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Shema Israel

Bible Correspondance Course



Israel and the Church

What is Truth?

A strange question perhaps, yet one that expresses both our confusion and our skepticism regarding truth. Confusion, because with a multiplicity of religions and a diversity of beliefs around us we may genuinely wonder, “*Where is the truth?*” Skepticism, for it suggests that truth does not exist; in fact, there really is no objective truth.

The Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*, answers the question clearly. “*Hashem, God is the truth*” (Jeremiah 10:10; literal translation). For the Bible then, truth does exist; truth *is* association with God Himself. In fact, truth, *Emeth*, in the Hebrew language, is one of the 13 attributes of God. It falls seventh in the list in the exact center of the 13 attributes listed in Exodus 34:6; literal translation, a passage that is recited in the liturgies of Rosh Ha-Shanah Yom Kippur (Jewish New Year, Day of Attonement).

If truth is identified with God’s character, it does not come from us but is to be found outside of us – in God. This recognition implies that in order to find the truth we should not approach it with the preconceived idea that we know what the truth is. Instead, we should approach the truth with a question, “*What is it?*” This is the very same question, in fact, the ancient Israelites asked when confronted with the *manna*, the bread of God in the wilderness. “*What is it?*” they asked, and the question gave the name to this heavenly bread, for the Hebrew word *manna* means “*What is it?*” The meaning of the word *manna* suggests an important lesson regarding how we should approach Biblical truth. We should approach it with the question: “*What is it? What is truth?*” We should approach it with the same humble and honest mindset as the ancient Israelites approached the *manna* in the wilderness, asking “*What is it?*” Asking the question from this frame of reference no longer suggests confusion or skepticism. Instead, it implies sincere questioning from one who expects a true answer from above.

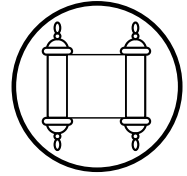
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Bible Study- Lesson # 6*

Israel and the Church



No Religion Is an Island

“**N**o religion is an island,” said Abraham Heschel, and this statement applies particularly to Israel and the Church. Neither Israel nor the Church can claim independence from the other. Yet ironically instead of providing a bond, this reality has produced rejection and hatred. The Church has settled and constructed her identity against Judaism; and conversely, Judaism has often created its singularity in reaction to the Church. And theology is not the only factor to blame in this scandal. Prejudice, ignorance and the deliberate will to lock the other in definitive labels, have all played a considerable role in this tragedy. It is important to think right, but it is also important to think right about the other. Christians need to learn more about and from the Jews, and inversely Jews will benefit to learn from Christians.

Could it be, in these times of dialogue, openness and unexpected happenings, that two former enemies might suddenly wake up and concede that they need each other – not only for their mutual salvation but also for the salvation of the world? Then, moving beyond the pride of their institutions, they may begin to face their responsibility as witnesses to the great God above?

**Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the New International Reader's Version of the Bible, Copyright 1998, by the Zondervan Corporation.*

1. Has God rejected the people of Israel?

The Lord says, "...I will come to give peace and rest to Israel...I have loved you with a love that lasts forever. I have kept on loving you with faithful love" (Jeremiah 31:2, 3). (cf. Isaiah 54:7, 8)

So here is what I ask. Did God turn his back on his people" Not at all! I myself belong to Israel. I am one of Abraham's children. I am from the tribe of Benjamin" (Romans 11:1). (cf. vs. 28)

- Frederic II, King of Prussia, once asked his personal medical doctor, the Swiss Zimmermann: "Tell me Zimmermann, can you give me one single proof of the existence of God?" And the doctor answered: "Majesty, the Jews!"

2. Why does the Church need Israel?

They are the people of Israel. They have been adopted as God's children. God's glory belongs to them. So do the covenants. They received the law. They were taught to worship in the temple. They were given the promises. The founders of our nation belong to them. Christ comes from their family line. He is God over all. May he always be praised! Amen (Romans 9: 4-5).

- “If Jews were to disappear, the Torah would disappear.” (Rashi on Psalm 83:6; *Midrash Tehillim* 185a)
- “Is it really the will of God that there be no more Judaism in the world? Would it really be the triumph of God if the scrolls of the Torah would no more be taken out of the Ark and the Torah no more read in the Synagogue, our ancient Hebrew prayers, in which Jesus himself worshiped, no more recited, the Passover Seder no more celebrated in our lives, the law of Moses no more observed in our homes? Would it really be *ad majorem Dei gloriam* to have a world without Jews?” Abraham Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder*, p. 111.

3. Why does Israel need the Church?

“So you must go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

4. What does the Church need to learn from Israel?

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” he said. “So you must obey them. Do

everything they tell you. But don't do what they do" (Matthew 23:2, 3).

5. What does Israel need to learn from the Church?

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. Not one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6).

6. How did the Jews respond to the message of Jesus when he came?

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. News about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him (Luke 4:14).

"Heal those who are sick. Bring those who are dead back to life. Make those who have skin diseases 'clean' again. Drive out demons. You have received freely, so give freely" (Matthew 10:8).

- "Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles." (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII, III; p. 379)

7. Who was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus?

But the chief priest and the elders talked the crowd into asking for Barabbas and having Jesus put to death... The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the palace, which was called the Praetorium. All the rest of the soldiers gathered around him (Matthew 27:20, 27).

"But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us. All of us are like sheep. We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the Lord has placed on his servant the sins of all of us" (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

8. How did the Jews in general respond to the testimony of the early Christians?

But many who heard the message believed. The number of men who believed grew to about 5,000 (Acts 4:4). (cf. vs. 32; cf. 11:19; 13:14, 15; 14:1; 15:4; 17:4)

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they spoke to Paul. "Brother," they said, "you see that thousands of Jews have become believers" (Acts 21:20).

9. Why has it become difficult for the Jews to be receptive to the Christian testimony?

If you don't pay attention to the law, even your prayers are hated (Proverbs 28:9). (c.f. John 4:8-11).

- Martin Luther: “When I see how Christians have treated the Jews, if I were a Jew, I would rather be a hog than a Christian” (cited by Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984], p. 50)

10. When did anti-Semitism begin?

So don't think you are better than the other branches. Remember, you don't give life to the root. The root gives life to you (Romans 11:18). The Church forgot its roots!

11. What are the three main stages of the history of anti-Semitism?

1. The 4th Century, where we find anti-Semitism's birth paralleled with the rejection of the Law, the first accusations of deicide, and the installation of the established Church; thus, the great and formal separation.

2. The 11th Century, a time parallel to the Crusades, when anti-Semitism became cloaked in violence with a focus on acute economic problems.

3. The 19th/20th Centuries, when a new ingredient, racism (parallel to nationalist and pseudoscientific movements), was added to the traditional spectrum of anti-Semitism.” (*Drinking at the Sources*, p. 36).

12. What are the main characteristics of psychological anti-Semitism?

“Here is the source of those clever little smiles intended to say more than they do. Here, too, is the basis for an unfortunate vocabulary spawned by our current civilization. By inflexible edict, this language sets the Jew in a concrete atavism (manifestation of primitive characteristics of a family or a race) from which he can never escape and which he can never understand because it doesn’t make sense. From this source also comes “a portrait traced by others, in which the Jew does not recognize himself.”

So the invisible, the unverifiable, becomes the last resort in the effort to spin fables on Jewish differences. There exists, it is said, a Jewish intelligence – praised and admired. This unique intelligence is said to be strictly Jewish and cannot become Christian! Jean-Paul Sartre has given a special twist to this contention. “Anti-Semitism,” says he “is an attempt to upgrade mediocrity per se, in order to create a mediocre elite. For the anti-Semite, intelligence is Jewish; he

therefore can scorn it along with the other virtues the Jews possess.

Yet this Jewish intelligence, along with other apparent qualities conceded to the Jews, sooner or later will be turned against them: “Is it said that the Jew is intelligent? You might think that is a quality. But not at all! The Jew is TOO intelligent. His sagacity is destructive, corrosive, vexing.”

Nor can we forget the popular image often created to represent the Jew in Christian circles. The image depicts knavery, cupidity, wealth, and class materialism as naturally Jewish. Though the image is legendary, it is still false. One can find just as many poor people among the Jews, if not more, than elsewhere. Of course, some Jews are rich, some are covetous, and some are deceitful, just as are some Christians. But in the case of the Jew, these faults are not individual weaknesses – they are Jewish characteristics. The difference lies in the community to which the individual belongs.

Literary works generally present the Jew as “deceitful and cowardly,” but it was left for Albert Memmi to reveal the secret of it all: “Let none tell me that you cannot find deceitful and cowardly Christians. Such are deceitful and cowardly on the one hand but upright on the other, the same as all other people. Their deceitfulness and their cowardice are

not related to their membership in a community. Furthermore, positive heroes are also Christians. The Jew practices usury and is cruel because he is Jewish.”

If one falls victim at the hands of a dishonest businessman who happens to be a Jew, the normal comment is the following: “He is Jewish – what can you expect!”

The anti-Semite monster must be pursued into the depths of his lair so we can denounce even his language. Yes, even the language people use can be sullied. “*What a Jew,*” people often exclaim, though the person they have in mind may not be a Jew at all. He is called a Jew simply because he has shown cunning and avarice.” (*Drinking at the Sources*, p. 29-30)

13. What are the main characteristics of theological anti-Semitism?

“In speaking of theological anti-Semitism, we recognize the existence of Christian anti-Semitism. When this point is clearly made, a Christian reaction is to be expected; for the Christian will say with total sincerity that Christians cannot be anti-Semitic. Further conversation would then lead to the observation that if the Jews have suffered so much through anti-Semitism, it is because... Then follow explanations, theological justifications, and the “reasons of conscience” that sent Jews to the

stake and the scaffold. Murder and assassination are also explained as unfortunate necessities.

In short, the Jew in all ages, and even today, is considered to be responsible for the death of God – this simply because 2000 years ago some of his probable ancestors could have sentenced Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified.

On one hand, accusations; on the other, pretended love. On one hand, anti-Semitism is condemned; on the other, anti-Semitism is fed generously by theological reproach.

Yet a relationship exists between the two points of view. This was perfectly clear to Kierkegaard, who said: “Tell (to the child) the tribulations of Jesus during His life, the betrayal by one of His close companions, the denial by several others, the insults and reviling of others up to the very moment when they finally nailed Him to the cross, as you can see in the sacred pictures, asking that His blood fall on them and on their children, while He prayed for them and asked that this not be so, and that the heavenly Father would forgive their sin. . . . Tell how at the same time that Love lived, an infamous thief sentenced to die was preferred by the people who greeted his release with hurrahs. . . . While they cried out: ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’ in the face of Love. . . . What impression do you think that story will make on

the child? . . . He will resolve firmly, when he has grown up, to cut to pieces the ungodly who acted thus toward Love.”



Kierkegaard’s observation was confirmed on an Austrian television program during a recent Easter season. A former Nazi, now “repentant,” was interviewed. He explained how this indictment of the Jew had been taught to him repeatedly since his early youth and had contributed largely to instilling in him hatred, even as an atheist, that would qualify him as a future member of the Hitler Youth.

Of course, not all German Christians fell into the snare of Nazism; many of them, even when they were anti-Semitic, battled this evil at the peril of their lives. Yet these same Christians who opposed the Nazi monster, possibly unconsciously and without understanding the consequences of their attitude, tried to justify, at least partially, the Jewish predicament.

Articles and publications aimed at demonstrating the fulfillment of certain Biblical prophecies used the “Jewish argument;” it went like this: “The predicament of the Jews is terrible, frightening; but could not this be a striking confirmation of Biblical truth? After all, did not the Jews crucify the Incarnate God?” at times in the course of a public lecture, photographs were exhibited showing, with a touch of morbid

zeal, such concentration camps as the one at Treblinka. Human bodies, even skeleton like naked children, were pictured – all this with the implied message that, after all, here was irrefutable proof that the Bible is true and that God can be relied upon! “Impenitent theologians,” commented Jules Isaac, “do not bring God into this; human villainy is enough.”

The worst is the trick this can play on conscience. Persecution of the Jews actually becomes the will of God; thus, one can be at peace in hatred as well as in indifference.” (*Drinking at the Sources*, p. 31-32)

14. What is the relationship between Israel and the Church?

“I will give power to my two witnesses. They will prophesy for 1,260 days. They will be dressed in black clothes to show how sad they are.” The witnesses are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand in front of the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and eats up their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These witnesses have power to close up the sky. Then it will not rain while they are prophesying. They also have power to turn the waters into blood. And they can strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want to (Revelation 11:3-6).

15. How does Biblical prophecy predict the future of the relationship between Israel and the church?

After that, the people of Israel will return to the Lord their God. They will look to him and to a king from the family line of David. In the last days, they will tremble with fear as they come to the Lord. And they will receive his full blessing (Hosea 3:5).

After all, weren't you cut from a wild olive tree? Weren't you joined to an olive tree that was taken care of? And wasn't that the opposite of how things should be done? How much more easily will the natural branches be joined to their own olive tree (Romans 11:24). (cf. vs. 25, 26)

- E. G. White: “Through Hosea was given a prophecy that set before them [the Jews] the privilege of having a part in the final restoration that is to be made to the people of God at the close of earth's history” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 298).

The Two Witnesses*

*What makes the Church in need of Israel;
what makes Israel in need of the Church?*

The law of Moses requires the testimony of at least two witnesses to make a story believable (Deuteronomy 17:6). In the New Testament, John repeats this principle when he states: “*the testimony of two men is true*” (John 8:17). Indeed when two persons tell the same story, this means they saw the same thing. They so confirm each other; they say the truth. Likewise the testimony of the Church makes Israel a true witness and the testimony of Israel makes the Church a true witness. Both testify to the same story: The same miracles of Creation, the Exodus, the resurrection, and the same hope proving God was there. He spoke and acted; God is still there, He speaks and is alive!

This is why the two witnesses, the Church *and* Israel, are needed; so that people *out there* may believe and hope in something beyond their pain and struggles. Beyond the valley of shadow, they may bring ethics into their lives and therefore become the human manifestation of the divine reality.

But there is more. The two witnesses are not only needed in order to repeat and thereby authenticate the same story. They are also needed in order to complete the story. Each witness may have seen something that escaped the other’s eyes. We need both testimonies in order to get the whole story. Also, both witnesses need each other to make their own story more meaningful and beautiful.

The Church Needs Israel

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History is the first and certainly the most obvious place where the Church is dependent on Israel. The Church was born and grew in the soil of Israel. The first Christians were all Jews who behaved as faithful Jews. Yeshua (Jesus) was a Jew. The Old Testament, as well as, the Midrashim, the Jewish parables, were part of His teachings. All His disciples were Jews; the whole New Testament was written by Jews who constantly referred to the Jewish Scriptures and traditions. The Church needs Israel as a house needs its foundation and even more as a tree needs its roots. The apostle Paul makes this point very clearly when he compared Israel to an olive tree in which the new branches of the Church were to be grafted in (Romans 11). Note that Paul, the Jew did not speak of another tree which would replace the old. For him the Church was to extend the tree, not to replace it. The Church needs Israel for its very existence and identity. But that need goes even beyond mere historical reality. The present Church needs Israel for what Israel now has, and the Church does not have.

The Hebrew Scriptures have been preserved by the tenacious work of Jewish scribes who carefully copied the ancient manuscripts, and also by faithful Jews who read them throughout generations in the synagogue. Moses, Isaiah, the Psalms, the Song of Songs are still chanted today in the original language. Thanks to Israel, Christians have access to the Hebrew text of the Old

* Jacques Doukhan, "The Two Witnesses," Shabbat Shalom, August 1995, 14-18.

Testament, to the Hebrew thinking of the writers of the New Testament, and even to the Hebrew prayers in which Yeshua himself worshiped.

*The Law, the Ten Commandments, the dietary laws, the Shabbat, and the entire ethical code, have not only been preserved in writing by the Jews, but they are also being witnessed to by the people who observe them in their lives. The Church needs the Jews in order to rethink the theology of the law. Christians have stressed grace and love to the extent that they have often ignored the value of justice and concrete works. Emotions, feelings and the subjective experience have been overemphasized at the expense of faithfulness, will and the objective duty of obedience. Along the same lines, the Church needs the Jews in order to rediscover the intrinsic value and beauty of *studying the Word of God* for itself, the word from above which has its own truth to be discovered. The naive Christian belief that the Holy Spirit will inspire personal reading of the Scriptures no matter how they do it has deterred them from the discipline of searching the Scriptures. Too often the Bible has been used to prove one's point in a theological dispute, or as a shallow sentimental inspiration for religious devotion. Even the way Jews worship – their attention to the great God, their respect for the holy Scriptures, their corporate singing which involves effort of mind, aesthetic sensitivity, deep emotions, as well as, motions of the body – might inspire Christians in their search for more creative and genuine worship services.*

The joy of life and the sense of the feast, the ability to receive the gift of God in Creation, is also a value which Christians may learn from the Jews. From its earliest stages the influence of Gnosticism and especially of Marcion Christianity has opposed faith in the God of Creation, the God of beauty and of the senses. It has resisted the God of the Old Testament, in favor of the God of the Spirit and soul and salvation, the God of the New Testament. This is sometimes reflected in the Christian theology of Sunday worship which is interpreted as the sign of salvation versus the Jewish Sabbath, sign of creation. This dualism has influenced generations of Christians and produced a religion of sadness where laughter and enjoyment are suspect. Christians may learn from the Jews to pay attention to their physical, as well as, their spiritual life. They may learn from them a holistic view of life. What they eat, what they drink, whatever they do affects their total being. Christians need to learn from Jews that religion is a way of life and not just a turn of the soul.

The Messiah himself would come closer to Christians if only they were closer to the Jews. Indeed the “Messiah” concept is specifically Jewish. The word *Christos* (Christ) from which the word “Christian” comes, is nothing but the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Mashiah* (Messiah). This word is found in the Hebrew Scriptures where it designates the king, the priest, the prophet, anyone who is anointed (*mashah*) by God for a specific purpose. Ultimately the *Mashiah* (Christ) is described in the Bible as the ideal King of David who will

bring change, peace, and salvation to Israel and the world. This is why for the Jews the Messiah has not yet come; He is expected in the future. Christians need Jews to be reminded that salvation has not taken place yet; that salvation apart from the world is not salvation and that the Kingdom of God is a historical, physical reality and not just an existential subjective experience. The Messiah implies hope for a better world, which is not the one we presently know. This is why the Messiah has been represented in Hebrew Scriptures and in Jewish tradition as a star. The lonely star, the last star which announces the coming of the day—the star of David, is the very star that shines in the Israeli flag. Christians have so emphasized the value of the past event of the crucifixion, that they often stop at the cross. The cross overshadows the star. The Kingdom of God is already here. However, Christians may learn from Jews to become more lucid, to look around and realize that the wolf does not yet lie down with the lamb. Death, violence and suffering are still striking, eloquent signs that the Messiah is still to come. With the Jews, Christians will learn to hope.

Israel Needs the Church

History has demonstrated that Israel needs the Church. Christians have made the God of Israel known throughout the earth. Thanks to Christians, the Hebrew Bible and its message has been translated into most, if not all, the languages of the world. The story of Joseph and the Psalms of David have been heard by Africans of the jungle and Indians of

the Amazon, as well as, by sophisticated Europeans or Americans. The selection of Israel as a chosen people has been complemented by the Universalism of the Church which took the truth of Israel beyond its historical and geographical borders. Thanks to Christians the world has learned about the existence of Israel. This is one of the most ironic and interesting paradoxes of history. Without the Church, the Jews might have remained a small, insignificant and obscure religion which might well have disappeared. The Church has not only made Israel known by the nations but has also made the existence of Israel necessary for the Church's own identity. Israel owes her subsistence, fame, and survival to the Church.

The New Testament has been deliberately ignored by the Jews, although it was written by Jews and for Jews even before the time of the composition of the Talmud. Therefore Jews will benefit from the reading of these texts; for they not only witness to the life and belief of first century Judaism but they also contain valuable truths which may strengthen and enrich their Jewish roots.

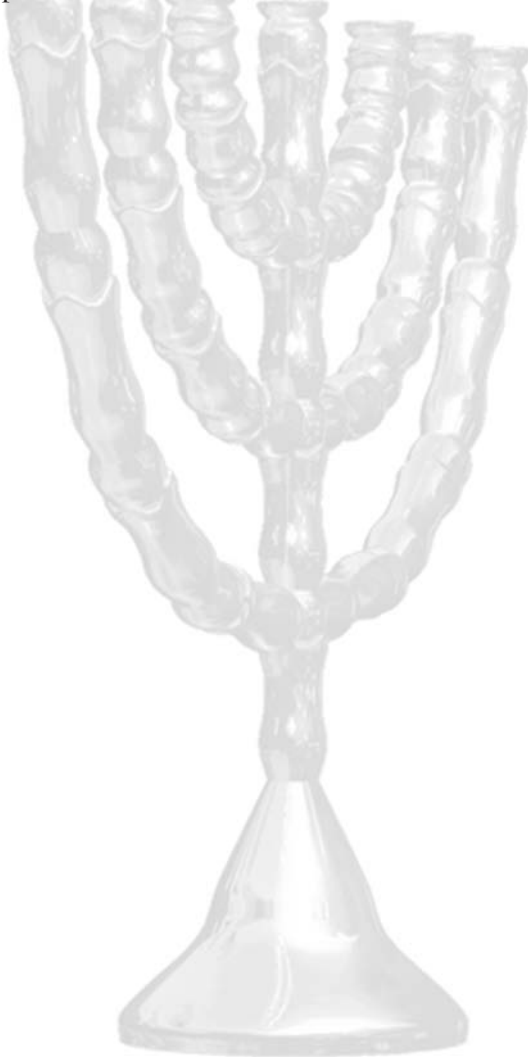
As a matter of fact, Jews well versed in their own Scriptures and tradition may understand these writings even better than Christians themselves, who often project their own "Gentile" world view into them. Jews will discover in the New Testament that it is not as foreign as they thought. In this light they may even get a better grasp of their own heritage. Often the meaning and the beauty of the Hebrew Scriptures will be enhanced

in the explanations of the New Testament. Also the Talmud and Midrashim will be set up in context. The stories about the rabbi of Nazareth, his parables and his teachings will surprise them with their Jewish flavor and the high Jewish ideals they convey.

Grace (hesed) is not specific to the Christian message. Grace is also cherished by the Jewish people. It is a genuine Jewish value. From the Christians, however, Jews will be reminded that salvation is not just achieved through *mitzvoth*, but through the God who comes down in history and acts on behalf of Israel. Jews need to learn more about the proximity of God, the God who goes so far as to enter the complex process of incarnation in order to speak with humans, be with them, and save them. Certainly Abraham Heschel thought of this reality when he observed that “*the Bible is not man’s theology but God’s anthropology.*”¹ Learning about God’s incarnation, Jews will better understand the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who spoke face to face with Moses, the God who fought for Israel at Jericho, the God of the prophets. And this perspective will even bring new life into their *mitzvoth*. The law will not just be performed as a required chore; it will blossom from the heart as a fruit emerging from their personal relationship with God.

The Messiah embodies this very principle of God’s involvement in human history and existence. The Christian emphasis may therefore help the Jew to recognize the effective presence of God in the flesh of history. For the Messiah was not only to

be out there in heaven, or in the far future. He was also to be here among humans—“Messiah for all generations”—as it has been taught in mystical Judaism and recently pointed out in Hasidic currents.²



¹ Abraham Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 129.

¹ Abraham Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 129.

The Ten Points of Seelisberg

1. *Remember that One God speaks to us all through the Old and the New Testaments.*
2. *Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel, and that his everlasting love and forgiveness embraces his own people and the whole world.*
3. *Remember that the first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews.*
4. *Remember that the fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one's neighbor, proclaimed already in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, is binding upon both Christians and Jews in all human relationships, without any exception.*
5. *Avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or postbiblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity.*
6. *Avoid using the word Jews in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus, and the words The Enemies of Jesus to designate the whole Jewish people.*
7. *Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone. It was only a section of the Jews in Jerusalem who demanded the death of Jesus, and the Christian message has always been that it was the sins of mankind which were exemplified by those Jews and the sins in which all men share that brought Christ to the Cross.*
8. *Avoid referring to the scriptural curses, or the cry of a raging mob: His Blood Be Upon Us and Our Children, without remembering that this cry should not count against the infinitely more weighty words of our Lord: Father, Forgive Them, for They Know not What They Do.*
9. *Avoid promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accursed, reserved for a destiny of suffering.*
10. *Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews.*