



*Comfort, Comfort
My People*

Towards a Growing Adventist–Jewish Friendship

Richard Elofer, Editor

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Towards a Growing Adventist-Jewish Friendship
Adventist-Jewish Conference Papers
Jerusalem, February 6-12, 2006

Richard Elofer
Editor

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Comfort, Comfort My People
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Comfort, Comfort My People

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Adventist-Jewish Conference Papers
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Richard Elofer
Editor

Department of World Mission
Andrews University
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INTRODUCTION

The World Adventist-Jewish Friendship Center (WJFC) serves the world community with love and compassion, embracing God's call to "comfort my people" with a reconciling message of "hope, faith and love." WJFC is one expression of the historic Adventist movement continuing the church's commitment to proclaim Bible truths to every person.

The Adventist-Jewish Conference held in Jerusalem in 2006 was a historic event for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Conference adopted a statement (see page 206) defining a wide range of relationships between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Jewish people. This ground-breaking statement will serve to create a better understanding among church members, Jewish people, and the world community.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church takes its message and mission from the Bible. Holding the sacredness of God's Word as a fundamental pillar of faith, this value forms a natural bond with Jewish people. The Seventh-day Adventist Church owes a huge appreciation to the Jewish faith for sacredly guarding the historic truths of the Bible.

As the conference materials find a place in the hearts of sincere seekers of truth, may God bind us together in hope, faith, love, and mission.

Michael L. Ryan
Vice-President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

PREFACE

The fact that the Seventh-day Adventist movement takes its inspiration, mandate, and identity from the Bible brings us into close connection with Jewish believers in God.

For example, a passage that has always had special importance to us is the prophecy in Revelation 14:6-13. It is directed to “those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” but also to God’s holy people who have “obedience to God’s commandments and faithfulness to Jesus.” Letting this prophecy define our identity, it is obvious that Adventists are called to befriend and seek to understand also the Jewish people wherever they may live in the world.

This is so, not only because the Jews are a distinct people in the world, but because of the special affinity that exists between Adventists and Jews. Our Christian faith was born among Jewish people, the first Christians were Jews, and even today Adventists have many things in common with Jewish practices and beliefs in that we share respect for and obedience to the Hebrew Bible of Jesus, seeking to understand New Testament Christianity from its Jewish roots—long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For this and other reasons, Ellen White gave some very clear and strong counsel to our church, urging us to seriously consider our affinity with Jewish people and seek to find ways of introducing them to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

With this background, the Trans-European Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists worked with other valued partners in the General Conference—the office of Adventist Mission and the World Adventist-Jewish Study Centre—to organize the special conference near Jerusalem which took place in February 2006. The most important of the papers presented and

discussed on that occasion have been collected here for the benefit of different readers. We hope it will stimulate a heightened mutual interest in Adventist-Jewish relations from both Adventists and Jews.

As Adventists, we believe in God as Creator—not only as Originator but as One who continues to sustain His creation by on going saving acts. In this mission of God to the world, we believe that He has made Jesus our Saviour, the Lord of our life, and Priestly Mediator between God and us, and that God’s promises of a new heaven and a new earth will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ comes as Ruler of the Universe. While we wish to share these treasures of our faith with all other peoples, we also understand that we are called to meet others with respect and humility. True mission can only take place in friendship and trust as we recognize our mutual dependence on God who created us all. It is therefore vital that we understand what Adventists and Jews have in common, that we remove obstacles and prejudice that prevent us from talking to each other in full confidence, and that we learn to communicate about the important matters of faith in a language that we both can understand. These were some of the considerations that influenced us to invite various speakers on specific topics in order to take stock of where we stand and how we can improve relations with our Jewish friends.

As you read the articles in this book prayerfully and thoughtfully, it is our deep wish that God will bless you and let His face shine upon you, that He will send His Spirit over you and fill your heart with joy and peace.

Bertil Wiklander
President
Trans-European Division
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since the day I was appointed as Director of the Global Mission Worldwide Adventist-Jewish Friendship Center (WJFC), I had the desire to organize a world conference on the topic “Israel and the Church.” It is certainly one of the topics which is not very much studied in our church and needs more investigation from our scholars and theologians.

The project was presented to the Trans-European Division (TED) Adventist-Jewish Friendship Committee, who recommended it to the TED Executive Committee, where it was approved. The TED administration then brought an application for funding to the General Conference Council on Evangelism and Witnessing (CEW) who decided to support the project financially. The result was that the first Adventist Jewish Friendship Conference was held in Jerusalem on February 6 to 12, 2006.

I would like to thank all the people who have contributed to the success of this project and the publication of the conference papers in this book.

My first thanks go to Dr. Bertil Wiklander, who as President of the Trans-European Division, not only supported the project and presented it to the CEW of the General Conference, but also took an active part in the conference itself. Then I want to thank Peter Roennfeldt for his encouragement and his initial steps in the organization of the conference. His task was taken over by Dr. Daniel Duda, who organized the speakers and their topics in the TED Adventist-Jewish Relations Committee. Thanks are due also to Esti Pujic who organized and managed all the practical details of the conference, gathering information, communicating with the lecturers and participants, and dealing with registration and many other things. She was assisted by Nina Usacheva based in Jerusalem.

From the General Conference I would like to thank Dr. Mike Ryan, who was the first director of Global Mission and the initiator of the WJFC and supported me in all my initiatives on the Adventist-Jewish Friendship ministry. I thank also Gary Krause, current director of Global Mission who supported fully the project.

A special expression of gratitude to every pastor and theologian who accepted to come to Jerusalem and take time for preparing and presenting papers of great quality, and who accepted them to be published in this book.

I would also like to thank especially Bruce Bauer, from the Department of World Mission at Andrews University, who has allowed us to publish this book under the series of books published by the department and also who gave me advice for the publication of this book. I would also like to thank Coral Johnson, who read carefully the first typescript of the lectures before the conference and again the entire manuscript for the present book.

Finally, my greatest feeling of gratitude goes to the God of Israel, who is our God and who helps me in the task entrusted to me by the General Conference and the Trans-European Division. Praises to our God and His Messiah Jesus of Nazareth!

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Section I.

Experiencing Jewish Thinking

Chapter 1

* * *

JESUS THE JEW

(Matthew 4:1-11; 22:34-40)

BERTIL WIKLANDER

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (NIV, stands for "The New International Version").

Comfort, Comfort My People

Adventists and Jews agree on one obvious fact about Jesus: that he was a Jew. However, the far-reaching implications of this recognition for understanding Jesus the Messiah tend to be routinely passed over.

The biblical gospels underline that Jesus was born a Jew. Look at the genealogies in Matthew and Luke! Look at the setting of the story of Jesus! And look at various other biblical evidences! But this is where Jesus' Jewishness stops for many. In his teaching, it is often said, Jesus brought something new. We all know he did. But when this is taken a step further, to a denial of the theology of Jesus as being Jewish, I disagree. And this morning's devotional is going to be an argument in favor of the idea that Jesus was a Jewish teacher and a Jewish theologian.

Before we look more closely at the Scripture reading this morning, a comment is appropriate on the reasons for the denial of the Jewish roots of the theology of Jesus. Abraham Joshua Heschel has put it this way:

The Christian message, which in its origins intended to be an affirmation and culmination of Judaism, became very early diverted into a repudiation and negation of Judaism; obsolescence and abrogation of Jewish faith became conviction and doctrine; the new covenant was conceived not as a new phase or disclosure but as abolition and replacement of the ancient one; theological thinking fashioned its terms in a spirit of antithesis to Judaism. Contrast and contradiction, rather than acknowledgement of roots; relatedness and indebtedness, became the perspective. Judaism a religion of law; Christianity a religion of grace; Judaism teaches a God of wrath, Christianity a God of love; Judaism a religion of slavish obedience, Christianity the conviction of free men; Judaism is particularism, Christianity is universalism; Judaism seeks work-righteousness, Christianity preaches faith-righteousness; the teaching of the old covenant a religion of fear, the gospel of the new covenant a religion of love (1990:320).

In the history of the Sabbath, scholars have demonstrated how one of the primary factors in the change of Sabbath to Sunday was the attempt to distance the early Christian church from Judaism and from the Torah. The denial of Jesus' Jewishness went hand in hand with the denial of the biblical Sabbath and many other original truths that the early Christians shared with Judaism.

As Seventh-day Adventists we believe in the sanctity of the biblical Sabbath and understand church history as a movement away from God's original truth. And on that basis we call Christians to Bible-based reform. We may therefore