

Spring 2018 / Volume 1 / Number 26
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ARIEL
MINISTRIES

Plus:

Ordaining
a Qualified
Elder

Debunking
the Khazar
Myth

CHESED
The Loyal
Love of the
Lord

1943 - 2017:
Dr. Charles Barg

Guard Yourself Against Identity Theft

Who Is the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16?

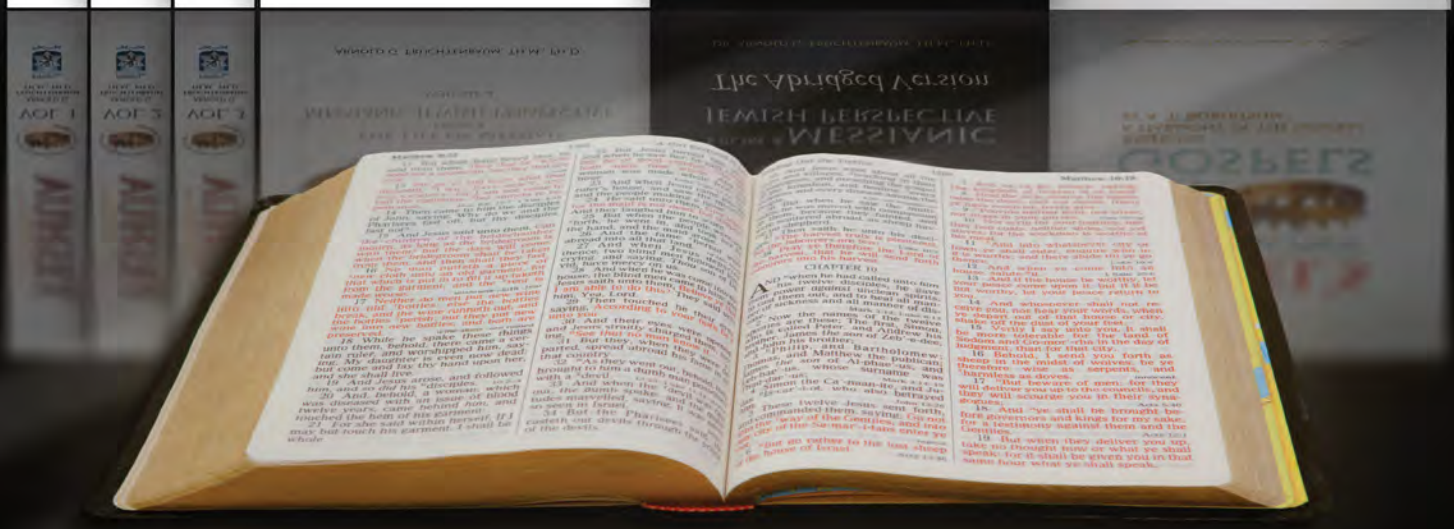
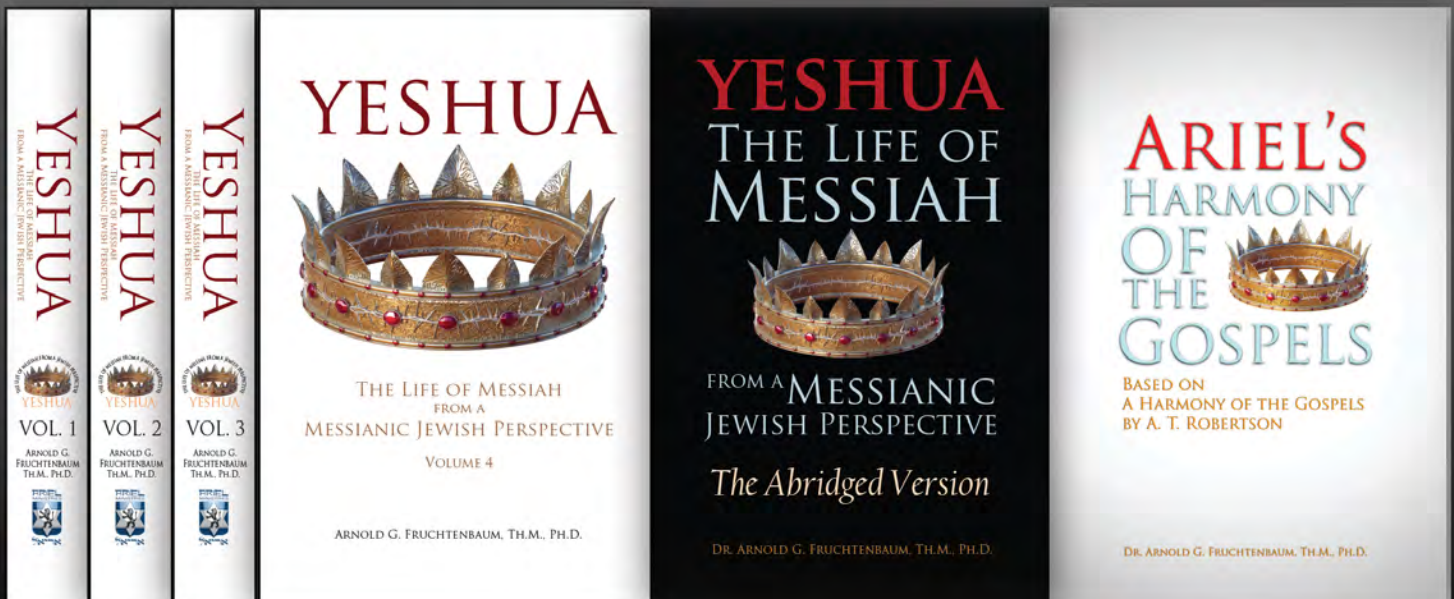
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Cover Story:

Typically, replacement theologians are professing Gentile believers who hijack Israel's identity and take exclusive ownership of the promises God made to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Replacing biblical literalism with allegorical interpretation, they teach that God's purposes for Israel as a territorial nation ended with the cross and that all unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies are to be reinterpreted spiritually in favor of the church. In this article, Dr. Gary Hedrick exposes this doctrine as what it is: spiritual identity theft.

08

Eye on Israel:

Purim is a rather jolly festival, celebrated every year on the 13th day of the Hebrew month of Adar (late winter/early spring). It commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot to kill and to annihilate them all, *both young and old, women and children, in one day*, as recorded in the book of Esther.

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Feature:

In December 2017, two men were ordained as elders of their respective congregations, at Beth Ariel in Montreal. What qualifies a believer to become an elder? And what does an ordination look like? In this article, Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum answers these questions, while Jacques Isaac Gabizon gives testimony to the character of the candidates.

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In Memoriam:

One of Ariel Ministries' most influential board members, Dr. Charles Barg, recently went home to be with the Lord. Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum tells his story, which began with an unlikely coming-to-faith experience and led to a life of faithfulness and devotion to Ariel Ministries.

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Feature:

Over the centuries, the Jewish people have been the target of ill-informed rumors and myths. A more recent myth has grown in popularity, even in the evangelical community. It alleges that most of the Jews in the world today are not blood Israelites, but converts to Judaism called Khazars. In this article, Mottel Baleston debunks this myth.

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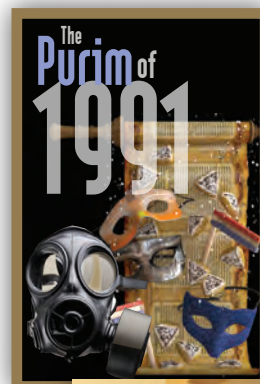
Biblical Word Study:

The Hebrew word "*chesed*" is so multi-layered that it makes the job of any Bible translator very difficult. Dr. Paul Wilkinson carefully chisels out the deeper meaning of the word, uncovering the loyal love of the Lord for His people.

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Testimony:

When Jacob Cohen was but a young child, he "stumbled" upon Isaiah 52 and 53 and was shocked to find Yeshua in the Jewish Bible. His journey of faith led him through a period of agnosticism and despair to a life in ministry.



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Charles Barg

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What is
He
Doing
in Our
Bible?



Purpose Statement

Ariel Ministries exists in order to evangelize Jewish people and to disciple Jewish and Gentile believers through intensive Bible teaching from a Jewish perspective.

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Dear fellow Arielniks,

In my work as editor of Ariel Ministries, I receive about twenty emails a day. Some of them are short and sweet, as the one that came in the other day from New Zealand:

“God is good! I had just been praying for the Lord to send someone in terms of discipleship, and pretty much the next day this young man comes in and says that he wants to learn about Israel and fix the incorrect teaching he had received.”

Yes, God is good indeed! To this day, He is in the business of saving people, Jews and Gentiles alike! And to this day, He is interested in our learning the Scriptures from the proper perspective.

When sitting down to compose a letter to you, my desire usually is to bring hope and joy to you and not depress you with somber thoughts. However, this is a special time. Maybe it is my work on our newest book; maybe it's the emails I am receiving from some of our precious volunteers who are experiencing unusual trials.

Whatever the reason might be, I certainly feel the heaviness of the times we live in. I, like many of you, have read the book of Revelation and Dr. Fruchtenbaum's superb exegesis of it, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*. So, I know we live in the end times, and I know that the love of many will grow cold. Still, the unprecedented hatred we see expressed toward Israel by the church today surprises me time and time again.

The book I mentioned above is called *Israel Betrayed*. Once it is published, I urge you all to buy it! It surveys the history of replacement theology and systematically exposes the teaching for what it is: a doctrine of demons. A few quotes from *Israel Betrayed* will show what I mean:

“Augustine is the Charles Darwin of the church, the pioneer of a mutant system of evolutionary theology which has replaced biblical literalism with allegorical interpretation; his system was destined to lay the foundation upon which Western theology would be constructed.”

“To venture into Chrysostom's Homilies is like entering a firing range with the reader bombarded on every side by a torrent of explosive anti-Jewish invective.”

For centuries, the church at large has spread the heresy of the church fathers. Sadly, even representatives of the evangelical world have fallen into the traps of replacement theology. The second part of *Israel Betrayed* shows in great detail the newest outworking of the doctrine: the rise of Christian Palestinianism.

While editing the book, I caught myself feeling more and more outraged by the developments, and a deep sadness threatened to take root in my heart. Then, the Lord reminded me of His promises: In a not-so-distant time, He Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Him shall rise first; then we who are alive shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet our Savior in the air: and so shall we ever be with Him! (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

The apostasy of the church must happen; the war of Gog and Magog must occur; and the governments of the world must unite into one. God said so.

But He also said that He will pick us up before the terrible end. He is coming soon! So, let us rejoice in His promises and not allow the evil one to use what has to happen to paralyze us with depression. Let us comfort one another with the hope of our rapture; and let us use the time wisely and not grow weary doing good until that glorious day (Gal. 6:9)!

In this hope,

Christiane Jurik
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Ariel Mission Branches & Representatives

ARIEL BRANCHES



Ariel Australia Chris & Lisa Savage

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Chris and Lisa Savage represent Ariel Ministries in Australia. Based in Victoria, they teach the Scriptures from the Jewish perspective in weekly and bi-monthly classes and day seminars.



Ariel Canada Jacques Isaac and Sharon Gabizon

Website: www.arielcanada.com
Email: info@arielcanada.com

Jacques and Sharon Gabizon represent Ariel Ministries in Canada. Their projects include door-to-door evangelism of Jewish homes in Montreal and translating Ariel's manuscripts into French. Ariel Canada established a messianic congregation in Montreal called Beth Ariel.



Ariel India Bakul N. Christian

Email: bakulchristian@yahoo.co.in

Bakul Christian represents Ariel Ministries in India and resides with his wife and daughter in Ahmedabad. After a chance meeting with a former New Zealand representative, Bakul became interested in the Jewish perspective of God's Word. Today, Bakul daily seeks the Lord's direction concerning his outreach ministry in India.



Ariel Israel Sasha G. & Lilian Granovsky

Email: sashag@ariel.org

Sasha and Lilian Granovsky represent Ariel Ministries in Israel. The husband and wife team have been representing Ariel Ministries in Israel since October 2009. They are responsible for coordinating the translation of our manuscripts and books into Hebrew and Russian.



Ariel China

For safety issues, we must protect the identity of this branch. Please keep them in your prayers.



Ariel Germany

Website: www.cmv-duesseldorf.de
Email: germany@ariel.org

Thanks to Manfred Künstler and his wife, Hanna, Ariel Ministries has had a presence in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland since 1985. In 2002, the work was passed on to Georg Hagedorn who, eight years later, turned it into a full branch. Today, this branch is led by a team of brothers and sisters.



Ariel Hungary Ivan & Rita Nagy

Email: hungary@ariel.org

Ivan and Rita Nagy represent Ariel Ministries in Hungary. The husband and wife team have developed a Come & See website in Hungarian. They also host several home Bible study groups, teaching from Ariel's materials. Their goal is to make teachings available to Jewish and Gentile believers and unbelievers in Hungary.



Ariel New Zealand Johan Jansen van Vuuren

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Web: <http://ariel.org.nz/>

This branch is led by Johan van Vuuren, Jason Santiago, and John Cavanagh and headquartered in Auckland, New Zealand.



Ariel Ministries Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

This branch is devoted to teaching the Word of God from a biblical Jewish perspective in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. We also travel throughout the United States. If you are interested in hosting a teaching session, symposium or seminar contact us for further information

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ARIEL REPRESENTATIVES



Michael & Hannah Gabizon – Students (Hamilton)

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Michael and Hannah Gabizon are missionaries representing Ariel Ministries in Canada. The young couple has actively been involved in teaching and discipling people through God's Word. Their goal is to identify other young people within their sphere of influence who may be interested in becoming involved with Ariel.



John Metzger – Field Representative (Pennsylvania)

Website: www.promisestoisrael.org
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John Metzger is a missionary who represents Ariel Ministries in Pennsylvania. He is a teacher and speaker who actively travels throughout the central and eastern part of the U.S., speaking at various churches and conferences. John is also the author of *Discovering the Mystery of the Unity of God* published by Ariel Ministries.



Gary & Missy Demers – Camp Representatives (New York)

CampShoshanah@ariel.org

Gary and his wife Missy are the managers and camp facilitators of the Shoshanah campus in Upstate New York. Every summer they help host Ariel's Program of Messianic Jewish Studies. For more information about this program, please visit www.ariel.org.



Roberto Anchondo – Field Representative (El Paso, Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico)

Roberto Anchondo represents Ariel Ministries in parts of the Southwest regions of the U.S. and some cities in Mexico. Upon studying Dr. Fruchtenbaum's work, he recognized the missing link and became interested in teaching the Jewish interpretation of God's Word. He is currently discipling groups of men in the Jewish perspective. He also works with numerous churches in Mexico, teaching the importance of standing by Israel.



It was in Jerusalem, in 1966, that a burning seed of desire was planted in the heart of Arnold Fruchtenbaum. On December 1, 1977, in San Antonio, Texas, Ariel Ministries was born, and the seed began to bloom. Ariel means “Lion of God,” representing the Messiah Yeshua as the Lion of Judah. It is also an alternate name for Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:1) — the city of peace now waiting for the Prince of Peace to return. Today, the ministry has eight branches around the world and a school of Messianic Jewish Studies.



Jackie Fierman

Ariel Ministries’ declared goal is to share the good news of Messiah Yeshua with the Jewish people first and then also the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). The ministry does so by combining the two key areas of evangelism and discipleship, with a heavy emphasis on Bible theology and doctrine. We seek to develop a balanced program of reaching out to others, as we grow in maturity ourselves. Our international branches and representatives help us achieve our goals.

One of these representatives is Jackie Fierman. As Dr. Fruchtenbaum wrote in his letter of recommendation about her, Jackie “is an extraordinary woman who has been a Jewish believer since the age of 17. She has been working as a missionary with our Canadian branch of Ariel Ministries since 2005. Jackie’s passion is to share the gospel of Messiah Jesus with all she meets. She is an exceptional teacher and communicator

who presents thoughtful, reflective and engaging topics, teaching from the Jewish perspective. Jackie has a tremendous ability to develop a connection with her audience and relates with all levels of believers through her solid knowledge of Bible topics.”

Asked to submit a little summary of what she is up to in 2018, Jackie started out by telling the story of one woman who has sat under her teaching for several years:

Martine became a believer, but due to her unbelieving husband, she could only attend weekly ladies’ Bible studies. Although we’d studied many subjects in the weekly meetings I led over the years, she advanced only somewhat. Then I attended Camp Shoshanah, and my life changed as a teacher. After Martine studied the life of Messiah,

the feasts of Israel, the covenants, and the dispensations with me over a two-year period, she grew significantly. One week, she told me she was reading Ezekiel in her devotions. She and I were both so thrilled she was able to understand the book in context without further help. She joined a church and was recently baptized.

This is only one of many stories I could tell about women who studied the Scriptures from Ariel’s solid Messianic Jewish perspective and have grown in understanding and their love for God. This year, the Lord has opened the doors for me to teach at several women’s conferences in the States. However, I am available to take on a few more speaking engagements from April through the end of the year. Please contact info@arielcanada.com to get in touch with me.





USA
Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

2017 was a dynamic year for the DFW branch, as we continued our study centers in Argyle and Grand Prairie, Texas, and taught on the book of James, Yeshua in the Passover, the Minor Prophets, some of

the feasts of Israel, and Messiah in the Tabernacle/Temples. In January and February of this year, we were able to continue the positive trend, offering several seminars. For the upcoming months, we are pleased to announce a schedule of Saturday seminars to be held at Good Shepherd Baptist Church, located at 1880 Mayfield Road in Grand Prairie, Texas:

Seminar Schedule

March 24:	Daniel
April 7:	Passover, First Fruits, Unleavened Bread
May 3-5:	Footsteps of the Messiah with Dr. Fruchtenbaum
June 9:	Daniel 9 (The Seventy Sevens) and the invasion of Gog and Magog



While the seminars are free, registration is required (dfw@ariel.org or call 817-504-4817). You can see the detailed schedule for 2018 at <https://www.ariel.org/itineraries>.

If you are in the Dallas/ Fort Worth area, we hope that you will attend these seminars. If you live outside the DFW Metroplex and would like to host any of these seminars in your area, please let us know.

The Ariel DFW Branch is continuing to support two Messianic Jewish ministries in Israel. The first ministry is called *Netivah*, which means "pathways." This national youth ministry was established in 2005 by Joel Goldberg. One of the programs *Netivah* offers is called *Netzor*, which means "to guard." This 10-day program gets high-school graduates ready for their

military service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). It is designed to allay fears and to instruct new recruits how to deal with a life away from home into a rigorous military lifestyle. It also prepares them to deal with moral and ethical dilemmas they probably will face during their mandatory service. Lessons are taught about how to be a light and a positive testimony to unbelieving fellow soldiers and officers. The young people are taught that this is an opportunity for personal growth and maturity rather than a long period they must silently endure. The program also encourages families, pastors, and elders in the congregations to actively pursue contact with the soldiers in their midst. The participants are challenged to strengthen and grow in their faith and encouraged to be a testimony and a light as they boldly and openly share their faith.

Netivah also offers a conference for young Messianic soldiers who are already serving in the IDF. This conference gives active members of the military an opportunity to come together; to study from the Word of God; and to worship, pray, and fellowship with one another. It also deals with issues and challenges that are faced every day in the military. The soldiers are able to develop relationships and get counsel and guidance from mature and godly men and women.

Another Messianic ministry we support is called *Makor HaTikvah*, which means "source of hope." *Makor HaTikvah* is a Messianic day school in Jerusalem that provides an exceptional academic education together with biblical instruction and godly character development to students from elementary to middle-school age.

July 14:	Leviticus, Part I
August 11:	Leviticus, Part II
September 8:	Book of Hebrews
October 13:	Messiah in the Tabernacle/Temples, Part I
November 17:	Messiah in the Tabernacle/Temples, Part II
December 8:	Hanukkah



New Zealand

For many years now, Ariel New Zealand has given out scholarships that allowed some of our brothers and sisters in the Lord to attend Camp Shoshanah. The two recipients of 2017, Chris and Marcus, sent us their reports, which we would like to present to you today. We would also like to draw your attention to the upcoming Camp Shoshanah style down-under experience that Ariel Australia will be hosting in 2018. For full details, see <https://ariel.org.nz/enews/>. Furthermore, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum will be coming to New Zealand in April, and full information is available on the Ariel New Zealand webpage.

Chris Nel

It all started when I was reading Scott Brown's Celebrate Messiah newsletter and saw an ad saying that Ariel New Zealand had made two scholarships available for Kiwis to attend the Shoshanah summer camp in the US. The ad further said that they would prefer people between 18 and 25. Well, I figured that 50-something ain't too far off the mark and applied anyway. Can you imagine my amazement when I was actually granted the scholarship?

My first real test of faith came when I had to apply for a visa to travel to the US and could not get an interview at the embassy until a week after classes had started. Since my tickets were bought, that just wasn't an option for me. Soon, I realized that only God could make this work—and He did! There was a cancellation, and an opportunity arose that got me my visa, hours before the flight departed! Thank you, Lord!

The camp is an amazing experience. I am one of those campers who reap the rewards of many years of hard work; where this camp started out with bare basics about 40 years ago, it had grown through God's provision, step by step to this beautiful camp with first-class facilities. Its setting in the Adirondacks is lovely beyond description, tucked away in the forest, between the mountains, and virtually on the shore of the Trout Pond. Coming from a spoilt New Zealander, this says it all!

The highlight of the camp were the people I met from every corner of the world who climbed into my heart, boots and all. And there

was the teaching! Dr. Arnold was the drill sergeant, who marched us at a dizzying pace through the pages, keeping the smiles on our faces with his dry sense of humor. His teachings are full of revelations for us first-year students who were oozing with wows, whats, and I never saw that before. I had a ferocious hunger for a deeper understanding of the Hebrew roots of our faith, but never imagined the roots to lie so deep! Our other lecturers were also brilliant!

Understanding the Jewish history and the (mostly very sad) role of the church is vital to reaching the Jewish people of today. We need to have answers to the deeply hurting and dividing questions. The insight I gained into the Jewish Scriptures and its people can't be measured in terms of cost. We Kiwis have a unique, golden opportunity in that we receive a multitude of Israelis every year who come to travel our beautiful island, most of them soon after completing their military service. The mission field comes to us! We have a network of families who host these special travellers for free, thereby giving them the opportunity to share the gospel and just love them to bits. We also have Celebrate Messiah New Zealand, a ministry started by Scott Brown as part of Chosen People Ministries who specifically aim to reach these Jewish travellers in many ways and introduce them to their own Messiah.

Please pray for us as my wife Uta and I join Celebrate Messiah full-time next month, and that the investment that was made into my spiritual life will be fruitful in this ministry.

Marcus Thornley

Sitting in the back seat of the car, I was a touch bewildered at the rapid-fire French and Russian with occasional translations into English for the benefit of my monolingual ears, as we drove south from Montreal to the Canada-US border. After my thirty-hours of travel, it was a challenge trying to keep up with the flow of conversation. The language count would be added to over the next few weeks; Hebrew, Hungarian, Czech, and German also spring to mind. What this would mean, though, is that I would be spending

my time with a wonderful variety of people at Camp Shoshanah as we fellowshiped and studied together.

I was accommodated in one of the new bunkhouses in a 6-berth room with two Kiwis and a Canadian who all stayed for the full six weeks of camp. There was another Canadian initially and a couple of Americans who were to stay with us for shorter periods of time. We were a mixed bunch in our room, with some like myself who

were attending camp for the first time and others who had been there several times before. One of our bunkmates, Julian, was attending for the fifth time and completing the course. He received his certificate at our final Shabbat evening. We had a great bunch of guys in our cabin, and many evenings we stayed up late discussing the events of the day or some point that came up during our study and was of such merit that it was worth missing out on several hours of sleep as we came to grips with the implications of what had learned that day. This was a common point that got raised: How was it that we had been so long in our walk without learning about or perhaps understanding a point that our lecturers had made during the day, and now that we understood it, how blindingly obvious it now seemed.

I am sure it was not just us. Many of those I spoke with who were for the first time on a course of full-time study confirmed their understanding of Scripture was greatly improved by the concentrated Bible study.

The sessions themselves were brilliant. All our lecturers presented great material on some very interesting topics and passages of Scripture. The Q&A sessions that were held periodically throughout the camp were a real blessing and a time to fill in some gaps and get answers to questions that had arisen during the course of our studies. The outworking of the benefits of the effort the teachers put into us will be displayed throughout our lives.

Of all the lecturers, it was the late night lyrical homilies of John Kanter that immediately spring to mind. He'd say, "Gentile inclusion does not equal Jewish exclusion, that's just theological confusion!" His life verse, which he paraphrased as, "I desire to be the best student, practitioner, and communicator of the Word I can be for the glory of God" (Ezra 7:10), is a great verse to spend time with during a period of intensive Bible study.

As the lecturers were an inspiration in their teaching and life stories, so it was also found in the campers that were there this summer. Many, many paths were laid out for the people who attended; some had been planning this trip for years, others do this every single year. So, it leads to the Lord's provision in my life: Knowing only a little about Camp Shoshanah and the far-reaching work of Ariel Ministries, I was taken in a short period of time to a position where Ariel NZ offered me a scholarship for travel and camp fees. Support both practical and fiscal was made available to my family, to keep them while I was gone, and my employer was willing to let me go on six and a half weeks of leave. To God be all the glory!

It was a brilliant time of study and fellowship with believers. I may one day be able to go back again. But for now, the mission field is where we are right now. I have a new understanding, a bunch of great material, and a small group ready to learn.



Hungary

The fourth Messianic conference in Hungary is scheduled for May. Decisions have been made as to the venue and the topic of the conference, and Ivan is preparing his work as interpreter for Dr. Fruchtenbaum's teaching. Please contact us at hungary@ariel.org or visit our website (<http://www.bib-liatanitasok.hu/>) for further information.

In past editions of this magazine, we informed you about the many different Bible studies and fellowship meetings we offer. A Messianic Jewish believer who regularly attends the fellowship meetings has family in Shanghai. Thankful for the teaching she receives, she passes on the link of the recordings of our studies to her

daughter. Her daughter's four children are believers in Messiah, and the daughter is married to the leader of the Jewish community in Shanghai.

We would also like to draw your attention to our Jewish friend Gabor, with whom we have been reading the Bible on a regular basis. Last fall, he invited us to his house for Sukkoth, and Ivan got to blow the shofar. In December, the man also invited us to celebrate Hanukkah with him and his Jewish friends. He taught us the practice of Hanukkah and invited us to eat delicious Hungarian-Jewish doughnuts (see picture below).

Nothing will be accomplished without your prayers! So, don't stop praying for us! Thank you!



Above: Gabor reciting Scripture during Hanukkah.

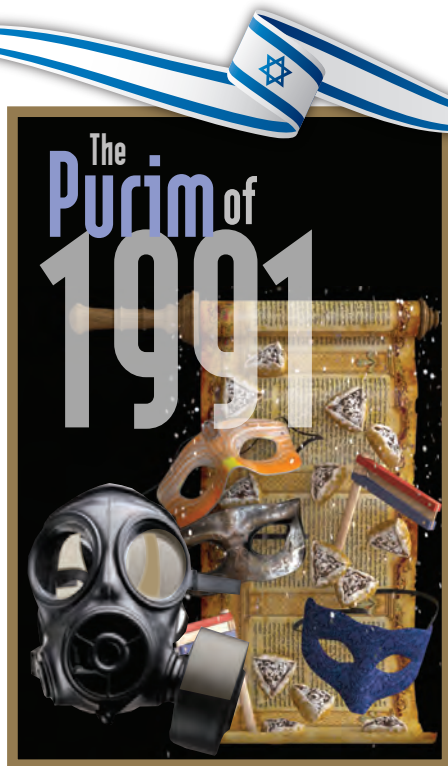


Above and below: Hungarian donuts.





Eye on Israel



By Sasha and Lilian Granovsky

Sometime at the end of winter or the beginning of spring, the Jewish people celebrate Purim. Sadly, most Israelis view this holiday as Israel's Halloween and an opportunity to dress up in crazy costumes. While Purim is a one-day holiday, you can see Israelis all week long going about their business dressed up as Peter Pan, zombies, or Fred Flintstone. However, Purim is much more than a chance to dress up. The festival commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot "to kill and to annihilate them all, both young and old, women and children, in one" (Esther 3:13).

What happened in Persia thousands of years ago and was recorded in the book of Esther has been the experience of the Jewish people for their entire existence. There is a long list of wicked men who attempted to destroy the Jewish people, and so it is today.

We personally will never forget our first Purim in Israel. It was the year 1991, and the First Gulf War had been raging since August of the previous year. Initially involved in the war were the United States and Iraq, the country not far from ancient Persia. However, as soon as the American forces went to Iraq, Iraq opened war against Israel. Saddam Hussein, as Amman in the book of Esther, decided that he would destroy Israel, sending missiles from there to here. For us, the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the most offensive part of this story was that the missiles were made in our home country. What a shame to make it all the way to Israel and possibly be killed by rockets from our mother-land! But—and this is hilarious—the Soviet Union was selling to its "friends" defective weapons, which were of no great use for the Iraqis. How ironic!

A joke is a joke. That's how we Jews survive. Our sense of humor is a defense mechanism for us, as a nation and as individuals, to go through trials. I think it is a reflection of one of God's traits, as He, no doubt, has a sense of humor. Read the book of Esther and see how hysterically funny Amman was treated, upon his first attempt to get rid of Mordechai!

Still, in the First Gulf War, there were two Israeli victims, and both of them were elderly people. One died from a heart attack during (or due to) the sound of the sirens. Another took medicine designed to help in case Hussein would use biochemical weapons against Israel. The antidote killed the person.

Other than these two casualties and some damaged buildings, our nation was once again miraculously saved and fully protected by God.

I could tell you more "funny" episodes of our experiences during this war, which, by the

way, would not be our last war in this country. In the past 27 years, we have lived through six other armed conflicts here. However, since the space in this column in the magazine is limited, we will concentrate on only one more story, which to us was the funniest of all. It happened at the end of the First Gulf War in February of 1991, when we were less afraid to get around. I, Lilian, was waiting at a bus stop, when suddenly the red code (siren) began to sound. The approaching bus stopped for few seconds, then started its move again, and finally reached the bus stop. The door opened, and I saw the bus driver wearing a gas mask! At first, I froze, terribly frightened. Then, I began to laugh hysterically, as the driver continued to perform his duties as if nothing had happened. He took the money, gave a ticket and some change. When I turned around to look for a place to sit, I saw that ALL passengers were wearing gas masks! As I could not see their facial expressions, I just almost fell down from laughing. I felt as one of the heroes in a surrealistic horror movie. I will never forget that moment!

The First Gulf War symbolically ended on the day of Purim; and as so many times before in the history of this nation, it ended in full and absolute defeat for Israel's enemy. While the enemy was not immediately hanged, as in the book of Esther, a few years later he ended his life in a very similar way to Amman.

These were the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Esther 9:22

Israel was indeed rejoicing on the day of Purim in 1991—not because we were commanded to do so, but because it was the only way to react to God's goodness!

Each local church is to be ruled by a plurality of elders who are coequal, and they are the authority of the church. The relationship of the elders to the people is often that of shepherds and sheep. Much may be said about the role and office of an elder, and a thorough study of the position is recommended for all. Ariel Ministries offers an extensive manuscript with the pertinent information. In the context of the ordination of Roberto Anchondo and David Tamala at Beth Ariel in Montreal, however, this short study will only focus on the qualifications and ordination of an elder.

There are three Greek words in the New Testament that describe the office of an elder. The first word, *presbuteros*, is the most commonly used term and the root of the English word “presbytery.” *Presbuteros* emphasizes the office itself and the position of authority that lies with the office. A second term is *episkopos*, or “bishop,” which is the root of the English word “episcopal.” This term emphasizes the function of the office, which is general oversight (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:12; Titus 1:7; I Pet. 2:25). The third term used of the same office is the word *poimanos*, or “pastor.” It emphasizes the aspect of shepherding and feeding (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 2:25; 5:12).

Several Scriptures prove that these terms describe the same office, the first one being Acts 20:17 combined with verse 28, where all three terms are applied to the same body

of leaders (see also Acts 20:28; I Tim. 3:1-7, 5:17, and 3:4; Titus 1:5 and 7; I Pet. 5:1-2).

The nature of the office of an elder, then, is threefold: As an elder, he rules and exercises authority; as a bishop, he oversees; and as a pastor, he shepherds and feeds the flock. This concept arose out of Jewish tradition where an elder exercised authority over the people of Israel. The New Testament was rooted in and built upon that tradition. It never envisioned one pastor over a congregation, but a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; Jas. 5:14). This provides the necessary checks and balances and guarantees that the individual elder may be held accountable and corrected by the others.

What Qualifies a Man to Become an Elder?

Two New Testament passages detail the qualifications of an elder: I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

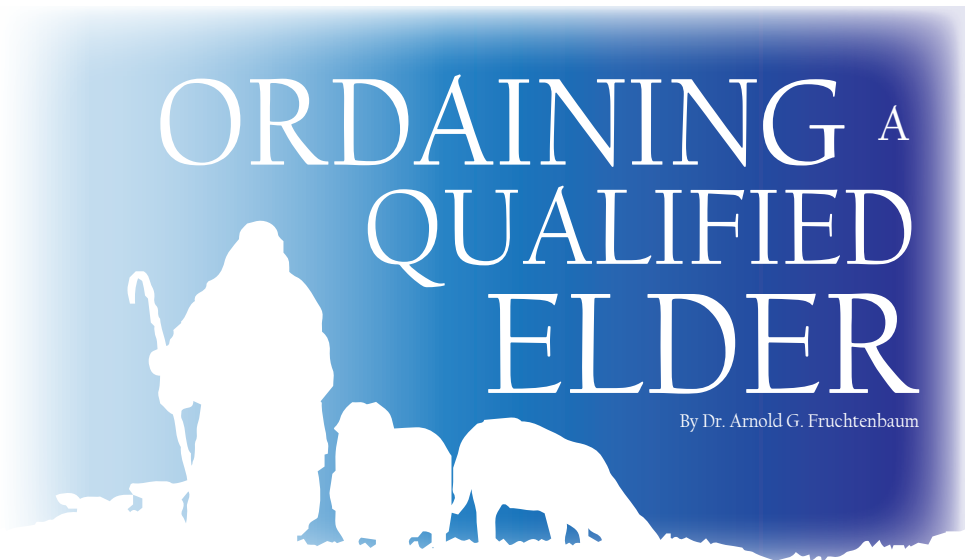
I Timothy 3:1-7

¹Faithful is the saying, If a man seeks the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. ²The bishop

therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, soberminded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach; ³ no brawler, no striker; but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money; ⁴ one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; ⁵ (but if a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have good testimony from them that are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

This passage spells out sixteen qualifying characteristics of an elder.

1. The candidate must desire this position.
2. He must be above reproach, which means he must live an exemplary, godly life.
3. He must be the husband of one wife. Literally, the Greek text reads





“a onewoman man.” This could be taken in two ways. It might mean “one wife ever,” which is the implication of the same type of construction found in I Timothy 5:9. This would disqualify a single man and any remarried man, whether a divorcee or widower, from becoming an elder. Another possible interpretation of the verse is to limit it to adultery or polygamy. This would allow both the single man and the remarried widower to seek the position. The Greek allows for both renderings. Therefore, every local church must make its own decision about what it feels this passage means, and then consistently function accordingly and not make exceptions to the rule depending on each case. It is when a church acts inconsistently on this matter that problems arise.

4. The candidate for eldership is to be temperate. He should not be given to excesses in life. He should be mentally alert and able to make sound judgments.

5. He must be prudent, sensible, and of sound mind. He must exercise selfcontrol and not act impulsively.

6. He must be respectable. He must be characterized by good behavior and have a wellordered life.

7. He must be hospitable not only to those close to him, but to people in general and also to strangers.

8. He should be able to teach. This does not necessarily require the gift of teaching, but he should have a minimum amount of ability to teach.

9. He is not to be addicted to wine. Literally, the Greek reads, “no one who sits too long at his wine.” This verse does not teach that an elder must practice total abstention. It simply means that he should not be characterized by drunkenness or any form of overindulgence. If he knows how to partake of wine in moderation, then he still qualifies.

10. He should not be a striker, meaning he cannot be given to physical violence. Men who are guilty of wife or child abuse do not qualify.

11. He should be gentle and patient.

12. He should not be contentious; he should not be a brawler.

13. He should not be a lover of money; he should not be characterized by covetousness or greediness.

14. His children are to be in subjection. He should be able to rule his own house. The fact that the children are in subjection shows that the person has exercised discipline over his children. If a person is not able to exercise discipline over his children, what will he do if he must exercise church discipline?

15. He must not be a new believer. Every man who comes to faith will by nature be spiritually immature. If he were placed in a position of authority before he is spiritually ready for it, then he might be filled with pride. This is the same sin that brought about the fall of Satan. Therefore, a church should never put a new believer in the position of an elder.

16. He must have a good reputation with those outside the church. They may not respect his beliefs, but they should respect his conduct and his way of life.

These are the sixteen qualifications spelled out in I Timothy 3:17, and if men who have these qualifications are appointed to the position, the eldership will run smoothly.

Titus 1:6-9

⁶ if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children that believe, who are not accused of riot or unruly. ⁷ For the bishop must be blameless, as God's steward; not selfwilled, not soon angry, no brawler, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; ⁸ but given to hospitality, a lover of good, soberminded, just, holy, selfcontrolled; ⁹ holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers.

This passage also lists numerous qualifications of an elder, some of which are the same as those in the first passage. Some are different.

1. The candidate must be above reproach.

2. He must not be selfwilled; he must not be pleased with himself; he must not be arrogant.

3. He must not be easily angered, but be even-tempered.

4. He must not be addicted to wine.

5. He should not be a striker or a brawler.



6. He should not be greedy for gain. The love of money should not be a characteristic of his.

7. He should be hospitable, exercising a love of strangers.

8. He should love that which is good. His thoughts, his attitude, and his behavior should be concerned with the good (cf. Phil. 4:8).

9. He should be sensible, knowing how to reason things out.

10. He should be a devout person. His life should be characterized by holiness. He should be performing his duties to God; he should be exercising practical holiness.

11. He should be characterized by selfcontrol. His life should be temperate and disciplined.

12. He should be the husband of one wife.

13. He should have believing children. The Greek word translated here as “believing” does not necessarily require the children to be believers in the sense of having salvation. It could simply mean “faithful” or “reliable.” One should have children that can be relied upon, that have been disciplined and brought up correctly; but as it reads, it may not be necessary for the children of an elder to be believers themselves.

14. The candidate should not be characterized by rebelliousness, but by a spirit of submissiveness to the Word and to the will of the other elders, who may overrule him at times.

15. He should hold solid doctrine and should not be characterized by wishy-washiness in his theology.

16. He should be able to exhort in sound doctrine. This includes both the teaching and the application of solid doctrine in those situations where false teachings might arise in the church.

17. He must also be able to refute false doctrine. If someone starts to teach false doctrine in the local church, the elder should be able to confront the person by proving from the Word of God where the doctrine of the other has deviated from the truth and exhort him accordingly.

Combining the lists of I Timothy and Titus, it becomes clear that the elder has to fulfill quite a number of qualifications. It is very important that no one is appointed to the office unless he meets all prerequisites. Even churches that follow the biblical form of government and have eldership-rule will encounter great problems, but not because there is something wrong with the type of church government. The problem is with people who were put into the office of an elder without having met the biblically determined qualifications.

Ordination

Once the candidate for eldership has been found qualified according to biblical standards, he should be ordained to his office. He will not be elected by the congregation, but ordained by appointment. Paul wrote in Titus 1:5: *For this cause left I you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave you charge.* A plurality of elders in each city, for each local church, were to be appointed by other elders. A congregation

tends to elect on the basis of emotions and personal likes and dislikes, but those are not the qualifications of an elder. It takes other elders to determine if a person is qualified, and if he is and desires the office, then he can be appointed as an elder.

It is worth repeating that this is not to be done without an investigation of the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3:17 and Titus 1:6-9. Paul warned: *Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep yourself pure* (I Tim. 5:22). The laying on of hands is the way the appointment of elders comes, and they are not to do so hastily.

That the manner of ordination was the laying on of hands is also seen in Acts 13:13, where Paul and Barnabas were ordained to be traveling elders and to go out to establish other churches. In I Timothy 4:12-16, Paul admonished Timothy concerning the appointment of elders, and that, too, was done by the laying on of hands.

Concerning ordination then, there are three things to note:

1. Ordination is by appointment by other elders.
2. The appointment may only be done after careful investigation of the candidate.
3. The appointment is made by means of the laying on of hands.

The position of an elder brings with it many challenges. However, according to I Peter 5:4, those who do fulfill their roles in a biblical way will receive as their reward one of the five crowns of Scripture: *the crown of glory.*





A few months ago, in December 2017, we were blessed to have two dedicated candidates publicly proclaim their desire to serve the Lord in the capacity of leader and as pastor/teacher in their place of worship. Roberto Anchondo from New Mexico (one of our Ariel field reps) and David Tamala from Hawaii (a friend of Ariel for the last 20 years) were ordained and consecrated by Dr. Fruchtenbaum and me at Beth Ariel Congregation in Montreal, Canada. Our drive to ordain these men comes from our desire to see a proper understanding and order put in the preaching and teaching of the Word, especially in light of the increasing apostasy in postmodern church philosophy. Sadly, even a recent board member of Ariel Canada redefined his doctrines and is now teaching and holding to amillennialism.

Introducing the Candidates

Roberto became a field rep for Ariel Ministries several years ago. For years before, he was wonderfully convicted and convinced that the proper teaching and preaching of God's Word had to be brought even to such dangerous cities as Juarez, Mexico. During the ordination, he shared how the call to headship became increas-

ingly apparent as more and more men showed their desire to come under his leadership in the area of teaching and discipleship.

What we observed in David Tamala was a deep compassion for the lost and a sincere desire to affirm those around him, an important trait when considering the impact an overseer has over his flock.

A first glance at the word *ordination* leads us to suspect that it probably finds its root meaning in the word "order." As the article by Dr. Fruchtenbaum showed, our intuition would have proved itself correct. Reading through the demands found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 concerning the exposure of a congregational leader's lifestyle, one should be discouraged to undertake such a responsibility unless they understand that success and reward will come only when submission to the Spirit of God is the driving force. While we are not all called to be leaders or teachers, we are called to be students of the Word. And just as God's Word commanded the stars into certain order, just as the Levites and priests were commissioned to work in specific capacities and functions, God, through His Word, brings order into our lives so that we, too, in full view of a world needing to see this order, may bring honor to His name by ordering our steps according to His will.



The newly ordained elders, Roberto Anchondo (middle) and David Tamala (right) with Jacques Isaac Gabizon (left).

For years, people have encouraged me to become a pastor. I always knew that to do so, I would need God's leading, for there was no way that I would take that step without His guidance. For the past three years, I have taught a group of thirty men. I was teaching eight classes a week. People started addressing me as "pastor," which made me uncomfortable. I did not want to use a title that I did not have. Eventually, the program I was involved in began to run like a church, with five elders and several deacons. So, at this point, I started considering ordination.

One day, one of the men who had graduated from the program contacted me and asked me to baptize him. He knew that this was a serious matter and wanted someone who was serious about God's Word to do it. When the other men found out, one after the other also wanted to be baptized. With 18 men lined up, I had to get help from the other elders to assist me. Once again, ordination came to mind. So, I started praying about it.

Next thing I knew, one of the men asked if I would perform his marriage ceremony. I contacted Pastor Jacques Isaac Gabizon and inquired about ordination. We opened our Bibles and went through the requirements. We made arrangements, and I was supposed to be ordained at Beth Ariel Congregation in January 2016. However, I was unable to make it; once again, I lifted the whole issue up in prayer, assuming that the Lord might have other plans after all.

Then another brother asked me to marry him, although his father was a pastor. At that point, I knew that God wanted me to be ordained. At around the same time, Pastor Gabizon contacted me and informed me that he had spoken to Dr. Fruchtenbaum. They had agreed to fly me out to Canada in December and ordain me.

So, finally, on December 16 of last year, I was ordained. After the solemn event, the brethren from the congregation approached me to congratulate me. Since I had addressed the congregation in English and Spanish, the Spanish-speaking believers were very appreciative. I talked about the importance of II Timothy 2:15 for the purpose of bringing back the Jewish people who lived as Roman Catholics to God's Word, instead of going back to Judaism. The brethren were fascinated and asked me to write an article about the Sephardic Jews who came from Spain to the Americas after the edict of 1492.

I was overwhelmed with their interest! I have been working in Mexico to educate the churches on this issue, and the brethren here were from Cuba, El Salvador, Chile, Peru, Mexico, and other countries. They were just as interested in the subject! Surely, the Lord is working to bring back Israel from Latin America. There is much work to be done, and so I will continue working with other pastors and churches to teach the Scriptures from a Jewish perspective.



Roberto giving his testimony.



Arnold Fruchtenbaum (left) and Jacques Isaac Gabizon (right) ordain Ariel's field rep, Roberto Anchondo.



Linda and Charles Barg celebrated their 50th anniversary in November 2017.



Charles Barg

One of Doc's favorite pastimes was singing to the tunes of his guitar.



Charles Barg and Arnold Fruchtenbaum break the ground for a new building at Camp Shoshanah.

I flew into Dallas on Friday, December 1st of last year, to speak at a Bible church in Austin and then participate in the annual Pre-Trib Conference that would start on Monday at a Dallas Fort Worth hotel. That evening, when I checked my email I received a notice that Charles (“Doc”) Barg had finally received his promotion into heaven and that a memorial service would be held in Little Rock, Arkansas, on Monday morning. I was determined to be there if at all possible.

I did not know where the service would be conducted. I only had Charles’ cell phone number, which no one now answered, and did not have the number of his wife Linda. But I finally got the details from one of my staff members. I flew into Little Rock and arranged for a taxi to pick me up from my hotel the next morning. However, the taxi failed to arrive, and so I had to call for another cab. With the Lord’s answering my prayer, I arrived shortly before the service

began. At this point, Linda did not know I was in the audience of over one hundred people attending the service.

My first meeting with Charles and Linda was decades earlier. I was holding a four-day Bible conference at a church, and Charles was a successful Jewish doctor—but not a messianic one. His wife Linda had undergone a conversion to Orthodox Judaism before their marriage, and thus they lived a very Jewish lifestyle. Charles’ fellow doctors were true believers, and they were concerned with him hearing the gospel message. So, they invited him to attend the Sunday evening meeting. He agreed, but when they came for him, he stated that he had not finished making his rounds and therefore could not attend that night, but would do so the following night. However, he used the same excuse for Monday and Tuesday night. Wednesday night was my final session. That day, Doc’s friends decided to do his rounds for him

without telling him, and when he again used the same excuse, they informed him of what they had done. So, he and his wife came to the meeting.

My topic was “How to Destroy the Jews,” which shows the outworking of the Abrahamic covenant in that those who bless the Jews will be blessed and those who curse the Jews will be cursed. I surveyed both biblical and modern Jewish history, showing how the principles of blessing worked out historically and what to anticipate in the future. Linda noticed that I was wearing the Jewish star, and she gave me unfriendly looks: How would I dare wear such a symbol of Jewishness since from her perspective I was no longer a Jew, but a Christian!

During the fellowship time afterwards, Charles was sitting in one part of the room, expecting me to bounce upon him as others had before. But that was never my method.



I kept to myself talking to others nearby. Finally, he approached me and initiated the conversation; he asked if there was a source that would provide a comprehensive overview of what the Bible teaches. I mentioned a chart book that surveys the seven dispensations. It was available at the house where the meeting took place, and a copy was given to him. I also gave him a copy of *Jesus was a Jew*. I returned to San Antonio and did not hear how the story ended.

As I found out later, Doc took the task to heart. He seriously looked at the Bible as a whole and considered Yeshua's proclamations of being the Messiah. However, he did not want Linda to know, since she had gone through the rigors of converting to Orthodox Judaism. So, he would hide in the master closet to study. Eventually, he became a believer. Some time after he told Linda, she too joined the faith. Their decision led two other Jewish doctors and a few Jewish nurses to come to faith.

Shortly thereafter, we started to become friends. When the Bargs took a week off to go skiing in Colorado, Mary Ann and I went up there to spend time with them. We do not ski, and so we met regularly each evening. When we drove back to Denver to catch a plane, a severe snow storm forced us to spend two days at the airport; but the time we spent with Doc and Linda was all worth it.

As Ariel Ministries moved from California back to San Antonio, Charles joined the board of directors and became the chairman. He took his position seriously and became very active. He frequently visited San Antonio even when the board was not meeting. He also began coming to the summer program at Camp Shoshanah, befriending many other staff members of Ariel Ministries.

At one point, he virtually saved the ministry. A staff member had come in with his own agenda and began plotting to change the purpose and goals of Ariel Ministries. He would make calls to the other board members behind my back to get them to support his ideas. Doc always reminded him that it might be a good idea, but he first had to check with me, which this man never did. Eventually, the lawyer on the board sent out a letter before the next board meeting suggesting that I should be forced to retire and that this individual should become the new CEO. This would have been a disaster. Doc and a couple of the other board members started to become suspicious. I remained quiet unless I was asked. Doc chose to come down to San Antonio several days before the meeting and began talking to the home office staff and others in the know. He then called the lawyer to spell out the real situation. At the board meeting, the individual was removed and my place in leadership was sustained. That weekend, Doc saved the ministry. He had insights into people I never had, and that is where he also became an advisor. He was able to warn me about specific people, warnings that proved to be very true. He was also able to bring people into the ministry such as the present editor of all publications.

One day, Doc collapsed in the parking lot of a medical facility. He was quickly taken in and fell into a coma, and I was told he may not survive. For the next three weekends, I flew into Little Rock to spend time with him in the hospital. He was hooked up to various pipes, and there was blood dropping from his brain. One of his doctor friends came in and told me that as long as there was no change in the color of the drops, there would be no recovery. Nothing changed during the first or the second weekend. I prayed for Doc's recovery several times, but I was uncertain whether Doc

would survive or not. Linda, however, had a lot more faith, and repeated more than once that he would survive and this was not the time he would go to heaven. She proved to be right. When I came back for the third weekend, there was still no change—until the moment I was leaving for the airport. I noticed that the drops of blood started to turn pink. It was the first sign of recovery, and recover he did. Although he was no longer able to walk well, he was able to serve the Lord and Ariel Ministries for several more years.

Doc had a great sense of humor and was always ready to give good advice. Some I did not accept right away, but I learned to accept it later. There is so much more I could say, but space will not allow it.

A few months ago, I got a call from Doc. He told me that while he had survived several different cancers, he would not survive the one he had now and that he would pass away some time in the next several months. I prayed that God would allow me to see him one more time before He brought him home. I was not free to do so until November. I had a speaking engagement scheduled in Arkansas, about a 45-minute drive from Little Rock, so I flew in early to spend a day with Doc. In spite of his weakened condition, he chose to come out for the Friday night service. When he learned that on Sunday night I would be speaking on "How to Destroy the Jews," he insisted on coming again since this was the message that led him to faith. It would also prove to be the last time I would see him, but my prayer was answered.

At the memorial service, I learned about the moment of his death. He was in the arms of Linda when he looked up and then breathed his last. It was a tender moment when he was promoted to heaven, and we at Ariel Ministries miss him greatly.



Guard Yourself Against Identity Theft

By Dr. Gary Hedrick

Who Is the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16?



We've all heard about identity theft, and some of us have experienced it firsthand. It's a crime where a thief pretends to be you. He hacks into your credit card accounts and wreaks havoc, often stealing money right out from under your nose, making your credit score tank. It's a serious problem, especially in our digital economy. During the most recent year for which figures are available, roughly 16.6 million Ameri-

cans experienced at least one incident of identity theft. Financial losses for that year totaled a staggering \$24.7 billion.

However, there's another form of identity theft that many people are unaware of—spiritual identity theft. Another name for it is supersessionism, or replacement theology.¹ It's a deception where professing Christians hijack Israel's identity and take

exclusive ownership of the promises God made to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In this article, Dr. Gary Hedrick, the president of Christian Jew Foundation Ministries (CJFM) and editor-in-chief of *Messianic Perspectives*, takes a closer look at spiritual identity theft. His article was first published in January of 2016 and is republished here with minor edits.



The Range of Options in Defining “The Israel of God:”

1. “The Israel of God” is the NT church, the spiritual seed of Abraham who have displaced the physical seed of Abraham. This is the majority view in Christendom today. Yeshua but insisted that non-Jews should undergo a de facto conversion to Judaism (via circumcision) in order to gain full recognition as Yeshua followers.
2. It's an eschatological reference to the “all Israel” that Paul says will be saved at the end of the age (Rom. 11:26).
3. It's a self-designation used by Paul's Judaizing opponents in Galatia and elsewhere. NOTE: The judaizers were observant Jewish individuals who had professed faith in
4. It was a localized phenomenon in Paul's day—i.e., a “non-judaizing” group of Jewish Christians in Galatia.
5. It's a reference to Jewish people anywhere who are believers in Yeshua—so they represent the overlap between Israel and the church.

Bruce Waltke, a Harvard-trained Anglican scholar and prolific writer, defines supersessionism in blunt yet honest terms. He says it means that “national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant.”²

Replacement theologians build their case largely by redefining the term “Israel” in the New Testament — Galatians 6:16 in particular — and making it apply to the church. However, the word “Israel” appears 75 times in the New Testament, and in every instance but one, the terms “Israel” and “the church” cannot be interchanged without

reducing the passage to absurdity.³ When the New Testament says “church,” that’s what it means: the corporate body of New Testament believers.⁴ And when it says “Israel,” it means ethnic Israel: the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The consistent testimony of God’s Word is that “Israel” refers to *Am Yisrael*, the “people of Israel.”

The one exception is Galatians 6:16 where Paul refers to “the Israel of God.” Almost universally, Christian commentators through the ages have said it refers to the church, the New Israel. W. A. Criswell, the

much-revered pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas for more than half a century, was a respected scholar (PhD from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) with a deep and abiding love for Israel and the Jewish people. He never believed that the church had replaced Israel, but he admitted for years that he nonetheless struggled with Galatians 6:16. It seemed to leave the door open for replacement theology, and he wanted to know why. Everything else in the Bible was cogent and consistent, as far as he could tell, except that one verse. At the end of this article, I’ll show you how he finally and conclusively

¹ Some proponents of supersessionism seek to soften the term a bit by emphasizing fulfillment rather than replacement: “Supersessionism is the traditional Christian belief that Christianity is the fulfillment of biblical Judaism, and therefore that Jews who deny that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah fall short of their calling as God’s Chosen People” (“supersessionism” on *Theopedia* at www.theopedia.com).

² In his essay (“Kingdom Promises as Spiritual”) in John Feinberg’s *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 1988), Waltke describes two “hard” realities as opposite sides of a coin: “As the obverse side of the NT coin bears the hard imprint that no clear passage teaches the restoration of national Israel, its reverse side is imprinted with the hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant” (274).

³ One example of absurdity would be replacing “Israel” with “the church” in a passage like Luke 4:27. The result reads like this: “And many lepers were in the church in the time of Elisha the prophet.” Or what about Hebrews 8:8, where God says *He will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*? If the house of Israel is the church, who’s the house of Judah? Does the church have northern and southern kingdoms?

⁴ The Greek word translated “church” is *ekklesia*, meaning “a called-out assembly” (its Hebrew equivalent is *kahal*). *Ekklesia* is the word the Greek New Testament uses to denote the church (i.e., the body of believers in Yeshua the Messiah) because we’ve been “called out” of the world to become His disciples (John 15:19). It doesn’t refer to towering steeples or ecclesiastical institutions, but rather to God’s people serving God and each other under His headship. The New Testament church was founded on the Day of Pentecost (*Shavu’ot*), when God breathed life (the Holy Spirit) into His earthly “body” (Acts 2:1-21). Not only that, but when the Lord Himself spoke of building His church, it was in the future tense (Matt. 16:18), implying that the church had not yet been called into existence. So what about the fact that the KJV uses the English word “church” in Acts 7:38 to describe the Old Testament Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai? Doesn’t that mean the church existed in the Old Testament? No, it doesn’t. The Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, uses the word *ekklesia* in numerous passages to denote the Jewish “congregation” (or “assembly”) of Israel—so the KJV translators were simply taking a cue from the LXX when they used the word “church” in Acts 7:38. The congregation of Israel in the Old Testament was an *ekklesia* in the sense that they were “a called-out assembly.” (The Hebrew New Testament uses *kahal* [lit., “assembly”] to translate the Greek *ekklesia* in Acts 7:38.) The Old Testament congregation of Israel is always functionally distinct from the New Testament church—just like the “elders” of Israel (e.g., Num. 11:16; Acts 25:15) are distinct from the “elders” of the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; Jas. 5:14). The two sets of elders finally come together in Revelation (12 + 12 = 24), but even then, they are distinct (4:4).



resolved his problem with this enigmatic verse.

First, though, let's go to the verse itself and talk about it. Why do so many people take the term "Israel," which uniformly means ethnic Israel throughout the New Testament, and then abruptly plug in a different definition (i.e., the New Testament church) in Galatians 6:16?

Here's what the Apostle Paul says in this much-debated verse: *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.* It's only 17 words in the original Greek text, but it has occupied the attention of theologians since earliest times.

To supersessionists, the church is the New Israel or the new people of God—"the Israel of God." Old (ethnic) Israel has faded permanently into oblivion, they say, because she (through her national representatives, the Sanhedrin) rejected the Messiah in the first century (Matt. 26:65-66). But is this really what Paul had in mind when he used this term "the Israel of God" (Gk., τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ Θεοῦ)? I am an advocate of comparing Scripture with Scripture; however, it doesn't help us here because there are no other passages to compare. "The Israel of God" is a unique expression. Galatians 6:16 is the only place in the Bible where it appears.

So, who, exactly, is this "Israel of God"? Well, let's see if we can do some sanctified detective work and uncover the answer to that question.

Paul's Rule

Since we are doing detective work, let's begin by taking a look at the scene of the crime. What does the verse itself tell us about "the Israel of God"? It says they (whoever "they" are) enjoy *shalom* (Heb., "peace") and *rachamim* ("mercy" or "compassion") because they walk according to a certain "rule" with the believers in Galatia.⁵

Next, what was "this rule" (or "canon"; Gk., κανὼν) that they observed so scrupulously? Whenever we run across a perplexing word or phrase in Scripture and we can't figure out what it means, the solution is usually nestled somewhere nearby, in the passage itself. In fact, the demonstrative pronoun "this" (as in "this rule") in verse 16 makes it sound as though it's something Paul has just mentioned. So, what rule did the apostle lay down just prior to verse 16? Here it is:

For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of Adoneinu Yeshua haMashiach [our Lord Jesus Christ], by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. (Gal. 6:13-15)

The rule, then, is that we don't boast or trust in anything other than the finished work of the Messiah on Calvary. There's nothing we can do to supplement what He

did there. Through the merits of His sacrifice, imputed to us when we placed our faith in Him, each Christian has been made a "new creation." In Him, we have new life, new priorities, new purpose, a new nature, and a vital, new relationship with our Creator—and it's all His doing! Writing to another church, Paul said, *Therefore, if anyone is in [Messiah], he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new* (2 Cor. 5:17).

Messianic Pharisees

In Galatia, there were evidently Jewish people from the Pharisaic party who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, but didn't consider faith in Him to be sufficient by itself. Their legal background in Judaism, steeped in layers of traditional and cultural Torah observance, may have made it more difficult for them to accept the validity of salvation by grace and through faith alone. But for whatever reason, they wanted circumcision to be a requirement. So, if a Gentile in Galatia wanted to become a believer in Yeshua, these Messianic Pharisees wanted him to undergo a de facto conversion to Judaism and be circumcised.⁶

Even today, some two thousand years later, this problem of *additionalism* (my term for piling more requirements on top of simple faith) persists! Many professing believers want to supplement Messiah's work of redemption with things like church membership, confirmation, baptism, emotionalism, living a good and ethical life, or whatever it might be.

⁵ The New Testament was written in Greek, of course. We sometimes use Hebrew equivalents for words like "peace" and "mercy" because the biblical writers were Jewish and almost certainly had Hebrew terms and concepts in mind as they were writing these divinely-inspired words. Employing some of the Hebrew terms is our way of emphasizing the Jewishness of the New Testament and the early Messianic (Jewish-Christian) movement.

⁶ For a more detailed treatment of this topic (i.e., whether Gentile believers should be required to convert to Judaism and be circumcised), see Chaim Urbach's article "To Convert or Not to Convert—That Is the Question" on the *Messengers Messianic Jewish Outreach* website (www.messiahnj.org).



When we say salvation is by grace and through faith alone, maybe the additionalists think our approach (i.e., no other conditions for salvation) is too minimalist—or just too easy. Surely there's something we can do to curry God's favor, even if it's just a tiny, little bit! Perhaps that's their thinking. But alas, as humbling as it is, there's nothing we can do. Like the old hymn says, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling." When Yeshua died on that old, rugged, Roman execution stake two thousand years ago, the work of redemption was finished forever (Jn. 19:30). He did it all; there is nothing we can contribute other than simply accepting it by faith.⁷

The Power of a Three-Letter Word

Every word of the Bible is important. That's why we believe in the "verbal" (word-for-word) inspiration of the Bible rather than in watered-down "thought inspiration."⁸ Galatians 6:16 is a good example of a verse where the correct interpretation can hang on just one word—in this instance, the little conjunction *kai* ("and").⁹

Again, here's what the verse says: *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and*

mercy be upon them, AND (kai) upon the Israel of God. That final *kai* determines the relationship between "the Israel of God" and "as many as walk according to this rule." Are the two entities one and the same? Or are they distinct? That's the issue here.

There are two ways to interpret the controversial *kai* in Galatians 6:16:

1. The first possibility is that the second *kai* should be translated "even," indicating that both phrases ("the Israel of God" and "as many as walk according to this rule") refer to the same entity.¹⁰ The result looks like this: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, EVEN (*kai*) upon the Israel of God." (And yes, "even" falls within the range of meaning for the Greek word *kai*.) If this is the correct translation, the church is most likely "the Israel of God." Early replacement theologians like Justin Martyr and John Chrysostom treated it like an equation—i.e., "as many as walk according to this rule" = "the Israel of God"—because their assumption was that "the Christian church is 'the true, spiritual Israel'" (Martyr in *Dialogue with Trypho* 11.5).

2. The other possibility is that this critical *kai* should be translated "and" because it introduces another category of believers: namely, Jewish believers in Yeshua the Messiah. The term "Israel" denotes the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—with "the Israel of God" (Jewish followers of Yeshua) being a subset of greater "Israel." This category would encompass Jewish people who are Yeshua followers. The translation looks like this: "And as many as walk according to this rule [i.e., the Gentile believers in Galatia], peace and mercy be upon them AND (*kai*) upon the Israel of God [the Jewish believers among them]."

Note that Paul blesses "the Israel of God" with "peace" and "mercy." The apostle would have been well acquainted with the appended portion of the ancient Eighteen Benedictions, known collectively as "the Amidah" (from *Tefilat HaAmidah*, "the Standing Prayer"). It concludes with: "Blessed are You, O LORD, Who blesses Your people Israel with peace." (...)

⁷ Some commentators suggest that when Yeshua died on the cross, He didn't finish the work of redemption. One writer, for example, says it wasn't fully complete until the Lord entered the heavenly Tabernacle and sprinkled His own blood on the mercy seat (see "It Was Not Finished" by David J. Stewart at www.jesus-is-savior.com). Others claim that the work of redemption wasn't completed until Yeshua was resurrected on the third day following the crucifixion (Rom. 4:25). However, these other views tend to overlook the finality of the Greek *tetelestai* ("it is finished") in John 19:30. The perfect-passive-indicative verb form signifies a once-and-for-all action with results that continue indefinitely and enduringly into the future. That is, redemption was finished in the past; it is still finished now, and it will continue to be finished in the future. All that remains now is for the redemption that has already been wrought to be fully worked out in history. Clearly, the idea is that Jesus' role as our Passover sacrifice had been fulfilled according to the Scriptures by His death and the shedding of His blood (Isa. 53:7-10; I Cor. 5:7). "The verb *τελέω* fundamentally denotes 'to carry out' the will of somebody, whether of oneself or another, and so to fulfill obligations or carry out religious acts. 'It is accomplished' renders that aspect of the word. Doubtless both meanings of the term, the temporal and the theological, are intended here. 'So the last word of Jesus interprets his suffering and dying as the crowning conclusion and high point of the work that he has performed in obedience' (Dauer, *Passionsgeschichte*, 20)" (George R. Beasley-Murray in *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36: John* [Dallas: Word Books, 1999], 352).

⁸ The term *inspiration* refers to the method God used to convey His written revelation to the world through the instrumentality of human authors. The New Testament says the Bible's content was "breathed out" by God (II Tim. 3:16-17), with the end result being that its words are God's words. Plenary-verbal inspiration means that we believe "all" of the Bible is inspired (that's what the word *plenary* means), even down to its singular "words" (*verbal*) in the original languages. Thought inspiration, on the other hand, erroneously maintains that only the concepts and ideas in Scripture are inspired by God—not necessarily the words themselves.

⁹ In the Greek text, the conjunction in question is the *καί* ("and" or "even") right before the phrase *ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ* ("upon the Israel of God").

¹⁰ This has been referred to as an exegetical use of the conjunction *kai*.



There has always been a believing remnant—an “Israel of God,” if you will—within the ranks of God’s earthly people Israel (e.g., 1 Kgs. 19:18). Paul may well have been taking this opportunity to point out that Jewish believers—by virtue of their personal relationship with *Sar Shalom*, the Prince of Peace—foreshadowed the yet-future fulfillment of that ancient prayer for peace on the People of Israel.

Commentators who object to this second view (i.e., that Jewish believers constitute “the Israel of God”) claim that it’s inconsistent with Paul’s statement in Galatians that under the terms of the New Covenant, there is no more distinction between Jew and Gentile: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua* (Gal. 3:28). But is that really what the verse is saying? After all, during the course of his missionary journeys, Paul often mentioned his own Jewish heritage and ethnicity, and was readily recognized by others as Jewish (Acts 19:34; 21:39; 22:3; 23:6; 26:5; Phil. 3:5). His statement in Galatians 3:28 about the unity of believers, then, was surely not

intended to suggest that a Jewish believer is no longer recognizable as Jewish once he’s in the Body of Messiah, just as it wasn’t meant to suggest that men and women are no longer distinguishable from one another in the family of God. The fact is that Paul continued to embrace his Jewish identity even long after he became a believer in Yeshua.¹¹

F. F. Bruce has a variation on this second view. Leaning on the work of a German commentator, Franz Mussner, Dr. Bruce takes an eschatological approach, suggesting that “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 is the same entity as the end-time “all Israel” in Romans 11:26.¹² He includes this note from church history: “So Marius Victorinus, the earliest Latin commentator on Paul [in the fourth century AD], comments on the phrase: ‘not “[peace] on Israel” in the sense of any and every Jew, but “[peace] on the Lord’s Israel”; for Israel is truly the Lord’s if it follows the Lord, not expecting its salvation from any other source.’”¹³

So, then, what sector of Israel would this be? Who among the Jewish people would not be expecting salvation from any other source than the Lord himself? It could only be Jewish believers in Yeshua the Messiah.

They represented the overlap between the church and Israel.

Circumcision: Back-Door Entree for Legalism

If we’re right about “the Israel of God” being a reference to Jewish believers, the phrase itself may have been meant as a slap in the face for Paul’s Pharisaic opponents in Galatia (but I doubt that they responded with, “Thanks, I needed that!”). As we have already seen, they were insisting that Gentiles who came to faith in Yeshua should be circumcised according to the Law of Moses: *But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses”* (Acts 15:5).

So when Paul says “the Israel of God” walks according to this rule—boasting in nothing other than the death of Messiah Yeshua—these Messianic Pharisees would have readily recognized the stark contrast between Paul’s grace-based paradigm and their own works-based approach.

Is it okay for a believer to be circumcised? Yes, of course—as long as there’s an understanding that the physical procedure does

¹¹ Charles Halff, the founder of CJF Ministries, said he was irritated to no end by Christians he encountered who commented that he “used to be Jewish.” He objected to the insinuation that when he became a believer in Yeshua, he was “converted” from being Jewish to being something else. He would often tell these people, “No, no, you don’t understand. My DNA didn’t change. I was born a Jew and I’ll die a Jew.”

¹² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 273-75.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Circumcision is a surgical procedure that removes a portion of the foreskin on the male baby’s genitalia (Gen. 17:11). It was a sign of the unilateral, grace-based covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants through the line of Isaac and Jacob. The works-based Sinai Covenant came later and was broken by Israel almost from its very inception (Jer. 31:32); and once it was broken, it was no longer in force as a legally binding covenant (Heb. 8:13). Now the Sinai Covenant is a legitimate and beneficial expression of Jewish culture and history; but it doesn’t regulate Israel’s relationship with God. Today, believing Israel is under the New Covenant, which is essentially a restatement of the original, grace-based, unconditional Abrahamic Covenant. One difference, however, is that “circumcision” under the New Covenant isn’t merely a medical procedure. Rather, it’s a spiritual circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29, Jer. 31:33-34, see also Jer. 4:4). A bris for the heart wasn’t unheard of in the Old Testament, by the way; God elaborated on it as early as Deuteronomy 10:12-16.

¹⁵ Note that in Acts 15, circumcision was merely the starting point for a whole system of legalistic Torah observance. Luke records that the Pharisaic Jewish Christians were saying, “It is necessary to circumcise [non-Jewish believers], and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (v. 5). The apostles convened a council in Jerusalem to deal with this matter and they decided that non-Jewish believers are not obligated to observe Jewish cultural norms or traditions (Acts 15:24-29). Instead, perhaps so they wouldn’t feel like they were being neglected, the Gentile believers were provided with their own, abbreviated list of guidelines that appears to be derived, at least in part, from the seven



nothing to enhance one's spiritual standing before God. Most Jewish believers want to identify culturally with their Jewish community, and that includes circumcision for males. But at the same time, they understand that it doesn't score any brownie points with God. It's simply a way for them to identify with their Jewish heritage.

Paul himself said that in Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15). So if you're circumcised, that's fine. And if you're not, that's fine, too. The important thing is that you've become a new creation by placing your faith in the Lord Yeshua the Messiah.

The problem arises when someone starts thinking that circumcision is more important than it really is.¹⁴ It can become an access point for legalism to make inroads into the life of a believer.¹⁵ It's a concern because performance-based religion can be a source of great frustration, uncertainty, and anxiety for young or inexperienced believers.¹⁶ It can also contaminate the true message of salvation by grace, sometimes even to the point of morphing it into "another gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4).

Proof-texting Replacement Theology

Galatians 6:16 isn't the only text supersessionists rely on for Scriptural support.¹⁷

Another key passage for them is I Peter 2:9-10:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Even though the term "Israel" doesn't appear here, replacement theologians find particular significance in Peter's application of Jewish terminology to the church. To them, it confirms that the church has taken Israel's place in God's program. Why else would Peter apply "Israel" language (i.e., "chosen generation [or race]," "royal priesthood," "holy nation," and God's "own special people," all drawn from Isaiah 43:20 and Exodus 19:5-6) to the church?

This is the majority view in Christendom today, especially among those in the Reformed camp. They say Peter uses this Messianic, royal language (drawn from the Hebrew Bible) because the church has inherited Israel's status as the people of God.

So how do we explain this? Very simply, there's another, markedly different reason for Peter's application of this Messianic

terminology to the church. Peter was writing his letter primarily to Jewish believers in Yeshua (i.e., Jewish Christians). He was using this language to remind them that they have a rich heritage as the believing remnant of Israel (referred to by Paul as "the Israel of God" in Galatians) and that they are the vital link between Israel and the church.

This, in fact, is the most reasonable, logical, and biblical way to reconcile both passages (Gal. 6:16 and I Pet. 2:9-10) from a non-supersessionist perspective.

While it's true that most commentators today don't take this view (i.e., that Peter was addressing his fellow Jewish believers in his epistle), it turns out that it is well attested all the way back to the earliest days of church history. A substantial number of ancient writers concluded that I Peter was addressed to Jewish believers. Here's what Michael Vlach says:

Hiebert points out that "Origen and many others, saw them [Peter's audience] as Jewish Christians." These "others" include Calvin, Bengel, Weiss, Alford, English, and Wuest. In its introductory comments on I Peter, the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* states, "With few exceptions, the Fathers believed that

so-called Laws of Noah (see "Jewish Concepts: The Seven Noachide Laws" in the Jewish Virtual Library at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org). However, the New Testament is the "Torah of Messiah" (or the "Law of Christ"; Gal. 6:2) and includes everything we need to live godly lives (I Pet. 1:3). In Jewish tradition, there is a teaching that says when the Messiah comes, He will bring a new Torah with Him: "And the Messiah will sit in the Yeshiva, and all those who walk on earth will come and sit before him to hear a new Tora and new commandments and the deep wisdom which he teaches Israel" (Raphael Patai in *The Messiah Texts* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979], 256-57). Some Talmudic experts see this as contradicting the ninth of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of the Faith (which declares that "there will be no other Torah from the Creator"); but the teaching exists nonetheless.

¹⁶ Perhaps the most obvious problem with performance-based religion is that no one is able to perform consistently, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even when we commit ourselves to living in the power of the Holy Spirit, there are inevitably times when we will fail to live up to that ideal. Grace-based faith recognizes that our *position* "in Messiah" is divinely fixed and never wavers, even when our *practice* does. So when we sin, we ask for forgiveness and move on (I Jn. 1:8-9). Positionally, we are already seated with the Messiah in Heaven (Eph. 2:6). Practically, however, we're still down here in the trenches fighting a war (Eph. 6:12)!

¹⁷ The key proof texts supersessionists use to establish that the church is the New Israel are: Romans 2:28-29; 9:6; Galatians 3:7, 29; 6:16; and I Peter 2:9-10. Due to our space constraints, we are only dealing with two of these texts in this article.



this letter was written by the apostle Peter and sent to Jewish Christians in the Diaspora.” It then lists Eusebius of Caesarea, Didymus, Andreas, and Occumenius as those who held this view of the Jewish audience of 1 Peter.

Peter’s letter was written to “sojourners of dispersion” (1:1), which, as Hiebert points out, “has a strong Jewish coloring.” Some have argued that the use of the Septuagint in the OT quotations and the thrust of Peter’s argument would make Peter’s letter largely unintelligible to Peter’s readers if they included Gentiles. Plus, Paul points out that Peter was specifically the apostle to the circumcision (see Galatians 2:7-8).¹⁸

So, if our argument hinges on identifying Peter’s audience as Jewish (and it does, to a great extent), it would appear that we are on solid ground!

Writing in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Professor Louis Barbieri provides this helpful summary:

Unlike those who are rejected by God (see [1 Peter] 2:8), Peter’s readers are A CHOSEN RACE (v. 9), probably referring to Jewish believers; a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a function no longer related to one tribe. They are a HOLY NATION, a set apart group, a PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION. Many

scholars claim that this verse indicates that the Church replaces Israel in God’s program, that the Church is the “New Israel,” and that ethnic Israel has significance in God’s plans only as it is incorporated into the Church that replaces Israel. But Peter is writing primarily to Jewish believers, and these terms are perfectly suitable for the present remnant of Israel, for Jewish believers during the current Church Age.¹⁹

“The Israel of God”—Why It Matters

Why should we care about the identity of “the Israel of God”? Why is it still important today, some two thousand years after Paul coined the term?

It’s important for several reasons:

1. *It’s important because it assures us that God always keeps His promises.*

God made promises in the Old Testament by making covenants with certain people. We know (from archaeological discoveries) that some covenants were conditional (bilateral) while others were unconditional (unilateral). The Abrahamic Covenant was primarily unconditional, but did have some conditional provisions. The unconditional provisions had to do with Abraham’s relationship to God, his posterity, and his

ownership of the land of Israel. The conditional aspects had to do mainly with his *possession* of the land.²⁰

The conditions for dwelling securely in the land are reflected, for example, in this warning from the Torah: “*Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God. So you shall observe My statutes and keep My judgments, and perform them; and you will dwell in the land in safety*” (Lev. 25:17-18). We know that Israel did not observe God’s statutes and judgments, and that they were expelled from the Promised Land by the Romans in AD 70. Their *possession* of the land came to an end (temporarily). However, the fact that God has preserved His people Israel, even through the desolate centuries following their expulsion, is evidence of His promise-keeping power and faithfulness—and since 1948, they have been in the process of repossessing their land. The children of Israel are still His ancient people, and the relentless attempts of their enemies to destroy them have utterly failed. God is faithful even when we are not.

And since God is setting the stage even now for the final fulfillment of His promises to Israel, and their spiritual resurrection as a nation,

¹⁸ Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 147-48.

¹⁹ Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, gen. ed., *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1961.

²⁰ Note that there are important legal distinctions between *owning* a parcel of land and actually *possessing* it. In modern real estate law, for instance, there’s a concept known as “adverse possession,” where someone possesses a piece of real estate without being the owner of record. Similarly, God made Israel’s *possession* of the land contingent on her obedience; but her *ownership* of the land has never changed because it is unconditional.



we too can take comfort in the assurance that He will likewise keep His promises to the church!

The covenant-keeping God who has not forgotten or forsaken the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God who will never forget or forsake us.

2. *It's important because it reminds us that there's always a believing remnant.*

Even during the darkest hours in her history, Israel has always had a faithful remnant of believers. When apostasy was rampant in the days of Elijah, for instance, and the feisty old prophet thought he was the only faithful one remaining (1 Kgs. 19:10, 14), the Bible tells us that there were still seven thousand men left who hadn't bowed down to Baal (v. 18).

Likewise, there is a growing remnant of Jewish believers today—both in Israel and around the world. The new generation of believers that's rising up in Israel (consisting largely of young people who have grown up in believing homes) is deeply committed to their Jewish identity, and in many cases, they're even more bold and outspoken about their faith than the older generation!²¹

This proves conclusively that God has not rejected Israel permanently. If He were to do so, He would also be rejecting the believing remnant

among them—and that is impossible. That is precisely Paul's argument when he writes, *I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin* (Rom. 11:1).

If God had cast away His people Israel, He would have been casting away Paul, too! And that would have been, very simply, an impossibility.

3. *It's important because it informs our reading of the entire Bible.*

Some supersessionists concentrate on the New Testament and ignore most of the Old Testament. To them, the older revelation is passé and no longer applicable for believers. However, the central message of God's Word is redemption through the shed blood of the Messiah, and that unifying theme weaves its way from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible is a unified revelation. It is not schizophrenic.

The Older Covenant (the Jewish Tanakh) is about *anticipation*; the New Covenant (*Berit haChadashah*) is about *implementation*. One builds on the other and both are equally God's Word! In fact, Paul told Timothy that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for all things" (II Tim. 3:16). When Paul penned those words, the only Scripture they knew at the time was the Old Testament!

4. *It's important because it helps us understand future prophecy.*

We meet numerous people who say they struggle to understand prophecy. In many cases, the problem is that they're trying to unlock prophecy without the key—and that's Israel! The nation Israel is the linchpin around which God's end-time program revolves. If we lack a proper understanding of Israel's ongoing role in what God is doing here on earth, we will never understand prophecy.

5. *It's important because if "the Israel of God" isn't the church, the supersessionists are stealing someone else's identity.*

Are you concerned about the fact that ours is a minority view in Christendom today? Just think of the biblical characters who were outnumbered in their day—towering luminaries like Moses, Joshua, the Prophet Elijah, King David of Israel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Yeshua Himself (with only twelve rather ordinary guys as His disciples), among others. They obeyed God, stood alone when necessary, and ended up changing the world.

It's really not all that complicated. Paul said, *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* (Rom. 11:29). You can remove, temporarily, Israel's blessings, her land, her peace, her prominence, and you can even allow tyrants, tragically, to take the lives of her people (like the Nazis during the Holocaust); but you can never take away

²¹ See "Messianic Soldiers in the Israeli Army: Bolder than Ever about Their Faith" from *Kehila News* (March 1, 2016) at www.kehilanews.com.



her gifts or her divine calling. Those things flow from Israel's identity as the sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and that will never change.

One Preacher's Epiphany

I told you earlier that I would share how Dr. Criswell figured out what Galatians 6:16 means. After years of frustration, he finally realized that this puzzling verse must be understood against the backdrop of the rest of the Bible. And he knew that everywhere else in the Bible, the term "Israel" refers to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, whoever they were, these people who were called "the Israel of God" had to be Jewish! On one Sunday morning in 1966,

Pastor Criswell shared with his congregation in downtown Dallas how the Lord showed him, at long last, the identity of "the Israel of God":

[Paul] was talking about those Jewish people who had accepted the gospel of the grace of the Son of God without works. And in contradiction to the Judaizers, he called these who believed in Jesus "the Israel of God." . . . [They were] the Israelites who had come to find in faith alone in Jesus the pardon of sin, [and] the fulfillment of all of the Messianic prophecies. "The Israel of God" [is] the Jewish people who [have] found in Jesus a Savior. So all of it came to me; all of it, all of it,

without exception. There is no place in the Bible where the word "Israel" is used but that it refers to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And there is no place in the Bible where the word "church" is used but that it refers to the called out *Ekklesia*, the elect assembly of God in this day and in this age of grace. And isn't that an astonishing thing?²²

That's how this godly pastor finally solved the mystery of "the Israel of God." They were Jewish believers in Yeshua who trusted in Him and in nothing else! Along with Paul, who himself had been a Pharisee, this "Israel of God" stood firmly against the Messianic Pharisees who wanted to add more stipulations for salvation.

²² This excerpt is taken from a transcript of the sermon Dr. Criswell preached on Sunday, April 17, 1966, in the 10:50 a.m. service at First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas (accessed at www.wacriswell.com).

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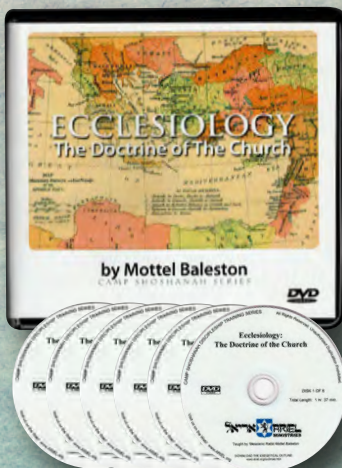
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 Messiah teManim
 SepHardic GenEtic
 TRIBES middle eAst
 Yeshua
 roots taAsha
 myths
 euRope
 ashkEnaZic
 theories
 histoRy
 Jewish
 Israel

Throughout their history, the Jewish people have often been the target of ill-informed rumors and myths. In medieval ages, superstitious peasants were fed the falsehood that the plagues and death sweeping through cramped villages were caused by "the Jews poisoning the wells." It had been observed that Jewish people were succumbing to diseases at a much lower rate than the general population, and so the rumor was hatched. In reality, the reason for lower death rates was that the Jewish communi-

ty held to a strict code of sanitation mandated in Jewish religious tradition, including handwashing before meals, something not practiced in the general population. Other prejudices were ludicrous, such as the charge that Jewish people use the blood of a Christian child in order to make Passover matzah. A charge like this is so irrational and absurd that the hateful intent of the people inventing the fiction becomes clear. What is especially sad is that a significant number of the people making these false charges in years past were members of large institutional churches and imagined themselves to be Christians.



For those of us who are Jewish believers in Messiah Jesus, these slanderous statements, along with the bias found in some Christian communities against the Jewish roots of the faith, are very unsettling. While we are comfortable in our skin as Jewish believers in our Messiah, we find ourselves often fending off foolish and uninformed, negative theories about the Jewish people. These theories have become more common with today's social media and YouTube videos made by people with a very biased agenda and little interest in telling the whole truth.

A more recent myth has grown in popularity, even in the evangelical community. It has a pseudo-scientific sound to it, but its effect in stirring up anti-Jewish sentiment is the same as the older myths. It is summed up in an email question I received in January 2017:

"Is it true that most of the Jews in the world today are not blood Israelites but are in fact Khazars who converted to Judaism many centuries ago?"

To understand the question, let's define some terms:

"Jewish"

Simply put, the biblical definition of a Jew refers to someone who is ethnically and biologically descended from one of the 12 sons of Jacob, who formed the 12 tribes of Israel. Members of all 12 tribes are represented among the Jewish people today. The notion of "lost tribes", i.e. that entire tribes migrated away and are being recovered today, has been proven false upon careful research. Additionally, the Bible uses the terms "Israel" and "Jewish" interchangeably. So, whether one is descended from the ten

northern tribes of Israel or the two southern tribes of Judah, by New Testament times all were called Jewish, as seen in Romans 11:1. While in modern liberal Judaism some would like to redefine Jewishness as a code of common ethics, the Scriptures are clear in defining it by ethnicity. A person can be Jewish without embracing the beliefs of modern Rabbinic Judaism.

The Jewish people are broadly divided into two ethnic groups:

Sephardic-Mizrachi Jews, centered around Israel, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean

Ashkenazic Jews, whose ancestors migrated from the Middle East into Europe around A.D. 800

"Khazar"

The kingdom of Khazaria was an amalgamation of some Turkic and Mongol tribes who established a capital in A.D. 720. Located in the Caucasus region of modern-day Russia and Azerbaijan, the kingdom eventually expanded into parts of Ukraine and Romania, but by 1030 it had shrunk to a small size and was breaking into parts.

So, is there a Jewish connection to the Khazars? This is where written records are scarce and legends loom large. Further retelling of the earlier legends leads to later revisions. One version of the story says that in the year 860, the Khazar King Bulan was listening to a debate between proponents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and decided that Judaism was the faith he preferred. While he was able to convince a number of his family members and nobles

to convert with him, the vast majority of Khazars did not convert. Even those who believe this story to be authentic conclude that the number of Khazars who continued holding to a Jewish faith was relatively small, approximately 2% of the worldwide Jewish population of their day. They further believe that as the Khazarian kingdom weakened and dispersed, this very small number was absorbed into Jewish communities in Europe by the year 1100.

There are other reputable historians who say that the King Bulan story is a myth, derived only from oral tall tales and legends and assembled into a book titled *The Khazar Correspondence*, which was first published in 1577 in Constantinople. Of course, the book was printed 600 years after the supposed conversion of King Bulan. Even at the time

it was published, many contemporary historians doubted its credibility.

This small footnote to history would have remained obscure were it not for a book written in 1976 by the Jewish author Arthur Koestler. In his *The Thirteenth Tribe*, Koestler argued that modern day Jews of Ashkenazic European background are actually descendants of these Khazar converts and not descendants of the Semitic Israelites of the Bible. Personally, he also saw the opportunity to argue that if Jews were not Semites (whom many in Christendom blame for the crucifixion of Jesus) then the racial basis for anti-Semitism would be removed.

Of course, this was a very naïve assumption because it imagines that racism and bigotry have some rational basis. Further, as Bible-believing Christians we understand that the ultimate origin of anti-Semitism lies with Satan in his plan to stop the Jewish people in their two God-appointed



tasks: to bring to the world the Scriptures and to bring to the world the Savior.

While many academics criticized *The Thirteenth Tribe* as lacking scholarly historical research, neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan, and other toxic racist groups promoted it as part of their anti-Jewish agenda, as did some Christian groups who already had had an ill-informed bias against the Jewish roots of our Christian faith. Arab governments picked up on it and cited it as a basis for denying the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

For some, it boils down to this: If modern day Ashkenazic Jews are not descendants of ancient Israelites, then they have no right to the land of Israel. Those with an anti-Jewish agenda don't want you to think too closely about that, for if you do, the question arises, what percentage of Jews in Israel are Ashkenazic compared to Sephardic? Most sources report that in Israel 45% are Ashkenazic Jews, whereas the majority, or 55%, are Sephardic. Of course, because the Khazar theory only questions Ashkenazic Jewish background and not Sephardic, it is not crucial to Israel's legitimacy, for the majority of Jews in Israel are Sephardic and have never left the Middle East area!



Modern Genetic Studies

While the actual historical records that touch upon the Khazar issue are small, preserved mostly in Arab and Byzantine writings that only mention the Khazars incidentally, the last 20 years have brought about an additional means of getting to the truth of this matter. DNA and genome testing are not only the new frontier in medical research, but also have made a contribution to genealogical questions. The cautionary warning that many overlook is this: Ethnic identity conclusions based upon DNA tests are only as good as the raw data that the scientists write into the computer program. There is no completely certain genome identity for "Khazars" that we can test for, as the small number of Khazars who remained in A.D. 1100 assimilated long ago into a dozen different ethnic groups, such as Romanians, Russians, Armenians, Georgians, and Ukrainians.

On the other hand, by looking at the Sephardic Jewish population which has never left the Middle East and by testing their DNA, particularly looking at men within that group with the names Cohen, Levi, and variations of those, all indicating descent from the tribe of Levi, scientists have found striking genome markers that correlate across geographic areas, all held by Sephardic Jewish men with that Levite background. The marker appears frequent-

ly and consistently, leading some scientists to label it the "Jewish priestly" marker.

In 2013, a very detailed scientific investigation was conducted by Wayne State University, involving many Ph.D. scientists from Europe, Asia, and America on the question of any genetic link between the Khazars and

Ashkenazic Jews. Their overview document is 59 pages alone, with many genome charts and a description of the methodology used. It is available free online.

The Wayne State University Genome Study concluded this:

We find that Ashkenazi Jews share the greatest genetic ancestry with other Jewish populations, and among non-Jewish populations, with groups from Europe and the Middle East. No particular similarity of Ashkenazi Jews with populations from the Caucasus is evident, particularly with the populations that most closely represent the Khazar region. Thus, analysis of Ashkenazi Jews together with a large sample from the region of the Khazar Khaganate corroborates the earlier results that Ashkenazi Jews derive their ancestry primarily from populations of the Middle East and Europe, that they possess considerable shared ancestry with other Jewish populations, and that there is no indication of a significant genetic contribution either from within or from north of the Caucasus region.¹

¹ "No Evidence from Genome-Wide Data of a Khazar Origin for the Ashkenazi Jews" (2013). Human Biology Open Access Pre-Prints. Paper 41. http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/humbiol_preprints/41.

The “other Jewish populations” referred to are the Sephardic Jews, who have never left the Middle East.

A second genome study, published in 2013 by Stanford University scientist Peter Underhill, Ph.D., along with Siiri Rootsi Ph.D. and several other researchers, made this summary statement:

Previous Y-chromosome studies have demonstrated that Ashkenazi Levites, members of a paternally inherited Jewish priestly caste, display a distinctive founder event within R1a, the most prevalent Y-chromosome haplogroup in Eastern Europe. Here we report the analysis of 16 whole R1 sequences and show that a set of 19 unique nucleotide substitutions defines the Ashkenazi R1a lineage . . . In contrast to the previously suggested Eastern European origin for Ashkenazi Levites, the current data are indicative of a geographic source of the Levite founder lineage in the Near East and its likely presence among pre-Diaspora Hebrews.²

This second study addressed the fact that older, imprecise studies had found some similarities between Ashkenazic Jews and the general European population; but having used more modern methodology, it found among Ashkenazic Jews the same genome identity markers for the Levite tribe as it did in Sephardic Jews. So, in summary, these Levite genetic markers are found very strongly in Jewish populations that are



clearly recognized to be Jewish with origins in Israel:

Sephardic - Mizrahi

from the Middle East

Falasha

from Ethiopia

Temanim

from Yemen

Ashkenazim

from Europe

Of course, all four of these groups also have an easily demonstrable Jewish history, have genuine artifacts of Jewish worship going back for centuries, and were having Jewish services all during that time. In contrast, recent Jewish claims by small groups in central Africa and their descendants, as well as Asian tribes in the Himalayas, have very weak evidence.

What Do the Scriptures Say?

While recent scientific studies clearly show a Middle Eastern Hebrew origin for Ashkenazic Jews, our focus should be on the promise of God to preserve the Jewish people intact and as a visible people who can be identified. As Jeremiah 31:36-36 says:

Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name. “If this fixed order departs from before me,

declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.”

The very events of the last days are dependent upon having an identifiable people of Israel and the nation of Israel back in their own land. We are privileged to live in a time when we have seen this biblical truth come alive with our very own eyes, as Jews of various skin colors and cultures, but all Jewish, have come together in our ancient homeland just as prophecy foretold.

The Khazar myth is one of a long string of false charges made to delegitimize the Jewish people. In Romans 11, the Apostle Paul addresses Gentile believers, but reminds all of us of this truth:

For I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be ignorant of this mystery — lest you be wise in your own eyes — that a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer shall come out of Zion. He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Concerning the Good News, they are hostile for your sake; but concerning chosenness, they are loved on account of the fathers—for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:26-29 TLV)

May we see more and more examples of believers embracing, and not fearing, the Jewish roots of our Christian faith, embracing Jewish friends and neighbors with unconditional love, and sharing with them that the greatest example of the love of God for His Jewish people was sending them their Messiah, Yeshua.

² Rootsi, S. et al. Phylogenetic applications of whole Y-chromosome sequences and the Near Eastern origin of Ashkenazi Levites. Nat. Commun. 4:2928 doi: 10.1038/ncomms3928 (2013).



The Loyal Love of the Lord

By Dr. Paul Wilkinson¹

In I Samuel 20, Saul's son Jonathan makes the following impassioned plea to his covenanted friend, David:

If I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever. When the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth, let not the name of Jonathan be cut off from the house of David. (I Sam. 20:14-16, RSV)

The words “loyal love” and “loyalty” were finally decided upon by the RSV (Revised Standard Version) translation committee after they had labored to render into English the beautifully rich, absorbing, and almost-impossible-to-translate Hebrew word *chesed*. In fact, such was the degree of difficulty they encountered, that after several months' work the committee finally agreed on one thing: No single English noun could do it justice! *Chesed* proved to be the final word they voted on before completing

their translation of the Tanakh, or Old Testament.

A comparison of other English Bible translations, from the earliest to the more modern, reveals just how multi-layered this extraordinary Hebrew word is. In our selected text, *chesed* is translated “mercy” (Coverdale, Geneva, Bishops’), “kindness” (KJV, NKJV, Darby, NIV), “lovingkindness” (ASV, NASB), “steadfast love” (ESV), and “loyalty” (NET). The RSV committee



generally favored “steadfast love” when translating *chesed* elsewhere in Scripture; but in this particular text, I believe they made an insightful decision.

Wherever Bible students “dig” or “excavate” in the Old Testament, sooner or later their exegetical trowel will strike the word *chesed*. Occurring 248 times in the Tanakh and 127 times in the book of Psalms alone, this theological gem sparkles to the glory of God, for its true meaning can only be found by digging deep into the rich seam of God’s covenant relationship with His people.

In our chosen text, it is important to note that Jonathan did not ask David for *his* loyalty to be shown him, since the loyalty of man will always be limited and deficient; he asked for the loyalty of *the LORD* – and David did not disappoint. Following the death of Jonathan and Saul and David’s accession to the throne, the man after God’s own heart asked Ziba, a servant in Saul’s household, the following question: *Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?* (II Sam. 9:3, RSV).

Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan, was to be the recipient of God’s

chesed through David, who restored Saul’s land to him and gave him a permanent place at the king’s table.

Before we proceed, it is important to highlight the other significant aspect of Jonathan’s appeal: his use of the tetragrammaton, YHWH. Often pronounced “Yahweh” and usually translated “LORD” in our English Bibles, it is the Name by which God reveals Himself to those with whom He is in covenant relationship. With this in mind, let us consider the following definition of *chesed* by William O. E. Oesterley (1866-1950), a Church of England vicar, theologian, and professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at King’s College, London:

[*Chesed* is] an essential quality of soul, a spiritual endowment which goes deep down into the very nature of him who has it . . . No other word means so much to the Hebrew ear, and its cultivation in the human heart is the highest demand of the prophetic morality. In all its completeness it can be seen only in Yahweh.²

The Abundance of God’s Mercy

A study of the Tanakh reveals how often the loyal love of the LORD was shown to God’s covenanted people, *and* to those outside Israel who were being drawn into relationship with Him. Genesis 24, for example, tells the beautiful story of the search for a wife for Abraham’s son Isaac. Upon meeting Rebekah and her family in the Mesopotamian city of Nahor, Abraham’s servant gives thanks to God for showing

chesed to his master: *Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master* (Gen. 24:27, NASB).

Later in Genesis we read how this same love sustained Joseph throughout his imprisonment in Egypt: *But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison* (Gen. 39:21, RSV).

It was the *chesed* of Yahweh which David joyfully acknowledged after being delivered from the hand of Saul and from all his enemies: *He is the tower of salvation to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore* (II Sam. 22:51).

In the book of Joshua, we read of the two men who were sent to spy out Jericho, and who promised Rahab that if she hid them from the king, then they would show her *chesed* in return: *Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land* (Jos. 2:14).

And it was the loyal, steadfast, merciful kindness of the LORD which was shown to Naomi and Elimelech through Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer. As Naomi joyfully declared to her daughter-in-law Ruth, *Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!* (Ruth 2:20).

Wherever we turn, the *chesed* of God glistens in the glorious light of His Word. This should not surprise us, for it is integral both to the law of God and, more importantly, to His very Name and nature. Having prohibited the creation and



worship of graven images, God jealously declared at Sinai that He would visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but would show lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:5-6, NASB). When Moses later ascended the mountain, carrying with him a second set of stone tablets, the LORD passed by and proclaimed His Name:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty... (Ex. 34:6-7, RSV)

The Election and Salvation of Israel

This revelation of God's character is foundational to Israel's "chosenness" as a nation, as the LORD reminded His people before they crossed into Canaan:

The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people... Know therefore that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations. (Deut. 7:7-9, KJV)

This same revelation of God's *chesed* is absolutely essential to Israel's future survival, for the nation's lamentable history of covenant-breaking infidelity warrants only judgment, not mercy. In the midst of

the glorious "I will" promises of Ezekiel 36, the LORD solemnly reminds His people that in the last days, when He finally restores them, they will remember their "evil ways" and "loathe" themselves for their "abominable deeds." It is the integrity and honor of God's Name, and not Israel's, that is ultimately at stake. As the LORD concludes, *It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you* (Ez. 36:31-32; cf. Isa. 48:11).

Nevertheless, when we look through the restoration promises of God, one word is conspicuous throughout: *chesed*. In His judgment, God waits to be merciful! Here are just a few examples:

In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you. (Isa. 54:8, NASB)

Jehovah hath appeared from afar unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. I will build thee again, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel! (Jer. 31:3-4, Darby)

For the Lord will not cast off for ever, but, though He cause grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love. (Lam. 3:31-32, RSV)

I will betroth you to me forever; yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy. (Hos. 2:19-20, NKJV)

You will be loyal to Jacob and extend your loyal love to Abraham, which you

promised on oath to our ancestors in ancient times. (Mic. 7:20, NET)

It is important to note that God's *chesed* is the only true basis of intercessory prayer for Israel and not an unhealthy emotional attachment to all things Jewish, which sadly characterizes part of the church. Whether we read Solomon's prayer of dedication upon completion of the Temple (I Kgs. 8:23), Daniel's prayer for the restoration of the exiles in Babylon (Dan. 9:4), Nehemiah's prayer for the favor of Artaxerxes (Neh. 1:5), or Ezra's prayer of shame on account of those who had intermarried (Ezr. 9:9), we discover that the common denominator is not Israel's merit, or even Israel's plight; these servants of the LORD appealed to God's character, as it had been revealed to Moses at Sinai. We must not forget, of course, that it was the *chesed* of God which roused Jonah's anger in Nineveh (Jon. 4:1-4), and that of the prodigal son's brother in Jesus' parable (Lk. 15:11-32), a warning to us to guard our own hearts so that we can be heralds and instruments of God's mercy.

A Glorious Bridge

Although the New Testament was written in Greek, *chesed* acts as a bridge between the Old and the New. The New Testament counterpart is *eleos*, which is the word that was generally favored in the Septuagint (LXX), or Greek translation of the Tanakh. We hear this word in the Spirit-inspired songs of Mary and Zechariah, when they declare how God has *helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy* (Lk. 1:54), remembering to *perform the mercy promised to our fathers* (Lk. 1:72). In this way, then, the good



news of Jesus the Messiah, which was *preached . . . beforehand to Abraham* (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:8), is inextricably bound to the loyal love of God. In His miraculous birth, sinless life, atoning death, and glorious resurrection and ascension, the Lord Jesus personified *chesed*, and will soon fill it up completely with meaning when He returns. As the Apostle Paul declared,

Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy [eleos].
(Rom. 15:8-9)

In making this statement, Paul also pulled the theological rug out from under those in the church who have espoused replacement theology and do not glorify God for His mercy to Israel.

The Loyal Love of the Church?

As we turn the pages of the New Testament, the loving faithfulness of our Lord and Savior shines through. Our Lord promises that He will never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5), that He will be with us to the close of the age (Mt. 28:20), that no one will be able to snatch us from His hand (Jn. 10:28), that He has gone to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3), that He lives forever to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25), and that the work which He began in us will be completed *at the day of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:6). If that were not enough, the Apostle Paul declares that *if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself* (II Tim. 2:11-13). This does, however, beg the

question: What if we *are* faithless? Will the Lord simply turn a blind eye because we are His bride? Scripture could not be more emphatic: The Lord takes a low view of disloyalty. Jesus expects that we will show Him, and one another, the same *kind* of loyal love that He has shown us.

Let us consider the following statements which the Lord made to the early church, either directly or through His apostles, and then ask ourselves whether the same kind of indictments could be laid at the door of many of our churches today:

Do not boast over the branches . . . For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. (Rom. 11:18-21)

What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? (I Cor. 1:12-13)

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you . . . ? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-2)

Many . . . live as enemies of the cross of Christ . . . with minds set on earthly things. (Phil. 3:18-19)

The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. (I Tim. 4:1)

Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses . . . Christ has obtained a

ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant He mediates is better. (Heb. 3:3; 8:6)

There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies . . . And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. (II Pet. 2:1-2)

But I have this against you, that you have forsaken the love you had at first. (Rev. 2:4)

You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam . . . you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (Rev. 2:14-15)

You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. (Rev. 2:20)

You have the name of being alive, and you are dead. (Rev. 3:1)

I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:16-17)

This list makes for uncomfortable reading, but the church needs to wake from its slumber and take careful note. A brother in Christ recently wrote to me in an email, "Even so, the time is now so short—the last couple of seconds of the last hour." As the Apostle Peter declared in his first epistle, *For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God* (I Pet. 4:17). Thus, one of the crucial lessons of *chesed/eleos*, which we



must learn from Israel's history *and* that of the church, is that we dare not take God's loyalty for granted.

On Guard

Three times the risen Lord asked Simon Peter whether he loved Him, and each time the Lord made it clear what kind of love He expected from him. In the process, Peter was both restored and commissioned to lead, feed, tend, and protect Christ's flock, with the same kind of dedication and loyalty that the Good Shepherd had shown throughout His earthly ministry (Jn. 21:15-17; cf. 17:12). For those of us holding positions of responsibility within the church, let us remember that this commission was not given to Peter alone. In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, the Apostle Paul, knowing what was about to befall the church at Ephesus, warned them to

Be on guard, for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood... remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. (Ac. 20:28-31)

This passage of Scripture burned in the heart of my pastor Andrew Robinson (1951-2016), who faithfully shepherded the flock under his care and frequently expressed godly indignation towards those pastors in the wider church who were failing the Lord's sheep. In his 1841 discourse *On Discipline*, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), the principal founder of the Plymouth Brethren and a herald of Israel's

restoration and Christ's return, also recognized the urgent need in the church for true pastors who would shepherd God's people. He wrote:

One thing I would pray for, because I love the Lord's sheep, is that there might be shepherds. I know nothing next to personal communion with the Lord, so blessed as the pastor feeding the Lord's sheep, the Lord's flock; but it is the *Lord's* flock . . . I know nothing like it on earth – the core of a true-hearted pastor, one who can bear the whole burden of grief and care of any soul and deal with God about it.³

Conclusion

We conclude our survey of this remarkable word *chesed* with the timeless shepherd psalm of David. As a grateful recipient of God's loyal love, David was forever singing the praises of the One who was ever mindful of him. As the shadows lengthen on this dark and decaying world, may we too be found declaring the praises of Him who has called us *out of darkness into His marvelous light* (I Pet. 2:9), and whose incomparable faithfulness and unceasing loyalty took Him to Calvary, where He showed the world just how much He loved the Father

(Jn. 14:31). May we determine in our hearts to be more devoted and loyal to the One who is called "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11), and in so doing draw comfort from the closing words of this psalm, saying confidently with David:

*Surely
goodness and
mercy [chesed]
shall follow me
all the days of
my life: and I
will dwell in
the house of the
LORD
[YHWH]
forever.
(Ps. 23:6, KJV)*

¹ Dr. Wilkinson is the minister of Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church, Stockport, England, and a Gentile supporter of Israel. This article is based on a devotion Dr. Wilkinson presented during the Pre-Trib Conference of 2017, in which he addressed a Gentile audience using terminology that is familiar to them (such as "Jesus" and "Christ" instead of "Yeshua" and "Messiah"). The devotion is reproduced here in form of an article, but without major edits to his style.

² W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: SPCK, 1953), 80.

³ John Nelson Darby, 'On Discipline (1841),' *The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby, Volume 1*, ed. by William Kelly (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible & Tract Depot, n.d.), 348-9.



From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Messiah Yeshua. (II Tim. 3:15b)

My family and I emigrated from Israel when I was five years old. We settled in the other holy land: Brooklyn, New York. We spoke Hebrew at home and practiced traditional Judaism, attending synagogue three times a year, celebrating Passover and Rosh Hashana, and fasting on Yom Kippur. Though not terribly strict in our religious observances, we firmly identified ourselves as Jews religiously and ethnically.

I attended public school in Canarsie, and when I was about ten years old, my parents enrolled me in a religiously conservative Hebrew school. The immediate purpose of this additional schooling was to prepare students for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah with the overall goal of teaching them to live a life pleasing to God. Included in the studies was Jewish history, the significance of the Jewish holy days, as well as the commandments. The Older Testament (Tanach) was in the pews of the synagogue, and I became enamored with it as I re-read the stories my

parents had recited to me from childhood. This book was unique, and it captivated my imagination. In some ways, it also frustrated me. Much of it was cryptic, though other parts seemed straightforward enough. The Hebrew Bible drew me in like no other book I had ever read. I knew it contained the mystery of eternal life, but where? I developed a deep hunger for the things of God at that time and even began attending Sabbath services frequently.

One day, during a break in between classes, I was sitting in the pews of the synagogue reading the Tanach and stumbled upon Isaiah 52:13-53:12. It is no exaggeration to report to you that I was shocked at what I read. "What is He doing in *our* Bible?!" My first thought was that some Christian had

placed one of their versions of the Old Testament in our pews. I turned to this Bible's front page only to find out that it was from the Jewish Publication Society and thus "one of ours." I re-read those Isaiah verses over and over again because I recognized the description: It was Jesus! Until that time, I couldn't understand why Christians read *our* Older Testament alongside with *their* New Testament. What did the Hebrew Scriptures have to do with Christianity? Nothing, I assumed.

During these three years in Hebrew school, I noticed that the Hebrew Bible's description of God *seemed to read* as if the one God of Israel was a trinity-one. This was a concept I rejected offhand as foreign and contrary to what Moses and the prophets taught. I dismissed these notions as my own misunderstanding, being ten at the time. I figured, what could I know? I remember thinking, "Christians must be mistaken about their concept of a trinity." But now I understood why they would use *our* Bible to defend *their* doctrine since it can seem like some of these passages in the Hebrew Bible matched their view of a trinity. I found verses of the triune nature of God in Isaiah, in Daniel, and throughout the Older Testament *including the Torah*. Odd.

When I was turning 13, my family and I traveled back to Israel, where I was bar-mitzvahed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. After my Bar Mitzvah, I continued to identify culturally as a Jew, but I lost any serious involvement in Judaism as a religion. I knew that Einstein identified himself in a similar way: Jewish in ethnicity, but not in religion. I figured if it's good enough for Albert Einstein . . .

Fast forward, I became an agnostic/atheist up until my mid-twenties. I went through a

What is He Doing in Our Bible?

By Jacob Cohen



life crisis at that time and happened to be studying under the tutelage of a Dr. Paul Edwards, who taught Philosophy at Brooklyn College. Dr. Edwards offered an elective course on “The Great Unbelievers,” which gave the best arguments by the finest minds for reasons why God did not exist. When I took this course, I was amazed at how weak the atheist arguments against God were. When it came to the question of God, all these brilliant atheist philosophers were dolts.

I was driving a yellow cab in NYC at the time to get myself through school, and it was at this point that God began bringing many believers into my taxi. When they witnessed to me, we wound up speaking over one another’s heads. They would say that I needed Jesus, and I would reply that I was Jewish (meaning I was not allowed to worship a god other than the God of Israel). They would remind me that Jesus was a Jew.

However, in my reckoning, Christianity had transformed the understanding of the

oneness of the God of Israel into an unrecognizable mess with the doctrine of the Trinity. I acknowledged that Jesus and the apostles were Jewish, but that wasn’t enough. After all, His followers could have been in error with regards to their sincerely held beliefs. As far as I was concerned, Jesus was fine for the Gentiles; but He was not for Jews since Christianity spoke of a god other than the God of Israel.

One day a kindly elderly Christian lady explained that the word “Christos” was a Greek translation of the word “anointed.” Now, that connected the dots; Christians believe they are following the Jewish Messiah. This begged the question: Is Jesus the true Jewish Messiah?! I was not convinced that He was. She suggested I read the Tanach to see whether Jesus was who He claimed to be, and so I began reading the Hebrew Bible. I had several versions of it on my bed and cross-referenced them. I could get by in a rusty Hebrew, which helped although it came with difficulty. As I read through the Tanach, I came across passages which I had read as a child. I remembered having recognized Jesus in these passages but was now reading them through the eyes of an adult.

As I read and re-read these passages, I began seeing how the pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit together. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); His hands and feet were to be pierced at His death, which seemed like a crucifixion (Ex. 12:21ff; Ps. 22); and many more prophecies. But I reasoned, “What if the writers of the NT filled in what was lacking and made it seem that Jesus fulfilled the Scripture when in reality the Messiah had not yet come?” I knew that if Jesus were the Messiah, I had to follow Him; but if He were *not* the Messiah, I would be committing idolatry if I did worship Him as God. As I was pondering this great issue, I began begging God to show me. “Give me Scripture which would

really show me if Jesus is the One or not.” By providence, as I was praying, I turned to Isaiah 53. I remembered reading these verses when I was a kid. But this time, I came to believe that Jesus is the One. I came to faith at that moment.

The Son has set me free, and I am free indeed. This was a cleansing that no Yom Kippur could offer. Not too long after I placed my faith in Yeshua (Jesus), I realized the Lord was calling me into full-time ministry. God has carried me even until now.

Eventually, I met and married my wife Stephanie. I tell people that only God could match a Puerto Rican from the Bronx and a Jew from Israel and make the marriage work. Stephanie worked as I earned my Master of Divinity through Western Seminary’s Portland campus. Stephanie, who was led to the Lord and discipled by Jewish believers, has walked with me through one of the toughest ministries (I was a police chaplain for 14 years). We were both in NYC on vacation during the attack on 9-11, and I volunteered and worked ground zero as a chaplain, staying in New York until October 8th. My bride has backed me up with prayer and an unmatched devotion to God. She loves the Lord and has the same passion I do for reaching the Jewish people and teaching Christians the Jewish roots of the faith and how to witness to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jacob Cohen and his wife Stephanie have been regular attendees of Ariel’s Camp Shoshanah. They work with the Christian & Missionary Alliance. If the Lord puts it on your heart to support their work, please send your donations to CMA P.O. Box 211, Rescue CA 95672. Make the check out to CMA with the number 1034 in the memo section.

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