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The Messianic Jewish Community and the Handshake

WALTER RIGGANS

Preface

One of the most significant events of recent years has undoubtedly been the signing of the Israeli-PLO accord on Monday 13th September 1993. The handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat is destined to become one of the most celebrated moments in the pictorial history of this century. And yet....

Readers of this article will be well aware of the fact that opinion has been sharply divided over the wisdom of the whole affair. The Jewish people worldwide, including citizens of the State of Israel, have been polarised to some extent by it all. Many are delighted, relieved, desperately hoping that this will prove to be the beginning of a genuine new world of peace and security in the Middle East. There is a buoyancy in many economic markets, several regional projects are being mooted, political hopes are high, and certain synagogues are full of thanksgiving prayers. On the other hand, many Jewish people are quite devastated, and feel that they have been betrayed into the hands of cunning and ruthless Palestinians who are exploiting the accords as a first step towards the elimination of Israel. Financial sponsors are withdrawing their backing from projects, new political alignments are being formed to hinder the progress of the continuing talks, Orthodox Jewish communities are taking activist stands against the whole programme, and synagogues are filled with the sounds of lament.

It may be that many Christians in the west are not surprised by this split reaction among Jewish people, since they see the issue as essentially a political one, and of course people are always divided over political issues. In this reading of the situation, therefore, it may be natural for them simply to see the Jewish response as analogous to that within the Muslim Arab world. These communities are also divided, of course. Many are genuinely relieved and overjoyed at the chance for a peaceful and just life in the Middle East, whereas there are also those who have welcomed the accords as a tangible step on the ladder which will lead to the dissolution of the State of Israel. On the other hand, there are those who see it all as a worldly compromise of the Muslim peoples' duty to restore the whole of the Middle East to Islamic rule and life. They are not at all interested in any co-existence, not even for a 'strategic period', and do not wish to pretend that they are.

The problem is that in neither case is the issue purely political. Deeply *religious* issues are at stake here, but we can see what has become a typical western perspective, namely the marginalising of the influence of religion on the political and economic life of people and nations. This perspective has

even affected the view of Christians, who should know better.

The particular type of post-Enlightenment western thinking (and I am not a naive Enlightenment-basher) which holds that only a radical separation of religion and state can produce a *healthy* state is simply incomprehensible and unacceptable to classic Islamic teaching. As far as traditional Jewish teaching is concerned, the land of Israel, including the politically disputed territories and more besides, is sacrosanct. Sovereignty over it belongs to the Jewish people alone. Very few western Christians today seem to share the classic Jewish or Muslim attitudes to territory.

This potent combination of 'religious' and 'political' convictions and passions is what lies behind the massive controversy over the famous handshake between Rabin and Arafat. The responses from within the *Christian* Arab world should be of considerable interest to western Christians, especially since a second major factor in the west's perception of the whole affair is the fact that people make the unconscious assumption that Arab = Muslim. There were Christian Arabs for centuries before there were Muslim Arabs. The Israel-PLO accords impact just as much on Christian Arabs as they do on Muslim Arabs in the Middle East. However, that particular matter will have to wait for another article.¹

My intention in this article is to draw the readers' attention to what is likely to be even more of a closed book to most than the reactions within the Christian Arab world. I am speaking about the responses from within the Messianic Jewish communities in Israel and around the world. Have all of our Jewish brothers and sisters in Messiah Jesus reacted with unanimity? Are their assemblies full of joy or lament? Related to this central presentation is the question of the reactions from the various western Christian churches and groups which are particularly committed to Jewish ministry, to working with Messianic Jewish communities, or to active support of the State of Israel. Therefore I shall also present some of the typical material which has come from those quarters in recent months.

Messianic Jewish responses: Israel

In his regular publication from Jerusalem entitled 'Teaching from Zion', Joseph Shulam, Pastor of the Netivyah Congregation in the city, wrote an extended piece concerning the significance and implications of the accords. Shulam is the director of one of Israel's most influential Messianic centres and congregations. He began his article with these words:

At first glance, one might think that the days of the Messiah have arrived, since peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours seems to be just around the corner. Of course we all hope that this is true, but realistically I have some serious concerns and reservations.²

This is fair enough, of course, and we must continue in his article to learn about his particular concerns. He clearly regards the American determina-

1 Readers are directed to an important article by Salim Munayer, a Palestinian Christian who teaches at Bethlehem Bible College, entitled, 'The Oslo Agreement from a Palestinian Point of View'. It can be found in the *Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism Bulletin*, issue 35, February 1994, pp 7-10.

2 *Teaching from Zion*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall 1993, p 1.

tion to convene the 1992 Madrid conference as simply a case of political self-serving in the light of the decline of the Soviet Union as a world and Middle East power:

When the Soviet Union collapsed and America no longer needed the Middle East as a player in the balance of powers, American policy makers wanted the region to quiet down and find a way to make peace.³

Shulam also analyses the change in the attitude of the PLO in terms of cynical self-service, seeing that it had lost vital financial support as a result of its backing of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, and that it was losing ground fast in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the radical Islamic fundamentalist groups like Hamas. Arafat decided to go along with the Americans in order to recover momentum and finances for the PLO:

Arafat realized that if he did not take brave new steps to deal with Israel he would soon find himself confronting the radical Islamic movements over the control of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.⁴

After his analysis of the background to the accords, Shulam repeats his concern about the future and expresses a fear that it may all 'possibly usher in the days of a terrible world war'.⁵ He follows this thought up later:

Let me present you with a potentially negative scenario which might result from the peace process: Israel will give back Gaza and Jericho and thus establish a precedent for the Arab nations and the West to demand the return of more and more land until they get to Jerusalem. Then the whole process will blow up and turn the entire world, including the United States, against Israel, which might be the preamble to what Israel's prophets call the 'last war' or the war of Armageddon.⁶

Now it is evident here and throughout the article by his constant use of the terms 'might', 'may', 'potential', etc., that he wishes to stop short of a full-blooded alarmist attitude. Nevertheless, his insistent presentation of the possibility of a disastrous future does expose his real fears. Theological convictions underpin his political concerns:

God gave the land of Israel to the seed of Abraham for ever. He promised to bring Israel back to the Land after her exile among the nations (cf. Ezek. 36-37, 39:23ff., Isa. 60-61). Israel is at present seeing the fulfilment of God's promises.⁷

I chose to open my own article with that of Joseph Shulam to make the point that a thoroughly Jewish and Zionist believer in Jesus, as he is, could be only too alert to the dangers of the situation, and yet also adopt at least an open mind to the possibility that it is God who is at work in the current process. In spite of his deep concerns and reservations, he goes on to conclude that

As a follower of Yeshua the Messiah I am obligated to 'seek peace and pursue it'.... Yeshua's followers should be happy that Israel and the

3 Art. cit., pp 1f.

4 Art. cit., p 2.

5 Ibid.

6 Art. cit., p 3.

7 Ibid.

PLO are talking to each other about peace. We should rejoice that the United States is willing to help the two parties towards peace negotiations. America's reasons for doing this are not important to me.... I must seek peace and therefore support the current negotiations. My ultimate source of peace is in Yeshua. Perhaps he may see fit to bring peace and reconciliation between the sons of Abraham in these coming days. In him alone do we put our trust.⁸

This same line is taken by another Messianic Jewish writer in the same publication, Tsvi Sadan. In his article, ostensibly a meditation on Proverbs 3:17,⁹ Sadan concludes that for those who claim to follow the Lord

peace should always be welcomed... the present developments may last for a long time or may be short-lived. In either case, we should welcome any attempt to establish peace among men for it is written, 'all her ways are peace'.¹⁰

Menachem Benhayim, for many years the Israel Secretary of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, shares this caution in hoping that it could be the right move at the right time:

It's encouraging. We have to be glad that we have the opportunity for peace, although we are skeptical because of conflicts between ourselves and the Palestinians.¹¹

It would be inaccurate to describe these three leaders as being really optimistic, since it is more of a hope than a conviction which is keeping their minds and hearts open. But the next person whom we shall hear certainly seems considerably more generous in his attitude. Baruch Maoz is the Pastor of Grace and Truth congregation in Rishon Letsion, Israel, and a former coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism for Israel. He has a deep commitment to the welfare of the Palestinian people, and is clearly longing for the day when Jews and Arabs can live together in peace and justice. In an article entitled 'Peace At The Doorstep?', he presents something of his hopes for the peoples of the region and then proceeds to write more specifically of his desire for real fellowship between Jewish and Arab believers in Jesus. In a positively-worded paragraph he addresses these believers and states:

Let us pray that the church of Christ in our respective national communities will know how to play its part in the unfolding drama of the Middle East.¹²

Maoz wants this peace accord to work — for the sake of Israel and the Jewish people, for the sake of the Palestinian people, and for the sake of the believers in the land. Believers will benefit enormously because:

Jewish and Arab Christians will be able to fellowship, cooperate in

8 Ibid.

9 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

10 *Teaching from Zion*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall 1993, p 7.

11 Menachem Benhayim is quoted in the article 'Israel, PLO Sign Peace Accords', in the recently established Messianic Jewish newspaper, *The Messianic Times*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall 1993, p 1.

12 'Peace At The Doorstep?', *Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism Bulletin*, no. 34, November 1993, p 13.

evangelism, and support each other as we have not been able to under the previous circumstances.¹³

Maoz shows no reluctance in this article to sharing the land with the Palestinian people, and indeed there are no overtly 'Zionist' remarks whatsoever. What he does say is this:

Israel's prophets called the people to holiness, to a fair and just society in which human kindness and mutual concern were a daily reality, and in which individuals yielded their legitimate privileges for the good of others. That is what Israel must now seek to do in relation to its Arab Palestinian neighbours, and in Israeli society.¹⁴

At the other end of the spectrum, we find Benjamin Berger, one of the elders of the Messianic Jewish congregation, Kehilat HaMashiah, situated in the Old City of Jerusalem. He takes an avowedly religious and Zionist position on the accords, going so far as to condemn the whole process as a betrayal of what God is seeking to do for the Jewish people and the world in and through the State of Israel today.

In 1967, God did something very, very great. He restored to us Judea, Samaria and Gaza, also the Old City of Jerusalem. In this time God wanted to give the nation the opportunity to know that there is a God, that the God of Israel is alive, that the God of Israel fulfills his promises.¹⁵

Berger made it plain that he opposed the accords altogether, and in fact that he believed that the PLO could not be trusted, since their constituency were 'haters of Israel and haters of the Lord'.¹⁶ A time of judgment will now be coming on Israel for their failure to recognise God at work, but ultimately God will have his way. He believes that Israel's failure to annex the so-called West Bank in 1967 was a sin, not just against the Jewish people, but also against the Arabs:

God from his perspective doesn't recognise the word 'Palestine'.... The Lord sees this land through the covenant he made with Abraham as the land of Israel. We must understand this even if it seems radical or fanatical today when we're seeking peace. God does not change. God has given to us this land, but we have not given him the glory.... There is more and more sin in our land. This includes the way we have related to the Arabs throughout the years. We have sinned against them. In 1967 we should have annexed off those territories into Israel forever and we should have related to the Arabs in a very positive way.... Because sin entered into our land God has allowed that there would be an Intifada.... It is a judgment upon us because we did not believe in the promises of God and we did not act according to the promises of God.¹⁷

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Berger's opinion was recorded in an interview in Jerusalem by Julie Stahl. It is reproduced in an article entitled 'Israeli-PLO Accord Prompts Fears', in *Charisma*, November 1993, p 63.

16 Ibid.

17 Quoted by Derek White in his periodical, *Towards A Christian Understanding Of Israel*, February 1994, p 2.

Another Messianic Jewish leader who was interviewed in the same article, David Tel Tsur, was even more explicitly opposed to the accords:

This is a false peace. Don't let any believer have any hope that there will be a peace here, because this is the peace of Satan. This is not the peace of God.¹⁸

Ari Sorko-Ram, the Director of Maoz, a Messianic Jewish organisation dedicated (among other things) to encouraging Messianic Jews to emigrate to Israel, also rejected the accords. He presented the basic issue as being whether or not one had the right *faith*. Responding to the question as to whether the peace accords could possibly work, he stated:

Until there is a basic change in the faith of the Arab community, I don't see how this can succeed.¹⁹

Gershon Nerel, the new Messianic Jewish Alliance Secretary in Israel, gave a stark reason for his negative response to the accords:

We should remember the existing spiritual battle between the spirit of the Bible and the Koran still continues.²⁰

We can see, therefore, that the Messianic Jewish community in Israel is also in some sense divided over the peace accords. Different interpretations of what is essentially seen as the *religious and biblical* issue of Zionism appear to be the deciding factor in this debate. All of the leaders quoted above are Zionists of one sort or another, but the particular *type* of religious Zionism seems to be the determining factor.

Messianic Jewish responses: America

In the following selection of opinions from the large number and broad range of Messianic Jewish congregations and organisations in the USA I hope that I have succeeded in representing the overall membership fairly. One of the most significant and powerful associations in America is the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (the MJAA), and in its October 1993 NewsBrief, the General Secretary, Joel Chernoff, wrote these words in his editorial:

Israel has taken a drastic, even desperate step toward peace by giving up Jericho and the Gaza Strip. And this, perhaps, may only be a prelude to a Palestinian state within the Biblical boundaries of what we know to be Israel proper. But before we get too 'stressed out' over these events, let us remind ourselves that God is in control of this situation and cares more than we do about how things turn out in Israel.²¹

The Zionist perspective is evident once again, and in fact it becomes even more explicit as the editorial continues. He asks his members the rhetorical question as to whether the peace initiative is doomed, and replies that 'more than likely' it is doomed.²² His reasons are unequivocally Zionist. God gave the whole land to the Jewish people, and they will need all of it to house the

18 Ibid.

19 Art. cit. in *The Messianic Times*, op. cit., p 1.

20 Art. cit., p 7.

21 *MJAA NewsBrief*, vol. 6, no. 10, October 1993, p 1.

22 Ibid.

final in-gathering of the Jewish people to Israel.²³

Truly, this peace is futile!... The peace plan is in direct conflict with God's ultimate prophetic plan for returning exiled Israel to her promised land.²⁴

For many Messianic Jews, the core issue remains that of the inviolability of Jerusalem as the Jewish capital of the Jewish State. Even where some are prepared to speak about the theoretical possibility of giving the Gaza Strip or other areas to the Palestinians, they categorically refuse to consider any sharing of Jerusalem. We see this attitude, for example, in an editorial in the latest edition of *The Messianic Times*:

Can Israel afford to give up land?... The city of Jerusalem cannot fall into militant Islamic hands.²⁵

This fundamental presupposition is shared by Gabriel A. Goldberg, the Director of the organisation, Friends of Zion. The final 1993 edition of their official publication, *Hashivah — The Return*, was devoted to the issue of the accords. Goldberg is convinced that the peace process

will most likely lead to another war; a war, I believe, more destructive than all previous Arab-Israeli wars.²⁶

The essential context is clearly that of a religious battle, not a political problem, as far as Goldberg is concerned. The political and social troubles are merely the result of the world refusing to accept God's ways. He presents a litany of Arab aggression against Israel, and concludes that

The real reason for the Arabs' compulsive hostility is Islam.²⁷

Now of course the PLO, as well as many other organisations, are representative of Christian Arabs as well as Muslim Arabs, and there are large numbers of Christians throughout the world who support the Palestinian cause but who are not friends of Islam. Goldberg holds that these Christians, as well as journalists, have been deceived by the revisionist histories and polemics of the Islamic propagandists.²⁸ His conclusion is no surprise:

Criticism of the current peace process does not mean that one is against peace. It just means that one is realistic and recognises that the formula is fatally flawed.²⁹

The great majority of American Messianic Jewish leaders have taken this line that the peace accords are simply a cosmetic helping the world to deceive itself into thinking that everything is going to work out in an acceptable way from now on. One important voice which has served to hold out more hope for the present initiative, however, is that of Louis Goldberg, the professor of Theology and Jewish Studies at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He describes himself as 'cautiously optimistic', though he acknowledges that

23 Art. cit., pp. 1 f.

24 Art. cit., p.2.

25 *The Messianic Times*, vol. 4, no. 3, Winter 1994, p 4.

26 *Hashivah — The Return*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1993, p 1.

27 Art. cit., p 2.

28 Art. cit., pp 2f.

29 Art. cit., p 6.

There are going to be some stresses and strains here and there because they're in uncharted waters.³⁰

These words might seem ridiculously naive to some in the context of the years of bitter hostility between Israel and the PLO. One can only surmise that Goldberg is seriously trying to encourage other Messianic Jews to support the initiative as much as is possible. His type of positive approach, though, is a minority one in the American scene.

The generally more aggressive tone of the American Messianic community in comparison with that of the Israeli Messianic community perhaps helps us to appreciate the words of Ilan Zamir, a senior Messianic Jewish leader in Israel:

The further you get from Jerusalem and from American immigrants, the more moderate the views become. Don't tell me that believers are not influenced by secular Jews.³¹

Messianic Jewish responses: Britain

Although I have had a great many conversations with British Messianic Jews on this very matter, to date I have neither read nor received any written opinions. It is soon evident, however, that here in Britain the reaction from within the Messianic Jewish community has also shown the same divide which we have noted in Israel and America. On the whole, the British scene is closer to that in America than that in Israel.

Generally speaking, the same difference is found between those whose commitment to a certain type of Zionist vision of the whole land, especially Jerusalem, as belonging exclusively to Israel, has led either to a marginalising or even to a complete dismissal of the concept of the accords as a 'break-through', and those whose commitment to peace and justice among peoples has led to a definite hope that this might indeed be God at work in a new and positive way.

Western Christian responses: Israel

The very division which we have noted among Messianic Jews is also to be found among non-Jewish Christian supporters of the various types of ministry to Jewish people. Many (most?) are deeply upset at what they see to be an attack on God's plan for the Jewish people, whereas others are prayerfully hopeful that this will be the beginning of a lasting peace settlement. Jan Willem van der Hoeven, the spokesman for the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ), is adamant that this accord is not the work of God:

If it is successful, [it will] deny everything that God has kept the Jews alive for — not to be a secular nation of humanists, but to be His nation with a circumcised heart.³²

30 *The Messianic Times*, vol. 4, no. 3, Winter 1994, p 13.

31 Quoted by Menachem Benhayim in *The Messianic Jew and Hebrew Christian*, 66/4, December 1993 — February 1994, p 103.

32 'Israeli-PLO Accord Prompts Fears', art. cit., p 63.

The Director of the ICEJ, Johann Luckhoff, exhorts his readers to remember that God is in control of the destiny of Israel, so that

Even if Israel's leaders make mistakes, those mistakes will only have the effect the Lord will permit them to have.... Our response therefore should be that we continue to implicitly trust the Lord for the protection of His people, while not ceasing to pray for the true peace of Jerusalem.³³

David Dolan, a highly respected journalist and author who lives in Israel, sympathises with people who desperately long to see peace in their lifetime, but can find no real comfort for them in these accords:

Many Jews and Arabs yearn for peace. Still, it indeed seems quite premature to say that a period of actual peace is now in store for the Middle East. It seems more than likely that further unrest looms on the immediate horizon, and possibly even war.³⁴

Dolan has a whole end-times programme ready, and he is able to make use of a worst-case scenario out of the present accords in his programme:

Does the Bible have anything to say about the prospect of a Palestinian state in Israel's biblical heartland? Several portions of Scripture indicate that God has intended for Jews to return to these areas.... In chapters 32 and 33 of Jeremiah, six specific areas are cited to where God would bring scattered Jews from around the globe.... If current Palestinian leaders have their way, Jews would again be forbidden to reside in most of these areas. Such a prospect would seem to be in opposition to God's final ingathering intentions.³⁵

This view is certainly typical of many Christian individuals and organisations in Israel. To this point I have only come across one reference to a non-Jewish Christian in Israel who has taken a 'cautiously optimistic' stance on the accords. In the Charisma article from which I have already quoted, there is a paragraph about Ray Lockhart, the rector of Christ Church in the Old City of Jerusalem. He is not in fact quoted, but the author of the article says this *about* him:

Not all Christians in Israel have condemned the peace accord. Ray Lockhart... is trying to look on the bright side. He exhorts his congregants to pray for their enemies and take every opportunity to share their faith.³⁶

The very tone of this paragraph in the article indicates how rare it is to find a Christian leader in Israel who will, publicly at least, speak positively of the peace accords.

Western Christian responses: Britain

The Chief Executive of the society, Christian Witness to Israel (CWI), John S. Ross, has taken a positive and hopeful stance regarding the current situation. He writes of a 'sincere desire for peace' and the challenge now 'to put

33 *A Word from Jerusalem*, the Newsletter of the ICEJ, September/October 1993, p 2.

34 'Future Uncertain Under Accords', in *The Messianic Times*, vol. 4, no. 3, p 14.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Art. cit.*, p 63.

substance to desires and turn the symbols into reality'.³⁷ He is convinced that 'Christians must hope and pray that peace succeeds', and he is pleased to 'congratulate both Israeli and Palestinian leaders on their brave initiative'.³⁸ But there is no naive hope in his conviction, because he goes on to remind his readers of 'the inadequate concept of peace that predominates among men whose thoughts are not ruled by God's Truth'. His concluding words are:

For this reason let us all pledge ourselves to renewed commitment to pray and work together for the establishment of the reign of Jesus Christ, the Messianic Prince of Peace, and the outpouring of his true Shalom in Jerusalem.³⁹

Tony Pearce, director of the society, The Messianic Testimony, is equally aware of the need for prayer for God's Shalom to be established in Israel, and writes accordingly. However, his basic attitude to the accords seems to be considerably more pessimistic than that of Ross. In fact the most positive comment he makes in his front page article is:

The present peace agreement may last a while because of the desire of many on both sides for an end to conflict.⁴⁰

But he does not really believe this, and focuses his presentation around the belief that 'people may be saying peace, peace, when there actually is no peace'.⁴¹

Derek White, the Director of the British organisation, Christian Friends of Israel, produced a four-page commentary in February 1994 entitled, 'A Dangerous Peace?' In this, he helpfully sets out some of the hopes and fears of both those who are optimistic and those who are pessimistic about the role of the accords, but again, a basically suspicious and negative evaluation comes through. When he presents his own understanding of the basic issues involved, he begins with the conviction that:

Part of God's unconditional covenant with Israel is to give them the whole Land of Israel, (and indeed ultimately a larger area than that at present occupied by Israel), as their own national inheritance.⁴²

His second conviction is that:

The Middle East conflict is theological and not political or territorial. It is basically a conflict between the forces of Islam and that of the God of Israel.... Whatever may be said by the PLO about the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, to their right to Jerusalem as capital of a Palestinian State, etc., these are secondary to, and indeed means to, the ultimate end of achieving an Islamic domination over the whole of the Middle East.⁴³

But most interestingly of all, as far as distinctive perspectives go, White

37 *CWI Herald*, Winter 1993, p 3.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Op. cit.*, p 16.

40 'Peace In Our Time?', in *CHAI, The Magazine of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Great Britain*, issue 189, Winter 1993, p 1.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Towards...* *op. cit.*, p 3.

43 *Ibid.*

also sees a sinister outcome even if there should prove to be 'a period of peace and prosperity' in the region. He links the possible implementation of a workable and working peace with

recent talk of a 'new world order' with express wishes to achieve peace at any price... a movement towards a period of artificial peace and some sort of new world government, possibly centred in Jerusalem. Such a scene could also lead to the emergence of an anti-Christ figure with a centre in Jerusalem.⁴⁴

It seems to me that by linking the possible immediate to medium-term presence of peace and stability in the region with such a hypothetical scenario, White has graphically made his own position clear.

The organisation which has been most explicitly opposed to the accords, at least as far as its official publications are concerned, however, is Prayer for Israel. The editorial in their March/April 1994 publication, written by Geoffrey and Margaret Smith, views the whole process through the lens of Ezekiel 13. Here is their own judgment, based on their interpretative application of that chapter:

God warns His people that they are misled by prophets saying, 'Peace! when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold they plaster it over with whitewash; so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash that it will fall.'... It is a flimsy wall they have plastered over. Plaster may disguise the cracks and weaknesses of construction, but they are fatal flaws.... Let us pray for His mercy on the plasterers, and thank God that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowing. If God has allowed the process, and in His time God will finally tear it down, what is His purpose?... To draw back to Himself those who live in disbelief, God allows us to come to the end of our way of doing things. If we will not return to Him because of His love, then surely we will return when we have tried every alternative!⁴⁵

Clifford Hill, the Director of the Prophetic Word Ministries Trust, has also written on our subject. He regards the motivation of the Israeli leaders to make such a peace agreement with the PLO as a desire by men who are 'tired of war' to 'buy peace in the short term so that they can live out the remainder of their days in quietness'.⁴⁶ He follows up this negative evaluation by expressing his conviction that even though things may quieten down for a period, this will simply lead to a further time of what the Bible calls 'Jacob's trouble', a reference to a period of persecution and hardship for the Jewish people.⁴⁷ Indeed this time of 'Jacob's trouble' is taken by those involved in Jewish ministry as a reference to tribulations associated with eschatological fulfilments, and Hill goes on to say that:

The Israeli-PLO treaty is an important sign indicating that we are getting closer to the fulfilment of the biblical prophecies referring to the times leading up to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴⁸

44 Op. cit., p 4.

45 *Prayer for Israel*, issue 26/2, March/April 1994, p 1.

46 'Peace! Peace!', the editorial in *Prophecy Today*, 9/6, November/December 1993, p 4.

47 See Jeremiah 30:7.

48 Op. cit., p 5.

However Hill does see two reasons for hope in this situation, which he calls 'a window of opportunity':

It gives further time for Jews *and* Arabs to come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.... Secondly, it gives further opportunity for the church in many nations to wake up to the biblical significance of what is happening in Israel,...⁴⁹

Summary

What, then, have we learned from these representative persons? Whereas some Messianic Jews and non-Jewish Christian activists in the area of Jewish ministry are keen to encourage a hopeful attitude towards the peace accords, more seem to be decidedly antagonistic to the whole affair. Even the cautious optimists are acutely aware of the vulnerability of their hope.

The more hawkish the person is religio-politically, the more likely he/she is to take a strong negative position vis-à-vis the Israeli-PLO accords. In sharp distinction to other, indeed the great majority of, Christians, it is the Messianic Jewish community and the Christians who are involved in Jewish ministry who are the religio-political hawks vis-à-vis the people and the land of Israel.

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49 Ibid.