

Jewish Expectations of Redemption – Is There Room For Yeshua?

Presented to Hashiveinu Forum 2004

by Elazar Brandt

© Hashivenu

Introduction

For many decades we Messianic Jewish teachers and leaders have labored to understand and present New Testament theology and Christian theology in terms of their antecedents in the Tenakh and Judaism. Many of us achieved significant “victories” by persuading the various bible schools and seminaries where we studied to allow us to present papers, to address the student body, or even to design and teach courses on a variety of subjects relating to Judaism and Christianity. Perhaps this has been more true nowhere else than here at Fuller Seminary, who themselves were praying and planning in this direction as the first Messianic Jewish students arrived to study here. At first the driving force behind their interest was Jewish missions and evangelism. But indeed, over the years we have seen major accomplishments, at least among the Evangelical Christians, in awakening them to be more aware of their “Jewish roots”. Some bible schools and seminaries now have Jewish studies departments or even degree programs, in attempts to make students aware of the Jewish background of the Gospel. Churches the world over celebrate Jewish festivals and are trying in one way or another to connect with their “Jewish roots”.

Should we therefore rejoice in these achievements? In a sense they are impressive. Our tiny Jewish numbers have had their characteristically large influence on our society. Yet I fear somehow that we have created a golem—an impressive accomplishment, perhaps, with a certain useful form and function, but lacking the soul it needs to make it human, or at least Jewish. You see, my colleagues and friends, in a classic case of not seeing the forest for the trees... er... trees, we have missed a crucial fact. In the last analysis, it is not the roots that are Jewish, but the whole tree... the

whole orchard... the whole forest. It is not the background that is Jewish, but the foreground, and the entire stage on which our drama of redemption unfolds.

It is therefore with great joy that I accepted the invitation to present this paper at this year's Forum, because I believe that at long last we are beginning to ask more correctly formed questions, and that can only help us in our quest to grasp the answers.

Approaching the Question

We have been asked to “attempt to articulate a Jewish understanding of redemption, and then develop it in light of our distinctive perspective as Messianic Jews”. The wording of the assignment appears to acknowledge the fact that there is no single unified “Jewish understanding” of redemption. Jewish theology, as it were, is fluid, and little attempt is made to systematize or preserve consistency. However, there are certain fundamental themes that permeate the subject of redemption in Jewish literature, and these can be said to lay the foundation for a “Jewish understanding of redemption”.

In order to articulate these fundamental themes, I am going to turn to a number of often-quoted passages in the standard library of Jewish faith and practice. In my experience, these texts are the main ones that will be cited in most any discussion of the subject of redemption with informed Jewish people. They are not sectarian texts. They are not apocalyptic, hard to understand mysteries. They make no attempt to establish an order of end-time events. They are simply standard Jewish texts that are accepted without question by pretty much all Jews in all places and times since the texts themselves came into being. They are: the *Torah*, the *Mishnah*, the *Babylonian Talmud*, the *Siddur*, Maimonides' (Rambam's) *Thirteen Principles of the Faith*, and his *Mishneh Torah*. The last of these texts is some 800 years old. None of the texts are affected by internal conflicts in Judaism over Chassidim, Ashkenazi or Sephardi tradition, secularism, Zionism, or modern day Jewish or Israeli politics. As much as possible, they speak for everyone who is considered Jewish. I will endeavor to draw from

these passages a picture of the main features of redemption in Jewish expectation, and then address the question of how the New Testament fits into the Jewish spectrum. Now without further ado, let us turn to our texts.

Redemption in the Jewish Sources

From the Torah

For the purposes of this Forum, I am intentionally *not* looking to the *Prophets* for thoughts about redemption. I will excuse this seemingly glaring oversight with a brief explanation which, once said, might seem obvious. The *Prophets* do not really add much new information on the subject. They affirm the description given by Moses. They flesh out the picture and add many details, but in the end they don't tell us much that would be new to us as long as we know what Moses said. Perhaps one of our other presenters will focus on these details. I prefer for now to look at the basics. And I know of no better text for this purpose than *Deuteronomy* 30. (In the interest of time and space, I will cut some of the text that does not directly add to our subject at hand.)

1. And it shall come to pass, when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you shall call them to mind among all the nations, where the L-rd your G-d has driven you, 2. And shall return to the L-rd your G-d, and shall obey his voice according to all that I command you this day... 3. That then the L-rd your G-d will ... gather you from all the nations, where the L-rd your G-d has scattered you. 4. ... 5. And the L-rd your G-d will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and he will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers. 6. And the L-rd your G-d will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live. 7. And the L-rd your G-d will put all these curses upon your enemies, and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. 8. And you shall return and obey the voice of the L-rd, and do all his commandments which I command you this day. 9. And the L-rd your G-d will make you abundantly prosperous in every work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your land, for good ... 10. ... 11. For this commandment which I command you this day, is not hidden from you, nor is it far off. 12. It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it? 13. Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14. But the word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it. 15. See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil; 16. In that I command you this day to love the L-rd your G-d, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments ... that you may live and multiply; and the L-rd your G-d shall bless you in the land which you are entering to possess.¹

We can see that Moses envisions a series of events in Israel's future history that include:

¹ *Deuteronomy* 30:1-16.

- Long dispersion and exile due to idolatry and disobedience.
- Repentance and return to *Torah* and mitzvot.
- Regathering of the dispersed into the land.
- Circumcision of the heart.
- Subjugation of enemies.
- Obedient Israel blessed with unprecedented prosperity. Obedience to *Torah* is key to life and longevity in the land.

Is anyone besides me surprised to find that, from this rather short passage of *Torah*, we have enough of a skeletal structure on which to build a fairly complete Jewish eschatology? The *Prophets* speak volumes about the return from exile, the future repentance and restoration of Israel, the blessings on the people in the Land, renewal of heart and soul, and defeat of Israel's enemies. But I can think of only three major themes that the *Prophets* add to this foundation: 1) the participation of the nations in the Kingdom of G-d; 2) the renewal of heaven and earth and/or a world to come. As for the nations' place in the Kingdom, this is at least implied here and elsewhere in the *Torah*, since all that G-d does for Israel is said to be for the purpose of bringing the world to the knowledge of the one true G-d.

The third missing theme is that of 3) Messiah. This is not surprising, since the concept of Messiah is built upon the covenant G-d made with David, who is yet several centuries in the future. Verses 11-14 could be taken to suggest that no special messianic figure is necessary to accomplish the redemption if only Israel will turn from idolatry and return to *Torah*. In the *Torah*, it is not in G-d's purpose for Israel to have a king, since G-d himself is considered our king. Indeed Israel's first experiment with a king—King Saul—is taken to be a rejection of the kingship of G-d, and it was a disaster. Yet G-d goes on to choose and embrace David, to the extent that David's throne and

Jerusalem become synonymous with the seat of the kingdom of G-d on earth. In G-d's covenant with David's dynasty, we have the seeds of a messianic expectation. We are told:

And when your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who shall issue from your bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son...²

At first this promise appears to refer to Solomon. But the phrase "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" suggests that there will be a final and eternal son of David, the one along the way being a sort of installment plan payments that point toward the final one. In the Psalms we observe that the filial relationship between G-d and the Davidic King is taken to apply to all of them, although perhaps there is a uniqueness to that relationship between G-d and the final one.³

A painfully brief passage in *Daniel* suggests that there will be a resurrection of the dead, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."⁴ This implies that there will be some kind of judgment. However, details are lacking, and to my knowledge and recollection are not supplied elsewhere in the Tenakh, except through hermeneutics that start with later presuppositions and go back looking for more information by means of allegorical or other "midrashic" interpretation methods.

By the end of the biblical period, we come out with an expectation of a regathering of Israel from exile, a return to *Torah*, some form of spiritual renewal, the defeat of our enemies, rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, a rejection of idolatry and embracing of *Torah* and the rule of G-d by the nations, all presided over and/or accomplished by a messianic son of David, resurrection of the

² 2 *Samuel* 7:12-14.

³ Note that we need look no further than here to ascertain the meaning of "Son of G-d" as a messianic title, and the entire Christian debate over the deity of Messiah may well be nothing but a very large red herring. Note as well, that the title "Son of G-d" emphasizes the *humanity* of Messiah as a descendant of David, in contrast to the title "Son of Man" in *Daniel* 7:13-14, which speaks of the heavenly origin of the (or *a*) messianic figure.

⁴ *Daniel* 12:2.

dead, final judgment, and at some point during or after these things, a renewal of creation. Not bad. But our story doesn't end here. This is only the beginning.

From the Mishnah.⁵

In its typical fashion, the *Mishnah* is more interested in the legal minutiae of our subject than in the subject itself. At the end of Tractate *Sanhedrin*, and so in the context of a long discussion of the functioning of courts and judges, it is natural to find a discussion about the final judgment. This is indeed where we find the most important passage on this subject, both in the *Mishnah* and in the *Talmud*. The *Mishnah* begins the discussion this way:

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, for it is written, "Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified."⁶ But the following have no portion therein: he who maintains that resurrection is not taught in the *Torah*, the *Torah* was not divinely revealed, and an Epikoros. R. Akiba added: one who reads uncanonical books...

First our *Mishnah* affirms that "all Israel" will inherit the "world to come". Now it is not at all clear yet whether the "world to come" includes the days of Messiah, or is after them, or both are the same thing. What we do know is that, in Jewish eschatology, the "world to come" is in contradistinction to "this world", and it means the world as it will exist after the redemption has occurred.

The *Mishnah* uncharacteristically cites a verse in support of this statement, the verse stating that *all* of the people will inherit the land forever, and this for the sake of bringing glory to G-d himself. The word "all" is apparently troublesome, since even the *Mishnah* feels the need to appeal to a scripture verse to back it up, and then it proceeds to list numerous Israelites who will *not* share in the world to come with "all Israel". So we have here the notion that there is an entity known as "all Israel" that includes those who are faithful to G-d and people and who will share in the promised inheritance, while there may be other Israelites who are lost due to disobedience or somehow separating themselves from G-d and the people. This term and concept also appears in *Romans* 11,

⁵ *Sanhedrin* XI

⁶ *Isaiah* 60:21

where Paul uses it in precisely the same context and with the same meaning. In my opinion, this concept of “all Israel” must guide our Messianic theology and practice much more than it does now.

Who will *not* share in the world to come? The list is interesting. Whoever does not believe the resurrection from the dead is taught *in the Torah*. It is not enough to believe in the resurrection. One must believe it is taught in the *Torah*—a debate that was current between the Pharisees and the Saducees at this time, and that shows up in the Gospels in a debate between Yeshua and the Saducees.⁷ (Note that Yeshua does argue that the resurrection is taught in the *Torah*!) Obviously this implies that one must believe in the resurrection in order to participate in it, and also that the “world to come” either includes or follows the resurrection from the dead. Furthermore, the centrality of the *Torah* is upheld, as it is in the next requirement as well.

Whoever does not believe the *Torah* was revealed by G-d is not a part of “all Israel”, and will not share in the world to come. This implies that the *Torah* will still be in force in the world to come, and will not be replaced by another. It also implies that those who claim to believe in its divine origin will therefore live by its commands.

The Epikoros has no share in the world to come. The usual definition of an Epikoros is one who lives as though there is no G-d. Most likely it is taken from the name of the Greek school of philosophy known as the Epicureans, whose motto was “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” The Epicurean engaged in whatever pleasure he wished, as this was considered by them to be the reason for living. This philosophy has no place for a G-d who tells people what to do.

Akiba’s addition, whoever reads the non-canonical books, is interesting. He lived in the decades following the canonization of the Tenakh at Yavneh, and apparently felt it necessary to

⁷ *Matthew* 22:23-33.

reinforce the Sages' decisions. He could be referring to NT books, but he could also be referring to various other noncanonical Jewish books, as well as books of Greek philosophy that were disdained by the Rabbis. Whether his prohibition is against casual reading of these books, or studying them and living by them is an interesting question, but one that need not concern us in our present study.

Some other lesser restrictions are listed, along with several examples of biblical characters who do or do not have a share in the world to come. The point is that at this time in Jewish history, the main voice of Jewish authority demanded allegiance to G-d, *Torah*, land and people in order for one to be a part of the “all Israel” that stands to inherit the promises of G-d. These four pillars of Jewish existence have pretty much always been definitive for us, and I believe that they will stand as such until the end, and that the coming of Messiah will not change this, but rather will affirm it.

Note that the *Mishnah* does not include any mention of Messiah or the Days of Messiah in this discussion, even though certainly both the belief in a Messiah and the expectation of one were well established by then.

***From the Talmud*⁸.**

The *Talmud* has many sayings about the end times and the redemption. However, they are scattered throughout the text, and there is a serious difficulty in interpreting them, aside from the difficulty of finding them all. To properly understand a Talmudic saying, it must first be analyzed in terms of what it contributes to the discussion it is a part of. Collecting them in a word processor, sorting them by subject and trying to extract from them a systematized theological picture does violence to the sayings to the point that the original intend of their authors may well be totally distorted and lost. Therefore I have opted to select the single longest and most important passage I know of and focus on that. This text is well known to most of you. It is the *Talmud's* own

⁸ *Sanhedrin* 97a ff.

commentary on the *Mishnah* passage I already spoke about. It begins on page 97a, and starts to lose steam around page 99a, with some residual comments peppering the discussion over the following few pages. The context is the climax of a long treatise on the function of courts and judges, in which the text turns its attention to the final judgment and themes associated with it. In the interest of time and space, I must slash all but the bare essentials from the quoted text.

Note that throughout the passage it is always assumed that there will be a Messiah, and that this fact is somehow obvious in the Tenakh. I know of no place anywhere in Rabbinic literature where any attempt is made to demonstrate from the Tenakh that there will be a Messiah. There is plenty of discussion and debate about when he will come, how he will come, what he will do, for how long, and a multitude of details about him, some more important than others. But the assumption of his existence always stands, and any challenge to it is disposed of briefly and without ceremony.

This is more than interesting, since without the Rabbinic and intertestamental literature, one could read the Tenakh from beginning to end and be almost blissfully unaware that there will ever be such a messianic figure. We would only know the expectation to restore the kingship of David and the former glory of Israel at some future time, after a long exile and a time of repentance and restoration that G-d himself will bring about for Israel. The Tenakh gives us only vague glimpses and hints about this.

A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that the Jews of the Second Temple period, perceiving a need for just such a character, farmed the Bible for every scrap of information they could harvest, and put together a composite picture of “the Messiah”. They then began to hope for and watch for his coming, all the while continuing to search the scriptures for more information. Now I do not in any way mean to suggest that the messianic idea is an invention of the human

mind. I am only trying to discern the process by which the obscure hints left us by Moses and the *Prophets* became a fully personified vision and expectation that is almost universally accepted by Jews from the days of the Second Temple until now. With this in mind, let us look at some of the key citations from the Talmud.

(97a) It has been taught: R. Nehorai said: in the generation when Messiah comes, young men will insult the old, and old men will stand before the young [to give them honor]; daughters will rise up against their mothers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law... It has been taught, R. Nehemiah said: in the generation of Messiah's coming ... the vine yield its fruit, yet shall wine be dear, and the Kingdom will be converted to heresy with none to rebuke them...

Our passage begins with the need for redemption. The world will be in trouble as never before. Justice will be turned on its head. Greed will cause upheaval in the economy. And Rome (“the Kingdom”) will embrace what to the Jews is heresy—a possible reference to Christianity and if so, a remarkable prediction of the triumph of Christianity over the Roman Empire.

An attempt is now made to calculate when the days of Messiah might come:

R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, And the L-rd alone shall be exalted in that day.⁹ ... For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.¹⁰ The Tanna debe Eliyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the *Torah* flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era, (97b) but through our many iniquities all these years have been lost...

This sample is just a taste of many similar passages, some more interesting than others. The saying of the Tanna debe Eliyahu, that the 6000 years of world history break down into 1) chaos from Adam to Abraham, 2) the age of *Torah* from Abraham to the destruction of the Second Temple, and 3) the Messianic era that should have been from then on, is quite interesting for us. But I shall reserve comments on this text for later. Picking up on the last statement, the text goes on to make the bold statement that all the possible dates for the redemption have passed, and it remains only for Israel to repent in order for the redemption to occur.

⁹ *Isaiah* 2:11.

¹⁰ *Psalms* 90:4.

Rab said: All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds. But Samuel maintained: it is sufficient for a mourner to keep his [period of] mourning. This matter is disputed by Tannaim: R. Eliezer said: if Israel repent, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed. R. Joshua said to him, if they do not repent, will they not be redeemed! But the Holy One, blessed be He, will set up a king over them, whose decrees shall be as cruel as Haman's, whereby Israel shall engage in repentance, and he will thus bring them back to the right path...

The debate between Rabbis Eliezer and Joshua continues for several rounds, and Rabbi Joshua wins, concluding that G-d himself determines the time of the redemption, and it is not dependent on Israel. It is interesting to note that, in his estimation, if Israel needs to repent, G-d will send an evil king to oppress us. Bringing Israel to repentance could be considered to be one of the tasks of Messiah, but that road is not taken in this passage.

The accuracy of the following paragraph for our own day is striking:

R. Abba also said: There can be no more manifest [sign of] redemption than this: viz., what is said, But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel, for they are at hand to come.¹¹ ... R. Hama b. Hanina said: The son of David will not come until even the pettiest kingdom ceases [to have power] over Israel, as it is written, He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches;¹² and this is followed by, in that time shall the present be brought unto the L-rd of hosts of a people that is scattered and peeled.¹³ ... R. Johanan said: When thou seest a generation overwhelmed by many troubles as by a river, await him, as it is written, when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the L-rd shall lift up a standard against him;¹⁴ which is followed by, And the Redeemer shall come to Zion.¹⁵ ...

As we have been privileged to see the flourishing of the land of Israel in response to the return of her people, we also see that we are still at the mercy of a number of petty kingdoms, such as Lebanon, Syria and the would-be kingdom of “Palestine”. At least in earlier times it was the world powers that subjugated our people and land. Now we can see all too easily how we could be overrun by our enemies, along with a host of other troubles. And unfortunately for us, it might be just this kind of disaster that will be needed to force us to call upon the L-rd our G-d for help.

R. Joshua b. Levi met Elijah standing by the entrance of R. Simeon b. Yohai's tomb... He then asked him, ‘When will the Messiah come?’ — ‘Go and ask him himself,’ was his reply. ‘Where is he sitting?’ — ‘At the entrance (of Rome).’ And by what sign may I recognize him?’ — ‘He is sitting among the poor lepers:

¹¹ *Ezekiel* 36:8.

¹² *Isaiah* 18:5.

¹³ *Isaiah* 18:7.

¹⁴ *Isaiah* 59:19.

¹⁵ *Isaiah* 59:20.

all of them untie [them] all at once, and rebandage them together, whereas he unties and rebandages each separately, [before treating the next], thinking, should I be wanted, [it being time for my appearance as the Messiah] I must not be delayed [through having to bandage a number of sores].’ So he went to him... ‘When wilt thou come Master?’ asked he, ‘Today’, was his answer. On his returning to Elijah, the latter enquired, ‘What did he say to thee?’ ... ‘He spoke falsely to me,’ he rejoined, ‘stating that he would come today, but has not.’ He [Elijah] answered, ‘This is what he said to thee, Today, if ye will hear his voice.’¹⁶

From Rabbi Joshua ben Levi’s bizarre experiences we learn a couple of important facts. There was some concept of a leper Messiah, based on *Isaiah* 53:4, who was sitting among the lepers outside the gates of Rome, awaiting his summons to appear and bring in the redemption. This is the only Rabbinic reference to *Isaiah* 53 as a messianic text that I know of, at least in the mainstream literature. This is especially curious because Rome was at that time already becoming an important center of Christianity, and because the Hebrew names Esau and Edom were used as code language in Rabbinic literature as anagrams respectively for Yeshua and Rome—the association easily made by supplying a little *yod* to the letters for Esau, and exchanging the *dalet* for a *resh* in Edom, and then arranging the letters in the appropriate order. Despite themselves, the Rabbis have embedded in the discussion the possibility that a suffering Messiah can be found waiting in Rome until the time of redemption comes.

... Rab said: The world was created only on David's account. Samuel said: On Moses account; R. Johanan said: For the sake of the Messiah. What is his [the Messiah's] name? — The School of R. Shila said: His name is Shiloh, for it is written, until Shiloh come.¹⁷ The School of R. Yannai said: His name is Yinnon, for it is written, His name shall endure for ever: e'er the sun was, his name is Yinnon.¹⁸ The School of R. Haninah maintained: His name is Haninah, as it is written, Where I will not give you Haninah.¹⁹ Others say: His name is Menahem the son of Hezekiah, for it is written, Because Menahem [‘the comforter’], that would relieve my soul, is far.²⁰ The Rabbis said: His name is ‘the leper scholar,’ as it is written, Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him a leper, smitten of G-d, and afflicted.²¹ ...

This playful passage, in which the various schools seek to name Messiah after their own Rabbis, informs us that the world was created for the sake of Messiah. Though it may only be the

¹⁶ *Psalm* 95:7.

¹⁷ *Genesis* 49:10.

¹⁸ *Psalm* 72:17.

¹⁹ *Jeremiah* 16:13.

²⁰ *Lamentations* 1:16.

²¹ *Isaiah* 53:4.

opinion expressed by one Rabbi, this statement still reflects the central place Messiah had come to occupy within the spectrum of Jewish expectations.

More important than the names suggested here are the attributes associated with them. Shiloh is to come and take the royal scepter of Judah. A certain pre-existence is attributed, at least to his name. His role of bringing grace and comfort is suggested. And once again, the concept of the suffering leper Messiah is expressed, this time with a full citation of the verse from *Isaiah* 53.

As we near the end of the passage, the Rabbis discuss how long Messiah's reign will last:

(99a) ... It has been taught: R. Eliezer said: The days of the Messiah will last forty years, as it is written, Forty years long shall I take hold of the generation.²² R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Seventy years, as it is written, And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king.²³ Now, who is the one [uniquely distinguished] king? The Messiah, of course...

Many more lengths are suggested, some much longer, but nobody suggests that he will reign forever, which is one idea I would have expected to be clearly available from the Tenakh. As we see in the next paragraph, a distinction is proposed between the days of Messiah and the world to come. I see no suggestion in this long discussion that Messiah's reign will continue into the world to come. We even find Rabbi Samuel so bold as to declare that the Messiah's only function is to subjugate the nations and free Israel from their rule so we may engage unhindered in the study and practice of the *Torah*. However, in all fairness, it must be repeated that the details are disputed as much as they are agreed upon, and little effort is made to systematize the beliefs held by the Sages about the redemption.

R. Hiyya b. Abba said in R. Johanan's name: All the prophets prophesied [all the good things] only in respect of the Messianic era; but as for the world to come 'the eye hath not seen, O L-rd, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.'²⁴ Now, he disagrees with Samuel, who said: This world differs from [that of] the days of the Messiah only in respect of servitude to [foreign] powers...

²² *Psalm* 95:10.

²³ *Isaiah* 23:15.

²⁴ *Isaiah* 64:3.

Our lengthy discussion winds to a close with a reprise of the statement made by the *Mishnah* about who will not share in the world to come:

AND HE WHO MAINTAINS THAT THE TORAH WAS NOT DIVINELY REVEALED. Our Rabbis taught: Because he hath despised the word of the L-rd, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off:²⁵ this refers to him who maintains that the *Torah* is not from Heaven. Another rendering: Because he hath despised the word of the L-rd, refers to an epikoros. Another rendering: Because he hath despised the word of the L-rd, refers to one who gives an interpretation of the *Torah* [not according to the halachah]. And hath broken his commandment: this means one who abolishes the covenant of flesh. That soul shall utterly be cut off [hikkareth tikkareth]: 'hikkareth' [to be cut off] implies in this world; 'tikkareth' [it shall be cut off], in the next. Hence R. Eliezer of Modi'im taught: He who defiles the sacred food, despises the festivals, abolishes the covenant of our father Abraham, gives an interpretation of the *Torah* not according to the halachah, and publicly shames his neighbor, even if he hath learning and good deeds to his credit, hath no portion in the future world.

The *Talmud's* explanation appears to be based on the offenses punishable by *karet*—"that soul shall be cut off from his people". In other words, while sin is indeed problematic as far as delaying the redemption, it does not seem to be definitive in preventing Jews from being redeemed, according to this explanation. Of course, a sinner must repent, and as has been suggested, G-d will arrange circumstances in order to compel us to repent as necessary. But certain sins have the effect of severing us and our offspring from "all Israel", and after not too long a time, cannot be undone. Offenses such as rejecting circumcision, abstaining from festival celebrations, eating forbidden foods, rejecting the authority of duly constituted leaders of the people, and rejecting certain principles on which our existence as a people stand, by these things a Jew cuts himself off from "all Israel", and therefore forfeits his share in our inheritance.

Now we leave this all too brief look at the *Talmud* with a summary of what we learned from it.

- Messiah will come at a time of troubles and oppression for the Jewish people.
- He will subdue Israel's enemies.
- There is a time for redemption fixed by G-d, but it is possible that we could hasten it or delay it by our cooperation or lack thereof.

²⁵ *Numbers* 15:31.

- Repentance and obedience to *Torah* are factors that can hasten the redemption.
- It is assumed but not stated that Messiah will have some role in the gathering of the exiles back into the land, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple.
- He will create the conditions in which Israel can learn and do *Torah* and inherit its promised blessings.
- He is a primary focus of creation, and all the prophets spoke of his reign.
- He will redeem Israel *en masse* but not those who have separated themselves from Israel.
- How long he will reign is an open question.
- There is a very scant hint that he is somehow connected with Rome, and that he will bring redemption to Israel after the world has embraced Christianity.²⁶

As we might expect, the *Talmud* is not so interested in speculating about the end times. It tends to focus on the things that are important to it, namely, the themes of repentance, learning and doing *Torah*, hoping for the redemption, and living in such a way that we will be able to share in it.

I now want to turn to our *Prayer Book*, which should not be overlooked as a primary source for information about our aspirations for redemption. There are two key texts in the daily prayers that speak of redemption in some detail, namely, three of the closing benedictions of the daily *Amidah*, and the second paragraph of the *Alenu*.

From the Siddur, Amidah.²⁷

It is fair to say that anything we pray for three times daily is an important object of our hope. In the following benedictions, we ask G-d 1) to return to Jerusalem, rebuild it forever, and secure the throne of David there; 2) to bring “salvation” through the messianic offspring of David; and 3) restore the Temple service to Mount Zion forever, so that G-d can dwell there and Israel’s worship may always be acceptable to him. Let us look at these petitions one by one.

²⁶ While this is stated in a negative manner from the perspective of a 2nd or 3rd century Jew, it may indeed not be far from the truth.

²⁷ *Artscroll Siddur*, Ashkenaz version, pp. 108-110.

And to Jerusalem, your city, may you return in compassion, and may you rest within it, as you have spoken. May you rebuild it soon, in our days, as an eternal structure, and may you speedily establish the throne of David within it. Blessed are you, O L-rd, the builder of Jerusalem.

There can be no question that Jerusalem is central to the hopes and aspirations of all Jews who have any Jewish identity left at all. Redemption includes a return to and rebuilding of Jerusalem, that it should forever be a Jewish city, the seat of the throne of G-d himself, and of the Messianic/Davidic King. Today, I live in Jerusalem. Yet if King David or Yeshua or any biblical personality were to visit my little apartment, he would think to himself that he still has at least a one hour walk ahead of him to reach Jerusalem. Modern West Jerusalem is not the focus of Jewish hope. “Jerusalem” in the Jewish heart and soul is inseparable from the City of David and the Kings of Judah, and the Temple Mount. Today these are in East Jerusalem, and are on the block as bargaining chips in the deadly game we call “peace”. All politics aside, we dare not forget for a moment that our hopes for redemption are rooted in “East” Jerusalem, the city our ancestors knew as Jerusalem. Anything else is a bonus. G-d help us if we ever need a passport and a visa issued by Arabs in order to come and pay homage to our Messiah or worship at his Temple!

The offspring of your servant David may you speedily cause to sprout, and exalt his power through your salvation, for we hope for your salvation all day long. Blessed are you, O L-rd, who causes the power of salvation to spring up.

Notable in this prayer is the fact that the messianic offspring of David is conceived of as an agent of G-d’s salvation. Messiah does not of his own accord or in his own right bring salvation. The L-rd causes salvation to come, and the Son of David is the bearer of it.

Accept, O L-rd our G-d, your people Israel and their prayer, and restore the sacred service to the Holy of Holies of your Temple. The fire-offerings of Israel and their prayer accept with love and favor, and may the worship of your people Israel always be acceptable to you. And may our eyes see your return to Zion in compassion. Blessed are you, O L-rd, who restores his presence to Zion.

In our Jewish conception of things, the return of G-d’s presence to Zion can only be accomplished by rebuilding the Temple and restoring its services. This is the arrangement he made whereby he might be able to dwell among humanity. Maintaining a sacred precinct in which G-d’s presence can be located is somehow essential to his dwelling among us. There is something about

the sanctity of the sacrifices and offerings, the people cleansing ourselves in body, soul and spirit before approaching, and the communal nature of the worship that takes place there that is pleasing and acceptable to G-d.

It may be true that there are some indications in the *Prophets* and in the NT that the holiness and purity of the Temple may one day extend beyond its physical boundaries so that a more free and open fellowship is possible between us and G-d's presence. However, this must not be perceived as a cancellation or relaxing of the requirements of holiness and purity, but rather that G-d, by renewing or transforming his people, and the nations as well, makes us qualified to interact with him on the level of the priests in the Temple.

In the end, the point of redemption is the reconciliation of man to G-d. It means that man—Jew and Gentile—will finally be able to live up to the glory for which we were created.

***From the Siddur, Alenu.*²⁸**

The *Alenu* is a remarkable prayer that stands almost alone in Jewish literature as far as I know in its hope that all the nations of the earth will turn from idolatry and worship G-d.

Therefore we put our hope in you, O L-rd our G-d, that we may soon see your mighty splendor, to remove detestable idolatry from the earth, and false gods will be utterly cut off, to perfect the universe by the Almighty's sovereignty. Then all humanity will call upon your Name, to turn all the earth's wicked toward you. All the world's inhabitants will recognize and know that to you every knee should bend and every tongue should swear. Before you, O L-rd our G-d, they will bend every knee and they will cast themselves down, and to the glory of your Name they will render homage, and they will all accept upon themselves the yoke of your kingship, that you may reign over them soon and forever. For the kingdom is yours and you will reign for all eternity in glory, as it is written in your *Torah*, "The L-rd will reign for all eternity."²⁹ And it is said, "The L-rd will be king over all the earth; on that day, the L-rd will be one, and his name will be one."³⁰

True, this hope is expressed in the *Prophets*, but in real history, our people have seen precious little evidence of the possibility of it. Perhaps for this reason the best we usually hope for is the

²⁸ *Artscroll Siddur*, Ashkenazi version, p. 160.

²⁹ *Exodus* 15:18.

³⁰ *Zechariah* 14:9.

subjugation of our enemies. But we must admit that one good way to solve the problem of our enemies is to turn them from idolatry and make them into friends. Had this actually happened with Christianity, it could have been a terrific testimony. But even a cursory look at Christian history can only leave us thinking “well, one out of two isn’t so bad”, or we can admit that it indeed *is* bad, and too many of those people who call themselves “Christian” do not in reality know the G-d of Israel. Christianity has succeeded in winning the allegiance of about one fourth of the world’s population. However, only a relatively small minority have truly embraced the G-d of Israel, and his land and people, much less his *Torah*. As for the others, as often as not they have merely exchanged one form of idolatry for another, and their vicious hatred of Jews, Israel and *Torah* do not reflect favorably on their claim to love G-d. These facts of history must be addressed fearlessly and honestly if we are ever to make a credible presentation of Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel.

In any case, the hope that the nations will also turn from idolatry and be redeemed is both a biblical and Jewish hope.

From Rambam’s 13 Principles of the Faith.³¹

The Rambam’s *Thirteen Principles* are the closest thing Judaism has to a systematic theology. While all thirteen of them are of course interesting and important, the last two bear directly on our subject.

12. I believe with complete faith in the coming of Messiah, and even if he may tarry, nevertheless, I will await his coming every day.
13. I believe with complete faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead at such a time as the creator chooses, blessed be his name and may his remembrance be exalted forever and ever.

Of all of the possibilities available to him, Maimonides chose Messiah and the resurrection as the normative focal points of redemption. As we have seen, Messiah is inextricably bound to the hope of the Davidic King ruling in rebuilt Jerusalem over a regathered Israel who comes to worship

³¹ *Artscroll Siddur*, Ashkenazi version, p. 180.

at the rebuilt Temple where the presence of G-d has returned to Zion. So Messiah can be said to represent the entire package of redemption. It is not necessary to list the other points as articles of faith, because they are all included in the concept of Messiah.

The resurrection, on the other hand, Maimonides does not commit to whether this will happen before, during or after Messiah's reign. It might indeed be a separate event. Implied in the concept of resurrection is the final judgment, which will assess one's compliance with the other articles of the faith, and either some form of punishment or else life in the world to come.

These two articles of faith, therefore, embody and summarize the whole concept of redemption. Now I will conclude our rather lengthy journey through the Jewish texts on redemption with a look at Maimonides' more detailed explanation in the *Mishneh Torah*.

From Rambam's Mishneh Torah.³²

Rambam does not add a lot in terms of new information, but his summary of the deeds and qualifications of Messiah is both helpful and it has become as authoritative as any Jewish text on this subject.

1. The King Messiah is destined to stand and restore the kingdom of David to its former glory, and build the Holy Temple, and gather the dispersed of Israel, and all of the ordinances (of the *Torah*) will return in his days to what they were before, sacrificing sacrifices, observing the years of release and jubilees according to all their commands given in the *Torah*. And whoever does not believe in him, or whoever does not wait for his coming, does not reject only the prophets, but also the *Torah* and Moses our Rabbi, since the *Torah* bears witness to him, as it is written, "And the L-rd your G-d will restore your fortunes, and have compassion on you, and come back and gather you... If you are dispersed to the ends of the heavens... the L-rd will bring you..."³³ And these things that are expounded in the *Torah* include all the things spoken by all of the prophets...

No surprises here. Rambam starts where I began, with *Deuteronomy* 30, and states, as I did, that the *Torah* includes all of the ideas later expounded by the *Prophets*. For Rambam, as for the Sages, the grand constant in the picture of redemption is the *Torah*. This is the standard by which we are to

³² Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws concerning Kings and their Wars", ch.11, (author's translation from the Hebrew).

³³ *Deuteronomy* 30:3-4.

judge any prophet, king or messiah. If someone comes and declares to us a Kingdom of G-d without the *Torah*, or with a different torah, Jews are not going to accept this, and according to our own scriptures, never mind the rabbinical texts, rightly so.

2. ...
3. Do not let it enter your mind that the King Messiah must show signs or wonders or renew things in the world or raise the dead or anything like this ...

Some of us who place great emphasis on signs and wonders might be surprised by this statement. However, Rambam stands squarely in the prophetic tradition here, as we know from passages like *Deuteronomy* 13 that the true test of a prophet is not his ability to do signs and wonders, nor his ability to predict the future, but whether he uses these abilities to entice people away from G-d and the *Torah* to worship foreign gods. The prophet, or the Messiah, may well perform signs and wonders, but they are not required nor are they alone proof of his office or calling.

4. But if a King arises from the house of David who lives by the *Torah* and occupies himself with the commandments as David his father did, according to both the written and oral Torahs, and if he compels all Israel to live by it, and enforces its strictures, and fights the wars of the L-rd, it is possible that he is the Messiah. If he does these things, and succeeds, and builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, then he is certainly the Messiah, and he will fix the whole world, so that it worships the L-rd together, as it is said, “For then I will turn all the nations to a pure language so they all will call upon the name of the L-rd and serve him together.”³⁴

So this is the acid test, yes, according to Rambam, but I think I have demonstrated that these central pillars of the redemption have been consistently in the picture since the time of Moses. Now it remains to turn to the *New Testament* and see how Yeshua measures up.

The NT Picture of Redemption

I must interject at this point a word of personal testimony to lend some poignancy to my presentation. About 33 years ago, on a lonely and frightful night, I, at the age of 18, embraced Yeshua on the condition that he is the Messiah of Israel. At that time and at that age I had no idea

³⁴ *Zephaniah* 3:9.

how to articulate my faith. I only knew that no one could be the Messiah if he was not the Messiah of Israel. Therefore, I knew that I was not converting to Christianity or changing my religion in any way. The only way I knew to express this was to pray, when I prayed to surrender my life to Yeshua, the *Shebechiyanu*. In so doing I thanked G-d, the G-d of Israel, for the honor and privilege of seeing the day when Messiah was beginning to reveal himself to Israel. Today, 33 years later, I am living in Jerusalem, I am learning to be *Torah* observant, I pray and study with *Torah* compliant Jews, I reach out to encourage the morale of the Israeli people in a difficult time through music, and in my own way I am playing a small part in helping to secure the land by entertaining settlers and terror victims in the settlements of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. G-d, land, people and *Torah*—the four pillars of Judaism—are now the focus of my life. Today I am coming full circle, standing before you to articulate to the best of my ability to what and to whom I committed myself on that night 33 years ago. This is not just a theological exercise. It is our heart, our soul and our life, for all of us and for all Israel.

Redemption in the Gospels

In order to outline a picture of redemption as it is portrayed in the NT, I have opted to limit my scope to the words of Yeshua himself. I do this for the same reason that I turned primarily to Moses for a picture of redemption from the Tenakh. First of all, I hope it is safe to assume that Yeshua knew why he came, what his mission was and what his future mission was intended to be. I don't believe that the apostles added significant revelation to what Yeshua himself said, although, like the *Prophets*, they filled in some details of the picture.

Now the mission of Yeshua has got to be regarded as happening in two stages: 1) what he accomplished in his lifetime of 30-some years in the beginning of the first century, and 2) what he said he will accomplish upon his return in the last days.

Yeshua's Role in History

When Yeshua first began his public ministry, he started by proclaiming, as did John the Baptizer, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”³⁵ Mark’s record of the events adds, “and believe the good news.”³⁶ What would the crowds have understood these words to mean at that time? I believe the meaning is clear when we consider where the terms come from.

The phrase “kingdom of heaven” should have been quite well known to and welcomed by the people from the prophecies of Daniel. Daniel foretold the succession of world empires from his own day to what he perceived to be the end of history: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. During the time of the fourth empire, a kingdom is to be brought from heaven by “one like a son of man”³⁷ and this heavenly kingdom will subdue the Roman empire and spread over the whole earth. As Yeshua began to preach, Israel had been under Roman rule for about 100 years, and was quite ready to be relieved of the Roman oppression. They knew the scriptures, and were waiting expectantly for the coming kingdom, which is why there were many false messianic movements at the time.

The “good news” is an expression taken from Isaiah, who used it when announcing to Zion “Your G-d reigns”³⁸, which is another way of saying, G-d is King, or G-d’s kingdom is coming. The context in Isaiah was the preparation for the return of the exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and restoration of the land of Israel to its people.

Why should one “repent and be baptized” as a response to this news? Because, as we have seen, repentance, and returning to G-d and the *Torah*, are preludes to the redemption, and immersion was necessary for purification in order to participate in the holy work of rebuilding, and

³⁵ *Matthew* 4:17.

³⁶ *Mark* 1:15.

³⁷ *Daniel* 7:13-14.

³⁸ *Isaiah* 52:7.

the sanctity of the renewed worship of G-d in his Temple. All these expressions fit naturally into the context of Yeshua's original proclamation and the people's expectations. There is only one problem. The expected result never happened. Herein lies the problem of placing Yeshua within the spectrum of the Jewish hope of redemption. I will return to this point shortly.

Yeshua went on to say that he did not come to cancel the *Torah* and the *Prophets*.³⁹ I never cease to be amazed at how easily Messianic Jews ignore this statement because we find Luther's interpretation of Paul to be more to our liking. He said that nothing at all from the *Torah* would pass until all things are fulfilled. I don't know about you, but last time I checked, all things have not yet been fulfilled. So it follows from Yeshua's words that the *Torah* and *Prophets* still stand as the basis for our covenant with G-d. *This* is definitely in keeping with the Jewish concept of redemption.

My friends, here we have a crucial hermeneutical watershed. I tell you, if we decide that Yeshua has fulfilled the *Torah* and *Prophets* and instituted some new thing as the basis of the covenant, then there is no point whatsoever in having a messianic movement. We completely step outside of the context of "all Israel" and the Jewish concept of redemption. And even if this is precisely what G-d wants "all Israel" and everyone else in the world to do, I still say that "all Israel" is no longer Israel, and we have moved on to a hermeneutic of replacement in which *Torah*, Israel and Judaism are at best nothing more than interesting relics from the past.

In this sense, Yeshua's call to Israel to repent and believe the good news has got to begin with us. Repentance in the Tenakh does not ever mean anything other than turning from sin and disobedience, and returning to *Torah* and the G-d who gave it. How we ever thought that we could repent without returning to the *Torah* is beyond me. John tells us that "sin is violation of the

³⁹ *Matthew* 5:17.

Torah”.⁴⁰ So how can we say, or even think, that repentance means to turn from sin, but we do not need to keep *Torah*? Turning from sin *is* turning to *Torah*, and this is one of the most universally agreed upon precursors to redemption in all of Judaism. Why do we have trouble placing Yeshua within the Jewish spectrum? Perhaps it is because we ourselves have for all practical purposes left that spectrum, and dragged Yeshua with us, quite against his expressly declared intentions. Maybe when we ourselves repent and return, and once again embrace our calling as part of “all Israel”, our gospel proclamation will look and sound more like good news than it does now.

Now, as for the question of why Yeshua did not meet the other expectations of taking the throne and establishing the kingdom of David, defeating the Romans, and so on, my best answer is that he died doing what needed to be done first, before any of these other things could happen. There was simply no point in Yeshua raising up an army and leading them against Rome, attempting to overthrow the Herodian dynasty or purifying the Temple and restoring its sanctity, until there was a massive repentance among the Jewish people. In his day, some were in the land, and many were not. The political and religious establishments were corrupt and sold out to the Romans, serving them as puppets. The people thought they wanted the kingdom of heaven, or at least some of them did. But the fact is that they really did not want it, because it meant subjugating their own wills to that of G-d and his Messianic King. And so, Yeshua called people to repent, he taught *Torah*, he healed people, and did some impressive things in order to rekindle in their hearts a love for G-d. In the end, he saw his mission as having to die to ascertain for people the forgiveness of sins, and then to be resurrected to attain at some future time the glory people expected to be associated with him.⁴¹

⁴⁰ 1 John 3:4.

⁴¹ Matthew 26:28; Luke 24:26.

Yeshua's Future Role

The main source for Yeshua's conception of his future mission is his discourse on the Mount of Olives in *Matthew* 24 and the parallel passages. There seems to be some overlap here between Yeshua's prediction of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and his return as the Son of Man. Did he himself expect that these events would coincide in the near future? It's hard to say. In any case, the main explicit feature that we learn here is, when the Son of Man comes in the clouds, he will send his angels and gather the chosen ones—presumably Israel—and bring them home. This is indeed one of the tasks of Messiah and one of the features of redemption according to the Jewish description. The rest we must surmise based on what we know of the task of the Son of Man, which I have described already. It is not very difficult to equate the Son of Man with the Son of David, and the kingdom of heaven with the restored kingdom of David. If our hermeneutic is such that we stay within the Jewish parameters unless the NT explicitly states otherwise, then it is logical to assume that Yeshua will at that time build, rebuild or restore the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, and will rule from there over Israel and the nations.

Analysis and Conclusions

We were asked to demonstrate how, or whether, Yeshua fits into the Jewish understanding of redemption, and on that basis, how we can relate appropriately and passionately to our fellow Jews about Yeshua and the gospel. I believe I have articulated a reasonably accurate and broadly accepted description of redemption in Jewish expectations, using Moses and the standard texts of Judaism as my basis. The picture that emerged was one of Israel in exile, repenting and returning to *Torah*, consequently being regathered to the land, where G-d will effect some kind of renewal (circumcision of heart, or other metaphors used by the prophets) enabling Israel to be permanently faithful to the covenant, and the resulting prospering and blessing of Israel and the subduing of our enemies. As

later pieces of the puzzle fall into place, we find a figure called Messiah, a son of David, who will come during times of great trouble and upheaval, defeat Israel's enemies, gather the dispersed, rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, and establish his kingdom there forever. He will study, teach and enforce *Torah* in Israel. We have shown how these things will happen to an entity known as "all Israel", which does not necessarily include all Jews, and particularly excludes those who have excluded themselves by rejection of commitment to G-d, *Torah*, people or land. These are the constants. The Messiah cannot change them, and G-d will not change them.

Then we have tried to describe Yeshua's own conception of his mission and role in the redemption. We see that he does not intend to cancel or change the *Torah* or *Prophets*. He begins by calling Israel to repent and prepare for the coming kingdom of heaven. His life and ministry are mainly focused on drawing people near to G-d and the *Torah*, and in the end, to die in order to secure forgiveness of sins for those who repent and return. His resurrection is a prelude to his future glorification when he returns as Son of Man, Messiah, presumably to do the things expected of him at that time.

Whether or not Yeshua fits the Jewish scheme of redemption depends largely on our guiding hermeneutic. If we conceive of Yeshua as bringing in some kind of new order that renders the *Torah* and Israel a part of the "old", then we should not be surprised to find ourselves in the replacement camp, and the things that are important to Jews will not matter so much. As such, Yeshua will not fit very well at all into Jewish expectations, and Jews, even *Torah* observant ones, must be considered as lost as any idolater, until they leave the old order and embrace the new. Obviously, I categorically reject this approach.

If, on the other hand, we conceive of Yeshua as a crucial figure on the Jewish continuum, then there is little problem seeing him fit into the plan for redemption. He has the priestly role of drawing

people to repentance, drawing people back to G-d, working atonement and reconciliation, even by means of his own death. (Such a conception is found here and there in Jewish sources, but not in the mainstream ones.) And he will perform the tasks of the Son of David upon his return.

So, do Jews “need” him in order to be saved? Well, do we “need” Moses? Aaron? David? If we have the covenant of Abraham, why do we “need” anything or anybody else? The answer can only be, if it pleases G-d to work out our redemption in certain ways through certain people, then, yes, we need them. If Yeshua is the Messiah, then we need him. If he is not, then nobody needs him. The answer can be very simple.

I have a suggestion that might help us to relate better to our fellow Jews. We have an annoying tendency to assume that the resurrection of Yeshua was the end of the story. We have inherited a pompous triumphalism from the Christian church that is ungodly. We have come to think of anyone who says he embraces Yeshua as completely saved, enlightened, sealed. We have borrowed ideas from the future that have not yet happened, and appropriated them in ways to which we have no right. The so-called “new covenant” of Jeremiah, which we wrongly assume to be identical with the gospel message, the new covenant according to which our sins are history never again to be remembered, in which everyone has the *Torah* in our hearts and knows G-d in such a way that we do not need even to be taught—if this covenant is in force anywhere on our planet, I’d surely love to see it. The sad truth is, I know of no such thing. It has not yet come to pass.

If we speak and act as though we have reached the end of the journey, when obviously we have not, then we have no credibility, not with Jews, and not with anyone. But if we acknowledge that our understanding is imperfect, that we are all in need of G-d’s grace, whether we already embrace Yeshua or not, that G-d has much work to do yet on each one of us, then our attitude can be adjusted to a more normal human one, and we will find it considerably easier to speak with

others about our faith. And perhaps most important of all for us as Jews, if we stop separating ourselves from “all Israel” and if we stop claiming to be the true Israel or the true remnant or other such hogwash, if we abandon our adversarial stance toward our own families and people, and if we accept that all of us are in this redemption thing together, we will find more receptive ears and hearts on the other end of our conversations. Yeshua’s work was not finished on the cross. Our salvation is not secure until we reach the end zone with the ball still in our hands. If we are ahead of some of our fellow Jews in that we recognize a Messiah whom they do not yet know, then let’s extend a hand and help them to see what we see. If some are ahead of us in other things, being “not far from the kingdom”, faithful to *Torah*, land, people and G-d in ways that we are not, then let’s stop rejecting them, and learn from them. And most of all, when we invite Jews to come to Yeshua, let’s invite them to come home, and not to leave home.