

## EDITORIAL

# Facing Up to the Jewish Roots of Jesus

Professor Marvin Wilson's best-seller, *Our Father Abraham*,<sup>1</sup> makes a powerful argument for a return to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith:

The Bible reflects a view of reality which is essentially Hebraic. Indeed for the earliest Church, to think Christianly was to think Hebraically. It should not be surprising that the understructure and matrix of much of the New Testament is Hebraic. After all, Jesus was a Jew, not a Christian of Gentile origin. His teachings, like those of his followers, reflect a distinct ethnicity and culture.

Wilson maintains that the apostle to the Gentiles never cut ties with his roots in Judaism: "In Paul's view any church which exists independently of Israel ceases therein to be the church as a part of God's salvation plan and becomes simply another religious society." But has the church retained and proclaimed its heritage from Israel? Wilson thinks not. "As early as the middle of the second century the Church had arrogated to itself the very position of the Olive Tree." He then proposes to discuss in the next five chapters "the story of this arrogant takeover, with the severing of Jewish roots and the long history of anti-Judaism to follow."<sup>2</sup>

The sophistication of modern research into the Jewish background of the New Testament is likely to provoke a crisis of belief. The findings of Wilson and other scholars would seem to lead us naturally to a reassessment of the cardinal doctrines of the Trinity, the nature and future of man, and the content of the Gospel.

Cracks are beginning to show in the edifice which supports the ancient and very Greek doctrine that God is three. Can this proposition be squared with the unitary monotheism of the Hebrew Bible? The question becomes acutely important in view of Jesus' affirmation of Israel's creed (Mark 12:28ff.). Has the public considered the awful possibility that Jesus would have balked at the confession that he himself was the Supreme God coequal and coeternal with his Father? Would Jesus be

<sup>1</sup> Eerdmann's, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> 12, 15, 16.

excluded from a teaching position in almost every contemporary body of believers gathering in his name?

The precarious arguments for the Trinity on the basis of a supposed “compound unity” in the word “one” (*echad*) in the Shema (“Hear O Israel”) die slowly. They now live on mostly at a popular level. Scholars have long admitted that they have little force. The Bible-believing public may soon be faced with the fact that the Trinity is not in the Old Testament. If it is not there, and if Jesus subscribed to the Hebrew Bible’s view of God as a single Person, what business have Christians insisting on Trinitarianism, much less condemning as unchristian those whose researches have led them to lay aside a very speculative and complex notion of God? Ought not the creed of Jesus, which was the creed of Israel, be sufficient as a basis for faith? The thousands and thousands of singular pronouns which designate the God of Israel appear to us to provide overwhelming testimony that the Jews for millennia did not misread their own Scriptures. To this day they find no hint of the Trinity in the sacred documents Christians claim to share with them.

The so-called plurality of *Elohim* (God) has ceased to cut any ice among commentators as an indication of the Trinity in the Hebrew canon. Others cling to it in the hope of turning the Hebrew Bible into a document approving the Church Councils.

There is a great deal at stake here. What John W. Cooper says in his book defending the orthodox view of the soul surviving death may soon be said also of the traditional understanding of God. Admitting that many of his colleagues have abandoned the traditional view of the nature of man, he observes:

Many in the academic community have taken a clear position on the body-soul position which they continue to assert with conviction. And if what they are saying is true, then two disturbing conclusions immediately follow. First, a doctrine affirmed by most of the Christian Church from the beginning is false. A second conclusion is more personal and existential — what millions of Christians believe will happen when they die is also a delusion . . . . There is a pervasive sense of tension between what the church has taught and what numerous educated Christians think they ought to believe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, Eerdmans, 1989, 1, 4, 5.

A similar tension is arising also wherever Christians are seeking to recapture the Jewish Messiah Jesus — a Jesus who, while being the seed promised to Abraham, was also the one to whom the great land promise was made (Gal. 3:16, 19). This journal makes a plea for the reinstatement of Jesus as the Christ, Son of God, in a Hebrew sense. Such would seem to follow naturally from the current cry for a return to our Jewish roots.

With the Messiah again as the center of our focus, we would urge also a recovery of the territorial element in the Abrahamic faith on which Christianity is founded. A Messiah without a land is no Messiah. Indeed all the heroes of faith died without receiving the promised land (Heb. 11:13, 39).

A Messiah who is the Supreme God is offensive to Judaism. But is such a Jesus really credible in the light of His Jewish roots? If we take advantage of the welcome surge of interest in a Hebraically-oriented Christian faith, who knows what restructuring and revision of cherished tradition may occur?

— Anthony F. Buzzard