

The Return to Jerusalem
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Dr. Efraim Goldstein
International Director CJF Ministries
yshuahai@gmail.com

The Jewish return to Israel is one of the key events in biblical history and the life of the Jewish people. The emergence of a Jewish national homeland after almost 2,000 years of dispersion is an event that has impacted history in the 20th and 21st centuries. Jerusalem is a city known throughout the world not just because of who lives there, but because of what it represents.

The return to Zion began in the latter part of the 19th century and did not happen in a historical vacuum. There was a confluence of historical events that came together making the return to Israel a reality. There was a shifting of political balance in the Middle East and Europe. Spiritual awakening and revival was taking place amongst Christians in Europe. The fears and concerns stirred in the hearts of a new generation of Jewish people causing them to realize that the only safe place for Jews in the future would be in Eretz Israel. Finally there were cataclysmic events of the 20th century which included the two World Wars, the Holocaust and the rise and fall of the Soviet regime.

Biblical Reading on the Return to Zion

A Messianic reading of Ezekiel 36 and 37 interprets the passages as occurring in stages. There is the physical restoration of the Jewish people and a geographic repositioning to the Land of Israel. The last phase is the breathing *Ruach* (Spirit) on the bones. (Ezekiel 37:14)

The restoration of the nation has long been considered to occur in two distinct but interrelated phases; physical return and the spiritual renewal. This notion of a gradual return of the Jewish people to Zion was understood by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer was born in Posen, Poland in 1793. He one of the few orthodox rabbis in the 19th century who supported the fledgling Zionist movement. In his important work, *Seeking Zion* in 1862, he writes that the return of the Jews to Zion would be in phases:
The redemption of Israel, for which we long, is not to be imagined as a sudden miracle. The Almighty, blessed be His Name, will not suddenly descend from on high and command His people to go forth. He will not send the Messiah from heaven in a twinkling of an eye... The bliss and the miracles that were promised by His servants, the prophets, will certainly come to pass - everything will be fulfilled- but we will not run in terror and flight, for the Redemption of Israel will come by slow degrees and the ray of deliverance will shine forth gradually.¹

The return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel was not in a manner that was accepted by the leading rabbis of the 19th century. The impetus of the return would be in the hands of secular Jews under the quiet but watchful eye of the Holy One of Israel.

Changing Historical Tides & Emergence of Zionist Movement

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Invasion of the Holy Land in 1798 was a series of events that was of significance to both Jews and evangelical Christians. Arie Morgenstern writing on the events leading to the birth of the Zionist movement saw the significance of these events:

Napoleon's expedition to the Land of Israel and all that it entailed were marvelously consistent with the Jews' expectations for the role of Christians in the process of Israel's redemption in the midrashim.

In Protestant England as well, Napoleon's expedition to the Land of Israel gave rise to theological deliberations over Israel's return to its land.²

Events as they began to unfold in Palestine awakened and alerted the senses of those people who viewed matters from a biblical perspective. It was a clarion call for the end times.

Our beloved brother, mentor and scholar, Dr. Louis Goldberg, viewed the return of Jewish people to the Land of Israel as an intricate process that developed within the historical changes in the Ottoman Empire:

Many believers have the tendency to think only in terms of God's working in the cataclysmic event: Messiah will come, Israel will be born again in a day. ...However, the providence of God works quietly in and through the events of human history, as in the establishment of modern Israel through a people still in unbelief concerning the reality and identity of the Messiah.³

The Ottoman Empire began to yield to the winds of change and this marked the dawn of a new era in the Middle East. Since the 16th century, Ottoman rule was monolithic and unchanging. By the beginning of the 19th century the Ottoman Empire was losing its dominance and the European nations began vying for position in the Mediterranean region.

In reaction to the shifting situation, the Ottoman Empire began to ease their control over Palestine. They opened trade and religious access to the Russians, Germany, British and the Americans in the 1800's. When the early Zionist began to show up in the second half of the 19th century, the Turks were open to offering land grants at a handsome price.

The emergence of the Zionist movement brought together Jewish intellectuals and evangelical Christians in a unique relationship. Special contacts were forged between early Zionist leaders and the Christian Zionists. (as they came to be called).

An example of this unusual alliance is demonstrated in the life of William E. Blackstone (1841-1935). He was Chicago businessman who had many achievements in his life from being the first Dean of Biola to the founding of the Chicago Hebrew Mission (now Life in Messiah International). Blackstone petitioned on behalf of the Jewish people to the U.S. President Benjamin Harrison to campaign for their return to Israel. "The Blackstone Memorial was the first petition of its kind, which predated the work of Theodore Hertzl's Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)." ⁴

Changes in Western Christianity

Prior to development a movement of Jews to return to Israel there was a spiritual renewal taking place in Northern Europe. Amongst the Protestants sects was a renewed interest for missions and evangelism in the 19th century. The birth of the modern missions movement had a Middle East component. The British and Germany Protestants began to focus their efforts in the Middle East. Mission stations were opened and the presence of missionaries became a regular presence in Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. The changes in the Christian missions

movement and a renewed awareness for evangelism in the Palestine has been well documented through the good work of Kai Ker Hansen, Kevin Crombie, Tzvi Sadan, Gershon Nerel and others. Their research and writings have appeared in editions of Mishkan, books, and as papers at previous LCJE conferences. Various mission agencies and denominations have kept meticulous records of that era as well.

The active missionary works of John Nicolayson, Joseph Wolf, Bishop Michael Alexander (the first Jewish bishop in Israel), Melchior Tschoudy, Abraham Oczeret, Bishop Samuel Gobat and Ben Zion Friedlander were meticulously documented. The difficulties they faced in those years (1825- 1910) were overwhelming, often causing illness and early death. In spite of the hardships the missionary efforts succeeded in establishing a viable testimony in Palestine and the region. When the Jewish immigrants began to appear in Israel in 1880's, they had favorable encounters with the missionaries who provided some basic care and assistance.

When many Jewish refugees from the pogroms in Russian began to arrive in Israel in 1882, they warmly received much needed aid from the missionaries. Yaron Perry and Elizabeth Yodim in their book, *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-century Palestine*, wrote an intriguing history of British Missions in the 19th century in Israel and have these interesting insights into the role of missions:

The missionaries offered immediate solutions to their physical and spiritual needs. These immigrants were also familiar with the efforts of the missionaries in their country of origin and were received with greater tolerance. ⁵

The testimony of missions to the Jewish people was established and functioning in Israel before the first and second Aliyah began. When John Nicolayson began building Christ Church and Bishop Alexander accepted his appointment, they did not anticipate the vast changes that would occur within the next 100 years in Israel. The Jewish population would increase to 600,000 by 1948. During those years from the building of Christ Church until the founding of the modern State of Israel, an infrastructure for congregations, education, medical care and ministry had been established by the foreign mission agencies and denominations.

For all the criticism "the Mission" has received by the Jewish community over the years, in this critical time the "the Mission" was in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of these Jewish refugees. The *Yishuv* at that time was unable to meet the needs of the immigrants. The broader Jewish community had not mobilized sufficient resources to aid the Jews in Palestine.

Jewish Views on the Return to Zion and "Yeshu"⁶

It is generally considered that the Zionist movement that emerged in the 1800's was a secular movement. The overwhelming Orthodox Jewish view was that the Messiah would appear and lead the Jewish people back to Zion.

With exception, there were several influential rabbis who weighed in favorably on the Zionist movement and saw the hand of God moving in these efforts. The most notable are the writings and teachings of and Rav Zvi Hirsh Kalisher and Rav Avraham Kook.

The secular Jews spearheaded the Zionist movement from its earliest days until the founding of the Jewish State in 1948. Leading the movement was a cadre of enlightened Jewish academics and writers who were nationalists able to spark the desire of Jews to return to Zion. These

leaders would include Theodore Herzl, Max Nordau, Ahad Ha'am, Moses Mendelsohn, Leon Pinsker, Moses Hess, Vladimir Jabotinsky and David Ben Gurion.

Many in the ranks of the Zionists leaders were secular or non-Orthodox in their affiliation, but they were not insensitive to a spiritual yearning. Many of them sought to incorporate and express a spiritual element into their views concerning the return to Israel.

Included in this expression was an attempt to reclaim Jesus, *Yeshu* as an authentic Jewish figure. He would be portrayed as a man of compassion, faith and concern for the well-being of Israel. Jesus represented the new Jewish man to many of these writers and artists.

Since the European emancipation, Jewish views concerning Yeshua had been changing. According to Tzvi Sadan, a Jewish reevaluation of Jesus began to emerge during the long process of Jewish emancipation.⁷ Sadan in his doctoral thesis gives a detailed examination of the writings of the early Zionist who dared to give expression to their understandings of *Yeshua*.

The openness to incorporate *Yeshu* into the dialogue of the Zionist pioneers was a bold move away from long established Jewish tradition. In the early phases of Modern Hebrew literature, writers like Yosef Klausner, Aharon Avraham Kabak, and others wrote of *Yeshu* in non-conventional terms as a sympathetic character. Naphtali Imber, the composer of the Israel national anthem, *Hatikva*, wrote about *Yeshu* and had favorable encounters with Christians in Israel in the 1880's.

Imber, as a new immigrant to Israel, had a special friendship with the early Christian Zionists Laurence Oliphant and his wife, Ann. The Oliphant's lived in Osifiya and Imber served as their administrative assistant from 1882-88.⁸ While Imber never calls himself a "Christian" he was heavily influenced by the faith of the Oliphant's. Concerning Imber, his lifelong friend Israel Zangwill says that Imber converted to Christianity in the latter part of his life.⁹

A valuable book on Israeli views of Yeshua is, *Other and Brother*, by Neta Stahl. Stahl does a thorough study on the writings and art that appeared about Jesus in the 20th century. Stahl's book has been published in both Hebrew and English.

Stahl carefully outlines the progression of thinking concerning *Yeshu* in Modern Hebrew writing. She presents the challenge Yeshua presented to Zionist thinkers and writers:

For Zionist thinkers and writers, on the other hand, the figure of Jesus offered an even more complicated melding. It represented their attempts to relocate the Jewish people back to the East, while keeping its cultural orientation in the West.

The emergence of Hebrew culture in Palestine between 1882 and 1948 involved conscious efforts to create a new literature that was on the one hand native and rooted in the Land of Israel and, on the other, based on Western values and ideals.¹⁰

The book, *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes* – *אותו האישי* edited by Avigdor Shanan, (Yediot Achronot, Israel 1999) written in Hebrew covers leading Jewish thinkers and their views of Yeshua from the Middle Ages until modern Israel.¹¹ The editor captures some of the unique insights of modern Israeli writers concerning Yeshua.

Most notable was the short story, *The Narrow Path* במשעול הצר written by Ahron Kabak Avraham. In *The Narrow Path* we come across Yeshu in a garden philosophizing and seeking to redeem himself.

Yeshu says, every man says to his heart, I want to be good, the best, better than every other man...the Holy one gives his creation this, this desire for good, but there isn't good these days.¹²

In the pre-state, pre-Holocaust Israeli literature and art, Yeshu was portrayed in a humanistic and compassionate light. The attempts to reclaim Yeshua as, *one of ours*- הוא מי שלנו was evident. In the post Holocaust, Israeli literature, little effort has been made to reclaim Yeshua as one of our own. In the post Holocaust era of Jewish and Israeli art and literature, we see a decrease in any mention or references to Yeshua in any way that could be considered traditional or meaningful.

We must realize that in Jewish views concerning Yeshua as expressed in art and literature, there were better times than today. The atmosphere in the pre-Holocaust era was healthier and more open on the part of the secular Israeli leaders concerning Yeshua. The climate today remains remote and indifferent concerning Yeshua and his proper place in Israeli society.

Implications

The return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel has been carefully guided by the hand of God in the unfolding events of history and the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies of Scripture. The dramatic times from the mid 1800's until the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 provides us with a broad base from which we can draw pertinent implications.

First, many of the Jewish immigrants and the evangelical Christians who witnessed the cataclysmic events from 1860-1948 viewed them as apocalyptic. They had good reason to believe that two World Wars, the Holocaust and the miraculous establishment of the State of Israel were the end times. Those were tumultuous times. Those who thought the return of Yeshua was imminent had to wait a little longer.

As current events unfolds today there are many who once again are declaring the "end of days". Shofars are sounding around the world the end has come! We need to need be cautious and vigilant as when we discern the times we live in.

Second, the Jewish return to Jerusalem did not occur in a vacuum. The קיבוץ גלויות – *Ingathering of the Exiles*, occurred in those years when the Arab population in Palestine was also growing. Side by side the two communities were expanding in the same land under the same conditions.

The unfortunate fact is that historically the emerging Arab and Jewish Messianic communities had little interaction with each other. The Missions agencies and denominations that were influential in each community did not work to bring the two communities together. The focus was to develop each community on what seemed to be the solid missiological principle of homogeneity. Let Arabs grow and develop in Arab churches and Jews believers in their own communities. Given the suspicions and tension between the Jewish and Arab communities, separation enabled stability in the emerging Messianic communities.

The following generations of Arab and Jewish evangelicals in Israel did not do enough to build solid bridges between their communities. As always, there are noteworthy exceptions but they did not leave a lasting legacy.

In recent years the emergence of fellowship and unity among Jews and Arab Messianic believers has been notable if not miraculous. Our generation has the opportunity to make a difference in the Arab and Jewish testimony of the Messiah Yeshua. I am sure our spiritual forefathers would be proud of our efforts.

Third, we do well to remember that the pre-State Jewish and Arab Messianic communities were built by the Missions and denominations. There was not a strong indigenous Messianic community. The institutions that were built were paid for by foreign funding and many of these properties and institutions remain foreign holdings.

Some of the pioneers we are honoring this week understood the principle of not being reliant on international funding. Some of our heroes didn't follow the principle of "build it and they will come." They didn't build big facilities or invest in lavish projects due to a lack of vision or hope. They had a practical understanding of paying for things you could afford. Things were difficult economically in the 1920-60's and people understood what it meant to be frugal. There was a sense of self-reliance that imbued the early State of Israel. We too need to learn how to build our indigenous communities on what we can afford locally and not be dependent upon foreign funds.

The pioneers in Israel and the faithful believers who labored to proclaim Yeshua in the early years of the return faced unbelievable hardships and cataclysmic events. In spite of the obstacles they kept moving forward with the Good News of Yeshua.

We too face difficult times in our day. We need to keep our hands to the plow and our eyes on the harvest—a harvest of the sons of Abraham in the Promised Land.

My hope and pray for our generation's best as said by Paul:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

Footnotes

¹ Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, "Seeking Zion" in *The Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg, 111-114. (New York: Atheneum Press, 1984), 111.

² Arie Morgenstern, *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel*, translated by Joel A. Linsider. (USA: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10-11.

³ Louis Goldberg, *Historical and Political Factors in The Twentieth Century Affecting The Identity Of Israel in Israel The Land and the People*, ed. H. Wayne House, 113-141. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub. 1998), 116.

⁴ Jonathan Moorehead, "The Father of Zionism: William E. Blackstone?" *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 53/4 (December 2010 787-800), 787

⁵ Yaron Perry, and Elizabeth Yodim, *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-century Palestine*, (London:Frank Cass Pub., 2003), 136.

⁶ The use of the name Yeshu is a choice of the author's in order to maintain consistency since the writers referred to exclusively called Yeshua, "Yeshu" when writing in Hebrew. When they wrote in English, they called him Jesus. Many of the writers did not consider calling Yeshua, "Yeshu" as a sign of disrespect.

⁷ Tzvi Sadan, "Jesus of Nazareth in Zionist Thought 1881-1945." *Mishkan* Issue 49 (2006):59-64.

⁸ Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol 8 He-Ir, (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Pub., 1972. 1290

⁹ EJ 1290

¹⁰ Neta Stahl, *Other and Brother Jesus in the 20th-Century Jewish Literary Landscape*, (New York: Oxford Press, 2013), 7.

¹¹ אותו האיש - עורך אביגדור שנאן , היודים מספרים על ישו
Avigdor Shanan, ed. *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes* - (Israel: Yediot Achronot, 1999).

¹² 272 במשועול הצר , קבק אהרן
(Aharon Avraham Kabak, "The Narrow Path") this author's translation of the portion.