

The Jewish People and Salvation
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In 1996, I received a phone call from my cousin in Israel, telling me that my father had just died. A Holocaust survivor and an Orthodox Jew, he had cut all ties with me when I became a follower of Yeshua. He moved to Israel and refused any contact with me. When he passed away, his only surviving sibling, my aunt, instructed the entire family not to let me know of my father's passing. Gratefully, one of my Israeli cousins refused this last painful demand and called me.

From 1972 until 1996, I had made repeated efforts to reach my Dad, not to share my faith with him but just to restore our relationship. As a result, I had three separate meetings with him, in 1978, 1981 and the last one in 1992, when after speaking together for 10 minutes, the wife he had married in 1977 realized who I was, causing her to assault me and drive from their house. Years later, when my cousin phoned me to relay the details of my father's passing, she noted that just one day before his death, he had reiterated that I was no longer his son and did not want me informed of his soon coming death.

I suppose that was the very first time I began to question the particularist¹ soteriology I had been taught at Bible college and seminary. I had been taught and believed that apart from conscious faith in Yeshua, all people, including Jewish people, including my father, would be

¹Particularism affirms that "salvation depends on explicit personal faith in Jesus Christ" R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach" in Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World edited by Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy Phillips. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 214. Although sometimes called exclusivism, particularism is more appropriate because of the unwarranted negative suggestions of undue dogmatism.

lost for eternity. But if ever someone could earn his way into heaven on the basis of suffering, certainly my father could. He lost his first wife, five sons, and an adopted daughter to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. He himself had suffered miserably in the Lodz ghetto and then several concentration camps. After the war, he remarried and his new wife died while giving birth to my half-brother. Then he married my mother, who was eighteen years younger than he, with whom he had a daughter, my sister Esther, who died in a drowning accident in Berlin when she was two years old. After this tragedy, my parents moved to America and tried to rebuild their lives.

In 1971, my mother went public with her previously secret faith in Yeshua and my father divorced her for this. Within 1 ½ years, I and then my two sisters came to faith in Yeshua, so that he disowned all three of us and moved to Israel to be near his own sister, the only one of his 7 siblings that had not perished in the Holocaust.

After his death, a small voice in my head began to question how God could exclude my father from eternal life. He had suffered so much, he had kept Torah as much as was humanly possible, and then he gave up his second family out of devotion to that Torah and his people. In the midst of my doubts, I had two firm convictions: That Yeshua was truly the promised Messiah and that the Bible, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Covenant, was the inspired Word of God.

So it was, that I turned to the Bible to examine my previously held convictions and where I still turn when I am pained by the tragic loss of my father and the continuing unbelief of the vast majority of my people. Must Jewish people consciously believe in Yeshua to have eternal life or are their exceptions to this seemingly biblical requirement? In the next few pages, I will share what I believe the Scriptures say about the Jewish people and salvation.

Before examining those Scriptures, I offer this caveat: In what follows, I do not speak or write as one who has all the answers. I struggle and continually study. I acknowledge my own limitations and I accept the caution that Yeshua gave that we will be surprised by who will indeed attain to eternal life with Him (Matt 7:21-30; Luke 13:22-30). I recognize that others have different conclusions and respect what motivates them. What follows is my understanding of what I believe the Bible has to say about the Jewish people and salvation. I will frame this by first expressing the reasons this issue is so important, then by examining the biblical evidence, followed by addressing the objections that have been raised to my understanding of the scriptures. Finally, I will present some needed responses to the biblical issues before us.

The Importance of the Issue

In a pluralistic and relativistic² society, any statement affirming that one faith asserts an exclusive claim to truth and maintains there is only one way to experience God's forgiveness will certainly raise hackles. Anyone who has lost a loved one who did not trust in the Messiah Yeshua will certainly struggle with particularism. For those of us who have felt the pain of the murder of the Six Million by vicious and cruel Nazis, it is natural that Jewish believers would struggle with any teaching that limits salvation to those who have a conscious faith in Yeshua. It is hard to assert the particularist claims of Yeshua in the face of the Holocaust. Cultural trends, personal grief, and the Shoah demonstrate why this discussion is so important—the exclusive

²For the sake of clarity, although I reject relativism, the idea that objective truth does not exist, I affirm pluralism in our society. Pluralism does not assert that all faiths are true but that people must be freely permitted to explore and assert what they understand to be true. A colleague of mine has said, "Relativism says that there is no right or wrong. Pluralism says that you have the right to be wrong."

claims of the Messianic faith are *difficult* in that they are both unpopular in society and painful to us and our people.

Besides the difficulty of the issue, it is important because it is *divisive*. Those who affirm particularism often treat those who support a more inclusive soteriology as heretics. This is decidedly unfair. Heresy in scripture requires a denial of an essential truth that would exclude its adherent from the community of faith and the family of God. Inclusivists do not deny Yeshua's deity and absolutely believe in Him as Redeemer. They are part of God's family.

At the same time, inclusivists also can divide by accusing particularists of being close minded, fundamentalists that deny the loving nature of God and fail to practice *ahavat Yisrael* (the love for our people Israel). Sometimes such opinions are expressed with an attitude of intellectual superiority and theological advancement, deriding particularists for their far too literal, old fashioned, or narrow interpretation of the Bible. This subject is so significant because it could potentially tear the messianic movement apart to such a degree, that we will wither and disappear, much as the ancient Nazarenes did.

A third reason this topic is so important is that it is a *decisive* issue. While those holding either position affirm the need to share Yeshua with our Jewish people and all people, certainly the view one takes will affect the amount of urgency there is to that proclamation. It will affect our view of outreach and our sense of "mission." In fact, the decisive nature of this issue is probably why we have gathered here to discuss it.

Since Jewish people and salvation is such an important and weighty issue, we must turn to the Bible as our supreme authority to seek answers.

The Evidence from Scripture

The Bible does indeed address this topic, in what seems to be clear terms. There are four principles that the Scriptures appear to affirm regarding Jewish people and salvation.

The Lost Condition of the Jewish People

To begin, the Bible appears to assert that *Jewish people, in fact all people, are lost without faith in Yeshua as their Redeemer*. Generally, the Scriptures consider humanity to be dead in “trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) and as such separated from God. Isaiah proclaims to Israel that “your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you” (Isa 59:2). However, some passages require a closer look.

John 3:18

The apostle John³ considers any individual, including those from the Jewish people, as having been “judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Ronald Nash believes this verse so plainly maintains the lostness of humanity without conscious faith in Yeshua, that when he cites it, he fails to comment on its meaning, only stating that this text speaks for itself.⁴ Perhaps he is correct, but then again it might be helpful to make some comments.

First, John 3:18 is in the context of a general statement about God’s love for the whole world and his provision of the Son of God to save it (John 3:16). It plainly states there that those

³Although it is possible that Yeshua directly spoke these words, it is more likely that the quotation by Him ended in John 3:15 with verses 16-21 presenting the theological reflections of John (D.A. Carson, The Gospel According to John, [Downers Grove: IVP, 1993] p. 203; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] p. 228. Assuredly, they reflect the teachings John had received from Yeshua during his earthly ministry.

⁴Ronald H. Nash, Is Jesus the Only Savior? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 148.

who believe will be saved. However, John 3:18 presents the alternative circumstance: the consequence of failing to believe, and concludes that the result is judgment.

Secondly, it is unlikely that John considers this to be true only for those who have been evangelized with a loving and clear presentation of Yeshua, since this distinction is not found anywhere in this text. It appears that John is speaking of those who fail to believe in Yeshua regardless of whether they have ever heard of Him or even heard of Him in an accurate way.

Finally, it is a failure to believe “in the name of the only begotten Son of God” which brings judgment, indicating that it is not merely a lack of faith in God but failure to believe explicitly and consciously in Yeshua. To believe “in the name” of a person was to understand their true identity. When the psalmist stated that “those who love your name may rejoice in you” (Psa 5:11) obviously he spoke of those who consciously knew the identity of the God of Israel. To make the phrase “believing in the name of the Son of God” exclude conscious faith in Yeshua would seem to violate John’s usage as well (John 1:12; John 20:31).

John 3:36

John maintains that “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). A person that believes in the Son is assured a place in the age to come. The opposite is also true. A person that does not believe will fail to see life in the age to come. Although John uses the words “does not obey” he uses it in contrast to the verb “believe.” It appears that his purpose is to show that failure to believe is in essence disobeying the commandment of Messiah to believe in Him. Leon

Morris expresses it well: “Those who believe do in fact obey the Son, and those who do not believe do not in fact obey Him.”⁵

Most significant to this discussion is that the “wrath of God” abides on any person that does not believe and obey the Son. This does not refer to an anger distinguished by an “irrational or emotional outburst” but it is used in reference to the effects of a holy God’s just response to all unrighteousness (Rom 1:18).⁶ Failing to believe in the Son results in God’s wrath abiding on Jew or Gentile alike, without distinction. Apart from faith in Yeshua, all people stand in their sins and justly deserve God’s wrath.

John 8:24

In a context that is clearly Jewish, Yeshua told his audience of Jewish leaders, “You shall die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). According to Yeshua, the only way to avoid dying in an unforgiven state is to have faith. In the conditional clause, Yeshua made clear that He was the proper object of that faith when He said “if you do not believe $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ ’.” This is an explicit self declaration of deity. Some have objected that the phrase $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ ’ is not referring to deity but has an implicit completion, such as, “if you do not believe I am who I claim to be” or “if you do not believe that I am not of this world but from above” you are still in your sins. However, Carson correctly rejects those possibilities by pointing out that these translations are unlikely with the absolute usage (no object

⁵Morris, p. 248.

⁶G. Stahlin, “Orge” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, abridged by Geoffrey Bromily. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 722-27.

included) present in this verse. The alternative possibility, that Yeshua was declaring his own deity, is far more likely.⁷

The phrase $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota'$ is probably not a reference to Exodus 3:14 because the LXX translates the phrase “I Am has sent me” with the Greek words $\tau\omicron \ \omega\upsilon$ (“the Existing One has sent me”) rather than using $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota'$. More likely it is taken from the LXX’s consistent usage of $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota'$ as the translation of אֲנִי הוֹאֲנִי , a phrase used for God’s self disclosure in Isaiah (Cf. Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12). For example in Isaiah 43:10, the LORD says, “In order that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He (אֲנִי הוֹאֲנִי)”⁸

To sum up, speaking to a Jewish audience, Yeshua declared that they needed to recognize that He in fact was deity or they would still be in their sins. If there is any doubt that Yeshua was making a claim to deity, the context clarifies that He was. Later in the chapter, John records that Yeshua said that “Before Abraham was, I AM ($\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota'$)” (John 8:58). His hearers fully understood the import of these words because “they picked up stones to throw at Him” (John 8:59). This all this relates to the question at hand in that Yeshua told a group of highly committed Jewish people that they were lost and remained in their sins so long as they did not consciously believe that Yeshua was God in the flesh.

Romans 2:17-23

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul made the case that all people, Jewish or Gentile, are lost in sin and in need of redemption. In order, he demonstrated that pagans were lost (1:18-32), as are

⁷Carson, pp. 342-43.

⁸Ibid.

moralists (2:1-16), and then, that Jewish people are lost in sin as well (2:17-3:8). In the section about Jewish sin, Paul's point is that Jewish people who celebrate God's gift of the Torah and teach others to obey it, still failed to keep it themselves. Thus he asked, "You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?"

It may be objected that all Jews do not literally steal, rob temples, or commit adultery. Of course some examples of this kind of behavior may have taken place, but not universally among all Jewish people.⁹ However, if the stricter interpretation of the Law is true, as set forth by Yeshua in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-48), evaluating obedience based on the intentions of the heart, certainly not one Jewish person is innocent.

Since Paul's rhetorical questions must be answered affirmatively, then Jewish people are just as lost and accountable to God for sin as are the Gentiles. Douglas Moo captures the import of these words when he writes, "In arguing in this manner, Paul is implicitly contesting the traditional Jewish understanding of the covenant. Whereas Jews tended to rely on their election and works of the law, Paul insists that it is faith—only and always—that is the basis for a righteous standing with God."¹⁰

⁹C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1957), p. 56-57.

¹⁰Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans in the New International Commentary on the New Testament edited by Ned Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon Fee. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 158.

Romans 3:9-20

Having made his case that Gentiles, moralists, and Jews are all guilty before God, Paul concludes by stating “that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin’ (Rom 3:9). He follows this with a catena of verses from the Hebrew Bible that show that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike are lost and separated from God. Paul then states categorically that the Law speaks judgment to those who have failed to keep it completely, “that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God” (Rom 3:19). The universal condemnation of humanity for sin summarizes the point of this section. All people, including Jewish people, appear to be lost and separated from God because of sin. But there is hope that forgiveness is available through faith in Yeshua, which is the second component the Scriptural perspective on Jewish people and salvation.

The Need for Conscious Faith in Yeshua

The New Covenant consistently seems to affirm that *Jewish people, or Gentiles, must have conscious faith in Yeshua to experience God's forgiveness and receive the promise of life in the world to come*. There are so many passages that can be adduced that it is necessary at this point to limit this discussion to but a few from a number of sections of the New Covenant.

In the Gospel of John

John 3:16 is the most basic verse that asserts the need for explicit and conscious faith in Yeshua, by stating that in love, God gave His Son so that “whoever believes in Him should not perish.” Beyond that, it is faith in His name that will result in not being judged for sin (John 3:18). According to John, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” but without that faith the wrath of God justly abides on him. All these verses from John 3 are in the context of Yeshua’s

discussion with Nicodemus, a good man, a Pharisee, and a Jewish leader. If Nicodemus needed conscious faith in Yeshua to be born again and forgiven, it would appear that all other Jewish people do as well.

In John 6:28, the multitude asked Yeshua, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” In essence, they wanted to know what God required of them. Yeshua’s response is quite simple—to fulfill God’s requirements they were to “believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). This is not just faith in general but faith that has a specific object, namely, Yeshua, the One sent from God.¹¹

In Acts

One example in Acts is Paul’s sermon to the Jewish community in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-41). After a long discussion of the history of Israel, Paul argues that the entire plan of God focused on the promised Messiah and that the promise was fulfilled by Yeshua of Nazareth in his death and resurrection. Paul concludes his message to his Jewish audience with an appeal to believe in Yeshua because it is “through Him (Yeshua) that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and through Him everyone who believes is justified (Acts 13:38-39). Additionally, Paul argues that through faith, a believer in Yeshua receives complete justification, a benefit not available through the Law of Moses.¹²

¹¹The Gospel of John includes a number of other verses that appear to state plainly the need for conscious faith in Yeshua, some of which are 6:40; 8:24; 10:9, 26-28; 11:25-26.

¹²Paul’s “distinctive themes of ‘forgiveness of sins,’ ‘justification,’ and ‘faith’ . . . resound in this first address ascribed to him in Acts just as they do throughout all his extant letters” Richard Longenecker, “Acts” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* Vol. 9, edited by Frank E. Gabelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 427.

In Romans

The point of Romans 9:30-10:21 is that, although the Older Covenant only required faith in the God of Israel, now, with the coming of Yeshua the Messiah, He has become the required object of faith for salvation. Although some might object that this would cause many in Israel to lose their salvation since they did believe in God but not in Yeshua, that is not the case. Paul has argued forcefully that even before Messiah came, most in Israel pursued a righteousness that came by works of the Law rather than by faith (9:30-32). Although taught the message of faith in the Hebrew Bible, most of Israel chose to pursue salvation by works of the Law (“But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works” 9:30-31). As a result, when Messiah came, they rejected Him (“stumbled over the stumbling stone”) not because of their faith in God but because of their devotion to works of the Law.

After describing his own heart’s desire for Israel to be saved and their need to be saved despite their zeal for God that is “without knowledge” (10:1-2), Paul addresses Israel’s problem. He maintains that before the coming of Yeshua, the Jewish people sought to establish their own righteousness (10:3) rather than receiving the righteousness that comes by faith. Bringing the Messiah into the equation, Paul maintains that the goal of the Law was always to point to Messiah, in the words of John Piper, he was “the climactic expression of what the law was teaching all along, namely the message of faith.”¹³ Quoting Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Paul shows that the faith taught by the Law was always near, “in your mouth and in your heart” (10:6-8).

¹³John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 152.

Having established this principle, Paul shows that Messiah is the fulfillment of this teaching, with salvation being as close as the confession of one's mouth and heart. Therefore, Yeshua has become the proper object of faith for salvation. All people, but in this context, particularly Jewish people must confess Yeshua as God and believe in their hearts that God did indeed raise Him from the dead in order to be saved.¹⁴

Paul then applies this crucial principle: Since Yeshua is the true object of faith for salvation, therefore He must be called upon for anyone to be saved. And in order to call, one must believe. And in order to believe, one must hear the message. And to hear the message, there must be a proclaimer of that message that is sent with the good news that Messiah has died for sin and has been raised to prove He is indeed God (Rom 10:13-15). This passage could not be clearer. Jewish people must believe in Yeshua so there needs to be intentional outreach to bring that message to them. There does not appear to be any alternative way for a person to come to a knowledge of that which is necessary to be saved apart from faithful proclamation of the gospel. This age remains a time of "missionary" work among our people whether that word is used or not. Should a "post-missionary" period actually ever arrive, it will make Messianic Judaism die rather than flourish.

Since hearing the good news of Yeshua is essential to believing it, Paul takes up the objection that could be raised, specifically that Jewish people do not believe because they have not heard of Yeshua. Hence Paul asks, "Surely they have never heard, have they? . . . Surely Israel did not know, did they (Rom 10:17, 19)?" Paul replies to his own two questions in order.

¹⁴The confession of the mouth is not an insertion of works to salvation but rather an aspect of the expression of true faith.

First, he cites Psalm 19:4 to argue that there is sufficient general revelation (“their voice has gone out to all the earth” Rom 10:18).¹⁵ Secondly, Paul maintains that Israel also knows that God has opened the door of faith to Gentiles so that just as Moses (Deut 32:21) and Isaiah (65:1) had predicted, Jewish people would be made jealous for the gospel.¹⁶ In other words, Paul argues that although followers of Yeshua are obligated to proclaim the message of Messiah to Israel (Rom 10:13-15), Jewish people still have sufficient knowledge of revelation so they cannot be excused by ignorance (Rom 10:16-21).

This section of Romans has affirmed that Jewish people need to have explicit and conscious faith in Yeshua for salvation. Therefore, Yeshua’s followers are obligated to share the good news of Yeshua with them. But even if Jewish people do not believe, have not heard or even do not know of Yeshua, Paul deems these excuses as insufficient.

In numerous passages the New Covenant maintains that Jewish people and all people, are lost without Yeshua and need conscious and explicit faith in Him to enter into a forgiven relationship with God. But the New Covenant also adds that Yeshua is the only One who can redeem.

The Absolute Uniqueness of Yeshua

Some might acknowledge the lost condition of Jewish people and even the need for conscious faith in Yeshua. However, they would object that faith in Yeshua is but one way to

¹⁵This is similar to what Paul has previously argued about the availability of general revelation to lost Gentiles (Rom 1:18-20). While not sufficient to save (that is why preachers are necessary) it is sufficient to condemn.

¹⁶This is similar to what Paul will argue in Rom 11:11-14, that Jewish rejection of Messiah and Gentile faith in Him will provoke Jewish people to jealousy.

enter a forgiven relationship with God, maybe even the best way, but certainly not the only way. The Bible does not seem to offer this as an option, insisting that *Yeshua is the only way to God*, especially in two passages.

John 14:6

Thomas asked Yeshua, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?” to which Yeshua responded, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:5-6). The verse, if taken plainly excludes any other possibilities. The use of the article before each of the three nouns dismisses the possibility that Yeshua is but one way, one truth, and one kind of life. The only other alternative is to suggest that Yeshua may be the only way, truth and life but that it is possible to experience His uniqueness apart from conscious knowledge of Him. Not only do the many verses cited in the previous section argue against this possibility, but it would be contrary to the necessity of faith in Yeshua as presented in the rest of the Gospel of John.¹⁷ It appears that there are no alternatives—Yeshua is the only way to the Father.

Acts 4:12

Peter, at a hearing before the Sanhedrin, declared to this body of Jewish leaders that “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Geivett and Phillips make four observations that lead them to conclude that these words must be interpreted in a particularist way. First, the use of the phrase “under heaven” indicates how extensively all other names are excluded as possible ways of salvation. Second, the use of the word *ανθρωποις* (humanity)

¹⁷Particularly John 3:16, 18, 36 (see the discussion on these verses above).

implies that the necessity of salvation through faith in Yeshua is all-inclusive, for all human beings. Third, the word δεῖ (must) indicates the absolute necessity of faith in Yeshua. Finally, the presence of ὄνομα (name) expresses the fullness of all who Yeshua is in His person and work. Moreover, based on its usage in the New Covenant it includes explicit knowledge of Him (cf. Acts 4:17-30; 5:28-32; 40-41; 8:12, 35; 9:15, 27; 10:43; 19:13-15; 26:9; Rom 15:20; 3 John 7).¹⁸ It seems that if salvation could come apart from conscious and explicit faith in Yeshua, Luke, Peter, and Paul (Acts 16:31) appear oblivious to this possibility in the book of Acts.

Clark Pinnock objects to this interpretation by stating,

Peter's declaration does not render a judgment, positive or negative, on another question . . . , the status of other religions and the role they play in God's providence or plan of redemption. Now I grant that Peter judges the religion of Judaism, in confrontation with the preaching of Jesus as Messiah in Acts 3-4, to be an inadequate vehicle of God's endtime salvation (the same would hold true, a fortiori, of any other religion in this situation). But Peter does not say what would hold for Judaism or any other religion in the situation where Christ has not yet been named, where the contest has not been joined . . . Thus we should not see him as denying that there have been and are lesser instances of saving power at work in the world where Jesus' name is unknown. Peter is magnifying a mighty act of God bringing in the kingdom, not discussing comparative religions. We should not generalize his remarks so far beyond the context of Acts 3-4.¹⁹

The problem with Pinnock's objection is that he wants to limit Peter's words to a select group of Jewish people who are found in Acts 3-4. Luke's book will have none of this. He consistently demonstrates that the apostles preached that all need to believe explicitly in Yeshua, both Jews and Gentiles. Accordingly, Peter says to God-fearing Cornelius, that it is "through His name

¹⁸Geivett and Phillips, p. 230-31.

¹⁹Clark H. Pinnock, "Acts 4:12—No Other Name under Heaven" in Through No Fault of Their Own edited by William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), pp. 110-11. Pinnock also raises another objection that will be addressed later in this paper.

every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43). Conscious faith in the name of Yeshua appears to be the only way.

Moreover, if Pinnock were correct, then Paul would certainly have realized it and would have restrained his determination “to preach the gospel, not where Messiah was already named” (Rom 15:20) so as not to bring judgment upon those who had never heard. Although Pinnock does affirm the missionary enterprise,²⁰ his view is logically contrary to it. Proclaiming Yeshua to those who never heard of Him would also bring the possibility of judgment and not only life in His name.

Besides the lost condition of all people apart from Yeshua, the need for all to exercise conscious faith in Yeshua, and the unique claim of Yeshua for salvation, there is one more crucial principle contained in the Scripture regarding the Jewish people and salvation.

The Accountability for Unbelief

All people in general, and *Jewish people in particular, will be held accountable for failing to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah.* This idea is found in several passages, both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Covenant.

Deuteronomy 18:19

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 contains Moses’ prediction that the LORD will send Israel an eschatological prophet like Moses. Numbers 12:6-8 clarifies that Moses unique characteristic as a prophet was that he spoke to God face to face. Therefore, the prophet like Moses would be required to communicate with God in like manner and could not be just any prophet of Israel. Finally, in Deuteronomy 34:10-12, an epilogue added to the Torah many years after Moses

²⁰Ibid, p. 114.

(likely during the time of Ezra, at the close of the canon), the epilogue states that “Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” Thus, at the close of the canonical period, Israel is reminded that no prophet had ever fulfilled the prediction of a prophet like Moses and therefore to keep looking for the Messiah, the eschatological prophet.²¹

The point of all this is that there is a serious warning for Israel attached to this messianic prophecy. Deuteronomy 18:19 concludes by saying, “whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in my name, I Myself will require it of him.” The meaning is that should the people of Israel not attend to the messianic prophet like Moses, God will hold them to account. If Yeshua did indeed fulfill this prediction, then any Jewish person that fails to hear and obey His words is responsible for this to God.

Psalm 2:12

According to both classical Jewish and Christian interpretation, the Son described in Psalm 2 has been understood as referring to the Messiah. If this is indeed an accurate interpretation (and I believe it is)²² then the end of the Psalm is significant. It offers blessing to all who take refuge in the Son but warns of the disaster of failing to do so. The psalmist writes, “Do homage to (literally ‘kiss’) the Son lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His

²¹For a more detailed defense of the messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, see Michael Rydelnik, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy” MISHKAN (Fall, 1998), pp. 50-57.

²²For a defense of a canonical process approach to reading the Psalms as messianic, see Bruce K. Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalm” in Tradition and Testament, edited by John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) pp .3-18. David C. Mitchell has defended an eschatological/messianic reading of the Psalms in The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

wrath may soon be kindled” (Psalm 2:12). Once again, failure to follow the Messianic King will result in facing Him in judgment.

John 5:45-47

At the end of a Sabbath controversy, Yeshua challenged his Jewish audience about their virtual bibliolatry (“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life” John 5:39). As a result of their wrong focus, they failed to understand the Scriptures and to recognize that Yeshua was the Messiah. However, Yeshua warned that only by coming to Him was it possible to have spiritual and eternal life (John 5:40). This failure to recognize Yeshua would bring accountability. Yeshua warned, “Do you think that I will accuse you before the Father, the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words (John 5:45-47)?” According to Yeshua, true faith in Moses and the Torah would produce faith in Messiah Yeshua.

It may be appealing to believe that Jewish people have rejected Yeshua out of faithfulness to Torah and thereby have, through loyalty to the Torah, expressed an implicit faith in Him. This kind of thought is directly rejected by Yeshua. True fidelity to Torah compels faith in Yeshua as Messiah and Lord. Failure to recognize Yeshua from reading the Torah will bring accountability not just to the Father and the Son, but to Moses, the author of the Torah.

In this evaluation of the Biblical evidence, four principles have become apparent. First that Jewish people are lost without faith in Yeshua. Second, that Jewish people must have conscious faith in Yeshua to be saved. Third, Jewish people have no other means of salvation except by faith in Yeshua alone. Finally, that if Jewish people fail to believe in Yeshua, God the

Father will hold them accountable. Because of the severity of these issues, some have offered alternatives and objections. To these we now turn.

The Objections to Particularism

It is absolutely understandable that some have objected to the understanding of Scripture expressed above. Like Paul, whose great compassion for his own people led him to wish himself accursed if it would produce the redemption of Israel (Rom 9:1-3), so many in the Messianic movement, because of a similar compassion, are longing for a wider hope for the Jewish people rather than the narrow way described in Scripture. Those who object are motivated by love and concern and should be respected for their great desire for Jewish people to experience the world to come in the presence of God. Nevertheless, they should also be evaluated biblically, as best as finite minds are able.

The Possibility of Unrecognized Mediation

Some have expressed the hope that the benefits of Messiah Yeshua's atoning death and resurrection would be applied to devout Jewish people, even if they do not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. While accepting that Yeshua is the only way to God and that His is the only name by which salvation is possible, this view believes that perhaps God will apply the benefits of Yeshua's atonement to devout Jewish people who do not consciously believe in Him.

All that was written above about conscious faith in Messiah seems sufficient to address this hope. Nevertheless, several passages of Scripture seem to speak directly to it. One example is Acts 2, in which Luke described the thousands of Jewish people present at the feast of Shavuot as "devout" (Acts 2:5). Yet, despite devotion and spiritual sincerity, Peter still called on them to repent for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). If there is any doubt as to the object of their

faith, it is evident in that Peter also calls upon them to “be baptized in the name of Yeshua.” Peter is not asking for a general repentance for sins committed, but rather repentance for not believing in Yeshua and a conscious turn to Him in faith.

Another case is Romans 10:1-2, in which Paul states that his heart’s desire and prayer for the people of Israel is that they might be saved. Paul recognizes that his people are lost without Yeshua but still acknowledges that “they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” It appears that devotion is an insufficient basis for obtaining any unrecognized mediation.

Some appeal to the case of the Roman centurion Cornelius of whom Peter said, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:34-35). These verses are claimed to show that God will save people who fear Him and do what is right. If that were the case, then why was Peter directed by the Lord to preach Yeshua to Cornelius? The answer is that despite his devotion, Cornelius was not yet saved. In Acts 11:13-14, the angel is said to have directed Cornelius to send for Peter that he might “speak words to you by which you will be saved.” The point of Acts 10:34-35 is not that fearing God and doing good apart from faith in Yeshua is salvific. Rather, that regardless of nationality, those who seek God are welcomed by Him and so God will, in His sovereignty, extend greater light to such people.

As for the value of piety apart from faith in Yeshua, according to John 5:23, ultimately it is inadequate for salvation. There Yeshua says, “He who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent Him.” Regardless of personal devotion to the Father, without faith in the Son, it falls short.

The Problem of Transitions

This objection is that Jewish people with sincere faith during the Older Covenant before the coming of the Messiah, were saved without conscious faith in Yeshua. Nevertheless, Hebrews 10:4 states that the blood of bulls and goats do not take away sin. Hence, the atonement of Messiah had to be applied to the faithful of Israel without their conscious faith in Yeshua. As a result, it is presumed that the blood of Messiah can be applied to Jewish people today who respond in faith to the promises of God but lack conscious faith in Yeshua. Pinnock uses this argument when he writes, “People like Abraham knew God even though they did not know Jesus” and argues for the “salvation of Old Testament saints who lived before Jesus and therefore could not have called upon his name for salvation.”²³

This proposal misunderstands how people have always been saved. There has only been one way of salvation and it remains so in every generation. Namely: **people are saved by grace through faith in the revealed will of God.** Under the Old Covenant, believers in Israel were saved by grace through faith in the God of Israel and the faithful practice of the sacrificial system. This was the revealed will of God for them and they were not required to have a conscious faith in Yeshua as the Messiah. However, since the coming of the New Covenant, God has revealed the truth of Yeshua’s Messiahship, deity, sacrificial death and resurrection. All people are called upon to believe this message because it is the revealed will of God today. According to the author of Hebrews, “In these last days, [God] has spoken to us in His Son” (1:2). With the inauguration of the New Covenant, it is no longer possible to rely on Old Covenant circumstances to be saved.

²³Pinnock, p. 112-13.

A variation of this objection contends that those Jewish people already saved by grace through faith in the revealed will of God at the time of Yeshua's coming, somehow would have automatically lost their salvation at the coming of Messiah—or perhaps at his death, or resurrection, or ascension—because they had not yet heard of Him. Since this is an unthinkable possibility, it maintains that it is proof that even the progress of revelation does not mandate explicit, conscious faith in Yeshua.

This argument fails to see the function of Acts as a transitional book, recording the events in a period of change. It shows the progress from the Older Testament revelation to the New, by taking the good news of Messiah Yeshua “to the remotest part of the earth.” As the gospel spread, those Jewish believers saved on the basis of the previous revelation would have now heard of Messiah's coming and believed in this new revelation. After the book of Acts ended and by the time of the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, there would not have been any more of these transitional believers left. Hence, the period of change just described closed and the requirement for conscious and explicit faith became normative.

The Fairness of God

Ultimately, this objection rests upon the justice of God. Certainly, God would not hold people accountable for failing to believe in someone of whom they had never had. This is uniquely true of the Jewish people and Yeshua, since for the most part, the only message Jewish people have received of Yeshua is the distorted one proclaimed by the historic Church. The true Yeshua was blotted out by the anti-Torah, supercessionist, anti-Jewish Jesus forced upon the Jewish people for centuries. According to this view, God would be unjust if he failed to overlook Jewish unbelief because the good news of Yeshua was so distorted by the Church.

Needless to say, the Church bears a great deal of guilt for obscuring the message of the true Yeshua to the Jewish people. However, if God will hold pagans accountable for unbelief solely on the basis of general revelation (Rom 1:18-20), how much more can He expect of the Jewish people who have access to the special revelation of Scripture that predicts the Messiah.²⁴ This objection could very well be answered with the words of Abraham to the rich man, “They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them . . . If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:29, 31).

The Exception for Infants

Pinnock chides particularists for inconsistency in that many “hope for the salvation of children who die in infancy, even though babies cannot call on the name of Jesus and the Bible never actually states such a hope clearly.”²⁵ On the basis of this “exception” to the plan of God, others suggest that there may also be other exceptions for people who do not believe for lack of full information about Yeshua.

In response, it is unfair to compare the lack of faith of those who are incapable of belief (infants) with those who choose not to believe (adults). Additionally, all particularists do not hold the same position with regard to infants that die before reaching an age of accountability.²⁶ Geisler proposes one possibility on the basis of Romans 5:18-19, which says that “through the obedience of the one man the *many* (i.e. *all*) will be made righteous.” He suggests that Paul does

²⁴See the discussion above about John 39-40, 45-47.

²⁵Pinnock, 113.

²⁶See Norman Geisler, Systematic Theology Vol. III (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), pp. 430-54 for an overview of salvation and infant mortality.

not mean that all were made righteous in the sense of forensic justification which is only by faith. Rather, it can mean that the imputed guilt brought by Adam's sin was canceled for all humanity by the work of Messiah. Thus, people are not separated from God until such time as they actually commit acts of personal sin themselves bringing condemnation. He then concludes, "Consequently, since infants have not committed actual sins, they could all be saved even though not yet able to believe."²⁷

Whatever the explanation is for infants that die before they are able to believe, Yeshua did say of children that "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). This seems to indicate that children are part of the world to come. But there is no similar promise for adult Jews or Gentiles that fail to believe for lack of a clear proclamation about Yeshua.

The Number of the Lost

One final objection to the particularist position is that if it were true, far more people would be lost than saved. This seems contrary to the love of God who does not wish that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9).

With respect to the love of God, the Bible says that multitudes from every nation will be saved. (Rev 7:9). The Lord does love the world and chooses to embrace myriads of people and nations. Yet, with great sorrow, Yeshua did warn of the danger of following "the way that is broad that leads to destruction and many are those who enter by it." Rather, He taught, that people are to "enter by the narrow gate . . . for the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life and few are those who find it" (Matt 7:13-14). Although this is painful to accept, it seems that Yeshua is saying that the path to life is indeed narrow.

²⁷Ibid, p. 449.

Additionally, in Romans 11:1-5, Paul identifies Jewish believers as the remnant of Israel. The word “remnant” (λεῖμμα) means “what is left over”²⁸ and generally, when referring to people, refers to a small group of survivors. The point is that Jewish believers form a small part of the whole of Israel. Paul illustrates the idea of a remnant in this age with the Elijah story in which 7,000 did not bow their knees to Baal. His point is that even in the Older Covenant, the vast majority of Israel did not know the Lord. Rather, God has always worked through a remnant. Therefore, it is not surprising that only a remnant of Israel will be saved today.²⁹

For those who know Yeshua, being the remnant and walking on the narrow path ought never to be the source of triumphalism or gloating. Rather it should break hearts and serve as motivation to share the message of Messiah in the most effective way to the most people possible.

Despite the difficulties involved in affirming a particularist view of salvation with regard to all people, and especially Jewish people, it appears to be what the Scriptures teach. If that is so, how should it affect those who have put their trust in Yeshua? The next section will address how a particularist doctrine should be embraced.

²⁸V. Hertrich IV, “Leimma” in TDNT abridged, p. 523.

²⁹This does not end the discussion for Paul. He looks forward to the eschatological day of the Lord, when the nation of Israel as a whole will turn to Messiah Yeshua in faith and He, the Deliverer will come. Then, the remnant will become the whole (Rom 11:25-26). At that time, God’s words to Jeremiah will come to pass, “‘For they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive them of their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”

The Response to Particularism

Too often particularists are characterized as arrogant or unloving towards the people whom God loves, consigning them to perdition rather than life. Unfortunately, that is how particularists may act sometimes. It seems better for particularists to adopt a different tone and attitude.

Humility

To begin, those who have experienced God's grace should be overcome with humility. Receiving salvation was certainly not a result of any merit on the part of the believer. Becoming a part of the remnant of Israel is a result of "God's gracious choice" (Rom 11:5). An attitude of humility should prevail.

Once, I appeared on the Phil Donahue Show and as soon as he realized I was a Messianic Jew, he immediately asked me if Jewish people who do not believe in Yeshua all go to hell. My response was to tell him that I am not the Judge and no one will ever stand before me to determine their eternal destiny. God is the Judge of all humanity and that I trust Him to judge justly. Yet, I told him, I recognized my own sinfulness and did not feel confident to stand before a holy God on the basis of my own goodness. Therefore, I put my faith in Yeshua for forgiveness. Others may feel more confident in their own goodness and they will have to determine for themselves if they are good enough to face God's judgment on the basis of their own merit. He asked me why I was fudging and I, in turn, asked him why he was trying to make me God. Then he dropped the question.

Some of the believers present with me on the panel did not like my answer. Afterwards, they told me I should have just given a simple yes answer. Others commended me for a slick

apologetic. In my opinion, neither of those comments truly understood my response. I sincerely believe that God alone is the Judge of all the earth and it would be presumptuous on my part and arrogant to opine on the destiny of others. I can openly state that I believe that the Scriptures teach a particularist position but still would not be brazen enough to feel that I can determine the fate of anyone. God is the judge and He is wiser than all. I am grateful that I need not serve as an associate justice on the Supreme Court of Heaven. Life might be a better if I let God do His job and I stayed out of His way.

Motivation

If judging the world is God's job, He has made my job clear as well. In the words of Paul, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor 5:11). God has committed to me and to all followers of Yeshua "a ministry of reconciliation." Therefore, we serve as God's ambassadors to a world that He loves, begging them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20). If we take seriously that the broad way is filled with our people, we will be motivated to fulfill our commission to bring good news to them and announce salvation, and to say to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isa 52:7).

Trust

Lastly, if particularism is true, then I need to learn to trust that God is just and knows what He is doing. It is a hard truth and I am not sure I am fully able to comprehend it. That is not to say that I do not understand what the Scriptures say, just that I do not fully grasp God's purpose and plan. But I do trust Him and it is sufficient. I trust that God is supremely gracious and is always extending Himself in love to a world that wants very little to do with Him.

I will end where I began—with two stories about learning of my father's death. After he died, a gentile friend of mine, a pastor's wife from Memphis, revealed to me that she had been so burdened for my Dad that she had spent the previous 12 years corresponding with him in Israel, paying to have her letters translated into Yiddish. She had regularly sent him Yiddish books and tracts and several Yiddish New Testaments. She had never told me because she feared I would not approve. But I was amazed—my father corresponding with a gentile woman about Yeshua! I thought my father had never heard about Yeshua only to discover he had heard far more than I ever had dreamed. God had not left him without a witness.

And now for the second story. When my cousin called to notify me of my father's death, as we were about to hang up, she remembered one last thing she wanted to tell me. She said on the day before he died, a woman from the U.S. entered my father's hospital room to visit her own father in the next bed. She happened to see my father's name on a piece of tape on the wall. So she turned to him and asked if he was related to Professor Michael Rydelnik from Chicago? He responded by saying, "He used to be my son, but he is dead to me." I do not know who this woman is. She has never made any effort to contact me. But according to my cousin, she angered my aunt by coming to my father's death bed and sharing with him about Yeshua. She told him that he was the Messiah who was his atonement for sin. As far as I know, my father rejected her message, and died the following day of kidney failure. Yet I can see the mercy and grace of God. To the very end, the Lord sent his ambassadors to my father, in the form of a southern pastor's wife and an unknown American Jewish believer. That is why I need to trust God about the Jewish people and salvation. He cares about His chosen people even more than I do and He is doing much more than I ever dreamed to reach them.