

# Our Abrahamic Connection\*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Our Abrahamic connection is the foundational biblical basis for our link to the Jewish people. Abraham is our father. Abraham is not simply the father of the Jewish people but of all who share the faith of Abraham. If someone professes to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that person automatically comes into a new family heritage whereby he is related to our father Abraham. “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed” (Gal. 3:29). There is a people who are the physical seed of Abraham. Jewish people are of the natural stock. Gentile believers, however, are different in that they have been ingrafted by God’s mercy into Abraham’s family and are the spiritual seed of Abraham. Through faith Gentiles come to a vast and rich legacy of a new heritage and a new people. Gentiles experience a new history which is no longer that of another people — the Jewish people. Rather, their history becomes our history as we are grafted into the Jewish people.

Spiritually we are all Semites. Abraham, in the very beginning, was promised numerous descendants. This promise begins in Genesis 12:2: “I will make you into a great nation.” In Genesis 15:5 God reiterated that Abraham would be a great nation. Indeed, God promises to bless “all

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peoples on earth” through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). That is reiterated as well in 18:18 and 22:18. The same promises were affirmed to the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob.

We have an Abrahamic connection because we who name the name of the Messiah have been blessed through him. How was this blessing to be fulfilled? The New Testament instructs us on how this promise was fulfilled through Abraham’s spiritual family.

The promise was first fulfilled through the Jewish people who were heirs of that promise. In Acts 3:25 Peter says to a crowd of Jews: “You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’” So the fulfillment of Genesis 12:2 and 3 is realized first in Abraham’s physical line, the Jewish people. They would be recipients of God’s good news and His good blessing. The fulfillment of the covenant through the coming of Jesus is part of the *kerygma* of the early Church (cf. Luke 1:55, 72, 73). It was proclaimed and heralded to Jews, but it also includes us.

Secondly, the promise was fulfilled in Gentiles who would be blessed through Abraham and his descendants through the coming of the Messiah. “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith” (Gal. 3:8). Here we have an appeal to the text of Genesis 12. Paul says the Gospel was announced “in advance” to Abraham. How did that happen? Abraham was told “all nations will be blessed through you.”

We are those who have been blessed through Abraham, through the coming of the Messiah. All who have faith are related to Abraham. His name is mentioned about 75 times in the pages of the New Testament. When I began teaching the Scriptures nearly forty years ago I was told I should always start teaching college freshmen the familiar — i.e., the New Testament — and then take up the unfamiliar, which for the most part is the Old Testament. I tried that on an experimental basis for a year or two and this approach did not work. We must read the Bible the way it was written. We will not make sense of the New Testament until we understand who Abraham is and the role he plays in the Jewish Scriptures. Isaiah, who lived more than a thousand years after Abraham, said: “Look to the rock from which you were hewn . . . Look to Abraham your father” (Isa. 51:1, 2, RSV). Abraham was not forgotten in Isaiah’s day, not to speak of 700 years after Isaiah when the greater descendant of Abraham was born — our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham’s true children do what Abraham did (cf. John 8:39). He walked by faith and so must we.

Abraham was “the friend of God” (James 2:23, RSV). Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees; he stepped out and trusted that God had a plan for his life.

Today, how does one come into a right relation with God? There is not a new way of salvation in the pages of the New Testament. Jewish people did not get right with God one way while people in the Church get right with God a different way. There has been one way of salvation from Abraham to the present day. The Scripture is very clear on this point. Paul argues in Romans that the church in Rome had to do it the way Abraham did. It is because “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). That was the basis of Paul’s argument, and that is the basis of our salvation. We need a faith-trust relationship with the living God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul goes on in Romans chapter four to say that Abraham is the father of believing Gentiles and the father of believing Jews: “he is the father of us all” (Rom. 4:11, 12, 16). Do we really understand our connection to our Abrahamic family? Do we know our ancestors? That is very important. We may choose our friends but we do not have the luxury of choosing our family. We are inextricably connected to our father Abraham. We have no other choice but to get to know who our relatives are early on in our Christian pilgrimage.

## II. THE ORIGINS OF THE CHURCH

How have Christians been blessed by Abraham and the Jewish people? Certainly this has occurred in many ways. I have sought to articulate a variety of those ways in my book *Our Father Abraham*.<sup>1</sup> The gospel, or God’s good news of salvation, came through the Jews (cf. John 4:22).

The three primary biblical functions of the Church derive directly from the Jewish synagogue. We know from the Jerusalem Talmud that before the year 70 A.D. (Megillah 3:1) there were at least 480 synagogues in Jerusalem. That means that in the first century every neighborhood had at least one group of ten or more families committed to meet together. Simeon the Just, a high priest in Israel during the third century B.C., said that the world is sustained by three things: the worship of God, the love of Torah or learning, and the practice of good deeds.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the synagogue is first of all a *bet ha-tephillah*, a “house of prayer” or place

<sup>1</sup> Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Mishnah, Abot 1:2.

of worship. It is where the community or corporate fellowship finds its life through periodic times of coming together. This concept is rooted in texts such as Isaiah 56:7: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” Secondly, the synagogue has always had an educational component. It was established to be a *bet ha-midrash*, a “house of study” or place where people came to investigate and search out the Scriptures. The noun *midrash* comes from the verb *darash*, meaning to “search,” “investigate” or “study” a text. This educational emphasis involving the love of learning and study of God’s Word is foundational to both synagogue and church. The third function is the *bet ha-kneset* which means a place of gathering together or an assembly. In modern Israel the word *Kneset* refers to the parliament. When the modern state of Israel was born on May 14, 1948, it patterned its government mainly on the British system. The Israeli parliament is an assembly with 120 seats. In regard to the synagogue, *kneset* refers to an assembly of people committed to minister to the needs of the community. Social justice or helping people is the focus. In the early Christian centuries the law courts met in the *bet ha-kneset*. It was a place where one could always have his practical needs met. Here was the outreach into the community, the caring for needy people.<sup>3</sup>

The original Church was totally Jewish. In the first century Judaism was a mosaic of various groups or sects. There were the Essenes, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Zealots, and the Nazarenes. The Nazarenes were the followers of Jesus; they functioned very easily within the Jewish community in this early period. The book of Acts points out that these Jewish followers of Jesus were enjoying the favor of all the people (2:47). Only later did they experience tensions which eventually led to the parting of the ways. Clearly, at this early point, the Church was a part of Judaism. It functioned well within the Jewish womb that gave it birth on the Jewish holiday, *shavuot*.

The book of Acts demonstrates that the earliest Church saw its function similar to the threefold function of the synagogue. In Acts 2 we read, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (v. 42). They

<sup>3</sup> The rabbis said that a synagogue must be built on the highest point in town. Accordingly, anyone coming into that town could find a bed for the evening or be distributed food or alms. Itinerants and wayfarers could have their needs met as they entered the community. If the synagogue structure could not be built on the highest spot in town a pole had to be placed on top of the building. The pole was to orient people as they came into a community, so they would know where there would be people who cared. Some scholars point out that this pole eventually gave rise to the spire on church buildings.

assembled together to be a *bet ha-midrash*, a community of study like the synagogue. Secondly they assembled for fellowship, to break bread (probably the celebration of the Lord's Supper), and to pray (v. 42). That is to say, they met for corporate worship. Thirdly, verse 45 indicates, "they gave to anyone as he had need." They were even willing to sell their possessions to minister to other people. Thus the Church reflects a threefold function directly tied in origin to the threefold function of the synagogue.

The body of Christ today should keep the above three emphases in healthy balance. Christians should come together for serious study of the Word. They should also assemble to worship, which includes the exercise of prayer, fellowship and spiritual gifts. Thirdly, the Church should also engage in practical ministry and outreach. It must minister to the hurt and needy of the world in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. These three main points of focus were part of Abraham's people in the pages of the New Testament. When kept in balance, they are likewise signs of a healthy church in today's world.

### III. THE EARLIEST CHURCH AND JUDAISM

What is the origin of Christianity? Is it rooted in Hellenism, Greek mystery religions, early Gnosticism or Platonic dualism? It finds its beginnings in none of the above. Indeed, the origin of the Christian faith is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.

What the Church has named the Old Testament should more accurately be called the First Testament, the Older Testament, or the Original Testament. In this manner we would remind ourselves that it is not inferior to the New. The Hebrew Scriptures comprise the only Bible the earliest Church had. It is the one authoritative written source the apostolic Church used to solve its theological debates and arguments. It was the one court of appeal for finding authoritative theological direction for spiritual living. The earliest Church quoted the Scriptures again and again in this manner: "It is written," "It is fulfilled," "Did not David say?" "Did not Isaiah say?" "Did not Moses say?" The appeal is to the Word of God in the form of the Hebrew Bible.

It is very important for us to understand that the origin of Paul's religion was not in pagan philosophies, but in the rich matrix of the Jewish

Scriptures which nurtured him as a child. Paul studied under Gamaliel, who in turn had been taught by Hillel, who was the greatest Jewish scholar just prior to Jesus' birth. Today, if one goes to any university around this country which has a large concentration of Jewish students, one is likely to find a Hillel Society, an organization committed to the enhancing of Jewish values and culture. Some scholars argue that Paul's religion was not rooted in Judaism and really does not have a direct connection with it. I think, however, if one takes the New Testament in its entirety and reads Paul very carefully — even with the ambiguities and the enigmas in Paul's teachings about the Law — one will find that the origin of Paul's religion was in the Hebrew Scriptures.

With the above in mind, I think it is preferable that Christians not refer to what happened to Paul in Acts chapter nine as a conversion. Let me expand on this. When we first meet Paul in the book of Acts he is hauling off to jail those who had Abrahamic faith. He is persecuting Jewish believers, those who trusted in Jesus as their Messiah and risen Lord. He exhibits much zeal by persecuting them, rooting them out all the way to Damascus. Then, he miraculously experiences a heavenly light as he encounters the risen Lord on the road. For Paul, it was a radical spiritual about-face, a life-changing event of enormous magnitude. God calls him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. God turned this man around and gave him a burden to reach those outside the land of Israel. Paul was soon to be sent on missionary journeys.

God had uniquely equipped Paul for his missionary task. Paul was a Jew of the *Diaspora*, from the little seaport town of Tarsus tucked away in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. Though a Jew, he knew Greek well. In fact, Paul quotes frequently from the Greek Septuagint, a version compiled in Egypt in the third century B.C. Through a knowledge of Greek, God equipped Paul for his task of reaching Gentiles. He knew the customs and cultures of the wider Mediterranean world.

Many scholars today would say that Paul had a conversion. They argue that Paul left Judaism, the faith that nurtured him as a child. To these scholars, when Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus, he ceased being a Jew because he had a conversion. The popular meaning of conversion today is that a person turns his back on a particular religion, philosophy, or people, leaving it behind, and joins up with a different one. That definition of "conversion" does not describe what happened to Paul. Paul saw himself as a Jew, albeit a believing Jew, to his dying day. Paul

never left his Jewish roots. Paul continued to see Abraham as his father. The New Testament indicates that Paul continued to practice various Jewish customs throughout his life. Paul never left Judaism to establish a completely different faith separate from and totally apart from his ancestral faith.

If we argue that Paul “converted” to Christianity, we may be setting ourselves up for a great misunderstanding with many who want us to say exactly this, for they do not see the origin of Paul’s religion in Judaism. It is often argued that Paul got these strange ideas about a Lord who dies and is resurrected from Greek mystery religions. In Greek mythology, nature gods die and are resurrected. I would argue that it is preferable to say Paul had a radical spiritual encounter with Christ that sent him in a new direction. I would suggest it not be called a “conversion.” If we use the word “convert” we may be suggesting that Paul left Judaism and went into another world, a world largely removed from Judaism. The New Testament record is clear that Paul patterned his Christian life after Judaism and the teachings of his Jewish Lord. For Paul Christianity was not the antithesis of Judaism, it was the fullest flowering of Judaism. Christianity was what Abraham and the prophets of Israel had anticipated. Paul, a *Diaspora* Jew, was deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and in rabbinic thought. He was very proud of his Jewishness after finding Christ. He said, “What anyone else dares to boast about . . . I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews?”; He did not say “I was a Hebrew”; he said “so am I.” “Are they Israelites?” He did not say “I was an Israelite.” He said “so am I.” “Are they Abraham’s descendants?” “So am I,” not “so was I” (2 Cor. 11:21, 22). He did not say “that was my former religion, my previous life, my earlier identity.” What does Paul say in Philippians 3:5? “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin,” and named for Israel’s first king, *Shaul*, “a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee.” If all of this religious identification with the Jewish people was insignificant, why does Paul mention it? Why mention it if he had left it all behind?

Paul was still deeply connected to the root that supported him. And Gentile Christians are connected to that same root too (Rom. 11:18). Paul’s connection to that root meant he was being nourished by the Abrahams, the Isaacs, the Jacobs, the Moseses, the Davids. Here was the spiritual legacy of Paul’s Jewish ancestors. Into these same people every Christian is grafted the moment he or she comes to faith. The New Testament writers thought with Hebrew minds but wrote in Greek. Paul’s

theology was Hebraic to the very core. It is to Jerusalem we look for the biblical view of reality. Our tutors to Christ were Moses and the Prophets, not Plato and the Academies. Christians set themselves up for a great distortion of Scripture if they look in the wrong sources for the origin of the Christian faith.

Gentiles are heirs to Israel’s history. Gentiles who come to faith in Christ immediately inherit a new family and a new history. Ephesians 3:6 says “Gentiles are heirs together with Israel.” We are in this thing together. God’s people within the Church have always been one body, believing Jews and believing Gentiles. We are one olive tree made up of two parts, Jews and non-Jews. Jews and Gentiles who have come to faith in the Messiah are not placed in two separate assemblies. Gentiles are heirs together with Israel. We Gentiles share their heritage of the faith.

First Corinthians 10:1 reminds us that we have had a Red Sea experience, because as the people of God we participate in what our spiritual ancestors did. Israel’s history becomes our history. Most Christians would say that the Jewish people of old — those people we investigate at museums and read about in history books — at one time came through the waters of the Red Sea. But Paul wrote to the Corinthians (a largely Gentile congregation) and said simply this: “our forefathers . . . all passed through the sea.” What Paul is reminding the Gentiles of is that it was their forefathers who had the Red Sea experience. As Gentile believers, has Israel’s history become our history? Have we entered into that in a vicarious way, as Paul shares with the Corinthians? Christianity is not the antithesis of Judaism, it is of the very bone of Judaism. Christianity is deeply rooted in the Jewish people. Ephesians 2:20 states that the foundation of the Church is the Jewish Apostles and the Jewish prophets, a Jewish Lord being its chief cornerstone. The Church cannot be described as any more foundationally Jewish than that.

As a non-Jew, over the years I have come to an understanding and appreciation and love of my Hebraic heritage. I was not taught these things growing up in the church. I have had to discover them on my own. Abraham has a spiritual seed. Romans two speaks about the fact that one is not a Jew if one is only outwardly one; neither is circumcision only a physical matter: a person is a Jew if he is one inwardly, through a circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit (vv. 28, 29). Where did Paul get this theology from? In Paul’s day, any Jew who knew the Torah knew that this was not new thinking. Paul’s statement goes right back to the Law of Moses, in Deuteronomy 10:16, and to Jeremiah 4:4. The prophet Moses

and the prophet Jeremiah say “circumcise your hearts” — that is, inwardly and spiritually one must be set apart to God. Circumcision of the flesh is not enough. You hear with your heart, not simply with your ears. There is a deeper level, a deeper work that God desires to do. It goes far deeper than an outward ritual.

I sometimes wonder, if Jesus were to show up on the earth this weekend and a TV reporter were to stick a microphone into his face and say, “Jesus, where do you plan to worship this weekend on your visit to earth?” How would Jesus answer? Would he go to a local Catholic church, a mainstream Protestant church, a Greek Orthodox church, a Reform synagogue, a *lubavitch chabad* house, a local Baptist church, a Messianic synagogue, or none of the above? Where would Jesus really be comfortable worshipping? I will not attempt to answer that question for it is debatable. What is undebatable and undeniable, however, is that the structure of today’s Church is so greatly de-judaized that Jesus might have a hard time feeling at home and fitting in.

Recently, some denominational Sunday School literature for five-year-olds was sent to me for my perusal. One page, meant for coloring, had a picture of a five-year-old going up some steps, entering a building. The caption under the picture read, “Jesus was a nice Christian boy who went to church every Sunday.” On all levels, we must represent Jesus in his Jewish context. He lived a very Jewish life. He launched his public ministry at his synagogue in Nazareth, calling for the scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21). He lived his life according to the (Jewish) Scriptures.

#### IV. THE OLIVE ROOT AND BRANCHES

In Romans chapters 9-11, Israel is represented by the metaphor of the olive tree. Paul did not invent this figure; it comes from the Hebrew Bible (Jer. 11:16). In the production of olive oil today, Italy is number one in the Mediterranean world. It may well have been this way also in the first century. At any rate, however, a person of the first century living in Rome or in Italy would have been familiar with the olive tree. Paul uses a very familiar concept.

Paul makes several important points about the olive tree in the eleventh chapter of Romans. Paul talks about Israel’s hardness and fall in verses 7-10. God sovereignly permits Israel’s fall. He allows them to have a spirit of stupor so that they could not see (v. 8). Their hearts were hardened, their

eyes were darkened (v. 10). Salvation has come to the Gentile world because of Israel’s blindness and fall (v. 11). Paul asks, however, about whether they fell beyond recovery. The answer is that they did not. This was in God’s plan in order for Gentiles to eventually make Israel jealous, or envious.

If one studies the history of Christian-Jewish relations over the last two thousand years, one recognizes that the Church has hardly made Israel jealous. Indeed, it has been just the opposite; the Church has made Israel angry. The vicious anti-Jewish rhetoric of the Church Fathers bears grim testimony to this. One of the most venomous of these Church Fathers was John Chrysostom. His name means John the “Golden-mouthed.” He spat out vitriolic language about the Jewish people, calling the synagogue a brothel, a den for wild beasts, and a theater. Martin Luther called the Jews “venomous” and “stubborn as the devil.” “Let us drive them out of the land for all times,” he said. When Pope Urban II in 1096 inaugurated the first crusade — one of six crusades from Europe to liberate Jerusalem from the “infidels,” the Muslims who were holding it — Jewish people were rounded up and burned to death by the thousands. In 1492 Jewish people suffered dearly in their expulsion from Spain during the Inquisition.

It is no wonder that the Church was silent, 400 years after Martin Luther, at the time of Hitler. Martin Luther and other Reformers did not speak with appreciation and indebtedness concerning their Jewish roots and Hebrew heritage. Rather, they created an “us and them” mentality. Hitler carried out Martin Luther’s desire with horrifying success. In 1933-1945, the Holocaust years, six million lives were taken simply because they were Jews. Not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were victims. It was a systematic attempt on the part of Hitler to exterminate Jews. Jews were declared to be *untermenschen*, subhuman. They were as lice to be exterminated. How could this happen in a country as cultured as Germany, a country of Bachs and Beethovens and Mozarts, of great German philosophers, poets, artists, and theologians? How could it happen? Why was the Church so silent? It seems to me one of the reasons is that the Church had forgotten its Jewish roots. Hitler started demonizing the Jews in the 1920s by saying that they were of the devil, and the people bought it. The people did not question him for that aberrant theology. That is where the Church should have reared up on its heels and nailed Hitler.

Wars begin with attitudes and words. Eventually, if we do not check these things, they will result in the destruction of lives. Anti-Semitism is

hostility and hatred directed toward Jewish people. Anti-Jewishness and anti-Semitism feed on each other. Paul says the obligation of Gentile Christians is to make the Jew envious and jealous. With such a long negative history of Christian-Jewish relations, the Church has a lot of work to do to create the jealousy that Paul writes about. I suggest that until we understand our Abrahamic connection and can speak with affection and deep appreciation for our own Jewish roots, and become reconciled to our own Jewishness as believers, it is foolish to talk about making Israel jealous. If we in the Church are successful in becoming reconciled to who we are, we must then seek to become reconciled to our Jewish neighbors. Then, by God's mercy and grace, through that reconciliation God can affect a deeper spiritual reconciliation between Himself and His people.

Eventually, in Romans 11, Paul seems to say that there is going to be a re-grafting after the full number of Gentiles come in. We are partaking of "the nourishing sap from the olive root" (v. 17). So Paul says to Gentile Christians, "do not boast" (v. 18). Gentiles are "Johnny-come-latelys" on the spiritual scene. They have little to boast about. Who are Gentiles? According to Ephesians 2:12, 13, Gentiles are "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world . . . far away." Gentiles have little about which to boast. But, by God's mercy, they are no longer excluded from the promises but through the miracle of spiritual ingrafting have come into this venerable heritage of faith. According to Paul, Gentiles are "pagans," those "led astray to mute idols" (1 Cor. 12:2). Suddenly through this ingrafting Gentiles have value, they have richness, they possess a venerable heritage of faith. To the Israelites are the adoption as sons, the divine glory, and the covenants (Rom. 9:4). Paul did not write that to the Jewish people "*were* the covenants." Rather to them *are* the covenants. God is continuing to work out His plan on this earth with the Jewish people. God promised to Abraham that he would be a blessing to the earth and that he would be a great nation. God also linked it with land. The land and the calling of Abraham go together. Land is a part of the original call of Abraham. How can Abraham's spiritual children, the Church, be indifferent to Abraham's land?

It is the root of the olive tree that supports Gentiles (Rom. 11:16, 18). What is the root of the olive tree? It is the patriarchs. The context goes right back to the bottom of that root, which is Abraham. The New Testament talks about the root of David, which is Christ, but not in this Romans context (cf. Rev. 5:5). The root in Romans refers to the faithful

forefathers of the Jews. This should send us a message about reordering our study priorities. Should we not seek to master the book of Genesis where the deepest roots of our faith go? We must understand the life of Abraham, a man mentioned 75 times in the pages of the New Testament Scriptures. The book of Hebrews (chapter 11) describes Abraham as one of the great heroes of the faith. It is this faith-filled deeply rooted channel that God would use to bless His people. This root supports us (Rom. 11:18). The Greek word Paul uses here for "supports" is the same word used of a child in its mother's womb. It depends on the mother for nourishment and support. So for us Christians, all that we have comes to us through the Jewish heritage of the Scriptures, and a Jewish Lord. As Paul says in verse 20, there is no room for arrogance or boasting. You do not support the root (you Gentiles who are ingrafted wild olive branches), but "the root supports you" (v. 18).

In the olive tree connection, "Who joins whom?" For centuries the ecclesiastical answer was that Jews join us non-Jews. The New Testament answer to that question, however, is that we non-Jews join the Jews by our faith in the Jewish Messiah. Gentiles are grafted into Israel. We join the faithful remnant of the Jewish people who have always trusted in the God of Israel for their salvation, and who refuse to give their honor to anyone else. We are grafted into that remnant which is made up of those Jews who are faithful to God. The fact that today the Church is numerically predominantly Gentile is an accident of history, not the way it was in the beginning. It is hard for us to understand this today because we too often casually assume that the Church is for Gentiles. In fact the earliest Church had people knocking on its door and saying, "Let us in. We understand this is a Jewish body, but please let us in." Today the situation is almost reversed because of the demographics of the Church.

#### V. CONCLUSION

We have been grafted into Israel and if we belong to Christ we are Abraham's spiritual seed. We must take the time to get to know our relatives in the faith. That means we have to learn to think Hebraically, perhaps more so than we may have thought necessary in the past. Christians must have a cultural transformation every time they open the Bible. This is the case because we are Westerners and the Bible is an eastern book. It is a Semitic book; thus we have to get into its Semitic

thought forms. We have to enter the mind-set of the people who wrote that book.

Our relatives in the history of our spiritual family come from a different culture. The Hebrew Scriptures originated in Asia. We must speak with understanding, indebtedness and appreciation today for our Hebrew heritage. The study of our Jewish roots is not an optional matter; it is foundational. We have sought in this article to validate this point from Scripture. One of the most exciting and liberating things in my own spiritual experience has been a rediscovery of these roots. To me it has been a richly rewarding experience. It allows me to place the Bible in its cultural context. But most of all, it leads to an understanding and appreciation of our Lord and his teachings. May God be glorified as we daily grow in our knowledge of our Hebrew Lord and his earliest followers.