

Making the Messiah Known through Theological and Academic Work

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The Chicago-born Jewish playwright David Mamet, challenged people to dream big. “The poker player learns that sometimes both science and common sense are wrong; that the bumblebee can fly; that, perhaps, one should never trust an expert; that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of by those with an academic bent.” The task of Jewish evangelism demands this same hopefulness. But instead of a card player’s slim chance, faith in Jesus among the Jewish people is guaranteed by the promises of God—for now, just a remnant; but in the end “all Israel will be saved.” (Rom 11:26)

The purpose of this discussion session must quickly be limited to those areas of academic interest having a direct impact on the evangelistic enterprise of making Messiah known among the Jewish people. Additionally, “theological and academic work” is limited to that found in peer reviewed journals or sponsored by academic institutions and publishers rather than ministry-funded or self-published materials. Further, this discussion will not focus on the important work of ministry training (how to “do” Jewish evangelism) but theological and academic reflection (how to “think and reflect” on issues directly connected to Jewish evangelism). Therefore, while there is another fertile discussion to be had about Jewish ministry issues (e.g., congregational life, polity, Messianic Jewish theology, etc.), these lie outside the scope of the current discussion of theological and academic work directly impacting Jewish evangelism.

The following are offered as some of the areas of greatest need for continued academic inquiry having the greatest potential for assisting the work of Jewish evangelism: hermeneutical issues, exegetical studies, missiological method and strategy, and demographic studies.

Rather than being satisfied with definitive words like the Ten Commandments, academics often prefer probing questions. So here are nearly ten questions that I believe need to be probed by exegetes, theologians, historians, missiologists, anthropologists, and others who do their best academic work in order to make the Messiah known. Since there are a variety of ways that research questions may be framed, I will combine those of a similar nature. After each series of questions, a few bibliographical works will be cited in order to advance the discussion.

1. Is the Old Testament messianic? In what sense? To what extent? How does this discussion affect the work of evangelists who seek to persuade Jewish people of the messiahship of Jesus? Is it no longer valid to list OT prophecies and their NT fulfillment?

Bateman, Herbert W., IV, Gordon H. Johnston, and Darrell L. Bock. *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011.

Brooks, Roger, and John Collins, eds., *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *The Messiah in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Rose, Wolter H. "Messiah." Pages 565-568 in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. Eds., T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Rydellnik, Michael. *Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* New American Commentary Studies in Bible & Theology. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009.

2. Is Isaiah 53 a predictive prophecy about the Messiah? Is it about Israel? Both? Even some evangelicals question its application to Jesus, and the debate rages on.

Bock, Darrell L., and Mitch Glaser, eds. *The Gospel According to Isaiah: The Identity and Mission of the Messiah in Isaiah 53*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011. Forthcoming.

Clines, David J. A. *I, He, We and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53*. JSOTSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1976.

Janowski, Bernd, and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds. *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*. Trans., Daniel P. Bailey. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Whybray, R. N. *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 53* JSOTSup 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978.

3. What can be known from Qumran and other sources about early Jewish messianism? From where did messianism emerge? What did it entail? How does this impact New Testament interpretation and our current presentation of Jesus as the Jewish messiah?

Charlesworth, James H., ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.

Collins, John J. *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*. Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Collins, John J. and Craig A. Evans, *Christian Beginnings and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Hess, Richard S. and M. Daniel Carroll R., eds., *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Kim, Sook-Young. *The Warrior Messiah in Scripture and Intertestamental Writings*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

Mowinkel, Sigmund. *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1956; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Neusner, Jacob, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs. *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987; repr. 1996.

4. Did Jesus and the disciples share a Passover seder? (i.e., was the Last Supper a Seder?) Did the seder as it is known in traditional haggadas exist in the Second Temple period? The following publications present a formidable challenge against answering any of these questions in the affirmative and discourage connecting Jesus with passover.

Klawans, Jonathan, "Interpreting the Last Supper: Sacrifice, Spiritualization, and Anti-Sacrifice," *New Testament Studies* 48.1 (2002): 1-17.

_____. "Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?" *Bible Review* 17.5 (2001): 24-33, 47.

Kulp, Joshua. "The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah," *Currents in Biblical Research* 4.1 (2005): 109-134.

5. What is known of the lives and faith of early Jewish believers in Jesus? How did the split of early Christianity and Judaism occur? How can these historical investigations assist the work of Jewish evangelism today? Is there a Jewish-Christian dialogue? Or have the stakes been drawn so clearly that there is not much left to say?

Parkes, James William. *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism*. London: Soncino, 1934. repr. New York: Hermon Press, 1974.

Berger, Alan, and David Patterson. *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey from the Rock*. St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008.

Porter, Stanley E., and Brook W. R. Pearson, eds. *Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries*. Roehampton Papers 6. JSNT Supplement Series 192. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000; repr. London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2004.

Skarsaune, Oskar, and Reidar Hvalvik, eds. *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

6. What can be learned from the history of Jewish missions? The history of Jewish missions is an important story to tell, and much can be learned from the successes and failures of the past. Historical studies are being used to both legitimize and deligitimize Jewish evangelism. Are there new ways to make the case for Jewish evangelism?

Bock, Darrell L., and Mitch Glaser, eds. *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008.

Congdon, Jim, ed. *Jews and the Gospel at the End of History: A Tribute to Moishe Rosen*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009.

Crombie, Kelvin. *For the Love of Zion: Christian Witness and the Restoration of Israel*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1991.

Glaser, Mitch. *A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe, 1900-1950*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998.

Moorhead, Jonathan. "The Father of Zionism: William E. Blackstone?" *JETS* 53 (2010): 787-800.

Tucker, Ruth. *Not Ashamed: The Story of Jews for Jesus*. Sisters, OR.: Multnomah, 2000.

7. Can/should demographic studies guide us to the next frontier of Jewish evangelistic effort? What are the discernable Jewish population trends for migration, aliya, heart languages of diaspora communities, intermarriage, assimilation, etc.? The North American Jewish Data Bank is the central repository of social scientific studies of North American Jewry.

Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 2010" Online at
jewishdatabank.org/Reports/World_Jewish_Population_2010.pdf

Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, "Jewish Population in the United States, 2010"
jewishdatabank.org/Reports/Jewish_Population_in_the_United_States_2010.pdf

Multiple organizations engage in social scientific studies relevant to Jewish evangelism.

- IUSSP - International Union for the Scientific Study of Population
- PAA - Population Association of America
- EAPS - European Association for Population Studies
- AIDELF - Association Internationale des Demographes de Langue Francaise
- SIDES - Societa Italiana di Demografia Storica
- CISR - Conference Internationale de Sociologie des Religions
- WUJS - World Union of Jewish Studies
- ISS - Israel Sociological Society
- IHS - Israel Historical Society
- AJS - Asociacion of Jewish Studies
- ASSJ - Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry
- LAJSA - Latin American Jewish Studies Association
- AJDS - Association for Jewish Demography and Statistics

8. Should the focus of Jewish evangelistic effort make aliya to Israel or are there greater gains in the diaspora? Do the trends demand a more immediate indigenization of evangelistic efforts? Consider the following prediction by the famed professor of Jewish demographics, Sergio DellaPergola of Hebrew University.

In the future, most Jews will live in Israel. This process, however, does not derive from Israel's draw or attraction but from the weakening of Diaspora Jews. This diminished self-perception among world Jews and their reluctance to identify as Jews derives from the dramatic erosion in Israel's image in the world. (Hava Pinchas-Cohen, "Are We Assimilating?" *Eretz Acheret: About Israel and Judaism*, Oct. 29, 2009).

Conclusion

In keeping with the world of academic inquiry, this introduction to our time of discussion will conclude with a series of reflection questions. What other topics of theological and academic inquiry should be included as directly relating to the work of Jewish evangelists who desire to make the messiah known? How should the questions be framed? To whom will Jewish evangelists turn to accomplish this needed work? How can LCJE members promote effective partnerships with academics and promising students who will assist in advancing the gospel among the Jewish people?

My brief assignment was to introduce our discussion of making the Messiah known through theological and academic work. My prayer is that participants in this session will have much to add as there is no lack of work to be done.

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