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An Overview of Christian Hebraists through the Centuries

Zhava Glaser

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians in every era have recognized the value of studying the Hebrew Scriptures in their original languages. We refer to these individuals as “Christian Hebraists.” The command of these languages was initially solely the domain of the Jewish people. The earliest Christians were themselves Jewish, but as the numbers of Gentiles in the Church increased, some began to seek instruction in Hebrew from Jewish rabbis and what were referred to as “converts” – or Jewish believers in Jesus.

In the early Middle Ages, Jewish converts became a source of information about Talmudic teachings, which resulted in the censorship and burning of Jewish literary works. These newly understood Jewish writings were then used in proselytizing efforts by emerging monastic orders such as the Dominicans.



Meanwhile, with the rise of scholasticism in the 12th century, schools and universities began to include Hebrew in their curricula, with Roger Bacon in the 13th century and Cambridge University in the 14th advocating the study of Hebrew for other than missionary purposes. The Enlightenment brought about a new interest in the humanities, including the study of oriental languages. Hebrew was then considered, along with Latin and Greek, as one of the classical languages that deserved a place in academia. In subsequent centuries, Christian scholars spent lifetimes producing Hebrew lexicons and concordances for the benefit of students of Hebrew.

What follows is a quick chronological survey as an introduction to some of the better-known non-Jewish Christian Hebraists from the first to the nineteenth centuries. In our modern day, it is common for non-Jews to take an interest in Jewish culture and literature, including the Hebrew language, but the term “Christian Hebraists” is no longer used.



100-165 – Justin Martyr was an early Christian apologist whose *Dialogue with Trypho*, in which he argues with Trypho the Jew about the validity of Christianity, demonstrates his familiarity with Jewish thought and beliefs. In the Dialogue, as Trypho expresses his arguments, Justin brings forth proof that Jesus is the Messiah and disparages the Jews for their unbelief. In the course of the dialogue, Justin provides an insight into the varied beliefs of Jewish believers in the second century CE.¹

185-253 – Origen of Alexandria was a scholar who wrote on

1 Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church: Exploring the Formation of Early Christian Thought, Evangelical Ressourcement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 48–52, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip078/2007000485.html>.

Biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, textual criticism, and various branches of theology. Wanting to establish a reliable biblical text and having contact with rabbinic scholars, he produced the *Hexapla*, the first critical edition of the Hebrew Bible. The six columns of the *Hexapla* contained the original Hebrew, a Greek transliteration (the *Secunda*), as well as four Greek translations (Aquila of Sinope, Symmachus the Ebionite, a recension of the Septuagint, and Theodotion). The work itself has been lost, but survives in fragmentary quotes, and was the basis for Jerome's later translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin, which eventually became the Vulgate. Origen was tortured for his faith in 253 and died three years later from his injuries.²

260-339 – Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea and Greek historian of the early church, was a contemporary of Constantine and a participant in the Council of Nicaea. In addition to his many historical and theological writings, Eusebius wrote treatises (now lost) on the Greek equivalents of Hebrew nouns, the geography of Jerusalem, a plan of the Temple of Solomon, and a description of ancient Judea and the ten northern tribes.³

306-373 – Ephrem the Syrian was a composer of hymns who modeled his works after early rabbinic Judaism, as well as Greek and Mesopotamian traditions. Raised as a pagan, he became a Christian after his father evicted him from his home. He left a large number of commentaries and sermons which became influential in the Syrian churches, among which are a series of homilies on Jewish topics, including circumcision, the Passover, the Sabbath the Call of the Gentiles, Jesus the Messiah, and the Dispersion of Israel.⁴

2 See Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2002)

3 See Timothy David Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

4 See John Gwynn, ed., *The Life and Essential Writings of Ephraim the Syrian*, vol. 5, Desert Fathers Series (Revelation Insight Publishing Co., 2011),



c. 345-420 – Jerome is best known for creating a Latin translation of the Old Testament based on the Hebrew Bible rather than on the Septuagint. Arguing for the importance of *Hebraica Veritas*, the original Hebrew and Aramaic texts, he viewed the Septuagint as a translation, and not a revelation as some thought. Jerome learned Hebrew from Jewish teachers, moved to Jerusalem to improve his knowledge, and completed his translation in a monastery in Bethlehem. Jerome’s translation became the basis for the Vulgate, which was declared in 1546 by the Council of Trent to be the authoritative version to be used by the Catholic church.⁵

1079-1142 – Peter Abelard was a French scholastic philosopher and theologian who wrote “*Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*,” an apology for Christianity. There, he advocates for tolerance toward the Jews, arguing that their oppression was responsible for their limitation to money-lending activities. Although he claims to know Hebrew and complains his contemporaries did not have sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew language, there is no evidence that he himself knew the language. His wife, Héloïse d’Argenteuil, however, was renowned for her command of Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.⁶

c. 1100-1175 – Andrew of St. Victor, part of the School of Hugh of St. Victor, was a scholastic innovator who consulted Jewish sources to determine the *pshat*, or literal interpretation

https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Life_and_Essential_Writings_of_Ephraim/OjY5CwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=ephrem+the+syrian&printsec=frontcover; See also “Philip Schaff: NPNF-213. Gregory the Great (II), Ephraim Syrus, Aphrahat - Christian Classics Ethereal Library,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213/npnf213.iii.iii.iii.html>.

5 Paul B. Decock, “Jerome’s Turn to the Hebraica Veritas and His Rejection of the Traditional View of the Septuagint,” *Neotestamentica* 42, no. 2 (2008): 205–22.

6 Aryeh Grabois, “The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century,” *Speculum* 50, no. 4 (October 1975): 618, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2855470>.

of Old Testament passages. By turning to the Jewish exegetical tradition in Rashi, Kimchi, and others, his aim was to critically rework and supplement Jerome's Bible translation.⁷

1219-1292 – Roger Bacon was the first English philosopher and scholar who advocated the study of Hebrew fully two centuries before it gained acceptance in Europe. He was preceded in his interest in the language by the Venerable Bede (673-735) and Alcuin (735-804), but these merely referred to Hebrew in passing, and did not show an extensive knowledge of the language. The authoritative Bible at the time was the Latin version. Bacon believed it was full of errors, and his declared goal was to translate accurately the Old Testament from the original language, without the many errors which he believed plagued the current translation. Unusual for his time, Bacon was not in favor of “converting the Jews.” He turned to contemporary Jews to learn the Hebrew language and did not look disparagingly at Jewish contemporaries, nor at the Jews who lived at the time of Christ.⁸

c. 1220-1284 – Ramón Martí was a Dominican friar selected by his order to study Jewish writings to the end that any anti-Christian passages might be censored. After fifteen years of immersing himself and his team of Dominican scholars in rabbinic writings, he concluded that passages in the Talmud could be used to demonstrate that the Jewish Messiah had already come. He

7 See Frans van Liere, “Andrew of St. Victor, Jerome, and the Jews: Biblical Scholarship in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,” in Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman, Eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59-75,” in *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman (Leiden: Brill, 2005); See also Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995), <http://0-www.netLibrary.com.library.scad.edu/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=70813>.

8 S. A. Hirsch, “Early English Hebraists. Roger Bacon and His Predecessors,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 1 (1899): 34–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1450570>.



compiled his observations into the Latin work, *Pugio Fidei*, a comprehensive missionizing manual which became the chief source for Dominican polemics. Martí quoted rabbinic sources in Hebrew and Aramaic, demonstrating familiarity with the Talmud and Midrash, and buttressing his arguments with quotes from rabbinic authorities such as Rashi, Maimonides, ibn Ezra and Kimchi. Martí's efforts reflect the new Dominican missionizing strategy, proving to the Jews from their own literature that the Messiah had already come, and anticipating that they would recognize that it was Jesus.⁹

1455-1522 – Johannes Reuchlin was a German Catholic Greek and Hebrew scholar, whose life's focus was to advance the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. As he was preparing for a career as a Greek lecturer in a university, he met Pico della Mirandola in Italy and became intrigued with his kabbalistic teachings. While seeking a teaching position, he learned Hebrew from a Jewish physician and continued to seek out Jewish instructors in the language. Though he was never employed in a university,¹⁰ he taught Hebrew to private students through materials of his own making. His interest in Hebrew was for the purpose of reforming preaching in the church. For this, he looked to the grammatical and exegetical tradition of David Kimchi and other medieval rabbis.

This was a radical departure from his contemporaries, such as Johannes Pfefferkorn, who argued that to achieve the conversion of the Jews, it was necessary to take away their books.¹¹ To

9 See Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft0w1003jg>; See also Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

10 In 1518, Reuchlin was appointed professor of Hebrew and Greek at Wittenberg, but sent Melancthon, his nephew, in his place.

11 See Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Hess, eds., *Revealing the Secrets of the Jews: Johannes Pfefferkorn and Christian Writings about Jewish Life and*

counter this argument, Reuchlin attempted to show that very few Jewish books maligned Christianity, while the majority were necessary for Jewish worship, which was legal according to papal and imperial law.¹² Some scholars have proposed that Luther's statement in his commentary on Galatians that justification by faith was the "true Kabbalah" may reflect Reuchlin's influence.¹³

1483-1549 – Daniel Bomberg was one of the earliest printers of Hebrew books and the first non-Jew to print them. His interest in Hebrew printing began when he met Augustinian friar Felix Pratensis, a Jewish convert. In 1517, his first Hebrew project was the *Mikraot Gedolot*, which was printed with the approval of Pope Leo X on the condition that the printing would be supervised by Pratensis. Although he was opposed to censorship, he was very cautious of printing anything that would be offensive to Christianity. In this and other Hebrew publishing projects, Bomberg consulted heavily with Jewish scholars and rabbis, as well as converts.

Bomberg was the first to publish a complete Babylonian Talmud, also with the approval of Pope Leo X. Bomberg's layout of the Talmud was modeled on that created by Joshua Solomon Soncino and is still the format used in Talmud publishing today. Bomberg was also the first to print chapters and verses in a printed Hebrew Bible, including Hebrew numbers in every fifth verse. In addition to the above publications, he also printed about 200 other Jewish works, including siddurim, codes of law,

Literature in Early Modern Europe (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), <https://www.worldcat.org/title/987936637>; See also Frank L. Herz, "Johannes Reuchlin's 'Opinion on Jewish Literature', a Landmark on the Road to Toleration." (Southbury, CT: publisher not identified., 1978), <http://digital.cjh.org:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=429030>.

12 David H. Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, Reprint edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

13 See *Philosophia Symbolica: Johann Reuchlin and the Kabbalah* (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2005).



commentaries, books on philosophy and ethics, and responsa.¹⁴

1509-1564 – John Calvin is not often counted among Christian Hebraists, but the Hebrew language had considerable influence on his life. His cousin, Robert Olivetan, who influenced Calvin during his stay in Paris from 1530-1533, was the first reformer to publish a French translation of the Hebrew Bible. While in Basel in 1533, Calvin studied with Simon Grynaeus, a noted Christian Hebraist. And in Geneva, from 1538-1541, he continued his Hebrew studies with Wolfgang Capito and Martin Bucer. When Calvin began an academy in Geneva, he established a Chair of Hebrew and appointed as principal Theodor Beza, a promoter of Hebrew studies and admirer of Johannes Reuchlin. We know that Calvin had contact with contemporary Jews as well, particularly Jewish convert Immanuel Tremellius, whom he supported in obtaining a teaching position. All of these no doubt influenced Calvin's attitude toward Biblical Jews, which was significantly more positive than that of his contemporaries.¹⁵

1564-1629 – Johannes Buxtorf, known by the title “Master of the Rabbis,” was a professor of Hebrew for thirty-nine years at the University of Basel. His interest in Hebraica went beyond understanding the Bible, reaching into rabbinics and early modern German Jewish culture and society. His volume, *De Synagoga Judaica*, first published in 1603, relates in detail the customs and traditions of German Jewish society. His correspondence, archived at the University of Basel, shows that he had cordial

14 See David Werner Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy; Being Chapters in the History of the Hebrew Printing Press* (Philadelphia: J. H. Greenstone, 1909), <http://archive.org/details/cu31924029498213>; See also Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*. (Philadelphia: U Penn, 2007), 139; and George Foot Moore, “The Vulgate Chapters and Numbered Verses in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, January 1, 1893.

15 Pablo Kirtchuk, “Hebrew in the Universities,” 2011, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00639142>.

relationships with Jewish contemporaries, consulting them on matters of Jewish customs and ceremonial law. He wrote the *Biblia Hebraica cum paraphrasi Chaldaica et commentariis rabbinorum*, which contains rabbinic commentaries and Aramaic passages from the Targums, showing his extensive knowledge of rabbinics as well as the Hebrew language.¹⁶

1581-1617 – Christoph Helwig was a German linguist and theologian, a professor of Greek and Oriental languages at the University of Giessen. He believed that knowledge of Hebrew was essential for a correct understanding of the Old Testament. To help with this goal, in 1608, he published a Hebrew grammar, the *Compendiosa Institutio Linguae Ebraicae*, in which he tried to make Hebrew accessible to students by using summaries, tables, and simplified explanations. He saw Jews as curiosities, as can be seen in his *Jüdische Historien*, the complete title of which reads “Jewish stories or wondrous Talmudic-Rabbinic legends that are read by the Jews as truthful and sacred stories on their Sabbaths and holidays: from them can be seen the superstition and fabulist works of this obstinate people: from their own books produced in German print.” His stated goal in writing this was to show that Christianity was superior to Judaism.¹⁷

1602-1675 – John Lightfoot, Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, was one of the first Christian scholars to call attention to the importance of understanding the Talmud in New Testament interpretation. He applied rabbinic learning to his exegesis of the New Testament, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudical exercitations upon the Gospels, the Acts, some*

16 Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Brill, 1996).

17 Nathanael Riemer, “The Christian Hebraist Christoph Helwig (1581–1617) and His Rendering of Jewish Stories in (His Work) *Jüdische Historien*,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 6, no. 1 (2012): 71–104, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187247112X637560>.



chapters of *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. He also wrote commentaries on other New Testament books. Utilizing his knowledge of rabbinics, in 1650 he wrote *The Temple, especially as it stood in the Days of our Saviour*. In addition, Lightfoot revised the Samaritan version of Brian Walton's 1657 Polyglot Bible.¹⁸

1633-1705 – Johann Christoph Wagenseil was professor of Oriental languages at the University of Orleans. Based on reading the *Toledot Yeshua*, he became convinced that the Jews were guilty of blaspheming Jesus, and wrote his *Denunciatio Christiana de Blasphemiis Judæorum in Jesum Christum* (Altdorf, 1703). He addressed this to the government authorities with the aim of preventing the Jews from mocking Christianity and devoted his life to publishing anti-Jewish, Christian books. In spite of this, he remained opposed to forcible baptism and advocated publicly against the charges against Jews of ritual murder.¹⁹

1694-1760 – Johann Heinrich Callenberg was a German Lutheran professor of theology and Orientalist. He studied philosophy at the University of Halle and in 1728 founded the *Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum* there. Callenberg's first interest was Islam, although by traveling he became aware of the great need among the Jewish people. He failed in his outreach to Muslims, but through the *Institutum Judaicum* trained and sent out more than twenty missionaries to the Jews. The *Institutum* produced a Yiddish translation of the New Testament and published biographies of famous Jewish believers in Jesus and

18 See Jace Broadhurst, *What Is the Literal Sense? Considering the Hermeneutic of John Lightfoot: Discovery Service for Biola University*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

19 See Piet van Boxel, Kirsten Macfarlane, and Joanna Weinberg, eds., *The Mishnaic Moment: Jewish Law among Jews and Christians in Early Modern Europe*, First edition, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

other Christian literature before it was dissolved in 1791.²⁰

1786-1842 – Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar is the standard work in Hebrew grammar and lexicography, not only in Germany where it was first written, but in the entire scholarly world today. Well versed in the Hebrew grammarians of the Middle Ages, Gesenius combined their exegetical insights with comparative Semitic philology. He was a popular professor whose lectures often attracted 500 or more students. In 1811, he became *professor ordinarius*, a professor of the highest rank, at the University of Halle, where he spent the rest of his life. Gesenius was buried in Halle, and according to tradition, students at the university put stones on his grave on the eve of their Hebrew exams.²¹

1813-1890 – Franz Delitzsch was a Christian Hebraist and German Lutheran theologian. He specialized from an early age in Semitic studies. His Old Testament commentary series, written in collaboration with Carl Friedrich Keil and first published in 1861, is still in popular use today. Delitzsch spent fifty years translating the New Testament into Hebrew, an extraordinary feat considering that Hebrew was no longer a living language. He wrote it as a corrective to the Hebrew version of the New Testament published by the London Missionary Society, which he felt was not ideal for the work of Jewish evangelism. It was to this project that he devoted his last strength.

20 See Alan Levenson, "Missionary Protestants as Defenders and Detractors of Judaism: Franz Delitzsch and Hermann Strack," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92, no. 3-4 (2002): 383-420, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jqr.2002.0038>; See also Yaakov Ariel, "A New Model of Christian Interaction with the Jews: The Institutum Judaicum and Missions to the Jews in the Atlantic World," *Journal of Early Modern History* 21, no. 1-2 (March 23, 2017): 116-36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342538>.

21 See Edward Frederick Miller, *The Influence of Gesenius on Hebrew Lexicography, Contributions to Oriental History and Philology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927); For this anecdote, see Yaakov Shavit, "וגם - 'And Also Gesenius Shall Be Blessed,'" *HaAretz*, April 16, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1197789>.



During his lifetime, it was often supposed that Delitzsch was of Jewish descent. His defense of Jewish people against attacks and his strong interest in Jewish learning contributed to this impression. His benefactor, Lewy Hirsch, lived in his family home, was Jewish, as was his godfather, Franz Julius Hirsch. Delitzsch was a leader in the fight against antisemitism prominent in his time. His last literary effort before his death was his *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*.²²

Seeing the decline of Jewish missions in the Lutheran Church, in 1863 he founded *Sown in Hope: a magazine for the mission of the Church to Israel*, and maintained the publication, writing articles for it over the next 25 years. In the preface to the first volume, he wrote:

But we are persuaded that not a single word of prayer for Israel is in vain, but will have its part in filling up the chasm [between the Church and the Synagogue]. Therefore we sow in hope, and water our seed with our tears; and even though the black earth swallows our grain, yet the indwelling power of the Divine promise will not be in vain... Although the soil may be so barren, we hope against hope. Our hope rests in God's promise (Isa. xxvii. 6): "It will at length come to pass that Jacob shall strike root, and Israel shall blossom and become green, that they may fill the earth with fruit."²³

Franz Delitzsch in 1886 founded an *Institutum Judaicum* at the University of Leipzig, which was renamed in his memory after his death in 1890. The *Delitzschianum* was closed by the Nazis in 1935 but re-opened in Vienna in 1936 and was re-established in Münster in conjunction with the Evangelical Theological

22 Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. Samuel Ives Curtiss (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891).

23 Samuel Ives Curtiss, *Franz Delitzsch: A Memorial Tribute* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1891), 117, [https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h7h&bquery=\(HJ+5K2K\)&type=1&site=ehost-live](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h7h&bquery=(HJ+5K2K)&type=1&site=ehost-live).

Faculty of the Westphalian Wilhelm University. It now serves as a research center for Christian and Jewish scholars. There were similar institutes in Tübingen and Hamburg. All of these institutes offered courses in rabbinic literature as well as on the New Testament with an emphasis on the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy.²⁴

1848-1922 – Hermann Strack, a German theologian and Semitic scholar, was the leading Christian authority of his time in rabbinic literature and Talmud. He produced an introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, German editions of several Mishnaic tractates, a Hebrew grammar, a concise commentary on the Old and New Testaments, and edited the journal *Nathanael, Zeitschrift für die Arbeit der Evangelischen Kirche an Israel* [Journal for the work of the Evangelical Church in Israel]. In 1883, Strack founded an Institutum Judaicum in Berlin, which was responsible for publishing his writings. In 1923, the institute changed its focus from missionary education to theology, and was disbanded in 1933.²⁵



What motivated these non-Jewish Christians to devote time to learning the Hebrew language? For some it was the desire to establish the text of the Hebrew Scriptures and to better interpret and understand the Bible. For some it was polemical: a desire to either prove to Jewish people that they were wrong, or to show them from their own Scriptures or the Talmud that Jesus was their Messiah. And for some, it was simply a drive for knowledge.

Historical periods and contextual situations influenced

24 See Ariel, “A New Model of Christian Interaction with the Jews.”

25 See Levenson, “Missionary Protestants as Defenders and Detractors of Judaism.”



the type of Hebrew studies of their times. The earliest Gentile Christians, such as Justin Martyr, clearly turned to learned Jews and rabbis to obtain a knowledge of Hebrew and even to Jewish customs in their polemical arguments. The Church Fathers, such as Origen and later Jerome, immersed themselves in the Hebrew Scriptures, also with the aid of Jewish rabbinic scholars, to establish accurate translations of the Old Testament texts. Some who devoted themselves to studying Jewish literature such as the Talmud, Midrash, and other rabbinic writings, did so for polemical reasons with the aid of Jewish converts.

Later scholars devoted themselves to “oriental” languages in general, Hebrew among them, to gain philological understanding. These early Hebraists established programs and chairs of Hebrew studies. Some of these scholars devoted themselves to producing lexicons, concordances, grammars, and tools to further the study of Hebrew. More recently, academics such as Callenberg, Delitzsch, and Strack, established schools of Jewish studies, motivated by their desire to witness to the Jewish people.

We may never fully understand the motivation of Christian Hebraists through the centuries. Did they view Hebrew as a vehicle for evangelizing, or studying the Scriptures, or a quest for knowledge itself? Motivations are complex and can be difficult to discern merely from historical evidence. But we do know that from the first to the nineteenth centuries, there were non-Jewish persons, Christian Hebraists, who pursued an interest in the Hebrew language and often in the Jewish people as well.

Editor’s Note: The impact of the Hebrew Scriptures on the Christian begins with the careful translation of the text by faithful scholars of the language and culture. The fact that there have been so many non-Jewish, Christian Hebraists who painstakingly parsed, defined, declined, and interpreted the Hebrew Bible (as

well as the Septuagint and other versions) makes it clear that the ancient text profoundly influenced them and those who studied after them.

The Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies is indebted to Dr. Zhava Glaser for this excellent summary of the most significant Christian Hebraists in the history of the church.

