

Beginning with the End: The Place of Eschatology in the Messianic Jewish Canonical Narrative

**A paper by Mark S Kinzer delivered at the Fourth Hashivenu Forum,
February 5, 2002, in Pasadena, CA
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A “canonical narrative,” as defined by R. Kendall Soulen, is “an interpretive instrument” – a hermeneutical tool – that orders the Bible’s complex story line so as to present it as “a theological and narrative unity.”¹ While the Bible describes people and events set in the distant past, its narrative transcends that past. It includes prophetic and apocalyptic material, and even its accounts of historical events are told for the purpose of shedding light on the future. Therefore, our canonical narrative must deal with the future as well as with the past.

The title and topic of this paper might lead one to expect discussion of end-times scenarios, millennial controversies, or the imminence of Messiah’s coming. However, that is not my purpose here. Instead, I will inquire into how the Bible’s eschatological vision shapes the entire Biblical narrative, and is shaped by it. How is the description of the creation of the world informed by convictions concerning its ultimate consummation? How do the election of Israel and the Sinai covenant and its institutions relate to creation’s destined fulfillment? How are the enfleshment of the primordial Human and his death and resurrection a preview of the eschaton? How do the gift of the Ruach, the exile of the *Shekhinah*, and the intertwined histories of the Christian church and the Jewish people point to that final breakthrough that will simultaneously renew, transform, and transcend history?

This last question demonstrates an aspect of the canonical narrative that we could easily overlook. We are not just attempting to understand the story told by the Bible. We are also seeking to place the history of the last two thousand years within the framework of that story. Thus, the canonical narrative is a hermeneutical tool both for reading the Bible and also for

interpreting history in the light of the Biblical narrative – or, rather, as an integral part of that narrative.

We come to these questions with a unique perspective. We are Jews, rooted in Jewish soil. That soil is Israel’s experience of a continuous covenant existence through the centuries, and the literary, liturgical, and institutional embodiments of that experience. At the same time, we are Messianic – loyal students and followers of Yeshua the Messiah, who have accepted the Apostolic Writings as the authentic witness to his mission and message. We believe that Yeshua began a decisive new phase in the outworking of the Divine plan, and that the nations of the world have been drawn into Israel’s orbit with its covenantal center. Our construal of the canonical narrative should both reflect and reinforce our identity as Messianic Jews.

Three Eschatological Horizons

David Novak employs the term “eschatological horizon” to characterize the way a theology envisions the relationship between this world (*Olam Hazeih*) and the world to come (*Olam Haba*).² This term and the concept it expresses provide a useful tool for analyzing the role of eschatology in the varied readings of the canonical narrative. A theology operates with a low eschatological horizon when it minimizes the difference between life in this world (at least among the faithful) and life in the world to come. In contrast, a theology with a high eschatological horizon accentuates the radical disjunction between these two orders of existence.

Utilizing Novak’s terminology, I will argue that three versions of the canonical narrative provide negative examples for us as we seek to develop our own Messianic Jewish perspective on the role of eschatology in the story of HaShem’s dealings with the world and with human beings.

(1) *Excessively Low Eschatological Horizon (Jewish)*. This view is found in both a traditional and a modern form. The traditional form sees the Messianic Age as a restored Davidic empire that brings peace to the world, but does not alter its fundamental ontological structure. The

¹ R. K. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 13.

modern form builds upon a utopian vision of human progress, and aims for a world of peace and justice but without any dramatic, extraordinary Divine intervention.

(2) *Excessively Low Eschatological Horizon (Christian)*. The Christian low eschatological horizon differs markedly from the Jewish version. It exaggerates the transformation of the world's ontological structure that has already occurred in the *ekklesia* through the death and resurrection of Messiah and thereby minimizes the distance between *Olam Haba* and *Olam Haze*. Rather than fashioning the world to come in the image of this world, it tends to spiritualize the future world and in like manner spiritualize and idealize life in Messiah in the present world.

(3) *Excessively High Eschatological Horizon (Jewish)*. This view maximizes the distance between Jewish life under the Torah of this age and life in the world to come, both by emphasizing the transformed character of the future world and by denying the eschatological nature of Jewish life in this world. Ironically, this perspective on Jewish life is shared by those Christians who have an excessively *low* eschatological horizon in relation to their own life in the present age. While minimizing the difference between Christian life in this world and the life of the redeemed in the world to come, they maximize this distinction for Jewish life!

I will look at each of these views in reverse order, and contrast them with how a Messianic Jewish understanding of the canonical narrative should set its eschatological horizon.

Judaism and Proleptic Eschatology

The intense rivalry and polemics between Jews and Christians over the centuries have had many regrettable consequences. One of the less recognized of those consequences is the distortion brought to both Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity as each sought to distance itself from the other. From the Jewish side, Michael Wyschogrod notes that “The temptation here is to make the contrast [between Judaism and Christianity] as sharp as possible, thereby, at times,

² D. Novak, “Beyond Supersessionism,” *First Things* 81(March 1998) 58, 60.

distorting Judaism.”³ Many Jewish thinkers have succumbed to this temptation when dealing with eschatology and Jewish existence in this world. Arthur Cohen is a case in point:

The Jew is the “between-man,” between time and eternity, between the sadness of the world and the joy of redemption. He neither believes that in this time and history has the Kingdom of God been foretasted nor does he know when it is that God appoints this time and history for redemption.⁴

To deny that Jewish life provides any “foretaste” of “the Kingdom of God” is to posit such a lofty eschatological horizon that the sky cannot even be glimpsed. Is this true to the Torah or to Rabbinic tradition? Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer sees the weakness of such a perspective:

In Judaism, we have stressed the communal nature of redemption and the “not yet” quality of its futurity. In my judgment, many Jews have underemphasized the idea that at least a taste of redemption is already here. The idea surfaces in the notion that the Sabbath is a foretaste of the Messianic Time, but many Jews do not put sufficient weight on this concept and spend more time speaking of past and future than of the present.⁵

The Torah itself presents Jewish life in this age as an anticipation or *prolepsis* of the life of the age to come. It does this, as Fuchs-Kreimer notes, through the institution of the Sabbath, but, even more fundamentally, through the reality that underlies the Sabbath and that is associated intimately with Israel’s life – *kedushah* (holiness).

The creation narrative of Genesis 1:1–2:3 tells us six times that God, beholding what He had made, saw that it was good (vss 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After completing the work in six days, in keeping with the numerical symbolism of the narrative, God looks upon the whole, and finds it *very good* (1:31). Thus, the world was good in all its parts, and very good in its totality.

However, the climax of the narrative comes not on the sixth day but on the seventh. Ceasing from His work, “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (2:3). The world, untarnished by any evil, was very good. But it was not yet holy. It was *chol* – profane, secular.

The Divine sanctification of the seventh day does not in itself alter the world’s profane

³ M. Wyschogrod, *Body of Faith* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996) xxxv.

⁴ A. Cohen, “The Natural and the Supernatural Jew,” *Contemporary Jewish Theology* (eds. E. N. Dorff and L. E. Newman; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 198.

⁵ N. Fuchs-Kreimer, “Redemption: What I Have Learned from Christians,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (eds. T. Frymer-Kensky et. al.; Boulder: Westview, 2000) 283.

character. God does not command Adam and Eve to keep the Sabbath, nor does the book of Genesis show us anyone doing so. The Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3 is not an institution but a hope, a promise, a pledge indicating the appointed destiny for this world that was created “very good.” The seventh day thus represents a consummation of the created order that transcends the conquest of evil and the restoration of a world that is entirely good. It represents a world that is holy, i.e., filled with the Divine Presence, like the innermost shrine of the desert sanctuary or Jerusalem temple. Thus, we see from its initial appearance in the Biblical text that holiness, *kedushah*, is itself an eschatological concept referring to an eschatological reality.⁶

The Sabbath does not become a human institution until after Israel has departed from Egypt. The *kedushah* associated with the Sabbath is likewise associated with the people of Israel and the Sinai covenant. Only with the establishment of Israel as a holy people (Exodus 19:6) does *kedushah*, that eschatological destiny of consummated creation, descend to earth and become a signpost pointing the way to the world’s ultimate fulfillment.⁷ Thus, already in Genesis 1-2 we have allusions to Israel’s role in the Divine plan. Even before Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and are expelled from the garden, Israel has an honored place in the Divine purpose, a role in bringing the world from goodness to holiness, from infancy to maturity, from potential splendor to actualized glory.

Kedushah as an eschatological reality is also seen in the institution of the *Mishkan* (the tabernacle) and the *Bet Mikdash* (the temple). Just as the Sabbath consummates the six-day creation, so the narrative describing the construction of the *Mishkan* is patterned after Genesis 1,

⁶ This is clearly the perspective of the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4, for whom the category of *kedushah* is fundamental. The creation account of Genesis 2 shares a similar perspective, but expresses it in different images and concepts. Here the Tree of Life serves a parallel function to the Sabbath: it represents the consummation that is Adam and Eve’s destiny but not yet their possession. In this light the customary Rabbinic linkage between the Tree of Life and the Torah (based on Proverbs 3:18) takes on new significance. The Sabbath, as the central *mitzvah* of Israel’s Torah, symbolizes the proleptic eschatological holiness inherent in the Torah as a whole.

⁷ N. M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989) 14; Soulen, 118. It is surely significant that the various forms of the Hebrew root Koph-Dalet-Shin appear nowhere else in the book of Genesis. They are not seen again till HaShem’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5), and

with the implication that Israel's "work," directed by the Divine command, completes God's work in creation.⁸ The Sabbath could even be called "a temple in time."⁹ Though the phrase is less immediately intelligible, it might be even more appropriate to call the temple a "Sabbath in space."¹⁰ Both the holy day and the holy place are signs of the covenant between HaShem and Israel (Exodus 31:13, 16-17; Num 10:33, Deut 10:1-8). Both are also eschatological signposts. They show that the world has not yet attained its appointed goal of unrestricted *kedushah*, for only one day, one place, and one people are set apart as holy. Yet, they also show that holiness has pitched its tent in this world, granting a foretaste now of the life of the world to come.

The eschatological character of *kedushah* can be seen most vividly in Zechariah 14 and Revelation 21. The final chapters of Zechariah contain prophecies pointing to Jerusalem's desperate conflict with the nations at the end of the age. The battle ends when HaShem himself appears, "and all the holy ones with Him" (14:5). The coming of HaShem brings not only Israel's deliverance, but also a transformation of the created order, in which the distinction between day and night that derives from Genesis 1's first day of creation is removed, and "there shall be continuous day" (14:7). More significantly, the presence of HaShem brings a new *kedushah* to the city, a *kedushah* that swallows up all that is profane and renders the distinction between holy and profane obsolete. Thus, the bells of the horses in the city are as holy as the High Priest's crown, and every pot and pan in Jerusalem and all of Judah become as holy as the bowls in front of the altar (14:20-21). This demonstrates the eschatological character of

then with the first commandments given to Israel – in Egypt (Exodus 12:16; 13:2) and at Sinai (Exodus 19:6, 10, 14, 23)

⁸ J. D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) 142-45.

⁹ "Judaism teaches us to be attached to *holiness in time*, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn; a shrine that even apostasy cannot easily obliterate: the Day of Atonement...Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time, as *architecture of time*...The seventh day is like a palace in time with a kingdom for all" (A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath* [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001; orig. pub. 1951] 8, 21).

¹⁰ Heschel argues for the superiority of the Sabbath to the Temple (*The Sabbath*, 79-83).

kedushah, and implies that the world to come is “that day that is entirely Shabbat.”¹¹

The final chapters of the Revelation of John convey the same message. As in Zechariah, darkness is swallowed up by light (22:5) and the profane by the holy. The new Jerusalem is the holy city (21:2), in which the Divine Presence resides (21:3), and into which no unclean thing may enter (21:27). The twelve stones that represent the twelve tribes of Israel and that adorn the High Priest’s breastplate now adorn the foundations of the wall of the city (21:19; see Exodus 28:15-21). Like the holy of holies, the city is a perfect cube (21:16); this explains why there is no temple in the city (21:22), for the city as a whole has become the inner sanctuary of the Divine Presence. Like the Sabbath, which distinguishes between holy and profane time, the temple implies a distinction between levels of holiness, and between holy and profane. But in the new Jerusalem there is only Shabbat, there is only the Holy of Holies. Once again, the eschatological character of *kedushah* becomes evident.

By presenting Israel as a holy nation in the midst of a profane world, *Tanakh* points to Israel’s life in this world as a foretaste or anticipation of the life of the world to come. *Olam Haba* does not involve an entirely unprecedented Divine invasion from without; smaller invasions have already occurred, to make us aware of what lies ahead. Rabbinic tradition grasps this Biblical truth, and extends it in various ways. Above all, Rabbinic tradition recognizes the eschatological character of Shabbat.¹² The Mishnah offers this midrash on the superscription to Psalm 92:

On the Sabbath they sang *A Psalm: a Song for the Sabbath Day*; a Psalm, a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in life everlasting. (M. Tamid 7:4).

In accordance with this midrash, we pray in the Shabbat Birkat HaMazon (Grace after Meals) that we might inherit “the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in life everlasting.” Thus, the Mishnah (and the liturgical tradition that builds upon it) acknowledges that the definitive Shabbat

¹¹ “In the renewed world that is the target of eschatological hope the difference between God and creature will remain, but that between the holy and the profane will be totally abolished (Zech. 14:20-21).” (W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991] 400.

is eschatological in nature. This implies that our experience of Shabbat in this world anticipates the life of the world to come. Such an inference finds explicit support in the following midrash:

R. Hanina [or, Hinenai] b. Isaac said: There are three incomplete phenomena (נובלות): the incomplete experience of death is sleep; an incomplete form of prophecy is the dream; the incomplete form of the next world is the Sabbath (נובלת העולם הבא שבת). (Gen Rab 17:5)

The word נובל refers primarily to unripe fruit that falls from a tree. However, it can also refer to a lesser member of any general category. Jacob Neusner offers an amplified translation, rendering the word as “partial realization of a complete experience.”¹³ When Israel observes Shabbat in this world, it tastes in a partial and preliminary way the powers of the age to come. This is true because “the Sabbath possesses a holiness like that of the future world” (Mechilta Ex 31:17).

Rabbinic tradition likewise views the land of Israel as an anticipatory sign of the world to come. Thus, the Mishnah interprets Isaiah’s prophecy that Israel “shall inherit the land” (Isaiah 60:21) as meaning that it will “have a share in the world to come” (M. Sanhedrin 10:1). Abraham Joshua Heschel states emphatically the proleptic eschatological character of the land:

There is a unique association between the people and the land of Israel...The Jew in whose heart the love of Zion dies is doomed to lose his faith in the God of Abraham who gave the land as an earnest of the redemption of all men.¹⁴

In similar language, the Conservative Movement’s Prayer Book calls the State of Israel *אֶרֶץ הַבְּרִיחַ* -- “the first-fruits of the sprouting of our redemption.”¹⁵ The language adopted by Heschel (“earnest”) and *Sim Shalom* (“first-fruits”) in reference to the land resembles that employed by Paul in reference to the *Ruach HaKodesh* (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14; Rom 8:23). Just as Paul sees the gift of the *Ruach* as a foretaste of the future inheritance, so Jewish tradition as a whole sees the gift of the land in a similar light.

¹² Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 73-76; I. Greenberg, *The Jewish Way* (New York: Touchstone, 1988) 129; R. Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer* (New York: Schocken, 1995) 212-18.

¹³ J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah, Vol. 1* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 184.

¹⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955), 425.

The daily liturgy also grants Jews an anticipatory experience of the world to come. It does this through *Pesukey deZimra*, the collection of Biblical hymns recited each morning before the *Shema* and its blessings. The centerpiece of this collection consists of Psalms 145-150. These Psalms were composed in the wake of the return from exile in Babylon. In later tradition, however, they are seen as pointing forward to the ecstatic praise of the world to come. The following midrash on Psalm 145:1 (“I will bless Your name for ever and ever”) illustrates this mode of interpretation:

One day it will not be as it is today, when, if He does wonders for Israel, they sing His praise, but if He does not, they do not sing His praise. In the time-to-come Israel will never cease singing, but will ceaselessly sing praises and blessings, as it is said, *And I will bless Your name for ever and ever* (Ps. 145:1). We shall have no vocation other than blessing You with new blessings.¹⁶

Similarly, Psalm 146:7, “The LORD will loose the bonds,” receives an eschatological reading:

What is meant by *bonds* in *will loose the bonds*? The bonds of death and the bonds of the nether-world.¹⁷

The last verse of Psalm 146 and the first verse of Psalm 147 are linked in the following eschatological midrash:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, reigns, everything will sing praises to Him...*The LORD will reign for ever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD; for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is fitting* (Ps 146:10 – 147:2). That is, when the Holy One, blessed be He, is King, it will be proper to praise Him. Why? Because everything will belong to the kingdom of the Holy One, blessed be He. Then all will sing, all will shout praises, all will laud Him because all will see Him reigning.¹⁸

Since these Psalms are consistently read this way in the Midrashic tradition, Heinrich Guggenheimer can say that their recitation before the statutory morning prayers is “intended as a preparation for the life in the World to Come.”¹⁹ This view finds support in the texts that conclude *Pesukey deZimra* (Exodus 15; Psalm 22:29; Ovadiah 1:21; Zechariah 14:9), all of which

¹⁵ *Siddur Sim Shalom* (ed. J. Harlow; New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1985) 416. The translation included here is my own. *Sim Shalom* itself translates the phrase as “with its promise of redemption” (417).

¹⁶ *The Midrash on Psalms, Vol 2* (trans. W. G. Braude; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 362.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

have a clear eschatological import. It receives further confirmation from the opening and closing *berachot*, that refer to HaShem as “Life of the Worlds” (חַי וְקַיְוָה) – Life of this world and Life of the world to come. Thus, just as Shabbat provides a weekly taste of the coming age, so every morning the observant Jew enters in a preliminary and preparatory way into the ecstatic praise offered on that day that will be completely Shabbat.

In the Torah itself Shabbat and the *Mikdash* (the Sanctuary) serve as joint expressions of the eschatological *kedushah* given to Israel in this age. The destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash* in 70 A.D. and the subsequent exile from Jerusalem raised serious questions for the Rabbinic tradition. Had Israel lost its *kedushah*? With no temple, no high priest, and no sacrifices, and with a life lived in the impure lands of the *Goyim*, how could Israel maintain its holiness? The answer of the Rabbis is striking. They did not merely claim that Israel maintains its holiness, despite its loss of the temple system and the land. They went further and asserted that Israel’s holiness was never entirely dependent on these factors. Taking up themes emphasized by the Pharisees while the temple still stood, and based upon certain strands of Biblical teaching, the Rabbinic movement reconstructed Israel’s sense of holiness along more universal lines.

The questions taken up by the Mishnah, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, are whether and how Israel is still holy. The self-evidently valid answer is that Israel is indeed holy, and so far as the media of sanctification persist beyond the destruction of the holy place – and they do endure – the task of holy Israel is to continue to conduct that life of sanctification that had centered upon the Temple. Where does holiness reside now? It is above all in the life of the people, Israel. The Mishnah may speak of the holiness of the Temple, but the premise is that the people – that kingdom of priests and holy people of Leviticus – constitute the center and locus of the sacred.²⁰

The sect of the Pharisees and the profession of the scribes – together with surviving priests who joined them – framed a Judaism to take the place of the Judaism of Temple and cult. It emerged as a Judaism in which each of the elements of the Judaism of Temple and cult would find a counterpart: (1) in place of the Temple, the holy people, in whom holiness endured even outside of the cult, as the Pharisees had taught; (2) in place of the priesthood, the sage, the holy man qualified by learning, as the scribes had taught; (3) in place of the sacrifices of the altar, the holy way of life expressed through the carrying out of religious duties (*mitzvot*, “commandments”), and acts of kindness and

¹⁹ H. Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggadah* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1995) 316.

²⁰ J. Neusner, *A Short History of Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 57.

grace beyond those commanded (*maasim tovim*, “good deeds”), and, above all, through studying the Torah.²¹

Every Jew has priestly obligations, every meal partakes of the holiness of a sacrificial banquet, in every place HaShem makes his presence known. In thus refashioning Jewish life for *Galut*, the Rabbis extended Israel’s sense of *kedushah* into realms formerly considered profane. In ways analogous to those adopted by the followers of Yeshua, Rabbinic Judaism seized the opportunity provided by the exile and advanced toward the ideal of eschatological holiness found in Zechariah 14, rather than accepting with resignation a state of irreparable impurity.

The extension of *kedushah* into new realms was carried even further within the Hasidic movement.

The Holy strives to include within itself the whole of life. The Law differentiates between the holy and the profane, but the Law desires to lead the way toward the messianic removal of the differentiation, to the all-sanctification. Hasidic piety no longer recognizes anything as simply and irreparably profane: “the profane” is for hasidism only a designation for the not yet sanctified, for that which is to be sanctified. Everything physical, all drives and urges and desires, everything creaturely, is material for sanctification.²²

Buber recognizes that the Torah itself distinguishes clearly between holy and profane, yet he also sees a “messianic” (i.e., eschatological) impulse within the Torah (evident, as seen above, in Zechariah 14) toward the progressive removal of this distinction. This sets the stage for the new Hasidic teaching regarding worldly engagement.

...the Hasidic way of life...stressed the idea of ‘*avodah be-gashmiyyut*, “divine worship through the use of material things.” This involved a positive embrace of things of this world as means toward the greater service of God...In the essential Hasidic doctrine, God is to be worshiped not only by the study of the Torah, prayer, and the observance of the precepts but also, and particularly, by engaging in worldly pursuits with God in mind...When attending to his material needs for the sake of God, the *hasid* is carrying out acts of divine worship.²³

In the Hasidic worldview, Israel participates in the divine drama leading to redemption by living

²¹ Ibid., 53.

²² M. Buber, “The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul,” in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity* (ed. F. A. Rothschild; New York: Continuum, 1996) 126-7.

²³ L. Jacobs, “The Uplifting of Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism,” in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present* (ed. A.Green; New York: Crossroad, 1997) 115—16.

within the profane world in such a way as to lift it to the level of holiness. *Kedushah* is an eschatological reality, and Israel shares in that reality in anticipation and also extends that reality as part of the process of preparing for the final redemption.

In light of the above, the place of proleptic eschatology within the Torah and within traditional Jewish thought must be reconsidered. When we tell Israel's story, the eschatological horizon must not be placed so high that we miss the significance of *kedushah*. Israel waits for her redemption, but she also experiences now a foretaste of what she waits for.²⁴

Jewish Proleptic Eschatology and the Mission of Yeshua

Once the note of eschatological anticipation is heard in the Torah and in Rabbinic Judaism, Messianic Jews cannot avoid the question: How is this proleptic eschatology related to that introduced by Yeshua's birth, death, and resurrection? How we answer this question will determine the basic contours of our Messianic Jewish canonical narrative. The usual strategy of Christian theology has been to ignore the eschatological character of Israel's *kedushah*, and to accentuate the discontinuity between Israel's covenant existence before Yeshua's coming and the eschatological newness that Yeshua brings. Messiah is thus exalted by the lowering of Moses and Israel. However, I have argued that such a strategy does violence to the Biblical text and to traditional Jewish understanding of it. Our attempt to shape a Messianic Jewish canonical narrative must proceed along different lines.

The Incarnation. The place to begin is with Yeshua's identity as the individual embodiment of the people of Israel. This theme was enunciated clearly by Jewish theologian Will Herberg, who noted that Yeshua "appears in early Christian thinking as, quite literally, an incarnate or one-man

²⁴ Franz Rosenzweig is one thinker who has not missed the significance of eschatological anticipation in Judaism. Stephane Moses calls such anticipation "one of the most central concepts in the system of *The Star of Redemption*. Anticipation is the experience through which man lives the future within the present itself, without negating the reality of the future...For the Jewish people...the anticipation of the Redemption will thus be the central experience of its religious life" (S. Moses, *System and Revelation* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992] 175).

Israel, the Remnant-Man.”²⁵ More recently, N. T. Wright has claimed that this notion is central to the Apostolic understanding of Yeshua’s role.²⁶ Both David Stern and Daniel Juster have recognized that Yeshua “embodies” (Stern) and “represents” (Juster) Israel.²⁷ However, the full implications of Yeshua’s representative role have not yet been incorporated into a coherent Messianic Jewish canonical narrative.

An essential feature of Israel’s covenantal identity is to be a holy people (Ex 19:6). As seen above, Israel’s holiness has an eschatological character. It is also connected to the Divine Presence (the *Kavod* or *Shekhinah*) that abides with and in Israel. After the ratification of the covenant (Ex 24), Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive instructions concerning the building of the *Mishkan* – HaShem’s mobile sanctuary in the wilderness. The reason for this institution is stated at the outset: “They shall make me a holy place, and I shall tent among them” (Ex 25:8; Friedman). The Holy One seeks a people among whom He can dwell, and the *Mishkan* serves as the localized sign and instrument of His Presence. Far from being an added blessing, the gift of the Divine Presence constitutes a central element in Israel’s vocation and identity: “For how shall it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?” (Ex 33:16; NJPS). While the *Mishkan* and the Jerusalem Temple represent the earthly home of the Divine Presence, that Presence is not confined to these structures. The prophet Ezekiel sees the *Kavod* (enthroned on a chariot-like structure that symbolizes its mobility) departing from the Temple, and appearing among the exiles in Babylon (Ezek 1; 10). Ezekiel’s conviction that the Divine Presence went into exile with the dispersed people of Judah after the destruction of the First Temple reappears in

²⁵ W. Herberg, “Judaism and Christianity: Their Unity and Difference,” in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, 244. Of course, for Herberg Yeshua functions as a one-man Israel for the sake of the nations, not for the sake of Israel itself.

²⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 18-40, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 402, 407, 416-17, and *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 106. Wright takes the extreme opposite position from Herberg: for him Yeshua in effect *replaces* Israel.

²⁷ D. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988) 105, 107; D. Juster, *Jewish Roots* (Rockville, MD: Davar, 1986) 47-8.

Rabbinic literature as the conviction that the *Shekhinah* continues to dwell with exiled Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Israel's experience of the abiding Presence of HaShem anticipates the consummation of the world, when "the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). That anticipatory experience is brought to a new height in the coming of Yeshua, the one-man Israel, in whom the Divine Word becomes flesh. The Apostolic Writings begin their story by narrating the birth of Yeshua, who is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23), and conclude by describing the New Jerusalem as "the dwelling (ἡ σκηνη. ., tent) of God" (Rev 21:3). While the enfleshment of the *Memra* (Word) is a new and unique event, it should nonetheless be viewed in continuity with what precedes it -- as a concentrated and intensified form of the Divine Presence that accompanies Israel throughout its historical journey. Thus, contrary to the common Christian canonical narrative, the Divinity of Yeshua can be seen not as a radical rupture and disjunction in the story but as a continuation and elevation of a process initiated long before. As we will see later, the incarnation, like the building of the *Mishkan*, also needs to be viewed in terms of proleptic eschatology – it points forward to a reality that is not yet fully in our grasp.

The Character of Yeshua's Life. Yeshua's enfleshed *kedushah* stands in continuity with the holiness of the *Mishkah* and the *Bet HaMikdash* (the Jerusalem Temple) – but there is also something new about his *kedushah*. The character of his life and mission displays a dynamic, outgoing, prophetic *kedushah* that will eventually lead to the sanctification of the entire created order (as envisioned by Zechariah 14 and Revelation 21). The holiness of Sinai, the *Mishkan*, and the Jerusalem Temple required fences, boundaries, and guards, so that the holy might not be defiled by contact with the impure or insufficiently holy. Such contact leads to the destruction of those who bring it about. Thus, Nadav and Abihu are consumed for offering "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1-3), Korah and his Levitical companions are annihilated for assuming prerogatives belonging solely to the *kohanim* (Numbers 16:1-11, 16-22, 35), and Uzzah dies when he tries to

prevent the Ark from falling (2 Samuel 6:6-7). When the Philistines capture the Ark and bring it as a trophy into Ashdod and Gath, the cities are struck with disease (1 Samuel 5). Thus, HaShem's *kedushah* present in Israel through the priestly system threatens an impure world. At the same time, a holy person or object that comes into contact with impurity is thereby profaned, and cannot approach the holy God and the sanctuary until he, she, or it is purified. Thus, impurity also threatens Israel's *kedushah*. In either case, the boundary between the holy and the impure must be preserved and guarded at all costs.

As noted earlier, many Jews in Yeshua's day understood holiness as extending beyond the priesthood, the Temple, and its sacrifices, as the heritage of every Jew in every place (at least in the land of Israel). The Pharisees seem to have held such a view. The *Yachad* (community) of the Dead Sea Scrolls saw itself as the temple, the locus of true *kedushah*, and so all who shared in the life of the community had access to the angelic assembly. It is thus appropriate to call the Pharisees and the *Yachad* "holiness movements."²⁸ Nevertheless, the traditional concern for separating the holy from the impure remains strong in these movements; in fact, it rises to new heights.

With Yeshua something new appears on the scene. It becomes most evident in what Dale Allison calls the "new channels" through which Yeshua "mediated the sacred...healings and meals."²⁹ The accounts of Yeshua's healings often highlight his unconventional contact with the sphere of impurity. Jacob Milgrom points to only three sources of impurity according to the Torah: corpses/carcasses, scale disease, and genital discharges.³⁰ Yeshua is described as having contact with all three. As for genital discharges, all three synoptic gospels tell the story of the woman with the hemorrhage who touches Yeshua and is healed (Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48; Matthew 9:20-22). Davies and Allison comment that "It is possible that the woman comes up 'from behind' precisely because she is unclean and must accordingly try to touch Jesus without anyone

²⁸ S. McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 46-48.

²⁹ D. C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth -- Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 63.

observing... Instead of uncleanness passing from the woman to Jesus, healing power flows from Jesus to the woman.”³¹ Dunn rightly contends that the reader is expected to respond, “And she *touches* Jesus! And he makes no objection!”³² As for scale disease, again all three synoptic gospels tell about the healing of the “leper” (Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16; Matthew 8:1-4). As Dunn notes, “Given the importance of skin disease in the purity legislation (Lev 13-14), the significance of Jesus *touching* the leper would not be lost on anyone familiar with the Torah.”³³ Davies and Allison once again recognize the reversal of the expected flow of impurity and sacred power: “When Jesus touches the man, leprosy does not spread to the healer; rather, healing power goes forth to conquer the disease.”³⁴ As for corpse impurity, we have two accounts of Yeshua raising the dead through contact that would have been considered defiling (Jairus daughter in Mark 1:40-45, Luke 5:12-16, and Matthew 8:1-4, and the widow’s son at Nain in Luke 7:11-17). As Milgrom observes, holiness is associated with life and impurity with death.³⁵ Here Yeshua overwhelms death with life, impurity with holiness. Just as striking is the story of the healing of the Gadarene/Gerasene/Gergasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39; Matthew 8:28-34). The story is filled with images associated with impurity: impure spirits, impure animals (the grazing pigs), impure land (the Decapolis, inhabited mainly by Gentiles), and impure tombs.³⁶ Rather than fleeing this impurity, Yeshua wrestles with it and conquers it. Therefore, it is emblematic of Yeshua’s program as recorded in the gospels that the first healing reported in Mark involves an *impure* spirit addressing Yeshua as “The Holy One of God” (Mark 1:23-26). The Holy One marches forth to make war on the kingdom of impurity.

³⁰ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 46.

³¹ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. II* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) 129-130.

³² J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991) 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁴ Davies and Allison, 2:13.

³⁵ “...there is a common denominator to the three above-mentioned sources of impurity – death” (Milgrom, 46).

³⁶ S. T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament – The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1987) 163; Dunn, 43.

The other “new channel” through which Yeshua mediates the sacred is the communal meal.

Davies and Allison remark that Yeshua,

following established custom, often spoke of the kingdom of God as though it would be a great banquet (Matthew 8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; 26:29). But given his ‘realized eschatology,’ the festive meals in which he participated were in all likelihood interpreted by himself and others as proleptic experiences of the kingdom (cf. Matthew 9:15).³⁷

Just as Yeshua’s works of healing were signs of the proleptic presence of *Olam Haba* and its *kedushah*, so this was also the case for his meals with his followers. Thus, it is especially significant that he ate with disreputable Jews, “tax collectors and sinners,” who were certainly considered impure by the devotees of other “holiness movements” such as the Pharisees (e.g., Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32; Matthew 9:9-13). Scott McKnight sees the relevance of this fact for understanding Yeshua’s approach to holiness:

The opposition that Jesus provoked in his table practices is surely to be understood in this context; he provoked the Pharisees and other holiness movements because he had a different vision for the nation, because he understood holiness in different categories, and because he had a different perception of how the God of Israel was now at work among his people. It might be said that these other holiness movements had a different *ordo salutis*, in which repentance leads to holiness, which permits fellowship. Jesus affirmed, rather, that fellowship leads to both repentance and holiness.³⁸

Yeshua’s approach to meals parallels his practice of healing. Yeshua’s contact with the impure does not defile him, but instead transmits purity, holiness, and life to the impure ones around him.

Yeshua’s life and mission thus display a new type of *kedushah*, a prophetic, invasive holiness that needs no protection, but reaches out to sanctify the profane. In this respect Yeshua’s approach has much in common with the Hasidic perspective, as enunciated by Buber: “Hasidic piety no longer recognizes anything as simply and irreparably profane: ‘the profane’ is for hasidism only a designation for the not yet sanctified, for that which is to be sanctified.”³⁹

Yeshua mediates the Divine Presence as the fleshly *Mishkan*, but he is not surrounded by a series

³⁷ Davies and Allison, 2:101; see also J. D. G. Dunn, “Jesus, Table-Fellowship, and Qumran” in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 263.

³⁸ McKnight, 48-49.

³⁹ See full quote on page ____.

of concentric barriers designed to restrict access to a privileged few. Instead, he anticipates and prepares the way for the sanctuary of the New Jerusalem, in which the city and the holy of holies are one and the same.⁴⁰

Yeshua's Death and Resurrection. Just as the Apostolic Writings portray the Divine enfleshment in the priestly imagery of the *Mishkan*-Temple, so they portray the death of Yeshua in the priestly imagery of atoning sacrifice. And just as the meaning of the *Mishkan* can only be understood in relation to Israel's covenantal identity as a holy people, so also the meaning of the sacrificial system established in the Torah can only be understood in relation to Israel's corporate summons to *kiddush HaShem*, to sanctify the Divine Name. According to Genesis 22, the sacrificial system of the Torah is founded on the *Akedah* – the willingness of Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. This is evident through the reference to “the mount of *HaShem*” in verse 14 and through the Chronicler's identification of Moriah as the Jerusalem Temple mount (2 Chr 3:1).⁴¹ Thus, the Torah teaches that Temple sacrifice is meant to be an expression of the wholehearted commitment and self-giving love typified by Abraham and Isaac when they ascend Moriah. In post-Biblical Jewish tradition, the *Akedah* takes on a new significance: it becomes the model for martyrdom.⁴² This is first seen in texts dealing with the martyrs of the Maccabean period (4 Maccabees 16:20). At a later date, the *Akedah* is associated with the martyrs who suffered under Roman persecution (as seen in Gen Rab 56:3, which compares Isaac's carrying the wood for the sacrifice to one who carries his own execution stake). Israel's martyrs, suffering for *kiddush HaShem* (to sanctify the Divine Name), show the same commitment to God and the same

⁴⁰ This need not imply abolition of all the lines of differentiation established by the Torah's approach to impurity and holiness. However, it does imply that these lines no longer function as levels of proximity to the Divine.

⁴¹ J. D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 114-23. Rabbinic tradition recognized this relationship between the *Akedah* and the sacrifices, as seen by the morning preliminary service in which the *Akedah* is read just before a set of texts concerning sacrifice, and as seen by the importance of the *Akedah* during the Ten Days of Awe that culminate in Yom Kippur.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 187-99; S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1993; orig. 1967).

self-giving love as Abraham and Isaac. In this way the *Akedah* links martyrdom with the Temple sacrifices, and makes it possible to see martyrdom as likewise having atoning efficacy (4 Macc 17:21-22).

Michael Wyschogrod has argued that Israel's suffering, modeled on the *Akedah*, has always been the true sacrifice intended by the Torah:

...is it not possible that the rabbis understood that the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of its sacrifices, rather than signaling the termination of sacrifices as such, restored the people of Israel to its role as the sacrifice whose blood is to be shed in the Diaspora when the holy service in Jerusalem is suspended? If there is no need for sacrament in Judaism, it is because the people of Israel in whose flesh the presence of God makes itself felt in the world becomes the sacrament.⁴³

Accordingly, the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy includes not only a retelling of the Temple sacrifices offered on that day, but also a martyrology. This fits the reading of Isaiah 53 that applies it to the suffering of the Jewish people.

If Yeshua is the perfect one-man Israel, then his death as a martyr under the Romans sums up all of Israel's righteous suffering through the ages, provides the ultimate expression of the commitment to God and self-giving love shown first in the *Akedah*, and effects definitive atonement.⁴⁴ Since Yeshua represents and embodies Israel, Isaiah 53 is fulfilled by him *and* by the people as a whole.⁴⁵ A Messianic Jewish version of the canonical narrative will see the death of Yeshua in continuity not only with Israel's Temple system but also in continuity with Israel's ongoing life in this world. As with the incarnation, so with Yeshua's atoning death: the Messiah epitomizes and elevates Israel's story, rather than ending it and beginning something entirely new.

But what does martyrdom have to do with eschatology? In order to answer this question, it is best to move on and speak also about Yeshua's resurrection. Just as martyrdom first became a

⁴³ Wyschogrod, 25.

⁴⁴ The treatments of this topic by W. D. Davies (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980; orig. 1948] 259-84) and H. J. Schoeps (*Paul* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961] 128-49) are still valuable.

⁴⁵ "The controversy over whether Isaiah 53 refers to Israel or to a then unborn Messiah dissolves when it is remembered that Israel's Messiah embodies his people" (Stern, 107).

significant theme in Jewish life as a result of the persecutions during the Maccabean period, so resurrection likewise emerged as a major motif during the same period – and precisely in relation to the martyrs. 2 Maccabees 7, which describes the execution of seven Jewish brothers, provides both the first martyrology and one of the earliest explicit statements of hope in the resurrection of the dead. Daniel 12:1-3, the most explicit text in *Tanakh* dealing with resurrection, likewise addresses (at least as its initial frame of reference) the situation of the Maccabean martyrs.

Daniel and the Apostolic Writings prophesy that persecution and martyrdom will characterize the events leading up to the end of the age, and will in fact prepare the way for the renewal of all things – a renewal that features the resurrection of all the righteous.

N. T. Wright captures these connections effectively in the following paragraph:

Why did the belief in the resurrection arise, and how did it fit in with the broader Jewish worldview and belief-system which we have sketched in the preceding chapters? Again and again we have seen that this belief is bound up with the struggle to maintain obedience to Israel's ancestral laws in the face of persecution. Resurrection is the divine reward for martyrs; it is what will happen after the great tribulation. But it is not simply a special reward for those who have undergone special sufferings. Rather, the eschatological expectation of most Jews of this period was for a renewal, not an abandonment, of the present space-time order as a whole, and themselves within it. Since this was based on the justice and mercy of the creator god, the god of Israel, it was inconceivable that those who had died in the struggle to bring the new world into being should be left out of the blessing when it eventually broke upon the nation and thence on the world.⁴⁶

Wright continues by noting that the hope for resurrection was primarily a hope for national renewal and restoration:

The old metaphor of corpses coming to life had, ever since Ezekiel at least, been one of the most vivid ways of *denoting* the return from exile and *connoting* the renewal of the covenant and of all creation. Within the context of persecution and struggle for Torah in the Syrian and Roman periods, this metaphor itself acquired a new life. If Israel's god would "raise" his people (metaphorically) by bringing them back from their continuing exile, he would also, within that context, "raise" those people (literally) who had died in the hope of that national and covenantal vindication. "Resurrection", while focusing attention on the new embodiment of the individuals involved, retained its original sense of the restoration of Israel by her covenant god.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Wright, *People of God*, 332.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 332. See also P. M. van Buren, *According to the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 27-28.

This background makes it possible to understand Yeshua's death and resurrection as the eschatological one-man Israel. Just as Yeshua dies as the ultimate Jewish martyr, engaged in the eschatological conflict that will result in the renewal of the covenant and of all creation, so he rises from the dead as the pledge of Israel's national resurrection and the first-fruits of all who sleep. This perspective on Yeshua's resurrection is articulated by R. Kendall Soulen:

Jesus, the firstborn from the dead, is also the first fruits of God's eschatological vindication of Israel's body. In light of Jesus' bodily resurrection, it is certain not only that God will intervene on behalf of the whole body of Israel at the close of covenant history but also that by this very act God will consummate the world.⁴⁸

Whereas the enfleshment of the *Memra* in Yeshua intensifies and elevates an eschatological reality already anticipated in Israel's life, and Yeshua in his death embodies and sums up all of Israel's martyrs through the ages and prepares the way for *Olam Haba*, in his resurrection he establishes a proleptic eschatological reality unprecedented in Israel's history. However, as Soulen makes clear, that proleptic eschatological reality can only be understood in relation to Israel's destined future, of which it is a pledge.

Like the resurrection, the founding of the *ekklesia* as a two-fold community, consisting of a Jewish corporate component and an associated multi-national extension of Israel, represents an unprecedented reality in Israel's history. Like the resurrection, this new element in the Divine scheme also constitutes a proleptic eschatological reality, for it anticipates the final renewal of creation when Israel and the nations will be bound together in a relationship of mutual blessing among those who continue to be different. Once again, Soulen states it well:

The resurrection anticipates the eschatological outcome of covenant history and reveals its character *in nuce* as God's vindication of Israel's body to the blessing of Israel, the nations, and all creation. But the resurrection does not have only this ultimate eschatological point of reference. The resurrection also inaugurates something new within the open-ended story of God's work as the Consummator of creation...the new thing is the church, the table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles that prays in Jesus' name for the coming of the God of Israel's reign.⁴⁹

Thus, certain features of Yeshua's identity and mission (his Incarnation and his atoning death)

⁴⁸ Soulen, 166.

are in continuity with Israel's past history, whereas other features (his Resurrection and the founding of the two-fold *ekklesia*) are pledges of Israel's promised future.

Jewish Tradition. The Messianic Jewish canonical narrative must place the person and work of Yeshua within the context of the proleptic eschatological reality of Israel's life according to the Torah and Jewish tradition. But what is the status of that tradition itself within our narrative? What of the Jewish people as a whole after Yeshua's death and resurrection and the founding of the *ekklesia*? What are we to make of the Rabbinic extensions of *kedushah* noted above? Many in the Messianic Jewish movement have rejected them as human attempts to refashion Judaism in the absence of the Temple. Is this the only option for us?

This is not the place to assess the Rabbinic tradition as a whole from a Messianic Jewish perspective. However, I would offer a brief proposal for how we might affirm the value of that tradition and incorporate it within the Messianic Jewish canonical narrative. I have already pointed out how some of the Rabbinic extensions of *kedushah* parallel certain tendencies seen in the Yeshua tradition and in the life of the *ekklesia*. Just as the Apostolic Writings portray the *ekklesia* as a holy people in and among whom the Holy One resides as He did in the *Mishkan* and the Temple, so Rabbinic tradition sees Israel as a holy people among whom the *Shekhinah* rests. Just as the Yeshua tradition treats each member of the community as a priest, so does the Rabbinic tradition (though a few distinctive priestly prerogatives remain). Just as the Yeshua tradition sees prayer, *tzedakah*, and good deeds as equivalent to Temple sacrifices, so does the Rabbinic tradition. Just as Yeshua's approach to *kedushah* was expansive and invasive, involving contact with the impure in order to mediate to them his own holiness, so the Hasidic movement has taken as its mission the transformation of the profane into the holy. The main difference on these matters between the two movements is the basis for the development. The Yeshua tradition sees the extension of *kedushah* as deriving from the person and work of Yeshua – his identity as the enfleshed *Memra*, his atoning death, his resurrection, and his gift of the Ruach. The Rabbinic

⁴⁹ Ibid., 169.

tradition employs creative exegesis to assert that what appears to be a development is not really a development at all.

If we view the ongoing life of the Jewish people as a providential blessing for the world, and if we believe that Israel maintains a distinctive national holiness despite its refusal to accept Yeshua as the Messiah (Rom 11:16), and if we believe that there is even a mysterious Divine purpose behind that refusal (Rom 11:25-36), then we should seek an explanation that is as favorable as possible to these parallel trajectories. I propose that we see Yeshua at work not only in the *ekklesia* but also among the very Rabbis who reject his claims. The power of Yeshua's death and resurrection extends beyond the boundaries of the *ekklesia*. David Stern suggests something like this in his *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*:

This concept, that the Messiah embodies the Jewish people, should not seem strange to believers, who learn precisely that about Yeshua and the Church...But the Church has not clearly grasped that the Holy One of Israel, Yeshua, is in union not only with the Church, but also with the Jewish people.⁵⁰

Stern draws upon the notion that Yeshua is the one-man Israel, and comes to this radical but sensible conclusion. Try though it may, Israel cannot escape its Messiah. Wanted or unwanted, noticed or unnoticed, acknowledged or unacknowledged, he still rules over his people. Therefore, we should not be surprised to find signs of his presence and activity within the people and tradition of Israel.

Lifting the Christian Eschatological Horizon

We have seen that both Jewish and Christian thinkers have often understated the note of eschatological anticipation sounded in the Torah and Rabbinic tradition, and overstated the discontinuity between the epoch inaugurated by the coming of Yeshua and Jewish life under the Torah. Thus, the Messianic Jewish canonical narrative needs to lower the eschatological horizon to allow for the foretaste of redemption and consummation given in Israel's life of *kedushah*.

On the other hand, the traditional Christian canonical narrative has another problem: while

understating the continuity between Yeshua's coming and Jewish life, it overstates the continuity between life in Messiah in this age and life in Messiah in the age to come. In fact, it often so accentuates the redemptive power of Yeshua's incarnation, death, and resurrection, and the richness of life in the Spirit and in the Church, that the future redemption drops out of the picture completely or survives merely as an anticlimactic wrap-up of an already completed story. Jewish critiques of Christianity have often seized upon this defect. Leo Baeck provides just such a critique, though he wrongly directs it not only at later Christian theology but also at the Apostle Paul:

The romantic faith in salvation also furnishes us with the very opposite of the ancient messianic idea which was still the idea of Jesus, too: the idea of the days to come, the idea of the promised kingdom...the messianic idea out of which Christianity had developed and from which it has received its name was now pushed back more and more and eventually annulled historically. The place of the kingdom of God on earth, the ancient biblical ideal, was taken over by the kingdom of the Church, the romantic *civitas Dei*.⁵¹

This Messianic expectation had been done away with by Paul in its essential features. Since for him the coming of the Messiah and the redemption was something which had already been fulfilled, was already an actual possession of the present, the idea of the great future hope had consequently lost its significance.⁵²

Sometimes the critique of Christianity is secondary, and serves mainly as a foil to clarify the Jewish perspective on the final redemption, as in the following citations from Michael

Wyschogrod and David Novak:

Christianity sees before it a completed salvation history. Creation to resurrection constitutes a totality of promise and fulfillment that is available to viewing and therefore to thought. Israel's story is incomplete. It is replete with great peaks and deep disappointments, but it is, above all, incomplete. The redemption implicit in the very first promise to Abraham is still in abeyance. The Exodus, Sinai, the Temple are all peaks and previews of what is in store for Israel and humanity in the fulfillment.⁵³ But that fulfillment has not yet occurred, and we are therefore dealing with an uncompleted tale whose outcome we know because of our trust in the source of the promise. Nevertheless,

⁵⁰ Stern, 108.

⁵¹ L. Baeck, "Romantic Religion," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, 86-87.

⁵² L. Baeck, "Judaism in the Church," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, 105.

⁵³ Wyschogrod thus acknowledges proleptic eschatology in Israel's life in this world even as he emphasizes the height of the eschatological horizon.

however great our trust, we must not confuse promise with fulfillment, especially for man, who lives in time and for whom the future is shrouded in darkness.⁵⁴

And by not seeing the redeemed future as any kind of projection from a present state of affairs, Israel cannot claim to be any more redeemed than anyone else. This lack of redemption, either Jewish or universal, is a point Jews have always emphasized when the adherents of other religions and ideologies have made triumphalist claims against us, claiming that the world is already redeemed. But what God will finally do with the world is as mysterious as what God has been doing with Israel in the past and the present. Against the hidden horizon of the final redeemed future, everything past and present is ultimately provisional. God has not yet fulfilled his own purposes in history.⁵⁵

Occasionally, a Jewish author simply contrasts the Jewish orientation to a future redemption yet awaited and the Christian orientation to a past redemption already accomplished, without any explicit praise of one or attack on the other, as in the following paragraphs from Franz

Rosenzweig:

The [Jewish] people...lives in its own redemption. It has anticipated eternity. The future is the driving power in the circuit of its year. Its rotation originates, so to speak, not in a thrust but in a pull. The present passes not because the past prods it on but because the future snatches it toward itself. Somehow, even the festivals of creation and redemption flow into redemption. What gives the year strength to begin anew and link its ring, which is without beginning and end, into the chain of time, is this, that the feeling that redemption is still unattained breaks through again, and thereby the thought of eternity, which seemed contained in the cup of the moment, brims up and surges over the rim.⁵⁶

There is no festival of redemption as such in Christianity. In the Christian consciousness, everything congregates around the beginning and for beginning, and the clear distinction which exists for us between revelation and redemption is obscured. Redemption has already taken place in Christ's earthly sojourn, at the very least in his crucifixion, properly speaking already at his birth...With us the ideas of creation and revelation contain a compulsion to merge in the idea of redemption for whose sake, in the final analysis, everything prior has occurred. In Christianity, correspondingly, the idea of redemption is swallowed back into creation, into revelation; as often as it erupts as something independent, just so often it loses its independence again. The retrospect to cross and manger, the eventuation of the events of Bethlehem and Golgotha into one's own heart, there become more important than the prospect of the future of the Lord. The advent of the kingdom becomes a matter of secular and ecclesiastical history. But it has no place in the heart of Christendom...⁵⁷

Whether the critique is explicit or implicit, it is evident that Jewish authors see the subordination of the final redemption to the finished work of Messiah as a problematic feature of the Christian

⁵⁴ Wyschogrod, 69.

⁵⁵ D. Novak, *The Election of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 255.

⁵⁶ F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) 328.

canonical narrative.

R. Kendall Soulen's *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* agrees with these Jewish assessments of the Christian canonical narrative. He seeks to craft a new canonical narrative that overcomes supersessionism and facilitates constructive dialogue with contemporary Judaism, and in order to do so he must confront the traditional Christian low eschatological horizon. In a review of Soulen's book, David Novak sees this as the heart of Soulen's project:

Perhaps the main stumbling block to a better, and more fruitful, theological relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people has been the tendency of many Christian theologians to see the Christ event as the end of history. In this view, the Jews, like all the rest of the world who have not accepted Jesus as the Christ, are still struggling within history. Christians, conversely, are already beyond history and its vicissitudes and are living in eschatological time...

This, more than anything else, it would seem, has led to what becomes the *bete noir* of Soulen's book: "supersessionism."⁵⁸

How does Soulen reshape the canonical narrative? He does so by reconfiguring the first and second comings of Yeshua, so that the former is subordinated to the latter rather than the reverse. Instead of seeing the final coming of the kingdom as a public manifestation of what in principle was already accomplished in the death and resurrection of Yeshua, he presents the death and resurrection of Yeshua as an anticipation or *prolepsis* of what will occur definitively only at the end.

If Jesus is the proleptic enactment of God's eschatological fidelity to the work of consummation, then Jesus is by this very fact the carnal embodiment of God's end-time fidelity toward Israel and toward Israel's future as the place of unsurpassable blessing for Israel, for the nations, and for all creation. By its nature, then, Jesus' resurrection from the dead anticipates a future event whose character as victorious fidelity can no longer be in doubt.⁵⁹

Thus, the Good News is not merely a proclamation of what has already occurred, but also and preeminently an announcement about how Yeshua's death and resurrection will lead to the coming reign of Israel's God:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 368.

⁵⁸ D. Novak, "Beyond Supersessionism," 57.

⁵⁹ Soulen, 166.

...the gospel is good news about the God of Israel's coming reign, which proclaims in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection the victorious guarantee of God's fidelity to the work of consummation, that is, to fullness of mutual blessing as the outcome of God's economy with Israel, the nations, and all creation.⁶⁰

Soulen takes the traditional Christian canonical narrative, centered in the incarnation, and re-orders it so that it is closer to the traditional Jewish narrative, oriented to the final redemption:

The necessary correction...is a frank reorientation of the hermeneutical center of the Scriptures from the incarnation to the reign of God, where God's reign is understood as the eschatological outcome of human history at the end of time.⁶¹

Novak perceives the nature of Soulen's revision of the Christian canonical narrative, and agrees that it is crucial to Soulen's goal of overcoming supersessionism:

Soulen seems to be constituting what I would call "the highest possible eschatological horizon." This comes out when he says, "The Church is not a community that issues directly into God's reign...A hiatus separates the Church and God's eschatological reign."...Clearly, when Christian theologians constitute a "lower" eschatological horizon, which usually has meant seeing the Eschaton as the *extension* of the Church's reign on earth, it has been most susceptible to the types of supersessionism so opposed by Soulen...Conversely, when Christians regard themselves within history but not its masters, they become most like the Jews.⁶²

While Soulen's revised narrative requires some modification (e.g., he seems to present Yeshua's death and resurrection primarily as a pledge of God's final reign, rather than as a means of bringing it to pass), his work does point the way that we should follow.

Another theologian who seeks to raise the eschatological horizon of the Christian canonical narrative is Wolfhart Pannenberg. Like Jurgen Moltmann, Pannenberg restructures Christian theology so that the eschatological future takes on special prominence.⁶³ He emphasizes the proleptic character of Yeshua's work, and his treatment of the *ekklesia* in relation to the Divine Reign employs such expressions as "provisional representation," "advance representation,"

⁶⁰ Ibid., 157.

⁶¹ Ibid., 138.

⁶² D. Novak, "Beyond Supersessionism," 58, 60.

⁶³ Jurgen Moltmann would also be worthy of study in this context. Stephen R. Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) 103-160, provides an excellent summary of how Moltmann's writings contribute to the development of a post-supersessionist Christian theology. Haynes notes that "Moltmann's understanding of the unfinished nature of reconciliation...has implications for the church-Israel relationship...Moltmann's eschatological Christology reopens the reconciliation which is completed in Barth's theology by incorporating a 'not yet' element absent in Barth" (112-113).

“exemplary anticipation,” “provisional sign,” and “preliminary sign.”

The presence of God’s kingdom and of his eschatological fellowship of salvation in the church is sacramental. . . . But the final form of such participation and fellowship is still invisible in this transitory world and comes into it only through faith, hope, and love. It is thus of the nature of the church that it points beyond all that is provisional and imperfect in its own form to the future of the fellowship of God’s kingdom. Of this kingdom the church is only a provisional representation and one that in the life of its members is often hidden and distorted beyond recognition.⁶⁴

Pannenberg strives both to emphasize the proleptic eschatological nature of the *ekklesia* (and of Israel) and to guard against any tendency to blur or erase the distinction between the *ekklesia* and the coming Kingdom. In his view, this tendency posed a dangerous temptation for the early church:

From the very first the Christian church had to fight the temptation to equate its own fellowship exclusively with that of the end-time elect and thus to see itself as an initial form of the kingdom of God. When this happens, a sense of the provisional nature of its own form of life is easily lost, and with it a reference beyond its own particularity to the universality of the race that is the target of God’s saving purpose.⁶⁵

Pannenberg claims that the first test of the church’s sense of its own identity in relation to the eschaton arose in its dealings with the Jewish people.

In its relations with the Jewish people the church had to decide for the first time whether it would view its own place in God’s history with the human race along the lines of a provisional sign of a still awaited consummation, or view itself as the place of the at least initially actualized eschatological consummation itself. The decision went in favor of the second alternative and it came to expression in the church’s claim to be exclusively identical with the eschatologically “new” people of God. The dangerous and destructive consequences of this choice mark the further history of Christianity. They take the form of dogmatic intolerance, the result of a false sense of eschatological finality that fails to see the church’s provisional nature, and an endless series of divisions that follow from dogmatic exclusiveness.

It is important to realize that this painful false development began with a primary mistake in the church’s relation to the Jewish people.⁶⁶

Pannenberg’s thinking has much in common with that of Soulen. However, they have different starting points. Soulen begins with the problem of supersessionism, and this leads him to a new emphasis on eschatology. Pannenberg begins with a new emphasis on eschatology, and in

⁶⁴ W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 464.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 464.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 476.

working out the implications of this restructuring of Christian theology he sees its importance for the relationship between the *ekklesia* and the Jewish people. Regardless of the starting point, they agree that the Christian canonical narrative must be redesigned so that special attention is given to the final consummation.

Pannenberg's eschatological rethinking of ecclesiology also leads him to a rethinking of the nature of the New Covenant itself:

Jeremiah 31:31-32 and Isaiah in 59:21 promise the new covenant not to another people but to Israel as the eschatological renewal and fulfillment of its covenant relationship with its God. When at the Last Supper that he held with his disciples on the night of his arrest Jesus related the promise of the new covenant to the table fellowship with his disciples that he sealed with his self-offering, he was not snapping the link of this promise to the people of Israel. Instead, he was showing that fellowship with himself is for the whole Jewish people the future of salvation that breaks in already in the fellowship of the band of disciples. The later inclusion of non-Jews in the Christian community on the basis of the confession of Jesus that is sealed by their baptism does nothing to change this.

...The Christian church is not exclusively identical with the eschatological people of God. It is only a provisional form of this people and a preliminary sign of its future consummation that will embrace not only members of the church but the Jewish people and the "righteous" of all the nations who stream in from every culture to the banquet of the reign of God.⁶⁷

Pannenberg's treatment of the New Covenant reveals how significant his eschatological orientation can be for a Messianic Jewish rereading of the canonical narrative. The New Covenant itself is an eschatological reality, promised preeminently to Israel as a whole, but now "breaking in" sacramentally among "the band of disciples."

Traditional Christian theology lowered the eschatological horizon by overstating the finished nature of Yeshua's work and by exaggerating the eschatological powers inherent in the Church. At the same time, it tended to individualize and spiritualize the eschaton so that it became virtually indistinguishable from the destiny of the soul after death. The Christian Church thus suffered a diminished vision of its true hope – to be resurrected as a community and to inhabit a renewed creation. As the "last things" were individualized and spiritualized, the eschatological horizon was lowered once again – now not through the inordinate exaltation of the eschatological

potential of life in this age, but through the downgrading of the nature of the future hope. In this scheme, if one turns from earthly concerns and cultivates the life of the soul in this world, one already partakes of the life of the world to come.

As we seek to develop a Messianic Jewish canonical narrative, we should follow the lead of Soulen and Pannenberg. Without detracting from the significance of Yeshua's incarnation, death, and resurrection, we should raise our eschatological horizon so that life in this age, while anticipating life in the world to come, is never confused with it.

Lifting the Jewish Eschatological Horizon

Jewish thought has its own problematic version of an excessively low eschatological horizon. It arises through a lowering of expectations for the Messianic era. David Novak has discussed the two types of eschatological views common in Jewish tradition. He calls the first position "extensive eschatology," and the second "apocalyptic eschatology." Novak describes them, and then explains why he favors the latter.

In the first position, the extensive one, the future is an extension *from* the covenantal present *into* its fulfilled future...The future of the covenant is that the political conditions now absent for the full normative authority of the covenant, the Torah, will be finally made present. Most immediately, Israel will at long last dwell in security in her land. As for the rest of the world, they will either be subordinate to Israel or become part of the people through their conversion to Israel and its Torah...

In the second position, the apocalyptic one, the future is far more radical. It is the transcendent interruption *into* the present *from* somewhere else. As such, it will radically alter the relationship between Israel and God, including that which has been codified in the Torah already revealed. It assumes that the future will bring an ontological change much more radical than the mere improvement – even vast improvement – of political conditions for the Jews.

In terms of biblical texts themselves, the apocalyptic position has greater support by far. On theological grounds, it is convincing because it helps mitigate the error that Israel often assumes from her covenantal experience, namely, that she possesses within herself the power to carry the covenant from the present into its future completion. And on philosophical grounds, it enables us to appreciate the finite fragility of the present through the affirmation of the future that transcends it.

The final and future redemption will radically change Israel's relationship with God and with the world, especially with the nations of the world...

⁶⁷ Ibid., 477.

Israel's future redemption will have literal cosmic effects. It will be an invasion from the future into the present, not a transition from the present into the future. This doctrine is the very antithesis of any ideal of "progress" – ancient, medieval, or modern.⁶⁸

Extensive eschatology renders the eschatological horizon too low in relation to Jewish life in this world. Michael Wyschogrod's view is the same.

The difference between the world as we know it and the world as foreseen by the prophets is too great for a more or less normal evolution to account for the transition of the former into the latter. The apocalyptic dimension of messianism stresses the extraordinary magnitude of the coming transformation, which is seen as cataclysmic, since nothing ordinary can put an end to the tired and broken world of history as we have known it.⁶⁹

Whether consisting of a hope for a restored Davidic Monarchy in the land of Israel within an otherwise unchanged cosmic order, or a more universal humanistic Jewish hope for a just and peaceful world order, extensive eschatology lowers the horizon too far.

Conclusion

We have argued to this point for rediscovery of proleptic eschatology in Jewish life, renewed attention to the continuity between Israel's *kedushah* and Yeshua's Incarnation, death, and resurrection as proleptic eschatological events, and increased awareness of the preliminary and provisional nature of life in Messiah in this age in relation to the eschatological fullness of the life of the world to come. At this point it will be helpful to summarize the place of eschatology in the Messianic Jewish canonical narrative in light of these assertions, and to draw some final conclusions from the nature of that narrative.

Eschatology becomes part of the story from the very beginning. The world is created good, but not yet holy. It has an appointed destiny that transcends its original constitution. Thus, eschatology is consummation before it is redemption. The eruption of evil makes redemption a necessary component in the consummation of all things. The world is now wounded and needs to be healed, it is now broken and needs to be made whole. But the final consummation involves

⁶⁸ D. Novak, *Election*, 153-54, 157.

⁶⁹ Wyschogrod, 255-56.

more than restoration to a pristine state.

The covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and its embodiment at Sinai initiates the move from the sixth to the seventh day, from the profane to the holy, from the imperfection of this world to the fullness of the world to come. Through Israel the world takes its first preliminary steps towards its consummation. The Divine Presence pitches its tent within this people, and the sacrifices ordained by the covenant enable Israel to assume its role as the world's *Kohanim*, offering itself to God in worship so that the world might be sustained, redeemed, and renewed.

In Yeshua the tent of the Divine Presence takes a new form. As the true Israelite, blameless and holy, Yeshua sums up all that Israel was intended to be. He becomes the perfect temple, priest, and sacrifice, offering himself to God on behalf of Israel, the nations, and the entire creation. Yeshua dies not only as a sacrifice but also as Israel's perfect martyr, who, like Isaac in the *Akedah*, embodies all of Israel's martyrs in himself, and whose blood is shed both to atone for sins and to prepare the way for the coming of *Olam Haba*. That new world is anticipated and proleptically realized in the resurrection of Israel's perfect martyr, and the gift of the *Ruach* and the founding of a two-fold *ekklesia* that extends Israel's heritage among the nations likewise represent anticipations of the renewed world to come.

That two-fold *ekklesia* suffers a profound disruption early in its history, so that one of its two component parts is lost or at least hidden from view, and the Jewish people as a whole chart a course through history that appears to ignore the one who perfectly embodies its destiny. This disruption brings the brokenness of the present world into the very heart of the preliminary realization of the world to come, and serves as a continual reminder of the provisional nature of that realization. Nevertheless, the two-fold *ekklesia* never completely loses its two-fold nature, for it always includes Jews and is always headed by a Resurrected Jew.⁷⁰ Similarly, the Jewish

⁷⁰ "It is extremely doubtful whether there has ever been a time when the living membership of the church included no Jews. Yet even if there were such a time, the presence of the church's living Lord, the Jew Jesus Christ, ensures that the church remains essentially a table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles" (Soulen, 173).

people never succeeds in eluding the grasp of its Resurrected brother. Like Joseph dealing with his siblings, he is never far from them, and continues to effect the Divine purpose in their midst. Guided by his counsel enfolded in the ontological depths of its corporate being, the Jewish people does not retreat from its vocation after the destruction of the temple, but presses on to express the power of eschatological *kedushah* in every aspect of its life, even in exile. At the end, God will make Yeshua known to his brethren and to all of creation, not only as temple, priest, and sacrifice, but as Messianic King, the eschatological ruler of Israel and the nations. At that point the New Covenant will be realized in its final and definitive form.

Accepting a version of the canonical narrative like this one will have certain consequences for our lives as Messianic Jews. First, it will highlight the importance of *kedushah* as an eschatological category. When we observe *mitzvot* in general and certain *mitzvot* explicitly associated with *kedushah* in particular (such as Shabbat and *Kashrut*), we are not only identifying with our people and its history; we are also entering into a dimension of existence in which *Olam Haba* is experienced corporately as a proleptic reality. As we separate the holy day from the profane days, and as we separate pure food from impure food and treat our daily meals as sacred sacrificial banquets, we both affirm Israel's calling to be a holy people and take our stand as a preliminary sign of *Olam Haba* within the present order of *Olam Haze*. We also testify to the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, who has brought this *kedushah* to a new level through the gift of the Spirit of Holiness, imparted to Jew and Gentile alike on the basis of Yeshua's faithfulness.

Second, when we express our love and unity with those who are members of the multinational expression of the two-fold *ekklesia*, we are likewise participating in the proleptic *kedushah* of the world to come. As Soulen points out, this two-fold *ekklesia* serves as a preliminary sign of the Shalom of *Olam Haba*, when Israel and the nations will share in the economy of mutual blessing among those who are and remain different.

Third, this form of the canonical narrative stresses that the world to come entails the perfect

realization of all that is good in this world and the overcoming of all evil that thwarts such realization. This will not occur through an evolutionary process, but through a future invasion of Divine power and *kedushah*, just as in the election of Israel and in the resurrection of Yeshua. However, this invasion from beyond will bring the world to its ultimate goal. Thus, a vivid eschatological awareness is not in conflict with a sensitive appreciation for all that is good and beautiful in this world. Neither is it in conflict with energetic efforts to thwart evil and realize the good in the midst of the present age; in fact, it demands just such efforts, for the invasion from beyond has already begun with the election of Israel and the coming of Yeshua. Our sincere attempts to mend the world can bring to *Olam Haze*h an anticipatory encounter with the redemptive power of *Olam Haba*.

Fourth, the proleptic experience of eschatological realities occurs in a variety of ways. We have only spoken briefly of the *charismata*, but it is clear from the Apostolic Writings that they are to be seen as a foretaste of the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5; Matt 11:2-6; 12:28) – especially as they mediate healing to the sick, wholeness to the broken, and *kedushah* to the profane and impure. Messiah’s *Tevilah* and *Zikkaron* likewise signify and convey eschatological realities in a proleptic manner. As noted above, Shabbat and *Kashrut* have an eschatological significance, as do other traditional Jewish holidays (such as Passover, Sukkot, and the High Holy Days) and rites (such as Grace after Meals and the Wedding Ceremony).⁷¹ We should be careful not to restrict proleptic eschatological experience to those areas that we find most comfortable, but should seek to be open to the full range of what is given.

Finally, our joy in the eschatological *kedushah* of traditional Jewish life, our convictions about the eschatological power of Yeshua’s resurrection, and our experience of the eschatological renewal imparted through the Spirit of Holiness, should not dim our awareness of the proleptic quality of all these realities. From Him who has given so much, much is still to be expected. The

gift serves as a pledge, pointing us forward to that which lies beyond. As Rosenzweig states ,
“The present passes not because the past prods it on but because the future snatches it toward
itself.”⁷²

The canonical narrative is the unfinished story of the world’s creation, reconciliation, redemption, and consummation through Israel and its Messiah. It is the One Story that encompasses all our individual stories and gives them meaning and purpose. The Story remains unfinished – but the role we play gives us a preliminary and provisional taste of what is to come, and even confers the privilege of participating in its ultimate realization. Because of this, we are convinced that the plea of the *Kaddish* is far more than a utopian wish; it is an inspired invocation whose answer is assured by the resurrection of Israel’s hidden Messiah:

May His great Name be magnified and sanctified
throughout the world which He created
according to His will.
May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days,
and within the life of the entire house of Israel,
speedily and soon; and say,
Amen.

⁷¹ On the eschatological dimensions of the Grace after Meals and the Jewish Wedding Ceremony, see J. Neusner, *An Introduction to Judaism: A Textbook and Reader* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 3-8, 22-30.

⁷² Rosenzweig, 328.