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Baruch Maoz

**The Role of the Gentiles
in Jewish Evangelism**



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Table of Contents

Inhaltsverzeichnis

The Role of the Gentiles in Jewish Evangelism	3
Historical and Theological Considerations	5
Exegetical Considerations	5
Isaiah 65-66 and Its Implications	7
The Gentiles in Isaiah's Prophecies	7
The Context of Isaiah 65–66	8
Isaiah 65	9
Isaiah 66	9
Romans 9–11 and Its Implications	11
Some Brief Comments on the Contemporary Scene	13
The Author	17
Impressum	18

The Role of the Gentiles in Jewish Evangelism

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We are not here concerned with the general duty that all Christians have toward their unconverted and redeemed fellow-humans, the Jewish people included. As we intimated earlier, the duty of gentile Christians toward their fellow humans who are Jewish is equal to that which they have toward those who are not Jewish. Our task is to discover whether or not Christians from among the gentiles have a specific evangelistic role with regard to the Jewish people. My purpose in this article will not be to work out the details of that role but to try and indicate its very existence. It appears to me from the biblical data that gentiles do indeed have a role in Jewish evangelism and that this aspect of the ministry of the church must be undertaken by the disciples of Jesus with dedication, commitment, sacrifice and a humility born of the Gospel.

The Role of the Gentiles in Jewish Evangelism

It is a sad symptom of our times when there is need to think on a topic such as the one now before us. It is one of

the unhappy products of the accentuated focus on the difference in Christ between Jews and gentiles.

Surely, the whole church should be engaged in evangelism of the whole world, regardless whether the preachers or they to whom the Gospel is preached are Jews or gentiles. Surely, the church should be as concerned for the evangelization of the Jews at least as it should be for the evangelization of any people on earth. Sinners among the Jews are as much in need of the Gospel as are sinners from other nations.

Surely the church recognizes the fact that it has entered into the promises and blessings originally given to Israel. Surely the church also recognizes the biblical truth that it now has the joy and exquisite duty of sharing those promises and blessings with those to whom they naturally belong by virtue of the divine decree. Surely the church recognizes that, if Israel's being set aside for a time has proved to be such a blessing to the world, their being brought back can be compared to nothing less than a resurrection. Surely the glory of God is dear to the church, and it would therefore long for the day when God

will be glorified through the grace and salvation he will bestow on his beloved, erring people.

Liberal humanism has crept into the church under the guise of a devout kindness and respect for those who differ. The result has been a dilution of Christian conviction. The hubris that informed much of Christian endeavor before the two World Wars has collapsed under the burden of humanity's horrific ability to sin. Wisely, evangelical Christians no longer consider themselves better than others.

But they have unwisely dragged the truth of their faith down with their former pride and now tend to imply (while denying) that the faith they affirm is no truer than that of others. This is a major error which has contributed to the reticence of Evangelicals to proclaim the Gospel with conviction, confidence and a humility that relies on God for its consequences. Many Evangelicals unconsciously look upon the Faith as a relative truth that purportedly brings more happiness, makes more sense and motivates toward a better society. Consequently, many evangelical Christians have engaged in debate, image-creation, self-promotion, social support and emotional manipulation in an effort to win more converts, rather than confidently declaring, "This is what the Lord has said", and leaving the results with him. These attitudes are no more evident than in the relations established by many Evangelicals between themselves and the people of Israel, particularly the Jewish State.

The Messianic Movement has become a significant contemporary major influence on the church's relationship to the Jewish people, including the church's view of the evangelization of the Jewish people. This Movement has challenged the church's understanding of itself, of the scriptures and of the scriptural message. It has rightly called upon the church to reconsider the frequently arrogant attitude of its adherents toward Israel. It has mistakenly sought to impose a rabbinic grid on the church's understanding of the scriptures, and it has insisted on the truthfulness of the error that claims that only Jews and those versed in Judaism can truly understand the message of the Bible.

The topic for our discussion is not the contribution made by the Messianic Movement to Jewish evangelization, nor that of the loss of evangelical nerve. Although an understanding of those distinct contributions can help us discover the roots of some of our difficulties, they should be the topic of another paper. Our present task is to remind ourselves from the pages of holy writ the role of the gentiles in Jewish evangelism.

To this we set our minds with an eagerness to grow more into the image of him who made us, to please him better and to serve him and his cause in accordance with his wishes. We therefore pray, "your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven – in this area of Jewish evangelism as much as in any other." Our theology, we hope, is born out of a passionate desire to love God and serve

him better by discovering what is desirable in his eyes. Our aspiration should be to do what God desires.

Historical and Theological Considerations

Obviously, none of us has the dubious luxury of theologizing in a vacuum. We are children of our times and called upon by God to address the issues of our times. History, both the history of truth understood and of error promoted, plays a large role in the framing of our questions as well as of our answers.

Recent history, the spread of evangelical liberalism and the emergence of the Messianic Movement, have impacted our discussion. The view, common among Christians for many years, that Israel has been superseded by the church, plays no small role in the framing of our question. The history of the Holocaust and of the church's moral failure is another important contributor that, we suspect, plays a larger role in the minds of European readers than in that of others.

Exegetical Considerations

Obviously, the sole grounds on which we can determine the church's role as well as that of any member of the church is God's declared word in scripture. We are at liberty to recognize no higher authority. God has spoken in his

word and it is for us to study that word in order to discover his will.

In so doing, we are faced with a fascinating challenge. The Hebrew Bible, known among evangelical believers as the Old Testament, is replete with idiom, analogy, superlatives and other valid literary devices. These devices serve to give us a sense of what they cannot analyze or describe in detail. They are often also necessary because of the terms with which the original hearers could be addressed. Future realities were largely unknown, and where they were known they could only be perceived faintly, in broad outline and in terms of the realities of the day. The familiar contemporary terminology was the only means of communication available to the Holy Spirit as he framed the revelation of that future.

For example, Isaiah speaks of a time when the land overgrown with thorns and thistles, the forsaken palaces of Jerusalem and the depopulated a countryside will be transformed. He says that this will happen "when the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high". Then the wilderness will become a fertile field, and the fertile field will become a forest.(Isa 32:13–15). Where here is the literary device? Does the land represent the people (on whom the Spirit, Isaiah tells us, is to be poured out), now rendered blessed, spiritual and holy? Or is the pouring out of the Spirit on the people itself a literary device meant to indicate God's blessing on the land?

So too in Isaiah 44. God promises Israel, his chosen servant, a blessing in

the teeth of the nation's sin (Isa 43:22–25). He has assured the people of punishment, but the day will come when, having punished them (43:26–28), he will work for their salvation (44:1–8). That salvation is then described as the pouring of water onto dry ground, the pouring out of his Spirit and of his blessing on the seed of Jacob. The seed will then blossom among the wheat like willows planted beside plentiful water sources. God does not change and is not subject to change. Man's sin cannot alter his decisions. Israel should remember these things and be comforted by them. He will wipe their guilt away like a cloud is wiped away from the sky, like a mist from a mirror. This is to be a source of joy to all creation. The heavens are invited to sing and the very foundations of the earth to shout for joy, the mountains and all the trees to break forth with singing, because God will have forgiven Jacob and been glorified in Israel (44:21–23).

Which are the literary devices – God's saving sinful Israel in spite of its sin, or the joy of creation? God pouring out his Spirit on unworthy Israel or the people's grain blossoming among the wheat?

I here posit the question but do not have space to defend the answer proffered. I can here only state the case as I see it. The need for me to do so will become apparent as we proceed to answer the question our article has been asked to address.

The literary device, I think, is obvious: God describes a spiritual blessing in highly material terms. I believe that

the Old Testament provides us with what were then (some of which still are) future realities in consistently Old Testament terms, and that the literary devices employed in sample texts given above are descriptions of spiritual realities. In other words, both Isaiah 32 and 44 speak of the fruition of the souls of Israel in terms of the fruition of the land. The wonderful joy attributed to nature is primarily if not wholly that of the people.

Crass literalism does little justice to the text of the Bible. It leads its adherents astray, as has been evidenced in much eschatological speculation. Such speculation affirms strict fealty to the meaning of the text but often fails to discover that meaning because it is so focused on attributing literal meaning to every detail that it cannot see the whole.

Piecemeal exegesis will inevitably impoverish those who engage in it because it will mask the wider, fuller, more substantial message of scripture by being taken up with literary minutia.

I propose to discuss the role of gentile Christians in the evangelization of the Jews on the basis of two texts, with some reference to others as we proceed. Our two texts are Isaiah 66 and Roman 9–11. Shortage of space will not allow an extensive exegesis. We shall need to rely on the substantial work done by others and on the reader's acquaintance with these texts.

Isaiah 65–66 and Its Implications

Chapter 66 is the closing chapter of Isaiah's stupendous book of prophetic messages. The prophet, serving as a mouthpiece for God, has pointed out the nation's sin and the inevitably dire consequences of such sin because the God who rules the world is holy. The pride that motivated the people will be crushed and God alone will be exalted. But that exaltation is remarkable in its nature as well as in its extent: a sinful people will be brought back to God.

The Gentiles in Isaiah's Prophecies

In that connection, Isaiah is prominent among the OT authors in his frequent reference to God's kind intentions toward the gentile nations. In chapter 2:1–4 he speaks of a day when all nations will serve God and submit willingly to his rule. This is meant to serve as a motivating call for the people of Israel, which is why the next verse goes on to address the people, with the invitation, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob". If the nations to whom the covenanted promises have not been given are to serve God, all the more so should the children of Jacob joyfully undertake his service.

In 19:18–25 God goes on to speak of the day when the Egyptians will call

out to the Lord because of their oppressors (19:20), and he will hear them and send them a savior. The Lord will be known to the Egyptians, who will serve him and vow by his name (v. 21). An amazing threesome will be established: Israel, Egypt and Assyria will be a blessing in the earth, themselves blessed by God and described by him as "Egypt my people", "Assyria the work of my hands" and "Israel my inheritance" (19:24–25)!

In chapter 25 Isaiah goes on to describe the celebration of joy that will follow the preceding judgment (24:1–23, 25:2), which will teach the proud never to exalt himself again (25: 3). At the same time, God will be a shelter to those who recognize themselves as weak and unworthy (24:4–5). He will remove the veil now covering the eyes of all the nations (24:6–7), overcome death forever, tenderly wipe away all sorrow and remove the sinful shame of his people (24:8). These deeds will bring forth a peon of praise: "Look, such is our God, the God on whom we put our hope for salvation. This is the God in whom we hoped – we rejoice and are glad in his salvation" (24:9).

Isaiah 56:1–8 is an extraordinary promise regarding the gentiles. It contains all that the letter of the Hebrews has to say about the no-longer-binding ceremonial elements of the law, without releasing them from the joy and duty of keeping God's eternal Law as reflected in the Ten Commandments. God calls upon mankind as such to maintain a

just and holy life, including the keeping of the Sabbath (56:1–2). Not Israel, nor even Judah, nor the two are addressed here. Man as man, be he Jewish or gentile, is called upon to live as God has commanded. The prophet's next words prove this beyond doubt: the stranger, even the eunuch, is no longer to say, "God has set me apart from his people" (56:3). Those among them who live as he would have them live, who keep covenant with him although not part of the original covenant people, will be accorded in God's house a name better than that given to sons and daughters, who would naturally expect to be blessed! These non-Israelites will be joined to Israel and accorded an eternal name (56:4–5) perhaps later hinted at in Revelation 2:17, never to be taken from them. The body of the faithful will be one, although made up of both Jews and gentiles.

What is more (56:6–8), the gentiles will be accorded as free access to God's presence as is accorded the historical children of the covenant, their service will be as acceptable to God and their prayers as welcome in his house because the very One who will regather the dispersed of Israel will also gather others alongside that nation. (Remember Jesus' words: "I have other sheep ... not of this fold... I must bring them also and they will hear my voice and they will become one flock with one shepherd" John 10:16.)

The Context of Isaiah 65–66

It is in this light that we must read chapters 65–66 of the book of Isaiah's prophecies. Judah has mourned its just and punitive destruction (64:2–11), acknowledging the righteousness of God's dealings with the people (64:4). Judah has confessed its sin: "None of us sought you, so you caused us to melt in the heat of our own evil ways" (64:5–6). This a picture of Israel today, as it is of Israel since Isaiah's days onward. Israel is a rebellious people, constantly angering God by their conduct and by their false and unbiblical worship. Israel still justly deserves to be the object of God's anger. As was true of our forefathers, Israel today has no grounds on which to hope, no fulcrum by which to move the heart of God, no right to mercy but this: we know God to be an amazingly merciful God, our Father and our Maker – and we know ourselves to be his people in spite of our sins (64:7).

On those grounds the people are depicted by Isaiah as turning to God and daring to request that he limit his just anger. In light of the horror of the punishment he brings, the people beg for divine compassion. This is nothing less than the Gospel. It is man recognizing his sin and his unworthiness before God, recognizing he has no grounds on which to beg for mercy, recognizing that God is just to punish. Man therefore appeals to God's grace in spite of his sin. Any supposed conflict between the Old Testament and the New Testa-

ment is the exclusive product of a prejudiced or uninformed mind.

Isaiah 65

What is God's answer to the plea? We find the answer in chapters 65–66 of the prophet's message: God begins by saying he has been found by those who did not seek him, that he has revealed himself to a nation that has not called on him.

On the other hand, he has repeatedly and incessantly appealed to a rebellious people who followed their own thoughts rather than the way he set before them (65: 2), who constantly anger him by their false worship (vv. 3–5a). God will recompense them for their evil. He will not rest until he has paid them back to the umpteenth degree (65:5b–7). God contrasts the gentile nations with Israel, and his grace to the former with the latter's lack of obedience.

God has more to say about how he will treat the people of Israel. He promises to carry out his just intentions and punish Judah, but to exercise his right to mercy in so doing. He will not fully destroy Israel nor fully cut them off (vs. 8). Have they fallen to be destroyed? No, by no means. The God of justice is also the God of sovereign, undeserved, unilateral and amazing mercy. He will bring a remnant out of the people, an offspring that will enter into the promised inheritance (65:9). Those among the people who do not turn to the Lord will

be punished while the others will enjoy mercy (65:10–12). Rebellious Israelites will remain hungry while others are fed (65:13–14), the name of the rebellious name will be a sad memorial to the consequences of evil in God's world, while those who serve God will be known by a new name (Rev 2:17).

Those thus blessed will share in a new creation that God is preparing. In this new creation all the ultimate joys of true life are to be found. The very essence of nature will be transformed back into what it was from the beginning, when there was no sadness, no need to contend with briars and thistles requiring the sweat of one's brow to obtain bread from the ground, no carnivorous animals. God will be very close, so much so that he will be discovered to be near even before a prayer can be framed or voiced. There will be no suffering and no evil in this new world (65:17–25).

Isaiah 66

God is above his creation, in need of and subject to none. Everything that exists is the product of his divine fiat (66:1–2). This is a declaration of God's right to deal with the sinners in Israel as he sees fit, to show mercy to whomever he wishes and to visit the just reward of sin on those sinners with whom he sees fit to deal in justice. Those who humbly tremble at his sovereign decree will find him to be favorable toward them (66: 2b). Those who rebelliously exalt them-

selves will have him to deal with. They chose their ways, now God will choose their punishment (66:3–4).

As to the humble who presently suffer at the hands of the rebellious, they should not despair. God will call the evil into account and accomplish all his declared purposes in and for Zion. It is inconceivable that God would begin a work without bringing it to completion (66:5–9).

This assurance should be a source of joy and a motivation to action. But for whom? For those who love God's purposes, cherish his will and rejoice in his mercies among those found of the Lord who had not sought him (65:1) and among those to whom mercy had been shown in spite of their national sin. All such should rejoice in the knowledge that God is sovereignly merciful (after all, if he is not, they too might perish for their sins). They should long to share in the richness of his blessing, to be satisfied with the same Gospel comforts and find pleasure in beauty of the glory granted by grace (66:10–11).

God declares that he will show sinful, suffering Judah mercy as plentiful as an overflowing river. Those who love Judah will be comforted with her. They will themselves be blessed because God's hand will have been revealed in both justice and mercy (66:12–14). God will display his justice to all the world by punishing the sinful, be they among the strangers who have never called on his name or those of the covenant people who have forsaken him and his covenant (66:15–18).

That is not all God will do. Out of those so blessed he will call people to himself, yes, out of the nations far and wide who have never heard of his name nor seen his glory. They will declare that glory to the nations (66:19). They will also bring the people of Israel back to the Lord as one brings an offering to the Lord, with joy and gladness (66:20). They will spare no effort to do so (66:20). They will serve God alongside the people of Israel, and they will do so as equals (66:21 – cf. Isa 56:1–8). All flesh will serve him. Judah will be eternally restored and God's justice eternally established.

It is now time for us to summarize our findings in relation to the role of gentile evangelicals in the evangelization of the Jewish people. We have purposely conducted our discussion in the broader context so that we could see it in its wider biblical perspective. Israel's salvation is a matter of God's honor and will. It is not the product of national desert but of sovereign grace. The same grace which reached out to gentiles who did not seek him is the grace by which God chooses to save undeserving Jacob. All who have been recipients of such grace will inevitably cherish and rejoice in it. The redeemed gentiles are therefore called upon to rejoice in the hope for Jerusalem. They will to be used by God to bring the people of Israel, now scattered and as distant from him as ancient Lydda, Pul and Tarshish were from the temple in Jerusalem, to serve the Lord together with their gentile fellow believers. The church is one, made

up of both Jews and gentiles, caring for each other and serving God together.

This is Isaiah's view of things. This is his answer to the question, should non-Jewish recipients of grace proclaim that grace to Jews? Should gentiles be engaged in Jewish evangelism? The prophet's answer is simple: if they have been recipients of grace, how can they not proclaim it to fellow sinners from among the Jews?

The church has traditionally bought into the prideful idea that Israel had proved so unfaithful to God that, true to his word, he turned away from them. He now has exclusive interest in the church. On those grounds, how can the church be confident that God will not treat her in a similar fashion? Has she proved more faithful to him than Israel? Is her record any better? Is her security due to her purported achievements, or is salvation by grace? If by grace, on what biblical grounds can we affirm that this amazing grace does not extend to Israel?

The church is to labor to bring sinners in Israel back to God, however far they may have wandered from him, for God is Israel's Father, Maker and Redeemer. They are to bring the Gospel to the Jews and the Jews to the Gospel as one brings an offering to the Lord. They are to rejoice in Judah's fortunes of grace, which become all the richer as they flow more widely.

Romans 9–11 and Its Implications

It is not clear whether the parallels between Isaiah 63–66 and Romans 9–11 are intended or that Paul was simply informed and unconsciously influenced by Isaiah when he penned his letter to the Romans. The similarities are remarkable. Paul makes explicit reference to Isaiah 65:1 in Romans 10:20.

The issue discussed in Romans 9–11 is similar but not identical to that which occupied Isaiah's mind so many years earlier. Isaiah was addressing the Jewish people, calling them not to despair but to put their hope in God in spite of their sins, and seeking to broaden their perspective so they could understand that they are not the sole recipients of mercy. The extension of mercy is, by its very nature, a sovereign act unilaterally and undeservedly applied. It can never be the product of desert. It can never be owed or claimed. In his letter to the Romans the shoe is on the other foot and the issue is not mercy *per se* but divine faithfulness in the teeth of sin (Rom 7:24–8:39). If God is truly and sovereignly faithful, how can it now appear that he has broken Israel off and turned to the gentiles? The answer Paul provides is the same framed by Isaiah, from a different angle.

Space will not allow us to deal as extensively with Romans 9–11 as we have with Isaiah 63–66. We shall focus on a number of salient points that illuminate our subject.

First, Paul has not written Israel off because God has not done so. He is deeply saddened by their present spiritual state (9:1–5). He recognizes that the Gospel and all its harbingers, not to speak of Christ himself, have to do (note the present tense – 9: 3–5!) with Israel. But God has the right to decide to whom he will show mercy (9:14–24). He did so in Hosea’s day (9:25–26) when he showed Israel favor in spite of their sin (Hosea 2:1–3 Heb.). He did so when Isaiah described the terrible punishment due to Israel (9:27–29), and then intimated the mercy of God by referencing the remnant God had left for himself.

Paul goes on to summarize the dilemma. Gentiles, described earlier in his letter as the objects of God’s grace (2:7–11, 3:21–30, 4:9–25. See also 9:23–24, 10:10–13), are granted righteousness through faith while not all Jews are granted such righteousness.

Paul first responds to this dilemma with a revelation of his heart: He longs and prays for Israel’s salvation. Is this a longing prayer from which his gentile readers are excused? Dare we not pray for what the apostle longs, and dare we pray without translating our prayers into action? Salvation comes through faith, and faith from hearing the Gospel (10:11–14). How can the people of Israel believe if they do not hear? How can they hear if no one preaches to them? Of course, none are to preach unless they are sent (10:15), but Isaiah had already addressed that issue when he spoke of the wonder and the glory of

preaching the good news of God’s sovereign grace (*ibid*, see also Isa 52:6–10).

Israel has rejected the Gospel. It has turned its back to God (10:16–21). But does this mean that God has turned his back to Israel in any final sense (11:1)? May it never be! Evidence to God’s insistent faithfulness is to be found in the fact that Paul himself is Jewish. He is a harbinger of what is to come, part of the remnant that exists and that has always existed within the nation (11:2–4), the product of the same divine and sovereign grace we have been discussing (11:5–6).

Israel’s rejection is not final (11:11). In fact – strange as this might sound – that rejection has their salvation in view because they are to be provoked to jealousy by the favor now shown to gentiles. Israel’s salvation is also in the highest interests of the world because, if their rejection has been such a blessing for the world, surely their being restored will have still greater, still more glorious implications (11:12). Consequently, while Paul is engaged in the execution of his own ministry among the gentiles, he always has his eye on the salvation of the Jewish people. He chose to emphasize the grace shown to the gentiles with a view to exciting some among the Jewish people to spiritual jealousy, and thus to save some of them (11:14).

Second, Paul turns to address a very human propensity that had shown signs of raising its ugly head among the non-Jewish believers of his day. Although redeemed by grace, they were inclined to think that salvation was, at least to

some extent and in some manner, attributable to them. The Jews, according to this view, deserved to be rejected but we in some way deserve to be accepted. Paul warns his readers not to think themselves in any way better or more secure than the people of Israel. The only way to salvation is through faith in the sheer mercy of God, unearned and undeserved. Israel ceased to exercise that faith and fell – and you, beloved gentile reader, are liable to the same kind of fall if you think that you are in any way better than those rejected (11:14–22).

What is more, those once rejected are to be restored if they do not continue in unbelief. God is fully capable of undoing their unbelief (11:23). It is natural to expect him to do so precisely because he is faithful, as Paul had been telling the Roman believers. The apostle acknowledged their sin (7:14–23) by identifying with them in their struggles with it, and yet assured them that God would never forsake them and that nothing could ever separate them from God's love (8:1–39). Now he affirms the same for Israel. God's faithfulness assures us that he is working among the gentiles with a view to Israel's salvation, and that the day will come when he will forgive their sins and turn ungodliness away from his people (11:23–27). Israel's unbelief will, by the grace and power of God, become enduring faith and Israel, too, will enjoy the favor of God.

Here follows another short summary: With respect to the Gospel, the Jews have been made enemies so that the

Gospel will go out to the world, but they remain God's beloved because God is unchangeable and his love is not contingent. What he has covenanted to do he will indubitably and unquestionably perform. Jews and gentiles will stand before him on the same grounds: grace rather than purported obedience, faith and not works (11: 28–32). Surely, God deserves to be praised beyond all measure. Salvation and judgment are both his perfect work, carried out for his glory and to his eternal worship (11:33–36)!

What follows from this? That gentile Christians have a Gospel duty toward God and toward the Jewish people. Because the salvation of Israel has to do with God's glory, they should ever have an eye on Jewish evangelism. They should ever be conscious of their duty and privilege of preaching the Gospel to their fellow sinners from among the Jews. They must recognize that God's faithfulness to his covenant promises to Israel are the grounds for their own confidence in his continued mercy toward them.

Some Brief Comments on the Contemporary Scene

Each of the issues raised below deserves a full discussion. We can only accord it passing reference.

Has the Holocaust changed anything?

The Holocaust has made it clear to all who can see that the church has no grounds on which to boast before Israel. Its moral failure is plain for all to see. It can and should now preach the Gospel with the kind of humility that suits a recognition of unworthiness before God, a fellow sinnership with the Jewish people and a dependence on grace for salvation. The thrill of sins forgiven should drive it to love God more, and therefore to cherish every opportunity to proclaim and to display his grace to others.

The Messianic Movement

Certain modern emphases have tended to emasculate Jewish evangelization by insisting that a thorough knowledge of and identification with Jewish traditional custom and understanding are essential for effective evangelism. The sovereign grace of God teaches us that God can (and does) use the unsuited, the ill-equipped and the unlikely to achieve his purposes, and that “effectiveness” in evangelism is a matter of his will and work. He alone can open the eyes of the blind to see.

It is unquestionably true that an acquaintance with Jewish traditional custom and understandings is helpful in presenting the Gospel to the Jews, as it is true in the evangelization of any nation. But a thorough understanding of the Gospel is far more essential to

that end, and without a heartfelt confidence in its power we might as well remain silent.

An identification with Jewish traditional custom and understandings is not only unnecessary, it is unhelpful. Much of Jewish tradition rejects Jesus with a firmness that has been articulated with increasing clarity through the centuries. One cannot identify with what seeks to subvert.

Gentiles and the Indigenization of Evangelism

There is little doubt that indigenous evangelism normally meets with less difficulty than evangelism that is conducted by those who do not belong to the society being addressed with the Gospel. For that purpose, one important role of the gentiles should be to equip, encourage and promote the indigenization of evangelistic outreach to the Jewish people. But indigenization is not everything.

First, the church is one and the Gospel should be presented in terms of that unity as to who preaches the Gospel, why and how he does so, as well as to the distinctive lifestyle that Gospel preaching will promote among those Jewish people who will have been brought into the Faith. There must be no reconstruction of the dividing wall between Jews and gentiles. Rabbinicism is not an option for faithful disciples of Jesus.

Second, in an area of need and opportunity, where a suitable Jewish person is

not available and a gentile Christian is, there should never be a reticence on the part of the latter to undertake the task of preaching the Gospel to Jews.

Third, cultures and theologies isolated from the challenges of other cultures and theologies inevitably develop a tendency to isolationism, arrogance and an authority beyond what is right. No single culture can discover or display the fullness of Christ. Jewish Christian culture and theology need to be challenged by the give and take of highly significant, compelling relations with those of other cultures and theology in order to protect itself from the dangers mentioned above. This requires a constant engagement of gentiles in the work of evangelizing the Jewish people.

Fourth, Jewish Christians will naturally want to preserve their national identity. They have every right and reason to do so in the context of their private lives. Jews do not cease to be Jews by believing in Jesus any more than gentiles cease to be gentiles. From that distinct vantage point, Jewish believers have a distinctive contribution to make to the church's weal. The intermeshing of Jews and gentiles in the work of evangelism and in the corporate worship of and obedience to God in the context of church life will enable them to make that contribution while giving Christ the preeminence he deserves in the community of those who believe.

Evangelical Liberalism

A disconcertingly growing number of Evangelicals who consider themselves to be friends of Israel have been satisfied with political and social support, often allying themselves with the more extreme elements of Israeli society. We all need to be reminded of the biblical priorities. Israel ensconced over all the Middle East, with the Palestinians at its feet, a temple in Jerusalem, and all the riches of the world available to it is still Israel in its sin, doomed to sin's just rewards. Only through the Gospel will Israel find what it truly needs: forgiveness of sins, a new heart with God's law written on it and a right spirit.

Eschatology

Modern evangelicalism's fascination with eschatology has done both the church and Jewish evangelism a great disservice. It has all-too-largely displaced a spiritual and moral engagement by an attempt to identify the assumed eschatological implications of world events and to forward those events to their expectations. The result has been an irrelevant message, often at times of extreme need.

Eschatology has tended to displace the evangelization of the Jewish people by an offer of political and economic support that ignores moral issues and allows Israel to restrict freedom of religious expression, particularly Jewish Christian religious expression. Its reward

has been the dubious privilege of posing for photographers while handing to one Israeli celebrity or another a cheque or expressing fawning support of his or her political platform. The result has been the erosion of civil liberties in Israel, particularly for Jewish Christians, an encroaching restriction of evangelism in the country and, in the minds of Israelis, increased disrespect for both the Gospel and those who claim to represent it. After all, if evangelicals dare not make the Gospel their first priority, why should the Jewish people accord that message consideration, let alone their sincere attention?

The Glory of God as our Goal

If we believe Isaiah, if we believe Paul, we must believe in the Gospel and in its power to save. God reveals himself to the world through the Gospel, and he will reveal himself to the Jewish people in the same manner. The role of gentiles in Jewish evangelization begins with their believing the message and following the biblical pattern established so many years ago: We ... believe, and therefore speak (2 Cor 4:13). If our gentile brethren do that, everything else will fall into place.

The Author

Über den Autor



American-born Jewish Christian converted in Israel while serving in the army in 1963. Married to Bracha, father of three. Pastor since 1976 of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation. (He pastored the church until his retirement, at the age of 65, in January 2009.) Authored nine theological and expositional books in Hebrew and one in English, another of his works is being prepared for publication in English. Two of his works have been translated into Dutch. Contributor to numerous books and author of numerous articles, including the extensive Jewish Christian Occasional Papers. Editor of the Modern Hebrew Bible, member of the editorial team for the New Hebrew Translation of the New Testament and of the Annotated New Hebrew New Testament. Initiator of Mishkan; the International theological forum on Jewish evangelism, Founder and Chairman of the International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship and of Keren Tkuma, the national social aid fund in Israel. Founder of the Fellowship of Hebrew Speaking Congregations in Israel, Instructor at the Israeli College of the Bible. Founder of the Messianic Action Committee which led the successful international protest against proposed anti-Christian legislation in Israel.

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Martin Bucer Seminar, Breite Straße 39B, 13187 Berlin
E-Mail: berlin@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Bonn

Martin Bucer Seminar, Friedrichstr. 38, 53111 Bonn
E-Mail: bonn@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Chemnitz:

Martin Bucer Seminar, Mittelbacher Str. 6, 09224 Chemnitz
E-Mail: chemnitz@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Hamburg

Martin Bucer Seminar, c/o ARCHE,
Doerriesweg 7, 22525 Hamburg
E-Mail: hamburg@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Pforzheim

Martin Bucer Seminar, Bleichstraße 59, 75173 Pforzheim
E-Mail: pforzheim@bucer.de

Website: www.bucer.de

E-Mail: info@bucer.de

Studycenters outside Germany:

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Contact:

mbsmaterialien@bucer.de

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