

A  
Handbook  
on the  
Jewish  
Roots  
of the  
Christian  
Faith

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Edited by  
Craig A. Evans  
and David Mishkin



This excellent *Handbook* provides an exceptionally fine resource for studying the Jewish roots of Jesus and Christianity. It is a mine of useful information, with effective and concise discussions of a broad range of pertinent subjects, presented by a team of outstanding scholars. A particular strength is the fact that a good number of contributors are Jewish believers in Jesus who have a special sensitivity to the continuities between Jewish and Christian worlds. The *Handbook* is positive in its orientation and, given the variety of contributors, amazingly coherent. Readers will come away with a richer understanding of the whole Bible and the history of salvation.

**Donald A. Hagner**  
**George Eldon Ladd Professor Emeritus of New Testament**  
**Fuller Theological Seminary**

So just how Jewish is the Christian teaching about Jesus? The answer is quite a lot. So much so that it is just about everywhere. That is what *A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* shows so admirably. A reading of this book will demonstrate just how rooted the Christian faith is in Jewish hope.

**Darrell L. Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement and Senior**  
**Research Professor of New Testament Studies**  
**Dallas Theological Seminary**

This helpful and well-informed work edited by Evans and Mishkin rightly highlights the Jewish identity and context of Jesus and his earliest followers.

**Craig S. Keener, F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies**  
**Asbury Theological Seminary**

An exciting volume by a diverse range of scholars on the Jewish origins of the early church and the New Testament. Readers interested in biblical backgrounds, ancient history, Jewish institutions and festivals, how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament, how Jesus and the apostles related to other Jews, or simply pining for a deeper knowledge of the Bible will benefit immensely from this book. It is useful too with its account of how Messianic Jews and Christian Arabs can worship together in Israel.

**Michael F. Bird, Academic Dean and Lecturer in Theology**  
**Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia**

Through Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity is deeply entrenched in Judaism. That is commonplace today. This Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith, however, is unique in two ways. No other work covers such a wide range of relevant topics from Old Testament covenants and Israelite kingdoms to modern debates about Messianism. Moreover, several of the authors are Messianic Jews, clearly showing that this movement now has a voice in scholarly discussion.

**Rainer Riesner, Professor Emeritus of New Testament  
University of Dortmund, Germany**

The question of the Jewish roots of Christian faith comes with historical as well as theological implications, demanding not only knowledge but also due sensitivity. Craig A. Evans and David Mishkin have, together with their coworkers, admirably succeeded in doing precisely this. A comprehensive handbook may appear as a contradiction in terms. Through its brief and concise contributions the book is, indeed, a handbook, but the way it highlights the questions and issues that come into play in this field is really complete. The book will be a most helpful and needed tool for students, pastors, and teachers.

**Karl Olav Sandnes, Professor, New Testament  
MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society**

Craig Evans and David Mishkin are to be heartily congratulated for this very helpful compendium on the Jewish roots of Christianity, a subject that is much too often neglected in theological discussions. There can be little doubt that the first subject covered—God's covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David—is most crucial for understanding the central role played by Jesus as the Messiah in the New Testament Scriptures. Moreover, Old Testament prophecy, Jewish feasts, atonement, and the Temple are core topics for comprehending Jesus' ministry as the Messiah in whom the Old Testament Scriptures find fulfillment. The section on the Jewish roots of Jesus and his early followers is mandatory reading for anyone interested in the historical background of the Christian faith.

**Pieter Gert van der Veen, PhD habil.  
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 HENDRICKSON  
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## **A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith**

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# Abbreviations

## General Abbreviations

Aram.	Aramaic
BCE	before the Common Era
ca.	circa
CE	Common Era
cf.	compare
ch(s).	chapter(s)
d.	died
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
Eng.	English
esp.	especially
ESV	English Standard Version
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others
frag.	fragment
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
Heb.	Hebrew
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
par.	parallel
<i>passim</i>	here and there
pl.	plural
P.Oxy.	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus
RSV	Revised Standard Version
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
v(v).	verse(s)
x	times

## Ancient Sources

### DEAD SEA SCROLLS

CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>
1QH <sup>a</sup>	<i>Hodayot</i> <sup>a</sup>
1Q35	<i>Hodayot</i> <sup>b</sup>
1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>
1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>
4Q169	<i>Nahum Peshar</i>
4Q174	<i>Florilegium</i>
4Q246	<i>Apocryphon of Daniel</i>
4Q266	<i>Damascus Document</i> <sup>a</sup>
4Q285	<i>Sefer ha-Milhamah</i>
4Q317	<i>AstrCrypt</i>
4Q319	<i>Otot</i>
4Q320	<i>Calendrical Document A</i>
4Q321	<i>Calendrical Document B</i> <sup>a</sup>
4Q385	<i>Pseudo-Ezekiel</i> <sup>a</sup>
4Q386	<i>Pseudo-Ezekiel</i> <sup>b</sup>
4QMMT	<i>Halakhic Letter</i>
4Q394	<i>Halakhic Letter</i> <sup>a</sup>
4Q398	<i>Halakhic Letter</i> <sup>c</sup>
4Q399	<i>Halakhic Letter</i> <sup>f</sup>
4Q500	<i>Benediction</i>
4Q521	<i>Messianic Apocalypse</i>
11Q13	<i>Melchizedek</i>
11Q19	<i>Temple Scroll</i> <sup>a</sup>

### APOSTOLIC FATHERS

<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
<i>Diogn.</i>	<i>Epistle to Diognetus</i>

### EUSEBIUS

<i>Chron.</i>	<i>Chronicle</i>
<i>Dem. ev.</i>	<i>Demonstration of the Gospel</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>

### HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME

<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Refutation of All Heresies</i>
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## IGNATIUS

*Magn.*                      *To the Magnesians*

## JEROME

*Vir. ill.*                    *De viris illustribus*

## JOSEPHUS

*Ag. Ap.*                    *Against Apion*

*Ant.*                        *Jewish Antiquities*

*J.W.*                        *Jewish War*

*Life*                        *The Life*

## JUSTIN MARTYR

*1 Apol.*                    *First Apology*

*Dial.*                        *Dialogue with Trypho*

## PHILO

*Decalogue*                *On the Decalogue*

*Dreams*                    *On Dreams*

*Good Person*            *That Every Good Person Is Free*

*Spec. Laws*              *On the Special Laws*

## SUETONIUS

*Vesp.*                        *Vespasian*

## TACITUS

*Hist.*                        *Histories*

## TERTULLIAN

*Adv. Jud.*                *Against the Jews*

## Journals, Series, and Reference Works

AB                            Anchor Bible

ABD                        *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman.  
6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992

ABRL                        Anchor Bible Reference Library

ApOTC                    Apollos Old Testament Commentary

ASOR                        American Schools of Oriental Research

ATDan                      Acta Theologica Danica

AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
DJG	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013
DNTB	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000
DOTP	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets</i> . The IVP Bible Dictionary Series. Edited by Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EBib	<i>Etudes bibliques</i>
EDB	<i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. ET. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1993.
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EncJud	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . Edited by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum. 2nd ed. 22 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GNS	<i>Good News Studies</i>

<i>Herm</i>	<i>Hermanthena</i>
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by George A. Buttrick. 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
MSJ	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009.
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by Colin Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–1978
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>

NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by Hans Dieter Betz. 4th ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBFCMi	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Minor
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Edited by Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

# Introduction

David Mishkin

It is no longer a novelty to say that Jesus was a Jew. In fact, the term “Jewish roots” has become somewhat of a cliché in books, articles, and perhaps especially on the internet. The popular interest is an outgrowth of scholarship which began over two hundred years ago, and both Christians and Jews have been involved. Each group followed a different trajectory, but the end result is undeniable: any discussion about Jesus of Nazareth must not only include but highlight the fact that he cannot be understood apart from his Jewish context. It is among the few things upon which virtually all contemporary scholars agree.

The Christian quest for the historical Jesus has been well documented (Evans 2008; Charlesworth 2014). In the beginning there was no interest in the Jewishness of Jesus as scholars were addressing more fundamental issues. This trend is usually traced back to Samuel Reimarus (at least among German scholars), whose work in the late 1700s was so radical that it was published only posthumously. Nineteenth-century figures such as David Friedrich Strauss, Ernst Renan, and many others attempted to find the “historical Jesus” as opposed to the “Christ of faith.” There were two main issues, broadly speaking, that fueled this trend. The first was Enlightenment rationalism, which doubted (or outright denied) the possibility of supernatural events. The second was the fact that the canonical Gospels do not attempt to record history in the same way as modern historians (Burridge 2004). Despite the fact that they were not looking for a Jewish Jesus, their approach demanded some interaction with first-century Jewish groups, Jewish religious practices of the day, and the geography of Judea and the Galilee. The Jewish context was a peripheral reality. A seemingly endless number of authors attempted to explain who Jesus “really” was and what he “really” did. By the early twentieth century, however, this *First (or Old) Quest* was ultimately declared a failure (Schweitzer 1910).

What emerged in its wake is sometimes called the “no quest” era, largely inspired by Rudolph Bultmann’s proclamation that it was impossible to construct the life of Jesus. This would have a profound effect on all subsequent New Testament scholarship. Soon afterward, any notion of a Jewish Jesus would take an even greater step backward with the arrival of the Nazi regime. Obviously, Nazis could not have a Jewish Jesus, and they went to great lengths to promote a perverted version of the New Testament’s message (Heschel 2008). With the

help of some of Germany's leading theologians, they formed the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life. Galilean residents, it was declared, were actually "Aryans" and only the residents of Judea (whom Jesus spoke against) were Jews. Infamously, Walter Grundmann declared that Jesus "was no Jew" (Grundmann 1941, 165–75). An intricate web of absurdities and propaganda was needed in this attempt to deny the Jewishness of Jesus. Ironically, the grand scope of this project illustrates how thoroughly Jewish the New Testament actually is. The Jewish aspects cannot simply be dismissed by providing an alternative explanation for one or two verses.

The first hint of progress came in the 1950s when some scholars (including students of Bultmann's) began to declare that it *is* possible to know at least some things about Jesus. This is usually regarded as the start of the *Second* (or *New*) *Quest* for the historical Jesus. There was still no specific focus on the Jewishness of Jesus, but again, placing him in history meant placing him in context. It would be about three more decades before scholars were ready to interact more seriously with the world of Second Temple Judaism. This was one of the key factors leading to the *Third Quest* (Witherington 1997), which has focused on understanding Jesus as a Jew in a Jewish world.

Jewish scholarship on Jesus had different motivations, although its roots may also be traced to the late 1700s. The Enlightenment was giving way to a new Europe and a new situation for Jews (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 2011). They would no longer be confined to ghettos, and in some places (particularly in Germany) they were even allowed to enter public universities. This opened up a whole new world, leading to the emergence of Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century. A number of traditional (Orthodox) Jewish ideas were challenged. The belief in the transmigration of the soul replaced the concept of bodily resurrection, the concept of the messiah was no longer an individual but an era, and the Tanakh (Old Testament) was seen more as a human than a divine creation (Meyer 1995). At this time, Jewish scholars first began to interact with the New Testament. Since much of the "Christian" scholarship of the day was critical and not necessarily bound to a faith commitment, Jewish scholars were able to join the conversation. As Christian scholars were busy searching for the historical Jesus, Jewish scholars had broader objectives. Pioneers such as Abraham Geiger were more concerned with how the Jewish community should interact with Christendom as a whole than with deciphering the identity of the man from Nazareth. Nevertheless, the Jewish study of Jesus begins here.

In the twentieth century, Jewish scholars began to interact directly with the historical Jesus. Books by Claude Montefiore, Joseph Klausner, David Flusser, Geza Vermes, and others set the standard. A number of books have documented this trend, which is often referred to as the Jewish "reclamation" of Jesus (see Jacob 1974; Hagner 1984; Homolka 2015). The *Third Quest* was in some ways an *outgrowth* of this interest among such Jewish scholars. At the same

time, the *Third Quest* also served as a *catalyst* for the wave of Jewish scholars that followed. This field of study has grown exponentially in the early years of the twenty-first century, as demonstrated by the publication of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Levine and Brettler 2011). This is the work of fifty Jewish scholars commenting on each book of the New Testament, along with a number of additional articles. The Jewishness of Jesus is here presumed and even Paul is understood to be a Jew, although he has not quite been “reclaimed” to the extent that Jesus has.

But, what does the Jewishness of Jesus actually mean, and why is this important to both Christians and Jews? These are among the questions which are addressed in this volume. This is not the first book on the Jewish roots of the New Testament and the Christian faith (see Wilson 1990; Schwartz 1992; Scott 2000; Bauckham 2010; Johnson 2017). But, it is unique in several ways. First, it is a “handbook,” which means it is meant to provide a scholarly but accessible overview of a variety of relevant topics. It is also multi-authored. About half of the contributors are (or have been) on the faculty of Israel College of the Bible. Most of these authors are Jewish and/or Israeli citizens, and believers in Jesus as the Messiah. This perspective complements the perspectives of the traditional Jewish and Christian communities, which were mentioned above. Finally, the scope of topics covered below is vast. The primacy of the Jewish Jesus (as opposed to the coincidentally Jewish Jesus of past research) is not an end in itself. It raises questions regarding history and theology, but it also has ramifications for current events. The word “Roots” in the title is meant to have an overarching connotation, referring not only to antecedence but also to an ongoing interconnectedness.

We begin in “The Soil.” The new appreciation of the Jewish Jesus must recognize the importance of *his* Bible, the Tanakh (note: in this volume authors may variously use the terms Old Testament, Tanakh, Hebrew Scriptures, or Hebrew Bible). Debates throughout history have often centered on a small handful of verses and whether or not they find their fulfillment in the New Testament claims. But, the subject is much greater than this. The New Testament authors immersed their message in the words and themes of the Tanakh. This is hardly a peripheral issue, and as will be seen below, the Tanakh itself provides the best commentary and explanation of its own intentions. An understanding of Jewish exegesis is valuable as well.

The following section, “The Roots,” grows naturally from the soil. This section covers first-century beliefs, practices, literature, institutions, and geography. It also examines the life and teachings of Jesus. These are the issues that are usually addressed in works about the Jewish roots of Jesus and the New Testament. The articles provide a succinct summary of the latest scholarship.

The next section, “The Trunk,” focuses on the immediate aftermath of the life of Jesus. This includes his resurrection and the movement that emerged from it. It was nothing if not a Jewish movement, and it was understood to be a

continuation of God's plan throughout the Tanakh. But, were the benefits meant to be only for Jews? This question dominated the very first church council in history (Acts 15), and it was decided that, based on God's plan throughout the Tanakh, gentiles could join the fold without needing to become Jews. Paul was tasked with bringing the message to the gentiles, yet he neither forgot his own people nor excluded them from his message.

Finally, we arrive at "The Branches," which begin in the years immediately following the early church. There has been much discussion about the so-called "parting of the ways" (Dunn 1991; 1992; Boyarin 2004; Yuval 2006). Prior to the *Third Quest* it was commonly assumed that with the coming of Jesus, "Judaism" and "Christianity" naturally and immediately developed as two mutually exclusive entities. Actually, the process took not just decades but centuries. As the Jewish people were dispersed from Israel (as the land is called in Matt 2:20–21), and as the gentile movement became dominant, the Jewish roots of Christianity began to dissipate. The message became less Jewish, non-Jewish, and then all too quickly anti-Jewish. The corporate remnant of Jewish believers in Jesus would disappear by the fourth century, only to return in the modern period. By the Middle Ages, any semblance of a Jewish Jesus was at best seen as a historical oddity, and the Jewish community had no interest in the non-Jewish, "European" Jesus being proclaimed by those who were persecuting them. This history of persecution is long and painful and must never be forgotten (Carroll 2001; Cohen 2007). But, it is not the end of the story.

There has also been a *mending of the ways*. In the first one hundred years or so after Jesus, Jews were still living in the land of Israel and there were still Jewish followers of Jesus. In the last century or so, both of these patterns have been restored. The reality of the modern state of Israel presents challenges that are undoubtedly controversial and complicated. But, the return to the land after an extended (almost nineteen hundred years) exile is at the very least an unprecedented situation in history that, along with the scriptural record, must be addressed by those who take the Bible seriously (and is compelling evidence for those who do not!). Similarly, the re-emergence of Jewish believers in Jesus has presented its own set of challenges, and their history has become a topic of academic interest (Skarsaune and Hvalvik 2007; Pritz 1992; Sobel 1974; Jones 2012; Cohn-Sherbok 2001; Harris-Shapiro 1999; Darby 2010). The contemporary remnant, particularly in the United States and Israel, is becoming more difficult to ignore.

This collection of articles is meant to be a comprehensive yet concise primer on the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. It does not claim to be the final word on the subject, although it does seek to highlight the topics that should be considered in this field of study. Knowledge of the Jewish roots of Christianity is valuable to the extent that it sheds light on both the New Testament itself and Jewish-Christian relations (in history and today).

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## **PART I: THE SOIL**

## CHAPTER 1

# God's Plan for Israel

## 1.1 The Kingdom and the Covenants

Noam Hendren

The absolute and universal sovereignty of God is declared from the first verse of the book of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” As the creator of all that exists, God is the absolute Lord of the universe and all that is in it: “The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all it contains, You have founded them” (Ps 89:11 NASB). As Ps 24:1 declares, “The earth is the LORD’s and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.” Nevertheless, in the climax of the creation account, God revealed his intent to rule the earth not directly but through human intermediaries created in his image (see Gen 1:26–28; cf. Pss 8; 115:15–16).

Humankind as a whole, male and female, received this mandate from the Lord to fill the earth with life, to bring it under their authority and to rule it as God’s representatives (Ross 1988, 112–13). Having been created in God’s image (Gen 1:26) and filled with his life (2:7), human beings were fully equipped to fulfill their mandate. Adam and Eve, the perfect couple, were placed in a perfect environment—the garden of Eden—where they were given meaningful work: to nurture and protect the garden, and to extend its borders to cover the entire earth (cf. 1:28, “fill the earth and subdue it”; Hamilton 1990, 139–40). They maintained a perfect relationship with one another, transparent and loving (2:25), and with their Creator, who walked with them there (cf. 3:8). This is the situation concerning which God reflected in Gen 1:31, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”

The blessed conditions described in Gen 2 embody God’s original, intended purpose for the creation: perfect humankind created in the image of God was to rule over a perfect creation as God’s representatives. This is the archetype of the “kingdom of God on earth” as God himself intended it to be (Merrill 1987, 298). The ultimate fulfillment of God’s original purpose for humanity and the world becomes the central theme of the Scriptures and of human history: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

## The Fall

Humankind's sinful rebellion against their loving Creator plunged humanity and the world into a renewed chaos, corrupting their nature and bringing them under the curse. Genesis 3 describes the immediate effects of sin on humans and the world which was under their dominion: Adam and Eve experienced true moral guilt (v. 7), alienation from God (vv. 8–10), and alienation from one another (vv. 11–12). Their physical existence would be characterized by painful labor in a cursed world, and ultimately they would die (vv. 16–19). Finally, they experienced separation from the presence of God, expelled from the garden of Eden. Thus, they were cut off from access to the tree of life and the life of God (v. 24).

## The Promise

But God was not willing to abandon his plan or the people whom he had made. As he pronounced the curse he also promised and provided redemption. Whereas the serpent had used the woman to bring sin and the curse into the world, God would use her to bring a redeemer, a “seed” who would destroy the satanic interloper, just as a man would kill a snake (Gen 3:15; Kaiser 2009, 43). This promise contains within it the first ray of hope in an otherwise desperate situation: If the source of sin in the world would one day be destroyed, perhaps sin's cursed effects would likewise be reversed and creation itself restored (Vlach 2017, 68–69).

The “seed of the woman” introduces the theme of redemption in the Scriptures. As God intended to rule his perfect world through perfect human beings, so God would raise up a redeemer through fallen humankind. This theme would be developed in the promise to Abraham that “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 22:18; see 18:18–19); and later in the promise to David that his “seed” would become God's priest and king, restoring humanity and the world to its original “kingdom of God” state (1 Chr 17:14; cf. Isa 11:1–10).

Along with this promise of ultimate redemption, God made an immediate provision for Adam and Eve. “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). According to God's commandment (Gen 2:17), Adam and Eve should have been put to death on the very day that they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but God in his grace had another plan. God took an innocent animal and, killing it, made garments of skin to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve. A death did in fact take place on that day; but it was the death of an innocent substitute which allowed the sinful couple to live on. Substitutionary atonement, as later reflected in the sacrificial system of the Torah, became the divine means for restoring sinful

human beings to a limited relationship with the holy God (Merrill 2006, 228). A full and final restoration would require something more.

## **The Parade of Shame**

In spite of God's redemptive act, sinful rebellion continued to dominate human life from that day on. Genesis 4–11 presents the degradation of humanity and vividly demonstrates the need for divine redemptive intervention. Beginning with Cain's murder of Abel, the downward spiral of sinful human beings is laid out before us.

Human sin brings human death, as in the "genealogy of death" from Adam to Noah, which closes each generation with the words "and he died" (Gen 5). The curse of sin is pervasive and, like a steamroller, irresistible. The only exception is Enoch, who "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen 5:24), thus introducing another central theme of the Scriptures: to experience God's blessing, even in a world under the curse, one must "walk with God," living in holy fellowship with him (Ross 1988, 174–75).

Universal rebellion brought about universal destruction in the flood (Gen 6–8). But, although God had scoured the world with water, the sinfulness of human beings immediately resurfaced. The renewal of the creation covenant (8:21–9:17) proved illusory. Noah was found lying drunk and naked in his tent, and his son Ham put him to public shame. Noah, in turn, cursed Canaan, Ham's son (Gen 9:20–25). The cycle of sin and curse had resumed and quickly swelled to renewed worldwide rebellion, leading to divine judgment at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11).

Humanity's steady descent had reached a new nadir. Sinful rebellion following sinful rebellion had demonstrated people's total inability to redeem themselves and return to Eden. The absolute necessity of divine intervention—if there was to be any hope for human beings and the world—was now clear beyond all doubt.

## **The Kingdom and the Covenants**

God's intervention began with the call of Abraham, and in three short verses he laid out his plan for world redemption (Gen 12:1–3). God chose Abraham and his descendants to become the object and instrument of his restored blessing in the world, a calling formalized by an unconditional covenant (Gen 15). The Abrahamic covenant formed the bedrock of Israel's unique role in God's redemptive plan and the guarantee that the nation would ultimately fulfill her mission (Lev 26:42–45; Isa 41:8–9; Luke 1:71–75; Rom 11:28–29). The Abrahamic

covenant would be further explicated and ultimately realized through three subsequent covenants (Merrill 1987, 297).

In the Sinai covenant, God revealed the conditions under which Israel would enter into her blessing and fulfill her role as “a kingdom of priests,” bringing the promised kingdom blessings to the world (Exod 19:4–6; Lev 26:3–13). God also promised that in spite of Israel’s rebellion he would bring the nation through severe judgments to sincere, universal national repentance and national redemption “in the latter days” (Deut 4:25–30; 30:1–9; cf. Lev 26:14–45).

In the covenant with David, as illuminated by the prophets, God promised to raise up a redeemer, the seed of David, who as a priest would bring spiritual restoration for wayward Israel and for the world (2 Sam 7:11–16; Isa 49:3–9; 52:13–53:12; 59:16–20); and as judge and king would restore the world to its pristine Edenic state, reestablishing the kingdom of God on earth (Isa 9:1–7; 11:1–10; Jer 23:5–6). The Chronicler summarized the prophetic revelation concerning the priest-king Messiah (Zech 6:11–13; Ps 110) as he rephrased the conclusion of the Davidic covenant: “I will cause him to stand in my house [i.e., to serve as priest] and in my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever” (1 Chr 17:14, literal translation; cf. 1 Kgs 12:32; 2 Chr 5:14).

In view of Israel’s consistent failure to fulfill the demands of the Torah at Sinai, and in his gracious allegiance to his covenant with Abraham, God promised to inaugurate a new covenant, bringing national repentance and spiritual transformation by the outpouring of the spirit of God on the nation (Jer 31:33–34; Ezek 36:24–27; Isa 59:17–20; Zech 12:10–13:6). This transformation would enable Israel to perfectly fulfill the righteous demands of God’s Torah and thus to inherit his blessing and become his channel for world redemption, as originally promised to Abraham (Isa 60:1–3, 20; 61:6–9; Ezek 36:27–31; Zech 8:11–13, 20–23).

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## 1.2 The Abrahamic Covenant

Seth D. Postell

Genesis 15 and the making of the Abrahamic covenant is the literary summit of the patriarchal narratives (Gen 12–50). (Actually, a more appropriate name would be “Abramic covenant,” as it is made prior to the change of name to Abraham.) From this passage, we can see the landscape of the entire Torah (Pentateuch), and even beyond. This passage picks up on and relates to the three key themes introduced in the first chapter of Genesis—blessing (Gen 15:5; see Gen 1:28; 9:1), seed (Gen 15:3–5; see Gen 1:28; 3:15; 4:25; 9:1, 26), and land (Gen 15:7, 18; see Gen 1:28; 2:10–14). It should be noted that although the word “bless/ing” does not appear in Gen 15, the promise of abundant seed is directly related to the divine blessing in Genesis (Gen 1:22, 28; 9:1; 17:20; 28:3). This passage also anticipates the story of Israel’s exodus out of Egypt (Gen 15:13–14) as well as Israel’s eventual conquest of the land as recorded in the book of Joshua (Gen 15:16). The making of the Abrahamic covenant comes within the context of two specific promises: the promise of a seed (Gen 15:1–5) and the promise of the land (Gen 15:6–18). The land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant is emphasized in Gen 15:7–21, while the seed aspect is the focus of Gen 17.

The hinge verse joining the promise of the seed with the promise of the land appears in Gen 15:6: “And he believed in the Lord, and he credited it him *as righteousness*” (author’s translation). The Abrahamic covenant is given within the context of Abram’s faith. At first sight, this chapter presents the recipient of the covenant (Abram) as one who is struggling over God’s unfulfilled promises. In fact, every time God refers to a promise in Gen 15, Abram retorts with a question (see Gen 15:2–3 and Gen 15:8).

These questions are so atypical of Abram, the man who has silently obeyed up until this point, that the author is compelled to note that faith was a quintessential quality of Abram’s experience with God. The theme of faith appears again within the context of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19:9). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the promise of the land is rescinded from the wilderness generation, including Moses and Aaron, because they do not believe (Num 14:11; see 20:12).

### The Relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15 and 17

Before we discuss the meaning of the Abrahamic covenant within its larger literary context, it is important to explain the relationship of Gen 15 and 17 since both narratives describe the making/establishing of a covenant with Abram/

Abraham. Because of the presence of these two separate covenant narratives, some scholars suggest that Gen 15 and 17 represent two distinct covenants, the former an unconditional covenant and the latter a conditional covenant (Williamson 2007; Alexander 2012). The major problem with this view, as is well pointed out by others (Niehaus 2013; Gentry and Wellum 2015; Todd 2017), is the fact that all other passages in the Hebrew Bible (as well as the New Testament) only and always refer to one covenant God made with Abraham, a covenant that was subsequently reconfirmed to Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants (Exod 2:24; Lev 26:42; 2 Kgs 13:23; 1 Chr 16:16; Ps 105:9; Acts 3:25).

How are we to understand, then, the literary and theological relationship of Gen 15 and 17? Why is there an additional covenant in Gen 17 when one has already been made in Gen 15? Are there theological differences between these two covenants, i.e., unconditional vs. conditional covenant? In terms of the need for a second installment of the Abrahamic covenant, it is essential to note that Gen 17 follows the story of Abram and Hagar (Gen 16). In Gen 16, Sarai impatiently pushes her Egyptian maidservant on Abram, who silently acquiesces to her plan. The literary parallels between Sarai's taking of Hagar to give to Abram (Gen 16:3) with Eve's taking of the forbidden fruit to give to Adam (Gen 3:6) suggest that Gen 16 is intended to be understood as a fall narrative (Sailhamer 1992). The literary context suggests that it is best to consider Gen 17 as a covenant renewal that comes in the wake of Abram's failure to trust God's promise specifically concerning the seed, much as Exod 34 is a renewal of the Sinai covenant in light of Israel's worship of the golden calf in Exod 32.

In terms of the added conditional aspects of the Abrahamic covenant in Gen 17 which were not originally part of the covenant in Gen 15 (e.g., circumcision; Gen 17:9–14), it is necessary to consider the fact that the unconditional nature of God's earlier promises to Abram and his seed already contain elements of conditionality (Gen 12–15). For instance, the promises in Gen 12:2–3 are contingent upon Abram's obedience to "go forth" from his land (Gen 12:1). In Gen 15, Abram is commanded to bring and prepare the covenantal sacrifice (Gen 15:9). Jeffrey Niehaus (2013, 260–61) explains the conditional aspects of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham quite well when he writes,

The Abrahamic covenant is both unconditional and conditional. It is unconditional in the sense that the Lord, having instituted it, will see it through until it has accomplished its purpose. It will not fail. It is conditional in the sense that any individual who participates in it may drop out of it by covenant-breaking. That is, the individual may fail.

It is best, therefore, to regard Gen 17 as a covenant renewal which focuses on the specific area of Abram's lapse of trust: the seed. And though there are certain conditions placed upon individuals to enjoy the benefits of the covenant,

God is unconditionally committed to fulfill all his promises and purposes to Abraham with respect to the seed and the land (Rom 11:28–29).

## The Purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant

The purpose for the Abrahamic covenant can only be appreciated within the context of the plot of the Primeval History (Gen 1–11). According to Gen 1:28, blessing, seed, and land are integral parts of God's plan for creation. The first chapter of the Torah describes the protological *blessing* of God (Gen 1:22, 28; 2:3) and the penultimate chapter of the Torah refers to blessing five times (Deut 33:1, 11, 13, 20, 24). The Torah begins and ends with blessing and therefore any attempt to understand the Torah's plot must include God's priority to bless Israel and the nations. [See Figure 1.]

Likewise, the opening chapter mentions "land" twenty-one times. The land theme also appears in the final two chapters of the Torah (Deut 33:13, 16–17, 28; 34:1–2, 4). Just as the Torah begins and ends with divine blessing, so the Torah begins and ends with a focus on the importance of the land. Finally, filling the land (earth) through human procreation appears in the first chapter of the Torah in the context of God's blessing (Gen 1:28). This theme also appears in the concluding chapters of the Torah (Deut 30:5, 16).

Genesis 2:4–11:26 not only explains how God's very good purposes for creation were disrupted by rebellion and disobedience, but also paves a literary-theological trail to the resolution of the problem through a specific line of Adam's descendants. Genesis 2 focuses on the gift of a land (Gen 2:10–14) as well as the gift of a wife as part of God's plan for filling the land (Gen 2:18, 21–24). Genesis 3 tells the sad story of rebellion and disobedience that directly undermines God's original purposes. Firstly, instead of blessing we are now introduced to the antithetical problem of the curses of disobedience. The word curse (*'arar*) appears five times in the Primeval History (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25) and another nineteen times at the end of the Torah (Deut 27:15–26; 28:16–20). Secondly, marital conflict, as well as pain and suffering in childbirth, are introduced, an obvious antithesis to the original blessing of marriage and procreation. Finally, Adam and Eve are thrust out of the land God gave them (Gen 3:23–24), and exile becomes another major antithesis to the divine plan of giving the land to his people.

The Torah's solution to the curses of disobedience is a chosen seed (Gen 3:15; 4:25; 5:29; 9:26). God's pledge to bring about a solution to the curses of disobedience is through the making of a covenant (Gen 9:8–17). God's choice of Abram (an individual seed) through whom humanity will be blessed or cursed (Gen 12:1–3), the promise of a land (Gen 12:7), and the making of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:18) must all be understood through the lens of

this redemptive story. The Abrahamic covenant provides God's unconditional commitment to restore the blessing through the provision of the seed and the land. The Abrahamic covenant is deeply rooted in the faithfulness of God, who alone passes between the pieces of the parted animals to signify his unilateral commitment to ensure the fulfillment of the covenant with all its promises (Gen 15:9–17; see Jer 34:18–19).

To summarize, the Abrahamic covenant was made in the context of Abram's faith (Gen 15:6), and God required from Israel, the covenant people, this same faith to enjoy the promises of this covenant. Faith is so important to this covenant that when Moses and Aaron "did not believe" (Num 14:11; 20:12), they were not permitted into the land that the covenant promised (Gen 15:7). This theme of faith and the Abrahamic covenant becomes one of Paul's major theological points in his discussions of the gospel (e.g., Rom 4:1–5; Gal 3:6). Also, the relationship of Gen 17 with Gen 15 reveals that the circumcision narrative is portrayed as a covenant renewal in light of Abram's failure to trust God for the provision of a seed through Sarai (Gen 16). The purpose of the Abrahamic covenant is to fulfill God's commitment to restore creation through the seed of Abraham. The apostle Paul notes that "seed" can be understood both collectively and individually. Collectively, Paul assures the believers in Rome that God will save Israel (the collective seed) because of his unchanging covenant promises to Abraham (Rom 11:28–29). Individually, Paul well notes that the fate of the collective seed is inseparably bound to the individual seed (Gal 3:16). The idea of the Abrahamic covenant's fulfillment through an individual seed is already well rooted in the Old Testament, where we see the literary-theological relationship between the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants (see articles below). Because of the faithfulness of this individual seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez, and David, the hope of the collective seed (Israel) is assured.

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