MAIMONIDES’ YAHWEH: HOW HIS VIA NEGATIVA GOD INFLUENCED RABBINIC JUDAISM AND ITS SUBSEQUENT MISUNDERSTANDING OF INCARNATIONAL CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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MAIMONIDES’ YAHWEH: HOW HIS *VIA NEGATIVA* GOD INFLUENCED RABBINIC JUDAISM AND ITS SUBSEQUENT MISUNDERSTANDING OF INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

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To Barbara Ellen Downey, who was told that girls did not need to go to college
but can now say, “My daughter, the doctor.”

and to the 99% who keep me awake at night and keep me going during the day—Romans 1:16.
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ABSTRACT

The life of Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) remains a mystery to many within evangelical Christianity while he is lauded as a “Second Moses” within Modern Judaism. In many ways, Maimonides is deserving of the title as his understanding of the nature of God being that of via Negativa created a rationale for rejecting the Messiahship claims of Jesus in Rabbinic Judaism. However, and one of the purposes of this dissertation, is to illustrate that Maimonides in his desire to create an anti-Christian apologetic regarding the Incarnation fashioned a Judaism that does not reflect the truths of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and developed a Judaism that was untenable for the Jewish people of the twenty-first century. Therefore, we as believers in Jesus must return them to the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures and the truth of Messiah Jesus who is also God the Son.
CHAPTER 1
Establishing the Rationale for the Dissertation

According to statistics from Joshua Project regarding the unreached spiritual condition of the Jewish people, 96.4% of the estimated 14.4 million Jewish people in the world today are separated from a personal relationship with Jesus the Jewish Messiah.¹ On many levels, this could be perceived as implausible when one realizes that the Christian faith is predicated on the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament) and that Jesus himself was Jewish. However, the vast majority of the Jewish population today does not accept the Messiahship of Jesus nor acknowledge the possibility of the Trinity which includes the theological construct that Jesus is himself God in the flesh via the Incarnation.²

Problem Statement

A place to begin the study of why modern Judaism³ would reject the identity of Messiah Jesus must include the evaluation of early Jewish theologians and scholars who were the most vocal in rejecting Jesus’ divinity and deity. It is the purpose of this dissertation, therefore, to examine the life, thought and legacy of one of the most predominant Jewish scholars and

¹ “Jews,” Joshua Project; accessed 29 October 2012; available online at http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-clusters.php?peo2=197. Please note that there is an ongoing debate within the circles of Jewish evangelism as to whether this number itself is optimistic; however, and because there is no concrete number, I will allow this number to stand.


³ The dissertation will seek to differentiate modern (aka Rabbinic) Judaism from Old Testament Judaism. I believe that while the official separation from its Biblical moorings began much earlier, as will be shown, that it reached its greatest fruition in the life and teachings of Maimonides.
rabbinical forces in Judaism – Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). It is also the presumption of this study that the teachings of Maimonides from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries continue to influence and block the Gospel message from the Jewish people in the twenty-first century.

In many of Moses Maimonides’ teachings and writings, one finds it difficult to find any association to the identity, accessibility, and possibility of a personal relationship with God. In essence, Rambam, as he was also known, believed that God could only be known by what was unknown about the Deity. Marilyn McCord Adams describes Maimonides’ and other similar views as one that believes that “God does not literally feel mercy (etymologically, misericordia meaning ‘have a miserable heart’) or anger, but only produces effects of the sort that merciful or angry human rulers would produce.” This concept of knowing God by what is unknowable will ultimately create not only a disconnect between the Jewish connection to Christianity but also Jewish people’s connection to God.

For there is a disconnect between Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism in relationship to the identity of Jesus due to what will be described in this dissertation as Maimonides’ “un-God concept.” This disconnect, which this study will seek to both identify and rectify, needs to be evaluated in order to bring the truth of Messiah Jesus and the second member of the Godhead, to the people for whom He first came (Mt. 10:1-28, esp. v.6; 23:13-37; Rm. 1:16). Therefore, this research will also seek to develop an apologetic method which will counteract the theological

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6 Marilyn McCord Adams, Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 169. It should be noted that Adams compiles her quotation through the words of Anselm, Aquinas and Maimonides.
error of Maimonides and diminish the arguments against the Messiahship and Deity of Jesus. An error which is found not only in his monumental work, The Guide for the Perplexed, in which he writes – “Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes imply polytheism, and are inadequate as we have already shown… Then I shall show that we cannot describe the Creator by means except by negative attributes”\(^7\) but also throughout the rest of his writings. As an example, Moshe Halbertal writes that Maimonides displayed what could almost be described an “Almohad-ish”\(^8\) fervor towards debunking any possibility a vision of God that included anthropomorphic concepts. Halbertal writes that Rambam saw that “God’s wisdom, as revealed in nature, was to be seen as the highest expression of His revelation—a position very much at odds with the conventional view that God’s presence in the world was expressed primarily through the extraordinary and the miraculous.”\(^9\)

Given the stated research problem, the following seven sub-questions will be addressed:

1. What is the historical perception of the Jewish people that has created the disconnect noted in the research problem which indicates the probability that Maimonides established a Jewish or Hebraic-centric Negative Theology premise to offset the Incarnational argument of Christianity?
2. What about Maimonides’ past encounter with Christians necessitated his creation of the “un-God” concept?
3. Why would such a concept as Maimonides’ be attractive to a Rabbinic Jewish audience?
4. What has Judaism lost by creating this separation between God and His people?


\(^8\) The term “Almohad” was the term for the Muslims who invaded Spain and harbored no possibility of any faith but Islam in the Iberian Peninsula. Perhaps not the best term to be utilized but “Crusader” also bears unfortunate connotations for the Jewish people as well.

5. Has Maimonides created in essence a deistic Judaism by his response to an Incarnational theology?
6. How has the Christian’s general misunderstanding of what is meant by the term “Incarnational Theology” impacted the necessity of Jewish evangelism?
7. What can be done within the Christian faith to reunite the Jewish people with their God – which would thereby bring them to Jesus as well?

Brief Historical Overview of the Jewish-Christian World

In order to understand the analytical and theological mind of Maimonides, especially in his relationship to his understanding of God in the negative, it is necessary to provide a brief historical overview of the world in which Maimonides found himself living in on a daily basis. In the following dissertation chapters, a full historical overview will be provided; however, it was deemed sufficient for this chapter to provide an overview of Christian-Jewish relations in the years following Jesus and the disciples up to and including the years of this Jewish sage.10

It is impossible to give anything but a cursory survey of Christianity’s anti-Semitic history. This ambivalent atmosphere began with one of the earliest Church fathers in a post-apostolic world – Justin Martyr (c. 100-165). Questions abound to the validity of an actual debate occurring between a Jewish traveler Trypho and Justin. The one constant that is agreed upon, however, is the fact that this dialogue laid the foundation for the doctrine of Replacement Theology.11

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10 The primary vehicle for this overview will be an edited excerpt from the my own presentation at the International Society of Christian Apologetics meeting in April 2010. The entire presentation paper is available at http://www.isca-apologetics.org/papers/isca-2010/apologetic-response-how-share-gospel-messiah-jesus-light-holocaust. The footnote information in the following pages will be identical, except where mistakes were discovered at a later date, to the paper itself except for numerical adjustment.

Replacement Theology, also known as Supersessionism, is the belief that the Church had replaced Israel as God’s Chosen People as evidenced by the destruction of the Temple, began to fester within the minds of church leaders. This belief, albeit first voiced in the late first or early second century Epistle of Barnabas, found its expression in the allegorical theology of Origen (c. 182-251), a voice which was to influence many theologians and councils after his passing.

The Council of Nicaea (325), known primarily for responding to the controversy related to Arian teachings, also set the official and a possible final stage for the division of the church from its Jewishness. The council determined it was necessary to separate the calendar date for remembering the resurrection of Jesus from the sacrificial redemption story of Passover, Feast of

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14 James Carroll, Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 167; and Jocelyn Hellig, The Holocaust and Antisemitism: A Short History (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 208-09. In the appropriate chapter of this dissertation, the writings of Tertullian will also be drawn out to show the division between the church of Jesus and the roots of Jesus.

15 I will seek to argue definitely in this research that the Council of Nicaea was the third stage of separation with the first stage being the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and the second stage being the failed Bar Kokhba rebellion in AD 135. This concept was also briefly introduced, albeit without the stage concept mentioned here, in the Latin Fathers paper mentioned in fn. 9. These three stages also gave rise to the concept of Judaism that was more Rabbinical than biblical in perspective. Rabbinical Judaism can be simply defined as the Judaism developed after the losses of the first two stages in which modifications were forced to be made because of the inability to offer sacrifices in the Temple at Jerusalem (definition is that of the author but compiled from a variety of sources which could be argued as common knowledge). However, a simplistic definition is available online at http://judaism.about.com/od/abcsofjudaism/g/mishnah.htm. A fuller definition is offered by Jacob Neusner online at http://www.brill.com/rabbinic-judaism-0.
Unleavened Bread, and Feast of First Fruits because of their Jewish connections.¹⁶ Emperor Constantine’s letter at the conclusion of the Council provides evidence of this desire for partition when the emperor supposedly wrote, according to early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea:

> And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way. A course at once legitimate and honorable lies open to our most holy religion. Beloved brethren, let us with one consent adopt this course, and withdraw ourselves from all participation in their baseness … For how should they be capable of forming a sound judgment, who, since their parricidal guilt in slaying their Lord, have been subject to the direction, not of reason, but of ungoverned passion, and are swayed by every impulse of the mad spirit that is in them?¹⁷

This separation perhaps created the final “nail in the coffin” between the Church and its roots of Judaism. A separation between the two sides which continues to this day as both sides of the spectrum do not realize how intertwined the two faith systems are intertwined over the identity of Jesus and the possibility of the Incarnation.

However, it was Augustine (354-430) who built from the replacement of Justin, Barnabas, and the Nicene Council an allegorical comparison of the Church and the Jewish people to Abel and Cain.¹⁸ This allegory of the Jews as Cain manifested into the “Wandering Jew” who were destined to remain on earth to serve as emblems of what happens to those who reject Jesus. Augustine encouraged not pity or sympathy but rather a cautionary tale of the

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The dangers of rejecting Jesus. Augustine advocated perhaps what could be described as a “fate worse than death” in Book XII of *The City of God*:

> For whoever destroys them in this way shall suffer sevenfold vengeance, that is, shall bring upon himself the sevenfold penalty under which the Jews lie for the crucifixion of Christ. So to the end of the seven days of time, the continued preservation of the Jews will be a proof to believing Christians of the subjection merited by those who, in the pride of their kingdom, put the Lord to death.\(^{20}\)

The writings, sermons, and advocacy of the Church Fathers paved the way for the next 1,500 years of Christian history. The inglorious Crusades, which were ultimately neither holy nor triumphant, began when Pope Urban II called Europe to arms in 1095.\(^{21}\) Perhaps it could be argued that more persecution was done to the Jewish people than actual victories achieved in the battles against the Muslims. Jewish citizens of France and Germany were forced to either convert or die.\(^{22}\) These faulty evangelism tactics only resulted in false converts (i.e., *marranos*) or Jewish martyrs who died for their faith which resulted in eternal separation from the God of their Fathers. “The Chronicles of Solomon bar Simson” recalls this futile eternal martyrdom when it was written:

> Twenty-two people were slain there and the majority were forcibly converted because of our many sins and great guilt. The forced converts remained there until the day of indignation passed, and afterwards they returned to the Lord with all

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\(^{19}\) Joel Carmichael, *The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism* (New York: Fromm, 1992), 36. Carmichael explains this wandering punishment as – “That was why they survived—to be eternal witnesses precisely to their own guilt, as well to the truth of the prophecies embedded in their own Scriptures, now properly understood only by the Church, and to be witnesses too to the very Triumph of the Church.”


\(^{21}\) Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, 238-239; and Hellig, *The Holocaust and Antisemitism*, 211.

their heart; may God accept their penitence and forgive the sins of His people… It is now fitting to recount the praises of those who were forcibly converted. They risked their lives even in matters pertaining to food and drink. They slaughtered the animals they ate in accordance with Jewish ritual, extracted the forbidden fat, and inspected the mean in accordance with Rabbinic law. They did not drink prohibited wine and rarely attended church, and whenever they did go, it was under great coercion and fear, and they went with aggrieved spirits.

The Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries opened the door for more horrors to follow for the Jewish people. The Inquisition, which was focused on uncovering the false converts of the Crusader period, brought about growing suspicions about the Jewish people. These “Urban Legends” of Blood Libel and Host Desecration today are seen as the naïve beliefs of illiterate Middle Age citizens; however, to the Jewish people they often meant torture and death.

Maimonides existed in a world that included almost daily threats against the Jewish people from the people who called themselves Christian. He also existed in a world, which will be explored in more detail in the dissertation, in which the Muslim people for periods of time


24 Jay Rubenstein, Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for the Apocalypse (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 5-7, 49-53. This is an additional notation beyond what was presented at the ISCA meeting.

25 Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, Why the Jews: The Reason for Antisemitism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 97-103; Carroll, Constantine’s Sword, 268-77. Prager and Telushkin bring out the fact that the accusation of Host Desecration led to the 4th Lateran Council (1215) which ordered the wearing of a yellow badge of all Jews so that they could be identified and perhaps even targeted. These accusations and suspicions fed and were in turn fed more hatred against the Jewish people with the production of —Passion Plays. Gordon R. Mork, “Christ’s Passion on Stage: The Traditional Melodrama of Deicide,” Journal of Religion and Film vol. 8, special issue no. 1 (February 2004); Internet: http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/2004Symposium/Mork.htm. Accessed on 13 January 2010. An anonymous letter (“The Narrative of the Old Persecutions, or Mainz Anonymous,” The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades, trans. and ed. Shlomo Eidelberg [Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1996], 102) from the Jewish people of France provides a glimpse of this barbarity in the name of Christ with this warning:

When the errant ones and burghers heard this, they cried out. They all assembled, anyone of capable of drawing and bearing a sword, big and small, and declared: —Behold, the time has come to avenge him who was nailed to the wood, whom their forefathers slew. Now, let no remnant or vestige of them be allowed to escape, not even a babe or suckling in the cradle.
were open to Jewish people than the followers of the Jewish Messiah.\textsuperscript{26} It would be safe to assume, therefore, that the skewed and skewered message of Jesus would be one that would cause a Jewish scholar to consider and against which to create a rebuttal argument.

**Literature Review**

I have sought to ascertain whether or not anyone previously has written a dissertation on a combination of the subjects – Maimonides, Messiah, Negative Theology, Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, Transcendence, Immanence, Condescension, God, Jesus, Trinity, Incarnation, and Evangelism.\textsuperscript{27} The following is a list of related but not specific dissertations that were located, and why they do not create a barrier to continuing with this dissertation concept. (1) Meir Soloveichik of Princeton University entitled his dissertation – “God’s Beloved: Election and Tradition in the Theology of Michael Wyschogrod.” The excerpt from the dissertation shows that Soloveichik sought to examine the love aspect of God as Wyschogrod did from Maimonides’ concept and the abstract does reveal some interaction with Pauline writings but not from a Christian or apologetically evangelistic perspective. Nor does the dissertation deal with the issue of Maimonides’ Negative Theology as a possible response against the Incarnation. (2) Joseph Anthony Buijs of the University of Western Ontario entitled his dissertation – “Negative Language and Knowledge about God: A Critical Analysis of Maimonides’ Theory of Divine Attributes.” Buijs does deal with the Negative Theology of Maimonides but from a philosophical construct and not a Christian or evangelistic thought process. (3) Shoshanna G. Gershenzon of

\textsuperscript{26} María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002). This will be an area of further development for the dissertation. This book will also serve as a stepping stone to illustrate the point being made.

\textsuperscript{27} The literature review acknowledges that a great many dissertations have been written on the topic of negative theology; however, I sought to restrict herself to listing only those dissertations which relate/connect specifically to Maimonides’ approach to the topic.
The Jewish Theological Seminary of America entitled her dissertation – “A Study of Teshuvot Le-Meharef by Abner of Burgos.” Gershenzon’s dissertation might be utilized my dissertation as she examines the life of a Jewish convert who attempted to create an apologetic model against Maimonides and his philosophical understanding of God as well as showing how the Incarnation is an Old Testament theology. This dissertation is a closer match than I expected to find; however, she does belief her uniqueness continues to exist as Gershenzon focused on Abner of Burgos and not on Maimonides. In addition, the anticipated apologetic model to be formulated in this dissertation will hopefully be unique enough to not mimic Abner’s which is described by Gershenzon in the abstract as increasingly “anti-Jewish” in “tone.” (4) Jonathan Leonard Hecht of New York University entitled his dissertation – “The polemical exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440 ‘Iggeret Teshuvat Apikoros’ and ‘Teshuvot la-Meharef.” This dissertation revolves primarily around the polemical arguments made by Abner of Burgos and evangelistic methods of his time period. There is nothing overtly obvious that would negate the uniqueness of my approach. (5) Jack Irwin Meadows of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School entitled his dissertation – “An Investigative Study of Rashi’s and Maimonides’ Messianic Interpretations of the Star Prophecy in Numbers 24:14-19.” The focus of this dissertation relates to one primary prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptures and why two Medieval Jewish scholars veered away from the traditional Rabbinic understanding the prophecy. It could have a relationship to Maimonides’ Negative Theology; however, it is does not interfere with the overall focus of this dissertation.

(6) David S. Goldstein of St. Mary’s Seminary and University entitled his dissertation – “Teshuba: The Evolution of the Doctrines of Sin and Repentance in Classical Jewish Thought, with Reference to Maimonides’ Hilchoth Teshuba.” This dissertation will examine the
theological concepts of sin and repentance in relationship to Maimonides but not singly one document of Rambam. Additionally, Goldstein’s dissertation does not create an encumbrance to this dissertation as it does not examine the issue from a Christological, apologetic and/or missiological perspective. (7) Martin T. Kavka of Rice University entitled his dissertation – “Being and Nonbeing: The Appropriation of Greek Thought of ‘To Me’ in Jewish Thought.” This dissertation while focusing primarily on Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophical constructs does examine how Greek though influenced Maimonides’ understanding of the Messiah. Kavka’s dissertation while unique and Messianic-related does not impact the foci of this dissertation. (8) Anastasia Christine Wendlinger of the University of Notre Dame entitled her dissertation – “Beyond Analogy: Articulating God’s Transcendence and Immanence according to Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart.” Wendlinger does consider the via Negativa of Maimonides but only as a corollary to her primary focus on Aquinas and Eckhart. Therefore, there is no obstruction for this dissertation. (9) Joseph Gerard Trabbic of Fordham University entitled his dissertation – “Aquinas, God and Ontotheology.” Similar to Wendlinger’s dissertation, the concept of Negation Theology and its connection is discussed; however, there is no apologetic, evangelical, or missiological connotation to the dissertation.

(10) D. Davies of the University of Cambridge entitled his dissertation – “The Unity of Metaphysical Vision in The Guide of the Perplexed: A Study in Maimonides’ Methods of Presentation.” Davies does consider and examine the presence of Maimonides’ via Negativa in The Guide of the Perplexed but solely from an analytical perspective and not from a theological or evangelical presentation. Therefore, this dissertation does present an obstacle from the pursuit of my research goals. (11) Albert D. Freidberg of the University of Toronto entitled his dissertation – “An Evaluation of Maimonides Enumeration of the 613 Commandments, with
Special Emphasis on the Positive Commandments.” This dissertation by Friedberg is of value to
the writer as it not only summarizes a core Rabbinic tenet of living a faithful Jewish life but also
does a work of explaining how Maimonides viewed this commandments as the means by which
to achieve God’s unity and incorporeality. However, this dissertation does not hinder the overall
topic of my dissertation. (12) J. D. MacCullum of The University of Manchester entitled his
dissertation – “Silence and Salvation in Maimonides’ Guide.” The abstract from MacCullum’s
dissertation reveals a philosophical analysis of the doctrine of salvation in connection to
Maimonides’ “unknowable” God; however, but while useful for evaluation, this dissertation does
not encumber my dissertation project. It should be noted that I have examined many other
dissertations; however, it is believed that these twelve dissertations reflect the closest connection
to the theme/title/focus of this dissertation project. Therefore, it is my assertion that I have
demonstrated uniqueness and need for this writing project.

Additionally, and aside from the dissertations mentioned above, there are noteworthy
works on Maimonides that played a significant role in my understanding of the character,
theology and mindset of Rambam. Additionally, and as shall be noted, sources will also be noted
which illustrate Maimonides’ influence on Rabbinic (modern) Judaism. (1) Moshe Halbertal in
one of the most recent works available (2014) wrote Maimonides: Life and Thought as a
compendium that not only sought to provide a biography of the philosopher but also sought to
illustrate how Rambam’s life influenced three of his most influential works—Commentary on the
Mishnah, The Guide of the Perplexed, and the magnum opus Mishneh Torah. (2) Joel L.
Kraemer in 2008 wrote an exhaustive biography, Maimonides: The Life and World of One of
Civilization’s Greatest Minds, of the scholar in 2008 that incorporates not only the Jewish but
also the Muslim perspective of Maimonides, including the question as to whether Rambam was a
pseudo-convert to Islam during the Almohad “occupation” of Spain and Morocco. (3) Marc Saperstein in his comparative work, *Jewish Preaching: 1200-1800—An Anthology*, only provides a limited example of Maimonides as a personal contributor to Jewish preaching; however, and what is fascinating is to see how in the six-hundred years of Saperstein’s examination how many prominent Jewish preachers are influenced by Maimonidean thought and exegesis. For example, and this will be examined in greater detail in a later chapter, Maimonides’ allegorical approach to Scriptural interpretation is evident by the following statement:

> The worst offenders are preachers who preach and expound to the masses what they themselves do not understand. Would that they kept silent what they do not know,… But they believe they do understand, and they vigorously expound to the people what they think rather than what the sages really said. They therefore give lectures to the people on the tractate Berakot and on the present chapter and other texts, expounding them word for word according to their literal meaning (emphasis added).28

(4) Rifat Sonsino in his work *The Many Faces of God: A Reader of Modern Jewish Theologies* summarizes fifteen modern Jewish scholars/theologians and then illustrates their concept of God through the reproduction of their own works. It was a fascinating summary as one was able to see the Maimonidean influence present in many of the scholars even if Rambam’s name was not overtly mentioned. (5) Ilil Arbel in her work *Maimonides: A Spiritual Biography* provides in less than two-hundred pages a surprising amount of details and anecdotes that proved insightful and invaluable to me. I picked up this work as an afterthought and I am most grateful that I did. (6) Alfred Ivry in his article for the *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* entitled “The Guide and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources” was like Arbel’s work—an unexpected surprise. It in many ways, despite some historical disagreements, validated my original presumptions and

28 Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching: 1200-1800—An Anthology*, Yale Judaica Series, volume XXVI. Edited by Frank Talmage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 379. Saperstein notes in his own footnote the writing of Isadore Twersky and his *A Maimonides Readers* (p. 408) that Maimonides was against the practical of literal, exegetical interpretation of Scripture because it showed a disrespect for the Talmudic writers
suppositions about Rambam’s motives and fears. However, this dissertation argues that none of these works responded completely or adequately or from the perspective that this dissertation is taking.

**Method Statement**

The primary method will involve bibliographic research of Maimonidean thought as well as apologetic tools used in his time frame, aside from the obviously negative ones used by the Crusades and Inquisition. Finally, the dissertation will consider the development of an apologetic approach for evangelism among the Jewish people in current time parameters in light of Maimonidean influence.

For there is a missing component, as I have discovered in fifteen years of Jewish missions, that connects the dots for most Jewish people who are seeking to understand the identity of the Jewish man that the Christian church recognizes as both Messiah and God. For example, when asked what are the biggest obstacles to Jewish evangelism in the twenty-first century, I will always have two answers – the Holocaust and the Trinity. If there was a means to respond to one of the barriers to Jesus through this dissertation, then work could begin in earnest on the other issues of concern.

Therefore, and in response to the question of criticism that could possibly impact “internal or external validity,” for this dissertation there are two primary areas that this I foresee as potential obstacles. First, the fact that Thomas Aquinas also held to a form of Negative Theology will need to be responded to and answered in the dissertation itself. This work will also

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need to dispel potential concerns that it is trying to anthropomorphize the Godhead. Therefore, a more in-depth comparison of Aquinas’ negation view will need to be illustrated.

Second, the modern day approach of Dual Covenantalism within both the liberal and evangelical camps will need to be addressed. I completed a book review of John Hagee’s *In Defense of Israel* and completed two papers for Ed Hindson on Christian Zionism in the 20th Century and Replacement Theology in Post-Modern Christianity for an independent study I did for him. These papers will assist in developing and expanding the concerns mentioned in this issue. In addition, I have done additional work, such as the ones mentioned in this dissertation and the bibliography.

**Preliminary Interpretation and Conclusion**

After fifteen years in the field of Jewish evangelism, I believe the following conclusions can be made based upon initial research and practical experience in the field of Jewish missions:

1. There is a disconnect present which limits or inhibits effective and widespread Jewish evangelism. In my view, this disconnect revolves primarily around Rabbinic Judaism which was established in a post-Temple environment. The two primary voices which have appeared to transcend time and criticism are Moses Maimonides and Rashi. Both live within the same general time parameters and both are considered as the voices of modern or Rabbinic Judaism for many Jewish people.
2. Therefore, a question arises as to whether Rashi or Maimonides’ view of God is the most predominant in modern Rabbinic Judaism. If I find that Rashi plays a larger role in modern Judaism then I can still utilize the Maimonidean concepts for an apologetic response for today as the second Jewish voice would have to be that of Moses Maimonides.30
3. One anticipates that the Biblical/Jewish literature cited within the dissertation will need to be re-examined for its Messianic and Trinitarian overtones with the ideal result being that Judaism will have to reconsider its arguments against the Messiahship of Jesus and the place of the Trinity and Jesus’ divinity/deity within its tenets.
4. If #3 is validated, then all of Maimonides’ arguments and positions will need to be reconsidered in light of the findings of this dissertation.

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30 Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 317. Kraemer considers the *Mishneh Torah* “the backbone of Judaism” and “the benchmark for all subsequent writing on Jewish jurisprudence,” including such works as Joseph Caro’s *Shulhan ‘arukh* which has become an established systematic credo for Orthodox Judaism.
5. If #3 is found to be true, then a working apologetic can be developed from within the Biblical/Jewish literary sphere that allows for the deity and divinity of Jesus to be a viable argument within Jewish thought and hearts.

Therefore, and as mentioned in the introduction, at least 96.4% of the Jewish people living in the world today are separated from a personal relationship with Messiah Jesus. The history of the Christian church has played a role in their spiritually lost condition. However, the doctrine and teachings of Rabbinic Judaism, influenced heavily by the teachings of Moses Maimonides as will be shown in this dissertation, have also played a role in their separation from the Jewish Messiah and the Godhead. For even Halbertal has the honesty to recognize that in many ways that “Maimonides belonged to the rare and unique species of religious reformers—even, one may say, of religious founders.”31 Additionally, Joel L. Kraemer believes that Rambam in his own writings saw himself “as a Moses redivivus”32 perhaps because even today Maimonides can be known by the term the “Great Eagle.”33 Therefore, it is the writer’s belief

31 Halbertal, Maimonides: Life and Thought, 4. Halbertal (p. 11) quotes from Maimonides’ “Introduction” to the Mishneh Torah an example of what some might consider the Spanish rabbi’s hubris and belief in his absolute understanding of Judaism: “Hence, I have entitled this work Mishneh Torah (Repetition of the Law), for the reason that a person who first reads the Written Law and then this compilation, will know from it the whole of the Oral Law, without having occasion to consult any other book between them” (emphasis added).

32 Joel L. Kraemer, Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization’s Greatest Minds (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 51, 165, 166, 237, 471-72. Kraemer bases this proposition (expanded upon in his fn. 44 for page 51) on three sections of The Guide of the Perplexed (I:71; II:2 and III:31) which if read do allow for a consideration that Rambam expected his views to be received as fiat.

But the truth is undoubtedly as we have said, that every one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts serves to inculcate some truth, to remove some erroneous opinion, to establish proper relations in society, to diminish evil, to train in good manners or to warn against bad habits. All this depends on three things: opinions, morals, and social conduct. We do not count words, because precepts, whether positive or negative, if they relate to speech, belong to those precepts which regulate our social conduct, or to those which spread truth, or to those which teach morals. Thus these three principles suffice for assigning a reason for every one of the Divine commandments. (III:31)

33 Ibid., 209. See also, p. 367, where Kraemer again quoting directly from Maimonides from The Guide of the Perplexed’s introduction writes that Rambam saw “himself in the first person as the man of destiny to carry out the task:
that this dissertation will provide a new instrument in the evangelistic “tool bag” that will seek to not only provoke the Jewish people to jealousy (Rm. 11:11) but also will bring them to Jesus the Jewish and Gentile Messiah.

Lastly, when I have a difficult subject before me—when I find the road narrow, and can see no other way of teaching a well-established truth except by pleasing one intelligent man and displeasing ten thousand fools—I prefer to address myself to the one man, and to take no notice whatever of the condemnation of the multitude; I prefer to extricate that intelligent man from his embarrassment and show him the cause of his perplexity, so that he may attain perfection and be at peace (emphasis added).
CHAPTER 2

A Brief Examination of Jewish-Christian History (AD 70 to 1290)\textsuperscript{34}

Seeking to examine the history of the Christian church and its relationship with its Jewish relatives in many ways does resemble the legendary battle between the Hatfield and McCoys of American Appalachian folklore. What began as an inter-doctrinal squabble between followers of the new Jewish sect known as “The Way” and the establishment directed from the Temple leadership of the Sadducees and the Pharisees of the Sanhedrin became something that has created division, confusion, hatred and death for almost two millennia. This chapter will seek to briefly examine this separation and its causes for the time period both preceding the time of Moses Maimonides and the immediate time frame following his death. For it was in this time frame that one begins to see the beginning days of expulsion for the Jewish people, from first England and then other areas of Europe. It was also in this time that we see established a seemingly, impenetrable dividing wall between the faith of Jesus the Jewish Messiah and the Jewish people. Therefore, this is a wall that must be torn down if the twenty-first century church is to return the Gospel to the brothers and sisters of Messiah Jesus (Rom 11:11).

\textbf{Ramifications of the Destruction of the Temple (AD 70)}

In Matt 24:1-2, one can read what this dissertation argues is the only overt prophetic statement of Jesus. For while the Olivet Discourse in Matthew and the other Synoptic Gospels deliver the essence of Jesus’ declaration concerning what will happen in the “End Times,” the future destruction of the Temple is a clear prophecy promise that had immediate results in the

\textsuperscript{34} It should be noted that portions of this chapter have been taken from edited seminar papers from my Ph.D. program at Liberty University’s Divinity School. Specifically the papers are primarily from Ed Smither’s “Augustine” and “Latin Fathers” seminars and Ken Cleaver’s “Patristic Exegesis” and “Patristic Theology” seminars.
lives of the disciples—“Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.” And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” Approximately forty years later, the fulfillment of this prophecy was realized as the future Emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem with only the outer wall that separated the Temple itself from the community (today known as the Kotel) remaining erect. However, there were ramifications to the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 that would ultimately lead to the separation of Jewish Christianity and traditional Judaism.

Theodore Stylianopoulos writes, “the New Testament marks the beginning of Christianity, when the Christian church was born from the matrix of Judaism, and testifies both to the close connections between the two communities of faith as well to the decisive factors which separate them.” While on the surface, the statement exhibits a certain connectivity between Judaism and followers of the Christian faith, there is on the other hand an immediate contradistinction which assumes that there was always a separation between the two religious views. Stylianopoulos’ argument is overstated; however, James Parkes while missing the overall point as well does come closer to the truth when he wrote that “the Jewish communities of apostolic and sub-apostolic times provided the bases from which the apostolic message was preached; and that without them the Church would have had a much more difficult task of interpretation and explanation to the Hellenistic and Asiatic worlds.” The actual truth that until AD 70 and even after the Messianic sect which followed Jesus of Nazareth were considered as

35 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the NASB.


much Jewish in ethnicity and religion as the Essenes in Qumran and the Pharisees in Jerusalem. This is because the followers of “The Way” taught from, believed in and practiced the same practices of Jewish Scriptures as anyone else. It was only in the annals of history that this began to change from both the perception of Judaism and Christianity.

Jews of the Sanhedrin

Therefore, it is required that we briefly consider in the overall schema of this dissertation just exactly who were the non-Christian Jewish people at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple—from the development of Rabbinic (i.e., Modern) Judaism to the disappearance of the other religious groups that existed at the time of the great tragedy. Additionally, this will include a brief examination of the legacy of Masada and the impact it played on Judaism up to the time of Bar Kokhba.

Development of Rabbinic (i.e., Modern) Judaism

As it has been illustrated by Stylianopoulos that he saw a dividing wall between Jewish Christians and traditional Jews in the first century, he himself acknowledges that Judaism of this time was a virtual panoply of views and opinions that “distinguished them[elves] sometimes quite sharply from one another.”38 Yes, the differences between Jewish believers in Jesus and non-believers were sharpest in contrast and views, including accusations of blasphemy and non-monotheistic views;39 however, this could be because these two groups were the only ones to


survive the Great Revolt of AD 66-70 which led to the destruction of the Second Temple.  

However, it is to a brief examination of the early developmental stages of Rabbinic Judaism that this dissertation know will consider.

The germination of Rabbinic Judaism begins in the days of the Sanhedrin. For while there is a question as to the formation and formulation of the Sanhedrin in both the times prior to Jesus and during his days, even Lester Grabbe who seeks to question the Gospel account of the power of body, and even the naming of the body, acknowledges the existence of such an entity.  

Howard Clark Kee affirms the existence of the Sanhedrin and examines the power of the body from both the writings of the Talmud and the historian Josephus, albeit acknowledging that there could have been more than one group which called itself Sanhedrin in pre-AD 70 times—the Great Sanhedrin with seventy-one members and the Small Sanhedrin with twenty-three members.  

This is a view that is allegedly archaeologically supported by the tombs of “Elders of the Great Sanhedrin” even if absolute historical evidence is impossible to affirm.  

Coincidentally, Kee would argue that the existence of the Sanhedrin was such an integral part of

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40 Jacob Jervell, “The Mighty Minority,” *Studia Theologica* 34 (1980): 15-37. Jervell’s article it should be acknowledged attempts to slander Paul as anti-Jewish in his theology; however, he does an adequate job of illustrating the continuing Jewish-Christian presence within the Church up to at least the year AD 100.


Judaism that it played a role in the formative days of Rabbinic Judaism; and, hence, why one of the tractates was named *Sanhedrin*. Kee wrote, “The aim, however, was to regain orientation of the religious community in an age in which the past was gone and a new era was emerging, so that the goal was to build up a trustworthy mode of shared existence.”

This idea of “regaining orientation” is a concept that Jacob Neusner examined as he recognized that the Judaism which did not include Jesus was in a crisis mode after the destruction of the Second Temple. As the fires still burned throughout Jerusalem in AD 70, it was the rabbis such as Johannan ben Zakkai that lived out the concept of a new orientation in which a new Rabbinic Judaism was born due to the fact that in their minds the old Biblical Judaism was no longer possible because the sacrificial system had been forever abolished. Ephraim Urbach takes this idea of new orientation one step further and begins to argue that Rabbinic Judaism began to isolate itself and become a “self-enclosed movement.” Therefore, Biblical Judaism was abolished along with the Essenes and other religious groups and the isolation of Rabbinic thought would consequently allow for the question of whether one could be Jewish and now believe in Jesus.

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Disappearance of the Essenes and Other Religious Groups

Despite Jacob Neusner’s analytical genius, he was incorrect in writing that the Temple’s destruction only impacted the religious Jews in Judah proper.\(^{48}\) For even though the Essenes had abandoned worship in Jerusalem long before AD 70,\(^ {49}\) the destruction of Jerusalem spelled the end of Sadducean control of the Temple complex and the Essenes lost their own spiritual stronghold and were in a large sense forced to find refuge with the secular Jews of their time residing at Masada.\(^ {50}\) Ultimately, and as William Stegner points out by the end of the war and the destruction of Masada,\(^ {51}\) there were only two groups strong enough to vie for control of Jewish religious thought – Pharisaical (Rabbinical) Judaism and Jewish Christianity.\(^ {52}\)

Jews of the Sect Known as The Way (Acts 9:2)

In the first two verses of Acts 9, we find an interesting location and expression as it refers to the early followers of Jesus: “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at

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\(^{49}\) Ibid., 317. See also, Steven D. Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” in Jewish Spirituality, vol 1, from the Bible through the Middle Ages, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 267. Fraade goes into more detail as to why the Essenes left Jerusalem for worship in the wilderness.


\(^{51}\) The focus of the paper does not necessitate a full historical breakdown of the Masada martyrdom; therefore, the following source will provide the only information that is required at this point. Ehud Netzer, “The Last Days and Hours at Masada,” Biblical Archaeology Review, vol. 17, no. 6 (1991): available online at http://members.bib-arch.org/search.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=17&Issue=6&ArticleID=13&UserID=0&.

Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” The followers of Jesus were going to be found in the synagogues of Damascus, in contradistinction to the argument made by David Flusser, as they were Jewish and had taken on the identity of Jesus’ description of himself in John 14:6, “The Way.”

Therefore, there should be no question that the earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish. It can be seen that they continued to follow and observe Jewish festivals, albeit with a fulfillment perspective. Across the theological spectrum, the acknowledgement of this fact is affirmed. From the Jewish perspective, Jacob Neusner describes believers as a “Christian [who] was another kind of Jew and saw himself as such.” Bruce Malina even attempted to provide a definition for first-century Christian Judaism that would be permissible in a Second Temple milieu. From the Christian perspective, we find the dichotomy of Schuyler Brown who sought to find the balance between the “ecumenical” Paul who allowed the Gentiles into the fold with


54 Robert R. Hann, “Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in the First Century,” *The Journal of Religious History* vol. 14, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 341, 343. The dissertation writer makes the exegetical comment regarding the location and expression comment. Hann makes the notation regarding the Jewish nature of early Antiochene believers while also noting on this same page that by the end of the first century that the dynamic had changed to primarily Gentile in nature (pages 347, 355).


the “restrictive” leaders in Jerusalem who sought to maintain fidelity to the Jewish past.\textsuperscript{58} We also find the definitional struggle of James D. G. Dunn who argued that Paul was a Jewish believer but wondered just what kind of Jewish believer?\textsuperscript{59} Ultimately, it should be recognized that Jewish believers of the first centuries were not simply members of the heretical Ebionite sect;\textsuperscript{60} but, were Jewish believers who were seeking to find their place as both Christians and Jewish in a Second Temple and non-Temple world. For as L. W. Barnard notes, “Jewish-Christianity in the diaspora was not eclipsed by the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70,” for while they might have been moved to such places as Pella, the existence and persistence of recognized Jewish believers in Jesus continued within Judaism at least until the disaster known as the Bar Kokhba Rebellion.\textsuperscript{61}

**Ramifications of the Bar Kokhba Rebellion (AD 135)**

Even before the disaster known as the Bar Kokhba Rebellion, there is value in considering whether there was a continuing Jewish-Christian presence in the area now known as Palestine following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. David Sim and Jacob


Jervell would not only argue against such a presence but also would argue that the Jewish-Christian emphasis had been a complete failure.\(^{62}\) This approach is negated on both a pragmatic level by Eric Meyers and an esoteric concern by Theodore Stylianopoulos;\(^{63}\) however, the most obvious answer as to whether and how the message of the Jewish Jesus impacted the Jewish community can be seen by their response both before and after the Bar Kokhba Rebellion. Megan Hale Williams and Burton L. Visotzky, who while writing for Jewish academic journals, express the continual confusion even into the twentieth and twenty-first century as to what should be done with Jewish believers in Jesus much in the same way as the rabbinic scholars did in the early centuries of the “Common Era.”\(^{64}\)

Therefore, it is the penultimate catastrophe of the Bar Kokhba Rebellion that in many ways created one of the true fissures between traditional Judaism and a Judaism that believed and affirmed Jesus as Messiah.\(^{65}\) This divorce which caused the rabbis to consider the once Jewish dominated sect as nothing more than “notzerim” (Nazarenes) also opened the door for the

\(^{62}\) David C. Sim, “How Many Jews Became Christians in the First Century? The Failure of the Christian Mission to the Jews,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* vol. 61, issues 1-2 (March 2005): 426 and Jervell, “The Mighty Minority,” 13. Sim in his article creates this convoluted mathematical algorithm that estimates that the number of Jewish believers in Jesus never exceeded one thousand; however, this necessitates his denunciation of the Biblical accounts in Acts and his lack of understanding that the converts at the Day of Pentecost would themselves have been Jewish as they were there for the Jewish festival of Sukkot.


\(^{64}\) Megan Hale Williams, “No More Clever Titles: Observations on Some Recent Studies of Jewish-Christian Relations in the Roman World,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 99, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 40, 45 and Burton L. Visotzky, “Prolegomenon to the Study of Jewish-Christianities in Rabbinic Literature,” *AJS Review* vol. 1, no. (Spring 1989): 47-48. Both Williams and Visotzky struggle with what to do with Jewish believers while Williams refers to the mountain of sources that validate the struggle, Visotzky simply writes, “They just don’t fit very neatly; they never did. Ever since it became clear that the law-free mission to the gentiles would create a church and not a synagogue, Jewish-Christianity has been an uncomfortable reality with which to deal (p. 47).”

\(^{65}\) Tomson, “The Wars against Rome,” 22-23. Tomson includes the Eusebius citation (*Hist. eccl. 4.8.4*) which notes that Bar-Kokhba sought out punishment for the Jewish Christians who would not deny Jesus as Messiah.
official foundation of Rabbinic Judaism. Therefore, it is of some value to briefly examine the theological significance of a rebellion that was short-lived and short-sighted.

In many ways, after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, religious Jews wavered on the brink of despondence until Rabbi Akiva announced the arrival of “the Messiah”—Simeon Bar-Kokhba. While there has been recent scholarly debate as to whether Rabbi Akiva indeed made the proclamation of Bar Kokhba’s Messiaiship, there is no doubt that such a man existed and he ruled as a “despot of record in the Jewish homeland.” There is also little doubt that Bar Kokhba led a “Messianic-type” rebellion in the mode of the Maccabees against Rome that resulted in utter destruction and the expulsion of all Jews (believers in Jesus or not) from the now named Aelia Capitolina (i.e., Jerusalem). This short-lived messianic dream also resulted in the deaths of more than half a million Jewish lives. However, it was not until Bar Kokhba that Jewish-Christians had their faith and ethnicity put to the test literally and figuratively. Up until this time, Jewish believers in Jesus, according to Yehudah Liebes were not only included in the synagogue

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67 The historical significance of Bar Kokhba will only be considered in a cursory fashion due to two factors: (1) space consideration and (2) it is not significant to the overall theme of the dissertation.

68 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 144-46.

69 Matthew V. Novenson, “Why Does R. Akiba Acclaim Bar Kokhba as Messiah?,” Journal for the Study of Judaism 40 (2009): 551-72 (esp. 568). Novenson is the one who seeks to cast doubt on Rabbi Akiva acclamation; but, there is evidence for both positions and one must discern for themselves what they believe.


71 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 146.
but allowed to be prayer leaders to the point that they even modified the *Et Zemah* blessing to reflect their faith and ethnicity. However, and when Bar Kokhba required allegiance even to the point of Messianic recognition or possible death, the Jewish-Christians were required to follow their faith even at the perceived expense of their own people. And it was this choice that many surmise was one of the “final coffin nails” between the Jewish Church and the Jewish Synagogue.

### Traditional Jewish Reaction to Jewish Believers Who Declined to Participate in the Rebellion

Before one fully answers this section’s question, one must consider whether the foundation for such a reaction was already in the preparatory stages of being established. Was there antipathy building toward Jewish believers in Jesus among the Jewish leadership before Bar Kokhba even with the general acceptance of their presence in the synagogue? Stegner would argue such a paradigm was taking place as Jewish-Christians were breaking boundaries that “leaders of formative Judaism” were so desperately trying to maintain. While perhaps a leading voice for doubt on the subject, Steven T. Katz allows for the possibility of such opposition because of the need “to find a new equilibrium in the face of the disaster of 70.”

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74 Riddle, “The So-Called Jewish Christians,” 29-30. Riddle leaves himself some room for error; however, he does propose that that the edict against the *malshinim* of Gamaliel II’s Eighteen Benedictions are primarily at Jewish Christians.


Two leading rabbis of the immediate post-Second Temple period were Yohannan ben Zakkai and Gamaliel II. According to Neusner, Zakkai the Pharisee did not see the destruction of the Temple as an end to Judaism and the possibility of atoning sacrifice, the purity laws and the synagogue model could serve as an alternative approach to the sacrificial system. Therefore, along with Gamaliel II and the other surviving Pharisees who escaped to Yavneh, Judaism would require a “facelift” that would not only in essence supersede the sacrificial system but also consider the announcement of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, and under the primary leadership of Gamaliel, the Birkat Ha-Minim (benediction against heretics) was revised with many believing the purpose was to separate and castigate Jewish believers in Jesus from traditional Judaism. Both Katz and Asher Finkel provide an alternative consideration of who the minim were in pre-Bar Kokhba Judaism were. Additionally, it should be noted that early Rabbinic Judaism was neither the normative or generally accepted by all


78 Tomson, “The Wars against Rome,” 7-8. The dissertation has included some editorial license in developing Tomson’s argument; however, the dissertation believes the essence of what Tomson wrote is not violated by my interpretation.


Jewish people; however, the stage was established for a post-Bar Kokhba response to Jewish believers in Jesus who were considered by many to be traitors to the Jewish cause and to the Jewish people for not joining in the fight for liberation from Rome.  

As stated previously by Ephraim Urbach, Judaism in a post-Second Temple period found itself becoming more isolated and a “self-enclosed entity” from the world. Any desire for missionary work toward the world had disappeared in an effort to reconstitute itself in a post-sacrificial and post-Temple world. This hermetical reality became even truer after the debacle known as the Bar Kokhba Rebellion. The need to “circle the wagons” and to determine the loyalty of its membership reached a critical mass and the Jewish traitors known as Christians could no longer be welcome in the fold. Both Peter Tomson and Asher Finkel acknowledge this separation beginning in the post-AD 135 period while Steven Katz seeks to push the dating to the beginning of the third century. However, regardless of the exact dating of the separation of Jewish-Christians from non-believing Jews, the failure of Simon Bar Kokhba created a critical mass between the two.

Aside from the Birkat Ha-Minim, Ben Zion Bokser notes the inclusion of “sectarian writings” along with the Hebrew Scriptures to denounce Christian teachings and a translational replacement for the Septuagint by Aquila of Pontus. Gideon Bohak also notes that in addition to the invocation against the minim, the rabbis were not necessarily opposed to magical

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incantations being cast against the Jewish believers in Jesus. Philip Mayo, albeit citing Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, refers to the eight anti-Christian prayers that were uttered daily in the synagogue. The antipathy following the Bar Kokhba Rebellion between Christians (Jewish believers as well) and Jews was strong and would only grow stronger with the passing years. The *Birkat Ha-Minim* was only the beginning of the growing division between Judaism and its sect known as Christianity.

Codification of the Mishnah by Judah the Prince (Impact on Jewish Believers)

Rabbinic Judaism was created out of a desire to preserve the very existence of the Jewish people. An existence that was threatened by political catastrophes and a group of Jewish sectarianists known as Christians who were beginning to make the claim in their Gentile adherents that they were the true descendants of the “covenant promises.” Therefore, an alternative concept to what was lost when the Second Temple was destroyed was deemed necessary (interestingly, this concept of providing an alternative to Temple sacrifice actually finds its

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86 Mayo, “The Birkath Haminim in Jewish-Christian Relations,” 329. Mayo is referring to Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho 137.2 for his source material. Mayo does acknowledge that Justin has an intrinsic bias but also puts forth the argument that bias or not, Justin’s position is based on historical precedent.

87 Israel Jacob Yuval, “Christianity in Talmud and Midrash: Parallelomania or Parallelophobia?,” in *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and John H. Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 56; David Novak, “The End of the Law: A Significant Difference between Judaism and Christianity,” *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and John H. Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 35; Bokser, “Religious Polemics in Biblical and Talmudic Exegesis,” 706; and Davies, “Early Christian Attitudes Toward the Jews,” 73. Yuval specifically notes that the Talmud/Mishnah sought to be somewhat covert and obtuse in their accusations but it was primarily because the rabbis did not wish to give more press than necessary to this sectarian group of Jewish renegades.
heritage in the days following the Babylonian exile). Following the defeat of Bar Kokhba in AD 135, the surviving rabbis not only saw concept as necessary but imperative and thereby sought to reorganize the heart of Judaism in the city of Yavneh.

The leading Jewish figure of this period in a post-Bar Kokhba world was Judah HaNasi, also known as Judah the Prince (c. 138-220 CE). He directed the codifying of the Oral Law, which resulted in the formation of the Mishnah and Babylonian/ Palestinian Talmuds, which many believe to have originated from the times of Mount Sinai. In many ways, this action saved the practice of Judaism but at the expense of the Jewish Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures, even though there was originally opposition to Judah’s effort at codification. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin writes this about the Torah – “… the Torah alone, even with its 613 commandments, is an insufficient guide to Jewish life.” Therefore, in today’s Judaism you will find knowledge of Scripture but the default interpretation lies not with the Word of God but with

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88 Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 310-12. Daniel’s practice of praying three times towards Jerusalem in chapter 6 has often been understood as an example of prayer replacing the sacrificial times when sacrifice is not possible.

89 Ibid., 322-23, 337-39. See also, Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 27-53. However, one would disagree with Cohen’s comment that Jewish believers were immediately “excommunicated” as Yavneh convened.

90 Ibid., 341.


what the Talmud says about the biblical passage. Ultimately, and because of his later writings, Maimonides has become as important as Moses in synagogues of the twenty-first century.94

As it relates to Jewish believers in Jesus, the Mishnah/Talmud and other extra-biblical sources from the days of Yavneh and Rabbi Judah forward create a dichotomy of responses and approaches. Constant revisions and adaptations of liturgical prayers because of Jewish-Christians are noted by Binyamin Katzoff and Harris Hirschberg.95 A constant intertextual and intervarsity debate as to the terminology related to the usage of minim is found throughout the Talmudic structure, specifically as to whether a min worships a plurality of deities or simply teaches that God has rejected Israel (both issues which reflect Patristic Christian teachings).96 And, ultimately, how one should define the person of Messiah as it could not be Jesus of Nazareth,97 an individual that was written negatively about both in code and overtly in the Talmud/Mishnah.98 These words will come back to haunt both the rabbis and the Jewish people

94 This statement is based upon personal experience of working in the field of Jewish missions for fifteen years. Further insight into this concept can be found in the writings of Chaim Potok, specifically in his book—In the Beginning. Additionally, this is the point the writer will be making throughout the dissertation and the apologetic argument that the dissertation will be seeking to rebut and refute throughout this work, especially in chapter five.


in the Patristic period for it will not only be used against them but it will also be used to justify the persecution that will be inflicted upon them, often times in the name of Jesus himself.

**Rise of the Patristics and Consideration of the Jewish People (AD 170 to c.500)**

Joel Carmichael, who is probably approaching the question with a somewhat simplistic and preconceived bias, helps to answer the question of how Jewish people in early church history, in the time of Maimonides in the Middle Ages, and also today perceive our Christian past:

The Church Fathers (Origen, Tertullian, Chrysostom), have abandoned the expectation of the Kingdom of God, welded Paul’s ideas together and interpreted them as a part of a new philosophy, in which the Church, eternal and universal, the reflection of God on earth, was confronted by the enemies of God, the children of Satan, the Jews, whose paramount function was to epitomize the struggle of the Devil forces against God.99

**Early Church and Theological Understanding of Galatians 6:16**

There is no verse in Scripture that should be considered as innocuous; however, this writer doubts that the Apostle Paul in Gal 6:16 could have anticipated the debate and consternation that the following words would cause in the Church Age: “And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.” However, the question of who has the right to the designation of “Israel of God” was debated with vigor in the

Patristic Age, and even still being debated today among both the Replacement Theologians and those who avidly support the continuation of Israel as the People of God.

However, as it relates to the Patristic period, Paul’s epistle to the Galatian church creates a whole dynamic, whether Paul was creating an anti-Judaizing apologetic for Galatia or not,\textsuperscript{100} that allows for a Supersessionistic interpretation. While Petra Heldt will argue that early Patristic writers of the second and third centuries were more concerned about a proper understanding of the place of the Nomos in a Christian life, she will acknowledge that later Church Fathers examined the passage differently.\textsuperscript{101} For example, Augustine’s interpretation of Sarah and Hagar in 4:21-31, which includes both a literal and heavenly place for the city of Jerusalem, places Sarah in the role of the church and Hagar in the role of the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{102} This interpretation this writer argues creates a complete biological switch from the Genesis account of the story as it places the child of Sarah in the role of the lesser and Hagar’s descendants in the role of the greater place of God’s economy or choseness.

Therefore, the prevailing Patristic understanding of Gal 6:16 and the “Israel of God” reflects Augustine’s concept of 4:21-31. John Chrysostom in “Homily on Galatians 6.16 stated, “But those who oppose it, even if they have been born of Israel and carried Israel’s name with


\textsuperscript{102} Wendy Elgersma Helleman, “‘Abraham Had Two Sons’: Augustine and the Allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Galatians 4:21-31,” \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 48 (2013): 37-39, 41, 51, 58. Helleman, while not justifying Augustine’s response, does illustrate as well how the man took the analogy further to justify the church’s attitude toward both the Jewish people and the Donatists—“to advise Donatists to return to the Catholic Church as the one universal and true Christian church (p. 63).”
them, have fallen away from Israel and from that name and family.”

Cyprian wrote in *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, “According to what had been foretold in advance, the Jews had departed from God… Instead, the Christians have succeeded to their place, preserving well of the Lord by faith.”

And the *Apostolic Constitutions* that was compiled in c.390 writes in relation to the idea of the phrase “Israel of God” the following statement: “To you, the converted Gentiles, is opened the gate of life. You were formerly not loved, but now you are beloved—a people ordained for the possession of God.” Therefore, as will be illustrated by the six selected Patristic theologians, the idea of replacement and growing repugnance towards the Jewish people was present in the Patristic Age. This is a repugnance that will affect both the Church and the scattered Jewish nation as they interact, interrelate and consider each other, even to this day.

Justin Martyr

Often when a Christians hears the name Justin Martyr, they think of a man who suffered for his faith in Jesus. Christendom in general thinks of a man who left behind a legacy and a volume of work to be studied and admired. However, to hear the name of Justin Martyr with the ears of a Jewish person is to think of a man whose work ensured that a theology teaching that the Jewish people had been replaced in the economy of God’s covenant. Judaism thinks of a man who left behind a legacy and a polemical model that would be repeated and followed throughout the centuries.


105 Ibid.
Justin is known primarily as an apologist for the Christian faith. His best known work is his engagement with the Jewish Trypho in which he attempts to prove the Messiahship of Jesus. He is known as well for his argument in support of the miraculous and the Virginal conception. His defense of Christian miracles occurs predominantly in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, a subject which James Kelhoffer divides into five sections: (1) the power of Jesus to perform “exorcisms” as proof His power; (2) miracles of Jesus’ disciples comes via His Messiahship; (3) belief that Jesus is Messiah is a miracle; (4) miracles of Jesus confirm the Daniel 7 prophecy; and (5) exorcisms done by the apostles prove the truth of Jesus.

Jules Lebreton sees Justin’s apologetical approach focusing on two primary areas – the supremacy of Christian morality in a pagan world, which is the primary focus of the *First Apology*, and the proof texts of the prophecy passages from the Hebrew Scriptures. This sense of moral supremacy, as well as on a lesser level prophecy, can be seen in his argument from chapter twelve in which he writes, “And more than all other men are we your helpers and allies in promoting peace, seeing that we hold this view, that it is alike impossible for the wicked, the covetous, the conspirator, and for the virtuous to escape the notice of God, and that each man goes to everlasting punishment or salvation according to the value of his actions.”

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Bryan Litfin ultimately makes the best argument for why Justin was successful as perhaps the first true Christian apologist: “he tailored his message to his audience.”

This is a concise response to a good question because while there are some that want to find egalitarianism in Justin, the focus of Justin’s apologetics was to present Messiah, regardless of whether it was done through analyzing miracles or engaging in a supposed conversation with a Jewish man. One could make the argument that nothing else truly mattered to Justin.

Additionally, Peter Richardson and others after him have presented the case that Justin is the first Christian scholar to make the argument that the church has replaced Israel as the Chosen Ones. R. Kendall Soulen is bluntly succinct when he writes, “But Justin insists that God’s history with the Jews never possessed any saving significance in its own right. God’s commerce with the Jews served either to restrain the particular wickedness of the Jewish people or to prefigure Christ.”

Matthew Bates in an article he wrote for the *Journal of Theological Studies* details exactly how Justin utilized the Scriptures of the Tanakh to take the prophecies of Isaiah and “hermeneutically” and creatively discover a way to eliminate the Jewish people from the

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100 Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 62.


promises of Zion.\textsuperscript{114} In fact, Bates sees that Justin considered not the Church but Jesus himself as the true Israel.\textsuperscript{115}

However, Bates has to balance his position by acknowledging that Justin viewed the words of the Tanakh to not belonging to the Jewish people but to the Christian church, and this is the point in which Bates contradicts his earlier argument by stating that Justin saw the Church is Israel of God.\textsuperscript{116} We can find evidence of Justin’s “bi-polar” argument in chapter 29 of the dialogue when he writes the following:

For these words have neither been prepared by me, nor embellished by the art of man; but David sung them, Isaiah preached them, Zechariah proclaimed them, and Moses wrote them. Are you acquainted with them, Trypho? They are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours. For we believe them; but you, though you read them, do not catch the spirit that is in them.\textsuperscript{117}

However, and regardless of Justin’s intention and views of Israel, the truth holds that he was one of the beginning voices of Replacement Theology that would become not merely a whisper but a shout with Tertullian, an allegorical view of Origen, a reprimand with Augustine, a false pity with Jerome, and outright disdain with John Chrysostom. Justin began a movement that continues to this day and for that we should remember both his positive attributes as well as his negative positions.

The significance that the \textit{Dialogue with Trypho} plays in developing the Jewish-Christian relationship cannot be underestimated both positively and negatively. For what Justin more than likely meant as an evangelistic “tract,” became a work that developed a theology of replacement.


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 548, 553.

\textsuperscript{117} Justin Martyr, \textit{Dialogue with Trypho}, 29.
and antipathy towards the physical descendants of Jesus and the apostles. This work of Justin, and the ones that followed,\textsuperscript{118} has impacted and hindered any true evangelistic effort towards the people of Israel and still does today.

We do know according to Johannes Quasten that it “is the oldest Christian apology against the Jews that is extant” even if parts of it have been lost for perpetuity.\textsuperscript{119} William Varner gives the reader a date of approximately AD 150 which is probably in the right time frame.\textsuperscript{120} Quasten notes that the \textit{Dialogue} must have been written after the \textit{First Apology} because of a reference to it in the conversation with Trypho. One also can know that Antonius Pius, the Emperor of the apology, reigned from AD 138 to 161.\textsuperscript{121} Therefore, if \textit{First Apology} was written first, we can ascertain a date of post-AD 135 because of a reference to the Bar Cochba rebellion in its pages.\textsuperscript{122} Therefore, an estimated date of AD 150 fits within the appropriate time frame for the writing and the timing also represents a dark time in Jewish history as all hope for a warrior Messiah ended with the deaths of untold thousands of Jewish men, women, and children.\textsuperscript{123}

Therefore, the argument that Justin was offering an evangelistic balm to the Jewish people could on the peripheral surface be made; however, the time of a predominant Jewish

\textsuperscript{118} William Varner, “In the Wake of Trypho: Jewish-Christians Dialogues in the Third to the Sixth Centuries,” \textit{Evangelical Quarterly} 80.3 (2008): 219, 221, 224-27. Varner argues that these anti-Jewish dialogues often work together and feed off of each other as well.


\textsuperscript{120} Varner, “In the Wake of Trypho: Jewish-Christians Dialogues in the Third to Sixth Centuries,” 220.

\textsuperscript{121} Quasten, \textit{Patrology}, 199, 202.


influence in the church was already on the wane\textsuperscript{124} and one wonders if this was a balm or gloating moment? Quasten inadvertently offers the opportunity for the same question when he considers that while the audience was different than the leaders of Rome, Justin still focuses on verses which eliminates or replaces the Jewish people from God’s covenant relationship.\textsuperscript{125} This rationale for the purpose can be found in the words of Justin himself when he wrote:

\begin{quote}
I do not process to have a mere verbal controversy with you, as I have not attempted to establish proof about Christ from the passages of Scripture which are not admitted by you? Which I quoted from the words of Jeremiah the prophet, and Esdras, and David; but from those which are even now admitted by you, which had your teachers comprehended, be well assured they would have deleted them, as they did those about the death of Isaiah, whom you sawed asunder with a wooden saw.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Between all the visceral comments and attacks found within the words of \textit{Dialogue}, there remains only one question to answer – was Trypho real or an allegory? Eusebius votes in the affirmative and infers two arguments that will become a part of the “urban legend” folklore about the Jewish people – (1) the existence of a world plot instigated by the Jewish people to denigrate Jesus and (2) an accusation that states that the Jewish people have modified the Hebrew Scriptures to eliminate any reference to Jesus.\textsuperscript{127} Johannes Quasten and Marcel Simon, while not perpetuating the Eusebius plot allegation, do believe and affirm that Trypho was real, and in the case of Quasten was identified as “Rabbi Tarphon” from “the Mishnah.”\textsuperscript{128} William Werline, “The Transformation of Pauline Arguments in Justin Martyr’s \textit{Dialogue with Trypho},” 88-89.


Justin Martyr, \textit{Dialogue with Trypho}, 120.


Varner, F. E. Talmage, and David Nirenberg vote in the negative. Timothy J. Horner evaluates dozen of opinions and comes across with no true opinion. Jon Nilson avoid the topic of Trypho’s identity and instead argues that the audience was the focus of Justin’s writing as he was trying to reach a “non-Christian Gentile audience” who viewed positively both Judaism and Christianity but were “unable to adequately distinguish the one from the other.” However, the ultimate problem is not the identity of Trypho but that the germination of Christian hatred, and ultimately accusations of deicide by the Roman Catholic Church which were not renounced until Vatican II, and Luther’s venomous On The Jews and Their Lies, had to begin somewhere and the argument can be made is that it began with Justin.

Tertullian

The only exposure that many have to Tertullian is centered on one event and one statement: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” However, it should actually be translated to be read as “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow;


133 Nirenberg, Anti-Judaism, 246-268.
the blood of Christians is seed.”  

It is perhaps not as catchy but more emotively honest and that should be an expression which defines this fallible yet fascinating Latin Father.

There is great debate about how much, if any at all, contact that Tertullian and the Jewish community of Carthage might have had. Sabrina Inowlocki brings to the table the very real question of whether Tertullian actually knew any of the people he saw as the enemy. Stéphanie Binder argues that Tertullian’s *De Idololatria* shows enough similarities to the Mishnah’s Avodah Zarah that minimum general acquaintanceship must be allowed. Geoffrey Dunn in *Tertullian’s Aduersos Iudaeos* presents the gamut of academic scholarship in an attempt to answer the question but ultimately leaves the reader with these words: “Thus, Tertullian could declare a parting of the ways between Christian and Judaism on the theological level, yet still be engaged with Jews on a social basis.”

It should be acknowledged that the Latin Father viewed the synagogue (presumably the one at Carthage included) with hostility as he perceived Judaism to be an antagonist against Christianity. However, Robert MacLennan argues that the hostility towards the Jews of

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Carthage was really an attack on Marcionism in disguise.\textsuperscript{139} This argument by MacLennan seems to be a stretch as so many of Tertullian’s works indicate an anti-Jewish bias\textsuperscript{140} and they could not have possibly been completely about Marcion. In addition, Binder argues that Tertullian would have referenced Carthaginian rabbis as a tool in his battle against the threat of Marcionism,\textsuperscript{141} a threat which was greater than his perception of Judaism as Marcionites denied the truth of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{142}

However, regardless of Tertullian’s own personal antipathy regarding the Jewish people, this did not stop him from incorporating Jewish symbols, both positive and negative, into his theological works. In a positive strain, Tertullian viewed the Passover season “as the most appropriate time” for catechumens to be baptized into the Church,\textsuperscript{143} perhaps due to the relationship of the Resurrection to the Jewish holiday. In a mixed perception, Tertullian advocates a biblical understanding of a spiritualized circumcision (i.e., baptism) but rejects the physical act of Jewish circumcision (bris) with these words, “For, as the carnal circumcision, which was temporary, was inwrought for ‘a sign’ in a contumacious people, so the spiritual has


\textsuperscript{141} Binder, “Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Second and Third Centuries C.E.,” 220.

\textsuperscript{142} Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 49-51.

been given for salvation to an obedient people;…” Finally, in a negative light, Tertullian negates the continued validity of Mosaic Law with this statement:

But—as is congruous with the goodness of God, and with His equity, as the Fashioner of mankind—He gave to all nations the selfsame law, which at definite and stated times, He enjoined should be observed, when He willed, and through whom He willed, and as He willed…Whence we understand that God’s law was anterior even to Moses, and was not first (given) in Horeb, not in Sinai and in the desert, but was more ancient; (existing) first in paradise, subsequently reformed to the patriarchs, so again for the Jews, at definite periods; so that we are not to give heed to Moses’ Law as to the primitive law, but as to a subsequent, which at a definite period God has set forth to the Gentiles too and, after repeatedly promising so to do through the prophets, has reformed for the better, and has premonished that it should come to pass that, just as “law was given through Moses” at a definite time, so it should be believed to have been temporarily observed and kept.

Therefore, the argument could be made that it is an early form of what modern theologians call Tertullian’s basic Supersessionistic perspective that almost forces him to admit the Jewish people into the discussion of Jesus but only to serve as a model of those who do not understand the identity of Jesus as Messiah and God because of their willful stubbornness. Eric Osborn would argue such a Tertullian position when he considers that the Latin Father saw “three stages in the development of the Christian Gospel” which while including Judaism that stopped at Moses but did interestingly enough allow for the continued inclusion of “Greek philosophy.” Ultimately, therefore, for Tertullian, he would advocate that the Jewish people


had “transgressed” God’s law and the “whole race has denied natural virtue”.148 This antipathy towards the descendants of Jesus by virtue of DNA will find a loud voice in the Adversus Judaeos of Tertullian and those who followed him in church history.

Robert MacLennan generally defines the term Adversus Judaeos as “early Christian writings of late antiquity which tried to prove that Christianity was superior to Judaism.”149 The most infamous example of Adversus Judaeos is attributed to the pen of Tertullian by many but not all historical scholars.150 One, therefore, finds in Tertullian’s version a sense of both consternation and a need to finally prove that Christianity had replaced Judaism in the mind and heart of God.

If one were to place Tertullian in today’s religious spectrum, it would be safe to surmise that in tone and tenor he would have fit in well with the style of the early 20th century preacher Billy Sunday. Paul Davies describes Tertullian’s approach as being one who “with characteristic vigor took up the cudgels with all opponents of the faith, and the Jews did not escape.”151 The term “irascible” comes to mind when one considers Tertullian relationship’s with the Jewish


149 MacLennan, “Four Christian Writers on Jews and Judaism in the Second Century,” 190.

150 Dunn, Tertullian’s Adversus Judaeos, 6-14. Dunn mentions one author in particular as he goes through a litany of scholarly opinion and contra-opinion, which has already been noted in the paper – A. Lukyn Williams (p. 45). It should be noted, but not necessarily in the bibliography, that Williams is known as well for his work, Christian Evidence for Jewish People, vol. 1-2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998). Printed originally by SPCK in 1911. The book was a response to Isaac Troki’s anti-missionary endeavor entitled Faith Strengthened and one wonders if this was not a 20th century Adversus Judaeos in the approach it often takes to argue for Jesus and against the Jewish people.

people and it should not be reduced as Stéphanie Binder or A. Lukyn Williams attempted to do by calling it an apologetic approach to evangelism. The word “antipathy” is the polite word that should be utilized when it relates to Tertullian’s basic feelings toward the Jewish people. Clark Williamson, despite his liberal and dual covenantal attitudes, states it correctly when he pens that “[T]he conflict between Judaism and Tertullian’s Christ is strong, bitter, and profound.” It is bitter because Tertullian’s Supersessionistic tendencies cause him to reflect on the “superiority” of Christianity over the “ethnocentric” and displaced Judaism of his century.

To describe Tertullian’s approach in the most basic of ways would be a baseball team who wins the World Series on the opponent’s home field. Tertullian believed that Judaism was not only wrong but also evil, whether it was his view of them from the pages of Scripture or it was a Carthaginian Jew who passed him on the street. He believed that they were responsible solely for the death of Christ (deicide) and this can be illustrated from his own Apology – “Judea, whose God you Romans once honoured with victims, and its temple with gifts, and its people with treaties; and which would have never been beneath your scepter but for that last and

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154 Ibid.

155 Dunn, Tertullian, 51.
crowning offence against God, in rejecting and crucifying Christ (emphasis added).” Such an attitude then made Jewish evangelism nearly impossible.  

Origen

Origen belongs in many ways in a Patristic classification all to himself. He was a biblical allegorist. He was considered by many to be a heretic due to contradictory teachings regarding Jesus’ divinity. Such teachings on divinity would eventually lead to charges against Origen of being a subordinationist and his official condemnation in 553. He also influenced others in his allegorical approach to the Old Testament and it can be argued continues to impact how the Jewish people are viewed as the people of God even today. Interestingly enough, it could also be argued that Origen and Maimonides viewed the understanding of Scripture in a similar manner, albeit from a different perspective regarding the nature and person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Origen (ca. 185-251/54) in many ways is the most famous of the School of Alexandria exegetes. His legacy of being the son of the martyr Leonidas did not lead him away from faith in Jesus but more directly towards it until he encountered his own martyr’s death in ca. 251. This desire towards a deeper faith with God and a salvific relationship with the Messiah Jesus of the Gospel directly impacts his understanding of hermeneutics, regardless of the allegorical

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156 Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. XXVI. See also, Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, ch. VIII, when he wrote the following: “Accordingly, all the synagogue of Israel did slay Him, saying to Pilate, when he was desirous to dismiss him, ‘His blood be upon us, and upon our children;…’”


gymnastics he was forced to undertake.¹⁶⁰ Karlfried Froehlich describes Origen’s understanding of exegesis in this manner: “Biblical hermeneutics [for Origen] presents the method for anagōgē, the ascent of the soul, which is at the heart of his soteriology.”¹⁶¹ This idea of “the ascent of the soul” fits naturally into what Christopher Hall saw as Origen’s three-level understanding of the Bible.¹⁶² He wanted people to go beyond the basic to the advanced level so they would achieve perfection and thereby receiving the “higher spiritual truths.”¹⁶³ Ironically, this will become a Maimonidean hermeneutical argument in his approach to Scriptural interpretation and one that will become commonplace in Jewish understanding today. A Maimonidean approach by modern Judaism that will be used, as will be illustrated in this dissertation, is to seek to discount the possibility of Jesus’ Messiahship and deity.

However, and regardless of the future kinship synergy that Origen and Maimonides might display in regards to hermeneutical strategy, Origen’s own antipathy towards the Jewish people is available for consideration. He was opposed to Jewish believers in Jesus maintaining any historical connection to their heritage, including the fasts.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, his hermeneutical approach to Hebrew Scriptures was so allegorical in interpretation that it stimulated the Jewish


¹⁶² Christopher A. Hall, Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 144.

¹⁶³ Blossom Stefaniw, “Reading Revelation: Allegorical Exegesis in Late Antique Alexandria,” Revue de l’histoire des religions T. 224, Fasc. 2 (April-June 2007): 233. See also, Hall, Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers, 144.

rabbis of his time and locale to fight Origen’s attempt to find Jesus and the Church in the Song of Songs.\textsuperscript{165} Finally, this allegorical interpretation of scripture allows for Supersessionism to reign supreme as it relates to whether it is the “church” or the Jewish people that are the “chosen people” of God: “Those who are fully and truly sons of Abraham are sons of his actions (spiritually understood) and of the knowledge that was made manifest to him.”\textsuperscript{166} Origen took this allegory to the point that Deeana Klepper believed he saw the Jews as “Hagar thirsting in the desert … unable to drink the water of Scripture that was right in front of them.”\textsuperscript{167}

Augustine

An attempt at even a short biography of Augustine is impossible. The life of this Latin Father and leading light of church history has so many nuances and twists that it would take away from the point of his influence and impact on Jewish-Christian relations for two millennia. However, it would be remiss to not briefly note how his sojourn into Manichaeism and the impact of Ambrose played upon his perception of the physical descendants of Messiah Jesus.

It was on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of March, 242, that a young man called Mānī began to announce to the crowds assembled in the streets and bazaars of Ctesiphon the new Religion of which he was the Prophet. Such was his success that within a century, in the midst of the decay of Graeco-Roman paganism and the public triumph of Christianity, it seemed to many observers doubtful whether Manichaeism would not overwhelm them both.\textsuperscript{168}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kannengiesser, \textit{Handbook of Patristic Exegesis}, 542, 551.
\item Berkot, \textit{A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs}, 565. The quotation is from Origen’s \textit{Commentary on the Gospel of John}.
\item F. C. Burkitt, \textit{The Religion of the Manichees: Donnellan Lectures for 1924} (Cambridge, England: Cambridge at the University Press, 1924), 3.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
What the Manichaean religion offered to a young Augustine were answers to questions that he felt he could not find in the Christianity of his day. Specifically, Manichaeism looked at the world through a prism of darkness and light, evil and goodness, Satan and God. However, this religion did not look at these entities as separate concepts but as two sides of the same coin. History reports of Augustine’s gradual withdrawal from the cult of the Manichees – not because of a sudden realization of its error but because of a gradual understanding that while Manichaeism offered surface answers to life’s questions it did not answer the eternal ones. However, and until he encountered Ambrose, the truth of the Christian faith was not his alternative to the errors of the Manichees, he subsisted with a sense of spiritual resignation.

After his conversion, Augustine became an ardent critic of the religion he had once devoted a great deal of his young adult life to follow. However, it would be nothing more than short-sighted to not assume that Manichaeism influenced him in regards to Judaism and the Jewish people. The questions therefore become “to what extent” and “positively or negatively”? In the beginning days of Augustine’s spiritual search, we find him struggling with the passages of the Old Testament which as Maria Boulding summarizes “repelled him.” This seemingly repugnance at the “immoral” Old Testament fit in quite nicely with the Manichaean


170 O’Meara, The Young Augustine, 87-106.


172 Augustine, The Confessions, 5.10.18.

approach to the Hebrew Scriptures.\textsuperscript{174} It appears that Manichaeism suffered from an almost bi-polar existence which vacillated between self-hatred and thinly veiled absorption. Manichaeism rejected much of the New Testament because of what it saw as Jewish self-interest in the pages,\textsuperscript{175} while rejecting the Old Testament because of the fulfillment of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{176} However, Manichaeism also included Jewish apocalyptic sensibility in its teachings as well.\textsuperscript{177}

Therefore, and while not necessarily “provable beyond a reasonable doubt,” the argument can be made that when Augustine vociferously rejected Manichaeism in his views, he also rejected the “bi-polar” Jewish concepts of the false prophet Mānī even while expressing his own ambivalence towards them. A position also could be made that Ambrose’s allegorical interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures was Augustine’s antidote to Manichaeism. Ambrose’s influence and leading of Augustine towards a real profession of faith in Jesus certainly places Ambrose’s teaching, both good and bad, in the highest of esteem for Augustine.\textsuperscript{178}

Therefore, and because of Ambrose’s influence, Augustine developed and refined his eventual “Jewish Witness” to a theology that will hold sway for more than a millennia and is still prevalent in some circles today. For regardless of how well-intentioned Augustine wanted to be

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\textsuperscript{175} O’Meara, \textit{The Young Augustine}, 54.

\textsuperscript{176} Peter Hebblethwaite, “St. Augustine’s Interpretation of Matthew 5, 17,” \textit{Studia Patristica} vol. 16, issue 2 (January 1985): 511 and Leo Ferrari, “Isaiah and the Early Augustine,” in \textit{Augustiniana: Me langes}, ed. T. J. Van Bavel (Leuven, BE: University Press, 1990), 742. The bi-polar nature of Manichaean thought the dissertation proposes is answered by the question that John Reeves of Winthrop College attempts to answer as to whether Mani was at one time attracted to and/or involved in the Jewish-Christian sect known as the Elchasai. There is no definitive answer to the question but it is an intriguing thought, as well as perhaps answering some of Augustine’s antipathy. See, John C. Reeves, “The ‘Elchasite’ Sanhedrin of the Cologne Mani Codex in Light of the Second Temple Jewish Sectarian Sources,” \textit{Journal of Jewish Sources} col. 42, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 68-91.

\textsuperscript{177} Gruenwald, “Manichaeism and Judaism,” 34-36, 41-45

\textsuperscript{178} Carroll, \textit{Constantine’s Sword}, 200-201.
with this theology of the spiritual and familial outcome of the Jewish people, we can see its outcome in that “the gospel has been interpreted in the context of human religiosity more or less foreign to the theological idiom of the Bible…. [T]he gospel has been contextualized one-sidedly in the realm of the personal and private.”\textsuperscript{179}

The story of Cain and Abel has long fascinated the readers of Scripture. However, for Augustine the story of Cain and Abel told a different story, a story which allegorized the Jewish people into the role of Cain and the church as the sympathetic and innocent Abel.\textsuperscript{180}

As Cain’s sacrifice of the fruit of the ground is rejected, while Abel’s sacrifice of his sheep and the fat thereof is accepted, so the faith of the New Testament praising God in the harmless service of grace is preferred to the earthly observances of the Old Testament. For though the Jews were right in practicing these things, they were guilty of unbelief in not distinguishing the time of the New Testament when Christ came, from the time of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{181}

We can also find that Augustine perhaps utilizes the Cain and Abel story as a precursor to his ultimate concept of “Jewish Witness.” For in his reply to Faustus, the reader can see the germination of the idea that the Jewish people are present with a mark of Cain that protects them from destruction but enables the “children of Abel” to be able to identify them.

It is a most notable fact, that all the nations subjugated by Rome adopted the heathenish ceremonies of the Roman worship; while the Jewish nation, whether under Pagan or Christian monarchs, has never lost the sign of their law, by which they are distinguished from all other nations and peoples. No emperor or monarch who finds under his government the people with this mark kills them, that is, makes them cease to be Jews, and as Jews to be separate in their observances, and unlike the rest of the world. Only when a Jew comes over to Christ, he is no

\textsuperscript{179} Soulen, \textit{The God of Israel and Christian Theology}, 17.


\textsuperscript{181} Augustine, “Reply to Faustus, the Manichean,” 29.
longer Cain, nor goes out from the presence of God, nor dwells in the land of Nod, which is said to mean commotion.\textsuperscript{182}

Paula Fredriksen in \textit{Augustine and the Jews} affirms this position when she summarizes Augustine’s concept of Cain symbolizing the Jewish people, “Without the visibility of their ancestral practices to identify them, Jews could not be of service to the church.”\textsuperscript{183} Ultimately, and in a different piece on the ministry and theology of the church father, Fredriksen places Augustine’s point as being that the Jewish rejection of Jesus was not a simple case of “deicide” but instead “an elaborate ecclesial metaphor.”\textsuperscript{184}

However, and compared to other Patristics and their relationship to the Jewish people of their times, Augustine comes across as an enlightened and quasi-evangelistic theologian. From Chapter 10 of his \textit{Adversus Judaeos} we see these closing thoughts:

\begin{quote}
Dearly beloved, whether these divine testimonies with joy or with indignation, nevertheless, when we can, let us proclaim them with great love for the Jews. Let us not proudly glory against the broken branches; let us rather reflect by whose grace it is, and by much mercy on what root, we have been grafted. Then, not savoring of pride, but with a deep sense of humility, not insulting with presumption, but rejoicing with trembling, let us say: “Come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord,” because His “name is great among the Gentiles.”\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{182} Augustine, “Reply to Faustus, the Manichean,” 31.

\textsuperscript{183} Fredriksen, \textit{Augustine and the Jews}, 319 (see also 271-73).


The term “hermeneutical Jew,”\textsuperscript{186} therefore, adequately describes some of the prose found in Augustine’s \textit{Adversus Judaeos}:

When these Scriptural words are quoted to the Jews, they scorn the Gospel and the Apostle; they do not listen to what we say because they do not understand what they read. Certainly, if they understood what the Prophet, whom they read, is foretelling: “I have given thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth” they would not be so blind and so sick as not to recognize in Jesus Christ both light and salvation…. Consequently, testimonies are to be selected from sacred Scripture, which has great authority among the Jews, and if they do not want to be cured by means of this advantage offered them, they can at least be convicted by its evident truth.\textsuperscript{187}

On the surface, one should find little to argue with Augustine in this point. However, the point is that by reducing Biblical Judaism and the Old Testament to a mere “opening act” for Jesus,\textsuperscript{188} we have created a hermeneutical Jewish straw man that can serve both as a metaphorical punching bag for rejecting Jesus and a people group to be most pitied. Therefore, the question must be asked is if Augustine’s call for never ending and difficult perseverance throughout time was not a greater punishment than a quick, even painful, death? For in \textit{The City of God}, it is found:

\begin{quote}
Therefore God has shown the Church in her enemies the Jews the grace of His compassion, since, as saith the apostle, ‘their offence is the salvation of the Gentiles.’ And therefore He has not slain them, that is, He has not let the knowledge that they are Jews be lost in them, although they have been conquered by the Romans, lest they should forget the law of God, and their testimony should be of no avail in this matter of which we treat. But it was not enough that he should say, “Slay them not, lest they should at last forget Thy law,” unless he had also added, “Disperse them;” because if they had only been in their own land with that testimony of the Scriptures, and not every where, certainly the Church which
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{187} Augustine, “In Answer to the Jews (\textit{Adversus Judaeos}), 1.2.

is everywhere could not have had them as witnesses among all nations to the prophecies which were sent before concerning Christ.\textsuperscript{189}

Jeremy Cohen describes “this compliment” of the “Jewish Witness” in Augustine’s eyes as being “recipients of divine blessing as well.”\textsuperscript{190} Cohen also notes that Augustine argued that that the persistence of the Jewish survival and scattering is unique proof of the Church’s replacement and new title of “True Israel.”\textsuperscript{191} Augustine was in fact more merciful in his regards for their continued survival. He was also more, and perhaps this word is too strong, sadistic by condemning them to a lifetime of suffering and never ending eternal damnation.

Jerome

Jerome exemplifies the term ambiguity in many ways throughout his life but none more than as it relates to his early days in Stridon, Dalmatia, who was born to nominally observant Christian parents with dates ranging anywhere from 331 to 347.\textsuperscript{192} After coming to faith, he attempted unsuccessfully to live the life of an ascetic;\textsuperscript{193} however, he found his fulfillment as a monastic clergy who devoted himself to writing and translating commentaries and the Word of God.

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\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 33.
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\textsuperscript{193} Kelly, \textit{Jerome}, 47.
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In 392, he published the *Lives of Famous Men* which is remarkable for his daring at the time to include Jewish men into his encyclopedia.\(^{194}\) However, it was not this controversy but his decision to include rabbinic sources, commentaries, and advice into his writings of commentaries and translation of Scripture that created the most drama.\(^{195}\) He was in many ways not only a rebel but also an immensely difficult man who demanded loyalty but wavered in his loyalty toward others if the situation proved itself too difficult.\(^{196}\) Jerome died c. AD 420 leaving behind a mixed legacy and *The Vulgate*, which truly changed the Christian world.\(^{197}\)

Jerome was one of the few Christian theologians of his time who was unafraid to approach Jewish rabbis for assistance in understanding the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament).\(^{198}\) It was as Michael Graves describes a part of his “method of interpretation” that was necessary “to uncover the meaning of the text *ad litteram* or *iuxta historiam*.”\(^{199}\) Jerome procured the services of rabbis to teach him the language of the Hebrew Scriptures.\(^{200}\)

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\(^{196}\) Kelly, *Jerome*, 51, 243-258.


\(^{198}\) Kelly, *Jerome*, 84. Kelly recounts the time when Jerome abandoned the opportunity to answer questions from Pope Damasus “to transcribe” works in Hebrew from a nearby synagogue.


\(^{200}\) William P. H. Kitchin, “The Literary Influence of St. Jerome,” *The Catholic Historical Review* vol. 7, no. 2 (July 1921): 168, 169, Kelly, *Jerome*, 134 and Simon, *Verus Israel*, 185. Kitchin interestingly enough creates a spotlight on the amount of money that Jerome had to pay for the lessons and the fact that the rabbis would only come at night. In today’s world, most would consider that unnecessary information and with a tinge of anti-Jewish bias. However, Kitchin wrote in a different time and the pre-Holocaust world of 1921.
His Hebraic ability, due in large part to his rabbinical teachers, rose to the point that he was able to write what Stefan Rebenich considered a quite remarkable work entitled *Hebrew Questions*. However, this acclaim from some did not come without the recriminations of others, especially as it relates to *The Vulgate*. Most scholars, including Augustine, were content with the continued utilization of the Septuagint (Old Latin Bible) and believed any translation which involved Hebrew was inviting theological problems.

The accusations of Judaizer were lobbed at Jerome throughout the biblical translation process. Jerome responded in two unique ways: (1) taking on an almost self-defensive stance by accusing others of Judaizing themselves or (2) arguing with the bishop of Hippo who defended as a privilege the right of Jewish Christians to continue the practice of their Hebrew heritage. A third approach was one that typifies Jerome’s personality – he went on the attack.

The work on the *Vulgate* began around AD 390 after he became convinced that the Hebrew version of the Tanakh was more accurate than the Greek Septuagint. He notes in his own preface to *The Vulgate* that the Greek translators emended some passages so as not to draw the

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201 Rebenich, *Jerome*, 93.


203 Graves, “‘Judaizing’ Christian Interpretations of the Prophets as Seen by Saint Jerome,” 143.

204 Simon, *Verus Israel*, 93-94. See also, Augustine, Letter XXVIII, ch. 3, 3. It should be noted that Jerome’s interpretation of the Galatians is incorrect while Augustine’s is more closely and exegetically sound.


ire and eye of Ptolemy that would allow for the presence of Christophanies in the Hebrew Scriptures.\textsuperscript{207} There is more than just cause to disagree with Jerome’s defense mechanism or to note if correct that the translators must have overlooked other possible Christophanic moments. However, Jerome did have a viable reason for the translation, one must always go back to the original text in order to discern the original meaning.

Joel Itzkowitz has asked a probative question as it relates to the core of Jerome’s heart and theological mind – “how can the Jews, the people to whom God first spoke, the keepers of the Hebrew Bible, be cut off from the new dispensation, while at the same time still be of surpassing interest to him?”\textsuperscript{208} Itzkowitz asks a fundamental question regarding the life of Jerome – why or did Jerome care about the Jews? There are two probable answers to Itzkowitz’ question as well as the core question of this section – was Jerome anti-Jewish in sentiment? The first answer can be found in his words and approaches towards the Jewish people. Jerome saw Judas as the representative symbol of Judaism but yet engaged their rabbis and scholars to help him learn the original text language.\textsuperscript{209} He responds angrily to his contemporary Rufinus against charges that he regretted using Jewish materials and being influenced by their teachings;\textsuperscript{210} yet, his commentaries of Old Testament books are filled with images identifying the Jewish people with wretchedness in Zephaniah, harlotry in 1 Kings, and being the true face of Edom in

\textsuperscript{207} Jerome, Vulgate Version of the Pentateuch, preface. See also, Kelly, Jerome, 157.


\textsuperscript{209} Simon, Verus Israel, 230-231. See also, Hillel I. Newman, “Jerome’s Judaizers,” Journal of Early Christian Studies vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 444. Newman’s specific point is that while Jerome threw around the term “Judaizer,” it was his relationship with the Jewish people that could best be decribed as “Jew-friendly.”

Obadiah. However, the most honest answer to answering the question of whether Jerome was anti-Jewish can be found in his exchange with Augustine (Letter LXXV) when he writes the following statements:

If, however, there is for us no alternative but to receive the Jews into the Church, along with the usages prescribed by their law; if, in short, it shall be declared lawful for them to continue in the Churches of Christ what they have been accustomed to practice in the *synagogues of Satan*, I will tell you my opinion of the matter, they will not become Christians, **but they will make us Jews** (emphasis added).

He adds, “I, on the contrary, shall maintain, and, though the world were to protest against my view, I may boldly declare that the Jewish ceremonies are to Christians both hurtful and **fatal**; and that whoever observes them, whether he be Jew or Gentile originally, **is cast into the pit of perdition** (emphasis added).” And while it might be argued that Jerome was responding in his typical way of utilizing hyperbolic attacks in his communication with Augustine, it is difficult to make that argument when Jerome compares any attempt by Jewish believers to maintain their heritage through observing the ordinances as nothing more than being guilty of Ebionism. In addition, his allegorical approaches to interpreting the books of the Tanakh as reflecting poorly on the Jewish people and the fact that he was according to Kelly an admirer of Tertullian (and by whom it could be rationally argued that he was influenced), the argument of literary exaggeration is difficult to make. Some might argue that Jerome was not anti-Jewish in sentiment; however, it is hard to argue against that fact when his own commentary

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211 Kelly, 166, 222 and 253.

212 Jerome, *Letter LXXV*, ch. 4, 13. See also Jacobs, 261.

213 Ibid., ch. 4, 14.

214 Ibid., ch. 4, 16.

on Haggai argues that the synagogue has been replaced (i.e., Supersessionism) by the Church.\footnote{Ibid., 166.}

Perhaps it would be accurate to surmise that his relationship to the Jewish people is much like his relationship with everyone – difficult and uncertain.

John Chrysostom

The young man who will become praised as one of the great orators of Christian history and reviled in Jewish history for the words which he spoke in his oration had a rather inauspicious beginning when he was born in the middle of the fourth century. John Chrysostom was raised by a widowed Christian mother (Anthusa) after his Roman officer father was killed when he was a baby.\footnote{Kannengiesser, \textit{Handbook of Patristic Exegesis}, 783 and Hall, \textit{Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers}, 93.} His early educational efforts at rhetoric and plans to become a lawyer changed when he decided to adopt the life of a monastic, despite the opposition which came from his family.\footnote{Lauri Thurén, \textit{“John Chrysostom as a Rhetorical Critic: The Hermeneutics of an Early Father,” Biblical Interpretation} 9,2 (2001): 183 and Hall, \textit{Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers}, 93.} He lived for several years as an ascetic before becoming a deacon and then priest and one of Diodore of Tarsus’ foremost students (along with Theodore of Mopsuestia). He also became one of the leading voices of a more literal interpretation of Scripture via the School of Antioch.\footnote{Kannengiesser, \textit{Handbook of Patristic Exegesis}, 783 and Froehlich, \textit{Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church}, 19.} Kannengiesser describes Chrysostom as having an “idealistic disposition [that] was permeated by his intense familiarity with scripture.”\footnote{Kannengiesser, \textit{Handbook of Patristic Exegesis}, 783 and Froehlich, \textit{Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church}, 19.} Ultimately, Chrysostom became the bishop of Constantinople and it is here that some of the more interesting aspects of his biography...
must be limited as it tangential to the dissertation topic. However, it should be noted that he was exiled from his pastoral post and died in exile in September 407.221

What is essential as it relates to the life of the “Golden Mouth” of John Chrysostom are the words which came from this powerful orator, specifically the words which relate to the Jewish people and their relationship with God. Most of the surviving homilies that are available for inspection today are from his days in Antioch and do indicate his Antiochene exegetical view; however, they also indicate something in this writer’s opinion that is more profound and ominous as well.222 From Chrysostom’s Adversus Judaeos, one can analyze two statements for both their anti-Jewish comments as well as their supersessionistic contents—regardless of whether he came from the Antiochene or Alexandrian school of hermeneutics. The first provides evidence of the continuing argument that the Jews are not simply complicit in the death of Jesus but that this act has cast them into the realm of Satan worshippers: “If, then, the Jews fail to know the Father, if they crucified the Son, if they thrust off the help of the Spirit, who should not make bold to declare plainly that the synagogue is a dwelling of demons? God is not worshipped there. Heaven forbid! From now on it remains a place of idolatry.”223 The second statement of the future bishop of Constantinople is not only anti-Jewish in its denigration of the people but also disparages feasts that were commanded in Leviticus 23 for Chrysostom saw them as both unnecessary and replaced by Christianity224:

221 Hall, Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers, 96 and Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 783.

222 Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 784-87.


224 Ben Ezra, “‘Christians’ Observing ‘Jewish’ Festivals of Autumn,” 67 and Simon, Verus Israel, 217-23. Simon will acknowledge that a portion of Chrysostom’s invective is toward Judaizers; however, he still views the bishop’s main focus of vitriolic language as towards the Jewish people themselves.
The festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us one after the other and in quick succession: the feast of Trumpets, the feast of Tabernacles, the fasts … Yet some of these are going to watch the festivals and others will join the Jews in keeping their feasts and observing their fasts. I wish to drive this perverse custom from the Church right now.225

Marvin Wilson has sought to redeem Chrysostom to a point by arguing that the pastor was seeking to fight against the Judaizers that were seeking to infiltrate his congregation226—and perhaps there is a certain amount of leeway that should be granted to the fourth century pastor from our twenty-first century perspective. However, as Daniel Cohn-Sherbok correctly points out, it is difficult for a Jewish audience to do so when their faith and heritage have been accused of sacrificing children for religious rituals (i.e., blood libels) by church fathers.227 It is also difficult when John Chrysostom himself writes these words regarding the Jewish people:

But the Jews neither know nor dream of these things. They live for their bellies, they gape for the things of this world, their condition is not better than that of pigs or goats because of their wanton ways and excessive gluttony. They know but one thing: to fill their bellies and be drunk, to get all cut and bruised, to be hurt and wounded while fighting for their favorite charioteers.228

ADDENDUM – Jewish Reaction to Patristic Theology

With all the vitriol that the Jewish community believed they were receiving from the Christian community in general and patristic leaders in particular, a few questions should be


226 Marvin R. Wilson, Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 95. This same argument by Robert Wilken’s work John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric, Reality in the Late 4th Century. And while both Wilson and Wilken could have a point to make as it relates to Chrysostom’s rhetorical approach to the issue of Judaizers, later generations took the bishop’s words seriously towards the Jewish people themselves. See also, Klaas A. D. Smelik, “John Chrysostom’s Homilies against the Jews: Some Comments,” Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift vol. 39, no. 3 (July 1985): 194-200.


raised briefly as to what was their reaction. Was it merely a “doubling-down” of the Eighteen Benedictions and the *Birkat Ha-Minim* or did they react more strongly? Did they have a voice to react in the latter days of the Roman Empire? Did Constantine’s conversion change the status quo and the ability of the Jewish people to muster a reaction to the church’s accusations of deicide and other venal accusations?

There was in essence a “doubling-down” as it relates to *Birkat Ha-Minim*;229 however, this also expanded to the concept of the Talmud being as Michael Chernick describes it as “the true understanding of the written Torah, though not necessarily the literal understanding of it.”230 Therefore, it is easy to see how the Talmud easily become a repository of legends that are contra-Jesus, especially as a reaction to the church fathers.231

Chernick will argue that the rabbinic leaders were definitely responding to anti-Jewish responses of the church leadership and perhaps this was their last political opportunity to do so.232 For Constantine’s conversion to Christianity did change the political and social climate of the Jewish people’s station in the latter days of the Roman Empire, except for occasional moments of reprieve.233 Yes, the rabbis sought to respond to Origen’s exegetical

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229 Joel Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian ‘Amidah?,” *Early Christianity* 3 (2012): 221-25 and Kimelman, “Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence….” 242, 243, 244. Kimelman expands even more than Marcus on how the term *nasrim* relates to the idea of Nazarene(s) and how the Talmud interdicted against fasting on Sunday lest Christians misunderstood the intent of the observance.


misappropriation of the Song of Songs; however, one can began to see that David Berger was correct when he writes that “it is by no means clear than even those patristic works that were directed Adversus Judaeos were marked by realistic missionary objectives.” They were simply just “against the Jews.”

Rise of the Dark Ages and Expulsions (c.500 to 1290)

As Augustine witnessed the fall of Rome to the Visigoths, a different period that was unique and different of the Medieval Period began. A period of political, theological and social confusion abounded in all parts of Europe. Intellectual darkness in many ways reigned supreme and theological superstition was the norm and not the exception of the day. These experiences of confusion, darkness and superstition did not encompass all members of society as sparks of intellectual brightness flickered across monasteries to the fiefdoms of people in the Jewish enclaves. For one question was still predominant in many minds—who had the right to claim sonship as the “Chosen People of God”? The people to whom it was first given or the people to whom now claimed the right, the Roman Catholic Church. For, indeed, much that will occur religiously and socially in this period will truly revolve around that very question.

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234 Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 551.


236 Pamela Berger, “The Roots of Anti-Semitism in Medieval Visual Imagery: An Overview,” Religion and the Arts 4:1 (2000): 5. Berger notes the arguments that others have made, including Robert Chazan in the inter-familial dialogue found in the Gospels but notes that the Medieval Period took it a step further with this observation: “But Christianity reached outside the Jewish faith, and internal criticism was transformed into external condemnation.” See also, Robert Chazan, “Medieval Anti-Semitism,” in History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism, ed. David Berger (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 53.
Formulation of Catholic Dogma in Regards to Judaism

Michael Frassetto overstates the argument when he argues that the Jews of the Medieval Period were “defined as the diabolical enemy of Christendom and associated with heretics, witches, the minions of Antichrist, and the devil.”\(^{237}\) However, within this period the church established a pattern of assumptions and presumptions regarding the Jewish people that will follow them to this day as well as enable the Jewish people themselves to develop a defense mechanism and a philosophical leader, Maimonides, to defend their theological moorings and values. The establishment of theological moorings and values which will prevent them from seeing the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus.

For it was in the Medieval Period that codification of the view that the Jewish people were solely responsible for the death of Jesus (i.e., deicide) was affirmed.\(^{238}\) Indeed, even the sympathetic Bernard of Clairvaux viewed the Medieval Jews as guilty of deicide, even if he did not want them severely punished for their crime.\(^{239}\) It was also in this period that the Catholic dogma of deicide was fleshed out for the masses in the form of “Passion Plays,” frescoes, icons, and stained glass windows which depict the Jewish people as responsible for the death of Jesus, regardless of Jesus’ own testimony in Jn. 10:18.\(^{240}\)


However, it was not only the Catholic dogma of deicide that the church established in this period. Fears such as the outlandish, imaginary “Jewish-Mongol Plot of 1241” that Sophia Menache described encouraged Christians and the church to establish both eschatological demarcations and possible identifying badges for the Jewish people of Europe. The badge of identification established by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was one such means of identification and separation and isolation for the Jewish people, all established as a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.

Medieval Papal Attitudes toward the Jewish People

The popes of the medieval period cast a long shadow on the lives of the Jewish people, from often choosing their livelihood to the daily existence of their very lives. For as Rebecca Rist notes that many followed both the Augustinian “Jewish Witness” and the Theodosian Code of the fifth century which promised them the protection of life, each pope varied in the approach he might take in regards as to the quality of their lives. The most positive papacy towards the Jewish people is interestingly led by one that has been given the title, “the Great,” Gregory (590-604). Gregory opposed forced conversion of the Jewish people and sought to win the Jewish

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242 Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church: The Middle Ages from Gregory VII, 1049, to Boniface VIII, 1294, vol. V (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1907); Cohen, Under Crescent & Cross, 38-40 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 185-86 and Chazan, “Medieval Anti-Semitism,” 60-61. Schaff also notes that the Jews “were bidden to keep within doors during passion week” and the rationale behind the badges was so that no “carnal intercourse be had between” the Jews and Christians.

people to Jesus by means of persuasion and apologetics. And while D. N. Makuja might argue that Gregory’s largesse was perhaps because of his interest in speeding up the eschaton; nevertheless, his papal decrees regarding providing compensation to Jewish individuals for lost and/or seized property is not something that will necessarily be seen in other papacies.

There were other “good” popes towards the Jewish people during the medieval period. For example, Calixtus II (1119-1124) confirmed the Gregorian codicil of the Theodosian Code of fair treatment towards the Jewish people. However, many of the popes either displayed either an attitude of apathy or antipathy towards the first people of “The Book.” Two examples of “bad” popes as it relates to Jewish-Christian relations are Innocent III (1198-1216) and Gregory IX (c.1127-1241). Each of these popes played a role in establishing a demarcated dividing line between reconciling the Jewish people to the Jewish Messiah.

Innocent III is known not only for the decision of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) in which European Jews were required to wear yellow badges to delineate them from the rest of society. This pope was also known for allowing, via the Sicut Judaeis, of allowing for Jews to be attacked if they were even suspected of verbally denigrating Christianity. He acknowledged Augustine’s call for personal protection; however, he also followed Augustine’s Sarah/Hagar typology and believed that Jews should live in “Christian society” in a subservient position.

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247 Ibid.

Gregory IX took the antipathy towards Judaism one step further and called for the burning of the Talmud and other Jewish extra-biblical sources following accusations made by a Jewish believer Nicholas Donin against his own Jewish countrymen (c. 1239). Each event and occurrence seemingly isolated in many ways; however, they built upon a legacy of antipathy between the Christian church and its Jewish roots even to this day.

Crusades and the Jewish People

In this already brief summary of almost eight hundred years of Jewish-Christian history during the Medieval Period, only a few words can be allotted to the blood-soaked stained era known as the Crusades. A period often romanticized and mythologized by those outside of Judaism, the Crusades are a time of sorrow and lamentation for those who call Abraham father. A time of loss and grief often directed toward the physical descendants of Jesus by those who carry the flag and cross of the Messiah as their clarion validation for their actions.

It is known that in 1095, Pope Urban II called for the Christians of Europe to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslim pagans. This sermon by Urban II began a series of “Crusades” of individuals leaving the relative security of a darkened Europe to travel to the mysterious East to liberate a land they had only heard about in homilies and seen on stained-glass windows.

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250 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 183-84. While the above sentences were written from my own hand, it should be acknowledged that my “common knowledge” of this concept comes from reading diaries and Jewish evaluations of the period such as from Telushkin who writes, “For more Jews, the word ‘Crusades’ has two very different associations: murder and forced baptism.”

However, it was what happened during the Crusaders’ travels to Palestine that is often undiscovered unless one opens the pages of musty historical tomes. The murder of Western European Jews has left an indelible stain on the spiritual hearts of Jewish people that not even a millennia can erase.  

While one may argue with Norman Roth that French Jews were left unscathed by the First Crusade, French Jews were most definitely touched by the massacres of the following crusades as seen by the efforts of sanctuary by such clerics as Bernard of Clairvaux. However, it was the Jews of Germany who experienced a swath of wrath from Crusaders determined to both liberate Jerusalem and massacre the Diaspora of Zion while on their journey. Many German Jews chose the path of martyrdom (i.e., suicide) while others chose the path of least resistance, a forced conversion that had little impact on their eternal soul.  “The Chronicles of Solomon Bar Simson” provide a detailed report of martyrdom and false conversions that were “reversed” as soon as possible or as the narrator puts it “until the day of indignation passed.”

Therefore, due to the ultimate failure of the Crusades, one may ask: what was ultimately accomplished by these failed raids of the Holy Land and pogroms of European Jewry? Did it

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252 Much more could be written about this period than even a hundred dissertations could contain. Therefore, it is my decision to simply highlight key points of loss and consequence of this period with appropriate documentation as necessary.

253 Norman Roth, “Bishop and Jews in the Middle Ages,” Catholic Historical Review 80, no. 1 (1994): Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed 11 August 2015); P. Berger, “The Roots of Anti-Semitism in Medieval Visual Imagery,” 13-14; and Kroemer, “Vanquish the Haughty and Spare the Subjected,” 62.Interestingly, Roth himself describes the attacks of Jews during the First Crusade as not being instigated by Crusaders but by “a gang of criminals let loose from prison.”


255 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 184 and Rubinstein, Armies of Heaven, 49-53.

256 Eidelberg, The Jews and the Crusaders, 67, 68.
accomplish some need for “blood lust” of vengeance for the death of Jesus as Shmuel Shepkaru hypothesizes? Or, was it for some misguided attempt at evangelism as proposed by David Berger? The only thing accomplished was apparently more death. As Susan Weingarten reports, it was following the Crusader period that the “urban legends” of Blood Libels (Jewish communities killing Christian children for their blood to be used in rituals) began, which only led to more killing of European Jews by Christians and churches. Indeed, in 1028, it is reported in “The Narrative of the Old Persecutions,” that accusations that will come to be known as Blood Libels were occurring in the city of Mainz.

Early Inquisitions and Jewish-Christian Disputations

While Cullen Murphy is correct that the earliest Inquisition was directed towards the Cathars of France in 1231 by Gregory IX, the word itself stirs the imagination of abuse and misuse towards European Jewry for a great portion of the Medieval Period. Therefore, a Jewish approach to protecting Rabbinic Judaism from the natural temptation of a quasi-conversion or a self-defeating martyrdom was often to engage in polemical apologetics and disputations with the Catholic Church that was seeking what it perceived to be its destruction.


As will be illustrated in later chapters, Maimonides was such an individual; however, it is David Blumenthal who provides a modern explanation for the Jewish Medieval rationale:

The true meaning of the sacred texts was up for discussion. The true path to God and Torah was at issue. Often the coherence of the Jewish community—religiously and socially—was a major concern. In the interfaith disputations, the very existence and safety of the community was frequently at stake. And so was God’s honor, and Israel’s. The intellectual had no choice but to respond. It was his sacred duty.263

Two of the most well-known apologetic Jewish polemics, outside of the time period known by Maimonidean thought and philosophy, were written by Rabbi David Kimhi (Sefer ha-Brit) and Rabbi Judah Loew who sought particularly to negate Christian interpretation of Messianic prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures such as Ps 22 and Gen 49:10.264

And it was from these works, including those noted specifically in fn. 282, that the most well-known disputations such as in Paris (c.1240s) and Barcelona (1263) were based, as well as the lesser known Ceuta Disputation (1179) in North Africa.265 Often the disputations engaged the Christian scholars were reticent to engage in polemical arguments with scholar but that they were exception to the rule and sometimes their reticence was because, as in the case of Adam of Perseigne, they believed Jewish turning to Jesus was “reserved for the eschaton.”

263 David R. Blumenthal, “Religion and the Religious Intellectuals: The Case of Judaism in Medieval Times,” in Take Judaism, For Example: Studies for the Comparison of Religion, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 126. Blumenthal also provides an excellent description of his understanding of the Jewish intellectual during the Medieval Period (p. 119) that notes the isolation of such individuals as well as the necessity of such men to be “autodidactic” in all areas of life.


thoughts and arguments of leading Jewish scholars such as Nachmanides and Jewish believers in Jesus such as Paul Christiani (Barcelona). The decision of the debates were often pre-set as the judges were Catholic kings and/or Catholic bishops; however, the purpose was not truly for evangelism but ultimately for triumphalism on the one hand and survival on the other. Therefore, little was accomplished but further separation between the church and its Jewish roots.

Jewish Expulsions in Medieval Europe

There is an adage in Judaism that states, “Someone tried to kill us, God saved us, let’s eat.” The Jewish people were accustomed from the Babylonian Diaspora onward to trials, calamities, and expulsions. Therefore, the expulsions from various areas and countries of Europe during the Medieval Period was not necessarily new; however, the tinge of religious and economic prejudice that these expulsions took on what could only be described as somewhat new and unusual experiences.

In France, expulsions began in various regions of the country beginning as early as the ninth century by the Archbishop of Sens. In 1182, King Philip II expelled Jews from the Bourges-en-Berry region of France for financial benefits to his coffers. His actions encouraged other French fiefdoms to follow suit with Jewish expulsion for financial gain throughout the


267 Roth, “Bishops and Jews in the Middle Ages,” EBSCOhost.

thirteenth century.²⁶⁹ So even though there had been a French Jewish presence since at least the fourth century in Gaul, financial benefits cast them from the land in a matter of days.²⁷⁰

The evidence of a German Jewish presence in Medieval times is obvious by not only the calls for expulsion by the Archbishop of Mainz in the middle of the tenth century and their actual expulsion from the city in 1012; but, also by the discovery of Responsa (rabbinical document providing a Halakhic evaluation of the Torah) on whether Jewish merchants could sell to Germans on Christian holidays.²⁷¹ However, it is the 1290 expulsion from England that is the most well-known and most infamous as it combined both religious and financial rationales for their choice to dispel a people who had become accustomed to expulsion.²⁷² However, it arguable that this expulsion was exceptionally personal as the roots and semblance of permanence established by English Jews was unprecedented during the Medieval Period.

Cecil Roth reports that as early as the Crusades, Richard the Lion-Hearted sought the personal services of Maimonides which validates an influential Jewish presence on the British Isles as early as the recognized date of 1066.²⁷³ However, Gabriel Sivan argues for an even


earlier date for Jewish immigration to England even if their total population never grew to more than 10,000 even by the time of their expulsion in 1290. Regardless of the exact settlement date of British Jews in Medieval times, the presence of multiple synagogues throughout England indicate a communal presence that was strong and “tight-knit.”

Therefore, the Blood Libel accusation after the death of William of Norwich in 1144 and the subsequent accusations created an environment of religious danger for the Jewish people that was unaccustomed to British Jews. However, the power of greed also created a financial danger for the Jewish people for by 1290 the influence they had once extended as moneylenders had evaporated and their usefulness was gone. Their presence was also no longer necessary and Edward I ordered their expulsion. This was an expulsion that was to last for almost four hundred years until they were allowed to return under the auspices of Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s.

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275 Joe Hillaby, “Beth Miqdash Me’at: The Synagogues of Medieval England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol. 44, no. 2 (April 1993): 183, 186, 188-191, 194. Hillaby provides in the article a complete list of not only synagogues but also examples of expulsion lists from these houses of worship.


278 Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, 190.
Chapter Summation

Any attempt to cover thirteen hundred years of Jewish-Christian history in one dissertation will by necessity leave some events covered in a summary fashion.\(^{279}\) However, the importance of this chapter cannot be overlooked as it relates to the overall focus of the dissertation itself. The background that established Maimonides as a Jewish philosopher/scholar/theologian would not have been possible without the millennia of Jewish-Christian history that preceded him. The antipathy that bubbled to the surface after the death of the disciples by Gentiles towards the Jewish people who still resisted the Gospel, the overt animosity of some of the Patristic leaders towards Rabbinic Judaism, and the “urban legends” and hostility of the Medieval Period all created an environ in which the Sephardic scholar could create a Judaism that was designed around the construct of negation and separation from the God of Israel.

\(^{279}\) Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 442-57. The reason for this footnote placement is that even while Schaff laments the treatment of the Jewish people during this period, he also seeks to provide some sense of rationale and/or justification for it. Schaff writes, “Some explanation is afforded by the conduct of the Jews themselves.” He then goes on to fall into the basest of stereotypical traps regarding Jews and wealth, etc.
CHAPTER 3
Moses Maimonides (1135/38-1204)

As I stood under the beating Spanish sun in the heat of an Andalusian summer in 2015, it was not difficult to imagine a young Jewish boy running the streets of the Jewish section of Cordoba towards home and his daily rabbinical studies with his father/teacher.\(^{280}\) I could imagine him running past the Mezquita de Córdoba, one of the great mosques of twelfth century Sephardic Spain, which runs parallel to the Jewish Quarter. I could imagine him seeing the opulence that was Islamic Spain while running to the more simple life of Jewish Spain. The boy’s name in actuality was Moshe ben Maimon and the real world will eventually know him by other names as well such as Rambam or more commonly Maimonides.\(^ {281}\) Eventually, albeit not without a great deal of early opposition, much of the very real world of Rabbinic Judaism will view him as the savior of modern Judaism.\(^ {282}\) This writer will argue in this chapter and beyond that the legacy that the very real Rambam will create will be one of both spiritual confusion and theological division between the “Mother Faith” of Judaism and its child of Christianity—confusion and division about perhaps the core issue of faith, the possibility of a personal relationship with God himself. As I stood there in the summer of 2015, I could not help but wonder—could the boy running home for Torah study imagine the legacy that lay before him?

\(^{280}\) Sherwin B. Nuland, Maimonides, (New York: Nextbook, 2005), 30-33; Arbel, Maimonides, 15. See also, Edward Hoffman, The Wisdom of Maimonides: The Life and Writings of the Jewish Sage (Boston: Trumpeter, 2008), 6. Arbel and Nuland conflict on the paternal/fraternal relationship between Maimonides and his father. Arbel presents an idealized portrait of the relationship while Nuland is perhaps more honest about the unique dynamic present between father and son. Nuland perhaps built his perception of the strained relationship between father and son from the work of A. Benisch who wrote in a quite literary manner of the scholar’s early years of being less than an admirable student in his nineteenth century work. A. Benisch, Two Lectures on the Life and Writings of Maimonides (London: Wertheim, Aldine Chambers, Paternoster Row, 1847), 2-4.

\(^{281}\) Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 176. Rambam is an acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon

\(^{282}\) Ben Zion Bokser, The Legacy of Maimonides (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 12.
Biography

Birth in Cordoba to Expulsion from Andalusia

Moshe ben Maimon was born c. March 1135/38 in Cordoba, Spain; however, the legacy and history of Jews in Spain had long preceded this son of Sephardim(ic) (or Jews of the Mediterranean, Spanish, and Iberian worlds) Jewry. Indeed, some will attempt to date the arrival of Jews in Spain to the time of the Babylonian Diaspora (i.e., Obadiah 20) but most assuredly to the times of the Roman Diaspora. Maimonides himself attempted to trace his family’s lineage in the Commentary on the Mishnah back at least seven generations and, according to Kraemer, believed in the Obadiah 20 legend. Consequently, and perhaps the most thorough work on the subject appears to be done by Mariona Vernet Pons who believes the location of Obadiah 20 is

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283 Abram Leon Sachar, A History of the Jews, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1965), 178; George C. Papademetriou, “Moses Maimonides’ Doctrine of God,” Philosophy vol. 4 (January 1974): 306-307; Bokser, The Legacy of Maimonides, 2 and Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 175. Some of the preliminary biographical information was also completed in a paper I did during my MATH experience at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Therefore, see also, Amy Karen Downey, “Maimonides’ Via Negativa: The Unknowable Nature of God as a Response to the Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation,” a research paper for Philosophy of Religion (PHREL 413), (Fort Worth: SWBTS, April 2005): 1, 3. Albert van der Heide, “‘Their Prophets and Fathers Misled Them’: Moses Maimonides on Christianity and Islam,” in The Three Rings; Textual Studies in the Historical Triilogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, ed. Barbara Roggema et al., Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht ns, 11 (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 35, provides the anecdotal story that Maimonides was born on the 14th of Nisan (i.e., Passover) which will play an important role in the legacy of Rambam throughout time.


Lydia, Sardis, but will acquiesce to the likelihood that Sephardic Jews lived in Spain as earlier as AD 70. Martin Cohen describes the Jews of Spain as truly a phenomenon and notes that for most of the two millennia of the “Common Era,” the Sephardim outnumbered the Ashkenazi (German and Eastern European Jews). However, the question at hand is not the population statistics but the introductory and lasting influence the Jews of Spain have played on religious and philosophical thought, especially the influence of Maimonides.

The term, “Convivencia,” refers to the period in Spanish Medieval history in which Christians, Jews and Muslims lived in what was allegedly a time of peace and harmony. The concept and utopian idealism of such a term is highly suspect as even Benjamin Gampel will acknowledge; however, he also notes that for Spanish Jewry the idea of attempting to live in relative harmony and not acrimony was the norm whether it be Roman pagans, Islam or Christianity dating at least back to the third century. However, it was the triad of Muslim, Jewish, Christian under the aegis of the Islamic Umayyads that allowed for the flowering of a Sephardic Jewish religion and culture that the ancestral family of Maimonides will find their place in Cordoba and Andalusia. María Rosa Menocal describes this idealistic period as a time


290 Wolf, “Convivencia in Medieval Spain,” 77-78; Cohen, Under Crescent and Cross, 52; and Gampel, “Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia,” 14-18. Both Cohen and Gampel note that the Muslims considered to view non-Muslims as dhimmis but as a “protected minority” as long as they did not seek to overthrow Islamic rule.
when the language of the synagogue Hebrew was allowed to breathe again even while
Maimonides himself prayed in both Hebrew and Arabic as both were available to him.²⁹¹ Ruth
Birnbaum notes that for Jews in Spain, they experienced two unique features that would be
unheard of throughout the rest of Europe: (1) freedom of travel and (2) living among Christians
and Muslims and outside a ghetto-proper environment.²⁹²

However, this bastion of relative safety for both Spanish Christians and Jews changed
when the Umayyads were overthrown by the Almohads at the conclusion of the eleventh century
with an approximate date given by Norman Roth of 1090, or approximately forty-five years
before the birth of Rambam.²⁹³ The Almohads invaded from North Africa and brought with them
a more ascetic and observant brand of Islam that contravened with the Umayyad Islamic faith
that was more tolerant of art, diverse faiths, and lifestyles.²⁹⁴ Therefore, and anywhere between
Maimonides’ eighth and thirteenth year, the family followed the southern exile path to Morocco
around 1150.²⁹⁵ This was an exile that Ilil Arbel describes as lasting for Rambam the remaining
years of his life.²⁹⁶

²⁹² Ruth Birnbaum, “Maimonides, Then and Now,” Judaism: A Quarterly Journal vol. 54, issue 1/2
(Winter/Spring 2005): 67. The dissertation would disagree with Birnbaum’s idealistic assessment of the living
situation as I have visited the Jewish quarter of Cordoba; however, she is correct that it was not a ghetto in the
strictest sense of the word.
²⁹³ Roth, “The Jews in Spain at the Time of Maimonides, 15. See also, Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 174.
²⁹⁴ Jerrilyn D. Dodds, “Mudejar Tradition and the Synagogues of Medieval Spain: Cultural Identity and
Cultural Hegemony,” in Convivencia: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain, ed. Vivian B. Mann et al.
(New York: George Braziller and the Jewish Museum, 1992), 119; Gampel, “Jews, Christians, and Muslims in
Medieval Iberia,” 20; and Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 174. Telushkin notes the Almohads followed an obscure
teaching that ordered all Jews to convert to Islam if the Jewish Messiah had not arrived within five hundred years
from the date of Mohammad’s edict.
²⁹⁵ Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 174; Bokser, The Legacy of Maimonides, 2; and Sachar, A History of the
Jews, 178-79.
²⁹⁶ Arbel, Maimonides, 22. See also, Halbertal, Maimonides, 16
Years in Morocco and North Africa

The years in Morocco and North Africa can be described in many ways for Maimonides as his “wilderness” years. Additionally, and in many ways, these years will prove to be among the most controversial years of his life because of what is shrouded in mystery and for what is sometimes brought to life. For while many of the fleeing Sephardic Jews of Spain chose to travel north to Europe, Moshe’s father chose the less traveled route into the heart of Islamic territory.

Ben Zion Bokser acknowledges that they settled in Fez, Morocco, for twelve years but calls it a period “without a fixed home.” Both Abram Leon Sachar and Martin Cohen focus on the continent and the scholar’s youthful intellectual achievements while mentioning the city of Fez only in passing. Joseph Telushkin continues the ambiguity regarding the years of North Africa but does include a mention of his brief time in Palestine.

The mysterious years of Maimonides, albeit revealed somewhat by his intellectual accomplishments and writings, will in some measure be subsumed by a question that has challenged Jewish scholars for nearly a millennium. This is a question that is not completely answerable and a question that is perhaps not fair to ask from the relative safety of a twenty-first century purview. However, it is a question that needs to be considered not only for understanding

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297 The utilization of terminology in some of the sections related to Maimonides’ biography is intentional and not accidental due to the nature of the dissertation topic as well as to what be revealed in both Rambam’s view of himself as well as how many within Judaism view the scholar as a “savior” of Judaism, i.e., including the legend that he was born on Passover in 1135/1138.


301 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 176.
but also for implications to Rambam’s own theological underpinnings—did the family Maimonides convert to Islam during their “wilderness” years?

Rumors of Possible Conversion to Islam

Bokser and Sacher, while noting Maimonides’ sojourn in Morocco and North Africa, also hastily mention one of the most controversial areas of his life—the accusation of his conversion to Islam. Telushkin avoids the subject altogether and instead argues that Rambam’s family traveled throughout North Africa in essence one step ahead of forced conversion. Marc Shapiro notes that Maimonides exhibits little respect for the first prophet of Islam, Muhammad, and referred to him by a number of negative terms. However, it is Norman Roth who offers the counter-factual perspective to the whole legend and argues that no one in Fez was forced to convert to Islam. The preponderance of the evidence lies against Norman Roth, especially when one considers the story provided by D. S. Margoliouth.

Margoliouth in an article for The Jewish Quarterly Review not only recounts the legacy of Maimonides and his family’s conversion to Islam, including stories of how Rambam “faked” reading from the Koran and reciting prayers during Ramadan and also went to great lengths to ensure his economic backstory preserved his conversion story. However, one does not need

303 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 176.
304 Marc B. Shapiro, Studies in Maimonides and His Interpreters (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 151-53.
306 D. S. Margoliouth, “The Legend of the Apostasy of Maimonides,” The Jewish Quarterly Review vol. 13, no. 3 (April 1901): 539-41. The overarching purpose of Margoliouth’s article was to discount the strong efforts of Maimonidean defenders such as Grätz and Friedländer who sought to debunk Maimonides’ Marrano period.
anecdotal proof such as Margoliouth’s research to find evidence within Maimonides’ and his father’s own writings that called for compassion for those who felt compelled to “fake a conversion” for physical safety for a period of time.  

We also have the possible inference of his own experience that he provided to the Moroccan Jewish community, after he was safely ensconced in Cairo, who were once again being pressured to choose. However, this choice came from a Rabbi who was encouraging them to choose death rather than undergo a false conversion and telling them any acts of Judaism they performed as “converts” would be nothing more than “a sinful act.” Maimonides wrote to the Moroccan Jewry these words that if one chooses to read between the lines, one can sense almost a self-identifying word of testimony about his own time of “spiritual exile” while on the way from Spain to Egypt:

If a person wishes to fulfill the 613 commandments of the Torah in secret he can do so. He is not guilty of anything unless he happens to desecrate the Shabbos without being forced to do so. This oppressive regime does not force anyone to do any prohibited act, just to make an oral affirmation [of faith]. They know very well that we do not mean what we say, and that the person is only doing so to escape the king’s wrath and to satisfy him with a recitation of meaningless incantations.  

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309 Maimonides, Discourse on Martyrdom, IV (96). It should be noted that the writer found a form of this original quotation in the Boušek article; however, the writer is seeking to go to primary sources as much as possible. Additionally, the writer has included a sentence on the observance of the Sabbath that Boušek omitted as the Sabbath would be sacrosanct to Maimonides and Rabbinic Judaism—regardless of the circumstances one might find themselves in at the moment.
Therefore, one can safely assume from these words, despite the protestations of many Jewish scholars that struggle with the thought that Maimonides might have went through a period that he prayed, albeit falsely, toward Mecca.\textsuperscript{310} While this period of false conversion does not change who Maimonides was to the Jewish community, it certainly does raise the question—how much influence did Islam play on Rambam himself?

**Influence of Islam on Rambam**

Menachem Kellner writes a telling statement that is accurate on one level; however, this dissertation argues that it misses a key influence on the theological view of Rambam on another level. He writes:

Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) expressed a vision of Judaism as a remarkably naturalist religion of radical responsibility; a religion in which concrete behavior serves the needs of abstract thought; and a religion in which that abstract thought is to be understood as the deepest layer of the Torah and is a system which, at least in Maimonides' day, could be most clearly and accurately expressed in the vocabulary of the Neoplatonized Aristotelianism which Maimonides accepted as one of the highest expressions of the human spirit.\textsuperscript{311}

Yes, Maimonides was influenced by Aristotelianism and the thoughts of others as will be examined in the later sections of this chapter; however, this writer would also argue that the beginning influences of Rambam’s thought related to concreteness and an incorporeal God begin in his hometown of Cordoba as he viewed from a distance the magnificent, mysterious, and powerful arches of the Mezquita Mosque.

\textsuperscript{310} Boušek, “Polemics in the Age of Religious Persecutions,” 58-59. Boušek also takes the time in his article to go into a great deal of detail regarding the accusation brought against Maimonides by Ibn al-Qīfī in the rabbi’s later years about his earlier conversion and the corroborated Islamic sources from the Cairo hospital.

Perhaps Lawrence Berman better expresses the amalgamation of this perspective when he notes Alexandrian influences but sees that they were “absorbed into the writings of some of the most well known names of the eastern Islamicate intellectual tradition…” I myself stood within the shadow of those arches and was overwhelmed by the power and the mystery of Medieval Islamic thought as row upon row and column and column lay before me. I then considered how young Moshe must have seen the power of Islam, itself a religion that he viewed as a monotheistic religion, with a God who exhibited distant-like qualities, and wondered if he had a twinge of both jealousy and aspiration on how to develop within Judaism that sense of power and presence. It has also been suggested that Maimonides saw within Islam, given that they were truly monotheistic unlike Christianity in Rambam’s view, a system that had the potential to become Jewish with proper instruction and teaching. However, this writer would still maintain the better question to ask and answer is how did the Medieval Islamic teachings regarding the singular God influence Maimonides’ view of the via negativa Jewish God?

The first observation would perhaps be considered somewhat banal in light of all that has been and will be discussed; however, it is more consequential than might be realized at first glance. Oliver Leaman and Gideon Lideon both note that Rambam’s writing style and approach to his evaluation of the Torah and its Talmudic sources are Islamic in approach. Leaman

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writes that Rambam style in taking this approach was “to provide the Jewish community in the Islamic world with a series of texts that would help them cope with the difficult conditions in which they found themselves.”

This dissertation argues that this is an idealistic summation of the argument and would surmise that Maimonides was drawn to the structure and organization of the Islamic world as will be shown in this and the next section, a structure that Hassan Hanafi would argue can even be found in his division of works based on the number fourteen as it corresponds to the “Divine Imperatives to Prescriptions and Proscriptions.”

This structural comparison to Islam could be called a stretch but it is an interesting observation.

The second observation is to note that Rambam was not hesitant to note the influence that the writers and scholars of Islam had on his teachings, even if he disagreed with them. However, it is the work of such scholars as Ibn al-Farabi (aka Ibn ‘Arabī) and Al Ghazali and their impact on the “God-Scholarship” of Maimonides that is worthy of brief and special attention. Lenn Goodman writes of this period of Islamic scholarship that it “represents the most open, and so the most creative phase in the history of Islamic thought. And it was Maimonides’

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317 Sarah Stroumsa, “Elisha ben Abuyah and Muslim Heretics in Maimonides’ Writings,” Maimonidean Studies vol. 3 (1992-1993): 183-93. Stroumsa takes the analogy from the Talmud of four scholars who are taken to Paradise and are either driven mad, driven to the Talmud, etc., as a personal analogy for some of the Islamic scholars that Rambam cites in Guide of the Perplexed. Tangential to this discussion; but, nevertheless, interesting, is the story of Elisha ben Abuyah who many believe became a Christian and is purported in the Talmud to go insane.

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openness to their ideas that made possible the philosophical synthesis [Goodman is speaking specifically on the subject of theophany] that he achieved.” (emphasis added)318

Influence of Islam on Maimonidean Judaism

In using primary sources such as Teshuvot ha-Rambam, Albert van der Heide argues that according to Maimonides Muslims are true monotheists as opposed to Christians whose Trinitarianism “always confused the other monotheists.”319 Additionally, Alfred L. Ivry relates a series of Islamic philosophers and scholars that Maimonides was not only influenced by in his writing of Guide of the Perplexed but also recommended as secondary resources to one of his translators Samuel ibn Tibbon as good scholarship material.320 This writer also argues and one that she will seek to maintain in this and following chapters that the concept of the Incarnation created a God-dynamic for Maimonides that was unfathomable and untenable. Even if Shapiro is correct about Rambam’s disrespect for the first Islamic prophet, the Allah of Islam more closely resembles the incorporeal, unattainable and inaccessible God of Maimonidean thought than the Triune God of the Christian faith that would come in human form to be the Messiah of humanity. Therefore, and as mentioned previously about the specific influence of al-Farabi and Al-Ghazali,


319 van der Heide, “‘Their Prophets and Fathers Misled Them,’” 43-46.

we should compare and contrast what if anything those two Islamic teachers taught Rambam and if their teachings continue to influence modern (i.e., Maimonidean) Judaism today.

Pines will argue that Rambam’s basic premise of epistemology that “the divine science, with regard to whose object matter no certainty is possible for man” was perhaps influenced by al-Farabi’s *Commentary on the Ethics* as much if not more than as by the thought of Aristotle.\(^\text{321}\) The concept of epistemology and the idea of the true knowledge of God is the cornerstone of all of Maimonides’ work but none more so than his *Guide of the Perplexed*. Aydogan Kars points the plethora of sources—early Greek but most importantly Islamic—who “intersect and crystallize in Maimonides’ critical philosophy.”\(^\text{322}\) He points out that both al-Farabi and Maimonides allows for “no [sense of] potentiality for God” and “positive ascriptions in reference to God are nothing but implicit profanation and blasphemy;” however, Rambam did not go as far as al-Farabi in delimitedness of God.\(^\text{323}\)

In relation to Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Amira Eran write a rather compelling case that Maimonides garnered some of his views regarding both his views of the resurrected body and the incorporeality of angels from the teachings of this Islamic scholar.\(^\text{324}\) Please note that while the full Maimonidean comparative references can be found later in this chapter, this writer has


\(^{323}\) Ibid., 267, 268, 269.

included the Eran references to Al-Ghazali’s *Tahafut al-Falasifah* and *Revival of Religious Sciences* here. Al-Ghazali did not believe that angels “experience sensuous pleasures like those of mating and eating” because they have an “insight into the realities of things.” He also wrote of the greatest pleasure that a man can attain is “…getting the secret information of an emperor. God is the most high and most honorable. So the divine knowledge is the best of all kinds of knowledge.” These all reflect Maimonides’ concept of the incorporeality of angels and the idea that the reality of eternity is not about temporal pleasures but to gain complete knowledge of God apart from the body itself. Ultimately, Eran writes that Al-Ghazali’s views gave Rambam “a cover in his struggle against the naïve interpreters of the Torah.” This dissertation argues that this Islamic philosopher gave the Cairo rabbi another rationale for his attempt to create a God that was distant, inaccessible, and impossible to become the Incarnate Messiah Jesus. For as has been shown in this section, Medieval Islam influenced and continues to influence Judaism in ways that no one could have anticipated.

**Years in Egypt (“Out of Egypt, I Called My Son”)**

It could be seen perhaps as pseudo-heretical to utilize a perceived Messianic prophecy (Hos 11:1) as a sub-heading for a section dealing with one of the leading influences on modern Judaism that rejects Jesus as Messiah. However, this writer has chosen to do so because in many respects Rambam serves as a pseudo-Messianic figure for many within Medieval and even modern Judaism. There is a Jewish cliché related to Maimonides that states, “From Moses to Moses, there were none like Moses.” This statement even appears as an epitaph on his

\[325\] Ibid., 144.

\[326\] Ibid., 138.

tombstone in Tiberias,\textsuperscript{328} which creates an allusion to the prophecy in Dt 18:15 which reads, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” Indeed, Moshe ben Maimon and his teachings regarding the accessibility of God in the lives of individuals have become in many ways almost “Gospel” to the Jewish people who are searching for meaning and purpose and spiritual presence in their lives. Therefore, Maimonides’ years in Egypt are vitally important as they play a key role in establishing the religious legend of the rabbi who will influence Judaism even to this day.

**Physician to the Court**

Maimonides and family arrived in the land of Egypt in c.1165 after sojourns in Morocco, North Africa, and Palestine. He remained the rest of his life in the land of the ancient Pharaohs surviving religious controversies, familial calamities, and political upheavals; however, as Mark R. Cohen notes, he always considered himself a Sephardic (aka Spanish) Jew and a pilgrim longing for home in Andalusia.\textsuperscript{329} Upon the family’s arrival in Egypt, the original plan was for Rambam to be permitted to occupy himself with Torah and Talmudic studies while his younger brother financially provided; however, this all changed when David died while traveling abroad in c.1169/1173.\textsuperscript{330} After a period of grief that perhaps extended as long as a year, Maimonides

\textsuperscript{328} I have been to Maimonides’ Ohel in Tiberias and have seen Jewish souls paying homage and praying to the supposed remains of a man who has been deceased for over eight hundred years.


took responsibility for the family finances and became a physician of some renown in Egypt.\footnote{Meyerhof, “Jewish Physicians under the Reign of the Fatimid Caliphs in Egypt,” 138.}

It was also during this time that Rambam married and became father to his son Abraham; however, little is known about his family life, including his wife’s name, beyond his son’s legacy who followed after him in rabbinical studies.\footnote{Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 34-36; Benisch, \textit{Two Lectures on the Life and Writings of Maimonides}, 11; Elisha Russ-Fishbane, “The Maimonidean Legacy in the East: A Study of Father and Son,” \textit{The Jewish Quarterly Review} vol. 102, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 190-223; Warren Zev Harvey, “The Obligation of Talmud on Women according to Maimonides,” \textit{Tradition} 19(2) (Summer 1981): 122-30; and Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 230-32. It would be tempting to write a great deal about Rambam’s misogynistic attitudes; however, the purpose of this dissertation prevents such an endeavor. However, one can refer to his views on women in the \textit{Mishneh Torah} and the Laws of Marriage to ascertain his feelings on the subject. Another interesting subject would be Abraham’s devotion had to continuing his father’s legacy and the ongoing struggle that the son had with the ha-Levi family as well.}

Maimonides’ ability as a doctor, and the long-standing practice of the Fatimid Dynasty to employ Jewish medical experts, eventually brought him into the circle of the last Caliph of the ruling Fatimid, Al-Adid, and ultimately as the court physician for the Emperor Saladin and his son Al-Afdhal after the Fatimid Dynasty fell.\footnote{Steven Harvey, “Maimonides in the Sultan’s Palace,” in \textit{Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies}, ed. Joel L. Kraemer, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 47; Meyerhof, “Jewish Physicians under the Reign of the Fatimid Caliphs in Egypt,” 131-38; Bokser, \textit{The Legacy of Maimonides}, 2; and Lowney, \textit{A Vanished World}, 146.} Maimonides’ medical aptitude and approach to healing could be described in modern vernacular as holistic in perspective in that he viewed a healthy soul as key to a healthy body.\footnote{Lowney, \textit{A Vanished World}, 147-56 and Nuland, \textit{Maimonides}, 154-85.}

Within his role as court physician, the legend of an invitation by Richard the Lion-Hearted and perhaps even Amalric to join the ranks of medical doctor by the invading Crusaders began to grow.\footnote{Bernard Lewis, “Maimonides, Lionheart, and Saladin,” \textit{Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical, and Geographical Studies} vol. L. A. Mayer Memorial Volume (1964): 70-75; Meyerhof, “Jewish Physicians under the Reign of the Fatimid Caliphs in Egypt,” 139; and Roth, “Maimonides and England,” 209.} The question of the legend’s authenticity is debatable; however, we do know that Maimonides served as a physician to the Emperor, medical
advisor to the Jewish people of Egypt, rabbinical scholar as this was when much of his scholarship was written, and Jewish leader during his “wilderness years.”

**Chief Rabbi of Cairo**

From the Avignon Papacy during the Medieval Period to the Reformation’s conflict between Calvin and Arminius, church squabbles can be legendary and even deadly. Whether it imy mother’s childhood memory of the police being called out to break up a West Texas gunfight at Calvary Baptist to a secret business meeting to dismiss the pastor when he is on vacation, churches have diminished their witness over control issues. Interestingly enough, Maimonides himself was involved in such a battle of religious control and influence during his years in the Egyptian “wilderness.” However for Maimonides, the “spiritual” mêlée only raised his stature in the eyes of the people.

Much historical backstory involving the internecine struggle for rabbinical power could be written in these pages; however, only a summary description is possible as it is both convoluted and as Jacob Lavinger himself would summarize in one word, “confusing.” Ultimately, it appears to be a struggle between the heart and soul of Rabbinic Judaism and two men, Sar Shalom ha-Levi and Maimonides. Ancient documents in which Sar Shalom ha-Levi appears to be referred to by the offensive term *Zuta* only exacerbate the confusion as well as why

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Shivtiel, “The ‘Contribution’ of Maimonides to the Cairo Genizah,” 97

Jacob Lavinger, “Was Maimonides ‘Rais al-Yahud’ in Egypt?” in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 83-93. The term “Rais al-Yahud” as Lavinger describes it (p. 83) would be considered as “the official head of Egyptian Jewry,” and describes it as “one of the most difficult problems in his biography.”

Maimonides would be so opposed to the religious rulings of the Babylonian (Geonim) faction led by the ha-Levi family.  

Ultimately, we do know that Maimonides appeared to serve as “Chief Rabbi of Cairo” in two separate periods from c.1171 to 1177 as well as from 1195 to his death in 1204 with the ha-Levi serving in the role in the intermediate period. We can also ascertain from documents found in the Cairo Genizah that Maimonides was often sought after for decisions (Responsa) on a variety of difficult Biblical and Talmudic decisions. In fact, S. D. Goitein compares Maimonides’ Responsa work to that of being a “chief justice.” Therefore, and despite Lavinger’s confusion, there can be no doubt that Maimonides’ role in Egypt was that of rabbi, advisor, and spiritual judge.

**Surviving Political Upheaval**

Today in the Middle East there is a growing battle between the two largest factions of Islam—Sunni and Shia. Alliances are being established. Iran (Shia) and Saudi Arabia (Sunni) are shooting missiles, murdering clerics and establishing “red lines” to determine who will gain ultimate control of the territory. However, this battle is not new or unique in Islamic history. It is

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a struggle that has existed since shortly after Muhammad’s death and simply found a home in Rambam’s new Egyptian home when the Fatimid’s and the Ayyubids finalized their penultimate struggle in 1171 and the Sunni Ayyubids were triumphant.

However, Maimonides and Egyptian Jewry were able to survive the political tumult and continue the existence in relatively the same way they have lived before, even though Sunni Islam was more forceful in enforcing and observing Sharia Law. This continued existence could be related to a number of factors, some of which are based on actual fact and some of which are based on the writer’s historical and anecdotal observation of Jewish sociology: (1) the ability to adapt to changing political circumstances regardless of location due to the need to be amenable to governmental entities because of the perception of they are “wandering aliens;” (2) Saladin’s Empire’s “positive attitude towards medicine and public health” that allowed Maimonides and other Jewish physicians to continue to practice their trade; and (3) the Jewish view, specifically that of Maimonides according to Joseph Drory, that at the time that if

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one must choose between a Christian or Muslim master that the Muslim ruler would be preferred.346

Death and Legacy of Rambam

Any individual who is still being discussed and written about eight hundred years after his death in 1204 and apocryphal burial in Tiberias, Israel, will have such words as legacy, controversy, and mystery attached to his name.347 Maimonides is no exception. Ben Zion Bokser wrote a fitting if idealistic tribute about Rambam with these words, “The controversy faded after a time. It is the lot of every pioneer in thought that the world’s first reaction is to ignore him, then to vilify him, and finally to acclaim. Maimonides was too great a man to be ignored.”348 Yes, his works were burned by the Catholic Church at the instigation of French rabbis less than three decades after his death.349 However, it is interesting to note that P. B. Fenton observes that some of the “most factual contemporary accounts” of Rambam’s life come from Muslim sources, including a letter detailing his interaction with a young child.350 It is also invaluable to note that by the early part of the fourteenth century, the Jewish communities in certain parts of Spain were

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347 Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 47. The writer utilized the word apocryphal here as there is a tomb that is alleged to hold the body of the rabbi; however, and while many make pilgrimage to the burial site, there is no concrete proof that Rambam is actually buried in this location. Kraemer in this article also takes the opportunity to draw the allusion to the “first Moses” with the allusion to Dt 34:6.

348 Bokser, The Legacy of Maimonides, 12.

349 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 177; Menocal, The Ornament of the World, 231; and Bokser, The Legacy of Maimonides, 12.

350 P. B. Fenton, “A Meeting with Maimonides,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London vol. 45, no. 1 (1982): 1-3. What is unique about this information is it indicates Rambam’s influence even within Islamic thought at this time; thereby, affirming the concept that was raised in a previous section.
basing all their Talmudic decisions, except for “two questions of halakhah,” on the scholar’s *Mishneh Torah*.\(^{351}\)

Controversial in his time—Yes. Controversial today—Yes. However, the influence of the Sephardic Jewish scholar who spent a great deal of his formative years fleeing from Spain across North Africa to Egypt cannot be denied. Telushkin notes his influence on both on both Christian and Muslim thought to the point that the United Nations hosted a conference in 1985 to honor/celebrate the 850th anniversary of his birth.\(^{352}\) Jacob Minkin writing in 1957 correctly writes: “His appeal is universal. The only Jewish scholar whose prestige and influence extend far beyond the confines of his own people, Christian and Moslem theologians recognized—and disputed with—him.”\(^{353}\) However, it is influence on modern Jewish thought and the souls of Jewish people that is of particular interest and concern to this dissertation and its writer. For while there is merit and validity to the Jewish adage, “From Moses to Moses there were none were like Moses,” the missing presence of Messiah Jesus in the phrase should cause Christians and churches to pause in great concern.

**Specific Writings of Maimonides**

It would be impossible to break down each letter of correspondence, *Responsa*, sermon and treatise of Rambam. Therefore, this section of the chapter will examine specific major writings of Maimonides that relate to not only the dissertation topic at hand but also to his understanding of the presence and availability of God and to this understanding of the identity and purpose of the Messiah. While some of the letters of correspondence and other minor

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\(^{352}\) Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, 178.

writings/treatise are invaluable to the topic at hand, and will be utilized as primary source materials in later sections, this section will seek to introduce and explain the penultimate writings of the rabbinical scholar in order to lay a foundation for the remaining sections of this chapter. Maimonides was definitely prolific and his writings, even while his writings were being burned and subject to censorship by both Christians and other rabbis after his death, most managed to survive and be reproduced even though Guttenberg’s transformative invention is still almost four hundred years in the future.

*Commentary on the Mishnah*

Rabbi Marc Angel in his summary explanation of the young twenty-three year old (c.1161) Maimonides’ purpose behind writing his first major work, *Commentary on the Mishnah* or *Siraj*, explains it in a way that is significant but often not understood from a Christian perspective. He writes, “Since the Mishnah is the foundation stone of Jewish law, Maimonides felt the need to study it thoroughly, to explain it to students of Jewish law, and to incorporate the Talmudic discussions on each passage.” What is significant is two-fold: (1) the Torah is not mentioned at all in the rabbi’s sentence but the Mishnah is considered the foundation of Jewish law and (2) the rabbi does not indicate that Maimonides refers to the Tanakh but to the Talmud for his commentary source. This is important not only for this chapter but also for the final two chapters as it serves to illustrate that Rabbinic (or Modern) Judaism depends more upon outside Jewish sources than “The Source” for its understanding of the Jewish religion and beliefs. This concept did not begin with Rambam but it could be argued that it certainly received it credibility/credence from him.

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The Mishnah is the “codified core of the Oral Law” and is “considered as “equally authoritative” in Rabbinic Judaism to the “Written Law, or the Scriptures.”\footnote{Arbel, Maimonides, 81, 82.} While the Mishnah was a law code, it became an amalgamation of arguments and interesting sociological insights into Jewish thought and history that the Talmud was intended to clarify; however, the Talmud itself grew exponentially larger and more complex.\footnote{Ibid., 82} Therefore, the still young Maimonides in c.1168 completed the work in Egypt, while allowing for constant revisions throughout his life, to repair the clarity issue from his perspective and naturally also create additional controversy.\footnote{The exact date of the publication is flexible. The primary understanding is that it was written before, during and after his father’s death and completed around the time of his brother of his brother’s drowning in c.1169/1173. Sachar, A History of the Jews, 179; Halbertal, Maimonides, 92-93; Kraemer, Maimonides, 164; Nuland, Maimonides, 54-62; and Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 21-22. Nuland devotes considerable time in his evaluation of this work to examining how Rambam’s opposition to Karaites could have played a role in the work.}

Two primary issues of controversy that deserve a small amount of attention, especially the second one as it will be amplified/illustrated in the following section are: (1) Rambam’s preference for the Jerusalem Talmud over the Babylonian Talmud and (2) his division and/or categorization of Jewish scholarship into an approach that almost resembles the allegorical approach of the Christian Origen from earlier centuries. As it relates to the issue of the Talmud preference issue, we should begin at the beginning of Rambam’s actual commentary where he wrote the following:

> It should be understood that every mitzva that the Holy-One-blessed-be-He gave to Moshe Rabbaynu [Moses our Teacher], peace unto him, was given to him together with its Explanation. G-d would tell him the mitzva, and afterwards He would give its Explanation, its substance, and all the wisdom contained within the Torah’s verses.\footnote{Moses Maimonides, Maimonides’ Introduction to the Talmud: A Translation of the Rambam’s Introduction to His Commentary on the Mishna, rev. ed., trans. Zvi Lampel (Brooklyn, NY: The Judaica Press, 1998), 35.}
This statement by Maimonides should be understood to reflect the Rabbinic view that a commandment in the Torah was not seen as sufficiently self-explanatory but required additional material (i.e., Oral Law) that was to be passed down until it was written down by Rabbi Judah the Prince and the compilers of the Talmudic literature. This passing down of the Oral Law was understood by Maimonides in his commentary the *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers)* for it states in the actual *Pirkei Avot 1:1* and then his commentary the following:

[1:1] Moses received the Torah from Sinai and passed it on to Joshua; Joshua [passed it on] to the elders; the elders to the Prophets; the Prophets passed it on to the Men of the Great Assembly. They [the men of the Great Assembly made three statements: Be deliberate in judgment; raise up many students; and make a fence around the Torah.

[Commentary of the Rambam] In the introduction to this text [Commentary on the Mishnah as the *Pirkei Avot* and his understanding of it was included in the Commentary], we already explained the order of the [Oral] Tradition, and how it was transmitted. Therefore, my intent [in these notes] will be merely to explain these ethical statements, to encourage the acquisition of these qualities, for they are of great value… And make a fence around the Torah— institute decrees and ordinances that will separate a person from sin.359

This idea of “institut[ing] decrees and ordinances” from his commentary on the *Pirkei Avot* fits in perfectly with Kraemer’s supposition that Rambam viewed Jewish law as “evolve[ing] over time, as every generation of sages derives new legislation from the Oral and Written Law.”360 New legislation that will be validated and confirmed by Talmudic references as the need arises and rabbinic bodies decree.

359 Moses Maimonides, *Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim: The Rambam’s Classic Work of Ethics and Maimonides’ Introduction to Perek Chelek Which Contains His 13 Principles of Faith*, trans. Eliyahu Touger (Brooklyn, NY: Moznaim Publishing, 1994), 62. Perhaps some might see this particular section as extraneous to the issue; however, it is important groundwork to future chapters, especially chapter five, as it will seek to examine apologetic approaches to presenting the Gospel. We have to understand their perspective if we are to be effective witnesses of Messiah Jesus.

Interestingly in his *Pirkei Avot 1:3* commentary, we find a reference to the Jerusalem Talmud and not to the Babylonian Talmud. Therefore, and because the Babylonian Talmud was/is the default Rabbinic resource for Jewish scholars, we can speculate over the primary reasons why Maimonides developed an affection for the Jerusalem Talmud. First, this writer proposes that the Babylonian Talmud was the resource of his religious opponents. The Sar Shalom ha-Levi family in Egypt were of the Geonic lineage (see fn. 341) and one could argue that he disrespected their rabbinical abilities with such statements as “For, if you should ask any of the great Ge’onim for the explanation of a certain law of a Mishna, he would be unable to tell you a thing unless he would know the Gemora on that Mishna by heart…” Second, Rambam had written a work, *Precepts of the Jerusalem Talmud*, and scholars recognize that he appreciated its succinctness and its usage of “explaining the reasons for normative legal decisions,” and this led to him defaulting to Jerusalem over Babylon in particular instances.

This put Rambam at odds with many of the Geonim rabbis of his day but it was his next controversial action that is especially relevant to the dissertation study.

According to Arbel, Maimonides divided the Jewish people into three groups as it related to understanding Torah and the meaning of *Olam Haba* (“the world to come” or what Christianity would call heaven/the afterlife)—literalists, non-literalists but avoiders of deeper

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361 Maimonides, *Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim*, 63.

362 Maimonides, *Maimonides’ Introduction to the Talmud*, 181. See also, Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 98. Halbertal spells out succinctly the four goals that Rambam elucidated in his introduction while the writer has only given you the first goal above; however, she stands by her perspective that there was a hidden agenda by the overt statement of the Geonim especially since the first struggle with the ha-Levi was occurring during the time the Commentary was being completed.

study, and allegorists who sought out the deeper meaning of the text.\textsuperscript{364} As will be illustrated further, Maimonides ultimately was an allegorist in much the same way as the Latin Father Origen. Rambam wrote in his introduction to the \textit{Commentary on the Mishnah}, “Altering the \textit{Oral Law} in any way is equally as well a manifestation of false prophecy, even if the prophet is ostensibly supported by a literal interpretation, as opposed to its \textbf{actual meaning} (emphasis added).”\textsuperscript{365} It could also be argued that Maimonides was an elitist if one agrees with Arbel and Sherwin Nuland who wrote, “Much of the holy writings, he said, are in the form of metaphor, with the deeper meaning only to be understood by those with the proper training and intellect.”\textsuperscript{366} Rambam himself refers to this metaphor concept as “Secrets” as it relates to the “Aggadic Drashos”: “It is thus improper for a scholarly person to reveal what he knows of the Secrets, unless it is to one who is greater than, or at least equal to, him. For, if he reveals it to an unknowledgeable person, even if this person will not discredit it, he will still not appreciate it properly.”\textsuperscript{367} Therefore, Rambam’s allegorical views in his first work will allow him to establish a God, a Messiah, and a Judaism that reflects himself and not the God who is there.

\textbf{Epistle to Yemen}

Today Yemen is not a locale that one imagines as a Jewish region; however, during the Middle Ages this area was such an expanse. In his biography of Rambam, Kraemer notes the

\textsuperscript{364} Arbel, \textit{Maimonides}, 84. See also, Angel, \textit{Maimonides}, 150. Angel does not go into the explicit detail that Arbel does; however, the general concept is present.

\textsuperscript{365} Maimonides, \textit{Maimonides’ Introduction to the Talmud}, 50.

\textsuperscript{366} Nuland, \textit{Maimonides}, 70. See also, Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Maimonides’ Exoteric and Esoteric Biblical Interpretations in the \textit{Guide of the Perplexed},” in \textit{Study and Knowledge of Jewish Thought}, ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 163. This thought is present throughout Klein-Braslavy’s work; however, it is most overtly stated, albeit in the most tactful of wording on page 163.

\textsuperscript{367} Maimonides, \textit{Maimonides’ Introduction to the Talmud}, 151.
importance of the port of Aden to trade routes and a place where Jewish travelers could study “the Torah of Moses,” and hold “fast to his covenant.”\textsuperscript{368} Therefore, the letter that Maimonides received in 1172 from Yemenite leader Jacob ben Nethanel detailing the desperate conditions of Yemenite Jews, the newly minted \textit{Ra'\textsuperscript{\textit{is}} al-yah\textsuperscript{\textit{ū}}d} of Egypt responded not only to the leader but also to the whole of Yemenite Jewry as well.\textsuperscript{369} The response to the three conditions reveal themselves as very telling to both Maimonides perspectives on the Messiah and his understanding of Jesus’ claim to divinity, which are key components of this dissertation.

The three “emergencies” related to (1) Islamic attempts to forcibly convert the Yemenite Jews; (2) the attempt of a Jewish convert to Islam to spread the message that Muhammad was prophesied in Torah; and (3) the rise of a Messianic claimant who was attracting a large following.\textsuperscript{370} Obviously, Rambam could understand the emotional toil of the first and second issues given his upbringing in Islamic Spain and residual questions over his own pseudo-conversion experience. Therefore, the Messianic issue became an issue of paramount concern to Maimonides and this is reflected in his response to the Yemenite Jewry and because he sought to develop “an active Messianism built on natural preparation, not a passive Messianism based on eschatological visions of divine interventions.”\textsuperscript{371}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 253.
\item Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 34. Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 50, would not agree with my assessment for he wrote, “At the heart of the work is Maimonides’ effort to provide the Jews living under Muslim rule with a credible historical picture that would preserve the historical sense of time that was now threatened with collapse.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
This idea of “natural preparation” included a rather elaborate analysis based on his own family tradition of Nm 23:23 which allowed for the restoration of prophecy and advent of the Messianic era to begin in c.1216.\textsuperscript{372} One could argue that Maimonides was himself making a prophetic utterance, or as Jewish scholars today call simply a prediction. However, he was not called to account for his error due to his death prior to the missed date and what could only be called “hedging his bets” with the wording—”Although I have spoken out against making such calculations and strongly opposed the publicizing the date of his arrival, I have done this in order to keep people from [falling into despair], thinking that his coming is in the distant future. I have mentioned this to you earlier. Blessed is Hashem Who knows [the truth].”\textsuperscript{373}

This idea of “natural preparation” also necessitated dealing with the historical claims of other supposed Messiahs, in particular and most importantly the subject of Jesus of Nazareth.

Kraemer argues that Maimonides never believed Jesus sought to establish a new religion but instead blamed the Apostle Paul for the natural outcome of Christianity and that by happenstance the errors of Christianity and Islam would create the avenue for the Messiah to arrive.\textsuperscript{374} One

\textsuperscript{372} Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 236; Arbel, \textit{Maimonides}, 95; and Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 34.


\textsuperscript{374} Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 239, 240. The rationale behind Kraemer’s view is his translation of the phrase (p. 238), “A long time after Jesus a religion ascribed to him became prevalent among the descendants of Esau [the Christians, although this was not his aim.” The translation by Finkel reads as “Long after he lived, the descendants of Esav created a religion and traced its origins to him. He did not establish a new faith,…” Another translation which is noted in full bibliographic form in fn. 377 reads as “ Quite some time later, a religion, which is traced to him by the descendants of Esau, gained popularity. Although this was the aim he hoped to realize…” Therefore, the competing translations as well as the animosity towards Jesus by Maimonides in other places negate Kraemer’s argument.
finds it difficult to find a Pauline fault line in Maimonidean thought; however, the concept that
two negatives could make a positive for Rambam is present when he wrote:

They [Jesus and Muhammad] will enable the masses and the elite to acquire
moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability. Thus, the godly
community becomes preeminent, reaching a twofold perfection. By the first I
mean man’s leading his life under the most agreeable and congenial conditions
[Messianic Age]. The second will constitute the gain of the intelligibles, each in
accordance with his native powers.\(^{375}\)

It is also impossible to agree with Kraemer’s view that Maimonides had a sympathetic
inclination towards Jesus when one reads: “The first to institute this plan was Jesus the Nazarene,
**may his bones be ground to dust.** He was Jewish because his mother was a Jewess although his
father was a gentile, and our principle is that a child born of a Jewess and a gentile or slave, is
legitimate. Only figuratively do we call him an illegitimate child (emphasis added).”\(^{376}\) Thus,
we find in this short segment not simply the negation of any possibility of divinity but also the
renewal of the bastard claim against the basis of the Christian faith. There is no sympathy or
positivity in Maimonides’ view towards Jesus, even if Rambam did hold Christianity in slightly
higher esteem than Islam.\(^{377}\) Additionally, the concept of his attitude towards Jesus’ divinity will
be considered in greater detail in the introductory section on Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah.*

*Mishneh Torah*

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\(^{375}\) Moses Maimonides, *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership: The Epistle of Martyrdom, The
Society of America, 1985), 100. See also, Yehuda Shamir, “Allusions to Muhammad in Maimonides’ Theory of
Prophecy in His Guide of the Perplexed, The Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 64, no. 3 (January 1974): 212-16. For the
purposes of this dissertation, the writer placed this article here as it better served to emphasize the point she was
seeking to make about Rambam’s feeling about Islam and Christianity than about Muhammad being a prophet.

\(^{376}\) Ibid., 98.

In many respects, Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* and *Guide for the Perplexed* are what could only be described as the magnum opuses of his writing career. Haym Soloveitchik refers to the *Mishneh Torah*, while also praising the *Guide for the Perplexed*, as a “work of art” that is “a work of crystalline clarity and protean ambiguity.” However, it is to his *Mishneh Torah* that we now turn for it is here that much of the Maimonidean concept of the *via negativa* God is found. In his biography, Halbertal notes that Rambam sought to render “his spiritual and religious positions binding status” and it is here that his “voice shook the rafters in its day and posed a lasting challenge to all later Jewish thought.” Isadore Twersky describes this perception and reality in this both elegant and necessarily lengthy way:

The *Mishneh Torah*, the first serious attempt, since the redaction of the Mishnah by R. Judah the Prince, at a comprehensive survey, classification, and codification of Jewish law, changed the entire landscape of rabbinic literature. Although it did not attain its goal—it was not adopted as the universal Jewish code nor were its really novel features (scope and arrangement) imitated by later codifiers—the *Mishneh Torah* did become the pièce de résistance of all Talmudic study through the ages… The *Mishneh Torah* was like a prism through which practically all Talmudic study had to pass.

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379 Moshe Halbertal, “What is the *Mishneh Torah?: On Codification and Ambivalence,” in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, ed. Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 81-83; Menachem Genack, “Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*: The Significance of Its Title,” * Tradition* 38:2 (2004): 78-84 and Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 53. The significance of the title according to Genack is that it is the Hebrew name for Deuteronomy. Menachem Kellner raises an interesting question while acknowledging the sense of binding status in a religious sense for *Mishneh Torah*—does the binding spread across all areas of Jewish life including areas of science given that Maimonides wrote at a time when Ptolemaic thought was still triumphant. Kellner cites that there are some ultra-Orthodox, and she has heard some as well, who will argue in the affirmative. Menachem Kellner, “Maimonides on the Science of the *Mishneh Torah*: Provision or Permanent?,” *AJS Review* 18/2 (1993): 169-94 (esp. 173, 176).

It has already been mentioned (fn. 31) that Maimonides viewed the *Mishneh Torah* as sufficient for understanding both the Oral and Written Law; however, the rationale for his perception should also be noted:

In our days, severe vicissitudes prevail, and all feel the pressure of hard times. The wisdom of our wise men has disappeared; the understanding of our prudent men is hidden. Hence, the commentaries of the [earlier] Geonim and their compilations of laws and responses, which they took care to make clear, have in our times become hard to understand so that only a few individuals properly comprehend them… On these grounds, I, Moses the son of Maimon the Sefardi, bestirred myself, and, relying on the help of God, blessed be He, intently studied all these works, with the view of putting together the results obtained from them in regard to what is forbidden or permitted, clear or unclean, and the other rules of the Torah—all in plain language and terse style, so that thus the entire Oral Law might become systematically known to all,…

The theological history has already been explained by Rambam himself; however, a quasi-historical backstory does need a further examination and understanding. One is left with somewhat of a conundrum as to the date of the compilation of the *Mishneh Torah* and we can only estimate a date range of between 1175-1180 which would place firmly established him in Egypt; however, we do know that it took at least ten years for him to codify and compile all his arguments and writings together. The division of the book into fourteen books/sections was significant as the number itself is the “numerical value of the Hebrew word for ‘hand’ which earned the work its secondary title of *ha-Yad ha-hazaqah* or *The Mighty Hand* based on Dt 6: 21—“then you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD


brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand.” Both Arbel and Kraemer also note that Maimonides was born on the 14th of Nisan (aka Passover); however, it is only Arbel that draws the connection to the “Moses to Moses” adage as well as the inclusion of two anecdotal legends which tie the two Moseses together even further. One could argue that Moses Maimonides did indeed see himself as another Moses and as this writer will argue additionally that he developed somewhat of a quasi-Messianic complex, or at the very least a forerunner mentality, about himself. For as both Halbertal and Arbel will argue, Maimonides saw his Mishneh Torah as something that would serve as a “transparent, accessible system” that would one day “serve as the Israeli Constitution.” This is a controversial and perhaps arrogant thought when one considers not only the almost millennia of Jewish thought that preceded Rambam’s compilation but also dangerous in many ways and one of the reasons why his writings were so controversial in the Medieval Period. However, Halbertal considers this question as valid to be asked in his biography. He concludes that Maimonides saw the Mishneh Torah as “halakhah itself, and the composition is a replacement for the halakhic literature that preceded it” but that he sought to “conceal that stance” as he was aware of the controversy that such an overt stance would create. Isadore Twersky is more effusive in his praise of Rambam’s effort: “It is, as we shall

383 Kraemer, Maimonides, 316 and Arbel, Maimonides, 120. Arbel disagrees with Kraemer’s usage of Dt 6:21 and prefers the reference of 34:12 which reads, “and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.” The KJV, YLT, ASV, WEB, DBY and HNV translate “power” as hand.

384 Kraemer, Maimonides, 24 and Arbel, Maimonides, 120-22.


386 Halbertal, Maimonides, 194. It should be noted here that the writer agrees with Halbertal’s position.
see, unprecedented in terms of scope and structure, and although it did not have the precise impact which Maimonides envisaged, it is decidedly unique in its multifaceted influence.\textsuperscript{387}

Therefore, it should surprise no one that within Rambam’s \textit{Mishneh Torah} we find such definitive stances on the corporeality/incorporeality of God, the person of Jesus and the identity/role of the Messiah. Clear stances which leave no room for disagreement or bifurcation in the eyes of the Sephardic rabbi living in Egyptian exile. For as it relates to the concept of personhood and the existence of God, it is clear from the inception of \textit{Mishneh Torah} that the two are not mutually compatible. Warren Zev Harvey writes in this way, “God is One means both that God is incomparable and that He is incorporeal.”\textsuperscript{388} For Maimonides, the cliché of never the twain shall meet is quite apropos. However, Kraemer is correct that Maimonides does it in a most Aristotelian way\textsuperscript{389}:

The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being. All existing things, whether celestial, terrestrial, or belonging to an intermediate class, exist only through His true existence.

If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist.

If, however, it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist. Their non-existence would not involve His non-existence. For all beings are in need of Him; but He, blessed be He, is not in need of them nor any of them. Hence, His real essence is unlike that of any of them.\textsuperscript{390}

\textsuperscript{387} Twersky, \textit{Introduction to the Code of Maimonides}, 20.

\textsuperscript{388} Warren Zev Harvey, “Maimonides’ Monotheism: Between the Bible and Aristotle,” Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions—Doshisha University, Japan. Seventh Conference on Jewish Studies, 29 June 2013.

\textsuperscript{389} Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 326. Kraemer specifically follows the argument that this dissertation has also noted that Rambam follows “Aristotle’s cosmology as formulated by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.” The Islamic influence on Maimonidean thought is definitely worthy of further study. See also, Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 197-98.

\textsuperscript{390} Maimonides, \textit{Mishneh Torah}, Book One: Knowledge, Ch. 1, secs. 1-3. Source is from Twersky translation as noted above and all further references will be from this translation.
Interestingly, both Halbertal and Kraemer who wrote fascinating and invaluable biographies of Maimonides, both struggle to define and explain how the rabbi sought to rationalize the command of loving a God that was existent but also distant in his definition of the First Being.\footnote{Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 326-31 and Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 197-208.} Rambam first seeks to create a God that is not only incorporeal in the intransigent sense but also one that is intractable. Phrases in chapter one of the “Book of Knowledge” include the following:

He alone is real, and nothing else has reality like His reality… And whoever permits the thought to enter his mind that there is another deity besides this God, violates a prohibition … and denies the essence of religion—this doctrine being the great principle on which everything depends… That the Holy One, blessed be He, is not a physical body, is explicitly set forth in the Pentateuch and in the Prophets … and a physical body is not in two places at one time… If He were body, He would be like other bodies… But God’s essence as it really is, the human mind does not understand and is incapable of grasping or investigating… If God were sometimes angry and sometimes rejoiced, He would be changing. All these states exist in physical beings that are of obscure and mean condition, dwelling in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust.”\footnote{Maimonides, \textit{Mishneh Torah}, Book One: Knowledge, Ch. 1; secs. 4, 6, 8, 9, 12}

Maimonides then seeks to command the Jewish people to love an unattainable God who cannot be understood regardless of how much investigation is undertaken—“This God, honored and revered, it is our duty to love and fear …”\footnote{Ibid., Ch. 2, sec. 1.} This dissertation argues that Kraemer, Halbertal and other Jewish scholars since Rambam struggle with this dichotomy that the rabbi created because they do not recognize that in many regards this first chapter is not only an attempt to define God as First Being but also to “undefine” the possibility of Jesus and the Incarnation. Maimonides’ emphatic pronouncements that God alone is real; that whomever allows for the idea of other deities has denied the essence of religion; the absence of a body because a body cannot be in two
places at once; the presence of a body would make God just like anyone else; and that for God to express emotions is nothing more than a reaction of a vapid, mercurial individual are attempts to negate the person of Jesus as will be illustrated in concluding sections of his *Mishneh Torah*.

This dissertation argues that Rambam began in his definition of God as *via negativa* because he needed to refute any attempt that Jesus could be God Himself. Many Jewish scholars miss this nuance; however, it can be seen if one reads the words of Maimonides:

> And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great name;... If the Creator lived as other living creatures live, and His knowledge were external to Himself, there would be a plurality of deities, namely: He himself, His life, and His knowledge. This however, is not so. He is One in every aspect, from every angle, and in all ways in which Unity is conceived. Hence the conclusion that God is the One who knows, is known, and is the knowledge (of Himself)—all these being One. This is beyond the power of speech to express, beyond the capacity of the ear to hear, and of the human mind to apprehend clearly.

If the concept of God to Maimonides should be defined by acknowledging that “one should not say that God exists in the usual sense of the term; all we can say that God is not non-existent” and that one should “attempt to express knowledge of God by what God is not, rather than by describing what God is,” then we have both created the ultimate of negation theology and a God in which the Incarnation through Jesus is impossible. And this dissertation argues that this was Rambam’s ultimate objective in his writing of the *Mishneh Torah* as well as the *Guide*

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394 Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 196 and Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 326. Kraemer even notes that the *Mishneh Torah* “did not begin, as we expect in a Jewish theology, with the Exodus from Egypt or the revelation at Mount Sinai.” And because Rambam did not begin this way, Kraemer acknowledges that “It transforms Judaism from a religion rooted in history, in great events, to a religion implanted in nature and knowledge of the existent beings, God’s works rather than God’s words.”

395 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book One: Knowledge, Ch. 2; secs. 2, 10. The writer of the dissertation would speculate that perhaps even an anti-Trinitarian response could be found in his words as well.

396 Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 156.
for the Perplexed. He needed to create a God in which Jesus could not only be God the Son but also not the Messiah of the Jewish People. Therefore, he wrote a statement about Jesus in Book 14, ch. 11 that was often “suppressed by Christians censors” for generations that is available today.

Even of Jesus of Nazareth, who imagined that he was the Messiah, but was put to death by the court, Daniel had prophesied, as it is written, “And the children of the violent among your people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall stumble” (Dan. 11:14). For has there ever been a greater stumbling than this? All the prophets affirmed that the Messiah would redeem Israel, save them, gather their dispersed, and confirm the commandments. But he caused Israel to be destroyed by the sword, their remnant to be dispersed and humiliated. He was instrumental in changing the Torah and causing the world to err and serve another besides God.

However, Rambam sought to find a silver lining in the person of Jesus. He believed that through the “false teachings” of Christianity and Islam, the path would be made for the real “King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord,...” because when the real one finally arrives “they will forthwith recant and realize that they have inherited naught but lies from their fathers, that their prophets and forebears led them astray.”

The concept of a personal, relational God was an impossibility for Maimonides, ergo no possibility for the Incarnation. Additionally, Rambam denounced the Messianic claim of Jesus. Therefore, who for the Cairo rabbi could fit his select definition of Messiah? Halbertal writes of Maimonides’ Messiah—”By concluding his halakhic treatise with the messianic concept, Maimonides makes the point that the messianic age will be within the halakhah purview, not

397 Twersky, Introduction to the Code of Maimonides, 452.
398 Kraemer, Maimonides, 353 and Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, 226 (Twersky Note).
399 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book Fourteen: Judges, Ch. 11 (uncensored version).
400 Ibid. See also, Twersky, Introduction to the Code of Maimonides, 452-53.
beyond it. Moreover, the Messiah will institute full halakhic governance (emphasis added).”

For while the Messiah will live, die and be succeeded by a Messianic lineage in Rambam’s purview, the Torah but most especially the Talmud must always be preserved and sustained.

Therefore, one can find certain stock definitional parameters for the Messiah within the pages of any Maimonidean biographer: (1) restoration of the Davidic kingdom to its original and former glory; (2) rebuilding the Temple and regathering the people; (3) reinstating all original sacrifices (whether he believed it was necessary/vital or not); (4) complete fulfillment of Torah; (5) end of strife and restoration of harmony between man and nature; and (6) unusually long life for all people. Many of these are parameters that many Christians, especially of those premillennial eschatological perspective, would affirm; however, we would state that these come in the Messiah’s second coming and not in his first arrival.

However, and as already stated in the uncensored section of Mishneh Torah, Bk. 14, ch. 11, the Messiah is not allowed to be slain/killed in Rambam’s definition; thereby, negating the possibility of Jesus of Nazareth. However, this is contradictory to a basic Talmudic statement regarding a Messiah who would indeed die—Messiah ben Joseph and then be succeed by Messiah ben David:

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401 Halbertal, Maimonides, 223.


The messiah will die, his son will succeed him, and then his grandson, God has explained that he (the messiah) will died. He said: He shall not fail nor be crushed until he establishes justice in the earth, etc. His kingdom will last an extremely long time. The duration of life will also increase, because with the removal of grief and hardship the duration of life increases. It would not be surprising if his dominion lasted for thousands of years. For the wise men have said that if the virtuous community comes into existence, it is unlikely that it disintegrate.

403 Arbel, Maimonides, 119; Kraemer, Maimonides, 354-56, 397-99; and Halbertal, Maimonides, 223-28. The notation regarding Rambam’s ambivalence towards animal sacrifices will occur in Guide to the Perplexed.
What is the cause of the mourning [mentioned in the last cited verse]? R. Dosa and the Rabbis differ on the point. One explained, The cause is the slaying of Messiah the son of Joseph, and the other explained, The cause is the slaying of the Evil Inclination. It is well according to him who explains that the cause is the slaying of Messiah the son of Joseph, since that well agrees with the Scriptural verse, And they shall look upon me because they have thrust him through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son;... Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the Messiah, the son of David (May he reveal himself speedily in our days!). “Ask of me anything, and I will give it to thee”, as it is said, I will tell of the decree etc. this day have I begotten thee, ask of me and I will give the nations for thy inheritance. But when he will see that the Messiah the son of Joseph is slain, he will say to Him, “Lord of the Universe, I ask of Thee only the gift of life”. “As to life”, He would answer him, “Your father David has already prophesied this concerning you”, as it is said, He asked life of thee, thou gavest it him, [even length of days for ever and ever].

Perhaps this is why he himself did not cite differing opinions from himself that were in the Talmud, especially one that related to such an important concept as one that dealt with the identity of the Messiah. He also contradicted the Messianic promises of Isaiah (11:6; 35:5) as it relates to power of the Holy One when he wrote:

Do not think that King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, bring anything into being, revive the dead or do similar things. It is not so... Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course. The words of Isaiah: “And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid” (Is. 11:6) are to understood figuratively, meaning that Israel will live securely among the wicked of the heathens who are likened to wolves and leopards,...

For Rambam, complete observation of the Written and Oral Torah by a kingly ruler of the Davidic throne was sufficient to be declared Messiah:

If there arise a king from the House of David who meditates on the Torah, occupies himself with the commandments, as did his ancestor David, observes the precepts prescribed in the written and the Oral Law, prevails upon Israel to walk

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405 Kraemer, Maimonides, 324.

406 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book Fourteen: Judges, Ch. 11, 12; sec. 3 and 1.
in the way of the Torah and to repair its breaches, and fights the battles of the Lord, it may be assumed that he is the Messiah. If he does these things and succeeds, rebuilds the sanctuary on its site, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is beyond all doubt the Messiah.  

Ultimately, Maimonides created a Messiah in his own image, for he sought to create a Messiah because he could not accept the truth of Messiah Jesus. This dissertation argues that Rambam created a Messianic idol much like the statue of himself that resides currently in Cordoba, Spain, a statue that does not talk, speak or offer eternal hope to the Jewish people. He also created an apophatic God because of his rejection of the true God and the true Messiah that resembles this statue that will be addressed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Guide for the Perplexed

As I was walking through the cobbled-stone streets of the Jewish Quarter of Cordoba in the summer of 2015, I stopped at the statue of Rambam in a small square to take a few pictures. I encountered a Reform Sephardic rabbi and her California family who were there on vacation. As we discussed the statue that stood before us, the rabbi stated that she had a love/hate relationship with Rambam and it all stemmed from what he wrote in Guide for the Perplexed. For her it represented perplexity, irritation, and the overwhelming sense that Rabbinical Judaism was something that could never be accomplished or understood wholly. The Jewish scholar Shlomo Pines writes as well of this conundrum when he states: “There is a question whether the Guide was meant to be an apologetic attempt to render religion intellectually respectable by exposing the limitations of human reason; or, alternatively, whether it meant to demonstrate that religion

407 Ibid., Ch., 11, sec. 4.

408 It should be noted that there are variations in the title with the preposition alternating between “of” and “to” and “for.” The dissertation will use all three interchangeably.
has a purely practical use.” This dissertation argues that in many ways, this was Maimonides’ ultimate attempt—not to clear up the confusion for the rabbinically perplexed but to establish his own map/guide so that his stamp would forever mark the face of Modern Judaism.

Therefore, it is valuable to repeat as this writer did with the explanation of *Mishneh Torah* to divide the evaluation of *Guide for the Perplexed* into two arenas—a historical summary and a theological evaluation as it relates to the dissertation topic at hand. Kraemer in his article for Seeskin’s *Cambridge Companion* refers to Rambam’s *Guide of the Perplexed* as the final volume of what might be called “the third stool leg of Rabbinic Judaism” around 1190 when the rabbi was fifty-two and exhausted after completing a five year writing journey. It is different from both the first two legs—*Commentary on the Mishnah* and *Mishneh Torah*—in two distinct ways: (1) it serves as more of a series of letters between Maimonides and a student, Joseph ben Judah (aka Joseph ibn Aknin) and (2) its purpose was to reveal to his student, who he believed was capable of understanding, “the hidden meanings of Scripture and the metaphysical tradition” behind the text. While much could be written about Joseph ben Judah, the best information

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409 Shlomo Pines, “Maimonides,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967), 130. Steven Harvey, “Maimonides in the Sultan’s Palace,” 52-55, and Kraemer, “How (not) to read The Guide of the Perplexed,” 389, will argue that the purpose of the *Guide* is to explain two parables found within the pages of his work. However, Rambam himself will argue that he does not want everyone to understand the work and that it is not for everyone. Therefore, this dissertation argues generally that Kraemer and Harvey’s premise is wrong as Jonathan Ray illustrates through a quotation (not included here as the dissertation was not able to find the primary source) he includes from the original translator Samuel Ibn Tibbon who wanted to preserve Judaism’s teaching against the “inherent challenge to Judaism and its stature in Christian Europe.” However, Ray did note that it was Ibn Tibbon and not Maimonides who took Rambam’s teachings to the masses. Jonathan Ray, “The Reconquista and the Jews: 1212 from the Perspective of Jewish History,” *Journal of Medieval History* 40:2 (2014): 170.


about the student of Rambam comes from Islamic tradition and includes that he as well once experienced the “Jewish sorrow” of having to undergo a forced conversion.\footnote{412} Therefore, one could surmise that perhaps Maimonides saw within the Jewish merchant/trader and student, touches of himself and his beloved brother David who had died more than a decade earlier.

Regardless of why Judah ben Joseph was chosen as the recipient of what will become \textit{Guide of the Perplexed}, the letters reveal a rabbi who wanted to pass down not simply biblical information but also the deeper meaning of the text so that the law would be “respectable to philosophy and to make philosophy compatible with the law.”\footnote{413} However, this passing down of information was something that Maimonides wanted to keep self-contained to what this writer would call a select and elite few.\footnote{414} It was not Rambam’s intention for the \textit{Guide} to reach a broad audience; however, the broader audience was the ultimate outcome of the work and his worst fears were realized as both Jewish and Christian audiences burned the work in Paris in 1232.\footnote{415} It also reached the broadest of audiences in the latter parts of the thirteenth century and beyond.

\footnote{130-35; Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 65; Arbel, \textit{Maimonides}, 152-55; Nuland, \textit{Maimonides}, 131-35; Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 361-66; and Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 40-41. Manekin uses forms of the word “apprehend” a great deal in his article. Perhaps the best example is found in this statement—“Yet because Maimonides singles out the inability of the ignorant to approach an apprehension of the divine essence, one may infer that the learned can approach this apprehension.” Frank takes a slightly different approach to the instruction for Joseph ben Judah as he sees Maimonides first wanting to temper the upstart student. In other words, “tear him down so that he can build him up” into the mold of who Rambam wants him to be.}

\footnote{Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 363-64.}

\footnote{Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 366-67.}

\footnote{414 Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in \textit{Studies in Maimonides}, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 159 and Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 66. Halbertal cites a letter from Maimonides to Joseph ben Judah in which he writes: “I am here sending you sending six booklets of the Guide which I have taken from the others, and they complete the first part… They have been copies only the pious dayyan and Abu al-Mahasin, so treat them carefully and do not lose them, so I am not harmed by the gentiles or by the many wicked Israelites.” Original source is from Yizchack Shailat translation of \textit{Iggerot ha-Rambam} (Ma’aleh Edomim: Ma’Elisot Press, 1987), 310-11.}

\footnote{415 Ibid., 67.}
when Frederic II requested a Latin translation of the work, and by the 1800s when it was a recognized literary masterpiece in European thought.\(^{416}\) However, this writer proposes that this was because one could relate its ideas and/or interpret them as early quasi-Enlightenment as it related to his view of God and the absence of the possibility of miracles.\(^{417}\) This is an idea that will be explored in greater detail in chapter four.

Ivry punctuates the overarching thrust of Maimonides’ purpose of *Guide of the Perplexed* with this not so succinct but yet still important paragraph from his article in Seeskin’s *Cambridge Companion* to the rabbi’s life:

Maimonides’ first concern in the *Guide* is to educate the reader how to read the Bible. He does so forcefully and dogmatically, for the first seventy(!) chapters of the book. This section of the *Guide* is primarily devoted to an unorthodox hermeneutic of the biblical text. Maimonides’ basic conviction is that the canon is not to be taken literally when it speaks of God. In as thorough a manner as possible, Maimonides removes every human and personal aspect of the Deity, every attribute by which He is conceived and depicted.\(^{418}\)

Ivry goes on to explain his view as to why Rambam chose to take this path which agrees to a limited but not complete extent with the writer’s original perspective as well—”…predicating attributes of God introduces *plurality* and corporeality into the unique simplicity of God, thereby

\(^{416}\) Arbel, *Maimonides*, 159-60.

\(^{417}\) Daniel H. Frank, “Maimonides and Medieval Jewish Aristotelianism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 136 (online) and Arbel, *Maimonides*, 160. This is not Arbel’s position but my own since she mentions the influence that *Guide* had on Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Hegel and Moses Mendelssohn. Frank also mentions Maimonides’ influence on Spinoza. Additionally, and this will be noted in the bibliography as the source will be used again in in chapter five but it was originally utilized for a Ph.D. seminar for Gary Habermas that Rambam was skeptical of the validity of miracles and it has influenced Judaism today—Ronald H. Isaacs, *Miracles: A Jewish Perspective* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997), 64-70. Please note this statement from the *Guide of the Perplexed*: “For a miracle cannot prove that which is impossible; it is useful only as a confirmation of that which is possible, as we have explained in our Mishneh-torah.” Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), Part III, ch. 24 (508).

\(^{418}\) Ivry, “The *Guide* and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources,” 64. Aside from direct references to primary sources, the dissertation is attempting to keep block quotes to the bare minimum; however, this was too important of a statement for the overarching theme of the dissertation to edit down and so the writer left it as it was.
returning Judaism to the pagan world from which it came (emphasis added).” 419 This writer agrees with Ivry on Maimonides’ concern about the issue of a plurality concern but this dissertation would argue that it is more related to the Christian and Trinitarian concern of Jesus as God the Son than a return to paganism “from which it came.” There is no evidence in Maimonidean thought that he viewed Judaism as coming from pagan roots; however, there is ample evidence throughout Rambam’s writings that he was concerned about Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, he would, as Ivry would argue, need to turn “the historic God of Israel into an ahistoric Deity.” 420 José Martínez Delgado proposes a unique and viable approach that Maimonides might have taken to develop this allegorical hermeneutic—a Biblical/Talmudic lexicon that undergirds his arguments and concepts based upon his Andalusian roots/history. 421 Such an approach would have fit in comfortably with his view that Andalusian Jewish scholarship was superior and allowed him to affirm the non-corporeal status of God without demeaning the historical uniqueness of God that Ivry proposes.

Kraemer notes that Rambam began his Guide to the Perplexed with the following poem that this dissertation argues reveals an individual who thought of himself destined to be responsible for the future of the Jewish people (i.e., pseudo-Messianic or a forerunner of the individual himself):

\[
\text{My knowledge goes forth to point out the way,} \\
\text{To pave straight its road.}
\]

419 Ibid.

420 Ibid.

The accepted and readily available introduction to Joseph ben Judah also reveals that Maimonides saw the need to introduce his allegorical hermeneutical premises to the intended select audience regardless of the anger that it might incur. He believed it was necessary for the future of Judaism and for the protection of an apophatic God that was created more in the image that Rambam wanted to preserve than the One that actually exists. He wrote this to his student:

Lastly, when I have a difficult subject before me—when I find the road narrow, and can see no other way of teaching a well-established truth except by pleasing one intelligent man and displeasing ten thousand fools—I prefer to address myself to the one man, and to take no notice whatever of the condemnation of the multitude; I prefer to extricate that intelligent man from his embarrassment and show him the cause of his perplexity, so that he may attain perfection and be at peace.423

Beginning with the very first chapter of Guide of the Perplexed, Maimonides takes on one of the most difficult hermeneutical and theological issues related to the issue of corporeality versus incorporeality in Scripture—Gen 1:26 and the question of the Imago Dei or tzelem in Hebrew. How is man created in the image of God? Is it bodily? Is it spiritual? Is it a combination of the two? Another question that should also be asked is why did Rambam begin here with this passage and at this point?

While Shoshanna Gershenzon’s Ph.D. dissertation of Abner of Bergos deals with a Jewish believer’s Trinitarian apologetic which includes the usage of midrashic argumentation in

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422 Kraemer, Maimonides, 368. It should be noted that the writer has been unable to locate either in the Friedländer translation or in a Isadore Twersky supplemental source.

423 Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, introduction (15). Both Kraemer’s biography and Twersky’s supplemental source have more “entertaining” translations; however, and for the sake of continuity, the writer will continue utilizing the Friedländer source. However, usage of words such as “ignoramuses” and “creatures” was entertaining.
the latter part of the thirteenth century, almost one hundred years after Rambam’s death, it still indicates that the Christian argument that Gen1:26 pointed to a plurality of the Godhead was present in the years of Maimonides. In fact, she writes that the Scriptural origins of the Trinity “already had a long polemical history,” and it is this history that this dissertation argues that Rambam sought to negate in the first pages of his allegorical, hermeneutical, perplexing, guide to Hebrew Scripture (Tanakh). He writes, “The incorporeality of the Divine Being, and His unity, in the true sense of the word—for there is no unity without incorporeality—will be fully proved in the course of the present treatise.”

Therefore, Maimonides in Guide of the Perplexed, will have to create a hermeneutical understanding of tzelem that will allow for a non-corporeal understanding of the word. In other words, he will have to allegorize what is understood on a surface level throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (specifically as it relates to concept of the image of the visible idols—Num 33:52; 1 Sm 6:5; 6:11; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17; Ez 23:14; Am 5:26) as something visible and tangible. He sought to do so by translating tzelem as something that “constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is, the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being.” Understandably, and as will be discussed in the section related to Thomas Aquinas, Christians

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425 Ibid., 94. Harry Wolfson would concur with Gershenzon in his article; however, he spends what this dissertation argues is too much energy wondering if Rambam is attacking Islamic thought rather than Christian doctrine. Harry A. Wolfson, “Maimonides on the Unity and Incorporeality of God,” The Jewish Quarterly Review vol. 56, no. 2 (October 1965): 112-36 (esp. 132-33).


427 Ibid. (19-20).
can affirm the Maimonidean concept of “Divine intellect with which man has been endowed” but the imperative purpose behind Rambam’s design was to eliminate the possibility of any future Incarnate reality of the Godhead through Jesus the Son. This is something that we in the Christian faith cannot affirm. Ivry writes of Maimonides that his goal was to “reform his society and educate those capable of understanding him to the path he believed led to happiness required him to expose the esoteric dimension of the Bible as much as he dared. He further wrote that “Maimonides’ allegorical treatment of the Bible extends … toward understanding the entire text as imaginative human construct, not to be taken literally as God’s spoken word.” Rambam himself wrote in Guide of the Perplexed:

Therefore bear in mind that by the belief in the corporeality or in anything connected with corporeality, you would provoke God to jealousy and wrath, kindle His fire and anger, become His foe, His enemy, His adversary in a higher degree than by the worship of idols… I do not consider those men as infidels who are unable to prove the incorporeality, but I hold those to be so who do not believe it, especially when they see that Onkelos and Jonathan avoid [in reference to God] expressions implying corporeality as much as possible. This is all I intended to say in this chapter.

The incorporeality of Maimonide’s Jehovah/Yahweh/God will take on many shapes, forms, and approaches throughout his Guide of the Perplexed which will only create a more perplexing God for the Jewish people, and a more distant and remote God causing humanity to

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430 Ibid., 66-67.

431 Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, Part 1, ch. 36 (93). Onkelos was a Gentile convert and will be briefly mentioned later in this section.
have a more deistic perception of Him.\textsuperscript{432} The concepts of God’s speech and the possibility of knowing God personally/individually will take precedence in this remaining section as they relate to the question of both the possibility of the Incarnation and negating the issue of possible Jewish deism in Maimonidean thought.\textsuperscript{433} Additionally, this dissertation argues that the usage of the phrase “possible Jewish deism” that it is used in the previous sentence is idealistic. For if Maimonides was so concerned about any tinge about the personification or perhaps even the humanization of God that he utilized allegory as a hermeneutical device throughout \textit{Guide} “wherever the Bible describes God anthropomorphically,”\textsuperscript{434} he must have recognized the ramifications of what it would mean if it was present. This is why \textit{Guide of the Perplexed} began with a hermeneutical analysis of Gen 1:26.\textsuperscript{435}

The purpose of Rambam’s \textit{Guide} has been described by Halbertal as one that was “primarily an exegetical book that administers therapy to religious language.”\textsuperscript{436} This is a clever turn of phrase by Halbertal but accurate in many ways. Maimonides could not allow the obvious expression of God to stand for it might turn the Jewish people in a direction towards what this dissertation argues would be to the Islamic or Christian faith. Such a turn towards this direction

\textsuperscript{432} This concept will be fleshed out in further detail in chapters four and five of the dissertation and so the discussion of this sentence will end here.

\textsuperscript{433} From this perspective, Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 376-82, focuses more on the knowledge aspect, while Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 293-311, focuses on both. This dissertation argues that both are of equal importance for one cannot God if one does not hear/speak with God and one speaks/hears God in order to know Him. Others might add aspects to this list; however, the dissertation is focusing on these two areas as the primary issues of concern.

\textsuperscript{434} Ivry, “The \textit{Guide} and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources,” 65.

\textsuperscript{435} Howard Kreisel, “\textit{Imitatio Dei} in Maimonides’ \textit{Guide of the Perplexed},” \textit{AJS Review} 19/2 (1994): 179-181. Kreisel (p. 180) describes the \textit{Imago Dei} for Maimonides of Gen 1:26 as the “theoretical intellect” in which “humans distinguish between truth and falsehood, i.e., attain knowledge of the sciences culminating in the knowledge of God.” However, it is interesting that despite Rambam’s best efforts to dissuade his Jewish audience that words such as “knowledge” still creep into the conversation. See also, Cohen, “Figurative Language, Philosophy, and Religious Belief,” 385.

\textsuperscript{436} Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 291.
would be politically expedient as this writer has shown in chapter two for the oppressive winds of the Crusades in Europe were blowing and the pressures of conversions were always prevalent. Therefore, he took the path that had been laid out earlier by the Roman proselyte Onkelos and sought to remove the “humanity,” the closeness, the tangible relationship an individual could have with God.\footnote{Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 377. Kraemer notes that Onkelos that would substitute the words \textit{memra}, \textit{shekhinta}, and \textit{yeqara} for the word God. A brief historical explanation of Onkelos the Roman proselyte to Judaism is appropriate but a separate and unique section is unnecessary. According to most historical legends/accounts, Onkelos was a member of the Emperor Hadrian’s royal family who converted to Judaism during the second century. He is credited with translating the Torah into Aramaic and credited with the \textit{Targum Onkelos}. The source for this brief explanation is from http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112286/jewish/Onkelos.htm (accessed 4 February 2016); however, it will not be included in the bibliography as it is superfluous to the dissertation.} We will examine the cost of this approach in chapter four and the possible Christian apologetic approach to re-engagement with the Jewish people in chapter five; however, this chapter will include Rambam’s allegorical exegesis in his \textit{Guide for the Perplexed}, as it relates to speech and knowledge, of the \textit{Akedah} of Gen 22; the “Angel” of Gen 32; the name of God in Ex 3, the encounter with God and Moses and the Elders in Ex 24:10-11 and the desire of Moses to see God’s face in Ex 33.\footnote{Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 376 and Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 306 and 326. Obviously, more examples from both Scripture and \textit{Guide of the Perplexed} could be examined; however, these have been chosen since they are obvious and are from the Torah and either include a Patriarch or the Prophet Moses himself.}

In many ways, the rabbi from Cairo’s concern about direct speech and knowledge coming from God to individuals relate to the idea of what he called prophecy.\footnote{Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 321. Halbertal specifically notes that Rambam specifically focuses on prophecy in Part II, chapters 32-48, of the \textit{Guide}. However, references dealing with the passages of concern will come from areas across a wide spectrum of the work.} Whereas one can seemingly find a plethora of individuals in Scripture, including Am the Sheepherder and Hosea the husband of a harlot, who were not considered the “best and brightest” of Israel, Maimonides seems to express what could only be considered an elitist mentality toward the subject. For while
upon only a sage, great in wisdom, heroic in character, whose reason overcomes his passion, and who has a broad and sound mind.” Rambam’s own words in Part II, ch. 32 speak for themselves:

Among those who believe in Prophecy, and even among our coreligionists, there are some ignorant people who think as follows: God selects any person He pleases, inspires him with the Prophecy, and entrusts him with a mission. It makes no difference whether that person be wise or stupid, old or young; provided he be, to some extent, morally good… As for the principle which I laid down, that preparation and perfection of moral and rational faculties are the sine quâ non, our Sages say exactly the same:… There are, however, numerous passages in Scripture as well as in the writings of our Sages, which support the principle that it depends chiefly on the will of God who is to prophesy, and at what time; and that He only selects the best and the wisest. We hold that fools and ignorant people are unfit for this distinction… We must not be misled by the words of Jeremiah (i.5),… Nor must we be misled by prophecies like the following: “I will pour out my spirit over all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy”; since it is distinctly stated what is meant by “prophesy” in this place, viz., “Your old men will dream dreams, your young men shall see visions…” Since we have touched upon the revelation on Mount Sinai, we will point out in a separate chapter what may be inferred as regards the nature of that event, both from the Scriptural text, in accordance with reasonable interpretation, and from the words of our Sages (emphasis added).
Additionally, Halbertal stated that Rambam will argue that all prophetic incidences of speech and knowledge that can happen between God and man will occur with an angel serving as an intermediary. For example:

There are four different ways in which Scripture relates the fact that a divine communication was made to the prophet. (1) the prophet relates that he heard the word of an angel in a dream or vision; (2) He reports the words of the angel without mentioning that they were perceived in a dream or vision, assuming that it is well known that prophecy can only originate in one of the two ways, “In a vision I will make myself known unto him, in a dream I will speak unto him (Num. xii. 6). (3) The prophet does not mention the angel at all; he says that God spoke to him, but he states that he received the message in a dream or vision. (4) He introduces his prophecy stating that God spoke to him, or told him to do a certain thing, or speak certain words, but he does not explain that he received the message or vision, because he assumes that is it is well known, and has been established as a principle that no prophecy or revelation origins otherwise than in a dream or vision, and through an angel (emphasis added).

The writer’s emphasis of the wording “and through an angel” was purposeful as it illustrates this perhaps unintentional but impactful Deistic God that Maimonides will create for future Jewish thinkers (see ch. 4). It is also impactful as it discounts an intimacy that God had with Abraham when He asked the first Patriarch to do what on the surface to be the unthinkable—sacrifice His son. It is this intimacy that it is key to this passage and to what it represents to the future of humanity.

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The account of the Akedah (binding) of Isaac in Gen 22 is read in every synagogue around the world on every Rosh Hashanah. It is considered both a linchpin of the Abrahamic Covenant for Judaism and a testament of Abraham’s faithfulness to his relationship with God.\textsuperscript{444} Rabbis will struggle with how to create a new sermon on a familiar tale just as Christian pastors try to find a new way to tell their parishioners to love their mothers on the second Sunday of May because they will finally have a full house. They also struggle with two other issues in this passage—the apparent call of God for human sacrifice and what to do with this mysterious “Angel of the Lord” in v.11 and following. Maimonides’ answer was to simply call it a vision and/or a dream with the premise that the lesson/test was not actually for Abraham but was a model lesson for future generations of how to behave:\textsuperscript{445}

He [Abraham] sees an angel that speaks to him \textbf{in a vision}, as was the case when Abraham was addressed by an angel at the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. xxii. 15). This I hold to be—if we except Moses—the highest degree a prophet can attain according to Scripture, providing he has as reason demands, his rational faculties fully developed. But it \textit{appears to be me improbable that a prophet should be able to perceive in a prophetic vision God speaking to him; the action of the imaginative faculty does not go so far}; and therefore we do not notice this in the case of the ordinary prophets;… (emphasis added)\textsuperscript{446}

However, the question still remains if Rambam was correct—did Isaac have this same vision?

Was it Abraham’s solely? Was this why Isaac did not return with his father for we next see him

\textsuperscript{444} Maimonides, \textit{The Guide of the Perplexed}, Part III, ch. 24 (507-11). It should be noted in all fairness, especially since this dissertation is highly critical of the overarching teaching of Rambam’s views, that the rabbi presents a nice homily on the issue of faith despite what seems logical to human sensibilities in this letter to Joseph ben Judah. And while the writer might take issue with some of his insertions that are superfluous about the “unity of God,” it is still a teaching that even Christians should examine as an example of how to respond to trials and understand God in the midst of them?


\textsuperscript{446} Maimonides, \textit{The Guide of the Perplexed}, Part II, ch. 45 (408-409). The confusion over this exegesis is that the passage begins with a literal reading of God speaking directly to Abraham and then the Angel of the Lord speaking directly to him. Why the “apparent” change of persons? Followers of Rambam would never address this confusion except to go back to the default four ways of divine communication found in Part II, ch. 32.
living alone in Beer-lahai-roi (Gen 24:62)? These are issues which Maimonides never answers in his *Guide* and hence leaves his readers only more perplexed.

The question of angels in the theology of Maimonides is one that has been briefly discussed in fn. 442 regarding the person of Metatron. However, there are some specific notations that should be noted as well for Rambam: (1) angels like God are non-corporeal not simply because it fits with his view of God but also because it fits an Aristotelian concept as well; (2) angels are messengers whose purpose is missional in nature; and (3) angels can override man’s freewill if it serves the purposes of God.447 These notations are relevant as we consider the second relevant passage of Jacob’s wrestling match with a man who is also an angel in Gen 32.

We have already confirmed Halbertal’s argument that the Cairo rabbi would argue against the possibility of even seeing an angel since they are non-corporeal.448 We must also examine three other aspects of Rambam’s exegesis of this passage—(1) was it a man or an angel that Jacob wrestled?; and (2) if a non-corporeal angel in a vision, how was Jacob maimed?; and (3) what did Jacob mean when he said he saw the face of God? These three crucial questions create a tension for Maimonides as they relate not only to the negation theology which he is creating but also to the question of whether God can ever become Incarnate in human form.

His attempt to answer the first issue is found in this rather convoluted response:

In such visions, a prophet either sees God who speaks to him, as will be explained to us, or he sees an angel who speaks to him, or he hears some one speaking to him without seeing the speaker, or he sees a man who speaks to him, and learns afterwards that the speaker was an angel. In this latter kind of prophecies, the prophet relates that he saw a man who was doing or saying something, and that he

447 Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Part II, ch. 6 (270-71). One of the largest objections to Jesus in modern Judaism is their argument that “Original Sin” denies the possibility of freewill; however, Maimonides does the same thing as it applies to the freedom of angels to move men capriciously. This is something to consider for chapter five as an apologetic response.

learnt afterwards that he was an angel… The same, I hold, is the case when it is said in reference to Jacob, “And a man wrestled with him” (Gen. xxxii.25); this took place in a prophetic vision, since it is expressly stated in the end (ver. 31) that it was an angel.\footnote{Maimonides, \textit{The Guide of the Perplexed}, Part II, ch. 42 (396-97).}

What is so difficult to understand about this perplexing passage of Maimonides is what appears to be a desperate need to force an interpretation of a vision/dream into an event that left someone injured for the remainder of his life. Interestingly, this section of the rabbi’s \textit{Guide} never deals with the subject and one can only assume that according to Rambam’s own guidelines in Part II, ch. 32 that the injury must have been psychosomatic and that now made Jacob no longer eligible to be a prophet.\footnote{Deena Miller, “Jacob’s Injury: Differential Diagnosis of Hip Pathology; available online at download.yutorah.org/2014/1053/813251.pdf.} These are two concepts that many would be uncomfortable assuming; however, this is what would be required if one follows the rabbi’s guidelines that are designed to create a \textit{via negativa} Jehovah and a God that could not become personal and relational with His people either through a Christophanic encounter or through the Incarnation of Messiah Jesus.

Maimonides also took the same approach and referred back to Onkelos in dealing with the sticky issue of Jacob seeing God’s face by re-translating \textit{panim el-panim} as \textit{panim lepanim} which takes God out of the equation and replaces it with “So went the present over before him.”\footnote{Maimonides, \textit{The Guide of the Perplexed}, Part I, ch. 21 (55).} A clever approach but something that takes the meaning and purpose from the text, an intention which was deliberate.

The final three passages under examination in this dissertation all relate to the person for whom Maimonides feels the greatest kinship—the prophet and leader of the Exodus, Moses. The first passages deals with what appears to be a personal and intimate conversation between Moses and God as it reveals the personal name of God in Exo 3:13-14—”I AM WHO I AM. It is
personal in a plain reading of the text; however, and based upon Rambam’s guidelines (Part II, ch. 32) it was not even a real conversation but a vision, a dream.

However, a plain reading of the entire context of the passage (personal emphases will be added) reveals perhaps what could be a described by some as a vision but something that is intimate, personal and Christophanic in its dynamic:

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.” Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

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A full exegesis of this passage from a Christian perspective is tempting; however, it should be noted that the verbs related to God hearing/seeing the oppression and suffering of the people are in the Qal Perfect tense meaning that it happened; however, the sense that God would be with Moses in the process of liberation is in the Qal Imperfect meaning that it would be an ongoing and/or action that is not yet complete. These are not the verbs of a via negativa God. This dissertation argues that this is one of the weaknesses of Maimonides in that he knew Hebrew but he did not understand the nuances of Hebrew grammar.
Additionally, and a vitally important question, how can one reconcile the statement in v. 2 in which we find the “Angel of the LORD” appearing to him from the bush and Moses hiding his face in v. 6 out of fear to see the face of God with Maimonides’ view that God is non-corporeal and impossible to possess our attributes at any time or place? For Rambam wrote, “Anything predicated of God is totally different from our attributes; no definition can comprehend both; therefore His existence and that of any other being totally differ from each other, and the term existence is applied to both homonymously, as I shall explain.” Maimonides’ response is to hearken back to an Aristotelian response and attribute Moses’ response to a literal fear of the very real light coming from the bush while also expressing humility during the visional manifestation. However, such a reaction does not make sense if Moses was not yet sure whom he was addressing and it is curious why an allegorical vision suddenly needed a literal fire. It also does not answer the question of the verb tenses or the issue of the name given to Moses that is of utmost importance.

The name of I AM WHO I AM is a question of pronunciation, mystery, and quandary for the Jewish people. The word Adonai is utilized instead of Yahweh in the synagogue. It is never used as it is considered too holy, too reverent, and too special. As Maimonides explains, “Every other name of God is a derivative, only the Tetragrammaton is a nomen proprium, and must not be considered from any other point of view.” The I AM WHO I AM is called a Tetragrammaton as it consists solely of the letters yod, hé, vau, hé and is a nomen proprium as it

453 Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed, Part I, ch. 35 (89).

454 Ibid., Part I, ch. 5 (28). The beginning of the exact statement reads as follows: “When the chief of philosophers [Aristotle] was about to inquire into some very profound subject, and to establish his theory by proofs, he commenced his treaty with an apology,…”

455 Ibid., Part I, ch. 61 (161).
is a name that can only be applied to God alone. Contrary to Scriptural attestations from David, Hannah and others, Maimonides will argue that “[T]his sacred name, which, as you know, was not pronounced except in the sanctuary by the appointed priests when they gave the sacerdotal blessing, and by the high priest on the Day of Atonement, undoubtedly denotes something which is peculiar to God, and is not found in any other being.” While even Christians could agree with the concluding statement that God possesses traits (i.e., “something”) that is not found in any other aspect of His creation, there is contradictory evidence within the Hebrew Scriptures as to his claim that the name was reserved to the priestly class and was reserved to being pronounced only in the sacrificial blessings and holy days. Eli did not condemn Hannah for saying the name of Yahweh, he condemned her for his assumption that she was intoxicated. David’s relationship with God was often predicated on his choice of the word Yahweh or Elohim (Ps 23 or 51). This effort to segregate the name of God within Maimonides’ Guide appears to be another effort to segregate understanding of biblical knowledge to the best and the brightest according to Rambam’s standards. Sadly, this is a segregation that will hamper the Jewish people’s relationship with God in later centuries.

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456 Ibid. (160).

457 Ibid.

458 Chapter 62 of Guide offers the recounting of an interesting apocryphal legend that has been passed down in Jewish tradition about expanded ways to pronounce the mysterious name of God from the four-word method to a thirteen letter approach to a forty-two letter pronunciation. Darren Aronfsky even produced and directed the movie PI about this apocryphal legend as some ultra-Orthodox Jews believe that if this name can be revealed it will bring about the advent of the Messianic Age.

The second of the third Mosaic passages that will be examined does not include Moses alone. It also includes the elders who also “saw God.” In Ex 24:10-11—”and **they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He [God] did not stretch out His hand** against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and **they saw God, and they ate and drank.”** (emphasis added) What is unique about these two verses is that we have two words for the action of seeing God in these verses and they can both mean either the action of really seeing something or a vision. Therefore, one has a choice in interpretation and Maimonides has chosen the action which fits his overarching motif of vision/dream. However, he is forced to deal with two issues: (1) the elders are not worthy of such a vision according to his prescribed definition as laid out for seeing and knowledge of a prophet and (2) they do a very real action of eating and drinking. His conclusion is to condemn and punish them for both choices.

But the “nobles of the Children of Israel” were impetuous, and allowed their thoughts to go unrestrained: what they perceived was but imperfect… [t]he purpose of the whole passage is to criticize their act of seeing and to describe it. They are blamed for the nature of their perception, **which was to a certain extent corporeal**—a result which necessarily followed, from the fact that they ventured too far before being perfectly prepared. They deserved to perish, but at the intercession of Moses this fate was averted by God for the time… The nobles of the Children of Israel, besides erring in their perception, were, through this cause, also misled in their actions, for in their consequence of their confused perception, they gave way to bodily cravings… All we here intend to say is, that wherever in a similar connection any one of the three verbs mentioned above occurs, it has

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460 The actions of the elders are in the Qal Imperfect. The action of **Elohim** is Qal Perfect.

461 Michelle Levine, “Maimonides’ Philosophical Exegesis of the Nobles’ Vision (Exodus 24): A Guide for the Pursuit of Knowledge,” *The Torah u-Madda Journal* (11/2002-03): 61-106. Throughout a reading of this attempted exegesis of the passage, Levine both acknowledges and attempts to excuse Maimonides’ struggle to explain what she calls the elders “physics” and “metaphysics” encounter” with God. She attempts to re-exegete the passage while maintaining a Maimonidean understanding of the passage which only creates more confusion.
reference to intellectual perception, not to the sensation of sight by the eye; **For God is not a being to be perceived by the eye.** (emphasis added)^462

Three notations are worthy of further attention: (1) Maimonides recognized a corporeal encounter by the Elders even if he struggled to reconcile the passage with his allegorical exegesis; (2) his allegory of the passage completely counters the passage itself and allows for a changing of God’s mind even though in other passages of the *Guide*, he seeks to discount such a possibility; and (3) It appears sometimes that Rambam perhaps is not even aware that in his own struggles to create a *via negativa* God that is so distant from humanity that he is fighting against the Incarnate Jesus himself. As I read the last statement I included from ch. 5, “for God is not a being to be perceived by the eye,” I was drawn to many of the Johannine statements “I Am” of Jesus about himself and when he quoted Dn 7:13-14 before the Sanhedrin after his arrest.

Maimonides could not allow the concept of anyone who could “hear and know” God in a personal, intimate, concrete way. There are innumerable times in which he stated at the end of his letters to Joseph ben Judah two simple words that are anything but simple because they take on an almost dictatorial-type decree now when one reads then in retrospect. They read simply—”Note it.”^463 Today, as I discuss Jesus with Jewish people and I hear them say, “I will have to ask my rabbi,” I believe I also hear will those two words as well.

The final Mosaic passage under consideration of Ex 33:18-23 is controversial and confusing even within Christian circles, much less Jewish thought. What was Moses really

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^462 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part I, ch. 5 (29). Rambam also notes that that most were later punished according to the Midrash at Taberah while Nadab and Abihu were punished for burning the strange fire in the Tabernacle.

^463 There are too many instances of this phrase to footnote each one; however, the writer will note one in particular that relates to the issue of Dn 7:13. He begins Part II, ch. 44 (402-403) with this statement—”Prophecy is given either in a vision or in a dream, as we have said so many times, and we will not constantly repeat it.” Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 294, writes in this way, “Once the reader learns that speech [in the writings of Maimonides] cannot be attributed to God, he has no choice but to reinterpret the meaning of prophecy.”
asking of God? What did Moses see? How anthropomorphic, literal and/or allegorical should this passage be taken?

The writer actually agrees with Rambam’s definition of God’s glory and the idea of what it truly entail to engage in glorification to His name:

For the true glorification of the Lord consists in the comprehension of His greatness, and all who comprehend His greatness and perfection, glorify Him according to their capacity, with this difference, that man alone magnifies God in words, expressive of he has received in his mind, and what he desires to communicate to others.\textsuperscript{464}

However, this is where this writer’s agreement with the Cairo rabbi ends. For Maimonides returns to his separation between God and man motif of explaining Moses’ encounter in Ex 33 as a “perception” since it occurred without the “intervention of angel,”\textsuperscript{465} the rock is an allegorical representation and not literal,\textsuperscript{466} and that Moses can only know the actions of God and not who God is which is key to the passage itself.\textsuperscript{467} Sarah Pessin seeks to redefine Maimonides’ own explanation of himself by presenting a hylomorphic apophasis interpretation of the meeting. Pessin describes Moses’ vision as truly a philosophic encounter with the wonders of nature and therefore he did “see the face of God” via the rocks on Mount Sinai.\textsuperscript{468} However, I would describe this as even more allegorical interpretation than Maimonides (or even Origen) would be

\textsuperscript{464} Maimonides, \textit{Guide of the Perplexed}, Part I, ch. 64 (170-71). Rambam goes on to relate that non-living organisms such as “minerals” can also glorify God (cf. Hab 2:11; Lk 19:40). The writer is not suggesting that Rambam had an intimate knowledge of all of Jesus’ teaching; however, it is interesting.

\textsuperscript{465} Ibid., Part I, ch. 37 (94-95).

\textsuperscript{466} Ibid., Part I, ch. 16 (47).

\textsuperscript{467} Ibid., Part I, ch. 54 (137-38). See also, Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 304-305.

comfortable utilizing. This dissertation argues that Pessin recognizes that Maimonides stretched the boundaries of allegory and instead of drawing back the edge, she stepped over the edge.

Halbertal provides an excellent explanation of illustrating what Moses was asking in v. 18. Moses wanted a relational connection to God that would be described as that of a friend and was only shown God’s back.\textsuperscript{469} In other words, in Rambam’s perspective Moses and all of creation can only know what is unknowable of God. However, this is contradictory to what Moses told the people in Ex 20:20 after they expressed fear and sought to keep their distance from God in verses 18-19. The first Moses implored them with these words, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” However, the second Moses with his \textit{Guide to the Perplexed} preferred to keep the Jewish people rooted at a distance from God unable to discover the true prophet that was indeed greater than Moses (Dt 18:15).\textsuperscript{470}

\textit{Treatise on the Resurrection}

I have a Jewish friend who would call herself a Conservative but practices more of a Reform Jewish lifestyle. In the twelve years we have known each other, we have had many discussions on the person and divinity of Jesus, whether one can remain Jewish if one believes in Jesus, the reality of anti-Semitism in the modern world, and other biblically related issues. In fact, until I sent her a Passover card four years ago with Isaiah 53:5 inside and she literally “unfriended” me in the pages of the \textit{Texas Jewish Post}, there was almost nothing we could not discuss except the question of what happens after we die. She steered away from the question

\textsuperscript{469} Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 304.

\textsuperscript{470} Obviously, this dissertation could have written more on just the \textit{Guide} alone. However, this dissertation has sought to restrain itself to the key issue at hand—that being the issue of \textit{via negativa} present in the pages.
because of the great unknown it presented to her and the mystery behind the veil of death. The adage of “ashes to ashes and dust to dust” seems to create a smokescreen for most Jewish people in the twenty-first century and I would surmise that much of the enigma for it can be laid at the words of Rambam himself. In seeking to solve the paradox, Maimonides himself seemingly made a more perplexing problem out of it than was necessary when one examines the words of Dn 12:2—”Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”

“Belief in resurrection is one of Maimonides’ thirteen principles of faith. It is mentioned in the main prayer of liturgy, the ‘Amidah. Yet important as it is for Judaism, resurrection is even more for Christianity and Islam.”\footnote{Kraemer, Maimonides, 408.} Perhaps these might be considered as startling words to hear from a Jewish scholar; however, they are actually very accurate. The issue of the resurrection will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four and then considered as an apologetic tool in chapter five for it is a complicated issue within Modern Judaism, an issue fraught with nuances and speculations and debate as to its relevance and necessity. However, this debate is not new and actually began in great earnest as the continuation of an internecine struggle between the Geonim forces in Babylon and Maimonides in Egypt and it began in earnest for what appears to be an omission in the rabbi’s Mishneh Torah over what happens when we die.\footnote{Halbertal, Maimonides, 143; Kraemer, Maimonides, 413; Arbel, Maimonides, 165; and Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 45.}

In the latter part of the twelfth century, and after the completion of the Guide of the Perplexed, the popularity of Mishneh Torah was creating a division within Judaism as to what should be the default source to follow—Maimonides’ work or the Babylonian Talmud? The Geonim family in Baghdad led by Samuel ben Eli did not appreciate the challenge to their

\footnote{Kraemer, Maimonides, 408.}
authority as well as the dissemination of Rambam’s work throughout the region by his student from the Guide, Joseph ben Judah. Therefore, the rumors began that the Cairo rabbi did not believe in a literal, physical resurrection and, thus, the controversy began that Maimonides was forced to address in 1191 with his Treatise on the Resurrection.473

Kraemer would argue that “[T]he doctrine of a literal resurrection was problematic for Maimonides, but he could not afford to let that be known.”474 If this was the case for Maimonides that he did not believe in a literal resurrection, it would rationalize his anger in the beginning pages of the letter as to why he referred to the first Moses—it was both a defense mechanism and a self-comparison.475 However, these attacks will be something that Rambam will have to confront and respond to if Halbertal is correct in his understanding that the rabbi saw (1) “physical reward” as something to push man toward a “pursuit of his true purpose—knowledge of his Creator” and that (2) “the central purpose of the Torah is to elevate human life

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473 Ralph Lerner, “Maimonides’ ‘Treatise on Resurrection,’” History of Religions vol. 23, no. (November 1983): 144-45; Arbel, Maimonides, 163-67; Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides,” 45; Halbertal, Maimonides, 143; and Kraemer, Maimonides, 412-15. It should be noted that there was an attempt by J. Louis Teicher to discredit the validity of this treatise; however, it did not go far and the writer is included the “debunking” of Teicher for reference in the bibliography. Isaiah Sonne, “A Scrutiny of the Charges of Forgery against Maimonides’ ‘Letter on Resurrection,’” in Eschatology of Maimonidean Thought: Messianism, Resurrection, and the World to Come, ed. Jacob Israel Dienstag (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1983), 48-64

474 Kraemer, Maimonides, 412. See also Daniel Jeremy Silver, “The Resurrection Debate,” in Moses Maimonides, Moses Maimonides’ Treatise on Resurrection, trans. and annot. Fred Rosner (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), 79. Silver expresses an amusing turn of phrase related to Rambam’s conundrum on the subject even as he relates the historical difficulties of many Medieval Jewish scholars on the issue of the resurrection, “Maimonides affirmed even as he squirmed.”

475 Moses Maimonides, Moses Maimonides’ Treatise on Resurrection, trans. and annot. Fred Rosner (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), 1, 1-2. Rambam took the tactic that he should not be surprised that he would have to defend himself against such accusations if the prophet Moses had to defend the unity of God against “the false view” “of the dualists.” Indeed, the whole first section (esp. I, 5) is a diatribe against “dualists” that one could surmise, including Rosner who would agree with me according to his footnotes on the subject, ultimately becomes an attack against Christianity when he writes—“Indeed, other people that I met from some lands unequivocally proclaimed Him to be corporeal and denounced as a heretic anyone who believes the opposite, and they call him a sectarian and an epicurean, and they cite many passages (in their support which they understand) literally.
to a dimension that transcends worldly needs and fulfillment of basic material impulses." For this was not the teaching at the time of Rambam and the Geonim family in Baghdad was drawing attention to the differences of opinion between Cairo’s view and the rest of Judaism at the time.

Therefore, I will argue that it was crucial for Maimonides to establish several crucial tenets of his concept involving the meaning behind Olam Haba (World to Come) before he established his own views of the purpose resurrection and the afterlife, including the role of the Messiah, (all direct quotes from the treatise):

1. The resurrection of the dead is a cornerstone of the Torah and that there is no portion for him that denies that it is part of the Torah of Moses our Teacher, but it is nevertheless not the ultimate goal;
2. Separated existence is the true existence because it is not subject to any manner of change. These are (the wise) to whom it is absolutely clear that God is not corporeal nor a power within a body and, therefore, the level of His existence is the firmest of all; and
3. This situation is similar to one who thinks that he has achieved an understanding of the truth, in one moment, although he has very meager knowledge and made only feeble attempts (at penetrating analysis) and neglected all wisdoms and contented himself with the simple interpretation of Scriptures as if the Sages of blessed memory had never written in many places in the Talmud that the words of Torah have both revealed and hidden meanings, and that the hidden meanings are referred to as the “secrets of the Torah,” and as if the Sages had never said anything about the secrets of the Torah.

Indeed, and in many ways, Kraemer is correct that Maimonides is defending his previous works of Guide of the Perplexed and Mishneh Torah; however, this dissertation argues that Kraemer is

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476 Halbertal, Maimonides, 143, 145. It should be noted that as much as the writer has gleaned and appreciated Halbertal as a source that the writer does disagree with his supposition that Rambam taught a form of reincarnation/resurrection in his writing on the subject (p. 146). The writer has not been able to find such a teaching in this treatise.

477 Maimonides, Treatise on the Resurrection, II, 8, 12, 14. Moises Orfali of Bar-Ilan University (Israel) believes that there was an additional purpose to the treatise—to finally place an end within Judaism itself to the latent anthropomorphic tendencies some applied to God as this had become an apologetic attack by Medieval Christian apologists against Rabbinic Judaism. Moises Orfali, “Anthropomorphism in the Christian Reproach of the Jews in Spain (12th-15th Spain),” Immanuel 19 (Winter 1984-1985): 60-61, 71.
wrong that he merely was writing to a general audience but also was talking down to the Geonim family in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{478} For while one could argue that David Hartman’s argument itself is pedantic in its devotion to the Cairo rabbi, I would not disagree with the sentiment that he expresses when he writes, “Rather than claim that Maimonides did not believe in rewards and punishments in general and in resurrection in particular, it is more correct to claim that he was embarrassed to talk at length about doctrines used to motivate observance of commandments by appeals to self-interest.”\textsuperscript{479}

Consequently, the question is simply—what did Rambam believe about the resurrection and the \textit{Olam Haba}? Was it earthshaking? Was it groundbreaking? Ultimately, does it cast doubt on the idea and person of Jesus whether intentionally or unintentionally? He claimed to believe in a literal return of the soul to the body and that Dn 12:2 should be interpreted non-allegorically; however, the body is not the same as the one we once inhabited.\textsuperscript{480} Interestingly, this Maimonidean concept is not “strikingly” different than the Christian concept of the resurrected body (Lk 20: 34-36; 1 Cor 15:51ff.). He writes of the eternal body: “Further, the life following which there is no death, is the life in the world to come because there are no (physical) bodies there. We firmly believe—and this is the truth which every intelligent person accepts—that in the world to come souls without bodies will exist like angels.”\textsuperscript{481} Yes, he believes in a bodiless existence in the \textit{Olam Haba} while Christianity believes in a resurrected body that we struggle to

\textsuperscript{478} Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 418.


\textsuperscript{480} Maimonides, \textit{Treatise on the Resurrection}, III, 16; IV, 22, 24; and VII, 40, 42, 43.

\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., IV, 24. He goes on in this paragraph to go into an explanation of bodily functions that the dissertation has omitted.
define or understand; however, we both recognize that this human and sinful flesh is lost to something greater than we have now. The key difference between Maimonidean understanding of the resurrection and the Christian faith is two-fold: (1) how does it unfold and (2) what is the place/role of the Messiah in all of it?

Interestingly, these two issues actually can be evaluated together in a unique way. For Maimonides, resurrection and the “World to Come” is an individual event in the life of each person and the Messiah has nothing to do with resurrection, especially as it has already been noted that Rambam believed that the Messiah will himself die. Rambam argues that “It does not follow from this treatise that the Almighty, at the time of His choice, will not resurrect those He wishes to resurrect, whether during the era of the Messiah or before him or after his death” (emphasis added). We have here three important qualifiers about Rambam’s view of the resurrection: (1) resurrection is variable according to God’s timing; (2) resurrection is capricious according to whom God will or will not resurrect; and (3) Maimonides wants to restate that the Messiah will die. This is emphatically important to the Cairo rabbi because it was necessary for Rambam to reemphasize that Jesus could not be the Messiah. The writer’s position is validated by his argument restated from the Mishneh Torah that the Messiah will have nothing to do with performing “signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, resurrect the dead or do similar things.”

However, it is his closing statement of “Section VI” designed to be what this dissertation argues an apologetic against the Messiahship of Jesus that will create spiritual disaster for the

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482 Commentary on the Mishnah, Pereq Heleq (ch. 10).
483 Ibid., VI, 30.
484 Ibid.
Jewish people. For in creating a God of negation and impossible incorporeality out of fear of the Incarnate Jesus, he creates a God that was so Deistic and so distant that many modern Jewish people cannot find Him. He wrote:

"It is well known that we are very opposed to changing the order of creation. Let those who precede or follow who are mistaken remain mistaken in that they cannot differentiate between miraculous events which do not endure and which are permanent but occur as a temporary necessity or to accredit a prophet—and natural events which always recur and which represent the laws of nature which the Sages of blessed memory explained by repeatedly stating "the world follows the laws of nature.""

One might ask—"If only the first portion of this statement was copied, could you discern if this was from the rabbi from Cairo or David Hume?" Ultimately, Maimonides sought to create a resurrection without meaning and a Messiah without miracles but apparently he created, as will be illustrated in chapter four, a twenty-first century Judaism without God.

**Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith**

Many Jewish people today could not locate the book of Nahum in the Hebrew Scriptures or even tell you that there was a prophet Nahum; however, even the most secular of them can tell you about Rambam’s Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith. In the darkest days of the Holocaust, apocryphal stories abound of etchings on cellar walls where Jewish souls hid in fear from Nazis but found the fortitude to write one or more of the Thirteen Principles to mark their place in the world.

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485 Ibid., VI, 33.

486 J. Abelson, “Maimonides on the Jewish Creed,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 19, no. 1 (October 1906): 24, 25. Abelson refers to this section in the *Commentary on the Mishnah* as both the “locus classicus” and as Rambam’s design so that “every Israelite [could] know what exactly what were the things he was expected to believe, so as to be entitled to call himself a Jew, and expect others to do so.” (emphasis added)

Jewish person, a common refrain will be, “But Jesus doesn’t match Maimonides’ criteria for the Messiah,” which are found in another section of the *Commentary on the Mishnah* but summarized as number twelve in the Thirteen Principles. In other words, one of the most powerful and influential legacies of Rambam’s writings can be found as a conclusion, not an afterthought but perhaps as an addendum, to his first work, *Commentary on the Mishnah.*

The historical background to the *Commentary on the Mishnah* has already been provided in this chapter; therefore, this section will be devoted more to a theological and evaluative consideration of these thirteen principles. It should be noted, however, that attention will be given more too some areas than others:

1. The first fundamental principle is the existence of the Creator—i.e., the existence of a Being who is perfect in all manners of perfection;
2. **The second fundamental principle is His oneness, that this Cause of all being is one;**
3. The third fundamental principle is the negation of all material properties from His Being; i.e., **that this oneness is not a body, nor physical power;**
4. The fourth fundamental principle is [His] primeval existence—i.e., **that this unified Being exists above all concepts of time;**
5. The fifth fundamental principle is that it is fitting to serve and exalt God and publicize His greatness and the obligation to serve Him… **Nor should these entities [angels, stars, etc.] be considered as intermediaries through which one can reach God. Instead, we should direct our thoughts to Him alone, disregarding any other entity. This is the fifth fundamental principle, the warnings against the worship of false divinities…;**
6. The sixth fundamental principle is prophecy—i.e., **to know that among mortals that there will be individuals with heightened sensory potentials and highly developed characters.** When they concentrate their minds, they are able to receive the pure form of intellect, and fuse mortal intellect with the active potential for intellect, from which they will derive sublime influence;
7. The seventh fundamental principle is the supremacy of the prophecy of Moses our teacher. This includes the belief that he is the master of all the prophets, those who preceded him **and those who followed him, they are all beneath his level;**

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488 The dissertation will provide a complete translation of the Thirteen Principles; however, most Jewish people could not do so. They depend on a condensed version that can be found in a variety of source. Two examples are Nuland, *Maimonides,* 68-69 and Arbel, *Maimonides,* 86.
8. The eighth fundamental principle is that the Torah is from heaven, that we should believe the entire Torah that we possess today is the Torah that was given to Moses, and that is of Godly origin in its entirety;

9. The ninth principle is that the Torah of Moses will never be nullified. There will never come another Torah aside from this;

10. The tenth fundamental principle is that God knows the deeds of men and has not forsaken them;

11. The eleventh fundamental principle is that God grants a generous reward to those who observe the mitzvot [deeds] of the Torah, and punishes those who transgress its prohibitions;

12. The twelfth principle is the era of the Mashiach—i.e., to believe earnestly that the Mashiach will come, and not to say that the time for his coming has passed. Instead, if he tarries, wait for him; and

13. The thirteenth fundamental principle is the resurrection of the dead, which we have already explained (emphasis added).

Many rabbis since Maimonides have attempted to explain or codify the concepts that have been laid out in these pages. Some will disagree or seek to expand upon aspects of his argument. Others will present nothing more than a commentary on what each statement means without recognizing the often contradictory statements that Rambam himself presents within the statements themselves. This dissertation argues that what one sees here, especially what has been emphasized, is in many respects the groundwork for the anti-Christian apologetic that he

489 Maimonides, *Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim*, 173-76, 179-82. Obviously, some of the added emphases have already been discussed in previous sections but the writer has noted them to show a consistency in Rambam’s argument throughout the scope of his thought and life.


seeks to create with all his writings. Therefore, and while it is in many ways an addendum to the original work, this dissertation argues it is the most powerful addendum in post-Jesus, Jewish theological writings. Therefore, a specific examination of the fourth, fifth, seventh and ninth principles will be considered in these concluding paragraphs of this section as this dissertation argues the third and sixth doctrines have already been considered sufficiently to this point. Louis Goldberg brings out an important concept in the second principle over the usage of the word, “one.” Instead of the Hebrew word echad as found in Dt 6:4, which gives the connotation of a plural or unified one, Maimonides uses the alternative of yachid which can only be define as the singular (i.e., lonely) one. Goldberg who was a Jewish believer in Jesus writes this simple but clear statement—”With one neat statement, this Jewish philosopher undercut what the Council of Nicea sought to express: the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, each viewed as God, are one God, but in a Tri-unity. That is, God is one but in three persons.”492

The influence that Aristotle and Islamic-Aristotelian thinking played in influencing Rambam’s religious thought already has been established earlier in the chapter. This dissertation will also examine the influence and counter-influence that Thomas Aquinas and other Christian writers such as Gregory of Nyssa and John Philoponus had on the rabbi. However, as one considers the fourth principle of God’s timelessness, one cannot help but be drawn to the thought of fifth century AD Aristotelian philosopher Boethius’ whose work on the concept of eternity and time appears to be reflected in this fourth principle.493 Boethius wrote in his The Consolation

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of Philosophy some thoughts on the Creator and eternity that call to mind what Rambam himself wrote about God as well:

…And, further, God, should not be regarded as older than His creations by any quantity of time but rather by the peculiar quality of simplicity in His nature… Thus if we would apply proper epithets to these subjects we would say, following Plato, that God is eternal, while the universe is perpetual… God is the ever prescient spectator of all things, and the eternity of His vision, which is ever present, runs in unison with the future nature of our acts, dispensing rewards to the good, punishments to the evil.  

Maimonides himself notes that this fourth principle is not “original with him” as a later translator (Rav Kapach) added it in a content footnote to the principle that was found written by Rambam in the margins of his work: “One of the reasons I put so much emphasis on (the negation of the concept of) the world existing before time, as (some of) the philosophers maintain is because (the creation of the world from nothingness) proves God’s existence absolutely, as I explained in the Guide for the Perplexed.” Maimonides interacted with the sources of Christian writers, even such Christian writers as Boethius, to the point that he knew their thoughts about time and creation and God. He knew the concepts of existence and pre-existence and this dissertation argues that many of the arguments of the Thirteen Principles were engaged as an effort to disprove that God could be personal and active with humanity as a counter-point to the Incarnate Jesus being God the Son. The fourth principle is such an example of this engagement. God alone created the universe out of nothing because nothing but God alone existed before creation.

Michael Schwarz, while writing particularly in reference to a section in the Guide, speaks of this “atemporal” nature of God. He references the Islamic philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna), a philosopher worthy of further Maimonidean connection/consideration, but one can also see

494 Ibid.

495 Maimonides, Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim, 175.
perhaps a Boethius influence as well with this statement from Schwartz—”…His knowledge is identical with His essence; that through His own essence, He knows the principle and the cause of all existents; and that knowledge of the cause includes knowledge of the effect and, moreover, that this knowledge causes the existence of all things known.”

One of the great promises of the New Testament is found in 1 Tim 2:5-6—”For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” However, Rambam will argue in this principle that to believe in any sort of mediator is to believe in nothing but idolatry as Rabbi Angel has argued. Idolatry is a punishment worthy of death, a place in Gehinnom. I personally have heard this charge brought against me many times; however, the most interesting example occurred several years ago in Bensonhurst Park, Brooklyn. A young anti-missionary named Daniel came to disrupt an evangelistic outreach that I was participating in when a thunderstorm disrupted the activities. Daniel and I found ourselves underneath an awning as shelter from the rain. We began to discuss just who was Jesus—a lunatic, a liar or the Lord. This fifth principle came up when I asked him about the eternal destiny of Christians such as Corrie ten Boom who are considered as “Righteous Gentiles” for their actions during World War II. He was literally “stuck between a rock and a hard place” because condemning them to Gehinnom was wrong yet they believed in Jesus as God and 1 Tim 2:5-6. Daniel was torn between Maimonides’ Fifth Principle and the New Testament claims about Messiah Jesus at that moment. I do not know which he chose as he chose to go out into the rain.


497 Angel, Maimonides Essential Teachings on Jewish Faith and Ethics, 155.
In Dt 18:15-18, a prophecy is given through Moses to the people that a prophet will come to the people that will be like Moses and he should be obeyed as Moses was—”A prophet from among you, from your brothers, like me, the Lord, your God will set up for you you shall hearken to him.” There is no implication in the Scripture that Moses’ was the pinnacle of prophecy. There is nothing within Scripture that Moses advocated such a position. Moses was punished for his sins by not being allowed to enter the Promised Land; however, Moses was established by this “Second Moses” as the ultimate prophet of all Judaism. One might ask—for what purpose? Was the purpose to downgrade the next prophet who would come after him who was destined to ultimately fulfill Dt 18:15-18, Jesus of Nazareth? Rabbi Angel again writing in almost sycophantic language on behalf of both the first and second Moses’, explains this seventh principle in this way, “The Name, blessed be He, only communicated with other prophets through an intermediary; but with Moses, there was no intermediary.” (cf. BT Berakhot 7a)

The ninth principle is obviously a response to both what the Christian church calls the New Testament and Islam calls the Koran. For if there is additional testimony which comes from God, the first eight principles from Maimonides can be called into doubt and the remaining principles, especially as it relates to the person of the Messiah, could be called into question as well. In many ways, this is one of the most important principles. However, it should be

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498 This translation is from The Complete Jewish Bible which is utilized by the Orthodox Jewish denominations. The dissertation used this translation as opposed to the NASB to illustrate that there was harmony in the interpretation. Additionally, the word hearken should be understood in the Qal Imperfect sense as a continual obedience.

499 Angel, Maimonides Essential Teachings on Jewish Faith and Ethics, 157. The Babylonian Talmud states at this point the following: “Moses was privileged to obtain three [favours]. In reward of ‘And Moses hid his face’, he obtained the brightness of his face. In reward of ‘For he was afraid’, he obtained the privilege that They were afraid to come nigh him. In reward of ‘To look upon God’, he obtained The similitude of the Lord doth he behold.” (cf. Nm 12:8)

500 Moses Maimonides, Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim, 180-81 (fn. 113).
understood that this does not relate solely to the Tanakh but also, and in some respects especially, to the Oral Torah as well.\textsuperscript{501} As has already been illustrated throughout this section on the specific writings of Maimonides, the Oral Torah is just as important to Modern Jewish understanding to Jewish life and perhaps more. This is a reality that many Christians and churches do not understand; however, this must become a primary understanding of apologetics if we ever hope to reach the Jewish people with the truth that Jesus is the Messiah of us all.

\textbf{Two Specific Maimonidean Beliefs (Aside from \textit{Via Negativa} and Messiah)}

It is important to briefly examine two specific Maimonidean beliefs that do not relate to his understanding of God as \textit{via negativa} and his belief of the Messiah; though, they tangentially influence both concepts. Rambam had a love/hate relationship with Kabbalah and mysticism and a complicated relationship with the role of converts and Noahides. Today, Modern Judaism does as well. Therefore, these beliefs will also play a role in both chapters four and five as they play a role in both modern Jewish life and in developing a Christian evangelistic apologetic in reaching Jewish people with the Gospel message.

\textbf{Kabbalah}\textsuperscript{502} and Mysticism

As I walked through the streets of Cordoba in the summer of 2015, I was amazed to see the number of Hamsas hanging off the carts of market vendors. Hamsas, which are a standard amulet of modern Kabbalists, can be found for sell almost anywhere in the world—from Hollywood for the starlets to Safed, Israel, the mythical birthplace of Kabbalah, for those on a

\textsuperscript{501} Angel, \textit{Maimonides’ Essential Teachings on Jewish Faith and Ethics}, 160, 163.

\textsuperscript{502} A complete explanation of Kabbalah cannot be defined in this setting; however, Telushkin, \textit{Jewish Literacy}, 200, defines it in broad tones as “Kabbalah is the name applied to the whole range of Jewish mystical activity. While codes of Jewish law focus on what it is God wants from man, kabbalah tries to penetrate deeper, to God’s essence itself.”
spiritual quest. I was curious as to why a city which corners the market for Jewish tourists and this dissertation writer would promote Jewish mysticism in the birthplace of a Jewish rationalist. However, there was a rational reason and cause for their promotion of a good luck amulet and perhaps explains why so many were also rubbing the foot of Rambam’s statue.

There is a well-known debunked, but nevertheless persistent, legend within Jewish history that in the latter stages of Maimonides’ life that he converted to Kabbalist thought. After being introduced to the mystical teachings, he renounced the teachings of rationalism found within Guide of the Perplexed and became a follower of the writings of the Zohar. Aside from the theological unlikelihood of this happening, the Zohar which functions in many ways as a commentary of the Torah, was not brought to public attention until well after Maimonides’ death. Nevertheless, there is a strong argument that before Maimonides’ death there existed what both Menachem Kellner and Moshe Idel might call elements of proto-Kabbalism which should be examined not only for what they could have brought to his teachings but perhaps to consider if he fought against these early teachings. Kellner also provides two specific

503 This reference is based upon personal anecdotal experience as I have attended Kabbalist workshops and have visited Safed, Israel, and been the synagogue of Isaac Luria. Hamsas also have an Islamic connection/history as well—http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hamsa/.


505 Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 200-203; Halbertal, Maimonides, 365-66; Shapiro, Studies in Maimonides and His Interpreters, 86. Personally, the writer would refer to the Zohar as a mystical “decoder ring” for Kabbalists; however, Telushkin puts its more academic language.

examples of proto-Kabbalism in the period of Maimonides’ life: (1) *Sefer Yetsirah* which is the idea that human language/words can actually create things which gave rise to the Jewish legend of the Golem and (2) *Heikhalot* literature which is the idea that the use of God’s name can ward off evil spirits (i.e., “God bless you” and amulets such as Hamsas).\(^{507}\) Perhaps, Kellner has a point that the world of Rambam’s day was deeply “debased and paganized,”\(^{508}\) however, it should be recognized that Maimonides expressed a measure of mystical thought as well. Whether it was his attention to detail of having fourteen sections in the *Mishneh Torah* as it matched numeral value for Hebrew word for “hand” which is nothing more than *Gematria* to the idea that Aaron, Miriam and Moses died by the “kiss of God,” the Cairo rabbi was not completely innocent as it relates to the idea of mysticism.\(^{509}\) However, modern scholars will attempt to rationalize the rationalist rabbi by explaining that it was a philosophical or “intellectualist mysticism.”\(^{510}\) Indeed, Maimonides was a rationalist in all areas and would not have been a Kabbalist either in his approach to interpretation of Scripture for while he saw hidden meaning to

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\(^{507}\) Kellner, *Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism*, 18-25. For a modern example of *Sefer Yetsirah* being dramatized, one can watch the Richard Gere movie about Kabbalah entitled *Bee Season*.

\(^{508}\) Ibid., 1.

\(^{509}\) David R. Blumenthal, “Maimonides’ Intellectual Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. David R. Blumenthal (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 41-42; idem, “Religion and the Religious Intellectuals,” 132-133. Blumenthal provided the reference to Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part III, ch. 51 (637): “To this state our Sages referred, when in reference to the death of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, they said that death was in these three cases nothing but a kiss.” The rest of the chapter/epistle goes into greater detail to describe how each death occurred.

Torah, it was not parabolic in nature as Kabbalists seek to promote but allegorical as we have already explored.511

A primary summary example of this approach is how he responded to the question of astrology to the French Jewish rabbis of Provence in the early 1290s.512 Throughout Southern France, a discussion had arisen over the claims of a Messianic claimant in a distant land and whether any validity could be found in the claims of astrology—particularly what Maimonides will respond to in his letter as “judicial astrology.”513 Rambam’s concern over “judicial astrology” takes on many forms and many judgments that is worthy of consideration as it relates not only to Kabbalah then and now but also to his continual drumbeat against the concept that God could take on any aspect of corporeality (i.e., Incarnate form).

511 Elliot R. Wolfson, “Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in Moses Maimonides (1138-1204): His Religious, Scientific and Philosophical Wirkungeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts, ed. Görge K. Hasselhoff and Otfrid Fraisse (Ergon: Würzburg, 2007), 209-37 (esp. 211-12) and Altmann, “Maimonides’ Attitude Toward Jewish Mysticism,” 201, 203, 208, 210. Wolfson and Altmann come at this argument from completely different perspectives; however, Altmann’s arguments carry the day based upon historical and theological arguments. Wolfson’s perspectives are based upon a wish-fulfillment desire more than actual hard evidence. Additionally, you have an exegetical argument from Maimonides’ issue with the prophet Moses himself which illustrates that Rambam struggled with any example of “magical incantation” even in Scripture. The example of Moses striking in the rock the second time in Nm 20 is found by Maimonides as an example of disobeying God’s order. See, Jacob Milgrom, “Magic, Monotheism, and the Sin of Moses,” in The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall, ed. Herbert B. Huffman, et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 88-112. Primary sources for Maimonidean references could not be located at this time.

512 Kraemer, Maimonides, 426-38. The entire historical overview of this scenario is from the same source as the story is consistent with all sources.

513 Moss Maimonides, “Letter to the Community of Marseilles: Letter on Astrology,” Jewish Times: Mesora (14 June 2013): 21. Rambam defines “judicial astrology” as the “(the science) by which man may known what will come to pass in this world or in this or that city or kingdom and what will happen to particular individual all the days of his life.” Kraemer, Maimonides, 428, gives this form of astrology the technical term of genethlialogy or the “the technique of compiling a horoscope.” Please note that the Jewish Times: Mesora provides a condensed edition of the letter while the Twersky volume provides a fuller scope of the letter; however, the writer has chosen to use this version for reference as it focuses on the aspect punishment and God’s deity. The issue of the Yemenite episode which is extrapolated has already been covered in this chapter and is not crucial to this discussion. However, the writer of the dissertation has read and evaluated this portion of the letter which was found as well. Leon D. Stitskin, “Maimonides on Refuting False Notions: A Letter to the Jews of Montpellier,” Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought vol. 11, no. 4 (Spring 1971): 99-104.
The Cairo rabbi writes in 1294 that it was because of such foolishness that the Second Temple was lost due to a focus on astrology and star gazing—"They erred and were drawn after them, imagining them to be glorious science and to be of great utility. They did not busy themselves with the art of war or with the conquest of lands, but imagined that those studies would help them."\textsuperscript{514} However, Rambam also wanted the French Jewish community to know that astrology is pointless because not only did God alone create the stars out of nothing (ex nihilo) but also that He did it \textbf{alone} and "whoever does not acknowledge this is guilty of radical unbelief and is guilty of heresy."\textsuperscript{515}

Therefore, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson is correct when she argues that while Rambam "did not rid Judaism of myth" he sought to replace "it with a logocentric myth, the crux of which was that the Torah is a philosophic, esoteric text whose interpretation constitutes the happy life in this world and the bliss of immortality in the afterlife."\textsuperscript{516} However, the question must be raised—is the thought and argument of Maimonides winning the day in the twenty-first century? This is an issue that will be explored further in chapters four and five; however, this is an issue that should be considered constructively and theologically in this chapter as well. Halbertal writes that the Cairo rabbi was able “more or less” able to eliminate “the belief in a corporeal God” from Jewish thought, there is still a long battle to be fought from “reject[ing] all personification of the divinity.”\textsuperscript{517} Alan Yuter in his review of Menachem Kellner’s \textit{Maimonides’ Confrontation with}

\textsuperscript{514} Maimonides, “Letter on Astrology,” 21. Original source for this reference was from Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, 433-34.

\textsuperscript{515} Ibid., 22.


\textsuperscript{517} Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 366.
Mysticism recognizes the battle that the Orthodox rabbi is seeking to fight within his own Jewish denomination to return from a Kabbalistic tendency to Maimonidean thought but believes the battle is lost because Jewish people want to feel something and not just think about God. And while Rabbi Kellner might believe that Maimonidean thought and practice today has been relegated and considered as “largely ignored backwater” due to the wave of Kabbalistic thought in Modern Judaism, this dissertation argues that his first belief regarding Rambam as “one of the most influential Jews who ever lived” is still by and large correct. Jewish people are attempting to fit both the thoughts of Maimonides and mysticism today into a systematized Jewish box without realizing that neither fit the “God Box” of their lives because Messiah Jesus is the only one who can.

Noahides and Converts

Conversion, proselytism, evangelism are not words that one associates with Modern/Rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, the concept of someone becoming Jewish by choice is even today the exception and not the norm. However, the question of Noahides and the question of converts to Judaism was an issue during Maimonides day and is actually a growing issue today as will be considered in chapter five. Therefore, a brief examination of the issue is worthy of consideration as it involves the questions of God’s non-corporeal status and what a non-Jewish person must do with the identity of Jesus becomes very important for all parties involved.


519 Kellner, Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism, 1, 4.

The first and most obvious question that many have is simply—what is a Noahide? Rambam in the *Mishneh Torah* reaffirmed the definition of the Sages and set the following parameters for who is one:

A heathen who accepts the seven commandments and observes them scrupulously is a “righteous heathen,” and will have a portion in the world to come, provided that he accepts them and performs them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Law and made known through Moses our Teacher that the observance thereof had been enjoined upon the *descendants of Noah* even before the Law was given (emphasis added).521

Kraemer simplifies the definition by stating that “Noahide laws are the elementary moral standards of civilized behavior for all mankind. Six go back to Adam, and are thus ultimately Adamic or universal human laws, and one was added at the time of Noah.”522 Upon a first reading of this concept, many unsuspecting individuals might assume that this is a biblical concept; however, this idea of the Noahide Laws and its obligation was a later addition to the Talmud in post-Jesus times (*BT Sanhedrin* 56a). However, it is important to understand two issues—(1) why Christians cannot affirm the Noahide Laws and (2) why the hidden meaning behind Maimonides call for a form of universalism has another purpose behind it.

First, this Talmudic concept was designed to offset the basic Great Commission calling of Christians to be evangelistic to the Jewish people and all the people of the world. If non-Jews can obtain a place in the “World to Come” by observing the following commands while the Jewish

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people are commanded to observe these and the additional 613 Commandments prescribed by Maimonides, then there is no need for Christian evangelism of any kind:

Six precepts were given to Adam: prohibition of idolatry, of blasphemy, of murder, of adultery, of robbery, and the command to establish courts of justice. Although there is a tradition to this effect—a tradition dating back to Moses our Teacher, and human reason approves of those precepts—it is evident from the general tenor of the Scriptures that he (Adam) was bidden to observe these commandments. An additional commandment was given to Noah: prohibition of (eating) a limb from a living animal, …

Christians should and do observe precepts three through seven; however, according to Maimonides himself, we would be in violation of the first precepts by affirming the Incarnation and stating that Jesus is God the Son. Therefore, to become a follower of what Kellner calls Rambam’s “universalism” (i.e., Noahide) requires a renouncement of one’s Christian fidelity.

Second, we find an Islamic tenor rising up within the chords of Rambam’s thought. For this dissertation argues, he dreamed of the day when his form of Rabbinic Judaism would have the political weight of Saladin’s Empire and could force the issue of Noahide belief upon the

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523 One of the most aspects of Jewish and Christian life is that we hear about these 613 Commandments of Judaism; however, there is no place in Scripture in which they are laid out or counted. This is a Talmudic addition of which there are several versions/renditions. Maimonides in his Book of Commandments (which we did not examine) is the one who spelled out the list we have today. Naturally, this list of 613 rules has overtones of Gematria and focuses on the unity and non-corporeality of God. For further information see, Herbert A. Davidson, “The First Two Positive Commandments in Maimonides’ List of the 613 Believed to Have Been Given to Moses at Sinai,” in Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, ed. Rachel Elior and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 113-45.

524 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book Fourteen: Judges, ch. 9, sec. 1.

525 Kellner, Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism, 250. However, it should be noted that Kellner struggled with this concept even though he affirmed it (p. 251-61). He qualified the statement ultimately that Rambam’s universalism extended to those non-Jews who became what we might term as enlightened or “Noahides” for the sake of this discussion. See also, J. David Bleich, “Divine Unity in Maimonides, the Tosafists and Me’iri,” in Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY: State University of New York: 1992, 239-40. The writer believes it should be noted that Bleich begins his article with what could be called an unnecessary diatribe of Maimonides view towards Christians that defeats the overall theme of the article.
Gentiles. For while he wrote that no one should be forced to convert to Judaism, he did advocate the following:

Moreover, Moses our Teacher was commanded by God to compel all human beings to accept the commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noah. Anyone who does not accept them is put to death. He who does accept them is invariably styled a resident alien. He must declare his acceptance in the presence of three associates. Anyone who has declared his intention to be circumcised and fails to do so within twelve months is treated like a heathen infidel.  

Consequently, there was a subtle call for a reverse form of “Jewish evangelism” by Maimonides to either become a Noahide or a full-fledged convert to the faith. However, those who did convert were faced with other questions that Rambam sought to answer as well.

Ben Zion Wacholder in expressing his understanding of Rambam’s view on converts to Judaism writes an important statement as it expresses in a cogent manner the defined purpose and heart of the Cairo rabbi’s mission of life, regardless of the cause—”To him conversion to Judaism meant not so much the acceptance of the commandments as the philosophical recognition of the unity of God. It is from the unity of God that the observance of the Torah naturally follows.” This philosophical approach to Judaism is important as it opens up the community of Abraham to a broader audience that extends beyond a genetic heritage but to a philosophical-religious component that includes anyone who affirms the Maimonidean tradition. James Diamond takes this concept even further and develops “a pedagogical teacher-

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526 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book Fourteen: Judges, ch. 8, sec. 10. See also, Halbertal, Maimonides, 251, 252-53.

527 Ben Zion Wacholder, “Attitudes Towards Proselytizing in the Classical Halakah,” in Readings on Conversion to Judaism, ed. Lawrence J. Epstein (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), 18. Wacholder argues that Rambam believed that teaching about the “oneness of God and the futility of idol worship” should take priority over any aspect of Talmudic instruction.

528 Baruch Frydman-Kohl, “Covenant, Conversion and Chosenness: Maimonides and Halevi on ‘Who Is a Jew?,’” Judaism: A Quarterly Journal vol. 41, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 66, 75. Obviously, Frydman-Kohl perceives of Maimonides’ perspective in a much more amenable way than the writer does; however, the premise of the New York rabbi’s statement, “In this examination, Maimonides will be shown to hold that Judaism is a philosophical
disciple” construct to replace “biological father-son model.” Father/Teacher Abraham is the father to the world (cf. Gen 12:1-3) because his responsibility was to bring Judaism to the planet. Therefore, if a convert wants to become Jewish by religion, he is ultimately a Jew in an ethno-religious-genetic sense as well.529

The test case in this whole situation as it relates to Maimonides and the issue of Jewish converts can be boiled down primarily to one convert from Islam—Obadiah the Proselyte. The dating of the correspondence is uncertain; however, we do that the questions revolved around two issues: (1) could Obadiah pray as a Jewish man to the “God of Our Fathers,” and (2) was Islam a monotheistic religion? These two questions were important to Obadiah as he had been confronted by his synagogue rabbi and told that as a convert he could not pray to God as “his Father,” and that Islam was full of idolatry and pagan worship.530

Maimonides’ response to Obadiah was unique in several ways. He wrote to Obadiah that (1) Abraham taught people about “the true faith and the unity of God;” (2) Abraham even now is the one “who converted them to righteousness” as they are under the umbrella of his teaching model because “he converts future generations through the testaments he left to his children and household after him;” (3) Abraham is “the father of his disciples and of all proselytes who adopt Judaism; and (4) “Do not consider your origin as inferior. While we are the descendants of community with common beliefs that entail common practices…” (p. 66) has one consistent word—common. Uniformity is the word of the day in Maimonidean Judaism.

529 James A. Diamond, “Maimonides and the Convert: A Juridical and Philosophical Embrace of the Outsider,” Medieval Philosophy and Theology 11 (2003): 127-35. The question of “Who Is a Jew?” today is an issue of great controversy both within the United States and in Israel proper. This approach of Diamond would never be accepted and this dissertation argues that he is presenting a somewhat idealized view of Maimonides’ view; however, he is not completely off-base from what Rambam proposed—within limits.

530 The summation of the background to this story came from both Halbertal, Maimonids, 81-83 and Kraemer, Maimonides, 311-13. It should be noted that we have examined Rambam’s view that he saw Islam as a monotheistic religion in earlier parts of this chapter and so the focus of this section will be on the first question.

Maimonides, Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim, 182-83.

Kellner, Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism, 232-33.
Maimonides’ Negation Theology Analyzed in Relation to the Christian Faith

In examining the concept of Maimonides’ negation (apophatic) theology (via Negativa) that I have been discussing in broad strokes and statements throughout this chapter, a brief definition at this point would prove helpful. However, even within the term itself there is not one simple definition; therefore, I will list here some of the more prominent ones with their author included:

1. Denys Turner—"An adequate theology has to be unremitting in its denials of theological language, for all talk about God is tainted with ultimate failure … It is the encounter with the failure of what we must say about God to represent God adequately."

2. Rowan Williams—"Thus the use of negation to characterize the divine life expresses not simply the retreat of the finite mind before infinite reality—thought it does at least that; it expresses the process of ‘finding our way’ within the life of the three divine agencies or subsistents.”

3. John Bussanich—"[T]heologies which regard negative statements as primary in expressing our knowledge of God, contrasted with ‘positive theologies’ giving primary emphasis to positive statements … However, within their original theistic context, positive and negative statements about God are interdependent, the second indispensably qualifying the first, the negative statements taken alone are useless.”

4. Hilary Putnam (speaking in his estimation on behalf of Rambam in modern vernacular)—"There are no ‘propositions’ about God that are adequate to God.”

5. Diana Lobel—"Negative theology is built on the premise of the unknowability of God: we can only make statements about what God is not; we cannot ultimately know what God is. Negative Theology belongs to two spheres: the

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sphere of epistemology—what can we know?—and the sphere of discourse—what can we say?538

The first two definitions are from Christian sources, albeit from the non-evangelical end of the spectrum. The third and fourth options fall within more of a philosophical construct. The fifth from the Jewish scholar is also the primary defender of the Maimonidean view. However, what each have in common is that they are different but yet they agree on the essential idea that in negation one cannot adequately know God in a personal way.

Ehud Benor, who along with others have sought to soften this perception of Rambam, acknowledges that this can cause others to see the Cairo rabbi as appearing to offer an “austere theology” that creates an “absolute unknowability of God.”539 Benor will argue that this perceived sternness by Maimonides was an attempt to prevent the worship of (1) one’s own imagination and (2) subjective rather than objective worship.540 The defense of Maimonides’ emphasis on God as via Negativa by modern scholarship is admirable and understandable in many ways, and will be found in some measure in the Christian thinkers that we consider as well.

One idea put forth by the modern defenders is that Maimonides wanted his fellow Jews to understand the “Who” they were worshipping and not worshipping a feeling, an emotion, or a concept. Hannah Kascher considers Maimonides’ focus on the negative attributes as recognition of the fact that God is a “self-cognizing intellect” and/or “absolutely other” we are not; therefore,


540 Ibid., 341.
we should only speak of him in the negative.\footnote{Hannah Kasher, “Self-Cognizing Intellect and Negative Attributes in Maimonides’ Theology,” \textit{Harvard Theological Review} 87:4 (1994): 468, 470, 472. See also, David Burrell, “Naming the Names of God: Muslims, Jews, Christians,” \textit{Theology Today} vol. 47, no. 1 (April 1990): 27 and Lobel, “Maimonides on Negative Theology,” 26. Both Kasher and Burrell both reference the Leviticus references of “Be Ye Holy as I am Holy” as illustrations in their context of Maimonides.} Another idea is simply the idea of silence or what Benor refers to as “rational mysticism.”\footnote{Benor, “Meaning and Reference in Maimonides’ Negative Theology,” 344. See also, Lobel, “Maimonides on Negative Theology,” 27, who expresses this way—“The only true expression of rational certainty about God is silence.”} If one is silent before God, one is not tempted to give in to the temptation to engage in effusive and/or offensive language that could border on idolatrous language that detracts from “God’s true reality.”\footnote{T. M. Rudavsky, \textit{Blackwell Great Minds: Maimonides} (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 47.} Maimonides wrote about the idea of silence in the \textit{Guide} this statement:

\begin{quote}
You must bear in mind, that by affirming anything of God, you are removed from Him in two respects; first, whatever you affirm, is only in a perfection in relation to us; secondly, He does not possess anything superadded to this essence; His essence includes all His perfections, as we have shown … The idea is best expressed in the book of Psalms, “Silence is praise to Thee (lxv. 2). It is a very expressive remark on this subject; for whatever we utter with the intention of extolling and of praising Him, contains that cannot be applied to God, and includes derogatory expressions; …\end{quote}

However, it is Lobel who is the most honest about the desire for silence in Maimonidean thought when she writes—"Nevertheless, one can represent God falsely by endowing Him with essential attributes, which is no different from the Christian affirmation of the Trinity. This position leads one on a dangerous road away from monotheism."\footnote{Maimonides, \textit{Guide of the Perplexed}, Part I, ch. 59 (152-53). Original source which directed me to section of the \textit{Guide} was Halbertal, \textit{Maimonides}, 296.} This is perhaps why Joseph Buijs in multiple articles on the topic focuses on the idea of Maimonides’ negation providing an “indirect
knowledge” of God through what he is not;\textsuperscript{546} however, is this enough to satisfy the longing of an individual’s heart? Do the Christian proponents of negation proponents both ancient and modern offer something more that we could offer to twenty-first century Jewish people?

Gregory of Nyssa

Born in 335, Gregory of Nyssa was one of the three great Cappadocian fathers of Christian history along with his brother Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. Before his death in c.394, he became known not for pastoral gifts or oratorical eloquence but for the ability to express himself in writing and in his intellectual ability.\textsuperscript{547} He also became known along with St. John of the Cross as early advocates of a Christian \textit{via Negativa} that is counter-intuitive to Maimonidean thought. Gregory’s idea sought to drive/compel the individual towards a closer, mystical union, vis-à-vis prayer or meditation, with the unknown God in order that one might eventually know and love Him in a non-idolatrous way.\textsuperscript{548}

This Christian \textit{via Negativa} of Gregory begins with a conceptually correct but awkwardly phrased understanding of the Tri-Unity of God with this statement from \textit{On “Not Three Gods”:}

But in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to the Creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{549}


\textsuperscript{547} Johannes Quasten, \textit{Patrology}, vol. 3 (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2002), 254-55.

\textsuperscript{548} Bussanich, “Negative Theology,” 759.


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Yes, on first reading it could read as if Gregory is advocating a God with emanations; however, I believe this confusion can be resolved upon a further reading—

Since then the Holy Trinity fulfils every operation in a manner similar to that of which I have spoken, not by separate action according to the number of the Persons, but so that there is one motion and disposition of the good will which is communicated from the Father through the Son to the Spirit (for as we do not call those whose operation gives one life three Givers of life, neither do we call those who are contemplated in one goodness three Good beings, nor speak of them in the plural by any of their other attributes); …

What Gregory made available through his understanding of the Trinity (aka Tri-Unity) is a God who can be both unknowable on one level but yet accessible on another through the actions of Son and Spirit, as well as through the actions we ourselves take to know Him. This is most evident because we were created in the Imago Dei and our soul longing (i.e., mysticism realized) is to return to this relationship that has been lost. Gregory explains in his Sermon on the Beatitudes, however, that this is not possible without a life-change on our part and the purification made only possible by God alone:

The Divine Nature, whatever It may be in Itself, surpasses every mental concept. For It is altogether inaccessible to reasoning and conjecture, nor has there been found any human faculty capable of perceiving the incomprehensible; for we cannot devise a means of understanding inconceivable things … For it is possible to see Him Who has made all things in wisdom by inference through the wisdom that appears in the universe … Thus also, when we look at the order of creation, we form in our mind an image not of the essence, but of the wisdom of Him Who has made all things wisely … For power, purity, constancy, freedom from contrariety—all these engrave on the soul the impress of a Divine and transcendent Mind … If a mind’s heart has been purified from every creature and unruly affections, he will see the Image of the Divine Nature in his own beauty …

http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.viii.v.html. Original source for this reference was made available via the Quasten volume.

550 Ibid.

551 Quasten, Patrology, vol. 3, 292, 293. Quasten (p. 293) writes lyrically about what this writer has attempted to summarize/explain: “Thus the image of God in man enables him to attain the mystic vision of Him and compensates for the deficiencies of human reason and the limitation of our rational knowledge of God.”
Hence, if your thought is without any alloy of evil, free from passion, and alien from stain, you are blessed because you are clear of sight. You are able to perceive what is invisible to those who are not purified, because you have been cleansed; the darkness caused by material entanglements has been removed from the eyes of your soul, and so you see the blessed vision radiant in the pure heaven of your heart.552

Gregory of Nyssa in essence filed a pre-emptive strike in the areas of God’s unity within the confines of diversity as well as in the ability to know the unknowable and to have intimacy with the unattainable on Rambam. However, Maimonides was more interested in the writings of another Christian writer, John Philoponus, and there is no tangible evidence that he ever read the writings of Gregory of Nyssa.

John Philoponus

Augustine, Justin, even Origin would be early Christian scholars that I would have expected to see in Guide for the Perplexed; however, I was proven wrong. It would a practice of mere speculation as to why such writers were not found, especially the thoughts of Gregory of Nyssa, given their similar views on the personal presence of God. The only early Christian writer to be found by name is the relatively obscure philosopher and Christian monophysite, John the Grammarian (aka John Philoponus).553 However, it was not in glowing terms that John Philoponus was mentioned but almost in a condescending tone: “When the opinions of John the Grammarian, of Ibn Adi, and of kindred authors on those subjects were made accessible to them, they adopted them, and imagined they had arrived at the solution of important problems.”554

Consequently, it is important to understand who John Philoponus was, what his opinions were,

552 Ibid., 294-95. Note: This writer was unable to locate a primary source for Gregory’s Homilies on the Beatitudes.

553 Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed, Part I, ch. 71 (192).

554 Ibid.
and why Rambam was so dismissive of his claims, especially as it related to the unity and knowledge of God?

John Philoponus (c.490-575) was born in Egypt and became a Christian scholar who was highly influenced by the writings of Plato and Aristotle. He also came of age during the height of the Chalcedonian controversy which revolved around the person and nature of Jesus. What is most enlightening about Philoponus’ biography was written in the abstract to L. S. B. MacCoull’s article: “His intention was to provide the nascent Coptic church with a powerful set of tools for argument, with which Egyptian Monophysites could defeat their Chalcedonian opponents.” This serves to bring out a point and a further reality—the view of the Monophysites should be understood and the writings of John the Grammarian was apparently still available to the Cairo rabbi as evidenced by this statement just prior to John’s mention: “they [Greek and Syrian Christians] commenced by putting forth such propositions as would support their doctrines, and be useful for the refutation of opinions opposed to the fundamental principles of the Christian religion.”

Therefore, what is Monophysite Christology? One of the easier definitions to understand is simply the “juxtaposition, mixture, compound/fusion—are what are analyzed in all discussions of how divinity and humanity formed the ineffable union of the one saving Christ;” Ultimately, however, it should be recognized that in his Christology, John Philoponus was

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creating a Trinitarian system that was untenable to basic Christian thought. Uwe Michael Lang correctly refers to this concept as Tritheism—three natures, three substances, three godheads—because of the confusion of how Jesus “could become flesh apart from the Father and the Spirit.”

Lang provides an example of this confusion from a translation of Philoponus’ own words (Arbiter)—”If things that are united become one, things that have not become one are necessarily not united. Thus if there are two natures of Christ and not one, and if a duality … is indicative of a division, but what is divided is not united, then the natures of Christ are not united.” This confusion about the nature of Jesus, the nature of the Trinity, the nature of God’s unity as understood by Christianity is what Maimonides saw and expounded upon in his Guide. One can understand his perplexity for while Gregory of Nyssa was imperfect in places, he found a way to meld the truth of Tri-Unity and the concept of via Negativa in a relational God as well. Rambam, unfortunately, apparently never saw this side of Christian thought.

Thomas Aquinas

The life, work and ministry of Thomas Aquinas (1225-75) itself has filled many doctoral dissertations. One might argue that the Summa Theologica personifies the term magnum opus.

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560 U. M. Lang, “Nicetas Choniates, A Neglected Witness to the Greek Text of John Philoponus’ Arbiter,” Journal of Theological Studies ns 48, no 2 (October 1997): 546 (ch. X, 36: 70.24-31). Lang notes that the extant version is in Syriac and provides a complete explanation of how it came to be translated into English (p. 540-41).

561 George E. Saint-Laurent, “Avicenna, Maimonides, Aquinas, and the Existence of God,” in Festschrift in Honor of Morton C. Fierman, ed. Joseph Kalir (Fullerton, CA: California State University Fullerton, 1982), 168-69, takes care of writing out a biography the dissertation when he states the following:
However, the point of this section is not to amplify Aquinas but to examine the similarities and differences of the via Negativa between the Christian scholastic and the Jewish rabbi. Before I begin, it should be noted that Maimonides is mentioned often as a reference point in Aquinas’ Summa Theologica under the name of Rabbi Moses.562

However, this does not mean that the two were kindred spirits on the concept of via Negativa in connection to the person of God and/or humanity’s relation to Him. Yes, they agreed on some aspects as to this relationship being a special gift; but, he did not believe it was deposed to only the spiritually elite.563 However, Jacob Haberman argues that Aquinas seeks to find a balance between a form of Maimonidean agnosticism and polytheistic anthropomorphism through the usage of analogy; however, Haberman will ultimately argue that St. Thomas falls victim to what we might call nonsensical speech or “verbalism.”564 It was not that Aquinas was opposed to the usage of speaking of God in the negative, it is that he felt that humanity needed to

Thomas became a model for devout emulation as a priest, a mystic, and a saint. He became the source of rich spiritual nourishment as a poet, hymnographer, and exegete of Sacred Scripture. He became the object of intense admiration as an intellectual of giant proportions with an altogether extraordinary talent for synthesizing his penetrating analyses of reality into a self-consistent whole.


recognize that God was “good, wise and the like.” Additionally, St. Thomas adds the following to elaborate on this analogical answer:

Therefore we must hold a different doctrine—viz. that these names signify the divine substance, and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of a full representation of Him. Which is proved thus. For these names express God, so far as our intellects know Him … Therefore the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly. So when we say, “God is good,” the meaning is not, “God is the cause of goodness,” or “God is not evil”; but the meaning is, “Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God,” and in a more excellent and higher way. Hence it does not follow that God is good, because He causes goodness; but rather, on the contrary, He causes goodness in things because He is good; according to what Augustine says (De Doctr. Christ. i, 32), “Because He is good, we are.”

Idit Dobbs-Weinstein expresses this philosophical division between Rambam and Aquinas as a difference between a focus on the incorporeality of God and a focus on the “unity of all existing things in virtue of their first and final cause—the Good, irrespective of composition.” Taking this concept further, both Seeskin and Harvey will argue that Aquinas viewed Rambam’s God as

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566 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part 1, Question 13, Art. 2.

too limiting for humanity to ascertain. In other words, Aquinas saw that people need a connecting point to God even if we do so in some form of via Negativa.

This idea of a connecting point is especially relevant in the closing paragraph of the section. For connecting to God in the form of redemption/repentance is at the core of both Rabbinic (Modern) Judaism and Christianity. However, the question of how and to whom is where the great divide begins and ends. Jonathan Jacobs expresses the rabbinic position quite well when he states that it is the duty of the community to come together in a covenantal action of repentance. This Maimonidean thread via the “Thirteen Principles,” Commentary on Teshuvah, and other documents that we have examined have become a mainstay in Jewish life, even for the non-observant Jewish man/woman. However, Thomas Aquinas illustrates a more personal way that Jacobs himself notes even if misunderstands the reference: “A person may repent of sin in two ways: in one way directly, in another way indirectly. He repents of a sin directly who hates sin as such: and he repents indirectly who hates it on account of something connected with it, for instance punishment or something of that kind.”


569 Joseph A. Buijs, “The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas,” The Review of Metaphysics vol. 41, no. 4 (June 1988): 727, 731. It should be noted that the primary point of Buijs’ article is to disprove Isaac Franck’s premise and criticism of both Maimonidean and Thomistic via Negativa. In doing so, Buijs creates a more convoluted and complicated article than necessary; however, the point that he makes is that the two scholars share similarities and differences in their approaches to the knowledge and negation of God.


571 Ibid. The Summa Theologica reference specifically deals with the punishment with the damned. The dissertation finds it interesting that Jacobs gravitates towards this reference as an example of interplay between Creator and humanity. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Supplement to Part 3, Question 98, Art. 2.
Therefore, sandwiched between John Philoponus’ odd Tritheism, we find two Christian via Negativa theologians who shared a similar concept as Maimonides as it relates to unknowability of God on a human plane but recognized that the search never ends, even while here on earth. Gregory of Nyssa and Thomas Aquinas are the individuals we must show to Jewish people who cannot let go of the idea that God is unknowable. Additionally, we in the Christian church who occasionally slip into bad Trinitarian theology similar to Philoponus must disregard his thought if we ever hope to answer the hope that lies within us as it relate to the truth of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

**Maimonides Criteria for the Messiah Analyzed in Relation to the Christian Faith**

There has been a great deal of discussion already in this chapter related to Maimonides’ criteria for the Jewish Messiah. Therefore, this section will seek to accomplish three primary goals: (1) a quick summary of his view; (2) a comparison and contrast of how Rambam’s Messianic figure is different and similar to the Christian Messiah; and (3) an analysis of why the Cairo’s rabbi Messiah needed to be different than Jesus of Nazareth from both a religious and sociological perspective in order for Rabbinic Judaism to survive (a more complete analysis of the third goal will be examined in the final two chapters as well).

Am Funkenstein states it well in explaining Maimonides’ view of the Messiah by stating that he “was the first theoretician of a ‘realistic Messianism’;…”\(^{572}\) This idea of a Maimonidean realistic Messianic Age “will be expressed through the rectification of the existing world...

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through the improvement of the social-political reality." Rambam’s Messianic Age will include a real person whose focus will be:

King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state and original sovereignty. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All the ancient laws will be reinstated in his days; sacrifices will again be offered; the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will again be observed in accordance with the commandments set forth in the Law.

This dissertation argues that the Cairo rabbi’s perception of the Messiah was influenced/tainted by the experience of a visual representation of Islamic power from his earliest childhood days with the Mezquita de Córdoba and this why he presented a kingly only Messiah in the Mishneh Torah. There would be no need for a redemptive “Suffering Messiah” of Messiah ben Joseph that even the Talmud mentions in BT Sukkah 52a but that Maimonides chooses to overlook in his reference to the passage—”The prophecy in that section bears upon the two Messiahs: the first, namely, David, who saved Israel from the hand of their enemies; and the later Messiah, a descendant of David, who will achieve the final salvation of Israel.”

In many ways, the answer to the question of how Maimonides’ Messiah is similar and different than Messiah Jesus might appear to be obvious. However, there are subtleties that

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574 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book Fourteen: Judges, ch. 11, sec. 1.

575 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book Fourteen: Judges, ch. 11, sec. 1 and Kraemer, “Maimonides’ Messianic Posture,” 131. Please note that this dissertation provided the complete notation of BT Sukkah 52a in a previous footnote.
should be considered as it is important for understanding and evaluation. I have already brought forth from Maimonides’ own words that he decried any need for the Messiah to testify of his position through the use of miracles or mighty works but through a return of the people to the land of Israel and a return of the people to Torah observance. This is why some would key in on the term “historical success” and why today Jewish people will negate the possibility of Jesus being Messiah as there was no “historical success” to his actions.\(^{576}\) Marcel Poorthuis acknowledges this conundrum albeit with a tinge of bias when he writes, “It is an old and stubborn prejudice of Christian origin that Jewish messianism is too political to be able to reach the spiritual heights of the Christian messianic message. But we do better to follow Maimonides in asking whether a religious expectation which denies political oppression may bear the predicate ‘messianic.’”\(^{577}\)

However, Christians would ask what kind of Messiah are the Jewish people hoping for if he only brings a human Messiah that would one day die as has already been shown? What kind of Messiah brings a Messianic Age that brings sovereignty but not the hope for the “World to Come,” as “The Sages said that the prophets only spoke of the days of the Messiah, but regarding the World to Come, the eye has not seen except for God.”\(^{578}\) The response of Maimonides would also come from his *Commentary on Teshuvah* in which he states: “They will find rest [during the days of Messiah], and increase their wisdom in order that they inherit the

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\(^{577}\) Poorthuis, “Messianism between Reason and Delusion,” 62. Funkenstein, “Maimonides,” 83, is even less subtle as he refers to Christianity as growing “out of a Messianic heresy.”

life in the World to Come.\textsuperscript{579} However, this is a promise that Christians will avow that we already have as well in the concept of the “already but not yet” of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, there are both similar similarities and differences in the sense of the Messianic Age with the greatest difference that Christians are no longer waiting while many Jewish people today have either given up or have allegorized the person into a Messianic concept.

**Chapter Summation**

Consequently, it is necessary to answer the third question for this section—why did Maimonides need for the Jewish Messiah to not fit the parameters of the Christian Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth? This third question ultimately can serve as a summary section for this chapter as well because this question is the basis for Rambam’s life and work from *Commentary on the Mishnah* to his treatises about resurrection or a letter to struggling people in Yemen. What drove the Cairo rabbi to focus all his work, drive, energy to create a God that was so distant and inaccessible that he was unattainable to the Jewish masses that needed Him most? What drove the young child in Cordoba who became the Second Moses of Judaism to create a Messiah that resembles nothing like the Messiah of Isaiah 53 and elsewhere in Scripture?

Is it a drive to place Christianity and even Islam as subservient to Judaism in the sense that they are merely precursors to the ultimate Jewish Messianic Age?\textsuperscript{580} For after all, he did argue in the *Mishneh Torah* that Jesus and Muhammad served an ultimate purpose even if they were misguided? Is it a need to illustrate that the intellect and the mind is greater than emotionalism in religious discussion as he did in *The Guide of the Perplexed*? To both of these

\textsuperscript{579} Ibid., 9.2.

\textsuperscript{580} Poorthuis, “Messianism between Reason and Delusion,” 66–67. This might not be the complete intention of Poorthuis’ argument; however, this dissertation argues that the implication is present in his concluding paragraphs.
questions, it should be argued in the affirmative. For this dissertation has sought to show throughout this chapter that to Maimonides that Torah, and especially the Talmud, via his brand of Judaism was of greater value to him than any concept of “hearing, knowing, seeing” God. Aviezer Ravitzky writes this about Rambam—”While his Messianism is dictated not by his mind but by his faith, it is essentially his mind that directs, defines, and limits the object of his faith.”581 Ravitzky attempts to meld this definition of Maimonidean Messianism by explaining his concept of an ideal society in almost Platonic/Utopian terms as a melding of the ideal political state and perfection of spiritual society.582

For when one creates a Rabbinic Judaism such as Maimonides sought to develop, it naturally creates a Judaism that will supersede Christianity and render Jesus of Nazareth moot. For when one creates a Utopian Jewish world as Rambam sought to do through his Mishneh Torah and Guide of the Perplexed, the God of Judaism is by matter of form distant. However, the creation of a Messiah whose appearing is still uncertain—”[f]or indeed there is no definite time assigned for the appearance of the Messiah and no one can state with any assurance whether his coming will be in the near future or at some remote period”583—creates an uncertainty that many Jewish people cannot live with any longer. They will ultimately turn away from Judaism either in form, function, or in apathetic non-compliance. How could they not? For as Arthur Cohen states it—”The view which Maimonides held of the divine attributes led him to the paradoxical


582 Ibid., 222-30. To state that the dissertation completely understood Ravitzky’s argument would not be entirely truthful; however, the basis of it corresponds to all that has been communicated throughout this chapter.

583 Leon D. Stitskin, “Maimonides Letter on Apostacy: The Advent of the Messiah and Shivat Zion (Return to Zion),” Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought vol. 14, no. 2 (Fall 1973): 110. Stitskin argues that this is the first public document produced by Maimonides in c.1160. Interestingly enough, it was about the Messiah.
conclusion that the greater our knowledge of God, the less we are able to affirm of Him.” This will be revealed in greater, modern detail chapter four and an effort to develop an apologetic, evangelistic response to this spiritual crisis will be fleshed out in chapter five. It will be argued that we have no choice but to do otherwise if still we believe that “to the Jew first” has any continuing validity.

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Jewish scholars will defend the theory of negation theology to prevent the creation of a “separate deity (i.e., would lead to dualism).”\textsuperscript{585} However, I have sought to present the argument in the first three chapters that the fear is not dualism but that the “separate deity” issue is a straw man argument against the separate person of the Trinity, God the Son. I would also argue this effort to create a via Negativa God within Judaism that is intangible, indiscernible, and imperceptible to the Jewish people ultimately created a God that was useless to many of these same people at the hour of their deepest theological and spiritual needs. Therefore, this chapter will examine five specific and concrete areas, historically and sociologically, of how Maimonides’ impact on Modern Judaism negatively impacted the Jewish people and their relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The chapter will then conclude with a brief examination on how Maimonidean theology also created a vital disconnect from what is real and false as it relates to Jewish understanding of specific Christian doctrines—(1) the Incarnation of Jesus; (2) the resurrection of Jesus; (3) forgiveness/mercy/grace as a triad concept related to Christian actions; and (4) salvation and eternal life. For ultimately, this fourth chapter will serve as a springboard for the final chapter which is designed to be an apologetic response of bringing back the Jewish people back to a true Judaism and the true Messiah Jesus.

\textsuperscript{585} George Englebretsen, “The Logic of Negative Theology,” \textit{The New Scholasticism} 47 (1973): 229. The overall point of Englebretsen’s article is not to defend negative theology but he does present the point of Jewish scholarship while also point out that even many negative theologians do speak of God in a positive manner even if by accident or happenstance.
Understanding of God in Philosophy

In chapter three, it was noted how even the devoted Maimonidean biographer Ilil Arbel acknowledges the influence the Sephardic rabbi had on writers of the Enlightenment and beyond. And while I have often stated in public venues that Rabbinic (Modern) Judaism bears little resemblance to Biblical Judaism, David Biale’s statement that “Judaism as a religion is a modern invention” is an example of hyperbole; however, the question that this section will consider to some degree is by how much?\textsuperscript{586} For Biale is again correct to a degree when he argues that “secular Jewish thinkers seized these categories [of Modern Judaism], emptied of their religious meanings and filled them instead with new, secular definitions, informed by alternative traditions from premodernity: they declared their independence from the tradition in terms taken from the tradition.”\textsuperscript{587} Therefore, the question which arises if Biale is correct within the margin of error is from what tradition did many of these secular Jewish thinkers receive their impetus and thought? Biale’s response is Moshe ben Maimon, the rabbi who developed a God who “can only be worshipped by philosophers” because He “is virtually a God that does not exist.”\textsuperscript{588}

However, and despite the fact that I agree with Biale to a certain extent, this is a blanket and powerful statement to make without some measurable level of evaluation and consideration. Leo Strauss makes the argument that Maimonides’ writings, especially \textit{The Guide of the Perplexed}, was both a philosophical work and something more, something secretive and hidden. He writes that the \textit{Guide} contains both a philosophical section and a non-philosophical section


\textsuperscript{587} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{588} Ibid., 347, 348.
that is “exoteric” in nature.\textsuperscript{589} Therefore, a brief examination of Medieval Jewish philosophy is in order to determine if Biale’s premise is correct or if the observations of Biale, Strauss, and Arbel are overlapping or unique coincidences. Norbert Samuelson sets out or defines the concept of Jewish philosophy in the medieval period by combining the idea of theology and philosophy into a mutual definition based upon the ideas of Torah (compassed of both Scripture and the Talmudic literature) and philosophical thought that “was either Neoplatonic or atomistic or Aristotelian in origin.”\textsuperscript{590} The supposed goal of the Jewish medieval philosopher was to compare/contrast and present the greater case for Torah if there was conflict between the two.\textsuperscript{591} David Shatz agrees in principle with Samuelson’s definition but notes that medieval Jewish philosophy shared as much in common with the philosophic thoughts of other cultures as they did with the works of Scripture themselves.\textsuperscript{592}

This dissertation argues that this melding of religion and philosophy, especially within the Maimonidean Jewish sphere, created a dynamic that was ripe not only for the sense of the elitism that I have already discussed in the rationale for his creation of the Guide of the Perplexed but also furthered the mentality that only truly developed minds could understand the deeper messages of Scriptures that Rambam presented.\textsuperscript{593} Therefore, the question that will


\textsuperscript{591} Samuelson, “Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” 262.

\textsuperscript{592} Shatz, “The Biblical and Rabbinic Background to Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” 17, 18-19.

\textsuperscript{593} Gad Freudenthal, “The Biological Limitations of Man’s Intellectual Perfection According to Maimonides,” in The Trias of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, and Ancient Culture of Knowledge, ed. George Tamer, 178
continue to be answered throughout this section to the end of this dissertation is what does this neo-Platonic Maimonidean \textit{via Negativa} God offer to the people? Steven Katz, who writes an overarching historical narrative of neo-Platonism from Philo to the medieval period, acknowledges the difficulty which arises and concedes even if ultimately attempting to defend the logically illogical that such \textit{via Negativa} arguments become “devoid of content” because ultimately there is nothing that has meaning.\footnote{594} This sense of a Maimonidean Rabbinic Judaism being devoid of content not only in the medieval period but also in the modern ages can be realized when one simply reads the words of a Reform Jewish rabbi who finds solace in the words of Rambam that justify his invalidation of Scripture as anything but sacrosanct and pure:

\begin{quote}
Are we ready to renounce the view that Judaism is a process, a becoming, a constantly growing and evolving syndrome of beliefs and practices? That it always has been and within the purview must continue to be a compound of attitudes, some of which are permanently valid while others are transitory, hence subject to replacement? … Maimonides implored his generation to study physics as well as metaphysics if they would truly know God. When asked what he would say about the Torah account of Creation if science were one day to prove that the universe was infinite in time and therefore could have had no beginning, he responded that in that event he would be necessary to understand the Torah differently! He asserted also that every expression in the literature of Judaism which is inconsistent with reason must be interpreted as a figure of speech.\footnote{595}

This transition from a concept of a \textit{via Negativa} God to outright rejection of absolute truths did not occur within a Jewish vacuum. There were Jewish philosophic individuals in the

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Studia Judaica 30 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 137, 139, 143. The dissertation would define Freudenthal as labeling Maimonides not simply as an elitist but oligarchist in many ways for he argues that the Cairo rabbi believed that “men are unequal with respect to their intellectual potential is a matter of biology” (p. 139).


\footnote{595} Roland B. Gittelsohn, “No Retreat from Reason!,” in \textit{Reform Judaism: A Historical Perspective: Essays from the Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis}, ed. Joseph Leon Blau (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), 188-89, 192-93. It should be noted that this article is over forty years old. How much more has the descent from a general acknowledgement of Scriptural affirmation has the Reform Jewish denomination gone since then?
intervening centuries as has been hinted out in the previous chapter and in the beginning words of this section that bridged the gap from the twelfth century to today—from Spinoza to Mendelssohn to Derrida to mention only three—who illustrate the detrimental impact that Maimonidean thought has played on not simply Jewish philosophy but also on the Jewish soul.

Indeed, perhaps one of the first major Jewish scholars that should be up for discussion is Baruch Spinoza (1632-1676). A man who has been given perhaps unfairly the label of being “the first secular Jew.” However, the question which must truly be considered here is whether the via Negativa concepts perpetuated by Rambam facilitated Spinoza’s ability to ultimately reject God’s presence on an even greater level than the Cairo rabbi could even have imagined or anticipated. Biale believes so and ultimately argues that while the two philosophers were diametrically opposed on one level, they were “dialectical twins” on another. Does Biale have a point or an agenda? And if Biale has a point, the next question is then “what then hath Rambam wrought?”

As this chapter briefly considers this question from Biale of the Jewish heretic Spinoza, the dissertation is confronted not only with two diametrically opposite opinions but also whether Spinoza deserves the term Jewish heretic or simply misguided searching individual. Steven Nadler offers a list of Spinoza’s possible Jewish sins—questioning the providence of God, the perpetuity of the Torah’s obligation upon man, and wondering whether the soul continues to


597 Ibid., 349. See also, Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism: A History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Shocken Books, 1973), 301-23 (esp. 302). Guttmann writes a key statement that should be considered in the overall argument as it relates to the diametrically opposed or dialectical twins argument: “Of course, Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides, Gersonides, and Crescas, who exerted a strong and continuing influence on Spinoza, are quite distant from the latter’s pantheism.” Guttmann would argue for a both/and conclusion to the argument.
exist after death—but cannot categorically state them because they remain a mystery in many regards to this day. The first and third “sins” would be considered as errors even within a Christian milieu; however, it is the second error that deserves special attention as it is applies to the question of this dissertation and this section.

Warren Zev Harvey, an Orthodox rabbi, will find many overlaps between Rambam and Spinoza on the nature of good/evil even if there are nuances in specific considerations on the issues. The similarities relate to word choices, the question of intellectual truth as being disconnected from imagination and that Adam’s greatest sin was “his abandonment of rational knowledge.” The differences while slight in one respect are significant in that they differ on how they define evil/bad and the fact that Spinoza sees in Jesus something that Rambam refuses to acknowledge—a potential for “exalted knowledge.” However, James Diamond sees nothing in common between the two Jewish philosophers. Diamond will argue from biblical interpretation in which Spinoza had a quasi-literal approach to exegesis to the scholar from Amsterdam’s critique of Maimonidean Aristotelian philosophy, they two had nothing in common except their Jewish heritage.

Therefore, who is correct about Maimonides’ influence on Spinoza’s negation and/or naturalization of God—Biale, Harvey, Diamond? The probable answer is a composition of all

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three. Biale is approaching the question from the bias of a Jewish scholar who teaches at a state university. Harvey is an Orthodox rabbi who tries to balance Orthodoxy in a modern world. Diamond is a prolific writer on Maimonides who appears to be protective of the legacy of the rabbi. However, and given that Spinoza is known for his naturalism, the tie breaker most likely comes from an unexpected source—a naturalist theologian. Frederick Ferré who defines his version of the term as “the theoretical effort of religious persons to consider the universal bearing of the God they worship on the world at large.” Ferré argues that this concept which is also Spinozian is something that the Cairo rabbi could affirm because both approach the Creator of the universe from “universal or pervasive properties of things.” Therefore, Biale’s statement of dialectical twins is an overstatement; however, this dissertation argues on a simplistic level that Spinoza could not have developed a naturalistic concept of God that becomes the natural theology we see today without the first inklings of it coming from the mind of Maimonides.

If Spinoza was the first secular Jew to Biale, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was in many respects the first modern Jew as he provided to the Enlightenment an approach to reading the Bible that resembled the personification of Jewish rationalism. Mendelssohn’s place as one of the members of the German Jewish Enlightenment is secured because of his belief that “Judaism [is a] religion founded upon a reason alone” but who also believed on the eternality of

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601 A biographical sketch of the writers is not available in this dissertation; however, such a sketch is available if necessary.


603 Ibid., 120.

604 Biale, “Not in the Heavens,” 352. A different perspective of Mendelssohn’s story but also one that acknowledges the German Jewish scholar’s focus on reason and rationalism can be found in Guttman’s Philosophies of Judaism, 330-44.
the soul.\textsuperscript{605} However, and less well-known, is that he studied with the Maimonidean scholar Israel Samcz and wrote a commentary of Maimonides’ \textit{Treatise on Logic}.\textsuperscript{606} Therefore, James H. Lehmann has legitimacy in making the claim that Mendelssohn was “the bridge between Maimonides and the \textit{Haskalah [movement]}.”\textsuperscript{607}

Lehmann notes that the logic and rationality of Maimonides’ approach to religion and faith was the primary appeal for Mendelssohn; however, the rigidness of Rambam’s requirement for Jewish people to follow the Thirteen Principles of Faith and that non-Jews should affirm the Noahide principles were an unnecessary drawback in Mendelssohn’s appeal for an egalitarian world.\textsuperscript{608} Therefore, we find within the teachings of Mendelssohn a logical/rational conundrum for one whom Lehmann describes as wanting to always treat the Cairo rabbi with “certain reverence.”\textsuperscript{609} This would explain why the \textit{Haskalah} movement as a whole “pictured Mendelssohn as the New Maimonides” and his biographer adapted the name Rambeman to model this new representation.\textsuperscript{610} Mendelssohn and Maimonides might not have been symbiotic on all Jewish practices and concepts; however, the concepts of reason espoused by Rambam found a natural home in the German Jewish Enlightenment mind of Moses Mendelssohn. This


\textsuperscript{606} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{607} James H. Lehmann, “Maimonides, Mendelssohn and the Me‘afim: Philosophy and the Biographical Imagination in the Early Haskalah,” \textit{Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook} vol. 20, issue 1 (January 1975): 88. Lehmann (p. 87) also provides a great but succinct definition of the Haskalah movement: “The Berlin \textit{Haskalah} was the first of a number of Jewish movements in Central and Eastern Europe which sought to adapt the political and cultural situation of the Jews to the modern world of Enlightenment.”

\textsuperscript{608} Ibid., 90, 91, 92.

\textsuperscript{609} Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{610} Ibid., 101.
will become a home that will find root and flowering in Reform Judaism and its natural offshoots to be explored further and later.

If Spinoza was the first secular Jew and Mendelssohn was the first modern/rational Jew, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), the father of Deconstructionism, could be called the first ambiguously, paradoxical, and resistant Jew. A Sephardic Jew who experienced a certain level of Nazi oppression from the Vichy government that controlled their French colony of Algeria, this modern philosopher might seem out of place in the argument of Maimonides and philosophers given that there are continual questions as it relates to his Judaism, his possible Christianity, the question as to whether he has even a belief in God, and the fact there is no discernible evidence of a viable Maimonidean connection between the two philosophers. However, this dissertation argues that Derrida’s confusion, isolation, and ultimate the philosophic question he raises over the value of speech and silence are the ultimate manifestation of Jewish Maimonideanism even if Rambam’s name is never mentioned.

Steven Shakespeare writes of Derrida’s two key religious concepts that are integral to making this writer’s subtle point: (1) the modern philosopher’s Judaism is one based on rabbinic thought from the Talmud—”a tradition of reading and interpreting the Torah in the absence of any direct manifestation of God” and (2) Derrida is not a “pure atheist” but one who sees God in

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deistic terms as retreating from the world “into an inaccessible otherness.” Shakespeare sees these two notations as coming from a Kabbalistic concept which Maimonides would have rejected; however, both of these concepts ring resoundingly of thoughts coming from the Cairo rabbi. However, it should be the words of Derrida himself who settles the matter at hand. He explains in an interview with John Caputo, Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood his concept of prayer and other issues:

When I pray, I am thinking about negative theology, about the unnamable, the possibility that I might be totally deceived about my belief, and so on. It is a very skeptical—I don’t like this word, “skeptical,” but it will have to do—prayer. And yet this “skepticism” is part of the prayer. Instead of “skepticism,” I could talk of *epoché,* meaning by that the suspension of certainty, not of belief. This suspension of certainty is part of prayer… But I can’t tell if I am praying to someone invisible, to the transcendent one, or if I am praying to those others in myself that I want to address out of love and for the protection of their lives. However, and uniquely, this same negation-filled description of prayer is also compounded by Derrida’s anthropomorphic visualizations of how God might appear as He hears the scholar’s prayers. This conundrum continues as he acknowledges that within his Deconstructive prologue, “God could not be the omnipresent first cause;” however, his Jewish tradition demands that he acknowledge that the name of God “is the empty place, beyond any name.” His own deconstructionism creates a sense of bi-polar identity within himself. Names are important; however, they are not. The importance of the words of prayer are important; however, silence

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616 Ibid.

617 Ibid., 37.

618 Aryeh Botwinick, *Skepticism, Belief, and the Modern: Maimonides to Nietzsche* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 29. Botwinick is a self-proclaimed agnostic in his book; therefore, one should argue that he has an agenda. However, he writes a most intriguing statement in his book as he examines the deistic motif and
and speech are not. He identifies with Jesus and the Incarnation; however, he struggles with the concept God’s sovereignty. 619 Again, this dissertation argues that Derrida exemplifies the end result of Maimonidean theology/philosophy which offers a via Negativa God but no ultimate answers on which one can define either God or as one of the writer’s old professors used to argue the answers to “Life’s Ultimate Questions.” From Spinoza to Mendelssohn to Derrida, and countless others that we could have examined, the philosophy of Maimonides impacted Jewish thought concerning God and philosophy in negative ways from his death in 1204 until today.

**Understanding of God in General**

This dissertation has examined Maimonides’ conception of God in great detail in chapter three. Therefore, the question which this section of chapter four will seek to examine how Rambam’s via Negativa perception of the Holy One impacted and continues to Modern Judaism in two specific ways and means: (1) His presence in our lives on a personal level and (2) our ability to communicate with Him in prayer. For if one does not understand that one can know God personally, how can one worship Him as God? Deirdre Carabine can seek to defend the Cairo rabbi by arguing that ultimately via Negativa can “be a springboard into the search for unity with the transcendent;” however, she also acknowledges that without cautionary points established it can also be a rapid decline into negation negationis if it remains strictly religiously intellectual and perfunctory in its practice. 620 Rabbi Mark Solomon describes this modern influence of Maimonides’ via Negativa on future philosophers: “What Maimonides does to the word “God” (invokes a context in relation to which the meaning of the word becomes destabilized) Derrida applies to all words in natural and artificial languages. In key respects, the Maimonidean tradition of skepticism culminates in Derrida.”


dichotomy with the Sephardic rabbi and his *via Negativa* [and the corresponding silence of God that by necessity comes with it] in the most honest and refreshing of ways when he states: “The Western church, with its fondness for theological systems and definitions, have never been particularly comfortable with this, and Jews revere Maimonides far more than they understand, or even agree with him” (emphasis added). Therefore, this dissertation argues that this is exactly what Rambam has established with his *via Negativa*, especially given his disdain for God’s place in human history and the possibility of miracles being a way that God speaks to man and man speaks to God.

One of the great comforts of the Christian walk is the seeming knowledge that God is there with us on each step of this life’s journey. The poem by Mary Stevenson Zangare, “Footprints in the Sand,” has been reproduced on wallprints, cards, and everything imaginable that could be sold in Christian bookstores since it was first written in the late 1930s. Christians believe that we can know God through our relationship with Messiah Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When life hits a dark night of the soul, we can rest assured that we are not alone.

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622 Shubert Spero, “Maimonides and the Sense of History,” *Tradition* 24(2) (Winter 1989): 128, 130, 134. The dissertation has already mentioned Maimonides disdain for the miraculous; however, Spero states it more clearly when he writes two interesting pieces of information: “In short, God as the consummate pedagogue works *around* the principle of man’s freedom. In designing the Torah and guiding history, God seeks to achieve His goals by adapting the means to fit man’s range of responses” (emphasis of around was not added but was in the original text) and “At the same time he rejected apocalyptic and supernatural elements and instead ruled in accordance with those talmudic rabbis whose views were purely naturalistic.”

However, the Jewish psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm (1900-1980)\textsuperscript{624} raises a very important question/point as it relates to Maimonidean theology—“How can there be a ‘science of God’ when there is nothing one can say or think about God?”\textsuperscript{625} Can the Jewish people of today, therefore, have a dynamic and intimate present feeling of God if they are too focus on intimating God’s actions “and not of God Himself” alone\textsuperscript{626} In a desperate desire to preserve rabbinic traditions and experiences, have the rabbis of today under the continuing influence of Rambam created a God so intangible that he becomes scientific to the point of non-existence and/or agnosticism? Many Jewish scholars argue to the contrary and present a “safeguard concepts” defense;\textsuperscript{627} however, can one have a relationship with someone that one cannot feel or experience?

Shubert Spero raises further questions that he seeks to answer based on the Maimonidean principles of via Negativa, “[H]ow [can] the Torah presume to legislate love [Dt 6:5] … how can one learn to love someone like God who cannot be seen?”\textsuperscript{628} However, this dissertation argues

\textsuperscript{624} New World Encyclopedia Contributors, “Erich Fromm,” \textit{New World Encyclopedia}; accessed 26 February 2016; available online at http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Erich_Fromm&oldid=976278. Two additional items should also be noted: (1) Fromm came from an Orthodox German Jewish family and (2) he was a Talmudic scholar until he abandoned Judaism at the age of twenty-six.


\textsuperscript{626} Menachem Kellner, \textit{Maimonides on Human Perfection}, Brown Judaic Studies 202 ed. Jacob Neusner, et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 43-44. Kellner notes that Rambam does not discuss the very personal and intimate command of God from Lev 19:2b—“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,” in his halakhic works but only in his philosophical works.

\textsuperscript{627} Shubert Spero, “Is the God of Maimonides Truly Unknowable?,” \textit{Judaism: A Quarterly Journal} vol. 22, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 78. Spero presents this argument of safeguarding as a place from which both “Biblical and Rabbinic experiences [that] could be poured.” (emphasis added). This utilization of both concepts is key for understanding Spero’s argument.

that Spero is unsuccessful in his questions/arguments as the questions continue to be asked across the spectrum of Jewish thought. For example, a similar question was raised by the Jewish mystic, Zionist and first Ashkenazi Rabbi of Jerusalem, Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), who longed and fought for a return of the Jewish people to Israel as a means to forestall the religious apathy that he saw approaching in their minds and hearts.⁶²⁹ Lawrence Kaplan notes that while Rav Kook saw Rambam as a giant in the work of Halakhic scholarship, he also saw that man became distant from God when there was no ability to access Him through relationship.⁶³⁰ The twentieth-century Jerusalem rabbi sought to find a way to combine “man’s desire for God’s closeness” (i.e., affirmation) with “the spiritual movement of man’s purification of that desire” (i.e., negation).⁶³¹ However, the question that this writer asks and Spero asked in his 1983 article is such a combination possible? Can one become close and distant at the same time? If so, what kind of a relationship does one have with a family member much less than the Creator of the Universe?

Spero and Kaplan both note that Maimonides’ answer to such a question was built upon a logic that this dissertation argues would make the fictional members of the Vulcan race proud—we can grow to have an awareness of this emotion of love towards God once we have sufficiently developed our cognitive abilities of contemplation, knowledge, logic and rationalization.⁶³² However, even Spero raises the question—“But does this necessarily lead to

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⁶²⁹ Robinson, Essential Judaism, 393-95.

⁶³⁰ Lawrence Kaplan, “The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook,” Judaism: A Quarterly Journal vol. 43, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 227-28. The term “Rav” is another word for Rabbi. Other substitutes often seen are Rebbe or Reb. These substitutes are often seen in the more Orthodox and Eastern European cultures.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 228.

love? Does the recognition of wisdom in someone imply that I will love that person?" 633 This is the crux of the problem for Modern Judaism—can the matrix that Maimonides established in the twelfth century allow for a relational construct with God that permits spiritual intimacy and relationship? Or was Rambam’s intrinsic desire to build a wall against even the possibility of Jesus of Nazareth being the Messiah, much less God the Son as Incarnate God, so paramount that the edifice between the Jewish people and God called via Negativa more important?

Spero, albeit not in the terms or from the perspective that I shared, struggles with the same issues; however, he seeks to find an alternative approach for the twentieth and further centuries that I believe is unsuccessful for he continues his reliance on Maimonidean thought. Spero acknowledges the love of God towards humanity and wants the world to experience the pleasure of that love; however, the possibility that one could perceive of Jesus as being the full extension of that love as expressed in Jn 3:16 sadly is never considered by Spero. 634 Spero’s solution are found with these words: “Man need only open himself to a disinterested contemplation of these values of moral rightness or, perhaps, holiness in the Torah and to an aesthetic appreciation of nature and it will result in love for the God who is Himself these values growing into a passionate longing to draw closer to Him” (emphasis added). 635 Therefore, despite his earlier criticism of Rambam, Spero returns to the logically illogical approach of the Cairo rabbi. If one wants to have spiritual intimacy, then one must acquire knowledge and think about it long enough and then it might happen. Consequently, if it does not happen, logic states it is the fault of the individual. No wonder Erich Fromm who grew up as an Orthodox Jew but

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633 Spero, “Maimonides and Our Love for God,” 323.
634 Ibid., 327.
635 Ibid., 330.
ultimately abandoned it for a life of psychological thought writes the following: “I can understand what the Bible or genuinely religious persons mean when they talk about God, but I do not share their thought concept; I believe that the concept ‘God’ was conditioned by the presence of a socio-political structure in which tribal chiefs or kings have supreme power.”

Sadly, Fromm was conditioned first by his Orthodox Jewish faith and then by Freudian psychology, incidentally Freud who was also Jewish, to not believe in spiritual intimacy. How many other Jewish people lost their hope to know God because of similar experiences?

As a matter of personal knowledge growth, I attend sessions at the Jewish Community Center to develop my awareness Jewish thought and belief. A few years ago, I attended a session I roughly remember entitled “How to Pray as a Jew.” The Orthodox Rabbi explained the history of how these ritual prayers were created, incidentally all post-AD 70, and how the prayers gained their place in the Siddur (Jewish Prayer Book). A woman in the audience asked the rabbi the question I wanted to ask—”Can we ever just talk to God on our own?” The rabbi discouraged such spontaneous prayers as it might result in saying the “wrong” things and angering Hashem. His advice was in many ways very Maimonidean because it was simply to stick to the Siddur because it had been tested and tried over centuries—the words might be rote but they would not make God angry at you. I left the session grieving for the rabbi and all the people in attendance for I knew, from this writer’s perspective as an evangelical Christian, the greatest moments of this writer’s prayer life truly reflected the groanings of Rom 8:26.

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636 Fromm, You Shall Be As God, 1 (Kindle) and Sonsino and Syme, Finding God, 118-19.

However, it is not simply the concept of personalized prayers that is discouraged on a grand scale, it is also aside from the prescribed prayers such as the Shema that are mandated, personal prayer are also not encouraged. Maimonides himself wrote in the Mishneh Torah:

“Communal prayer is always heard by God. The Holy One Blessed be He never rejects the prayers of the many, even if there are sinners among them. Therefore, a person should always participate with a congregation and never pray alone whenever he can pray with a congregation.”⁶³⁸ And while Ehud Benor would argue that this communal approach to prayer was Maimonides’ *modus operandi* vehicle of expressing “an intellectual love for God,”⁶³⁹ Steven Schwarzchild would offer another Maimonidean approach—silence.

In a 1961 article for *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal*, Schwarzchild incorporates not only Maimonides as his model but also Jewish mystics to argue that silence is the best approach to take before the Sovereign God. His rationale for this approach could perhaps best be summarized by his own words but I will bullet-point it in this way: (1) Does God have time to bother; (2) Not praying shows how truly pious you are because it shows the level of your faith; (3) Your life cannot be really that bad if you have strength to pray; and (4) Maimonides says the best way to praise God is to be silent (Ps 65:2).⁶⁴⁰ Ultimately, Schwarzchild does grant that people must pray because we are after all human; however, his advice is not what I consider helpful either:

Pray other people’s prayers. You will appropriate them to yourself by using them and pouring your own personality into them. Do not wait until you “feel like” praying or until you know how to pray. You never will. And even if we could occasionally speak without having to use the thoughts and words of others, how

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shabby and sentimentally self-indulgent such worship turns invariably turns out to be.\footnote{Ibid., 204.}

I postulate that this approach of “preferred silence” but if necessary than followed the mandated prayers advocated by Schwarzchild is one of the primary causes as to why we find among American Jewry today that forty-five percent seldom or never pray.\footnote{Pew Research Center. “U. S. Public Becoming Less Religious: Modest Drop in Overall Rates of Belief and Practice, but Religiously Affiliated Americans Are as Observant as Before” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2015); available online at http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_full_report.pdf (page 155). This survey was of American religious beliefs as a whole; however, a subsection of the survey did include Jewish Americans.}

Therefore, if one reads Solomon Goldman attempt to explain Maimonides’ rationale for via Negativa, one is ultimately led to the reality that what Rambam wrought is the loss of what Goldman calls “pushing thought to the limit, and of attempting in words or symbols that to which there is no longer is anything corresponding in our imagination” in his twentieth-century “negative science.”\footnote{Solomon Goldman, The Jew and the Universe (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1936), 99-101 (esp. 101). Simon Rawidowicz writes that “Maimonides’ theory of God is the central pillar of his philosophical system. All the other sections of his system are either rooted in his theory of God or indissolubly connected with it.” However, this dissertation argues that he has ultimately created a God so disconnected from any sense of personal reality that he has truly created an “un-God” beyond any semblance of recognizably. Simon Rawidowicz, Studies in Jewish Thought (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974), 269.} For while Goldman might not completely agree with this writer’s analysis of his argument, this writer’s question is: can one have the ability to have truly prayed if one cannot imagine or conceive that there is someone there to hear our prayers? Or would one bother to pray if as Rabbi Harold Kushner argues that the miraculous element of God is not possible and finding the presence of God is a matter of simply “doing the right things” as much as praying to find Him in our lives?\footnote{Harold Kushner, Who Needs God (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 204 and Rifat Sonsino, The Many Faces of God: A Reader of Modern Jewish Theologies (New York: URJ Press, 2004), 188. Rabbi Kushner would} Many Jewish people have decided in the Negativa.
Understanding of the Person of Messiah

This dissertation has also examined in great detail Maimonides’ concept and description of the Messiah in chapter three. Therefore, this section of chapter four will briefly examine how his Messianic paradigm has influenced Jewish understanding and Messianic hope for today. It should be noted that there is not a monolithic belief structure among all fifteen million Jewish people living in the world today but most of them, at least those who hold to a belief in a form of God, will state that they hold to Maimonides Twelfth Principle regarding the Messiah. For example, Mayim Bialik, character actress on *The Big Bang Theory*, who also holds a Ph.D. in neuroscience, states this about her Modern Orthodox belief about the Messiah and the Messianic Age: “The concept of a messiah is a general … notion that we are partners in making the world better, in moving the world forward. The Messiah is progress, participation, suiting up and showing up for life.” Ultimately, I raise the question in the introduction to this section whether the idea of a person of Messiah is even relevant to the vast majority of Jewish people today? Yes, there is a contingent of faithful, ultra-Orthodox Jewish people working feverishly to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem but does the rest of World Jewry even care?

Joseph Saracheck in his chapter on Maimonides and his Messianic teachings writes this about the Cairo rabbi:

Upon the Jews of his own and subsequent days he has exerted a magnetic power. He is reverenced and admired as the protagonist of his race …, he codified Biblical and Talmudic laws on the basis of their underlying motives and common

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Daphna Berman, et al., “What Does the Concept of Messiah Mean Today? (Interviews),” *Moment Magazine* (March-April 2012); accessed 27 February 2016; available online at http://www.momentmag.com/what-does-the-concept-of-the-messiah-mean-today/. The writer of the dissertation has a subscription to this magazine; however, the writer thought it might prove invaluable for the opinions of the other interviewees to be accessible as well.
characteristics. He also rationalized the ceremonial disciplinary phases of Judaism as well as its theology.\textsuperscript{646}

Indeed, this is quite lofty praise for a Sephardic rabbi who traveled from Spain across Northern Africa during the apex years of the Middle Ages. However, it is ironic that while his chapter begins with such praise, Sarachek ends his chapter by noting that Rambam’s positions on eternal life would today (in 1932) perhaps “be regarded as untraditional and even heretical.”\textsuperscript{647}

However, this is the enigma that Maimonides presents for Modern Jewry. How does one respond to his categorical statements, especially as it relates to the identity and purpose and person of the Messiah? Maimonidean defenders claim that one cannot continue to be a “good Jew” if one abandons the Rambam’s definition of who can and cannot be Messiah.\textsuperscript{648} Reform rabbi David Wolpe of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles affirms a Messianic belief but one with a definite Maimonidean twist:

Today the Messiah must represent an ideal of peace whose fulfillment lies in our own hands. The age of magic formulas or mitzvot flipping the eschatological switch is past. The nobility in the messianic vision is to live so that when the Messiah comes, we will no longer need him. That may prove beyond our powers, in which case, quite literally, God help us.\textsuperscript{649}

Rabbi Phillip Sigal belonged to the Conservative Jewish denomination; but, he also struggled with the person and purpose of the Messiah. He acknowledges that apocryphal literature which pre-dates Jesus presents a Messianic figure quite different than Rambam’s figure—including the

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{646} Joseph Sarachek, \textit{The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature} (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1932), 126.
    \item \textsuperscript{647} Ibid., 161.
    \item \textsuperscript{648} Schwarzchild, “The Messianic Doctrine in Contemporary Jewish Thought,” 139. Schwarzchild goes against modern Jewish exegesis of Isaiah 53 and allows for a Messianic interpretation; however, he treads very lightly over the passage itself (p. 248-49).
    \item \textsuperscript{649} Daphna Berman, et al., “What Does the Concept of Messiah Mean Today? (Interviews),” online.
\end{itemize}
concept of a pre-existent figure and a Divine Messiah. While Rabbi Sigal would never acknowledge the truth of Messiah Jesus, he would accede that:

When one takes into consideration the long-continuing tradition of a pre-existent Messiah which requires incarnation at the appropriate time, and the various pre-Christian strands that point to an idea of divine conception and the Isaac allusions it might be considered reasonable to hypothecate that this, as in other facets of Christology expressed in the New Testament, we are dealing with elements of Judaic theology and not with original post-separation Christian concepts or Hellenistic philosophical encrustations.  

Therefore, Maimonides’ definition is not as status quo in a historical and/or theological sense within Judaism as presumed; however, many choose Rambam’s status quo over Redeemer Jesus:

- Rabbi Shlomo Riskin—”The Messiah is not a deus ex machina, a superman who flies down from the sky. He’s not even himself the great redeemer. The Messiah requires the backdrop of a world ready to receive him and to redeem itself. That’s what we are waiting for, and that’s what we must prepare for. Someone who claims to be the Messiah when there’s not peace on Earth cannot be the Messiah.”
- Rabbi Shmuley Boteach—”We need one person who will coalesce all of these disparate efforts of humanity into one powerful stream. Imagine the Messiah as a person of great wisdom, great learning, saintly authority, who could convince the world that war solves nothing. Once peace and harmony are established, the biggest beneficiaries are the Jews, because we’ve been the objects of so much violence throughout history.”
- Professor Harris Lenowitz—”Wherever there’s a problem, there could be an answer. And the messiah is the biggest answer to the biggest single question: ‘Does God care about me?’ We are lonely—Jews in particular—and we have long had evidence that God didn’t care about us or our grandparents. And so we create a messiah who is somehow heroic when we are fallible; with the Messiah, fear is of an entirely different order.”
- Shalom Auslander (author and former Orthodox)—”I think [the concept of the Messiah] is as personally useful and globally destructive as it’s ever been. It works for individuals because it gets them through the day but when it starts becoming a way that you live your life and dictating what you do and what other people should do, people tend to kill each other. If there is a messiah I suspect he’s laughing his ass off at us.”


Daphna Berman, et al., “What Does the Concept of Messiah Mean Today? (Interviews),” online. The writer recognizes that Auslander’s wording is perhaps shocking; however, this dissertation argues that it is invaluable to the point being made in this chapter and section,
Today in Israel, there exists another tension about the Messiah. During my most recent trip to the land, I had the privilege of being driven from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by Moshe the taxi driver. His family arrived in the land in the 1920s from Eastern Poland/Russia as they were truly original twentieth century Zionists. His grandfather settled the land, his father fought in the 1948 War for Independence, and his children have served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Only what appears to be either a slight case of polio or cerebral palsy prevented Moshe from taking his place in the IDF; however, he remains a staunch Zionist and defender of the land. For many Sabres (native Israelis), their effort to rebuild the land, to defend it, to bring a nation back from the dead is Messianic in its most basic and modern form.652 However, many Zionists have created for themselves a Messianic state without a Messianic belief system. Therefore, I will close this section with a series of questions: Are they violators of the biblical definition of Messianism? Yes. Are they violators of Maimonidean precepts for as I discussed in chapter three, the purpose of the *Mishneh Torah* was to serve as a form of a constitution for when the people returned to the Holy Land? Yes. Would many Zionists hold to Rambam’s Thirteen Principles of Faith? Not at all. These answers along with what has been presented throughout this dissertation sadly represent the state of Messiah in the twenty-first century not only for Israeli Jews but also for worldwide Jewry.

**Understanding of God and the Perfection of Scripture**

Growing up, the first song I remember learning was “The B-I-B-L-E.” I still have my baby dedication Bible sitting on a book shelf in my home alongside my first baby shoes. One of the rules in my childhood home that I still find myself observing is to never accidentally put a

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drink on top of a Bible lest it spill for while the book itself was not holy, the words inside represented the Word of God to humanity. Therefore, I remember in shock and horror another seminar at the Dallas JCC when an Orthodox rabbi picked up a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures and described those same words I cherish as worthless and unintelligible without someone who had proper training instructing the masses as to the meaning of the words. He then threw the Tanakh on the floor almost in disdain while he went on to pontificate almost the value of the Talmud and other Jewish works. However, should anyone be surprised by this approach and reaction? Yes, the rabbi was seeking to elicit a response from his audience; however, do not the teachings of Rambam as we have already examined encourage such an attitude, such a reaction, such a consideration?

Many Christians have read Chaim Potok’s *The Chosen* or seen the movie version starring Robby Benson. He digs deeper into the psyche of Orthodox Jewish life in such works as *Davita’s Harp* and *My Name Is Asher Lev*; but, it is the life and spiritual angst of David Lurie found *In the Beginning* that one finds the penultimate example of the conflict between Scripture and Talmud and father/son present. David wants to explore in his rabbinical studies the fertile ground of textual criticism of the Tanakh while his father wants him to “stick with the Talmud” like all good rabbinical students do. This internal conflict manifests itself even today in other ways as only eleven percent of American Jewry believe that the Torah is the literal Word of God while only roughly thirty-five percent consider Judaism as vital to their daily lives.653 The father of Modern Judaism has seemingly lost its searching child to other endeavors if the daily vitality

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of Maimonidean Halakah is lost when fifty-seven percent of American Jewry will admit freely to eating pork.\textsuperscript{654}

Another modern juxtaposition related to the Scripture with Maimonidean ties is the question of trustworthiness of the Biblical story itself. Aside from the early statistic given regarding only eleven percent of American Jewry believing the Torah is God’s Word, what did Maimonides bring to the spiritual table when he sought to meld the Mosaic account of creation with the Aristotelian approach? In other words, can \textit{ex nihilo} and Greek philosophy co-exist?\textsuperscript{655}

The Orthodox rabbi Harvey would fight against anyone who would claim that Rambam denied the Mosaic account of creation; however, he would accede that he would rebut the “vulgar notion(s) [or accounts] of creation.”\textsuperscript{656} However, one must ask what are these “vulgar notion(s) which brought out such a distaste for the Cairo rabbi? Ze’ev Levy would explain them as the anthropomorphic and/or simplistic notions found in Scripture that were placed there in essence to satisfy the simple or uncomplicated minds.\textsuperscript{657} Levy will argue that such simplistic notions allow also for both contradictions, perhaps intentionally or unintentionally, and the


\textsuperscript{655} Isaac Husik, “An Anonymous Mediaeval Christian Critic of Maimonides,” \textit{The Jewish Quarterly Review}, New Series, vol. 2, no. 2 (October 1911): 160. Husik writes: “Maimonides, as we know, was troubled by the fact that a literal understanding of the Scriptures seemed incompatible with the results derived from a study of the philosophy in vogue at the time, i.e., the philosophy of Aristotle.” Husik argues that Rambam’s approach was to not follow the literal but to rationalize so that philosophy would carry the day.


presence of a possible Godhead to be seen in the Tanakh. Evangelical Christians would agree with Levy on his second proposition but disagree with him on his first argument; nevertheless, such arguments coming from a Jewish scholar truly is shocking.

Therefore, one can see that at the core of Maimonidean philosophy regarding creation of man, Rambam might have upheld the view of *ex nihilo* but only on the most philosophic of strands. One is allowed to question whether Maimonides saw the people of Adam and Eve as real or philosophical symbols of what happens when one allows passion to become master of one’s mind. As one reads Andrew Gluck’s own philosophical analysis of the subject, one can conclude that Maimonides would have agreed with Gluck’s assessment: “Though the Bible is authoritative, it can always be interpreted allegorically when it conflicts with reason as when refers to God as being corporeal.”

However, and as I have often asked throughout this chapter, what did Rambam wrought in the modern Jewish age with this approach? While an apologist for Maimonides, Goodman still acknowledges that a modern reading of Scriptures which describes things about God that “could not be true of Him,” things that “are incompatible” about Him, and things that are incoherent and unrecognizable to His nature. The remainder of the section in his work involves Goodman attempting to explain how Maimonides’ *via Negativa* resolves the inconsistencies of Scripture; nevertheless, the presentation of the possibility that the Word of God is inconsistent and impossible to understand is present throughout Medieval and Modern Jewish thought. This

658 Ibid., 167, 168.


inconsistency creates a vacuum filled by a type of Jewish Higher Form Criticism that rejects the very essence of Torah itself. It is not simply the David Lurie’s of fiction but also the religious platform regarding faith of the Union for Reform Judaism today that we can find such vacuous thoughts of Higher Criticism:

Reform Judaism maintains faith in the Covenant between God and Israel as expressed over the generations in the teachings of an ever-evolving Torah and tradition. Stirred by the mandate of tikun olam, Reform Judaism seeks to be the living expression of those teachings. It welcomes all who seek Jewish connection to pursue a life of meaning as inspired by the Divine and proclaimed in the truths grasped by Jewish teachers throughout time. (emphasis added)

This concept of an “ever-evolving Torah and tradition” has allowed for a Jewish world that is spinning out of control as there is no Scriptural anchor on which to hold. There is no anchor this dissertation argues that because Maimonides would not allow for a literal reading of the text because such a reading might draw the people to the truth of Messiah Jesus—a drawing he could not allow.

Understanding of God in Light of the Holocaust (Suffering/Evil)

His name is Josef Hausner. I met him on 11 January 2000. He is the first Holocaust survivor I ever met face-to-face. Since then I have become friends with five other survivors—William, Rosalie, Agnes, Vera, and Jack—all of whom have a large piece of my heart but it all begins and ends for me in many ways with Josef. He was a lonely man living in a luxurious Manhattan apartment but who had watched his mother shot before his eyes as they were being boarded for a train ride to humanity’s version of hell from their hometown in Romania. He was a

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663 Faith Statement of the Union for Reform Judaism; Available online at http://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/what-reform-judaism.
lost man who was confronted with an empty synagogue when he returned from Poland in 1945 as his wife and children were nothing but ashes now. He was a now agnostic ex-rabbi who had given up on God because no one from his synagogue returned from the camps. In the early decade of the twenty-first century, he would occasionally visit the Manhattan women’s Bible study led by the idealistic Texas Jewish missionary who fought desperately for his soul until his dying day on 17 January 2002. To this day, I do not know where Josef’s soul resides in eternity even though his body resides on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem and this is why almost word in this section is written with my sweet and dear Josef Hausner in mind.

Many Christians and churches are unaware of the long history of anti-Semitism and virulent hatred directed toward the Jewish people throughout history that truly has only been summarily discussed in the pages of the dissertation. I was once again reminded of this reality as I walked through the streets of Cordoba, the birthplace of Maimonides, when I came up to the most disturbing crosses of my life, which represent a disgusting and depraved period of Christian anti-Jewish bigotry. The cross known as La Cruz del Rastro represents the massacre of Jewish Conversos and traditional Jews in 1473 who were slaughtered during Easter Week. Several crosses, with the last one in 1927, have been erected since to commemorate the event. Perhaps it was the heat of July in Spain, but I was overwhelmed by this event and Chaucer’s bigotry in Canterbury Tales, Shakespeare’s caricature of Shylock in Merchant of Venice and all the other events throughout “good Christian history” at that one very real but horrible anti-Semitic moment.

664 More information on La Cruz del Rastro and the massacre itself is available online at http://www.redjuderias.org/google/google_maps_print/cordoba-en.html.

However, it is not only Christians like the writer of this dissertation who struggle with the reality of evil, suffering and the penultimate moment of the Holocaust but also and obviously the Jewish people themselves. Daniel Cohn-Sherbok examined the writings of eight leading Jewish scholars in a 1989 work entitled *Holocaust Theology* about the theological meaning of the Holocaust, including the purpose of evil and suffering, and discovered that each scholar rationalized a different meaning and purpose to the period. No scholar could answer the core questions in a satisfactory manner—Where was God? Why did it happen? Was there a purpose to it all? From where did all this evil come?666

The question of the origination of evil is relevant in both Jewish and Christian circles? Did God create evil as it appears to imply in Isaiah 45:7—’’The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.” Harry Blumberg states that Maimonides fought against such an interpretation because while He did create matter, it is matter that allows itself to be “the cause of all corruption and evil.”667 Therefore, man because we are a subject of matter became corrupt in the mind of Rambam when we became obsessed with the things of good/evil and not the higher ideals of truth/falsehood.668 Consequently, it could be argued that the Cairo rabbi would argue that humanity is the creator of his own evil—an idea that would hold merit within some Christian thought. However, the

666 Daniel Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology* (London: Lamp Press, 1989). Cohn-Sherbok has since revised his original work under the title as *God and the Holocaust* and written a new and expansive work under the title, *Holocaust Theology: A Reader.* While the dissertation writer has not read the new work, she found something raw and visceral about the original work. From the bitter pain of Elie Wiesel to the disdain for God by other writers, the loss and confusion that one could read on the page was palatable and gut wrenching.

667 Harry Blumberg, “Theories of Evil in Medieval Jewish Philosophy.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972): 153

668 Harvey, “Maimonides and Spinoza,” 133 and Berman, “Maimonides on the Fall of Man,” 8.
difference lies in two areas: (1) the concept that miracles can still occur within Christendom and (2) the categorization of evil that Maimonides affirmed.

Theodicy is in essence a study of the theology of suffering and evil in the world. Alvin Reines describes Maimonides’ theodicy as “his vindication of the justice and goodness of God as the creator or ground of a universe in which there appears to be injustice and other evils.” The problem many in the Jewish community and the greater world at large would have with a cursory reading of Reines’ definition and the assumption that he accurately reads Rambam correctly is the word “appears.” The pogroms of nineteenth century Russia, the Crusades, and the barbarous selections which led to the human ashes found in the Auschwitz gas chambers did not give the inference of appearance but actually happened and they were unjust and evil. Indeed, the teachings of Rambam are taught in synagogues today and the rabbis teach that Biblical miracles are not to be understood as either literal or real. In fact, Howard Kreisel emphatically states that the Cairo rabbi would argue that if they had occurred that they “were [simply] a product of the Deity’s impersonal governance of mankind.” It is no wonder then that I once heard an older Jewish man respond with “He was taking a nap,” when asked the immortal question, “Where was God during the Holocaust years?”

However, it is his categorization of evil that seems out of reality in this modern world. Evil is the “lack of perfection,” “the absence of wisdom” and can be resolved with enough education and training in the Law/Torah. One also questions as will be illustrated shortly how

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the Jewish people today, especially in light of what they experienced since Rambam’s day, can still hold to this particular Maimonidean teaching on evil and sin. For as Rabbi Norman Saul Goldman illustrates, Rambam held to the view that sin is a disease “of the soul” rather than being “an ontological characteristic” (i.e., people are not born evil or what we call in Christian circles “Original Sin”).

However, and ultimately, it is what Blumberg writes about Maimonides view concerning man’s selfishness of his own pain that might possibly explain why and how Jewish people are turning away from Modern Judaism and often toward nothing at all:

Such people are of the opinion that evil and suffering in this life far exceed the good things. The reason for this error is that such people think only of themselves as occupying important places in the universe and are blind to the fact that they are very insignificant and infinitesimal in comparison with the rest of the universe, … If man suffers and evil befalls him, it is due to imperfections arising out of his matter, and man alone is the cause of his own misfortunes.

Therefore under this Maimonidean structure/stricture, the call by David Blumenthal for Judaism to create a “theology of protest” by which survivors can confront or “address God, face to Face, presence to Presence” would never be considered and healing would never begin. While the concept of considering God as abusive or blaming Him in light of the Holocaust might and should be considered as extreme, Blumenthal utilizes this approach as a means to reconnect and not disconnect the person to a relationship with God.

Consequently, Christianity indeed can offer the greatest hope to this burden that has become unnecessarily cumbersome. The image of Jesus on the cross corresponds to suffering on

672 Ibid., 8


675 Ibid., 257.
the grandest of scales. Chaim Potok as an Orthodox Jew understood this reality in his work My Name is Asher Lev and we must share this hope (as I will expand upon in the final chapter). For this writer’s heart continues to break as she ponders these words from the second- and third-generation descendants of survivors (note the despondency of so many of the rabbis):

- Rabbi Moshe Waldoks—”Ultimately the Shoah has become a projection of our own inclinations and political tendencies. The fact, however, is that the Shoah has no intrinsic meaning.”
- Rabbi Dov Lipman—”Only God could ensure this remarkable turnaround from my ancestors’ downtrodden trek to their slaughter to my upstanding march to that very same spot declaring that the Jewish people are alive and well.”
- Rabbi Michael Marmur—”We are witnesses to God and humanity, and that call to witness is not predicated on assurances of reward in this world or the next.”
- Aliza Olmert—”The secular social contract was shaped by the fathers of secular Zionism, with the kibbutz and the youth movements providing inspiration. We lived by a code of positive and negative mitzvoth that was broadcast from the centers of that secular Zionist ethos.”
- Joseph Berger—”Ultimately, after wrestling with these supreme questions I can’t give a cogent explanation as to why I pray to a God whose existence I would not try to argue for or whose management I often question.”
- Peter Singer—”The Holocaust gives us sufficient reason to reject the possibility of the existence of God, or at least of a God worthy of our prayers and worship.”
- Rabbi Mordechai Liebling (Reconstructionist)—”Since childhood I have been unable to believe in an omnipotent, omniscient God. No such God could exist and allow this to happen.”
- Chaim Reiss—”One should never criticize or look down on anyone who went through the Shoah and lost faith in God.”676

**Understanding of Specific Christian Doctrines**

In my sixteen years as a Jewish missionary/evangelist, I have come to two inevitable conclusions: (1) Jewish people as a whole cannot differentiate the nuances and differences in

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Christian denominations and (2) despite two thousand years of church history the intricacies of major church doctrines are a confusing maze for most Jewish people. This section will attempt to provide not only examples of both conclusions but also illustrate how Maimonidean (Modern) Judaism has suffered by not realizing that true Christian is not in competition with Judaism but we are truly the fulfillment of Biblical Judaism.  

Incarnation

A few years ago, I was returning from a trip to Israel when I pulled aside for special screening. The young woman who had just finished her two years in the IDF and had now been assigned to Ben Gurion Airport was lovely, friendly, and typical of most young native Israelis, an agnostic. After a five-minute inspection of my suitcase and determining that I was not a threat, she still had to remain with me until I was released to my gate. We began to discuss (intentionally on my part) my relationship with Messiah Jesus and she became fascinated to learn that not all Christians were Catholic because she was under the impression that this was a requirement. She also was shocked to discover that not all Christians pray to Mary. While not going into my opinion of the aberrant concept known as Theotokos, I explained that I viewed Mary as a wonderful woman who chosen to be the mother of God the Son, but that was also a sinner in need of Messiah as we all are. She was amazed as this was the first time this view was ever explained to her—and she lives only miles from Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

However, such concepts as the Incarnation and the divinity/deity of Jesus are difficult concepts for many Christians to truly grasp as well. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that

677 Novak, “The End of the Law,” 35. Novak writes, “Indeed, the case can be made that much Jewish self-understanding can be seen as the Jewish attempt to further distinguish Judaism from Christianity, especially in the face of repeated Christian attempts to absorb Judaism into itself by claiming Christianity to be fulfillment of Judaism.”
the physical descendants of Jesus, especially given the misinformation coming from Rabbinic Judaism, would truly struggle with the idea of Incarnation.\textsuperscript{678} Michael Wyschogrod in one of the most and transparent Jewish admissions of the struggle points to two historical causes for this tension among his own people: (1) the continuing fear remaining from the pre-Babylonian captivity days of becoming polytheistic and (2) the drumbeat influence of Maimonidean teachings. Additionally, Wyschogrod admits that Rambam’s influence has hampered the debate regarding Incarnational issues in Judaism today.\textsuperscript{679} This issue of the Incarnation is crucial for Jewish people today because it is not simply the question of whether Jesus could be Messiah but whether or not Jesus could be God Himself.\textsuperscript{680}

As a Jewish scholar attempts, Randi Rashkover, explain the concept of a Jewish Incarnation by utilizing the active Jewish engagement with the Torah as the fulfillment of an Incarnational reality; however, she also allows for Jesus to be the Incarnational reality for Christians.\textsuperscript{681} In other words, she attempts as my grandparents would say to have her cake and eat it as well as the epitome of a dual covenantalist. As a non-believing Jewish, Elliot Wolfson scholar offers an intriguing counter-point to Rashkover’s argument as he acknowledges the existence of what one would call in Christian circles theophanies in the Hebrew Scriptures as


well as recognition of those events in rabbinic traditions.\textsuperscript{682} Therefore, the concept of a non \textit{via Negativa} God is not impossible with Judaism but allowable;\textsuperscript{683} Therefore, while Christianity is not anthropomorphic in formulation it is interesting that Wolfson sees such a possibility in existence.

However, such a compromise of Incarnational reality on the part of both Rashkover and Wolfson compromises truth on both sides of the covenantal aisles. As an evangelical Christian, I have the uncompromising truth of Jn 14:6 and Acts 4:12 as well as missional commands of Isaiah for the Jewish people to be a light to the nations. How is this eternally possible for anyone if there are two incarnational realities? Ultimately, and what Rashkover does not yet recognize, is that she has stumbled upon the truth of the Incarnation. Jesus is the Incarnate God and He is living embodiment of Torah as well. Jn 1:1 tells us this basic truth—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
Such a truthful stumbling by the Jewish people is still possible today as it was for one of the most prominent Jewish scholars of the second century—Simeon Ben Zoma. According to Samson Levey, the Babylonian Talmud changed their lofty status of Ben Zoma from being a genius to insane. By all accounts, this change over allusions to the possibility of a virgin giving birth and statements that one could assume are Trinitarian to nature. While references to Simeon Ben Zoma are still found in the Talmud, they are found almost in quiet whispers because many do not want to believe someone like Simeon could believe in the Incarnational truth of Messiah Jesus but by all accounts he did and it is still possible for Jewish people to believe as well.684

Resurrection

One of the most unique and affirming books defending the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was written by Rabbi Pinchas Lapide, a Jewish scholar who did not believe in the Messiahship of Jesus. In one way he followed the argument the Maimonidean argument that Jesus’ presence would eventually bring the Gentiles to a complete awareness of the Jewish God; however, in another way he argued that Jesus was uniquely the Messiah for the non-Jewish people of the world. However, what he refused to deny was that Jesus of Nazareth most definitely rose from the dead and that His resurrection was a Jewish event occurring in a Jewish timeframe to a Jewish audience.685

The question of Jesus’ resurrection for Maimonides in the Medieval period and even today for Jewish scholars is not quite so simple as it is for Rabbi Lapide. As has already been noted, Maimonides desired that Jesus’ bones be “ground to dust” so it obvious that he


countenanced no possibility of Jewish resurrection for the prophet from Nazareth. Other Medieval Jewish scholars appear to avoid the subject of resurrection of Jesus in large part as they seek to focus on why Jesus could not be the Messiah because he did not bring about the earthly Messianic kingdom that Maimonides and other scholars so longed to see. However, and what was interesting in this article in this article by McMichael, is that Medieval Christian scholars sought to bring the subject back to resurrection and the Jewish scholars appear to what to ignore it altogether. The arguments appeared to be as the old cliché describe it as “two ships passing in the night” and today they seem to still be passing. The argument keeps arising but neither side seems to focus on the core issue—did Jesus arise or not? Indeed, when I bring the subject of Lapide’s argument and book up to other rabbis, they quickly seek to deflect to other issues. It as if the question of whether the greatest miracle of all time occurred or not is verboten to be discussed. One cannot blame Maimonides solely for this silence as there has been Jewish critics of the Maimonidean view of naturalism and rationalism as it relates to the miraculous since Rambam’s death; however, the question of the Messiah arising from the dead and bringing the Kingdom in an “already but not yet” concept is not conceivable as a topic for discussion. It as if such a discussion opens up a fearful wound/vacuum that Lapide’s book dared to consider but is not be touched by many.


688 Ibid.

Forgiveness/Mercy/Grace

One of the more consternating actions that I can take towards the anti-missionaries that often love to spew some of the vilest accusations against me is to extend words of forgiveness, mercy, and grace towards them. They simply do not understand how I can pray for them, forgive them, and love them, especially after they said and attempted to do some horrible things to me. When I attempt to explain to them that I do these actions because of the forgiveness/mercy/grace that I have been granted by Messiah Jesus, they are simply befuddled as this is outside of the confines of Rabbinic Judaism they understand.690

Perhaps this misunderstanding is caused by a literal reading of an “eye for an eye” or because of the perceived need to defend to “defend their territory” against the perceived threat of Jewish evangelism. Jewish missions is considered a threat, and one that has been instigated by some self-seeking rabbis, because they argue we are seeking to finish what Hitler began. However, I would also argue is it because of a misunderstanding created by what Rabbi Kellner defines as what it means for the righteous to live by faith in Hab 2:4.

Rabbi Kellner argues that Paul develops the argument in Rom 1:16-17 that Habakkuk was illustrating that we can never be righteous enough for salvation except through the grace of God and that it is our faith in the forgiveness and mercy of Messiah that we can have hope. The rabbi is absolutely correct in his understanding of the Pauline argument.691 However, the

690 The dissertation struggled to explain this thought process until the following article appeared in my email inbox—Abra Forman, “Chief Rabbi: It Is a Mitzvah to Kill Terrorists,” Breaking Israel News (13 March 2016): available online at http://www.breakingsraelnews.com/63469/chief-rabbi-it-is-a-mitzvah-to-kill-terrorists-jewish-world/. The article cites a rabbinic teaching BT Berakhot 58a which states: “If a man comes to kill you, rise early and kill him first.” I have been told that Jewish evangelism is a form of murder; therefore, what is done to me is justifiable.

Maimonidean and modern Jewish belief is tied to the 613 commandments and the Thirteen Principles of Belief. One is “redeemed” not by forgiveness/mercy/grace by recognizing one’s inability to be good enough but by seeking and/or striving to obey laws that are impossible to achieve. It is impossible to obey today not only because many of the 613 commandments relate to Temple observance but also because of the “fence” that has also been added as a safety measure against accidental disobedience.

Is 64:6 (verse 5 in the Jewish Publication Bible) states—“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” This is not a verse that is commonly read or commented on in Rabbinic Jewish circles today because it confronts a very hard truth—no one can achieve the Maimonidean call for perfection that is required to achieve acceptance by God that the Cairo rabbi expects but God himself knows is impossible. In fact, I once asked a rabbi about this verse and he was unfamiliar with it and asked me if it was in the Christian Bible. This verse reminds both Christian and Jew that forgiveness/mercy/grace are needed and it is possible only through one individual; however, the Jewish people are unaware in large numbers of this possibility.

Salvation and Eternal Life

On my last trip to Israel, I drove from Jerusalem to meet with a highly educated Orthodox Jewish woman living near Nazareth. We are developing a friendship that is based on honest and transparency. She states that she is “unconvertible” and she knows that my fervent prayer is that she will one day become a believer in Messiah Jesus. In fact, one of my last statements before I left her place near Nazareth was that she would one day love Jesus (i.e., have a relationship with)

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692 Ibid., 272-74.
as I do. To this day, we are still friends despite our spiritual differences regarding Jesus and our understanding as it relates to salvation and eternal life. However, the key to understanding the difference between my Nazareth friend is not simply whether or not she believes in Jesus or not but also what she understands about the concept relating to salvation, redemption and eternal life.

David Hartman who is a Jewish scholar offers two models of Jewish redemption/salvation from the teachings of two medieval scholars. One is obviously Maimonides and the other is the more mystically-minded Nahmanides. The Nahmanides model is the based on the God-involved premise of the Exodus motif in which God involves in freeing the slaves from bondage while the Maimonides model is based on the erudite focus of Sinai in which deistic God of the universe offers the Torah and the people are to live up to the expectations he establishes.693 Nahmanides considers the example of Jer 31 of God offering to engrave a new covenant on the heart of man as an illustration of preemptive engagement of God engaging actively in the lives of humanity but neither the medieval scholar nor Hartman engage in the possibility that this Jer 31 illustration could be prophetically illustrative of Messiah Jesus.694 Instead Hartman seeks to meld the two scholars in the form of a common ground of understanding and ultimately ends up missing the point for Jewish people then and today as it relates to salvation and redemption. Hartman seeks to have his Nahmanides feelings of God and Maimonides legalistic observance of Torah but how can the twain ever meet?

Additionally, many in the ecumenical community today seek to follow Hartman’s approach by having a Christian God of compassion and a Jewish Adonai of Torah? Maureen Fritz, who seeks to redefine the Incarnation in such a way that strips it of any meaning


694 Ibid., 376-77.
whatsoever for either Judaism or Christianity, does so in such a way that defines the redemption of humanity that limits God’s role to what man allows Him to do. Incidentally, Fritz is a Roman-Catholic; however, she takes her rational for this approach from Jewish scholarship—Rabbi Akiba to Rabbi Eliezer to midrashes to Kabbalah.

Therefore, this opens up a two-fold question: (1) what is the path to salvation for the Jewish people today and (2) does Judaism truly understand the Christians means of redemption? There is no salvation through the sacrifices of the Temple given that it was destroyed in AD 70. Additionally, Maimonides, who argued for the necessity of the renewal of the sacrificial system when the Temple was eventually restored during the Third Temple Period, believed sacrifices served as “sin-offerings” and were to be used as symbolic procedures for the securing of “atonement.” However, many modern Jewish people today recoil from the thought of reinstituting a sacrificial system as anathema and anti-PETA. Therefore, the question which naturally arises among many people—what about today? How do Jewish people receive atonement and/or redemption today?

Rabbi Kellner, who has been cited extensively in this dissertation, takes this question one step further and points out that Maimonides argues that his Thirteen Principles of Faith are the bottom line philosophies for which a Jewish soul must believe in order to attain a place in the World to Come. Apparently, Rambam determined within himself the right to establish a


696 Ibid.


dogmatic creed above and beyond the Torah (Levitical Law) which today many Jewish people follow. Others choose not to follow either because they do not believe in an afterlife or they have created a way of their own devices; nevertheless, redemption/salvation and eternity have become in many cases a device of their own making for the Jewish people today.

To answer the second question, one often hears from a Jewish person that we as Christians only have to state that Jesus is the Messiah. Jehuda Melber in attempting to explain Hermann Cohen’s Jewish systematic theology separates the Trinity into a duality and argues that we must believe in both God and Jesus as if they were separate divine individuals. Neither statement is accurate; however, many Christians and churches sadly could not do much better.

Therefore, a final question arises for me and one that I have asked more than one rabbi—if Jesus is not the Messiah for the Gentiles and salvation is not possible through Him for me, why are you not telling me how to go to heaven via Judaism? Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz of Jews for Judaism cited to me the historical dangers of Jewish proselytism of Christians as one reason; however, he became befuddled when I asked him if he did not love me enough to risk persecution for my eternal soul? The growing push of Noahidism is an approach; however, the question is still a thorn in the flesh for many Jewish people? If Judaism is the truth—why is it so exclusive? Eugene Korn traces the history of many Jewish people who sought to find a way around Maimonidean thought and ultimately rejected it and/or rewrote it for a modern age.

However, and ultimately, I would like to turn the argument around to us in the Christian church

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because Jn 14:6 is truly exclusive and yet we as Christians have failed to share the exclusively inclusive truth of Messiah Jesus with his physical brothers and sisters. Why? Perhaps it is because we are just as guilty as the Jewish people of not completely understanding our path of salvation.

**Chapter Summation**

This chapter has sought to examine the core question of what Maimonidean theology has wrought in the heart and minds of the Jewish people as it relates to modern theological Judaism, six key areas. This dissertation has examined the modern concepts of the following: (1) understanding of God in philosophy; (2) understanding of God generally; (3) a broad consideration of the person of the Messiah in the twenty-first century; (4) understanding of the truth or validity of the Tanakh based upon a perspective of God; (5) understanding of a relationship with God based upon the concept of theodicy; and (6) four general but specific Christian doctrines—the Incarnation, resurrection, forgiveness/mercy/grace, and salvation and the perspective of eternal life.

What this dissertation has attempted to illustrate through each of these of these sections is that Maimonidean thought has created a morass, a confusion, and ultimately a veritable quagmire of thoughts and opinions that the Jewish cliché, “two Jews, three opinions,” is not just an adage but a fact. Rambam’s rationalism and desire for reason opened the door philosophically for Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Derrida to name only three. This rationalism and via Negativa God created a separation as it relates to the issue of praying to God or identifying the Messiah or believing one is even possible in the twenty-first century. This dissertation has also sought to show that faith in the Torah has been shaken to the core as the Cairo rabbi found more “truth” in
the Talmud than in the Word of God and this led to a distance in understanding or empathizing with the concept of evil/suffering and the personal nature of God.

Therefore, and with all of these Jewish concerns established, the Jewish people are also naturally confused as it relates to core Christian doctrines and teachings. One primary example among all that are discussed in this chapter is the issue of the Incarnation. Given that they do not have a strong Biblical basis and foundation, the possibility of a pre-Incarnate appearance of Jesus in the Tanakh is a still taboo even though modern Orthodox scholar Michael Wyschogrod is willing to consider discussing it.702 Other core Christian doctrines such as the idea of “turning the other cheek” and “not returning evil for evil” that the dissertation has classified as forgiveness/mercy/grace were also highlighted in this chapter in perhaps more of an anecdotal fashion; however, this dissertation has illustrated how these have been misunderstood by some within the Jewish faith as something that they are not rather than what they truly represent. Additionally, this dissertation is not alone from the purview of the dissertation’s writer. Michael Marmur utilizing the personal writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, argues that the rabbi marched with Martin Luther King across the bridge at Selma expressed discomfort with the rigid rationalism and lack of empathy of the Cairo rabbi.703

Ultimately, however, it is the core issue of salvation that resides as the great stumbling block between Christianity and Judaism. A stumbling block which this writer has argued throughout this dissertation that lies not simply with one verse in 1 Corinthians but truly at the


feet of a twelfth-century Sephardic Jewish philosopher. His desire to create an anti-Christian apologetic, a Jewish barrier/wall of his own design if I might argue, because of his desire to create an *via Negativa* God that separated the relatives of Jesus and the reality of Messiah Jesus.\(^{704}\) It is time for the consideration to end and for it now to be confronted.

\(^{704}\) Eliyaho Krakowski, “What Must a Jew Believe: Dogma and Inadvertent Heresy, Revisited,” *Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* vol. 20 (Winter 2015): 91-98. Krakowski does not consider the possibility of anything but a Maimonidean perspective when he writes the following: “Contra [Menachem] Kellner, all medieval authorities accept that Judaism requires belief in specific doctrines (‘faith that’), because absent acceptance of the defining principles, the faith one ‘believes in’ is not Judaism.” (emphasis added)
CHAPTER 5

Development of an Apologetic Approach for Evangelism among the Jewish People in Light of Maimonidean Influence

As the writer begins this final chapter of a dissertation that has stretched literally across two millennia, it is important to bring the focus back to the dissertation question. The writer’s original question was whether a Sephardic rabbi who was forced from his Spanish home as a child required/encouraged/implored/cajoled the Jewish people to abandon the possibility of a personal, intimate relationship with the God of Judaism because of a fear that it also would lead them to a personal relationship with the Jewish carpenter known as Jesus of Nazareth (aka the Messiah). I have sought to show through a historical narrative of Christian history, a historical pilgrimage of Moshe ben Maimon’s own life and writings, and the subsequent consequences of the Cairo rabbi’s teachings on Modern Judaism that the answer is yes.

However, in this writer’s own journey of Rambam’s teachings and life, she has also discovered additional information about the rabbi. Maimonides’ thoughts and precepts conflicted with not only Rabbinic Judaism but also with his own views about God and Judaism itself. For how could he say that “All Israel have a share in the World to Come” at the conclusion of his Thirteen Principles of Faith,⁷⁰⁵ while at the same time threaten any who oppose his teachings with this statement: “A person who separates himself from the congregation of Israel and does not fulfill mitzvot together with them, does not take part in their hardships, or join in their [communal] fasts, but rather goes on his own individual path as if he is from another nation and

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⁷⁰⁵ Moses Maimonides, *Pirkei Avot with the Rambam’s Commentary including Shemoneh Perakim*, 155. The exact placement of this statement is in his introduction to the tenth chapter of the Sanhedrin tractate, *Pereq Heleq*. 
not [Israel], does not have a portion in the world to come? How could he argue for
Aristotelian rationalism while at the same time arguing for the purity of Jewish faith? How could
he argue that one could know God while at the same time advocating a God that is so remote and
distant that relatively modern Jewish philosophers such as Spinoza, Mendelssohn and Derrida (to
name only three) could advocate a form of his via Negativa even though they themselves could
be classified as holding a marginally deistic form of theism?

This is why the dissertation writer approaches this last chapter of the dissertation with
both trepidation and hopefulness. Eight hundred years of Maimonidean influence on the Jewish
people has left a mark of religious marginalization to the God of Israel that must be breached;
however, it cannot be opened casually and/or in the traditional means that many Jewish-Christian
mission organizations have tried over the last decades. It must be considered in light of the sway
and power that Rambam continues to have on Rabbinic Judaism and it must be considered
carefully as we the Christian church are not only asking Jewish people to consider something
that is considered taboo but also in many ways anathema when we ask them to believe in Jesus
the Jewish (and Gentile) Messiah.

Therefore, this chapter will consider as a beginning point three specific aspects in
developing an apologetic approach for evangelism among the Jewish people: (1) the return of
Biblical Judaism through a minimum of three theological aspects—the possibility of the
Incarnation, the reality of miracles, and the nature of redemption; (2) a comparison of
Maimonidean thought as opposed to the truth of Jesus’ teachings; and (3) the restoration of the
concept of community to Christian thought as a means to draw Jewish people home to Jesus.
Each of these three areas will be explained in greater detail in this chapter as well as their

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706 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book One: Knowledge (Teshuvah), Ch. 3, sec. 11.
relationship to the rabbi from Cairo who died over eight hundred years but whose legacy is ever present in the teachings of rabbis who still lead synagogues today.

**Return Minimally Three Aspects of Biblical Judaism to the Jewish People**

One of the primary focuses that I have sought to stress in this dissertation is that we should recognize the difference between Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism. The Biblical Judaism of the Torah, the writings and the prophets is what Messiah Jesus affirmed in Lk 24:44—"Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled,’” is not the same as the Rabbinic Judaism that is practiced today. I detailed the formation of Rabbinic Judaism that was authorized by Rabbi Judah the Prince in chapter two but I maintain that it reached its zenith and/or greatest reality through the writings and teachings of the Sephardic rabbi living in Egyptian exile, Moshe ben Maimon (see chapters three and four).

The Canadian Jewish scholar James Diamond would affirm this writer’s premise while granting that that the legacy of Rambam has weathered some rocky periods since his death in 1204. Phrases such as “the positions he took on matters crucial to Jewish existence and the practice of Judaism seminally influence the evolution of Jewish thought, worship, and observance ever afterward” and “[h]e augmented (or, some might say, encumbered) Judaism with a new fundamental credo, which quickly became sacrosanct,” and his works “achieved a canonical status in Judaism” are statements that can found in just the first two pages of his work *Maimonides and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon.*[^707] However, it is Diamond’s observation that

[^707]: James A. Daimond, *Maimonides and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1, 2 (the third statement was found in a footnote). Diamond utilizes as an introductory quote a statement from Isaac Husik’s 1941 *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* that is worthy of note even if it is utilized as a secondary source: “In the post-Maimonidean age all philosophical thinking is in the nature of a commentary on Maimonides whether avowedly or not.”
Rambam was masterful at “reappropriat[ing] … a biblical verse or rabbinic adage leave a new textual legacy for the ongoing development of Jewish thought” that most adequately illustrates in this writer’s opinion his ability of co-opting Biblical texts to eliminate the possibility of a personal God and the truth of Jesus’ Messiahship.708

This ability or what the writer would more truly describe as a legacy explains how even to this day, the mere discussion of possible diversion from his path will lead to charges of heresy in some circles of Orthodox Judaism.709 The fear of being labeled a heretic can truly be traced back not only to the warnings in the Mishneh Torah but also in some of his lesser known writings such as his “Treatise on the Unity of God.” In this treatise, Rambam writes about the characteristics of true prophets; however, the implicit warning that he gave to the people ought to be grasped as well:

> And he should instruct the people to serve the Lord, may He be praised, and [to believe in] His unity and to reject Divine plurality. He must, in general, command [the people to do] good, which leads to the ultimate success, and warning them against doing evil, which would prevent it. **We are obligated to accept [such a prophet] at all times** since his teachings do not contradict any of the fundamental principles of the Torah of Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, **and these are thirteen fundamental principles that we have mentioned.** (emphasis added)710

Though Josef Wohlmuth attempts to make an intriguing argument about the differences between Jewish thought and Christian theology,711 the dissertation writer again contends that today’s

708 Ibid., 5.


711 Josef Wohlmuth, “Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought as a Challenge to Christian Theology,” trans. Michael Parker, in Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today: Theology in Global Dialogue, ed. Norbert Hintersteiner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 389-409. Wohlmuth’s primary argument is that Christianity is dependent upon Judaism (which it is) for its existence; however, he as well confuses Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism.
Judaism is not and can never be the Biblical Judaism that was given to Moses and the other prophets, including the sheepherder and the husband of a harlot, as it was realized and fulfilled (Matt 5:17-20) by Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, it is implicit upon this section to examine three aspects of Biblical Judaism that we can return to the Jewish people that might also allow them to offer to a personal, intimate relationship with God through Messiah Jesus.

Theophanies and the Incarnation

It is disingenuous for S. Daniel Breslauer to write in one section of A Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue the following statement: “Christians, on the other hand, often fail to realize that Jews do have access to a close, intimate relationship with God,”712 when Marc Angel writes in a separate section:

Maimonides attempted to give reason supremacy over revelation, although he fully accepted the truths taught through revelation. For Maimonides, a prophet gained his position through the perfection of his intellectual faculties … While Judaism is based on revelation, there has been a tendency to play down the role of personal revelations. There is a fear that individuals may espouse absurd opinions or engage in improper behavior—claiming that they do so at God’s command. Since revelation to an individual can never be proven objectively, much confusion and evil can occur by giving credence to everyone who claims to have had a special revelation.713

Which is the real truth within Rabbinic Judaism today? Can one have a personal, intimate relationship with God or is a Jewish person restricted from advocating or proclaiming personal experiences out of fear that their proclamations will be construed as histrionic at best or evil at worst? Barry Holtz as a Jewish man who does not believe in Jesus but who wants to believe in

Consequently, his entire argument falls on this basic premise. Additionally, he incorporates the arguments of Derrida into his overall scope which is unusual because very few modern writers except this writer have.


God struggles with this very question. He even asks is he allowed to believe in the God of the Torah that was present and real, Jeremiah’s God that was present but difficult, the Maimonidean God that was rational but present in the negative sense or no God at all since even this perspective is allowed in Modern Judaism. One can note that nowhere in this listing by Holtz is the option of the God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit an option because the Jewish people have taught that it is an impossibility for Judaism. However, this writer’s question is simply, is it?

In Jn 1:1, Christians find the most overt statements of the truth of the Incarnation—”In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Christians, especially evangelical Christians, affirm that “Word” in this verse represents the person of Jesus not only because verse two begins with the word “He” but also because the Gospel of John is the theological foundation of Jesus’ Messiahship and deification claims. In many respects, Christianity and many Jewish people have assumed that Judaism has no answer to this Incarnational doctrine. However, Jacob Neusner, one of the great Talmudic and Jewish scholars of modern times, has sought to circumnavigate the concept of Christianity’s unique claim and find a form of Jewish Incarnational theology through the form of the Torah and literally became the “sage on the stage.” Neusner went back into the annals of rabbinic history and found the concept within the Jerusalem Talmud (c. AD 400) whereby “the process by which the sage came to be represented as the living Torah” (i.e., the Word became flesh and dwelt among man).

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715 Jacob Jocz, “The Invisibility of God and the Incarnation,” Canadian Journal of Theology vol. IV, no. 3 (1958): 179. It should be noted that Jocz was a Jewish believer in Jesus.

What the writer found interesting is that while Neusner did note Jesus in his articles, he avoided two observations: (1) the almost four-hundred gap between Jn 1:1 and the Jerusalem Talmud and (2) why Maimonides never mentions this concept especially since he preferred the Jerusalem Talmud as has been mentioned previously in this dissertation. Incidentally, Michael Fishbane deals with the reality with what he calls “divine appearance” or “biblical anthropomorphisms” as it relates not only to Ez 1:26 and Dn 8:16 but also midrashic texts that predate Rambam.\footnote{717} Fishbane notes that these verses and texts are ones that the Cairo rabbi dealt with in his studies but the nature of these verses create an obvious interpretative conundrum within both faith communities for who is the voice and who is the form of the man?\footnote{718} A theophanic manifestation of the Messiah would be the answer of many evangelical Christians but modern Judaism dares not to go in this direction.

Therefore, we can see that the concept of the incarnation, and as well as theophanies, was not a foreign concept to Judaism either in pre-Maimonidean thought or in ultra-Orthodox Jewish thought today. While not allowing for a belief in Jesus among its adherents, the Hasidic (aka Haredi) community today will affirm that their leadership can become Tzaddiks (holy men or righteous leaders). Shaul Magid acknowledges that such a position “when detached but not wholly severed from its historical and theological roots in Christianity—the one-time mysterious


\footnote{718} Ibid., 262-64.
embodiment of God in Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:45, 46), is not antithetical to Judaism.”

Magid’s article is summarized in this rather lengthy but important quotation:

Incarnational thinking in Judaism must point to a broader notion that the boundaries between the human and the divine are permeable and the absolute distinction separating the human and the divine (an idea that is fundamental to halakha) cannot survive that permeability. That is, while there may be a distinction between being God and being with God or a residence for God, the latter two are sufficient aspects of incarnational thinking. Or, being God is not a necessary condition to speak of incarnation as opposed to indwelling, although is surely is in John and Christianity more generally.

In other words, Hasidic Judaism would argue that anyone could become incarnational with God if they are simply holy (aka righteous) enough. Obviously, this is not a belief that I affirm could withstand biblical scrutiny; however, it illustrates the point that Judaism is not opposed to the idea of God becoming man—only Maimonidean (Rabbinic) Judaism.

Therefore, is a theophanic/incarnational God a possibility in Biblical Judaism? The Messianic Jewish scholar Jacob Jocz affirms the possibility but with this important caveat—”the complex theophany can only be understood from the characteristic biblical concept of revelation which implies an encounter with God, but at a distance, and only by mediation. What hinders man from approaching is not His invisibility but His holiness.”

Jocz goes on to argue that Biblical Judaism (or what he called the “ancient Synagogue”) still harbored a hope to come

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719 Shaul Magid, “Ethics Disentangled from the Law Incarnation, the Universal, and Hasidic Ethics,” Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts 15 (2006): 37. The dissertation writer read/scanned the entire article; however, she focused on the point of the article that deals with the question at hand.

720 Ibid. I believe a brief content footnote is deserved here. I once visited the ohel (gravesite) of Menachem Schneerson—the seventh rebbe of the Lubavitch Jews in Jamaica, Queens, New York. I can only describe his grave as a shrine, a mecca, and a pilgrimage for the Lubavitch. Many of his followers still believe he is in the Messiah even though he died in 1994 and will go to his graveside on the anniversary of his death to see if this will be the year he rises from the dead. Others take his message around the world and are better missionaries than Christians.

“panim el panim” with God via the Shekinah glory of God (Ps 92:6; Is 6:2). As a Jewish believer in Jesus, Jocz offers no quarter or equivocation on this most difficult of concepts. He is steadfast and argues the same for the church of the Incarnate Jesus. Therefore, he emphasizes repeatedly a lesson that we can still learn from him is that we should not to attempt to explain the Incarnation from a sense or a desire for dialogue that requires compromise but from a sense of strength—"God became man; man did not become God." This is not an anthropomorphic concept as many within modern Judaism will argue; instead, it is a recognition that “if religion is to mean anything to human devotees, the supreme focus of their worship must not be beyond representation as supremely worthy …” We must know God by name. We must recognize who He is when we worship Him. We must have a closeness to Him. We must know that we can love Him. This is Biblical Judaism first. This is also the Christian faith because Jesus was and is Jewish.

722 Ibid., 181.


724 Frederick Ferré and R. Ferré, “In Praise of Anthropomorphism,” International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, vol. 16, no. 3 (1984): 211. The title of the article is misleading as the point of the article is actually to defend Aquinas’ via Negativa over and against Maimonides’. The article wanted to illustrate that only a God that was accessible, even if He was understood ultimately in the negative, was worthy of worship. See also, Mark D. Jordan, “The Names of God and the Being of Names,” in The Existence and Nature of God, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 161-90.

725 Hans Herman Henrix, “The Son of God Became Human as a Jew: Implications of the Jewishness of Jesus for Christology,” in Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships, ed. Philip A. Cunningham (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 114-43. It should be noted that the dissertation writer had problems with various aspects of this chapter, including that it was a bit
The Possibility and Reality of Miracles (especially the Resurrection)

As a doctoral student at Liberty University’s School of Divinity, it might be expected that I would utilize the resurrection and miracle scholarship of Gary Habermas. However, and I have spoken to Habermas about this issue, the question of the miraculous and resurrection studies within modern Judaism is a completely different apologetic concern than the one he fights with such skeptics as Bart Ehrman. The issue of the miraculous, especially the possibility of a man rising from the dead of His own volition which thereby allows Jewish and all humanity to also one day to live forever if we believe in this truth, is one that must be approached from at least a two-pronged rationale: (1) did Jesus rise from the grave and is this a miracle that is relevant to Biblical Judaism? (2) does the miracle reality of Jesus’ resurrection truly impact a Jewish person’s eternity?

Therefore, and with only a few exceptions, the references the dissertation writer will use in this section will come via Jewish scholarship. Pinchas Lapide who was mentioned in chapter four, would make even the most ardent Christian defenders of the resurrection proud with his summary justification of Jesus’ resurrection. He considers Jesus’ resurrection not only wholly rational but also an example of what could only be called an “authentic Jewish experience.” Additionally, Lapide defends the 1 Cor 15 account of the resurrection as the “oldest faith statement” within Christianity and shows that it provides a plethora of Judaic illustrations that only serve as validation for its truthfulness:

1. Vocabulary was not Pauline in style or form (i.e., written to and/or for the typical Gentile audience that received his epistles)

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ecumenical. However, there can be found nuggets of merit that can be fine-tuned and nuanced for evangelical purposes within the pages—even though that would more than likely not be the author’s intent.

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726 Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 95, 117
2. Hebrew Scripture style of the “parallelism” found within the framework
3. “Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew way of narration”
4. Nature of not mentioning God’s name in the passage “in accordance with the Jewish fear of the name”
5. Utilization of Cephas and not Peter
6. Using the phrase “in accordance with the scriptures … corresponds with the faithfulness of the early church to the Hebrew Bible”
7. Usage of the twelve allows Lapide to cast doubt on Judas’ suicide (which I diverge from the scholar at this point)
8. The repetition of the concept that Jesus died, buried, raised and appeared is consistent with other narratives.\textsuperscript{727}

This is because the witnesses of the resurrection were Jewish and saw themselves as practicing a form of fulfilled Judaism, and they died as Jewish believers in Jesus.\textsuperscript{728} There was no sense of contradiction of believing in the resurrection of the dead and being Jewish as they lived in first-century Israel and not in the twenty-first century Jewish world. Lapide again expresses it well when he writes: “The unavoidable conclusion that forces itself on us from these facts is that the Easter event, in whatever way one wants to understand it, was primarily and chiefly a Jewish experience.”\textsuperscript{729} Yes, Lapide hoped in a modified form of Maimonidean thought that Gentiles would eventually come to Judaism through faith in Jesus;\textsuperscript{730} however, it is important to recognize that the presence of a resurrection thought was not uncommon in Jesus’ time but it was anticipated, expected and present throughout the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures as Lapide illustrates in his work—a work that should and must be utilized as a beginning place for

\textsuperscript{727} Ibid., 98-99.

\textsuperscript{728} Stylianopoulos, “New Testament Issues in Jewish-Christian Relations,” 588. Stylianopoulos’ article is from an interfaith dialogue perspective; however, his statement about the ethnicity of the first century church was elegantly phrased and deserved to be confirmed as such.

\textsuperscript{729} Lapide, The Resurrection of Jesus, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{730} Ibid., 92.
This was the point that Peter in Acts 2 made during the Jewish Festival of Shavuot (aka Pentecost), and the argument that Alister McGrath refers to as “historical apologetics.” He illustrated that the Jewish people had been anticipating and expecting the coming of the Messiah because the teachings were present in the Tanakh. Peter also showed that by necessity, because of the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Messiah had to die, be buried, rise again, and had appeared to His disciples before His ascension. This was the fulfillment of Scripture—their Torah, writings, and prophets. It still is today, despite the confusion that Modern (Rabbinic) Judaism presents to the people.

The teachings of today’s Judaism on the Reform side is summarized, and somewhat hyperbolized, with this statement: “Reform Judaism denies the doctrine of resurrection and has expunged it from its liturgy, saying it is a foreign import. Moderate Reform and Conservative Judaism sometimes identify resurrection with immortality of the soul (an idea that can be traced to Maimonides).” It is summarized because on one level it is correct because even Jon Levenson admits that the modern world and much of modern Jewry itself assumes that Jews are only focused on “this-worldly and uninterested in, or even positively skeptical about, the return from death and the World-to-Come.” It is hyperbolized because it needs to be pointed out that

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731 Ibid., 46-65. Lapide provides a summary listing of Biblical and Talmudic passages that support his position of the miracle of the resurrection from the story of Enoch and Elijah to Honi the Circle Drawer and Rabbi Sera. I would also like to utilize content footnote license to share that I have sent this book to an Orthodox Jewish anti-missionary named Mordechai who agreed to read it but interestingly never seemed to finish it.

732 Alister E. McGrath, Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 59-63. It should be noted that this note of “historical apologetics” is McGrath’s specific approach to sharing the Gospel to the Jewish people.


this radical skepticism is oversimplified even within the Reform movement for there is a history of a general resurrection concept. Additionally, there is also a movement within some of the liberal wings of Judaism towards wanting to believe that there is something more than “dust to dust” after this life is over. Neil Gillman writes of this movement:

[T]he principle arguments for the recent reaffirmation of the doctrine of bodily resurrection are both theological and anthropological. The theological argument suggests that God, in order to be really God, must be stronger than death. If death wins out, then death is God and we should worship death—which is inconceivable.

Another component that impacted the changing milieu of resurrection thought is the horrific psychological impression that the Holocaust had upon the minds and souls of the Jewish people that impacted the need to believe that the photos of the bodies of the victims at Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, and elsewhere being swept into pits had a future and a purpose.

Therefore, the allegorization of potential resurrection passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that one finds in Levenson’s *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* would offer no comfort or hope to a world Jewry that is beset by death, destruction, and terrorist attacks. The hope of a

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735 The Pittsburgh Platform (1885) is considered as the founding document for American Reform Judaism. The seventh principle of the document affirms “that the soul of men is immortal” even while denying “bodily resurrection,” heaven, and hell as they were “ideas not rooted in Judaism.” Ronald H. Isaacs and Kerry M. Olitzky, ed., *Critical Documents of Jewish History: A Sourcebook* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), 59. It should be noted that Levenson’s usage of a portion of this principle of the Pittsburgh Platform directed me towards a full reading of the principle itself.


737 Ibid., 73.

738 Ibid., 86.

739 Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 23-34, 123-32. These are the two primary chapters read by the dissertation writer; however, in glancing through the rest of the book the writer was startled to read that Levenson focused on attempting to allegorize all potential resurrection passages and/or turn to rabbinic scholarship to find alternative solutions to the dilemma whether one lives again after death. The passage dealing with the Torah itself includes the following two statements worthy of attention: (1) “In biblical thinking, it is
miracle should not be considered as ceased or reduced to mere allegory as Isaacs argues. For truly the greatest miracle and hope for humanity of all time was not simply cited by Paul in 1 Cor 15:55 but first promised in Hos 13:14: “Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from This writer’s sight.”

Redemption, Righteousness, and Salvation

Recently, the writer’s pastor in a recent sermon illustration utilized a statement from former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg that exemplifies the standard Jewish understanding of what it takes to achieve a place in a heaven, even if they doubt its existence. The former mayor’s quote: “I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I’m not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It’s not even close.” This statements illustrates a sense of semi-agnosticism, a heightened sense of self, and a grandiose vision of what it takes to move from Gracie Mansion to a heavenly one and is also from the writer’s perspective as an evangelical Christian lamentably tragic. Therefore, and while some individuals engaged in the interfaith dialogue process might try to present the argument that modern Jewry do not engage in the works-only salvation motif, the presumption possible to continue even after death, and without either resurrection or immortality in the sense of survival as a bodiless soul” (page 30) and (2) “but we do hope to show that the rabbis’ expectation of resurrection has far more continuities with their biblical predecessors than has heretofore been recognized” (page 34). The passage of Elisha raising the son of the woman of Shunem in 2 Kgs 4 according to Levenson relates more to the question of infertility than resurrection and a legacy than a miracle. He also believes that child of 2 Kgs 4 will “die a second and irreversible death.”

Isaacs, Miracles, 67, 69-70.


among the Jewish people is that if they do enough good works (mitzvot) and perform enough acts of charity (tzedakah) they will achieve the necessary points on the eternal scale to earn their place in the World to Come.

This presumption was made dramatically real to me via a three-way discussion I had with a rabbi (Hanan) I have previously mentioned and one of his followers. Rabbi Hanan had been invited by a mainline denominational pastor to present his perspective of a teaching of Jesus. The pastor is accustomed to me appearing at these events and even enjoys the exchange that occurs when I engage the rabbi in a discussion. Rabbi Hanan made the observation that while Christians are dependent upon someone else (Jesus) to redeem them from their sins, Judaism teaches that redemption is possible through personal righteousness. This is when I brought up the point of personal righteousness being akin to filthy rags (Is 64:6) and he was left grasping for answers. One of his followers who was attempting to assist the rabbi jumped into the discussion and argued that Christians have it easy as Jesus taught nothing but “Judaism Light.” I then asked the rabbi’s disciple if he had ever actually read the Sermon on the Mount which calls Jesus’ followers to a higher standard than Biblical Torah and a standard that is possible to live but is made achievable through Messiah Jesus’ fulfillment of the Torah and our belief in Him. Ultimately, both Rabbi Hanan and his disciple were left speechless and the Christian church pastor was left smiling because I was able to say what even he could not say due to the restrictions placed upon him by his organizational governance.

interesting to note that Breslauer contradicts himself in this article when he states the following argument regarding works or what he refers to as self-sacrifice: “Some people attain in one moment of self-sacrifice what it takes others a lifetime to achieve” (page 181). He attempts to present one face to the Christian audience for dialogue while acknowledging that there is a high degree of works effort involved in modern Judaism for he also writes, “The Jew does not earn either salvation or redemption, but Jewish deeds are understood as the preparation for each” (page 182). At least Gillman, Doing Jewish Theology, 62, is honest enough as he attempts to unravel the Jewish mystery of eschatology and Kabbalah to write that redemption is “human, through the resources, the commandments, are God’s gift to us.”
However, the truths that I shared with Rabbi Hanan and the others in attendance was not my perspective. I was only utilizing the truths of Biblical Judaism which is the realization and fulfillment of Christianity. For while some argue that Judaism is a completed form of redemption (vis-à-vis the argument of Franz Rosenzweig),\textsuperscript{743} the repeated custom of seeking God’s forgiveness on Yom Kippur and one rabbi’s admission to me that modern Judaism is practicing a “Plan B” type of Jewish practice because the act of sacrifice is no longer practiced belies this argument. Additionally, the progressive wing of Judaism has abandoned the concept of a redemptive type of Messianic hope and are seeking to redeem themselves, as if this was even possible (Is 64:6).\textsuperscript{744} I postulate that the progressive wing of Judaism, or what I would more accurately call the deistic, secular, or agnostic wing, has determined that if Maimonides is correct and God (if He exists at all) because after all He only is a “non-corporeal agent … cannot suffer a tangible sensible harm” then He “cannot suffer harm or injury of any sort” and would not need to hear or extend forgiveness;\textsuperscript{745} therefore, seeking redemption or salvation is an exercise in futility.

However, this sense of futility in humanity is exactly what McGrath describes in his work *What Was God Doing on the Cross?* He wrote, “We feel alienated from God because we are alienated from God. We feel ourselves to be guilty in his sight because we are guilty in his

\textsuperscript{743} Wohlmuth, “Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought as a Challenge to Christian Theology,” 391, 393. It should also be noted that Maimonides own belief that sacrifices would be reinstituted when his version of the Messiah appeared contradicts Rosenzweig and Wohlmuth’s position.

\textsuperscript{744} Jacobi, “‘In Its Time I Will Hasten It,’” 115, 118.

\textsuperscript{745} N. Verbin, “Can God Forgive Our Trespasses?,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol. 74, issue 2 (October 2013): 185-86, 187, 189. It should be noted that Verbin recognizes the audacity of his argument and he attempts to soften this concept with alternative philosophies and philosophers; however, what the dissertation writer found most intriguing was his closing paragraph in which he concludes that prayer is helpful whether God is exercises forgiveness or not (page 198).
Incidentally, this expression of lament is almost identical to the 1894 *Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship* wording that was used for almost one hundred years in the Reform Yom Kippur Eve services:

> We feel, O God, that our sins and transgressions are many and that we need Thy pardoning grace. For shouldst Thou strictly mark all our failings, O Lord, who would be able to stand to stand before Thee? … When we are oppressed with a sense of our unworthiness, we are comforted by the assurances given unto us in Thy word, that the sacrifice Thou desirest is a meek and contrite spirit, and that they who confess their sins and forsake them shall find mercy and pardon, and **be again accepted by Thee**. (emphasis added)

I acknowledge that not all Jewish people today are of the Reform and/or secular strain for the Rabbi Hanan example of this section would consider himself Orthodox. However, what all Jewish people share in common is a confusion of what it means to be redeemed, saved, and to be found truly righteous by God. On one hand, many are aware of the “Plan B” nature of modern Judaism. On the other hand, many like Michael Bloomberg are seeking to earn their own righteousness. Others have simply given up because of their deistic sense of God’s distance and inaccessibility. However, we in the Christian church can help the Jewish people discover the Biblical Judaism that illustrates that indeed God does want a meek and contrite spirit (Ps 51:17) because it is only He who can restore to us the joy of His salvation (51:12). For as McGrath states, “Our relationship to God is changed by the cross, as is our experience of God.”

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747 The Central Conference of America Rabbis, *The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship: Part II* (New York: Block Publishing, 1910), 87. This is from the writer’s personal copy of *The Union Prayer Book* and one of her most prized possessions that was found almost by accident at a used bookstore.

748 McGrath, *What Was God Doing on the Cross?*, 89.
Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

**Remind Modern Jewish People of Maimonidean Thought vs Jesus’ Teachings**

In Matt 11:28-30, Jesus’ words offer the promise of rest and comfort—”Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Conversely, Rambam offered a series of conflicting and confusing instructions to individuals who were confronted with the option of martyrdom or self-preservation. For while he offered comfort to the Moroccan and Yemeni Jews, Maimonides’ guide for when and how a Jewish soul should choose to give up his life was anything but restful:

The entire House of Israel is commanded to sanctify the Great Name, for it is written: I will be sanctified among the children of Israel; and they are warned not to desecrate it, for it is written: You should not desecrate my holy name. What does this mean? If a kuthi (unbeliever) will arise and force a Jew to break one of the commandments of the Torah on the pain of death, he should break the commandment and not be killed, for it is said of the commandments, if a man abide by them he shall live… When does this apply? When all the commandments are at stake, excepting idol worshiping, adultery, and murder. Where these three prohibitions are concerned, if a Jew is told, break one of them or else you will be killed, it is best he should permit himself to be killed and not transgress… If the Jew is alone and not in the presence of ten other Jews [minyan], then he should transgress and not be killed. But if he is ordered to commit the sin in the presence of ten Jews, he should rather allow himself to be killed and not transgress, even when the intention is merely to force him to transgress one of the other commandments (i.e., not one of the other enumerated above).749

Yes, it can be offered that Jesus did promise his followers opposition and persecution; however, He also offered them peace and ultimate victory with Him (Jn 14-16). The rabbi from Cairo, in the section above, offered none of the above and only offered Biblical misperceptions and

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contradictory teachings that confused the Jewish people then and even now.\textsuperscript{750} Therefore, this section of chapter five will seek to differentiate three areas of thought/teaching about which Jesus and Rambam disagreed: (1) misogyny; (2) discrimination; and (3) theodicy. I advance the proposition that when modern and world Jewry truly understand Jesus’ position on these issues, they will be drawn to Jesus of Nazareth and away from the real Rabbinic Judaism promulgated beginning with Moshe ben Maimon.

Misogyny

In his work \textit{Davita’s Harp}, Chaim Potok relates the story of young Davita who considers the Orthodoxy of her step-father while also longing for a closer relationship with him and the Talmudic rationale of why her mother chooses not to pray. The following is the exchange between herself and her mother:

\begin{quote}
I realized, as we sat together week after week in the little synagogue in Sea Gate, that she never prayed. One Shabbos during the service I quietly asked her about that.

“A woman is not required to pray,” she said.

“What do you mean?” All around us women were praying.

“A woman may pray if she wishes. But she is not required to pray. \textbf{That’s the law.} Ask your father. I don’t wish to pray. I prefer to read the Bible instead.”

The women’s section in that little synagogue was even more confining than the one in the yeshiva synagogue. A heavy muslin curtain had been drawn across the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{750} J. L. Teicher, “Christian Theology and the Jewish Opposition to Maimonides,” \textit{The Journal of Theological Studies} vol. 43, no. 169/170 (January/April 1942): 69, 72; Menachem Kellner, “On Reading Rambam in Brooklyn and in Haifa,” \textit{Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought} vol. 11 (Spring 2011): 225-233; and Daniel Statman, “Negative Theology and the Meaning of the Commandments in Modern Orthodoxy,” \textit{Tradition} 39:1 (2005): 58-70 (esp. 58-61). Teicher’s point in his argument is that while the Christian Church did burn Maimonidean works in the thirteenth century, it was often at the encouragement of Jewish leadership (page 72). Kellner’s article in the \textit{Hakirah} journal is part and parcel of an ongoing debate between himself and other Orthodox scholars as to whether Maimonides should be lionized or recognized as human. However, it is Statman’s article that is of particular interest because of the first sentence in the article. He writes: “The purpose of this paper is to show that in its negative theology, modern Orthodoxy has gone far beyond anything we find in classical Jewish thought, and that its version of this theology threaten to empty the commandments of meaning.” And while Statman will not go to the point of complete separation from Maimonidean thought, he does admit that if one follows the Shlomo Pines version of Rambam’s thought one will end up with an agnostic/deistic concept of God (page 61).
last few rows from wall to wall, forming a space that resembled a large cage. We could hear the service and see nothing. I found no holes or tears in that curtain. My new father was leading the service. I enjoyed hearing his deep baritone voice and wished I could see him (emphasis added).^751

As I consider this story from Potok, my memory also goes back in time to when I lived in New York City and attended a meeting of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA). I listened carefully to the women expressing a new form of discontent at being placed being a behind metaphorical curtain that hampered any sort of relationship with God as they felt constrained from praying to or connecting with God. As I rode home on the F Train that Sunday afternoon, I told a friend riding with me that it was all I could do not to jump on a chair and begin singing “Jesus Loves Me (You)” to them as this was the real message they needed to hear. However, and before Jewish women can hear this truth, they must first move beyond the traditional rabbinic message that tells them something that is a completely different reality.

Halbertal notes that Rambam followed the rabbinic, Islamic, and Aristotelian attitudes towards women and this is made evident in the positions he expressed in the Mishneh Torah regarding what could only be called in today’s vernacular spousal abuse.^752 This misogynistic attitude extended to the idea of women being educated in the Talmud, even though the Torah

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^752 Halbertal, Maimonides, 35-36. A plethora of examples was given by Halbertal that could be used in the Mishneh Torah; however, the one that was chosen to be included is from Book Four: Laws of Marriage, ch. 21, sec. 10: “Whenever a woman refrains from performing any of the tasks that she is obligated to perform, she may be compelled to do so, even with a rod.” It should also be noted that while the writer traditionally sought to utilize Twersky’s translation, this translation is from the following online source—http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/952895/jewish/Ishut-Chapter-Twenty-One.htm. See also Kraemer, Maimonides, 343-46.

A woman who studies Torah will receive reward. However, that reward will not be [as great] as a man’s, since she was not commanded [in this mitzvah]. Whoever performs a deed which he is not commanded to do, does not receive as great a reward as one who performs a mitzvah that he is commanded to do. Even though she will receive a reward, the Sages commanded that a person should not teach his daughter Torah, because most women cannot concentrate their attention on study, and thus transform the words of Torah into idle matters because of their lack of understanding. [Thus,] our Sages declared: “Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is like one who teaches her tales and parables.” This applies to the Oral Law. [With regard to] the Written Law: at the outset, one should not teach one’s daughter. However, if one teaches her, it is not considered as if she was taught idle things.\footnote{The source for this translation of the Mishneh Torah, Book One: Knowledge, ch. 1, sec. 13 also came from an online source— http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/910973/jewish/Talmud-Torah-Chapter-One.htm. Please note that the writer was directed to this quotation by Meiselman’s Jewish Woman in Jewish Law.}

Therefore, and while there is a growing rebellion among Jewish women against the perceived and real disenfranchisement in Rabbinic Judaism, the sense that the founders did not care about the spirituality of the women of Judaism is ever present.\footnote{Rachel Adler, “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halakhah and the Jewish Woman,” in On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, ed. Susannah Herschel (New York: Shoked Books, 1995), 12-18. Adler does a good job of casting dispersions on a wide range of rabbinic Jewish scholarships and not simply Rambam. This is a fair assessment; however, she does not exclude Maimonides from her analysis.} Consequently, there is a place and opportunity within the sphere of Jewish evangelism to illustrate that Jesus’ teachings and a proper understanding of Christian teachings opens the door to women—a door that allows women to enter and occupy the same space in worship and praise to God.

This can begin intentionally by illustrating that Jesus encouraged women to learn (Lk 10:38-42) and he permitted them to be the first to witness His resurrection (Jn 20). The idea of women as witnesses within Rabbinic Judaism is fraught with confusion and contradictory
opinions, even within the purview of Rambam. Additionally, and despite the misogynistic dispersions to the contrary, Paul opened the door to women to have roles in worship that would have been unheard of the synagogue then and even today. Brian Dodd notes that women commended such women as Phoebe, Aquilla, the daughters of Philip, and additional ones throughout his epistles. For in Messiah Jesus, there is neither male nor female because we are all one in Him (Gal 3:28). This is a message that needs to be shared today for as I was leaving Israel on my last trip, the construction began on the egalitarian prayer section at the Western Wall.

The idea behind this prayer section is that women and men could pray together if so desired without the current division that exists. It is controversial within Israel among the Orthodox and even in political circles. However, the “Women of the Wall” have fought for equality and ultimately have compromised on this section at the Kotel because they want to believe that they can pray just like the men do and be heard by God just like the men are. They do not know that this occurred almost two millennia ago when Jesus cried out “It is Finished,” but it is time that they finally hear the truth that “Jesus Loves Them” not despite the fact they are women but because they are women.

Discrimination

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756 Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, 73-80.


758 Ibid., 22-29. It should be noted that Dodd seeks to make Junia/Junius a female in this work. A step that the writer is not willing to make; however, the book itself is invaluable in dispelling stereotypical myths about Paul.

759 For additional information on the “Women of the Wall,” and to discover the compromise surrounding the egalitarian section, go to http://womenofthewall.org.il/about/mission-statement/. See also, Ruth Eglash, “Israel to Create an Egalitarian Prayer Plaza at Western Wall,” Washington Post (31 January 2016); available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-to-create-a-new-egalitarian-prayer-plaza-at-western-wall/2016/01/31/ac48e9e7-e8b2-4301-a81e-2d192efe9359_story.html.
The phrase “Social Justice” is a common watchword in today’s world. This concept is especially true in the Jewish world based upon my more than fifteen years as a missionary as one cannot read or hear about a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony without being exposed to their “Tikkun Olam Project.” The phrase Tikkun Olam is Hebrew for “repair/heal the world” and the idea of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah project that seeks to heal the world revolves around doing something to make the world a better place. Therefore, and despite Christianity’s less than stellar past and occasional present, an avenue of apologetic evangelism within the Jewish community would be to illustrate the truth of Jesus’ teaching regarding equality among all people as opposed to what the rabbi from Cairo advocated. For Rambam’s teachings would indeed be surprising to many in the Jewish community who fight so strenuously for social justice without realizing that the greatest proponent of it it is Jesus of Nazareth, who came to draw all people to Himself (Jn 12:32).

This section could focus on a multiplicity of areas related to the area of discrimination; however, I will briefly focus on two specific areas: religious and slavery. For as has already been mentioned but is worthy of repetition, Rambam’s idealistic hope was to one day require either conversion to Judaism and/or adherence to Noahide convictions:

Moreover, Moses our Teacher was commanded by God to compel all human beings to accept the commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noah. Anyone who does not accept them is put to death. He who does accept them is invariably styled a resident alien. He must declare his acceptance in the presence of three associates. Anyone who has declared his intention to be circumcised and fails to do so within twelve months is treated like a heathen infidel.\(^\text{760}\)

This hope was not based upon an Is 51:4 of bringing justice to the nations but more along the lines of bringing vengeance upon the Gentiles for sinful actions, similar to what happened to Shechem in Gen 34.\(^\text{761}\) In contradistinction, and sadly throughout history as illustrated in chapter

\(^{760}\) Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book Fourteen: Judges, ch. 8, 10.

one the Christian church failed to live out this truth, the Great Commission was not about bringing about discrimination, vengeance, or bloodshed. Jesus’ message was and still is about this living truth in Jn 10:10—”The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

For while there are consequences for not receiving this offer of religious life, the consequences are not to be meted out by the human followers of God the Son (which has been the sin of Christianity for two millennia) but only by God the Father himself. Paul the Apostle understood this reality when he wrote his heart cry in Rom 9:3—”For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,…” This is the message of Jesus’ teachings that need to be shared with the Jewish people as opposed to the religious discrimination that is hidden within the layers of Maimonidean Judaism.

The second form of discrimination is Rambam’s attitude toward the lesser classes, in particular towards those who would be considered slaves and while the argument could be made that the Cairo rabbi lived in a different place and time, it should be pointed out that his teachings regarding women are still upheld in many ultra-Orthodox settings; therefore, these should be considered as well. Meiselman notes, even while seeking to defend and rationalize the issue, notes that slaves are considered in the same position as women in regards to fulfillment of all Torah obligations, even if the male slave is seeking to convert, and is not allowed to be a witness because even a free non-Jew male is not allowed to stand before a tribunal.762 However, it is Rambam’s own words that indict him and which would cause socially justice-minded Jewish minded individuals to cringe:

762 Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, 51-52, 75-76. Meiselman (page 76) in his defense of the law of witnessing notes that “only a completed obligated Jew can testify.”
When a Jew has relations with a Canaanite maid-servant—even if she is his own maid-servant—the offspring is considered a Canaanite slave with regard to all matters. And one may use him for service forever as any other slave… It is permissible to have a Canaanite slave perform excruciating labor. Although this is the law, the attribute of piety and the way of wisdom is for a person to be merciful and to pursue justice, not to make his slaves carry a heavy yoke, nor cause them distress. He should allow them to partake of all the food and drink he serves.\(^763\)

Obviously, the charge will rightfully be brought against Christianity that we have also erred on this issue. The writer’s own Baptist denomination was founded upon a platform and from a rationale of slavery; however, we have renounced the incorrect Biblical eisegesis by which we were founded, repented of our sinful past, and have sought reconciliation with our African-American believers.\(^764\) This point/counter-point is an excellent issue by which we can show the Jewish people that Christianity is on the forefront of social justice issues, that we care about the issue of discrimination because as Gal 3:28 states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Theodicy

No one likes the word suffering. No one except the most masochistic in society enjoys the concept of suffering. However, the reality is that suffering is a part of life. Sadly, the Jewish people as a collective whole have experienced an inordinate amount of suffering over the last

\(^763\) Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book Twelve: Acquisition, Chapter 9, secs. 1, 8. The original source for section eight came from Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 272. The dissertation found the statement for section one along with eight at the following online translation—http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1363819/jewish/Avadim-Chapter-Nine.htm.

\(^764\) “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150\(^{th}\) Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention,” Atlanta, Georgia, 20-22 June 1995; available online at http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899. Please note that the writer did not included this in the bibliography as this was utilized as illustration and not for a reference piece. Additionally, and in light of a need of a Biblical hermeneutic on the issue of slavery, Brian Dodd, *The Problem with Paul*, 81-110, provides an excellent counter-point on the issue of slavery in the Greco-Roman world as slavery of the Civil War period.
two millennia, and as I have highlighted during the first millennia or so in chapter one, often at the hands of those who called themselves Christians. I have also written and presented in an academic and ministry setting about the subject of Christian anti-Semitism in my more than fifteen years of being a Jewish missionary.\textsuperscript{765} Obviously, Christian guilt as it relates to our apathy and inactions during the Holocaust years has often overwhelmed us. However, it should not preclude us from having an evangelistic message even though the temptation and pressure to do so is ever present.\textsuperscript{766} Actually, it is the contention of this dissertation that it should motivate us to be more engaged in Jewish evangelism, more passionate in sharing the Gospel with the Jewish people, and more proactive as we have already failed once.

For as mentioned previously in chapter four, the Jewish people as a collective unit are struggling with the issue of theodicy/suffering and the place of God behind it all, especially as it

\textsuperscript{765} One prime example where I have I presented on the subject in an academic milieu is at the 2010 International Society of Christian Apologetics meeting in Fort Worth, Texas. The topic was entitled, “An Apologetic Response on How to Share the Gospel of Messiah Jesus in Light of the Holocaust.” Additionally, my first master’s thesis (MAComm) was related to the issue of literature written during a time of suffering (1933-45) and their perception of God and His presence.

\textsuperscript{766} It should be noted that the writer is on guard against allowing this sub-section from becoming a boondoggle; therefore, she is providing a list of three journal articles and one book that seek to discourage Jewish evangelism due to Holocaust pressures. This is by no means an extensive list as she could provide a far more thorough list; however, the writer contends that this is sufficient to prove the argument: G. Peter Fleck, “Jesus in the Post Holocaust Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” \textit{The Christian Century} (12 October 1983): 904-906; Robert T. Osborn, “The Christian Blasphemy,” \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} LIII/3 (September 1985): 339-63; Simon Schoon, “Christian and Jews after the Shoa and the Mission to the Jews,” in \textit{The Image of the Judeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature}, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry, Wissenschaftliche: Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament Series 158, ed. Jörg Frey (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2003), 299-314; and Eckstein, \textit{What Christians Should Know about Jesus and Judaism}, 287-99. Fleck’s article should surprise no one since it comes from the Unitarian Universalist perspective. Osborn’s article is for lack of a better word tricky because one must read it carefully to understand the nuance of his argument; however, the premise behind it is simply to leave the Jewish people alone. Schoon’s chapter appeals to both the guilt reflex of Christendom as well to historical precedence as it illustrates the European denominational renunciation of evangelism among the Jewish people. Eckstein’s book should surprise no one since he is a Jewish non-believer in Jesus. However, what should surprise people is the publisher and two of the endorsers of the book—Paige Patterson and Bailey Smith (former presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention) and leaders of the “Conservative Resurgence” in the 1970s and 1980s.
relates to the Holocaust/Shoah. For example, it has been stated that “[o]ver the last seventy years, no Jewish ideology, of either the left or the right, has emerged that has not relied on the Shoah as to its basis and justification.” The dissertation affirms this statement for even Sherbok-Cohn’s *Holocaust Theology* compendium illustrates that no two modern Jewish scholars can agree on one singular reason for Jewish suffering:

1. Bernard Maza: The Jewish people brought the Shoah upon themselves
2. Ignaz Maybaum: The Holocaust serves as proof that the Jewish people are the Suffering Servant of Isaiah
3. Emil Fackenheim: We must not allow Hitler to win—*Am Yisrael Chai!*
4. Eliezer Berkovits: The Shoah was a test of the Jewish witness to the world
5. Arthur A. Cohen: The Holocaust was man’s fault because God was incapable of stopping what happened
6. Richard Rubenstein: God died in the ovens of Auschwitz
7. Elie Wiesel: How can one hate God on one hand and worship Him as God on the other hand—yet we must?
8. Marc Ellis: Israel must not move from victim to victimizer.  

However, we should not be surprised as this conundrum of opinions, voices, and conflict can be traced back to Rambam himself. Joseph Turner points out that “Maimonides’ position concerning the problem of evil is based upon the Aristotelian understanding” of the issue because “suffering … contains deep educational import.” On an intellectual level, this is an understandable and arguable position. However, this is not a response that meets an individual’s need at the moment of suffering and pain. This is not a response that comforts during the dark night of one’s soul.

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Therefore, Christianity vis-à-vis Jewish evangelism has the opportunity to provide a voice through the teachings of Jesus to meet the Jewish people who are still struggling; however, first, we must ourselves confront three intellectual and spiritual questions that I posed at the International Society of Christian Apologetics in 2010: (1) How do we illustrate Jesus’ love after two millennia of antipathy? (2) How do we model compassion amid the ashes of Auschwitz? (3) How do we share Jesus after the Shoah? Jocz’ response in his work *The Jewish People and Jewish Christ after Auschwitz* summarizes the answer far better than I ever could when he writes: “The secret of the Christian faith is not Christ’s ‘genius’ but his love. This is the underlying motif of much of the New Testament … What Jesus does for men and women, Jew or Gentile, is to give them new freedom to love God and to love each other.” This is, in essence, the answer to the Jewish question regarding theodicy—discover that the core answer to suffering was answered when Jesus’ love for the world kept him on the cross for the sins of humanity. He suffered for our sufferings. He died so that we might live. He became sin for a moment so that we could escape sin for eternity (Heb 4:14-16). This is the ultimate essence of “Incarnational Theology” that we in the Christian church must share with the Jewish people; however, we often forget this message ourselves.

**Restore the Concept of Community (Kehilla) to the Christian Ekklesia**

Many Christians and churches will speak of the word “community” as a central component of our spiritual walk and mutual accountability to each other; however, I contend that the idea of community often only extends to Baptist potluck suppers and “community groups”

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770 Downey, “An Apologetic Response on How to Share the Gospel of Messiah Jesus in Light of the Holocaust.” The wording of the questions have been tweaked for conciseness.

that meet once a week. However, the idea of “community” or the word *kehilla* in Hebrew takes on a life of its own in the Jewish world that can best be described through the words of a scholarship from slightly over fifty years ago and from more recent times.

C. Bezalel Sherman writes of the Jewish community in the early 1960s the following startling reality that exists outside of the Jewish world:

The Jewish community is frequently held responsible for the behavior of the individual Jew, but the individual Jew is not allowed to shed his Jewish group label if he no longer cares to stay in the Jewish community. This creates a gap between him and his non-Jewish neighbors while introducing an element of compulsion into his association with fellow-Jews. In this sense, we may speak of membership in the Jewish community as not being altogether a matter of voluntary choice.\(^{772}\)

This is a stark, painful and awkward definition. However, does Sherman’s definition from more than a generation ago read that much differently than the one provided in 2009 by Misha Galperin and Erica Brown: “It is the mutual voice of Jewish responsibility that most closely resembles being members of an extended family with all of the joys, anxieties, frustrations, idiosyncrasies, and responsibilities that membership in a family brings.”\(^{773}\) Both definitions bring their own sense of stresses and obligations that are infinitely hard to break, especially if one is told that to leave Judaism is to leave your ethnicity, your heritage, and your family.\(^{774}\) However, the words of Rambam are even more harsh to a Jewish person who considers leaving the *kehilla*:

A person who separates himself from the community [may be placed in this category] even though he has not transgressed any sins. A person who separates himself from the congregation of Israel and does not fulfill mitzvot together with them, does not take part in their hardships, or join in their [communal] fasts, but


rather goes on his own individual path as if he is from another nation and not [Israel], does not have a portion in the world to come.\textsuperscript{775}

Therefore, it is imperative that the evangelistic community in the Christian world discover a way to return in full measure to the kehillekklesia model of Acts 2 which was in fact comprised of Jewish believers if we ever hope develop to both develop a functional model of Jewish evangelism and reverse the confusion regarding Incarnational Theology that has created a barrier for them. While writing in regards to evangelical theology proper, David Clark best expressed this concept that I hope to expand upon in these final pages of this dissertation when he wrote: “Theological truth, properly expressed, forms spiritual community and fashions godly persons who worship God, love each other, and serve the world—to the glory of the triune Creator.”\textsuperscript{776} If this closing section can develop such a model, we have begun to develop a standard that will close the argument against Rambam’s via Negativa apologetic that negates the possibility of the Incarnation and Tri-Unity of the Godhead. It will also close the distance and allow the Jewish people know that a relationship with God is possible not only with the Father but also with the Son Messiah Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Importance of this Concept

In the good and happier times before my Texas Jewish Post friend, that had I mentioned previously, “unfriended” me, she shared with me one of the most honest and tragic reasons for

\textsuperscript{775} Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book One: Knowledge, ch. 3, sec. 11. The following is from the online translation—http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/911896/jewish/Teshuvah-Chapter-Three.htm. Two items should be noted: (1) the Twersky translation was limited in some places and the dissertation writer had to go to some outside translations once she went outside of chapter three and (2) she utilized this and the Galperin/Brown quotation in a presentation she did at the Lausanne Consultation for Jewish Evangelism Conference in Jerusalem, Israel, in August 2015. This is an issue that is of great concern for her and one that she has considered for quite some time.

not believing in Jesus as Messiah, “I cannot believe in Jesus. Do you know what it would do to
my standing in the community? Do you know what it would cost me?” Indeed, John Donne,
while not writing of the Jewish world, could not have expressed it more eloquently or more aptly
as it relates to the emotional, spiritual, and sociological ties that the Jewish world has on a Jewish
person when he wrote:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.

For my dear friend, the call of community is more valuable and more important, even if it is
more transient, than the call of eternal life with Messiah Jesus. However, we in the Christian
community should not be surprised by this truth at this point in the dissertation. The general
misunderstanding of life after death created by Rabbinic (Maimonidean) Judaism created this
reality. It was created by the confusion about the possibility of a close, personal relationship with
God because of the via Negativa teachings by Rambam that have been transmitted over time by
the rabbis in the synagogue. It was developed by the strong pull of the community to “stay
Jewish” even if the pull of the synagogue has lost has lost its power. Therefore, this section will
illustrate the importance of the Christian church to restore the concept of community as a means
of building an apologetic approach evangelism to the Jewish people.

However, the first question many will ask is what does this idea of community look like?
I propose that this is the wrong question to ask as it is in the old cliché, “putting the cart before
the horse.” By following this practice, and not truly understanding the importance of the word
community, we as the Christian community will make many of the same mistakes that we have
made in the past and continue to make in the present. This dissertation argues that the most
obvious mistake of the interfaith dialogue concept is that we should all go back to our respective theological corners and allow God to sort it out when He arrives at the end of days.

The Reform rabbi Alvin J. Reines developed a construct entitled the “Polydoxy Principle.” Polydoxy according to Reines is “that every person possesses an inherent right to ultimate self-authority over her or his psyche and body” and has the ability “to determine the religious or philosophic beliefs she or he will accept, the observances she or he will keep, and the morality she or he will follow.” The ultimate purpose behind Reines’ idealism polydoxy was to create a universal community in which anything was permissible and/or allowable; thereby, negating any specific belief system. However, such a concept in this writer’s opinion creates a religious anarchical system in which there is no community but only chaos. Additionally, Eugene Korn acknowledges that despite the calls for dialogue, the Jewish leadership is suspicious of this possibility for success for two reasons: (1) the historical backstory that is filled with less than positive outcomes and (2) the hesitancy of Rabbinic Judaism to “sharing the covenant” with Christianity.

777 Alvin J. Reines, “The Polydox Confederation,” Religious Humanism vol. 19, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 84. Reines passed away in 2004; however, the work of the Polydox Institute (http://polydoxinstitute.org/index.htm) continues and they state the following interesting maxim: “Dr. Reines was a medieval scholar and is considered to be the person who broke the ancient code of Maimonides.” Obviously, others would disagree with such a blatant statement; however, Reines was a student of Rambam and also held the view that his via Negativa was such that God was not accessible in any regards (i.e., “absolute transcendence”) in the “human experience.” See also, Alvin J. Reines, “Maimonides’ True Belief Concerning God: A Systematization,” The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel. The Sixth Jerusalem Philosophic Encounter: Maimonides and His Philosophy on the 850th Anniversary of His Birth.” 2-7 May 1985.


779 Eugene Korn, “Covenantal Possibilities in a Post-Polemical Age: A Jewish Age,” Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations vol. 6 (2011): 1-13 The purpose of Korn’s article is to discover means and methods around the obstacles as he is a pursuer of dialogue; however, the dissertation writer appreciated his transparency in acknowledging the issues.
The second mistake being made today is that some in the Messianic Jewish community will argue that it is time for both a post-missionary period between Christianity and the Jewish people, even though as the dissertation showed in chapter one only approximately 3.5% know Jesus as Messiah, and a separation is needed between the Gentile and Jewish believing communities. The primary problem with this approach is that it relies on multiple stereotypes and Biblical errors: (1) that all in the Christian church uphold the doctrine of Supersessionism; (2) that all Jewish believers want or need to maintain a Torah-observant lifestyle; (3) that those outside of the faith community of Messiah Jesus perceive of missions/evangelism as a pejorative word; (4) that the Jewish community will accept them if “they look and behave more Jewish;” (5) that all Christians expected Jewish believers to abandon their heritage and (6) that a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile was even Biblical.

Mark Kinzer’s reasons are built upon a sandy foundation of allegories and suppositions that create divisions and greater suspicions between all believers in Jesus at a time when the call for unity must be greater now than ever. The idea of “two corporate subcommunities” or “two distinct communal entities” is at its core unbiblical as Eph 2:11-16 reminds all of us (specifically verses 14): “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” However, and what is of greatest concern to the issue of evangelism, is the apparent closet universalism that he displays when he argues for community at

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780 Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 12-16. Please note that the dissertation writer will be engaging in a personal critical analysis of this book for this second mistake section; therefore, the succeeding footnotes will be a series of ibids and page numbers.

781 Ibid., 12-16, 43, 151, 263.

782 Ibid., 152, 160. Kinzer believes further that “if the Jewish branch of the ekklesia maintains solidarity with the Jewish people as a whole, then the Gentile ekklesia is thereby brought into meaningful relationship with ‘all Israel’” (page 152). This dissertation argues that this does not sound significantly different than Rambam’s rationale than Jesus was brought into the world to bring Gentiles to Judaism.
the cost of open evangelism—“the Jewish ekklesia bears witness to the One already present in
Israel’s midst. It does not need to make him present; it only needs to point other Jews to his
intimate proximity” as “the Jewish ekklesia [needs to] bear(s) witness discreetly, sensitively, and
with restraint.”783 This is not community and the Jewish people would not recognize it as an
option. This is an abandonment of the commission that is set before us by Messiah Jesus in Matt
28. Therefore, an alternative approach that allows a Jewish individual to recognize Jesus as
Messiah and recognize that a close, personal relationship with God is possible, regardless of
what Maimonidean (Rabbinic) Judaism has taught him needs to be considered and established.

Possible Model – Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Finkenwalde

As mentioned previously in fn. 71 (ch. 5), I was invited to make a presentation at the 10th
International Conference at the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, Jerusalem, Israel,
16-21 August 2015, on the topic “A Fear of Loss of Community as a Hindrance to the Gospel in
Jewish Evangelism.”784 In this general overview of what I will unpack in greater detail here, I
pointed out that while Christian churches do struggle with understanding the Jewish mindset and
emotional struggles about the issue of making a decision for Jesus, it would be foolhardy to
separate churches from the evangelistic operation. We who are on the mission field and those
who are sitting in the pews need each other for this endeavor if we hope to be successful and

783 Ibid., 304, 305.

784 For full access to the PowerPoint presentation, go to http://www.lcje.net/IndexofPapers2015.html. I also
presented a modified form of this presented for two of Tim Sigler’s classes at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago,
Illinois, October 2015.

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perhaps the model was established during the early but increasingly dark days of Hitler’s Third Reich by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died from the gallows of Flossenbürg on 8 April 1945.\footnote{Eric Metaxas, \textit{Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy} (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 527-32 and Mark Devine, \textit{Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs} (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 36-37. A complete biography of Bonhoeffer’s life, ministry, and death would be superfluous at this point in the writer’s opinion; therefore, the dissertation writer will not include one.}

While Bonhoeffer has been revitalized, recast, and recognized again as the European evangelical this writer believes him to be following the success of Metaxas’ biography, she has always been a tremendous admirer of the German pastor. His writings and teachings are well-known but his efforts to save German Jewish believers (Operation 7) during the most dangerous years of the Holocaust are not.\footnote{Robert E. Willis, “Bonhoeffer and Barth on Jewish Suffering: Reflections on the Relationship Between Theology and Moral Sensibility,” \textit{Journal of Ecumenical Studies} 24:4 (Fall 1987): 600 and Metaxas, \textit{Bonhoeffer}, 388-89, 423, 441. Ironically, it was the actions of Operation 7 that caused the original arrest warrant. It was only after the failure of Valkyrie and the July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler’s life that the other subversive activities became known.} However, there are still those within the liberal Christian theological spectrum and Jewish world that have conflicting emotions about the German pastor. William Jay Peck castigates Bonhoeffer for both advocating the church’s responsibility to share the Gospel to the Jewish people and still maintaining a quasi-deicide position regarding the Jews.\footnote{William Jay Peck, “From Cain to the Death Camps: An Essay on Bonhoeffer and Judaism,” \textit{Union Seminary Quarterly Review} vol. XXVIII, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 158-76. Obviously, the dissertation writer wishes as well that his statement regarding the idea that the Jewish people had nailed Jesus to the cross did not exist; however, this does not negate the rest of what Bonhoeffer did vis-à-vis Operation 7, the Barmen Declaration and his other activities.} Writing from the perspective of a Jewish man, Stanley Rosenbaum offers no quarter but views the German pastor as one who did not do enough to stop Hitler then and whose writing today encourages Jewish evangelism; therefore, he is a menace that should be rebuked.\footnote{Stanley Ned Rosenbaum, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Jewish View,” \textit{Journal of Ecumenical Studies} 18, no. 2 (1981): 301-307.}
Peck and Rosenbaum are both right because Bonhoeffer did believe in Jewish evangelism; however, the focus of this section will examine another area of his work that I believe will help in the work of missions to the Jews today—his *Finkenwalde* approach. I have italicized the word Finkenwalde previously because even though it is a location in Germany where Bonhoeffer and others of the Confessing Church established a seminary for men and women, it is as much of an idealistic concept community in this writer’s opinion as a geographical location. Sadly, and ultimately, the seminary at Finkenwalde lasted only a few months before it closed by the Gestapo in 1937; however, the lessons and structure of *Finkenwalde* can assist us today in Jewish evangelism.

For it was also an ideal, a concept, a vision of what community could be; however, it should not confused for a utopian commune. Bonhoeffer defined the concept of Christian community as:

> Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ, we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.

I postulate that Bonhoeffer’s view of the word mirrors in many ways the definitions provided earlier by the Jewish scholars Sherman and Galperin/Brown; however, there is also added the key component of someone in which to believe. Bonhoeffer again in *Life Together* writes:

> The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and

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his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity.  

Through this approach, we as the Christian church are answering the ultimate question that many Jewish searchers have as they consider the person of Jesus—”Who will be there for me?“  

Martinson writes of Bonhoeffer’s ethos that “God is here, not as eternal nonobjectivity but graspable in his Word within the church.” This is key not only in the sense of community that we are building in this section but also in rebutting the premise of Maimonides’ Yahweh premise—A believer in Jesus can have a close, personal relationship with God because of the truth of Incarnation Theology? Bonhoeffer answers the question not only for the Gentile but also for the seeking Jewish heart when he wrote: “Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. We are silent before hearing the Word because our thoughts are already directed to the Word, as a child is quiet when he enters his father’s room.”  

Additionally, the Finkenwalde established a system of daily prayers and Bible readings that are very similar to Midrashic system established by Rabbinic Judaism. Such a model would enable the new Jewish believer to transition to the Christian community without following a Kinzer post-missionary model that is truly no model at all and would encourage true

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792 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 26.

793 Roland Martinson, “Spiritual but Not Religious: Reaching an Invisible Generation,” Currents in Theology and Mission 29:5 (October 2002): 335. It should be noted that the primary aim of Martinson’s article and his usage of Bonhoeffer as a principle example is to the generic postmodern generation; however, the dissertation contends that the question is especially relevant not only to the Jewish people as a generic whole but especially to Jewish post-moderns. Therefore, the usage of this article both relevant and invaluable.

794 Ibid., 336. Additionally, Bonhoeffer while as far as the dissertation can ascertain from a thorough research never read Buber’s I and Thou does note that “the human soul seeks a complete fusion of I and Thou” (page 33).

795 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 79.

796 Ibid., 51-52, 61-66.
discipleship. Therefore, the community created at Finkenwalde by Bonhoeffer in the 1930s can ultimately be a prototype for a model that we can create today for Jewish seekers and new believers within the sphere of the greater Christian church. If developed carefully and cautiously, it will answer the question of community loss as well resolving the problem of God-relationship that Jewish people are seeking to resolve. For as Bonhoeffer writes again in Life Together, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate,”797 which is truly the heart of Acts 2:42-47 and a heart of the Christian community which we appear to have forgotten in the twenty-first century church.

Chapter and Dissertation Summation

As this chapter concludes, I have also reached the end of the dissertation. However, I have only begun my studies on the subject which is laid out before me. As I consider this chapter singly but within the whole structure of the dissertation itself, I would like to make the following recommendations to my fellow Jewish evangelists as well to the overarching world of missiology and the Christian church:

1. I believe additional studies in the area of Jewish sociology are necessary and has largely been overlooked by Jewish mission organizations for far too long. We ask Jewish people to abandon their community, their sociological undergirding, and their historical heritage but fail to offer them the same in return. This must change if we want to change the percentage of Jewish believers in the near and long-term future.

2. For far too long, Jewish evangelism and mission organizations have been afraid to confront the heresies which exist within Rabbinic Judaism out of fear of offending Jewish seekers and the establishment. This needs to change as the Jewish people are themselves offended by the misogyny, discrimination and lack of answers regarding theodicy within Maimonidean Judaism and Christianity has the answers if we will only deliver the truth of Messiah Jesus.

3. The Christian faith is Judaism realized as Matt 5:17-20 reveals to us. Jesus did not come to “begin a new religion.” He came to fulfill the truths of Judaism

797 Ibid., 30. I developed an introductory model of such a concept, but without the Bonhoeffer concepts included, for the LCJE conference that can be seen on Slides 17-18 of the PowerPoint Presentation noted in fn. 784.
and not abolish the Tanakh as He is the Word. There can be debatable questions as to the place/role of the Trinity in the Hebrew Scriptures; however, the hope of the Incarnation (Is 9:6), the possibility of miracles and resurrection of the dead; and salvation is ever present despite Rambam’s protestation to the contrary. We should embrace these truths and illustrate them to the Jewish people for truly we know the Scriptures of the Tanakh far better than the average Jewish person and often times even better than a Talmudically-trained rabbi.

Therefore, and in conclusion to this dissertation which covers two millennia and a difficult theological question, I believe I have engaged with and adequately all seven questions that I have sought to answer in chapter one of this research problem:

1. What is the historical perception of the Jewish people that has created the disconnect noted in the research problem which indicates the probability that Maimonides established a Jewish or Hebraic-centric Negative Theology premise to offset the Incarnational argument of Christianity?
2. What about Maimonides’ past encounter with Christians necessitated his creation of the “un-God” concept?
3. Why would such a concept as Maimonides’ be attractive to a Rabbinic Jewish audience?
4. What has Judaism lost by creating this separation between God and His people?
5. Has Maimonides created in essence a deistic Judaism by his response to an Incarnational theology?
6. How has the Christian’s general misunderstanding of what is meant by the term “Incarnational Theology” impacted the necessity of Jewish evangelism?
7. What can be done within the Christian faith to reunite the Jewish people with their God – which would thereby bring them to Jesus as well?

The only possible exception is the second question as it appears that Rambam had limited exposure to Christian audiences except what was taught to him through the ages and in the Talmudic literature. However, and in even in that regards, the historical narrative that Maimonides was exposed to and as I illustrated in chapter two would more than suffice for the Cairo rabbi to have a negative perception of the Christian faith. Additionally, I also illustrated that Rambam’s exposure and personal attraction to classical Islam would answer both questions two and three as well.
Before concluding paragraphs on Rambam are written for this dissertation, a few summary recommendations for the Christian academic community as it applies to this twelfth century Jewish philosopher—a Jewish scholar who this writer believes forever changed the face of Rabbinic Judaism should be made. First, and aside from a smattering of articles and musings from the theological mainstream and liberal end of the spectrum, Maimonides has been left to the Jewish academic community. This abandonment has been to the detriment of the evangelical academic world not only because this indicates an alarming lack of awareness that Jesus utilized rabbinic patterns in his teachings but also that the disciples did as well in their later epistles (i.e., 1 Pet 3:15 and the *Pirkei Avot*). Therefore, I hope to continue to my research on the influence that the early rabbis such as Hillel and Shammai played in the teachings of Jesus and the disciples as an apologetic tool to illustrate the Judaism of Jesus and his fulfillment of Tanakh (Matt 5:17-20). Maimonides does not and should not be the primary voice for modern Judaism and we in the Messianic and Christian community should point out the better options. Second, the teachings of Maimonides as I have shown has created a theological, sociological and psychological void as it relates to the idea and hope of finding God. Therefore, and while I have no intentions or plans to pursue another degree, I do foresee pursuing additional research in the area of sociology, especially as it relates to understanding the sociology of Jewish people. Third, I became fascinated after my trip to Spain with the influence of classical Islam on the mindset of Rambam. I believe he envisioned a future time of a Jewish Caliphate, if I may borrow the term, and I would like to pursue the research as time and opportunity allows, especially as it relates to the concept the urgency with the ultra-Orthodox community to build a Third Temple. Fourth, and finally, I have already begun the process the work of developing a motif of creating a Messianic community model for millennials that will enable them to recognize that it is not an either/or...
option as it relates to Jesus. Rambam attempted to develop such a mindset and that needs to be confronted and defeated.

Ultimately, Moshe ben Maimon established a Judaism that was by his design and for his purpose as counter-apologetic to the Christian faith. For if Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah than the teachings of the previous one thousand years prior to his birth would have been for naught. However, and what Rambam wrought was a teaching that created another thousand years of lost Jewish souls, that know nothing of the Messiah and nothing of God the Father. For Rambam was either wrong or he lied when he stated in the *Mishneh Torah* that

The Sages and prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the heath, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of life in the world to come.\(^{798}\)

However, the Talmud itself states that the prophets foretold of only the days of the Messiah;\(^ {799}\) while, the Hebrew Scriptures tell us that the Messiah’s name will be Immanuel or “God with us” (Is 7:14). This is the essence of Incarnational Theology. This is the essence of showing that God longs to have a close and personal relationship with the people. This is the essence of illustrating that Maimonides’ Yahweh is no Yahweh at all.


\(^{799}\) *BT* Sanhedrin 99a.
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