at the temple together with the leaders of the people. The Bar Mitzvah, which developed greatly in the Middle Ages, has enabled generations of Jews and families as a whole to connect with our heritage. This process is an effective tool to instill in our young people the importance of their Jewishness and Jewish life, just as they enter their crucial teen years.

It is very important to also note that, in addition to the example of living a Jewish life in Jewish space that Yeshua the Messiah provides for us, we also find that Shaul lived a Jewish life and aimed to create for himself Jewish space wherever he went. At the end of his life, while imprisoned

in Rome, he makes himself known to the local Jewish community. There he makes a point of stating that he has never sinned against the traditions of the fathers; he does not speak merely of following the writings of the *pshat*—the basic reading of the Torah—but instead emphasizes that he also practices the teaching that has developed through the centuries and was passed down, which is the essence of the *Torah Shebeal Peh*—the Oral Law. Shaul, in one of his final statements, is presenting his fidelity not just to the Torah of old, but to the way that it was being interpreted and practiced at that time. By his coming and speaking to the Jewish leadership of the city, he is setting forth for us an example of the respect we should show to those from the Jewish people who have been given a place of authority to interpret the Torah in accordance to Deuteronomy 16 and 17. This does not lead Shaul or us to follow in blind obedience, but it also does not allow us to ignore these leaders. Pamela Eisenbaum says that Shaul subjected himself five times (2 Cor. 11:24) to lashes at the hands of the synagogue officials as a sign of the respect that he held for the Jewish leaders.⁷ It is important to note that Shaul does not speak of himself as being formerly Jewish at any point, but instead speaks of his Jewishness in a very real present tense. Unfortunately, many readers of his writings have come to the conclusion that he looked down on the Torah, and yet if one looks at his writings, one can in fact find that he makes as many positive statements about the law as he does negative ones (e.g., Rom. 2:13, “It is the doers of the law who are righteous”). For him it is crucial that the law be understood and applied differently to those who are Jewish and those who are from the nations.⁸

Unfortunately, for too long Jewish followers of the Messiah were encouraged not only to drop the traditions of the fathers, but also to refrain from the very basic commandments of the Torah such as Shabbat and circumcision.

This lack of observance by Jewish followers of Yeshua has stood in tragic contrast to the ways in which Jewish people through the centuries have succeeded in protecting their traditions, festivals, and more. Some would say that it was, in fact, these acts of fidelity to HASHEM that kept the Jewish people together. A fine example of this is the unique observance and guarding of the Shabbat.

The Shabbat has been a continuous sign, along with the festivals of Israel, of the viability of the ancient commandments and their application despite the variety of situations and places where Jews have lived. One might have expected that the changes we see in the world and among the Jewish people would easily have led to a lower level of observance. In reality, we have seen how Jewish people have gone to great lengths to keep the Shabbat, and it in turn has protected our people. More than the Jewish people keeping the Shabbat, the Shabbat has kept the Jewish people from assimilation and from denying the calendar they were commanded to keep.

Circumcision among Jewish followers of the Messiah was discouraged in the past by the church, and Jewish followers circumcised their eight-day-old boys at a very real risk of ostracism. We read in Matthew about the circumcision of Yeshua, but that did not seem to be enough for the church to allow Jewish followers to follow in his footsteps. The words of Shaul have again and again been misconstrued, especially where he discouraged those from the nations from entering into obligations that HASHEM gave to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so they would be a set apart people. Not surprisingly, Shaul testifies of how he was circumcised on the eighth day. This central rite of Jewish life is not only a clear commandment that was given to Abraham; it was also given to Moshe at Mt. Sinai with a warning to pass it on to the sons of Israel from generation to generation, as one who does not circumcise his son will be cut off from the people. The lack of

⁷ Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: Harper One/Harper Collins, 2009), 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

circumcision among Jewish Yeshua-followers in previous ages was thus understandably interpreted by fellow Jews as a desire to hide or deny one's own heritage. Thankfully we are now seeing a change within the Messianic Jewish community, and this is no longer an issue of controversy. Indeed, the vast majority of Jewish Yeshua-followers in Israel and the Diaspora circumcise their sons. This is a very important message and a sign to the Jewish people in the present generation.

If the Messiah says that he did not come to abolish or take away even a small letter or decoration of a letter, how can we imagine that his coming was meant to do away with the Torah, and therefore remove all obligations on our part? Why would Yeshua have kept these reminders of the covenants and then just do away with them, leading us on a path to faithfulness—but not faithfulness to HASHEM?

As I mentioned earlier, counting the Omer is a command that is clearly mandated in the Torah. We are to count the days and weeks between Passover and Shavuot each year. This does not require much time or work from the Jew who observes this commandment, but it does require us to concentrate and to obey. In some ways, the counting of the Omer can be seen as an example of the struggle to obey. Even though this is not even a matter of following Orthodox Judaism, it is something that we struggle with.

In Israel, the only Jewish country, we have seen that when kosher food is available, most Jews will choose to keep kosher. Some do so out of expediency, so they will be able to host their neighbors, but many more do so because it was kept in the homes they grew up in, and they believe that the chain of observance should not be broken. I believe that keeping the laws of *kashrut*, which by definition carry within them an acceptance of a level of Oral Torah, is another opportunity for Jewish followers of Yeshua to live out covenantal fidelity to the Almighty and to care for fellow Jews. This is an important element of establishing Jewish space.

Michael Wyschogrod provides an important Orthodox Jewish voice speaking out for Jewish observance as a whole and for Jews at the margins (as some would consider Messianic Jews to be). In his book *Abraham's Promise*,⁹ he writes about how Shaul has been misunderstood. According to Wyschogrod, it was clear to Shaul that the nations were not to be required to undergo circumcision and follow all the Torah commanded to the Jews, but there was never a question as to the Jewish people's responsibility to continue to be faithful in this way.

In a famous letter that Wyschogrod wrote to Cardinal Aaron Jean-Marie Lustiger, he challenged this fellow Jew to live out his life in a Jewish way, in line with the people he claimed to belong to. Wyschogrod challenges the notion that it is possible to be merely an ethnic Jew and not also a religious Jew. He says that he has no problem recognizing the cardinal as a Jew, and yet the central question is what the implications of his Jewishness are to the cardinal.

Jews are required by God to live in accordance with the commandments of the Torah while gentiles are required by God to obey the Noachide commandments based on Genesis 9:1-17. The Noachide commandments resemble the natural moral law though they do not coincide with it. It therefore follows that a gentile who eats leavened bread during the Passover season (to choose but one example) is no way displeasing God while a Jew who does so is, from the Jewish point of view, displeasing God because God has forbidden Jews to eat leavened bread during Passover (see Lev. 23:6).

The only operative test, therefore, for whether someone is a Jew is whether he sins when he eats leavened bread on Passover, does not inhabit a *Succah* (booth)

⁹ Michael Wyschogrod and R. Kendall Soulen, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004).

during Tabernacles, or violates any of the other positive or negative commandments of the Torah. A gentile does not sin in any of these instances (except when he violates the Noachide commandments) and a Jew does.¹⁰

Wyschogrod goes on to remind the cardinal that more and more Christians have come to the understanding that Romans 11:29 clearly speaks of the election of Israel, and that “the gracious gifts of God and his calling are irrevocable.”

It is clear that neither Shaul nor Yeshua spoke about any portion of the Law of Moses having become outmoded for Jews. If anything, it would seem that the Messiah empowers us to observe the Torah with greater strength and purpose. The Messiah takes into account the ways in which the commandments are observed and emphasizes, in line with other Jewish leaders of the time and times past, the importance of not forgetting our fellow man amid the zeal to observe. A good example of this which the Master exemplified was the concept of *pikuach nefesh*, literally the guarding of the soul. Here one is allowed to go to great lengths to preserve life, even to the extent of desecrating an individual Shabbat, so that future Shabbats can be observed.

Some in the church have divided the moral and ceremonial laws of the Torah, claiming that the moral law continues while the ceremonial has come to an end. This of course creates great difficulty as we approach the 613 *mitzvot*, as many of them are difficult to classify, and it seems that the Torah itself was not attempting to make such a distinction easy. For a great many Jews, the law given by HASHEM to the Jewish people as an eternal directive and path for communal life is a vital distinctive, particularly in this multi-cultural world.

Wyschogrod also states:

Jewish-Christian dialogue has taught me that there is not Judaism without the law. . . . I am not saying that the law is the most important feature of Judaism. But I am saying that it is the most characteristic feature of Judaism . . . my point is that there is not Judaism without Torah observance.¹¹

I find that I greatly agree with Wyschogrod’s understanding. The Torah is not only the law, but the very path by which we are guided and protected as a distinct people. If as we believe that the gifts and the callings are irrevocable, we need to also take seriously the words of the Messiah as he teaches that he has not come to cause a jot or a tittle to pass away from this world. Yeshua practiced an observance of early Judaism in which *derech erez* was a central tenet. This understanding was that the law was not made to cause man to sink and drown, but to provide a distinct path by which the Jewish people could be protected, preserved, and enabled to be a kingdom of priests and holy nation. This same Torah was not made to allow people to fall by the wayside but instead was designed, among other elements, to build the collective ethos that would require a Jew to reach out and help another Jew as he walked the challenging path of observance. Not only this, but it also provides a place for the observant Jew to reach out and pick up the stranger and sojourner from the nations who has drawn near to the Jewish people.

It is interesting to note that Cardinal Aaron Jean-Marie Lustiger, mentioned earlier, relates to the continuity and election of the Jewish people in their present state. He does not look to some future date but speaks of the present:

¹⁰ Ibid., 206.

¹¹ Ibid., 230.

The Jews are who they are only because they are, first of all, witness to the Election. Christians who reject them whether deliberately or not are engaging in an abusive or blasphemous appropriation of the Election. It is a concrete refusal of the reality of God's gift, of God's ways.¹²

Lustiger goes on to speak of what a wide variety of Jews from very different perspectives have in common:

Whatever their religious, cultural, political or ideological diversity, and whatever their theoretical differences when it comes to defining themselves, all Jews have something in common. Moreover, this common identity resists all criticisms and attempts or temptations to drift apart. It is not linking to any nationality, or culture, or language. It is not even dependent upon religious practice, although this has played and still plays a key role traditionally. It is rather the awareness of an indelible common destiny, implying a certain ideal in human life. It is the remembrance (even if it is buried) of several millennia of a history dominated by dispersion and persecution and at the same time the hope indestructibly rooted in the promise of life.¹³

Asking a friend who practices Messianic Judaism, he said it is rather simple. We need to practice Judaism, which is a following of the commandments given in the Torah and its development to this time, with Yeshua being central to all. Some will question, of course, what Judaism means, but it is clear to Jews that we need to be within Judaism.

Another dear friend, Stuart Dauermann, writes:

The Messianic Jewish movement as well is called upon to love an unseen Yeshua, a Jewish Yeshua, who is hidden behind the veil of ,2000 years of church cosmetics, caricatures and calamities. We are called upon to love this Jewish Yeshua, not Jewish once upon a time, but Jewish still, whose full character is so obscured from our view. But we love him, and in faith we believe that part of our faithfulness to him is faithfulness to the ways of our fathers because by faith we believe that he values those ways and is glorified in those ways, even if the church and the synagogue deny that this could be so. And we wait patiently for the day when he will be revealed to all, when "a spirit of grace and supplication" will be poured out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and they shall recognize Yeshua as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. We Messianic Jews have welcomed this Jewish Yeshua proleptically. Without having seen him, we love him.¹⁴

A good example of how even small elements within the Torah and Judaism can be looked at from different perspectives is the important place given to wine. In a commentary on Torah portion Nasso, Rabbi Berel Wein elaborates on the multi-faceted aspects of wine.¹⁵ In certain Protestant denominations that influenced early communities of Jewish followers of Yeshua, wine was frowned upon and seen as a negative influence—and yet we know that it is very central to Judaism as a whole.

¹² Jean-Marie Aaron Lustiger, *The Promise* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 120, 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 146, 147.

¹⁴ Stuart Dauermann, *The Rabbi as a Surrogate Priest* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 63.

¹⁵ Rabbi Berel Wein, "Shabbat Shalom," *Torah Tidbits* vol. 1138 (Jerusalem: OU Israel Publishing, 2015): 36.

From the time of the *mishkan* (tabernacle) and the *mikdash* (temple), wine was a central libation that was part of the temple service. We also drink wine at all the important lifecycle events in Jewish life, whether it be circumcision on the eighth day, the redeeming of the first born (*pidyon haben*), the Jewish wedding service, the Pesach Seder, the Shabbat Kiddush and Havdalah services, and on and on. Wine is a symbol of joy and gladness. On the other hand, we see that the Jewish Nazarite was commanded in Numbers 6 not to drink from the fruit of the vine, and King Solomon warned of the dangers that could come from drinking wine and its possible negative effect on Jewish life.

So how are we to look at wine? Is it a symbol of holiness and joy or of physical and spiritual destruction? Wine in and of itself is neutral, but it does not act in isolation from all the other items in our life. In this reality, like with other elements of Jewish life and Judaism, we need to find a balance. We need not take wine or any other element of Jewish observance to an extreme. Instead, as we read in *Pirkei Avot*, we need to walk with our fellow man in a way that presents a positive view of Torah and draws them near.

Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and bringing them close to the Torah. (*Pirkei Avot* 1:12)

What one does with Judaism, like with wine, will determine the way that others view our faith. Do we pervert things for personal gain or for the gain of Messianic Jewish communities, or do we work toward the unity of our people upon their return to the land of Israel, their return to HASHEM, and the full redemption?

In conclusion, I believe that a Messianic movement that is a community of Jewish followers of Yeshua must be deeply rooted in a Judaism that appreciates and gleans from both the written and Oral Torah, and must work as a catalyst to encourage its members to walk in covenantal fidelity to the Torah and to *Tzur Yisrael*—the Rock of Israel, which is the Messiah. The Messianic movement should be lighthouse that encourages Jews to return to the ways that HASHEM has predestined, a walk of Torah observance and unity that will lead to the full redemption, and ultimately we will see the return of the Messiah.

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**Book Review: *Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning
Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine*
by Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden (Paternoster, 2014)**

Andreas Johansson

The book *Through My Enemy's Eyes (TMEE)* has two co-authors, a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jew, both active in Musalaha (a ministry of reconciliation) and personal friends for many years. The book covers mainly topics within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, especially focusing on the part of the (theological) conflict between Palestinian Christians and Israeli Messianic Jews.

The first three chapters retell the history of the conflict and deal with different perspectives on how to write and tell the history of a people—and I was surprised by how different stories about the same happenings in the same area could be.

A large portion of the book is aimed at presenting and describing the two communities, and it is clear that the way each community sees itself and reads the Bible is not only very different, but in many cases directly contradicts the other's story and interpretation. Cultural differences in the ways people express themselves also become clear.

One chapter gives different perspectives on and answers to important themes like “chosen people,” “the Land,” “covenants,” and “justice.”

The last chapter is called “Towards a Theology of Reconciliation,” and an appendix presents the six stages of reconciliation developed by Musalaha.

The book is well written, and the bibliography reveals enormous efforts by the authors to study the topic of conflict and reconciliation in depth. The great challenge of putting such different and conflicting perspectives in the same book must also be acknowledged.

Having read the book three times, in this review I want to mention some of my questions and comments.

The title of the book, *Through My Enemy's Eyes*, leads me to wonder if the co-authors still are enemies. If the title had been *Through My Former Enemy's Eyes*, it would have communicated more strongly that walking through a reconciliation process produces fruit and that it's possible, in the midst of the turmoil of the Middle East, to end the enmity between persons. This would serve as an example for others to follow.

The hermeneutical starting point of *TMEE* seems to be the national narrative and self-perception of each people group. In some cases the gaps are somewhat bridged. In other cases the gap is not bridged, e.g. the Palestinian Christians' understanding themselves “to be descendants of the first apostolic-era believers and to embody a faithful testimony to the events of the Bible” (p. 104), while on the Jewish side evidence is given (p. 75) that according to Eusebius, the first 15 bishops of Jerusalem were all circumcised Jews (i.e., up to 132 C.E., when Jews were not allowed by the Romans to enter the city anymore). So were the first Jesus believers in the apostolic era Jews or Palestinians? *TMEE* doesn't even try to bridge this gap. My own addition to those two different narratives in *TMEE* would be that we know that around the year 57 C.E., the thousands of Jesus

believing Jews in the vicinity of Jerusalem were Torah-observant (Acts 21:17–26). The value of the Palestinian contribution in *TREE* would be greatly increased if the narrative of the church history of the Land had started with those thousands of Torah-observant Jews—and of course it would have brought still more clarity if it had been explicitly mentioned that the Messiah (the Christ) himself was also a Torah-observant Jew.

In *TREE* we see a hesitance on the Palestinian side to openly confess that the Jewish people are God's chosen people. This seems to be out of fear of having to say that the Jews are right in the current conflict. But there is nothing forcing us to infer the one from the other. The chosen people are more criticized and punished in the Tanakh than other peoples (Deut. 28:15–68; Amos 1–2). Even Moses, called to lead the chosen people, was severely punished because of disobedience (Num. 20:1–13), which is an example of how God will judge all people on the last day, for all things done in all of history—including the people of Israel, the Jewish people (cf. Rom. 2:9–11). It's not difficult to find reliable evidence that many times during the past 70 years the IDF didn't act according to its self-proclaimed ethical code, and God's ethical standards are higher than human standards. Having said that, I ask, like the apostle Paul, "What if some [of the Jews] did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?" And we must answer according to the Scriptures: "Not at all!" (Rom. 3:3–4a).

What approach do the New Testament Epistles take toward the conflicts and quarrelling in the socially very unequal early churches? Slaves and slave owners worshiped together in most of them. The approach of the NT is most of all God-centered, as in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." The Greek work for reconcile, *katalasso*, is further used in Romans 5:6–11, Ephesians 2:11–16, and Colossians 1:19–23, and is the foundation of all believers' new identity. Based on the reconciliation that God already has obtained, the exhortation is clear: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32; cf. Matt. 6:12–15; Luke 11:4; Col. 3:13; and the example of Jesus himself in Luke 23:34). How did God justify us? While we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8–9). How should we forgive each other? While the others are still sinners.

Even though many of the above points on reconciliation are mentioned in *TREE* (pp. 191–99), I still felt three things were missing: 1) explicit commitment to the passages in the NT where the word *katalasso* occurs, which infer that every sin in the whole world was punished on the cross; 2) a reference to the need for every human being to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20), since that is our main problem regardless of how intractable and painful our human conflicts might be; and 3) an explicit teaching that, based on God's forgiveness for us, we as believers should forgive others even before they repent.

It doesn't matter whether it's forgiving an extremist settler, an IDF soldier who might have racist views, a terrorist spreading pain and death, or anti-Semitic hate speech from public broadcasters. As followers of the Messiah of Israel, it's our calling to forgive—nothing less. It's not unrealistic: During apartheid, Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years. He entered the prison as a bitter and angry man, understandably so. But, his former prison guard says,

Mandela did the unthinkable. He befriended his white Afrikaner prison guards. He learned their language and studied their culture. Mandela even went to church with them, and his heart was changed. Mandela's friendship with his prison guards was sincere and endured to his death. So what was it that allowed Mandela to miraculously unite a nation? Mandela forgave the Afrikaners. Forgiveness. Yes that

same forgiveness Jesus expressed when he cried out to his Father while hanging on a cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Forgiveness removed the shackles of hate, and Mandela knew that mutual forgiveness was the key to national reconciliation.¹

Mandela forgave while the power balance was still completely uneven. I don't even dare to think about how much more blood might have been shed if he had said, while in prison, "I will forgive only after justice is done" (cf. also Matt. 18:21–35).

Forgiveness is certainly not the same as excusing evil. It's only possible to forgive what is evil and wrong. But until we forgive, our minds will be blurred, in a way, so we will not be able to distinguish well between what is justice and what is vengeance. If we demand justice, the other side will hear "vengeance," and if we let our pain and fear guide our decision making, the other side won't be able to understand our pain and fear from our actions. But if we forgive—i.e., if we offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God—there is a transformation of our mind that will grow in its understanding of God's will, of what is good, pleasing, and perfect (cf. Rom. 12:1–2). I would argue that it's only those who have forgiven others who can truly promote a just society. And in the end, forgiveness comes not from our own power, but from the Holy Spirit.

TREE introduces many difficult issues to reflect upon and discuss. But I missed reading about some of the toughest issues, especially because I think that's where the most healing is to be found. When marriage counseling is done, and problems and accusations are traded back and forth, two pieces of advice might help: 1) Ask, "What did you see in him/her when you fell in love with him/her?"; and 2) Do something constructive together in order to serve others.

Jews and Gentiles (and I count the Palestinians as Gentiles) do have a thorny and painful history. But way back in time it started as a blessed love story. Most of all, it's a love story from God. Contemplating Genesis 12:3, I would challenge every Gentile (Palestinian Christians included) to accept the message that God chose Abram, regardless of whether we understand God's choice or not, and that criticizing God's choice only increases the damage to ourselves. I would equally challenge every Jew (Messianic Jews included) to accept the message that the election and the promises were not a goal in themselves, but rather were meant to be a blessing to the whole world. So how can Messianic Jews be a blessing to Palestinians, Egyptians, Syrians, and all the other peoples?

Following the example of the apostles, I want to challenge Palestinians to see how much love the Jewish apostles Peter and Paul showed to all the Gentiles (including the Roman soldier and occupier Cornelius) when they included them among the children of God (Acts 10:28–29; 13:48; Rom. 11:13–15; 15:16–17). I want to challenge Jews to reflect upon how the Jewish believers in Jerusalem praised God when the Gentiles came to faith in the Jewish Messiah (Acts 11:18; 21:19–20), and how the Gentile believers sent a gift to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25–27; 2 Cor. 8:19). In the biblical perspective, neither Jews nor Gentiles are serving themselves (Rom. 15:7–13). There is a 2,000-year-old love story here, not without its difficulties, but still a love story that should be retold and practiced in the Middle East today in order to reshape exclusive, nationalistic, and self-serving narratives.

Secondly, I want to challenge believers in Jesus who are Jewish, and those who are Palestinian or Arab, to do many more constructive things together, such as evangelizing and serving people in the whole Middle East. Sitting at conferences and discussing conflicts and hurt feelings can be meaningful to some extent, but few things create unity and love as much as serving the Lord together!

¹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/11/opinion/nelson-mandela-apartheid-cop-essay>.

Although *TMEE* has a lot of good nuances and suggestions, I think the book could have stressed far more that reconciliation is not about proving that any certain narrative is right, since every national narrative is influenced by sin. It's much more about the mercy of God: "For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom. 11:32).

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**Book Review: *The Jewish Gospel of John:
Discovering Jesus, King of All Israel*
by Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg (CreateSpace, 2015)**

Sam Rood, Jews for Jesus

Much has been written regarding the apparent anti-Judaism or even anti-Semitism (the difference being that the former is strictly a theological/religious polemic while the latter is a broader cultural/national one) in the Gospel of John. The question is what to do with the repeated hostile statements regarding “the Jews” (5:18; 7:1–10; 8:1–22; 8:40; 8:44; 10:29–33; 11:8; 18:14; 18:28). The issue has obvious application to the task of bringing the gospel to Jewish people today. Of all of the books of the New Testament, the Gospel of John seems to most frequently and most viciously single out the Jewish people. Most New Testament scholars, including some evangelicals, have accepted that the Gospel of John indeed contains anti-Judaic views. Because of this, not many resources are readily available to pastors who teach the Gospel of John to their congregations that can help them sensitively and clearly deal with this vexing issue in a way that faithfully communicates the message of John *and* deals fairly with contemporary Jewish people.

I’ve heard many sermons containing these harsh-sounding statements from the lips of Jesus. Sometimes the preacher would dismiss the difficulty completely by stating that the people Jesus was speaking about were not the Jews but Judeans—it was a geographical people group. Another common approach was to immediately universalize the statement to include all people apart from Christ. That way it isn’t “just Jews” that these things are true of, and therefore isn’t anti-Semitic. Most of the time, these difficult statements went unexplained—or worse. I haven’t found any of these explanations satisfying.

In ministering to Jewish people I’ve found that many who have very little familiarity with the New Testament nonetheless possess the opinion that the New Testament is anti-Jewish and teaches that the Jewish people are no longer the people of God but are under his condemnation for rejecting Jesus. The misconception that the New Testament, and especially the Gospel of John, is hostile to Jewish people is one of the major barriers to Jewish people being able to explore the Messianic claims of Jesus.

That is why I am grateful for Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg’s learned yet accessible treatment of the Gospel of John, *The Jewish Gospel of John: Discovering Jesus, King of All Israel*. In the preface, Dr. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg admits that the Gospel of John has bothered him for years. How could such a well-loved gospel contain such apparently hateful language toward the Jewish people? As a Jewish believer in Jesus myself, this question resonates with me.

Dr. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg’s proposal is that the Jewish context of the Gospel of John needs to be fully taken into account. Clearly, John was Jewish, as were the vast majority of the people described in his gospel, obviously and preeminently Jesus himself. Therefore, Jesus’ statements shouldn’t be read as targeting all Jews from a non-Jewish perspective; instead, the gospel should be understood as a Jewish document addressing an intra-Israelite debate. None of this is new or

unique to the scholarly discussion of the Gospel of John, although of the four gospels it has often (and unfairly) been singled out as the least Jewish. What sets *The Jewish Gospel of John* apart is the way Lizorkin-Eyzenberg applies that insight to the interpretation of the message of the gospel as a whole.

In particular, Lizorkin-Eyzenberg believes that the meaning of “the Jews” in the Gospel of John is unique and very different from its meaning today. The original readers would not have understood these statements to apply to all Jewish people, but only to a particular group within the people of Israel. So rather than reading “the Jews” as “all Jewish people,” we should read “the *loudaioi*”—the formal Jerusalemite authorities and those in Judea, greater Israel, and the Diaspora who recognized their authority. The Gospel of John was trying to persuade the *loudaioi* as well as other Israelite groups, particularly the Samaritans, to believe in Jesus and reject the authority of the official Jerusalem officials. When we read “the Jews” in this sense, we shouldn’t imagine “all Jews” or apply these statements directly to Jewish people today but understand that the original and primary reference was to this specific group and their followers.

A large part of Lizorkin-Eyzenberg’s argument is that the Gospel of John appears to be contextualized to the sensitivities of Samaritan Israelites. He notes that there is a great amount of interaction with the Book of Ezekiel and the prophet’s vision of a reunification between Judah (i.e. the *loudaioi*) and Israel/Ephraim (i.e. the Samaritans; see Ezek. 37:15–28). The Gospel of John also speaks very positively of the Samaritans compared to the synoptic Gospels (John 4, especially verses 39–42; compare with Matt. 10:5; Luke 9:51–53). In addition, many of the arguments for the truth of Jesus’ Messianic claims appealed to the Torah rather than to the Prophets or Writings (i.e. the other 34 books of the Old Testament), possibly because the Samaritans did not consider these books canonical. Further, the Messianic title “Son of David” is not attributed to Jesus in this gospel, even when it would seem obviously beneficial to do so (e.g. John 7:41–42).

The Gospel of John, then, is a trial in which evidence is presented and witnesses are called. Jesus is the Good Shepherd sent by the God of Israel to regather his sheep—in other words, unify the scattered people of Israel. The *loudaioi* are wicked shepherds who don’t care for the people but care for their own power. They opposed Jesus because he wouldn’t submit to their authority. According to *The Jewish Gospel of John*, the argument of the gospel in its original context comes down to this: “Jesus is the Messiah, the King of Israel who has the right to regather the people of Israel into God’s flock. As Israelites, we should not follow the *loudaioi*, the wicked shepherds who have rejected God’s Messiah and therefore the God of Israel, but the Good Shepherd, Jesus the Messiah.”

Not every part of Dr. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg’s argument was entirely convincing. Much of his interpretation comes down to his (learned and compelling) historical reconstruction of the original context of the Gospel of John. As interesting as that reconstruction is, it simply can’t be proved. For example, I’m not sure that a Samaritan audience is as much in view as Lizorkin-Eyzenberg argues, though the theory is compelling. While these doubts prevent me from accepting every one of his conclusions, the value I see in *The Jewish Gospel of John* is that he consistently interprets every passage in the gospel as a Jewish (Israelite) message. By carefully attending to the original audience, Lizorkin-Eyzenberg not only helps us to read the difficult “anti-Judaic” statements in a first-century Jewish context (and therefore not anti-Semitic or Judaic), but takes that same approach to the rest of the narrative. He helps the reader to slowly re-read the beloved gospel and consider it as a Jewish message before moving on to its universal applications. For those of us who desire to see Jewish people come to know and love Jesus, this is essential.

I commend this book not only to those actively involved in ministry to Jewish people but to all who want to lovingly communicate the gospel to Jewish people. Along with standard

commentaries and studies, I also suggest that preachers read this book as a guide to sensitively but accurately interpreting and teaching the Gospel of John so that any Jewish people present hear the gospel and not anti-Semitism.

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From the Israeli Scene: Knives for Peace

David Serner

Here in Israel, the last few months have been troubled. There has been much talk about stabbings, violence, and a massive military presence with a policy of “shoot first and ask questions later.” Mutual distrust and a lot of accusations are in the air. That leaves many feeling frustrated and powerless. Israelis are terrified of Arabs because of the violent and sudden attacks, and Arabs are staring into hopelessness and oppression.

It is an unavoidable topic no matter where you go. It’s hard to see a way out of this evil spiral, especially when relations between Jews and Arabs are becoming scarcer and more polarized. We need relationships to curb radicalization and hate. It is harder to hate and fear those with whom you sit and drink coffee. But it’s hard not to get carried away and succumb to emotions—the feeling of injustice, frustration with the media’s biased reporting, and the eye-for-an-eye mentality that arises in our powerlessness. How do we break our own negative spiral and move in a different direction?

I have been thinking about a kosher restaurant called The Eucalyptus. I met some of their chefs in the Old City, on the border between the Muslim and Christian quarters, just outside a store with beautiful pictures of Jerusalem in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The chefs stood there in their uniforms, sporting the logos “Chefs for Peace” and “Knives for Peace.” The idea is that knives can be used for other things than to attack people; they can also be used to create fellowship and joy, as when people cook together. The restaurant is run by a Jew who wants to show that the road to peace is through coexistence, and he has managed to create an exciting and positive dynamic that turns a violent symbol into something natural and good. I think there is a wonderful testimony in this.

I also witnessed Asher Intrater, one of the leaders of the Ahavat Yeshua congregation and author of the book *Who Ate Lunch with Abraham?*, along with other Messianic leaders, standing before over 5,000 people and blessing the Arab leaders, setting them free to serve in confidence. This gives me hope and helps me believe in change. In addition, the humble Arab youths who got on their knees before their young Messianic brothers and asked forgiveness for their nation’s hatred and violence—even though they are not themselves part of the violence—restore my faith in a new and changed future. These things give us courage to unite as believers, so that we can stand together on a foundation of truth and make a difference as we work together with Jesus in his ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18), forgiving and covering one another with the love and peace of God.

Everything is not perfect yet; violence still manages to get hold of both Arabs and Israelis, filling the Israelis with fear, discouragement, and hardness, and the Arabs with hopelessness. But there is light: knives can be used for good! I hope that we, too, are affected by the gospel so that

we are “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) and repent of our own ways. This will move us into the light of God, where we can dare to walk in the belief that the future belongs to Christ.

Shalom from Jerusalem.

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