



## THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

# THE PROMISE OF TOMORROW

### JEWISHNESS AND HEBREW CHRISTIANITY

By Arnold Fruchtenbaum

This title, "Jewishness and Hebrew Christianity," may not reveal very much to some people. In fact, it may even be confusing because of the term "Jewishness."

What in reality constitutes Jewishness? Before Jewishness can be adequately defined we must determine who, or what, is a Jew. Does the word Jew mean a religion, a race, an ethnic group, a nationality, or what?

Still another confusing term may be the word "Christianity" and who, or what, is a Christian. Is a Christian one born of Christian parents? Can one be born a Christian, or become a Christian by joining a church or by being baptized?

Also adding to the confusion is the term "Hebrew Christianity." Who, or what, is a Hebrew Christian, or, as such a person is sometimes called, a Christian Jew? How is it possible for a person to be both a Jew and a Christian at the same time, or is this to be relegated to schizophrenia? Can the terms Hebrew and Christian be reconciled or are they permanently contradictory?

#### WHAT DOES "JEWISHNESS" MEAN?

We come to the issue, who, or what, is a Jew? As a Hebrew Christian minister, I often discuss the Messiahship of Jesus with other Jewish people. Almost always they chal-

lenge my statement that my faith in the Messiahship of Jesus in no way has changed the fact that I am a Jew. When so challenged I usually reply by asking the question, "What is a Jew?" In answer I have received many definitions, few of which excluded me as a Jew. In fact, the question of who is a Jew is not clear to Jewish people generally, even in the State of Israel. While Israeli law is very clear on who is not a Jew, it is totally unclear on who is a Jew. This definition is important, for the status of a Hebrew Christian depends upon it.

Does religion enter into the consideration of this question? Some people say it does — the religion of Judaism. To many people, including a segment of Orthodox Jews, the terms Jew and Judaism are synonymous.

In 1966 I left the United States for a year of study in Israel. On the flight to Israel, I sat next to an Orthodox Jew, a professor at Yeshiva University in New York City. When he learned that I was a Hebrew Christian, he told me outright that he considered me no longer a Jew. When I asked him for his definition of a Jew, he replied that being a Jew — Jewishness — is purely a religious matter. I asked him whether he considered a Reform Jew to be

Jewish. He said he did because a Reform Jew still practices Judaism in a limited way. Then I asked him if he would consider an atheist Jew or a communist Jew to be a Jew. He said he would. I finally asked him that if he considered a Jew who is an atheist or a communist having nothing in common with religious Jews, to be a Jew, how could he deny that I, a Hebrew Christian, am a Jew, as I have much in common in a religious way with both Orthodox and Reform Jews.

He had no answer, but still maintained that the atheist Jew is a Jew whereas the Christian Jew is not. So it would seem that if Jewishness is defined as a religious matter, namely, Judaism, then Hebrew Christians are not Jewish. However, defining Jewishness on a purely religious basis does not satisfactorily explain who or what is a Jew. Judaism may be said to be the religion of most Jews, but all Jews cannot be defined in this way, because most Jews do not practice Judaism.

#### DAVID BEN GURION'S DEFINITION

One day during my studies at the Hebrew University in Israel, all the foreign students, numbering about 300 including myself, were called together for a special meeting. We were to be addressed by David Ben



Gurion, considered to be the George Washington of the State of Israel. In his address he defined a true Jew as one who comes to Israel, settles in Israel, and raises his children in Israel.

Jewishness then, in Mr. Ben Gurion's opinion, is nationalism, tied up with the State of Israel. He did not recognize the Jewish people living outside of Israel as being true or complete Jews. In fact, he considered Jewish people outside the land as "Christianized" Jews.

In the question-and-answer session that followed Mr. Ben Gurion's address, many American Jewish students, both Orthodox and Reform, challenged the speaker. The Orthodox students even denied that Israel contained true Jewishness, and one said that Israel is a State of Jews but not a Jewish State because it is not based on Orthodox Jewish law. To these Orthodox students, Jewishness is a matter of religion. To Ben Gurion the Jewish people outside the land are in the Galuth (Exile). But the Jews outside the land consider themselves not as being in the Exile but in the Dispersion. Thus the Ben Gurion meeting provided me with additional definitions of who is a Jew.

#### AN ATHEIST JEW'S OPINION

Twenty years after the State of Israel was reborn, the question of who is a Jew remains unsettled. It now involves the Supreme Court of Israel. Commander Benjamin Shalit of the Israeli Navy and his Gentile wife are both atheists. When Commander Shalit sought to register his children as Jews by nationality but non-believers in religion, his request was refused by the Israeli Minister of the Interior. So Commander Shalit took the matter to court, and since the case involved the definition of who, or what is a Jew, nine chief justices attended the hearing, a greater number than had attended the Eichmann trial.

Shalit's argument is that the Israeli Minister of the Interior has no right to use religious standards in judging the secular issue of nationality. He maintains that as a nonbeliever he cannot be forced to accept any decision grounded on religious law. He insists:

*It is not faith that unifies us as a nation. Too many people do not practice religion for that. The cultural and sociological factors are the ones that determine who is a Jew. Not the memory of a primitive religion. My children were born in Israel, speak Hebrew, live in a Hebrew culture, and go to Hebrew schools. They know nothing else. How can the Interior Minister say that they are not Jews?*

(Time, November 29, 1968)

Shalit defines his Jewishness on the following basis:

*Religious observance is not part of the concept of Jewishness and that the principal test of Jewishness is deliberate and declared association and identification with the Jewish people, its history, language, culture, and inheritance. He sought to persuade the court that anyone who declares himself to be a Jew by nationality is a Jew, even if he be an atheist, with the reservation however that he should not be so registered if he declares that he belongs to some other religious denomination. Jewishness to him then is not a biological question but one of historical, sentimental and intellectual identification.*

(Jerusalem Post, Nov. 25, 1968)

Shalit contradicts himself in one major aspect: On the one hand he says that a Jew is anyone who identifies himself with the Jewish people, culturally and sociologically; while on the other hand he says that a Jew is not a Jew if he belongs to a religious denomination other than Judaism. This is a statement that implies prejudice against Hebrew Christianity. A Hebrew Christian can also identify himself with the Jewish people but he believes that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. In what way can Shalit, the atheist, rule out a Hebrew Christian from considering himself Jewish without contradicting himself and destroying his own argument for his Jewishness?

If the Supreme Court of Israel agrees with Shalit, it would in effect rule that culture rather than religion

is at the core of Israel's Jewishness. Shalit states:

*But if I win, a Jew will be a Jew by virtue of his own identification with the Jewish people, and not by virtue of religious law alone.*

(Time, November 29, 1968)

So the Supreme Court of Israel will make the final decision as to who is a Jew.



#### A PUBLIC OPINION POLL ON "WHO IS A JEW"

In conjunction with the Shalit case, the National Religious Party of Israel has announced that if the Supreme Court rules in favor of Shalit, the NRP will pull out of the government coalition, so strong is the popular feeling on the question of who is a Jew. As a by-product of the interest aroused by the Shalit case, a public opinion poll was held recently on this question. Fifteen hundred Jewish families were canvassed with the following results:

12% declared that a Jew was a person whose father or mother was Jewish or has a Jewish spouse.

23% claimed that a Jew was a person who considers himself a Jew.

19% held that religious law, that is, a man born to a Jewish mother or who converts to Judaism is a Jew.

13% said a Jew is one who lives in Israel or who identifies with the Jewish State.

13% state a Jew is one who observes the Jewish religious practices.

11% answered that a Jew is one who was raised and educated as a Jew.

9% said they could not define it.



These results were recorded in *The Jerusalem Post* of November 25, 1968.

So of the six definitions listed only one leaves the Hebrew Christian out. At the same time it rules out a large number of other Jews who also do not observe Jewish religious practices. The other five definitions would by no means rule out a Hebrew Christian.

### A HEBREW CHRISTIAN'S DEFINITION

How would a Hebrew Christian define a person who is a Jew? A Hebrew Christian is forced to define Jewishness in the Biblical meaning of the term, for to the Jewish believer in Jesus the Hebrew Scriptures are the source of authority. His main test is the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3:

*Now Jehovah said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*

In the Abrahamic Covenant God promised Abraham that from him would come forth a people and a nation. This covenant is later confirmed to Isaac and reconfirmed to Jacob. Therefore I believe that the safest way of defining the question of who is a Jew is as follows: A Jew, according to the Abrahamic Covenant, is any descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jewishness would then be defined as nationality. But unlike the view of many Israelis, this nationalistic definition is not confined to the State of Israel alone, but is confined to all Jewish people no matter where they are.

Biblically speaking, the Jewish people are a nation. Today we are scattered, but we remain a nation. We are a nation because we are descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By this definition, no matter what the individual Jewish person

may believe or disbelieve, he remains a Jew. A Negro who is a Christian remains a Negro. A Negro who becomes a Moslem remains a Negro. A Negro who becomes a Buddhist remains a Negro. A Chinese man who becomes a Christian remains Chinese. A Chinese man who remains a Buddhist also remains a Chinese. The same is true of the Jewish person. He is a Jew because he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whether Orthodox, Reform, atheist or communist, he remains a Jew. If a Jew chooses to believe that Jesus is his Messiah, he also remains a Jew. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can change the fact that he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

### WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

We next attempt to find out who or what is a Christian. Again, the Hebrew Christian is forced to go to the Scriptures to determine the true definition of a Christian. The New Testament portion of the Scriptures plainly teaches that no one can ever be born a Christian. The New Testament divides the world into three groups of people: Jews, Gentiles, and Christians.

What does the New Testament teach about who is a Christian? It teaches that a Christian is a Jew or a Gentile who has come to realize that man is born in a state of sin and for this reason he is separated from God. The Scriptures teach that God has a wonderful plan for the life of every individual but because of sin separating him from God, he cannot experience this wonderful plan of God for his life. The penalty for sin must first be paid. However, being a sinner, an individual Jew or an individual Gentile cannot by himself pay the price or penalty for sin. This was the purpose of the coming of the Messiah whom many Jews and Gentiles know to be Jesus. At Messiah's death He became the substitute for sin and so paid the penalty for sin. The Scriptures teach both in the Old and New Testaments that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. (Leviticus 17: 11 and Hebrews 9:22). The act that determines whether or not a person is a Christian is his willingness to

place his faith or belief in Jesus as the substitute for sin. For the Scriptures teach in John 1:12:

*But as many as received him to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

So a person who at some point in his life personally receives Christ as the one who has made atonement for his sin, experiences what it is to become a Christian. Hence, if anyone says that he was born a Christian, it is an obvious sign, according to the New Testament, that he is not a Christian, for no one is born a Christian! Becoming a Christian is an experience by which he comes to know God through Jesus Christ, and the sin which has separated the individual from God is thus removed. Hence, Christians are made, not born.

In summary then the New Testament teaches that everyone is born either a Jew or a Gentile. Christians are composed of Jewish believers and Gentile believers in the Messiahship and Lordship of Christ.

### WHAT IS A HEBREW CHRISTIAN?

In the common view, the term Hebrew Christian is a contradiction. One can either be a Jew or a Christian. To be both at the same time is, in this view, an impossibility.

One Jewish writer states that the term Jewish Christian challenges logic. Another writer limits the title to Jewish believers in Christ during the first century but not thereafter. This is a view held by a number of my former professors at the Hebrew University. They used the term, Jewish Christians, in relation to Jewish believers in Christ during the first century but did not recognize the term as valid for Jewish believers today. Yet they never explained what they considered was the difference between the first century Jewish believers and the twentieth century Jewish believers.

What then is a Hebrew Christian? If a Jew is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which we believe to be the proper definition, and if a Christian is one who has personally by his own decision accepted Jesus of Nazareth as his Messiah, then a Hebrew Christian is a Jew who be-



lieves Jesus Christ is his Messiah. Religiously speaking, by faith Hebrew Christians align themselves with other believers in Christ whether they be Jews or Gentiles but nationally they identify themselves with the Jewish people.

A Hebrew Christian then must acknowledge himself to be both a Jew and a Christian. If a Jewish person accepts baptism solely on the basis

of attempting to lose his identity as a Jew, he is by no means to be considered a Hebrew Christian, but a renegade, a traitor, and an apostate. A Hebrew Christian is proud of his Jewishness and is also proud of his faith in the Messiahship of Jesus. The experience by which a Jew becomes a Christian (or a believer) is just as much a mystery as it is when a Gentile becomes a Christian. The experience can be described but it

cannot be explained. The center of this experience is the person of Jesus Christ. The causes which brought it about may differ. It could be the testimony of another Hebrew Christian, the printed word, preaching, or reading the New Testament. The causes vary but the results are always the same: Jesus Christ becomes the object of faith and trust.

*(Continued in the December Issue)*

### JEWISHNESS IS?

By Richard P. Briefstein

What is Jewishness? Joining the J.D.L.? Giving to Hadassah? Laying tefillin? Keeping Shabbos? Praying three times a day? Speaking Hebrew? Or just being born into a Jewish family?

Some believe that Jewishness is keeping the traditions and rituals of our forefathers. Yet, is that all? What about God? Where does He fit into Jewishness? Some might say, "He's in heaven." Others might say, "Who cares?" In spite of what people say, somehow God and Jewishness go together — like bagels and lox.

We, as Jewish people, are to love God with all our hearts and souls and might (Deut. 6:5); but who does this or even wants to? Some shrug their shoulders and say, "It's impossible to love God with all our hearts." Yet, that's what we are to do.

Maybe Jewishness is loving God and knowing that He loves you. The problem is that this seems to be an impossible prospect. God doesn't

seem to hear us. Some people say, "he's sleeping or hiding."

The word "Jew" in Hebrew is "Yehuda" and means "a praiser of God" (Gen. 29:35). Maybe Jewishness is praising God. But why should we? How can we praise a God we don't know? That would really be hypocrisy.

However, God promised that there was coming a day when He would replace the Old Covenant with a New Covenant, one much better than the one which the people had broken and rebelled against. In this new relationship God promised to put His Spirit into our hearts so that we would know Him, love Him with all our hearts, and follow His ways naturally (Jer. 31:31-33 and Ezek. 36:26-27). In Deuteronomy 30:6, we read, "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

When would this new personal relationship with God come into being? When would we receive God's Spirit into our hearts? When would we be given new hearts full of love of God?

At a Passover Seder centuries ago one stated, as He pressed His lips to the pesach wine, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Covenant (Testament) which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:27-28).

This One claimed to initiate the New Covenant or relationship to God by His blood sacrifice for our sins. He became our Passover lamb to deliver us from the bondage of sin and to enable us to love God with all our hearts. This One was Jesus. As He, our Messiah, rose from the grave, so will we rise from the grave of traditions and rituals to a living relationship with our loving God.

What is Jewishness?

Knowing Jesus is Jewishness! Δ

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