

## **What Is The Gospel We Should Be Commending To All Israel In These Times Of Transition?**

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### *Introduction*

I was about ten years old the first time somebody called me a Christ-killer.

I had just come out of Morris Schaeffer's candy store, on the corner of Winthrop Street and Nostrand Avenue, in Flatbush, Brooklyn. A bunch of kids whom I had never met before jumped me, pummeling me to the ground, while making a profound theological query: "Why'd you kill God?" I had no answer for them. At that moment I didn't know what they were talking about. Only later, while tending to bruises and scrapes (some) and checking for broken bones (none), did I realize that they were talking about Jesus. Thus ends my first experience with witnessing.

My bruises and scrapes healed a long time ago. Still, fifty-three years later, I am still hurting. But the pain of being picked on as a child is nothing compared to how I feel now when friends and colleagues in the missions and Messianic Jewish world, most of them Jews, beat up on the Jewish people. It isn't any prettier when we lump the Jews or any group of Jews into a distrusted, despised class, than it was for those Irish kids to beat me up one cool and clear autumn in New York.

I confess that, in part, I am missiologically directed and driven by my sensitivity to theological Jew-bashing. I know we all agree that this should have absolutely no

place in our outreach to our people. But, beyond contradiction, most of us are well practiced in bashing Jews and Judaism. These old and deep prejudices are mostly hidden from us. In this paper I want to show that this is true, and outline a better way for us to think about our people and serve them in Yeshua's name.<sup>1</sup>

I have expanded my assigned topic, "What is the gospel?" to "What Is The Gospel We Should Be Commending To All Israel<sup>2</sup> In These Times Of Transition?" It is in four parts: Matters of Context, Matters of Content, Matters of Controversy, and Cumulative Conclusions. My argument is inductive, making its case moving from particulars to a general conclusion; cumulative, because each component contributes to the credibility of the whole; and synergistic, because the contribution of each component can only be rightly perceived through appreciating how the components work together, with the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Only by keeping the parts and the whole dynamic tension will readers rightly understand, evaluate, and most important, respond to what I say here.

Today I want to pull the covers off a sleepy movement, arousing all of us to a unified, demanding, and sacrificial evangelistic mandate, appropriate to our times, to the whole counsel of God, and to our identity as the Remnant of Israel. Mine is a call to inconvenience: it is a call to radical change. Mine is a call to sacrifice: it is call to risk and discomfort. And above all, mine is a call to seek, speak, and live a gospel that is good news for all Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> To prevent abuses of my own, I have chosen to leave unnamed the authors or published sources I criticize in this paper. Anyone requiring further identification of these sources may contact me.

<sup>2</sup> "All Israel" is a term borrowed especially from Ro 11:26, connected in this paper to "all the people [of Israel]" in Lk 2:10-11. It is a phrase found 149 times in Scripture. In the present discussion, I believe the sense of the term is equivalent to "Israel as a whole," rather than "every single Jew." This is compatible with the Talmudic view: "All Israel has a share in the world to come: the following (out of Israel) do not have a share in the world to come" (M. Sanhedrin 10:1).

### *Matters of Context*

We communicate an eternal gospel<sup>3</sup> in the midst of time. Therefore, we can only do so at specific times, in specific places, and to specific people. “Context” should not be dismissed as a trendy buzzword: it is instead our unavoidable reality. Since only those who properly analyze the soil have a right to expect a good harvest, we would be foolish to omit this step in our rush to sow the seed. Since we must begin by assessing the soil of our context, I begin by examining five contextual issues demanding our attention: Living in Times of Eschatological Transition; New Paradigms, New Tensions; The Bad News Gospel; Individualism, Community and Consummation; and, Implications of Adopting a New Creation Eschatology.

#### *Living in Times of Eschatological Transition*

The first of our five contextual factors identifies five signs that these are eschatological times, with the consummation of all things is drawing near. God’s agenda has begun to shift from a focus on the ingathering of the fullness of the Gentiles to the ingathering of the fullness of Israel.

**The Founding of the Modern State of Israel ---** The Prophet Zechariah tells us that at the time of the end the Jewish people will be living in the Land, with all the nations of the world gathered against them.<sup>4</sup> This could not have happened for 1900 years, and only became a possibility again in 1948, with the establishment of the Jewish State. This is a sign of the times. We should be anticipating and preparing for the consummation of all things.

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<sup>3</sup> Rev 14:6

<sup>4</sup> Zech 12:1-3, 9; 14:2,3; Micah 4:11-13

**The Liberation of Jerusalem** --- The prophets remind us as well that Jerusalem will be a Jewish city in the end-times. This was a non-issue for two millennia, until the Liberation of Jerusalem in 1967. This too is a sign of the times.

**The Regathering of the Jews to Israel From the Land of the North** --- Part of the nexus of events in the latter days is the regathering of Jewish exiles not only from the nations in general, but also explicitly “from the land of the north,” commonly associated with the heartland of the Former Soviet Union. Many of us are old enough to remember when it was front-page news when one Jew from the former Soviet Union emigrated to Israel. But all of this changed forever with the advent of glasnost and perestroika under Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980’s, and the astounding break-up of the former Soviet Union (FSU) in 1991. It was Ronald Reagan who said, “Mr. Gorbachev: tear down this wall,” but God swung the hammer.

Since the 1980’s, well over a million Jews from the FSU have emigrated to Israel. When we combine this statistic with others such as the massive airlifts and repatriation to Israel of over 85 percent of Ethiopia’s Jews, can we be blamed for seeing these events in the context of this prophecy from the Prophet Jeremiah?

*So then, the days are coming when they will say, “As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.” Then they will live in their own land (Jer 23:7-8).*

**The Repentance-Renewal of the Jewish People** ---Deuteronomy 30 and Ezekiel 36-37 are among the texts connecting this return to the Lord with a renewal in covenantal faithfulness, when God will spiritually renew his people and cause us to “again obey the voice of the LORD, and keep all his commandments . . . and his statutes which are

written in this book of the law.”<sup>5</sup> Today, we are seeing this spiritual renewal becoming a manifest reality, at least in nascent stages. Ever since the Liberation of Jerusalem in 1967, Jews have begun coming to Yeshua-faith in increasing numbers. Many who have come to Israel from “the land of the north” are already Yeshua-believing Jews. Today it is impossible to find an Israeli congregation of Jewish Yeshua-believers that does not include a substantial number of Russian speakers. In Israel today, greater numbers of Jews are coming to believe in Yeshua than at any time since the first century. Mitch Glaser estimates that the numbers of Israeli Yeshua-believers have grown by three or four hundred percent in the past ten years, with sixty or seventy percent of this growth among Russian speakers. Something is happening which Scripture foretold, and the times are changing.

**A New Concern for Messianic Jewish Covenant Faithfulness ---** In recent years, the issue of Torah-based covenant faithfulness has moved to the forefront of Messianic Jewish discussion. On July 31, 2002, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations ratified a definitional document including these words: “Messianic Judaism is a movement of Jewish congregations and congregation-like groupings committed to Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant.”<sup>6</sup> The reference to “covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, [and] expressed in tradition” is nothing short of revolutionary. Such a sentence would never even have come to mind when I came to Yeshua-faith in the early 1960’s. The statement contravenes the older consensus that

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<sup>5</sup> Dt 30:8-10, also Eze 37:24, “They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to obey my statutes.”

<sup>6</sup> From the statement affirmed by the Delegates to the 23rd Annual UMJC Conference on July 31, 2002.

Torah observance was to be regarded as strictly a matter of personal preference, and to only be pursued in circumspect moderation.

Can it be that such indicators are heralding the promised shift of God turning His attention from accomplishing the fullness of the Gentiles, to pursuing the fullness of Israel? I think so! More than that, I am convinced it is so. Now is a time when both the church and the Remnant of Israel need to reexamine their priorities and embrace paradigms and priorities suited to the times.

### **New Paradigms, New Tensions**

Times of transition not only bring new missional dynamism; they are also times of destabilization, threat, and jockeying for power.

Any of us who have been change agents in times of transition can attest to the controversies, denunciations, and resistance attending such efforts. For example, have we forgotten how many in the conservative Christian world resisted what Jews for Jesus stood for in its early days? As one ridiculous example, Moishe Rosen had a file of letters from Jack Wyrzten exhorting him to have the Jews for Jesus guys cut their hair and shave their beards. Of course he had chapter and verse to back him up. And I'm sure that all of us who are leaders of groundbreaking Yeshua-groups have been called on the carpet by concerned or outraged critics not only differing with us, but denouncing us in some way. It's still going on. Today you can discover "proof" on the Internet that many of us are involved in a one-world, one-religion conspiracy! Yes it's news to me, too.

Because we represent groups birthed in God-ordained times of transition, we have all had to learn to live with opposition and vilification. Now new and different transitions

are upon us—and with the growth of new paradigms, new tensions have arisen. Now the tensions and vilifications are not from outsiders, but among ourselves.

David Bosch traces the past and future of mission theology under the overall concept of paradigm shifts. Beginning with the writings of Thomas Kuhn, the father of modern paradigm theory, he explains reasons why advocates of new paradigms always meet with denunciations and resistance. We may see our situation magnified and clarified through the lens of his words:

[A shifting of paradigms] seldom happens without a struggle, however, since scientific communities are by nature conservative and do not like their peace to be disturbed; the old paradigm's protagonists continue for a long time to fight a rearguard action. . . . Proponents of the old paradigm often just cannot understand the arguments of the proponents of the new. Metaphorically speaking, the one is playing chess and the other checkers on the same board.

. . . This explains why defenders of the old order and champions of the new frequently argue at cross-purposes. Protagonists of the old paradigm, in particular, tend to immunize themselves against the arguments of the new. They resist its challenges with deep emotional reactions, since those challenges threaten to destroy their very perception and experience of reality, indeed their entire world.<sup>7</sup>

Bosch and Kuhn are reading our mail. This is us, and this is now.

### **The Bad-News Gospel<sup>8</sup>**

Because our sojourn in Christian space, particularly the evangelical camp, affects all our missional thinking and doing, we must recognize how Christendom has not

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<sup>7</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 184-5. In part, Bosch's argument paraphrases Paul Hiebert, "Epistemological Foundations for Science and Theology," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (March), 9, and Paul Hiebert, "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (May-June), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Another aspect of the bad-news gospel is Christendom's habit of denigrating Jewish faith and sancta, postulating that these are worthless when compared with the church's patrimony. This too is bad news, not treated here for the sake of space.

presented the gospel as good news for all Israel since the end of the first century, and what this should mean for us now.

In the famous Christmas story, we read words so familiar we miss their import. They provide a core insight we must embrace if we would be faithful messengers:

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who Christ, the Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

Notice the phrase, “good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.” It is too easy to misread the reference as “good news of great joy which will come to all the peoples of earth,” but that is not the referent here. The context speaks of one people in particular, the Jewish people. Many will recoil from this aspect of our text due to reflexively regarding the Jewish people as fundamentally spiritually lost, eternal losers, and the coming of Christ as not being good news for *the* Jewish people, but at best, good news only for *some* Jews, exceptions to the rule.

Although this is the position most of us adhere to, it raises problems. Let one suffice for now. The year before Yeshua died and rose, faithful Jews needed only seek to live faithful to God, trusting in His faithfulness to Israel and in the provisions he had made through the Temple sacrifices. Under such an arrangement, certainly there must have been tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of Jews whose status with God was assured, in this life and the next. But with the coming of Christ, all that changed. Now, according to the prevailing paradigm, all of these Jews were

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 2:8-11



fundamentally lost, unless and until they accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Is this the kind of gospel we preach? And if so, how is *this* gospel good news for all Israel rather than for a spiritually enlightened elite minority? It will not do to respond that Yeshua is good news for all Israel, as a medicine might be for seriously ill patients, who must take the medicine if they would recover. To speak thus is to read back into the context something which is not there: the angelic messenger assumes the gospel to be good tidings for Zion for whom the triumphant and vindicating reign of their God is becoming evident in the birth of the Son of David.<sup>10</sup>

Terrance Tiessen reminds us that holding to the evangelical paradigm that salvation is a matter of one-by-one destiny, with no salvation except for those who accept Christ as their personal savior, means the coming of Jesus was bad news for the Jews of his generation, as myriads of formerly saved Jews and perhaps God-fearers slipped into perdition or least into eternal jeopardy, because the basis of salvation had changed and narrowed with Yeshua's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, or ascension, take your pick.<sup>11</sup> This is like your car warranty becoming invalid because the warranty holder went out of business, with you needing to buy a new warranty involving new stipulations and costs if you want coverage. Is this good news for you? And is the one-by-one gospel good news for all the people of Israel? Hardly.

Donald Anderson McGavran, founder of the Fuller Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, took as his watchword “π•ντα τ• •θνη — panta ta ethne,” all the

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<sup>10</sup> See Isa 52:7

<sup>11</sup> Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 199. Tiessen will argue for “accessibilism,” which asserts “God does save some of the unevangelized, but he has not raised up the world’s religions as instruments for achieving this” (Tiessen, 47).

nations. Today I urge that we take as our own a neglected biblical mandate, παντ • τ • λα • --panti tow laow, all the people of Israel.

As will become clearer later, we have cropped and narrowed the gospel message due to our focus on individual soul salvation. The eternal lostness of those who fail to accept our “medicine” is always the backdrop of our presentation, even if not stated. This means that the message we deliver to a Jewish “contact” is not only of the opportunity for him or her to be “saved,” but also of the certain perdition of the vast majority of the descendants of Jacob, likely including fifty generations (two thousand years) of his or her family. How is such a message “good news of a great joy which will come to all the people (of Israel)?”

Years ago, Mark Kinzer made an off-hand comment, the seed of what I am saying: “I just think that somehow the coming of Yeshua the Messiah must have advanced the condition of the Jewish people.” Do we believe that with the coming of the Messiah, the condition of the Jewish people as a whole took a great leap backward? It *is* an interesting question, don’t you think?

I am suggesting that our paradigms and presentations of the gospel are imbalanced and misshapen. Part of the problem is that our gospel is shrunken and distorted. How and why this is so will become clearer as we proceed. For example, consider the phenomenon of category mistakes.

### **Category Mistakes**

One reason for our confusion about Jews, Judaism and the gospel, is the category mistakes the church, mission, and Messianic Jewish communities make about Jews and

Judaism. The term “category mistake,” devised by English philosopher Gilbert Ryle, names “cases where we talk of something in terms appropriate only to something of a radically different kind.”<sup>12</sup>

Many Christians, many of us, and many of our constituents, act and think as if the seed of Jacob is a nation like any other, and Judaism a religion like any other religion, except for Christianity. This attitude is a legacy from supersessionism, infused like dye throughout the warp and woof of much of our theologizing. According to such assumptions, Jews no longer enjoy the status they once did now that Christ has come “and his own received him not.”<sup>13</sup> Of course, we would protest that the Jews remain a unique and chosen people, referencing numerous texts highlighting the unique status of the Jewish people.<sup>14</sup> No doubt all of us here avoid this particular category mistake: we see the Jewish people as still a unique and chosen people.

Yet many of us make the same kind of category mistake whenever we feel and think of Judaism as being a religion no different from other religions, and by extension, Jews who do not believe in Yeshua as no different from other people when it comes to knowledge of God, spiritual experience, status, and salvation. In feeling, thinking, speaking, and writing, many view the Jews as simply non-Christians, categorically bound for hell, without hope and without God in the world, effectively pagans, even if religious ones. Whenever we do so, we slot the Jewish people into a category Paul applied not to

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<sup>12</sup> Definition accessed on line September 20, 2007 at <http://www.philosophyprofessor.com/philosophies/category-mistake.php>. For a related study on the history of Christian negative categorization of the Jewish people and Judaism, see Averil Cameron, “Jews and Heretics—A Category Error?” in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 95. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 345-360.

<sup>13</sup> John 1:12

<sup>14</sup> See Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 32:8; Psalm 33:12, 147:19-20; Isa 43:20, 65:22; Amos 3:2; Romans 3:1-2, for example.

Israel, but to Gentile pagans. Still, some regard Judaism as a fruitless religion, no different categorically from Hinduism, animism, or Buddhism. They consider Judaism to be a dead, false religion, devoid of the Spirit, and its practitioners, wasting their time on a religion that can neither save them, commend them to God, nor mediate to them any measure of true knowledge and experience with Him. This negation of Jewish religion is axiomatic for some of us, and woe to the person who questions such a position or takes an opposing stance. He or she is sure to be regarded as deviant, dangerous, and at best, confused.<sup>15</sup>

But something is very wrong here. Judaism is *not* a religion just like all the others, any more than Israel is simply a people like all the others. Just as the Jews remain the chosen people, Judaism remains the context of this people's trans-generational communal devotion to the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and their covenantal bond with him.<sup>16</sup> Can this be said of any other people and their religion? Of course not! No, the Jewish people are in a different category from any other people, and their religion is not simply just another non-Christian religion.

John Howard Yoder helps us here, correcting our category mistake and that of Christendom, by referring to Judaism as “a non-non-Christian religion.”<sup>17</sup> We are not speaking here of a two-covenant theory, or of the alleged impropriety or superfluity of

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<sup>15</sup> One does not have to look hard or long to find explicit, bald and strident statements from within the Jewish missions and/or Messianic Jewish world denouncing Judaism as categorically no different from other non-Christian religions. Thus, one missionary says this on his website, “Rabbinic Judaism is a false religion. The synagogues of today are deceptions, which lead Jewish people away from the way of salvation into a system that rejects Torah, substitutes Torah with human tradition, and leads them into destruction. Rabbinic Judaism is as much a false religion as any other false religion” (Reference available upon request).

<sup>16</sup> Along with Mark Kinzer, I believe Judaism to be a house still inhabited by Yeshua even though he is yet to be recognized and explicitly honored by the majority of those living there.

<sup>17</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 147-159.

gospel proclamation to this people. When we say that the Jewish people are a non-non-Christian people, we correct the category mistake of simply thinking of Jews as non-Christians and Judaism as a fruitless and fundamentally false religion, equivalent to any other world religion one might name. Paul was closer to the truth, speaking to Herod Agrippa the Jews and Judaism as his own people and religion:

My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of *our religion* [not *their religion*] I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as *they earnestly worship night and day*.<sup>18</sup>

How many Jewish mission newsletters would publish articles categorizing religious Jews as “earnestly worshipping [God] night and day?” How many would refer to the Judaism practiced by other Jews as “our religion.” None, I would imagine. And this is because our categories have changed. But if we would rightly commend the gospel to the Jewish people we must repudiate the colossal category mistakes of hamfistedly thinking of the Jews as just like any other non-Christian people, and Judaism as no different from any other non-Christian religion. Although most Jews are not categorically Christians, Judaism is a non-non-Christian religion, and we might even term Jews “non-non-Christians.” To paraphrase the Prophet Balaam, “Ours is a people . . . and a religion . . . that dwells apart, that shall not be numbered with the nations nor with pagan religions.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 26:4-7

<sup>19</sup> Nu 23:9

### **Crypto-Supersessionism**

In some ways, the river of Jewish missions and much Messianic Jewish thinking flows between the banks of unawareness on the one side and denial on the other. Ironically, this flows from our Zionism, our conviction that the Jewish people remain God’s chosen people, and our vigorous opposition to supersessionism. Because we denounce supersessionism, we imagine ourselves to be axiomatically positive about the Jewish people in contrast to most of the church. But again, there are problems.

Consider the teaching, popular in some of our circles, that the Law of Moses is categorically rendered inoperative, and that, since the death of Messiah, the only Law that applies to Yeshua-believers is the Law of Christ. Since the church too is subject only to the Law of Christ, is it not clear that this teaching postulates the expiration of a major status marker that formerly attached to the Jewish people? Yes, I know there are those who would say that the Abrahamic Covenant with the promise of blessing and the Land remains in effect, but in practical terms, the jettisoning of the Law of Moses and the substitution of what is termed “the Law of Christ” means abolishing Judaism for Jewish Yeshua-believers and assimilating them into a code of conduct and way of life indistinguishable from Gentile Christians—the same Law, the Law of Christ. I must protest, and suggest you join me. It will not do to imagine that maintaining pride in Jewish lineage, or attending periodic Jewish Yeshua-believer meetings will sustain Jewish identity for us and our descendants.<sup>20</sup> It will take more than nostalgia about our

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<sup>20</sup> Although they say much on other matters for which I am grateful and with which I heartily concur, Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising are among those who unwittingly grease the skids for the assimilation of Jewish believers in Jesus when they say “progressive dispensationalism . . . teaches that Mosaic covenant law has ended dispensationally, it also teaches that it has been replaced by new covenant law” (Craig L. Blaising, Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], 1999. If this is so, then the on-the-ground distinction of Messianic Jewish life and community rests on an exceedingly

Jewish ancestors and the expectation of a Millennium to come to inform and sustain Jewish continuity, covenantal living, and trans-generational identity. If we accept that we are subject to no religious law other than the same Law of Christ to which the average white-bread Gentile in Tulsa subscribes, then we are fitting Jewish community and continuity into a plain pine box. It's time to say *Kaddish*.

This doctrine of the expiration of the Law of Moses for Messianic Jews is but one example of crypto-supersessionism, an unconscious cluster of presuppositions which assume the expiration, setting aside, or suspension of that status and those status markers formerly attached to the Jewish people. Unlike supersessionism itself, crypto-supersessionism is a virus epidemic among those who repudiate supersessionism. This plague casts its cold shadow across almost all of the Jewish missions and Messianic Jewish world, leaving behind a trail of misdeeds and misstatements. Examples surround us like Spanish moss in the bayou.

For example, a contemporary Jewish mission newsletter said this:

Scripture teaches that God has called a social community into being, a community comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, what one early church writer even called a "third race." . . . We are not advocating that Jewish believers distance themselves from their Jewish heritage. May it never be! But our primary spiritual and social home must be among those whom we allow to influence us the most and that should be the body of believers.<sup>21</sup>

While I applaud the author's caveat concerning not distancing ourselves from our Jewish heritage, his wider context and choice of language enfeebles its force. The Jewish covenantal calling is a communal calling, requiring of us an ever-renewed engagement

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narrow bed. In their paradigm, in practical terms of lifestyle and legacy, how are Messianic Jews fundamentally different from other Yeshua-believers?

<sup>21</sup> Reference available upon request.

with the wider Jewish community, rather than the stand-offish caution proposed here. The author further vitiates our covenantal calling by terming it our “heritage.” Whenever the holy obligations of the Jewish people are treated like cultural souvenirs instead of mandates from on high, we encounter crypto-supersessionism.

More alarming still is the author’s telltale reference to Christians as “a third race.” This expression from the second century *Epistle to Diognetus*, is used to mean that in Messiah, Jews are no longer Jews, and Gentiles no longer Gentiles, that the two constitute a third race. I imagine we all find this rather repugnant when so stated. The concept feels Neo-Platonic, treating Jew and Gentiles in the Body of Messiah as discarnate and denationalized souls, negating the persistence of Jewish communal identity. Only the virus of crypto-supersessionism could cause a Jewish Yeshua-believer to issue a caution against bonding with the Jewish community, advocating a superseding bonding with the church, in view of the third race nature of the people of God.

Dan Juster’s views, while not identical, greatly overlap mine in regard to crypto-supersessionism. His preferred term, “hidden replacement theology,” is interchangeable with mine, although his area of concern is the persistence of these views in the church, while my concern is with Jewish missions and Messianic Jews. Juster refers with approval to the views of Michael Wyschogrod on this matter:

Wyschogrod’s assertion that “The Church will not have fully repented of its replacement theology until it teaches its baptized Jews that they are responsible to live a Jewish life based on Torah.” [Wyschogrod] realizes the logic that anything less is still replacement theology, since it does not really value the ongoing continuity of the Jewish people. . . .

Our light for evaluation [of Wyschogrod’s position] is based on Romans 11:29, where Paul argues that the gifts and call of God to Israel are irrevocable and Romans 11:5 where he calls Jewish disciples of Yeshua the saved remnant of Israel. Therefore, if we want to see the growth of



identifiable Jewish disciples of Yeshua, and do not desire to see Israel diminished, it would seem that Wyschogrod's argument is airtight.<sup>22</sup>

### **Individualism, Community, and the Consummation**

Post-Enlightenment individualism corrupts our relationship with our people and our understanding of their status. Such individualism, endemic in our time, blinds us to the communal context of our gospel proclamation. Bosch strikes a necessary balance here, and we need to hear his critique of how individualism corrupts our perceptions and activities:

The gospel is not individualistic. Modern individualism is, to a large extent, a perversion of the Christian faith's understanding of the centrality and responsibility of the individual. In the wake of the Enlightenment, and because of its teachings, individuals have become isolated from the community which gave them birth.<sup>23</sup>

How many of us are isolated from the community which gave us birth? And how many of us preach a gospel which isolates Jews from the Jewish community? While at first we recoil from the suggestion, further thought should leave many of us shuddering with recognition.

We need to recover again or discover for the first time a deep sense of communal identity and responsibility, and of the communal nature of God's eschatological purposes for Israel and the nations. This sense of the Jewish communal context is summarized nicely for us in Ezekiel 37:21-28, where five facets of God's eschatological purpose for the Jewish people are named. In these times of transition, we can only faithfully serve

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<sup>22</sup> Dan Juster, "Do We Want the Jews to Disappear?" at <http://tikkunministries.org/newsletters/dj-jan06.asp> (accessed Sept 27, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Bosch, *Transforming*, 410-411.

God's purpose among the Jewish people by treating each of these facets as a non-negotiable priority. Notice that they are all communal—good news for all Israel, not as individuals, but as a whole, *communal* good news.

Ezekiel lists the facets of this good news in this order:

- ✓ The regathering of the Jewish to our homeland, Israel (thus, Aliyah)
- ✓ The restoration of the unity of the people of Israel
- ✓ Repentance-renewal<sup>24</sup> for the people as a whole
- ✓ Messiah reigning in the center of this gathered people
- ✓ Torah living as the communal life of this people

God is to be praised that each of these priorities is being widely reflected in the Messianic Jewish movement, although, in most cases in an inconsistent and rudimentary manner. Yet for others, this is no description of their current mentality, practice and message because they are infected with crypto-supersessionism and individualism. In broadest outline, this is the kind of gospel we should be proclaiming to the Jewish people, seeing Yeshua in his reigning role, bringing communal blessings to the whole people of Israel. And God is calling us, infused with his Spirit, to vigorously, joyously and communally incarnate and serve these synergistic priorities. Anything less and anything other than this is at best someone else's gospel. Our people will rightly continue to find an individualistic message of soul salvation which fails to highlight God's continued commitment and consummating purposes for the community of Israel to be stale, irrelevant, and foreign—far less and far other than God's invitation to participate in the

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<sup>24</sup> I hyphenate the two terms, because repentance itself is the fruit of the Spirit at work, and the renewal we value and long is evident in repentance and not possible without it. The two realities, repentance and renewal, are inseparably hand-in hand, and as perceived by the human observer, they can occur in either order.

anticipated vindication and blessing of the seed of Jacob. We must repent and return to this perspective.

### **Adopting a New Creation Eschatology**

Craig Blaising identifies another habit of thought to recognize and forsake: the explicit or tacit acceptance of a spiritual vision eschatology. Spiritual vision eschatology is that view of the final state “which sees eternal life as timeless, changeless, spiritual existence consisting primarily in the human soul’s full knowledge of God . . . a direct view, a beatific vision.”<sup>25</sup> Such a vision sees the redeemed with spiritual bodies composed of some sort of spiritual substance, and views earthly life as a symbol (and preparation) for these eternal realities. Because “a future for Israel literally has no place in a spiritual-vision eschatology,”<sup>26</sup> when we hold to these assumptions, we are desensitized to the prophetic expectation that drove the apostles. Even tacitly, our sympathies for a glorious and eternal future for Israel are weakened.

Some want to have it both ways, seeing the physical promises for Israel fulfilled in a Millennium, with the eternal state being some version of spiritual-vision eschatology. Without dismissing millennial beliefs, I concur with Blaising’s critique, that “a limited duration [millennial] kingdom alone does not do full justice to the Biblical vision for Israel and the Gentiles.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Craig Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3(2001):448.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 449

<sup>27</sup> *loc. cit.*

New creation eschatology restores the communal dimension individualism destroys, providing a holistic vision of time and eternity fully compatible with the thrust of this paper:

New creation eschatology emphasizes the liberation of the cosmos from sin, the bodily resurrection and glorification of the righteous, and the liberation of the cosmos to share in the liberty of the children of God. It does not see the eschaton as simply a continuation of the past, but does emphasize its continuity with the past as seen in the resurrection of the body. New creation does not see the eschaton as a timeless, changeless or essentially visionary-like epistemic state. It is not eternal in the classic timeless sense but everlasting. New creation has a place for the earth, the cosmos, for the fullness of created life, but especially for resurrected human life living under the lordship of the resurrected Jesus Christ in fellowship with the Triune God. It would see human life in created wholeness—not as undifferentiated individuals but as differentiated individuals. But neither would it see them as just differentiated individuals, but rather differentiated in ethnic and communal dimensions as well, since these form an essential aspect of our identities. And what will we find here except Israel and the Gentiles who are together blessed by God, living under the lordship of Jesus Christ to the glory of God.<sup>28</sup>

Blasing's views point us to the outreach revolution which summons us. Such views not only uproot post-Enlightenment individualism, they also unseat a tunnel-vision focus on heaven and hell issues, while disempowering the seduction of crypto-supersessionist assumptions such as third-race ecclesiology. Instead, we see a panorama of the covenantal and communal future of the Jewish people, and the promise of resurrection to communal life in a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. God is glorified not simply by the salvation of nationals, individuals extracted from the nations and incorporated into a homogenous people of God, but by his saving work among nations and people groups, all destined to retain their creational distinctiveness into the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. For a fuller treatment on the roots and contrast between spiritual vision eschatology and new creation eschatology, see Craig A. Blasing, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 160-81.

eschaton: resurrected, glorified humans in community, not a non-differentiated crowd of souls gazing forever in adoring wonder before the Throne.

John Stackhouse reminds us that “Salvation is about heading for the New Jerusalem, not heaven: a garden city on earth, not the very abode of God and certainly not a bunch of pink clouds in the sky. . . . And salvation is not only about what is to come but also about what is ours to enjoy and foster here and now.<sup>29</sup> His last phrase, “ours to enjoy and foster here and now” lies at the heart of the outreach revolution I believe God is calling us to in our remnant role. We are being called to prepare the way of the Lord by being a sign, demonstration and catalyst of God’s consummating purpose for Israel.

Second Peter the dynamic tension between waiting and preparing:

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Matters of Content***

When I first learned of my assigned topic, I was uneasy. Charles Dickens explains why.

In the second chapter of *Hard Times*, Dickens draws an indelible portrait of Victorian education at its worst, describing how the strict school master Thomas Gradgrind torments sweet little Sissy Jukes over her inability to satisfactorily define a

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<sup>29</sup> John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *What Does It Mean to be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons About Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 10.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Pe 3:11-13

horse. Sissy's father works with horses, and she certainly knows and loves them. But the abrasive Gradgrind gets her flustered and tongue-tied.

Predictably annoyed, Gradgrind turns instead to a pupil more to his liking, a lad named Bitzer, who does not disappoint him.

"Bitzer," said Thomas Gradgrind. "Your definition of a horse."

"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth." Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

"Now girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind. "You know what a horse is."<sup>31</sup>

Didn't Sissy Jukes know better than either Gradgrind or Bitzer what a horse is?

Did Bitzer's definition really capture the wonder that is a horse? Is it not clear that Bitzer's definition, however accurate, remains wholly inadequate? Obviously, we all want to avoid duplicating Bitzer's blunder in "defining" the gospel.

Conditioned by evangelicalism and post-Enlightenment conceits, we may at first think that defining the gospel is a straightforward matter, and simple, really: begin by quoting 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, and throw in some discussions of the etymology and uses of *evangelion*. I advise against this approach! The gospel should not and cannot really be defined in the same manner as other terms. We must not convert the wonder that is the gospel into some slot in our systematics. We can define philosophical terms, because they are constructs of the mind devised to facilitate thought, but the gospel is something else entirely—it is fundamentally a report we have received and which we pass on, an

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, "Chapter Two - Murdering the Innocents," found on-line at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/hardtime.htm> (accessed September 28, 2007)

authoritative, empowered, but always fragmentary report concerning God's saving intervention in Jesus Christ.

Which brings us to 9-11.

We all saw news reports about the 9-11 tragedy. Some of us were eye-witnesses, or nearly so, while others of us were a continent or even an ocean away, glued to the television. But, whatever the case, whenever we speak of 9-11 we are exchanging impressions, perceptions and something always greater than what we know, think, and say.

The gospel is not a concept, nor even a term to be defined. Rather, the gospel is fundamentally a report (Isaiah 53), good tidings of great joy for all the people of Israel (Luke 2), and yes, a message to be delivered (1 Cor 15), that is always a reduction of the reality being reported. Although the gospel is not whatever one says it is, nor everything in general, it is and always will be more than we can grasp and define. After all, when we speak of the gospel, angels bow.

In *Be My Witnesses*, Darrell Guder repeatedly visits this issue:

Only through its pilgrimage through time can the church discover the vast dimensions of the meaning and application of the gospel. The early Christian community, although evangelized and instructed by the apostles themselves, did not fully grasp what the gospel meant. In fact, the church has not yet grasped the full meaning of the gospel.<sup>32</sup>

Reflecting further, he calls for a theological modesty seldom found in our ranks:

It would be wise for us to approach with modesty the task of gospel definition. . . . When we assume that our confidence is to be placed in the accuracy of our dogmatic formulations, the reliability of our particular confessional definitions of the gospel, or a particular version of the

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<sup>32</sup> Guder, Darrell L. *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 39.

inspiredness of Scripture, we have transformed the gospel into a subtle kind of Gnosticism.<sup>33</sup>

Theological immodesty and certitude-addiction leads to truncated, mangled truth. Worse still, convinced partisans often will denounce and attack others, who may, like Sissy Jukes, actually sense or know aspects of the gospel invisible to them.

### *Matters of Controversy*

Before turning to a concluding and summational report, or description, of the gospel, we should clear from our path matters of controversy blocking our way.

### **“Find Heaven, Avoid Hell”**

In 2000, I attended the meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee. Riding from the airport to the hotel, a missionary to the Jews whom I hardly knew, without any foreplay whatsoever, badgered me with one question: “Do you believe that a Jew who does not believe in Jesus goes to hell?” Aside from being put off by his abrasive approach, I was mystified as to why, of all questions he might have selected, he chose *this* one to test of my orthodoxy? Why this preoccupation with the population of perdition?

Of the eighteen evangelistic sermons in the Book of Acts, none uses the find-heaven-avoid-hell approach as a motivation either for missional engagement by the apostolic messengers, or for repentance by their hearers. Neil Rees, International Coordinator for World Horizons International, forcefully reminds us that “the basic

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<sup>33</sup> Guder, 76



apostolic kerygma fails to mention hell as a motive for accepting the gospel message,” adding that “the apostles were perfectly capable of evangelizing without threatening their hearers with hell . . . [and] this is never developed in evangelistic preaching.”<sup>34</sup> He states further that using the prospect of others going to hell as a goad for missionary action or financial support “succeeds only in producing feelings of self-condemnation rather than considered and solid commitment.”<sup>35</sup> Should not these facts make us suspicious of a fixation on heaven and hell issues?

### **“You Are Going to Destroy the Engine Driving Outreach to the Jews”**

I would not and do not deny the reality of hell, nor minimize its significance in Holy Writ. But I do question why this was such a focus of attention for my tram-mate and for many others, whether explicitly or implicitly, considering its total absence from the apostolic kerygma. It seems current vehemence surrounding this issue stems from how this doctrine has been long-used to spur missional action, support and response, and how it is used to inform polemical sparring. My guess is that some imagine that my call to ease off on this approach is nothing less than an attack on mission to the Jewish people, through disassembling its engine.

The reverse is true. Instead, I want to replace this non-apostolic engine with an older one—better rooted in the Bible and better behaving on the road God is calling us to.

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<sup>34</sup> Neal Rees, “*Snatch Others from the Fire and Save Them*”: *An Examination of Belief in Hell as a Motivating Factor in Missions*.” Unpublished paper, originally submitted as a term paper to William Carey International University, at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050228025757/perso.wanadoo.es/neil/Hell.htm>, Accessed on line Sept 20, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Rees, n.d. 12. After providing a succinct and helpful historical survey of Protestant motivations for mission, Gailyn Van Rheenen traces the contemporary shift in such motivations in his aptly titled essay, “Changing Motivations for Missions: From ‘Fear of Hell’ to ‘the Glory of God.’” In Michael Pocock, Gailyn van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, eds, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 161-181.

This engine has four “pistons” helpfully summarized in the opening verses of “The Lord’s Prayer.”

***The First Piston of Our Missional Engine: Sharing Our Relationship with God***

The Lord’s Prayer begins “Our Father.” Our first motivation for missional action is to call others to the depth of relationship with God we ourselves enjoy. A moment’s thought will prove that this is what energized the apostles. Through their encounter with Messiah and their infusion with His Spirit, God had become so luminously real to them that they could not but tell others what they had seen and heard which had brought them to this joy, this power, this intoxication. Our first missional motivation should then be to share with others the vital relationship with God driving us. But what is *our* experience with God? The early church was awash in wonder. Are we? Or are we practiced professionals, with a Bible verse and answer for anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us, while, to tell the truth, we’re out of touch with the God of hope. I know that when I was in my forties, I had to repent of how my relationship with God had become peripheral to me, even while I was preoccupied with “ministry.” Can anyone relate?

***The Second Piston of Our Missional Engine: The Doxological Motive***

The second phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed be Thy Name,” names what missional literature terms “the doxological motive,” a passion to see God glorified and worshiped. Contemporary scholars are nearly unanimous in emphasizing this to be the most powerful piston of all, able to drive the entire engine, and do it well.

After tracing throughout the Bible the centrality of the glorification of God, Steve Hawthorne applies his findings to the contemporary missional task, contrasting the doxological motive with other motives, including “find-heaven-avoid-hell.” “Guilt-based appeals to care for billions of people continues to soften our hearts a little. In practice, however, they weary and harden believers to a minimal token obedience. . . . Now more than ever believers need to be nurtured into a jealousy for God’s glory.”<sup>36</sup>

Today, John Piper is the leading advocate of the preeminence of God’s glory. His perspective is a much-needed counterbalance to task-oriented and statistically driven approaches:

Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. . . . Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It’s the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God’s glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.<sup>37</sup>

Some might imagine that Piper wins adherents to his view from Reformed circles alone. However, this is not the case. In a fascinating article, fundamentalist pastor and educator, Sam Horn (B.A., M.A., Ph.D. Bob Jones University!) tells how he encountered, resisted, and was eventually converted to Piper’s views. Using the same metaphor of the missional engine, he makes the issue unmistakable:

I was also forced to consider that God’s desire to be worshipped by men of all nations is actually the engine that drives biblical missions rather than the need of lost men to be saved from an eternal hell. In short, my perspective on missions was too man-centered.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Steven C. Hawthorne, “The Story of His Glory,” in *Perspectives on The World Christian Movement: A Reader*, Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. (Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 15, a pdf found on line September 24, 2007 at [www.waymakers.org/files/glorystoryglory.pdf](http://www.waymakers.org/files/glorystoryglory.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> John Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*. [Second Edition]. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

<sup>38</sup> Sam Horn, “The Heart of Biblical Missions” on his website *Sharper Iron*. <http://www.sharperiron.org/2006/10/05/the-heart-of-biblical-missions/> Accessed September 2007.

He goes on to highlight a related concept which Mark Kinzer and I highlighted in our flyer, “The Emerging Messianic Jewish Paradigm,” and not without controversy. We said this:

Such outreach proclaims the Name of Jesus, not the neediness of Jews.

Sometimes mission approaches to the Jewish people include the assumption or even declaration of the emptiness and inadequacy of Jewish religious practice and faith. In contrast, the apostolic motivation for outreach to Jewish people was driven by the realization that in Yeshua, the long awaited Messiah had come. The oft-quoted passage, “There is no other name given among mortals by which we must be saved,” comes in a context where Peter and John were seeking to lift up the name of Jesus rather than put down the Jewish people: “for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:12, 20). We would do well to imitate their example and lift up the name of Yeshua without denigrating the holy things already given to the Jewish people (see Romans 3:1-4; 9:1-5).<sup>39</sup>

Sam Horn helps to silence outcries against our call to leave off a preoccupation with Jewish “neediness” and instead uplift the name of Yeshua.

At the heart of Biblical revelation is God’s self-revelation to man. Part of what God chose to reveal in the Scriptures concerns His primary motive for the activities ascribed to Him in the words of the Book. That motivation can be summed up in the phrase, “God does what He does for the sake of His name.” God’s primary motive in the salvation of lost men is doxological, “for the sake of His name” (Isaiah 63:7-14; Acts 15:14; Romans 1:5). The Scriptures reveal God’s primary motive in delivering His children from their troubles is “the sake of His name” (I Samuel 12:22; Psalm 106:8). God’s primary motive in showing mercy to sinning people is “the sake of His name” (Isaiah 48:9; Ezekiel 20:44). God’s primary motive in dealing with the wicked is “the sake of His name” (Exodus 9:14-16; Romans 9:17). Finally, God’s primary motive in His dealings with saved men is “the sake of His name” (I John 2:12; Acts 9:16).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Stuart Dauermann and Mark Kinzer, *The Emerging Messianic Jewish Paradigm* (2005).

<sup>40</sup> Horn, *loc cit*

Sam Horn, John Piper, and Steve Hawthorne are right in redirecting our attention to the centrality of lifting up the name of God and the name of Yeshua. Can we deny that the supremacy of Yeshua's name rather than the alleged spiritual bankruptcy or neediness of the Jewish people or of a hell-bound Sanhedrin was uppermost in the minds of Peter and John? I challenge all of us to examine deeply why it is that some of us fight so energetically to maintain our habitual preoccupation with the neediness of Jews, a habit that leads to repeatedly proving to ourselves and to others the alleged futility, vacuity, and impotence of the Jewish way of life. This is not the engine that drove the apostles who lived to glorify Yeshua and the One who raised him from the dead. Isn't this focus and motivation good enough for us?

***The Third Piston of Our Missional Engine:  
Hastening the Consummation of All Things***

When we speak of ourselves as “the Remnant of Israel,” what do we mean? And what relationship does this have to the consummation of all things?<sup>41</sup>

Dan Johnson<sup>42</sup> demonstrates how Scripture presents two different modalities of remnant identity, one being survivors of a time of judgment, the other being the seed from which God's continuing purposes will be realized. Both of these perspectives are to be found in Romans 9 to 11. Johnson finds the earliest reference to the remnant as the seed and earnest of future blessing in the verb form used in Gen 7:23, “only Noach was *left* (*vayisha'er akh noakh*), along with those who were with him in the ark,” the term,

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<sup>41</sup> Stuart Dauermann, *Seeds, Weeds, and Walking the High Wire: The Role of the Remnant – Embodying Israel's Destiny*. Unpublished paper from the Hashivenu Forum (Hashivenu: Pasadena, CA, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Dan G. Johnson, "The Structure and Meaning of Romans 11." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 46(1), 1984:91-103.

*vayish'er* being elated to the term *sh'erit* (remnant). As Noach/Noah, his family, and the animals left with them in the Ark (as a remnant) were a sign of God's continuing purpose for the earth, and instruments for its realization, so the eschatological remnant of Israel of Romans 9 to 11 is meant to be a sign, demonstration and catalyst of God's continuing purposes for the Jewish people—a seed of good things to come. This is our calling.

In Romans, chapters nine to eleven, Paul speaks of two “fullnesses,” “the fullness of the nations” (11:25) and “the fullness of Israel” (11:12). Paul calls Israel's fullness greater than the fullness of the Gentiles ( $\pi \cdot \sigma \cdot \mu \cdot \lambda \lambda \omicron \nu \tau \cdot \pi \lambda \cdot \rho \omega \mu \alpha \alpha \cdot \tau \cdot \nu \dots$  “How much greater will their fullness be?” [Ro 11:12]). Therefore if the fullness of the Gentiles is associated with the Great Commission, the fullness of Israel, that “greater riches” (Ro 11:12, NIV) God will bring to pass, may be termed “the Greater Commission,” as this reality affects our Remnant responsibilities.

Because we are so used to operating out of an older paradigm, these concepts, and terms like “the Greater Commission” may come as a shock. However, these reflect biblical realities. The Great Commission might more properly be termed “the Penultimate Commission,” for it is the magnificent prelude to something greater. The Greater Commission is our Remnant calling. God is calling us to prepare the way for the fullness of all Israel.

But are we listening? If we are nearing the pivotal juncture when the gigantic wheel of God's purpose is turning toward the fullness of Israel, we cannot simply go on with business as usual, living by older paradigms. Our responsibility is as great as our

privileges.<sup>43</sup> Our role in the consummation of things is crucial and pivotal. I don't know about you, but this heats up my blood!

### ***The Fourth Piston of Our Missional Engine: Obedience***

Obedience to God, “thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” is our fourth powerful piston. And even if this were the only one, it would be more than enough to drive our engine. We must speak to our people about Yeshua because we have been commanded to do so. Paul’s words apply to us: “For if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”<sup>44</sup> Cannot such a piston drive our engine? Of course it can! And beyond that, should we not be passionate to “bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name” among all the people of Israel, as was Paul’s passion for the nations?<sup>45</sup>

Such a mighty missional engine roars at the curbside like a Maserati, its door open, waiting only for us to get in the driver’s seat to go zero to sixty in five seconds flat. By comparison, the find-heaven-avoid-hell motivation seems like a donkey, energized by a carrot and a stick! I may be taking away our donkey, but our Father in heaven has given us the keys to the Maserati. Let’s take her out on the road!!<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more” (Lk 12:48),

<sup>44</sup> 2 Cor 9:16

<sup>45</sup> Ro 1:5, 16:26

<sup>46</sup> Johannes Verkuyl, writing thirty years ago, reached similar conclusions, naming six motivations for mission, including all four I identified. His list, in order: obedience; love, mercy and pity; doxology; the eschatological motive (where he makes mention of the Lord’s Prayer!); haste; and the personal motive—the arousing of ourselves through arousing others. Verkuyl was the pre-eminent missiologist of the mid-twentieth century (*Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978]), 164-168.

### **“The Law of Moses Has Been Rendered Inoperative”**

On the basis of the lexical meaning of *katargeo* (“render inoperative”), some argue that the Law of Moses has lost all force and authority, having now been replaced by the law of Messiah, by extension making inoperative any argument for God’s preordained return to Torah-based covenant-faithfulness by the seed of Jacob. Is there any answer to this objection? Actually, many answers.

First, defining “the Law of Christ/Messiah” as “all the individual commandments from Christ and the Apostles applicable to a New Testament believer”<sup>47</sup> should not be regarded as either the unanimous or majority view of the exegetical community. Todd Wilson introduces his survey of recent opinion on the matter in a manner which should at least give all of us pause before confidently asserting the Law of Messiah is a code of law replacing the Law of Moses. “While the phrase [the Law of Christ] has traditionally been harmonized with Paul’s negative portrayal of the law by treating the phrase either as a circumlocution for Christian living or as a reference to some other “law,” a growing number of interpreters want to treat the “law of Christ” as a reference to the *law of Moses*.” Wilson also surveys the widening group of exegetical opinion viewing Paul’s “law of faith” and the “law of the Spirit of life” as referring likewise to the Law of Moses.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “Messianic Congregations May Exist Within the Body of Messiah as Long as They Don’t Function Contrary to the New Testament,” In *How Jewish is Christianity? 2 Views on the Messianic Movement*. Stanley N. Gundry and Lois Goldberg, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2003), 121.

<sup>48</sup> Todd A. Wilson. “The Law of Christ and the Law of Moses Reflections on a Recent Trend in Interpretation.” *Current Issues in Biblical Research*. (London, Thousand Oaks CA and New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Volume 5.1:125-144.. Found on line at <http://cbi.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/5/1/123> (Accessed September 23, 2007).



My point here is not to summarize or advocate for any of these arguments in the literature but instead to caution against accepting as self-evident a position which is by no means a settled issue. We still have homework to do.<sup>49</sup>

But I have a stronger argument against those who would confidently discount the persistence of the Law of Moses on the basis of the alleged meaning of *katargeo*.

D.A. Carson names sixteen word fallacies, of which the eighth is “false assumptions about technical meaning,” in which cases, “an interpreter falsely assumes that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning—a meaning usually derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter’s personal systematic theology.” He notes that one of this fallacy’s corollaries occurs whenever such interpreters “go one step further and reduce an entire doctrine to one word which they have understood to be a technical term.”<sup>50</sup> Later, he names and discusses a related error, “unwarranted restriction of the semantic field,” by which he means “misunderstanding the meaning of a word in a particular context by illegitimately restricting the word’s semantic range.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Some of our finest minds have done much of the groundwork for us, although space does not permit a review of their argumentation here. Among them, see John Fischer, “Messianic Congregations Should Exist and Be Very Jewish: A Response to Arnold Fruchtenbaum” in *How Jewish is Christianity? 2 Views on the Messianic Movement*. Stanley N. Gundry and Lois Goldberg, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 129-139; “Torah” in David L. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*. Third Edition. (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publications, 1997), 125-158; Dan Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*. (Rockville, MD: Davar Publishing, 1986), and Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006). For succinct, illuminating treatments of all the relevant texts, see David L. Stern *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*. (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Resources International, 1996). For a detailed presentation of the Law of Messiah as an alternative code to an inoperative Law of Moses, see as well, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*. Revision 2001. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries) 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Donald A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Second edition) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 45, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Carson, 57.

The heart of the matter is that words are best defined not from lexicons but always from contexts—and often, slightly differently from context to context. Besides, lexicographers have theological commitments, interpretative traditions, and communal interests affecting their interpretations of word meanings. This being the case, those who base their doctrines and stances on lexical data may wrongly attribute objectivity and dependability to lexicons neither objective nor dependable. Furthermore, we who consult lexicons have our own theological commitments, interpretive traditions, and communal interests, all of which cause us to eagerly welcome lexical “evidence” when it appears to confirm our preferences. Lexical evidence is helpful, to be sure, but must always be regarded as provisional, its validity contingent upon rigorous historical, cultural, and semantic analysis of each separate textual context.

It seems to me that those who base their “proof” of the nullification of the Law’s authority, alleging that *katargeo* means “to render inoperative,” commit methodological error. They illegitimately and prematurely foreclose discussion on a matter that can only be rightly resolved by means of exacting examination of each context where the word is used. Such contexts may illumine or may, on the contrary, contrast with one another in how the term in question is being used elsewhere. And Carson notes that despite our best interpretive efforts, disputed interpretive matters may not be resolved at all, and surely not by a lexicon: “The fallacy lies in thinking the correct interpretation of a passage can be discovered anyway; and in many instances, that is not possible”<sup>52</sup> This calls for us to exercise far greater exegetical caution than is our habit.

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<sup>52</sup> Carson, 60.

Theological positions must be founded on rigorous and self-critical inter-communal exegesis, not on the verdicts of lexicons. Even these hard-won exegeses are not always certain. Therefore, the jury should be recalled on many arguments that have, in the past, seemed settled on lexical grounds. These cases deserve to be reopened, and discussion resumed, not only to define terms, but to rightly understand both how each specific context influences, shades, and determines meaning, and how these contexts may properly be compared with one another.

Nor does this exhaust the problems created by those who confidently assert that *katargeo* spells the death-knell of the Law of Moses. They can be refuted by what I call “Fruchtenbaum’s Criterion.” It was Arnold Fruchtenbaum from whom, thirty-five years ago or so, I learned the foundational argument against those who dismiss any distinction between Jew or Gentile on the basis of Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Arnold indicated that we must always ask in what *sense* there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, and neither male nor female. Applying Fruchtenbaum’s Criterion to the case at hand, we must be careful to ask, “In what sense, under what conditions, and for whom is the Law of Moses rendered inoperative now that Messiah has come?” The blade of Fruchtenbaum’s Criterion cuts down those who, on etymological grounds, confidently assert the demise of the Law.

Two more arguments, briefly noted. First, it is not possible to separate the Law from the narrative of the Older Testament, where the narrative justifies and explains the setting and rationale of the laws there imbedded. The law can no more be successfully extracted from the narrative (or vice versa) than the skeleton can be extracted from a

human without killing the patient. Second, and closely related, if the Law of Moses is rendered inoperative, does this not have implications for messianic prophecy? Is this too rendered inoperative now that Messiah has come? And if not, on what basis do we make an exception for the persistence of messianic prophecy from within a body of law and inextricable narrative now declared inoperative?

**“Aren’t You Arguing for ‘The Wider Hope’?”**

I argue not *for* the wider hope as much as *against* the wider ego.

It has been decades since I have heard anyone in our circles, speaking on a theological or missiological issue, say, “I don’t know.” Not many manage to mumble these monosyllables. But wouldn’t our relationships with each other be vastly improved if we learned to so speak? As it stands, those who say, “I don’t know,” especially when asked questions about the census of the redeemed, are regarded as confused, deviant or dangerous. I am suggesting that this kind of marginalization and stigmatization of the diffident is uncalled for, likely rooted not only in theological commitments but also in an appalling lack of theological humility. The wider ego.

I have been encouraged to discover that even missiological giants like David Bosch and Paul Hiebert had smaller egos. We would do well to heed these, who, being dead, yet speak:

Our theologies are partial, and they are culturally and socially biased. They may never claim to be absolutes. Yet this does not make them relativistic, as though one suggests that in theology--since we cannot really ever know “absolutely”--anything goes. It is true that we see only in part, but we do see (Hiebert). We are committed to our understanding of revelation, yet we also maintain a critical distance to that understanding. In other words, we are in principle open to other views, an attitude which does not, however, militate against complete commitment

to our own understanding of truth, We preface our remarks with “I believe. . . ,” or “As I see it . . .” (Hiebert). It is misleading to believe that commitment and a self-critical attitude are mutually exclusive.<sup>53</sup>

Applying such theological humility to our missional task, Bosch says further, “The commitment we give to any theological paradigm is therefore wholehearted and provisional, wholehearted because we hold back nothing from our Lord, provisional because our Lord makes us his witnesses, not his know-it-alls.”<sup>54</sup>

I wonder if we got the memo.

Some no doubt remain dissatisfied, demanding a verdict on the status of others, even hypothetical others. Again, I must demur, especially in the case of God’s chosen people, whom he hardened for his purpose, but who remain beloved for the sake of the fathers. The full outworking of the drama of the Jews and the Holy One remains to be played out. A cloud of incense obscures our view of the mercy seat—by divine design. I prefer to echo the roar of another giant, Lesslie Newbigin, one of the most seminal missiologists of the past hundred years. We would do well to hear him:

I confess that I am astounded at the arrogance of theologians who seem to think that we are authorized, in our capacity as Christians, to inform the rest of the world about who is to be vindicated and who is to be condemned at the last judgment. . . . I find this way of thinking among Christians astonishing in view of the emphatic warnings of Jesus against these kinds of judgments which claim to preempt the final judgment of God. Nothing could be more remote from the whole thrust of Jesus’ teaching than the idea that we are in a position to know in advance the final judgment of God. It would be tedious to repeat again the innumerable warnings of Jesus in this matter, his repeated statements that the last day will be a day of surprises, of reversals, of astonishment. In his most developed parable of the last judgment, the parable of the sheep and the goats, both the saved and the lost are astonished. Surely theologians at least should know that the judge on the last day is God and no one else. . .

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<sup>53</sup> Bosch, 186-7, quoting Hiebert, *Epistemological Foundations*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Bosch, 47.

. If a theologian is really serious he must learn to understand the impossible possibility of salvation.

In St. Paul we find this same tension of confidence and awareness of the abyss that lies underneath. Paul, who is certain that nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus, also tells his friends that he has to exercise severe self-discipline “let having preached to others I myself should be disqualified” (I Cor. 9:27). The Christian life, lived in the magnetic field between the two poles of the amazing grace of God and the appalling sin in which I share, has a corresponding synthesis of a godly confidence and a godly fear.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps we should exchange our wider egos for wider souls—like that of Newbigin. I would trade. Would you?

### *Cumulative Conclusions*

Some important disclaimers, lest all I have said be misconstrued:

1. When I speak of the gospel as good news for all Israel, I am neither saying nor implying that all Jews will be in the world to come. I am no more entitled to claim expertise on the census of the redeemed than are others to claim foreknowledge of the roll call of perdition. God alone is judge, and many surprises await us all. I am instead calling us back to a fundamental theme of both Testaments ignored or marginalized by the Church and by Jewish mission for centuries, if not for millennia. The Law and the Prophets point to a glorious hope for all Israel. This concern motivated the

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<sup>55</sup> Lesslie Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 177-8.

apostles and informed their preaching, and is entirely absent from our evangelistic practice, expectation and communal life.<sup>56</sup>

2. When I speak of the gospel as good news for all Israel I am not saying or implying that helping Jews come to Yeshua-faith is a superfluous non-issue. It is a matter of sharing with others our intimacy of relationship with God, of glorifying him, of our remnant responsibility in helping to bring in the consummation, of obedience, and allegiance to the Son of David. Neglect of this responsibility is a matter for which we will all give an account of ourselves to God.
3. I have sought to avoid demeaning anyone of our number or of our broad circle of associates. If I have failed in that regard, I ask forgiveness.
4. I am not saying that my approach alone is worthwhile, with all others bogus or passé. But I am certainly alleging that we have been grossly negligent in not pursuing such an approach deeply aligned with the whole counsel of God, with these times of transition, and with the prophesied consummation.

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<sup>56</sup> In the first chapter of *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, Darrell Bock speaks of "The Reign of the Lord Christ." His stated goal is "to argue that any reconstruction of New Testament eschatology [indeed of Messianic eschatology] must take into account the perspective of both Acts 2 and Acts 3" (37). In discussing the kingdom concept in Luke's gospel, he stresses the immanence of the Kingdom, and the fact that kingdom period begins with Jesus' ministry and message. "While the kingdom has not arrived in its fullness, it has come in its initial stages. In that inauguration the deliverance of God has come, and the future full rule of God has been guaranteed" (40). Bock sees in Luke-Acts a tension between kingdom present and kingdom to come [Acts 1:6]. When seen in context, the time of the consummation of the Kingdom *vis-a-vis* Israel is tied in with Yeshua's return [v.11]. Bock sees Acts 2 and 3 as being answers to the disciples question in 1:6, demonstrating the already of Jesus' kingdom reign [Act 2], and the not yet when the political promises to Israel will be consummated [Acts 3]. What we should not miss is the seamless connection between the gospel and the consummation: the one who tabernacled among us will return to consummate God's good news for all Israel. This deserves to be central to our gospel during these times of transition. See Darrell L. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in Craig A. Blasing and Darrel L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 37-67.

5. Although there is no mention in this paper of God's will for the nations, this must not be taken to mean that I am unconcerned about the nations or that the Great Commission has no place in my missiology. Nor should my silence on these matters be taken to mean that I am negative about the Church and/or its role. I have focused solely on the people of Israel in keeping with the nature of our symposium, concentrating on our role as part of the Remnant of Israel.

### **Integrational Thoughts**

First, I affirm that repentance and faith play a central role in the message we are called to proclaim. But I also believe that mission culture has had an inconsistent and sub-biblical concept of what repentance means and what it entails for Jews. R. Kendall Soulen helps us with this clarifying statement:

According to the biblical witness, God's work as Consummator takes enduring shape in the history that unfolds between the Lord, Israel, and the nations. Accordingly, *human sin is never merely the sin of the creature against the Creator-Consummator. Human sin is also always the sin of Jew and Gentile, of Israel and the nations.*<sup>57</sup>

The sins of Messianic Jews and of all Israel are far more dire and extensive than simply the record of individual human failings. The sins of all Israel, including Messianic Jews, include and indeed are foundationally our failure to live in covenant faithfulness with Israel's God.

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<sup>57</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 153, emphasis added.



Do Jews need the atonement Yeshua provides? Yes, by all means, yes, but for reasons deeper than we have yet realized and proclaimed. Jewish missionaries and Messianic Jews have always called for other Jews to repent and believe. But we fail to ask, “Repent for what?” By default, we would say, “Repent for being a sinner, for your sins,” or perhaps, “Repent for not recognizing the Messiah whom God sent for us.”

But this will not do, for we finally only know what sin is when we compare our conduct with what God demands of us. We, the seed of Abraham and Sarah, whose ancestors, standing at the foot of Sinai, said “na’aseh v’nishmah—we will do and we will hear/obey—all that the Lord has spoken we will do”—must repent not of being sinners in general, but of being *Jewish* sinners specifically. The sins of all Israel, including Messianic Jews, include continual and pervasive neglect of the covenant to which we are all obligated (Dt 29:10-15). Although we may confidently say “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua,” we may *not* say “there is therefore now no responsibility for those who in Messiah Yeshua.” “Yeshua paid it all,” but not that we might go back to each of us turning to his own way (Is 53:6). Surely, if our sin includes covenant violation, should not our repentance include not simply faith in the sin-bearer, but also a return to that covenant-faithfulness from which we departed? And is it of no significance that it is precisely to the restoration of this kind of obedience (communally) that God’s consummating actions are directed?

Second, under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, evangelicals have for too long been too focused on the gospel being true news. We zero in on apologetics and Messianic prophecy, good in their own right. However, when the subtext of our message is the certain perdition of the vast majority of the Jews who ever lived, including the intimate family members of those whom we evangelize, anyone who is reasonably astute, or who has been influenced by those opposing our message, is likely to turn to us a deaf ear. The “truth” of the gospel is not likely to make inroads when the news is unwelcome, oppressive, and when it implies, or even theologically *requires*, that the evangelized be eternally separated from their people, axiomatically viewed to be lost forever. Nor will it do to try and hide these implications from those we evangelize: Jewish people are not stupid, and, sooner or later, they know when they have been duped. With our prevailing propositions, we have news for the Jew standing before us: God is going to take her away from her family for ever and ever to be in heaven with him, with most if not all of her loved ones tormented eternally in the lake of fire. Not so good. Can we get back to a gospel that is good news for all Israel without betraying the text of Scripture? I believe we can and I believe we must. And I have tried to help point the way.

Third, we have been too focused on the salvation of individuals, and on individual response, both of which are nevertheless crucial, since all of us will give an account of ourselves to God—individually. But in the process, we have forgotten that the Bible portrays the gospel as good news for *Zion*. It is news of the vindicating and merciful reign of God displayed and accomplished in the One

whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting days, whose incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, High Priestly ministry and Davidic reign need to be restored in our thinking to their central place as the means toward prophesied national blessings.

Fourth, we have been too focused on the gospel as atonement, as if this were all there is or the main point, failing to see atonement as part of a “package deal” of sorts, which includes the regathering, renewal, reunification, return to covenant faithfulness and messianic fulfillment of all Israel. We have also seen atonement as monolithically individual, which is a strange concept considering the biblical evidence. (See as but one example the prophecy in Daniel nine which couches the atonement in this broader context of national vindication and salvation).

***Who Has Believed Our Report? Toward a Gospel For All Israel***

With all of this in view, consider the following description of the gospel we are being called to commend to our people at this time of transition.

1. The gospel of God for the Jewish people is above all else good news for all Israel rather than for a fragmentary spiritually enlightened elite.
2. It is not entirely new news, for the arm of the Lord has rescued Israel time and time again. But it is the good news of God, in covenant faithfulness, doing again what he has done before—coming to rescue his people—but outdoing Himself this time, in the foretold ultimate deliverance, through

the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah in his incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, and ascension as Great High Priest and ruling Son of David.

3. It is the good news of God vindicating his name and his people Israel in the sight of all nations in victorious strength and faithfulness, to be consummated in the regathering, reunification, repentance-renewal, and return to Torah-based covenant faithfulness of the community of Jacob, gathered around Yeshua the Son of David, resurrected and renewed in a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells and joy prevails, in the sight of all nations.
4. Therefore, if we and our communities are to be gospel messengers, we must passionately honor these priorities in our own communities, and, as Remnant people, celebrate, catalyze and advance these priorities in the life of wider Israel.
5. And so, in this fashion and toward such ends,” all Israel will be saved.” Does this mean every single Jew? Not likely. Rather, Paul is answering the question, “What is going to happen to the Jews as a whole?” For details, see the Letter to the Romans, chapter nine to eleven, against the background of the testimony of the Law and the Prophets to eschatological blessings promised to Israel as a whole.

### ***Related Implications***

1. And what of Jewish people who refuse the message? That of course is a serious matter, as has always been the cases whenever our people have

rejected or been unresponsive to the saving acts of God. But it is interesting that the Apostles, in their preaching to Jews, never pass a verdict that their rejecting hearers are going to hell. Rather they *warn* them to be careful concerning the possible consequences of such hardness of heart. Giving warnings and delivering verdicts is not the same thing. Again, God alone is judge.

2. Under this paradigm, we need to view ourselves not as missionaries but as prophets. Missionaries come from outside a community with a foreign message: prophets come from within the community, calling the people back to communal standards of faithfulness to God. However, our evangelism will fail if it is only a sales pitch. We must ourselves exemplify the faithfulness to which we are calling others, living for those things which Messiah is bringing to pass—the regathering, unification, spiritual repentance renewal, and Torah obedience of all Israel.
3. Our evangelism will involve the following:
  - a. Developing modalities (communal expressions) where Yeshua-faith and the power of the Spirit are realities making our pursuit of these goals qualitatively different from what people are likely to encounter elsewhere.
  - b. Seeing evangelism as recruiting and involving other Jews in the passionate pursuit of these priorities, we will be agents sensitizing them to the difference made by Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, and inviting them to Yeshua-faith.

- c. Cooperating with and commending Jews of all kinds in their pursuit of whichever of these priorities they are committed to. We are not in competition with them. We should seek out opportunities for cooperation. In such contexts too, our Yeshua-faith and the influence of the Spirit will be made known.
- d. Operating within such a model, even if Jewish people do not receive our witness of Yeshua, they will know that we are committed to the well being of the Jewish people and that our gospel is proclaimed as good news for all Israel.

### *Some Questions To Consider*

1. Do we spend far less time speaking with Jews about Yeshua than we do speaking with Yeshua-believers about Jewish evangelism? Why is this? (Try to identify at least two unflattering answers).
2. Does the approach here presented make you more eager to go out and share the gospel as here defined than you normally are under other paradigms? Why might this paradigm be more energizing?
3. Would most Jewish people we encounter be likely to perceive the message of the gospel as we normally present it as being good news for Jews as a whole? Why/why not?
4. Is our communal life good news for the Jewish people, or a doorway to or evidence of Jewish communal disintegration?

5. Without this vision, what are we left with, and how successful have we been/are we likely to be with our usual approaches?
6. A friend<sup>58</sup> suggests that prevailing approaches self-select those Jews alienated from their own Jewish covenant responsibilities. Do you agree, and is this a good thing?
7. If this evangelistic vision is biblically supportable, and something God is calling us to, would you be willing to implement it despite the social and financial consequences? What might some of those consequences be?

### *Epilogue*

A week ago I received a phone call from a friend, illustrating the burden of this paper. She is an outspoken Messianic Jew in Los Angeles, and an effective witness of her faith. She had been invited to visit the *sukkah* of an Orthodox rabbi active in the area who had been trying to win her back to mainstream Judaism, while she had been witnessing to him.

She had been meeting with him and his family for some time, and this time was quite unsuccessful. He saw that she was “a lost cause” from his point of view. At that point she mentioned Hashivenu, and encouraged him to visit our website. She also mentioned me. It turned out he knew of me, but how?

About two years ago, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) visited Los Angeles to speak at a local church on the divestment issue. Advance publicity indicated that his perspective was bad news for the Jews. I wrote a

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<sup>58</sup> Jon Cline

letter to two rabbis in town. One was Orthodox, but has shown himself willing to go outside the box. The other was a Reform rabbi with a strong social justice record, whom I had met previously. In my letter to these two rabbis I proposed that we picket the Presbyterian Church or the local Presbyterian Church (USA) headquarters in protest of their position on divestment, as highlighted by the planned visit of the denominational dignitary.

I never heard back. But the truth came out in the *sukkah*. As I mentioned, my friend's rabbi friend knew of me. And the reason he did was that "all the rabbis in town had discussed my letter, and had decided it was too loaded an issue to picket with a bunch of Messianic Jews."

What shall we say about this? Should we say, "That just goes to show you. The rabbis will never accept us and only want to convert us back and protect their people from us." Should we say that the letter was a wasted effort and a total loss? To say such things would be a grave mistake. It just will not do for the Remnant of Israel to fold up its skirts and scuttle back into its own enclaves, or seek solace in the lap of the church!

I would say that it is wonderful that all the rabbis in Los Angeles know that the people at my congregation, Ahavat Zion, care about Jewish concerns and stand for the issues that matter to them. I am going to be sending more such letters in the future, and meanwhile develop a synagogue that actively incarnates the glorious future God has for all Israel: gathered, united, repentant, renewed, faithful to his statutes and ordinances, around Yeshua, the reigning Son of David.

Is this not good news for all Israel?



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