

THE VIEW FROM HERE

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The entire issue of soteriology is a highly nuanced complex of theological subject matter—or at least it should be. To some it resembles more a minefield than a reasoned enterprise. It begs for answers to questions which may not have adequate answers this side of eternity. When “combatants” enter this fray, it might be helpful to understand from which direction they choose to approach.

Before stepping into this theological minefield, therefore, I want to identify the perspectives that inform my observations of these vital and volatile issues. I am firmly convinced of, and committed to, the following: 1] “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.” 2] “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”¹

Among other things, over the years of extensive examination I have also concluded that: 1] The Torah was authored by Moses and is not the compilation of multiple editors. 2] There is but one human author of Isaiah, of Zechariah, and of each of the rest of the prophets. 3] Daniel was written by Daniel in the Persian era and not in the Maccabean period. 4] The Exodus occurred in the fifteenth century BCE and not in the thirteenth. 5] All four Gospels were written in the first century. 6] The Rabbi Paul wrote all of the letters directly attributed to him. 7] The entire Newer Testament canon was written by Jews before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. These are some of the perspectives that inform my thinking and which I then bring to the matter at hand.

Furthermore, I do not intend to provide answers to each of the interrelated questions involved in this discussion. My purpose is limited to sketching some observations and outlining some perspectives I find relevant to these issues. I do not claim that these observations and perspectives are entirely original, nor are they final. In fact, many of them are derived from the thoughts and work of others from whom I have benefited and whom I will endeavor to cite faithfully.

One further matter concerns me. All too often the question—or questions—under discussion is intended to discredit rather than to inform. It is raised not to seek answers to honest questions but rather to provide the pretext to make accusations or cast aspersions about the person questioned, or to evaluate the quality and merits of his or her theology. However, I intend to proceed as if in answer to an honest inquiry.

Initially some general observations are in order. A primary consideration in dealing with these issues is that God is fair in all he does; in fact, he is absolutely fair and just, and more fair than we could ever hope to be. Abraham based his bargaining with God on this foundation. “Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?” he said. (Gen. 18:25) God deals with all people with absolute equity and complete appropriateness.

Further, all people have some “light,” some vital information about God, whether that comes from conscience and/or creation. Some knowledge of God, or gods, naturally seems to pervade all cultures. The near universal, normal response of humans—unless expressly educated otherwise—acknowledges the Divine in some fashion. Additionally, a sense of moral “oughtness,” some standard of right and wrong, appears across cultures. And, this is usually connected to some set of perceived Divine expectations or guidelines. The ancient Rabbi and the Psalmist address these two perspectives in several biblical texts. “What may be known about

God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.”

(Rom. 1:19-20 NIV) This apparently serves as Rav Shaul's commentary on David's comments about the role of creation or nature in informing humans about the existence of God: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” (Psa. 90:1 NIV)

The Rabbi then adds concerning the impact and role of conscience: “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” (Rom. 2:14-15 NIV) To responsive and open people creation and conscience testify to God's existence and to the moral necessity of behavioral standards.

Moreover, Scripture teaches that God judges people based on the “light” or information they have received. “All who sin not having the law will also be judged apart from the law, and all who sin having the law will be judged by the law.” (Rom. 2:12; cf. Lk. 23:34) Or as Peter expressed it: “I now most certainly understand that God shows no partiality. But, in every nation God welcomes the one who fears him and does what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35) God is the judge of all people. He judges them on the basis of what they do know and what they have done with that knowledge. Yeshua addressed it this way: “An hour is soon coming in which all who are in their graves will hear His [the Son of Man's] voice, and will arise; those who did good deeds to a resurrection of life, and those who committed evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:28-29) On the whole, it appears that many people have merely set aside the truth they are aware of as it relates to God, or so Romans 1:25 intimates. “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather the Creator.” (NIV)

However, this raises the question about the minority—regardless of how small or how large it may be. What about those who respond positively and correctly to the information they do have, and have not yet heard about Yeshua—or have not encountered a clear and accurate presentation of his message? Again the biblical texts provide some guiding principles. God makes a way to get these positively-responding individuals the information necessary to take the next step. In fact, it appears that he often “goes out of his way” to do so. In Acts 10 Cornelius had responded properly to the information and understanding he had about God. God then gave both him and Peter special visions in order to bring them together, and so Peter presented to Cornelius and his family the message they needed to hear in order to complete their journey to God. Of all the people in Jericho Rahab seems to have been the only one who understood and appreciated that God was clearly with Israel (Josh. 2:11-13). So God made sure the spies arrived at her house. She heard the rest of the story from them and consequently was rescued from the destruction that fell on the rest of the city. Ruth lived in Moab, a place where Israelites would (and should) not normally be found (Num. 25, Deut. 23). Yet Naomi and her family went there and impacted Ruth’s life. Ruth had apparently been prepared for this encounter and undoubtedly had responded to God previously to the best of her ability. Already sensitized to God, she was ready to respond to Naomi (and to God) with that ringing commitment: “Your people will be my people, and your God my God!” (Ruth 1:16) Apparently God brings people together and brings the needed information—whatever or how much that might be, he knows far better than we—to those who are already in the process of responding to him. As the author of Hebrews maintains: “He is the rewarder of those who seek him.” (Heb. 11:6) After all, the Torah does promise: “If you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you search with all your heart.” (Deut. 4:29) In Jeremiah (29:13) God confirms this promise when he announces: “You will seek me and find me

when you search for me with your whole heart.” There are also contemporary examples of previously unreached, primitive peoples welcoming “missionaries” with greetings similar to “We’ve been waiting for you to come and tell us the news about God.”² God seems quite willing to use unusual means, and to go to great lengths, to reach people who are responsive to him based on what they already do know. He is, after all, “not wishing that any should perish, but desires that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9).

But, are these people safe (with respect to their eternal destiny) until they have heard “the rest of the story?” They clearly are not certain, settled, and secure about this issue until they have heard and responded. Several examples illustrate this important perspective. Mahatma Gandhi, for all his devotion and accomplishments, stated in his autobiography: “It is a constant torture to me that I am still so far from Him whom I know to be my very life and being.”³ Mother Teresa, a globally-respected symbol of saintly devotion, could nevertheless write: “When I try to raise my thoughts to heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my soul. There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead.”⁴ A weeping Yohanan ben Zakkai could say on his deathbed: “Moreover, two roads lie before me, the road to Gan Eden [Paradise] and the road to Gehinnom [Hell], and I don’t know on which road I am to be taken—shall I not weep?” (Berachot 28b) No sense of certainty or assurance of a settled and secure relationship with the Almighty surfaces in these statements. In other words, a sensitive, responsive person usually senses his or her failings. Those without the Gospel—regardless of their piety and responsiveness—remain in great uncertainty and many in grave danger. However, the final word may not yet have been given with respect to their circumstances and destiny.

This raises an important question, particularly with respect to ben Zakkai. Is it just possible that he—and others—were still living circumstantially or functionally in an Older Testament “theological” context even though living chronologically in a post-resurrection historical situation? To be more specific, it would seem that many first century people actually lived during the time after Yeshua’s resurrection, yet they could be accurately described—given the concrete reality of their lives and the very recent “arrival” of the Gospel on the historical scene—as living in OT times with respect to the accessibility of, and their access to, Yeshua’s life-giving message. They simply had as yet no opportunity for contact with the Gospel; it had not spread to them during their lifetime. And Jews in these circumstances could still tap into the earlier covenant promises and what is described as “the gospel to Abraham” (Gal. 3:8) or “the gospel” in the wilderness (Heb. 4:2) as they had previously. The liturgical and rabbinic materials often express this same grace-based understanding. During Shacharit (the daily morning prayers) we pray: “Sovereign of all worlds! Not because of our righteous acts do we lay our supplications before you, but because of your abundant mercies.” At Mincha (the daily afternoon service) we add: “Our Father, our King, be gracious unto us and answer us, for we have no good works of our own; deal with us in graciousness and lovingkindness, and save us.” The Sages remind their students: “David said, ‘Some trust in their fair and upright deeds, and some in the works of their fathers, but I trust in you.’ Although I have no good works, yet because I call upon you, you answer me.”⁵ The Rabbis comment further: “Deal with your servant according to your grace (Psalm 119:124). Perhaps you take pleasure in our good works? Merit and good works we have not; act towards us in grace.” (Tehillim Rabba on 119:123) Every Shabbat morning synagogues around the world pray: “Enlighten our eyes in your Scripture, and let our hearts cleave to your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and revere your name that we might never be put to

shame. Because we have trusted in your holy, great and revered name, we shall rejoice and be glad in your saving power.”⁶ While this connection to God may have provided a relationship with the Almighty, it was clearly transcended by “the surpassing greatness of knowing Yeshua the Messiah” (Phil. 3:8), as Rav Shaul had experienced it, and by “the life abundant” (John 10:10) Yeshua offers. Is it just possible then that some people alive today—and many who lived in earlier generations—nevertheless still live circumstantially in an OT context? If so, then God may well deal with them in the same way as he dealt with those who actually lived in the similar pre-resurrection OT situation.

Two significant observations seem quite pertinent at this point as they bear directly on this question. The first comes from within Messianic Jewish circles.

“Yes, God can save through visions, can bring missionaries after a response to God. Yet the New Testament shares a general pessimism concerning the opportunity (not impossibility) of salvation apart from the preaching of the Good News. Why?

1. Its verdict in Romans one is that most have not responded to the revelation of God in nature. Humans go on in their self-centered existence.
2. Many have not responded rightly in Judaism. The truth is there. But many have not responded to God’s righteousness but have sought instead to set up a different way of righteousness. Romans is clear on this. Having a zeal for God, they nevertheless sought to establish righteousness in a way that caused a failure to submit to God’s righteousness. There is still more light here and possibility of response, but never so much as to blunt the urgency of the Good News.

So the Bible does not preclude responding to God and being connected to Yeshua in some non-specific way by seeking Him, but it leads us to believe the chances are slim

that many will. We comfort ourselves on our grandparents and hope they survived. We hope that those in the camps really turned to God, and there are wonderful stories of supernatural revelation. However, outside of explicit faith in Yeshua we simply do not know. We do have some hope. But the general condition of all is desperate need for the Good News. Besides that, the progress of the Kingdom through the Good News is the key to moving history toward the return of Yeshua and the fullness of the Kingdom.”⁷

The other observation comes from Harry Ironside, pastor of Moody Bible Church in Chicago in the 1930’s and 1940’s and a leading evangelical scholar of the early 20th century.

“I like to tell the story of a dear Jewish friend of mine, Mark Lieb, who, when he was a little boy of twelve in Odessa, Russia, came into a room where his aged grandmother sat with her Hebrew Bible on her lap and he saw tears on her face. “Mark,” she said, “I want to read something to you,” and she read from the Bible these words from Isaiah 53 [quoted in Acts 8:32-33]. Then she turned to him and said, “Mark, these words refer to our Messiah, the Messiah of Israel. Some day He is coming and He will suffer for our sins. Mark, I have been looking for Him for over forty years, but He hasn’t yet come. But you are just a little boy. He may come in your day. Keep these words in your heart and wait for Him, for He will surely come and fulfil God’s Word.” That dear Jewish lady went out into eternity without hearing of Jesus. But who can doubt that her faith in the Word of God was just as real and acceptable to God as if she had heard of Christ and accepted Him as Saviour! She was saved through believing in the name of the One who, to her, was yet to come.”⁸

Both the Bible and experience seem to indicate that there is genuine hope for a legitimate, though limited, relationship with God possible for those who genuinely respond to him based on

the knowledge they have of him. And, God will see to it that they then receive whatever further information and understanding is necessary to cement that relationship. For this, we can trust God explicitly.

There are some further considerations I would like to address, some of which are based on my previous reflections.⁹ These may serve as a preliminary response to the issues at hand. The final answers we happily leave to God!

Foundationally, all of God's actions are perfect and without even the faintest hint of unfairness. The Torah makes this an unambiguous claim. "...his works are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." (Deut. 32:4) Therefore, we can be absolutely confident about God's character and his assessment as he deals with people. While denying that all religions are equally valid, or that all people do have an adequate relationship with God, we heartily acknowledge that God will treat every person with complete love and perfect justice. The Psalmist described God's treatment of people as "righteousness and peace kissing each other." (Psa. 85:10) Or, as Elihu reminded Job: "Far be it from God to do evil, for the Almighty to do any wrong." (Job 34:10) Simply put, it is unthinkable to maintain that God will treat any person of any time, place or circumstance at all unfairly. The Judge of all the earth will do what is right!

Unequivocally, Yeshua is the definitive and fullest revelation of God. In other words, God has revealed himself to some extent in creation and conscience, perhaps even to some small degree in some other religions, and certainly at least partially in historical Judaism. However, God has fully and most definitively revealed himself in Yeshua alone, as Hebrews 1:1-3 makes quite clear: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, at many times and in various ways. But now in the end of days he has spoken to us by the Messiah, the Son, whom he

appointed the heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the full radiance of God's glory and the flawless manifestation of his reality. He sustains all things by his powerful word. After he made atonement for sins, he sat down in the place of authority beside the Majesty in heaven." And with this authority Yeshua will judge all other claims of revelation as well as the ultimate status of all individuals, as he pointed out: "The Son gives life to all he pleases. The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son." (Jno. 5:21-22; cf. Matt. 13:41-42)

No other means of full atonement exists apart from what God provided through Yeshua's death and resurrection. Unquestionably, Yeshua's all-sufficient atoning work remains undeniably necessary and clearly central to the issue of man's relationship with God. The discussion swirls around whether Yeshua's sacrifice can be efficacious and applied for people who have not sufficiently known and specifically accepted his provision of atonement. This would include such people as those who lived before his resurrection, infants who die, mentally challenged individuals intellectually incapable of understanding the gospel, and people who have had no real, clear opportunity to hear an accurate presentation of Yeshua and his life-giving message but have responded positively to God based on the information they have.

Clearly, while God is infinite and beyond full comprehension, humans remain finite and fallible. And, all too often, people speak far too quickly and dogmatically about matters beyond their purview. Job expressed it well. "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." (Job 42:3 NIV) Therefore, we all need to cultivate a significant measure of hermeneutical humility and theological tentativeness. This is not to argue for skepticism or agnosticism, nor to plead for the cessation of vigorous interaction. Instead, it is the reminder and recognition of what God declared: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts beyond yours." (Isa. 55:9) Rather than speak

too definitively and quickly, we need to step back and respond humbly as Rav Shaul did. He marveled: “How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways! For who has understood the mind of the Lord?” (Rom. 11:33-34) While we tend to be driven to arrive at clear-cut answers to life’s (and theology’s) complex questions, some questions have to go unanswered in this life. The Rabbis remind us of this tension-relieving approach to difficult matters when they remark: “When the Messiah comes, he will tell us.” We correctly insist that the Bible remains God’s revelation. However, this does not mean that it answers every question that nags us. Furthermore, not all things in the biblical texts are equally clear, nor, by any means, are they equally clear to all readers. Certainly we can arrive at a sufficient—even if not perfect—understanding of what is vital for life with and under God. On the other hand, we should remind ourselves that while the Scriptures are infallible, the interpreter—and hence his or her understanding—is not. Moreover, a high view of divine inspiration does not automatically guarantee a high level of accurate interpretation. Thus, theological modesty remains a quality for all to cultivate.

Consequently, we retain the challenge and responsibility to disciple every people and nation. Yeshua’s charge to us all remains; “Everywhere you go, and as you are going, disciple all peoples.” (Matt. 28:19-20; et al.) So we must guard against any loss of nerve or motivation to proclaim and explain the life-giving, life-changing message of the Jewish Messiah who remains the very source of life itself.

Based on these considerations, we need to steer a path between claiming too much and saying too little. The former can easily lead to a needlessly harsh—and over-dogmatically self-confident—position that drives people away from, rather than attracts them to, the person and power of the Gospel. The latter may lead to subtly minimizing the uniqueness and centrality of

Yeshua. To remedy this we hold two biblical principles together. God desires that no one should perish, but rather that every person be rescued and transformed by coming to know him. (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) And two, Yeshua alone is the only way to experience such rescue, transformation and relationship with God. (Jno. 14:6; Acts 4:12) Exactly how these two principles fully integrate and interweave with one another only God knows.

According to many interpreters, it does seem likely that some people have been “saved” exclusively by Yeshua even though they may not have explicitly called upon Yeshua, i.e. the afore-mentioned infants, the mentally challenged, and OT types. Others will similarly add to this group those who respond faithfully to that knowledge they do have of God. To paraphrase C. S. Lewis from Mere Christianity regarding this position, “We do know that no person can be saved except through Yeshua; we may not know that only those who explicitly know him can be saved by him.”

In an interview Terrance Tiessen, a missionary and the author of Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions (InterVarsity Press), further unwraps this perspective.¹⁰

“About ten years ago, I became convinced, much to my own surprise, that God may save people whom he does not reach with the gospel. For some years I expressed my thought in terms of the widely used typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism....*Accessibilism* [a term from an article by William Lane Craig] struck me as capturing very nicely what I have come to believe. Salvation is accessible wherever God chooses to apply the work of Christ by his Spirit, and he can do this even where new covenant revelation is not known....

The good news concerning Jesus is God's ordinary means for bringing sinners into relationship with himself and maturing them in communities of faith that provide a small foretaste of life in the kingdom of God. Evangelism is not just about getting individuals saved from eternal condemnation, it is about bringing into being new covenant communities of people in and through whom God is working to turn back the ravages of sin—personal and social—and to establish his reign on earth....I believe that we should rejoice in the thought that some of God's elect are among those whom the church, in its weakness or disobedience, has not reached with the gospel...Few things are more exciting to a missionary than the surprise of finding that God has been at work before we arrive with the gospel and the people's hearts are already turned toward God and eager to receive his fuller revelation. Why would it disturb us that God may have saved some of these people, particularly ones who had lived and died in the years before we got there?....

It fascinates me though, that people who show this much admirable sympathy for infants seem much less concerned about the large number of adults who live and die without any knowledge of Jesus. I see these as groups within the general class of the "unevangelized." They are sinners who need salvation but who do not know the gospel. I argue that our doctrine of salvation should account for all of the groups of the unevangelized and that it should do so in a consistent way. I hear a clear biblical statement that every human being is a sinner who needs God's salvation and that the only means by which God ever saves anyone is by grace through faith. There are no exceptions to this principle and so we have to unpack how it works in the varied situations of human existence....

I am not saying that the various religions of the world are agencies that God has raised up as means of his saving work in the lives of any of their adherents. I am not saying that there is a second chance for people after death if they have rejected God's revelation up to the end of their lives, although I do postulate that some who have been previously saved by faith (including infants and other unevangelized) will first place their faith in the person of Christ when they meet him at death. I am not saying that because God can and does save some apart from the church's witness to Jesus, we need not make costly sacrifices to bring to everyone in the world the gospel, which God uses with saving power and which marvelously transforms the lives of individuals and whole communities."

Tiessen has clearly articulated here some very important and consistently biblical considerations.

Before concluding I want to quote a friend and colleague with whom I have worked and interacted for over 30 years. Dr. Michael Schiffman has very pointedly and perceptively addressed the issues under discussion.¹¹

"This is my view...to this point.

First, I believe that NO ONE gets into the Kingdom of Heaven without Yeshua. He is the Only WAY through which people can be saved. Having said this, I must also affirm that I do NOT believe that every Jew who does not believe DIRECTLY in Yeshua (i.e., naming the name) automatically goes to hell. This may be heretical for some of you, but I honestly do not believe that, based on Scripture as well as Yeshua's own words and actions regarding our people, as well as all the other Scriptures regarding Israel. I base this upon the fact that the Jewish people have a covenant with G-d that is still in effect, that is not based upon them, but upon G-d Himself, and do not find a setting aside of the

Jewish people in Scripture. I do not believe in selling my people down the river to make my theological formulae work. I will yield to Scripture always, but not to theological constructions which are human and often blindsighted at times.

Our people have a covenant with G-d. This covenant itself is NOT a covenant of salvation; however it DOES set our people apart from the nations in several respects, among them being that we are a people with a relationship OF SOME KIND with G-d, and should not be viewed as the other peoples of the earth. This is the imagery in Matthew 25:32-42 of the final judgment, as well as the imagery of the life of Joseph and his BRETHREN. In both cases, our people are not seen as outside the love and protection of G-d.

In my understanding, this DOES NOT mean that Jewish people have another way of salvation other than through Yeshua. I believe in John 14:6 that Yeshua is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that NO ONE comes to the Father but by HIM. But if you look at the grammatical construction and language of that verse, it could be also understood, and with the same weight be translated “BY ME” or “BY WAY OF ME.” The former is the favorite understanding of the Church, because it fits their theology, and is on some level self serving. It follows the philosophy that there is no salvation outside the Church, therefore all must come in. The down side to this view is that this understanding robs people of the hope that IS in Scripture. It reduces salvation to a contractual agreement and leaves almost no room for G-d to be merciful and gracious. This is why we hear people commonly say of a deceased unsaved relative or friend, “Of course we don’t know what happened in the last moments of life...” as if Yeshua was going to reveal Himself as the last few brain cells die. This is not only unbiblical, it is a pathetic attempt

to give some hope to someone for a loved one who obviously did not do what the John 14:6 contract required.

If you understand John 14:6 to mean “BY WAY OF ME,” the imagery of Yeshua is understood not as the DOOR of salvation, but the DOORKEEPER of salvation. While Yeshua did say I AM THE DOOR in John, He is also pictured as a doorkeeper in Revelation. The value of understanding the verse in this way restores in our understanding Yeshua’s right to make a judgment call. WE only see the outside, but G-d looks upon the heart.

While I do not speak here of all Jews, I know of Jewish people of faith who truly believe in, and LOVE, the G-d of Israel. They are not pagans, who worship a false G-d, but people who have a knowledge of G-d, be it a limited knowledge. Paul said they have received from G-d a BLINDNESS IN PART. Many of us in the past have understood this in a self-centered way to mean that the larger part of Israel was blind (totally), but WE, the remnant, are those who are not blind, hence there being a blindness in part. I do not believe Paul was speaking in this manner. I think he was saying the Jewish people have a knowledge of G-d, and a love for G-d, but it is a partial knowledge because they DO NOT see Yeshua.

We know that Yeshua is G-d and the agent of creation. HE is the G-d who was at Sinai and gave the Torah to Israel. He is the one who was with our people through the wilderness, in the Land, and the One to whom our people prayed and directed their worship. When the Jewish people pray to G-d, they ARE praying to Yeshua, without realizing it. This is why Mark Nanos in his The Mystery of Romans says the weaker BROTHERS are Jewish people who have not yet come to the knowledge of Yeshua.

During the first century many, but not most, of the world Jewish population came into contact with Yeshua, and of those who did, it would be possible to say that many rejected HIM. Since that time, as our people encountered an increasingly non-Jewish Yeshua and totally gentile movement of His followers, it can not be said they rejected the real Yeshua. In fact, their NO to Yeshua could be understood to be a YES to His Father. IT was a demonstration of faithfulness, not unfaithfulness, although it missed the mark severely. Yet I believe that G-d who knows all hearts not only judges right from wrong, but He understands when we do the wrong things for the right reasons, and the right things for the wrong reasons.

It is quite possible that on the day of Judgment, many of our people who never encountered the real Yeshua, who really loved G-d and trusted in HIM, could be speaking with a man at the door, and have the feeling they know Him and have spoken to HIM before. He knows they loved Him and some went to their deaths with even the partial knowledge they had of Him, and He says, “We have spoken before. ‘I am your brother Joseph. Come near to me. I will take care of you’.”

As to those who say, “Then why does anyone need to accept Yeshua? And why should we bother sharing our faith with other Jewish people?” my understanding is, NOT TO PROVE SOMEONE’S theological point! The reason anyone should accept Yeshua is more than salvation as concept. IT is RELATIONSHIP. That is the reason for the Torah. That is the reason Yeshua came. Atonement in concept is closeness to G-d. The whole point of the Jewish religion is that we might be close to G-d, and every mitzvah is designed to bring us closer to HIM. Yeshua brings us incredibly close to G-d, by the fact

of our relationship to G-d and the forgiveness of our sins. All Yeshua's parables of the Kingdom point to this. All His critiques of the Pharisees point to this.

No one comes to G-d apart from Yeshua, but we need to give HIM room to make the call. We need to testify of Him and call others to Him because of the closeness He gives us to G-d. Salvation is not just a label or state of being. It is a relationship.”

I heartily resonate and concur with Dr. Schiffman's observations.

I want to conclude with several observations. People rooted in the Western world often seem driven to have clear-cut, precise answers to specifically-defined questions, and they desire to cleanly fit sharply-bounded concepts into exacting categories. We want to analyze, organize and systematize. Unfortunately, some issues defy this process, and reality truly is messy. The biblical texts, rooted as they are in a Semitic worldview, tend to treat reality differently. Paradox and tension thrive freely in this world; nuance and complexity flourish happily. Everything need not be reconciled nor understood. Some questions never arise, and others are intentionally and comfortably left unanswered.

I have not answered all the questions and addressed all the issues raised in this discussion; I did not intend to. I have observed and described what I felt I could accurately observe and reasonably describe; other matters simply defy human explanation. The destiny of any particular individual, or group of individuals, is simply beyond our knowledge; it is clearly God's business and not ours. Basically, that's "the view from here." More than this I cannot and will not say. After all, when Messiah comes, he will tell us!

NOTES

¹ "Doctrinal Basis" statement of the Evangelical Theological Society.

² For example, cf. Eternity in Their Hearts by Don Richardson. I have also personally heard similar reports from missionaries from TEAM.

³ Quoted in William R. Bright, Jesus and the Intellectuals, Campus Crusade for Christ, San Bernardino, 1966, p. 10.

⁴ Quoted in the ¹St. Petersburg Times, August 25, 2007.

⁵ Midrash, Psa. 141, ed. M. Buber, pp. 530-531.

⁶ For a further elaboration on grace and a relationship with God in Judaism, see the following articles by John Fischer:

"Torah: Can You Work Your Way to God?" Messianic Outreach, Autumn 1986.

"Foundations of Messianic Theology," Mishkan, no. 1, 1995.

"Yeshua and Halacha: Which Direction?" Kesher, Summer 1997.

"Jesus through Jewish Eyes: A Rabbi Looks at Jesus," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 2003; available through www.menorahministries.com.

⁷ Daniel Juster, email posting on the UMJC Leaders Forum, Sept. 1, 2000.

⁸ H. A. Ironside, Lectures on the Book of Acts, pp. 195-196.

⁹ For this section I am heavily dependent on Daniel B. Clendenin, "The Only Way," Christianity Today, January 12, 1998, pp. 34-40.

¹⁰ Dan Reid, "Salvation, the Unevangelized and the Religions," an interview with Terrance Tiessen in Academic Alert, Winter 2001, InterVarsity Press, pp. 3, 5. The entire interview has direct bearing on our discussion.

¹¹ Michael Schiffman, “Another view on heaven, hell and our sense of justice,” email posting on the UMJC Leaders Forum, April 4, 2000.