
Shabbat Shalom

December 1995/Kislev 5756

The Bible

Interviews:

Renée Néher about André Néher

William H. Shea

The Event:

Mourning Yitzhak Rabin

The purpose of this journal is “to promote a climate of respect, understanding and sharing between Jewish and Christian communities; not only for the exercise of love and appreciation of the other, but also for the discovery of truths and values which surpass the genius of both traditions.”

This is the hope dreamed in the name of our journal, SHABBAT SHALOM: hope of reconciliation, hope of SHALOM, inspired and nurtured through a common reflection anchored in the experience of the SHABBAT.

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Shabbat Shalom

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Editorial

“The Bullet of the Bible”



Jacques B. Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

“**T**ranslated into more than a thousand languages, the Bible is probably the book that is the most read, and paradoxically the least understood and the least followed. Indeed, if its word is the most spread out, it is also the one which has most divided. Jews and Christians have found there all the reasons to justify their hatred for each other; and the hatred also takes place among Jews and among Christians.

The Bible has never been as read as nowadays. The creation of the State of Israel, the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the profusion of biblical translations have contributed to this

awareness. Everyone now can read the Bible, and everyone can verify in Israel the historical truth of the biblical words. The study of the Bible has been elevated to the highest scholarly levels. In Europe, in Israel, and in the United States personalities such as the Jewish philosopher André Néher and the Christian biblical scholar William Shea have illuminated the Bible and brought it closer and deeper into the hearts and the minds of its readers.

Yet the Bible has not changed the human person. The Bible which was supposed to bring peace, love, and hope has on the contrary carried a reference to rejections, to wars, and to murders. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin tragically wit-

nesses to this confusion.

The lesson has hit us like a bullet. It is not enough to study the Bible, to know all about it; not only our mind but also our heart, our life, should be inhabited by the dynamics of the holy words. *Simhat Torah*, the Jewish festival which celebrates the gift of the *Torah*, has retained this tradition and this requirement. The Bible is not just an occasion for studying the law and its wisdom and the past history of Israel; it is also a reason for joy, a part of our happiness and of our daily life. “I learned all the *Torah*,” boasted the proud student of the Bible. “Good,” the Master answered, “but what did you learn from the *Torah*?” (Mendel de Kotzk).

Interview

Faithfulness to the Text:

Renée Néher about André Néher

Faithfulness to the biblical text, to its integrality, to its integrity—a new-old reading of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Born in 1914 at Obernai (Alsace in France) and died in Jerusalem in 1986, André Néher is considered as one of the most important Jewish thinkers of contemporary Judaism. A Rabbi and a professor of Hebrew language and literature, André Néher taught at the University of Strasbourg and in Israel (mainly at the University of Tel Aviv in Jerusalem). Among his many awards, he was named “Sage of Israel” by Prime Minister Ben Gurion in 1957, received the “Remembrance Award” from the World Federation of Bergen-Belsen Association in 1975, and the Zalman Shazar prize from the President of the State of Israel in 1973. His numerous books in English, French, Hebrew, etc., include Moses and the Vocation of the Jewish People (1959), The Prophetic Existence (1969), The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz (1981), Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: David Gans (1541-1613) and His Times (1986).

His wife Renée Néher-Bernheim (1922-) is a historian and lecturer in Jewish history at the School for Overseas Students of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. She has written Le Judaïsme dans le monde romain: textes latins commentés (1959), Histoire Juive de la Renaissance à nos jours (2 vols.; 1963-1965), and La Déclaration Balfour, 1917: Création d’un foyer national juif en Palestine (1969).

S *habbat Shalom*: The memory of André Néher is associated with faithfulness to the biblical text. His departure has left a void in the intellectual and spiritual world which is difficult to evoke without pain for you. However, who better than you, his wife, could say what kind of personality André Néher was—his philosophy, his life, his passion, and his method of penetrating into the soul of the Hebrew Bible?

Renée Néher: It is difficult for me to speak about it in a few words. My husband’s field of activities was very broad-ranging, from rabbinic tasks to the academic life of the university. He taught the *Torah* and Hebrew literature and philosophy at the University of Strasbourg (France); after our *aliyah*, he also

taught in Israel numerous courses, meetings, and colloquiums, Jewish as well as interconfessional. He wrote many articles and a great number of books, most of which have been translated into several languages.

I would like to underline two essential points concerning the work and the personality of André Néher. In regard to his work, my husband was particularly concerned with providing a better understanding of Judaism. He helped especially to integrate Judaism on the various levels of philosophy, literature, sociology, and history. In regard to his personality, I should say that he was an intellectual Jew, or rather more simply, a Jew in its fullest

sense on every level: human, spiritual and intellectual. He deeply felt and lived his Jewish identity, or rather, as he would say, his “Jewish being”; this “being” which only God could grant and sound and which brings God and the Jew into a special relationship. As he put it, “I am not a Jew as I look at myself; I am not a Jew as others look at me; I am a Jew as God looks at me. It is God’s look at me which provides me with this unsoundable identity.”¹

Shabbat Shalom: This is very far from stereotypical definitions.

Renée Néher: This is, indeed, a very important point which has often been read and discussed and which has impressed those who read it, precisely because it is not a banal definition. Also it

saves us from racist or anti-Semitic prejudice, or even from the confusion where politics and religion are mixed in a noncommendable manner. My husband has felt very deeply this Jewishness in a direct relationship with God who is the only One who can judge who is Jewish or who is not. I am not a Jew as the

in his heart this definition of what it means to be a Jew; he has also deeply lived it. This was not for him just words, but something extremely profound enrooted in his life, his prayers, his daily existence, always full of *brachot* (blessings), praises, and thanks to God for everything, his *mitzvoth* towards God and his



Photo: Barazani, Jérusalem

André and Renée Néher

others look at me (this is Sartre’s definition), but it is my relationship with God, which means that it is God who decides. It is in

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this vertical relationship in which my genuine being is located. My husband has not only felt deeply

neighbor. He was very sensitive to this principle and applied it with spontaneity and a very profound conviction.

Shabbat Shalom: How did your husband consider the covenant that God made with the Hebrew people on Sinai, and how did he apply it to our secularized world?

Renée Néher: My husband emphasized the notion of the covenant, the *Berit* in Hebrew: the covenant between God and mankind with Noah, which is called the Noachide covenant; the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. The covenant with Noah, the father of all the families of the earth, was a general covenant with mankind in which God promised that he would not destroy the earth

by another flood. This covenant implies that those who enter it keep a number of rules (seven,

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which are mostly moral commandments). Then within this general covenant, God has chosen a particular people who are the people of Abraham and of his descendants Isaac and Jacob-Israel. These people have received the mission to proclaim the word of God to the world: the word of a unique God, of a Creator, of a Saviour, the word of God Who comes into history. The Jewish people will continue to bring this message to the world until the whole earth recognizes this God of the covenant and of the word, until the whole earth is, as the prophet Isaiah says, "covered with the knowledge of God." Then the role of the Jews will be finished. The Jewish people has not been discharged, and has never discharged herself from this responsibility. It is enough to review the four thousand years of her history to realize it. This is what my husband has taught, understood, and lived. One of the basic ideas that my husband and I have cherished and explained is that there is no discontinuity be-

tween the biblical Israel and the Israel of today. Thus the Bible remains the reference book in the absolute sense of the history of Israel. As far as continuity is concerned, there is, of course, an evolution. We are no more living in the times of Moses or Jeremiah, there is a chronological unfolding; the word must be actualized. Yet the Bible remains the backbone of the life of the Jewish people. If the Bible is taken away from her, then there is no more Jewish people. The state of Israel is like a chapter of the Bible. It is this strong continuity which has marked all the thought and the historical and religious vision of my husband.

Shabbat Shalom: Although André Néher has translated large sections of the Bible, he did not translate the whole Bible. We know, however, how much the Bible translations of the Old Testament owe to him; even Christian translations such as the ecumenical translation of the Bible (TOB) have been inspired by his work and his insights. What is his contribution to biblical exegesis?

*Faith is not
something which is
given once for all.
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every day.*

Renée Néher: There is one primary essential rule: the faithfulness to the Hebrew text taking into consideration its interpretations in the *Massora* and in Jewish tradition. It is, indeed, difficult to render in other languages the richness of the Hebrew text, because of the triconsonantal roots of the Hebrew words which have no vowels. It is possible to construct several meanings and

thus give several meanings to the same word. Traditional interpretations play precisely on the multiplicity of meanings of the Hebrew term and help, thereby, to find the right word in the translation. The first principle in

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translation is, therefore, the faithfulness to the text and to the *Massora*, that is to the oldest tradition of biblical commentaries.

The second principle has been the faithfulness to the integrality of the biblical text. My husband was a staunch opponent to the historical-critical method. When he defended his dissertation, a professor from the Catholic University told him: "You are a dangerous opponent to Biblical criticism." He has always been faithful to this principle: the integrality of the text, not to cut the text in pieces. He did not want a polychronic Bible, a rainbow Bible. For him there was never a first, second, or third Isaiah. He did not accept the Documentary Hypothesis which taught that some texts might have been written by E (Elohist), J (Yahwist), or P (Priestly). He strongly believed in the fundamental unity of the biblical text; and in that also, he relied on tradition. More than a translator, my husband was an interpreter of the Bible. He thus set up a series of very important rules for the understanding of the biblical text; for instance, the chronological no-

tion that we must respect. This means that the *Torah* comes before the prophets and that the prophets have not opened the way to Deuteronomy, but it is the reverse. The prophets were Jews who observed the totality of the *Torah* of Moses.

Shabbat Shalom: After the Second World War, André Néher greatly contributed to the revival of biblical studies. One of his contributions was the stress that besides the teaching by the word there is a teaching by silence. He has expressed this thought in his book *The Exile of the Word*. Is it true that among the twenty books he wrote, he considered that one as his most important work?

Renée Néher: Yes, indeed, he said it and wrote that *The Exile of the Word* was “drawn from his guts.” This was for him his most important book, because the whole problem of the *Shoa* is underlaid. The subtitle “From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz” is significant. It means that the silence of Auschwitz, as striking or anguishing as it may be, already originates in the Bible. In the Bible, God speaks not only through His word, but also through His silence; He is the spring from which wells up the silence of the Bible. For André Néher, it was important to say that not everything is expressed and not everything is expressible.

Shabbat Shalom: Silence is therefore not absence . . .

Renée Néher: No, silence is the other side of the word. But God, as far as we can speak in the name of God, waited for the human reaction, but this human reaction has not come . . .

Shabbat Shalom: Your husband used to say over and

over again that “God needed men” . . .

Renée Néher: Yes . . . He meant by these words that not

need to emend, to correct, to improve the world, and in that men and women must do their part and God His. This is what my husband meant to say when he



This Hebrew Scroll (a portion of Exodus 24) handwritten on animal skin is thought to be approximately 250 years old.

only the world was entitled to demand from God, but that God also was demanding from the world. We are responsible; we have also our part to do. Faith is not something which is given once for all. We must conquer it every day. Even the most religious believer has moments when he/she wonders. One must sometimes struggle and strive to come back to one's feet. One must renounce the pride of reason. One must accept a certain humility in one's knowledge. One stumbles on this problem every day. There are many things in the world that we do not understand. But there is a

stated “God needs men.” Jewish thought, but also I believe Christian thought, makes room for this principle. André Néher has underlined the fact that in whatever domain it may be, if we look at the ideal and compare it to the reality, we are discouraged. We should not look at the gap that separates the ideal and the reality. We rather must look at the daily effort to go one step further.

This interview was conducted by Mr. Ermanno Garbi, pastor and president of the Seventh-day Adventist community in Jerusalem.

¹*Sens*, 12 (1989): 460.

Dr. William H. Shea

A close and respectful reading of the biblical text bound up with immense information about its historical background.



Shabbat Shalom*: As a medical doctor, what influenced you to abandon that career, which was your first choice, to concentrate on Bible studies? Could you tell the readers of *Shabbat Shalom* the journey which brought you to this interest?

Shea: As a child, I grew up with almost no religious influence at all. Finally, during my last year in high school or secondary school, I came to believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible. When I went to college, I studied both courses in religion and science since I had an interest in both. I finally decided to

make medicine my vocation and religious studies my avocation. When I finished my medical studies, I went to two different countries outside of the United States to practice my profession because I felt that I might be able to do more good in areas where medical care was not so readily available. Those two countries were Nicaragua and Trinidad. During my work in Trinidad in the West Indies, there was a Seventh-day Adventist denominational junior college a half an hour drive from the hospital in which I worked. They were short of teachers in the religion department so I volunteered. My particular interest was history during the period of the Hebrew Bible and the light that archaeology can shine upon it. I taught at that junior college for over two years.

While I was doing this teaching stint, I decided that if I was to do more of this I would need to become better qualified in the

*Medical doctor and surgeon, biblical scholar graduate from Harvard University and the University of Michigan, Dr. William Shea brings to the world of biblical studies the acute intelligence of the diagnostician in the emergency room and the broad information of the historian and of the linguist proficient in several Semitic languages. Dr. Shea has published hundreds of articles and several books dealing with various topics, ranging from ancient inscriptions to the meaning of biblical prophecy. Presently, Dr. Shea is a member of the Biblical Research Institute, an international organization located in Washington, DC, dealing with biblical and theological issues pertaining to Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. Among his numerous works we count *Famines in the Early History of Egypt and Syro-Palestine (1976)*, *Daniel and the Judgment (1980)*, and *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation (1982)*.*

field, so I spent three years at the Harvard Divinity School studying Hebrew Bible, language, and related subjects. While I was there, I received an invitation to join the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. I taught there for a total of fourteen years before I accepted my present post, which is a kind of combination between research and administration. My “pilgrimage” into biblical studies was a slow and gradual one to finally come to the place where I am today.

Shabbat Shalom: You are a member of the Biblical Research Institute. What is it? What is your contribution as a biblical scholar?

One way in which to read the Bible is to read the passage or book that one is delving into several times. Each time it is read, more will appear of meaning to the reader. In addition, as one reads one should look for key words. These are the words that are used more frequently in the passage.

Shea: The Biblical Research Institute is an information resource department located at the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church near Washington, DC. Many members of this denomination, and of other com-

munions too, write us with questions about the meaning of passages in the Bible or teachings of the church. We probably receive nearly 3,000 letters of inquiry per year, and we have a full-time staff of four scholars and two secretaries to handle this flow of inquiries.

We also receive manuscripts to evaluate. Some of these have been requested and some of these have just been volunteered. On any given day, I might receive as many as three manuscripts on various subjects that I am supposed to evaluate.

In addition, we have our own publishing projects here. We have published a series on prophecy. We are currently working on a systematic theology, and we have completed and are editing two other projects, one on the nature of the church, and another on the subject of human sexuality. We have many writers who contribute to these projects; we do not write them all ourselves.

Finally, we also run a study center in Jerusalem, Israel. It operates from March to October. During this season, we have one quarter of study for seminary students (ten weeks), and several shorter groups that come for two or three weeks at a time. These shorter term groups may come from different parts of the world. Some are from North America and the next largest number of them come from South America. Several groups have come from Pacific countries like the Philippines. These are study and tour groups. They have the opportunity of studying Bible lands as they tour through it.

Shabbat Shalom: What is your method, or for you the best method to read the Bible? Could you give the reader a few recommendations on how to read the Bible?

Shea: There are two main ways

to read the Bible. One is the scholarly intensive way. For that approach, I use what has been called the historical-grammatical method. This means that the reader must pay close attention to the analysis of the words present in the original language. The historical setting and the lit-

Another approach is to look for repeated themes as one reads through a passage or biblical book. It is not just a question of words being repeated over again, but also of their being used successively in different passages.

One can take important words like “salvation, redemption, covenant,” etc., and follow them all the way through a biblical book.

erary structure of the text must also be taken into account. Of course, there are many scholarly tools that can be used for such a purpose. These include concordances, dictionaries, commentaries, and encyclopedias.

The average reader may not wish to go into such depth. In that case, one can read simply for personal devotional or spiritual benefit. One way in which to read the Bible for this purpose is

to read the passage or book that one is delving into several times. Each time it is read, more will appear of meaning to the reader. In addition, as one reads one should look for key words. These are the words that are used more frequently in the passage. The

To me it is the Word of God, God's thought made audible—or legible—to me individually.

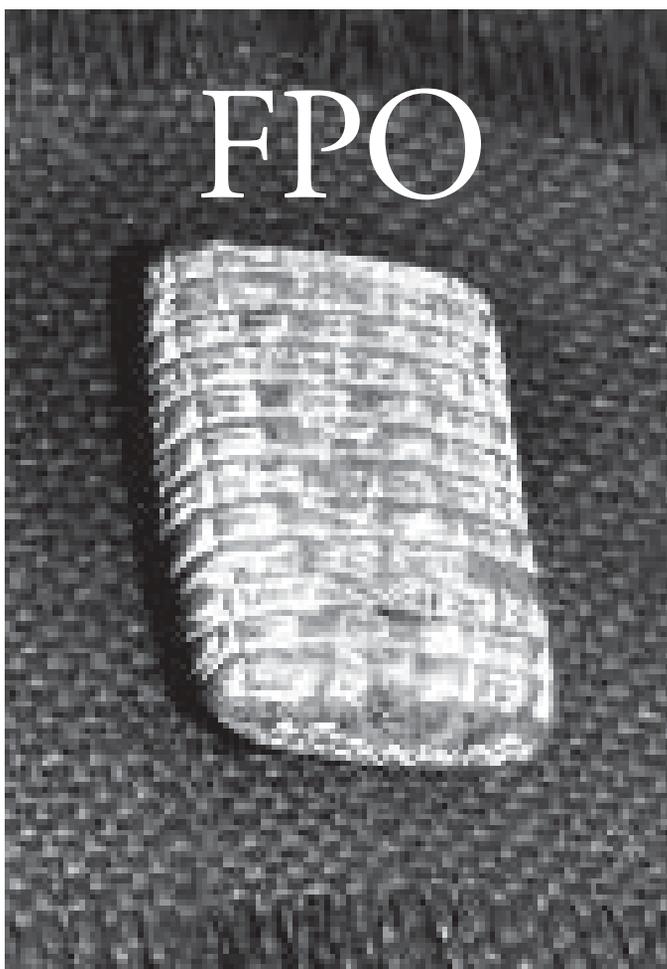
Bible writer has used these words over and over again because he wishes to emphasize them. One can take each of these occurrences and see just how the word is used in each case. That will give the reader an idea of the range of meaning in these words. All of these different avenues lead up to the idea that this is God's Word and through it He is speaking to us.

Shabbat Shalom: The Bible is far from us, enshrined in a remote past and a foreign culture; what would be your guidelines to help the reader and the student to understand its message?

Shea: Some of the methods just described above may be helpful here. Another approach is to look for repeated themes as one reads through a passage or biblical book. It is not just a question of words being repeated over again, but also of their being used successively in different passages. One can take important words like "salvation, redemption, covenant," etc., and follow them all the way through a biblical book. An example would be to study the theme of the covenant, the agreement between God and man, in the book

of Jeremiah. The chapter at the apex of this idea is chapter 31, but one might also look to see

astray. In Hebrew, this is called a *rib*, "a covenant lawsuit." A good idea of this can be found



This cuneiform tablet dated to 2050/2049 B.C.E. comes from Ur, known as Ur of the Chaldeans in the Bible. This is the town which Abram left when God called him for the first time (Genesis 11:31).

where covenant ideas are found elsewhere in Jeremiah, both before and after that climatic passage. One could also look for covenant ideas, not just the word covenant. It is often said that

There is no greater or lesser in God's Word to me. It is all inspired, or it is not inspired.

the prophets served as God's attorneys to bring God's case to the people when they had gone

in Micah 6.

The Psalter is another good place to take up this kind of study. There are many different types of psalms, and one needs to think about what each one is dealing with. The subject is complicated when treated in depth; but to make it simple, one might think of psalms that come out of one person's experience, like the Davidic Psalms, and also those psalms that come out of a corporate or congregational experience, like the Psalms of Korah and Asaph, the temple singers during the time of the first or Solomon temple. Then too there are Psalms of joy,

praise, and gladness, and other Psalms that are more mournful and of a lament nature. These stem from the experience of the people. When some sort of affliction had overtaken the whole nation of Judah, the people composed, sang, or chanted these congregational laments. Then too there are Psalms that were composed for special occasions. Frequently the titles on the Psalms give an idea of what those

The Bible is consistent from beginning to end in terms of the themes that it develops. Could this really have happened with 20, 30, or 40 ordinary human writers who worked and wrote over a thousand years? I don't think so. I believe in the property of predictive prophecy, and I believe that it is manifested in the Bible.

occasions were.

The reader should also remember that commentaries can be very helpful. The beginning student of the Bible should avoid detailed commentaries like the International Critical Commentary series. More appropriate for such uses are the simple short commentaries like the Tyndale commentary. Even for

long biblical books, they can be quite short so the reader can grasp the thought in a brief time.

Shabbat Shalom: What is the Bible for you as a person, as a Christian?

Shea: To me it is the Word of God, God's thought made audible—or legible—to me individually. It also tells me where I as an individual and we as a people, as biblical Israel or the church, have been and are going. Thus the Bible is multifaceted in its application to our lives. It tells us about our past, present, and future. Since so much of the Bible is history, it has been said that the Bible is the record of God's Mighty Acts. Since He acted on behalf of His people like that in the past, we can rest assured that He can also act that way in our own personal lives. In that way, He can show us the road to salvation.

Shabbat Shalom: For someone who accepts the authority of the New Testament, what does it imply in regards to the Old Testament? Is the Old Testament somewhat inferior or less relevant than the New Testament?

Shea: There is no greater or lesser in God's Word to me. It is all inspired, or it is not inspired. There is no halfway about it. There may be some portions that are particularly precious to each of us personally because of the part it may have played in our lives. But I happen to believe that the Bible is the objective revelation of God. This means that the Bible is true whether I have an experience with it or not. We may believe the Bible, or we may choose not to believe it; but from an objective point of view, it is still true regardless of the attitude of the reader.

It should be remembered that the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament was the Bible of the Christian church for a least three centuries of this era. First, it took almost a century for the letters of the New Testament to be written. Then it took the church a

Seventh-day Adventists share similar views about the Bible with those believers, both Jewish and Christian, who take the Bible very, very seriously. . . . Nevertheless, they believe that the human agent played a part in the transmission of God's word to the people. He was not just a typewriter upon which God typed. He shared in the process, he expressed the thoughts that God gave in his own way and words.

couple more centuries to decide what books should belong in the New Testament. All the time that the church worked on this, intermittently, it continued to use the Hebrew Bible as its Bible. As a reader of the Scriptures, I get benefit from all of its portions too.

Shabbat Shalom: In what way are Christians indebted to Jews in their understanding of the Bible, whether it is the Old Testament or even the New Testament? What can we learn from the Jews to better understand the Bible?

Shea: There are many ways in which we are indebted to the Jews for their providing the Bible to the world. In the very first place, they preserved the Bible. We have such beautiful examples of this in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947, the oldest copy of the Hebrew Bible was the

One can learn from the Bible anyplace in the world, but one can learn the most from the Bible in the place in which it was created, Israel.

Aleppo Codex, which was found in a synagogue in Aleppo, Syria. According to the scribal notation found with it, it was copied by a scribe in the year 895 C.E. It should also be remembered that the Jews were the first ones to make translations of the Bible into other languages, principally Greek and Aramaic at first. The Septuagint was a product of Jewish scholarship in the third century B.C.E. The targums or translations into Aramaic come a little later. We have a translation of portions of the book of Job into Aramaic that comes from the second or first century B.C.E. It was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

There is not only the matter of the writing, preservation, transmission, and translation that we must attribute to the Jews, but

there is also their preservation of the language in which it was originally written. Among Christians, the study of Hebrew was only revived during the times of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Jews, on the other hand, never lost the use of it. No wonder we can turn to them for such rich insights into the meaning of the text.

Shabbat Shalom: You have extensively written and lectured in the field of biblical studies; in a few words, could you delineate the nature of your contribution in that domain?

Shea: My particular interest, as I mentioned above, has been in the area of history and archaeology as it has related to the first and second temple periods. I am interested in biblical history, and I am interested in the history of the Ancient Near East, especially in Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Canaan. I am especially interested when these two main disciplines converge. To take but one simple illustration, something like eight kings of Israel and Judah are mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions, and about the same number of Assyrian kings are mentioned in the Bible. It is not just that they are mentioned by name, but the text also tells us what these individuals were doing. Second Kings 18-19, for example, tells us of an encounter of Hezekiah with the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Sennacherib's inscriptions tell us about Hezekiah and what he did also. Thus these two pieces of evidence can be fitted together to fill out the whole picture. These are the kinds of things that I like to study and write upon.

Shabbat Shalom: What arguments would you like to share with our readers which "prove" for you that the Bible is, indeed, the word of God?

Shea: There are many answers to this question, but only one that will ultimately tell the tale to an individual, that of personal experience. The Bible is consistent from beginning to end in terms of the themes that it develops. Could this really have happened with 20, 30, or 40 ordinary human writers who worked and wrote over a thousand years? I don't think so. I

I think that more and more today the Christian New Testament is being studied from the viewpoint of its Jewish nature. From the Christian viewpoint, the Old Testament flows naturally and logically into the New Testament; and they should both be found together as complementary.

believe in the property of predictive prophecy, and I believe that it is manifested in the Bible. Why isn't the Assyrian nation live among the nations of the world at this time? If it were, it would prove the predictions about its final fall as wrong. Nevertheless, the Bible is still true in what it says about the absolute end of Assyria. Assyria was so thoroughly destroyed that men of modern times did not even know where its capital of Nineveh was located. It was completely lost

from the collective memory of mankind until it was found again in 1840.

There is also the historical accuracy of the Bible. All of the wonderful inscriptions and reliefs and statuary that have been turned up from the ancient nations have contributed to tell us more about the world in which the people of the Bible lived. Sometimes they tell us directly about specific events in the Bible. Nebuchadnezzar's Chronicle, for instance, tells us that he conquered Jerusalem in the year that we call 597 B.C.E. It even tells us the date upon which that event happened, 2 Adar in the Babylonian calendar or 16 March in our calendar.

But the most important evidence for the Bible is the changes that it makes in the lives of people. Recently I visited in the home of a friend of mine who is working on the island of Truk. The fact that he is even there is a virtual miracle. This young man went through a period of about four years when he doubted the Bible. Eventually, especially through the witness of his family and his believing wife, he came back to faith. Not only did the Bible do this in his life, but he can see the same changes taking place upon the island of Truk where he currently works. I think that it was the philosopher Pascal who said, "the miracle of God is every believer."

***Shabbat Shalom:* What is the Bible for Seventh-day Adventists? In what way does this approach to the Bible differ from other Christians and from Jews?**

Shea: Seventh-day Adventists are firmly Bible-believing Christians. There are those Christians who take a more sociological view of the Bible. There are also differences in attitudes about the Bible in Judaism. Thus in both of these great faiths there are

those who take the Bible very seriously, and there are those that take it less seriously. Seventh-day Adventists share similar views about the Bible with those believers, both Jewish and Christian, who take the Bible very, very seriously. They take it as the Word of God communicated to us. Nevertheless, they believe that the human agent played a part in the transmission of God's word to the people. He was not just a typewriter upon which God typed. He shared in the process, he expressed the thoughts that God gave in his own way and words. As an interesting illustration of this, there is the fact that

The Bible gives the greatest meaning to life. In addition, it can provide internal spiritual peace.

dialect shows up in different books of the Bible. Hosea, for example, wrote in a northern dialect of Hebrew while Amos, even though a prophet sent from Judah to Israel, wrote in a southern or Judahite dialect of Hebrew. This would not have been the case if the prophets had merely been taking dictation from God.

Seventh-day Adventists differ from conservative Jews and Christians not so much in their general attitude towards the Bible as they do in terms of the portions of the Bible that they emphasize. They believe that certain portions of the Bible, especially apocalyptic prophecy, are especially geared for or aimed at these times in which we live. They are especially relevant now and should thus be emphasized now. When speaking to Christian groups, Seventh-day Adventists commonly emphasize the Sabbath. That is because they

still believe that the Sabbath is of a binding obligation even to modern man.

***Shabbat Shalom:* What are the great truths that the Bible has taught you?**

Shea: Well, it has taught me many things and none of them should be minimized. But I suppose that two elements that I would pick out to emphasize here are that God is our Creator and that He is our Redeemer. Just as God created the world at the beginning so He has created us through the processes that He set in motion at that time. The Bible also tells us that mankind is lost. It is lost through the fall. Therefore, we need to be redeemed back from evil. All of this we can find in God. Also the Bible teaches us how to live.

***Shabbat Shalom:* What attitude toward the Jews did the Bible inspire in you?**

Shea: The Bible has taught me to have great appreciation for the culture and life of Jewry. They are the preservers of this great tradition found in the Bible. They have preserved and revived the language in which those truths were preserved. They have also preserved the land which was the cradle in which the Bible arose. One can learn from the Bible anyplace in the world, but one can learn the most from the Bible in the place in which it was created, Israel. The Jew or Christian who goes to the Bible lands to see how it all happened there will come back a much better Jew or Christian, with a greater and deeper appreciation for the Bible. It is a sad thing to see in some of the countries of the Middle East that this heritage is not preserved as well as it is in Israel. One could only wish that this viewpoint would spread among all of the peoples of the Middle East

Shabbat Shalom: What could Jews learn from Christians to better understand the Bible?

Shea: I have spoken above on several occasions about prophecy in the Bible. Jewish scholars whom I know have done a great deal to provide the background for these prophecies so that we can understand them better. I wish that they would take more into account the genuinely predictive nature of those prophecies. I think that more and more today the Christian New Testament is being studied from the viewpoint of its Jewish nature. From the Christian viewpoint, the Old Testament flows naturally and logically into the New Testament; and they should both be found together as complementary.

Shabbat Shalom: What does the Bible bring to you in your daily life?

Shea: To start with, it provides the answers, as no other human document does, to the three great

questions of life: Where did we come from, what are we doing here, and where are we going? What that means is that the Bible gives the greatest meaning to life. In addition, it can provide internal spiritual peace. The poet speaks about a time when, "all about you are losing their heads

The Jew or Christian who goes to the Bible lands to see how it all happened there will come back a much better Jew or Christian

and blaming it on you." Even in such times, the Bible believer can have peace. And it seems with the hurried pace of today's society that there are more and more such times.

John Wesley was a member of the clergy of the Church of England. After he had come to visit

the colony of Georgia, he was returning to England by ship. Somewhere out in the Atlantic Ocean, a tremendous storm came up, so much so that everyone on board the ship feared for their lives. John Wesley was a clergyman, but he still did not have that peace with God that could bring him through such an experience. Then he noticed a group of Moravian Christians kneeling calmly in prayer. He said to himself, "that is the kind of faith that I would like to have." He eventually found that peace with God through the study of the Bible in a little chapel in London. That same peace through a personal relationship is available to everyone who reads and studies their Bible in faith. I too have found that peace through faith in God's Word.

*This interview was conducted by Dr. Angel Manuel Rodriguez, an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute.

The Bible on Broadway

From Wednesday, June 21, 1995, through 2:00 a.m. on Sunday, June 25, 1995, a reading of the Bible took place in a biblical scene on Broadway in New York City.

Three hundred and sixty readers including actors and political leaders from a broad range of churches and denominations participated. The occasion celebrated the American Bible Society's ten-year translation project of the Contemporary English Version (CEV) of the Bible and the completion of the so-called Old Testament (the New Testament was published in 1931). From Broadway, it remains that the words of the Bible should go into human hearts, for more love and also more hope in this disturbed world.

Hebrew Scriptures

The Bible, Book of Books

Jacques B. Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

*Why has the Bible survived centuries and crossed all the borders?
What makes this Book so powerful?*

The word “Bible” says it already. Derived from the Greek word *biblia* which means “books,” the word Bible suggests its essence and its role. This is *the* book for it contains all the books. It is the witness *par excellence*.

History

After all the sophisticated and elegant doubts cast on the accuracy of the Bible in the nineteenth century, increasing historical and archaeological discoveries have continually verified the accuracy

The Bible has many authors, from different periods, backgrounds, cultures, yet it is still one book, a remarkable phenomenon.

of the Bible in an extraordinary and unexpected way.

For example, the idea that Moses was able to write 1500

years before Christ used to cause people to smile, simply because it had been believed that writing was still unknown at that time. The discoveries of the Proto-Sinaitic alphabet, the ancestor of all other alphabets (sixteenth century B.C.E.), and of the Ras Shamra texts (fifteenth century B.C.E.) have confirmed, however, the claims of the Bible against the attacks of critics and rationalists who said no one wrote back then.

The story of the Flood was also given a cold shoulder, until similar stories started to crop up from various traditions, from South America to India, from the American Indians to the Eskimos.

Archaeological digs have brought to light ancient biblical sites: Ai, Megiddo, Jericho, Hazor, Shiloh, Beth-shemesh, Lachish, and from these sites some of the most incredible stories of the Bible have been confirmed.

Also, the way the history is reported in the Bible increases one's faith. Contrary to the historiographers of long ago, the Hebrew does not care to exalt the exploits of the hero. The unrighteous as well as the righteous are depicted. And even the righteous are presented with their worst characteristics. The first man, Adam, falls

into sin; Abraham, the patriarch, lies; Jacob deceives his brother and hurls doubts at God; the great King David murders and commits adultery. The Bible has not tried

The universal application of the biblical laws and even their actuality suggest that they have an origin that transcends human societies. Even atheists claim these laws when they preach nonviolence, honesty, or the respect of human rights.

to revise history; therefore, its testimony of history is untainted.

Unity

The Greek word *biblia*, the origin of the word “Bible,” is in the plural. The word translates the

ancient Hebrew designation *hasefarim* ("the books"), as seen in the book of Daniel (Daniel 9:25) and especially in the tannaitic literature (Meg 1:8; Git 4:6; Kelim 15:6). Yet "the books" are, in fact, one book. The Bible has many authors, from different periods, backgrounds, cultures, yet it is still one book, a remarkable phenomenon. The variety of the writings

that supernatural inspiration. It testifies to the existence of Someone who survives the ages, who was present with Moses, with David, and with Ezra, who was in Jerusalem as well as in Nineveh, on the mountain as well as in the belly of a fish.

Truth

No wonder that the truths of

cities. Even atheists claim these laws when they preach nonviolence, honesty, or the respect of human rights.

On the other hand, the values of dietetic and health laws, which the Bible promotes, are the same ones promoted today. It is now acknowledged that pork is not healthy, and doctors are increasingly recommending a vegetarian diet, similar to the one in the Bible (see Genesis 1:29), as the ideal. Research in psychosomatic medicine has confirmed many assertions of the Bible underlining the relationship between the spirit and the body, biblical truth, moral or scientific.

Prophecy

Biblical truth transcends time and circumstances. It even makes predictions. Today, at the end of the twentieth century, we are able to look back and confirm the accuracy of Bible prophecy. There was the fall of powerful cities like Babylon (Jeremiah 51:8), Nineveh (Nahum 3:1-7), and Tyre (Isaiah 23), which nothing at that time could foresee. At the same time, the Bible predicted the successive rise of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (Daniel 2 and 7). All these events had been predicted centuries in advance of their occurrence. Prophecy even assumed the risk of appearing in numbers to date upcoming events with accuracy. Already in the Bible, the ancient Hebrew is familiar with this prophetic word that always rings true at the turns of history. The patriarchs hear it as a promise that would be fulfilled during the Exodus. The exiled from Babylon take comfort in the prediction of Jeremiah about the return from exile. Saul, the king, cries out while envisioning his downfall. King Hezekiah



(poetry, prose, genealogy, oracles, laws, etc.) and the authors, over a period of 2,000 years, is traversed by their deep unity.

In almost all the books of the Bible, the prophets stand untiringly in the way of the kings, to remind them of love and justice, but at the same time always echoing the same hope. The reason behind this literary unity is found in the faithfulness of its heralds. Progress in the Bible is sung in terms of a return to the past, a "Teshuva." But beyond the stubbornness to root down in the sacred text only, the unity of the biblical text explains itself by the fact that it is inspired by the same Spirit. Only an author able to travel through time and space would be successful in achieving this unity. Thus, the unity of these writings gives testimony of

the Bible are held in so high an esteem, both by the moral that governs the relations among people, and by the ideal and hope that press them forward far beyond themselves. The ethics of Israel are so different from the cultures around it that it cannot help causing astonishment. The rationalists were so stricken by the ethics that they opted for a later date (people back then weren't supposed to have such exalted ethics). But it has been recently observed that the language and the structure of the biblical legal texts were of the same type as the alliance treaties of the second millennium before Christ. The superiority of these laws should be explained differently. Their universal application and even their actuality suggest that they have an origin that transcends human so-

learns of his death and its postponement by healing. Births are announced well before time. So the biblical word not only is witness to past events; it also shows itself as unexpected and sudden witness to the present as well as the future.

The biblical word not only is witness to past events; it also shows itself as unexpected and sudden witness to the present as well as the future.

Old and New Testaments

For these reasons the Bible will always remain relevant, always a novelty for all. To qualify its nature as “old” or “new” is nonsense. The Bible, if it is inspired from the Almighty, cannot be “Old Testament” or “New Testament,” because God, the Eternal remains always the same. During the

fourth century C.E., when Eusebius of Caesarea utilized the expression “Old Testament” for the first time to designate the Hebrew Bible, it was with a clear anti-Semitic attitude to diminish what had been until then commonly called the Scriptures and exalt the “New Testament.” In fact, nothing in the New Testament foresaw such an opposition. The authors are Jews as are the ones in the Old Testament; the events are situated in the extension of the history of Israel and are interpreted in reference to ancient prophets. In addition, the Law is always observed. A pious Jew could also consider these writings as those of the prophets of old and equally venerate them. What has been called the New Testament bears all the qualities met in the Hebrew Bible: the ethical ideal that pierces a tortuous heart, the victories over disease and death, the fulfilled prophecies, and also the extraordinary preservation of the documents. All these characteristics are as many arguments in favor of inspiration from above.

But whether it means the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh*, or the Gospels, the proof would never be found in the arguments alone: its

confirmation by archaeology and history, the miracle of its unity, its high ethical and spiritual ideal, its fulfilled prophecies, its actuality. Indeed, the proof is found essentially at the level of each one of us, Jew or Christian, believer or nonbeliever, in the measure that

The proof is found essentially at the level of each one of us, Jew or Christian, believer or nonbeliever, in the measure that one would accept to bet on that Word and accept it.

one would accept to bet on that Word and accept it. For if we open this old Book and we venture our eyes and our soul into the course of its pages, we will then be able to discover right here within ourselves in the throbbing warmth of our daily life, more convincing than ever, its power and its truth.

The Torah on One Foot

A pagan goes to see Shammai and says: “I am willing to convert, but on condition that you succeed in teaching me all the Torah during the time that I can stand on one foot.” Shammai chased him away with a mason’s rule that he had in his hand.

The man went to see Hillel, who converted him: “Do to others as you would they do to you,” he said. “That’s the Torah. The rest is simply commentaries. Go and study them.”

Shabbat 43

Roots

The Christians' First Bible

W. Larry Richards, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament Exegesis

*When Christians realize that their forefathers
relied only on the Jewish Bible.*

When Christians speak of the Bible, they refer to a book that contains 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. But these 66 books did not always make up the Bible for Christians. Many Christians today think of the 27 New Testament books as being a part of the Christian's Bible from the very beginning of the church, that is, from the first century. Of course, that simply was not the case. The Bible for the early Christians was only the Hebrew Scriptures, the *Tanakh*, and that remained so for many, many decades.

Although we know that by the middle to the late second century, the church essentially treated the

four Gospels with the same authority that they gave to the Hebrew Scriptures and that Paul's writings began to have special

The Bible for the early Christians was only the Hebrew Scriptures, the Tanakh, and that remained so for many, many decades.

authority shortly thereafter, Christians did not have a New Testament as we know it today until the fourth century of the Christian Era.

The Bible, then, that our early Christian preachers and missionaries used, was none other than the so-called Old Testament. It was a precious collection of sacred literature for them. It often afforded them the very proofs they wanted in order to establish the legitimacy of their existence as the new Israel and also as a valid extension of Judaism, from which, of course, they had sprung.

In a number of ways, we see evidence of the value and appreciation given to the *Tanakh*. One of the most obvious ways is the frequency of times New Testament authors used the *Tanakh*. The New Testament contains portions of the *Tanakh* content in hundreds of places. One readily recalls Matthew's use of

Jeremiah and Hosea to prove the Messiahship of Jesus; of Paul's frequent references to support his theological positions; and of the estimated 600 quotations or allusions in the book of Revelation.

The *Tanakh* was considered to be an irrefutable source of authority. Jesus himself, referring to the *Tanakh*, stated that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Jesus cited the *Tanakh* to deal authoritatively with his temptation experience by prefacing his quotations with a phrase that demonstrated his high regard: "It is written, . . ."

The New Testament writers used the word "Scripture" itself 51 times. In all of them except one (2 Peter 3:16), the term refers to the *Tanakh* or a part of it. The New Testament writers held the *Tanakh* in such high reverence that it was not uncommon for them to use "Scripture" and "God" interchangeably. We read in Romans 9:17, for example,

"*Scripture says to Pharaoh . . .*" In Exodus 9:16 we read that *God spoke* the words to Pharaoh through Moses.

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This sort of testimony showing the lofty worth of the Hebrew Scriptures for the New Testament writers could be demonstrated many times. We find in 2 Timothy and 2 Peter the most meaningful and lucid statements

about the place of the Old Testament. Paul wrote to young Timothy that "All scripture is inspired by God . . ." (2 Timothy 3:16). Although Christians today apply that statement to both the Old and New Testaments, as we noted above, the designation "Scripture" for the New Testament writers was solely applied to the Hebrew Scriptures. And finally, it was Peter who wrote that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:21).

Another indication of the early church's appreciation for its first Bible was the fact that in the middle of the second century the church declared that a man (Marcion) who wanted to deny the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures was a heretic!

How grateful Christians can be for that part of our Bibles today that was *the* Bible for the early Christians, the Bible we call the Old Testament!

Parallel Order of the Books of the Old Testament (*Tanakh*) and the New Testament

Tanakh

- I. Five Books of the *Torah*
- II. Prophets
 - Early Prophets
 - Latter Prophets
- III. Writings
(Daniel)

New Testament

- I. Five historical books
- II. Epistles
 - Pauline Epistles
 - Catholic Epistles
- III. Apocalypse

Jewish Festivals

Simhat Torah: The Joy of the Bible

Richard M. Davidson, Ph.D.

J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation

When the Bible is danced and sung and rejoiced upon . . .

The park was jammed with thousands of Jewish celebrants—young and old, men and women, rabbis and city dignitaries, representatives of the many different Jewish communities—all dancing together in giant circles with ecstatic joy, accompanied by exuberant singing and instrumental bands. Dotted the throngs of dancers there were scores of individuals hugging *Torah* scrolls as they danced, enthusiastically lifting them aloft at musical crescendos and then hugging them once more.

I was experiencing what I later learned is generally regarded as the crowning festival celebration of all the year. For the first time

I was savoring *Simhat Torah*, “The Rejoicing of the *Torah*”! Though the seven days of the Feast of *Sukkot* (*Tishri* 15-21) were over, I had arrived in Israel in time to witness the final climatic celebration of the eighth day. (In modern Jewry this day is technically regarded as a festival independent of *Sukkot*, and called *Shemini Atzeret* “Eighth day of Solemn Assembly” [cf. Numbers 29:35]. In the Diaspora—outside Israel—*Shemini Atzeret* lasts two days [*Tishri* 22-23], and the second day is called *Simhat Torah*, while in Israel *Shemini Atzeret* lasts only one day and thus also includes *Simhat Torah*. What I was viewing at the park actually came at

the end of the Israeli one-day combined celebration of *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simhat Torah*; in the late afternoon and evening Israelis have a final public “Rejoicing of the *Torah*” celebration to coincide with the beginning of *Simhat Torah* outside of Israel.)

. . . .

Since that scene of ecstatic Bible revelry indelibly imprinted my memory a decade and a half ago, I have been back to Israel a number of times, with visits spanning the different seasons of the year. The dream I had thought was dashed forever—to be able to observe and celebrate the whole annual round of Jewish festivals in the Holy Land—has now become a reality. I have

also been able to research more deeply the significance of these sacred times for both Jews and Christians.

All of the Jewish festivals have grown precious to me, but none has superseded the “Rejoicing in the *Torah*,” *Simhat Torah*. Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin has rightly called *Simhat Torah* “probably the most joyously celebrated festival day of the year.”¹ I can testify that he is also right when he says, “To see a *Simhat Torah* celebration in Jerusalem is to witness the heights to which religious ecstasy can rise.”²

The major rituals of *Simhat Torah* revolve around the completion of the annual cycle of *Torah* readings and the beginning again of the new annual cycle. It is preeminently a time of rejoicing in and honoring the *Torah*—God’s foundational revelation contained in the Five Books of Moses.

Certainly the most impressive tradition and the one most intimately identified with *Simhat Torah* is the ceremonial processional “circlings” (*hakkafot*) by worshipers carrying the *Torah* scrolls amid chanting and singing and dancing. Seven “circlings” around the *bimah* (the raised “pulpit” where the *Torah* is publicly read) in the synagogue take place in the evening service and another seven in the morning service. Although this practice on *Simhat Torah* was not introduced

The park was jammed with thousands of Jewish celebrants—young and old, men and women, rabbis and city dignitaries, representatives of the many different Jewish communities—all dancing together in giant circles with ecstatic joy, accompanied by exuberant singing and instrumental bands. Dotting the throngs of dancers there were scores of individuals hugging Torah scrolls as they danced, enthusiastically lifting them aloft at musical crescendos and then hugging them once more.

in Judaism till the late 16th century C.E., it is similar to the “circlings” of the second Temple altar with the palm and willow branches at *Sukkot* as described in the Mishnah, and ultimately reminiscent of the seven circuits around Jericho by Joshua and the army of Israel (Joshua 6).

The “circlings” in honor of the *Torah* are popular especially because they involve everyone—including the women and children. During the *hakkafot* is the only time in the year when the women are allowed to join the men on the main level of the synagogue. The small children also follow the *Torah* scrolls in the procession, each carrying a min-

ature scroll or a decorative flag (reminiscent of the tribal banners of ancient Israel in the wilderness) topped with an apple hollowed out to hold a lighted candle (evoking the image of *Torah* as light.) As the *Torah* scrolls pass by the celebrants, it is customary to kiss the scroll, or rather (out of respect for the holiness of the *Torah*) touch scarves or prayer shawls to the scroll and kiss them.

Between each of the seven circuits the leader breaks out in joyous song and dance, and the entire congregation forms circles dancing around the *Torah* scrolls in the center. The ecstatic fervor honoring the *Torah* often rises in intensity to a frenzy of enthusiasm, and singing and dancing can go on for hours.

The celebration is even sometimes carried outdoors. In Israel the morning *hakkafot* includes a mass procession through the streets of Jerusalem as thousands of celebrants dance and sing their way 8-10 abreast to the Western Wall, led by *Torah* scrolls carried under protective canopies. The jubilant procession stretches as far as the eye can see!

The next most distinctive feature of *Simhat Torah* after the

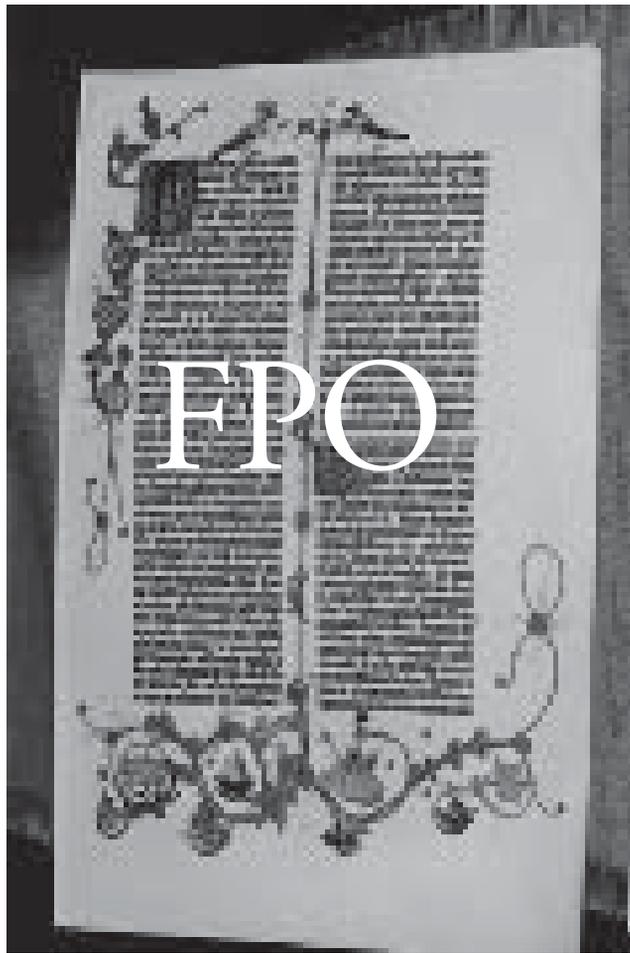
Although this practice on Simhat Torah was not introduced in Judaism till the late 16th century C.E., it is similar to the “circlings” of the second Temple altar with the palm and willow branches at Sukkot as described in the Mishnah, and ultimately reminiscent of the seven circuits around Jericho by Joshua and the army of Israel (Joshua 6).

hakkafot is the *aliyot*—the “goings up” to the *bimah* (“pulpit”) to read the *Torah*. *Simhat Torah* is the time for every adult male worshiper to be able to publicly read the *Torah*. Some synagogues have *aliyot* to read portions of the *Torah* in the evening service (which makes this the only time in the year when the *Torah* is read in the synagogue at night), but the main part of the *aliyot* ritual occurs in the service the next morning. After the seventh “circling” of the morning service, all the *Torah* scrolls are returned to the Ark except three. From the

It is not without significance that the two major Jewish pilgrim festivals—Pesah (Passover) and Sukkot (Tabernacles)—both end in holidays celebrating Torah.

first scroll every adult Jewish male has an opportunity in turn to “go up” to read the Scripture portion found near the close of the *Torah* (i.e., Deuteronomy 33:1-26). Even the young children come up for a special collective *aliyah* with a prayer shawl canopy over their heads, and receive a special blessing (from Genesis 48:16).

Then the “Bridegroom of the *Torah*” (*Hatan Torah*), a revered person in the community selected for this particular honor, is ceremoniously called up “by permission of the Great God” to read the final verses of the *Torah*, the description of the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:27 - 34:12. The annual reading cycle of the *Torah* is ended. The congregation rises and calls out (in



Facsimile of the Gutenberg Bible (1453-1455)
This printing in Mainz, Germany, is the first and most significant effort of using modern techniques.

Hebrew), “Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened!”

The first scroll is dressed and returned to the Ark, and the second scroll is opened to the book of Genesis. The honored “Bridegroom of Genesis” (*Hatan Bereshit*) is invited “by permission of One on High” to read from the beginning portion of the *Torah*: the Creation account of Genesis 1:1 - 2:31. The new cycle of *Torah* readings has commenced. The move from the end of the *Torah* to the beginning, from the death of Moses to the Creation account, embodies the truth that out of seeming death comes forth profound new life.

In some congregations, the entire *Torah* scroll is unrolled and held in a huge circle around the synagogue, with the end and beginning next to each other, ready

to be read from the last panel of the parchment and then the first, while the whole congregation is literally encircled by the *Torah*.

The final reading, from the third scroll, is Numbers 29:35 - 30:1, which describes the instructions for sacrifices on this eighth day of solemn assembly. This is accompanied with the *Haftorah* reading from the first part of Joshua, which records the continuity of God’s people and leadership under Joshua after the completion of the *Torah* and the death of Moses, and the beginning of the fulfillment of the *Torah* promise to enter the Land. Thus is embodied historically what is symbolized in the renewed cycle of *Torah* reading—from the death of Moses comes life in the land of Promise.

After the *aliyot* the worshipers

proceed to the *Kiddush* (prayer of “sanctification” over the wine and bread) and to refreshments chosen from a multitude of culinary delicacies. The remainder of the day is occupied in visiting each other’s homes, with more refreshments and merriment at each. Oh the joy of the *Torah*!

....

The attitude of reveling in the *Torah* is a dominant theme in the *Torah* Psalms of the Bible.³

Although the festival of *Simhat Torah* is not mentioned in the Bible by that name (the origin and name of the festival may be traced to the Middle Ages when the annual cycle of *Torah* reading became fixed throughout Jewry), its essential features may be deduced from three biblical passages connected with *Sukkot*. First, Leviticus 23:34-36 pinpoints the day and its general festival nature: “The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles [*sukkot*] for seven days to the Lord. . . . On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation. . . . It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.” Second, Deuteronomy 31:10-11 implies a focus of activity for *Sukkot* which presumably included the eighth day: “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this *Torah* before all Israel in their hearing.” Third, Leviticus 23:40 indicates the jubilant mood of *Sukkot*: “you shall rejoice before the Lord.” Putting together these three injunctions, the eighth day would be the natural climax to the special time of reading of the *Torah*. The final portion of the *Torah* would presumably be read at the last (eighth) day of the Feast, and it would provide the climax of re-

joicing that was to characterize the entire feast. Thus the understanding of *Tishri* 22 as the ultimate day of “Rejoicing in the *Torah*”—*Simhat Torah*—is consistent with Scripture, and the historical development of this festival and its liturgy serves to highlight the importance of the *Torah* for ancient Israel.

Thus Jewish tradition has underscored the value of the Bible by emphasizing the need of deep Torah study (the theme of Shavuot) and the mood of rejoicing in the Torah (the theme of Simhat Torah).

It is not without significance that the two major Jewish pilgrim festivals—*Pesah* (Passover) and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles)—both end in holidays celebrating *Torah*. This testifies to the high value that Judaism places in the Bible. *Pesah* is a seven-day festival, which culminates (fifty days later) in a one-day festival—*Shavuot* (Weeks, or Pentecost); likewise *Sukkot* is a seven-day festival culminating in a one-day festival—*Simhat Torah*. Both of these one-day festivals are lacking in specific biblical details for celebration. In Judaism *Shavuot* came to commemorate the divine revelation of *Torah* at Mt. Sinai, and its mood became one of awe and gratitude to God for giving the *Torah*, demonstrated by serious study—remaining awake all night poring over the *Torah*.

Simhat Torah, by contrast, does not focus upon God’s revelation of *Torah*, but upon the *Torah* itself as a “beloved com-

panion” in daily Jewish life. Michael Strassfeld makes an apt comparison to the joy and intimacy of a wedding couple: “As with a bride and a groom dancing with each other at their wedding, on *Simhat Torah* we desire to hold the *Torah* in our arms and dance the night away.”⁴ Strassfeld goes on to show how at *Simhat Torah* Jews learn to throw themselves completely into rejoicing with the *Torah*, drop their reserve and their defenses, and let go in the fullness of an unmitigated love relationship to a *Torah* of joy, a *Torah* without sense of burden or restrictions.

Thus Jewish tradition has underscored the value of the Bible by emphasizing the need of deep *Torah* study (the theme of *Shavuot*) and the mood of rejoicing in the *Torah* (the theme of *Simhat Torah*).

Protestant Christianity, like the Karaite Jews, emphasizes the value of serious Bible study (the theme of *Shavuot*) with the dictum of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible and the Bible only, rejecting all external interpretive grids such as tradition or philosophy. But Christianity has nothing compared to *Simhat Torah* to highlight the mood of delight in Scripture, and thus Christians may well learn from the Jewish celebration of this feast how to rejoice unabashedly in the Bible.

¹Hayim Donin, *To Be A Jew; A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), p. 257.

²Ibid.

³Psalms 1:1-2; 19:7, 10 (8, 11 Hebrew); 119:72, 77, 92, 97; cf. vss. 14, 16, 24, 47, 103, 111, 127.

⁴Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 155.

The Event

Mourning Yitzhak Rabin

Hernan DePaiva

A Saga of War and Peace

One of Israel's fiercest warriors and most admired heroes, and yet one who became the boldest advocate and builder of peace for his country, has been brutally cut from the land of the living.

It was Saturday night, November 4, when I received a phone call

for peace in the Near East would have been incalculable and perhaps even devastating.

From his early years, Yitzhak Rabin had worked untiringly in the pursuit of a dream in which his people would find freedom and regain their much yearned-for homeland where they could live in security and peace. During World War II, he joined the

freed 200 Jewish immigrants who had not been granted asylum by the presiding British Forces.²

The demand for his skills were such that by 1964 he was named army chief of staff. He led the army brilliantly during the Six Day War in 1967. This war had been triggered by a surprise offense mounted by the surrounding countries. He coordinated the

Shabbat Shalom mourns Yitzhak Rabin, artisan and martyr of *Shalom*.

from a friend who also shared common interest in the well-being of Israel and its citizens. I was shocked upon hearing the words "Yitzhak Rabin has been murdered!" My heart sank while my fears soared, and perplexity was added on learning that Rabin had been killed by a fellow Jew. How could this be? A Jew never kills another Jew, so says the unwritten rule. However, I must confess that in spite of my shock and perplexity, I breathed a sign of relief, for had an Arab been involved in the incident, the implications

Haganah, the Jewish underground army, and was readily invited to join the Palmach, an elite strike force. His performance was outstanding in numerous tasks assigned to him, to the point that senior officers regularly sought his advice on matters of military strategy.¹ Rabin was then sent on a mission to Syria, where his job was to climb up telephone poles and cut the wires so that the pro-Nazi Vichy forces would not be able to send for reinforcements. In 1945, just at the end of the war in Europe, Rabin led a daring raid that

maneuvers that enabled the army to gain the Sinai, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights.³ A major highlight in this operation was the liberation of Jerusalem, making its holy sites available to all. Afterwards, Rabin served a five-year term as the Israeli ambassador to Washington, DC, through which he greatly contributed to the modernization of the Israeli armed forces. In 1974 Rabin took over the labor party and shortly after he became Israel's youngest and first native-born prime minister.⁴

It was during this period that

To everything there is a season and a time, to every purpose under the heaven. Yitzhak Rabin's life seems to parallel this passage in Ecclesiastes in his endeavor to secure freedom and peace for his people, while coming to the realization that this was not possible at the expense of the freedom of the Palestinians, their subjugated neighbors. There was a time of war, but now it was time to make peace.

he authorized operation Entebbe, a dramatic rescue mission in Uganda that saved a number of Jewish hostages. In 1984, he was appointed at the Knesset to be the Defense Minister. During this time the Palestinian uprising (the Intifadeh) against Israeli rule surged in the occupied territories and Rabin came down with a heavy hand to suppress this rebellion. He was even known to have given instruction to break their bones. When the most harsh methods implemented proved to be ineffective, Rabin came to the conclusion that the 1.7 million subjugated people could not be ruled by force. He then realized that only negotiation through open dialogue could bring peace to this nation plagued with violence.⁵

Under this theme of negotiated peace, Yitzhak Rabin was reelected as prime minister in 1992. He declared: "The time for peace has come; we the soldiers who have returned from battles stained with blood, we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes, . . . we who have fought against you, the Palestinians—we say today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough." Thus he opened dialogue with the P.L.O. leader Yasser Arafat and began making land concessions for self-rule to the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and opening talks with Syria on the Golan Heights as well as achieving peace with Jordan.⁶

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neighbors. There was a time of war, but now it was time to make peace. War had ushered in a time to acquire, but it was now a time to give. And precisely in the time to dance, a time which had gathered the largest crowd ever to rally for peace in Israel, the mortal blow bitterly ushered in a time to mourn, from the gunpoint of the traitor, a fellow Jew. In this manner the most admired, apt, and

realistic warrior and leader of peace was cut off from the land of the living. It is hard to conceive other than that it was only the man who took the land in the first place who could be trusted to make the necessary concessions while not compromising national security.

To a great majority of Israelis, regardless of their orientation towards the peace process, Rabin was a national hero, and a man who could be taken at his word. In addition, for those in favor of the peace process, he was considered a man of integrity who was always willing to tackle the harsh realities of life in a realistic manner. For those who find hope in the words of Isaiah, and wish to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, for those who wish to see the day in which nation shall not lift up sword against nation, for those who do not wish to study war anymore, Yitzhak Rabin's life and martyrdom will undoubtedly be a guiding light for their path.

¹Kevin Fedarko, "Man of Israel," *Time*, 13 November 1995, p. 3.

²Marilyn Berger, "A Soldier, Politician, Statesman and Peacemaker," *The Chicago Tribune*, 5 November 1995, p. 19.

³Fedarko, p. 70.

⁴Peter McGrath, "An Indispensable Man," *Newsweek*, 13 November 1995, p. 48.

⁵Fedarko, p. 71.

⁶Berger, p. 19.

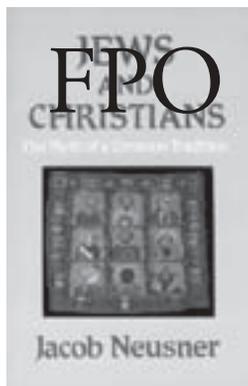
Recent Books



A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity, by Marc Hirshman, translated by Batya Stein (State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 179, \$16.95.

By comparing interpretations of the Hebrew Bible by Jews, Christians, and Gnostics in Late Antiquity, this book provides a unique perspective on these religious movements in Palestine. Rival interpretations of the early Church and the Midrash are set against the backdrop of the pagan critique of these religions and the gnostic threat that grew within both Christianity and Judaism. The comparison of the exegetical works of Christianity and Judaism illuminates the later development of the two religions and offers fresh insight into the Bible itself.

Marc Hirshman teaches midrash, talmud, and Rabbinic thought at the University of Haifa, the Hebrew University, and Oranim. He is a fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.



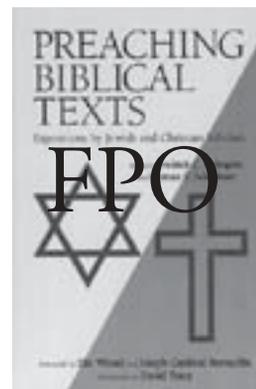
Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition, by Jacob Neusner (SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 158, \$14.95.

The author proposes that “there is not now, and there

never has been, a dialogue between the religions of Judaism and Christianity.” The first part of the book represents historical discourse through which Professor Neusner underscores that, from the very beginnings, the Judaic and Christian religious worlds scarcely intersected (with the exception of the fourth century). In the second part, Neusner spells out theological reasons underlying the “myth” of a Judeo-Christian tradition. He calls for an understanding of religions as systems so that each party can describe fully, honestly, and accurately the religion it proposes to bring into dialogue with the other. Only when both parties grasp what is meant in context can dialogue actually occur.

Throughout this absorbing book, Professor Neusner summons readers to make an effort to treat as legitimate and authentic religions other than their own, and to value a religion’s account of itself. Then genuine dialogue may be possible, and such dialogue is essential for world peace.

Jacob Neusner is Graduate Research Professor of Humanities and Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa.



Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars, edited by Fredrick C. Holmgren and Herman E. Schaalman, forewords by Elie Wiesel and Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, introduction by David Tracy (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 166, \$13.99.

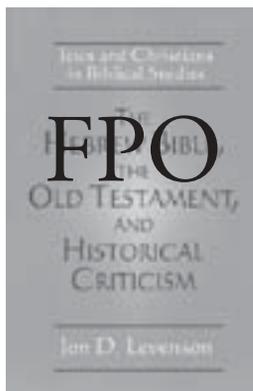
This unique volume collects expositions of biblical texts from the Torah/Pentateuch by eminent Christian and Jewish scholars. In addition to aiding readers in understanding and appreciating the biblical passages that are considered here, the major contribution of this volume is both the way it reveals the continuity that exists between the work of Jewish and Christian scholars and the way it illustrates very clearly the different

approaches taken to these texts by representatives of these two traditions.

The scriptural texts included in *Preaching Biblical Texts* were selected for their significance to both Jews and Christians, and each exposition has been sharply focused to assist pastors, priests, and rabbis in interpreting the texts for their congregations.

Fredrick C. Holmgren is Professor of Biblical Literature, North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. He is coeditor of the *International Theological Commentary* series and the author of several books on Old Testament studies.

Herman E. Schaalman is Rabbi Emeritus at Emanuel Congregation of Chicago and holds the Jewish Chautauqua Society resident lectureship at Garrett Evangelical Seminary and Chicago Theological Seminary.



The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), by Jon D. Levenson, pp. 192, \$14.99.

“This powerful Jewish voice may, in the end, serve as a major force in calling Christianity back to Scriptural roots” (Brevard S. Childs, Sterling Professor of Divinity, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut).

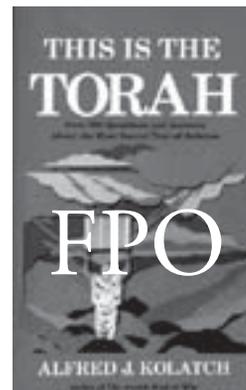
“In this provocative set of essays, Levenson takes aim at the orthodoxy of historical critical method, its assumptions, misplaced optimism, and institutional support systems. Timely, accessible, thought-provoking” (Christopher Seitz, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut).

Writing from a Jewish perspective, Jon Levenson reviews many oft-neglected theoretical questions. He focuses on the relationship between two interpretive communities—scholars who are committed to the historical critical method of biblical interpretation, and those responsible for the canonization and preservation of the Bible.

“This is an important book that opens a new era of mutual interreligious study of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. Jon D. Levenson challenges the traditional

Christian and in particular the Protestant way of studying the Old Testament. . . . He asks questions that urgently need to be asked and whose answers can only be given with the cooperation of Jewish and Christian scholars who are willing to face the problems of interpreting the common Jewish and Christian Bible in the religious and intellectual context of our world today” (Rolf F. Rendtorff, University of Heidelberg).

Jon D. Levenson is Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies, The Divinity School and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.



This Is the Torah (Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1988, 1994), by Alfred J. Kolatch, pp. 418, \$15.00.

“Popular in its orientation, *This Is the Torah* uses a question-and-answer format to address over 500 questions frequently asked about the most sacred Jewish text . . . Authoritative . . . excellent” (*Library Journal*).

“A learned but popular introduction to virtually everything worth knowing about the reading and writing of a Torah scroll . . . Enjoy an exhilarating experience of Torah study in the comfort of your own home. You could scarcely do better than to read Rabbi Kolatch’s masterful book” (Rabbi Robert Pilavin, Spring Valley, New York).

Alfred J. Kolatch, a graduate of the Teachers’ Institute of Yeshiva University and its College of Liberal Arts, was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, which subsequently awarded him the Doctor of Divinity degree, *honoris causa*. From 1941 to 1948 he served as rabbi of congregations in Columbia, South Carolina, and Kew Gardens, New York, and as a chaplain in the United States Army. In 1948 he founded Jonathan David Publishers, of which he has been president and editor-in-chief since its inception.

Rabbi Kolatch has authored more than a dozen books which include: *Jewish Book of Why*, its sequel *The Second Jewish Book of Why*, *Our Religion: The Torah*, *Jewish Information Quiz Book*, *Who’s Who in Talmud*, and *The Family Seder*.

ב-ה-ל-ל-ג-ל-י ד-ב-ר-ך
ו-א-ו-ר ל-נ-ר-י-ב-ת-י

תהלים קיט' קה"
ד"ן

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path."*

Psalm 119:105, NKJV