

## *A Jewish Theology of Liberation*

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FROM THE ORIGINS of the Zionist movement in the nineteenth century, the Hebrew Bible has been used in various ways to justify different approaches to the question of the Jewish return to the Holy Land. Initially secular Zionists simply disregarded biblical teaching about messianic redemption. In their view, it has been a mistake to wait for the Messiah to resurrect the dead and miraculously lead the Jewish people back to Zion. Orthodox critics of Zionism, on the other hand, regarded the creation of a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land as anathema: the actions of secular pioneers, they argued, were undermining God's providential plan of redemption. Early religious Zionists, however, believed that Jews should settle in Eretz Israel in anticipation of messianic deliverance. More recently there has been widespread belief that the creation of the state of Israel is the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Such a conviction has fuelled the Jewish determination to expand Jewish settlement building in the West Bank. There is, however, an alternative biblical tradition which calls for a different attitude toward the Middle East crisis.

### **Early Secular Zionism**

With the conversion of Sabbatai Zevi (1626–76), the self-proclaimed Messiah, the Jewish preoccupation with messianic deliverance diminished. Many Jews became disillusioned with centuries of messianic anticipation and disappointment; the longing for the Messiah who would lead the Jewish people to the Holy Land and bring about the end of history seemed a distant hope. Instead eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Jewry hailed the breaking down of the ghetto walls and the elimination of social barriers between Jews and Christians. In this milieu, belief in the Kingdom of God inaugur-

ated by the Messiah-king receded in importance. In its place the clarion call for liberty, equality, and fraternity signified the dawning of a golden age for the Jewish people.

Yet despite the emancipation of Jewry which took place in the nineteenth century, a number of secularists were convinced that Jews would never be secure in the countries in which they lived. In their view anti-Jewish sentiment is unavoidable. The philosopher Moses Hess (1812–75), for example, argued in *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), that anti-Jewish sentiment is unavoidable. Progressive Jews, he wrote, think they can escape from Judeophobia by recoiling from any Jewish national expression. Yet the hatred of Jews is inescapable. No reform of the religion is radical enough to avoid such sentiments and even conversion to Christianity cannot relieve the Jew of this disability. “Jewish noses,” he wrote, “cannot be reformed and the black, wavy hair of the Jews will not be changed into blond by conversion or straightened out by constant combing.”<sup>1</sup> For Hess, Jews will always remain strangers among the nations; nothing can alter this state of affairs. The only solution to the problem of Jew-hatred is for the Jewish people to come to terms with their national identity.

Echoing such a view, Leon Pinsker (1821–91), a medical doctor active in The Society for the Promotion of Culture among the Jews of Russia, published *Auto-Emancipation* in 1882. In this work he asserted that the Jewish problem is as unresolved in the modern world as it was in former times. In essence, this dilemma concerns the inassimilable character of Jewish identity in the countries where Jews are in the minority. In such cases there is no basis for mutual respect between Jews and non-Jews. “The Jewish people,” he wrote, “has no fatherland of its own, though many motherlands; it has no rallying point, no centre of gravity, no government of its own, no accredited representatives. It is everywhere a guest and nowhere at home.”<sup>2</sup> Among the nations of the world, the Jews are like a nation long since dead: the dead walking among the living. What is required, therefore is a secure land for the Jewish nation: “We need nothing but a large piece of land for our poor brothers; a piece of land which shall remain our property, from which no foreign master can expel us.”<sup>3</sup>

More than any other figure, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) has become identified with modern secular Zionism. Herzl’s analysis of modern Jewish existence was not original—many of his ideas were preceded in the writings of Hess and Pinsker. Yet what was novel about Herzl’s espousal of Zionism was his success in stimulating interest and debate about a Jewish state in the highest diplomatic and political circles. In *The Jewish State*, published in 1896, he wrote:

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It

<sup>1</sup> Moses Hess, “Rome and Jerusalem,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation* (London: Association of Youth Zionist Societies, 1932), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Pinsker, “Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew,” in Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea*, 194.

is not permitted us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens.... The majority decide who the "alien" is; this and all else in the relations between peoples, is a matter of power.<sup>4</sup>

Like Hess and Pinsker, Herzl maintained that there is only one remedy for the malady of antisemitism: the creation of a Jewish commonwealth. In the conclusion to *The Jewish State*, he expressed the longing of the entire nation for the creation of such a refuge from centuries of suffering:

What glory awaits the selfless fighters for the cause! Therefore I believe that a wondrous breed of Jews will spring up from the earth. The Maccabees will rise again. Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews who will it shall achieve their state.<sup>5</sup>

### Jewish Anti-Zionism

Although some Orthodox Jewish figures endorsed the Zionist movement, Orthodoxy in Germany, Hungary, and Eastern European countries protested against this new development in Jewish life. To promote this policy an Ultra-Orthodox movement, Agudat Israel, was created in 1912 to unite rabbis and laity against Zionism. Although the Torah maintains that it is the duty of the pious to return to Zion, these Orthodox Jews pointed out that such an ingathering must be preceded by messianic redemption. In the nineteenth century, the spiritual leader of German Jewish Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–88), decreed before the advent of Zionism that it is forbidden to accelerate divine deliverance actively. In the light of such teaching, Zionism was viewed by the Ultra-Orthodox as a satanic conspiracy against God's will and equated with pseudo-messianism.

Yet despite such attitudes, Scripture decrees that it is obligatory for Jews to return to the Holy Land, and this prescription called for an Orthodox response. Accordingly, Ultra-Orthodox figures differentiated between the obligation to return to the Holy Land and the duty of residing there. Orthodox Jews, they argued, were exempt from actually settling in the land for such reasons as physical danger, economic difficulties, and inability to educate the young. In addition these critics maintained that Zionism is not simply a movement to rebuild Palestine; it is a heretical attempt to usurp the privilege of the Messiah to establish a Jewish kingdom. Further, Ultra-Orthodox spokesmen

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Herzl, "The Jewish State," in Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea*, 209.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

declared that Zionism seeks to leave religion out of the national life; as a result a Jewish state would betray the ideals of the Jewish heritage. Throughout its history, the nation has been animated by spiritual principles, and refused to perish because of its adherence to traditional precepts. If Israel endured through thousands of years of persecution, it would be folly to abandon the religious values which kept alive the hope for Jewish survival. Hence, ideologists of the ultra-right such as Isaac Breuer (1883–1946) insisted that Zionism was depriving the Jewish people of its religious commitment in a misguided pursuit of modern notions of nationhood. This, he believed, is the most pernicious form of assimilation.

For these reasons Agudat Israel denounced the policies of modern Zionists and refused to collaborate with religious Zionist parties such as the Mizrahi. In Palestine itself the extreme Orthodox movement joined with Agudat Israel in its struggle against Zionism. Frequently its leaders protested to the British government and the League of Nations about the Zionist quest to make a national home in Palestine. Occasionally it even joined forces with Arab leaders. This conflict eventually resulted in the murder of a member of the executive of the Agudat, Jacob Israël de Haan (1881–1924). A Dutch Jew by origin, he denounced Zionism in cables to British newspapers, attacking the Balfour Commission and British officers for their seemingly pro-Zionist stance. On June 30, 1924, he was assassinated in Jerusalem by the Haganah. For the Ultra-Orthodox Jews of Jerusalem, de Haan became a martyr for the glory of God—this incident illustrated the depths of hatred of Zionism among right-wing Orthodox.

Paralleling the Orthodox critique, liberal Jews attacked Zionism for its utopian character. According to these critics, it is simply impossible to bring about the emigration of millions of Jews to a country which was already populated. In addition, in Western countries, nationalism was being supplanted by a vision of a global community—it was thus reactionary to promote the creation of a Jewish homeland. In Eastern Europe on the other hand there was still a Jewish national consciousness. Yet Zionism is unable to solve the problems facing Jewry. Multitudes of Jews in Eastern Europe were enduring hardship; only a small minority of these individuals would be able to settle in Palestine. Hence these liberal propagandists maintained that assimilation alone could serve as a remedy for the Jewish problem.

In response, Zionists protested that assimilation is undesirable and inevitably impossible—such a stance was influenced by racial theories published during the first two decades before the First World War. According to these writings, distinctive qualities were inherited regardless of social, cultural, or economic factors. For the Zionists, the Jewish people constitute an identifiable ethnic group whose identity cannot be manipulated through social integration. Antisemitism, they argued, cannot be eradicated. It is an inevitable response to the Jewish populace no matter what efforts are made to assimilate Jews into foreign cultures. Further, since Jews are predominately involved in trade and the professions—rather than agriculture and industry—they are bound to be the first targets during times of crisis. Pointing to Jewish history, the Zionists emphasized that in the past there were rich and powerful Jews, but without warning they lost their

positions and were reduced to poverty. There is thus no security for Jews in societies where they are in the minority. Zionism is the only solution.

Liberals viewed this interpretation of Jewish history as a distortion of the past. Previously, Jewish emancipation depended on the goodwill of rulers, but in contemporary society, they stated it would result from global socio-economic factors. The Zionists disagreed. The lessons of Jewish history, they believed, must guide current Jewish thought and action. Judeophobia is an inherent aspect of modern society, and those who champion liberal ideologies such as socialism will be disappointed. Everywhere Jews encounter the sign: "No Jews admitted." Despite the fact that modern Jewry has been assimilated into foreign cultures, Jews are not fully accepted. Having dissociated themselves from their coreligionists, they are rejected by their Christian neighbours. Despite fleeing from the ghetto, they are not at home in their adopted countries.

### Religious and Spiritual Zionism

Although the majority of Orthodox adherents were highly critical of Zionism along with liberal critics, there emerged a new trend: the advocacy of an active approach to Jewish messianism. Rather than adopt a passive attitude towards the problem of redemption, these Orthodox writers maintained that the Jewish nation must engage in the creation of a homeland in anticipation of the advent of the Messiah. Pre-eminent among such religious Zionists was the Serbian rabbi Yehudah Chai Alkalai (1798–1878), who published the booklet *Shema Israel* in 1834, in which he advocated the establishment of Jewish colonies in Palestine. When the Jews of Damascus were charged with the blood libel four years later, Alkalai became convinced that the Jewish people could be secure only in their own land. Henceforth he published a series of books and pamphlets explaining his plan of self-redemption.

In *Minhat Yehudi* he argued on the basis of Scripture that the Messiah will not miraculously materialize; rather he will be preceded by various preparatory events. In this light the Holy Land needs to be populated by Jewry in preparation for messianic deliverance. "This new redemption will," he wrote,

be different; our land is waste and desolate, and we shall have to build houses, dig wells, and plant vines and olive trees. We are, therefore, commanded not to attempt to go at once and all together in the Holy Land.... The Lord desires that we be redeemed in dignity; we cannot, therefore, migrate in a mass, for we should then have to live like Bedouins, scattered in tents all over the fields of the Holy Land. Redemption must come slowly. The land must, by degrees, be built up and prepared.<sup>6</sup>

Another early pioneer of religious Zionism was Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), the rabbi of Toruń in Poland (then Prussia). An early defender of Orthodoxy

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<sup>6</sup> Yehudah Chai Alkalai, "The Third Redemption," in Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea*, 105.

against the advances made by Reform Judaism, he championed the commandments prescribing faith in the Messiah and devotion to the Holy Land. In 1836 he expressed his commitment to Jewish settlement in Palestine in a letter to the head of the Berlin branch of the Rothschild family. “The beginning of the redemption,” he wrote, “will come through natural causes by human effort and by the will of the governments to gather the scattered of Israel into the Holy Land.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1862 he published *Derishat Zion*. In this treatise he advocated the return of Jews to their native soil. The redemption of Israel, he argued, will not take place miraculously: “The Almighty, blessed be his Name, will not suddenly descend from on high and command his people to go forth. Neither will he send the Messiah from heaven in a twinkling of an eye, to sound the great trumpet for the scattered of Israel and gather them into Jerusalem. He will not surround the holy city with a wall of fire or cause the holy Temple to descend from heaven.”<sup>8</sup> Instead the redemption of Israel will take place slowly, through awakening support from philanthropists and gaining the consent of other nations to the gathering of the Jewish people into the Holy Land. This view, Kalischer maintained, is inherent in Scripture. Thus the prophet Isaiah declared:

In the days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.... In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the Lord will thresh out the grain, and we will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain of Jerusalem. (Isa 27.6, 12–13)

Following in the footsteps of Alkalai and Kalischer, Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Palestine following the establishment of the British Mandate, formulated a vision of messianic redemption integrating the creation of a Jewish state. Such a conception was influenced by stirrings within the religious wing of the *Chovevei Zion* movement. Leaders like Shmuel Mohilever, Yitzhak Yaakov Reines, and Yechiel Michal Pines paved the way for Kook’s religious espousal of Jewish nationalism. In Kook’s writings there is the first attempt to combine systematically the centrality of the Holy Land within the religious tradition with the Zionist attempt to resettle the Jewish people in their homeland.

Unlike secularists who advocated practical efforts to secure a Jewish state, Kook embarked on the task of reinterpreting the Jewish religious tradition to transform religious messianic anticipation into the basis for collaboration with the aspirations of modern Zionism. According to Kook, the centrality of Israel is a fundamental dimension of Jewish life and a crucial element of Jewish religious consciousness. Yet the fervent belief

<sup>7</sup> Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, “Seeking Zion,” in Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea*, 110.

<sup>8</sup> In Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 53.

in messianic deliverance has not been accompanied by an active policy of resettlement. This disjunction between religious aspirations for the return from exile and the desire of most Jews to live in the diaspora highlights the confusion in Jewish thinking about the role of Israel in Jewish life. There is thus a contradiction between the messianic belief in a return to Zion and the accommodating attitude to exile of most Jews throughout history.

For Kook, the attachment of the land must serve as the foundation of Jewish life in the modern world. Although the secular pioneers who came to Palestine were motivated by ideological convictions alien to traditional Judaism, their actions are paradoxically part of God's plan of redemption. In the cosmic scheme of the divine will, seemingly atheistic and secular actions are absorbed into the unfolding of God's plan for his chosen people. Therefore these pioneers unintentionally contributed to the advent of the Messiah. Without consciously recognizing the significance of their work, they served God's purposes. Thus Kook maintained:

Many of the adherents of the present nationalist revival maintain that they are secularists. If a Jewish secular nationalism were really imaginable, then we would indeed be in danger of falling so low as to be beyond redemption. But Jewish nationalism is a form of self-delusion: the spirit of Israel is so closely linked to the spirit of God that a Jewish nationalist, no matter how secularist his intention may be, must, despite himself, affirm the divine. An individual can sever the tie that binds him to life eternal, but the house of Israel as a whole cannot. All of its most cherished national possessions—its land, language, history and customs—are vessels of the spirit of the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Such observations led Kook to insist that the divine spark is evident in the work of secular Zionists who sacrificed themselves for the land of Israel. Such pioneers were not godless blasphemers, but servants of the Lord. Unaware of their divine mission, they actively engaged in bringing about God's kingdom on earth. Religious Zionism must grasp the underlying meaning of these efforts to redeem the land and attempt to educate secularists about the true nature of their work. In Kook's view the redemption of Israel is part of a universal process involving all humanity. The salvation of the Jewish nation is not simply an event of particular importance—it provides the basis for the restoration of the entire world (*tikkun olam*).

### Exodus and Liberation

A central principle of religious Zionism is that Eretz Israel was promised by God to the ancient Israelites and that Jews have the permanent and inalienable right to the land. Central to this vision is the conviction that Jerusalem is a symbol of the Holy Land and their return to it is promised by God in numerous biblical prophecies. Following the

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<sup>9</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook, "Lights for Rebirth," in Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea*, 430.

teaching of Kook, religious Zionists such as Gush Emunim maintained that Zionism is not simply a political movement; rather, it was used by God to initiate the return of the Jews to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is God's will that Jews return to their home to establish a Jewish sovereign state in which they can live according to the laws of Torah and halakha. In their view, it is a *mitzvah* (commandment) to cultivate the land. Therefore settling Israel is an obligation of religious Jews. Today the Orthodox continue to focus on this one central theme in Scripture: God's promise of the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Despite their different orientations, traditional religious Zionists have universally embraced this biblical motif as a justification for their view of the Middle East conflict. In their view, the Holy Land belongs to the Jewish nation. This is a divine mandate and a crucial element in God's providential plan for his chosen people.

There is, however, another fundamental theme within the Hebrew Bible which provides a very different perspective. In Scripture, the Exodus experience is paradigmatic. In ancient Egypt, the Israelites were exploited and oppressed. This experience involved a degradation so severe that it caused the people to turn to God for deliverance. The Egyptians overwhelmed the Hebrew slaves with work: they "made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor" (Exod 1.14). Such affliction caused the people to cry out to God for liberation.

In the biblical account God is on the side of the oppressed. If there is a single passage that encapsulates the liberation themes of scripture, it is the Exodus describing God who takes sides, intervening to free the poor and oppressed. The Book of Exodus declares that God heard the groaning of the people and remembered the covenant with them (Exod 2.23–25). God took sides with his chosen people, stating that they would be liberated from their oppressors. Moses was to lead them out of bondage (Exod 3.7–10).

From this act of deliverance Jews have constantly derived a message of hope. If God was on the side of the poor in ancient times, surely he will continue to take sides with the downtrodden in all ages. Repeatedly, as Jews faced persecution, suffering, and murder, they derived hope from this account of divine deliverance. Yet, the biblical narrative is not confined to the destiny of the Jewish nation. The profundity of the Exodus consists in its significance for all—the past holds a promise for those who understand its relevance. Its message applies to all peoples in economic, political, social, and cultural bondage.

Throughout Jewish history, the experience of the Exodus has been typologically significant. It is a paradigm of divine liberation of the oppressed and persecuted. The Exodus is thus a key element in the self-understanding of the Jewish nation. In the biblical period, details of the Exodus were recorded in cultic sayings (Ps 107.35–38), in Wisdom literature (Wisdom 19), and by the prophets (Isaiah 63). After the exile, the Exodus continued to play a dominant role in the Jewish faith. In particular, the festival of Passover was regarded as crucially important in the religious life of the nation.

The Passover seder envisages the Exodus experience as a symbol of freedom from

oppression, and the whole of the Haggadah is pervaded by the image of God as the Saviour of humankind. For this reason the Passover service begins with an ancient formulaic invitation to those who hunger or are in need to participate in the festival:

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the Land of Egypt. All who hunger, let them come and eat: all who are in need, let them come and celebrate the Passover. Now we are here—next year we shall be free men.

Any Jew who sits down to the Passover meal and is oblivious to the call of those who are in want has missed the meaning of the celebration.

The Passover celebration of the Exodus is thus a symbolic exaltation of freedom. Jews are to rejoice in God's liberation of their ancestors, in which each of them takes part. Throughout the history of the Jewish people, this festival has awakened the spirit of the nation to the significance of human liberation. The biblical account of the Exodus, embodied in the liturgy of the Haggadah, has played a central role in the Jewish quest for human dignity and freedom. The Passover ceremony thus unites the Jewish people with their ancestors who endured slavery and oppression in Egyptian bondage. Despite the persecution of centuries, Jews are confident of eventual deliverance and the ultimate redemption of humankind. The message of the Exodus calls the Jewish nation to hold steadfast to their conviction that justice and freedom will prevail throughout the world. Jews therefore possess a biblical heritage and vision of the transformation of society, and the Exodus event unites them in a common hope and aspiration for the triumph of justice. Remembering the divine deliverance of the ancient Israelites, Jews in Israel and the diaspora can work together for the emancipation of those who long to escape from degradation and exile.

### **The Kingdom of God**

Linked to the Exodus event is the Jewish concept of the kingdom of God. In Scripture, the kingdom of God is understood as intimately connected with the establishment of justice on earth. In the Psalms, for example, God is extolled as a king who judges justly: it was he who righted injustice; he is the heavenly king who established and maintains justice on earth:

But the Lord sits enthroned for ever  
He has established his throne for judgement;  
He judges the world with righteousness;  
He judges the peoples with equity.  
The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
A stronghold in times of trouble.  
And those who know thy name put their trust in thee,  
For Thou, O Lord, has not forsaken those who seek thee. (Ps 9.7–10)

According to Scripture, God's kingdom is inconsistent with injustice and social misery. The effort to bring about the perfection of the world so that God will reign in majesty is a human responsibility. Jewish ethics as enshrined in the Bible and in rabbinic literature are inextricably related to the coming of God's kingdom. In this context a number of distinctive characteristics of Jewish morality are expressed in the Jewish tradition.

First, there is an intensity of passion about the moral demands made upon human beings. For sins of personal greed, social inequity, and deceit, the prophet in God's name denounced the people and threatened horrific catastrophes. The voice of the prophet was continually charged with agony and agitation. Such shrill denunciations of iniquity were the result of the prophetic conviction that people must be stirred from their spiritual slumber. As Abraham Heschel wrote: "The prophet's word is a scream in the night... while the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from heaven."<sup>10</sup>

Second, Jewish ethics requires that each person be treated equally. Biblical and rabbinic sources show a constant concern to eliminate arbitrary distinctions between individuals so as to establish a proper balance between competing claims. On the basis of the biblical view that everyone is created in the image of God, the Torah declares that false and irrelevant distinctions must not be introduced to disqualify human beings from the right to justice. The fatherhood and motherhood of God implies human solidarity. The Torah rejects the idea of different codes of morality for oneself and others, for the great and the humble, for rulers and ruled, for individuals and nations, for private and public citizens. Given this understanding of the equality of all people, the Torah singles out the underprivileged and the defenceless in society for consideration.

Since all of humanity is created in the image of God, Judaism maintains that there is no fundamental difference between Jew and non-Jew: God's ethical demands apply to all. Indeed, according to the Talmud, the righteous non-Jew is accorded a place in the hereafter: "the pious of all nations have a share in the world to come" (*Sanhedrin* 105a). In this light the rabbis emphasized that Jews must treat their non-Jewish neighbours with loving-kindness. One of the most authoritative rabbis of the nineteenth century, Isaac Spektor (1817–96) declared:

It is well known that the early as well as the later Geonim wrote that we must abide by the law of the land and refrain from dealing unjustly with a non-Jew.... Therefore my brethren, listen to my voice and live. Study in our Torah to love the Almighty and love people regardless of faith or nationality. Follow justice and do righteousness with Jew and non-Jew alike. The people of my community know that I always caution them in my talks and warn them that there is absolutely no difference whether one does evil to a Jew or a non-Jew. It is a well known fact that when people

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<sup>10</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (2 vols; New York: Harper & Row, 1969–71), 16.

come to me to settle a dispute, I do not differentiate between Jew and non-Jew. For that is the law according to our holy Torah.<sup>11</sup>

These specific qualities of Jewish ethics illustrate its humane orientation to all of God's creatures. Throughout biblical and rabbinic literature, Jews were encouraged to strive for the highest conception of life in which the rule of truth, righteousness, and holiness will be established among humankind. Such a desire is the eternal hope of God's people—a longing for God's kingdom as expressed in the daily liturgy of the synagogue. The kingdom is not an internalized, spiritualized, otherworldly concept. Rather, it involves human activity in a historical context. The moral life is at the centre of the unfolding of God's plan for humanity.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, at the end of the nineteenth century, traditional Orthodox Judaism—basing itself on biblical prophecy—regarded Zionism with contempt. Secular Zionists such as Leon Pinsker, Moses Hess, and Theodor Herzl were viewed as violators of the Torah. In their determination to create a Jewish commonwealth in the Holy Land, they had usurped God's plan of salvation for his chosen people. Other Orthodox thinkers, including Yehuda Chai Alkalai, Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, and Abraham Isaac Kook, however, interpreted Scripture in a different light. In their view, it is a mistake to think that God will miraculously send the Messiah to resurrect the dead and lead the Jewish people back to their ancient homeland. Rather, Jews must settle and rebuild Eretz Israel in anticipation of messianic deliverance. According to Kook, Jewish pioneers are fulfilling God's plan of redemption even if they are unaware of the religious implications of their actions. Following Kook, religious Zionists adhere to the belief that Israel belongs to the Jewish nation given God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

There is, however, another biblical framework for viewing Jewish responsibility in the Holy Land. A Jewish theology of liberation based on biblical teaching compels Jews to view the Middle East conflict in moral terms. In the contemporary world where Jews are often comfortable and affluent, the prophetic message of liberation can easily be forgotten. Yet, a theology of liberation—with its focus on the desperate situation of those at the bottom of society—can act as a clarion call, awakening the people of Israel to their divinely appointed task. Jewish tradition points to God's kingdom as the goal and hope of humankind: a world in which all peoples and nations will turn away from injustice. For over 3,000 years the land of Israel has been at the centre of the Jewish faith. Now that the Jewish nation has re-established itself in Eretz Israel after centuries of exile, what is now needed is for Jews worldwide to turn their attention to the Palestinian problem. The Jewish longing for statehood has been fulfilled. As

<sup>11</sup> Isaac E. Spektor, "Nachal Yitzchak," in *Morality, Halakha and the Jewish Tradition*, ed. Shubert Spero (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1983), 134.

an empowered people, we must empower those who cry out in their distress. God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must not be allowed to overshadow the Bible's commitment to the liberation of all of God's people.