

2020

Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jmjs>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2020) "Book Reviews," *Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies*: Vol. 3 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jmjs/vol3/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Charles Feinberg Center at Digital Commons @ Biola. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Biola. For more information, please contact university.archives@biola.edu.

Reviews

The Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies

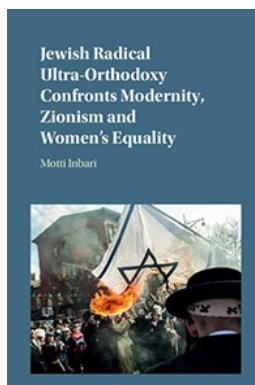


JMJS/CHARLES L. FEINBERG CENTER



Motti Inbari *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism and Women's Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2016), pp. 279.

Review by Alan Shore



In December, 2006, the world press took note of the highly controversial “International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust,” hosted in Iran during the administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Despite its lofty title, its participants and presenters were mainly Holocaust deniers from countries ranging from Austria to Indonesia, including Germany, France and Sweden. Former Louisiana State Representative and Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke was also in attendance. However, although Holocaust denial was certainly front and center, it had less to do with the past than the present, for its main purpose was to delegitimize Zionism and call for the destruction of the State of Israel. By denying the Holocaust, these enemies of the



Jewish State sought to undermine what they believed to be the main justification for the creation of the Jewish State in the first place. Destroy the credibility of the Holocaust; destroy the credibility of the State of Israel.

None of this was particularly new. But what might have caused your eyes to pop, if you happened to be paying attention, was that a half dozen ultra-Orthodox Jews were also there to express solidarity with the aims of the conference organizers. Although they were not there to deny the Holocaust, these members of the Israel-based, anti-Zionist organization Neturei Karta (Guardians of the City) likewise called for the end of the Jewish State. Although they were roundly condemned by the rest of the Jewish world for their attendance and even by leaders of their own community, the viewpoint they represented was nonetheless already deeply entrenched in their religious tradition. How are we to begin to understand this?

A good place to start would be Motti Inbari's informative and engrossing *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism and Women's Equality*. In it, Inbari provides a roadmap to guide us through the bumpy and sometimes confusing terrain of radical ultra-Orthodox Jewish faith and practice and its fractious relationship with what amounts to the rest of the Jewish world. One of the most fascinating aspects of his study is his exploration of the eschatological and ideological basis of their religious passion that is encapsulated in their Messianic hopes.

Inbari begins by taking us back to the challenges Judaism encountered in the modern era, beginning in the late eighteenth century, as the Enlightenment beginning in Western Europe and its Jewish counterpart, the Haskalah, gained traction. Orthodoxy in Judaism became a category only in response to competing Jewish movements and other forms of change that were perceived as threats. Ultra-Orthodoxy could be viewed as even more reactionary, cultivating a mentality characterized by a deep suspicion of modern culture, secular influence, particularly with regard to education, increased religious observance and more rigid standards of social behavior, with a special emphasis on modest dress among women.

What Inbari defines as "radical ultra-Orthodoxy" features a social structure he characterizes as an enclave that goes even further to separate itself not only from mainstream culture, but even from other Jews and Jewish groups that do not



share its views. Its alienation from the larger world of Judaism is amplified by an attitude of utterly uncompromising opposition to innovation. As Zionism grew in numbers and influence in the twentieth century, groups like the Neturei Karta in Jerusalem and the Satmar Hasidism, which originated in Hungary and was revived after WWII in Williamsburg, Brooklyn under the leadership of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, became increasingly virulent in their opposition. At times, they identified Zionism and its goals as nothing less than the work of Satan.

The basis of this implacable enmity, Inbari submits, is to be found in radical ultra-Orthodoxy's whole-hearted commitment to a specific vision of Messianic fulfillment that is at odds not only with secular Zionism, but even more so against religious groups such as Agudat Yisrael, the union of Haredi groups that came to terms with statehood, albeit reluctantly, once it had been established. Part of the reason for radical ultra-Orthodoxy's refusal, Inbari points out, is to be found in its interpretation of "The Three Oaths," a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (Ketubot 111a) that forbids Israel from "storming the wall." Traditionally, this has been interpreted to mean that Israel is prohibited from mass migration to the Promised Land before the End-Times. Rabbi Amram Blau, head of Neturei Karta, to whom Inbari devotes a whole chapter, vocally and repeatedly renounced Zionism as nothing less than rebellion against God and went so far as to portray the Holocaust as the outcome of God's wrath against such rebellion.

For Blau, the ascendancy of Zionism is simply one more proof that Satan is strengthening his grip on the world, and even the apparent triumphs of Israel such as that of the 1967 "Six Day War" are the work of Satan. In Blau's view, this period of spiritual degradation is so terrible that it is actually a sign of "the pangs of Messiah," and His imminent arrival. Contrast this view with



that of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine, who understood Zionism as part of an unfolding process of Messianic redemption. While disapproving of the secular ideology that propelled political Zionism, Kook's view enabled him to cooperate with Zionists where he felt it advantageous to do so.

Moving forward, Inbari turns his attention to Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, leader of the Satmar Hasidic group that traces its roots to the Maramaros region of Hungary, whose religious influence Menachem Keren-Kratz has so well described elsewhere. Grandson of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Teitelbaum, the head of the yeshiva where Leopold Cohn studied, Yoel upheld the rigorous standard of strictness that was the hallmark of Hungarian Hasidism and the Haredi antagonism toward modernism, secularism, and Zionism. Yet, as Inbari points out, it was the Zionists who saved his life by smuggling him out of Hungary and into Palestine as the Holocaust caught up with Hungary in 1944. This fact may have complicated Teitelbaum's attitude. As Inbari writes, "In my opinion, it is almost impossible to believe that Teitelbaum was not even slightly grateful to the Zionists for saving his life, particularly during the period immediately following the war."

Arriving in Williamsburg, New York City in 1946, Teitelbaum set about to rebuild the Jewish life he envisioned. Under his leadership, Satmar Hasidism has risen from the ashes and now boasts impressive numbers of adherents. It still holds to the creed of its forbears in its resistance to innovation, its disdain for alternative forms of Judaism, and a Messianic expectation that rejects the State of Israel.

Inbari concludes his work with a fascinating and enjoyable exploration of eschatology and the psychology of zealotry, proposing some commonalities between the first-century



Jewish rebels who were fired by their Messianic hopes and the later expressions of zealotry he has described throughout his book. Although beyond the scope of his study, the reader with an interest in the Christian side of things will find food for thought in comparing Inbari's cogent presentation of Jewish eschatological expectations and responses with the history of Christian movements that stressed Jesus' imminent return.

The only argument I have with the book is its title – *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism and Women's Equality*. Although Inbari devotes some space to the role of women in Haredi life and briefly features the influential wives of some of the leaders, the confrontation with women's equality the title promises does not fully materialize. However, the contributions of Dr. Inbari's scholarship far outweigh what is inevitably left undone in the ongoing work of academic research.

Menachen Keren-Kratz,
 “Maramaros, Hungary—The
 Cradle of Extreme Orthodoxy”
Modern Judaism
 (Apr. 17, 2015)

Review by Brian Crawford



The twentieth century witnessed the survival of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism through the Holocaust, its rebirth in Israel and the United States, and its explosive growth in radically new contexts. The story of how the *shtetl* lifestyle of Eastern Europe came to thrive



in urban Brooklyn and Mea Shearim is one that deserves to be told. However, Mendi Keren argues, one cannot fully understand the success of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish people unless one uncovers “the Maramaros Legacy” from which it came.

The Maramaros region is a county that once belonged to pre-World War I Hungary, but is now split between Romania and Ukraine. Keren writes that the region was the “cradle” whose unique dynamics shaped Ultra-Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century and enabled it to survive to this day. The Maramaros region had been an unpopulated wild land when the founder of the Hasidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), set his eyes on its potential. He commissioned his followers to settle and cultivate the land, and by the mid-nineteenth century, it had been transformed into an exclusively Ultra-Orthodox enclave. With this exclusive control came a host of political, educational, and ideological conflicts that few Jewish communities had faced before.

Keren briskly walks through the significant personalities, towns, and controversies of the Maramaros era, which he splits into three periods. He begins with the early nineteenth century Hungarian reform movement, called Neology, which sought to adapt Jewish law to modern (Enlightenment) times, often to the detriment of tradition. At first, some Hungarian rabbis accepted moderate reforms, such as adding general education studies to their curriculums, but then the reformers began forsaking traditional Jewish education altogether. This led to an unprecedented number of Hungarian Jewish people joining the modernist Neology movement or believing in Jesus as Messiah. Ultra-Orthodoxy arose as a movement to combat this slide away from tradition. Important early leaders of this movement included the Ashkenazi Rabbi Hatam Sofer, who famously said, “Everything new is forbidden by the Torah,” and Rabbi Moshe



Teitelbaum, who advocated for Hasidism in the region. Their successors, Rabbi Moshe Schick and Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Teitelbaum, respectively, carried on the movement, with great success. Their deaths in the 1880's brought the first period of the Maramaros legacy to a close.

The second period, Keren writes, stretched from the 1880's to the 1930's and involved ideological consolidation and decline. By this point, Ultra-Orthodox exclusivity in the region had been achieved, and no deviation from accepted policy was allowed. However, this period was also plagued by political infighting, controversies over Zionism, and the chaos of the region being split as a result of World War I. Significant leaders in this period included Ashkenazi Rabbi Amram Blum and Hasidic Rabbi Haim Zvi Teitelbaum.

The third period begins with the 1930's and ends with the reestablishment of Maramaros survivors in Israel and the United States by the 1960's. Keren narrates the emerging split between the Ashkenazi and Hasidic leaders on Zionism during this period. Ashkenazi Rabbi Yosef Zvi joined the Zionist *Agudath Israel* political conference and eventually came to lead it in 1932, two years after he left Maramaros for the Holy Land. He was instrumental in representing the interests of the Ultra-Orthodox to the British Mandate, establishing Ultra-Orthodox communities and institutions in the Land before the Holocaust. None of this was acceptable to the Hasidic Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, who rejected Zionism and narrowly escaped Maramaros onboard the Kasztner train in 1944. After attempting to establish himself in the Holy Land—despite his anti-Zionism—he settled in New York, where he built the thriving Satmar community until his death in 1979.

Several themes recur throughout this story, each of which are relevant to today's Ultra-Orthodoxy. The movement's disavowal



of “general education” is of particular interest. Keren explains that many of the movement’s leaders had never been exposed to non-religious education (science, history, mathematics, etc.) or non-Yiddish languages, nor did they see their relevancy to Jewish life. This attitude inculcated an expectation that the Ultra-Orthodox community should be allowed to teach itself without any interference from outside sources of knowledge. Another relevant theme is the politicization of Ultra-Orthodoxy in Maramaros, which became a necessity because the region was absent of Gentile or non-Haredi citizens. The leaders of the movement survived only because of shrewd political calculations and denunciations of opponents, enabling a no-compromise atmosphere to thrive. Finally, the theme of Zionism was a powder keg in Maramaros, with leaders taking hard lines for or against the resettlement of the Holy Land.

Keren’ retelling of the Maramaros legacy is insightful and compelling. It provides a detailed origin story for how the Ultra-Orthodox came to be, filling in gaps that may have been unknown to outsiders who see them as curious holdovers from a lost way of life. In fact, their way of life was never lost, but rather preserved.

While this story is skillfully retold, the reader may come away with a less sympathetic view of the Ultra-Orthodox movement than could have been achieved. This begins with the title. Keren chose to use the term “Extreme Orthodoxy” to describe this movement, rather than the more common “Ultra-Orthodoxy” or the term used by the community itself, “Haredim.” The word “extreme” has connotations of negative moral judgment, unlike the other two, which is unfortunate.

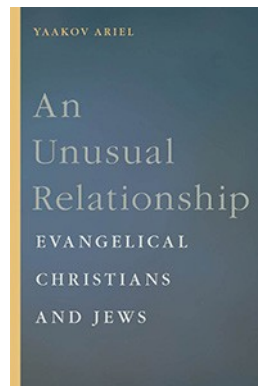
Further unsympathetic judgments are implied through the narration of Ultra-Orthodox ideologies and positions. We are told that the Extreme Orthodox of the era were against



general studies, against foreign languages, against the Neology movement, against modernity, against Zionism, against political compromise, against women's immodesty, against change in men's dress code, and against military service. We are not told *why* the Ultra-Orthodox had these positions, or what they were *for*. Speaking of their ideology in this way conveys the sense of an outsider's perspective, which may be unavoidable in this case, but also an evasion of stepping into the Haredim's ideological shoes to sympathetically explain their vision of the world. Keren's narrative would be helpfully complemented with a parallel account of the internal and self-described social, religious, and political motivations that combined to make the Maramaros legacy so fascinating and enduring.

Yaakov Ariel. *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.

Review by Gregory Hagg



Dr. Yaakov Ariel is an Israeli scholar and professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill whose research in the field of Christian Messianic groups and their relation to Jews and Zionism makes him eminently qualified to address this topic.



The author provides a common-sense evaluation of the relationship between evangelical Christianity (with all its variegated forms of support for Israel) and Judaism (with all its variegated suspicions of Christianity). One is struck with the absolute absence of acrimony, judgmentalism, sarcasm, or animosity in his writing. Such an irenic and generous tone is a pleasant departure other evaluations of the movement.

In Chapters 1-3 Appropriately, Dr. Ariel gives an extensive review of dispensationalism. It is an unusually fair treatment of the movement's history, major proponents, biblical support, and emphasis on the centrality of biblical Israel. He concludes that this approach to prophetic Scriptures has been one of the primary motivating factors in creating the unusual relationship of which he speaks. Ariel quotes influential scholars from early dispensational thinking to explain the position. His breadth and depth of this research is admirable. However, his case could be improved with the inclusion of "progressive dispensationalism" as articulated by Darrell Bock, Craig Blaising, and Robert Saucy, none of whom are mentioned in this regard.

Popular Christian culture in the form of novels, like Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*, and *The Left Behind Series*, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, figure prominently in Ariel's discussion. Concerning *Left Behind* he states, "Positive attitudes toward Jews and Israel are found in these writings. The attitude toward the Jewish people in this genre is relatively positive," (56).

Teaching on evangelizing the Jews was coupled with promoting Zionism as seen in the work of William Blackstone who wrote *Jesus is Coming*. Ariel retells the wonderful story of Blackstone's evangelistic zeal in having thousands of his book, *Jesus is Coming*, stored in Petra for the Jews who would run there to escape the Antichrist in the tribulation, (79).



Chapters 4-5 focus on the role evangelical Christians played in the restoration of the Land of Israel. Beginning with Lord Shaftsbury, Dr. Ariel traces the trajectory of events that led to Jewish people returning to Israel in the middle 1800's. Concerning Lord Shaftsbury, Ariel observes, "And like a number of evangelical leaders who were concerned with the fate of the Jews, he was involved both in evangelizing the Jews and in trying to restore them to their ancestral homeland," (82). This two-fold purpose is an oft-noted thread in evangelicalism that Ariel reports throughout the book, but it was evangelical Christian fervor surrounding the plight of the Jewish people that paved the way for restoration.

Not only did evangelicals argue for the right of Jewish people to settle in the Land, they joined them. "Attachment to the Holy Land and hopes for the rejuvenation of the country and the people of Israel went hand in hand," (110). There was a mutual symbiosis between evangelicals like Blackstone and Spafford; the former seeing prophecy being fulfilled, and the latter gaining medical aid, protection, and other material blessings.

In Chapters 6-7, Dr. Ariel turns his attention to the efforts of evangelicals to convert the Jewish people. Those holding different views of the future joined the premillennial Christians in the cause of evangelizing the Jews. His detailed account of European, British, and American missions is worth noting. The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews is given credit for the majority of work with Jewish people prior to the War of Independence, (112).

The work of Leopold Cohn and the American Board of Missions to the Jews (Chosen People Ministries) is highlighted by Dr. Ariel as a prominent force since its inception just before the turn of the century. In all of these descriptions there is no



dispute of their right to evangelize or the methods used. Ariel simply gives a dispassionate account of the activity. In fact he concludes, “Since the 1970s, missions to the Jews have emphasized more emphatically that becoming Christian does not eradicate Jewish cultural or ethnic identity but rather makes Jews truer to their real purpose and character,” (117). He also describes the love-hate relationship of the Jewish people with evangelical mission.

An entire chapter is devoted to the influence of Yiddish literature developed by Jewish believers for the purpose of evangelizing the Jewish people. He states, “Another noted Yiddish missionary journal during the period was *Roe Yisroel* (Shepherd of Israel) . . . published from the 1890s to the 1960s. Like titles of other Yiddish missionary journals, *Roe Yisroel* referred to Jesus,” (129). [A sample page of this publication appears after the article by Dr. Alan Shore, “*Chosen People Ministries and the Fog of War.*”]

Ariel’s treatment of this development is extraordinarily generous. The work of Henry Einspruch, a Polish Jewish believer who was also a Lutheran scholar/missionary whose translation of the New Testament into Yiddish was called *Der Bris Khodoshe*, is appreciated on different levels. He states, “Einspruch’s literary achievements gave him an entry into Yiddish literary circles, which had opened its doors to other converted Jewish writers as well,” (138).

In Chapters 8-10 attention is turned to the enemies of the Jewish people, whether the writers of the conspiracy theories like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the Nazis with their concomitant genocide. Dr. Ariel presents an honest picture of confusion among early evangelicals who endorsed the protocols as legitimate, but who later rejected them as bogus. Since the 1970’s the conspiracy about world domination by the Jews has



faded away in evangelicalism except for some radical minority opinions.

Ariel focuses on the literature which described the evangelical Christian relationship with the Jews of that period such as Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, which tells of heroic Christian protection of Jewish people. Among other writings, he highlighted the books by a former Nazi, Maria Anne Hirschmann, who became a Christian, Johanna-Ruth Dobschiner, the Jewish survivor who became a believer and wrote *Selected to Live*, and Vera Schlamm, another survivor who wrote *Pursued*. He discussed these books under the heading, "Jesus Heals Everyone," (157).

Concerning these writings Ariel stated, "They portray the behavior of evangelical Christians throughout the war years as exemplary, a proof that the acceptance of Jesus as a savior guarantees correct moral behavior, courage, and an ability to survive spiritually, if not physically," (165). Rather than ridicule these testimonies as some have done, Dr. Ariel accepts them at face value and sees them for what they purport to be, evidence of genuine faith.

Chapter 11 is a fascinating account of the common interest Orthodox Jews and many evangelical Christians have in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. Of course, after the 70 C.E. destruction the rabbinic shift to Talmudic centrism is well known, but Dr. Ariel gives an excellent summary of the ongoing importance of the Temple in Jewish liturgy and writings. He concludes, "Such interactions and alliances have even brought the Jews and Christians involved in them to modify their opinions and theological perceptions. The cooperation of Christian and Jewish advocates in plans to rebuild the Temple strikingly diverges from the familiar historical dynamics of Jewish-Christian interactions," (213).



In Chapter 12, the final chapter, Dr. Ariel reveals a thoroughgoing grasp of the history of the modern Messianic Jewish movement, citing forerunners like Joseph Rabinowitz in Russia who attempted to encourage Jewish identity among believers. He gives an account of its rise in a refreshingly positive light, describing how the resurgence of Jewish believers in the 60's took a turn away from mere assimilation into the Gentile dominated church. As Ariel puts it, "Evangelical missions promoted Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David and the menorah, and claimed that accepting the Christian faith did not contradict retaining a Jewish identity but rather completed it. This innovative position involved abandoning the traditional Christian claims that the church had inherited God's promises to Israel," (215).

Dr. Ariel is well acquainted with the stories of early leaders, and he tells those stories with generosity and accuracy. He even notes the differences between those who were more charismatic and/or orthopractic in orientation than others. The inclination on the part of some to distance themselves from the congregational movement is mentioned along with the change of heart that came later to those organizations. For example, he states, "By the 1980s, groups such as the American Board of Missions to the Jews began sponsoring Messianic congregations," (221).

Many other evangelicals joined the cause to encourage Messianic Judaism whether seminaries, publishers, denominations, or other missions. All this was occurring while the liberal wing of the church registered its dismay over the attempt to preach the gospel to Jewish people. The pro-Israel stance of Messianic Judaism has often impressed the Jewish people, but most have rejected the amalgam of Jewish and Christian identity as bizarre to say the least. Ariel mentions the anti-missionary groups like Jews for Judaism and *Yad L'Achim*



in Israel, which have strenuously opposed the movement, (227). Occasionally, the rhetoric erupts in violence.

On the other hand, Dr. Ariel eloquently explains why many Jews respond positively to the message. Several factors may attract them to the faith: theoretical or theological convictions, a sense of community, spirituality, moral boundaries, a conservative world view. In other words, “From their point of view, the newly converted have found in their new religious communities more nurturing environments than in liberal Jewish congregations or in secular, unaffiliated Jewish or non-Jewish life,” (229).

Subculture status is given to the Messianic movement by Dr. Ariel in that it has its own conferences, music, communities, camps, education, scholarship, internet presence, liturgies, vocabulary, and literature. While it was very small for many years, the movement has become larger than either Reconstructionist or Humanistic Judaism, (230).

As an Israeli, Dr. Ariel is eminently qualified to assess the strength of the movement in the Land. Concerning its growth he states, “The community of Messianic Jews in Israel grew considerably from the 1970s on. From no more than a few hundred people in the mid-1960s, it grew to over fifteen thousand by the 2010s,” (236). The growing secular Israeli acceptance continues to the extent that now most Israelis consider Messianic Jews to be one of many new religious communities rather than a serious threat to the society.

The unusual relationship is improving in Israel due in part to nomenclature. “Those joining Messianic congregations have called themselves *maaminim* (believers) and have spoken about “*lehagea laEmuna*” (becoming a believer) and not about their “conversions.” They remain “Yehudim” (Jews) and not “Notzrim” (Christians), even after their conversion,” (237). In other words, they are trying to maintain this two-fold identity

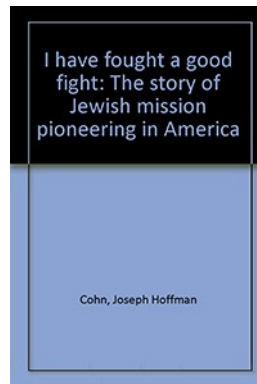


as Jewish followers of Yeshua, the epitome of the unusual relationship.

If there is a glaring omission in this wonderful book, it is the lack of emphasis on the primary motivating factor in evangelical theology. It is not merely an eschatology of premillennial restoration of the Kingdom of Messiah in the Land of Israel. It is a more fervent desire that Jewish and Gentile evangelicals see their Jewish friends and families come into relationship with the One who will occupy the throne, the Son of God, Yeshua the Messiah.

Joseph Hoffman Cohn,
*I Have Fought a Good Fight:
The Story of Jewish Mission
Pioneering in America.* New
York: American Board of
Missions to the Jews, 1953.

Review by Mitch Glaser.



INTRODUCTION:

I Have Fought a Good Fight is an anecdotal history of what began as the Brownsville Mission to the Jews and is now called Chosen People Ministries, but at the time of writing, was known as the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ). The key to understanding this book is to understand that it was completed within days of the death of the author. Joseph Hoffman Cohn, the son of Rabbi Leopold Cohn, the founder of the American Board



of Missions to the Jews, died suddenly on October 5th, 1953. *I Have Fought a Good Fight* is the story of this now 125-year-old Jewish ministry told through the eyes of one who personally experienced almost 60 years of the organization's history.

Joseph was eulogized in the preface of the book by the Chairman of the Board of the ABMJ, the well-known pastor, W. H. Rogers. He wrote,

Since the above was written, our dearly beloved leader of the mission and the author of these memoirs has gone home to be with his Lord and with his father, the founder of the mission. On October 8th, a beautiful service marked by simplicity and triumph, was held at the Mission, and many eloquent and well merited tributes given in memory of the honored life of the worker. Good and noble men found it extremely difficult to choose suitable words to adequately voice the mingled emotions of their hearts and the loss of their greatly esteemed friend, noble Christian, highly honored servant of God, and a prince among the Israel of God.

Dr. Rogers goes on to say,

This book now represents the last great work of its author on earth, for he had just finished it before going home to heaven. It will be a lasting monument to his memory, into the work he so dearly loved, and for what he gave his talent and strength, (IHFAGF pp.5-9).

The book traces the history of the ABMJ from its founding in 1894 until the death of the author in 1953. It is the last will and testimony of this son of the founder of this great historic mission to the Jewish people, the personal lives of its principle architects, and the intriguing cast of characters who helped shape the Mission and to some extent the growing and viable Protestant Fundamentalism in New York City, throughout the United States and even beyond.

The beauty of the book is that within itself it is a period piece



and a product of its historical context as much as it reflects Joseph's effort to recount the history of the Mission. I appreciate Joseph's honesty and his colorful use of language, which describes and rarely holds back on an opinion or interpersonal conflict. *I Have Fought a Good Fight* reveals as much about Joseph's personality and perspective as it does about the founding and growth of the organization.

THE EARLIEST YEARS

The story of the ABMJ is inextricably intertwined with the personal journey of the author. Joseph, in the most endearing of terms, describes the pilgrimage of his father, Rabbi Leopold Cohn, who left his native Breznia in Hungary to blaze a new path for his family in the United States of America, what so many Jewish immigrants at that time called "the Golden land."

Although Joseph advocated for the verity and motivational purity of his beloved father, I also appreciate the honesty with which he recounts the deeply personal details of the very stormy beginnings of ABMJ. With painstaking and heart wrenching pathos, Joseph describes the never-ending conflicts connected with the founding of the Mission.

According to Joseph the tensions experienced by Leopold Colin and his team of missionaries to the Jewish people came from a variety of sources. Joseph writes two lengthy chapters defending the innocence of the Jewish man who led his father to belief in Jesus as his Messiah. He presents a rare and very detailed account of how this man, Hermann Warszawiak was slandered and mistreated by the leadership of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian church, the church which sponsored his ministry on the lower East Side. It was because of the sponsorship of this



church that Warszawiak was supported in a ministry to Jewish immigrants to New York City which enabled him to meet Leopold Cohn in 1892. The conflict which erupted at the church, according to Joseph, caused the pastor, Reverend Jon Hall to have a nervous breakdown and end his career.

It seems that Warszawiak was accused of misusing funds and some other charges, which the Cohn's believed to be false. The Cohn's were very sensitive to what they deemed the antisemitic proclivity of many of Fundamentalist Protestants who also often supported their ministries. This was a typical sensitivity of European Jewish immigrants at the time—a basic mistrust of non-Jews. Cohn came from an area of Europe where Jewish people were often persecuted and had their rights restricted by alleged Christians, though not often Protestants.

After Leopold came to faith in Jesus, Warszawiak secured a scholarship for Leopold to study in Scotland, at the New College Edinburgh. Upon Leopold's return to Brooklyn after studying, Leopold established a ministry in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn and affiliated with the North American Baptists. However, as the story unfolds as told by Joseph, some of the Baptist leaders turned against his father. Whereas Leopold continued to have a number of friends among the Baptist Fundamentalists, he took the ministry independent. The fight between Cohn and the Baptists had to do with some large financial gift given to Leopold.

Again, this is the way Joseph understood the situation, and in part this mutual mistrust grew out of a basic alienation between Rabbi Cohn and the Christians who he felt did not really like Jewish people and tried to control his work and funding. It is remarkable that both father and son had a relationship with fellow Christians that was constantly tainted by conflict and mistrust.

Yet, in the midst of these uncomfortable relationships, the



Cohns had some very influential supporters among the Baptists and within the growing fundamentalist movement growing across the United States during these early decades of the 20th century. This movement was also influenced by an early form of dispensational theology, which was almost synonymous with a premillennial eschatology and thereby theologically favorable to the Jewish people. Sometimes, these same fundamentalists were more open to early 20th century conspiracy theories and the growing isolationism within the United States at that time. The anecdotal reporting of Joseph reflects the complex social/political and even racial milieu in which the ABMJ grew as an organization.

The Cohns lived an embattled existence. This included Leopold and Joseph's relationships with local churches which were so often fraught with difficulty. The Cohns never felt they quite accepted as equals because they were Jewish. Joseph wrote page after page describing how he and his father were constantly fighting to get a seat at the table among other Christian leaders in the greater New York area.

The Cohns were often fighting with other missionaries to the Jewish people as well. There was small group of Jewish missionaries to the Jewish people, like them, whom the father mentored and helped in their ministerial development. These men accused Leopold of fraud and immoral behavior.

The conflict grew to such a degree that it landed in the secular Brooklyn courts and were tried as well in the court of public opinion. The Brooklyn Eagle covered these trials at the courthouse between Leopold and the other missionaries to the Jewish people. In the end, Leopold sued these gentlemen for defamation of character, and after settlement the court case was dropped.

There were many battles fought by father and son with



Christians, Jewish believers in Jesus, and, of course, with the non-believing Jewish community who, according to Joseph, constantly sought ways to denigrate the character of his father and the authenticity of his Rabbinic qualifications, ultimately attempting to neutralize the efforts of the ABMJ.

Joseph details these battles in the most excruciating manner in *I Have Fought a Good Fight*. He seemed to feel that he was always on the edge of legitimacy and, like his father, constantly felt that he had to prove himself. These efforts to prove their integrity was endemic to the legacy of both Leopold and Joseph.

GROWTH AND SOPHISTICATION

On the other hand, because of faithful supporters like Francis Huntley of Rochester New York, an early and generous Cohn benefactor and surrogate mother to Joseph, and other friends who were national leaders within the greater fundamentalist movement across United States, the Mission stabilized. It changed its name to the Williamsburg Mission to the Jews and moved into a well-appointed facility in the heart of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. This began a slow climb to greater influence, staffing, funding, and success as a Mission.

A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

Joseph Cohen reflects upon the growth of the Mission in chapter 19 of *I Have Fought a Good Fight*,

the work had now grown to a size far beyond my father's early dreams. The old name, the Williamsburg Mission to the Jews, no longer reflected properly the ever-increasing outreach of the mission. Branches and other cities have begun to be open



up. These brethren have found the Lord within the plaster walls of 27 Throop Avenue (in Williamsburg, Brooklyn) . . . we have come to be noticed as having the finest and most competent staff of Jewish Christian missionaries in all the world.

Joseph was proud of his staff of workers who were primarily Jewish believers in Jesus, and many had come to faith and even grew up within the ABMJ family.

The Holocaust period was especially stressful for the European born Cohns, and the outreach, benevolence, and care extended to Jewish people suffering before, during, and after the Holocaust became perhaps one of the high points of Joseph's life and ministry. Leopold died before it happened in 1937. Joseph made many trips to war torn Europe, which he describes in the book, trying to help Jewish believers in particular escape the terrible and tumultuous times of the Holocaust.

Joseph then goes on to mention many of the workers who have served with Chosen People for many years. One of the major future-oriented steps Joseph took was to purchase a building in Manhattan, as the mission was growing more and more International. He bought a building on E. 54th St. in New York City, which for many reasons did not work out well, and the facility needed to be sold before the Mission occupied the space. Instead, the ABMJ purchase the property at 236 W. 72nd St., New York City for \$65,000 in cash. Cohn sold the E. 54th St. building and earned \$40,000 dollars profit on the sale which meant that the W. 72nd St. building cost only \$25,000.

Joseph writes about the success of the ministry in the new building on the Westside, "but from the very day we opened until the present hour the place has been one beehive of activity. We have made an impression on the Jewish population all about us," (IHFAGF p.311).



Joseph further comments,

And now here we come to the end of the story. The mission had become firmly established, deeply ingrained in the hearts of thousands of the Lord's people from coast-to-coast, though we never sent out any letters begging for money. All the gifts that come to us come because the Lord moved upon the heart of the individual givers to sit down and according to their free will and accord and send their gifts to us.

Joseph concludes, "we lay down our pen; it has not been an easy task to write these memoirs; but now they are written and to God we leave the results."

CONCLUSION

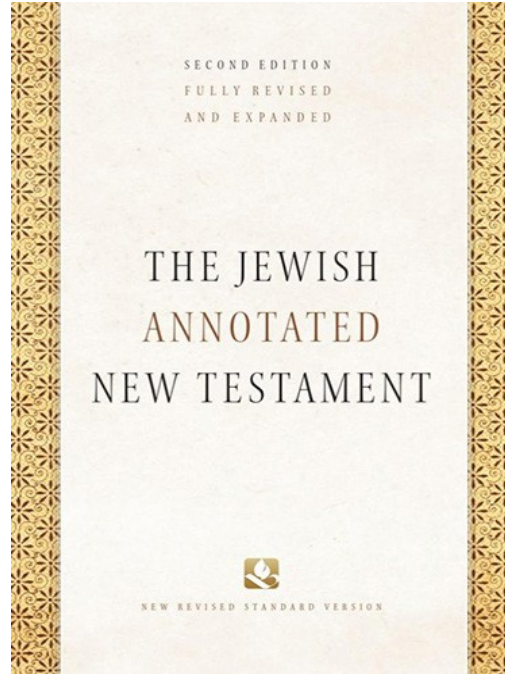
Joseph's life and ministry, as his father's, was steeped in hardship and conflict and reflects one battle after another. Clearly, Joseph believes it was worth it! He summarizes the embattled nature of their mission to the Jewish people when he writes,

As Mr. Irwin Linton, president of our Board of Directors, has often said, 'the American Board . . . thrives on persecution' . . . and never has anything truer been said; for literally our mission has always come out from under the tidal waves of persecution more strongly entrenched in the hearts of its supporters than ever before. From the first day that my father opened a little renovated horse stable in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, even to the present hour, there's hardly been a day and it did not produce its particular harvest of persecution, (IHFAGF p. 200).

Once again, it is clear that the title of the book *I Have Fought a Good Fight*, from the verse in Paul's second letter to his disciple Timothy summarizes the ministry of both Leopold Cohen and his son Joseph who believed the fight was worth it.



I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing, (2 Timothy 4:7-8).



Amy-Jill Levine & Marc Zvi Brettler.
The Jewish Annotated New Testament.
OUP USA, 2nd edition (2017)
pp. 856 pages

Editor's Note:

The following reviews consist of essays included in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler. They represent some of the current thinking among Jewish scholars about the New Testament and the life of Jesus. The concluding review addresses one of Dr. Levine's books, *The Misunderstood Jew*.



“Jewish Movements in the New Testament”
by Daniel R. Schwartz

Review by Richard Flashman

Daniel R. Schwartz (born 1952) is a professor of Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research focuses on Jewish history in the Second Temple period. The topic of his article is clearly in the area of his expertise.

The author notes the main Jewish sects (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and the Sicarii/Zealots) and summarizes his thesis on the philosophical tension between them:

“Could, and should being Jewish remain natural, a product of one’s birth – something most appropriate to life in Judea? Or was it, rather, something to be undertaken deliberately – an orientation more appropriate to a Diaspora situation, in which the geographical, social, cultural, and linguistic context do not define an individual as Jewish?” (615)

Schwartz asserts that the Sadducees, Essenes and anti-Roman rebels come out of the priestly/natural, nationalistic school of thought. Being Jewish is the result of one’s birth and ethnicity, the *Sons of Aaron/Priesthood* being a defining expression of this conviction. Being Jewish is something that you *are* (or *are not*), not something you *decide* to be. For example, the so called “proselytes” (Gk. *allogenes*) were not allowed in the inner courts of the Temple. They were seen as a distinct (perhaps inferior) group.

By contrast, Pharisees and Hellenistic Judaism represent the idea of Judaism as a more transcultural religious expression based on the willful decisions of the individual. The Pharisees were committed to the precise understanding and application of the Torah/TaNaKh, while the Sadducees were committed



to the Temple/Sacrificial system and priestly rituals. While the Essenes had major problems with the Sadducees, they too were preoccupied with the priestly aspects of Jewish life and practice. For the Sadducees and especially the Essenes, birth and location were the central elements of Jewish identity; for the Pharisees and especially the Hellenistic Jews it was more a matter of values and commitments. (618)

But then the author admits that all the various New Testament era Jewish sects had more mixed and nuanced views and practices than previously indicated. For example, Schwartz asserts that the Essenes had more universalistic categories in their belief system (e.g. Sons of Light and Darkness) and it's out of the tension between these universalist and naturalist world views that John the Baptist possibly emerges with a distinctly un-nationalistic prophetic message. (Mt.3:9)

Also, according to Schwartz, the Pharisees were not as dogmatic about the role of *choice* in the creation of Jewish identity as he had led us to believe. *Birth* was not unimportant to Pharisees after all. It should be noted that even John the Baptist thought that it was on their minds, as he warned the Sadducees *and the Pharisees* not to say to themselves "we have Abraham as our Father..." (Mt.3:9).

After following the author's arguments carefully for 90% of the article, he seems to (at least partially) overturn his own premises in the last 10%. The reader could be understandably confused by all this. One is left to wonder how sound the author's original premise was.

And then of course there was Jesus, influenced as he was (according to the author) by the anti-Roman rebels of the Galilee region (Lu.13:1; Acts 5:37) and recognized by Pilate as a rebel leader and handled as such by him (putting him to death). And then there is the evidence of his disciples who despite Jesus social



and ethical teaching were expecting him to crush the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel (Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6-8).

These and other conclusions seem to ignore the testimony of the New Testament itself, which clearly depicts Jesus as not leading a rebellion (Lu.22:52,53); Pilate clearly understanding that reality (Mk.15:6-14) and his disciples not grasping his mission. (Lu.18:34)

All the above requires handling the New Testament as one would any other credible ancient source. That is to say, with special care not to allow one's presuppositions to govern one's conclusions. However, in this case, the author seems to indicate his bias early on in the article when, despite evidence to the contrary from Josephus and rabbinic literature, he cast doubt on the New Testament depiction of the resurrection dispute between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Why?

In Schwartz's words, "because Luke's focus (on resurrection) corresponds so well to the interests of Christian readers we must wonder how central the issue was for the sects themselves." (615) So we, the readers, are left to wonder if the author is following the evidence (Josephus, rabbinic literature and the New Testament) or simply allowing his own bias to guide him to his predetermined conclusions.

**“Logos, a Jewish Word:
John's Prologue as Midrash” by Daniel Boyarin**

Reviewed by Robert Walter

In his short essay, “Logos, a Jewish Word: John's Prologue as Midrash,” Daniel Boyarin sets out to demonstrate how, based on Second Temple Jewish sources, the opening five verses of John's Gospel are not a departure from Jewish thought or belief,



but rather serve as an example of early Jewish midrash. He achieves this goal by relying heavily on Philo of Alexandria, the use of *Memra* in the Targumim, and laying out the formula for midrashic interpretation. In doing so, Boyarin shows how John's prologue meets the criteria.

Boyarin begins with the assertion that monotheistic, Second Temple Jewish communities would have been comfortable with the idea of a second, visible God communicating the divine will on occasion. Often this would be designated as the *Logos* (Word) or *Sophia* (Wisdom) in Greek, or *Memra* (Word) in Aramaic. Philo would use *Logos* without qualification, as if it was understood by his audience that the visible and perceivable "Word" of God had the ability to create, reveal, and redeem—attributes and actions reserved for the invisible God. This *Logos* was part of God but also a separate being, "neither uncreated by God, nor created by you, but midway between the two extremes, a surety to both sides" (546).

For Philo, the idea of *Logos*, *Memra*, and *Wisdom* were synthesized and viewed as referring to the same being. Boyarin lists a number of biblical (Prov. 8:22-31) and intertestamental (Sirach 24:1-34) passages that served as the basis of this "second power in heaven," but the clearest evidence of the personification is found in the use of *Memra* in the Aramaic paraphrastic translations of the Old Testament, the Targumim. There we find the Word of God creating (Gen. 1:3), speaking to humans (Gen. 3:8), revealing the Divine Self (Gen. 18:1), punishing the wicked (Gen. 19:24), saving Israel (Ex. 17:21), and redeeming (Deut 32:39). While the later rabbinic community would reject the "heresy of the two powers in heaven," Boyarin points out that "before the rabbis, contemporaneously with them, and even among them, there were many Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora who held on to a version of monotheistic theology that



could accommodate this divine figure linking heaven and earth” (547.) He also points out that in the first and second century CE, *Memra* was “an actual divine entity functioning as a mediator” (547).

At this point we are introduced to the suggestion that John constructs his prologue with the pieces laid before us. One of the most helpful insights from Boyarin is his brief explanation of midrashic interpretation. A midrash is a homily on a portion of the Torah that uses texts from the Prophets or Writings as the “framework of ideas and language,” (548) to interpret the portion from the Torah. For the early Jewish audience, this would demonstrate the intertextual consistency of entire Tanakh, and purport the idea that the later portions of Scripture are a form “interpretation of the Five Books of Moses” (548). Along these lines, John 1:1-5 would be an example of a midrash on Genesis 1:1 and the creation account, with Proverbs 8:22-31 as the interpretive framework. John used “Word” rather than “Wisdom” because the guiding passage was Genesis 1 where God “said” let there be light. John uses this to demonstrate the identity of Jesus as present at creation, and also introduces themes that focus on his incarnation. Boyarin closes his article by suggesting that it is only at John 1:14 when “the Word became flesh,” that John departs from the teaching of the synagogue, but asserts that nonetheless John is writing within a thoroughly Jewish framework.

Indeed, Boyarin’s short essay provides sufficient evidence for the reader to gain a greater understanding of John’s methods and view of Jesus as the embodiment of God’s Word and Wisdom, and that this was not a foreign idea or concept in the early Jewish world.



“Judaizers, Jewish Christians, and Others” by
Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert

Reviewed by Daniel Nessim

In a perceptive and balanced article, Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert surveys the current consensus on key issues that put the early Jesus movement in its religious context. The bulk of the text deals with the ambiguities in labeling the Jewish members of the early Jesus movement.

Beginning with a discussion on the “so-called parting of the ways,” Fonrobert points out the complexity of the process that resulted in “two distinct and separate phenomena.” This process, if it can be called that, did not reach its *terminus ad quem* in the first or second century as previously supposed, but somewhere between the third and eighth centuries, at the end of Late Antiquity. Of particular concern, is how did the later boundaries between Judaism and Christianity form, and where do we find their origin?

In the midst of this boundary formation, various “hybrid” groups variously termed as Jewish Christian, Christian Jewish, minim, or Judaizers are treated. As she points out, none of these terms would have been recognizable by their subjects, most being contrived either for polemical or scholarly purposes.

In fact, there is a certain “messiness” which she speaks of, as the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles in the movement were not always clear. In Antioch, this was epitomized in the conflict between Peter and Paul noted in Gal. 2, which raises the issue of Judaizing – the encouraging of Gentiles to “behave or live as Jews.”

Following the modern consensus, Fonrobert hereafter uses the term “Jewish Christian” for Jewish groups, as it is “more



straight forward.” She notes that this too raises questions, as to whether “Jewish” is referent to ethnic identity, Jewish praxis, or identity recognition by other Jews. Rightly, Fonrobert concludes from this that there is no clear delineation between Christianity and Judaism at this time, with Jewish Christianity bridging the gap, yet atrophying over time. Rather, it is forces of institutionalization both within Judaism and Christianity that calcified the boundaries between the two.

It is possible, however, that Fonrobert does not place early Christianity in its Jewish context firmly enough. This is reflected in the use of the term “Jewish Christian” rather than “Christian Jew.” While the first suggests that Jewishness is secondary to Christian identity, the latter suggests the reverse. This is the thrust of an article by Mark Kinzer on the “Nature of Messianic Judaism,” which puts the same issue in a modern context.

To say that in the early Jesus movement, Jewish disciples considered themselves as primarily Christian and secondarily Jewish is an anachronism. It was precisely the claim that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah that persuaded Jews to believe in him as an expression of their very faith in the God of Israel and the epitome of their eschatological hopes for the salvation of the Jewish people. In the context of Messianic Jewish studies, the very term “Messianic Jewish” rather than “Jewish Messianic” reflects this same perspective in the modern framework. Notably, the term “Christian Judaism” did not originate with Messianic Jews. Rather it is the likes of Marcello del Verme and David Sim who have argued for its use.

Use of the term Christian Judaism would signal that as the boundaries were being negotiated, the beginnings of the process were indeed to be found in places such as Antioch, but Jews in the nascent movement were far from hybrids.



“Midrash and Parables in the New Testament”
by David Stern

Reviewed by Daniel Nessim

As David Stern asserts, midrash touches directly on the “Jewishness” of the New Testament, although his assertion that it does so more than any other topic could be reframed. As he defines it, midrash both refers to the activity of seeking out the meaning of Scripture, and the results of that enquiry. Collections of midrashim began at the end of the third century, thus two centuries after the New Testament.

According to Stern, midrash is generally defined by its use in early rabbinic literature, and reflects a form of enquiry and exposition of the Hebrew Bible common to Jews in the Second Temple period through to the fifth century. It should be no surprise then that early Jewish followers of Jesus employed the same approach to, and assumptions about, Scripture and the use of the form as other Jews. This included the belief that the true significance of a text was “by definition cryptic.” In other words, midrash often involves the seeking out of a deeper, true, meaning underlying the text.

To substantiate this approach, Stern gives two examples of midrashic “fulfillment narrative.” These are Matt 2:15’s explanation that Jesus’ return from Egypt fulfilled Hos 11:1, and the virgin birth narrative of Matt 1:22–23 as fulfillment of Isa 7:14 (based on the LXX translation of the Hebrew ‘almah). These fulfillment narratives are paired by Stern with rabbinic midrash that used the same literary-exegetical form and a similar “hyper-literal” interpretive approach. Thus, in the rabbinic example Lam 2:12 was given an application as being fulfilled in a very specific time and place. The difference between the



Matthean and rabbinic midrash, Stern argues, is that the Christian narratives serve to “authorize their theology and understanding of scripture” whereas the rabbinic fulfillment narratives serve to show that the catastrophes that befell the Jews were “part of a larger divine plan that continues to govern Israel’s destiny.”

This drawing of boundaries in the context of Christian – rabbinic comparison culminates in the Jesus’ telling parable (or mashal) of the wicked tenants in Matt. 21:33–42, which includes the interpretive nimshal from Psalm 118:22–23 “the stone which the builders rejected.” Because of the mostly supersessionist cast this mashal has been given in Christian interpretations, the passage is not only the premier example of a midrashic form in the Gospels, but also of importance to Christian–Jewish relations.

Stern’s relation of the parable to the very similar Sifre Deut. 312 is an excellent example of how Jesus’ parable fits into a common Jewish pattern. Even more so, with the Gospel’s nimshal explaining the parable, it may be “our earliest example of the literary-exegetical form that becomes so prevalent in rabbinic midrash.”

Reflecting on Stern’s quite defensible assertion that this is the only Gospel mashal with a nimshal, echoes of the mashal–nimshal pattern do occur elsewhere. For example, Matt 13, which begins with Jesus’ mashal of the four types of soil is notable as the disciples request clarification on it. The mashal itself reflects a common four-fold pattern found in later rabbinic literature, as with the four types of sons in the Passover haggadah and the four types of people, four types of donors, four types of students, etc. found in Avot 5.13–18. Here Jesus does not directly use a nimshal to explain the mashal but in response to the disciples in Matt 13:14–15, quotes Isaiah 6:9–10 in order to explain specifically why he does not. Here, we may suppose, is a quotation much like a nimshal to explain the absence of a nimshal. The disciples,



holding a justified expectation for some form of clarification of the mashal, as was customary, were given a clarification to explain its absence.

Stern's excellent lesson in Midrash and Parables thus leads the reader to consider the even more pervasively Jewish character of Midrash and Parables found in the New Testament.

“Jewish Responses to Believers in Jesus” by Claudia Setzer

Reviewed by Richard Flashman

Claudia Setzer is a Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College in Riverdale, NY. Dr. Setzer's books and articles focus on social relations between Jews and early Christians, and is thus highly qualified to write on this topic.

The main idea in Dr. Setzer article seems to be that while relations were not perfect, early Jewish believers in Jesus and early Jewish non-believers in Jesus existed together in the same communities and were generally tolerant of each other. (732)

This may seem surprising to many who read the New Testament accounts of the tension and outright persecution of the Jewish believers in Jesus by the Jewish religious establishment in the early days of the Messianic Jewish movement. Beginning in the early days of Jesus ministry, the Gospel's portray a swift and even murderous opposition from the established religious leadership toward Jesus' ministry (Mk. 2:1-3:6), leading to his crucifixion by the Romans at the urging of the Jewish religious leadership (Mk. 15:1-15; etc.).

As Jesus predicted, sometimes violent opposition toward the Messianic movement would continue after his death and



resurrection (Mt.10:17-25; John 15: 18-25; etc.). These instances include Peter and John dragged before the Sanhedrin and flogged (only saved from death by the intervention of Gamaliel - Acts 5:33-40). Then Stephen is martyred, which leads to what the Luke calls “a great persecution” against the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, who in turn flee for their lives to Judea, Samaria and even as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch in Syria (Acts 8:1; 11:19).

This event even propels Saul of Tarsus to begin to destroy the Messianic community, going from house to house, dragging off men and women and putting them into prison (Acts 8:3). After Saul encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus and responds to his calling to carry Jesus’ name to Gentiles and Jews, Luke records that he faced Jewish opposition and hatred almost everywhere there was a Jewish community.

All this does not sound very tolerant. But the scriptural record is not a problem for Setzer’s thesis, for she believes Acts to be, “second century imaginings of church origins, probably a mix of memory and invention.” (730) But this is a decidedly minority view among scholars. Most are persuaded that the “we” statements from the author of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16), the abrupt ending of Acts (with no mention of Paul’s release, Nero’s persecution, the Jewish Revolt and the Temple’s destruction), and the overwhelming, almost unanimous external testimony from ancient witnesses date Lukan authorship in the first century.

Setzer also has some unusual interpretations of the New Testament record. For example, she speculates that Saul’s violent persecution of the church (Acts 8:3) was not so much because Jewish religious leaders (including Saul at the time) felt threatened by Jesus and the Messianic movement, but rather as a response to the trouble the Jewish Jesus followers created



for other Jewish community members by hailing as King one executed by Rome, evangelizing Gentiles and alienating them from the gods of their family or state, promoting celibacy, or proclaiming a destabilizing, imminent eschatology. (731) Setzer's efforts to build a case for her alternative interpretations of the New Testament witness are unconvincing. Setzer's concluding argument is one from silence. Tolerant people don't say much about their tolerance. (732)

To be fair, there are examples of Jewish tolerance toward the followers of Jesus embedded in the New Testament (although Setzer views these scenes as not necessarily historical). (732) No doubt, there were traditional Jews who spoke out against injustice (as at the stoning of James), advised benign neglect (like Gamaliel), identified with certain Messianic beliefs (like the Pharisees about the resurrection of the dead) and did not bother to send a report to Rome on Paul (as at the end of Acts). But exceptions do not make a rule. A respectful reading of all the phenomena (and not just the data one likes) will, in this reviewer's opinion, lead the reader to conclude that in the early years of the Jesus movement, there existed significant tension between Messianic Jews and traditional Jewish leadership.

“Jesus in Modern Jewish Thought”
by Susannah Heschel

Reviewed by Alan Shore

Daughter of Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), one of the twentieth century's most influential Jewish religious thinkers, Susannah Heschel, Eli Black professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College, is a formidable scholar in her own right. In her short essay in *The Annotated Jewish New Testament*, “Jesus



in Modern Jewish Thought,” Heschel manages to distill decades of her rigorous scholarship into a coherent, informative overview of her topic. The trajectory she follows is roughly this: after centuries of being forced to endure hateful and wildly inaccurate characterizations of Judaism on the part of Christian bible scholars and theologians, modernity gave Jewish scholars the opportunity to raise a voice with which to respond. The question was, who would be willing to listen? Although their perceptions about where to locate Jesus in the multifarious world of first century Judaism differed wildly from one another, they were united in two important respects. The first is that it is impossible to understand Jesus apart from the context of the Jewish world of which he was a part.

In “Reversing the Gaze,” the introductory chapter of her book, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, Heschel makes creative use of the image of Edouard Manet’s nude portrait, *Olympia* which, when exhibited in Paris in 1865, caused an uproar because rather than being modestly averted, the gaze of the figure appeared to be challenging the observer. Heschel likens this reversal to the work of Abraham Geiger and other scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) who spoke for a Judaism that had been for centuries interrogated by Christianity without the ability to respond. Now, ironically, enlisting the tools of modern historiography employed by Christian scholars, they brought to bear their knowledge of Jesus’ Jewish world to challenge the narrative of Christian scholarship by articulating a Jewish counter history that restored and emphasized Jesus’ Jewish identity. This not only places the Jew at the table of Western civilization, but in the seat of honor.

A second element that united, what has come to be called, “the Jewish reclamation of Jesus” is that whatever else Jewish scholarship proclaimed him to be (Zionist, mystic, religious



reformer, political revolutionary, et. al.), he was emphatically *not* the Savior that Christianity took him to be. By attempting to wrench apart the “Jesus of history” from the “Jesus of faith,” these early Jewish New Testament scholars were, for their own purposes, making common cause with liberal Christian theologians who had already wandered down that path.

As Heschel goes on to point out, a modern reconsideration of Jesus on the part of Jews was not confined to the ivory tower, singling out poet Uri Zvi Greenberg and Marc Chagall as two important Jewish artists who sought to enlist a non-Christian, Jewish Jesus as a figure of Jewish suffering and martyrdom. She also references author Sholem Asch, whose so-called “Christological trilogy” of novels gave his avid Christian reading audience a Jewish Jesus who was close enough to the Gospel’s Redeemer to make him a best-selling writer while he also infuriated many Jewish critics along the way.

As she continues, Heschel notes later scholars who built upon this earlier work in the 1960s and 70s, such as Schalom ben-Chorin, Pinchas Lapide, David Flusser, and Samuel Sandmel, all of whom in one way or another seek to situate Jesus in the world of Second Temple Judaism. She completes her catalogue with a “Third quest” list that includes Geza Vermes, Jacob Neusner, Paula Fredericksen, and Amy-Jill Levine. One name that is conspicuously absent, in the reviewer’s opinion, is that of Daniel Boyarin. Although *The JANT* was published some years before Boyarin’s notable *The Jewish Gospels*, his earlier works such as *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (1999) and *Border Lines* (2004) make him difficult to ignore. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig also deserved at least passing mention.

These quibbles aside, Heschel covers a remarkable amount of ground in a very short space and provides ample reason to



examine her own work more closely. She also challenged us to join the complex dance around Jesus that Jewish scholars continue to choreograph – now often in true partnership with their Christian counterparts.

“The Misunderstood Jew:
The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus”
by Amy-Jill Levine

Reviewed by Simon Lissak

The quote “the mark of an educated mind is to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it” is often attributed to Aristotle. One might keep this in mind when reading Amy-Jill Levine’s book, which demonstrates what might be gained by an informed and considered exploration of traditionally unacceptable ideas within the Jewish community. For example, and one of the key ideas in her excellent book, is to show how the Jewishness of Jesus provides an excellent bridge to better Jewish-Christian dialogue.

As Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and practicing Orthodox Jew, Amy-Jill Levine knows her topic well and writes in an engaging and provocative style that is “easy to read, easy to understand, hard to ignore.”

This book is exciting for those of us who want to better understand how Jewish people see Jesus and to see him in his geographic, cultural and religious context. The surprise for us might be that in the process, our own subconscious presuppositions, false assumptions and religious blind spots may also be exposed.



Informed by the perspective supplied by her knowledgeable Judaism, Dr. Levine writes, “I did not have to read Matthew 2-7 to know that the rescued baby [Jesus] would take a trip to Egypt, cross water in a life changing experience, face temptation in the wilderness, ascend a mountain, and deliver comments on the Law- the pattern was already established in Shemot, the book of Exodus.”

Levine is convinced that interfaith conversations are essential if we are to break down the prejudice and enmity that has kept the church and synagogue apart for millennia. She wants to reframe the dialogue as “two siblings fighting over the parents’ legacy,” promoting well informed, passionate, engagement without fear or compromise. With typical wit and incisiveness, she writes “The day Jews and Christians agree on everything is the day Messiah comes, or comes back!”

The book provides us with numerous examples of how understanding Jesus’ Jewishness brings new life and greater depth to many well-known passages, such as Mark 7:19 and Matthew 13:45. Levine also shows how historic context enriches the meaning of these and many other texts.

We are expertly led through the early history of the Messianic movement and the church as the movement of Jesus followers transitioned from a Jewish sect to Gentile-dominated church. She also presents very painful difficult material showing how the Jewish people were mistreated by the church as it grew more Gentile to the point where Jewish people were generally labelled as “Christ Killers.”

Levine weaves together seven prevalent mis-perceptions of first-century Judaism, drawing the materials seamlessly from the New Testament, Old Testament and Rabbinic sources.

Finally, she takes us through an acrostic solution to promoting genuine and fearless inter-faith conversation. Literally working



from A-Z, she notes, for example, that the “A” standing for avoid making any statement that begins with the phrase “All Jews think...” She then continues down the line, with letters starting phrases encouraging Jews and Christians to read the Scriptures together in an interfaith setting, train ourselves to look at the one another’s tradition with generosity, and seek the good for the sake of friendly engagement and dialogue.

The book issues a clarion call to both Jews and Christians to restore Jesus’ language, society, culture, birthplace and religion while illustrating how interfaith dialogue has a central role to play in this process.

Dr. Levine states her purpose succinctly - “If the church and synagogue both could recognize their connection to Jesus, a Jewish prophet who spoke to [other] Jews, perhaps we’d be in a better place for understanding.”