

“Jews” who the Jews themselves failed to become. Accordingly, for Jews, now on a most delayed basis, to decide to take a deeper look at the Dynamics underlying those texts that set forth this posture would seem a fair as well as permissible action. Further, the Jewish people, in their effort to comprehend their own history, need access to the New Testament because it has *directed* so much of it.

On the Problem of Timing:

But why, at the current juncture, should Jews be encouraged to reflect on Gospel Dynamics given that there has been such steady progress in Christian–Jewish relations over recent decades? First, I interpret this new pursuit as extending that progress. Second, I foresee a possibility for the resurgence of regressive tendencies in Gospel interpretation – indeed, has it begun? – at the least because Christianity’s future history will be played out largely, even primarily, in the Third World.⁵

It may be questioned whether this vast arena will exhibit the capacity to comprehend the Gospels in any fashion other than literally....

On Jews’ Incentive and Aptitude:

This book has covered a panorama of challenges – arising from the New Testament itself – that impact and disconcert Jews living in a Christian world. It has attempted to address, in a clear, direct, and concise way, this spectrum of problems by offering historical and theological analyses and practical applications that Jews require. And it has aspired to persuade Jews of the wisdom of accelerating a radical communal change whereby their seminaries, synagogues, religious schools, and college students will forgo a traditional mandate to shun the New Testament and instead seek to secure facility in Gospel Dynamics.... This book’s distinction between knowing *New Testament* and knowing *Gospel Dynamics* should not go overlooked. This is because Jews who feel no incentive to read the New Testament may feel every incentive to learn about the workings of those Gospel Dynamics that continually have impacted the Jewish people so deleteriously over two millennia.... Learning Gospel Dynamics ... is a ... venture ... for which Jews have shown a natural aptitude (cf. Chap. 7) and that they can find to

be stimulating as well as consistent with the paradigmatic means of Jewish problem-solving: namely, seeking and building knowledge....

On “Gospel Dynamics” in the College-Institute’s Curriculum:

Remarkable above all in impact was the curriculum change by the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC–JIR) – urged, to start with, by alumni! This move was to accord *core course status* to what before had been offered only as electives. The change now made Cincinnati’s campus in particular⁶ the first Jewish seminary in history to *require* courses in the technical study of (what I have named) Gospel Dynamics for rabbinical ordination....

On Our Unprecedented Opportunity:

History has presented Jews today with an unprecedented opening to correct what Harris Weinstock bemoaned in his 1899 petition: that fellow Jews left themselves “helpless” to respond competently to anything dealing with the New Testament because of their “dense ignorance of the origin of Christianity, the life of the Christian Savior, and the causes which led to his death” (see Chap. 1). But Weinstock was unaware of why his petition could *not* succeed in his day: ... Today, by contrast, all of these [seven] prerequisites are not only fully in place but are also in *convergence*. This remarkable state of affairs is the result of several facts and factors: ...

Today [then] is literally the first period in history when sufficient numbers of the Jewish *laity* (not just their theologians, clergy, and academicians) are psychologically primed to end their nearly two-millennia-old avoidance strategies respecting the New Testament.... We must not lose the opportunity to capitalize on this unprecedented momentum.

¹ Special Passover liturgy.

² A second-century bishop of Hierapolis (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.36.2).

³ “Hybrid riddle” even in *Nostra Aetate. Blame*: “... the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today....”

Benefit: “Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death

freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation.”

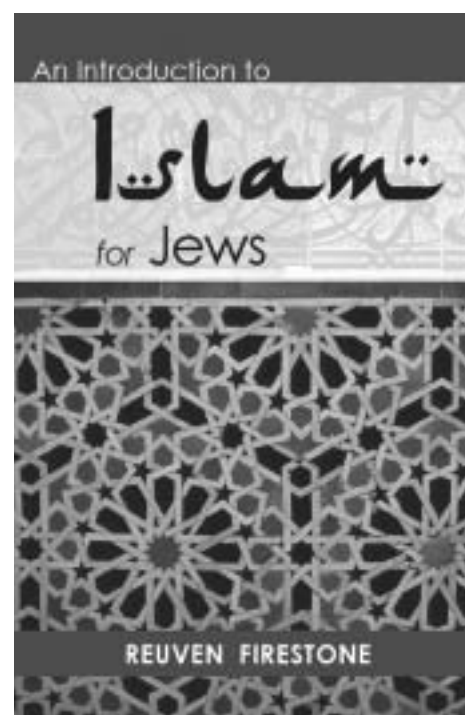
⁴ Jesus’ “predictions” of [his own] resurrection were introduced after the fact – see Chap. 8 §1....

⁵ Cf. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

⁶ See Chap. 1 n. 6. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (Philadelphia) requires a course in Christianity, although not intensively New Testament textually-based. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America offers New Testament on an elective basis.

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Companion Figures: A Visual Aid for Teaching “Modern Jews Engage the New Testament” is available at www.jewishlights.com



An Introduction to Islam for Jews

Dr. Reuven Firestone, Jewish Publication Society, 2008

What does the Qur’an really say about Jews? Why is Jerusalem so important to Muslims? Is *halla* the same thing as *kosher*?

Jews have today, as never before, a pressing need to understand the history, theology, and practice of Muslims and Islam. In *An Introduction to Islam for Jews* Firestone explains the remarkable similarities and profound differ-

ences between Judaism and Islam, the complex history of *Jihad*, the legal and religious positions of Jews in the world of Islam, how various expressions of Islam (Sunni, Shi`a, Sufi, Salafi, etc.) regard Jews, the range of Muslim views about Israel, and much more. He addresses these issues and others with candor and integrity, and he writes with language, symbols, and ideas that make sense to Jews. *An Introduction to Islam for Jews* is both readable and reasoned, presenting to Jewish readers for the first time the complexity of Islam and its relationship towards Jews and Judaism.

The Qur'an in Relation to Other Scriptures

The Qur'an contains a great deal of material that is parallel to the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. The most obvious is the appearance of many biblical characters from Adam and Eve (though she is not named in the Qur'an) to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph and the tribes, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Saul, David, Solomon, Jonah, Elijah, Job, John the Baptist, Zakariah, Mary, and Jesus. Many narratives known from prior scriptures are referenced or related in the Qur'an, but in forms that clearly differ from earlier narrations, and some material may be found in the Qur'an that finds direct parallels with the Rabbinic literature of the Talmud and Midrash (Q.2:93, 5:27–32).

The natural reaction among Jews and Christians to the differences in the new revelation was to believe that it was an inaccurate or poor attempt to mimic their own "true" revelation. We have examined this natural response earlier in the context of Muhammad's confrontation with the Jews of Medina, and we have noted how the Qur'an itself explains the differences by accusing the People of the Book of being untrustworthy regarding scripture and of even distorting their own. That episode was only one example of the conflict and competition between scriptures. The Qur'an records some of the arguments that were made against it, such as the critique that it was not revealed all at once as was the Torah (Q.25:32), or that it is only the ravings of a man possessed (Q.16:6). Five times, God

is depicted in the Qur'an as commanding Muhammad to challenge his detractors to produce verses or chapters equal to those of the Qur'an. "If you are in doubt about what We have brought down to Our servant, then bring a verse like it, and call on your mortal witnesses if you are truthful. But if you do not – and you will not – then get ready for the fire whose fuel is humans and stones, some who will not believe" (Q.2:23–24).

These verses, known in later Islamic tradition as the "challenge verses," were taken a century or so later as proofs that the Qur'an is matchless and inimitable. The absolutely perfect, miraculous nature of the Qur'an thus emerged as a religious dogma in Islam in response to challenges to its authority and authenticity. Today, and for well over 1,000 years, the perfect nature of the Qur'an is a sine qua non of Islamic belief. Its miraculous nature applies not only to its unsurpassed language and style, but also to its perceived truth in every detail.

Because of the arguments over the accuracy and general status of the Qur'an between the early Muslims and adherents of previous religions, it was necessary to understand its historical and theoretical relationship with the earlier revelations of Jews and Christians. A theory of universal revelation emerged already in the Qur'an that made sense of the similarities and differences, but it was elaborated considerably in post-qur'anic literatures.

The basic position is that God, in God's great love and compassion, sent prophets with instruction and revelation to all human communities (not only Jews and Christians) throughout history (Q.2:136, 21:25, 43:2–

8). All divine revelation originates in the "Mother of Books" (*umm al-kitab*—Q.13:39, 43:4) that is found on the "preserved tablet" (Q.85:21–22), which is, in turn, located in heaven at the divine throne. Although there may be differences in the details, there is no difference in the essential moral message of the revelations (Q.3:3, 26:192–197).

This theory of universal revelation allows for an open attitude toward previous scriptures. Every prior scripture originates with God. The Qur'an emphasizes that the scripture revealed to the Arabs is in clear Arabic language (Q.12:2, 26:192–197, 39:28), which presumes that the scriptures revealed to other peoples were given in different languages. Later thinkers understood that the differences were not only linguistic, but were also cultural, thus making sense of the obvious parallels and no less obvious differences.

As explained in our earlier discussion of the natural tensions that arise between newly emerging religions and establishment religions, such a position makes sense for a new religion that is trying to gain a foothold in a world dominated by well-established religions. It says, in essence, "We are as legitimate as you are!" Established religions, however, are not interested in welcoming communities that would threaten their position. Jews and Christians believed that any new claims of divine revelation must be false. They therefore rejected any such new claims.

The natural reaction of those who believe in the new revelations is to be suspicious of the criticisms of those representing establishment positions. The new prophet is only acting like the biblical prophets when he responds to



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