

THE WITNESS OF THE JEWS
TO GOD

Edited by
David W. Torrance

The Lord said to Abram, ... "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3)

'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem' (Ps. 122:6)

'Through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, ... Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!' (Rom. 11:11, 12)

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Preface

THE suggestion for this book arose in the Overseas Council of the Church of Scotland, after discussion of a report submitted to the Church and Israel Committee. This report was concerned with the ways and means whereby the Church could exercise her responsibility to the Jews more effectively, as well as learn to share and be seen to share in Israel's mission to the world. In order to deepen understanding on the part of the Christian Church and of Israel, which will lead to participation in Israel's mission, the report calls for the creation and publication of a relevant literature. (See Appendix A(2): Report for Church/Israel Committee.)

The Overseas Council, however, is not responsible for this book or for the views expressed in it.

A number of people from different backgrounds and experience have been invited to contribute. Four are Hebrew Christians. All who have contributed are persuaded of the importance of the witness of the Jews to God and of the importance of a deeper understanding of the nature of that witness. Readers will discern differences in biblical interpretation and theological outlook. It is not the aim of a symposium of this kind to present only one interpretation of issues, some of which are difficult to understand and in the understanding of which Christians are divided. No contributor is committed to what is stated by another contributor or by the editor, and likewise the editor is not committed to the viewpoint expressed by any contributor. The aim of this symposium is to seek to stimulate readers to search for and to endeavour to find what God is saying today to Christians and Jews, through his Word. It is our hope and prayer that this book will help toward a deeper understanding of what God is saying and doing in his world today, and so lead to a deeper participation, by Jews and Christians, in Christ's one mission to the world.

I express my warm gratitude to the Rev. Dr. Iain R. Torrance and to the Rev. James B. Walker for their assistance in the reading and checking of manuscripts and to the Rev. David H. S. Lyon for contributing the Foreword.

D.W.T.

Foreword

This is a very important book that may be expected, if read as widely as it deserves, to influence profoundly attitudes to contemporary events and the ways in which the purpose of God in world history is understood. Although it is a book about the Jews, written in order to encourage meaningful Christian/Jewish dialogue, it is to be hoped that it will be read not only by those with a specialist interest in that subject. It focuses long overdue attention on the determinative place of the Jews in the economy of God, and many who may not have given thought to the Jewish people at a level affecting Christian belief and practice may well have their eyes opened by it to basic and crucial questions to which they have been virtually blind.

It is a book of essays written from several different standpoints, but all with one major thrust. The writers all share the conviction that the Jewish people have a decisive place in God's creative and redemptive purpose for his world, that the fact that Jesus was a Jew is a central matter for faith, and that it is decisive for effective witness to the Kingdom that the Christian Church draw near to the Jews in thoughtful and humble dialogue.

There is disagreement among the writers at many points, not least where questions relating to the Land arise. Their differing approaches, however, and their varying interpretations of current events make the reading of this book more profitable than it would have been if all the writers had followed one consistent line alone. The reader will be led into an ongoing conversation in which, although he may not be given all the answers, he will certainly be faced with the challenge of the Jewish reality, and be given impetus to study afresh the Scriptures that belong to the Christian and the Jew alike, and to look again at the New Testament in the light of them.

DAVID H. S. LYON

*The witness of the Jews to God (their purpose in history)*¹

DAVID W. TORRANCE

When Zimmerman, private physician to Frederick the Great of Germany, said to his Majesty that the Jews constitute a proof for the existence of God, he was affirming what is perhaps generally accepted by Biblical scholars.

The very existence of the Jews in history, together with all that has happened to them in their long turbulent history, is proof that there is a God present and active, through his Holy Spirit, in history. By all normal laws of geography, history and ethnography, they ought as a distinct race to have disappeared long ago, like so many other larger and greater nations. As a nation they were broken up first by Assyrians and Babylonians, then by Greeks and Romans. Yet they returned and continued as a nation. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by fire and the Jews were scattered throughout the world. Despite the countries in whose midst they dwelt, with their vastly varying cultures, they were not absorbed. Despite wars, persecutions and repeated attempts to obliterate them, they have kept their peculiar identity. They have remained a people apart from the other nations of the world, a testimony to the preserving hand of God. 'For I the Lord do not change; therefore, you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed' (Mal. 3:6, see also Lam. 3:22 and the parable of the fig tree in Matt. 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33, where our Lord makes clear that the fig tree, the Jewish people, will be there at the end of history). Now from every corner of the earth and from at least 87 countries, a substantial remnant has returned to the ancient land promised within the covenant to Israel, a proof, for all who have eyes to see, of the truth of the living God witnessed to in the Bible (*cf.* Ps. 105:7-11; Gen. 13:14-15), and

giving to us and to the people of the world, our only true knowledge of God (John 4:22).

What is this knowledge of God that only Israel is able to unfold?

1. *Israel is a witness to God's continuing covenant of grace with Israel and the world.* God made a covenant of grace with Israel. This covenant made with Abraham was often reaffirmed to patriarchs, prophets and kings. Through it God promised to be their God and affirmed that they were his people, set apart for God, and thereby set apart from all the nations of the world. He promised to preserve them and bless them and through them to preserve and bless the world. God's covenant of grace with Israel was made within his wider covenant of grace with the world confirmed in the days of Noah. This wider covenant of grace was with man and all creation. God's universal covenant, which goes back to creation, was reflected and confirmed in his promises to Noah as given in Genesis (9:8-17). God's covenant of grace, with Israel and all mankind, and through mankind with all creation, was confirmed and sealed in Jesus Christ, who was himself a Jew and the complete embodiment of Israel. God took the initiative in making this covenant and therefore its continuance depends entirely on God. Its continuance does not depend on man. It is not a covenant of works (and the Bible knows nothing of a covenant of works between God and man). It is a covenant of grace. Israel by her continued presence today testifies that God is faithful. He does keep his covenant of grace with Israel and therefore with the world, despite Israel's and the world's continued sin and rebellion against him. He will never break his covenant with mankind even as he does not, and never will, break his covenant with Israel. He remains patient and merciful. His purposes of love and redemption remain. (For a full exposition of the Election of God and the Covenant see Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, pages 3-506, particularly pages 195-305; and vol. 4, part 1, pages 3-78; and for the relation of Creation and Covenant see vol. 3, part 1, pages 42-329.)

2. *Israel witnesses to the historical nature of divine revelation.* Her very presence today as a particular people on this earth amidst the other nations recalls us to her own early history and reminds us that our knowledge of God is given to us in an historical way, through the Jews. So often the Church has tried to link revelation with the insight of reason, as if we could discover God through our minds alone. So often a church has tried to order her worship, her life and her administration without careful

reference to God's historical revelation to Israel. She has not patterned her life and work strictly in accord with the Word of God witnessed to by the Jews in Scripture. In all such cases the Church has gone sadly wrong.

Again, many have tried to interpret the New Testament without any reference to the Old Testament, that is, without any reference to the historical revelation of God to Israel. The result has been a misinterpretation of the New Testament. Israel is a perpetual reminder that we can only understand God in the way that he has given himself to be known historically through Israel.

Both prophets and apostles witness through history to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, at a particular time, in a particular place, on this earth. The historic event of the incarnation has sealed the historic witness of both prophets and apostles and given to their witness that uniqueness, whereby the Bible, which is their written witness, is a Book marked off, and different from, any other book in the world. The Bible has been given to us by the Jews. They are in a remarkable way the people of the Book. The Bible, including the Old and New Testaments, is their Book. Whereas we can only understand the Jews through the Bible, so we can only rightly understand the Bible through our understanding of the Jews and their continuing rôle in history today. If we detach our understanding of the Bible from our understanding of the Jews, as scholars have so often tried to do, then our understanding of the Bible is not, as it were, earthed. We fail to understand the relevance of the Bible to society, nations and this world's needs, in the way in which God intends. We only rightly understand the coming of God into this world in Jesus Christ and his continuing presence in the world in mercy and judgement and saving power, as we understand God's historic revelation to Israel, together with Israel's continuing witness to God today. Her very presence recalls us to this fact.

Very often the Church has failed to recognise how much she needs the ongoing witness of Israel as she engages in Christ's mission to the world. In the great era of world mission, from the early years of last century, the Gospel has been taken, largely by gentile Christians, to every part of the world. A great deal has been accomplished in the expansion of Christ's Kingdom on earth. As the Gospel penetrates men's minds and reaches down into the roots of society and challenges the structures of society, great problems emerge. The world everywhere is thrown into ferment, because of the presence of the Gospel, the leaven in the lump (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21). Hence today we hear in world

missionary circles a great deal about 'liberation theology' and the call for Christians to be involved in politics. This is put forward as the urgent claims of the Gospel. Hence there tends to arise a division in understanding and in approach between, on the one hand, those who wish to emphasise the spiritual aspects of the Gospel, its temporal and eternal dimensions, as involving deliverance from the power of sin and death, resurrection, the gift of a new life in Christ and the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven and those, on the other hand, who wish to emphasise that the Gospel is not just otherworldly. It is concerned with this world and with society as we know it today, and with the policies of nations. It is concerned with justice and political freedom and the enjoyment of God's material blessings. Many would affirm that these two viewpoints are not necessarily conflicting and that both reflect important aspects of the Gospel. Still, differences remain, dividing Christians and churches, to the hurt and hindrance of world mission. It is only by taking seriously the historic revelation of God to the Jews and through an understanding of the Jews' witness to God today and with the help of their witness, that the church, in her understanding, and in her engagement in mission, can preserve the wholeness of the Gospel in all its dimensions and present a united witness to the world.

Again, many attempts are being made throughout the countries of the world to create new social orders. Nation after nation is experiencing upheaval and revolution. The claim of each new government is, generally, to promote law and order, justice and freedom for its people and improved international relations. In so far as each new attempt is detached from Israel and God's revelation to Israel, the result is injustice and unrest that is often violent. There exists no set of laws and no political structure which can prevent a nation, no matter how democratically ordered, from slipping into anarchy, or a government from slipping into dictatorship. The only restraining influences which will prevent such happenings are the actual people within that nation or government. The fear of the Lord, an understanding of his will, and the knowledge that we must all render account to him, can alone restrain such happenings to a nation or government. Israel's presence is a reminder of God's presence in the world today. She recalls men and women and nations and governments to the revelation of God's will for the world which he has made known through Israel. Israel is a living reminder that all must give account to God today.

3. *Israel witnesses by her inner testimony, through prophets and*

apostles, and by her own life, through the long years of her history, to salvation as a gift of God's grace. Jesus the Messiah is the servant of God. Those New Testament scholars who have affirmed this interpretation are surely correct. He is the one foreshadowed by the Old Testament prophets and anticipated in the servant songs (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. See also Isa. 41:8f., Jer. 30:10 and Ezek. 28:25). Jesus appears to have had such passages as these in mind when he spoke of his person and his mission through suffering (Mark 8:31-38; 9:30-32; 10:32-34, etc.). Israel, God's people, is also God's servant. This, the normal Jewish interpretation, is also surely correct. The servant is called out and set apart by God, not for Israel's sake alone, but for the salvation of the world. He is called to suffer and die for the sins of others and then to rise from death and be exalted by God, so that those who had rejected him are compelled to recognise that he suffered for their sins and for their salvation. What is required of him, as God deals with him in mercy and in judgement on behalf of others, is that he should respond to God in love and humble submission and obedience. He must be one with the people for whom he suffers and dies. He must in every way be their representative. Yet, at the same time, in order to be the instrument of God for their salvation, he must be in perfect harmony with God, fully yielded to him in love and obedience.

Israel in her weakness, stubbornness and sin is unable to respond to God's grace in a way that is effective for salvation. She is therefore unable in herself to fulfil the servant rôle to which she is called and therefore testifies that as she cannot, so no created man can. Salvation is not an act of man and cannot be achieved by an act of man, either by an individual or by a nation. It is entirely an act of God, a gift of grace. So Israel looks to the Messiah, as the one who alone can accomplish salvation and witness to salvation as a gift of grace.

Jesus, the Messiah, is alone able to fulfil the servant rôle. He is God himself come down to earth, entered into our humanity and taken to himself our flesh and blood. He alone is able to fulfil the divine mission on behalf of Israel and all mankind. He alone as man is able on behalf of all to respond to the Father in perfect love and faith and obedience and so to accomplish salvation for Israel and for all mankind. This salvation he accomplishes in what he says and does and above all in his own person, through suffering and triumphant resurrection. This salvation he bestows as a gift to all, Jew and Gentile, who come to him in faith.

Israel, despite her unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah, continues as

the people of God to witness to the uniqueness of God's saving grace in Christ. All that has ever happened to her throughout her history, her rejection by the nations, her incalculable suffering unto death, her deliverance and resurrection, witnesses to the fact that help, deliverance and salvation are from God alone and are a gift of grace through Jesus Christ. Israel, by her unbelief as a people and her rejection of God's call, has not lost the servant rôle to which God has called her. The nature of her witness has altered but not the fact of her witness. God's call to her does not alter. Hence through her divine calling and unique relationship with God and through her unique relationship with Jesus Christ who both fulfilled and confirmed her call, Israel, unknown to herself, witnesses to the nature of Christ's mission. Israel's rejection by the nations portrays Christ's rejection, her appalling suffering portrays Christ's suffering to the death of the Cross, even as her remarkable delivery from the Holocaust and restoration to the Promised Land portrays Christ's resurrection and is intimately related to it.

Israel, by God's over-ruling grace, witnesses to God's grace in Christ Jesus, by her unbelief and rejection of the Messiah, so that by God's over-ruling the very form of her present witness and even her rejection of Jesus as Messiah, have become part of God's call for her. This belongs to the mystery of God's call to Israel. In Peter's sermon in Acts, chapter 2, we read that Jesus was delivered up to be crucified 'according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (v. 23). At the same time it is stated that the people in their own freedom crucified and killed him, so that they are summoned to repent and to be baptised in the name of Jesus (vv. 23 and 28). We cannot put these two statements concerning God's election of Christ and man's freedom to crucify Christ, logically together. We hold them together only in faith. Man's sin was in no sense God's will. Even so, it belongs to God's election plan in Christ to arouse sin to its utmost limit so that he might take it upon himself, condemn it and take it away and, thereby, at the point of greatest alienation make peace between God and man. In the crucifying of Jesus all sin boiled over. This was the most desperate act of wickedness where man in his freedom rose up in revolt against God and tried to destroy him. God took this same most sinful act of man, over-ruled it, and by Grace, made it his saving act for the world and not only so but his saving act from all eternity. So man's very rejection of Christ at the cross, by God's over-ruling grace, is made to perfect God's redemption of man and to work to God's glory. So Paul,

in Romans, chapter 11, says of Israel's witness, 'Through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles' (v. 11) and again, 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved' (vv. 25, 26), and again, 'As regards the Gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved...' (v. 28).

Jesus suffered for us and the Jews have suffered for us and continue to suffer. When we ponder the fact that they have suffered for us as our representatives and for our salvation, how necessary that as a Church we repent of all the church's past and shameful treatment of the Jews! How necessary it is for our faith, for our entry into Christ's salvation, for our witness to Christ, that we learn to understand the Jews, to sorrow when they sorrow, to weep when they weep, to love them and in love to help them to faith in Jesus as the Messiah! Then as the elected community of God, Jews and Church together, we shall witness, not only to the shadow side of the cross but to the resurrection and to the praise and glory of Christ.

4. *Israel witnesses to man's antagonism to, and rebellion against, God.* God chose Israel to be the representative of the human race, in and through whom he would work out his purposes of love and redemption. As the representative of the human race, men are able to see in God's dealings with Israel, the way in which God deals with the world. Likewise they see in Israel, in her attitude to God and his love, their own attitude to God and his love. Israel is a mirror in which we see God, in his dealings with men, and we see man, in his attitude to God. The closer God draws to man and the more God draws man into relationship with himself, the more man's behaviour and attitude to God are thrown into relief and writ large. That is to say, all that is noble and good and all that is evil in natural man are writ large in Israel. In her long history of resistance to God and his purposes of love and redemption in Christ, Israel witnesses to natural man's antagonism to, and rebellion against, God.

5. *Israel witnesses to God's mercy and judgement.* God made his covenant of grace with Israel and the world. Israel repeatedly broke the obligations of the covenant. She broke those commands which were given as signs of the covenant, but God's covenant with Israel remains. Hence all that has happened to Israel, her preservation through appalling suffering, exceeding the suffering of any other nation in history, her preservation through the horrors of the Holocaust of Nazi-dominated Europe, and the restoration of a remnant to the Promised Land, testifies to God's faithfulness

and mercy to Israel. As God's covenant of grace with Israel mirrors his covenant of grace with all mankind, so Israel witnesses to God's faithfulness and mercy not only to Israel but to the world. Israel can turn away from Christ. The world can turn away from Christ. As God will not let Israel go, so God will not let the world go. He remains merciful and today is actively engaged in mercy in the world through his Spirit. Israel witnesses to God's mercy.

Likewise Israel's appalling suffering witnesses to God's judgement. Because of her disobedience Israel has suffered under God, over and above her other sufferings. There is evil in the world, and therefore suffering which is unrelated to man's evil. Evil reaches out in a mysterious way far beyond the will and existence of man and defies explanation: and much of Israel's suffering defies explanation. Again much of Israel's suffering belongs to her peculiar rôle in the world as God's servant for the saving of the nations. Even so, there is that within Israel's suffering which relates to her disobedience to God and which witnesses to God's judgement. Furthermore, her sufferings, which are the world's sufferings 'writ large', testify that there is that within the world's suffering that relates to man's sin and rebellion against God. God is a God of judgement as well as of mercy. Israel witnesses to God's judgement.

Again, Israel's sufferings point forward to a greater judgement to come, to a final day of judgement and of mercy. God takes seriously the sin and rebellion of this world and he takes seriously all the evil in this world. Those who finally resist his offer of grace and mercy and salvation will be condemned. All evil will be finally swept away and in mercy he will renew this world so that it becomes the new creation of our God and his people who love him, he will make to dwell with him.

6. *Israel witnesses to God as person whom we consider today in history.* Israel witnesses to a personal God who actively intervenes in history and actively confronts men and nations today, compelling them into a position of decision where they decide for him or against him, where they choose life or death.

So often people today talk about the Christian faith as if there is no personal God to whom we must render account. They talk as if all that matters is a way of life, a certain standard of moral conduct, a system of belief. So often people speak as if God does not call us to decision. The whole question of evangelism and the need for personal decision is often unpopular in certain circles. The very presence of the Jews reminds us that we have to do with

a personal God, who encounters us and who compels us to choose for him or against him, life or death.

Again, nations and governments often act as if God is distant and is not concerned about the way nations behave today. They often act as if God does not exist. The presence of the Jews and their restoration to the Promised Land remind us that God does exist and remind us that God is concerned about what nations are doing. He actively intervenes in history and every nation must give account to him. He is Lord of all history.

7 Israel frequently is the focus of man's anger with God and thereby highlights that anger. Natural man does not want God to reign over him. He wants to be like God, to have all power, to be master of his own life and the world. He would like to remove God from the earth and to forget God. Yet he cannot. The Jews, God's chosen people, remind him of the living and only true God. Their presence disturbs his conscience. He wants to remove this reminder of the living God and so, again and again, he tries to destroy the Jews. He excuses his anger against the Jews because of the many faults of the Jews, although the faults which he sees in them are really his own writ large, and because of the complexity of the situations in which the Jews are placed. He wrongly blames the Jews for all his problems. He imagines, sinfully, that his own survival, his mastery of his own destiny and the world, depend on the removal of the Jews. Yet, every decision he makes in regard to the Jews as Jews reflects the decisions he makes in regard to God. His anger with the Jews as Jews directly reflects his anger with God. Therefore the Jews, God's chosen people and instrument of God's salvation for the world, have suffered and their sufferings highlight natural man's real attitude to God.

8. Israel witnesses to the fact that there is a hidden process of judgement going on all through history and that all nations are held in continuous account to God. In calling Israel to be his servant and instrument for the redeeming of the world, God related himself to Israel in a way in which he did not relate himself to any other nation. As his representative in the world, the other peoples of the world, in their encounter with Israel, encounter God and their treatment of Israel reflects their desired treatment of God and indicates, in some measure, their acceptance or rejection of his plan as salvation for mankind. From such encounters with God there flow the inevitable consequences of divine blessing or judgement. Through succeeding generations in history, the rise and fall of many nations and individuals testify to

this fact. In loving Israel they have been blessed and in hating and persecuting Israel they have encountered God's displeasure. God's word to Abraham (Gen. 12:3, see also Gen. 27:29; Num. 24:9), which was fulfilled and sealed in Jesus Christ the Lord and Judge of all, has been, and is being, remarkably confirmed.

In promoting the Holocaust, Hitler promised the final solution of the Jewish problem, with the extinction of the Jews. Hitler fell and in a short space of time the Jewish people, delivered from the gates of death, became a nation restored to the Promised Land. What a witness to the hand of God! (Amos 10:14-15.)

Under the hand of God, Israel has been placed at the heart of world politics and repeatedly is the focus of world attention. Israel, through her conflict with the Arabs, lies at the heart of the energy crisis and the disruption of the world economy. What of the remarkable victories of Israel through successive wars? God's hand is upon Israel confronting the nations of the world and calling them to account. 'Lo I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the people round about; it will be against Judah also in the siege against Jerusalem. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will come together against it.... The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of Hosts, their God.... On that day the Lord shall put a shield about the inhabitants of Jerusalem.... And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem' (Zech. 12:2, 3, 5, 8, 9.)

Israel is not more righteous than the other nations. God said of old, 'Thou art a stiffnecked people' (Deut. 9:6; also 9:13; 10:16 and see 7:7-9). It is a matter of her calling as an instrument for God's saving of the nations. Israel, by her presence and through all that concerns her, is made by God to witness to God in the midst of his world today. Every action, by every nation, concerning her is a moral action and every decision concerning her a spiritual decision, through which governments and nations are being confronted by God and tested by him. 'He has showed you, o man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8).

Sometimes people think of the Judgement of God as something which relates only to the last day. Jesus in his teaching concerning the Judgement (Matt. 25:31-46) makes clear that this is not so. There is today, in our encounter with the poor and needy, the sick and imprisoned, a hidden process of judgement