

1986  
Sigal

An Analysis of  
The Jew and the Christian Missionary:  
A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity

by  
Gerald Sigal  
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ANALYSIS BY DR. LOUIS GOLDBERG - MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Gerald Sigal has written a definitive book in the attempt to set aright "those Jews who are being deluded into joining Christianity by out and out distortions of the Hebrew Bible" (page xviii). It is a serious work which examines practically every passage a missionary uses in his attempt to share with Jewish people. The book runs to 292 pages, has a good Scripture index as well as a general index. Sigal indicates that he has examined hundreds of missionary books and tracts over a period of twenty-five years and has spend countless hours talking to various missionaries about what they believe and preach. For this reason, his is a book which necessitates a thorough examination.

His claim is supposedly not to insult either Christians or Christianity and that he has not written his book with any malice. However, after he has attacked practically the entire New Testament, many times questioning the seriousness of the claims by the New Testament writers, one wonders if he will end up with any friends among evangelical Christians! In fact, in discussing Psalm 69:22, entitled, "Mixed up Drinks," (poison or myrrh, or was Matthew 27:34 really a fulfillment of Psalm 69:22), his charge is that "because we Jews refuse to accept their misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Scriptures, the followers of Jesus have

mingled our blood with the dust of the earth. To any Jew who entertains the idea that Jesus is the Messiah, the words of the true God spoken to Cain come to say: 'What have you done? the voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground'" (Gen 4:10) (page 103). This writer feels he becomes a little less than candid when trying to consider objectively the Christian understanding of the Old Testament.

Of course, he has no grudge at all against those Christians who are willing "to abide by the view of the prophet Micah: 'For let all the peoples walk each one in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever'" (Micah 4:5) (page xvii). Upon closer examination however, we may ask that if Israel walks in accordance with the Lord, then what pagan god are other peoples following, including the Christian? However, he has nothing to say to those Christians who will not engage in missionary work, that is, in reaching Jewish people with the gospel. Jewish people would dearly love for the evangelical to give up on their vocation in Jewish evangelism and will do their utmost to "help" Christians from fulfilling the "great commission" in sharing Yeshua with Jewish people.

We shall now make a number of observations from an analysis of Sigal's comments:

1. A Just Cause

Sigal has a just case with missionaries who read into the Old Testament Scriptures what is not readily apparent from the Old Testament itself.

For example, in dealing with whose seed the Scripture passage is talking about in Genesis 3:15, the missionary pushes

much of New Testament truth onto the Old Testament passage, e.g., is it so easily understood that the seed of the woman is Christ. Sigal is right when he charges Christians with attempting to force an exegesis on the passage which, considered from the Old Testament alone, does not provide a full blown explanation.

In another instance, when dealing with the doctrine of the Triunity in the Hebrew Bible: we cannot go to Genesis 1:1 and claim that the term Elohim is a very clear explanation of the Trinity of God. When we open to the first verse in the Old Testament, it is unfair to read New Testament revelation back into this passage. In addition, we can learn from the Jewish rabbis who assert that Elohim describes the majesty of God. Even Girdlestone, Synonyms of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. of 1897 edition, p. 22) does admit that the plurality of the Elohim expresses the majesty and authority of God.

Other examples are mentioned. In Genesis 1:26, when God declares, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness," is it correct for the Christian missionary to say that God is having a conversation with Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, and not realize we are reading too much into the Old Testament passage. We do not deny the implications present in Genesis 1:26, but we must also remember that the New Testament revelation is what gives us opportunity to suggest such an understanding in this passage.

A similar situation exists when considering sin and atonement in Leviticus 17:11 and by implication, the sin offering in Leviticus chapter 4. The usual procedure by many Christians

when they treat these two passages is to immediately deal with the type and New Testament message and completely overlook what these Scriptures meant to the Israeli, and particularly the believer. Very few exegeses by Christians actually describe how believers in the Old Testament were saved by following the principles Moses outlines in the sin offering. In this sense, Sigal has an important observation to make which we believers in Jesus the Messiah must take in to serious account.

## 2. Reform Liberal Position

As Sigal examines how the missionary uses pertinent passages in both Old and New Testaments and as he considers the claims by New Testament writers, at no point does he ever mention to which branch of Judaism he belongs. However, by the way he handles the Scriptures and how he sees Christians use them, we can come to no other conclusion but that his assessment of the Bible is from a liberal and many times, rationalistic exegesis.

For example, when dealing with Psalm 22, he completely repudiates the Christian's application of it to Jesus. But how should one handle this Psalm? The point is that in no place does he suggest what should be a Jewish messianic interpretation of it. Possibly, he intimates that it could have been either the experience of David and most certainly, the experience of the nation, but nowhere does he definitely say so. A Cohen, The Psalms, The Soncino Books of the Bible (London: Soncino Press, 1950, p. 61) does express the liberal view that "A Christological intention has long been read into this Psalm, but modern Christian exegetes are agreed that it describes a situation then existing and does not anticipate an event in the future."

When dealing with Micah chapter 5:1 (Hebrew Bible), Sigal confidently demolishes the Christian understanding of this passage. His own interpretation is that the birth does refer to the Messiah, a descendant of David but that "the text does not necessarily mean the Messiah will be born in that town, but that his family originates from there" (p. 76). In Isaiah 9:5, 6, he asserts that this refers to Hezekiah and has no meaning whatsoever for any future Messiah. But Patai cited an ancient source who thought differently of this passage: "R. Yose the Galilean said: 'The name of the Messiah is Peace, for it is said, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:5)...' R. Yose the Galilean said: 'Great is peace, for in the hour in which King Messiah is revealed to Israel, he begins with peace, for it is said, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings who announceth peace (Isaiah 52:7)'" (Pereq Shalom, p. 101) cited by Rafael Patai, The Messiah Texts (New York: Avon, 1979, p. 21).

When dealing with John 1:1, particularly, "and the word was God," Sigal quotes E.C. Colwell, "A definite rule for the use of the article in the Greek New Testament," Journal of Biblical Literature 52 (1933), pp. 12-21, who states that it is not necessary to translate this passage in the customary way, but instead, "And the Word was 'a god.'" Using this evidence (which we shall discuss later on regarding faulty exegesis) Sigal now confidently asserts that "Colwell's evidence and conclusions disprove the belief that there is any doctrine of a triune Godhead" (pp. 170-171). In this way, he can disprove that the Word, or Jesus, is God.

Actually the very opposite is true. Even though in the traditional translation of John 1:1, the definite article is omitted, but it is regarded as definite because the Greek text has the definite article attached to God, ton Theon: the context therefore demands the understanding of a definite sense. We shall discuss this further under Faulty Exegesis. However, by citing a theological liberal source, Sigal now confidently asserts that the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught by the apostle John. But why not consider carefully what conservative scholars have had to say about the exegesis of the text itself?

### 3. Hidden Agendas

When Sigal handles what some would consider to be the most basic passages of Scripture, he only states what modern Judaism teaches regarding them and never once considers if there was any shift or change from ancient Judaism. In this sense therefore, Sigal reveals a hidden agenda. Two of the most important cases are cited:

#### a. Concerning Messiah in Isaiah 53

When Sigal treats the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 under his title of "The Suffering Servant of the Lord" (pp. 35-68), he completely repudiates this passage as a description of Jesus the Messiah. We shall deal more with this below under "Cases of Faulty Exegesis," but for the moment, Sigal's interpretation of this portion of Scripture is that "Israel is often spoken of as the servant of the Lord (Isaiah 41:8-9; 44:1-2, 21; 48:20; 49:3)" (pp. 36-37), and therefore, this passage cannot be made to apply to an individual.

Sigal, however, never comments on what was the earliest interpretation of this passage in the Isaiah Targum (F.J. Stenning, Targum Isaiah, Oxford, 1933, pp. 142-148), where all the verses which relate to exaltation were applied to a Messiah who is personal while all of the rest of the passages relating to suffering were applied to the nation. We are not arguing now as to the validity of such an exegesis, but the Isaiah Targum is eloquent testimony that the interpretation of Isaiah chapter 53 was changed, some time during the middle ages, by Spanish Jewish exegetes. At least, in the ancient Jewish world, there was a belief in the Messiah who is personal and Isaiah 53 became one of the proof texts for the early Jewish believers.

Of course, if Sigal were confronted by this charge, he possibly would shrug it off and say that the rabbis had every right to change the interpretation because after some 1500 years of Christians trying to prove that Jesus is the Messiah from this passage, there was certainly enough reason to evade the attempt of the missionaries. But is this reason to reject the concept of a personal Messiah in such an important passage as Isaiah 53?

b. The Council of Yavneh and Substitute Atonement

Simon the Just declared in 200 B.C.E. that upon three things does the world rest: 1) Torah; 2) Worship, including atonement based upon the substitute sin offering; and 3) the showing of Kindness (The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers 1:2, ed. by R. Travers Hereford, New York: Schocken, 1962, pp. 22-24).

When dealing with Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to

make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement," Moses clearly pointed out the necessity of a substitute atonement. But Sigal confidently asserts that "the idea that prayer takes the place of animal sacrifice is clearly expressed in Hosea 14:3: 'So will we render for bullocks the offering of our lips' (p. 13). In fact, prayer is considered superior to animal offerings, 'I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving and it shall please the Lord better than a bullock that has horns and hoofs'" (Psalm 69:31-32). He makes the same assertion for the passages of 1 Samuel 15:22 and Psalm 32:5.

While it is true that the Old Testament stated many times the necessity of having a repentent heart and that this was more important than sacrifices, however, nowhere do the prophets mean to nullify Moses and his teaching of substitute atonement. Rather, they inveighed against Israelis who were coming to the services in a perfunctory and ritualistic manner, and with no repentent heart. Isaiah the prophet, in 1:10-16 pointed out how God indeed hates ritual. And yet, the prophets insisted that an Israeli first must repent of one's sin and then he was to present his offering in the prescribed manner (Isaiah 43:23, 24; Jeremiah 33:18).

But how is it that prayer became a substitute for animal sacrifice? Here is a hidden agenda which Sigal does not mention but at the Council of Yavneh in 70-90 C.E., after the destruction of the second temple, Yohanan ben Zakkai confidently changed the statement by Simon the Just to read: "...Rabban Yohanan said, I ask of you only Jabneh, which I might go, and teach my student (Torah) and arrange prayer, and do all the mitzvot..." The italics

are those of this writer while the third element is an emphasis on the acts of piety (Jacob Neusner, A Life of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962, p. 142, footnote 3, citing J. Goldin, "The Three Pillars of Simeon the Righteous," in the Periodical of the American Academy for Jewish Research, XXVII, pp. 50-51).

But a very legitimate question can be raised. Who told Yohanan ben Zakkai and the rest of the rabbis to change Moses and the prescribed message of atonement? Sigal will say that there was nothing else left to do because the temple no longer existed and it was necessary to create new forms by which Jewish people can worship the Lord. But nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is there to be a change in atonement through a substitute. In this sense, the Jewish writers of the New Covenant were faithful to Moses, demonstrating how the Messiah fulfilled what Moses declared and that Jesus the Messiah Himself is our substitute atonement. Who changed Moses? There is no doubt that the final conclusions of the Council of Yavneh did precisely that!

#### 4. Cases of Faulty Exegesis

This writer has examined almost all of the passages Sigal discussed. We cannot however, in this observation, treat all of what he has considered, but a few of them will suffice:

##### a. Until Shiloh Comes (Genesis 49:10) (pp. 9-10)

Sigal faults the Christian missionary who asserts that this passage refers to the Messiah. And yet, there are Talmudic indications that Shiloh was understood as the Messiah: "Rab said: The world was created only on David's account...R. Johanan said:

For the sake of the Messiah. What is his (the Messiah's) name? - The School of R. Shila said: His name is Shiloh, for it is written, until Shiloh come..." (Sanhedrin 98b).

In addition, Sigal insists in the passage that the right to the scepter will never depart from Judah, but at some time in the future the scepter will be wielded over all the nations (Isaiah 11). Until that time, the scepter is over Israel alone. But he seems to miss the point because: Did not Judah lose its scepter, its governing capacity to rule itself after the second temple was lost? While it is true that there was a patriarchate in the land until 425 C.E., nevertheless Judah was no longer a nation with an exclusive guidance over its political stance. In this sense, they therefore lost their ability to control solely their own affairs.

The point of the passage is that when the Messiah comes, the Sanhedrin was to yield allegiance to Him who, after He had made an atonement for sin, was to then take His rightful place upon the throne of David. Nowhere, however, does Sigal speak of the coming of the Messiah from this passage, but rather, the nation itself will take over the leadership, not only over itself but also all the nations.

b. Sin and Atonement (Leviticus 17:11) (pp. 11-16)

We have already pointed out the hidden agenda to which Sigal does not consider as to what happened to a substitute atonement after 70 C.E.

However, while he faults the Christian missionary for not dealing with what Jewish people consider a legitimate atonement today, nevertheless, he himself does not deal with what was atonement in biblical Judaism in Leviticus chapter four. He

contented himself by only explaining the validity of prayer over the actual substitute atonement, but he ignores what Moses attempted to say.

In exegeting Leviticus chapter 4, four principles can be derived: 1) the animal substitute; 2) identification, where as the Israelite laid his hands upon the head of the animal, the sin of the offerer was transferred to the animal; 3) the death of the animal because it had now become sin. In order for the Israeli to properly learn what this meant, he himself had to kill the animal while the priest caught the blood and applied it in the proper place. But also, God wanted the Israeli offerer to learn that a substitute had been provided for him because of His grace and the law therefore became a schoolmaster to teach the Israeli what atonement really meant; and 4) while the text itself does not specifically indicate so, nevertheless this writer would suggest that the fourth principle consists of the exchange of life whereby, as the animal died, its life was transferred to the offerer, providing for him a new life. (See the discussion concerning the sin offering according to Moses in Louis Goldberg, Bible Study Commentary: Leviticus, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980, pp. 26-31).

Now, if the Israeli truly committed himself to these four principles, he knew what it meant for his sins to be taken away and that beyond a shadow of a doubt, he was forgiven (Psalm 103:12). Furthermore, as a believer would watch the procedure on the Day of Atonement as the scapegoat took away the sins of the nation, he could very well cry, "Hallelujah," as he realized what was transpiring when the animal removed his particular sin. Sigal, however, completely ignores the message of Moses.

c. The Virgin Birth Myth (Isaiah 7:14) (pp. 20-28)

Sigal completely rejects the claim for the virgin birth, indicating that "many pagan religions believed in the idea of the impregnation of virgins by gods resulting in the birth of heroes" (p. 20). In a few words, he sweeps away the doctrine of the virgin birth because it is based upon pagan influence!

Isaiah 7:14, for Sigal, cannot at all refer to the virgin birth of Jesus. For example, he claims that the word almah does not at all mean virgin but rather, betulah is the word for it in every circumstance. Obviously, this passage is a hotly disputed one between Jewish and Christian exegetes. When the attempt is made to demonstrate that the Greek word parthenos in the Septuagint, used to translate almah, definitely means virgin, Sigal retorts that the Septuagint also used parthenos to describe Dinah when she was obviously not a virgin any more (Genesis 34:3; Septuagint).

While many Christians do assert that almah in the Isaiah passage can be translated young woman, this writer along with two others, when involved with the translation of the book of Isaiah for the New International Version, struggled long and hard with how one does translate almah. Herbert Wolf published the result of his research in an essay, "A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-8:22," in the Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1972, pp. 449-456, when he considered: 1) there is a definite article before almah and therefore, Isaiah pointed to someone in particular in the entourage of king Ahaz; and 2) the passages of Isaiah 8:1-4 describe first of all a wedding scene, the witnesses, the wedding contract or tablet of the witnesses,

and finally the birth of Isaiah's second child, "Maher-shalal-hash-baz." The conclusion therefore of the article is that the particular almah which Isaiah pointed out was a young woman but also a virgin with whom he then had a child, after they were married (his second wife). As to what happened to his first wife, we are not told of her identity, except that Isaiah had his first child with her, Shear Jashub (Isaiah 7:3). This writer and the other translators felt that some fresh ground had been broken in the interpretation of the passage. Therefore, when Isaiah's second child had reached the point when he was able to refuse the evil and choose the good, then in the historical sense, northern Israel and Syria would be defeated. The second child became the sign that God's protection was upon His people Judah.

However, the New Testament, in using this passage, can also refer to a maiden who had a child without the benefit of a husband. She too was a virgin and so troubled was Joseph over his impending marriage to Mary, he was ready to put her away, according to the law (Matthew 1:19). God stayed his hand however, and the marriage took place, but not without a stigma which stayed with Jesus throughout the years of His life (See John 8:41). The townspeople would have wondered as to who indeed was the father of Jesus. But the point to be made was that the circumstances regarding the birth of Jesus was held to be the most unusual, and it was a factor which also affected the Messiah in the days of His public ministry.

- d. The Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)  
(pp. 35-68)

Sigal completely repudiates the Christian interpretation of this well-known chapter and instead claims that it can only refer

to Israel as the suffering servant. Concerning Isaiah 53:10, "he would offer himself as a guilt offering," he claims that the "servant...must feel that the suffering he has been experiencing is part of his burden and task in life in order to strengthen him inwardly. Viewing it from this perspective, he will be able to bring out his inner potential, fortify his moral fiber, and, in the end, become spiritually transformed." But is this what the passage actually teaches?

What does it mean for the subject of Isaiah 53 to be offered as a guilt offering? Sigal, however, pays no attention to the sacrificial system and only interprets it in a moral sense. But what is a guilt offering. All offerings, first of all, must be perfect, without spot and without blemish. From Isaiah's own description, the nation was far from being perfect and morally clean (Isaiah chapter one). The point of Isaiah 53:10 is that subject of this chapter has been offered as an asham, or guilt offering for every individual sin. Can we say that Israel was this sacrifice, perfect, without blemish, and being offered as a sacrifice for the nations?

Sigal also completely repudiates the interpretation of the prophecy that the Messiah was humble and did not open His mouth and took whatever came to Him very quietly (vs 7). Instead, he insisted that Jesus could at times be quite mean in pronouncing judgment on fig trees, overturning the tables of money changers in the temple, taking a rope and driving out the money changers as well as making a mess by opening up the doors of the cages where the doves were kept and freeing them. But if Sigal points out how Jesus the Messiah could be "vindictive," can we not say this was

also true of Judah? Did Judah for the most part take its suffering without a whimper and with no question? This writer feels that a proper exegesis of the passage cannot refer to the nation but rather to an individual.

e. Jeremiah's New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)  
(pp. 70-73)

Sigal also repudiates the Christian's interpretation of the new covenant of Jeremiah as that which was ratified when Jesus the Messiah died. Rather, the Mosaic covenant of old is of "eternal duration, never to be recinded or to be superceded by a new covenant" (p. 71). But how so? If at the council of Yavneh, the three things on which the world rests was changed by Yohanan ben Zakkai and Judaism was made into a religion with no substitute atonement, then was not the old covenant changed? If there would be no longer a possibility to offer sacrifices in an accepted temple then is not one major part of the Mosaic covenant taken away?

But Sigal's explanation is that the new covenant "would be meaningless unless what Jeremiah meant by it was the renewing of the old covenant, which will thereby regain its full original vigor" (pp. 72-73). But what does this mean? Did not Jeremiah himself state that the new covenant will not be according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (Jeremiah 31:32). How therefore can the new covenant make the old more secure?

f. Who Was Pierced? (Zechariah 12:10) (pp. 80-82)

Sigal also completely rejects the idea that the Messiah is seen in this passage. Rather, he interprets it to mean that one

day, the nation of Israel, the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will look to "me (God) whom they (the nations) have pierced." But then Sigal says that God himself, of course, was not literally pierced. When the nations however will attack Israel, it will be as if God himself is pierced.

But that is not what the text is saying. The "me" does refer to a person and he is the one who is pierced. Furthermore, when the people are appraised of it, they mourn for "him."

Sigal also sees a problem in trying to equate "me" with the "him" and he therefore declares that the Christian has poorly exegeted the passage. His point is that "me" and "him" cannot refer to the same individual. But there are many passages in Scripture, however, which flip from one set of pronouns to another, e.g. Isaiah 56:5 where the NASV text reads "I will give them an everlasting name" where the literal rendering for "them" is "him", and so on. Therefore, it is well within reason of good exegesis to see "me" and "him" as one and the same person.

Of course, the Jewish interpretation in the period of the amoraim (200-500 C.E.) posited two messiahs, one the son of David and the other the son of Joseph: "And the land shall mourn (Zechariah 12:12). What is the reason of this mourning? R. Dosa and the rabbis differ about it. R. Dosa says: '(They will mourn) over the Messiah who will be slain'" (Sukkah 52a). See also the discussion by Pattai how the concept of the Messiah son of Joseph was developed (Rafael Pattai, Op. Cit., pp. 165-167).

There always was a problem in the Old Testament as to how to understand both the suffering and the exaltation of the one Messiah. Targum Isaiah solved this in part by saying that the personal Messiah will be exalted while the nation will suffer.

When the early Jewish believers proclaimed one Messiah who both suffered and was exalted, the rabbis in the period of the amoraim reacted and came up with two messiahs, one who is exalted, the son of David, while the one who will die fighting the enemies of Israel will be the son of Joseph. With a careful exegesis of Zechariah chapter 12, it is quite difficult to arrive at a concept of two Messiahs.

g. Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27) (pp. 109-122)

This writer will not take up Sigal's full argument regarding this passage, but he interprets the seventy weeks as seventy years, dating it from the loss of the first temple in 586 B.C.E. to the dedication of the second temple in 536 B.C.E. He completely rejects the notion that the decree to restore and build Jerusalem could refer to any word from Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.E). Sigal contends that Artaxerxes only gave Nehemiah permission to rebuild the wall and not in any way rebuild Jerusalem. But he does not pay attention to what Nehemiah did once the walls were finished because the governor did call for a census in order to repopulate Jerusalem, insisting that one-tenth of the nation must live in the capital city (Nehemiah 11:1). To restructure the population of the city would also mean the construction of new houses and restructuring a city with a viable defense. Evidently Nehemiah had the permission to do so and it would be wrong therefore to say that Artaxerxes gave his cup-bearer officer the authority to rebuild only the walls.

But how tenible is Daniel's seventy weeks to be interpreted as only seventy years? Sigal completely ignores Daniel 9:24 which describes the ultimate objective to be accomplished once the

seventy set of sevens are finished: to finish the transgression; to make an end of sin; to make atonement for iniquity; to bring in everlasting righteousness; to seal up vision and prophecy; and finally, to anoint the most holy one or place. It would appear, therefore, that the final objectives, once the seventy sets of seven are completed, is that Israel will be in the Messianic kingdom and that the Messiah will rule from the city of Jerusalem over the nations. Sigal's interpretation therefore that the seventy weeks only means seventy years is in fault because how therefore can we say that the objectives of Daniel 9:24 were fulfilled in 516 B.C.E.?

h. The Doctrine of the Trinity (pp. 125-178)

It will not be our intention in this limited space to deal with Sigal's entire consideration of the trinity. His charge is that such a notion is completely lacking within the Hebrew Scriptures. In one sense he is right because the concept and very word, triunity, is the product of the first general council in Nicea in 325 C.E. However, the truth of who Jesus is was not developed among the Gentiles, but rather came forth from within the Jewish context.

Furthermore, Sigal charges that the notion of the triunity had pagan influences. The pagan religions, i.e. the Hellenized Egyptian cult of Isis, presented the goddess Isis, her consort Sarapis and their child Horus who form a sacred trinity (p. 125) and therefore it was not difficult, according to Sigal, to advance the idea of a triune god in the early Christian church of the pagan world. But such a charge is preposterous if one reads carefully the writings of the early church fathers at the end of

the first century and very beginning of the second century. They were so dependent upon the testimony of the Jewish believers that it is difficult to understand Sigal's claim that the notion of the trinity came about through pagan influence.

The claim concerning the mysterious being of God and who the Messiah is comes sharply in focus at the trial of Jesus. He had been confronted by two questions after he had been placed under the Oath of Testimony (Matthew 26:63): 1) was He indeed the Messiah; and 2) was He the son of the blessed one, or in other words, did He claim deity in any way? In answer to the first question, Jesus had no hesitation but rather in a number of ways, said yes. As He replied to the second question, He paraphrased Daniel 7:13, declaring, "Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power (God), and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). The reaction was immediate when Caiaphas tore his clothes and then asked the council if they needed any further evidence of His blasphemy when He Himself claimed to be both man (Messiah) and God. For that reason, and that alone, did the Sanhedrin condemn Jesus. Therefore, if we are going to deal with the question of the triunity of God, we can begin with what was declared by Jesus at the trial.

Sigal proceeds to also demolish the argument for 'ehad, Hebrew for "one," as the means to describe the nature of God viewed as a composite unity. While he does admit that at times the word can mean "compound united one," but he insists that in the phrase, "The Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), the implication is that "one" must be viewed as yahid, or "only one." But his insistence on yahid takes on another hidden agenda because

Maimonides himself in principle two of the thirteen principles of faith declared God to be a unity, that is, Yahid. However, nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is the Lord referred to as yahid but rather, 'ehad'. Sigal has overstepped his bounds when he failed to consider what he himself already admitted that 'ehad' can mean "a compound united one," (See Genesis 2:24, basar 'ehad', or one flesh; and Numbers 13:23, eshkol 'ehad', or a single cluster of grapes), and if this is applied to Deuteronomy 6:4, then we do have the implication of God as the compound Unity.

Sigal spends considerable space trying to justify the translation of John 1:1 as, "in the beginnig was the Word and the Word was a god." He quotes several scholars who also insist that the implication of a definite article must not appear before "God." See his previous citation of Colwell who opts for the indefinite translation.

However, the Greek New Testament does indicate the definite article, attached to Theon, or God. Mantey states that "Frequently the article is used with the name of some person whose identity is made clear by the context, or assumed as well known by the reader" (H.E. Dana and Julius Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: MacMillan, 1949, p. 142)). Therefore, in no way can we translate the passage a "a god," when the definite article is already present in the Greek text. Even in New Testament passages where the article is missing, yet the sense of a definite article is translated as such. Mantey declared that "Sometimes with a noun which the context proves to be definite the article is not used" and is "due to the tendency toward abbreviation of frequent or customary phraseology" (p. 149). An example in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 reads, "For this we say

to you by the word of the Lord" and while the definite article does not appear prior to "Lord," but the context is so definite that one must translate it as the Lord.

This writer studied his Greek under Julius Mantey and on one occasion when the sect of the Jehovah's Witnesses attempted to drop the article attached to God in John 1:1, using Mantey's Greek New Testament grammar, he vociferously rejected such a notion because of the very basis of Greek exegesis. But Sigal does not consider these points at all.

- i. A Fable is Born (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38)  
(pp. 179-188)

Only one of Sigal's objections to the geneological account in Matthew chapter 1 and Luke chapter 3 will be considered. He completely repudiates these accounts because he finds too many inaccuracies in them and his primary charge is that Joseph, who according to Sigal was really the father of Jesus, is really of the line of Mary (Luke 3:23) because "Jesus himself was about thirty years of age, being supposedly the son of Joseph, the son of Heli." Sigal claims that a literal translation of the Greek says: "Joseph of the Heli of the Matthat of the Levi of the Melchi...of the Judah of the Jacob of the Isaac of the Abraham of the Terah" and "It is clear from the context that the Greek 'of the' is to be rendered 'son of'" (p. 181). Sigal now asserts from "the meaning of Luke 3:23 is that Joseph was the son of Heli and not his son-in-law, as some Christian missionaries would have us believe."

However, Sigal has not paid attention to the nuances of the Greek text. Geldenhuys states that "it is noteworthy that Luke

has no tou (the) before Joseph as he has before every other name in the list. By this he shows that Joseph's name is not really part of the list (Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951, p. 153, footnote 4). He also cited F. Rienecker, Praktisches Handkommenter Zu Lukas Evangelium, 1930, p. 302, who declared, "By the omission of the article, Joseph's name is separated from the genealogical chain and accorded a place of its own." Accordingly, therefore, the best exegesis is that Joseph was not at all connected with the genealogy which Luke supplies regarding the background of Mary.

- j. Was Jesus a Willing Sacrifice for Mankind's Sins?  
(Mt 26:39; Mk 14:35-36; Lk 22:41-44) (pp. 227-228)

Sigal seizes on the passages where Jesus struggled with the cup of sin He was to drink and he raises the question that "if He supposedly had full knowledge of why He had to die, and of the resulting awards that would accrue to Him, He should not have been in any need of a reassuring angel. Did this God-Man have to be reminded of His role and of its rewards?" The point, however, is that Sigal never seems, in most passages, to separate out the human and the divine natures of Jesus, but treats Jesus with both natures and when it suits him, ignores the humanity of Jesus. In such a case as Jesus dying for mankind's sin, Sigal sees Jesus as God as the missionaries claim and therefore He should not have any problem with dying. So he concludes that at the last critical moment, Jesus did not wish to die and be a willing sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

Of course, Jesus as a human being did struggle with the cup of sin but the main reason why he came was to die for the sins of mankind. On the Mount of Transfiguration when Elijah and Moses

appeared to Jesus, the subject was His decease (Luke 19:32), or the fact that His death was for the penalty of sin. Obviously, if Sigal can raise a debilitating question regarding the necessity of Jesus dying for our sins, then he has disclaimed one of the basic planks of the gospel: the Messiah died for our sins, according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

- k. The Resurrection (Mt 28:6-7; Mk 16:6; Lk 24:6; Jn 20:9) (pp. 238-253)

The second plank of the gospel is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Sigal, however, insists that because there were no actual witnesses of Jesus coming forth from the grave, then the entire doctrine of the resurrection rests on the most flimsiest of arguments. Sigals dismisses all of the post-resurrection appearances to the apostles as a combination of myth and highly emotional expressions stemming from the deep yearnings of disappointment and guilt of the followers of Jesus concerning His death. He then adds, "on the other hand, with the many discrepant discrepancies that appear in the story, it is no wonder that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people dismissed the resurrection story as one more fabrication of Jesus' followers" (p. 253).

In assessing the resureection as such, we recognize that if anyone attacks this plank of the gosepl, then the entire New Testament collapses because so many doctrines are based on it, e.g., salvation (Romans 10:9, 10); hope for the future (Romans 8:11), and so on. However, the resurrection is on such solid footing and set in such circumstances that even the most skeptical of lawyers have been convinced by the testimony of the evangelists (See Simon Greenleaf, Testimony of the Evangelists, Examined by

the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965, reprinted from the 1847 edition). As the brilliant Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University, he examined the testimony of the apostles and could only but substantiate what they declared, based on strict rules of evidence.

Time after time, Jesus told His disciples that He was going up to Jerusalem and be delivered into the hands of the chief priests and die. But, He would also be raised from the dead (Matthew 16:21; 17:9, 12, 22, 23; and so on). The disciples completely disbelieved it and only accepted the Jewish concept of the Messiah as a super man who would restore Israel to once more be the chief of the nations.

But what does the record state? Only as the report of the resurrection began to filter in did the disciples themselves check to see if the tomb was really empty or not. John himself declared that when he entered the tomb where Jesus had been, "he saw, and believed" (John 20:8). What made the difference? He no doubt saw the grave clothes in which Jesus had been wrapped, and that they had not been unwrapped but lay there as if the body had come through them which left them intact in their place. No wonder, therefore, when the apostle John understood this evidence, he remembered what Jesus had said concerning His resurrection and had no other recourse but to believe it.

Paul himself declared that in the time when he lived, more than 500 brethren, all at the same time, had seen Jesus after His resurrection and most of them were still living. In a sense, Paul said that he had a computer readout of names and addresses and if the skeptics wished to ascertain the truth of what really had

happened, they had only to take the list and seek out these brethren. This writer has always raised the question that it might be easy to fool one Jewish person regarding the resurrection of Jesus, but how would it be possible to fool more than 500 Jewish believers!

Another consideration is the fact that all of the apostles with the exception of John died a martyr's death. Generally, when a person comes to his death bed or his last moments on earth, he tells the truth. The fact that none of the apostles and others who had seen Jesus after His resurrection ever denied their experience makes the doctrine all the more a strong one.

We cannot go further and raise questions as to who would indeed be interested in stealing the body. Certainly not the disciples because they felt their hope was lost. The Romans would not because they had posted a guard to make sure the tomb would be left intact. Certainly the Jewish leaders heard the "rumors" of a resurrection but they responded by asking Pilate to place a guard at the tomb so that no one would come to steal away the body. We are only left with the truth that the evidence for the resurrection is valid and on this evidence do we believe the rest of the claims for Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

##### 5. Contextualization?

Never does Sigal, for one instant, consider the writers of the New Testament as Jewish. For him they are "Christians" and on that basis, he proceeds to demolish their arguments concerning that Jesus indeed is the Messiah.

It is a curious kind of situation whereby Jewish rabbis and

leaders wish Christian ministers to have a full grasp of the Jewishness of their faith. On the other hand, when these same Jewish religious leaders wish to demonstrate that Christianity is completely separate from Judaism, they have only to raise the issues of what "Christianity" has done to the Jew and thereby create a wide gulf between the two religions. It then becomes unthinkable for a Jewish person to ever cross over and become a Christian.

But what about the attempt to contextualize faith and practice by the early believers. Were they not Jewish? Did they not understand the Torah? Did not the early congregations in Judea and Samaria revere the Hebrew Scriptures? Did not these Jewish believers live a Jewish lifestyle, even until the 300s where Bagatti cites one of the rabbis of the period, "These Jewish believers are as full of commandments as pips in a pomegranite" (B. Bagatti, The Church from the Circumcision, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing House, 1971, p. 108). The testimony therefore suggests that the Jewish believers lived a Jewish lifestyle and had learned how to contextualize their faith, thereby enabling them to live in the land of Israel among their own brethren.

The concept of contextualization is a new one today and those involved in the planting of the congregations of Jewish believers are struggling as to how to expresss theology, liturgy, a proper ecclesiology, etc. But there is no doubt that one can be valid in his attempt to be faithful to his identity while at the same time also be authentic biblically. But Sigal and others do not accept such attempts. He does not want to have any Jewish believers living any kind of Jewish lifestyle because this tends

same time also be authentic biblically. But Sigal and others do not accept such attempts. He does not want to have any Jewish believers living any kind of Jewish lifestyle because this tends to close the gap, from the Jewish point of view, between Judaism and Christianity. For this reason, therefore, Jewish leaders reserve their greatest ire for those who attempt to contextualize their faith in a Jewish context.

The study of Sigal has been a good one. This writer has tried to be fair and has granted Sigal those instances when Christian missionaries and theologians have misread the Hebrew Scriptures and in their attempt to exegete them, have ignored completely what the Hebrew Scriptures meant to the Israeli. On the other hand, we can learn much from Sigal concerning the Jewish understanding of the Christian and how he at all costs will keep the Jewish person from looking upon Christianity with any favor to consider its claims. It does us well, therefore, to understand the argumentation and to prepare thereby our apologetic concerning the Messianic expression of faith and practice.