

Does Christianity Matter for Judaism – and Vice Versa?

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Valley Beit Midrash – January 2019

Jesus and Judaism and in the New Testament: The Case of Matthew

These twelve [disciples] Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles...but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” – Matthew 10:5-7

God in the Hebrew Bible

The word of the Lord came to Solomon, “With regard to this House [the Temple] you are building—if you follow My laws and observe My rules and faithfully keep My commandments, I will fulfill for you the promise I gave to your father David: I will abide among the children of Israel, and I will never forsake My people Israel.”

...

[After the Temple was built,] the cloud had filled the House of the Lord and the priests were not able to remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the Presence of the Lord filled the House of the Lord—then Solomon declared: “The Lord has chosen to abide in a thick cloud: I have now built for You a stately House, a place where You may dwell forever.”

– 1 Kings 6:11-13, 8:10-13

וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁלֹמֹה לֵאמֹר:
הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בֹנֶה אִם-תִּלְךָ בְּחֻקֹּתַי
וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי תַּעֲשֶׂה וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי
לֵלֶכֶת בְּהֵם וְהִקַּמְתִּי אֶת-דְּבָרִי אֲתָךְ אֲשֶׁר
דִּבַּרְתִּי אֶל-דָּוִד אָבִיךָ:
וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אֶעְזֹב אֶת-עַמִּי
יִשְׂרָאֵל:

...

וְהָעֶגְנוּ מָלְא אֶת-בַּיִת יְהוָה:
וְלֹא-יָכְלוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים לַעֲמֹד לְשֵׁרֵת מִפְּנֵי הָעֶגְנוּ
כִּי-מָלְא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה אֶת-בַּיִת יְהוָה:
אִז אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה יְהוָה אָמַר לְשָׁכֹן בְּעַרְפְּלִי:
בִּנְהוּ בְּנִיתִי בַּיִת זָבֹל לָךְ מִכּוֹן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ
עוֹלָמִים:

[You shall offer sacrifices] at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. For there I [God] will meet with you, and there I will speak with you, and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence...I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God.

– Exodus 29:42-45

פָּתַח אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אוֹעֵד לָכֶם
שָׁמָּה לְדַבֵּר אֵלַיךְ שָׁם:
וְנִעַדְתִּי שָׁמָּה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכַבְדִּי:
...
וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם
לְאֱלֹהִים:

<p>[The first human beings] heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden [of Eden] at the breezy time of day.</p> <p>- Genesis 3:8</p>	<p>וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בַּגֶּן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם</p>
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A Jewish Voice: Michael Wyschogrod

The most difficult outstanding issues between Judaism and Christianity are the divinity of Jesus [and] the Incarnation...terms which are not quite synonymous but all of which assert that Jesus was not only a human being but also God.

The doctrine of the incarnation thus separates Jews and Christians but, properly understood, also sheds light on incarnational elements in Judaism...The Christian move [of claiming that God is incarnate in Jesus]...has helped me better understand a dimension of Judaism—God’s indwelling in the people Israel—that I probably would not have understood as clearly. - “Incarnation and God’s Indwelling in Israel,” in *Abraham’s Promise*, 166, 178

How are we to characterize the relationship of Israel to God? Is he incarnated in Israel? No, that would be going too far...But God certainly dwells in the midst of his people in some special way. ...We are thinking spatially, and in spite of the instinctive horror this arouses among many Jews [who have been] thoroughly trained to shun anthropomorphisms, we cannot refrain from speaking about God in the language of the Bible. Living *in* a city does not involve fusing with its walls but residing in it, now here and later there, but all the time being an inhabitant of the city, dwelling in it...In light of this, we may be able to say that God is *in* the people of Israel with just a bit less fear than otherwise. He is not in the people of Israel the way a book is in a briefcase. Even the soul is not in the body the way the book is in a briefcase. God is in and with the people of Israel and that is all that matters. God is with and in Israel because God loves Israel. - *The Body of Faith*, 11-12

1. Wyschogrod states that “God certainly dwells in the midst of his people in some special way,” and that “God is *in* the people of Israel.” What might he mean?
2. Wyschogrod suggests that we should speak about God in this way—as being “*in* the people of Israel” and “dwell[ing] in the midst of his people”—because “we cannot refrain from speaking about God in the language of the Bible.” What might Wyschogrod mean? Have we read any biblical texts today that portray God as present *in* or *in the midst of* the people of Israel?
3. Wyschogrod suggests that this depiction of God might arouse “instinctive horror.” What might he mean? Why might someone react to this depiction of God in such a manner? Can you imagine any other reactions?
4. How might this depiction of God be an example of what we saw Wyschogrod refer to as the “incarnational elements in Judaism”? In what ways is the biblical idea that God dwells in the people of Israel similar to the Christian idea that God is incarnate in Jesus?
5. What do you make of this depiction of God? Why might someone find it attractive? Why might someone find it troubling? How do you react to it?

The New Testament Revisited: Paul's Letter to the Romans

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew...Have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means!...All Israel will be saved; as it is written, "Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob." [see Isaiah 59:20-21] – Romans 11:1-2, 11, 26

A Christian Voice: Scott Bader-Saye

To know God is to know God through those in whom God has been revealed...To ignore those with whom God has joined God's self is to close one's eyes to the ways in which God has chosen to be present in the world...Abraham and the people of Israel [therefore] exert an intrinsic claim on the church's life and thought. As such, this people should be the first place Christians turn to help us construct an alternative ecclesiology.

Jeremiah, speaking God's word to an exiled people, calls Israel to what seems initially to be a peculiar mission. "Seek the welfare [*shalom*, 'peace'] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare [*shalom*] you will find your welfare [*shalom*]" (Jer. 29:7)...This aspect of the politics of election is paradigmatically embodied in the lives of Israelites such as Joseph, Daniel, and Esther—Jews who...without denying their commitment to God and God's people, were able to contribute to the good [of society].

For the church to embody such a role today would obviously look very different, but we could perhaps imagine an analogous participation in the life of the nations. What would be called for are ad hoc engagements with the world's powers in order to achieve goods such as feeding the hungry, caring for the orphan, and welcoming the stranger...[Yet] any such ad hoc engagements would have to weigh carefully the tension that often arises between effectiveness and faithfulness...Just as Esther courageously claimed her Jewish identity and thwarted the king's planned pogrom, just as Joseph resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife that he might not sin against God...so the church must actively retain its identity and mission even if this brings it into conflict with the powers and threatens its partnerships. – *Church and Israel after Christendom*, 26-27, 146-147