

# MISHKAN

Issue No. 39, 2003

## Who is Jesus? The Divinity of Messiah

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# Believe in the Lord Jesus

## Editorial

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” With this simple declaration Paul and Silas answered the cry for help from their jailer in Philippi (Acts 16.30-31). Luke informs us that the unnamed jailer and his family “believed in God” (v. 34). All pretty simple and straightforward.

Or is it? What exactly was it that the jailer was expected to believe about Jesus? What, if anything, had the apostles told the man about Jesus before they exhorted him to believe? Does their statement imply a detailed list of “I believes” that the jailer would have to sign before he could be saved? Few of us would think so. It seems far more likely that Paul and Silas simply intended to communicate to this distressed man that his real salvation was to be found in someone he had probably never heard of before that night, Jesus of Nazareth. Exegetes may pile heaps of meaning on the apostles’ use of the title “Lord” Jesus, but is it really likely that, in the heat of the moment, the jailer would have thought of any of those meanings? Verse 32 tells us that they “spoke the word of the Lord to him,” but Luke does not expand on what that word might have contained.

If it is valid to exegete this passage using things Paul says elsewhere in Acts or in his letters, we could be fairly certain that he spoke about Jesus’ resurrection. But even this exercise will drive us uncomfortably close to eisegesis.

Scripture does make a connection between belief in Jesus’ resurrection and a person’s salvation (Rom 10:9). On the other hand, there is no explicit scriptural requirement to believe in or confess his divinity. That fact in itself, of course, says nothing about whether or not Jesus is God. Nor indeed does it diminish the importance of the doctrine.

Actually, there is surprisingly little indication in the New Testament writings that there even existed a debate about the person of Jesus in the first generation or two of believers. Acts does not hesitate to record sharp debates where they existed, but Acts is silent on this subject. Paul, who knew how to call down bad doctrine when he saw it, never sets out to correct believers who were claiming that Jesus was not divine. One of the few places in the New Testament that does point to a debate over Jesus’ person is found in 1 John 4. But there the doctrine that is “not of God” is that Jesus has not come in the flesh. It seems that Jesus’ divinity was not in question; it was his humanity!

A verse like 1 John 4:2 is characteristic of many places in the New Testament that seem to take Messiah's divinity for granted or just hint at it "by the way." Passages like Luke's "believe in the Lord Jesus ... believed in God" in Acts 16 are numerous. We may take, for example, the discussion in Hebrews 3:3-4 of the superiority of the Messiah Jesus (v. 1) over Moses: "Yet *this [Jesus]* has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as *the builder* of a house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by some one, but *the builder of all things is God.*" The equation seems to indicate that the writer just assumes that Jesus is God.

If, in fact, those Jews who wrote the New Testament books did not really believe that Jesus was divine (or, even stronger, believed such a doctrine to be contrary to the revelation of their scriptures), then they were extremely incautious with their formulations.

While any debate over the person of the Messiah seems to have been far from center stage in the New Testament period, it would soon arise. Near the start of the second century it may have been precisely this issue which caused the split between those Jewish believers in Jesus whom we know as Nazarenes and Ebionites. The evidence from our (admittedly sketchy) sources seems to show that it was the low-Christology Ebionites who were the innovators in the disagreement. Significantly, this sets the tone for most of the debates that will later arise over the person of Jesus; most "heretics" were those who wanted to see in Jesus something less than full divinity. In so doing, they were generally departing from what had been taught (or assumed) from the beginning.

The man from whom we have a large amount of our information about those early Church struggles over Christology was Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea. In this issue of *Mishkan* Gershon Nerel compares some of the issues described by Eusebius with issues faced today by the *altneu* Messianic Movement. It seems the Preacher was right—there is nothing new under the sun.

Most of the articles in this issue deal directly with questions of Christology. Akiva Cohen summarizes current scholarship on the Christology of Matthew, and focuses on the parting words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20. Dwight A. Pryor writes on the meaning of the *Shema* as the rabbis understood it and asks the question: Is it possible to have an extra-special Messiah without infringing on the *ehad*-oneness of God.

Richard Harvey brings us a broad overview of emerging Christologies in the Messianic Movement today as reflected in recent writings of some who have tried to grapple with the difficult questions of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus. John Fischer gives us an enlightening survey of doctrinal statements of American Messianic Jewish organizations. He then shows that the idea of Trinity may not be so foreign to Jewish thought as we have been led to believe.

Ray Pritz looks at some of the biblical teaching about the divinity of the Messiah. He suggests that even if we compile scriptures where Jesus himself seems to claim divinity or where others attribute it to him, we have only done part of the job. The very essence of the incarnation event necessitates that the Messiah be divine.

*Mishkan* regularly features reviews of significant books in the field of Messianic Judaism and Jewish Evangelism. This year Baruch Maoz published *Judaism is not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement*. The editors considered this book to be of more than average significance and interest for the Messianic Movement and so asked several people if they would write a review of the book. Our assessment of its significance was borne out by the fact that all five who were asked did in fact send reviews. Harvey and Nerel also found reason to mention the book in their articles.

Surely this book, more than any publishing event in recent memory, will serve to focus the discussion of the Messianic Movement on the relation of the Jewish believer to the Judaism that continues to reject Jesus. Maoz himself was given the opportunity to reply to the reviewers and has done so vigorously. Those of us who know Baruch Maoz know that he has tried for years to encourage discussion on issues that face this generation of Jews who believe in Jesus. *Judaism Is Not Jewish* seems to be just the catalyst he has been looking for.

*Ray Pritz*

# Jesus the Messiah in Messianic Jewish Thought: Emerging Christologies

Richard Harvey

Some 50 years ago Jacob Jocz wrote:

*At the centre of the controversy between Church and Synagogue stands the Christological question. This is not a question whether Jesus is the Messiah, but whether the Christian understanding of the Messiah is admissible in view of the Jewish concept of God. Here lies the dividing line between Judaism and Church. On this point neither can afford to compromise.<sup>1</sup>*

Yet Messianic Jews challenge the reality of this dividing line. In constructing the boundaries of Messianic Jewish identity they claim to be members of both Christian and Jewish communities,<sup>2</sup> appearing to challenge both Christian Trinitarian thought and the fundamental tenets of Jewish monotheism.

Recent interviews in the November 2002 issue of *Israel Today* and discussions that have followed from it<sup>3</sup>, have prominently raised the issue again, as Gershon Nerel states:

*Like in ancient times, also the modern movement of Jewish Yeshua-believers is shaping its corporate identity through theological debates and doctrinal definitions. Particularly during the last two years we are observing unceasing discussions concerning the topic of Yeshua's divinity.<sup>4</sup>*

There is little written material on the Doctrine of the Messiah in the Messianic movement, especially on the relationship between the Jewish understanding of the Messiah and the Christian understanding of Christ. In systematic theology the "Doctrine of Christ" includes discussion of the person,

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<sup>1</sup> Jocz (1958) in Kac, Arthur, *The Messiahship of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Baker: 1986, rev.ed.), 189.

<sup>2</sup> Feher, Shoshana, *Passing Over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism*, Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1998, 20.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.voice-wilderness.com/articles/trinity.asp> for a summary of Nov. 2001 issue of "Israel Today."

<sup>4</sup> Nerel, Gershon "The Trinity and the Contemporary Jewish Believers in Yeshua" in *Nachrichten Aus Israel (Beth-Shalom)*, no.5, May 2003, 1.

offices and work of Christ (soteriology). Messianology” studies the Jewish understanding of the appearance, identity, activity and implications of the *Mashiach*, the anointed one who will occupy the particular office and future role of the expected heir of David. It deals particularly with the signs of the Messiah’s coming and what Israel must do to bring the Messianic Age. But this is only one aspect of Yeshua’s identity, which was dramatically reshaped through the unexpected course his mission took. Christology deals with the purpose and mission of the Messiah, but goes on to consider Jesus in terms of his uniqueness, divine nature, pre-existence, virginal conception, teaching and ministry, Lordship, atoning death, resurrection, and second coming.

Messianic Jews have yet to integrate all these aspects of the topic, for several reasons. There is the traditional Jewish reluctance to engage in the task of systematic theology. Secondly, Messianic Jews often lack the theological training to engage competently in the disciplines of Jewish studies and Christian theology, and (as one Messianic leader informed me) “do not have the time for theology” which they see as a Christian pre-occupation. Those involved in leading congregations are often more involved in pastoral and leadership activities. Few make the time for reflection on their theological methods and resources, yet alone have the time to commit it to writing. In addition, the Messianic movement has yet to develop the theological maturity to effectively speak on issues that have been the focus of controversy over many centuries. Often the materials in the Hebrew Scriptures, which the early church saw as *Vestigia Trinitatis* (“footsteps of the Trinity”), have been given disproportionate emphasis in apologetics, but without sufficient acknowledgement of the further theological reflection that followed such evidence. Finally, the Messianic movement is often divided on theological and cultural lines, and there is no agreed mechanism or procedure for deciding key issues of theological orthodoxy.

### **The Creeds of Messianic Judaism**

When we look at the creeds and doctrinal statements produced by the Messianic movement, we find these reflect an orthodox Christian understanding of Jesus and the Godhead.<sup>5</sup> Michael Schiffman writes:

*Belief in the triune nature of God is not merely held by a group within the Messianic community, but is believed by every Messianic organisation of the community: the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, the Fellowship of Messianic Congregations and the Messianic Alliance of America.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Nerel, Gershon, “Creeds Among Jewish Believers in Yeshua” in *Mishkan*, 34/2001, 61-79.

<sup>6</sup> Schiffman, Dr. Michael, *Return of the Remnant: The Rebirth of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore, MD: Lederer Messianic Publishers, 1992,1996), 93. cf. ch. 10. “Messianic Jews

However, many Messianic Jews do not subscribe to creeds, for a variety of reasons. Esther Dorflinger, in the case that was brought before the Israeli High Court in 1979, chose not to join a church or give her assent to any credal statement. She declared:

*Theology and theological creeds are alien to the pure and simple New Testament faith in Jesus. The identity of Jesus is not simply an issue of theological definitions but one of divine revelation. My understanding of Jesus is not based on theological definitions but on God's revelation to me personally by his Spirit according to his word.*<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Shulam is similarly reluctant to affirm a particular creed (although willing to make his own personal statement of faith), seeing creeds as part of the plague of "denominational sectarianism imported by 'well meaning Christian Missionaries' who have brought with them the divisions and religious rivalry from their home countries."<sup>8</sup>

Jewish believers should not be "infected with 'Creedalism' and sectarian attitudes, which basically are foreign to the very Spirit of Israel." Instead they should "be satisfied with the study of the Word of God" and allow it alone to be their constitution. Then they would not need a "Statement of Faith," according to Shulam.

David Stern, while affirming the deity of Yeshua, was unwilling to sign the joint declaration recently proposed by leaders of congregations in Israel.

*I myself believe in the deity of Yeshua, and I can affirm the paragraph, but I would not have signed, because I don't believe others should require me to sign their creeds as a test of my faith....I prefer to see Messianic Jews given room to express their theological views within the framework of Jewish thought, rather than be required to sign on the dotted line of theological formulations that have a non-Jewish origin and a non-Jewish cast to them.*<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the use of a credal statement was vital to ensure the doctrinal position of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance<sup>10</sup> in 1937, when Hugh Schonfield, who wrote the "History of Hebrew Christianity" and was later to write the sensationalist "The Passover Plot," was excluded from membership of the Alliance because of his dissent from its doctrinal statement, in particular the clause on the deity of Jesus.

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and the Tri-Unity of God," 93-104. Reprinted in *The Enduring Paradox: Exploratory Essays in Messianic Judaism*, ed. John Fischer (Baltimore: Lederer, 2000), 61-69.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Cohn-Sherbok, D., *Messianic Judaism* (London: Cassell, 2000), 196.

<sup>8</sup> Shulam email, 3/2003.

<sup>9</sup> Stern, David H., "Israel's Messianic Jews and the Deity of Yeshua" in *Israel Today*, 23 2002. (<http://www.israeltoday.co.il/headlines/headlines.asp?CatID=8&articleID=666>)

<sup>10</sup> IHCA, now IMJA.



## Emerging Messianic Jewish Christologies

We will now proceed to examine five representative Christologies found within the movement, focusing on the assumptions, resources, methods and content of each perspective. We begin with the two most controversial Christologies, the first arising from Unitarian thought that denies the deity of Jesus, and the second from mystical thought that seeks to articulate the deity of Christ in line with the *Kabbalah*. We then survey two more acceptable formulations with a greater or lesser reliance on Jewish interpretive traditions. We conclude with the search for a new paradigm for Messianic Jewish Christology.

### Arian Christologies Linked to Unitarian Views of God

It is difficult to quantify how many hold this controversial view, but Ray Pritz considers no more than five percent would hold a formal doctrinal position that does not affirm the divinity of Jesus, adding that of the 12 Messianic Jews reported in the November 2001 issue of *Israel Today*, one third of those quoted came from two of the congregations who take this position, and their comments were given undue prominence.<sup>11</sup>

Uri Marcus, one of the members of the *Heftzibah* congregation, says:

*Myself as well as our entire congregation of Believers in Ma'aleh Adumim, completely reject the Trinitarian notions of plural unity, and will not acquiesce to any theology which challenges the ONENess of HaShem in any fashion....Yeshua is the Son of the living G-d, never G-d the Son, in our view.*<sup>12</sup>

David Tel-Tzur and Emanuel Gazit, also leaders in the same group, indicate a clear denial of Yeshua's pre-existence and deity.<sup>13</sup>

*John (the Evangelist) is not teaching that the Son (of God) was living prior to his birth. The Son appeared for the first time as an entity when he was miraculously created as the 'Second Man' in his mother's womb. The 'Word' (Logos) in Scripture never appears in the meaning of an entity or a person... The Trinity is paganism, contrasted with 'Hear (Shma) O Israel our God is One'. Yeshua is not the creator of the world, but the world was created for him.*

Marcus argues against the deity of Jesus on the grounds that the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition forbid idolatry, that the Christian understanding of the incarnation is idolatrous, and Trinitarian doctrine is a Hellenistic misreading of the biblical data. He defends this with a Unitarian critique of New Testament passages that suggest the divinity of Christ, claiming

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<sup>11</sup> LCJE Bulletin, Issue no. 69 (August 2002), 3. However, estimates vary as to what proportion of Israeli believers hold such a position. David Tel Zur claims that "more than half of all Jewish believers in Israel" would informally hold his views, a claim that is difficult to verify. (email from Robert Fischer 5/3/03.)

<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence, 3/2003.

<sup>13</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Kivun* no. 30, quoted in Nerel 2003.

that this is a misreading of scripture without the necessary understanding of the Jewish background and frame of reference. This is given by rabbinic tradition, which Marcus sees as providing the authoritative understanding of the nature of God, the meaning of idolatry and the nature of the Messiah. Only with the use of this interpretive tradition can the early church's excessive reliance on an anti-Semitic Hellenistic influence be avoided.

Marcus assumes that any physical incarnation of the deity or suggestion of a plural nature should be seen as idolatrous. He uses the Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of Faith* to affirm the incorporeality of God. He equates Maimonides' rationalist and Aristotelian formulation of the divinity with Sinaitic revelation, allowing the authority of later Jewish tradition to set the terms of the debate on how the divine nature should be conceptualized. He does not refer to the more fundamental issues that motivated Maimonides, who aimed to harmonize Judaism with the philosophy of his day, and reconcile the *Tanach* and *Talmud* with Aristotelian thought. For him the anti-incarnational emphasis is valid. This particular reading of the intent of the 13 Principles fits Marcus' overall position of denying at all costs the possibility of plurality within the Godhead.

He then goes on to say that the church fathers refused to consider any aspect of "Hebraic thinking," preferring to take the "road to Rome" rather than that which leads to Jerusalem.

This distinction between Hellenistic and Hebraic thinking is often found in Messianic circles, but is oversimplified for the purposes of demonstrating that Jerusalem is good, Nicaea bad. In reality, the interaction and inter-dependence of Jewish and Hellenistic thought is complex and varied. Dan Juster responds to this argument thus:

*The bifurcation of Hebraic thinking and Greek thinking as respectively functional and metaphysical-ontological is a widely held conclusion of modern scholarship (cf. O. Cullman, Christ and Time, also Bishop J.S. Spong, The Hebrew Lord). Yet, in my view, this absolute separation of functional thinking as Hebraic and metaphysical thinking as Greek can not be maintained. Functional thinking at least implies statements about the nature of being or it would lend to relativism in questions concerning the nature of reality. (This distinction has been used to bolster relativism in theology.) The real question is rather one which raises the issue of how a metaphysic that is implied by biblical teaching compares and contrasts with a Greek metaphysic. Because all human beings are created in the image of God, communication and evaluation with regard to metaphysical views is cross-culturally possible.<sup>14</sup>*

It is clear that Marcus is taking a particular hermeneutical approach to the text of scripture, framing it within his own theological grid. His use of rabbinic materials does not deal with questions of dating, or context, and this leads to certain conclusions about the intent of both the rabbinic tradition and the writers of the New Testament. Similarly, the complex landscape of Jewish views about the Messiah in the first century, including the apocalyptic and mystical

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<sup>14</sup> *Mishkan* 1/1984, 8.

speculation about the hypostatisation of the divine attributes, needs to be taken on board or else a shallow caricature of the contrast between Judaism and Hellenism can result.

Jacob Jocz's comment on this approach is relevant here:

*This is the reason why a Unitarian form of Christianity is a contradiction in terms; at best it can be a Gentile Synagogue, but it can never be a Church. It is important to remember that Christology to the Church is not an abstract theological subject which can be discussed on purely theoretical lines. It is not that Christology was first formulated and then adjusted to fit the case of Jesus of Nazareth. The process was the reverse; the Church defined her Christology in view of Jesus Christ. He must remain at the centre of Christian thinking, otherwise it ceases to be Christian.*<sup>15</sup>

### **Christologies Using the Jewish Mystical Tradition**

From the time of Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) it has been proposed that the *Kabbalah* confirmed the truth of Christian teaching, especially on the nature of the Trinity. Pico was the first of many Christian students of the *Zohar* who believed that he could prove the dogmas of the Trinity and the incarnation on the basis of kabbalistic axioms. In his 900 theses he claimed "No science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the *Kabbalah*."<sup>16</sup>

The Christian Kabbalists continued to develop their views throughout the Renaissance and Reformation periods, and their findings were used by the 19<sup>th</sup> century missions for apologetic purposes. The most familiar example of the Christian Kabbalist approach, which avoids some of the dangers that will be noted later, is Rev. C.W.H. Pauli's *How Can Three Be One?*<sup>17</sup>

Pauli uses Jewish tradition to explore the three-fold nature of God, the identity of the *Memra*, Angel of the Covenant and *Metatron* as descriptions of the Son of God, "who is an eternal emanation from God, therefore called Jehovah,"<sup>18</sup> and the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. But Pauli's method is not without its critics. His dating of the *Zohar* to the second century is now generally rejected in favor of a 12th century origin, and his examples of rabbinic

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<sup>15</sup> Jocz (1958) in Kac 1986, 189.

<sup>16</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Kabbalah*, (Israel: Keter, 1974, New York: Meridian, 1978), 197.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. C.W.H. Pauli was born in Breslau in 1800, named Zevi Nasi (Hirsch Prinz). He was educated as a rabbi by his father, was given a New Testament by the London Society missionary C.G.Petri, and became a believer. He studied at Cambridge, and went on to become Lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford. He served as a missionary in Berlin and Amsterdam from 1840 to 1874, then retired to the UK where he died in 1877. (Bernstein, A., *Some Jewish Witnesses for Christ*, London: Operative Jewish Converts' Institution, 1909, 210-211).

<sup>18</sup> Pauli Prinz, Hirsch (Rabbi Tzvi Nassi/Rev. C.W.H. Pauli), *How Can Three Be One?* (Jerusalem: Yanetz, 1970,1974), 70.

hermeneutics including *gematria*<sup>19</sup> as proofs for the Messiahship of Jesus “bring no honour to Christianity and reflect badly against the one who uses them as well as the one convinced by them.”<sup>20</sup> William Varner decries such attempts as deeply flawed:

*Although their motives may have been sincere, their hermeneutical methodology was so defective that they did more harm than good in its implementation. Their writings serve to warn Christians today about how not to conduct the Jewish-Christian discussion.*<sup>21</sup>

Yet this approach, while “straying from a grammatical-historical hermeneutic,” continues to have its proponents.

A contemporary example of this approach is that of Tsvi Sadan, also quoted in recent debate on the divinity of Jesus. Sadan seeks to articulate a Messianic Jewish Christology by developing a “high Christology” which can take in issues such as the incarnation and Tri-unity of the Godhead, while being accessible to a Jewish realm of discourse, representing a significant concern within the Messianic movement.

Sadan’s method is to remain within the Jewish understanding of God.

*If I can sum up my methodological assumption it will be this: anything a Jew needs to know about the Messiah (Yeshua) can be found within the Jewish tradition. This is a bold assumption but nevertheless, one that can be substantiated without violating this very tradition that stresses its incompatibility with Jesus. In “Hundred Names of Messiah” I am trying to demonstrate how this is possible. One of the more difficult things to do is my attempt to “talk Jewish” rather than bring disguised Christian concepts.*<sup>22</sup>

Sadan does not wish his attempt to be understood as a denial of the deity of Messiah, but rather addresses the Jewish objections to the plural nature of God from within the tradition itself. He recognizes that Judaism presents an “outward face” which rejects the possibility of the Trinity, while in internal debate allows for the plural unity of God to be expressed in at times controversial ways.<sup>23</sup>

Sadan seeks to avoid the confusion of the contemporary debate, which to him is a result not of the doctrine of the Trinity itself, but “because a man-made doctrine was turned into the very living word of God.” He proposes that “if the Messianic Jews will decide to speak about the unity of God within the boundaries set by the Bible, they would not only be able to promote unity among themselves, but also improve their relationship with the Jewish community.”

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<sup>19</sup> Mathematical computations involving the numerical values of the Hebrew letters.

<sup>20</sup> Varner, William, “The Christian Use of Jewish Numerology” in *The Masters Seminary Journal*, 8/1 (Spring 1997), 47-59, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Varner 1997, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Email correspondence, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2003.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

## Messianic Jewish Christologies Recontextualising Nicaea.

Louis Goldberg recognized the problems inherent in formulating a Messianic approach to Christology, and warned:

*Some Messianic Jews have sought to ingratiate themselves with the Jewish community and have spoken of God as simply a Unity. However, to this writer, this accommodates too much to the Jewish position of how to understand God as interpreted by the rabbis and therefore gives away what the Scriptures would assert. We must give a strong positive witness that God be considered as a composite unity thereby allowing for the possibility of the persons within the Godhead but yet at the same time, insisting that God is one. In that way, we have recontextualised the doctrine of God from that of Nicaea and dealt primarily with what the Hebrew texts have to say, and at the same time, also considering what the Messianic Jews of the first century asserted regarding who God is.<sup>24</sup>*

Yet Messianic Jews have recognized the need to recontextualise Nicean formulations:

*(The Synagogue) has a right and an obligation to ask ... "How is Jesus of Nazareth God?" The Christian answer cannot be evasive. It must not fall back upon the authority of Church Councils. To refer a Jew back to the Council of Nicaea is an admission of our own helplessness and lack of conviction. It is the task of theology to attempt a contemporary answer, but with a view to the past. The Jewish questioner to-day is not edified by the historical information what Christians in the fourth century thought about Jesus; he wants to know what we think about him in the intellectual context of our own time.<sup>25</sup>*

Several have made preliminary attempts to recontextualise Nicaea, by explaining the difficulties raised for Jewish and Messianic Jewish thought, yet engaging with the context and content of the Nicean formulation, and finding ways to express this within a Jewish frame of reference.<sup>26</sup>

Daniel Juster, as we have seen, rejects the "widely held conclusion of modern scholarship" that sharply differentiates between Hebraic and Hellenistic modes of thought as functional and ontological. For him the real question is rather

*....how a metaphysic that is implied by biblical teaching compares and contrasts with a Greek metaphysic. Because all human beings are created in the image of God, communication and evaluation with regard to metaphysical views is cross-culturally possible.*

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<sup>24</sup> Goldberg, Louis, "Recontextualising the Doctrine of the Trinity as Formulated by the Council of Nicaea," paper given at LCJE-NA Regional Conference, 1996, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Jocz 1958, 62.

<sup>26</sup> Space does not permit consideration of Juster, Brandt, Fischer, Fruchtenbaum, Yellin, Frydland, Rosenthal, Harvey and many others. For a fuller version of this paper see "Jesus the Messiah in Messianic Jewish Theology" in *LCJE Seventh International Conference Papers* (LCJE: Denmark, 2003), 136-166 (9<sup>th</sup> August 2003), also available online at [http://www.freewebs.com/messianic\\_judaism/messianicjewishchristology.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/messianic_judaism/messianicjewishchristology.htm)

For Juster this realisation places the debate on Christology on a less simplistic and more fruitful foundation. The Nicean statement in the light of all of this is neither totally Greek and unacceptable nor an accurate metaphysical statement of biblically implied truth. For Juster there is a need to reformulate the same truths safeguarded by Nicea in order to better communicate to the modern Jewish mind. He urges Messianic Jews to look to the very Jewish roots that influenced the Nicean creed and from these roots speak afresh to our day.

In *Jewish Roots* Juster defends the plural nature of God in the Tanach, and follows this with discussion of the Angel of the Lord, the superhuman nature of the Messiah (Isa 9:6-7) and discussion of New Testament passages that show the divinity of Yeshua. He then gives his own view of the nature of Yeshua.

*He is one person or aspect of that plural manifestation of God (from the Tenach) who became a human being. He, therefore, is a man who depends on the Spirit, prays to the Father, gets weary and dies. His divine nature never dies, but he is human as well as divine. As such, prayer in the New Testament is not primarily addressed to Yeshua but to "Our Father" in the Name of Yeshua. For Yeshua is the human revelation of the Father.*<sup>27</sup>

Juster warns against the Christomonism of losing sight of God the Father, calling for full recognition of Yeshua's divinity while recognizing that God is more than just Yeshua. He then calls for a deeper expression of the Trinity in Jewish terms: "Jewish ways of expression are needed, ways more consistent to the New Testament, if Jews are to penetrate Christian rhetoric to see the Truth of Yeshua's divine nature."<sup>28</sup>

Juster gives several reasons why it is important to accept the uni-plurality of God and the divine nature of Yeshua. Only a perfect man could bring a full revelation of God, as man is made in the image of God. A revelation of God's love in the form of a human being is the greatest way possible to show God's love. Such a revelation has a unique redemptive significance, as the Messiah's suffering is the revelation of the suffering love of God himself. As the divine Messiah Yeshua's suffering has infinite redemptive value.

According to Juster,

*the divinity of the Messiah is not idolatry, but reflects the fullest revelation of God ... The scriptures thus communicate to us the impression of one great divine reality of three inseparable manifestations of God. The relationship of love and accord blends the three into eternal oneness beyond human comprehension ... The reciprocal giving relationship of love is eternally existent within the plural unity of God.*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Juster, Dan, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*, (Rockville: Davar, 1986), 187.

<sup>28</sup> Juster 1986, 188.

<sup>29</sup> Juster 1986, 189-190.

David Stern views the present debate on the divinity of Yeshua as significant, but wishes it to be understood properly in context, rather than be misconstrued. Referring to the *Israel Today* article which reported the debate in Israel, Stern stressed:

*More importantly, whilst most of the twelve are concerned not to become 'Gentilized,' few have theological training; and this combination can distort theologising. In such cases the statements should be evaluated less as theology than as a heart cry to preserve Jewish identity. I think all twelve of the Messianic Jews quoted are believers who love God and his Messiah Yeshua with all their heart, even if some of their words about Yeshua deviate from what most Christians consider acceptable.*

Stern uses the concept of antinomies<sup>30</sup> because the biblical data underlying the theology of Yeshua's deity are too complex to be discussed in short magazine articles or debated in the form of slogans. The deity of Yeshua is a topic which refuses to "submit to law," and is one of the "paradoxes, mysteries, phenomena in which "A" and "not-A" both hold."<sup>31</sup>

In the *Jewish New Testament* and *Jewish New Testament Commentary* Stern addresses such questions as "Is Yeshua God?" and "Is God a Trinity?" but tries to push past the reflex responses of "Absolutely" (Christian) and "Absolutely not" (Jewish) in order to discuss the substance of the matter – what positive and negative answers might mean, and whether both Christian and Jewish contexts might admit of "less confrontational formulations without compromising the scriptural data."<sup>32</sup>

Michael Schiffman has gone further than most in engaging and re-expressing Chalcedonian orthodoxy in Jewish terms. In discussing the background to the Councils of the church fathers he recalls how in the post-Nicean period Jews were expected to renounce all things Jewish when they became believers. This policy of renunciation deepened the separation between Jewish Christians and the Jewish community.<sup>33</sup>

Recognizing that the terminology of the debate "sounds very Catholic, and hence, very non-Jewish" he suggests that there may never be a suitable answer to the semantic issue because there will always be a tension between finding a word that is both palatable to Jewish tastes and theologically precise. "Trinity" is a theological word based on a biblical concept that does not occur in scripture. If it were a biblical term, or if there were a Jewish equivalent, it would be more acceptable.

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<sup>30</sup> He ascribes this term to "Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973) by Geddes MacGregor (email 3/2003).

<sup>31</sup> Stern 2002, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Stern, David H., *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Clarksville, Maryland and Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), xiii.

<sup>33</sup> Schiffman 1992, 25.

Schiffman sees a theological development between the Hebrew Bible revelation of God, plurality notwithstanding, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

*The reason a formal trinitarian concept does not exist in the Old Testament is not because it is borrowed from Hellenism, as some suggest, but because as the revelation of God is progressive, so as with the nature of the Messiah himself, a full enough revelation did not exist in Jewish scripture until the New Covenant.*<sup>34</sup>

While the conclusions of Nicaea were “looked upon by some as having a distinctively anti-Jewish bias” such as the changing of the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday, and the discouragement to celebrate Jewish festivals, Schiffman recognises the good that was achieved in the facing of theological challenges affecting the *Ekklesia*, and the articulation of truth in the light of error.

Schiffman also challenges the notion that the Nicæan Trinitarian formula is incompatible with the Jewish view of monotheism, showing this to be an anachronistic reading of the nature of early Jewish monotheism which was far more flexibly interpreted than that of today, in the light of later Maimonidean rationalism and anti-Christian polemic.

### **Theocentric Christology**

Baruch Maoz argues for an orthodox Christology within a systematic theology framed by Reformed Dogmatics. His exposition of the divine and human nature of Christ, and his Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God, are clear and unequivocal. His material, in the form of lectures and his recent book<sup>35</sup> is both challenging, provocative and uplifting, but leaves little room for flexibility when it comes to expressing the nature of the Messiah or God outside the biblical frame of reference.

Maoz is critical of the Messianic movement for failing to focus on the Trinity:

*The Messianic Movement has been far too tolerant of deviant views on central doctrinal issues ... it is important to take note of the Unitarian tendency that finds acceptance among many non-Unitarian Messianics as expressed in a growing embarrassment with the Trinity and the deity of Christ.*<sup>36</sup>

Maoz’s exposition of the nature and being of God echoes that of Christian Reformed Dogmatics:

*When I refer to ‘God’ (Elohim) I mean that one and only self-existent, holy, perfect and gracious spirit who created all things, apart from himself, and that has neither beginning nor*

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<sup>34</sup> Schiffman 1992, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Maoz, Baruch, *Judaism is not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement* (UK: Mentor: Christian Focus Publications and CWI), 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Maoz 2003, 252-254.



*end. God is, as I learn from the Bible, unchangeable, immeasurable, beyond human comprehension. There are no limits to his power, wisdom or knowledge. He is the source of all life, of all existences, free from any dependencies. All creatures owe him worship and loving obedience. He revealed himself to mankind in scripture as the creator of all worlds, the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Divinity (elohut) is that mass of attributes that make God what he is and distinguishes him from all and any other beings. By definition, divinity is indivisible and cannot be imparted, earned or taken because it includes the attribute of self-existence that neither began nor can end.<sup>37</sup>*

*Christianity stands or falls with regard to the identity, nature and accomplishments of Jesus. It has to do with his pre-existence, his birth, life, suffering, teachings, deeds, death, resurrection, ascension, reign and return. It is as dependent on him as is life on the existence of oxygen. Jesus is not the primary apostle in a long list of devoted servants of God. He is not the founder of a new religion. If he is, to the slightest extent, less than all the scriptures declare him to be, then the message of the Gospel has no objective, binding validity in our lives because it has been robbed of its power to save (Rom. 1:16). If Jesus is not both God and man, and God and man in the fullest sense possible – equal to the Father in his deity, in all things but sin like us in our humanity – the Gospel is a vanity of vanities, a pursuit after the wind.<sup>38</sup>*

Maoz' doctrine of Christ is theologically orthodox, yet this is at the expense of any substantial engagement with Jewish thought or expression that goes beyond the biblical data. His matrix of interpretation leaves little room for new articulation of Trinitarian concepts or discussion of the divine and human natures of Christ, and stays deliberately within the mode of Chalcedonian thought, as interpreted through the Reformed tradition. For Baruch, the distinction between "Judaism" and "Jewishness" is crucial to his theological method. Religious Judaism, as continued by the Rabbis, is a false path away from the New Testament revelation, and no use should be made of it in the attempt to articulate or legitimate Christian truth about the Messiah. Jewish identity has ethnic, cultural and national value, but should not be linked to a religious component. For Baruch, the error of the Messianic movement is the blurring of these two categories, at the expense of biblical revelation and a proper focus on the supremacy of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

There is much in this argument that is helpful for a rediscovery of Jesus within the Messianic movement, although the central premise of Maoz' argument, that the "Judaism" of the rabbis is not properly "Jewish," will not convince all. On theological grounds the position is arguable, but if cultural factors are taken into account on how Jewish identity is constructed, and how

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<sup>37</sup> "Lectures on The Person of Christ – Part One –Introduction", 5. (pre-publication copy)

<sup>38</sup> "The Person of Christ" (Annual Lecture of the Israel College of the Bible in Jerusalem, March 2002), reprinted in abbreviated form in *Maoz News*, May 10, 2002 (Volume 4.69), 1.

<sup>39</sup> See Maoz 2003, and my review in *CWI Herald*, Summer, 2003 available online at <http://www.cwi.org.uk/Heralds/Sept-Nov%202003/Is%20Judaism%20Jewish.htm>

faith in Christ might affect this, the argument oversimplifies the complex interaction between religious, ethnic, cultural and other factors that make up Jewish identity and nationhood as a present-day witness to the electing purposes of God. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the Messianic Jewish movement will fully accept the norms and criteria of Maoz' own theological system, with its own particular perspective on the relationship between the gospel and culture. Nevertheless the emphasis on the centrality of Christ, and a right understanding of his divine and human nature, is a much needed one within the Messianic movement, and Maoz is surely right to re-emphasize this.

### **Postmodern Messianic Jewish Christology**

Mark Kinzer proposes a new paradigm for Christology within a Messianic Jewish theological framework. He realizes that Messianics have much more work to do on thinking through their theology, and recognizes the importance of the issues. Kinzer's method is to combine an "examination of historical and sociological data with an examination of scripture in the light of historical and sociological realities."<sup>40</sup> Kinzer takes the theme of "the Divine Paradox,"<sup>41</sup> the revelation of the invisible God in human form, and describes the models whereby this revelation is understood. He surveys the Tanakh and Second Temple Judaism, showing how "Eschatological Covenantal Monotheism" eagerly expected the full revelation of the presence of God and how the varieties of Judaism in the Second Temple period imagined this. Using the contemporary scholarship of Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, he shows how the New Testament writers, in their accounts of how the risen Jesus became the object of worship in the early church, bear witness to the "early Christian mutation" whereby earliest Christian worship of Jesus was a direct outgrowth from the divine agency tradition in inter-testamental Judaism. This gave a distinctive place to the risen Messiah alongside God, and "exhibited a sudden and significant difference in character from Jewish devotion," resulting in a binitarian conception of God.<sup>42</sup>

He then considers the "Divine Paradox" in Jewish tradition, looking at the rabbinic writings, early Jewish mysticism, medieval philosophy and *Kabbalah* and Chabad Messianism and 21<sup>st</sup> century Judaism. This is set alongside

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<sup>40</sup> Kinzer, Mark, *The Nature of Messianic Judaism* (West Hartford, CT: Hashivenu Archives, 2000), 44.

<sup>41</sup> "The tension found in Tanakh and Jewish tradition between descriptions of God as infinite, transcendent, and ineffable – in later Kabbalistic terms, as Eyn Sof – and descriptions of God that refer to a spatially localized presence, an anthropomorphic appearance, and an anthropopathic personality." (email, 6/2003)

<sup>42</sup> Hurtado, Larry W., *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (London: SCM, 1988), 99. cf. Bauckham, Richard, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1998.

incarnational and trinitarian theology in the Christian tradition, especially looking at the second century transition from Jewish to gentile context, the third-century fathers, the church councils and their protagonists, and an assessment of the patristic achievement. This survey allows for discussion of Messianic Jewish models for exploring the paradox, and discussion of how to develop Trinitarian worship of God “through the Messiah in the Ruach.”

Kinzer’s focus is on the “Jewish Models of the Differentiated Godhead.”<sup>43</sup> For him “the fundamental reality we must be concerned with is not that of theological propositions, but instead the worship practices that express and shape our actual relationship with God.” Yeshua is the human image and representation of God, and also the representative of Israel and all humanity. While worship of Yeshua is biblically sanctioned, outside a proper context it can lead to a “skewed relationship with the Godhead.” Yeshua’s life of self-emptying love reveals in definitive manner who God is. The honoring of Yeshua by submission, acclamation of his self-emptying love and obedience, and confession that he bears the divine name is still “to the glory of God the Father.” For Messianic Jews such worship of Yeshua is consistent with our identity in Christ, the representative of Israel, the High Priest for Israel, the one who mediates between God and Israel. As Messianic Jews, this means that we can pray the traditional prayers of the synagogue without having to alter those prayers (though we probably need to supplement them) as we pray them *through the Son, in the Ruach*. Kinzer gives the examples of wearing the *Tallit* as putting on Yeshua, saying the *Shema* as identification with Yeshua’s obedient love of the Father which was summed up in his death, and using the *Amidah* as identification with Yeshua’s priestly intercession on behalf of Israel and the world.

Kinzer speculates that the mystical understanding of the relationship between God, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah provides a possible model for the incarnation, but acknowledges the difficulty of rightly understanding and applying this to Trinitarian understanding. Kinzer is attempting to reformulate Trinitarian thought in line with incarnational thinking within the Jewish tradition. While some would question whether Judaism does use incarnational language, Kinzer cites contemporary Jewish thought to illustrate his point, referring to Michael Wyschogrod:

*In the broadest sense, the Jewish people is the incarnation of the Torah. If the Torah is demand, the Jewish people is the embodiment of that demand. A talmid chacham (“rabbinic scholar”) is considered a living Torah. We merely extend this to the people of Israel, of whom the talmid chacham is but an outstanding member.*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kinzer Course notes (Session 17).

<sup>44</sup> Wyschogrod, Michael, *The Body of Faith: God and the People Israel*, New Jersey, NY, Aronson, 1996 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 211.

Kinzer also considers Yeshua as the *Shekinah*, the one who accompanies Israel,

*...entering fully into our experience and suffering, who as the presence of God actually suffers with us (it would be proper to give this notion of Divine suffering a prominent place in our theology); the one who even (like the Shekinah of the Kabbalah) experiences in his total identification with us a separation from God (on the execution stake – “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”).*

For Kinzer the unity of the Deity needs to be understood eschatologically as a matter of his lordship being established throughout creation, so that all “accept the yoke of his Kingship.” The resurrection of Yeshua and the gift of the Ruach are anticipations of that final Echad. The revelation of the Triune nature of the Godhead in the apostolic writings and in the life of the body of Messiah is not just a fuller manifestation of the divine nature; paradoxically, this definitive demonstration of the inner differentiation of the Godhead has as its purpose the eschatological realization of his unity when “God will be all in all.”

Thus for Kinzer the Jewish mystical tradition is crucial for our formulating an authentic 21st century Messianic Jewish understanding of God and of Messiah.

While Kinzer approaches the issues with the benefit of contemporary New Testament scholarship, and the works of modern Jewish scholars to illustrate the possibilities of incarnational theology within the Jewish tradition, his approach awaits consolidation into a definitive statement on the humanity, divinity and work of the Messiah. However Kinzer provides a suggestive “road-map” for future progress on the issues, steering the debate on into more profound theological reflection while also recognizing the weaknesses of previous approaches.

## Conclusion

The UMJC position paper on the Tri-Unity of God summarises the biblical data for the plurality of God, the basis in Jewish tradition for plurality in the divinity, then goes on to state:

*It has also been pointed out that traditional Judaism has always rejected the concept of the tri-unity of G-d, interpreting the Shema in a narrower sense as an absolute oneness. This traditional view is in no way monolithic. The biblical data is also <part of> Jewish thought. Within Jewish thought, albeit mystical, the Zohar contains a trinitarian concept of G-d. While the Zohar is not our authority, it does demonstrate that the trinitarian understanding of G-d is NOT non-Jewish. Regardless of traditional views, we must not look to traditional Jewish teaching to tell us what is proper for us to believe. Our authority is the Word of G-d. Traditional rejection of the tri-unity is not based upon what we believe, but based upon their erroneous interpretation of what we believe. We in no way affirm the existence of three gods, but ONE G-d eternally existent in three persons.*

It concludes with the strong affirmation of the deity of Jesus and the plural unity of God:

*Because the tri-unity of G-d has a central bearing upon the rest of our theology and the scriptures do support it as a biblical doctrine, Messianic believers need to affirm the tri-unity of G-d as a central part of our faith and not relegate it to secondary importance or opinion for the sake of palatability to others.<sup>45</sup>*

Messianic Jews have yet to reach agreement on these issues, which profoundly affect the movement's direction and identity. Hopefully we will succumb to neither an "arid biblicism or shallow Trinitarianism." By listening carefully to one another and reflecting wisely on the rich resources of both Jewish and Christian traditions, we will be drawn to a deeper contemplation and expression of our understanding of the divine mystery. Only as the Messianic movement grows in spiritual and theological maturity will we be able to more adequately express that inexpressible revelation of God's love to us revealed in his Son, the Messiah.

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.umjc.org/aboutumjc/theology/triunity.htm>, "The Tri-Unity of G-d from a Messianic Perspective", UMJC position paper.

# Yeshua: The Deity Debate

John Fischer

Less than a generation after the resurrection of Yeshua, serious discussions arose over the theological implications of his mission, message and messiahship (e.g., Acts 15). The discussions accelerated and intensified during the patristic period, spawning numerous church councils. One of the focal points of these discussions continued to be the deity of Yeshua and the consequent understanding of the nature of God. Various formulations and creeds emerged, each attempting to wrestle with—and adequately express—the reality the biblical texts sought to convey about these important issues. The creeds and councils did their best to communicate these complex concepts to their own community and culture. For their own time and community—and to some degree for later times and communities—with respect to their expression of “the trinity,” they appear to have generally succeeded, though not completely without dissent and demurral. Their conceptualization of the “trinity,” or “tri-unity,” was the most effective way they had—in human language—to understand the biblical statements about God. On the other hand, ancient Messianic Jews, as did other Jews, tended not to be creedal. Instead, they used “testimonia,” the quotation of scriptures that supported their views (e.g., Sanhedrin 38b). Creedal thinking and expression was a tendency of Hellenism. Creeds, however, eventually entered Judaism, largely through the Rambam (Maimonides).<sup>46</sup>

From time to time, other historical communities have attempted to reformulate the classic expressions in terms and concepts more relevant to their own culture and time. Some have attempted to distance or disengage themselves completely from the creedal expressions—as well as the concepts undergirding them—while others have simply tried to reformulate them, and the biblical texts on which they are based, in ways more meaningful to their own “world.”

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<sup>46</sup> See further, John Fischer, “The Rabbinic View of God: A Contrast to the Rambam,” *Keshet* (Summer 2001).

This discussion began originally on Israeli soil<sup>47</sup> and has more recently resurfaced there once again.<sup>48</sup> The “controversy over the deity of Yeshua” in Israeli circles, however, appears to be more central and mainstream than its counterparts and discussion in America. In the United States, the debate and dissent appear to be more limited to the periphery of the Messianic Jewish movement rather than to its core.

## The American Scene

Several organizations normally serve to more or less define the landscape of the “formal” Messianic Jewish community in America. And, each of these “major” organizations expresses their understanding of the deity of Yeshua and the nature of God in ways that are clearly compatible conceptually—even if not linguistically—with the classic creedal formulations. A number of examples from their respective public “belief statements” should serve sufficiently to illustrate this.

The Doctrinal Statement of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) reads: “We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe in the deity of the Lord Yeshua.”<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that an elaboration and delineation of this statement will be presented to the delegates of the UMJC at their November 2003 meeting. That refining statement “unwraps” this formal statement without changing its essence.

The UMJC’s sister organization, the Association of Messianic Believers (AMB), says in its Statement of Faith: “We believe that God is One, manifested in the Persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Scriptures. We believe in the deity of the Lord Yeshua, the Messiah.”<sup>50</sup>

An even older organization, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), and its affiliated association of congregations, the International Association of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), takes a similar position on these issues.

*We believe that the Shema...teaches that God is echad: a united one, a composite unity, eternally existent in plural oneness...and that He exists forever in three persons: Father, Son,*

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<sup>47</sup> Several books which explore the discussion and dialogue of the early Messianic Jewish community come readily to mind. These include, among others: Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1964; Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, Alec Allenson, Naperville, IL, 1970; F.J.A. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*, Macmillan, New York, 1898; Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1988.

<sup>48</sup> “Messianic Jews Debate the Deity of Jesus,” *Israel Today* (November 2001).

<sup>49</sup> “Doctrinal Statement,” Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, Albuquerque, NM.

<sup>50</sup> “Statement of Faith,” Association of Messianic Believers, Clearwater, FL.

*and Holy Spirit...The Son is God (Deity), and is worshipped as God, having existed eternally...This one is the promised Mashiach of Israel.*<sup>51</sup>

Other sizable, and recognizable, Messianic Jewish organizations such as the North American Messianic Alliance (NAMA), the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship (SBMF), and the newly formed Association of Messianic Congregations (AMC), *et al.* have similar, compatible, conceptualizations and formulations in their own statements.

Interestingly, even those movements often perceived to be related to the American Messianic Jewish community – though in actuality only peripheral to that community – express themselves on these issues in similar ways. The Two House or Ephraimite movement affirms, regarding the nature of God: “a belief in one Almighty God, Creator of the Universe, and that He has revealed Himself to humanity in three separate but unified co-existent manifestations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We emphasize that as mortals we cannot fully comprehend the Godhead and how He chooses to manifest Himself to us, although it is clear that God is a plurality. (We) fully affirm the Deity of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and that He has co-existed for eternity with the Father.”<sup>52</sup>

Another peripherally Messianic movement, the Nazarenes, address these issues in the following manner:

*We believe that YHWH is one (ECHAD). We believe that YHWH reveals Himself in many ways, characteristics and sefirot, including those of Father, Word (Memra), and the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit). We believe that Y’shua (Yahushua) HaMashiach has come. We believe he was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life in accordance with the Torah, performed miracles, was crucified for the atonement of his people in accordance with the Scriptures, was bodily resurrected on the third day, ascended to heaven and currently sits at the right hand of YHWH.*<sup>53</sup>

While these statements are not quite as clear-cut, and do appear to leave room for non-trinitarian divergence, they are not anti-trinitarian and seem to be inclined toward a roughly trinitarian understanding.

It is as one moves further from the mainstream of the American Messianic Jewish community, as well as from some of its periphery, that one encounters non-trinitarian and anti-trinitarian sentiments. Two things should be noted at the outset. These statements come from those who consider themselves inside, but are not considered as such by, the mainstream Messianic Jewish community. And, that community has clearly distanced itself from such organizations and statements. Again, several examples should suffice.

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<sup>51</sup> “Statement of Faith,” Messianic Jewish Alliance of America and International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues, Havertown, PA.

<sup>52</sup> “Statement of Faith,” TNN Online, Kissimmee, FL

<sup>53</sup> “Statement of Faith,” [www.nazarene.net](http://www.nazarene.net), 7/30/03.



For a number of years Joseph Good aired two programs, “In the Footsteps of the Messiah” and “Ancient Israel,” over the American Christian television network TBN. Although his position is not made clear in these programs, his own Hatikva Ministry seminars are quite explicit.

*Yeshua was an attribute of the Father that was made flesh. But in being flesh, he was a man, totally a man...Yeshua we do not see as being God when he walked here on earth. We see him as a man, a man anointed by God, sent by God to perform a function. Now in his resurrection, we do not see him as God. We see him as a man appointed by God and that has been restored back to what man was intended to be....I once believed in the Trinity; now I obviously don't.*<sup>54</sup>

A number of years ago, Joe Good—who by the way is not a Jew—and the UMJC parted company over this very issue.

Then, there is the following, from the website of Light of Mashiach, which describes itself as Torah observant Messianic Judaism:

*I do not subscribe to Trinitarian/tri-unitarian doctrines which attempt to define God as three Persons in One. YHVH is one....Trinity is a manmade doctrine that borrows heavily from pagan sources. Scripture tells us that God is one not three. Ultimately the trinity doctrine seeks to limit our heavenly Father to merely one-third of the godhead.*<sup>55</sup>

This is yet another example of an organization that, while describing itself as Messianic Judaism, actually operates as a fringe group outside the American community's boundaries. Groups, and individuals, such as these are quite similar to “outliers” found in statistical analysis.

There are others who have separated themselves from the American Messianic Jewish community over this issue as well. Two Messianic Jewish believers, who are also authors, privately published a position paper, “Messianic Judaism and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” which they distributed to Messianic Jewish leaders. Concerning this paper they wrote:

*The theme of this position paper is the issue of how MJ should understand and teach about the nature of Messiah. Is he a man anointed by God and resurrected to His right hand, or is he God himself manifested in the flesh? ... (This study) is designed to raise significant questions, to point out some inconsistencies and, in some cases, deliberate deceptions that have been accepted by MJ as the correct “orthodox” doctrine. Does the doctrine of the deity of Messiah and the Tri-unity of God really reflect the views of the early Hebrew Nazarenes? When seriously scrutinized, we think this dogma will be shown to be historically, traditionally and biblically misleading.*<sup>56</sup>

The authors commend a more exhaustive study on the Trinity entitled *The Doctrine of The Trinity: Christianity's Self-inflicted Wound* by Buzzard and Hunting.

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<sup>54</sup> Jackie Alnor, “Bad Theology from Joe Good,” *The Christian Sentinel*, 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Ellen Kavanaugh, “G-d Is One, Not A Trinity,” [www.lightofmashiach.org](http://www.lightofmashiach.org), 7/25/03.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in a letter dated fall 2000, *Messianic Messenger*.

This book, which has apparently influenced numerous people, declares:

*It is a simple fact and an undeniable historical fact that several major doctrines that now seem central to the Christian Faith – such as the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the nature of Christ – were not present in a full and self-defined generally accepted form until the fourth and fifth centuries. If they are essential today – as all of the orthodox creeds and confessions assert – it must be because they are true. If they are true, then they must have always been true; they cannot have become true in the fourth and fifth century. But if they are both true and essential, how can it be that the early church took centuries to formulate them?<sup>57</sup>*

While this volume seeks to provide a clarifying Jewish perspective on these issues, and although it has affected some on the fringes of the Messianic Jewish community in America, its authors are not Jews nor are they Jewishly trained.

### A Jewish Reflection

Ultimately, the deity of Yeshua derives directly from an understanding of the description of God that comes from a careful study of the Tanach. Such a study reveals the “paradoxical” nature of the God of the Scriptures. It yields a God who spans the “distance” from HaMakom (the Place) to Malakh HaShem (Angel of God), from Adon Olam (Sovereign of the Universe) to Shekinah. Such a God comprises Ikar (Glory) as well as Memra (Word), as the Targums describe him, and who is “glorious in holiness” (from Mikhamokha in Jewish liturgy) and yet involves himself in his people’s history (for example, at the Red Sea). He creates the universe, yet walks in the Garden; he thunders at Sinai, yet dines with Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod 24).

These descriptions of God resulted in the ancient rabbinic sages reflecting and writing about this paradoxical picture of God and the mysterious ways in which he interacts with his world.<sup>58</sup> They seemed to realize that not only is his universe multi-dimensional, but its Creator is even more so. And, perhaps, they also realized that reality – contrary to theory – tends to be “messy” rather than neat and clear-cut.

God is HaMakom, “the Place.” Where? What place? Simply, he is *the* place, *whatever* place. In other words, the Sages understood the Scriptures to indicate that God clearly cannot be contained by the universe (q.v. 1 Kgs 8:27 f.), let alone any specific place. He inhabits the expanse, and beyond. He *is* every place, because he is *beyond* every place. Yet, as Malakh HaShem – that supernatural, divine angelic figure – he also appears at various *specific* places to

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<sup>57</sup> Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, International Scholars Publishers, Morrow, GA, 1994.

<sup>58</sup> For a more detailed development, see Mark Kinzer, public lecture, Conference of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, July 1997, Albuquerque, NM, available on tape.

several individuals (e.g., Jacob in Gen 32 and Gideon in Judg 6). And then, God dwells as Shekinah, his very real, clear presence *in* places (Exod 40:34-38; 1 Kgs 8:27f.) and *on* people as Ruach HaShem (Exod 31:1-3). Whether he comes as HaMakom, or Malakh HaShem, or Shekinah/Ruach, yet, he remains Adon Olam.

This is how the ancient Jewish Sages recognized and described God from the biblical texts and inscribed him in their liturgical texts. This is the way they dealt with the data and portrayed the paradoxes pictured in the Scriptures. As David Stern remarked in answer to a question on the trinity: "Whether you call God a trinity or tri-unity, or something else, the data for this are there in the Jewish Scriptures."<sup>59</sup>

A brief survey of these rabbinic reflections and musings surfaces some interesting descriptions and comments. In the rabbinic discussions about the Shekinah:

*The Shekinah is the personified Presence of God. In the Talmudic period, the Shekinah was identified with the 'Holy Spirit.' These concepts, originally imagined as (hypostatic) aspects of the Deity, gradually assumed an independent character and came to be conceived as something like a divine entity.<sup>60</sup>*

The Memra of the Targums developed conceptually in a similar fashion. So Targum Onkelos renders Genesis 15:6: "And Abraham trusted in the Memra of the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." And, the Jerusalem Targum reads, at Genesis 22:14: "And Abraham worshipped and prayed in the name of the Memra of the Lord, and said, 'You are the Lord who does see, but You cannot be seen'." In both—and in many other such texts—the "Memra of the Lord" replaces "the Lord" found in the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. It should also be noted that Metatron—who also appears in the Zohar's speculations as both "the Middle Pillar" of the Godhead (Zohar, vol. III, *Ra'aya Mehaimna*, p. 227, Amsterdam edition) and as Sar HaPanim (Prince of His Presence)—is described in the Talmud as "the one who sits on God's throne" (Sanhedrin 38b). The Targum Jonathan (Isa 9:6) also ascribes supernatural descriptors to the Messiah when it comments: "A son is ours...since the beginning his name has been pronounced:...Mighty God, Everlasting One, Messiah during whose days peace will abound upon us." The Midrashim (Mishle 57a) speak in similar terms: "The Messiah is called by eight names:... 'Mashiach,' 'El' (God), 'Gibbor' (hero), and 'Avi Ad Shalom' (Eternal Father of Peace)."

Appropriately, David Flusser noted:

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<sup>59</sup> David Stern, informal discussion with Experience Israel tour group, June 1993, Jerusalem.

<sup>60</sup> Raphael Patai, *Messiah Texts* (Avon Books, New York, 1979).

*The roots of the belief in the divinity of the Messiah are deep in Jewish Messianic ideas...[It] inherited some of the Jewish apocalyptic belief in a cosmic, supernatural Messiah who would appear with the heavenly clouds (Dan. 7:13)...[It] also adopted the Jewish belief in a Messiah who existed before the creation of the world....Therefore, both the doctrines of the logos and the Incarnation have Jewish foundations from which emerges the divine Messiah.<sup>61</sup>*

So, in keeping with this, rightly does the Zohar speculate on the Shema (vol. III, p. 288; vol. II, p. 43):

*Why is there the need of mentioning the name of God three times in the verse? The first "the Lord" is the Father above. The second is the Stem of Jesse, the Messiah who is to come. And the third one is the way which is below. And these three are one....The Ancient One is described as being three; because the other lights emanating from him are included in the three. But how can three names be one? Are they really one because we call them one? How three can be one can only be known through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.*

Little wonder two different Jewish encyclopedias could note: "The Cabala, on the other hand, especially the Zohar, its fundamental work...by its speculations regarding the father, the son, and the spirit, evolved a new trinity."<sup>62</sup> Or, "...above all emanated powers, there exist in 'the root of all roots' three hidden lights which have no beginning....It is stressed that these three lights constitute one essence and one root which is 'infinitely hidden,' forming a kind of kabbalistic trinity."<sup>63</sup>

Nor, is this kind of speculation limited to the Zohar. Philo (*Questions on Genesis*, IV, 2) could muse:

*...it is reasonable for one to be three and for three to be one; for they are one by a higher principle...he makes the appearance of a triad....He cannot be seen in his oneness without something else, the chief Powers that exist immediately with him...the Creative which is called "God" and the Kingly, which is called "Lord"...[Abraham] begins to see the sovereign, holy, and divine vision in such a way that single appearance appears as a triad and the triad as a unity.*

This same kind of reflection is expressed in a prayer in at least one machzor:

*Behold I prepare my mouth to thank and praise my Creator in the name of the Holy Unity, blessed be He, and His Shechinah, by the hand of Him who is 'hidden and concealed' [a rabbinic description of the Messiah] in the name of all Israel.<sup>64</sup>*

This sounds similar to the Aramaic prayer found in some haggadot, just prior to eating the *afikomen*:

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<sup>61</sup> David Flusser, "The Jewish Origins of Christianity," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, (Summer 1982), p. 92.

<sup>62</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, 261.

<sup>63</sup> "Kabbalah," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 563.

<sup>64</sup> *Rosh Hashanah Machzor*, translated by S. G., quoted in Solomon Birnbaum, "Behind the Curtain."

*I am ready and prepared to perform the commandment of eating the afikomen, to unite the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Divine Presence through the hidden and Secret Guardian on behalf of all Israel.*<sup>65</sup>

An interesting, though unintentional insight, comes from *Moment*, an American Jewish magazine. In a recent article the author writes:

*Fill in the blanks in the following statement:..."the physical life of \_\_\_\_\_ never operated in the manner familiar to us, and that true physical life continues with precisely the same force as before. More than this:...\_\_\_\_\_ is the 'master of the house' with respect to all that happens to him and all that happens in the world. Without his agreement, no event can take place, and if it is his will, he can bring about anything, and who can tell him what to do? It follows that if he wills it, he can at any moment cause his physical sense to act in a manner familiar to us, and his failure to do so is solely the result of the fact that it is not his will to do so." The answer, surely, is clear: the missing word in the above statement must be 'Jesus.' Perhaps it is a Christian statement, or possibly a Jews for Jesus tract? Guess again. The correct answer is 'Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,' the Rebbe, who died in 1994. The quote is from Rabbi Levi Yitzchack Ginsberg, a mashpia (religious mentor) at a yeshiva in Kfar Chabad, the major Lubavitch center in Israel. It was published in a 1996 catechism in Safed, Israel, designed to provide answers about the Messiah and Redemption.*<sup>66</sup>

So, the Jewish discussion over the deity of the Messiah has reached into modern times. And, it appears that this discussion both about the "tri-unity" of God and the deity of Yeshua are truly Jewish at their root. Perhaps, as one Messianic Jewish rabbinic scholar of the previous generation once wrote "Trinity is Jewish!"<sup>67</sup>

### **Some Final Thoughts**

The entire scope of the discussions about the "tri-unity" of God and the deity of Yeshua launches one into the realm of trying to understand, on a human level, the nature of God. Any such descriptions and expressions can only fall far short of his reality. Well does Isaiah quote God: (Isa 55:8-9): "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways beyond your ways and my thoughts beyond yours."

As one observer rightly noted:

*Anything that explains the mystery of the Trinity certainly comes close to a miracle...In H. Waddell's 'Peter Abelard' two persons discuss Abelard's 'De Trinite' and whether its contents are heretical, and one of them says: "Of course it is heretical. Every book that ever*

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<sup>65</sup> Harold Schulweis, "No Blessing Over the Broken Matzah," *SH'MA*, April 3, 1987, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> "Will the Rebbe Return?" *Moment*, February 2002, p. 60.

<sup>67</sup> Rachmiel Frydland, "Trinity Is Jewish!" available from Messianic Outreach, Columbus, OH.

*was written about the Trinity is heretical, barring the Athanasian creed. And even that only saves itself by contradicting everything it says as fast as it says it.”<sup>68</sup>*

However, as one reflects on the data, perhaps something a little useful can still be said. A doctoral student reflected in an email correspondence with this article’s author:

*I really appreciated your words on ‘unique unity.’ As I have been scrutinizing Maimonides’ ‘echad v’ ein yachid k’yichudo,’ I have concluded that ‘unique unity’ is absolutely the best descriptor of what he was trying to convey by this expression....Even while seeing G-d as complex vs. simple/uniform in composition (as described in ‘echad’...complex unity...tri-unity), G-d’s essence is irreducible and unlike any other that exists. (G-d’s complexity/tri-unity is ‘yachid,’ unique, and cannot be reduced/subdivided essentially, only conceptually.) The mysterious aspect is that an indivisible and irreducible unity IS complex (far from simple and uniform in composition). Thus, ‘unique unity’ seems the quintessential description of G-d.<sup>69</sup>*

As good as this descriptor and explanation may well be, we can still only begin to approximate the nature of God. As the wayward Jew Spinoza is said to have observed: “God possesses infinite attributes to an infinite degree, of which we know only a few, and these imperfectly.”

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<sup>68</sup> H. Meyer, “Comment about the Trinity,” email posting, 2/9/99.

<sup>69</sup> Emily Paulik, “Thanks for Conversation,” email exchange, 12/10/99.

# A Divine Messiah

Ray Pritz

*“You are my witnesses,” says the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. (Isa 43.10-11)*

It is a basic tenet – some would say the most important tenet – of the Hebrew Bible that God is one. What exactly that means is a matter of varying interpretations. It comes as a surprise to some to learn that the New Testament affirms the oneness of God on many occasions. In fact, on a per-verse basis the New Testament may actually speak of the unity of God more frequently than the Old Testament. The following list is probably incomplete, but it gives some indication of the importance of the doctrine to at least five New Testament writers: Mark 12:29; John 5:44; 17:3; Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; Galatians 3:20; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5; 6:15; James 2:19; Jude 25.

The earliest generations of Church history (as all subsequent generations) were characterized by sharp differences of opinion on theological matters. The letters of Paul are replete with references to those whom he considered to be in error, fellow believers who opposed him on questions of doctrine. It is surely significant, then, that there is no hint in his letters that there were those in the “Jewish period” of Church development who were denying that Jesus the Messiah is God. As we shall see below, Paul himself believed and taught the divinity of Jesus, so we might expect him to correct any who, in his opinion, were erring on such a foundational doctrine.<sup>70</sup>

It was not long, of course, until there arose those who did want to deny that Jesus is God. Groups like the Ebionites were ready to see Jesus as a good man, even the best man who ever lived, but just a man. This doctrine may have derived from their desire to preserve what they saw as a Jewish doctrine of

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<sup>70</sup> It has long been a stock claim in New Testament scholarship that the idea that God became man reflects Hellenistic thinking. Oskar Skarsaune has recently shown (*In the Shadow of the Temple*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2002, 319-338) that Hellenists in fact found the Christian doctrine of the incarnation to be absurd and could not, therefore, have supplied the source for that doctrine.

God's oneness (although this is a supposition and not demonstrable from available evidence).

*It is the purpose of this paper to investigate certain aspects of the doctrine that Jesus the Messiah is God. Obviously, in a short paper it is impossible to give a comprehensive treatment to such a broad subject. For example, we will leave aside such things as so-called christophanies in the Old Testament. We will limit our discussion to three tracks: Jesus' own words and actions, what others said about him, and the atonement imperative that the Messiah be God himself.*

## **Jesus' Words and Actions**

*He took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not tempt [test] the Lord your God.'" (Luke 4:9-12)*

Most commentators agree that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 with the same sense in which it is used there, i.e., that Jesus himself will not test God (unlike Israel in the wilderness). Some have recognized the possibility of a double meaning, where Satan is being warned that he should not be testing Jesus. Nevertheless, in this case it actually seems unlikely that this is a claim by Jesus to divinity. This example is brought to illustrate that many scriptures can be given more than one interpretation. That will be the case for almost all of those which we will consider below. We must not suppose that any single scripture is going to settle an argument that has had a long life. Instead, it is the cumulative effect of these scriptures that should be given weight.

### **Jesus forgave sins**

In Mark 2:1-12 and parallels (see also Luke 7:48) we read that Jesus forgave sins. The people standing around were shocked at this action, but why? The phrase that Jesus used would have included a word based on the Hebrew root "s - l - ch" meaning "to forgive." In the Hebrew scriptures this root is always and only used of an action performed by God (see, for example, Jer 31:34; Mic 7:18). It is never something one human being does for another. The people quite rightly asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus does not back down. Instead he confirms that they have heard him correctly by healing the man, another act reserved for God. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases" (Ps 103:3).



## My Father

Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working." This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him." (John 5:17-23) This passage gives us two matters for consideration. First of all, when Jesus calls God "my own Father," he is saying another thing that people were not accustomed to hearing. It was common to refer to God collectively as "our Father," but the singular, personal claiming of God as Father was not done. The possible basis for this is Psalms 89:26[27] (which in turn goes back to 2 Sam 7:14): "He [David] will cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'"

Here again, Jesus does not back down but rather reinforces the impression they have gotten (and were not comfortable with) by extending the application of his equality with God. Not only is he Lord of the Sabbath, he also raises the dead and has the authority to exercise God's judgment.

The second matter to be considered in this passage is Jesus' assertion that he, the Son, is to receive the same honor as the Father. The Greek word *timan/timē* frequently translates the Hebrew word *kavod* (usually rendered in English as "glory"). Whether we choose to understand this word as honor, respect, or glory, the statement of Jesus is not one we would expect to hear from any human being. In John 17:5 Jesus asks God to "glorify me ... with the glory [*doxa*, the most common translation of *kavod*] I had with you before the world was."

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah (42:8) God says "my glory [*kavod*] I will not give to another" (also Isa 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:5-6, 21; 46:9; 48:11). Is Jesus claiming for himself that which God says is reserved for himself alone? Surely the people listening to him on this occasion would have been scandalized by such a way of speaking.

The Gospel of John provides several additional strong indicators that Jesus had a divine self-image. For the most part these passages are a very familiar part of the discussion, and it will suffice simply to list them:

John 14:8-10, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father"

John 10:30-39, "I and the father are one"

John 8:56-59, "before Abraham was I AM"

## Jesus, prophets, and rabbis

*The prophets always said "this is what the Lord says"; they never said "I say to you." But Jesus never talked like the rabbis or the prophets. He always said "I say to you." This was especially significant, because for Jews there was only one authoritative "I" – God himself. The prophets called the people to return to God. Jesus says "come to me." It would never have occurred to a prophet to call the people to himself. Of course, this saying of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-29 is based on sayings of God himself (Exod 33:14; Jer 6:16), all the more remarkable since Jesus substitutes himself for "my Father" as the one who calls to himself and gives rest. R. Hananiah b. Teradion said: If two sit together and no words of the Torah are spoken between them, there is the seat of the scornful, as it is written, "Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" [Ps 1.1]. But if two sit together and the words of the Torah are spoken between them, the Divine Presence rests between them, as it is written [Mal 3.16]. (mAvot 3:2)*

We may contrast this saying of R. Hananiah with the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20. "If two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." The parallels are evident and instructive: Where the rabbinic saying has "words of the Torah," Jesus says "in my name," and where R. Hananiah says "the Divine Presence [*shechinah*] rests between them" Jesus says "I am there among them." The rabbis spoke of taking on oneself the "yoke of the Torah" (see mAvot 3:5; cf. also Acts 15:10; Avot de R. Natan 20). Jesus encourages his hearers to "take my yoke on you" (Matt 11:29)<sup>71</sup>.

The rabbis taught by quoting other teachers from earlier generations to show what the Torah meant. Jesus never cites any prior authority, implying that he himself is sufficient authority (cf. Matt 7:28-29), possessing in fact the full authority of the Torah.

Finally, Jews were taught by their religious leaders to be prepared to die to sanctify the name of God. Jesus calls on those who follow him to be prepared to lose their lives "for my sake" (Mark 8:35 par.). These are not proper words for prophet or rabbi, and it is no wonder that some were scandalized by them.

## What Others Wrote about Jesus

Here again we will not be able to discuss in detail many scriptures that, taken together, add up to an impressive weight of proof that the writers of the New Testament were comfortable with the idea that the Messiah was God, the God of Israel. Only in passing can we note that the Lamb of God receives all the same glory and worship as God (Rev 5:8-13). Jesus is described as receiving (and accepting) worship (Matt 14:33; John 20:28f), even though elsewhere (Acts 10:25f; Rev 19:10; 22:8f) we are told that neither human beings or angels should be worshipped, only God.

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<sup>71</sup> It is likely that Jesus is referring in this passage to an even earlier antecedent: wisdom. On the interrelationship between Wisdom and Torah as agents in creation, see Skarsaune, *Shadow*, 330-333.

Jesus also is prayed to in the New Testament. In Acts 7:54-60 Stephen addresses him directly in prayer. Almost every letter of Paul opens with a kind of short prayer, addressed to "God the Father and our Lord Jesus the Messiah," asking grace and peace for the recipients. Indeed, the closing words of the New Testament are a prayer addressed to Jesus: "'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" These tend to confirm the words of the Messiah himself (John 14:12-14), "if you ask me<sup>72</sup> anything in my name, I will do it."

Well known too are such passages as the following:

John 1:1-3, "the word was God" (and verse 18 speaks of "the only begotten God");

Romans 9:5, "Messiah over all, God blessed forever";

2 Corinthians 5:19, "God was in the Messiah, reconciling the world to himself";

Titus 2:13, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus the Messiah";

Acts 20:28, "the church of God which he obtained with his own blood."

When Paul, in Philippians, speaks of "the name that is above all names" that has been given to Jesus, that name is in fact the supreme title "LORD," which belongs exclusively to the God of Israel.

Two familiar passages in Colossians are especially uncompromising: "in him [the Son] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (1:19), and "in him [Messiah] all the fullness of deity dwells bodily" (2:9).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews adds his voice to the chorus, not only in the oft-quoted first three verses, as they affirm that the Son is what we see of God, but also more subtly in 3:3-4: "Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." Jesus is the builder of the house, God is the builder of all things. Jesus, then, must be God.

We may conclude this section with the closing words of the first epistle of John (5:20): "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

### **The Atonement Imperative**

At some point in the discussion, someone may well ask, "But is this really important? What difference does it make if I do not accept the doctrine of the divinity of the Messiah, as long as I believe that he died for my sins and that God raised him from the dead." The answering of this question takes us away

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<sup>72</sup> This is the reading accepted by the Greek New Testament texts of Nestle-Aland and UBS.

from considering specific scriptures that affirm Messiah's divinity and into a consideration of the essence of the message of the Gospel. When Jesus came to this earth, died, and rose again, what exactly was going on?

## **Messiah as man**

*When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his eldest son who was to reign in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came great wrath upon Israel; and they withdrew from him and returned to their own land. (2 Kgs 3:26-27)*

The act of the king of Moab disgusts us, just as it did the Israelite soldiers who witnessed it. Human sacrifice, such as that done by those who offered their children to Molech, seems to us the farthest thing from the true religion of the God of love. Some of us may even feel uncomfortable when we read in Genesis 22 that God commanded Abraham to slit his son's throat and then burn the body.

And yet have we stopped to consider that the central, definitive act of the faith we hold is based on a human sacrifice? Indeed, scripture seems to teach that only a human sacrifice would do. Israelite religion is all animal sacrifice; why suddenly a human?

"By one man sin came into the world" (Rom 5:12-19), and all were made sinners. There is a balance here. Because man brought sin into the world, it must be a man who will pay for its removal. It may seem the wrong place to start, but it is important for us to see first of all that the sacrificial victim in God's ultimate atonement must be a human being. Neither animals nor angels would suffice.

This principle is expressed in 1 Corinthians 15:21: "By a man came death, so also by a man came the resurrection of the dead." "Death" as Paul uses it here stands for the culmination of the coming of sin, its final outcome. "Resurrection" stands for the whole atonement process, of which resurrection is the seal, the consummation. Man (Adam) brought the need for atonement, and Man must pay for the atonement.

First of all, then, the big picture shows us that the agent God will use to accomplish atonement for mankind must be a human being, one of the race that caused the problem in the first place. If Jesus was not a man, the atonement was not done properly.

The typology of the Torah teaches us that God requires that a sacrificial victim be perfect. Otherwise the sacrifice will not be accepted, atonement will not be accomplished. That was on the physical level; the spiritual counterpart will require moral perfection. The difficulty is immediately and painfully obvious: no human can meet that standard, because all are themselves sinners and required to die for their own sins (Ps 14:1-3; Eccl 7:20, etc.).

The divine solution to the problem is beautifully described in Isaiah 59:1-20. The first eight verses tell how bad the sin looks to God. The following verses (9-15a) portray the bad situation that results from the sin. Verses 15b-16a then pose the dilemma poignantly: "The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intervene."

Man sinned. Man must atone. No man is eligible to do it. What is the way out of this impasse? There is only one possible answer (vss. 16b-20):

*Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD.*

God himself will do it. The redeemer who "comes to Zion" must be God, because there was no human to fill the role. This solution was inevitable. For the atonement to be accomplished as required, "God will provide himself a lamb." Only God will do. If Jesus was not God, the atonement was not done properly.

One cannot refrain from quoting the Passover Haggadah: "'And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt,' not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be he, himself, in his own glory and in his own person."

Is the doctrine of Messiah's divinity important? It is foundational.

Is a proper understanding of the doctrine and belief in it essential for salvation? Let those among us who are perfect in understanding and faith be the ones to make that judgment.

# The Divine Unity and the Deity of Messiah

Noam Hendren

The unity of God is axiomatic to the faith of the Jewish people. Not only is the “Shema” (“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”) the essential statement of faith in Judaism, it is the personal declaration of faith for every Jew. Throughout the centuries, Jews have lived and have been willing to die for “kiddush haShem,” the “sanctification of the Name” as expressed in this simple, yet deeply profound, creed.

With the expansion of the major monotheistic religions, which today dominate more than half of the world’s population, the faith in one God may appear to be a universal “given,” a commonplace which has always been obvious to thinking people everywhere. Yet clearly that is not the case. The revelation of this truth—or, from a biblical perspective, its restoration—came in the context of worldwide idolatry, at a time when the most advanced civilizations of the ancient world were hopelessly polytheistic.

Israel’s roots and the context of her early existence—from the beginning and until well after the coming of Yeshua the Messiah—are in pagan polytheism. From the time of the Patriarchs until the return from Babylonian captivity, Israel’s key challenge—and most consistent failure—was in the struggle against idolatrous worship. More than 500 years after the call of Abram, Joshua still needed to lay the challenge before the nation:

*But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Josh 24:15).*

It is little wonder that the biblical revelation is so emphatically monotheistic, not only in underlying theology but also in the nuances of expression. The biblical prophets, from Moses on, were fighting an uphill battle to wean Israel from her pagan roots and to immunize her from the contagion of polytheism which surrounded her on every side, and with which she shared the Land of

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Canaan. Every phrase spoken and written would be weighed to exalt the one true God and to exclude utterly the “gods of the nations” from the faith and worship of Israel.

This, Israel’s cultural and religious context, must inform our interpretation of the biblical evidence concerning the nature of God and the person of Messiah if we are to understand that revelation aright.

### **The Unity of the Godhead**

The expression of the divine unity in the Shema includes at least two senses: singularity and uniqueness. The Lord God of Israel is one God, not many. Israel has no pantheon; neither is the divine name (YHWH) a collective term designating abstract divinity which comes to expression in a multitude of individual deities.<sup>73</sup> The golden calf incident flies in the face of this truth not only by representing the infinite God by a created object, but also by associating the Lord with the plethora of pagan gods worshipped in Egypt and Canaan.

*[Aaron] took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt’. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, ‘Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD [YHWH]’ (Exod 32:4-5; cf. I Kgs 12:28).*

The fact of God’s singularity, however, does not deny the existence of other spirit beings. In the wilderness Israel “sacrificed to demons, which are not God – gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear”<sup>74</sup> (Deut 32:17). But the Shema declares that the Lord is unique as the infinite and self-existent One.<sup>75</sup> Moses also declares: “the LORD is God; besides him there is no other” (Deut 4:35). And Isaiah reaffirms: “Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me” (Isa 45:21). The God of Israel is the only God worthy of the name.

Significantly, the Rambam (Maimonides), in his Thirteen Principles, speaks of God not as “*echad*” (“one”) in the words of the Shema, but as “*yachid*”: “[God] is one (or “unique,” Hebrew *yachid*), and there is no oneness (*yechidut*) like unto His.”<sup>76</sup> Why should the Rambam abandon the language of the universally accepted credo of Israel in his declaration of Israel’s essential faith? The answer

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. use of “God” in ancient Greek writers, as well as Hinduism and its gods.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. I Cor 8:4-6 with 10:19-20.

<sup>75</sup> The name “YHWH” being most likely the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, hif’il imperfect from the root HYH/HWH, meaning “the eternal cause of being” and therefore “the self-existent One.”

<sup>76</sup> Maimonides composed the Thirteen Principles in Arabic, but they were translated into Hebrew in consultation with him and appear in the traditional Ashkenazi prayerbook at the end of the daily Shacharit service.

lies in the Rambam's Aristotelian conception of God as an absolute philosophical unity<sup>77</sup> (as in Islam)—one which contrasts starkly with the biblical description of God as a compound personal unity.

For the Rambam, the term "*echad*" allowed for elements of personal complexity within the Godhead which he had excluded *a priori* for philosophical reasons. As used in the Tanach, "*echad*" is the word of choice to express the unification of two or more elements to form one entity. Whether it is "the evening and the morning" combining to form "one day" (Gen 1:5), male and female becoming "one flesh" (2:24), or Ezekiel's two sticks becoming "one stick" in his hand (37:17), a compound unity is the result.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the above examples, because the God of Israel is infinite spirit, His unity is not the linking of pieces into an artificial "jigsaw puzzle" oneness, nor is it the combination of elements to form a new compound. His one eternal divine "substance" is omnipresent (Ps 139:7-10), and thus the distinctions within the Godhead are not material, but rather personal—as we shall see. Truly God's unity is unique.

Thus, by describing the Lord as "*echad*," the Shema does not exclude complexity within the essential divine unity. As the Rambam understood, the term falls far short of asserting an absolute philosophical unity.

### **Divine Dialogues: Personal Plurality in the One God**

Despite the dangers of miscommunication to a people besieged by idolatry, the Tanach repeatedly alludes to—or emphatically asserts—a personal plurality in the Godhead.

The first hints of plurality are found in the terms used to designate God—"*Elohim*" and "*Adonai*"—both of which are plural forms of existing singular nouns.<sup>78</sup> Had the biblical authors intended to assert the absolute (rather than compound) unity of the Godhead, they had readily available singular terms (*Eloah*, *Adoni*, as well as *El*) which would have avoided any confusion on this crucial point.<sup>79</sup> And while it is usual for *Elohim*, for example, to appear with singular verbs and adjectives (Gen 1:1; Exod 34:6); on a number of occasions a plural is used: "God caused (*hit'u*) me to wander" (Gen 20:13); "He is a holy

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<sup>77</sup> For Rambam's discussion of the nature of God and His "simplicity," in interaction with Aristotelian philosophical principles, see his *Guide of the Perplexed* (passim).

<sup>78</sup> In contrast to the term *shamayim* ["heavens"] which does not appear in a singular form in Scripture. The final syllable of "*Adonai*" is always pointed with the *kamatz* when referring to the God of Israel. The plural here may be related to the plural of ownership, which is common in biblical Hebrew with the nouns "*adon*" and "*ba'al*" (Cf. Gen 24:9; 39:2 and Exod 21:29; Isa 1:3 for examples of each).

<sup>79</sup> *Eloah* appears approximately 50 times in Scripture with reference to God (usually in poetic sections, esp. Job; cf. Hab 3:3); whereas *Elohim* is used over 1500 times.



God (*elohim kedoshim*)” (Josh 24:19); “Remember your Creator” (lit., “Creators,” Eccl 12:1); “Let Israel rejoice his Maker” (lit., “Makers,” Ps 149:2).

Such occurrences can be dismissed as mere grammatical agreement, but given Israel’s cultural and religious setting and the dangerous implications of the plural forms in that context, it is hard to explain a sudden attack of grammatical precision on the part of monotheism’s guardian angels. However one chooses to relate to the preceding anomalies, they leave the door ajar for an understanding of plurality within the Godhead.

God Himself pushes the door wide open in the Genesis 1 account of mankind’s creation:

*Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen 1:26-27).*

Verse 26 describes the interpersonal communication which took place within the Godhead on the occasion of man’s creation, the climax of the entire account. This divine consultation is revealed in order that the readers might understand God’s purposes in the creation, centered on mankind made in God’s image. Man has been created as a personal-social being, even as his Creator is personal and social. But while God would later declare “it is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18), God himself lacked nothing, being eternally satisfied with personal relationship and communication within the Godhead itself (cf. John 17:27, “for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”).

Certain Rabbinic interpreters have posited that God’s interaction in this passage was with the angels, with whom he consulted prior to man’s creation. This proposal is in sharp contrast to the declaration of Isaiah that God consults with no other being in planning and carrying out his purposes (Isa 40:13-14). It is further contradicted by verse 27, which reasserts the essential unity of God, making it clear that he alone created man and that man was created in His image, not in that of God plus the angels.<sup>80</sup> It is significant that, in Breshit Rabba, the sages portray Moses as challenging God’s wisdom in allowing this passage to be written as it was: “Why do you give an excuse to the *Minim* [Jewish followers of Yeshua]?”<sup>81</sup> Apparently the implications of the passage were clear enough to them!

Similar consultations are recorded on the occasion of two other especially significant divine interventions in early biblical history: following the fall of man (Gen 3:22-23), and in response to the building of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:7). In the first, man, having eaten from the tree of knowledge, is described as

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<sup>80</sup> It is, perhaps, significant that mankind’s common ground with the Son of God, in contrast to the angels, is asserted in Heb 2:9, 14-16.

<sup>81</sup> Bereshit Rabba, Parasha Chet, section 8.

having become “like one of us, knowing good and evil” – a clear parallel to the serpent’s promise that they would become “like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). As before, the deliberation is followed by God himself acting (singular verb): here, driving Adam and Eve out of the garden (cf. 1:26-27 and 11:6-8). In each case the plural pronoun (“Us”, “Our”) is identified with God alone, and all others are thereby excluded.

### **Divine Teamwork: Personal Plurality II**

Not only is there interpersonal communication within the Godhead, the Scriptures also refer to two or more distinct personalities as “God” or “LORD” (YHWH) in the same context (for example, Gen 19:24; Ps 45:7-8; Isa 48:12-16; 63:7-14; Zech 2:12-13). In these passages, the distinct persons of the Godhead are seen fulfilling different roles in the execution of the divine program.

In Zechariah Two, an angel of God is sent to bring a message from the Lord to Zechariah:

*“Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I,” says the LORD, “will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.”... For thus says the LORD of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.”<sup>82</sup>*

The Lord declares himself to be the protective wall and glorious presence in the midst of the future restored Jerusalem. He continues making first person pronouncements, calling on Israel to leave the lands of her dispersion, ““whither I have scattered you,” declares the LORD” (v. 6, Heb v. 10). Then, surprisingly, “the LORD of hosts” says, “He sent Me after glory,” to bring certain judgment to the nations which had plundered Israel, by shaking “My hand against them.” The “Me” of verse 8 (Heb v. 12) is the speaker, “the LORD of hosts,” who by a mere wave of his hand brings destruction on his enemies (similar to “the waving of the hand of the LORD” in Isa 19:16). Who then could be the “sender” of the LORD of hosts? The divine Speaker continues, explaining that when the plundering nations become “spoil for their servants,” “you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.”

“The LORD of hosts” sends “the LORD of hosts” to execute judgment on Israel’s enemies and thereby glorify himself. A clear personal distinction is revealed to exist within the Godhead, each equally “the LORD of hosts,” and yet

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<sup>82</sup> Zech 2:4-5, 8-9; in Heb vv. 8-9, 12-13.

“One” sending the “Other” to carry out the divine work. Because Israel is “the apple of His eye,”<sup>83</sup> the Lord will entrust this job to no one but the Lord himself.

When we turn to Isaiah 48:12-16 we find a similar situation, but with an added player. Once again we must carefully note that throughout the passage the Lord God of Israel is identified as the speaker. The speaker is the one who “called” Israel and is “the First” and “the Last” (v. 12; cf. 44:6). He is the creator and sovereign Lord of the heavens and the earth (v. 13). As he summoned all creation to attention (v. 13b), so he now calls Israel to attend to his comforting promise: To punish Babylon, Israel’s oppressor, through his chosen instrument (Cyrus, Isa 44:28; 45:1) and thereby bring about Israel’s restoration (vss. 14-15; cf. v. 20; 45:13; 46:11).

In verse 16, the divine Speaker again calls for Israel’s focused attention in order to assure her that his revelation of this promise has been publicly and confidently made, because he himself has been involved from the beginning to insure its fulfillment. Without the slightest indication of a change in the speaker, he concludes: “And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.”<sup>84</sup> As in Zechariah 2, the divine Revelator is also the divine Executor of God’s saving works, even when a human instrument such as Cyrus is also used. He is the agent and representative of the entire Godhead by Whom He is sent; and yet, though clearly distinct, He declares Himself to be God, the Creator of the cosmos who also called Israel into existence.<sup>85</sup>

### **Theophanies in the Tanach: the Angel of the Lord**

The revelation of personal distinctions in the one true God comes to remarkable expression in the repeated physical appearances of God in order to reveal himself and his will to his chosen instruments. In these appearances, God takes on true physical form, often human form, as a distinct localization of the omnipresent, invisible God in heaven whom he reveals. These physical

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<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, the phrase “His eye” in verse 8 (12) is an example of the “scribal emendations,” wherein the ancient copyists changed the biblical text intentionally because they found its sense offensive. (Job 2:9, “Bless God and die!” instead of “Curse God and die!” is another well-known example). The original text of Zechariah read “My eye,” again confirming that the speaker throughout the text—and the One sent—is the Lord God himself.

<sup>84</sup> Or, “has sent Me and His Spirit.” The grammar of the passage allows for “His Spirit” to be either part of the subject or another object of “sent.” For the interpretation of this passage and its significance in this section of Isaiah, see Allan A. Macrae, “The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah—Part II”, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 121, No. 483, p. 225-226 (July 1964).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. also Isa 63:7-14, where “the LORD,” the “Angel of His presence,” and “His Holy Spirit” (vv. 10-11; also called the “Spirit of the Lord,” v. 14) are mentioned as jointly involved in the redemption of Israel. Compare also Exod 23:20-21 and 33:14-23.

manifestations of the Deity caused considerable consternation to later Rabbinic interpreters, who sometimes adjusted the text<sup>86</sup> or paraphrased its translation<sup>87</sup> in order to mitigate – what was to their thinking – a theological inconsistency.

In the patriarchal period, God is often described as “appearing” in clearly physical form.<sup>88</sup> One could argue that such manifestations were merely visions representing themselves to the mind of the individual (cf. Gen 15:17; 28:12-15), but in certain cases the true physical embodiment of God on earth is undeniable.<sup>89</sup> Genesis 18 is perhaps the classic example.

This passage opens with the simple statement that “the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] at the Oaks of Mamre” (v. 1). What Abraham actually sees is three “men,” two of whom the text later calls “angels” (cf. v. 22 and 19:1). All three are shown Abraham’s best hospitality, including washing their feet (v. 4); and he waits on them hand and foot while they eat (v. 8). There can be no question that all three are real physical manifestations and not mere visions.

The third individual is the focus of Abraham’s attention, and Abraham addresses him personally as “*Adonai*,” calling him “the judge of the whole earth” (vv. 3, 25, 27, 30-32). When this person speaks, it is as the “LORD” (YHWH, vv. 13, 17, 20, 26, 33), Who has chosen Abraham to fulfill a crucial role in his plan for world redemption (vv. 17-19). He also reconfirms the promise that Sarah would bear a son, Isaac, just as “God” [*Elohim*] had promised when he “appeared” to Abraham in the previous chapter (vv. 10, 14; cf. 17:15-19). Having agreed to preserve Sodom if ten righteous men can be found in her, the LORD “walks” away (18:33) – apparently following the path of the two angels (cf. vv. 20-22).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> E.g. Gen 18:22, another “scribal emendation,” the original text saying, “And the Lord remained standing before Abraham.” Since “stand before” was the typical expression for the posture of a servant, it was considered inappropriate for God.

<sup>87</sup> E.g. Fragmentary Targum for Gen. 18:1 has the “*Memra* [“Word” in Aramaic] of the LORD” replacing the LORD Himself as the one appearing to Abraham (cf. John 1:1, 14). Similarly, the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum translates, “And the Glory [*Yekara*] of the LORD appeared to him...” (cf. Onkelos Targum on 18:33).

<sup>88</sup> Gen 12:7; 15:17; 16:7, 11, 13; 17:1; 18:1-33; 22:11, 12; 26:2, 24; 32:24-32; Exod 3:2-4, 6, 16; 24:9-11.

<sup>89</sup> Compare also the “Man” who wrestled with Jacob and whom Jacob recognized as God himself (Gen 32:25-31).

<sup>90</sup> It is conceivable that all three “men” together constituted the physical manifestation of the Godhead. The LORD had said that He would go down to evaluate Sodom’s sin, and the two angels departed for there immediately (18:21-22). The two angels claim that the LORD had sent them to destroy the city (19:13), and yet it is “the LORD” Himself who rains down fire and brimstone (19:24). As the angels are leading Lot away from the city, he addresses “them” in the singular, calling them “*Adonai*” (v. 18), just as Abraham had

After the two angels reconnoitered the situation in Sodom, and removed Lot and his family, “the LORD rained down on Sodom fire and brimstone from the LORD, from heaven” (19:24). God, who has temporarily assumed human form, is distinct from God in heaven and exercises the prerogative of God (judgment) in God’s name.

In a number of passages, beginning with the revelation to Hagar in Genesis 16, the visible manifestation of God is referred to as “the Angel of the LORD” – the term “angel” (*mal’akh*) meaning literally, “messenger” or “emissary.”<sup>91</sup> As used throughout the Torah and the Former Prophets (the historical books), the context of each passage makes it clear that God himself is the one intended, though in a physical form. The phrase “the Angel of the LORD” thus becomes a technical term for such a divine manifestation.<sup>92</sup>

God’s self-revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Exod 3:1-15) demonstrates the identity of the “Angel of the LORD” with the “LORD” himself who is manifested, in this case, in a non-human form. The divine appearance at Horeb is introduced in verse 2 with the phrase, “Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a burning flame from within the bush.” Already in verse 4 we are told that “the LORD” saw that Moses had turned to see the phenomenon and as a result “God [*Elohim*] called to him from the midst of the bush.”

That the divine Person was literally present is evident from the command which arrested the approaching Moses, “Remove your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (v. 5).<sup>93</sup> To leave no doubt as to who was present, God immediately identified himself as “the God of Abraham...Isaac...and Jacob,” and Moses appropriately covered his face, “for he was afraid to look upon God” (v. 6). Only then did the Lord reveal the purpose of His personal “descent” into the world (v. 8): To save his people Israel and bring them to the Land of promise.

God’s manifest personal involvement in Israel’s redemption would extend beyond his call of Moses (v. 12). As the “Destroyer” he would pass throughout the Land of Egypt and strike their firstborns (12:12-13, 23). As an “angel,” in the

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addressed the LORD in chapter 18. Lot, in turn, is answered by an individual, who promises to destroy the city only after Lot has gotten to safety (vv. 21-22).

<sup>91</sup> Compare “the Angel of His presence” (*Mal’akh Panav*) in Isa 63:9, referring to God’s saving presence at the time of the Exodus (see below). For the use of the term with human envoys see Gen 32:3 (Heb v. 4); Num 20:14; Josh 7:22; et al..

<sup>92</sup> Compare Gen 16:7-13; 22:11-15; Exod 3:2-4, 6; Num 22:22-35; Judg 6:11-16, 22; 13:3-21. The only exceptions are found in post-exilic texts, Hag 1:13 and Mal 2:7, as the context of each makes clear; see also Umberto Cassuto’s comment of Exod 3:2 in his *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967).

<sup>93</sup> Compare the later revelation to Joshua by “the Commander of the LORD’s army,” who accepts Joshua’s worship and issues an identical command (Josh 5:14-15). The subsequent narrative (6:1-5) confirms that this Person is, in fact, the LORD himself who issues Israel’s marching orders for the attack on Jericho.

form of the pillar of fire and cloud, He would appear in order to guide Israel and to protect her from the Egyptian counterattack (13:21-22; 14:19). As the “Commander of the LORD’s armies,” He would direct the attack on Jericho (Josh 5:14-6:5), even as God had promised Moses that His Angel—“in whom is My Name”—would lead Israel into her inheritance and expel her enemies (Exod 23:20-23).<sup>94</sup>

### **God Incarnate: The Davidic Messiah**

All the above physical manifestations of God were temporary theophanies for the revelation of his will and the execution of his redemptive purposes. Though temporary and limited in scope, such divine appearances provided the archetype for the ultimate revelation of God’s unique unity and the fulfillment of his plan of salvation in the person of the divine-human Messiah. In contrast to the various theophanies discussed previously, the temporary assumption of physical form is not the focus of Messianic expectation, but rather a true “incarnation”—God literally taking on humanity through conception and birth. In the revelation of the Messiah, based on the Davidic Covenant and detailed in the prophets, the pattern of divine intervention in our world reaches its logical, and yet stunning, consummation.

The Scriptures hinted at the coming of a Redeemer from the moment that redemption became necessary and repeatedly during the pre-monarchical period.<sup>95</sup> With the establishment of David’s kingdom, the promise became firmly attached to his dynasty by divine covenant (II Sam 7:12-15; cf. Ps 89:1-4 [Heb 2-5]). The chronicler provides an interpreted version of this covenant promise some 500 years later (I Chr 17:11-14), which incorporates the prophetic revelation concerning the Davidic Messiah to his time. While the chronicler recognizes the Redeemer’s physical descent from David, he also affirms his divine nature and eternity. For in this version God declares, “I will be his Father, and he shall be My son;... And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever.”

In contrast to II Samuel, the chronicler does not limit the Father-Son relationship to a disciplinary one, but leaves it undefined and, by implication, inclusive.<sup>96</sup> This is parallel to Psalm 2 which refers to “His Messiah” (*Meshicho*)

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<sup>94</sup> Note the interchange in this passage between the “Angel” and God, who speak and act as one; even to the point that the “angel” has the prerogative to forgive—or not to forgive—disobedience. Cf. Isa 63:9.

<sup>95</sup> Gen 3:15; 49:10-12; Num 24:17; Deut 18:15-19.

<sup>96</sup> The term “son(s) of God” in the Tanach clearly points to a superhuman (at least) figure. Besides the general usage of the plural for angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), the “son of God” appearing in Daniel 3:25 was clearly utterly different from the three men in the

as “My Son” who will rule the “ends of the earth” with “an iron scepter” (vv. 2, 7-9). The divine nature of the “Son” is confirmed by the prediction of his everlasting rule in the kingdom and in the very house of God. The latter parallels Ezekiel’s description of the returning “glory of the LORD” personified, establishing the throne of his kingdom in the restored temple (Ezek 43:4-7).

The Chronicler’s interpolations reflect the prophetic revelation concerning the divine-Davidic Messiah, as exemplified by Isaiah 9:6-7 [Heb vv. 5-6].

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

Here the future Redeemer of Israel is clearly a human child, born of the lineage of David the king and therefore able to sit on his throne. And yet, as the chronicler later saw, this “son of God” would be no mere mortal, but would rule “from that time on and forever.”<sup>97</sup> These statements are accompanied by a startling list of personal names which leave no doubt as to the essential deity of the child to be born.

When God declared his name to Moses, “I am that I am” (Exod 3:13-14), He revealed the essential significance of His covenant name YHWH and thereby made a direct statement about His true nature as the eternal, self-existent source of all being. Later God’s covenant faithfulness is reinforced repeatedly by the statement, “I am the LORD” (cf. Exod 6:2-8), the eternal—and therefore unchanging—One (cf. Mal 3:6).<sup>98</sup> In the same way, the divine nature of the Messianic King is emphatically asserted through the names by which God has declared he shall be called.

While each of the names given contributes to the identification of the Davidic Messiah as truly God,<sup>99</sup> perhaps the most significant in the context of Isaiah is “Mighty God” (*El Gibor*). This name, in its precise form, appears only twice in all of Scripture, here and in Isaiah 10:21; both part of the larger “Book of Emmanuel” section of Isaiah (chapters 7-12).

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furnace. The implication is that the “son” shares, at least to a certain extent, in the nature of the designated “father,” in this case, God himself.

<sup>97</sup> Note the parallels between this passage and Micah 5:2-5a [Heb., vv. 1-4a], where the King’s origins are said to be in “Bethlehem” (the Davidic connection), and yet “from eternity,” and his rule of peace “to the ends of the earth” (cf. Ps 2:8-9; Zech 9:9-10).

<sup>98</sup> Similarly, in the renaming of Abram and Jacob (Gen 17:5; 32:29), God was making a true declaration about their persons. Cf. also Isa 7:14, “Emmanuel.”

<sup>99</sup> For “Wonderful Counselor,” cf. Isa 40:16; Judg 13:18. Father of Eternity—i.e. the Eternal One, cf. Micah 5:2 [Heb 5:1]; Isa 41:4. Prince of Peace, cf. Micah 5:5a [Heb 4a]; Isa 45:7.

In Isaiah 10:20-21 Israel's future national repentance and reliance on God alone for deliverance is promised: "The remnant of Israel ... will rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth." This is followed immediately by a poetic restatement in the words, "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to [the]<sup>100</sup> Mighty God." The identification of "Mighty God" with "the LORD" as the object of Israel's trust and the agent of her redemption is directly parallel to the declaration concerning the Davidic Messiah, "Mighty God," in 9:6. The Messiah would be the literal embodiment of the Lord himself,<sup>101</sup> carrying out God's redemptive work for Israel.

The consummation of the divine-human Messiah's work, and the necessity of a true incarnation, is seen in Zechariah 12. As a description of the last days, this chapter reveals in specifics the circumstances leading to Israel's national turning to the Mighty God, as seen above. With "all the nations of the earth" gathered against Israel (12:3), God will enable Israel's national repentance by the outpouring of his Spirit, so that, "they will look unto Me Whom they had pierced, and they will mourn..." (12:10). As a result, "in that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (13:1).

Once again, God himself is speaking: he is the one who intends to destroy the invading nations, and he will pour out "the Spirit of grace and supplication" on Israel (12:9-10a). To him, "whom they had pierced,"<sup>102</sup> will Israel look for deliverance in her time of greatest need.<sup>103</sup> Without giving the details of the "piercing" or its significance (see Isa 53), the true physical embodiment of God is evident. God had taken human form and had been assaulted physically, apparently unto death as the subsequent mourning indicates (12:10b-14; cf. Dan 9:26).

The universal national repentance over this act—however it was carried out—is what will lead to Israel's national cleansing (12:10-13:1), making her "savable" as God himself desires. Thus, the death of the God-man Messiah has become a crucial link in the divine plan of salvation, leading to the ultimate redemption of Israel on the day when "the LORD will go forth to fight against those nations" and "His feet will stand...on the Mount of Olives" (14:3-4).

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<sup>100</sup> The addition of "the" in the English translation is misleading, giving the impression that a descriptive term, rather than a name, is intended.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Jer 23:5-6, where the Davidic Messiah is also called "The LORD our Righteousness" (*YHWH Tzidkeinu*). Cf. also Exod 23:20f., "My name is in him."

<sup>102</sup> "Whom" (*et asher*) identifies the subject (or object) of one action as object of another action (cf. Jer 38:9; also Prov 3:12; Deut 5:11). "Pierced" (*dakaru*) always appears (12x) in its literal, not a figurative, sense (cf. Zech 13:3).

<sup>103</sup> To "look unto Me" (*hibitu 'elai*; not *'alai*, "upon Me") has the sense "to turn to for help." See the parallels in Ps 121:1 and Num 21:9.



## **The Divine Unity and the Deity of Messiah**

The unity of the Godhead is without question the central theological teaching of the Tanach. And Israel's context—religious and social—demanded the clearest possible communication of this truth by Moses and the prophets. But the truth of God's unique unity was not compromised to achieve polemical ends. Personal distinctions were revealed as not only part and parcel of the true nature of the Godhead, but also as essential elements in the revelation and execution of the plans and purposes of God our Savior.

From the beginning, God purposed that a perfect man in the image of God would rule the earth as God's representative (Gen 1:26). Following man's fall and the marring of the divine image in him, such a purpose could only be fulfilled by the divine-human Messiah, who "had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa 53:9). Moreover the redemption of mankind from sin and its effects, which God alone—"apart from [Whom] there is no savior" (Isa 43:11)—could accomplish, required a sacrificial death that only a man could suffer. In his infinite wisdom and his infinite love, the one true God took on true humanity in order to offer up an infinite sacrifice to himself on behalf of all mankind. And he will return in his glorified human body to complete the redemption, restoring the physical world and taking his throne as God and King forever.

"And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—'The LORD is one,' and His name one" (Zech 14:9).

# One God and Lord

Dwight A. Pryor<sup>104</sup>

The restoration of the Jewish homeland, Israel, and the reconnection of the Church to its Jewish roots are not unrelated phenomena. Many sectors of the Body of Messiah today are being stimulated and enriched by the “nourishing sap” of Israel’s faith, scriptures and scholarship. We are discovering that there is scarcely a single New Testament subject that cannot be amplified, deepened, or balanced by a Hebraic perspective. As disciples of Yeshua, we are deeply indebted to Israel.

At the root of this renewal of the Church stands a Jewish man—Jesus of Nazareth. This itinerant first-century teacher with a keen sense of “high self-awareness”<sup>105</sup> surely is the cornerstone of the living temple God continues to build in our time. It is imperative and in every way advantageous therefore that we understand Yeshua—his person and his work, his mission and his message—in the full frame of his original Jewish matrix.

So compelling is his full humanity when seen in its Jewish setting that some people, in their explorations of their Jewish roots, have come to question the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God. Some even have dismissed this central Christian claim on the grounds that it is “Hellenistic” and not authentically “Hebraic.” They charge that an alien, Greco-Roman accretion was added to the authentic Jewish faith Jesus passed on to his apostles and disciples. Is this true?

In a 20-year journey as part of what I would call the Hebraic Renewal community, I too have wrestled with this most pivotal of claims: that Yeshua was fully man and yet fully God-in-man reconciling the world to himself. In other words, that the New Testament claim of the one God as Father-Son-Holy Spirit does not violate (but amplifies) the central tenet of the Hebrew Scriptures and the core of Judaism’s ethical monotheism—the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4. Whatever our views regarding the status of Jesus as the Son of God, all can

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<sup>104</sup> This article is adapted from a four-part lecture series delivered at Christ Church, Jerusalem, in November, 2002, at the invitation of Shores Ministries and the Alexander College. Tapes of the lectures, “*One God and One Lord – Considerations Regarding the Unity of the Godhead and the Deity of Jesus,*” are available from Christian Friends of Israel in Jerusalem or CJS at [www.jcstudies.com](http://www.jcstudies.com).

<sup>105</sup> *Jesus* by David Flusser (Magness Press;1997), 118.

agree that “the LORD is one (*ehad*)” must be the starting point in our confession of faith, as well as the anchor to which we always return.

### Multiple Meanings of *Ehad*

At least twice daily, morning and evening, a faithful Jew engages in the *K'riat Sh'ma* – the recitation of the Shema<sup>106</sup> – with its regal opening: “Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one.”<sup>107</sup> In this article we will look at three dimensions of the word *ehad* (“one”) and relate them to how the first, Jewish church handled the issue of Jesus’ divinity<sup>108</sup> within the boundaries of exclusive monotheism.

### The Uniqueness of *Ehad*

When Israel affirms the Shema it declares that Y/H/W/H,<sup>109</sup> and he alone, is God. Said another way, YHWH is utterly unique because he alone is altogether holy. “Who is like you among the gods, O LORD? Who is like you, majestic in holiness (*ne'dar ba-kodesh*)?”<sup>110</sup> In fact, there are no other gods (though many are pretenders to the Throne). Adonai alone is the supreme God, the Most High, the one, true, and only Elohim.

The *ehad* in the Shema, therefore, speaks of God’s holiness, which is related to his very being or ontological essence. *Kadosh* has an array of implications, applications and manifestations, but at root it refers to the eternal One as marked off, set apart and distinguished from all else that exists—precisely because he is the source of existence itself. *Kodesh* or holiness speaks of his

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<sup>106</sup> Three sections of scripture are incorporated into the *K'riat Sh'ma*: Deut 6.4-9; 11:13-21; and Num 15:37-41. In the Second Temple period, the Ten Words (Commandments) accompanied the recitation, and from the time of the Maccabees, benedictions preceded and followed it.

<sup>107</sup> Four translations of this verse are possible from the Hebrew because of the implied but unexpressed verb, “is”: 1) the LORD *is* our God, the LORD *is* one; 2) the LORD our God, the LORD *is* one; 3) the LORD our God *is* one LORD; 4) the LORD *is* our God, the LORD alone.

<sup>108</sup> At least since the time of Arius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, some would distinguish between the “divinity” of the Son (i.e., he is of a *similar* substance to the Father) and the “deity” of the Son (i.e., he is of the *same* substance as the Father). In this article, however, the more common English usage will apply – viz., that the two terms essentially are synonymous.

<sup>109</sup> The four-letter proper name spoken to Moses in Exod 3.15, *Yud/Heh/Vav/Heh*, is read as *Adonai* in the Hebrew Scriptures, indicated by *LORD* (all caps) in English Bibles, spoken as *HASHEM* by contemporary religious Jews, and rendered as *Yahweh* in scholarly literature. We write it as YHWH so as not to offend Jewish sensibilities, but at the same time to emphasize that it is a proper name with powerful implications, not merely a title, like “Lord”.

<sup>110</sup> Exod 15:11

radical transcendence and his unrivaled otherness. He is wholly “other than” all that we can conceive or conjecture. He is immeasurable, incomparable and indivisible.

Philosophers have conjectured the Divine to be the “Ground of Being,” the “Unmoved Mover,” or the “First Cause.” Mystical medieval Judaism speaks of the *Ein Sof*, the unbounded infinity of existence. But the God of the Shema is personal, with a name above every other name, YHWH.<sup>111</sup> He is the self-existent one that causes all else to exist, and he will be there for his people. All that was, is, or will be has its being from, through, and ultimately for him. He is the One.

The ultimate doxological predicate, therefore, is to declare that YHWH is holy. First and finally, the truth of his existence and essence is that the God of Israel is “Holy, Holy, Holy!” No higher truth can be told, no deeper affirmation can be attested. The angelic hosts, with fervent intention and unflagging enthusiasm, are compelled to proclaim perpetually in antiphonal affirmation: “*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh! Adonai Tz’vaot!*”<sup>112</sup> No other attribute of YHWH is emphasized in such a three-fold repetition of praise and adoration. Nowhere, for instance, does the Scripture declare the Lord to be “gracious, gracious, gracious” or “omnipotent, omnipotent, omnipotent.” Only “kadosh” is accorded this triple Hebraic intensification. Why? Because holiness is not just one of God’s many and glorious attributes. “*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*” signs the very ground and the grandeur of his being, the very mystery of who he is, in and of himself.

Only with HaShem is holiness intrinsic. For everything or anyone else, holiness is derivative. Whether it be in space, time or people, holiness comes only in relationship with the Holy One of Israel, by being set apart from the common for his exclusive purposes, privileges and presence. Holiness in God’s people requires sanctity or separation from sin and impurity, because they are to reflect the One in whom there is no darkness or turning, just the effulgence of truth and light.

Because YHWH is holy, his essence is impenetrable and his name, ineffable. Apart from the Almighty’s self-disclosure, we could only speculate about his “divine nature and eternal power.”<sup>113</sup> We might believe in Elohim’s existence, but apart from his self-disclosure in word and deed we would never come to know the character of YHWH as good and abounding in loving kindness, as faithful and righteous, as loving, merciful and forgiving.

The inner being or essence of God remains impenetrable ultimately. He is too radically “kadosh” for us to see his unguarded face, his unbounded infinity,

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<sup>111</sup> The Tetragrammaton (four letters) of Exod 3:15 may be an abbreviated reference to the longer “*eh’yeh asher eh’yeh*” (“I AM WHO I AM”) of 3:14. A better translation might be, “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.”

<sup>112</sup> Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8

<sup>113</sup> Rom 1:20 provides a succinct definition of *Elohim*.

and not be consumed in the blaze of his holiness. Moses, a friend of God, asked to see YHWH's face—i.e., to behold God's *essence*. But God instead displayed his *character*: "I myself will make all my goodness pass before you."<sup>114</sup> The Holy One dwells in unapproachable light. His character however is fully displayed in his declarations and documented in his deeds. We know who he is and what he has done by his words and his wondrous acts. In his love and covenant faithfulness, the LORD causes his Name to dwell near us. But in his infinite being, the One who is-was-will be, forever remains "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh.*"

The "*ehad*" of Israel's Shema reminds us of this. When we affirm it, we confess that YHWH is and always will be absolutely, wholly unique.

### **The Exclusiveness of *Ehad***

Secondly, when Israel affirms the Shema it pledges its exclusive allegiance to YHWH. More than a declaration of faith, the Shema is a summons to Israel's faithfulness. It is a call to worship/serve<sup>115</sup> the God of Israel and him alone. The justification for the LORD's exclusive demands on Israel is two-fold: *who* he is, and *what* he has done.

Adonai is the one, true and only Elohim. All creation comes from him, and nothing ever was, is or will be apart from him. YHWH is utterly uncommon, wholly unique, and quintessentially holy. Some scholars argue that Moses and the Torah held to a "modified monotheism"—believing that there were many gods, but that YHWH was the supreme one. He was the "Most High God." In other words, YHWH not only was the *Elohim* of Israel; he was the *Elohei HaElohim*, the God of all gods.<sup>116</sup> Every plague directed against the deities of Egypt, including the revered Sun god, demonstrated that Israel's God was supreme. In this view, the plural intensification of the noun, *Elohim*, hints that YHWH is the most powerful of all the powerful ones. He alone is *Ha-El Ha-Gadol, Ha-Gibbor, v'Ha-Nora*—the Great, the Mighty and the Awesome God.<sup>117</sup>

The classic and exclusive monotheism of Judaism—where *ehad* means one and only one—comes to its highest expression in the later portions of Isaiah, especially chapters 43-45. "Other gods" are but idols. Through prophetic voice, Adonai explicitly expresses his exclusive status as God and the prerogatives attendant thereto, in language like: "You are my witnesses, declares the LORD ... that I am he."<sup>118</sup> Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after

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<sup>114</sup> Exod 33:19-23

<sup>115</sup> In Hebrew, *avodah* is used with reference both to the *worship* of YHWH and to the priestly *service* rendered to him.

<sup>116</sup> Deut 10:17

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Not coincidentally, the seven occurrences of the "I am he" (*ani hu'*) declarations by YHWH in Isaiah—emphasizing exclusive monotheism—are paralleled in the seven "I am (he)" (*ego eimi*) declarations of Yeshua recorded in the Fourth Gospel.

me.”<sup>119</sup> Or, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no God.”<sup>120</sup> Or, “There is no other god besides me ... for I am God, and there is no other ... To me every knee shall bow and every tongue swear allegiance.”<sup>121</sup>

In its original setting, the focus of Deuteronomy 6:4 was not monotheism but *monolatry* (the worship of the One God).<sup>122</sup> In other words, the Shema of Moses was not so much a theological decree as a spiritual demand—for Israel’s exclusive allegiance and obedience to YHWH. The redeemed of the LORD were to love, fear, serve and obey “the LORD alone.”<sup>123</sup> It is not just *who* God is that gives him the right to command exclusive fidelity. It is *what* YHWH has done on Israel’s behalf. He abounds in covenant faithfulness, and his righteous acts redeem, deliver, and save Israel, to whom he then imparts the gift of Torah, written and conveyed by his Spirit. When the children of Israel declare that, “God is One” and commit their lives to his service, they take upon themselves the “yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>124</sup> The overriding issue then becomes the obedience of faith. The Shema calls for the *tzid’kot Adonai* – the righteous, saving deeds of the LORD – to be reciprocated in Israel’s faithful, just actions.

Yes, Israel indeed holds to an exalted view of ethical monotheism, a belief declared daily in the recitation of the Shema. But equally important is the fact that their exclusive monotheism is expressed not abstractly but in actions, in liturgy and loyalty to YHWH. Conduct is at the core of Israel’s creed, and its most telling expression is evident in how they walk and whom they worship.<sup>125</sup>

The “*ehad*” of Israel’s Shema reminds us of this. When we affirm it, we confess that YHWH is truly God, and him alone shall we worship and serve. To

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<sup>119</sup> Isa 43:10-11.

<sup>120</sup> Isa 45:5.

<sup>121</sup> Isa 43:21, 22, 23.

<sup>122</sup> The respected Jewish scholar, Moshe Weinfeld, notes that one cannot prove monotheism from Deut 6.4 alone. It is a summons to worship YHWH exclusively. *Deuteronomy 1-11, Anchor Bible Commentary* (Doubleday; 1991), pp. 349-351.

<sup>123</sup> See Deut 6:4 in the Jewish Publication Society’s *Tanakh*. The translation of *ADONAI ehad* as “the LORD alone” has been followed by other more recent Jewish translations as well. A parallel use of *ehad* is found in Zech 14:9: “... there will be one LORD, and his name the only name” (NIV) – *Adonai ehad u’shmo ehad*.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *BT Berachot 13a-14b*. In rabbinic thinking, when one says, with intention, Deut 6:4-9, one takes on the “yoke of the kingdom”; and 11:13-21, the “yoke of the commandments.”

<sup>125</sup> Not until the Rambam (Moses Maimonides) in the Middle Ages was a systematic Jewish theology of ethical monotheism composed. In truth Judaism is not so much a theology as a “theonomy” (*theos + nomos*), based not on man’s speculation about God, but upon God’s revelation of himself in the Torah (Law) and Israel’s covenant faithfulness to him. It is not surprising, therefore, that practical issues of *halakhah*, not abstract speculations about metaphysics, characterized the orientation of Israel’s ancient sages, including Yeshua.

compromise on these claims of exclusivity is to worship amiss and to become bent towards idolatry.

### The Unity of *Ehad*

Third, when Israel affirms the Shema it acknowledges the indivisible unity of YHWH. The Hebrew word *ehad* speaks of unity not singularity. The one and only God is a unity of all that he is-was-will be, of all his attributes, actions and appearances. Though he has many names, there are not many gods. The plural noun, Elohim, always takes a singular verb in the Hebrew when referring to the God of Israel. God's majesties are many and his manifestations manifold, but in himself he is indivisibly One.

In the Shema itself, two names of God are spoken, *Elohim* and *Adonai*. *Elohim* points to the creative power and righteous judgments of God; *Adonai* stresses his mercy and covenant faithfulness, say the rabbis. But these are not two gods—not two powers in heaven—they are different aspects of the one God.<sup>126</sup> This tension is affirmed in Jewish prayers that typically address God as *Avinu*, *Malkeinu* ("our Father, our King")—two foundational aspects of the divine unity-in-plurality. This is not dualism of any sort, but a biblically balanced mindset that persistently affirms a dynamic dialectic within the *ah'dut* or unity of the eternal One.

The textual revelation of *ehad* as oneness-in-unity is found from the very beginning of the Torah, in Genesis 1.5: "*vay'hi erev, vay'hi voker, yom ehad*" ("And it was evening, and it was morning, day one.") This first occurrence of *ehad* in the Bible unites two parts of a day, evening and morning, into one/*ehad*. No less telling is the use of *ehad* with reference to *adam* or humankind in Genesis 2:4. When the male and the female unite as husband and wife, "*v'hayu l'vasar ehad*"—"they shall become one flesh (body)." Two persons, equal but distinct, become inseparably joined together as one/*ehad*. In another instance, looking toward the end of all things, the prophet Ezekiel foresees a time when the children of Israel will be fully united, when the two "sticks" of Judah and Ephraim are joined in God's hand to become one/*ehad*.<sup>127</sup>

That *ehad* is used this way in the biblical text is important. *Ehad* points to unity, not singularity (*yahid*), and the implications of that bear profoundly upon the nature and character of the God of Israel. Consider, for example, the

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<sup>126</sup> The way many Christians read the Hebrew Scriptures, one would think that there are two gods—the OT God of law and the NT God of love; the stern Judge, Jehovah, and the gracious Father, Abba, of Jesus Christ. This unbiblical dichotomy has influenced Christianity since the earliest centuries, especially under Church leaders like the Gnostic, Marcion. See *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* by Marvin R. Wilson (Eerdmans; 1989), pp. 108-110, for a discussion of "neo-Marcionism" in our churches today.

<sup>127</sup> They become *eitz ehad*, one stick. Ezek 37:17, 19

creation of humankind (*adam*), made in the image of God. Why does God make one person, then from the one make two (*Adam v'Havvah*), in order that the two shall become one? If "one" is the starting point, how can it also be the goal? Because man alone is *yahid*, a singularity, but when the two become *ehad*, a unity is achieved that far surpasses singularity. From the one, God forms two-that-become-one because he wants humankind to learn how to love. In singularity only self-love is possible; to love truly it takes an "other." In learning how to love one's corresponding other, one learns how to love God.

Love is the *telos* (end/goal) of the Torah, as emphasized in the "Great Commandment,"<sup>128</sup> precisely because YHWH is love in his very being.<sup>129</sup> But this is not true of all gods. Consider, by contrast, the god of Islam. He is "one" in splendid singularity. In direct rebuff to Christian claims about God, Koranic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock (one of the first Muslim religious structures built outside Arabia) declare that Allah: "begets no son and has no partner"; "he is God, one, eternal"; "he does not beget, nor is he begotten, and he has no peer."

Whereas the Torah extols YHWH as the one who abounds in loving kindness (a term of covenantal partnership), the Koran exalts Allah as "the compassionate and merciful" (actions that a superior being extends toward an inferior one). The emphases are significant. Unlike the God of the Bible, Allah is not intrinsically a god of love, nor can he be, according to some Islamic scholars. To love another would bring contingency, and therefore, weakness into the godhead; but Allah is beyond all contingencies and any limitations. The point is this: I do not wish to overdraw these contrasts, for there are similarities as well. I am simply noting that the severe monotheism of Islam differs from the unified monotheism of Judaism and Christianity in a way parallel to the differences between *yahid* (singular "one") and *ehad* ("one" of unity). The God of the Bible has an inner harmony and indivisible unity of all that he does and is. In his oneness, there is plurality-in-unity – a unity that must not be broken, a plurality that must not be diminished. Unlike the uniformity of monism, biblical monotheism is irreducibly relational and characterized at its core by love.

The *ehad* of Israel's Shema reminds us of this. When we affirm it, we confess that YHWH is incomparably unique and utter holy; he is the one, true God alone that we shall worship and serve. The LORD calls for our exclusive loyalty and undivided love because he is faithful to his covenant and abounds in kindness toward his beloved. He is incomparable, insistent, and indivisible. The Shema is the supreme affirmation of God's unity.

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<sup>128</sup> Matt 22:36, 38

<sup>129</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16



## ***Ehad*, Jesus & the Early Jewish Church**

What might these multiple dimensions of *ehad* in the Shema mean for our understanding of the divinity of Jesus? The implications and applications are many indeed. Given the purpose and limits of this article, however, we will close with some hints, suggestions and recommendations that may be catalytic to our considerations.

It is clear is that Jesus,<sup>130</sup> Paul,<sup>131</sup> and the early Jewish church operated fully within the exclusive monotheism of Second Temple Judaism. It is equally clear, in the light of the sources available to us today, that a well-worn assumption entrenched since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century must be jettisoned. It is almost axiomatic in Jewish and liberal Christian scholarship that the “god-man” view of Jesus came into the church much later, under the corrupting influences of Hellenism. A common corollary is that this high Christology came into the Jesus movement through the Hellenized Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus. In other words, the apostle Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity as we know it.

Three points: 1) To the contrary, Hellenism cannot sustain the New Testament view of the incarnation—of a divine being or supernatural agent, yes, but of the incarnation of the one God, no; of a “god-man” yes, but of “God-in-man,” no. 2) A reading of the (early) Synoptic gospels, through the lenses of the Hebraic first-century mind and milieu supports, not diminishes, the evidence for Yeshua’s own high self-awareness and Messianic identity. 3) The New Testament letters provide impressive evidence that the earliest (Jewish) church had the highest Christology. It is not centuries later that these high views of the Messiah and the unity of Father-Son ‘infiltrate’ the Church through the Patristic Fathers; they are voiced, in classic Jewish expression, at the earliest stratum of Church worship. The exalted view of Jesus as the Son of God was an understanding and a tradition that the Jewish apostle to the gentiles, Paul, drew upon but did not create.

When the first believers in Yeshua assembled as the church, their worship typically included “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”<sup>132</sup> Many of these hymn-like compositions and creedal-like confessions are preserved within the Pauline corpus and have been identified by textual scholars. Philippians 2:5-11 is perhaps the best-known example.<sup>133</sup> These liturgical expressions date to the first two decades after the resurrection of Jesus, and they tell us much about the mindset of the early church regarding the divinity of Jesus.

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<sup>130</sup> E.g., John 17:3

<sup>131</sup> E.g., 1 Cor 8:4

<sup>132</sup> Eph 5:19; Col 3:16

<sup>133</sup> Other examples might include: Col 1:15-20 as a hymn; Rom 1:3-4 and 10:9-10 as creedal formulations; and Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6, and 1 Cor 16:22 as fragments of early church prayers. Paul would have learned these while part of the church (for more than a decade) before being sent on apostolic mission to the Gentiles.

While fully affirming the *ehad* of the Shema, the first-generation Jewish believers unequivocally experience and venerate the risen Lord Jesus as the Son of God. Almost programmatically they unite him in their worship of YHWH, as inseparable from God and in unprecedented ways, as identified with him. In hymns they celebrate the work and person of Messiah, and in prayers they address the Lord Jesus directly. They “call upon” the name of Yeshua as well as YHWH, including being baptized into his name; they “confess” that “Jesus is Lord” and commemorate a covenant meal in his honor.<sup>134</sup> These liturgical acts all go beyond the bounds of anything previously witnessed in Israel’s worship.

How do they explain theologically this devotion to a man and their veneration of him with God? They don’t—to the frustration of our western minds! These Jewish believers expressed their monotheism in the same manner Israel had done from the beginning—in their worship. Not abstractly with theological speculations, but with actions demonstrating loyalty, veneration and service; not with propositional truths so much as with liturgical exclamations. For them the relationship of Jesus and God focused more on *identity* than *divinity*, and the truth was framed in textual associations more than theological affirmations. For example, scriptures that apply to YHWH are now, in the light of the resurrection, applied to the Lord Jesus. The exclusive prerogatives of Adonai, such as creation and kingship, are now extended to Jesus—not as some external, albeit divine agent, but as someone within the very identity and oneness of God himself. This is a crucial point. This veneration of Yeshua with and connected to YHWH is permissible *only if he in some way is within the ehad of God*. Otherwise such attributions of scriptures, functions, authority, power, and identity to him that apply exclusively to the God of Israel would violate the Shema’s monotheism.

If in any way Jesus as the Son is outside the sphere of God’s *ehad*—whether as a godly man “adopted” by God and elevated to the highest place or as a supernatural, “divine agent,” maybe even the first-born of all creation, come down from heaven as a man—in either case Yeshua the Son remains outside the *ehad* of God and compromises his uniqueness, exclusiveness and indivisible unity. Quite simply, within a Jewish frame of reference, the risen Lord Jesus can be worshipped with HASHEM only if in some ontological sense he operates within the oneness of God, i.e., is divine. YHWH shares his glory with no one; worship/service is reserved exclusively for him alone.

Only in this light can we fully appreciate—and account for—the first church co-opting one of the strongest statements of exclusive monotheism in all the Tanakh, Isaiah 45:23, and applying it verbatim (from the LXX) to Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11, an early hymn of exaltation. But note the concluding words,

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<sup>134</sup> For a discussion of the devotion to Jesus in the context of Jewish monotheism, see L.W. Hurtado’s *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Eerdmans; 2003).

which are typically Jewish in their tension-yet-balance: “Jesus the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Perhaps the most direct and dramatic illustration of the early church’s amplified monotheism is to be found in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. First, Paul affirms the classic Jewish view by referencing the Shema: “We know that there is no God but one.” Then he enlarges that foundational truth by declaring, “Yet for us, there is but one God, the Father ... and one Lord, Jesus the Messiah ...” Here, the apostle takes the three key words from the Septuagintal rendering of Deuteronomy 6:4—God (*Theos*), Lord (*Kyrios*), and One (*Eis*)—and applies “God” to the Father, “Lord” to the Son, and “One” to both! This New Testament magnification of the Shema is possible within the multiple dimensions of *ehad*, but permitted only if the Yeshua is *within* the sphere of YHWH’s unity-in-plurality.

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When it comes to the *ah’dut* or unity of the *ehad* of God, we stand at the foothills of a mountain range of revelation. We can never “explain” the inner reality of God’s essence, anymore than the infinite can be circumscribed within the finite. We can try, however, to “define” it as rationally and faithfully as the witness of Scripture permits. A discerning study of the church fathers will be helpful in this regard.<sup>135</sup> Attempts by some within the Jewish roots movement to reformulate the unity of the Godhead in less “Hellenistic” and more “Hebraic” categories can be problematic.<sup>136</sup> Unwittingly they may recapitulate ancient heresies, just clothing them in Hebraic dress. In defense of the Shema they may be attracted to revived versions of Adoptionism, Modalism or even Arianism. But all these “explanations” were rejected by the Church Fathers for good reasons—because each in its own way fails to do justice to the person of Jesus of Nazareth revealed in the Scriptures, and/or compromises the work of the cross.

In view of the uniqueness, the exclusiveness, and the unity of the *ehad* of YHWH declared in Israel’s Shema—the Torah’s supreme affirmation of ethical

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<sup>135</sup> *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* by Harold O.J. Brown (Hendrickson; 1984) is a comprehensive but popular treatment of the subject

<sup>136</sup> The contrast between Hellenic vs. Hebraic thinking can be overdrawn, so that a useful distinction becomes a simplistic dichotomy. True, when Hellenism inappropriately intruded upon Jewish worship/service of the One and Only God it was to be resisted, even at the sake of one’s own life if necessary—as with the Maccabees. But in diverse ways, the culture, life and thought of Israel were influenced positively and edified by Hellenism. See Lee I. Levine’s *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (University of Washington Press; 1998). The Sages concluded that it was good for Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem—i.e., for Greek to take residence within a Semitic setting (cf. *BT Megilah 9a,b*). Many rabbinic rules for interpreting Scripture have antecedents in Greek logic, for example, and the Septuagint, for all its problems, was enormously important for Jewish life and thought in the ancient world, including the NT community.

monotheism—and in the light of the astonishing life, atoning death, and spirit-empowered resurrection of Yeshua, let us never settle for flawed “explanations.” Let us ask for wonder. And let us worship. With one voice and united hearts, let us join with the first Jewish church that confidently exclaimed, “Jesus the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!”

# The Christology of Matthew's Gospel and the Trinitarian Baptismal Formula

Akiva Cohen

In the following article, I will not attempt to treat our subject comprehensively, that has already been done in many studies and commentaries (e.g., R.T. France, pp. 279-312, 1989; s.v. "Matthew, Gospel of," in ABD, 1992; s.v. "Matthew, Gospel of," in DJG, 1992). Our purpose rather—in this limited study—will be to examine the inchoate Trinitarian formulation at the conclusion of the Gospel according to Matthew in terms of its textual reliability and its theological consistency with the rest of the Gospel.

Briefly, Matthew's Christology has been traditionally viewed under the rubric of a titular method. Here we find "Christ," "Lord," "Son of Man," "Son of David" and "Son of God." France is correct in noting that Matthew's Christological titles point us toward an important aspect of Matthew's understanding of Jesus, but cannot individually, or even collectively, do justice to articulate who Jesus is for Matthew. France turns to another approach—other than the titular one—to bring to light Matthew's understanding of the person of Jesus. One way is a prophetic construct, "the Servant of Yahweh," and the second is a poetic construct, "Wisdom."

France ends his study on Matthew's Christology by citing an expression of E. Schweizer (1971) that candidly acknowledges that Jesus is, "The man who fits no formula." France points to some of the central aspects of Matthew's portrait of Jesus as contributing to the fact that Jesus is accorded divine honor. This can be referred to as more of a "functional approach, as opposed to the "titular" one. These aspects are respectively (this is only a selection), Jesus' authority, miracles, supernatural knowledge, proclamation of forgiveness of sins, offering rest under the yoke of his own person, demand for total allegiance of his followers, declaration that men's destinies rest on their relationship to him, and (1:23) the depiction of Jesus as "God with us."

Another good example that seeks to be more comprehensive than a purely "titular" approach to Matthew's Christology, is that of S. McKnight (DJG, 1992). Using a synthesis of both "titular" and "functional" aspects of Matthew's Christology, McKnight arrives at the following summary: "Jesus is God's

Messiah who fulfills OT promise, reveals God's will and inaugurates the kingdom of heaven through his public ministry, passion and resurrection, and consequently, reigns over the new people of God."

Matthew's Christology has also been the subject of a study from the context of intra-mural polemic, by the eminent Matthean scholar Graham N. Stanton (1992). Although this aspect is not the focus of our study, it will nonetheless be profitable to briefly summarize his main points before moving ahead to our particular focus.

Stanton begins his article by noting the context of Matthew's *Sitz im Leben* which he describes as having "recently parted company painfully with Judaism" (p. 99). Although space will not permit us to interact in any meaningful way with Stanton's excellent article, a comment here is important. I find Stanton's description of Matthew's community as having "parted ... with Judaism," as highly anachronistic. If one were to have had occasion to have asked the editor/redactor of this Gospel, "Since you have recently parted ways with Judaism, how would you now describe the religion with which you are now identified?," one can only surmise the perplexed expression with which the author would have responded. Surely "Matthew" would not have been aware that there was another option other than "Judaism" to which he could have changed his allegiance. Again, I do not have time to belabor this argument and it has already been masterfully articulated by the recently deceased Matthean scholar, Anthony Saldarini, to whom Matthean scholars will remain in debt for his lasting contribution (Saldarini, 1994).

Returning to Stanton's article, he notes that whereas the controversy over the sonship of Jesus in John's Gospel is found in the context of the heated polemic between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, in Matthew's Gospel, although the title of "Son of God" is one of the most important features of Matthew's Christology (Kingsbury, 1975), "it is rarely opposed by the Jewish leaders" (p. 99). In spite of this fact, Stanton maintains that Matthew is indeed engaged in countering hostile allegations leveled against Jesus. Jesus' opponents viewed him as a magician and a deceiver of Israel. The most sustained opposition towards a Christological title by the Jewish leaders in Matthew's Gospel emerges from four redactional passages that acknowledge Jesus as the "Son of David."

Concerning Jesus as a "magician and a deceiver," Stanton notes the double witness of this accusation; in Matthew, and in early Christian and Jewish writings (p. 101). Concerning hostility to Jesus as the "Son of David," Stanton notes four redactional passages: Matthew 2:3; 9:27-28; 12:23; 21:9, 15. The first passage (2:3) illustrates the misconstrued threat of Jesus as the Davidic King, who is in reality a harmless child. In the second passage (9:27-28), Jesus is addressed by two blind men as "the Son of David" and it is that title that then

elicits the accusation by the Pharisees that Jesus “casts out demons by the prince of demons” in 9:34.

In the third passage (21:9, 15), Matthew introduces a redactional addition of the title “Son of David” in the mouth of the crowds as they address Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, and in the mouth of the children in the Temple who rejoice at Jesus’ healings. This “double confession” sets off a series of bitter disputes between Jesus and his religious opponents. These Matthean redactional passages that stress the Davidic Messianism of Jesus, are (as rightly interpreted by Stanton) reflections of the claims and counter-claims of Matthew’s community and the wider Jewish community of his day.

The balance of Stanton’s article argues for an early form of the “two parousia” schema that lies behind Matthew’s portrayal of the Davidic Messianism of Jesus. Whereas the Davidic Messianism of Jesus stresses his humble earthly ministry, the title “Son of Man” relates to the glorious coming of the exalted judge of all nations.

Having briefly surveyed the general academic approach to Matthew’s Christology, we will now turn our attention to the inchoate Trinitarian formula at the end of Matthew’s Gospel; 28:18-20. These verses are attested in virtually every single extant manuscript and are thus, simply not an issue in New Testament textual criticism of Matthew’s Gospel. However, while reading an article by the late Israeli New Testament Scholar, David Flusser, it was brought to my attention that he did not see these verses as original (Flusser, 1979 [Hebrew]). Flusser notes that as early as 1901, F.C. Conybeare noted that the command of Jesus to baptize and the Trinitarian formula in the baptism were missing in quotes that Eusebius cited before the Council of Nicea (Conybeare, 1901). Conybeare likewise noted that in Eusebius’s writings after the council he quotes the baptismal formula as we have it in our canonical versions.

Flusser noted that Eusebius’s view of the Trinity was known to be suspect, as a further corroboration of the above claim of Conybeare (Kretschmar, 1956). Flusser notes that the earliest evidence of the Trinitarian formula is the middle of the second century. He maintains there is absolutely no solid basis to view the Didache 7:1 as dependent upon Matthew.

According to Flusser Eusebius’s pre-Nicean version of Matthew 28:19-20 was “Go and instruct all peoples in my name, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Flusser opines that Eusebius found this version of Matthew’s closing verses in a manuscript from the famous library at Caesarea. Flusser infers that copyists would have ignored the shorter pre-Nicean version preferring the longer version that was more in line with the then accepted church view of the Trinity.

Flusser finds further corroboration for his theory here from an article by Hans Kosmala (1965) who saw the importance of Eusebius’s pre-Nicean version of Matthew. Kosmala cites Conybeare’s article, noting that he lists no less than

17 Eusebian attestations of the reading “in my name” excluding the words “Baptizing ... Spirit.” As Flusser mentions, all these citations that exclude the Trinitarian formula are pre-Nicean. There are three passages in Eusebius in which the Trinitarian formula is included, but all three of these belong to the last period of Eusebius’s literary activity after the council of Nicea. Since this would make Eusebius our only witness to this shorter version—with perhaps a couple of exceptions—his testimony is therefore normally rejected by scholars although they cannot disprove it. Among other difficulties with the canonical version, Kosmala notes that scholars acknowledge the awkwardness of the sequence of the participles “baptizing” and “teaching,” for the order should be the opposite; teaching should precede the baptism.

While Kosmala acknowledges that the Trinitarian formula was resident in the New Testament corpus *in nuce* (e.g., 2 Cor 13:14), it was not yet expressed in a baptismal formula. Kosmala notes, what is clearly obvious to New Testament scholars—that the baptismal evidence of the New Testament itself is only that of a baptism in Jesus’ name. Furthermore, it is the widely recognized suitability of Matthew’s Gospel for liturgical purposes that is seen as the reason for the inclusion of the Trinitarian formula within the baptismal conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel. It is undeniable that the Trinitarian baptismal formula is in tension with the other synoptic Gospel accounts.

Although of no probative value, I note for interest’s sake Matthew’s closing verses from the late 14th century Hebrew version of Matthew’s Gospel as preserved in Shem-Tov ben-Isaac ben-Shaprut’s polemical work, *Even Bohan*: “Jesus drew near to them and said to them: To me has been given all power in heaven and earth. Go and (teach) them to carry out all things which I have commanded you forever” (Howard, 1995).

What, then, are the Christological implications of the claims of Conybeare, Kosmala and Flusser, in their argument for the shorter non-Trinitarian baptismal formula as reflected in Eusebius’ pre-Nicean quotations of Matthew’s ending? Next to nothing. As we very briefly indicated above in our survey of traditional scholastic approaches to Matthew’s Christology, there is ample theological data in Matthew’s Gospel that argues in the direction of divine status for Jesus.

Perhaps there is substance to Kosmala’s claim that the transition from a baptism in Jesus’ name to one in the name of the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” evinces a need to explain to Greek hearers what would have been understood by Jewish ones. Namely, that for Jewish followers of Jesus, that God is the Creator and that his Holy Spirit emanates from him were self-evident. Now that the name of the Messiah was known, and with the delay of the *parousia*, there was a need to incorporate that name into the revelation of the Godhead as gentiles were admitted into the Church through the rite of baptism.



Unless a manuscript or fragment of Matthew's closing verses surfaces to confirm Flusser's hypothetical alternative (ante-Nicean) reading, scholars are correct to see the Trinitarian baptismal formula as the uncontested canonical form. Perhaps the "shorter" reading that Flusser proposed could have been a pre-canonical one that circulated for a period and then disappeared without leaving any manuscript trace—other than perhaps a secondary attestation in Eusebius' writings.

We could do no better here than follow Conybeare and Kosmala (pp. 146-47), in giving Eusebius' own commentary on the ending of Matthew's Gospel as preserved only in the Syriac version of in his *Theoph.* 5, 46.

*But he who used nothing human or mortal, see how in truth he again conceded the oracle of God, in the word which he spoke to his disciples, the weak ones, saying, Go ye and make disciples of all peoples . . . These things then the disciples of our saviour would either have said or thought; so by a simple addition of a word, he resolved the sum of those things of which they doubted, the sum of them he committed to them in that he said, ye conquer in my name. For it was not that he ordered them simply and without discriminating, to go and make disciples of all the peoples, but with the important addition, that he said in my name. For because of the power of his name did all this come about, even as the Apostle said, God has given him a name more excellent than all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, which is in heaven and in earth and under the earth . . . "*

The resultant translation of Eusebius' version of Matthew's closing verses gives us the following four balanced and rhythmic lines,

*All power is given unto me in heaven and earth  
Go and make all nations disciples in my name,  
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.  
And behold, I am with you all the days till the consummation of the aeon.*

As we noted above, regardless of the original form of these verses—and Flusser and his 20th century predecessors have given us pause to consider the Eusebian version—we are left with a divine Messiah who is "with us" until the end of the age. The entire Gospel of Matthew is, in essence, a Midrash of how God is "with us" in the person of Jesus. All the richness of who Jesus is, is bracketed in sort of inclusio, between one of the names given to him at his birth, Immanuel—God with us—and his promised abiding presence with us that seals the Gospel's end.

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# Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and the Modern Yeshua-Movement: Some Comparisons

Gershon Nerel

The first pioneering translation into modern Hebrew of the renowned *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea (c.260-c.340 AD), was released spring 2001.<sup>137</sup> This book is, indeed, a significant landmark for both professional historians and students, as well as for local believers and inquirers. Scholars and “laypeople” are now equipped with wide-open access to the primary source that portrays the comprehensive history of the early church. This doorway to the primal chronicles of the Church, following directly the *Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament, is invaluable. No longer can any Israeli thinker assume that the narrative of the early *Kehila*, the primitive followers of Yeshua, ends in the book of *Revelation*.

Eusebius' historiography demonstrates the gradual triumph of Christianity against her opponents—Paganism and Judaism—and how the “Church of the Circumcision” was transformed into the “Church of the Uncircumcision.” All this occurred within three intensive centuries of painful martyrdom, diverse sects and dissident heretics. The fast growth of the churches took place within all walks of society around the Roman Empire.

The appearance of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (*EH*) in modern Hebrew removes a serious linguistic barrier for those Israelis dependent on that language. With the elimination of this obstacle, Eusebius' drama of the early church is now presented to the Hebrew reader with great transparency.

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<sup>137</sup> Eusebius, Bishop Caesarea, *Toledot Haknessia* (History of the Church), NCMI/Caspari Center, Printed by Akademon, Jerusalem 2001. Hard cover. XXX + 373 pp.

## “Hebraic Eusebius”—Relevant for Today

The initiators of the “Eusebius Project,” which lasted for about seven years, were Dr. Ray Pritz and the *Caspari Center* of Jerusalem.<sup>138</sup> The translator, Rimona Frank, skillfully turned the ancient text into idiomatic and fluent Hebrew, and Pritz added some annotations within the footnotes. The translation into Hebrew was carried out from an English text, based upon the versions of K. Lake (vol. 1) and J.E.L.Oulton (vol. 2) in the series of the *Loeb Classical Library* (1926-'32), and not from the original Greek. However, the Hebrew rendering carefully consulted the Greek in specific passages where the Loeb text is obscure. In general, the newly born “Hebraic Eusebius” closely follows the original manuscript, as noted by Dr. Oded Irshai of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>139</sup>

Dr. Aryeh Kofsky of Jerusalem and of the Haifa University, an expert on Eusebius,<sup>140</sup> contributed an extensive and erudite introduction. His preface brings the reader to the most updated research on the “Father of Church History.” Kofsky’s synthesis rightly points to the fact that Eusebius, functioning simultaneously as a historian, a theologian and a geographer, was one of the greatest luminaries of late antiquity. This was reflected in Eusebius’ long ecclesiastical career and in his prolific writings. Furthermore, the *EH* also preserves some important texts that were lost, and otherwise would have been completely forgotten.

In his introductory words, Kofsky does not hesitate to voice the meaningful name *Yeshua*, and not “Yeshu.” Deplorably, the distorted appellation “Yeshu” is still widely used today within Jewish circles. Thus, Kofsky is in line with prominent young Israeli historians at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, such as Israel Y. Yuval, Yehuda Liebes and Yair Zakovitsch, who insist on pronouncing the correct name *Yeshua*. In other words, unlike the older generations of Israeli historians, such as the late Joseph Klausner and David Flusser, Kofsky reflects a new trend within the contemporary Israeli intelligentsia, which more and more realizes that *Yeshua* is indeed the proper name to use—not only within Israeli historiography and literature, but also in the media.

Further to Kofsky’s conclusion that Eusebius powerfully combined past and present (p. ix), we may add that same combination characterizes the modern movement of Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBY). Namely, in their keen desire to shape a historic identity, contemporary JBY combine the present issues with those of their forerunners in the early centuries. Just as Eusebius lived and

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<sup>138</sup> Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 36 Jaffa Rd., PO Box 46, Jerusalem 91000, Israel. See [www.caspari.com](http://www.caspari.com)

<sup>139</sup> In a private conversation, Summer 2001.

<sup>140</sup> See, for example, A. Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea Against Paganism*, Leiden 2000.

wrote at a historical juncture, during the emergence of Christianity to the forefront of history, so it is also with the re-emergence of the Messianic movement on the modern historical arena. With Eusebius' model of the *EH* we are able to point to some parallelism, even synonymous developments, between ancient gentile Christianity and the modern Messianic Jewish movement. A historic comparison, for example, of orthodoxy and heresy, is helpful in understanding the present issues with a deeper perspective.

In modern times, the need of the Yeshua-movement to safeguard its orthodox teaching by discerning between false and true doctrines is no less acute than it was in the early church. Some issues remain quite the same—arguments about the divinity of Yeshua, or the involvement of the modern movement of JBY in new religions and cults such as the syncretistic polytheism of the New Age and Freemasonry.<sup>141</sup>

Eusebius wrote about the globalization of the Christian faith and the globalization of the church as an institution. He reveals how within a most formative epoch Christianity affected the world. Similarly, today one may also talk about the global appearance of the modern Messianic movement, as demonstrated during the last two centuries. Thus, from a comparative perspective I wish to point to several topics that coincide *thematically* in the narrative of Eusebius and the issues that presently shape the modern Messianic movement. Practically, indeed, the relevance of Eusebius for today is within the parameters of similar themes existing across two formative periods: in the fourth century on the one hand, and in the 21st century on the other. In my comparative approach, therefore, I place a “reflective mirror” in the center of the discussion, to analyze the phenomenon of the Messianic Jewish movement as it is shaping its corporate identity.

## **Torah Observant Jewish Yeshua-Believers**

In his narrative of the church's history, Eusebius does not say very much about the communities of JBY of the early centuries. Except for some brief lists of Jewish bishops in Jerusalem,<sup>142</sup> and the reference to the heretical views of the *Ebionites*,<sup>143</sup> Eusebius knows very little about the collective identity of the ancient JBY. In fact, the “Father of Church History” does not differentiate substantially between the heterodox Ebionites and the orthodox Nazarenes.<sup>144</sup> It

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<sup>141</sup> J. Ankerberg & J. Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, Eugene, Oregon 1999, pp. 214-273.

<sup>142</sup> *EH*, Books III, 11, p. 79; III, 35, p. 98; IV, 5, pp. 107-108.

<sup>143</sup> *EH*, Book III, 27, pp. 91-92.

<sup>144</sup> R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity From the End of the New Testament Period Until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1992; and recently F. Blanchetière, *Enquête sur les racines juives du mouvement chrétien (30-135)*, Paris 2001, p. 321 ff.

seems that Eusebius “was scornful” of the “Church of the Circumcision” because JBY refused to abandon the Torah.<sup>145</sup> Because the “Ebionite sect” kept “every detail of the Law,”<sup>146</sup> it was actually seen by Eusebius as a “Judaizing” danger, and therefore viewed as heretical.<sup>147</sup> Consequently, Eusebius and other Church Fathers were supportive of the historic exclusion of both Ebionites and Nazarenes from the church.<sup>148</sup>

Today too, the issue of observing the Torah is often the cause of divisions between Jewish and gentile believers, as well as within the inner circles of JBY themselves. Thus, for example, Baruch Maoz from “Grace and Truth” Assembly in Israel argues that JBY should *not* keep the Torah at all.<sup>149</sup> Others, like Ariel Berkowitz from Jerusalem, claim that not only the Torah should be kept, but *also* the rabbinical traditions.<sup>150</sup> A third group, following the footsteps of the late Haim (Haimoff) Bar-David, believes that Torah observance today is strictly subject to the teaching of Yeshua himself in the canonical New Testament, yet without the rabbinical law.<sup>151</sup> De facto, all three streams within the modern movement of JBY regard themselves as the revived “*Kehila* of the Circumcision” of ancient times. However, most gentile churches now avoid the rejection of JBY who basically keep the Torah, i.e. circumcision and the Jewish Shabbat or other Jewish Holy Days, like Passover. On the contrary, many gentile believers approach Torah-observant JBY with an inclusive attitude.

Modern JBY raise the same ancient issue of Torah observance when they talk about creating a “Messianic Halakah.”<sup>152</sup> They actually attempt to shape their Jewish identity by keeping the Torah and by explaining that they are not a new religion. In fact, Eusebius also highlighted the “ancient character of Christian origins,” thus confronting the attacks of “those who imagine them to be recent and outlandish, appearing yesterday for the first time.”<sup>153</sup> In a sense, modern JBY keep the Torah for the same reasons and connect themselves directly with

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<sup>145</sup> See “Who’s Who in Eusebius”, in Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, Translated by G.A. Williams, Revised and edited with a new introduction by A. Louth, Penguin Books, London 1989, p. 366. Cf. *ibid* pp. xxiv-xxv.

<sup>146</sup> *EH*, Book III, 27, 5, pp. 91-92. See especially note # 4 on page 91.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>148</sup> Cf., for example, V. Martin, *A House Divided: The Parting of the Ways between Synagogue and Church*, Stimulus Book, New York 1995, esp. pp. 162-170.

<sup>149</sup> B. Maoz, *Judaism is not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement*, Glasgow 2003, esp. pp. 223-230.

<sup>150</sup> A. & D. Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered*, Littleton, Colorado 1996, esp. pp. 187-191.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. G. Nerel, “Observing the Torah according to Yeshua,” in *Chai*, The Magazine of the British Messianic Jewish Alliance, Summer 2001, # 212, pp. 4-5.

<sup>152</sup> See, for example, John Fischer, “Yeshua and Halakah: Which Direction?”, at: [www.lcje.net/papers/2000/LCJE-Fischer.pdf](http://www.lcje.net/papers/2000/LCJE-Fischer.pdf) See also under John Fischer at: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

<sup>153</sup> *EH*, Book I, 2, p. 2. Cf. *ibid*, pp. 11-13.

their forefathers in antiquity.<sup>154</sup> Yet today, JBY constantly face the need to discern between different forms of Torah observance, especially because of historical developments within the last 20 centuries.<sup>155</sup> In addition to that, the question of “Judaizing” the believers among the nations still remains a major controversy within the contemporary movement of JBY.<sup>156</sup>

Historically, as corporate entities, congregations of JBY slowly disintegrated and totally disappeared until around the 10th century.<sup>157</sup> Following the gentilization process within the universal church, JBY were forbidden by the church to maintain their Torah-observant identity, both as individuals and as congregations.<sup>158</sup> Individual believers, however, were accepted into the gentile churches after being asked to reject their Jewishness completely.<sup>159</sup>

In recent generations, however, we observe ongoing attempts among gentile believers to return to their Jewish and biblical heritage, almost as a reactionary step against the church’s anti-Torah policy of the past two millennia. Today churches also acknowledge the uniqueness of Israel according to their Covenant and Election in the Torah. This process is taking place, for example, within the Catholic Church,<sup>160</sup> and recently through the attitude of churches towards developing congregations of JBY.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, JBY presently point to the Apostle Shaul/Paul as a model of a Torah-observant Jewish believer in Yeshua, who was misinterpreted by the churches for many centuries.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> See, for example, G. Nerel, “Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews”, in S.C. Mimouni & F.S. Jones, eds., *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états*, Cerf, Paris 2001, 399-425.

<sup>155</sup> See G. Nerel, “Torah and Halakhah among Modern Assemblies of Jewish Yeshua-Believers”, in S.N. Gundry & L. Goldberg, eds., *How Jewish is Christianity? (Two Views on the Messianic Movement)*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2003.

<sup>156</sup> See, for example, M.G. Lew, “Messianic Judaism: A Return to Judaizing?”, in *The Messianic Outreach*, vol. 21:2, Winter 2002, pp. 11-15.

<sup>157</sup> See, for example, Sh. Pines, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source*, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Proceedings, vol. 2, # 13, Jerusalem 1966.

<sup>158</sup> See J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*, New York 1979, 92-115.

<sup>159</sup> Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire AD 135-425*, Littman Library, London 1996, pp. 65-68; 237-254.

<sup>160</sup> See, for example, J.M. Garrigues, ed., *L’unique Israel de Dieu (Approches chrétiennes du Mystère d’Israël)*, Limoges 1987. Cf. *Il Dono della Torah (Colloquio ebraico-cristiano)*, Camaldoli 1985.

<sup>161</sup> P. Hocken, *Toward Jerusalem Council II – The Vision and the Story*, Ventura, CA 2002. See also at: [www.TJCII.org](http://www.TJCII.org) and at [www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org)

<sup>162</sup> See, for example, G. Nerel, “Reinventing Paul,” in *Eretz Acheret*, vol. 9 (2002): 8-9 (in Hebrew); and J.G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul*, Oxford – New York 2002.

## Jewish Pessah (Passover) and the Church Calendar

The issue of how and when to fix the date of Easter (*Pascha*), so that it would always fall on a Sunday, was well noted by Eusebius.<sup>163</sup> For many decades the early church struggled to separate Easter from the Jewish Passover, which could be any day of the week, and not necessarily a Sunday. Eusebius writes that the controversy about the Easter festival arose “because all the Asian dioceses thought that in accordance with ancient [i.e. Jewish] tradition they ought to observe the fourteenth day of the lunar month [i.e. Nisan] as the beginning of the Paschal festival.”<sup>164</sup>

Eusebius also marks that since the lunar calculation of the Jewish Passover could fall on any day, not necessarily Sunday, this was *not* in accordance with apostolic tradition in the western churches. The “problem” was that the eastern churches had a tradition of fasting before the Passover until the 14<sup>th</sup> of the lunar month, and they were named “people of the fourteenth day” (*Quartodecimani*), because they followed the Jewish calendar.<sup>165</sup> Eventually, the biblical/Jewish foundation of beginning the Passover celebration on the fourteenth of Nisan was overruled by Bishop Victor, head of the Roman church.<sup>166</sup> The church adopted a new solar calendar, which was instrumental in the sharp transformation from the Jewish Sabbath to the church’s Sunday, as well as to Easter-Sunday.<sup>167</sup>

The Easter controversy reached its climax towards the end of the second century.<sup>168</sup> Bishop Victor of Rome (Pope AD 189-198) enforced his view that Easter should always be fixed according to the solar calendar on Sunday, “the Day of the Lord’s Resurrection.”<sup>169</sup> Victor actually exercised his papal authority, and compelled all churches to deviate from the Jewish Paschal tradition under threats of declaring them as heterodox. Thus, because of explicit intimidation of excommunication, the eastern churches also abandoned the Jewish Paschal tradition.

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<sup>163</sup> *EH*, Book IV, 14, p. 118. See also Book II, 17 {21}, p. 52.

<sup>164</sup> *EH*, Book V, 23-25, pp. 177-181.

<sup>165</sup> See “Quartodecimanism”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London 1974, 1150 (=ODCC).

<sup>166</sup> For a discussion on the *Quartodecimani* within a broad historical perspective, including references to JBY, see I.Y. Yuval, “*Two Nations in Your Womb*”: *Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Tel Aviv 2000, 75-91; 223-225 (in Hebrew).

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity), Gregoriana, Rome 1977, esp. pp. 74-89; 142-167.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. W.A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Collegeville, Minnesota 1970, 82-83; 106.

<sup>169</sup> S. Bacchiocchi, *Ibid*, 179.



In contrast to the “gentile Easter” that has developed since the early church history, contemporary JBY now return to the biblical calendar and observe both the Jewish Seventh-Day Sabbath and the Passover on the eve of Nisan 14. For modern JBY, the Sabbath commandment is still a valid sign between God and Israel. This Seventh-Day Shabbat has a specific sign of God’s eternal covenant with Israel.<sup>170</sup> Yeshua, in fact, never abolished the Shabbat. In the State of Israel, for example, JBY actually keep the Shabbat – not Sunday – as their day of rest and congregational worship.<sup>171</sup> The same holds true with regard to Sunday – Easter. Most Israeli JBY who celebrate Passover on Nisan 14-15, regardless of the day, do not set aside a special day for the Lord’s resurrection. What actually happens is that JBY combine the remembrance of Yeshua’s resurrection together with the Passover celebration itself (during the “Seder” meal), usually without keeping a specific day as the “Resurrection Day.”<sup>172</sup>

Therefore, we easily observe that on the one hand Eusebius’ narrative represents the church’s wish to differentiate herself from Jewry and from the Jewish calendar revolving around the Sabbath and Passover. Yet today, on the other hand, many modern JBY abandon the Sunday-keeping and return to observe the Seventh-Day Sabbath, and at least in the State of Israel, JBY also keep Pesach on Nisan 14, usually without a Sunday-Easter. Thus, in their calendar, modern JBY make a U-turn as they go back to their Jewish/biblical roots and that of the *Quartodecimani*. At the same time, however, we should also mention the modern Hebrew Catholics that still keep the Sunday according to the church’s calendar.<sup>173</sup> However, today even Hebrew Catholics aspire to express a distinct Jewish identity within their gentile surroundings.<sup>174</sup>

### Authority and Apostolic Succession

The legitimate succession of the bishops and their authority in the church is a central theme within the *EH*. Thus, towards the end of the *EH*, Eusebius boasts

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<sup>170</sup> See, for example, M.I. Ben-Maeir, “Remember to Sanctify the Sabbath Day!”, in *Tal*, no. 2, November 1962, pp. 5-7 (in Hebrew). Cf. D. Juster, “A Messianic Jewish Understanding of the Sabbath”, in *Mishkan*, vol. 22 (1995): 9-22.

<sup>171</sup> J. Shulam, “The Sabbath Day and How to Keep It”, in *Mishkan*, vol. 22 (1995): 23-28. See also B.F. Skjott, “Sabbath and Worship in Messianic Congregations in Israel”, *ibid.* 29-33.

<sup>172</sup> See, for example, G. Nerel, ‘*Messianic Jews’ in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967): Trends and Changes in Shaping Self-Identity*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996, 224-239 (in Hebrew).

<sup>173</sup> See, for example, “Calendar”, in *The Hebrew Catholic*, # 78, Winter-Spring 2003, p. 12.

<sup>174</sup> See recently D. Christiansen, “A Campaign to Divide the Church in the Holy Land”, in *America*, vol. 188, # 17, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003; and also I. de Gaulmyn, “Les chrétiens de Terre sainte se divisent”, in *La Croix*, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002, 6.

that he “dealt fully with the apostolic succession in seven books.”<sup>175</sup> The principle of solid apostolic succession in the church is of utmost importance in Eusebius’ understanding.<sup>176</sup> He sees in this matter the key for preserving “the stamp of apostolic orthodoxy” in its purity. Therefore, Eusebius insists on providing, as accurately as possible, the proper lists of the episcopal dynasty in the major cities, mostly in the patriarchal Sees of Jerusalem,<sup>177</sup> Rome,<sup>178</sup> Antioch<sup>179</sup> and Alexandria.<sup>180</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, he writes systematically about the early Jewish *Kehila* in Jerusalem and that “up to Hadrian’s siege of the Jews there had been a series of fifteen Hebrew bishops.”<sup>181</sup> With regard to the episcopal See of Jerusalem, as in all other Sees, Eusebius highlights the uninterrupted continuation from apostolic times, even when the succession of the “bishops of the Circumcision” ended, following the second Jewish revolt in AD 135, and the succession of the “bishops of the Uncircumcision” began.<sup>182</sup>

Ya’akov (James), the brother of the Lord, surnamed the “Righteous,” appears throughout the entire book of the *EH* as a highly esteemed authority within the foundational dynasty of apostolic succession. Ya’akov, who was the first Jewish bishop elected to the “episcopal throne of the Jerusalem Church”,<sup>183</sup> was respected not merely within the “Mother Church of Jerusalem,” but throughout the whole Christian world.<sup>184</sup> In fact, Eusebius also finds space to describe the physical “Throne of Bishop James” – that “has been preserved to this day.”<sup>185</sup> Eusebius underlines the historic fact that Ya’akov was the first to receive from Yeshua *himself* and *all* his apostles the episcopacy of the Jerusalem *Kehila*. In other words, there existed a strong awareness that the primitive episcopal authority in Jerusalem had a unique origin and prestige.

At the same time, however, Eusebius also refers to the increasing demands of the Bishop of Rome to establish his own primacy in the universal church.<sup>186</sup> Thus, the historian from Caesarea demonstrates that gradually the See of Rome,

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<sup>175</sup> *EH*, Book VIII, preamble, p. 270. The Hebrew translation here refers to “seven full books”, while the English translation of G.A. Williamson (Penguin Books), writes “full dealing” with the theme of apostolic succession. See above note # 9.

<sup>176</sup> *EH*, Books III, 37, p. 100; IV, 11, p. 115.

<sup>177</sup> *EH*, Books IV, 5, p. 107; V, 12, p. 164; VI, 8, 10, pp. 193-195.

<sup>178</sup> *EH*, Books III, 21, p. 83, IV, 4, p. 107; IV, 19, p. 130.

<sup>179</sup> *EH*, Books III, 22, p. 83; VI, 21, p. 206.

<sup>180</sup> *EH*, Books IV, 4, p. 107; IV, 19, p. 130; VI, 35, p. 215. Cf. p. 234, n. 4.

<sup>181</sup> *EH*, Book IV, 5, p. 107.

<sup>182</sup> *EH*, Book V, 12, p. 164.

<sup>183</sup> *EH*, Book II, 1, 2, p. 34.

<sup>184</sup> *EH*, Books II, 23, pp. 57-59; IV, 5, p. 107.

<sup>185</sup> *EH*, Book VII, 19, p. 246.

<sup>186</sup> *EH*, Book VI, 43, pp. 225-226.

upon the Petrine Doctrine, assumed the leading authority in the church.<sup>187</sup> Yet during the early centuries, the bishop of Rome could not totally ignore the apostolic status and the Hebraic heritage of the primitive bishopric in Jerusalem. Apostolic succession was pivotal in the struggle over theological hegemony within the consolidation of the ecclesiastical organization. Rome's bishop, as installed on Peter's See, wanted a hierarchical pyramid with himself in the top. In order to achieve that goal, Rome demanded a unified liturgy, through the new calendar with a "Catholic Easter" apart from the Jewish Holy Days.<sup>188</sup> Eusebius clearly defends the claim of having *one* bishop, i.e. in Rome, who leads the church.<sup>189</sup> This, de facto, also implies that the theological hegemony moved from James to Peter, or, from Jerusalem to Rome. This remains an issue for the modern movement of JBY.<sup>190</sup>

In modern times, the Messianic movement also struggles with the issue of apostolic authority and apostolic succession. Thus, in "*Kesher*," a journal of Messianic Judaism published by the "Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations" (UMJC) in the USA, the editors dedicated an entire volume to the topic of "Authority."<sup>191</sup> Modern JBY find it difficult to comply with the "authoritative traditions" of the historic churches. Habitually, for example, within their own ordination of leadership, or succession mechanism, JBY avoid the *imprimatur* of the different Christian denominations. Practically, when the Messianic movement searches for spiritual authorization, it is usually found in linkage with the pre-exilic times of the *Kehila* in Jerusalem—just as modern Herzlian Zionism bridges itself to pre-exilic Israel.<sup>192</sup> Except for the Hebrew Catholics, Messianic Jews do not accept the primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the authority of its Magisterium.<sup>193</sup> In reality, contemporary JBY regard themselves as a prophetic movement, authorized by God through the Holy Spirit. This is the restoration of the authority of the early Mother *Kehila* in Jerusalem, headed by *Ya'akov Hatzadik*, i.e. James the Just.

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. *EH*, Book V, 24-25, pp. 178-181.

<sup>188</sup> For the topic of a *pyramidal organization* in the shape of a universal Church, see *EH*, Books V, 23-25, pp. 177-181; VI, 43, 3, p. 224; VII, 6, p. 237. Cf. [http://www.catholic.com/library/Authority\\_of\\_the\\_Pope\\_Part\\_1.asp](http://www.catholic.com/library/Authority_of_the_Pope_Part_1.asp)

<sup>189</sup> *EH*, Book VI, 11, p. 226. See, for example, O. Irshai, "The Church of Jerusalem—From 'The Church of the Circumcision' to 'The Church from the Gentiles'", in Y. Tsafrir and Sh. Safrai, eds., *The History of Jerusalem*, (The Roman and Byzantine Periods, 70-638 CE), Yad Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 61-114 (in Hebrew).

<sup>190</sup> See, for example, G. Nerel, *Dissertation*, 188-197.

<sup>191</sup> M. Schiffman and M. Wolf, "Authority to Lead: What is the Source?", in *Kesher*, vol. 4 (1996): 123-136.

<sup>192</sup> See, for example, J. Shulam, "Theological Breakthrough and the Success of Messianic Judaism in Our Time", in *Teaching from Zion*, vol. 11 (1998): 16-36.

<sup>193</sup> See G. Nerel, "Haim (Haimoff) Bar-David: Apostolic Authority among Jewish Yeshua-Believers", in *Mishkan*, vol. 37 (2002), 74-75.

Today, some JBY view Ya'akov *Hatzadik* as a model for the "Jerusalem Community's Head Rabbi." Ya'akov is presented as a Torah-observant Jew, whose relationship to the Torah would be similar to Yeshua's relationship to the Torah. Thus, for example, David Friedman of Jerusalem refers to Ya'akov as "*Nasi*," in the sense of Chief Rabbi, because of Ya'akov's position in the early *Kehila*.<sup>194</sup> Nowadays, Ya'akov's teachings and lifestyle are grasped as a prime example of what was considered "normal Messianic Judaism—at least for his time and location."<sup>195</sup> In other words, within their restorationist thinking, modern JBY look for authoritative inspiration from Ya'akov, "who unfortunately is still called James,"<sup>196</sup> and not towards Rome, Canterbury or the Lutheran World Federation.

Interestingly, in his book *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, Ray Pritz writes about the position of Ya'akov *Hatzadik* and Jerusalem's loss of authority as follows: "Authority rests not so much in a geographical place as in a relational position [...] As the apostles died or moved away, so also the authority of Jerusalem began to diminish [...] By that time (c. 100), considerable attention was already being given to apostolic *writings*."<sup>197</sup>

For modern Yeshua-believers, the early Jewish *Kehila* in Jerusalem, as depicted in the New Testament, represents an authentic Jewish cathedral authority. The Jewish "Mother of all churches" has an enormous symbolic importance for the Yeshua-movement. Jerusalem is not merely the place where the first council of the apostles took place (Acts 15), but through the *apostolic writings* of the New Testament it is also grasped as *the* model for *the* pure and genuine faith—for both Jewish and gentile believers in Yeshua. Because "the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled," in the eyes of JBY it is *not* an anachronism to connect the restoration of the modern Yeshua movement directly to the first century *Kehila*.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> D. Friedman, "How did They Live?—A Look at the Jerusalem Messianic Community's Head Rabbi", in *First Fruits of Zion*, vol. 46 (1996), 33-36.

<sup>195</sup> D. Friedman, *ibid*, 34.

<sup>196</sup> Ts. Sadan, "In the Name of the Brother—The Ossuary of Ya'akov, Brother of Yeshua", in *Kivun*, vol. 30 (2002), 8-9.

<sup>197</sup> R. A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, (From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century), Magnes, Jerusalem 1992, p. 124.

<sup>198</sup> See, for example, M. S. Alexander, "Farewell Sermon", {esp. # 8; 17}, London 1841. I owe special thanks to Jorge Quinonez for providing this material to me. See also G. Nerel, "Hebrew Christian Associations in Ottoman Jerusalem: Jewish Yeshua-Believers Facing Church and Synagogue", in *Revue des études juives*, vol. 161 (2002), 431-457.

## The Canonical Bible and Unauthenticated Scripture

On many occasions Eusebius refers to the topic of sanctioned Scripture,<sup>199</sup> as contrasted with writings that were unauthorized by the Church Fathers.<sup>200</sup> Thus, for example, he writes as follows: “the second Petrine epistle we have been taught to regard as uncanonical; many, however, have thought it valuable and have honoured it with a place among the other Scriptures.”<sup>201</sup> However, other Petrine writings, like the “Acta” attributed to him, the “Gospel” and the “Preaching” that were called Petrine, Eusebius describes as excluded from the *Catholic*, i.e. whole, Scriptures.<sup>202</sup>

As for contemporary JBY, almost all of them accept the canonical Holy Scriptures comprising the Old and New Testaments as the “fait accompli” Word of God.<sup>203</sup> In principle, modern Jewish believers hold no claims that would question the validity of that Canon.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, mainstream JBY have no aspirations to initiate a theological process that would re-canonize the existing sacred texts. Jewish believers in Yeshua also make no attempts to canonize new or particularistic texts of their own.<sup>205</sup> Yet, at the same time, they do insist on their full right to provide independent scriptural interpretations.<sup>206</sup>

Thus, the modern Yeshua-movement recognizes that the gentile church at large crystallized the final shape of the New Testament. JBY give the church significant credit for canonizing and preserving the New Testament. As a result of that, nowadays JBY do not only follow those texts defined by the church as orthodox, but also reject many other texts which the church defined as heretical or eccentric.

Eusebius deemed it important to point to the “External Books,” alongside the Canonical Bible, such as the Book of Maccabees, “entitled Sarbeth Sabanaiel,” that existed in his times.<sup>207</sup> Today, the question of the *Apocrypha*, namely the unauthorized books to both the Old and New Testaments, is irrelevant for the Messianic movement. However, modern Hebrew Catholics do

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<sup>199</sup> For example, *EH*, Books III, 24-25, pp. 86-90; IV, 25, pp. 137-138; VI, 20, pp. 205-206.

<sup>200</sup> *EH*, Book III, 3, pp. 64-65.

<sup>201</sup> *EH*, Book III, 3, p. 64

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> K. Kjær-Hansen and B.F. Skjøtt, eds., *Facts & Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel*, Mishkan vols. 30-31 (1999), 30.

<sup>204</sup> See, for example, G. Nerel, “The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers”, in *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. 73, # 4 (2000), 16-19.

<sup>205</sup> This is manifested, for example, by the recent publications of the Hebrew Bible comprising Old and New Testament in one volume, by *Yanetz*, a Messianic Printing Press in Jerusalem.

<sup>206</sup> See, for example, M.I. Ben-Meir, *From Jerusalem to Jerusalem, Excerpts from the Diary*, Jerusalem 2001, esp. pp. 88-89, 169-170; Cf. G. Nerel, *Dissertation*, 342-344.

<sup>207</sup> *EH*, Book VI, 25, p. 209. See especially notes # 4 and 7 on p. 209.

accept the Apocrypha to the Old Testament, including the books of *Maccabees*, *Baruch*, *Jesus Ben-Sirah*, *Tobit* and *Judith*—as does the entire Roman Catholic world. In other words, the Messianic movement, together with mainstream Jewry, and most Protestant churches, excludes from the Canonical Bible the apocryphal Old Testament.

Concerning the ancient "*Apocryphal New Testament*," Eusebius mentions not only the so-called "Gospel of Peter,"<sup>208</sup> but also the "Epistle of Barnabas"<sup>209</sup> and the "Gospel of Thomas."<sup>210</sup> Today, while mainstream Messianic Jews relate to the Apocryphal New Testament as unbiblical, in Israel we still find a group of bohemian Jews who believe in Yeshua through harmonizing the Bible with ancient apocryphal literature. This trend of thought is developing under the patronage of Shlomo Kalo, a "spiritual leader" who immigrated to Israel from Bulgaria. With his new wife, Rivka Zohar, Kalo teaches syncretism—a reconciliation of different religious tenets. Thus Kalo composed a prayer book where he combines verses from the Old Testament, the New Testament, Hinduism and the Koran.<sup>211</sup>

Kalo is also responsible for a modern translation into Hebrew and dissemination of an *Unknown Gospel* - the *Gospel of Thomas*. Within a leaflet that was produced by the followers of Kalo, one finds among various publications a reference to a *Hidden Gospel*. The advertisement in this brochure reads as follows: "The Unknown Gospel - A translation of the Gospel according to Thomas (one of the disciples of Yeshua), that was discovered in an ancient Gnostic library in Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1946. Added is an original and surprising interpretation. Hard cover, 128 pages."<sup>212</sup> Thus, nowadays Kalo endeavors to create an extraneous "New Jewish Christianity." In reality, however, such apocryphal texts are now promulgated merely within Kalo's esoteric circles.<sup>213</sup>

Modern Jewish believers also raise the argument that when Yeshua himself was teaching, he never quoted from the apocryphal literature of the second temple period. In other words, modern JBY emphasize the fact that Yeshua, though he quoted the Old Testament frequently, always referred only to the

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<sup>208</sup> *EH*, Book VI, 12, p. 196.

<sup>209</sup> *EH*, VI, 14, p. 199. Cf. *Early Christian Writings*, (The Apostolic Fathers), Translated by M. Staniforth, Penguin Books, Middlesex 1968, 189-192.

<sup>210</sup> *EH*, Book III, 25, p. 90. Cf. *The Gospel of Thomas*, Translation, Introduction and Commentary: Amir Or. Foreword by R.J.Z. Werblowsky, Carmel, Jerusalem 1992 (in Hebrew).

<sup>211</sup> See, for example, D. Israel, "The Guru of Bohemians", in *Olam Haisha*, January 1995, pp. 48-50 (in Hebrew). Cf. B. Fastman, "Shlomo Kalo—Wolf or Lamb?", in *Kivun*, vol. 5 (1997), 2-4 (in Hebrew).

<sup>212</sup> See "Thomas, Gospel of", in *ODCC*, p. 1370.

<sup>213</sup> See, for example, Sh. Kalo, *The Day is Coming*, Jaffa 1997 (Original Hebrew Edition: *Ve'Hineh Hu Bah*).

canonical Hebrew writings, whether the Torah, the Prophets or the Psalms. (Ktuvim/Writings). The same is true about Yeshua's evangelists and apostles. This is another reason that the Apocrypha has no divine significance in the teachings of the modern Yeshua-movement. For most JBY the New Testament links itself immediately with the end of the Old Testament, as if no inspired writing came between.<sup>214</sup> And when modern JBY embrace a historic *textual succession*, directly following the Canonical Scripture, they view themselves as the legitimate and authoritative heirs of the early Jewish apostles.<sup>215</sup>

### **Ancient and Modern Paganism**

In the *EH*, Eusebius highlights the confrontations, mostly violent, between Christianity and the pagan world. This deadly encounter with paganism is depicted alongside the church's metaphysical struggle with Judaism. Yet the pagans are presented as the instigators of the cruelest persecutions against the Christians. Frequently Eusebius contrasts the deep faith and martyrdom of the Christians with the inhuman activities of the heathen.<sup>216</sup> The sufferings and bloody massacres of the believers in Yeshua while facing the idol-worshippers is a leitmotif in that narrative. For example, throughout the Roman Empire everyone was required to take part in sacrifice to the gods. When the Christians refused to do that, this resulted in martyrdom.<sup>217</sup> Occasionally some Christians were exempt from participation in such ceremonies.<sup>218</sup> Thus, Eusebius' *History* actually functions as a polemical and apologetic text,<sup>219</sup> also referring to other clashes with paganism on philosophical grounds.<sup>220</sup>

Unlike the ancient bloody collisions of Christianity with heathenism, today one observes a "peaceful encounter" between contemporary JBY and modern heathen cults. In modern heathenism we refer mostly to Hinduism, Buddhism and the spreading "oriental spiritual truths," which have even produced a mixture of heathenism from the Far East with popular Judaism.<sup>221</sup>

"Religious meetings" between JBY and heathenism take place through various outreach ministries, while JBY confront eastern religions and the New

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<sup>214</sup> See, for example, B. Berger, *Eine Herde – Ein Hirte*, Berlin/Wuppertal 2002.

<sup>215</sup> See, for example, H. & M. Benhayim, *Bound for the Promised Land*, (The Story of the First American Messianic Jewish Couple to Make Aliyah to Israel), Jerusalem 2003, 144-145.

<sup>216</sup> See, for example, *EH*, Books V, 1, 36, p. 148; VI, 42, 1, p. 222.

<sup>217</sup> *EH*, Book VIII, 10, 10, p. 281.

<sup>218</sup> *EH*, Book VIII, 1, 2, p. 270.

<sup>219</sup> *EH*, Books IV, 3, pp. 106-107; IV, 12-14, pp. 116-119.

<sup>220</sup> *EH*, Books V, 10, p. 162; VI, 3, pp. 188-189.

<sup>221</sup> See, for example, Yair Sheleg, "Young Observant Jews in the Paths of the New Age", in *Ha'aretz*, Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000, p. B2. Cf. "Long Live the New Age", in *Ha'aretz*, (Mussaf), Rosh Hashana Supplement, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

Age movement at full moon trance and drug parties.<sup>222</sup> In the modern State of Israel, for example, there is great fascination with oriental cults, classical and popular. It is almost a norm for thousands of veteran soldiers who have finished a lengthy and difficult military service in the IDF to organize pilgrimages to India and the Far-East, to search for “light from the east.”<sup>223</sup>

In Israel, therefore, certain JBY feel that it is their responsibility to act against the modern heathenism that sweeps Israelis both in the land and overseas. A number of seminars dealing with the New Age have been organized. In visits to New Age festivals, as in the “Boombamela Festival” at Nitzanim Beach during Pesach week 2003, some JBY tried to convince the youngsters to return to their biblical roots. People like David and Martha Stern of Jerusalem shared there their own experiences as hippies in the 1960s and how they found Yeshua.<sup>224</sup> Others even travel as far as India to convince Israelis to find the real light in Yeshua. *Caspari Center* and its director, Lisa Loden, have taken a leading role in these activities.<sup>225</sup> At the same time, we should also point to the growing heathen cults within normative Judaism, mainly the adoration of *Tzadikim*, i.e. “Saints”, and the prayers at their “holy graves,” such as the *Hilula* or Festival of “Baba Sali” at Netivot. Thus, JBY increasingly place themselves in positions where they confront various heathen phenomena in Israel and abroad.

However, one should not look for modern “paganized cults” only beyond the Messianic movement. In fact it is Eusebius who set a model for confronting pagan teachings and heathen practices that had penetrated into the body of believers. The *EH* is full of names of individuals and groups such as Gnosticism and Montanism that attempted to introduce heretical doctrines into the church and needed to be exposed.<sup>226</sup> Today too, special attention should be given to the existence of paganized syncretism within the modern Messianic movement itself. By this I mean the forgiven and forgotten field of Freemasonry, with its god and secret worship opposed to the Bible. The god of Freemasonry is described as an architect or geometrician rather than creator.<sup>227</sup> Here I wish to point particularly to the presence—probably indirect and concealed—of

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<sup>222</sup> “Israelis in India”, in *Caspari Views from Jerusalem*, The Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, Spring 2003, 3.

<sup>223</sup> See, for example, F. Barr, “The New Age and Similar Movements in Israel”, in *Mishkan*, vol. 38 (2003), 15-23.

<sup>224</sup> D. Stern, “Evangelize at the Festivals!”, in an *Open Letter*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<sup>225</sup> See L. Loden, “The New Age in Israel at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, in *Mishkan*, vol. 38 (2003), 24-38. Cf. H. Pedersen, “Hinjews, JUBUs and New Age Judaism”, *ibid*, 39-46; and J. Ross, “A Fatal Attraction—Israeli Youth in India”, *ibid*, 57-63.

<sup>226</sup> *EH*, Books IV, 7, pp. 109-112; II, 13, pp. 46-47; V, 14, pp. 165-166. Cf. *ODCC*, pp. 573-574; 934.

<sup>227</sup> See, for example, J. Lawrence, *Freemasonry: A Christian Perspective*, London 1999, esp. 137-140.



Freemasonry within the “International Hebrew Christian Alliance” (*IHCA*) during at least the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is no secret that the first President of the *IHCA*, Sir Leon Levison, was an ardent and active freemason. He joined the freemasons as a believer in Yeshua while living in Scotland, and after World War I he became a founder-member of St. Leonard’s Lodge. From 1921 to 1923 he was its “Right Worshipful Master.”<sup>228</sup> Levison was fascinated with the esoteric, kabbalistic and Old Testament references of Freemasonry. Freemasonry with its cryptic vows was, among other things, a social tool for Leon to consort with men from all walks of life.<sup>229</sup> However, it appears that in daily routine the Masonic secret rituals and symbols deeply affected his private thoughts and public practices. Although he was fully aware of criticisms of his Masonic life, he dismissed them “as no different from that of the idolater of sport.”<sup>230</sup>

Levison keenly served both freemasonry and the *IHCA*. As the President of the *IHCA*, he often traveled to Eretz-Israel on Alliance business, in which he also incorporated his Masonic interests.<sup>231</sup> Because of the international characteristics of both the *IHCA* and freemasonry, with a tendency towards universalistic encounters worldwide, it would not be unrealistic to assume that in Jerusalem and in the Galilee he found close contacts among the local freemasons. Thus, in Eretz Israel he probably developed further links with the Persian Bahais, under the motto of creating a “world brotherhood” between Hindus, Moslems, Parsees, Christians and Jews.<sup>232</sup>

One cannot avoid the impression that it was through Levison that the cult of Freemasonry, with heathenish tendencies, actually penetrated the policies of the *IHCA*. In a conversation with Dr. Robert (Bob) I. Winer, M.D., an experienced activist in the “Messianic Jewish Alliance of America” (MJAA), he shared with me his own assumption<sup>233</sup> that Masonic influences largely infiltrated the *IHCA* since its inception.<sup>234</sup> Masonic interests probably affected the selling of the

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<sup>228</sup> These and more details appear openly in the biography of Sir Leon Levison, written by his son, Frederick. See F. Levison, *Christian and Jew: The Life of Leon Levison (1881-1936)*, Edinburgh 1989, 141.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. J. Katz, *Freemasons and Jews: Real and Imaginary Connections*, Jerusalem 1968 (in Hebrew).

<sup>230</sup> F. Levison, *Christian and Jew*, 141.

<sup>231</sup> F. Levison, *Ibid.*, 152-153.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. F. Levison, *ibid.*, 73; 221.

<sup>233</sup> Private talk with Bob Winer at General Conference of the *International Messianic Jewish Alliance*, Mexico, May 1997.

<sup>234</sup> For the vast masonic network in the Land during Mandatory times see D. Tidhar, ed., *Barkai Lodge No. 17: Jubilee Album 1906-1956* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1957, esp. pp. 17-33.

property called “Abraham’s Vineyard” in Jerusalem<sup>235</sup> and the attempts to establish another Hebrew Christian colony in the Land.<sup>236</sup>

Thus, in some similarity to Eusebius’ references to people who worship “pictures and images,”<sup>237</sup> or accept “deadly poison brought from Persia”, in describing, for example, the demonic deviation of the Manicheans,<sup>238</sup> modern JBY also confront diverse occult beliefs in the form of neo-paganism.

## The Divinity of Yeshua

From the outset of the *EH*, Eusebius stresses the pre-existence and divinity of Yeshua. In his own words: “the nature of Messiah is twofold; it is like the head of the body in that He is recognized as God, and comparable to the feet in that for our salvation He put on manhood as frail as our own.”<sup>239</sup> Without any concession Eusebius strongly attacks heretics like Paul of Samosata, who taught that in his nature the Messiah was just an ordinary man, merely a person of flesh and blood.<sup>240</sup>

Like the church in ancient times, the modern movement of JBY is shaping its corporate identity through theological debates and doctrinal definitions. In recent years in particular ongoing discussions have occurred concerning the topic of Yeshua’s divinity and the Trinity. Such christological themes have been on the agenda of JBY for decades,<sup>241</sup> but the debate about Yeshua’s full divinity and the meaning of the Trinity came sharply to the forefront of the local movement following an article which appeared in November 2001 in the monthly *Israel Today*.<sup>242</sup> Basically, this “article” is a brief interview with 12 Israeli JBY, in which they reveal their beliefs about Yeshua’s divinity. According to the

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<sup>235</sup> F. Levison, *Christian and Jew*, 189-197.

<sup>236</sup> For the plans of establishing a Hebrew Christian colony in Eretz-Israel see R.I. Winer, *The Calling: The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (1915-1990)*, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, 1990.

<sup>237</sup> *EH*, Book II, 13, 3, p. 47.

<sup>238</sup> *EH*, Book VII, 31, p. 263.

<sup>239</sup> *EH*, Books I, 2, p. 2; I, 13, p. 29; II, 1, p. 33; II, 14, p. 47; II, 23, p. 57; III, 33, p. 97; V, 28, pp. 182-183.

<sup>240</sup> *EH*, Book VII, 27, p. 257; VII, 30, pp. 260-261.

<sup>241</sup> See, for example, R. Harvey, “Jesus the Messiah in Messianic Jewish Theology: The Shaping of Messianic Jewish Christology,” in K. Kjær-Hansen, ed., *Proceedings of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE)*, Seventh International Conference, Helsinki, 9 August 2003, Third of Five Booklets, Århus, Denmark 2003, 136-166. Cf. Zvi Nassi (Hirsch Prinz), *Haraz Deshlosha (The Mystery of the Trinity, or How Three are One)*, Yanetz, Jerusalem 1988 (in Hebrew).

<sup>242</sup> A. Schneider, ed., “Messianic Jews Debate the Deity of Jesus”, *Israel Today*, November 2001, p. 21. Cf. the same in the German version - *idem*, “Ist Jeschua Gott oder nicht?”, *Nachrichten aus Israel (NAI)*, November 2001, # 279, 23.

responses of the interviewees, about half fully accept Yeshua's divinity, and the other half rejects it. Thus, for example, Ofer Amitai, pastor of the "El-Roi" congregation in Jerusalem, believes without reservation in Yeshua's divinity, while Uri Marcus, director of the "Nehemiah Fund" from Ma'ale Adumim, declares that "Yeshua is God's plan, but not God Himself."<sup>243</sup> However, certain local believers reacted to this article by saying that it was "poor journalism," creating a misleading impression. They insist that many more than 50% of Israeli believers do accept Yeshua's divinity. Ray Pritz of the *Caspari Center* in Jerusalem, for example, estimates that "no more than five percent [!] would hold a formal doctrinal position that does not affirm the divinity of Yeshua."<sup>244</sup>

Following the interview in *Israel Today*, the public debate among Israeli JBY concerning Yeshua's divinity and the Trinity continued on the pages of *Kivun*, an Israeli bi-monthly magazine edited by Tsvi Sadan.<sup>245</sup> Thus, for example, Rami Danieli of Kfar Yona, in a letter to the Editor of *Kivun*, expressed his view as follows:

*there is a clear distinction between the Messiah and God. The Messiah is sent from God. He is the mediator between God and Humanity, doing only what his father (God) commands him. Additionally, in the Old and New Testaments there is no commandment to believe that Yeshua is 'God'. It is simply and solely clear that we have to believe that Yeshua is the 'Son of God.' Gentile Christianity developed the concept of the Trinity. This concept is neither biblical nor Hebraic.*<sup>246</sup>

Danieli's position actually denies Yeshua's divinity. His statement was soon confronted in the following issue of *Kivun*, where Rina Preiss from Zichron Ya'akov, and Daniel Yahav (who is the Pastor of the "Peniel" Messianic Congregation in Tiberias) expressed their belief in the full deity of Messiah Yeshua.

In her letter to the Editor of *Kivun*, Preiss emphasized the fact that the Old Testament verses clearly speak about the deity of the Messiah as expressed by the terms "Mighty God," "Everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6) and "Jehovah our righteousness" (Jer 23:6). However, Preiss also concludes that the "Messiah, son of God, is smaller than His Father, as He is sent by the Father and does only the Father's will, yet Yeshua should be fully worshiped because His name is the Father's name: Jehovah."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* Uri Marcus also distributed a booklet called *Zehuto Shel Hamashiach* (= Messiah's Identity), Haifa 2002, which is a Hebrew translation of Anthony Buzzard's original booklet named *Who Is Jesus?* (The Hebrew version was edited by Immanuel Gazit). This booklet seems to be the foundation for the beliefs held among believers in Ma'ale Adumim.

<sup>244</sup> See R. Pritz, "The Divinity of Jesus," in *Chai* (Life), Issue # 218, Summer 2003, 6.

<sup>245</sup> U. Tzoref, "The Trinity Hits Again," *Kivun*, vol. 26, Nov.-Dec. 2001, 5 (in Hebrew).

<sup>246</sup> R. Danieli, "From Three Emerges One," *Kivun*, vol. 27, 15 (Hebrew).

<sup>247</sup> R. Preiss, "As a Divine Mystery" (in Hebrew), *Kivun*, vol. 28, Mai-June 2002, 14.

In the same issue of *Kivun*, Daniel Yahav highlights the fact that Yeshua is no less than Jehovah Himself, the “Word” (Logos) that had existed before his bodily incarnation (John 1:1), and that “He made the worlds”; i.e. he is the creator of heaven and earth.<sup>248</sup> In conclusion, Yahav challenges his readers not to tolerate false teachers that deny Yeshua’s complete divinity, even if this will result in polarization and splits within the local body of believers. In fact, such uncompromising views were also expressed verbally by many other congregational pastors and elders. Consequently, *Kenes Artzi*, the national gathering of local pastors and congregational elders, initiated a special conference to discuss “The Divinity of Yeshua” in order to issue a unified statement. In this gathering, which took place at “Beit Assaf” Assembly near Netanya on 7 June 2002, the following brief statement was publicly issued:

*God: ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is One.’ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the only God and Creator. There is no other besides Him and all the divine attributes are His alone. His unique unity consists of Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Each of them eternal and divine in the perfection and fullness of deity. The Son, our Messiah, who was born without sin by the Holy Spirit to the virgin Miriam, is also human in the full sense of the term.*

This text was promulgated in four languages—Hebrew, English, Russian and Amharic, and about half of those who were present, around 40 leaders, accepted this credo by adding their signature to a common paper. Some who were present, however, also commented that the reference to Messiah as “human in the *full* sense of the term” could be misinterpreted as implying the possibility of sinfulness. In other words, the statement needed a specific clarification that Messiah was not merely born without sin, but also that his human nature remained sinless. Interestingly, because the “*Kenes Artzi*” took place near the grand “Ikea” Mall, it was half-seriously named the “Ikea Synod”, referring, by associative thinking, to the orthodoxy fixed at the first ecumenical synod at Nicaea in AD 325.

Yet the debate did not stop with the “Ikea Conference.” David Stern of Jerusalem, for example, responded to the “Ikea Council” with an article also published in *Israel Today*. In order “to unravel the knot,” Stern expresses his opinion that when JBY formulate their creeds very briefly, just in few sentences, they are primarily concerned *not* to become “Gentilized,” as only few have theological training. In other words, Stern stresses the point that when JBY condense their creed within few sentences, “in such cases the statements should be evaluated less as theology than as a heart cry to preserve Jewish identity.”<sup>249</sup> Stern’s conclusion is that gentile believers should allow and encourage JBY to

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<sup>248</sup> D. Yahav, “To Change Direction, and Fast” (in Hebrew), *Kivun*, vol. 28, *ibid*, 15.

<sup>249</sup> D.H. Stern, “Israel’s Messianic Jews and the Deity of Yeshua”, *Israel Today*, July 2002, # 43, p. 23.

develop their creed within a Jewish mind-set, not within a “Hellenistic and western” orientation.

Further views on Yeshua’s divinity were printed in the next issue of *Kivun*. An anonymous person wrote to the editor as follows:

*The term ‘Trinity’ was introduced in AD 325 to describe God, but it has no biblical foundation [...] There is a direct link between the teaching of the Trinity and the fruits of Anti-Semitism, growing on the branches of institutional Christianity [...] Again there is a negative result of the Trinity: the person that refrains from signing that creed is rejected.*<sup>250</sup>

And in the following issue of *Kivun*, David Tel-Tzur and Immanuel Gazit, co-leaders of the “Hephtzibah” Congregation in Ma’ale-Adumim near Jerusalem, published their explicit theology. Within their letter/statement one finds again a clear denial of Yeshua’s divinity. Tel-Tzur and Gazit write as follows:

*In essence, Yeshua is not God! He is not Jehovah! [...] John (the Evangelist) is not teaching that the Son (of God) was living prior to his birth. The Son appeared for the first time as an entity when he was miraculously created as the ‘Second Man’ in his mother’s womb. The ‘Word’ (Logos) in Scripture never appears in the meaning of an entity or a person [...] The Trinity is paganism, contrasted with ‘Hear [Shma] O Israel our God is One’. Yeshua is not the creator of the world, but the world was created for him.*<sup>251</sup>

This statement speaks for itself. Historically, however, in his *EH* Eusebius does refer to Yeshua as the “great Creator of the universe, the Word.”<sup>252</sup> Additionally, Eusebius informs us that within the early “Church of the Circumcision” the sect of the *Ebionites* (Evyonim), who were “paupers in their views about Messiah,” rejected Yeshua’s divinity as well as his miraculous birth and his existence prior to his incarnation.<sup>253</sup> Yet today, unlike the situation in antiquity, because the mainstream of JBY accepts the entire Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, that canonical text serves as a solid platform for JBY in their theological understanding about Yeshua’s full divinity.

With these recent theological arguments in the background, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel (MJAI) decided to organize during its bi-annual national meeting a special seminar on the theme “The Trinity – In What Do We Believe?” That conference took place on 7 February 2003, at Moshav Yad-Hashmona. About 120 people gathered from all over the country, most of

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<sup>250</sup> Anonymous, “Double Standard,” *Kivun*, vol. 29, July-Aug. 2002, 15.

<sup>251</sup> D. Tel-Tzur & I. Gazit, “On Martyrdom,” *Kivun*, vol. 30, Sept.-Oct. 2002, 12.

<sup>252</sup> *EH*, Book X, 4, 69, p. 334.

<sup>253</sup> *EH*, Book III, 27, pp. 91-92. Cf. R. Pritz, *ibid*, passim.

whom held leadership positions.<sup>254</sup> Several elders presented short papers, and an open discussion followed.

Asher Intrater, from congregation "Tif'eret Yeshua" in Tel Aviv, raised in his talk the following question: "Is Yeshua God?" His own answer was that the New Testament definitely states that Yeshua is God, however, the primary presentation of Yeshua in the New Testament is as the *Son* of God. Intrater highlighted the holy *modus operandi* in the Godhead, as according to the Scriptures the Father is unseen, while the Son is visible. Victor Smadja, from the Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem spoke on "The Nature of the Holy Spirit."<sup>255</sup> Smadja emphasized that according to Scripture the Holy Spirit is divine and fully belongs to the Godhead. That eternal Spirit, according to Smadja, has a unique personality and acts among the believers as an independent and divine person.<sup>256</sup>

Baruch Maoz, from Grace and Truth Assembly in Rishon LeTzion, spoke on "Messiah's Nature." Maoz highlighted the point that while believing in Yeshua's divinity, one should not forget his real humanity. Maoz also underlined that Yeshua's real humanity was sinless, because factually, sin entered humankind *after* the creation. Joseph Shulam, from congregation Roeh Israel and Netivyah in Jerusalem, spoke on "The Trinity as Seen through Judaism." Shulam stressed the point that the church's traditions and dogmas about creeds, both Catholic and Protestant, should *not* be forced upon JBY. Shulam also mentioned that "within Judaism there is no problem to call Messiah by the name *Jehovah*."

In my talk, I mentioned that the concept of tri-unity is not un-Jewish.<sup>257</sup> Schematically, in God one can see a vertical or hierarchic relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, whereby the Son submits himself to the Father. Although the Father and the Son are one, within this holy relationship there exists a divine and a perfect "functional differentiation" between the Father and the Son. In other words, the Father was never incarnated, and it was only the Son who died on the Cross of Golgotha and was resurrected. The vertical rather than horizontal "roles" within the Godhead absolutely do *not*

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<sup>254</sup> The Proceedings of the lectures at the "MJAI Trinity Seminar" are due to appear in *Zot Habrit*, organ of the 'Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel,' vol. 19, 2003 (in Hebrew), and in its forthcoming English version, vol. 5.

<sup>255</sup> Smadja reprinted portions of a book by Joseph Samuel C.F. Frey, under a new title: *The Divinity of the Messiah*, Yanetz, Jerusalem 2002, pp. 234-252 (originally named "Joseph and Benjamin," vol. 2, New York 1836).

<sup>256</sup> See also, for example, V. Smadja, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, Yanetz, Jerusalem 1995 (Hebrew Pamphlet).

<sup>257</sup> See also, for example, R. Frydland, "Trinity is Jewish", in M.G. Einspruch, ed., *A Way in the Wilderness*, Baltimore 1981, 93-98.

diminish Yeshua's divinity. At the end of the seminar, all agreed that these matters are a mystery.

### **Future Publications of the 'Ecclesiastical History' in Hebrew**

One hopes the next editions of the annotated *EH* in Hebrew will include additional bibliographic tools which would be of special help to non-professionals, and particularly Israeli and Jewish readers. Therefore, I would recommend as follows:

1. Adding an explanation for abbreviations, for example, *PG* (= *Patrologia Graeca*).

2. Improvement of the existing index by enlarging the paginal references to items which are already there such as *Ya'akov* (James), the 'Brother of the Lord' and *Tevila* (Baptism).

3. Enlarging the existing yet limited index by adding further new items. Terms like *Torah*, *Shabbat* (Sabbath), 'Pessah-Pascha-Passover'; *Natzrut* (Christianity); *Batei-Kvarot* (Cemeteries); *Gnosis*; *Pagans* and *Evyonim* (Ebionites) would be helpful.

4. In my opinion, instead of "Palestine," *Eretz Israel* should appear in most places throughout the Hebrew book. Namely, as we now already have E.Z. Melamed's Hebrew translation of Eusebius' *Onomastikon*, a work on biblical topography, why not use that valuable precedent concerning the Hebraic transliteration of geographical sites? This is true also, for example, with regard to Jerusalem (Aelia) and Pechal (Pella).<sup>258</sup>

5. Addition of a brief yet updated bibliography, in both Hebrew and English, dealing with major issues relevant to the *EH*.

6. The editor's note on the *Labarum* standard (p. 306, n. 6) should be corrected. The Christian monogram adopted by the Emperor Constantine with the two Greek letter X and P are *not* the "two first letters of the Greek language," but rather the first two letters of the *word* CHRISTOS (Messiah).

All in all, I have no doubt that the readership of historical source books would warmly welcome further Hebrew translations of authentic materials, by Latin authors as well, even those that originate from the Middle Ages. Such translations may come in the format of shorter pamphlets, etc.

### **Epilogue**

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* is not merely the history of the "Church of the Uncircumcision" and the early gentile believers in Yeshua. In fact, the *EH* belongs to the narrative of the entire Jewish Yeshua-movement, past and present. Truly, the *EH* demonstrates how the gentile church developed and

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<sup>258</sup> See *The Onomastikon of Eusebius*, Translated with notes by E.Z. Melamed, The Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1966 (in Hebrew).

shaped its identity by distancing itself from the early Jewish *Kehila* in Jerusalem. However, the *EH* is a unique historical document, full of lights and shadows about the relations between the gentile church and her biblical and Jewish roots. While the *EH* manifests the gradual institutionalization of the gentile church and her theological orthodoxy, it still remains a common heritage for both Jewish and gentile believers in Yeshua. This rich heritage enables *everyone* to construct historic comparisons, and so to deepen our understanding of the history of salvation.

Today, similarly, the church among the nations should view, with great openness and modesty, the contemporary history of JBY as part of its own history. The emergence of the modern Yeshua-movement during the past two centuries is an integral part of the eschatological and prophetic developments within the global body of believers. It is particularly in Eretz-Israel, the land of Israel, that the modern Yeshua-movement has the full potential to revive and reshape the *Kehila* portrayed in the New Testament within a Jewish majority and in daily life. Thus, as the universal church is increasingly searching for her Hebraic roots, here and now the current Messianic movement is able to mature and cure the relationship between Jewish and gentile believers in Yeshua.

The continuing significance of the Hebrew garb of Eusebius' *EH* should be valued in three contexts: education, edification and evangelism. First, the *EH* is a reliable tool for historical education and research for both secular and religious students; second, this is an inspirational and powerful testimony about believers who sacrificed their lives for the spiritual truth they adopted; third, this is an evangelistic tool especially among the Jewish people—demonstrating that faith in Yeshua is not an opportunistic step for social mobility and/or the improvement of economic standing. On the contrary, Eusebius' *EH* demonstrates that the price of becoming a disciple of Yeshua might be not only a person's property and dignity, but even his life. This price was paid until AD 313 by thousands of martyred believers. Indeed, Eusebius' monumental work demonstrates that the history of the gentile church is in its multifaceted perspective also the history of Jewish believers in Yeshua.



## Reactions to Baruch Maoz' book *Judaism is not Jewish*

In both the preface and afterward of his book, *Judaism is not Jewish*, Baruch Maoz is aware of the opposition his work will prompt. Maoz seizes on the opportunity to invite his critics, for whom he expresses affection and esteem, to dialogue with him. "Don't write me off," he enjoins. "Challenge me ..."

Consistent with the spirit of that proposal, *Mishkan* editors decided to facilitate such debate, inviting five of Maoz' colleagues to express their reactions to his book. The five are both Jewish and gentile, residents of Israel and outside of it, as well as adherents to different streams within the Messianic movement; more importantly, they are all committed to Jewish evangelism and the advancement of the gospel among the Jewish people.

To promote the dialogue, Moaz has taken the time to respond to each of the reviewers. His comments are included at the end of the five responses to his work. *Mishkan* is pleased to provide a forum for this vital interchange.

### Comments by Mark Kinzer<sup>259</sup>

In his recent volume, *Judaism is not Jewish*, Baruch Maoz provides a notable service for the Messianic Jewish movement by drawing the distinction between Jewish Christianity and Messianic Judaism in a clear and unambiguous fashion, and challenging Yeshua-believing Jews to make a decision between the two. He further serves the movement by accurately pointing out many of the deficiencies of the Messianic movement in the diaspora. But he also bestows an unintended gift on the Messianic Jewish movement: a theological attack whose weakness renders Messianic Judaism more rather than less credible.

Maoz asserts that the case for or against Messianic Judaism must stand or fall on the testimony of Scripture (p. 29). This does not bode well for the success of his own prosecutorial brief, for his exegetical practice possesses merely rhetorical force. For example, Maoz cites 1 Corinthians 7:18-19 as follows:

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*...was any man called circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.* (p. 71)

Maoz concludes from the above text that the maintenance of Jewish identity is permitted, but not required by divine mandate. However, this use of the passage flies in the face of the second half of the sentence in 1 Corinthians 7:19, which Maoz conveniently omits: “but keeping the commandments of God.” Paul acknowledges with these words that the Torah commands Jews to be circumcised and to keep the *mitzvot* given to Israel, but expects non-Jews to keep only those commandments given to all human beings. Thus, what matters is not being Jewish or non-Jewish, but obeying those divine commandments that apply to us. Of course, such a reading of 1 Corinthians 7 undermines Maoz’ entire argument, and so he slices the sentence in half and provides only its first clause.

We discover in a later section of the book how he understands the omitted clause.

*That is how Paul could say, circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God (1 Cor. 7:19). That is the burden of the prophetic message. Ritualistic emphasis at the expense of moral adherence is an abomination in God’s sight.* (p. 125)

Thus, Maoz interprets “the commandments of God” as referring to “the moral law,” which has universal and perpetual validity. This time he omits the *previous* verse: “Let the person who was circumcised when called remain circumcised, and the person who was uncircumcised when called remain uncircumcised” (1 Cor 7:18). When viewed as a complete unit, these verses suggest what Jewish tradition has always affirmed: that circumcision is a commandment for Jews, but not for gentiles. Maoz performs surgery on the text, removing the words that might lead a reader to “misunderstand” its meaning.

An even more egregious case of such radical surgery is seen in the following: “Phariseism attaches too much attention to measurable incidentals while neglecting the *weightier provisions of the Torah: justice and mercy and faithfulness.*” (p. 165)

In Maoz’ view, these words of Yeshua summon all to abandon Pharisaic (and contemporary Orthodox Jewish) teaching and practice. But in order to draw such a conclusion, he must excise the final words of the sentence: “these you should have done without neglecting the others” (Matt 23:23). The particular “measurable incidentals” mentioned by Yeshua – “tithing mint and dill and cumin” – were, in fact, not commanded in the Torah, but were later Pharisaic traditions. Thus, Yeshua tells his listeners to observe not only the Torah but also Pharisaic expansions of the Torah, while never losing sight of the difference between weightier and lighter *mitzvot*. Once again, Maoz supports

his case with a verse that in reality undermines it, and performs biblical surgery for rhetorical effect.

Maoz often interprets texts with the aid of unwarranted assumptions. Thus, he assumes that the issue in Peter's staying with Cornelius or eating with the gentiles in Antioch was his willingness to eat non-kosher food (p. 52, 135). This has no basis in the text, and is historically unlikely. Acts 10:2 informs us that Cornelius was a devout God-fearer who gave *tzedakah* to the Jewish people and prayed regularly, which probably means at the stipulated times of daily Jewish prayer (Acts 10:3). Cornelius likely observed the laws of *kashrut* himself. But even if he did not, is it probable that such a man would invite a Jew to his house and serve him non-kosher food? Similarly, is it probable that the common meals between Jews and gentiles in the Antioch community—founded and still overseen by Jewish leaders—consisted of pork and shellfish – especially when the Apostle Peter was visiting? The issue, as Peter states explicitly regarding the Cornelius incident in Acts 10:28, concerns association with impure gentiles, not the consumption of impure food.

These exegetical errors are not exceptional but typical of Maoz' work. However, an even more serious defect in the book is its theological confusion. Like most missionaries to the Jews, Maoz asserts the ongoing significance of the Jewish people in the divine plan. Yet this conflicts with his fundamental thesis that Jewish *national* and *religious* identity must be distinguished. Maoz defends the right of Jews to maintain their distinctive Jewish *national* identity after entering the church, but not their *religious* identity.

*In matters of national culture, Jews are as free to be Jewish as are the Swedes to be Swedish or the Hottentots to be Hottentots. (p. 86)*

*Jewish Christians have the same right to do what the Hottentots, the Inuit and the Magyars may do – no more and no less. (p. 145)*

Jews have the right to remain Jews, but they must recognize that their Jewish identity has no more religious significance than that of the Swedes, Hottentots, Inuits, or Magyars. Thus, while claiming to recognize the ongoing importance of the Jewish people in the divine plan, Maoz actually advocates a form of supersessionism.

From this supersessionist premise, there is no compelling religious reason for Jews to remain Jews. We have a *right* to remain Jews, just like the Swedes, Hottentots, Inuits, and Magyars have a right to maintain their national identity and culture, but we are not bound by religious *duty* to do so. Maoz seems to both embrace this conclusion and sense its problematic implications.

*Is it important for Jews in Messiah to remain Jews? It most definitely is, although we have no right to condemn any who choose to opt out of the Jewish nation, intermingle with the Gentiles and lose their Jewish identity, at least not on religious grounds, even though the loss of any Jew to the nation is painful. (p. 73)*

Why is “the loss of any Jew to the nation...painful?” Presumably because we, like Swedes, Hottentots, Inuits, and Magyars have nationalistic feelings, and want to see our nation preserved. However, “we have no right to condemn any who choose to opt out of the Jewish nation ... at least not on religious grounds.” But if Jews have no duty to remain Jews, in the long run most will not choose to do so. And Maoz has no cogent argument for why they should so choose.

Maoz’ faulty exegetical practice and confused theological thinking come together in his treatment of circumcision. On the one hand, he asserts that Galatians is not directed specifically to gentiles, but is universal in its scope (pp. 50-51). But then when looking at the main practical point of Galatians—Paul’s attempt to prevent the Galatians from being circumcised—Maoz applies it only to gentiles (p. 207). Why does this command from Paul not apply also to Jews? Why do Jewish believers in Yeshua who circumcise their sons not thereby “fall from grace”? We might think that Maoz would reply that circumcision for Jews is merely a national cultural practice. Yet, elsewhere he states emphatically that circumcision cannot be looked at in this way: “But circumcision is not a purely cultural matter; it connotes extensive theological and therefore religious implications” (p. 207). But this undermines Maoz’s national/religious distinction since Jews continue to practice a custom that must be viewed in religious terms! It even implies that circumcised Jews are *obliged* to keep the entire Torah!

*Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is [thereby] obligated to obey the whole Law (5:2-3). You cannot accept the Law piecemeal. It is all of a whole. (p. 58)*

If this is true for gentiles who accept circumcision, how can we say that it is not also true for Jews? And when Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 tells Jews that they should not remove the marks of circumcision, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he is saying that Jews are religiously *obliged* to maintain their Jewish identity, embodied in the Torah’s way of life. Thus, we have further support for our earlier exegetical assertion: the phrase “the commandments of God” in 1 Corinthians 7:19 refers not to morality, but to the distinct callings of Jews and gentiles. We therefore see that Maoz’ theological reasoning is self-contradictory.

In light of the above, Maoz’ following statement has unintended force: “The extent to which I have succeeded in proving this [i.e., the unbiblical approach of Messianic Judaism] is the extent to which Messianic Judaism should be rejected.” (p. 173).

If this is true, Messianic Judaism needs to be taken very seriously indeed.

## Comments by David H. Stern<sup>260</sup>

It cannot be denied that within the 400 pages of this book are mentioned issues that the Messianic Jewish movement should not ignore—and in very considerable measure has not ignored. However, since this article is not meant to be a thorough and balanced review of Baruch Maoz's book but rather just a general reaction, I will deal briefly with only four topics: (1) how he has chosen the book's title (foolishly), (2) how he handles theological ideas (dishonestly), (3) how he handles facts (carelessly), and (4) how he argues for the book's main point (unconvincingly).

The most bothersome thing about this bothersome book is its title. I know that book titles are marketing devices aimed at increasing sales and therefore are sometimes intended to shock, but Baruch's choice of this title reflects either a severe sense of alienation from the real world or a Humpty-Dumpty attitude toward words, or both.

Every Jew has to answer for himself the question, "What is a Jew?" But Baruch Maoz does not see this. Nor does he see that the public, both Jews and non-Jews, in fact define Judaism. Nor does he see that non-Messianic Judaism (or, as he calls it, rabbinic Judaism) contributes materially to the complex of meanings evoked by the word "Judaism." Nor does he see that various Jews may come up with various definitions which may not be consistent with each other, and yet they all remain Jews by one or more of these definitions. Nor does he see that history and society at large determine how words are used.

Instead, like Humpty-Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, he thinks words can mean whatever *he* wants them to mean, without a care for what others do in fact mean by them. He doesn't even do us the courtesy of defining "Judaism" or indicating what his sources are for the meaning he attempts to foist on the rest of us. Only thus can he state what is so obviously and obnoxiously false—that Judaism is not Jewish.

He could make a case that some of rabbinic Judaism is contrary to Scripture. He could make a case that being Jewish without knowing Messiah Yeshua is not enough to save. He could make a case that some adherents of Judaism are infected by pride—and he does make all of these claims at various points in the book, with varying degrees of cogency. However, these same points can be made about any religion, Christianity included.

The claim that Judaism is not Jewish is a complete non-starter, unless the title is only an awkward attempt to sound cute and attract attention. But if that was his purpose, he should have called his book *Christianity is not Christian* and gotten even more attention.

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Making Judaism the whipping-boy is exactly what anti-Semites in the church have done throughout history. Therefore this book title is an insult—but not mainly to his intended audience, the Messianic movement, of whom he says he is making “a friendly critique,” as he puts it in his subtitle. Rather, it is a provocation to non-Messianic Jews. Why should he want to do this? As the Hebrew expression has it, *Mah lo v'lahem*, “What is it between him and them?” Why should he want to provoke them when he has stated that his purpose is to correct errors of *Messianic* believers, not of *non-Messianic* Jews? I just don’t get it. It opens him and Jewish believers generally to a charge of anti-Semitism from non-Messianic Jews. Does he need this? Do we?

I’m already halfway through this article, and I’ve only dealt with the title. Clearly, I won’t have space to handle this book’s many inaccuracies and misconstructions. Rather, by examining in some detail a couple of typical ones, I will try to show how serious are the errors and misuses of materials that Baruch makes; and I feel safest in pointing out his intellectual dishonesty when he deals with me and what I have written.

On page 110, he writes,

*David Stern ... insists, “the Torah is in force and is to be observed” (Messianic Jewish Manifesto, ... p. 102). In his Jewish New Testament he translates Hebrews 7:12 as “there must of necessity be a transformation of Torah” and explains in his Manifesto, “A transformation of Torah does not imply its abolition” only that it is “adjusted”. David further argues in his Manifesto, p. 160, that the dietary laws are still in force and that “nothing in Galatians 2:11-14 can be construed to imply that the Jewish dietary law shall not be observed”. Indeed, “when the Jewish people become obedient and cease to break the covenant, God will fulfill his promise to bless them as a nation” (Manifesto, p. 100).*

From this he concludes I am saying that “not conversion is here called for, or faith in Jesus, but an observance of the Torah,” and claims this is in contrast to Hebrews 7:18-22.

His dealing with my three texts from *Manifesto* and the one from the *Jewish New Testament* is a typical example of how Baruch (1) intentionally chooses and manicures texts to serve his predetermined purpose without taking the context into account, especially if the context contradicts that purpose, and (2) assigns his own meanings to the texts he cites, obliterating the intended meaning of the writer (me).

In this case, the cited portion of Hebrews 7:12 carefully excludes the rest of the verse, which supports my interpretation, not his. The verse in its entirety reads, “For if the system of *cohanim* [priests] is transformed, there must of necessity occur a transformation of *Torah*.” Here the writer of Hebrews is showing that in order for Yeshua to be our *cohen gadol* [high priest], there has to be a change in the part of the *Torah* which specifies that the high priest must come from the tribe of Levi, since Yeshua is from a different tribe, Judah. It does not require the total abolition of the *Torah*. One cannot prove from Hebrews that

the *Torah* has been abolished. Moreover, Baruch's conclusion contradicts both Yeshua's statement in Matthew 5:17-20 that he did not come to abolish the *Torah* and Paul's in Galatians 3:15 ff., showing that a later covenant cannot cancel an earlier one.

On the contrary, the writer of Hebrews, in the immediately preceding verse (7:11), refers to the giving of the *Torah* by the same Greek word (*nenomothetetai*) as he uses 23 verses later at 8:6, where he asserts, in contrast to Baruch, that the New Covenant itself "has been given as *Torah*." This translation rather than the more usual "has been established" is defended in *Manifesto* and in greater detail in the *Jewish New Testament Commentary* discussion of that verse. Likewise, in these two books I show that Galatians 2:11-14 does not cancel the biblical food laws; rather it ranks their importance in the New Covenant framework as less than the importance of undisturbed fellowship among believers. But Baruch ignores all this – it does not support his claims about what I "insist."

If the New Covenant makes itself part of *Torah*, I cannot imagine Baruch would say that it is not to be obeyed on the ground that *Torah* is no longer in force! Just as the U.S. constitution is not abolished by being amended, neither is the constitution of the Jewish people received at Sinai abolished by being amended. I make this very point—and once again Baruch ignores it—on page 102 of *Manifesto* in the second half of the very sentence he quotes! Even Jewish disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant does not break it, because Scripture cannot be broken—disobedience does not obligate God to abolish it. All of this is clear as spring water in *Manifesto*, but Baruch chooses not to deal with what I wrote there. This strikes me as an intentionally illegitimate and unfair use of my words.

Not only in matters of exegesis and theology is Baruch careless, but also in matters of fact. Consider the mistakes in only six pages of his book (pp. 321-326). He tells us that the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish Alliance of America was formed in 1930 (p. 321), in 1915 (p. 322; this is correct), and in 1986 (p. 325); in the last place he says it has "daughter alliances in 16 other countries," whereas in fact it has none. He dates the formation of the Young Hebrew Christian Alliance to 1967 (p. 324) and 1965 (p. 325 – here as the Young Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, a name actually adopted in the 1970s). He gives the maiden name of Manny Brotman's wife Sandra Sheskin as "Sheila Shishkin" (p. 325). On this same page he says the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations was founded "in the mid-1970's"; on the next page he correctly dates its founding to 1979.

For 400 pages he mind-numbingly batters us with his opinion that Messianic Judaism insists that obedience to rabbinic traditions is a matter of biblical necessity, required by God of Jewish believers. As one spokesman for Messianic Judaism, I can say with absolute conviction that I insist on no such thing. Nor do I do so in any of my books. In *Manifesto* (pp. 140-145) I address the question,

“Should Messianic Jews keep the *Torah* as understood in Orthodox Judaism?” and offer five possible answers: (1) “Absolutely Yes,” (2) “It is Desirable,” (3) “It is Indifferent,” (4) “It is Undesirable,” and (5) “Absolutely Not.” Most Messianic Jews hold to the middle of the spectrum, positions (2), (3) and (4). Very, very few profess (1), and it is unfair to tar the whole movement with this view – to change the metaphor, it’s a red herring. As for me, I do not press for one answer or another but invite the reader to think about the question. More thinking and less shouting—that’s what I would ask from Baruch and from all Jewish followers of Yeshua, whether we call ourselves Jewish Christians or Messianic Jews.

### Comments by David Smith<sup>261</sup>

Baruch Maoz, in the section titled “A Practical Assessment,” writes of the Messianic Movement, it “has been more successful in raising the right questions than in providing the right answers” (p. 247). One hopes his legion of detractors will be equally reasonable in their assessment of his new book, *Judaism is not Jewish* (sub-titled *A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement*).

In his attempt to ensure a “friendly” critique, Maoz might have been tempted to sidestep the criticism. No such temptation was accommodated. Consider the following:

*Messianic Jews [who affirm both faith in Jesus and the Law] will have no choice but to continually erode their biblical convictions concerning Jesus, until they finally turn their back to Messiah and embrace a wholly rabbinic Judaism. (p. 49)*

*Where works of any kind are deemed contributory to one’s standing with God or nearness to him, works always displace grace. (p. 57)*

*Evangelism will best be promoted by a clear message, not by one obscured by the trappings of Christ-denying Judaism. (p. 64)*

*One of the great errors of the Messianic Movement is the fact that it has placed Jewishness at the centre of its life. That is where Jesus should be ... (p. 88)*

*Subservience to the Mosaic covenant is tantamount to a denial of Messiah (p. 106)*

*Still, as much as Maoz should be affirmed for prompting the right questions, it must be noted that some of the main questions remained unanswered. Maoz makes a clear distinction between the “trappings” of Judaism and its observance as a national culture (pp. 81-86). “There is, therefore, no room for Jewish Christian congregations” (p. 198). “Nor is there room to introduce in the worship of God anything but what he has explicitly commanded” (p. 202). Ultimately*

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*Maoz concludes, "There is no biblical call to forsake one's culture, except in isolated points where that culture may conflict with the gospel" (p. 207).*

The clarity of the language does not compensate for the ambiguity of the message. One senses that Maoz is more comfortable stating what he's against than expressing positive proposals. Examples would have been very helpful. For instance, in Hased VeEmet congregation, which Maoz has served as pastor for 20+ years, they have an *aron* or cabinet behind the pulpit which looks much like the *aron* where Tora scrolls are kept in a synagogue. This lovely *aron* contains much art which could broadly be defined as Judaica.

Presumably the *aron* meets Maoz' criteria for avoiding the "trappings of Christ-denying Judaism" which "rules out ... traditionally Jewish or Christian paraphernalia" (p. 202) while "in matter of national culture, Jews are free to be Jewish." (p. 86) Thorough explanations of how to celebrate national culture within biblical constraints would have added a personal and constructive element to the otherwise simply dogmatic text.

Maoz soundly exposit multiple biblical passages as indicated by the scripture index which contains more than 500 references. His exegesis of passages supporting his position (Hebrews; Acts 11-12, 15) is carried out with precision and accuracy, although doubtlessly many in the Messianic Movement will debate the fidelity of his interpretation. Still, Maoz did not actively engage his opposition in the movement by explaining the passages they so often quote.

He devotes an entire chapter (pp. 163-177) to expositing Matthew 23, focusing on the obviously anti-Pharisaic language employed by Jesus. Maoz quotes Jesus in v. 2 saying that "the scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses" (NAS). In that manner, according to Maoz, Jesus is "pointing out that the Pharisees had arrogated to themselves the right to legislate for Israel" (p. 164). Fair enough. One might debate his exegesis, and Maoz eagerly requests such dialogue (pp. 259-260). But there can be no debate as to whether the next statement ("therefore all that they tell you, do and observe") should have been dealt with.

Granted, a number of interpretations might be entertained, but the absence of any explanation of this passage (often quoted by Maoz' opposition in the movement) is as glaring as the severity of the rhetoric employed regarding rabbinic Judaism. Note the following quotes:

*The rabbis have created an unbridgeable gap between the gospel and what they and our nation recognise to be Jewish. (p. 105)*

*The rabbis knew and know God to no greater extent than a Shinto priest and Muslim Kadis, and their traditions have no more religious force. (p. 145)*

*"You denied and rejected the Messiah, you institutionalised hypocrisy, you have focused on rites and neglected internal devotion, and you have cultivated a religion of human pride and self-achievement in the very face of contrary biblical testimony. You have been the cause of*

*our continual misery, opposing the rejuvenation of Jewish national life, opposing the founding of the modern state of Israel and now are seeking to draw it back to the dark ages. Repent and believe the Gospel!"* (p. 154)

Many are convinced by the sound rationale of Maoz' argument, but open and biblically-based debate (towards which Maoz eagerly strives) requires more than exegesis of select passages and dogmatism.

Maoz' 400 page book is broken into two main sections—"A Theological Assessment" and "A Practical Assessment." But those two sections require only about half of the book. The rest of the work is composed of the preface, foreword, Stan Telchin's foreword, a section called "Foundations" (in which Maoz explains what he intends to write and offers a brief biographical sketch), an afterword, appendices (*six!*) an extensive glossary and bibliography, a "Final Word," and scripture and subject indices. The indices are helpful, but this work—clearly in need of an appendectomy—should have included suitable material from the appendices in its main two sections. For example, Appendix F ("Jesus in the Talmud"), was especially interesting, but should have been edited and inserted in the section titled, "Rabbinic Customs."

In conclusion I would like to focus on the service Maoz has rendered the Messianic and Jewish Christian communities by writing this book. Overlooking a passage or lacking precise answers to monumental questions must not undermine the importance of this volume. As noted, specific solutions are not offered, but Maoz has done a wonderful job of posing all the right questions. "How are Jewish believers to reconcile their faith in Jesus with their Jewish background?" "How might gentile believers serve in a congregation which has a Jewish majority?" "How might Jewish people be evangelized? The religious? The secular?"

*Judaism is not Jewish* goes beyond the Messianic and Jewish Christian question. It calls upon missiologists to reconsider the question of evangelizing particular ethnic communities. Obviously good missiology is not always good Bible. "Our main responsibility is to preach it faithfully, not effectively," (p. 180) according to Maoz.

I look forward to seeing this debate develop as Jewish believers of all persuasions dialogue as to how to preach and live more faithfully.

### **Comment by Ron Lewis<sup>262</sup>**

There are statements by Baruch Maoz with which I agree and also much with which I disagree in this rather repetitive book.

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Baruch seems to know "God's objective will." Knowing some of his sponsorship, I attribute much to the more extreme version of Scottish Calvinism that comes with the package. In Scotland there were several splits between Presbyterians, most claiming to be Calvinists and each claiming the support of Scripture. I was trained as a Presbyterian. Interpretation abounds within the church and blessed are those who know God's objective will.

Baruch does not accept that rabbinic Judaism is Jewish, yet he is Jewish because his father was a Conservative cantor. In the Bible there is development—the faith was being learned. Who is to say definitively what is Jewish? Baruch often appeals to Paul, who accepted slavery, the domination of husbands and parents and whose particular solutions to situations are all too often universalized into absolute precepts. That's the trouble with proof texts. Jews in Jesus' lifetime were sacrificing animals. So is it un-Jewish not to do so? Yes, Judaism has developed. Baruch may not like some of that development, but he has no right to be prescriptive about what is Judaism and whether it is Jewish or not. He dismisses Reform Judaism as a minority and because it has no legal status in Israel—a strange argument.

I do agree with Baruch that, given the shocking choice of being Jewish or following Jesus, I would have to choose the latter. I agree with the many criticisms of the practice by some of what they call Messianic Judaism. I do not want the restriction of a new Halachah or the hypocrisy over partial kashrut. The wearing of a uniform of kippa and tallit is not for me, though not because Paul had some nasty things to say about covering the head. I was once advised by a wise Liberal Jew that God is interested in what is in my head, not what's on it. I agree about the ridiculousness of some of the use of Jewish customs, e.g. wearing a Tallit on Friday evening. I abhor the type of prayer—not confined to Messianics – that needs to repeat a phrase in Hebrew and the vernacular. A bit like "Abba Father," as though God needs an interpreter.

Baruch has much to say about culture, some of it of an understanding nature, some not. Yet much of the ambience of churches is of a particular culture, e.g. Victorian Britain, revivalist America, the vocabulary full of words like "just" from American evangelists and the 1960s Jesus Movement. I see a place for people to express their faith within a comfortable cultural background, regardless of whether that is a biblical concern. For some, this may be a regular thing, for others, like me, an occasional supplement to the church life that has been mine for the past 50 years. I agree that it should not be a laid-down essential. I am certainly puzzled by those who have bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah and who use the term *mikvah* for immersion. I am uncomfortable with some of the eschatology and "Israel can do no wrong" attitude—certainly not a biblical stance. I agree that pressure to leave churches is unworthy.

I am appalled when some say they are not Christians. I do understand the preference for not calling themselves "converted" as this has nothing to do with

the evangelical use of the word; it does not imply they believe they have no sins to be forgiven. It is more an affirmation that they continue to feel they are Jews. I agree that Messianic congregations have lost much of the important history of the church; indeed, I believe they are in danger of repeating many of the mistakes.

I do not agree with Baruch that an emphasis on Jewish identity necessarily removes Jesus from the center. Sometimes I've heard a form of Yeshua worship that seems to remove God from the center.

*I appreciate the positive assessment Baruch makes of the movement, in particular the way it has helped to focus the church. Yes, there are a lot of gentiles in the congregations and even in some of the leadership, and sometimes one wonders why. For Jewish believers in Jesus, the need to satisfy an identity concern is often more important outside Israel. I found it very helpful to be put in touch with IHCA during my early days of ministerial training.*

There are other areas for which I do not have space, one being Baruch's apparent dislike of the expression of joy, other than an idea of joy in the Messiah. I also appreciate very much his statement that the prophetic message was far more than Christian fortune-telling.

I question Baruch's assertion that *meshichi* implies an evangelical Christian. I do not agree with Baruch's contrast of Torah and Christ. What some call "Torah obedience" is a different matter and usually means a Messianic form of orthopraxy, for which I have no time. As Baruch mentions elsewhere, Jesus did not come to destroy Torah. There is quite a discussion about the different ways Paul uses *nomos*. Jesus interpreted Torah in a deeper way, as the Sermon on the Mount shows. I am very much against the idea of inflicting so-called Torah obedience on gentiles, as is Baruch.

*Where Baruch and I are most at odds is when he talks of things being forbidden in worship because they are not expressly commanded in the Bible. The argument from silence is never a sound one. He is obsessed with criticism of those who use icons and incense and dance and gesticulation. These are not normally my ways of worship, but if they help people of a certain temperament to feel at home in worship, that seems to me to be good and in no way pagan. I am not against dance, but I see no justification for calling it Davidic worship. It is usually an adaptation of Israeli folk dance, some of which has non-Jewish antecedents. Baruch puts lighting Sabbath candles in this category, but I never scorn audio or visual aids. I do not think we should feel commanded to do these things.*

There are other odd things that Baruch says, e.g. a Jew may be circumcised, but a gentile never. What, not even for good medical reasons? This proof text way is ludicrous at times. It is like the "sola Scriptura" line in the reformation principles he quotes.

Another place where I agree with Baruch is when he criticises the way some Messianics seek a kind of christology in rabbinical and Jewish liturgical writings, e.g. in seeing Jesus in the *matsos*. I believe him to be unfair about many rabbis who are not as condemnatory as he suggests about Jewish believers in Jesus, although many are. I know Baruch has had some bad experiences but sin is not confined to rabbis. The great reformers of the church were not immune to

very nasty behaviour. I absolutely challenge his assertion that Jews have not become moral activists without ceasing to be Orthodox. I know examples both within and outside Israel who are living refutations. I would hate some of these comments to fall into the hands of anti-Semites.

### Comments by Torleif Elgvin<sup>263</sup>

Baruch Maoz has written an important book. The questions he raises vis-a-vis Messianic Judaism are vital. Some of the quotations he brings from reference persons and Messianic literature are revealing. They demonstrate poor reflection, lack of biblical judgment and ignorance of the history of the church.

*The book is too wordy. Baruch would have done all of us a service if he had cut it down 25 percent, given us less pages biblical exposition and more examples of both unhealthy and sound ways of life in Jewish Christian families and congregations. The preachy style weakens the argumentative power. The author paints with a wide brush, and he uses only black-and-white. Nuances are often hard to find. These weaknesses may cause readers and reviewers to brush aside Baruch's critical questions to a naive Messianic Judaism which struggles to come of age. It should not. Peeling off some of the wrappings, the core message of the book remains an essential challenge to the Jewish Christian movement of today.*

I would like to elaborate on the fairness of Baruch's treatment of Judaism. His characteristics of rabbinic Judaism are condemning, and may be misused by anti-Semites. A Jewish Christian should be aware of the power and possible *Wirkungsgeschichte* of such language.

Baruch rightly asserts that rabbinic Judaism after 70AD crystallized and developed with rejection of Jesus as a basic pillar (e.g. 171). And he questions the naive use of the Siddur and Torah scrolls in Messianic congregations (as I did 10 years ago in *Israel and Yeshua*, (ed. T. Elgvin) Caspari Center, Jerusalem 1993). The rabbis' *Torah* is not the same as *torah* in Jesus' days. But ink is spreading all around from Baruch's pen: "Judaism clashes with the message of the Bible on every crucial point imaginable" (174). "Rabbinic legalism has destroyed the spirit of the Law... it has transformed the Law into a means through which man in his pride seeks to satisfy the holiness of God" (157). "Messiah's opposition to Pharisaism led to [the Pharisees'] rejection of him and, ultimately, to his crucifixion" (155).

*A critical reading of the New Testament suggests that it was the Sadducean leadership – not the Pharisees – who, with the Roman authorities, were responsible for Jesus' death. The book of Acts confirms that the Sadducees were the main antagonists of the pre-70 church, while Pharisees at times sided with the apostles, and a number of the new believers came from Pharisaic background. A study of the pluriform Judaism of the first century indicates to many scholars that*

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*Jesus may be located closer to the Pharisees than to the other clear cut branches of the time (Essenes and Sadducees). Thus, Jesus' distance from the Pharisees is less than asserted in many sermons. Not only the gospels, but also rabbinic literature, contain harsh anti-Pharisaic statements.*

For Baruch, Pharisaism and rabbinic Judaism are two sides of the same coin. The Pharisees "manipulated civil authorities and engaged in physical and social harassment of Christians" (330). But on p. 160 he refers to first century Judaism as multiformed in contrast to the more monolithic religion from the second century onwards. Jacob Neusner has taught us that rabbinic Judaism crystallized only in the fourth and fifth centuries in a conscious contrast to the Byzantine church, powerfully present in the Land. It is only then that *Torah* became God's presence on earth and mediator between God and man. So please, do not accuse the Pharisees of the later rabbinic version of synagogal Judaism. Further, even if rabbinic Judaism has no salvific value, perhaps the creator still can use it and many of its adherents to bring forth valuable fruits for life among men. We should not forget the first article of the classical creeds.

Pre-rabbinic Pharisaism was not monolithic, as a careful reading of the New Testament should teach us. Pharisaic circles of the first century BC wrote the so-called Psalms of Solomon. Is the following paragraph (9:6-7) a good example of rabbinic or Pharisaic legalism?

*To whom will you be merciful, O God, except to those who call upon the Lord?  
He will cleanse and restore the one who confesses his sins,  
for all these things the shame is on us and upon our face.  
Whom should he forgive, if not the one who erred?  
You will bless the righteous and not punish them for their sins,  
you show mercy towards sinners who turn to you.*

Jesus and the early church are to a large extent the heirs of the pluriform early Judaism. Baruch's characteristics of Pharisaism and Jewish legalism do not further a cautious understanding of early Christianity in its Jewish setting.

*Modern advocates of Messianic Judaism are painted in black-and-white as well. On Joseph Rabinowitz of the 1880s Maoz writes: "Instead of focusing his work on Jesus, he focused on Jewish identity" (228). Is this fair and extensive treatment of this pioneer? On p. 254 he argues that Joseph Shullam intimates that Jesus is God but not equally so with the Father. This may or may not be correct, but a reader wonders where Shullam stops and Maoz begins in this paragraph.*

Baruch is not easily called an ecumenical. All non-protestant churches in the Middle East are seen as "poor representatives of the gospel" (329-30, cf. 114, 159). If one wants the Messianic movement to pass the litmus test of the doctrines of trinity and divinity of the Messiah, how can one so easily throw the churches who developed these rules of faith into the trash bin?

# **A Friendly Response to Reviews of My Book *Judaism is not Jewish***

**Baruch Maoz**

I am grateful to my reviewers for the time and attention given to my book, *Judaism is Not Jewish* (Christian Focus Publications, Ross-shire, Great Britain, 2003). Their engagement in dialogue is precisely what I both hoped and called for. I also thank Mishkan's editorial board for the opportunity to respond to these reviews. Space will not allow an extended response, so I will focus on the salient points of each.

## **Reliable Exegesis?**

Mark Kinzer's criticism of my book focuses on the exegetical grounds I seek to lay, which he believes to be very weak. The burden of exegetical proof rests with Mark and other proponents of the Messianic Movement rather than with me. His treatment of I Corinthians 7:19 is a case in point: his reading of that text as if "Paul acknowledges by these words that the Torah commands Jews to be circumcised and to keep the *mitzvot* given to Israel but expects non-Jews to keep only those commandments given to all human beings" is questionable, to say the least, and cannot be sustained by the facts of scripture. I invite my readers to view the passage for themselves.

Truth be told, it is my exegesis – not his – that enjoys the support of most exegetes, evangelical and otherwise. Of course, exegetes can be wrong, even when they are evangelical and form a consensus, but it must be admitted that Messianic Judaism represents a departure from commonly-accepted scholarly exegesis while my own proffered interpretations are consistent with it. Mark will need to persuade many of the validity of his exegesis before he can cast the first stone. Until he succeeds, my case is not as weak as Mark would like his readers to believe.

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## The Title, the *Manifesto* and the Torah

David Stern accords much attention to the title of my book. He generously admits that I “can make a case that some of rabbinic Judaism is contrary to scripture” yet insists that Jews are at liberty to define Judaism however they wish—and then he turns around and accuses *me* of acting the role of Alice’s Cheshire cat! Has Judaism become, in the hands of Messianics, a relative term? Is God not the arbiter of Jewishness? Has he not spoken in his word?

Ask any Rabbi: Orthodox Judaism insists that it is the only valid understanding of Jewish identity and of the duties that attend to such an identity because it is the only true understanding of scripture. Rabbinicism makes this claim with a degree of exclusivity that is directly related to the degree of orthodoxy it attributes to itself. (Is that not what the term orthodoxy actually means?) My title denies the truthfulness of rabbinic Judaism’s affirmation, and that is the burden of my book. I claim that Orthodox Judaism is unorthodox, that the burden of what characterizes Orthodox Judaism is contrary to scripture. If I am right to any meaningful extent, Orthodox Judaism cannot be considered Jewish in any biblical sense.

As to my reading of David’s own book, I stand by what I said and with which he is so unhappy. After quoting David I stated, “not conversion is here called for.” Note the qualifying word *here* in my statement. In the text quoted, David in no way calls for repentance, conversion or faith in Jesus, only to an observance of the Torah.

I know and respect David. I know that he believes that repentance, faith and conversion are necessary for salvation for both Jews and gentiles. Later on in his book he insists that “evangelism of Jews should be a high priority for every Christian” (*Manifesto*, p. 253). But he does not call for repentance anywhere in his book. In his proposed program for Messianic Judaism he speaks of the “Institutions We Need” (pp. 202-210) and of the “Literature We Need” (pp. 210-216). He then describes the relations he would like to pertain between Messianic Judaism and Israel (pp. 217-233). Under the title “Messianic Jewish Program In (*sic*) Regard to Israel” (p. 233) he makes but a slight reference to “Jewish evangelism in the State of Israel.” This is a disconcerting lack of biblical proportion which, I fear, betrays the weakness of the Messianic system David so vigorously seeks to promote.

Finally, David’s interpretation of Hebrews 7:12 is interesting, but there is no exegetical warrant to limiting the “passing away” of the Law to, as he puts it, “the part of the Torah which specifies that the high priest must come from the tribe of Levi.” Again, ask any Rabbi: a change in the priesthood implies a change in the whole Law, not merely in that which pertains to the levitical priesthood. Any good commentary can serve to show how poor an exegesis of this passage David’s view represents. The considerable departure from evangelical exegesis that Messianic Judaism repeatedly evidences, here shown



in Mark and in David's remarks, is yet another indication of that Movement's need to return to the Bible and to rethink its fundamental positions without the grid of determined presuppositions.

### **More Questions than Answers?**

I am at loss to understand David Smith's insistence that my message is ambiguous or that I have declined to present "positive proposals." Certainly, none of my other reviewers considered the book to be "ambiguous." I clearly called for the preservation of Jewish national and cultural identity and for Jewish Christians to remain in their churches rather than forming separate Jewish Christian congregations. Instead, I posited the Leeds Messianic Fellowship as an example to be emulated: Jews in Christ relating to one another as such within a non-congregational context and from within that context to both their churches and their own Jewish people.

David's reference to our church's "Aron" is the product of a misunderstanding. I never argued for cultureless congregational life. I contended that there is no such thing, and that congregational life should legitimately take on the cultural shade of the majority of its congregants and of the environment in which it is to be found. I did insist, however, that cultural tones should never become a congregational focus, thereby supplanting Messiah.

David is right to insist that I should have dealt with our Lord's statement concerning the duty to "do and observe" all that the Pharisees tell us while eschewing their example. The next edition of my book will do so.

### **The Authority of Scripture**

Ron Lewis' comments are of a very personal nature: "I would choose," "I would not want," "I abhor" and "I agree." Obviously, one cannot contend with personal preferences. All I can say is that, with all evangelicals and most professed Christians, I sincerely believe that what Ron describes as "God's objective will" can in fact be known from the scriptures, and that that will is binding on all mankind. That is why David Stern and Mark Kinzer sought to challenge the legitimacy of my biblical exegesis. Ron and I obviously entertain very different views of the authority of scripture. Consequently, we base our arguments on very different premises.

Nevertheless, Ron's concerns as to the legitimacy of culture are apropos. I fully agree with him and said as much in my book. I also agree that it is "very helpful" to be in touch with non-congregational Jewish Christian fellowships, such as the International Hebrew Christian Alliance. Would to God that the IHCA had not been transformed into what it is now!

## Pharisaism Defended

Torleif Elgvin misreads my statement on p. 155. (“Messiah’s opposition to Pharisaism led to [the Pharisees’] rejection of ... [Jesus] and, ultimately, to his crucifixion”). He therefore deems it necessary to remind us that “A critical reading of the New Testament suggests that it was the Sadducean leadership, not the Pharisees, who were responsible for Jesus’ death together with the Roman authorities.” Torleif is absolutely correct, but his reading of the New Testament is (deservedly!) more careful than his reading of my book. I never said that the Pharisees were responsible for the crucifixion of our Lord, only that their rejection of him “ultimately” “led ... to his crucifixion.” It must be admitted that the Pharisee’s negligence in forestalling an obviously unlawful legal procedure in which they, as members of the Sanhedrin, took part, and their well-documented antagonism to Jesus, made it possible for the Sadducees to act against him as they did.

The Pharisaism of the New Testament period was indeed, as Torleif reminds us, not that of the fourth and fifth centuries or that of today. I made the same statement in my book. But the roots of today’s Orthodox Judaism are in the Pharisaism of the days of our Lord, and many of the errors of that period are perpetuated in modern Judaism.

Torleif knows me well and is right when he states, “Baruch is not easily called an ecumenical.” I consider this to be a compliment. I am all for cooperation with those who share an evangelical foundation, and for sincere respect toward all who differ. But I cannot in good conscience consider those who deny the Reformation’s *Solas* to be true partners on the Way. In this matter, I seem to be more Lutheran than is my good friend and reviewer.

It is true, some of my statements could be used by those who are enemies of my people. But should we avoid speaking the truth for fear it might be misused?

## Mistakes

Friends and foes have pointed out a plethora of embarrassing mistakes in the first and second editions. Some of these are factual, some are spelling errors and some relate to references. I accept full responsibility for these, however they may have crept into the text. I am grateful to all who have taken the trouble to point them out. I undertake to correct them in the third edition.

## A Final Word

I am encouraged by the agitation that most of my reviewers have evidenced in their evaluations. Obviously, my message has touched a chord in their hearts. I extend to them and to all whose views they represent a sincere hand of loving and respectful friendship in the Messiah. We must continue to converse.

I still await a response that will not focus on secondary matters, nor merely exclaim against my thesis, but prove it to be false. Could the lack of any such be an indication of the truth of my thesis and of the force of my argument, in spite of the evident weaknesses of their presentation?

It is my firm conviction that God as he is known in Messiah should be the focus of all individual and congregational life. There is no room for any other emphases at the core of our lives, corporate or individual. I believe that only as our people are called back to God in Messiah—not to Torah—will they find the salvation they so desperately need. I further believe that God's Word must bind all of our consciences, and that we shall be judged according to that Word on the final day. May we all have grace to grow together in grace and in true spiritual knowledge.

# Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism

## Helsinki 2003: Jesus and His People

The Seventh International Conference of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), a worldwide network of organizations and individuals involved in sharing the gospel among Jewish people, met in Finland August 7-12, 2003. This venue was chosen because of its proximity to the former Soviet Union and because of the Nordic region's historic concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of the Jewish people. More than 200 participants from 18 countries and five continents met to consider the challenge of *Jesus and His People*.

Founded in 1980, the LCJE provides a forum for cooperation among mission agencies, theological institutions and other organizations, alerting the Church to the priority of Jewish evangelism.

### The Reunion of Jesus and His people

**We rejoice** that Jewish people worldwide are finding their Messiah. Wherever the name of Jesus (*Yeshua*) is being proclaimed, He is being recognized by His own, despite the obstacles of misunderstanding, opposition, anti-Semitism and prejudice. We are particularly encouraged by the vibrant witness of Russian-speaking Jewish believers worldwide and the creative and courageous indigenous leadership they bring to our movement.

**We also rejoice** in the breaking down of barriers among those in local congregations and communities who were formerly divided on religious, ethnic and other grounds. True reconciliation takes place through the receiving of the peacemaking love of God, demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of the Messiah.

**We observe** with concern that there are those who do not consider verbal proclamation of the gospel to Jewish people a necessary part of the Great Commission. While we appreciate all those who care for the material needs of Jewish people, we are saddened when the eternal need of the Jewish people is not directly addressed.

**We acclaim** Jesus, who, like His people, experienced persecution and rejection. He is their Lord and Savior. We rejoice that despite efforts to legislate against evangelism *Jesus and His People* are being reunited.

## Who is this Jesus?

**We rejoice** that in spite of current spiritual counterfeits and mystical speculation prevalent in the search for Jewish identity today, Jewish people are recognizing the uniqueness of Jesus and embracing Him as their Messiah.

**We observe with concern** the challenge to the deity of Jesus by some in the broader Messianic movement. A proclamation of a lesser Jesus, though more palatable to the Jewish community at large, will inevitably lead to a false gospel message.

**We acclaim** that Jesus is the one whom Moses called “a greater prophet” than himself. Indeed He is the one of whom the law and the prophets speak. There is salvation in no other name. He is both the suffering servant and God incarnate. This Christology is fundamental to our evangelism.

## What of His people?

**We rejoice** that there is today increased freedom and opportunity to proclaim the Good News of the Messiah to Jewish people in areas that were previously closed, such as the former Soviet Union.

**We rejoice** in the progress towards reconciliation between Jewish and Arab believers which testifies that the bond believers share in Jesus transcends all political and geographic barriers.

**We observe** with concern whenever the national identity of Jewish believers takes precedence over their unity with others in the universal body of believers.

**We observe** with concern the need of the Jewish people for safety and security throughout a world where anti-Semitism and racial prejudice are still active. We also note the concern for preservation of Jewish identity in post-modern and pluralistic environments.

**We acclaim** Jesus as both the road and map to true *shalom* with God and one another, and pray that those who seek peace and pursue it will know the presence and help of the Prince of Peace in all they do.

**We acclaim** Jesus, the true representative of Israel, as the key to His people’s search for identity and purpose.

## What is our response?

**We call** on one another, as those involved in the ministries of evangelism, teaching and congregational planting, to work in cooperation to bring *Jesus and His People* together. May we be quick to resolve issues among us and be united in the highest standards of ethical conduct and personal relationships. May we celebrate our diversity within our unity in Jesus.

**We call** on one another to share the need for Jewish evangelism with the emerging churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We call on our brothers and sisters there to pray and work for the salvation of the Jewish people.

**We call** on believers worldwide to share the Good News with the Jewish people, making every effort to relate the gospel in culturally appropriate ways, while maintaining that there is salvation in no other name.

**We call** on the Jewish people to recognize their Messiah and to follow Him. Israel is still chosen to fulfill her calling as His people, and this can only be accomplished when she recognizes the rightful place of Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

**Ultimately we call on the name of the Lord and implore Jesus**, in the power of His Spirit, and to the glory of His Father, to strengthen us for the task, to unite us in His name, and to come quickly for His people and for all the world.

# Books Recieved

**M. Luther Stirewalt Jr.**

*Paul, the Letter Writer.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 165 pp. \$22.00.

**Simon J. Gathercole**

*Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xii + 311 pp. \$32.00.

**Jodi Magness**

*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xlvi + 238 pp. \$18.00.

**Betty Jane Bailey & J. Martin Bailey**

*Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xiv + 215 pp. \$20.00.

**Larry W.Hurtado**

*Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xxii + 746 pp. \$55.00.

**James D. G. Dunn**

*Jesus Remembered. Christianity in the Making, Volume 1.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xvii + 1019. pp. \$55.00.

**John Howard Yoder**

*The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited.* Edited by Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. viii + 290 pp. \$30.00.