

Study guide for *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism*, edited by Darrell Jodock. Copyright © Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

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Introduction

A good deal of Jewish-Christian dialogue has occurred during the last sixty years. It has been fruitful not only in helping Christians and Jews understand each other more accurately and more fully, but in prompting Christians to rethink some aspects of their own religious tradition. Christians have come to appreciate aspects of the biblical tradition that they may have overlooked or undervalued. They have also come to regret some misrepresentations of Jews and Judaism disseminated by Christians down through the centuries—misrepresentations that have often had tragic consequences. The purpose of *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism* is to summarize some of the results of sixty years of study and discussion. What has been learned? How does this affect the theological self-understanding of Christians?

One possible way to use *Covenantal Conversations* is for a group to read the book and discuss it, chapter by chapter. The purpose of this study guide is to assist such an undertaking. A separate study guide is provided for each chapter, but the guides follow a pattern. They provide a brief overview of the chapter, a set of questions or suggestions for discussion, and some concluding ideas for ongoing reflection and/or use as a brief devotional.

Users are invited to pick and choose. Some readers may find the overview unhelpful. If so, bypass it, and go directly to the questions. Some of those questions require prior knowledge. If that knowledge is lacking, ignore that particular question and go on to another.

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Darrell Jodock

1. Judaism Then and Now

Darrell Jodock, in conversation with Rabbi Barry Cytron
Study Guide Prepared by Joel Zimbelman

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

This chapter provides a broad overview of the central tenets of Judaism, its historical foundations, and reflections on its recent development. Few Christians appreciate the fact that, just like the Christian church of the past two millennia, Judaism has undergone its own developments, growth, institutional reconfiguration, and theological, liturgical, and moral development. This chapter helps readers appreciate the development of Judaism as a religious tradition that has been just as dynamic and fractious as other religious traditions, including Christianity. It shows how the many branches of Judaism each struggle to determine precisely what is required of the Jew who wishes to keep and obey the commandments of God in today's world.

Central to the theology of biblical and rabbinic Judaism have been the ideas of covenant, election or calling (as a community), the idea that being Jewish imposes special obligations on a person, and the idea that “righteousness” or being right with God is something that can be true of Jews as well as non-Jews (Gentiles). At the same time, Judaism has a realistic view of the conflicted nature of human beings—aggressive, competitive, and fallible. These forces can overwhelm individuals and communities, but the tradition provides resources for rejecting and overcoming these tendencies.

Because Judaism never really developed a formal profession of faith the way Christianity (and Islam) did, Jewish identity is not tied to a statement of beliefs or affirmation of propositional revelation, but rather is more grounded in community identity and participation around moral beliefs with an emphasis on justice, dignity, human responsibility, and peace—as well as Torah reading, liturgical practice, and so forth. Jesus' followers were often messianic Jews (that is, they believed that Jesus was the promised Jewish savior), though their characteristics reflected the fact that they came from various sectors of this complex society.

There are differences between the faith affirmations and the beliefs and practices of Christianity and Judaism:

- a. *Original sin.* Judaism does not embrace the Christian idea of original sin as a loss of the image of God or the loss of a sacred destiny.
- b. *Messianism.* Christians get the idea of the Messiah (*Christos* in Greek) from the Jews. But messianism is not as central a doctrine to Judaism as it is to Christianity, and though many Jews have believed in the coming of the Messiah, the strength of this idea has not been consistently strong. For Jews, it is God, through the divine word, who gives the world salvation. And Judaism would also argue that this dependence on the Torah is not legalism.
- c. *Covenant.* There is a strong presumption, in the Christian tradition, that the new covenant (in Jesus Christ) supersedes the old covenant of God with Israel. We will discuss this belief more in chapter 2. But this view needs to be contrasted with that of Judaism, which seems to affirm that God has established many covenants with God's people, and that these covenants, while often different from each other, do not supercede or replace earlier covenants in some exclusive way.

The chapter also introduces readers to four main branches of Judaism that are part of the fabric of contemporary American culture.

- *Orthodox Judaism* is the most conservative branch, with a rigorous and literal reading of the Torah. Orthodox Jews hold a commitment to biblical and rabbinic Jewish purity laws (keeping kosher), segregation of the sexes in worship, use of Hebrew in worship, and limited mixing with other Jewish denominations in the community, along with little involvement in interreligious dialogue.
- *Reform Judaism* is a more modern branch of Judaism that develops out of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century emancipation of Jews in Europe (granting citizenship and the right to vote). Reform Judaism holds a commitment to the authority of the Torah, but with a more interpretive and historical and less literal reading of the Scriptures. Reform Judaism is willing to reinterpret the commands of the Torah in terms of continually changing needs and demands within the contemporary community. Mixed seating in the sanctuary, women leading worship, the use of more English in services, a de-emphasis on keeping kosher—all these characterize Reform Judaism.
- *Conservative Judaism* is a late nineteenth-century movement from the United States. Believing that Reform Judaism may have gone too far in recasting the shape of the tradition, Conservative Judaism gives a presumptive voice to the tradition—change is okay, but “go slow” and evolve slowly! Use of Hebrew in worship is desired but not mandatory; the same holds for kosher dietary laws. Mixed seating in worship and leadership by women are accepted.
- *Reconstructionist Judaism*, a recent development among the branches of Judaism, is quite conservative in practice, but desires to allow for interbranch dialogue and mutual support among Jewish groups.

The chapter ends with discussions of the way in which Zionism (as the search for a homeland for Judaism, beginning in the late nineteenth century) and the Holocaust (the destruction of European Jewry between 1934 and 1945) have focused attention on both the historical antecedents and the religious and practical arguments for establishing a nation of Israel. Even more, the Holocaust has intensified the urgency of the Jewish call for all human beings to be responsible for one another.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. This book is committed to interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews. Do you believe such dialogue is or is not important for contemporary Christians and Jews? If you think that dialogue between Christians and Jews is a good and important undertaking, what do you believe ought to be the goals of such a conversation? What are the promises and perils of engaging in this sort of discussion? If you were to initiate such dialogue, what would be some of your first questions to raise with Jews?
2. See if you can identify a few similarities and differences in the history and the development of Judaism and Christianity. Focus on such areas as origins (where and in what culture do they each originate?); social structure (what are the similarities and differences between synagogue life and the life in local Christian congregations?); ritual and worship; and the place of Scripture, ritual, law, and morality to the identity of the

community. What makes the history of Christianity different from the history of Judaism? Does your denominational heritage in particular have anything distinctively in common with Jews with respect to its history and emergence?

3. Discuss some of the similarities and differences in core beliefs and theology between Jews and Christians, particularly as articulated by your denomination. Focus your analysis on views of sin and rebellion, the nature of God and God's relationship with believers and nonbelievers, the nature of human righteousness and moral obligations, the nature of covenant and promise from God, the place of Scripture in the life of the community, views of salvation and grace, and the ideas of forgiveness and eternal life.
4. *Antisemitism*. Often societies will single out one cultural, ethnic, or religious group for discrimination and/or death. Can you think of situations where this has been the case during the past fifty years, and where this has involved Christians (either as victims or perpetrators)? What should be the response of Christians to such attitudes and actions (beyond just saying that they are wrong)? How has your congregation thought about or addressed this issue in light of the Holocaust, the destruction of Native American cultures in the past, apartheid in South Africa, the genocide in Rwanda, and ongoing discrimination against Christians and other religious communities in Africa, the Middle East, China, India, and other parts of the world?
5. *Zionism and Israel*. For many Jews, the idea of a homeland, a commitment to establishing such a homeland (Zionism), and the security that comes from knowing that there exists a nation that is committed to your survival (Israel) are important to Jews. What do you think of this set of ideas? Can you think of situations where such ideas have been important to Christians as well? What are the similarities and differences? What might be some of the problems or challenges associated with establishing such a homeland? Is it possible to be a religious believer without such a homeland for your religion?
6. What two or three things do you think that Christians can learn from Judaism?
7. Are there any important ideas or practices that your denomination embraces that might be offered to Judaism as suggestive considerations for adoption or affirmation?
8. For further summary and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points #1*.

Closing Reflection and Prayer

Name one or two things Christians can learn from Judaism.

Name an idea or practice that Christians embrace that could be of interest to Judaism.

Let us pray,

Holy God of all creation, we give thanks for our Jewish brothers and sisters. Assist them in their effort to embrace their calling to work for justice and mercy in the world; protect them from prejudice and stereotyping; let them be all you have hoped for them to be. This we pray for the Christian church as well.

Blessed be your holy expansive name! Amen.

2. Covenants Old and New

Peter A. Pettit, in conversation with Rabbi Elliot Dorff
Study Guide Prepared by Peg Schultz-Akerson

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

Since the biblical use of the word *covenant* is significant for both Christians and Jews, our appreciation of each other is strengthened by informed attention to how each tradition uses the term and how each use relates to the other. Working through this chapter can lay important groundwork, because how we interpret covenantal themes can either promote deepened understanding or expand grave misunderstandings between these two traditions.

In this chapter, Peter Pettit, in conversation with Rabbi Elliot Dorff, examines the biblical usage of “covenant” within both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, showing that, for both, covenant comes in different forms and changes over time, but neither varying form nor changes alter the enduring essence of covenant. The various framings of covenant and the ways covenant arrangements have changed over time are accommodated into the overarching intent of “covenant” to refer to the relationship between God and God’s people. Regardless of change in form or arrangement, “covenant” distinguishes God’s people—both Jew and Christian—in the world.

The chapter explores the pitfalls of seeing the Christian “new” covenant as a concept intended to be laid over against the Jewish “old” covenant. Christians who regularly celebrate the Eucharist will recall the words spoken as the wine is given: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.”

We listen to this promise week after week, but how is it heard? There are diverse interpretations in our churches regarding what “new covenant” in this context means for Christians. And if it means certain promises for Christians, drawing to mind for us the covenants in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament that we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters, how are Christians thinking about the covenant God has made with the Jews? This chapter helps us not to be afraid to ask such sensitive questions by giving us handles to grapple with them intelligently. Without help in understanding what is meant by “new covenant,” the age-old assumptions of supersessionism can remain intact and unchallenged. How helpful and timely it is, given the moral obligation we share in our pluralistic world to respect and honor other religious understandings, to be invited and guided to think more clearly about such a commonly spoken assertion as “This cup is the new covenant”! To call it “new” assumes there is an “old.” This chapter facilitates reflection on the relationship between the two.

One way this relationship is viewed through reflection on the original intent of Paul and the writer of Hebrews. They used the word *new* to call for increased faithfulness to the ever-changing and expanding efforts of God to covenant with the ever-faltering faithfulness of God’s people—both Christians and Jews. This original intent of the New Testament writers in using “new” in juxtaposition with “covenant” has profound implications for how we might more clearly think about the new covenant and its relationship to the old. Under this reading of Paul and Hebrews, the distinction between old and new is not understood as valuing one as better than the other, but rather as implying a now shared obligation by Jews and Christians—both as “covenanted with”—to be partners with God in God’s work for peace and justice in the world.

Finally, chapter 2 celebrates ways the Jewish community calls Jews to live distinctively as God’s people in the world through, for instance, their commitment to observing a weekly day

of rest at *Shabbat*. The Jewish community's efforts to be faithful can be a useful launching point for conversation about what symbols Christians nourish in our communities of faith to remind us of God's claim on our lives. God's covenant is such that it intends to make a difference in how we live.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. Chapter 2 suggests that, though recent decades have witnessed a broad and consistent repudiation of the teachings of contempt of Judaism by various Christian individuals and theological positions, that contempt remains engrained in some of the church's language and practice (*Covenantal Conversations*, 27). Do you see unhelpful attitudes toward Jews still at play in your community, in theological materials, assumptions, and attitudes? How have your attitudes toward Jews changed over time? What do you think brought about that change? What further changes might be needed in your community?
2. The chapter helpfully clarifies that in the book of Hebrews and in Paul, "new" covenant was not used to imply that "new" is inherently better than "old." The original intent was to draw on familiarity with the concept of "covenant" to call Christians to that same depth of faithfulness. Covenant was used as an example or hyperbole of how Christians now relate to God and God to them through Christ. Today some Christians are using the phrase "the Hebrew Scriptures" or "the Hebrew Bible" instead of "the Old Testament." Do you think that is helpful?
3. Brainstorm what your church might do to avoid dismissing the "old" without undermining the "new" (*Covenantal Conversations*, 28). Would Christianity lose something if we accepted that *their* "old" covenant is as valid as *our* "new"? Does Christianity change when we teach that both are valid? How would you explain to a Jew the Christian practice of sitting for the reading of the Old Testament and standing for the Gospel? Does it suggest "new" is better?
4. Discuss the dynamics of comparing a "new" relationship with a longer-standing one, such as a firstborn child compared to a second or third child in the family. Where are you in the birth order of your family? Did birth order affect you and your relationship to your parents and siblings? Have you known "older" siblings who felt superceded by "new" ones? What helps prevent that?
5. Pettit suggests that the way the book of Hebrews speaks of "new" and "old" may not serve us well in our very different circumstances today. What ways can your church work to deepen biblical literacy without turning people off altogether to Scripture as a relevant word for today? What has helped you want to deepen in Scripture study?
6. The Jewish community emphasizes observance of the *Shabbat* (Sabbath)—the weekly day of rest—in remembrance of God's relationship with them and calling them to partner with God in God's work in the world (*Covenantal Conversations*, 37). What observances and actions do you participate in as a Christian community to remind you and your companions in the faith of God's covenantal claim on your lives? How might we call people to more joyful remembrance of our covenantal call to partner with God in caring for the world?
7. For further summary and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points* #2.

Closing Reflection and Prayer

*Such is the company of those who seek God,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Psalm 24:6*

Seeing God's face is prohibited in the book of Exodus: "You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live" (Exod. 33:20). Yet the poet of Psalm 24 urges us to do just that—to seek God's face. Both Exodus and Psalm 24 have their place. Because God is holy, we do well to stand in awe; yet God seeks relationship, and the psalmist urges us to draw near. Opposite urgings stand together for different moments and needs.

In a similar way, covenants change over time, but covenant is always about everlasting relationship: God looks upon us with favor, and we seek that face through faith practices that help us be attentive to this favor and grace already shining upon us. God chooses to be our God, laying upon us promise, possibility, and call, not privilege.

Christianity celebrates that God shows us God's very self in Jesus Christ. We too, along with our Jewish brothers and sisters, are children of God, by *God's* doing, claimed and freed to share in God's redemptive work in the world. God's choice to covenant with us calls us in return to walk in a company endlessly worth keeping and beyond compare!

Let us pray,

Thank you, knowing God,

for calming our fear of seeking your face.

Give us courage to live lives that reflect your claim upon us.

It is your never-failing look upon us with favor

that enables us to look back upon you with grateful, responsive lives in the world.

Thank you for that possibility. Amen.

3. Law and Gospel

Esther Menn, in *Conversation with Krister Stendahl*
Study Guide Prepared by Joel Zimbelman

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

The affirmation of God's grace as the means to our salvation is the central doctrine of Christianity. Lutherans in particular have articulated this idea for centuries through two important ideas. The first is the distinction between law and gospel ("the good news"), the second the distinction between faith and works. However, these two ideas are linked and support each other theologically. The purpose of this language has been to show that, outside the work of Christ, human beings have sought to be redeemed by means of the law and conformity to its dictates (through "works"), but to no avail. Under the reign of Christ, however, the Scriptures witness to a new arrangement for the salvation of humanity: that of grace (the message of the gospel) given simply to human beings as a function of their receptivity to God's generous gift (*Covenantal Conversations*, 47). It is the contrast between law and works on the one hand, and faith and gospel on the other, that serves as the basic scaffolding for appreciating the power of grace—and the ineffectiveness of works and the law—in reestablishing our sacred destiny with God. A great deal of energy and creativity in the tradition has been expended to establish the centrality of these teachings. Lutherans especially have expressed their allegiance to God in terms of this teaching.

This chapter essentially makes four important points about this way of thinking about and expressing our relationship with God.

1. The doctrine of grace through the death and resurrection of Christ, and the central place of justification by faith in this formulation, should remain a fundamental touchstone of Christian theology. In important ways, the power of grace, gospel, and faith are decisive in revealing God's nature to us and God's plan for our salvation. They are the central teachings of an evangelical Christianity. However, Esther Menn argues at the same time that it is wrong to think about the complementary ideas of "law" and "works" as belonging only to "old" (read "Jewish" or "Old Testament") covenants between God and God's people. Christians are just as likely as anyone else to feel confident in the power of their own works and in conformity to the rules as the means to "betterment" or salvation. Indeed, the Scriptures (both in the Gospels and in the later parts of the New Testament) are replete with examples of individuals who claim their salvation in the things that they do, not the Lord they worship. Menn suggests that if we need to call to account the view of "salvation by works and conformity to the law," we can find in our own communities all of the examples we need for this prophetic act.
2. Menn argues that the very idea of distinguishing and then denigrating the law and works in a life that seeks to conform to the will of God is deeply misleading. Such a strong distinction gives a false sense of the covenant that Jews affirm they have with God. In fact, the dominant position of the law (Torah) in Judaism "does not regard Torah obedience as a means to salvation but rather as a response to God's gracious covenant" (*Covenantal Conversation*, 46). At the same time, this dichotomy fails to make sense of the fact that even in the Christian life we put tremendous emphasis on the importance of conformity to the commands of God and our own efforts to live a life that fulfills the

“law of Christ.”

As a way out of this confusion, Menn argues that we need to see the ideas of gospel and law (and faith and works) as essential, certainly distinctive, but also complementary—as all playing a positive and important role in the mature and organic life of faith (*Covenantal Conversations*, 49–50). What we have missed in our historical interpretations is the erroneous way in which this false dichotomy understands the real place that law plays in the life of the Jewish (and even our own Christian) communities. Faith and works, as Luther argued, both play important roles in a mature Christian life, and there can be no such life without both. Likewise, gospel and law convey different dimensions of God’s revelation, but to suggest that the gospel does not bind, and that the gift of the law is not itself a sanctifying presence in both the Jewish and Christian communities, is simply to misinterpret the true complexity of God’s message of salvation and sanctification (*Covenantal Conversations*, 49–50).

3. The negative results of the status quo interpretation have been harmful in two ways. First, because we have assumed that gospel and faith = “good,” and “law” and “works” = “bad,” and because we have attributed this dichotomy as central to the battle between Judaism and Christianity, we have painted Judaism into a corner both as possessing a “wrong” or “incomplete” view of the true covenant with God and as “opposed to the gospel” and “anti-Christ or Jesus-hating” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 48). This has led not only to deep misunderstandings, but also to antisemitism and, in other cases, to crimes of discrimination, murder, and genocide.

But the second negative result is that, because we denigrate the language of “works” and “law” in Judaism, it is then difficult to use these concepts to carry important and essential significance in the church. If law and works are seen as negative and “anti-gospel” in Judaism, how could they be otherwise even in Christianity? To be sure, law is seen by Paul to be both incomplete in some ways and also even stimulating us to act in ways contrary to the gospel (*Covenantal Conversations*, 46). But at the same time one need only read Paul’s letter to the Corinthians to see the results of an “antinomian” (anti-law) reading of the tradition that did great harm in early Christian communities.

4. Menn suggests that we need to head back into the Bible and into our study of early Judaism to reconstruct an accurate view of how this tradition related faith and works, grace and law. When we do this, what we discover is a new, more positive and creative way of thinking about God’s law in the lives of those who also affirm God’s gift of grace! “Within Judaism Torah is regarded as God’s gracious gift of guidance for faithful living within the covenant community. Exuberant praise for Torah finds expression in the Scriptures . . .” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 42–43; cf. 51, 54). And if we carry this study into the New Testament, we see similar sorts of arguments being made by Jesus himself about the positive significance of divine teaching in various areas of life. Our various readings of the writings of Paul, which we saw in chapter 2 and that are discussed further in this chapter, make it clear that even Paul was not consistent in affirming a rigid dichotomy between gospel and law.

Lutheran theology has always emphasized the limited use of the law (1) to stem anarchy and the messiness of life created by people “who are in bondage to sin.” We need law for order, or we end up in a world that renders all pursuits hopeless. The tradition has also affirmed the power of the law (2) to “drive us to Christ” by convicting or “accusing” us of our sin and making it clear

to us that “we’ll never get the grace we desire by working for it, since our works are doomed to failure.” What Menn suggests is that within Judaism (and also in several strands of Christianity) there is a more powerful, positive, and empowering way of appreciating the gift of the law. Here, the law provides ideals, standards, and even restrictions and mandates that can assist persons in living godly lives and in becoming the people that God desires! And reinvigorating the idea of human initiative in service to the law of Christ can empower a greater reaching out to the neighbor (*Covenantal Conversations*, 57). “Works” and “the law,” while they might not be a means to salvation, can be embraced as a powerful response to the gospel and can motivate us to effective action on behalf of God (*Covenantal Conversations*, 57).

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. In your group, develop two lists, one under the word *gospel*, the other under the word *law*. List the phrases that come to mind when you think of these words.
2. If you have time, read Romans 1–4 and 7 and James 2:14–26. Both are passages that talk about the relationship of faith to works and to justification and righteousness. Traditionally Lutherans have sided with Paul against James on the issue of how faith and works are related to justification. After reading the third chapter of *Covenantal Conversations*, how do you think about these passages now?
3. To the question, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus says, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:37–40). Is this teaching of Jesus one of “gospel” or “law”? Now, turn to Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and compare Jesus’ words to this Old Testament passage. What are the differences and similarities?
4. Look at the Ten Commandments. See if you can develop some Christian arguments for why these laws ought to be respected, embraced, and even loved by a congregation.
5. Think of times in your life when following “the law” or engaging in “good works” actually enriched your life as a Christian or undercut your relationships with others. How did you feel about following the rules at the time? How do you think about such rules now (positively or negatively)? When you prescribe rules for others to follow, why do you think they are important?
6. Do you think there is a difference between being a person who embraces or respects the law (biblical, other sorts of laws) and a “legalist”? What is the difference, and how is it possible to avoid being a legalist?
7. There has been much antisemitism in the past, expressed in parts of our tradition with reference to various New Testament passages. Do Christians today owe Jews anything for our past writings or behaviors—an apology, compensation, reconciliation? Why or why not?
8. For further summary and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points* #3. </NL>

Closing Reflection and Prayer

A meditation on reconciliation, by Simeon Maslin, past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Keneseth Israel (Philadelphia):

[U.S. Roman Catholic] Cardinal Law remarked: How necessary it is for men and women of differing faiths and backgrounds to meet one another in mutual respect and love. How necessary it is for us to share our personal and collective memories, and to allow the balm of genuine, mutual love to heal the wounds that for too long have divided us. His voice is surely not a lonely one in Christian circles today. Shall we join the ranks of those Jews and Christians who live only in the past, whose hearts are governed by hate and who live for dominance and revenge? Or shall we join the ranks of those Jews and Christians who have dedicated their lives to fashioning a new a better world, one firmly rooted in the rich soil of diverse traditions but joyously open to the possibility of “love thy neighbor as thyself”? I have made my choice. I hear my sacred Torah calling to me from Sinai: “Choose life!” I choose a world where brothers and sisters wipe away each others’ tears and greet one another with “shalom.”

From Simeon J. Maslin, “A New Day for Jewish-Christian Partnership,” *Christian Century* (March 7, 1990): 247–48, 250.

4. Promise and Fulfillment

Ralph W. Klein, in conversation with Isaac Kalimi
Study Guide Prepared by Peg Schultz-Akerson

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

The overarching intent of this chapter is to clarify how understanding the biblical themes of promise (or prophecy) and fulfillment, as ways of talking about God, can deepen respect and appreciation by Christians of how Jews understand these important themes. Ralph Klein begins his discussion by looking at Genesis and its two dominant promises of land and descendants.

Abram is told to go to the land that he will be shown, and he will be made a great nation (Gen. 12:1-2). This charge is greatly complicated by the lack of progeny between Sarah and Abraham. Various efforts are made to help God along with God's promise, but in the end the fulfillment comes by God's doing. The promise comes to pass because God has promised, not because someone is ingenious enough to make it happen. It is gift, not accomplishment. This is important for the way the future unfolds: promises are made by God, tying the people always to God in a relationship that is foundational.

But if a formative relationship between God and God's people is assumed, a monolithic process for how this relationship comes to pass is not. Prophecies undergo alteration over time, depending on the situation and circumstances. God is responsive to human reality and need. This can be seen in Israel's imploring Moses to mediate God's word to them rather than facing [the frightening prospect of hearing the divine word directly. God responds to their fear by allowing Moses to be a mediator. All of the prophets are mediators; they hand on the word heard from God. God promised to provide this mediation on an ongoing basis. While Moses is the first in this role, others such as Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah are examples of the ongoing fulfillment of God's promise, though none of these was the complete fulfillment.

As the book of Deuteronomy expresses, none of these later prophets lived up to the standards of Moses. In this sense, the fulfillment of the promise was only partial, and its completion is still expected in the future. Early Christians saw Jesus as fulfilling what the foretold Moses-like prophet was expected to bring. But how were people to be sure this was the true Moses-like prophet?

True and false prophecy had a long tradition. Various criteria have been used to determine which prophecies were true and which were false, but there were no guarantees. Prophecy looks ahead to the future, and until that future comes, there can be no assurance one way or the other. Further complication comes from what Walther Zimmerli describes as "the faithfulness and freedom" of God. God can be faithful to the promise, but still free to adapt it in response to changing circumstances. It is again complicated by what Klein calls "partial fulfillment of the promise" or by promises intended as metaphor.

A major portion of this chapter deals with the promised Messiah: what Christians claim regarding the Messiah and what Jews understand as promised. While there are commonalities between them, the understandings are not identical. The challenge facing the Christian community has been how or whether to make room for Jewish interpretation and understanding when the two traditions do not see the Messiah the same way.

Messianic hope is not a dominant theme in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, and when mentioned, this hope is not intended in the ways the New Testament interprets it. The chapter offers a brief summary of a few of the passages relating to the Messiah: three from Isaiah, two

from Jeremiah, and one from the Psalms. Significant in the Isaiah passages is the name that is offered as a sign: “Immanuel,” meaning “God is with us,” and “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” meaning, suggests Klein, that the mighty God is planning a wonder and planning peace.

These Isaiah readings assert something about God—not necessarily about the Messiah prophesied or promised, but these passages were interpreted as messianic by Christians who looked back into their only Bible at the time, the Old Testament in its Greek translation (called the Septuagint), for what could help them interpret their experience of Jesus, the Christ (Messiah). Klein, in this chapter, is careful to suggest that Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hope is really a “radical reinterpretation” of that hope. He names four changes that are departures from how talk of a messiah began in the original Hebrew texts.

1. No Jewish texts talk about the significance of the death of the Messiah.
2. The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament does not refer to the Messiah as divine.
3. While Christians speak of the “new” age as “already and not yet,” the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament has no concept of simultaneously having the promise and waiting for it.
4. The New Testament identifies Jesus with several different personages in the Hebrew texts (the prophet, servant, Son of Humanity), not exclusively the Messiah.

Klein suggests that the last thing the early Christians thought they were doing was “starting a new religion.” They experienced Jesus as the Messiah directly in line with the Old Testament Scriptures they held dear. Jesus did not negate the Hebrew texts, in their minds, but fulfilled them. Jews, however, do not interpret Jesus in this way and, this chapter suggests, Christians are not being unfaithful to Christianity when they respect how Jews see the promises of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament fulfilled or how they see the promises waiting for fulfillment in the future. Such respect toward Jews on the part of Christians, Klein urges, may in fact be the more faithful way.

A helpful section on New Testament fulfillments explores how early Christians faithfully used methods of interpretation available to them in the first century. Today, we would use “methods appropriate to our time.” What is hoped for in this chapter is that we will see in the theme of promise and fulfillment in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament not a great divide between Christians and Jews, but rather a continuity of both fulfilled expectation and future hope that can be celebrated and affirmed as legitimate, albeit in differing ways, for both traditions. For Christians to pray regularly the prayer that Jesus our Savior taught, “Thy kingdom come!” suggests that we, too, are still yearning for what is to come, as are our Jewish friends. The chapter concludes with the wonderful reminder that Christians and Jews “need to learn to wait together for God’s future” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 74). This chapter provides welcomed clarity, encouragement, and guidance toward that end.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. As note # 2 states, Jews call their Bible *Tanakh*. It is an acronym formed by the Hebrew letters of Torah, Prophets, and Writings. These same writings are what the Christian community has called the “Old Testament” or, more recently, the “Hebrew Bible” or a combination of “Old Testament/Hebrew Bible.” Some Christian communities are moving away from exclusively using the nomenclature “Old Testament.” However, “old” does

not necessary mean either obsolete or superceded. Using the nomenclature the “Hebrew Bible” has its own difficulties, as parts of the Old Testament are not written in Hebrew. Would you recommend using the fuller name “Old Testament/Hebrew Bible” in your worshiping community? Why or why not?

2. The underlying problem dealt with in this chapter is the division or offense that emerges when “Christian claims for fulfillment give the impression that God’s faithfulness and presence are not experienced among Jews and in Judaism.” How would you speak of the Christian claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of scriptural promises in nondivisive and nonoffensive ways to an interreligious gathering? Is it possible to speak passionately about Christianity’s hope in Jesus as the Messiah without appearing divisive? Share some helpful ways you have heard Christians speak of their hope in Christ without denigrating other faiths. What unhelpful communications have you heard? How might you respond to these without adding further offense?
3. Discuss Walther Zimmerli’s description of God as “faithful and free.” Do you agree that God can be faithful to God’s word and also free to adapt in response to changing circumstances? What might be some examples of how God is simultaneously faithful to the word and free to adapt in response to changing circumstances?
4. What do you think of Klein’s suggestion that early Christians “often started with a tenet of their faith and moved backwards, attempting to find a promise in the Old Testament of what they had experienced and to interpret what they had experienced as fulfillment of that promise” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 71). Klein suggests that how the Gospel of Matthew reads Isaiah 7:14, for instance, “does not determine what the prophet was trying to say in his eighth-century B.C.E. context” (*ibid.*). What do you think of the suggestion that the Scripture might be read both backwards (Christian reading) and forwards (Jewish reading)?
5. Klein urges that “Christians need to recognize that Jewish sisters and brothers see evidence for the faithfulness of God, and therefore for the fulfillment of God’s ancient promises, in the oral revelation recorded in the Talmud, in the land of Israel, and in the ongoing presence of God in the lives of Jews and Judaism. What Christians and Jews hail as fulfillments refer back to the promises of the same God” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 73). Can this be enough, that the same God promises, though the promise is experienced or interpreted differently? Discuss this. What are some of the implications, one way or the other, for Christian/Jewish relations?
6. For further reflection and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points #4*. </NL>

Closing Reflection and Prayer

In Eucharistic Prayer VI in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* the Presiding Minister prays:

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father: Endless is your mercy and eternal your reign. You have filled all creation with light and life; heaven and earth are full of your glory.

We praise you for the grace shown to your people in every age: the promise to Israel, the rescue from Egypt, the gift of the promised land, the words of the prophets; and, at this end of all the ages, the gift of your Son, who proclaimed the good news in word and deed and was obedient to your will, even to giving his life . . .

From *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 66.

Pray this eucharistic prayer together, giving thanks for these words of the church that embrace the theme and vision of promise and fulfillment for both Jews and Christians. May our life together with each other reflect and embody this praise for God's amazing grace! If this eucharistic prayer is not used at your services of Holy Communion or in your tradition, request a Sunday when it can be offered as the prayer at the Table. Print it in your bulletin so everyone can take it home and find occasions to offer it, perhaps at meal times.

5. Difficult Texts: Interpreting New Testament Images of Jews and Judaism

Franklin Sherman, in Conversation with Sarah Henrich

Study Guide Prepared by Peg Schultz-Akerson

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

In preparing these study guides, I assumed that dealing with “difficult texts” was simply going to be too “difficult.” Having now spent time with the chapter, my encouragement to the reader is not to be afraid, but instead to anticipate wonderful help with what surely is difficult, but, more importantly, is ever so central to Christian-Jewish conversation. A good place to begin might be to read first Sarah Henrich’s response. She gives a brief summary that can serve as a useful handle for approaching the chapter.

Franklin Sherman reminds all of us, and in particular preachers, of our moral obligation to understand these issues well enough not to get caught in perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Jews and Judaism. Quoting from the “Guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations,” issued by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1998, Sherman repeats its mandate not to use New Testament Scriptures as “justification for hostility towards present-day Jews.”

Sherman begins his essay by helping us look outside ourselves to what might be a Jew’s experience of hearing New Testament Scripture. While hearing texts that name “the Jews” in harsh ways may just roll off our backs, how might that same reading be heard by a Jewish visitor? And, are subliminal messages of stereotyping Judaism having an impact on us even though the words *seem* to be rolling off our back?

Of particular import in this chapter is the effect of Christianity’s move from a minority movement within a Jewish context to its place of cultural and political dominance throughout Europe. The language of the New Testament reflects the original context of Christianity’s minority standing. When the context changed, use of the same language regarding Jews became politically dangerous. The chapter recognizes Martin Luther’s complicity in the misuse of that language. Sherman summarizes the tragedy, quoting Abraham Joshua Heschel: “The children did not arise to call the mother blessed; instead, they called her blind” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 77; see n. 4). Chapter 5 serves to enlighten the true blindness.

Of the “difficult texts” in the Synoptics, in John’s Gospel, in Paul’s writings, and in Acts, John and Acts are recognized as requiring the most attention. The reader will be familiar with many of these passages, but seeing the texts grouped together illuminates how often they wrongfully refer to people as a whole when the situation most often shows that they are referring to particular actors. The bulk of the chapter struggles with the question, “What shall we do with these passages?”

Not all of the difficult texts are equally problematic. The chapter summarizes the work of George N. Smiga in his book *Pain and Polemic: Anti-Judaism in the Gospels*, in which he distinguishes three levels of language: “prophetic,” “subordinating,” and “abrogating.” The first two, as forms of “intra-Jewish self-criticism,” should be looked at differently from those texts that Smiga identifies as “abrogating.” The passages that fall into that third category are the ones that require the most critical attention when seeking to correct the use of the New Testament to perpetuate negative stereotyping against Jews.

Perhaps most painful historically has been the ways in which Scripture is interpreted to blame the Jews for crucifying Jesus. The chapter asserts that the theme of “collective guilt” must be challenged and corrected in the teaching and preaching ministry of the church—especially in

the telling of the Passion narrative in our Lenten/Easter season. Several times the chapter mentions the reality that Jesus and his disciples were themselves Jews. In addition to the books suggested by Franklin Sherman, Ronald J. Allen and Clark M. Williamson have also published one on the Epistles: *Preaching the Letters without Dismissing the Law* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006). Various suggestions scholars have made for dealing with these difficult texts are noted. Some have proposed simply omitting the passages from the New Testament, but Sherman finds this an inappropriate meddling with the authority of Scripture. Another scholar has suggested using regular-size type for the main text, while putting the most grievously anti-Jewish passages in smaller type to denote that we should regard them as less authoritative.

Most valued by Sherman himself are (1) clear communication regarding the original intent and cultural context of difficult passages and (2) work with “linguistic strategies,” including substituting for the phrase “the Jews” more accurate and limiting phrases such as “the Judeans” (those who live in the province of Judea) or “the religious leaders” or “those standing by.” Similarly, the term “the Pharisees” is used pejoratively in the New Testament, while Pharisaism, as a lay renewal movement within Judaism, is “something admirable” and is credited to a large degree with the survival of Judaism. The Pharisees are done a disservice when Christians think of them largely as “rigid and self-righteous.”

Far from being defensive and denying responsibility, the chapter acknowledges and admits grief over the negative impact New Testament language has had regarding Jews. Sherman asserts, “Texts such as these have helped to form, in the Christian mind down through the centuries, a highly negative and even demonic image of the Jews” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 77).

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. Discuss the chapter’s opening reflections on a Jew visiting either a Christian worship service or Bible study. Should we be concerned about their experience? Why or why not? What do you think about the chapter’s assertion that texts referring negatively to “the Jews” have influenced the Christian mind? What do you think has most influenced your mind regarding Christian/Jewish relations?
2. Reflect on the inference of children (Christianity) turning against that which has given them birth (Judaism). What is your reaction to the Abraham Joshua Heschel quote? What might make this particularly painful? Reflect from your own life experience within family and community.
3. Christians do not like to correlate the teachings of Martin Luther and others who wrote against the Jews with the horror of the Holocaust, but why is it important to acknowledge complicity in a pattern of hostility to the Jews? Do you think the complicity has been acknowledged and repented of in your community? What do you hear children and youth being taught about the causes of the Holocaust? What gives you hope that such an atrocity against Jews will not be repeated? Have you experienced anti-Jewish sentiment in your family, workplace, or community? If so, what might you do to offer a different perspective?
4. Discuss George M. Smiga’s three types of “anti-Jewish” polemic in the New Testament. How is this differentiation helpful? How might you apply it to your Bible studies?
5. Share with each other what you know about the “Jewishness of Jesus.” What would be some of the benefits of coming to know Jesus the Jew? Consider inviting your group or a

representative among you to read and report on one of the suggested books written about Jesus by a Jewish scholar.

6. For many people, the Gospel of John emerges as their “favorite” Gospel. Sixty-seven times, however, John’s Gospel uses the phrase “the Jews” to speak of those who oppose Jesus. Reflect together on the chapter’s comments about what might have permitted the use of this term. If it originally reflected an “intra-Jewish controversy,” how can we help people hear that it is not intended to speak of the Jewish people as a whole? Does using “the Judeans” instead of “the Jews” make a difference? Why or why not?
7. It could be interesting to draw some parallels between the defensiveness of the early Christians in a Jewish context and the defensiveness of American settlers in a Native American context. Anathemas were thrown back and forth supposedly for survival’s sake, but how we now grieve the consequences to Native cultures! Human sin runs rampant when fear abounds. What can save us from such fear? What do you think is helping Christians get beyond seeing Jews as a threat? Why might some Jews still feel threatened by Christians today?
8. How is the concept of “collective guilt” (where everyone is considered responsible for the actions of a few) dangerous? When, if ever, is it a helpful concept? How have you seen it used in schools, families? Is it helpful or harmful?
9. Read together the suggestions for preaching. Be sure your pastor(s) have a copy and invite clergy to talk about how they incorporate these suggestions. Create a similar list for Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders.
10. For further summary and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points #5*.

Closing Reflection and Prayer

In your closing prayer together give thanks for scholars, pastors, rabbis, and communities, Christian and Jewish, who are working to challenge anti-Jewish stereotyping and bring us into a new day of appreciation of each other as sibling faiths. As we struggle with these difficult texts in the New Testament, may we find the hope and courage to ask God continually to re-text us! We are a work in process, and God is not finished with any of us yet. Thanks be to God! Walter Brueggemann’s Pentecost prayer, “Re-text us,” may help us articulate our hope for newness.

Re-text us

*We confess you to be text-maker,
text-giver,
text-worker,
and we find ourselves addressed
by your making, giving, working.
So now we bid you, re-text us by your spirit.
Re-text us away from our shallow loves,
into your overwhelming gracefulness.
Re-text us away from our thin angers,
into your truth-telling freedom.
Re-text us away from our lean hopes
into your tidal promises.*

*Give us attentive ears,
responsive hearts,
receiving hands;
Re-text us to be your liberating partners
in joy and obedience,
in risk and gratitude.
Re-text us by your word become wind. Amen.*

From Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Edwin Searcy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 62.

6. Jewish Concern for the Land of Israel

Part I: “Go from Your Country . . .”: Understanding Jewish Devotion to the Land

Karla Suomala

Study Guide Prepared by William Kees

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

In her part of the chapter on Jewish concern for the Land, Karla Suomala begins by surveying classical sources of Judaism: the Hebrew Bible, the literature of the rabbis, and medieval thought. This overview helps establish an appreciative understanding of the Jews’ relationship to God and their call (vocation) as a people. She links this historical survey with Jews living in the Land (Israel) and those in the Diaspora (Jews dispersed in other lands).

The highpoints from the Hebrew Bible include a reminder of Abram’s call in Genesis to leave Haran and go to a land that God will show, not knowing where this will be. It continues with the story of Jacob and the name given to him, Israel (“God perseveres”). This story lifts up the theme that promise does not mean possession. It is up to the people to take possession.

Suomala moves to the story of the exodus, showing that possession is not permanent. A relationship exists between Land and covenant legislation. The Land belongs to God. God allows the people to live in the Land as they live in obedience. The results are peace and prosperity.

The Land takes on characteristics that are unique. It is exceedingly good, flowing with milk and honey. The Lord looks after it, and it is holy in that it could not tolerate moral pollution; the Jews are accountable through meeting the demands of the covenant.

The final link in the Hebrew Bible is through the words of the prophets. Because the people did not live up to the Torah (the law), there was, coming in their future, imminent destruction and exile from the Land. While this indeed happened, the prophets proclaimed the truth that the covenant is eternal. In fact, on return to the Land Isaiah projects images that show forth a covenant that will be made with all people.

Suomala continues to discuss the attachment to the Land by reviewing rabbinic literature and medieval thought regarding its importance. One area of tension is the reality that more Jewish people are dispersed outside Israel; it was the work of the rabbis to reconcile this tension. What is unique about Jewish culture is the openness to speak this truth clearly.

There are multiple resources that assist in this review, including the Mishnah, both Talmuds (Jerusalem and Babylonian), and the biblical commentary of the rabbinic *midrashim*. For those in the Land, the Mishnah strongly connects, as one third of it relates to agricultural requirements that can only be performed in the Land. This caused tension for those not in the Land.

The Land had connections for study, prayer, and burial. In the prayers of the 18 Blessings God is asked three times a day to bless the Land. While the latter was critical, some rabbis invited a growing focus on the understanding that those dispersed were invited to see all land as holy in a symbolic way. This carried weight in acknowledging that the Temple no longer was present.

By medieval times most Jewish people had not seen the Land, and so Suomala lifts up the challenge that was present. The Land is one among many areas of focus and at the same time the Land was essential to Jewish life. Two significant rabbis spoke to this tension. Maimonides was more liberal, and Nahmanides was more conservative. There were different interpretations of the

613 laws. One said that the Land was the Holy Land when inhabited by Jewish people. The more conservative interpretation involved making sure that Jews returned to the Land because the Land was ultimate.

In conclusion, Suomala speaks about context. In times of unrest more attention was given to the Land. At other times, when return to the Land was impossible, then the expanded view of the Land gained prominence. She concludes by saying that land is both reality and symbol.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. Is there any other time in recorded history when people are called by God to go to a land that will be shown as the people are on the way?
2. How do we understand the use of the word *covenant* when the Old Testament uses it to refer to that relationship established between God and Israel? Do we understand the word *covenant* in our world today in a similar way?
3. When were the times in Jewish history when the Israelites were rulers of the Land of Israel?
 - a. Consider the period of the patriarchs and the period of the kings.
 - b. Talk about when possession was impermanent.
4. Discuss the relationship of promise and possession of the Land.
5. What authority do the Mishnah and *midrashim* have in Jewish faith? Do Christians have anything similar?
6. Is there value in what a more conservative Jewish approach to the Land might give to all dwellers on the earth? What might that value be?
7. Is there value in what a more liberal Jewish approach to the Land might give to all dwellers on the earth? What might that value be?
8. What do we learn from talking openly and clearly about how we differ regarding issues that may seem for some to be essential and for others helpful?
9. How do we understand reality and symbol? Give examples.
10. How can the Jewish value for the Land affect our own understanding of the Land?

Closing Reflection and Prayer

Read Psalm 16:1-8

Prayer: Invite those gathered into a time of silence.

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-6 (read this passage three times with silence between each reading). Invite participants to lift up a word or phrase or image if they would like to without comment.

Close with the Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:24-26).

6. Jewish Concern for the Land of Israel

Part II: “Above My Highest Joy”: Understanding Jewish Devotion to Israel

John Stendahl, in conversation with Eugene Korn

Study Guide Prepared by Peg Schultz-Akerson

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

The second half of chapter 6 seeks to foster an understanding among Christians of the “specialness” Jews hold for the state of Israel. It does not offer a formal statement about that “specialness,” but rather seeks to nurture among Christians a balanced and fair understanding of how Jews define for themselves their relationship with the Land and the State of Israel. Christian awareness of and sensitivity toward Jewish self-understanding regarding the Land is an important early step in preparing to participate with Jews in working toward a much needed and longed-for peace in the Middle East.

The first and primary task before Christians in this regard is that of listening and trust building. Only when partners in the dialogue can trust that we are intentional about being careful and balanced listeners will we be taken seriously as dialogue partners. This chapter asserts the necessity of building trust and suggests useful practices toward that end.

Sensitive acknowledgment is made of the diverse and often conflicting ways Jewish devotion to the Land—Zionism—takes form within both secular and religious groupings of Jews. There is no unanimous standing regarding Zionism, except that devotion to the Land is precious and central to Jews. Of special interest to Christians, who share the Hebrew Bible stories with Jews, are the correlations between the development of the State of Israel and the biblical concept of exodus—both from Egypt and from Babylon.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, some see in it their opportunity, finally, to live out their calling to be a “light to the nations.” For some, connections with the Passover story make the Holocaust not exclusively an “obscene horror.” It is a horror for which the State of Israel offers a place of refuge and the promise of a future. Some Jews see this future as involving them in being that “light” that has been their enduring “special moral calling,” while other Jews assert that their people have suffered enough and should not be held by any higher standard than others.

“Christian Zionists” bring into this diversity of thought their own conflicting readings of the Scriptures. The chapter speaks strongly of the “wrongheaded and perverse” “Christian Zionist” interpretations that, nonetheless, have to be dealt with—especially in the United States. Using their naïve interpretations of Scriptures, many “Christian Zionists” feel religiously called to support Israeli military policies, even when these policies disregard the rights of others, whether they are Palestinians, Christians, or especially Muslims for whom they hold a particular hostility. That such military policies annihilate other groups of people does not present a compelling moral conflict in their eyes, because their more important fervor is connected to the messianic kingdom they believe Scripture promises through the establishment of the State of Israel.

This chapter acknowledges that Christians may have some touchstones into understanding how Jews relate to their Land through our visceral connections to “places of childhood or heritage,” but it notes also that this hardly captures the experience of a whole people alienated for vast years, from all over the globe, who finally feel in Israel that they are

normal and that they belong. Attention is given to the status of non-Jewish citizens in Israel, acknowledging that questions abound both in terms of what will make for peace and what will ensure security. Perspectives change depending on where one stands—as is demonstrated in note # 8 describing a book by a Palestinian Christian regarding the land being taken from Palestinians to make room for Jewish occupation. Reading this book alongside differing perspectives of the Land is encouraged.

Psalm 137 is fleshed out from its positive beginning to its violent ending, acknowledging how “fantasies of revenge” are human and cross-cultural when we are enduring great stress and loss and that we do well to reckon with this potential for violence in our own lives. Praying for God to help all of us resist evil is a shared responsibility. The chapter also offers insightful comments on the rising encouragement among Jews not to remain preoccupied with the Shoah to the exclusion of being invested in current moral obligations and passions. Continuously identifying oneself or one’s community as a victim shapes both identity and vision. For the sake of *shalom*, the call to move beyond victimization stands before both Jews and Palestinians.

The second part of chapter 6 reflects on the conflicting claims between Jews and Palestinians regarding the land that “spins on.” The risks to those of us on the outside are that we can be accused of being “immorally neutral” or “prejudicially committed.” There is no guaranteed safe way into the dialogue. But, the chapter asserts, though it is certainly “hard work,” interfaith dialogue is not “impossible or fruitless.” Discussion about any one issue, the wall or “security barrier” for instance, is wrought with a multitude of challenges. Lives are saved, but at what cost? It is precisely in the midst of just such vital discussions that “careful listening” becomes our role and contribution. What is at stake is not only our relationship with our Jewish and Palestinian brothers and sisters, but also the peace for which everyone longs.

The chapter nears its end offering a strong “counsel to Christians” regarding our “sacred obligation.” “If we are careless in these obligations, choosing either faithless neutrality or arrogant righteousness, we shall have furthered the dynamics of war and hatred even while we mouthed slogans of peace and justice” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 111). Surely that is something none of us wants to do.

The chapter’s final words call us to attend to what it is we as Christians have to learn in all of this. The hope is that if we will, with care, attend to what we can learn, we, too, will have something valuable to offer to the dialogue and efforts toward peace. This hope is our motivation to learn. This chapter offers welcomed inspiration and help.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. The chapter does not formulate a statement on the State of Israel, but seeks rather to deepen understandings regarding Jewish regard for the Land. What does the popular imagination, as you see it in your community, say about Jewish devotion to the Land they name “holy?” Do you usually hear it spoken of as a good and wholesome thing, or is it generally negatively critiqued? If the grassroots thought deepened beyond popular assumptions to a more informed understanding based on how Jews themselves define the Land and their relationship to it, what difference might that make? Do you know what youth in your community are taught in school about the State of Israel? What do you think should be taught?
2. The multiplicity of Zionisms is given a good deal of attention in the chapter. Make a list of the various takes on Jewish devotion to the Land that are described. What questions do

you have about these perspectives? Are you aware of Christian Zionists in your community? There are fundamentalist readings of God's will in both Judaism and Christianity that have no problem with interpretations that encourage the destruction of the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem. Many mainline Christian denominations would not be in support of this and would, as Stendahl does, call this Christian Zionism "scripturally wrongheaded and perverse." How educated do you think Christians are regarding Christian Zionism?

3. Note # 5 describes the 1997 successful breeding of a "flawless red heifer" like that which some "Christian Zionists" understand is needed for purifying the Jews and allowing Christ's return. What impact does this kind of fundamentalist Christianity have on the role and witness of Christianity in general throughout the world? Have you seen an impact in your community?
4. Mitri Raheb's *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), particularly when read alongside positive perspectives on Jewish understanding of the State of Israel, and Charles P. Lutz and Robert O. Smith's *Christians and a Land Called Holy: How We Can Foster Justice, Peace, and Hope* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), are both commended as helpful resources on the concerns of this chapter. Perhaps a book discussion could be developed within the congregation or a book review offered by a few who might be interested in making such a presentation.
5. Part II of chapter 6 begins using Psalm 137. It could be helpful to read the psalm together in preparation for the chapter's later reflections on its usefulness, not in spite of, but because of its move from a song of beauty and yearning to a song of rage and threats toward innocent others. All of us are capable of this movement from deep yearning to raging desire for revenge—the deeper the yearning, the greater the potential for fantasizing revenge over our unmet hopes. The chapter applauds the inclusion of this psalm in our Scriptures despite its violent urges, because by naming this reality of the human condition we might learn better to manage it. Do you think the whole of Psalm 137 should be included in our Sunday liturgies? Why or why not?
6. Stendahl notes having heard his father say that we are responsible "not only for what we say but for what we are heard to say." Do you agree that we carry responsibility for how we are heard? Why or why not? How does taking care for how we are heard matter in our families, in our church, in our community, in interreligious dialogue? How do you "hear" what your denomination is saying about the State of Israel? For example, see Inter-Religious Relations at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Web site (<http://www.elca.org>). What would you like to see your denomination's witness be in this arena?
7. Part II of chapter 6 reminds us that "the specific and personal is what we can witness to." To deepen your discussion to the "specific and personal" it could be informative to browse the Internet for information on Augusta Victoria Hospital, the Lutheran hospital on the Mount of Olives. What is its current reality? Does it appear at this moment that its work is being helped or hampered by current policies in the region? Are there specific and personal things you might be able to do to respond to their needs?
8. The chapter asserts the need to move beyond an understanding of oneself and one's community as victim. One example of the Jewish community making this choice can be seen in Los Angeles, California, at the Skirball Cultural Center and its Noah's Ark exhibit, which opened in July 2007. Noah's Ark is "open to the public inviting all

generations to share a timeless story, inspiring us to build a better world today.” See:
<http://www.skirball.org>

9. For further reflection and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points #6*. </NL>

Closing Reflection and Prayer

In his book *Israel's Praise*, Walter Brueggemann alludes to *A Place on Earth*, written by farmer and poet, Wendell Berry (San Francisco: North Point, 1983). Brueggemann writes:

In his novel *A Place on Earth*, Berry portrays the daily, slow life of a farming community in which folks are deeply enmeshed in each other's hurt. Berry intends to characterize a human community in which people still have time for each other, and the very process of interaction among them is itself a healing. In this novel, there is regular allusion to the importance of finding a place in the land, in the earth, in the fabric of human community and human experience. Berry is not romantic. In the story, there is a father who goes berserk as he watches his daughter swept away by a flood. There is a handicapped, lonely carpenter who commits suicide over the wife of another man whom he cannot have. The destructive reality of human life is available in the novel. The power of Berry's novel is that it is an act of hope in the face of a harsh brutalizing world that no longer has any reason. [*Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 130.]

This second half of chapter 6 speaks to the importance Jews have placed on having “a place in the land, in the earth.” Jewish devotion to the Land is also “not romantic.” It is filled with “the destructive reality of human life” and yet at the same time serves many as “an act of hope in the face of a harsh brutalizing world.”

Pray for Israel. Pray for the Jewish people living in that land, and the Palestinian people, for Christians and Muslims. Imagine hope. Imagine that there is a way to share the land that honors each with dignity and “a place on earth.” Pray for creative imagination and a willingness to compromise to inspire leaders of all involved. Pray for each to have the ability to listen carefully to the needs and hopes of the other as well as the ability to attend to how they are being heard as they speak. Pray for how Christians in the United States might contribute toward a positive future for this beloved region of God's world.

7. Healing the World and Mending the Soul: Understanding *Tikkun Olam*

Karla Suomala, in conversation with Richard Sarason

Study Guide Prepared by Peg Schultz-Akerson and Joel Zimbelman

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

In reading and discussing chapter 7, a helpful starting point may be to read the last paragraph of the chapter first. The bar is raised high regarding *tikkun olam* by the Jewish community's affirmation: ". . . it is unlikely that the Jews could survive, and it would be unseemly if they did, except as a community organized around values and committed to *tikkun olam*" (*Covenantal Conversations*, 127). The question is then raised, "Is this statement transferable to other communities? To our church? To me or to you?" If it is true that participation in the process of healing or repairing our world (*tikkun olam*) is in itself an experience of personal (and communal) healing, then let us be on with it!

This chapter sketches the varied history in Judaism of social action for the world's mending (*tikkun olam*). It notes that only in more recent years have Jews had the opportunity to focus outside their own survival and betterment because most countries excluded them from full participation in the political life of the society, limiting both their rights and their power. Nonetheless, Judaism has always held "a sense of the neighbor, whether inside or outside of the Jewish community" (*Covenantal Conversations*, 117).

Chapter 7 gives attention to the commitment to a "proper balance" of *tikkun olam* in regard both to balancing concern for soul with concern for material welfare and balancing concern for Jews with concern for non-Jews. A larger focus is on the wider question of how Jews are to be Jews in the world. What does it mean that Jews are "to be a blessing to the nations of the world"? The central "dream" of Judaism, the scriptural call to *shalom*, is developed by linking it both to *shelemut* (the notion of perfection: if justice has been accomplished, so has truth and so has peace) and the practice of *Shabbat* (Sabbath rest) where this world and the world to come are brought together.

Important attention is given to the impact of the Holocaust as an assault not only on the Jews, but also on the relationship between God and the Jews. Abraham Heschel is cited: "The greater masterpiece still undone . . . is history. For accomplishing this grand design, God needs the help of man" (*Covenantal Conversations*, 120; see n. 31). Several synagogue mission statements are included, demonstrating widespread acceptance of this divine calling to participate with God in the mending of the world—though it is made clear that it is God's action not ours.

Here there are interesting parallels made with Luther's understanding of vocation, where God could mend the world all on God's own, but God chooses not to. God alone works, but God works through us. Without our participation God's intended mending lies dormant. The chapter inspires hope by reminding us that it is in God's image that we are all created and reminding us that reflecting this image is our calling, our vocation, our joy.

Suggestions for Discussion

1. Help each other define *tikkun olam*. If you have heard this term before, in what context did you hear it? Compare the understanding of this term with Jesus' teaching of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.

2. Gather a collection of mission statements from other churches as well as that of your church. How do these mission statements compare to the synagogue mission statements? How are they similar? Different?
3. The dream of “an Eden of order and beauty in which life emerges from the divine ground of existence . . .” is experienced in the moments of *Shabbat* (Sabbath rest). The Jewish *Shabbat* “allows Jews to actually practice living in a perfect world—to learn how to enjoy it, appreciate it and be at ease in it. It brings together both worlds—this world and the world to come.” At the Eucharist Christians gather with “angels and archangels and all the company of heaven” for a foretaste of the feast to come. Discuss the depths to which we are called in Christian worship. How might it, like the Jewish *Shabbat*, have in it “world-mending” power? Do you allow, expect, and plan for worship to be this significant in your community?
4. The chapter points to Luther’s thought that “God could rule the church through the Holy Spirit without the ministry, but [God] does not want to do this directly. Therefore he [Jesus] says to Peter: ‘Feed My sheep’ (John 21:16). . . . To be sure [God] alone works. But [God] does so through us.”
 - a. Similarly, Luther writes in one of his lectures on Genesis (*Luther’s Works* 8:95): “This God could have made children without Adam, just as at the beginning Adam did nothing at all, since he was formed from the mud of the earth. Nor did Eve do anything since she was created from Adam’s rib. But later God said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Genesis 1:28), as though [God] were saying: ‘Now with your cooperation I will create children.’ This is true in all other actions in our common life. . . . And this is why God has given man [sic] reason, perception, and strength. Use these as means and gifts of God.”
 - b. Participation in the church’s ministry, for Luther, is part of a larger pattern whereby God’s creativity and activity are “incarnated” in humans. Discuss the implications of these Luther quotes. Does the church take this high view of our part in God’s actions in the world seriously today? Do you? In what ways?
5. After discussing the section, “*Tikkun Olum* as Vocation,” consider using it as a study with youth and young adults in your congregation. Better yet, invite the neighboring synagogue’s youth and young adults to share in an event of “vocation,” utilizing resources on *tikkun olum* and Luther’s writings on vocation. As chapter 7 points out, it is unfortunate that for most of Christian history, Jews and Christians have not been able to share their stories of vocational callings with each other, being cut off from each other as they have been. By gathering together to share our stories we can celebrate that we are no longer isolated. What first step might you take to plan a shared “vocation” celebration?
6. For further summary and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points* #7.

Closing Reflection and Prayer

In *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*, the Bidding Prayer for Good Friday includes a prayer for the Jewish people. When the ELCA Consultative Panel for Lutheran-Jewish Relations met with several rabbis in 2006 to share liturgies with each other, there was concern among the rabbis over the proposed wording in this prayer. They questioned why we would offer a special prayer for the Jewish people, setting them apart from other faith traditions. They also raised concern over the proposed wording that they “may receive the fulfillment of the covenant’s

promises”—for this assumes that the covenant’s promises are not being fulfilled in their midst. Below is an alternative proposal that emerged out of discussion with the rabbis.

Let us pray for “the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God.”

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
 long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and your Torah to Moses.
Grant true and lasting peace to your people Israel,
 fulfilling your promise of mercy and redemption.
Hear our prayers that the people you called and elected as your own
 may be the light to the nations you have called them to be,
 even as the Church seeks to be the people you call us to be.
Help us, and all faith traditions of good will,
 to work together for the common good
 that we may reflect your intentions for your creation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(The following prayer from ELW Good Friday Bidding Prayers has not been altered.)

Let us pray for “those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ.”

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, gather into your embrace
 all those who call out to you under different names.
Bring an end to inter-religious strife,
 and make us more faithful witnesses
 of the love made known to us in your Son.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 263.

8. Christians and Jews in the Context of World Religions

Darrell Jodock, in conversation with Mark N. Swanson and Rabbi Barry Cytron
Study Guide Prepared by Peg Schultz-Akerson

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

Against the backdrop of a national history in which we have most often conceived of ourselves as a “Christian nation,” recent decades have resulted in a changing self-perception. We more frequently recognize and accept the religious and cultural diversity of our country. This chapter takes as its starting point this religious diversity, and explores similarities and differences between Christians and Jews. The purpose of this comparative study is to explore whether there might be some areas of shared commitment and concern in the way Christians and Jews define themselves and understand their witness of God to the world.

The primary focus in this chapter is to explore two questions: (1) How should Christians understand the relationship between Christianity and Judaism? And (2) to what degree can Jewish-Christian relations function as a case study for understanding the relationship between Christianity and the other major religions of the world?

In exploring these two questions, we will need to compare the various ways in which Judaism and Christianity are similar *and* different. Such comparisons can be difficult, and often their success is a function of how the comparisons are carried out. In this chapter, Darrell Jodock offers a short list of rules for making the comparisons between Judaism and Christianity. These rules ask us to

1. Make sure that we compare “best” to “best,” and not engage in comparing the highest values and aspirations of one tradition to the worst aspects of the other faith tradition;
2. Be sure that one’s description of a tradition is one that an informed practitioner of that tradition would at least recognize or agree with;
3. Come to dialog with an open mind and a desire to learn; and
4. Not try to make other religions fit into the framework or outlook of one’s own faith tradition. This requires that we be particularly careful not to be always hunting for ideas or concepts in a tradition that we think are the same as ideas in our own tradition. The rule here should be: Let traditions speak for themselves on their own terms!

It is true that Jews and Christians share many beliefs and practices, including accepting some common scriptures, worshiping the same God, valuing community, and embracing certain theological concepts (such as covenant and the Messiah, among others). But the traditions diverge on other issues, such as the status Christians accord Jesus as the Son of God, different understandings of sin and its importance for human beings’ relationship to God, and the greater attention Christians give to right belief (orthodoxy).

The biggest problem that stands in the way of possible dialogue, according to Jodock, is the concept of supersessionism—the idea that Christianity has replaced Judaism. The author explains and critiques this notion and offers an alternative. Help is given for how a Christian believer can claim—with John’s Gospel—that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and that “no one comes to the Father except through me,” and at the same time acknowledge the religious value of Judaism and other world religions. Paul’s letter to the Romans is used as an authority

from which to argue against a supersessionist view of the relationship of Judaism and Christianity.

Finally, joy and a responsibility to love the neighbor are held up as reasons to encourage interreligious dialogue of this sort and to motivate us toward further discussion and conversation. The chapter ends with an invitation to imagine the role of interfaith dialogue as an agent of peace in the world. If such dialogue can serve as an antidote to those forces that create conflict and bloodshed in our present world, then it is serving the will of God and warrants our full participation. This chapter is helpful in giving us the kinds of footholds and handles without which we will be too afraid to begin or too uncertain of where we stand to enter dialogue's goal of listening carefully to the other.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. Jews have not always enjoyed the same equal protection under the law accorded to Christians in the United States. For instance, Minneapolis, a city with a good many Lutherans, had no laws prohibiting discrimination against Jews in employment and housing until 1947. What are some of your early memories of your encounters with Jewish people or with the way that Jews have been treated in the communities where you have lived?
2. Make a chart of the similarities and the differences between Christianity and Judaism. Which similarities and differences do you feel are the most important to emphasize? Which of these items seem to be real differences and which seem to be based on rumors, ignorance, or stereotypes? Consider this task as something that might be done in a forum of both adults and youth in your church.
3. What do you think of Jodock's "I don't know" response to the question of salvation for Jews? Is his response comforting or upsetting to you? Why? How might an "I don't know" response free us for new conversations within the Christian community about our relationship with Jews? Could it also have negative effects on your faith or community? Do you think "I don't know" means Christians have nothing to offer world religions? If not, what do you think we have to offer? How well are we offering it?
4. How do you think most people in your congregation think about the idea of supersessionism? Have they given it much thought? Do they believe it as an article of faith? Is it just something that they accept because it is part of the tradition? Do older and younger people—or liberals or conservatives—differ on their respective views of this idea? Discuss those differences.
5. Paul van Buren says: "If God is not faithful to His people, if He does not stand by His covenant with Israel, why should we think that He will be any more faithful to His Gentile church?" (*Covenantal Conversations*, 136). What do you think about that statement? How might it provide some light in addressing the challenge and truth claims of supersessionism?
6. Where/how have you experienced benefits from a respectful relationship with the Jewish community? Is there potential for and interest in deepening such a relationship in your congregation? How might Jewish understandings of faith help Christians "see their own faith afresh"? (See <http://www.elca.org/interfaithrelations> for related links and additional suggestions of ways to move forward.)

7. In light of the skepticism that he arrives at concerning the legitimacy of Christian claims to have a “superior” relationship to God over other faith traditions, Jodock asks, “Do Christians then have any incentive to evangelize?” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 144). What would your response to this question be? How and when might evangelism—sharing the good news—be appropriate between practicing Jews and Christians? Discuss the chapter’s advice that “The first job of a Christian should be to encourage a Jew to explore fully the best and deepest religious insights of Judaism before encouraging them to consider adopting Christianity” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 139). What do you think of this advice?
8. In his response to Jodock’s presentation, Mark Swanson expresses gratitude for the essay while pushing at the question as to whether Christianity suggests anything new about God’s identity. Do you share Swanson’s concern? What concerns and affirmations emerge for you?
9. Suggest an action your congregation might engage in to begin or further Christian-Jewish conversation on these issues. It might be helpful to review some general observations about dialogue as suggested by Jodock (*Covenantal Conversations*, 131–32) to encourage an environment where each tradition is supported to speak for itself on its own terms.
10. For further summary and discussion questions, see Appendix: *Talking Points* #8.

Closing Reflection and Prayer

Below is an excerpt from a prayer written for Yom Kippur in 1994 by Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. What does our discussion of Christian-Jewish relations lead you to “dare imagine”? Reflect on where you see God working reconciliation in our midst today. How would you alter the litany? What might you add to it? In light of today’s concerns, pray about what you “dare imagine.”

While the world says “not possible”

*Holy God who moves this day toward peaceableness,
 God of Jew and Greek, God of male and female,
 God of slave and free, God of haves and have-nots,
 God of the buoyant and the frightened,
 God of the tax collector and the Pharisee.*

You God who makes all things new!
*We come to you this day in dazzled thanksgiving for the reconciliation
 you have wrought in our midst,
 Some we all know . . . the strangeness of Gaza and Jerusalem,
 . . . the new paths in Capetown and Johannesburg,
 . . . the thinkably good option in Belfast,*

*Some we know secretly, so close to home,
 of transformations and healings and reconciliations
 and the defeat of anger and hate and hurt.*

We are dazzled and grateful, more than we can say.
*God of all newness, we come to you this day in daring hope,
 for healings we want yet to receive, believing in them,*

while the world says, "not possible"
We dare imagine . . .

From Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Edwin Searcy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 121.

Case Study: The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Peter A Pettit, in conversation with John Stendahl

Study Guide Prepared by Joel Zimbelman, Peg Schultz-Akerson, and Darrell Jodock

Chapter Highlights and Hopes

Author Peter Pettit assumes that the biblical and theological reflections undertaken in this volume have important ramifications—cash value—for the practical challenges individuals, nations, and the international community face in the modern world. The world can be evaluated and assessed in terms of the theological commitments that we make. Second, Pettit assumes that we should not suppose that the preferred response to emerging challenges and crises is on first blush obvious. Just because conventional wisdom or the preponderance of our fellow believers advance a particular position does not mean that it is the “correct” response or the one that is most “Christian.” Such assertions need to be tested by critical reflection on faith, the biblical and historical foundation of the tradition, and the theological themes that commend themselves to us as Christians.

More substantively, Pettit argues that Christians who are rethinking their relationship with the Jewish people with the help of the themes discussed in this book now need to take the plunge and explore how this relationship “may shape our approach to Israel’s continuing conflict with the Palestinian nationalist movement and with neighboring Arab states” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 149). It is incumbent on Christians to explore the issues of Israel as land and a nation-state and the legitimacy of Israel’s national security so that they can better “accompany” their fellow human beings in the struggles that they face.

Suggestions for Discussion and Practice

1. Pettit begins with a caution against reading this case study in isolation from the other chapters, especially chapters 1 through 6. Why does he do this?
2. Pettit claims that biblical and theological arguments have importance to and ought to inform, when used carefully, the views that we develop in various areas of public policy—for instance, our idea of a special relationship with the Jews in light of their covenant with God, theories of justice, particular forms of government, statehood for particular peoples and communities, and perhaps others. Is his claim correct?
3. Christian Zionists present a religious argument for supporting Israel. Palestinian liberation movements present a religious argument for supporting Palestinians. Although Martin Luther was actively involved in public affairs and believed that civic engagement could be a form of Christian service to the neighbor and the community, he objected to naming any political movement “Christian.” Is there any evidence that Pettit shares Luther’s reservations? What are the consequences for Christians as they seek to foster peace in the Middle East?
4. What is the importance for *North American* Christians of Pettit’s concern about “where you sit”? How should North American Christians assess appeals for support from groups involved in the conflict? Insofar as he is concerned, what does “accompaniment” entail?
5. Pettit calls for Christians to think theologically about the biblical promise of land. He suggests that “a serious theological assessment of the ‘landedness’ of God’s covenant with Israel is a necessity in the church” (*Covenantal Conversations*, 160), but he does not

endorse those Christian Zionists who insist that all of the land ruled over by David (including the West Bank) should belong to modern Israel. What can Christians say to acknowledge the importance of the biblical promises while not endorsing this form of Christian Zionism?

6. Why should Israel exist as a nation-state—and why should Christians support its existence? Here are some popular arguments: Which of these arguments do *you* find most compelling? Which ones does Pettit seem to find most legitimate or important?
 - *Biblical promise*—God promised it to them, and we should respect that promise.
 - *Illegitimacy of counter-claims to control*—No one else but the Jews make as strong a claim that they should have the land.
 - *Expediency*—The Jews have been the object of derision, scorn, assault, genocide, and disrespect (often from Christians, but most recently from Hamas and others who are intent on their annihilation). Guaranteeing them some real estate, control over it, and a superpower's support of its legitimacy will give them the protections that they need to survive—and in part pays the debt we owe them for historically how we have dealt with them.
 - *Possession*—Their legitimacy is based on either their present possession, the possession of the British after WWI that led to their identity, or their earlier possession before Roman occupation and the Jewish Diasporas of the fifth century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.
 - *God's present intent*—Even today, God intends that the people of the covenant with Abraham possess the land and bind to it as the sign of God's favor.
7. Justice and peace are two important values for Christians, Jews, and many others. Pettit makes clear that—in the discussion of Israel's right to exist and the disposition of the people who live in the territory, on its edges, and make competing claims to its possession—the priority of these values is seen to differ between Christians who side with Palestinian claims of having been treated unjustly, and Christians (traditionally evangelicals and fundamentalists) who side with Israel's right to govern. Pettit suggests that, in place of a Christian “liberationist” view of justice (grounded in the idea of a “preferential option for the poor”), we consider the traditional Jewish construal of what might be termed an equity model of justice (one that “render[s] judgment fairly to all with compassion”). In this view, all sides in the deeply divisive debate over claims to the land have a voice. This “Jewish” view of justice, Pettit argues, stands in some contrast to the traditional views of Christian justice. With which of these two views of justice are you most comfortable? How do you think about issues of justice and peace in this debate? Whose claims do you find compelling concerning Israel, and why?
8. Because of the limited purpose of this article, many voices seeking consideration and legitimacy in the debate about the land and State of Israel are not fully represented in it. These include Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians, some with many generations of life in the territory of what is today Israel or the West Bank and Gaza. Their views of the legitimacy of Israel's right to exist, the extent of its territorial claims, and its political constitution vary. And there are Jews who do not buy the argument of “land as a birthright under the covenant” at the high price of marginalizing others who might have a claim to the land based on criteria other than covenant. How do you think these individuals and communities might embrace or reject the various arguments developed in Pettit's article?

9. The actions of both Israelis and Palestinians are often motivated by fear. Can Americans do anything to reduce that fear and thereby enhance the possibility of a negotiated settlement?
10. Although they are not widely known, over seventy groups are currently working “on the ground” for reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. Some give their attention to improved educational materials and are active in schools. Some bring together Palestinian and Israeli teenagers. Some work with Palestinian imams and Israeli rabbis, introducing them to each other and to interreligious dialogue, and enlisting them in ongoing cooperation and leadership. Others seek to defend those whose civil rights have been violated. Should Christians in the United States support at least some of those groups? In order to help answer that question, ask someone to learn more and report back. (One place to start is the Web site of The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (<http://icci.org.il/>, accessed February 12, 2008). Select from their membership list and investigate those selected organizations to see what they do.)

Closing Reflection and Prayer

In the spirit of confession, consider ways in which we have been indifferent to the suffering of others in the world, including all of the peoples in the Middle East.

In the spirit of confession, consider ways in which the policies of the United States regarding the Middle East have reflected our own self-interest (such as Cold War concerns or a “war on terrorism”) rather than the well-being and security of the Palestinians and Israelis.

Prayers:

Gracious God, . . . cleanse from our own hearts the seeds of strife: greed and envy, harsh misunderstandings and ill will, fear and desire for revenge. Make us quick to welcome ventures in cooperation among the peoples of the world, so that there may be woven the fabric of a common good too strong to be torn by the evil hands of war . . .

O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give . . . peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts. . . . Amen.

From *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 76.