

# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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The Church's ongoing journey from anti-Semitism to a love for Israel—  
our Hebraic roots revealed





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# Reconciliation

The Church's ongoing journey from anti-Semitism to a love for Israel—  
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**In 1945, the world was stunned to learn the extent of the** murderous actions of the Nazis against their enemies, and in particular the killing of six million Jewish people. The fact that they justified their actions by referring to the writings of well-known Christian leaders, including the great reformer, Martin Luther, was shocking. Many sincere Christians began asking questions about long-held theological stances which had deeply impacted the Jewish people in an overwhelmingly negative fashion. In the ensuing years, many individuals and denominations subsequently repented of anti-Semitism.

In 1948, the birth of the nation of Israel was another watershed moment in Christian history. Suddenly the Christian world had to reconsider scriptural promises for Israel that had been overlooked, allegorized, or assumed to be for the Church. For many of us, we saw Scripture being literally fulfilled in our lifetime as the Jewish people streamed to their ancient homeland and re-established their State on the same piece of real estate they had been forced out of in AD 70.

Today, many Christians feel a love toward Jewish people, many times without even knowing a single Jewish person! I believe the Church is in a process of deciding her future destiny. While many in the Church have heeded the scriptural injunction to bless Israel, sorrowfully many others have taken an opposite viewpoint. Few have asked the deep questions that need to be addressed in order for God to resolve the chasm between Christians and Jews. Unfortunately, there are still many Christians who continue to espouse replacement theology. I am frequently in conversation with Jewish people



Martin Luther



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who are confused about why some Christians seem to be their best friends in the world and others are involved in discrediting Israel through BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions). The answer I give them is that those Christians who believe the Bible and interpret it in a literal fashion are those who are inclined to love. Those Christians who allegorize and spiritualize the Scripture often do not feel the need for a connection to Israel and the Jewish people.

## THEOLOGICALLY

Christendom has inherited much of our theology from the Early Church fathers who made the decision to separate from our mother faith, "Judaism." In order to establish the legitimacy of the Christian religion as different from Judaism, these leaders de-legitimized the Jewish people, forbade participation in Jewish practice, including the feasts of Leviticus 23, and repudiated much of Jewish thought. This was problematic because Jewish practice was based on biblical truth and, since the New Testament was canonized in the 4th century, the Early Church only had the Hebrew Scriptures. So, Scripture was interpreted allegorically rather than literally, and re-interpreted to be for the Church or "Spiritual Israel," as Justin Martyr referred to the Church. He was the first in a long line of theologians who came to use this new terminology. The Church was viewed to have superseded Israel. In this view, God was finished with the Jews. They had rejected the Messiah and now God was looking to the Gentile world to replace (replacement theology) them with a new chosen people. This, of course, completely overlooks the fact that, in the beginning, believers in Yeshua were all Jewish!

For most of the past 1,700 to 1,800 years, these theologies have been prevalent in the Christian Church to varying degrees. In recent years, God has birthed a love for Israel in the hearts of many true Christian believers. This love needs to be accompanied by a new understanding of the Word of God, untainted by the stains of wrong theology and anti-Semitic teachings, which have been passed down through the centuries.

## IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE HEBRAIC ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY

The Church needs to peel away the layers of history and rediscover the thinking of first century Jews. How can we understand the words of Jesus (Yeshua), Paul (Shaul), John (Yochanan), and Peter (Cephas) unless we understand their world, their language, their customs, and their theology? They thought like Jews, lived like Jews, read the *Torah* (Gen.-Deut.), and celebrated the Feasts as the Hebrew Scriptures taught. They believed that righteous action was important. They quoted from all but five books in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon).

Some scholars today are questioning traditional Christian interpretations of the Jewish writings found in the New Testament. Jewish and Christian scholars are taking a new look at Paul, whose writings have been interpreted in ways that seem to repudiate the Hebrew Scriptures and Judaism. They remind us that Paul wrote his letters as a self-proclaimed "Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5). What would he think about how his writings have been interpreted over the intervening centuries? In 1 Corinthians 5:8, Paul assumes that the Gentile believers in Corinth are celebrating the Feast of Passover and gives them instructions about their attitude while doing so. So, why do so many Christians not celebrate the Feasts? We don't celebrate the Feasts because the Early Church fathers told Gentile Christians not to do so. These are the same Church fathers who planted the seeds of anti-Judaism which grew into full blown anti-Semitism and produced a harvest of persecution and murder of Jewish people.

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Reading Torah in an ancient synagogue

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Another question that is being asked is about the relationship of good works and the Law to the believer. Certainly we know that works do not grant salvation, which is a free gift from God. Incidentally, while it is true that Judaism places great importance on works, they don't view them as the means to be saved, which in Jewish thought is a result of the covenant of God. Works to the Jewish person are a way to show their love to God. But, what did Yeshua say about good works? *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matt. 5:18). To the first century Jewish person, righteous action would have been vitally important as a way to affirm their agreement with their covenant relationship with God.

## WRONG THEOLOGY: THE CHARGE OF DEICIDE

The charge of deicide (killing God) can be traced back to the Early Church fathers as these two examples, recorded in Dr. Marvin Wilson's book, *Our Father Abraham*, demonstrate. Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, (second century) says to the Jewish Trypho, "For you have slain the Just One, and His prophets before Him; and now you reject those who hope in Him." In the third century, Origen wrote, "And these calamities they [the Jews] have suffered, because they were a most wicked nation, which although guilty of many other sins, yet has been punished so severely for none, as for those that were committed against our Jesus." From the fourth century, the Church began to teach that God had permanently cursed the Jewish people.

Heinous acts against the Jewish people were justified throughout the centuries because of this Church teaching. Easter became a time of horror for Jews in many places as Christians went on rampages against the "Christ Killers." Unfortunately, the heresy continues to influence Christian thought today.

A couple of years ago, Cheryl Hauer, the Bridges for Peace International Development Director, was speaking to a Jewish leadership group in Australia. During the Q & A time, a Jewish leader stood up and said that the most difficult thing the Jewish community deals with is the charge from Christians that the Jewish people killed Jesus. "What is your organization doing about this issue?" he asked. In many conversations, similar questions have been raised, usually after the person describes a particularly painful incident in which he or she had personally been accused of killing Jesus (Yeshua). If you Google the phrase, "Who killed Jesus," in 16 seconds, 55,500,000 links will come up. This is not a dead issue—just ask your Jewish friends.

But, who really killed Jesus? Jesus in speaking of His death said, *"No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"* (John 10:18).

The Scripture often cited to affirm the deicide accusation is; *"And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children'"* (Matt. 27:25). The location of Pilate's Judgment Hall is thought to be the Fortress of Antonia in Jerusalem. I have stood in the place where it is believed this event occurred, and there is not room for many people to stand there and make this statement—perhaps 200 would fit. Other places in the New Testament state that the multitudes followed Yeshua. Can the action of a few Jewish leaders bring a curse upon all the Jewish people who would ever live? Surely not! Especially since we know that all the early followers of Yeshua were also Jewish and cannot be charged with deicide.

In the May 2013 *Teaching Letter* (see [www.bridgesforpeace.com](http://www.bridgesforpeace.com)), I talked about the judgment of the nations for how they treat Israel and the Jewish people. Most of us are not world leaders, so you may have asked yourself what can be done as a Church, and as individual Christians?



## ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY AND RESPECT

As Christians we need to recognize that Christianity emerged from an already existing faith system. It has been said that Judaism does not need Christianity to explain its existence, but Christianity cannot say the reverse. We must begin to recognize and appreciate the Jewish roots of Christianity. The Newer Testament is all about Jewish people in a Jewish setting who influence the world with the news of the Jewish savior (Yeshua). Romans 9–11 is the great treatise concerning Israel in the Newer Testament. Paul writes in the Olive Tree Discourse about the mystery of the relationship between believers in Yeshua and the Jewish people. He describes the manner in which non-Jewish people become part of the kingdom of God and uses the picture of grafting into the olive tree. We, as Gentile Christians, are grafted into the already existing covenant relationship of God with Israel. Paul warns us about our attitude, “...do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (Rom. 11:18).

In *Israel and the Church, God's Roadmap*, Cheryl Hauer has done an excellent job of explaining the process of grafting, “Remember, both the scion and the stock must remain alive and healthy during the grafting process. For nearly 2,000 years, the Church ignored that admonition and attempted to promote its own life at the expense of the Jewish people. Today we must make it our objective to support the Jewish people, bringing life and encouragement where possible.”

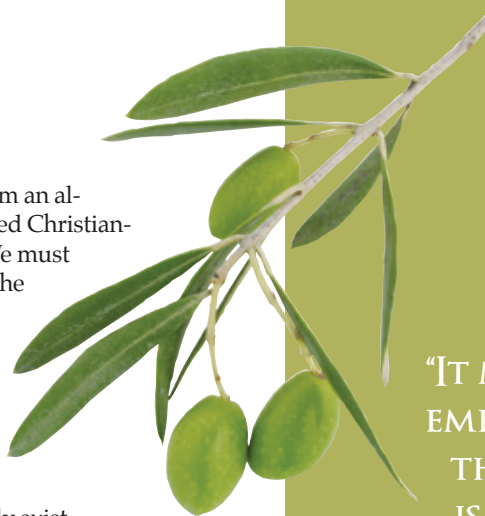
Our Orthodox Jewish friend, Moshe Kempinski refers to Romans 11 as a helpful passage in the blossoming of Jewish–Christian dialogue. Moshe writes this description in *The Heart of a People*, “The Church is described as a wild olive branch that is being grafted unto the root which is Judaism. For thousands of years, most Christians understood this statement to mean that the blossoming, flourishing branch of Christianity was being grafted unto the withering root of Judaism and was replacing, fulfilling, or completing it. It has taken 2,000 years, but people are finally beginning to understand that you cannot have a blossoming branch if the root is withering.”

Dr. Marvin Wilson writes, “As a new people of God, non-Jewish believers are now nourished by a rich heritage, with roots extending back to Abraham, father of the faithful. It must be emphasized that there is but one olive tree. It represents one people of God, Jew and non-Jew, fed by the same life-giving sap.”

## NOT REPLACED

Christians must address replacement theology. Paul addresses this issue when he says, “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Rom. 11:1–2a). Paul goes on to discuss the mystery, “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28–29). Jeremiah also speaks of the immutability of God's covenant with the Jewish people, “Thus says the LORD, ‘If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant...’” (Jer. 33:25–26). See also Jeremiah 31:31–37. Christians need to realize that God is a covenant-keeping God. He entered into a covenant with the “Fathers” and He plans to keep that covenant. The Jewish people may have consequences for ungodly actions, but ultimately He keeps His covenant.

Michael Wyschogrod, noted Jewish philosopher and theologian puts it this way in his book *Abraham's Promise, Judaism and Jewish Christian Relations*, “The general message is clear. Israel's election is irrevocable. If and when Israel sins, it is punished, even



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— DR. MARVIN WILSON



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“THE ANSWER IS LOVE. IT IS OUR DUTY TO EXTEND LOVE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER—TO ASK OURSELVES AT EVERY MOMENT HOW WE CAN BUILD BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING, RECONCILIATION, AND HEALING BETWEEN OUR COMMUNITIES...”

—RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN



Photo by Heather Gale

severely. The people will be expelled from their land and sent into exile. But this punishment will not destroy Israel, and it will not last forever. God’s love for Israel will return, and a reconciliation will take place. God will bring back the exiles from wherever they are and reestablish the kingdom as before. It cannot be denied that Israel’s repentance would be very helpful in bringing this about. But in the final analysis, it is not completely dependent on such repentance.”

Indeed, any person who accepts the Hebrew Bible as the inspired Word of God must come to a similar conclusion. All the prophets speak of God’s judgment and of God’s redemption of Israel. Living as we do in the days of the return of the Jewish people from the nations of their dispersion, we see the prophets’ words coming to pass in a very clear fashion. Though not perfect, the Jewish people will be redeemed, because the Holy One of Israel has promised. Paul referred to this in Romans 11, “*And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is MY covenant with them, when I take away their sins’*” (Rom. 11:26–27). Paul is referring to promises found in Isaiah 59:21 and Jeremiah 31:33, 34.

## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IS THE ANSWER

Relationships between Christians and Jews are deeply marred by the pain and suffering Jewish people have experienced from the Christian world for nearly 2,000 years. Pain like this is not healed suddenly or superficially. Christians need to act with unconditional love exhibited in a multitude of ways in order to bring healing to the relationship.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, in *How Firm a Foundation*, agrees, “The answer, while simple enough, has eluded us for centuries. The answer is love. It is our duty to extend love toward one another—to ask ourselves at every moment how we can build bridges of understanding, reconciliation, and healing between our communities; love our neighbors as ourselves and bring *shalom*, peace to our world. Christians should be neither surprised nor hurt if Jews, at times, spurn their gestures of friendship and reject their overtures of love. For many Jews, the *Talmud* expressed best the guarded relationship they ought to have with non-Jews: ‘respect and suspect them.’ ...Jews are



suspicious and disdainful of Christians' 'conditional love,' which is contingent upon their 'coming to Christ.'"

Bridges for Peace has embraced the command to love. Our many programs are efforts to change the relationship between the Christian and Jewish communities and do it with unconditional love. Seventy tons of food are distributed each month from the hands of Christian volunteers who love the people unconditionally.

## FIND AREAS OF AGREEMENT

For centuries the interaction between Christian and Jew has focused on the areas of disagreement with often-disastrous results. While not denying the deeply felt convictions of faith, it is possible to concentrate on the areas held in common while developing a relationship based on shared beliefs, shared values, respect, and kindness. What are some areas of agreement?

1. Both Christians and Jews believe in one God, the creator of the universe.
2. We share an understanding that God rules the world in mercy and justice, or law and love.
3. We believe that man is made in the image of God.
4. We believe that God works in and through human history.
5. Christians and Jews both believe in life after death.
6. We share a belief in the *Tanach* (Gen.–Mal.).
7. We share anticipation in the coming of Messiah.

## KEEP LEARNING WITH A HUMBLE ATTITUDE

It is incumbent on us all to keep learning—to seek the truth with an open heart, allowing the Spirit of God to reveal truth to us. Many Christian and Jewish authors are now writing about the Jewishness of Christianity. Christians are recognizing that they can learn from their Jewish brothers who have a continuous thread of scholarship going back to biblical days. Christians are beginning to ask questions about the beginnings of our faith, and to re-analyze the directions the Church fathers took when they separated from Judaism. Christian scholars like Brad Young, Marvin Wilson, R. Kendell Soulen, Tim Hegg, David Bivin, Skip Moen, Lois Tverberg, and others shed new light on the Jewishness of Jesus (Yeshua) and the Newer Testament. If we are really going to see change in the relationships between these two communities ordained by God, then we will have to apply ourselves to these studies.

Dr. Marvin Wilson gives sage advice in his book *Our Father Abraham*, saying, "Christians must take the initiative in the righting of wrong attitudes toward others. Jesus

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- DR. MARVIN WILSON



Photo by Yoshie Ishimoto

Volunteers pack food at the Bridges for Peace Assistance Center

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teaches, 'If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember your brother has something against you... First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift' (Matt. 5:23-24) [RSV]. Without a genuine spirit of repentance within one's group for past wrongs and failures, there can be little prospect for healing and ultimate reconciliation. In order to change our attitude, we must examine our theological views and change those which are faulty. Unlike God's immutable Word, theology is a human and fallible discipline...one must be prepared to write theology with pencil and eraser, not indelible ink. Theology may change or mature as one grows to perceive God's teachings and His work in history more clearly."

## SENSITIVE INTERACTION

As we seek to build better relationships between Christians and Jews, our encounters need to be sensitive and respectful. We need to learn to speak one another's language. As Christians we need to listen to our Jewish friends with a sincere desire to understand them, to appreciate them, and to respect them. Although Jewish friends who are comfortable speaking and interacting with Christians are few, there are growing numbers who are willing to engage in respectful dialogue. One, beloved by many Christians, is Moshe Kempinski, whose shop in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City has become a gathering place for Christians wishing to engage in dialogue. The strengthening ties between the two communities encourage Moshe. He says this about the journey, "Destinations are important, but the walk toward the destination is also important. In the past, it seemed that both our walk and our intended destination were different. But it is slowly becoming clear that both faith communities want to be cleaved to the same G-d in Heaven. When we realize that our destination is the same, we can also begin to walk in the same direction, closer to each other, yet still apart, until Zacharia's prophecy is fulfilled: 'We will walk with you for we have heard that G-d is with you' (Zacharia 8:23)."

In the biography, *A Gentile with the Heart of a Jew*, we read that our founder, Dr. G. Douglas Young, felt that God called him and Bridges for Peace to a ministry of reconciliation. Young recounted that God showed him that our job is to love the Jewish people, and God's job is to save them. May we ever partner with God in faithfulness, sensitivity, and love.

I have barely scratched the surface of the ways the Church can make a difference, but as these are addressed we will see bridges being built between these two communities of faith that God loves.

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer  
International President and CEO



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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

**Bridges for Peace** is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews worldwide through education and practical deeds expressing God's love and mercy.

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