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Are Christian Feasts Pagan?

Part 2 of An Article Seeking Mutual Understanding and Unity

By Dan Juster



Dr. Dan Juster has been involved in the leadership of the Messianic Jewish movement since 1971. He is the Senior Apostle and Director of **Tikkun International** ministries, a network of organizations dedicated to the restoration of Israel and the Church.

Continued from TJCII Communiqué, Summer 2010

2. The evidence of history, as detailed in Oskar Skarsaune's monumental book, **In the Shadow of the Temple**, is that the Eastern and Western Churches differed on when to celebrate the church feast days. In the East, closer to the Rabbis, the death and resurrection of Yeshua was celebrated on the date of Passover according to the Jewish calendar, for the Rabbis taught that First Fruits was the day following Passover; this was known as the quartodeciman position. In the West, the decision was to work back from the Resurrection which was always on a Sunday, the day after the Sabbath of Passover week. This produced a great controversy at the end of the second century as both churches claimed apostolic authority for their celebration dates. If the Eastern Church followed the Pharisaic practice of First Fruits and the resurrection being together and the Western kept First Fruits on the Sunday of Passover week as the Sadducees, we can see the controversy itself as rooted in Judaism. Skarsaune argues that the celebration of First Fruits is behind the Western tradition. From Resurrection Day, the Church calculated back to their celebration of the crucifixion, rather than strictly keeping Nisan 14 and 15. Interestingly, but unintentionally, this coincides in most years with the Sadducean Temple date for First Fruits. Skarsaune also provides amazing details concerning how the liturgy for communion took over elements from the early Passover Seder! Observing Sunday as a weekly celebration may be rooted in this as well, though my study suggests that the evidence here is more ambiguous. However, the resurrection became the dominant reason for Sunday observance. **The sad aspect to this was the later rejection of the legitimacy of the seventh day Sabbath for Jews.**
3. Pentecost would then follow from these calculations fifty days later, and is obviously rooted in Shavuot (Weeks). Skarsaune also argues that themes of the Law and the Spirit were also found in Judaism and became incorporated in the Christian celebration.
4. Christmas is sometimes corrupted with pagan syncretism, however, the charges against Christianity are too simplistic. Many claim that Christmas was to sanitize the pagan feast of Saturnalia. Yet it may also have Jewish rooting by the conflation of the 25th of Kislev, Hanukkah, with December 25th. This is the most likely time for the conception of Yeshua on the basis of the calculation of the birth of Yeshua at Sukkot (Tabernacles). If so, the evidence of Hegippus who claims in the late second century that Yeshua was born on the 25th of December, could be a confusion of birth and conception.

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The Privilege of Intercession

By Arlene Stucki



Arlene Stucki is a member of the TJCII North America Committee. A Bible teacher, she has been immersed in the Jewish community for nearly 40 years, and is deeply committed to the vision of TJCII. She and her husband John, live in Estes Park, CO, and lead the TJCII intercessory team there.

Eighteen people from three continents met at Kiryat Yearim, to provide a prayer covering for the annual TJCII Executive Meeting. We arrived a week before the Executives so that we might separate ourselves through fasting and prayer. We began with repentance toward one another. We continued by remembering the foundations already laid by those who had pre-

ceded us. We walked into the garden where a stele of stones had been placed in remembrance of the tribes of Israel, with whom we stand. Those who were new among us placed additional stones of remembrance, as an affirmation that the work already begun will be carried forward in good faith. How meaningful it was that we met at the very place from which King David had brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem with joyful praise. We sensed that the LORD was calling us “toward Jerusalem” in a profound manner unknown to us at the beginning. On the first Shabbat, we walked the southern ramparts of the Old City, and prayed from the very steps where the tribes of Israel ascended the Temple mount to worship the LORD. From there, we asked Him to raise up intercessors in Jerusalem, that this city might be prepared when the vision of TJCII comes into fullness.

During the week of Executive meetings, several of the Executive wives joined us in intercession. We prayed for and with them, thanking the LORD for the importance of their service. We interceded for Julie Dawson, focusing on the medical need that she is currently facing.

The theme of moving “toward Jerusalem” came to a climax on the last day of the Executive meetings. There was profound unity among us; the presence of the LORD was weighty as word after word came. We are to place intercession for Jerusalem at the highest level, to be engaged by seasoned, mature leaders. We are to establish a TJCII presence in the City, out of which people can be educated in the vision. We are to establish a constant intercessory presence, and provide a place where people of all nations can come to pray into the vision of TJCII. We were eager to share the depth of what the LORD had revealed to us with the Executives, only to find that they had received the same revelation, with even broader ramifications. They had been given the wisdom to anchor this TJCII presence to Messianic ministry in the land. The five local Executives will function as a TJCII Israel Committee, breaking ground for a TJCII Center in Jerusalem. We sent up a cheer to the heavens as we praised the LORD for His faithfulness to hear our prayers and guide His servants. May we be faithful in prayer to the completion of this significant step “Toward Jerusalem Council II”.

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The international intercessors at the Steps of Ascent at the Temple in Jerusalem.

(Missing from the photo is our intercessor from France.)



TJCII Executive Committee Meets in Israel

By Peter Hocken

The annual meeting of the TJCII executive committee took place at Kiryat Yearim, just west of Jerusalem from October 5–10, 2010. All Executive Committee members were present except for John Dawson (impeded by duties as YWAM International President) and Jonathan Bernis.

This year proved to be a meeting of major significance for the future. We were led deeper into the meaning of the word “Toward Jerusalem” received last year (see issue for Fall 2009). At first we were thinking mainly of a TJCII office in Jerusalem. But we were challenged to seek the Lord more deeply and this seeking was richly rewarded. We are to have a visible presence in Jerusalem that incarnates the full vision of TJCII. We see that this means having a TJCII center that will embody its different dimensions, including the provision of information and space for intercession, as well as an office. As an embodiment of the vision, the center will express the strong bonding between TJCII and the Jerusalem Olive Tree Fellowship (see issue for Summer 2008). Please pray for the unfolding of this new development.

As in 2009, six young leaders (five are the same as last year) were present at Kiryat Yearim. The three young men all sense they are being trained as leaders and two of the young women that their calling is especially intercession. At the end of the executive meeting, we invited the three young men to come again in 2011 but next time to be present for formation purposes during the greater part of the meeting. Meanwhile they are becoming more involved in TJCII at the regional or continental level. The two young women with a heart for intercession will become more involved in TJCII intercessory work. The third young woman, there for the first time, is already a member of the Swiss national group, and is being invited as an historian to help with the theological work.

The committee discussed a draft document prepared in Europe on TJCII and the Jews within the Churches. We recognized that the draft raised all the key issues and we had a deep and lively discussion. Many concerns were expressed that need to be taken into account. A committee of six or so members (four from Israel plus if possible Marty Waldman and Peter Hocken) will meet in the spring of 2011 to produce recommendations for the next executive meeting.

On the last day, the committee commissioned Elizabeth Kamau, an Anglican deacon from Nairobi, Kenya to be a coordinator for TJCII in East Africa with scope to go beyond the East, and then commissioned Agustin Marsal, an Anglican priest from Buenos Aires, to be coordinator for Argentina with a freedom to cover the Southern Cone of Latin America.

As in recent years, the presence on site of a significant group of committed intercessors (see page 2) was a huge protection and blessing. Most days all present joined for prayer and worship at the start of each day's work. Particular prayer was made for Julie Dawson, John's wife, who is going through a major health trial with cancer.

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5. Skarsaune's evidence for Jewish influence on the creeds is very important as well. He sees them as preserving the Jewish understanding in the Scriptures against a Unitarian heresy that arose in a Hellenistic context.

Therefore, calling the Church to return to Jewish roots should not be based on criticism of Church celebrations as being rooted in paganism and calling on them to adopt the true Jewish dates as if rabbinic dating methods are absolute. This is even more the case since these days celebrate biblical events and meanings. Rather, it is overcoming the paradox of the early churches seeking to have it both ways; adopting practices rooted in the Jewish traditions while rejecting the Jewish people themselves. **This produced a disguising of the Jewish roots that were and are present in the Church.** This can be seen in the common symbolism shared by both the Church and the Synagogue.

The Church is called to return to Jewish roots in the sense of being joined together with Israel and the Messianic Jews, acknowledging Jewish roots and understanding the Bible in its original context. This requires returning to a more Biblical understanding of an involved and responsive God, over against the abstract changeless God of Greek philosophy that has dominated Christian theology. The repudiation of the theology that says the Church has replaced the Jewish people is a foundational key.

Such an approach to Jewish roots is a much more feasible and truthful way to approach the churches and to gain their support in the great last days work for the salvation of Israel.

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TJCII Africa Diplomatic Mission To Kenya/Uganda/Tanzania/Ghana

The upcoming Diplomatic Mission to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana will take place March 11-24, 2011.

The Mission Team includes: Benjamin Berger and Eyal Friedman from Jerusalem; Canon Brian Cox from Santa Barbara; California and The Reverend Elizabeth Kamau from Kenya.

May we send you the TJCII Communiqué electronically? In this way you could help us at TJCII be even better stewards. As the cost of postage escalates, we feel compelled to use email wherever possible. Please send us your email address at egs@tjcii.org and thank you for your generosity.

TOWARD JERUSALEM COUNCIL II



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The Aims of TJCII Include:

- Make known the restoration of the Jewish segments of the Body of Messiah
- Foster repentance for the historic suppression of the corporate Messianic Jewish witness of Yeshua (Jesus), the Messiah
- Further the calling and election of Israel and the Messianic Jewish Community through intercessory prayer, teachings and diplomacy
- Foster reconciliation and unity between Christians and Messianic Jews