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Abstract Review of *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism* (2001), edited by Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward; *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel* (2000), by Frank J. Johnson and Rabbi William J. Leffler; and *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to the Crown Heights* (1998), by Harris Lenowitz.

Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

President Ezra Taft Benson admonished us, "We need to know more about the Jews, and the Jews ought to know more about the Mormons."[1] Three recently published books on Jewish and Mormon themes may assist Latter-day Saints in exploring the relationship to their "cousins" of the house of Judah. The newest and first reviewed, *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism,* is a compilation of scholarly yet spiritual treatments on both subjects and

1. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 97.

Review of Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward, eds. *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism.* London: Associated University Presses, 2001. 225 pp., with an appendix and subject and source indexes. $39.95.

Review of Frank J. Johnson and Rabbi William J. Leffler. *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel.* Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, 2000. xii + 243 pp., with three appendixes and a glossary. $24.95.

Review of Harris Lenowitz. *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. viii + 297 pp., with three indexes. $19.95.

should be a valuable source for anyone interested in the intersection of Mormon and Jewish thought. The second, *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel,* presents two rather narrow views of the respective religions but may still be useful to Mormons in terms of an overall understanding of what it means to be Jewish. The last reviewed, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights,* is perhaps the most fascinating, even though it does not deal specifically with Mormon themes.

Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism

This volume is the published record of a scholarly conference held at the University of Denver's Center for Judaic Studies in 1998. The conference itself was the brainchild of Stanley M. Wagner, founding director of the Center for Judaic Studies, and Daniel C. Rona, the well-known Israeli Latter-day Saint whose Ensign Foundation provided substantial financial support for the conference. The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies also contributed additional funding for the conference. But the book itself is the result of the tenacity of its three coeditors, especially Raphael Jospe and Truman G. Madsen, whose dedication to bridging the understanding gap that separates the two Israelite peoples has been unflagging.

Beginning with an introduction by coeditor Seth Ward, which gives a chapter-by-chapter preview that could easily have been published in lieu of this review, the book is divided into four parts. Each part features two or three chapters that, as Ward describes them, "debate scriptural foundations, in both the Hebrew Bible and . . . Mormon scriptures," as well as issues of Sabbath, temple, and "the development of ideas about covenant in the works of Joseph Smith and in contemporary Jewish theology" (p. 14). But the reader soon discovers that this is no debate in the classic sense. Not a single subject is approached from both Jewish and Mormon sides. The various authors each wind up pursuing a separate path. This loose focus not-

withstanding, the results of all four parts of the book are informative and thought provoking. A final and very useful contribution by Ward entitled "A Literature Survey of Mormon-Jewish Studies" appears as an appendix.

Part 1, "Scriptural Foundations of the Covenant," features chapters entitled "Biblical Voices on Chosenness," by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and "Covenant in the Book of Mormon," by Daniel C. Peterson. Book of Mormon perspectives will understandably be explored by Latter-day Saint authors in such compilations, but whenever I see a pairing like this, I am troubled that the Bible is so often left to the non-Latter-day Saint partner. Certainly no one understands the fulness of the Israelite covenant, as presented throughout the Bible, in the way that Latter-day Saints do. The Bible is, after all, first among equals among our standard works. A competent Latter-day Saint presentation on biblical voices would be appropriate, particularly since the offering by Frymer-Kensky, professor of Bible at the University of Chicago Divinity School, amounts to little more than a recap of selected Deuteronomic themes with no reference to Judaism until the final page.

The absence of endnotes in the article is troubling. At least one endnote should have been provided for the reference to Moshe Dothan's archaeological work at the Philistine site of Ashdod in Israel. Even the reference to Dothan's work is puzzling since the Ashdod work is over thirty years old and has been eclipsed by more recent work at Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath (was the writer unaware of this?). By contrast, Daniel Peterson's article on the Book of Mormon is logically crafted, well ordered, thematically consistent, and thoroughly referenced with endnotes. In discussing the Book of Mormon's contribution to understanding the "covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 13:23), Peterson explores the entire scope of Book of Mormon comments on the subject. He, of course, refers back to the Bible and even includes a reference to the Qurʾan, which Peterson, associate professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University, cannot (or does not) resist. In terms of Judah, Peterson demonstrates that the Book of Mormon covenant concept fully recognizes the Jewish people and their unique

position in the house of Israel. He also quotes 2 Nephi 29:4–5, the Lord's stern condemnation of those Gentiles who persecute and attack Jews. The message is timely. Peterson rescues part 1, making it, as a whole, a strong section of the book.

In part 2, "Signs of the Covenant: Sabbath and Temple," two Latter-day Saint authors explore the subject matter from both Latter-day Saint and Jewish perspectives. While both are qualified for the task, I wonder why no Jewish perspectives appear from Jews (who are, after all, the ones who can legitimately offer that perspective). Susan Easton Black, professor of church history and doctrine at BYU, competently presents "The Sabbath as a Covenant in Mormonism and Judaism." Her amply documented chapter samples the spirit of the Jewish Sabbath by quoting from Jewish authors such as coeditor Raphael Jospe and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Her comments on the Sunday Sabbath observed by Latter-day Saints are insightful but short enough (only four pages) that one might be left wanting more. The chapter authored by Andrew Skinner, professor of ancient scripture and dean of Religious Education at BYU, is particularly well written. A scholar familiar with Jewish primary sources (and who can read them in Hebrew), Skinner declares an important concept for Judah to keep in mind: "Latter-day Saints maintain unequivocally that the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham is *their* covenant too" (p. 84).

Noting the Latter-day Saint preoccupation with temples, Skinner also demonstrates "Judaism's temple-centeredness" (p. 73) with supporting quotations from Rabbi Chaim Richman, one of Israel's top scholars on the ancient Jewish temple. He then moves on to explore, from both Jewish and Latter-day Saint sources, the blessings of having temples, the despair at losing them for a time, the covenants connected with temples, and even the temple connections of the prophet Elijah, demonstrating (as the chapter title suggests) "The Inextricable Link between Temple, Covenant, and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism."

Part 3, "Covenants: Modern and Post-Modern," begins with a discussion by Stephen Ricks, "Covenant and Chosenness in the Revelations and Writings of Joseph Smith." Ricks, professor of Asian and

Near Eastern languages at BYU, contrasts Joseph Smith's very positive view of God's covenant with the house of Israel with the rather gloomy views regarding that covenant in the writings of early nineteenth-century Christian religionists, demonstrating how unique Joseph Smith's concept of the eternal covenant really was. As an example, Ricks describes Joseph's authorization of Orson Hyde to travel to Jerusalem "to dedicate the Holy Land for the return of the Jews" (p. 96). Ricks's treatment of Orson Hyde's prayer of dedication and its implications for the immigration of Jews to the land of Israel could be considered "politically incorrect" in some circles today but is remarkably accurate in terms of historical context and prophecy. He maintains that "The mission of Orson Hyde to dedicate Jerusalem and Palestine for the return of the Jews to their homeland was fulfillment of the covenant promise made to Abraham, renewed with Isaac, and confirmed with Jacob 'that thou wouldst not only give them this land for an everlasting inheritance, but that thou wouldst remember their seed forever,' as Orson Hyde expressed it in his prayer" (p. 100).

In addition to quoting Joseph Smith and Orson Hyde, Ricks quotes Brigham Young when addressing the issue of proselytizing, or rather *not* proselytizing, the Jews of the land of Israel: "Unlike Christian expectations for the return of the Jews, Orson Hyde's prayer for their return to Jerusalem did not include a prayer for affirmative preaching to them there. Brigham Young stated this in a sermon in December 1854—a point reiterated by other leaders of the LDS Church: 'Jerusalem is not to be redeemed by our going there and preaching to the inhabitants. It will be redeemed by the hand of the Almighty'" (p. 99).

In the next chapter, Neil Gillman provides the "post-Modern" part of this section of *Covenant and Chosenness*. A professor of Jewish philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, Gillman skillfully samples diverse twentieth-century Jewish thinkers, from voices Orthodox to Reform, in their search to find meaning in the notion of an ancient covenant in a modern world. His offering is interesting reading, albeit somewhat involved, and only goes astray when the author leaves the realm of Jewish thought to present what he thinks are parallel post-Modern trends in Mormonism. His quotations from

obscure articles in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* (there are no references to mainstream LDS sources) demonstrate that he is not up to speed in terms of the real forces driving the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints into the twenty-first century. In terms of the American Jewish experience, however, Gillman presents some genuine issues. Whether the vast majority of the Jewish world will come to think of themselves as "post-Modern" is another question (see below, "Do the Math!").

Part 4, "Covenant and Ultimate Destiny: Particularistic and Universalistic Visions" is a mouthful of a title for the book's final section. But the last three chapters do in fact address the issue of whether Mormonism and Judaism should expect a "particularist" or "universalist" fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel—in other words, can Jews and Mormons (and even others) believe and worship differently but still all make it to heaven? Coeditor Truman G. Madsen, emeritus professor of philosophy at BYU, eloquently describes and summarizes the universalist view that the restored gospel presents of the Israelite covenant and all humankind. Pointing out that all citizens of the earth, whether Jews or Gentiles, indeed all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, are eventually destined to be recognized as gathered Israel in the restored gospel sense—the inheritors of the gospel covenants God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Madsen reaches the ultimate universalist conclusion: "Who then is left out? No one. Except those who resolutely and finally choose not to be chosen" (p. 139).

In his chapter entitled "Overcoming Chosenness," Menachem Kellner, professor of Jewish thought at the University of Haifa, presents another universalist model, but one so radically different from any of his modern Jewish contemporaries that readers may be genuinely startled, Jewish and gentile alike. Citing a passage allegedly suppressed from Maimonides' *Mishnah Torah,* Kellner suggests that all the peoples of the world will, eventually, become heirs of the Israelite covenant and its blessings, because all the peoples of the world will convert to Judaism incident to the coming of the Messiah! "In the end of days all humans will be Jews" is the scenario predicted by Kellner, "because . . . to become a Jew it is enough to adopt correct beliefs;

halakhic practice and even the identity of one's mother become secondary issues" (p. 157). Christianity and Islam, according to Kellner's interpretation of Maimonides, serve to prepare the way for this mass conversion to Judaism by introducing large segments of the world to the precepts of the Torah (i.e., the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament). I quickly point out that Kellner is unique in his view—virtually no other Jewish commentator takes the positions he proposes—and other than passages from medieval literature, Kellner largely quotes his own previous works in the endnotes. The message here: Kellner is virtually alone among Jews in his notion that we will all one day be Jewish. Most of his colleagues (see Jospe below, for example) suggest that Jews will retain their unique identity and religion under the Israelite covenant in perpetuity, eternally separate from the gentile nations. But as alone as he is among Jews, the photographic negative of Kellner's model has been at work for centuries among Christians and Muslims, as well as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of whom believe that the world will convert to their faith at the end of days.

The third of this trio of chapters, however, takes a more traditional and "particularist" view of the Jewish people as sole inheritors of the ancient covenant God made with Israel, albeit leaving room enough and to spare for the Latter-day Saints as a modern covenant people of God in and of themselves. In "Chosenness in Judaism: Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity," coeditor Raphael Jospe, who is senior lecturer in Jewish philosophy at the Open University of Israel and adjunct professor of Jewish studies at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, maintains that Jews will remain Jews and non-Jews will remain non-Jews in the plan of heaven. *Both* Jews and Gentiles may expect a heavenly reward for their willingness to obey God's commandments, or, as the sages put it, "The righteous of the nations have a portion in the world to come" (p. 179). Gentiles in general have a covenant from God in the form of the seven Noahide commandments. And Latter-day Saints in particular have a specific covenant in their restored gospel. God can covenant with any people, or with all people. And the covenant expectations God has of one nation in any specific

setting or era may or may not be the same as for another nation in another setting or era. But chosen people must exercise caution. "There are Jews today," Jospe maintains, "who think that chosenness confers upon the Jewish people some spiritual or other superiority over non-Jews" (p. 185). Though he does not say the same of Latter-day Saints, that conclusion applies just as certainly to some of them. This often lends the very concept of chosenness a negative connotation among individuals who are not Latter-day Saints or Jews. However, Jospe suggests "that what is objectionable is not the concept of the Chosen People per se, but rather its externalization"—chosenness, says Jospe, "is a concept properly directed internally rather than externally" (p. 185). Jews and Mormons each have a covenant with God and are chosen peoples in his sight. And if his covenant with one differs from his covenant with the other, are they not both valid in his eyes? "Thus understood," concludes Jospe, "chosenness and covenant need not imply any triumphalism or superiority" (p. 187).

Do the Math!

The Jewish world is changing rapidly. In 1939 approximately 13 million Jews lived on our planet, the majority of whom were located in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. More than 6 million of those (nearly half the world's Jews) were killed in the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany. It took more than half a century for the Jewish world to rebuild its population to pre–World War II levels, but by the end of the twentieth century it was estimated that the number of Jews had again topped 13 million.[2] The location of the majority of those Jews, however, and the role that their location plays in religious life, has altered significantly. In the last fifteen years, for

2. The Israeli newspaper *Haʾaretz* reported the current world Jewish population at 13.2 million. Yair Sheleg, "Intermarriage, Low Birth Rates Threaten Disapora Jewry," *Haʾaretz,* 13 February 2002 (English Internet edition: www.haaretzdaily.com).

example, over 1 million Jews moved from the former Soviet Union to Israel, while more tens of thousands moved to the United States. Today, the country with the largest Jewish population in the world is the United States of America, with an estimated 6 million Jews (the plurality of world Jewry). The country with the second largest Jewish population is Israel, which, according to its 2002 population count, numbered some 5.3 million Jews as part of its 6.5 million total population.[3] Due to slowing Jewish birthrates, demographic models suggest that the world Jewish population will not increase to 14 million until some time between 2030 and 2040. However, continued immigration to Israel and a higher birthrate among Israeli Jews as opposed to non-Israeli Jews will result in more than 7 million of those Jews residing in the Jewish State. Israel will therefore be the home of an absolute majority of the world's Jews before the middle of the twenty-first century. Its population of Jews will also be much younger, on the average, than the Jewish population in America and other parts of the world and will, of course, be a Hebrew-speaking population.[4]

In terms of Jewish religious practice, this math provides a clear message. Prior to the 1800s, only one "type" of Judaism existed—the traditional system that is now called Orthodox Judaism. It was not even called "Orthodox" then because no other types of Judaism existed. Whether the tradition was Ashkenazic or Sephardic, Judaism was Judaism. But the appearance of Reform Judaism in Germany in the 1800s and its subsequent migration to and popularity in the United States resulted in the need to define traditional Judaism by assigning it some type of name, and "Orthodox" became the identifying tag. The 1900s saw the rise in America of a "third way" in Judaism—the Conservative movement, a sort of meeting in the middle for American Jews who were uncomfortable with some of the traditions and practices of the Orthodox but were put off by the radical changes instituted

3. As reported by the Central Bureau of Statistics of the State of Israel in April 2002. Tal Muscal, "Population at 6.5 Million on 54th Independence Day," *The Jerusalem Post,* 16 April 2002 (Internet edition: www.jpost.com).

4. Sheleg, "Intermarriage, Low Birth Rates."

by the Reform. Conservative Judaism attracted more American Jews than any other movement during the twentieth century, so that by 2002, nearly 1.1 million (or 18 percent) of America's 6 million Jews affiliated with Conservative synagogues, 960,000 (or 16 percent) affiliated with the Reform movement, and only about 360,000 (just 6 percent) affiliated with Orthodox movements. The Conservative and Reform movements together now claim over 2.1 million American Jews, about 34 percent of the U.S. total. But while the nontraditional movements are trouncing the Orthodox in terms of adherents in the United States, more than half of all American Jews (some 3.5 million) claim no religious affiliation with any of these movements.[5]

The situation in Israel, however, is a different story. For all intents and purposes, Orthodox Judaism is the only recognized Judaism in Israel. In spite of efforts by Reform and Conservative activists to obtain equal recognition for their movements, the religious apparatus of the Jewish state is controlled by the Orthodox. There is no sign of much popular opposition to the Orthodox monopoly over the religious life of Israel's 5.3 million Jews nor any sign that Orthodox control of Israeli Jewish institutions and practices will change in the coming decades. Relatively few Conservative or Reform Jews immigrate to Israel from America—most new American-Israelis are Orthodox. Another factor to consider is that nearly 80 percent of Israeli Jews (some 4 million) participate in their synagogues, to one extent or another, and identify themselves as traditionally adherent. The Jews of Israel who choose to exercise religion are nearly all Orthodox by default. What this means in terms of world Jewry is that the number of Orthodox Jews is double that of the Reform and Conservative combined. Even now, practicing Orthodox Jews in the world outnumber the total of all other movements together, literally by millions. And since the *majority* of *all* the world's Jews are projected to be living in Israel by the year 2040, the numerical gap between the growing Orthodox community in Israel and the smaller American Reform/Conservative

5. Rachel Zoll (A.P.), "Conservative Jews Ponder Future of Religious Moderation," *The Jerusalem Post,* 11 February 2002 (Internet edition: www.jpost.com).

community will continue to grow. The message, relevant for the next book to be reviewed, is simply this: Orthodox Judaism is in first place today and is in first place to stay.

Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel

This is a volume with an inviting title. Written by Frank J. Johnson (a Latter-day Saint) and William J. Leffler (a Reform Jew), its title seems to promise a comparison both of peoples and of their religious traditions. The format—alternating chapters by the two writers on the backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of Judaism and Mormonism—is strong and might have been employed well in *Covenant and Chosenness*. However, the book falls short of informing readers about the real nature and extent of Judaism because of its light treatment of Orthodoxy. The book also fails, in my opinion, to represent the essence and spirit of Latter-day Saint religion because of shortcomings in style and choice of content. The reason for these failures probably lies with the background and scope of experience of the two authors—Leffler is described as a retired Reform rabbi and Johnson is introduced as a convert to Mormonism and a high priest who recently served a year-long mission in Canada with his wife.

On the Jewish side, Rabbi Leffler writes in an intelligent and readable style, presenting a picture of his own type of Judaism that is both interesting and accurate—accurate, that is, in terms of Jews in America. Leffler gives a great deal more weight to the interpretation and practice of "non-traditionalist" Judaism (his combination term for Reform and Conservative) than to "traditionalist" Judaism (which, of course, refers to Orthodoxy). The discussion is transparent and honest, and Leffler does periodically contrast the beliefs and practices of the "traditionalists" with the "non-traditionalists" he clearly favors. But the discussion is not evenhanded. Reform ideas are given much more space than Orthodox ideas, to the point that the reader could easily come away with the impression that Jews in general are primarily non-Orthodox and that Orthodoxy is the much smaller school of Judaism, destined to continue shrinking and

eventually to disappear. In America, of course, this may be true—far more Conservative and Reform Jews than Orthodox live there. But as pointed out above, this is certainly not the case with world Jewry in general, not now and even less so in the future, if trends continue. Orthodox Judaism is far and away dominant in the Jewish world as a whole. But a Latter-day Saint reader could come away from Leffler's chapters with the impression that Leffler's own brand of Judaism represents how most Jews throughout the world operate, especially because Latter-day Saints tend to compare other religions to their own, and LDS doctrine and practices are not as diverse as those of the Jews (there is no "Reform" Mormonism).

Leffler often makes sweeping statements about "modern Jews" that certainly do not apply to all Jews, or even to the majority of Jews, in this modern age. For example:

> Modern Jews are not disturbed by the findings of biblical scholars who conclude that the Pentateuch was compiled by different authors and redactors over a period of many centuries and reflect their editing of the events it reports. This approach also permits Judaism to take a situational view of ethical questions, though still maintaining the overarching principle on which they are based. (pp. 3–4)

Even if this can be said to be the case for modern Reform or Conservative Jews, it certainly cannot be said of modern Orthodox Jews, for whom the Pentateuch (or Torah) is the word of God and for whom "situational ethics" is not an acceptable method of religious operation. Although Rabbi Leffler's chapters do not describe much concerning the beliefs and practices of the majority of Jews, namely Orthodox Judaism, I would give them a conditional recommendation for what they are—essentially an adequately written introductory discussion of Reform Judaism.

The discussion of Mormonism, in my opinion, was not as well written. Johnson's treatment suffers on two counts. His description of Latter-day Saint religion was, for my tastes, often tedious and one-dimensional. I found myself turned off by descriptions of church

organization, belief, and practice that, while correct in the technical sense, give the impression of a centrally run bureaucracy of mere conformists rather than the rich assortment of intelligent individuals with whom I regularly associate. If I were a prospective investigator, I would probably avoid a denomination described in such unattractive terms. Johnson's chapters also could have used some judicious editing. They go into far more detail about certain aspects of church history and government than is really necessary to adequately introduce a reader to Latter-day Saint belief and practice. The text is cluttered with hundreds of idiosyncratic references to everything from the nature of reformed Egyptian as "shorthand for Hebrew" to the "living expenses" of General Authorities. Lack of content control makes Johnson's chapters a rambling collection of run-on sentences and ideas that tend to be more confusing than informative.

The chapters on the Church of Jesus Christ also seem to be self-congratulatory, as if the church had been recognized by popular acclamation as the truly truest religion and receptacle of virtue, for example: "Today, Mormons are highly respected and much better understood by most people" (p. 37). Perhaps it can be said that Latter-day Saints are finding more respect in the United States and in some other areas of the world than we used to enjoy, but as a rule are we "highly respected"? In general, no. I regularly deal with people who know nothing at all about Latter-day Saints, or who have only heard stories of polygamy, and for whom I am the only Latter-day Saint they have ever met. We may be coming "out of obscurity," but in world terms we are only barely out and still have a lot of work to do.

Another weakness is that in terms of Jews, Johnson's text tends to be undiplomatic and condescending. (To Rabbi Leffler's credit, he makes no statements about Mormons that could be considered negative.) If I were a Jew reading this book, I would probably be amazed at what Johnson writes about Latter-day Saints but would undoubtedly be insulted by what he writes about Jews. A couple of examples will suffice: "'True' and 'truth' are words that we Latter-day Saints take very seriously and that relate to concepts in which we believe absolutely. In contrast, Jews have great difficulty with these words when applied to

religious concepts and teachings" (p. 23). "Mormons believe in absolute truth, whether it be scriptural, ethical, or moral, and most Jews do not" (p. 23).

I came away from this book thinking that it might be beneficial for Latter-day Saints to read it—it would be helpful if more Mormons understood something of Reform Jews and Judaism in America (if not in Israel). But at the same time I also came away hoping that no Jew would ever read it. The description of Mormonism is, in my opinion, so unattractively presented that I would not want anyone to think it accurately captured the essence, spirit, and revealed truth of my faith. Alas, since the book is published by Ktav, a major Jewish publishing house, the likelihood is that many more Jews will read it than Mormons. Oiy veh!

"We have found the Messiah!"[6]

There is something about the word *messiah* that excites Latter-day Saints. Somehow, just the use of the term *messiah* alongside the familiar anglicized Greek name-title "Christ" lends an air of ancient world authenticity to our conversations about Jesus of Nazareth. By now there cannot be many who have not been taught that the Greek term *christos,* which means "anointed one," was the initial translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic term *meshiah,* which also means "anointed one," and from which our anglicized term *messiah* is derived. When speaking of himself, Jesus (and his followers) actually used the term "Messiah" rather than "Christ." In our own time, to say "Jesus the Messiah" has become as meaningful an expression for some Latter-day Saints as saying "Jesus the Christ." The acceptability that use of the Jewish term has gained in Latter-day Saint settings is evident in the popular multivolume commentary on the life of Jesus by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, commonly called "the Messiah series"

6. John 1:41 KJV: "Messias" is rendered here as "Messiah."

(*The Promised Messiah, The Mortal Messiah* volumes 1–4, and *The Millennial Messiah*).

The Latter-day Saint concept of messiah, indeed the concept of the Christian world at large, is that there is but one: Jesus the Messiah, whom we more often call Jesus the Christ, or simply Jesus Christ. In the historical development of Judaism, however, there have been expectations of more than a single messiah. As far back as the time of Jesus himself, Jews looked forward to the coming of at least three different messiahs—a "forerunner" messiah of the lineage of Joseph, a "priestly" messiah of the lineage of Aaron, and a "royal" messiah of the lineage of David. (How these differing expectations were dealt with by the New Testament writers in terms of Jesus is a subject for another time.) A consensus has emerged among Jewish thinkers over the centuries that in every generation men arise who could become the promised messiahs, but whether or not God brings them to that point depends on the worthiness of the generation. Every generation of Jews over the last two millennia has prayed daily for the coming of messiah, and as will be seen below, has actually expected that arrival in its day. By the same token, every generation of Latter-day Saints since the restoration began has prepared for the coming of Christ, and every Latter-day Saint since Joseph Smith has probably thought, at one time or another, that during his or her own lifetime he or she would see the Savior's coming. Jews and Mormons continue to await the messianic arrival with great expectations, as widely different as those expectations are.

I have used the term *messiah* uncapitalized here, somewhat out of normal LDS literary practice, because it is applied above and below to men other than Jesus. In fact, Jesus himself used the term in warning about others who would come after he was gone: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is messiah, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false messiahs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:23–24, with *messiah* substituted for *Christ*).

Since Jesus warned of false messiahs, he must surely have known that they would come. But Christian history in general, and Latter-day Saint history in particular, does not report their numbers being fooled by the arising of any false messiahs. False messiahs really haven't appeared in Christian history. Which false messiahs, then, was Jesus speaking of? And who were the "very elect" he said might be deceived? Could they be Jewish, as was he? Could Jesus have been speaking of Jewish men who were thought to be messiahs?

The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights

By far the most intriguing of the three volumes I review here, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* is definitely not your average Mormon fare. The author, Harris Lenowitz, is Jewish, and no Latter-day Saint themes are explored in the book. But Lenowitz, who is professor of Hebrew at the University of Utah Middle East Center, has a long history of interaction with and service to Latter-day Saints, particularly those struggling to learn the Hebrew language at the University of Utah. Arguably the finest Hebraist in the western United States, Lenowitz's genius in numerous languages is supplemented by his able grasp of history, culture, and religion—his scope and ability are impressive.

The Jewish Messiahs explores what is known, or at least some of what is known, of the lives and efforts of more than two dozen Jews over the last two millennia who were deemed by their Jewish followers to be the promised messiah, beginning with the Galilean Jesus of Nazareth and concluding with the end of the twentieth century. It should be significant to Latter-day Saints and other Christian readers that Jesus is the first messiah treated by Lenowitz, who recognizes him as such not only in terms of historical priority, but also in terms of truly Jewish origin: "More has been written about Jesus than about any other Jewish messiah, yet it is quite common to find his Jewishness ignored, particularly by the traditional historians of Christianity. . . . He was a Galilean Jew, of the first century CE, who acted as a messiah and was taken for one" (p. 34).

In telling Jesus' story, Lenowitz employs a minimalist reconstruction of synoptic gospel accounts, of his own making but based on E. P. Sanders's "framework," entirely omitting the record of John. This approach does not result in a negative portrayal, however; he combines selections of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to present a positive and, if not complete, basically authentic and certainly sympathetic picture of Jesus as a messiah figure. One thesis that Lenowitz proposes will certainly resonate with Latter-day Saint readers—the notion that it did not take long for Jesus' teachings and organization to become corrupted after his departure: "Often thought the most successful messianic movement in Judaism, Christianity achieved its power and endurance largely by abandoning the goals and society of Jesus and his disciples following his death" (p. 7).

But this book is not about Jesus alone—he is just the beginning. Jesus is contrasted with Shiʾmon bar Kosiba (the famous Bar Kokhba), who also lived in the land of Israel, although he lived a century later than Jesus and was a Judean rather than a Galilean. There come accounts (rendered into English from Hebrew, Yiddish, and other original source languages by Lenowitz himself) of another two dozen Jewish figures who lived in diverse places from Persia to Poland and from Yemen to New York, who arose as teachers and leaders and were either claimed to be or were proclaimed as the promised messiah. While some readers might be tempted to check out this volume just to see what Lenowitz has to say about Jesus, they would certainly come away the poorer if they did not sample several of the other messiah accounts, from Shabtai Zvi to the Baʾal Shem Tov, that Lenowitz offers. Of most recent interest is the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of Crown Heights, New York, who was proclaimed King Messiah by many of his followers during his lifetime. The Rebbe Schneerson did not refute the claims prior to his death in June 1994, and even now there is a significant movement within Habad (the acronym-title for the Lubavitcher movement) who believe in him. In fact, a significant number of those followers believe that Rebbe Schneerson will resurrect from the dead to return and reign as the messiah of a redeemed Israel (as some had earlier

believed concerning Shabtai Zvi). I have met and talked with some of these believers myself and find this theme fascinating.

A word of caution is in order, however. This book is not light reading, nor is it devotional in nature. It is scholarly and difficult—literary "heavy lifting," so to speak. It is also set in a smaller type font than I found comfortable. Not only that, Lenowitz treats the messiahs with a certain aloofness that suggests he is not personally convinced their efforts were for the good of the Jewish people. It is not that he lacks esteem for them, for he certainly seems to admire each one of them as a Jewish individual. But the messianic ideal is one that he concludes has never ended successfully: "The ephemeral worth of such doomed creatures as our messiahs seems, finally, to be unequal to the real suffering endured to bear them" (p. 276).

My own reaction to Lenowitz's conclusion was that, with the exception of Jesus of Nazareth, he is probably right. But despite his unenthusiastic summary, *The Jewish Messiahs* certainly ranks as the most interesting compilation and treatment of Jewish messianic individuals to appear so far; it easily earns a recommendation as essential reading for those interested in Judah's longing for the hope of Israel.