Jews and Mormons: Similarities and Differences

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Background

My topic, "Jews and Mormons: Similarities and Differences," is not an obvious choice for an Israeli visiting America. Jews are overwhelmingly ignorant of and indifferent to Mormonism, even Jews who know something about other Christian religions or Islam. Indeed, a friend of mine, who is a highly respected Israeli scholar and who frequently lectures abroad, when he heard that I had begun teaching at Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, asked me whether it were true that Mormons still practice polygamy.

To a large extent, Jewish awareness of Mormonism, however minimal, remains negative, due mainly to two Latter-day Saint practices widely regarded as offensive in the Jewish community: Missionary work (or proselytizing) and baptism for the dead (namely, posthumous baptism by proxy of non-Mormons, usually ancestors of a Mormon). Most Jews are unlikely to be aware, however, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has attempted to respect Jewish sensitivities on both these issues, which are, after all, fundamental practices of Mormonism. In an agreement submitted to Israeli authorities when the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies was opened, the president of the church (Ezra Taft Benson) and the president of Brigham Young University (Jeffrey R. Holland) signed a solemn commitment (hung prominently next to the center's dining hall) forbidding Latter-day Saint

proselytizing in Israel, and threatening any student, member of the faculty, or staff violating that commitment with immediate expulsion from the Jerusalem Center and from the country. Similarly, respecting Jewish sensitivity, especially after the Shoah (Holocaust), the church agreed in 1995 to stop the practice of baptism for the dead applied in a wholesale manner to Jews (although reaffirming the right of individual Latter-day Saints to baptize their own direct ancestors).[1]

1. Given their experience of centuries of Christian missionary and conversionary activity, including forced baptisms, Jews are unlikely to appreciate the idealism, devotion, and commitment (what Jews would call *mesirut nefesh*) of Latter-day Saint "elders" in their late teens or early twenties, who spend a couple of years serving their church in distant regions, usually supporting themselves or being supported by their families. Jews are likely to resent the intrusion in their lives or the implication that they are in need of yet another gospel. It is precisely because missionary work is such a fundamental component of Mormonism that the commitment by the church and Brigham Young University to refrain from proselytizing in Israel is so solemn and should be taken seriously. Nevertheless, sometime after the center was closed, the influential *Jerusalem Report* published an article in which the antimissionary organization Yad L'Achim expressed glee at the closure (Ronit Zimmer, "Anti-missionary Group Rejoices at Closure of Mormon University," 10 February 2003, p. 7) and then published my response (24 February 2003) defending the center's scrupulous enforcement of the commitment and unparalleled record in bringing hundreds of students a year to study in Jerusalem. Baptism for the dead tends to be an even greater problem in terms of Jewish sensitivity, particularly when applied to Jews murdered in the Shoah (Holocaust), including Anne Frank, and also reportedly to such figures as Theodore Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, and Golda Meir (according to *Yedi'ot Aḥaronot,* 5 October 2003, and *Ha'Aretz,* 31 December 2003). In 1995 the church, once again, demonstrated sensitivity to Jewish concerns by agreeing to stop the practice of baptism for the dead applied wholesale and indiscriminately to Jews, although maintaining the right of individual Latter-day Saints to continue to baptize their direct Jewish ancestors. There continue to be periodic Jewish complaints about widespread violations of that policy, with the church, in turn, claiming that it cannot control all local and individual initiatives, nor can it filter millions of names. Hopefully, increased sensitivity on local as well as national levels, and more sophisticated computer techniques for review and control, may reduce if not totally eliminate this source of tension between Jews and Mormons. Nevertheless, while I fully and unconditionally identify with Jewish concerns on both these issues, I believe it is important for Jews to recognize that the Latter-day Saints, who have not yet met all Jewish expectations, have come a long way in showing understanding for Jewish sensitivity, and have made great compromises of what are for them fundamental tenets and practices, in their desire to respect Jewish opinion and improve relations with the Jewish people. Truman Madsen has informed me that when Latter-day Saint microfilmers first came to Israel to copy Jewish records and met with resistance, the eminent scholar of religions R. J. Zvi Werblowsky was consulted; he suggested differentiating between what people do and why they do it. Copying and preserving genealogical records provides a valuable service. Since Jews do not

Therefore, given that Mormonism is not a significant factor in the concerns of most Jews, why do I believe that Jewish-Mormon dialogue is important for both sides? My answer is given on three levels: general, Jewish, and Mormon.

First, in general, many people of diverse backgrounds today increasingly recognize the urgent need for increased interreligious dialogue and understanding, all the more so in our era of the "global village" and at a time when the whole world is threatened by fanatical and fundamentalist religiopolitical terror. As radical Catholic theologian Hans Küng has said, without peace among the world's religions, there will be no peace among the nations.[2] In my part of the world in particular, it is an unfortunate fact that religion is rarely a force for peace and is usually used (or abused) to exacerbate conflicts that are basically national and political, and not theological, in nature. We need, therefore, to encourage interreligious dialogue wherever possible, and with whomever possible.

Second, looking at interreligious, specifically Jewish-Mormon relations, from a Jewish perspective, the Jewish people in general and the state of Israel in particular do not have many friends in the world. Some of the decades-old Jewish alliances with mainline and liberal Christian churches over domestic American agendas such as civil rights and civil liberties are now increasingly strained due to some of these churches' involvement with overt criticism of Israel, support for Palestinians, and calls for divestiture and even boycotts of Israel, of Israeli universities and academicians, or of companies doing business in Israel. Moreover, given the resurgence of European anti-Semitism, it seems to me an obvious Jewish interest to foster relations with churches, like the Church of Jesus Christ, that have extended their hands in friendship to the Jewish people and the state of Israel and that have no history of consistent anti-Semitism. Various Christian churches are struggling with, or overtly repudiating, the supersessionist theology that typified so much of their

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believe that Mormon ceremonies in their temples can actually affect the redemption of a Jew, dead or alive, Latter-day Saint motivation is not a problem.

2. Hans Küng, "World Peace—World Religions—World Ethic," in *Caring for Future Generations: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Perspectives,* ed. Emmanuel Agius and Lionel Chircop (Twickenham: Adamantine, 1998), 69–81, especially 74.

historical attitudes toward the Jewish people and Judaism. The Latter-day Saint record is far more positive. For example:

> Ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn. (3 Nephi 29:8)

Specifically, given the diminishing numbers of Jews in America (in absolute terms, and all the more as a proportion of the American population), and in light of the fact that—contrary to Arab propaganda—the Jewish-Israeli lobby does not control the American Congress and has never been able to stop sales of advanced weapons to Arab countries (like Saudi Arabia) hostile to Israel, it seems clear that the only true power the American Jews possess is the power of moral persuasion. Persuasion, however, requires reaching out in dialogue to a broad spectrum of communities with whom the Jews have not previously had extensive dialogue, including the Latter-day Saints, who are growing in numbers and influence.

Third, though of course I cannot speak for Latter-day Saints, it seems to me from my encounters with them (including serving as the professor of Jewish civilization at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies), that there is growing interest among Latter-day Saints for dialogue with Jewish people, who occupy a special place in Mormon thought. Latter-day Saints, seeing themselves as physically descended from ancient Israel (primarily from the tribe of Ephraim), often feel a special kinship with the Jewish people, whom they sometimes refer to as "cousins" of "the house of Israel" of the tribe of Judah,[3] leading them to regard themselves and Jews as "two houses of Israel." In many respects this sense of kinship is reinforced when Latter-day Saints portray themselves as a new Israel, suffering persecution and wandering on the "Great Trek" in the wilderness until they came to an American "Zion." We shall return later to this LDS notion of physical lineage. But

3. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 403.

what is no less important for Jewish-Mormon dialogue is the growing "LDS effort to relate to Jews, not as an Old Testament tribe but as a living religious community."[4]

So for different and legitimate reasons, Latter-day Saints and Jews can recognize not only the general need for religious encounter, but also a specific common interest in a special dialogue with each other, a dialogue that will not eliminate the fundamental differences between them, but will, rather, enhance those differences with greater mutual understanding and respect.

That special dialogue suffered a setback some years ago, when the security situation in Israel led to the closing, for the time being, of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, despite valiant efforts of the BYU administration in Jerusalem and Provo to keep it open under difficult circumstances. The center was a major locus for Jewish-Mormon dialogue.[5] To the best of my knowledge, no other university in the world brought some 850 young people annually to study in Jerusalem over a number of years. Indeed, few, if any, Israeli universities have programs for overseas students coming from all over the world that can approach that number. In fact, few of my colleagues in Jewish studies around the world, who are often lucky to teach a few dozen students a year, taught, as I did, 850 students every year, all of whom were potential ambassadors of goodwill in the relationship between Jews and Latter-day Saints.

When, in the fall of 2001, just a few weeks after the tragedy of 9/11, I came to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, to participate in the celebration of the publication of the book I helped to conceive and edit, *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*

4. Arnold H. Green, "Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse," *Journal of Mormon History* 25/1 (1999): 195–228. Green here (p. 221) is describing the work of Steven Epperson (see below, note 25).

5. After the failure of the Clinton-Barak-Arafat summit at Camp David in 2000, there was a sharp quantitative and qualitative rise in Palestinian terror. Unlike the Intifada of the 1980s, which was an "uprising" starting on the ground while Arafat and the PLO leadership were still in Tunisia, the violence beginning in the fall of 2000 was not spontaneous but was organized and sustained as low-intensity warfare by Arafat's own Fataḥ as well as by Ḥamas and Islamic Jihad. So long as the U.S. State Department officially advises Americans against travel to Israel, Brigham Young University has been unable to obtain American insurance coverage for its students in Jerusalem.

(based on a conference held at the University of Denver in the winter of 1998), a reporter for the BYU *Daily Universe* newspaper asked me why the dialogue between Jews and Latter-day Saints is important, and I responded, "Because of the similarities and because of the differences between us."[6]

Having explained why I think Jews and Latter-day Saints need to engage each other in dialogue, I would now like to describe some examples of their similarities and differences, on a general level, and then deal with two specific issues, each exemplifying both similarities and differences between the two communities. Understanding each other's terminology and frame of reference is an obvious requirement for effective communication.

Similarities and Differences

In many cases, the same point serves as the basis for both similarity and difference between Jews and Latter-day Saints, beginning with the most basic fact of all, size of population. There are roughly the same number of Jews and Latter-day Saints in the world today, some twelve to fourteen million in each case—a point of obvious similarity. But the population figures are simultaneously a point of difference since the number of Jews in the world is generally decreasing (primarily through intermarriage and assimilation), whereas the number of Latter-day Saints in the world is generally increasing (primarily through a high birthrate and proselytes). Indeed, with the exception of the Orthodox sector of the Jewish community, which represents a small minority of the Jews in most countries, the only country in the world in which the overall Jewish birthrate exceeds the 2.0 replacement rate and in which a higher birthrate, combined with immigration, results in regular net annual growth is the state of Israel. Since 1939, the population of the world has probably tripled or quadrupled, and yet the Jewish people, which numbered some eighteen million

6. *BYU Daily Universe*, 17 October 2001. This particular quotation does not appear in the article. The occasion was the publication of *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism,* ed. Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press—Associated University Presses, 2001).

before World War II, remains not much larger than it was in 1945 after the loss of one-third of the Jewish people in the Shoah.

Another obvious similarity is that both these tiny communities (in global terms) see themselves as "chosen" and categorize the rest of the world as "Gentiles." But here, too, there is a difference. From a Jewish perspective, Latter-day Saints are usually seen (often ignorantly) as another vaguely Protestant group of Christians, and thus as Gentiles. Like many other Jews, I looked forward to my first visit to Utah, joking that I looked forward to experiencing what it feels like to be a Gentile. It was only some time later, when I became more seriously involved in dialogue with Latter-day Saints, that I found out that they see themselves as linked to biblical Israel (usually through the tribe of Ephraim) and do not consider Jews to be Gentiles but as descendants from the biblical tribe of Judah and thus as a sort of "cousins" in the house of Israel.[7] Indeed, a recent popular book, coauthored by a Jew and a Mormon, is called *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel*.[8] So the similarity becomes a difference: both groups regard outsiders as "Gentiles." But for Jews, there are only two categories: Jews and Gentiles (including Mormons), whereas for Latter-day Saints, Jews occupy a third, special category, being neither Latter-day Saints nor Gentiles.

Both communities base their religious authority on revealed prophecy, but here, too, the similarity breaks down almost immediately. For Latter-day Saints, prophecy remains an active category, the presidents and apostles of the church being deemed prophets. Revelation is understood among Latter-day Saints to be "continuing," and a later revelation can actually overturn and supercede earlier revelations, as (for example) the famous 1978 priesthood revelation, which opened the ranks of priesthood to all races. By sharp contrast, in Jewish tradition, authority decreases over time: the Torah has the highest authority, followed by that of the prophets, followed by the other books of scripture, followed in late Second Temple times by the earlier *tana'im,* who were in turn

7. Chadwick, "Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes," 403.

8. Frank J. Johnson and William J. Leffler, *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel* (Hoboken: Ktav, 2000).

followed by the later *amora'im* of the Talmud. Among the post-Talmudic rabbis, the authority of earlier authorities (*rishonim*) exceeds that of the later authorities (*aẖaronim*). Jewish tradition regards prophecy as having ceased with the destruction of the ancient temple in Jerusalem, and the Talmudic rabbis categorized people claiming to be prophets as fools.[9] In a famous incident, when Rabbi Eliezer invoked miracles and even a divine voice (*bat kol*) was heard to support his minority position, the majority sharply rejected the divine voice, stating that the *halakhah* (law) must be determined by human reasoning and majority vote of the rabbis because (citing Deuteronomy 30:11–14) now the Torah "is not in heaven" anymore, but is "close to you . . . in your mouth and in your heart, to do it."[10]

As a result of their opposing views of the ascending or descending nature of authority, Latter-day Saints and Jews tend to differ sharply in the structure of their religious organization. A colleague at Brigham Young University observed that the Latter-day Saint structure is, if anything, even more hierarchical and centralized than that of the Roman Catholic Church, and the clear emphasis is on convergence and consensus. While some countries have official or self-appointed "chief rabbis," such rabbis are widely ignored by other rabbis and by many or even most Jews. The emphasis, going back to the Talmudic system of disputing and questioning virtually every point of interpretation of law and lore, is on divergence and diversity.

This difference in approach was overtly evident in the Mormon and Jewish papers published in our book. The five Mormon participants, all distinguished scholars well versed in other religious literature, some of them also at home in Hebrew or Arabic, cited Latter-day Saint scripture as entirely authoritative, as a given revealed text. The five Jewish participants are all actively committed and religious Jews; yet all of them, both personally and professionally, manifested a critical

9. Babylonian Talmud *Bava Batra* 12b: "Rabbi Yoẖanan said: Since the day the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken away from the prophets and given to fools and infants."

10. Babylonian Talmud *Bava Mezi'a* 59b.

distancing from the traditional sources, and they came from diverse ideological sectors of the Jewish community.

Many other points of similarity should be explored, but in order to focus on two major points, I will simply mention some of them without further analysis. Points of similarity (even if frequently understood or implemented in different ways) would certainly include an emphasis on family and a regard for the family as a focal point for religious life and transmission of values. Consequently, both groups oppose marriage outside the community; both observe dietary rules, establishing boundaries between members and nonmembers; both have ritual garb (the Jewish *tzitzit,* fringes based on Numbers 15:37–40; and Mormon "temple robes" and undergarments); both emphasize the centrality of Sabbath observance; both groups reject the notion that religion is separate from life and relegated to the church or synagogue, but insist, rather, that it infuses all aspects of our lives; in both communities a high value is attached to education and intellectual accomplishment, as reflected in Doctrine and Covenants 93:36, "the glory of God is intelligence,"[11] and in the rabbinic statement, "the study of Torah counterbalances all the rest [of the commandments]."[12]

There are, however, also many points of difference that should be explored but which I will also merely mention, such as the obvious political differences between American Jews (the clear majority of whom, other than the minority Orthodox, consistently support liberal causes) and Latter-day Saints (who are equally overwhelmingly supportive of conservative causes). Jewish and Mormon theologies and conceptions of God are totally different, beginning with the fact that Latter-day Saints affirm a corporeal God, whereas virtually all Jews since the time of Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) at least give lip service to the notion that God is, and can only be, totally incorporeal (even if they do not necessarily understand the radical implications of that doctrine). Latter-day Saint temples, like the ancient temple

11. The statement is the motto of Brigham Young University. In Seth Ward's important "Appendix: A Literature Survey of Mormon-Jewish Studies," in *Covenant and Chosenness,* 203, the quotation is erroneously attributed to Brigham Young.

12. Mishnah *Peʾah* 1:1.

in Jerusalem, exclude outsiders (at least from inner areas), whereas the synagogue is not a "temple" and is open to all who wish to enter. Mormon rituals are kept secret from outsiders, whereas Jewish rituals, although they apply only to Jews, are not secret. Another point of difference is the lack of symmetry between Latter-day Saint interest in the Jews, including the extensive work of such notable scholars as Hugh Nibley, Truman Madsen, and Arnold Green, and widespread Jewish indifference to and ignorance of Mormonism, with the exception of a few Jewish scholars who have studied Jewish-Mormon relations (such as Rudolf Glanz)[13] or have related to Mormon themes in some of their writings (such as Jacob Neusner).[14]

To sum up thus far, the name of another book of Latter-day Saint scripture, Doctrine and Covenants, in a sense describes the differences between Jews and Mormons. Note that the first word, *doctrine,* is in the singular, and the second word, *covenants,* is in the plural. Latter-day Saints can speak of doctrine in the singular, given their affirmation of continuing revelation and prophecy; a singular, authoritative body of doctrine can be revealed and proclaimed. They can also speak of covenants in the plural because they affirm multiple covenants: (1) what Christians call the "old covenant"—namely the Jewish Bible; (2) the "new covenant"—namely Christian scripture; and (3) the renewed, modern, or "latter-day" covenant revealed in the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. For Jews, I think the instinctive phrase would be "doctrines and covenant"—multiple doctrines (as in the title of one of the first books of Jewish philosophy, Sa'adiah Ga'on's *Book of Beliefs and Doctrines*), with no uniform dogma or single body of doctrine, but one everlasting covenant of the Torah, which will not be superseded.

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13. Rudolf Glanz, *Jew and Mormon: Historic Group Relations and Religious Outlook* (New York: Waldon, 1963).

14. Jacob Neusner, *The Glory of God Is Intelligence: Four Lectures on the Role of Intellect in Judaism,* with an introduction by S. Kent Brown (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978); "The Case of Leviticus Rabbah," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley,* ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:332–88; Jacob Neusner, "Conversation in Nauvoo about the Corporeality of God," *BYU Studies* 36/1 (1996–97): 7–30.

Chosenness and Its Implications

This is not the place to explore in detail the concept of chosenness, which was the subject of my paper in our Jewish-Mormon volume.[15] Here I wish only to call attention to how the concept brings out similarities and differences between Jews and Mormons.

Chosenness can be understood as externally or internally directed; it can be based on truth claims or on patterns of behavior, and it can be applied in inclusive or exclusive ways.

Chosenness is externally directed when it is used to assert some kind of superiority over others, to compare the chosen group favorably with other inferior groups. Although there are certainly some texts in Jewish literature, beginning notably with several passages in Deuteronomy, that at least on a superficial level lend themselves to such an externally directed interpretation, they are generally conditional upon proper behavior and need to be understood contextually. Other texts, no less authoritative and traditional, modify and counterbalance such externally directed readings and redirect the concept of chosenness internally: their intent is not to compare Jews to others, but to challenge the Jews—not that the Jews are actually better than other people but that they themselves should become better people, who have not a higher privilege but a higher responsibility.

Although my paper in *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism* deals only with chosenness in a Jewish context, and therefore my expressed concern is only that Jews not adopt any superiority complex (spiritual or other), Mormon scholar Jeffrey Chadwick (in his review of three books of Jewish-Mormon interest) explicitly extends that concern to the Latter-day Saints as well.[16] Thus far, all we find is a similarity in terms of the need of both Jews and Latter-day Saints to exercise caution in their conceptions of chosenness, to avoid the danger of moral and spiritual arrogance. Ultimately, people who see themselves as chosen need to remind themselves, in the words of Micah 6:8, "to walk humbly with your God."

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15. Raphael Jospe, "Chosenness in Judaism: Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity," in *Covenant and Chosenness,* 173–94.

16. Chadwick, "Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes," 410.

But when we move to the next aspect of chosenness—namely truth claims, we see a marked difference in the two communities' understanding of chosenness. Jewish chosenness is expressed in the covenant at Sinai, with the injunction to live according to the Torah, which is traditionally understood to contain 613 commandments[17] that apply only to the Jewish people and not to non-Jews. The truths implicitly presumed or explicitly taught by the Torah are potentially accessible to anyone who recognizes them, but that recognition or acceptance does not, in itself, obligate the person to observe the Jewish way of life based on the Torah. One can affirm, for example, belief in a God who created the world, without accepting the obligation to observe the Sabbath (certainly not in the traditional Jewish manner). One can affirm the exodus from Egypt without observing the commandments relating to the Passover festival and eating *matzah*. In all these respects, Jewish understandings of chosenness remain internally directed and relate to certain patterns of behavior, not to specific truth claims. As I understand Latter-day Saint conceptions of chosenness, however, although there is certainly also a behavioral component, they tend to emphasize certain claims of truths revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors, revelations recorded in Latter-day Saint scripture but also in later and even contemporary "continuing revelation." Although Mormon teachings are, in some of these areas, characterized by "multivalence" and "unsettled openness" (in Arnold Green's terms) and are thus less unequivocal than classical Christian notions of "one truth," "one way," and "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" ("no salvation outside the church"), it seems to me that it is precisely such a basic belief in these exclusively Mormon truths as requisite for ultimate or full salvation that underlies the missionary

17. The tradition that the Torah contains 613 commandments goes back at least to Talmudic times, although it was not until the Middle Ages that actual lists of the 613 were compiled, most notably by Maimonides. See "Commandments, the 613," in *Encyclopedia Judaica,* 5:761–83. It should be noted that no Jew can possibly fulfill all 613 commandments, many of which are collective or national in nature and relate to the conquest and agriculture of the land of Israel, the temple, and sacrificial cult. In the absence of the temple and sacrificial cult, many commandments cannot be performed either individually or collectively.

drive: if it is true that one possesses an exclusive truth required for human salvation, the clear moral corollary is to attempt to share with others these keys to salvation.[18]

Jews and Mormons, each community similarly believing in its own chosenness and in its having received a unique divine revelation, thus derive opposing conclusions from a common premise. For the Jews, understanding chosenness primarily in behavioral terms, the conclusion is directed internally, namely that they alone are obligated to observe the ancient commandments of the Torah. For the Mormons, understanding chosenness in terms of truth claims, the conclusion is directed externally, namely that they have an obligation to share with the world the latter-day gospel of salvation.[19]

In that respect, Jews and Mormons also have opposing conceptions of inclusivity and exclusivity. Jews see themselves as exclusively commanded to certain patterns of behavior, which are not obligatory for any other people, but do not claim exclusivity of salvation. To the contrary, as Maimonides reworded a famous saying of the Talmudic rabbis:

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18. Truman Madsen is representative of an "inclusivistic" trend in Mormonism, which understands degrees of salvation in terms of progressive enlightenment and emphasizes the existence of good and true principles in all religions and philosophies. Covenant is thus a matter of both truth claims and behavior (personal correspondence). Nevertheless, it seems to me that a dynamic, dialectical tension remains between Madsen's inclusivism and various passages in the Book of Mormon, according to which full salvation does not come by the law of Moses (Mosiah 13:27–29; Alma 25:16), but only to those who repent, are baptized, and have perfect faith (2 Nephi 9:23); without Christ "all men must perish" (2 Nephi 11:6), and "Whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God" (3 Nephi 11:33).

19. Again, it seems to me that there is an inescapable tension between the missionary impulse that is basic to much of Mormonism and the inclusivism of Mormons like Madsen. Such dialectical tensions typify much of religious thought, certainly in our era, as in Roman Catholic struggles since Vatican II, and are pronounced in such documents as "Dominus Iesus" (2000) by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, which simultaneously continues to maintain classical truth claims while recognizing the value of interreligious dialogue. In a conference in Jerusalem in 1994, Ratzinger asked whether we can move from mere toleration to mutual acceptance—a question certainly in tension with his later "Dominus Iesus." Such tensions are characteristic of much of Jewish thought over the ages. To my way of thinking, such tensions do not threaten religions; to the contrary, they are spiritually and intellectually enriching and underlie any quest for truth.

"The righteous of the nations have a share in the world to come."[20] Salvation is thus inclusive and does not require being Jewish, but only being a decent human being. Conversely, because Latter-day Saints understand full or ultimate salvation in exclusive terms, as a function of belief in certain revealed truths that only they possess, they logically seek to share these keys of salvation with everyone else, and all others are invited to become Latter-day Saints. Again, therefore, chosenness for Jews is directed internally, and for Mormons, externally.

The Tension of Universalism and Particular Lineage

My friend, esteemed colleague, and coeditor Truman Madsen, professor emeritus of philosophy at Brigham Young University and former director of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, is well known for his prolific writings, which frequently explore parallels and similarities in Jewish and Latter-day Saint teachings. He also opposes supersessionist theology, which delegitimizes contemporary Judaism. I should like to adopt his comparative approach (but in reverse, beginning with Mormon teachings) and show how a dynamic tension in Mormon thought has a remarkable parallel in Jewish thought, which will, once again, bring out similarities and differences between the two communities.

In an important essay on "Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse,"[21] Arnold Green, an eminent historian at BYU (and also a former director of the Jerusalem Center), has described the tension between universalism and physical lineage in early and subsequent Mormon ideology. In contrast with other theological questions that are authoritatively and definitively resolved (in some cases by divine revelation, such as the 1978 priesthood revelation), this tension remains, and the question continues to be open and unresolved

20. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Law), Book of Knowledge, Laws of Repentances 3:5. Maimonides's phrasing differs from that of the Talmudic rabbis in Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 13:2, ed. M. S. Zuckermandel and Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1970), 434; cf. Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 105a. See my discussion in "The Concept of the Chosen People: An Interpretation," *Judaism* 43/2 (1994): 127–48, and in "Chosenness in Judaism: Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity," 173–94.

21. See note 4, above.

in Mormon thought, which at least in this area is (perhaps uncharacteristically) multivalent.

As Green shows, statements in the writings of the Prophet Joseph Smith support the view of a direct physical lineage between Latter-day Saints and the ancient Israelites (of the tribe of Ephraim). I would simply add at this point the comment that such a belief in physical lineage is phenomenologically similar to Jewish and Arab belief in descent from Abraham (respectively through Isaac and Ishmael) and differs sharply from classical Christian supersessionist emphasis of the new "Israel of the spirit" replacing the old "Israel of the flesh." Conversely (as Green shows), statements by Joseph Smith also support a "universalist" view that the affinity is spiritual, not physical; that anyone can become "adopted" as Abraham's posterity; that Latter-day Saints are "a community of faith" and "not a community of blood,"[22] and that all people, of whatever national, racial, or ethnic background, can participate fully in that spiritual community. Such a universalist position in Mormonism, it seems to me, is far closer to the Pauline notion that became dominant in classical Christianity: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:28–29 Revised Standard Version).

What Green demonstrates is that this unresolved tension and "openness" in Smith's teachings was continued in subsequent Mormon thought, with Brigham Young emphasizing physical lineage and Orson Pratt emphasizing universalism, and that the multivalence has continued down to our own day. What is important for us is not the internal Mormon debate itself, but two points of significance for Jewish-Mormon relations: (1) the link between the belief in physical lineage and philo-Semitism and (2) the parallel tension in Jewish thought.

22. There is no necessary contradiction or inconsistency between claiming both physical and spiritual linkage; both can be affirmed. This would constitute another Jewish-Mormon similarity, since, as discussed above, Jewish identity is simultaneously and inseparably national and religious.

First, the emphasis on physical lineage, which still plays a major role in Mormon thought, and which, as we have seen, represents a break with classical Christian doctrine, has been an important factor in Mormon philo-Semitism. Joseph Smith's interest in Jews was not merely one of religious curiosity. He criticized anti-Jewish legislation in Italy and praised the emancipation of the Jews in the United Kingdom.[23]

In his 1963 *Jew and Mormon: Historic Group Relations and Religious Outlook,* Rudolf Glanz showed that in nineteenth-century Utah, Jews were religiously and socially removed from the Christian–Latter-day Saint tensions and animosity. Unlike other Christians, the Latter-day Saints did not exhibit specific anti-Jewish animus; unlike non-Mormon Christians, the Jews were not involved in anti-Mormon agitation. Jews were excluded economically, together with other Christians, from the "Zion Cooperative," but "there was no basic Jewish-Mormon quarrel."[24] Early Jewish travelers to Utah, Samuel Nunez Carvalho (1854) and Israel Joseph Benjamin (1859), wrote favorably about LDS attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, and the Latter-day Saints gave early Jewish immigrants a place to meet on the High Holidays as well as cemetery plots in which to bury their dead. To add a contemporary note: Jews are certainly not involved in the current dispute as to whether Mormons are really Christians (since Mormons declare a belief in Jesus as Christ and accept the New Testament) or are not Christians (since they are not Trinitarian and since they affirm an additional, later revelation and covenant constituting them as a separate religion with its own particular scripture), nor are Jews involved in the question whether the World Council of Churches should include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Latter-day Saints' own experience of religious persecution, as well as a sense of kinship with the Jews, may also have contributed to their more positive attitude toward Jews, which is reflected in statements affirming the principle of religious toleration. The eleventh Article of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints states: "We

23. Green, "Gathering and Election," 201.
24. Glanz, *Jew and Mormon,* 3–4.

claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may." Earlier, in 1835, the church adopted a declaration of belief regarding governments and laws in general:

> We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience. . . . We do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul. (Doctrine and Covenants 134:2, 4)

All of this is not to suggest that Mormon teachings about Jews and Judaism are all uniformly positive. They are not. As with other scriptures and traditions, Latter-day Saint literature contains diverse and even opposing statements on various points, in this case both positive and negative statements concerning Jews and Judaism. Steven Epperson's 1992 book, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel,*[25] which promotes a positive attitude toward Jews, has been sharply criticized by Green and others for "dishonest" and selective use of Mormon sources, and for ignoring or underplaying negative stereotypes of Jews and Judaism also found in LDS literature.[26]

Nevertheless, despite some negative elements, the Latter-day Saint record, both literary and historical, is more consistently positive than the record of much of Christianity of the period, or indeed of other

25. Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); based on Steven Epperson, "Gathering and Restoration: Early Mormon Identity and the Jewish People" (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1991).

26. Such criticism of Epperson may be found in Green, "Gathering and Election," 220–22, and is also discussed by Seth Ward in his "Appendix: A Literature Survey of Mormon-Jewish Studies," in *Covenant and Chosenness,* 195–211. See Frank F. Judd Jr. and Terrence L. Szink, "The Restoration of Israel in the Book of Mormon," review of *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel,* by Steven Epperson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 17/2 (1995): 106–22.

pre-Vatican II periods. This also applies to early Latter-day Saint proto-Zionism. Orson Hyde was sent by Joseph Smith to the Holy Land. Hyde himself tended toward the universalism of Orson Pratt, for whom the ultimate conversion of the Jews would take place prior to their final gathering, or at least prior to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, because Jews and Gentiles alike have the same sins and require the same redemption.[27] Nevertheless, as Stephen Ricks has noted, Orson Hyde's prayer on the Mount of Olives on 24 October 1841 for the return of the Jews to the promised land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, "unlike Christian expectations for the return of the Jews . . . did not include a prayer for affirmative preaching to them there."[28] Hyde expressed the desire

> to dedicate and consecrate this land unto Thee, for the gathering together of Judah's scattered remnants, . . . for the building up of Jerusalem again after it has been trodden down by Gentiles so long, and for raising a Temple in honor of Thy name.[29]

Referring to the nations and governments of the world, Hyde prayed:

> Let them know that it is Thy good pleasure to restore the kingdom unto Israel—raise up Jerusalem as its capital, and constitute her people a distinct nation and government, with David Thy servant, even a descendant from the loins of ancient David to be their king.[30]

However, Hyde's proto-Zionism and prayer for the restoration of the Jews and of the land of Israel did not prevent him from also referring to Jewish "unbelief" in terms familiar from Christian anti-Jewish stereotypes: "Let Thy great kindness conquer and subdue the unbelief

27. Green, "Gathering and Election," 202–4.

28. Stephen D. Ricks, "From Joseph to Joseph: Covenant and Chosenness in the Revelations and Writings of Joseph Smith," in *Covenant and Chosenness,* 99.

29. The complete prayer is found in Johnson and Leffler, *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel,* appendix 1, 207–12; quotation on 208.

30. Johnson and Leffler, *Jews and Mormons,* 210.

of Thy people. Do thou take from them their stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh."[31]

In summary, Latter-day Saint teachings, from the time of Joseph Smith to our own day, contain a tension between universalism—which, like classical Christianity, sees all people, including the Jews, in need of the gospel and which regards linkage to Abraham as spiritual and as conferred upon all believers in Christ—and an emphasis on physical lineage and identification with the ancient Israelite tribe of Ephraim, resulting in a special and positive regard for their "cousins" of the house of Judah and leading to benevolent relations with the Jews in Utah, a general lack of anti-Semitism, and a proto-Zionist interest in the return of the Jewish people to rebuild their homeland and state in the land of Israel.

Finally, the second aspect of the Latter-day Saint tension between universalism and physical lineage relevant to Jewish-Mormon relations is a certain parallel tension in Jewish thought. As mentioned before, Mormon philo-Semitism is attributable, at least in part, to Latter-day Saints' sense of kinship with the Jewish people because of their belief that they, too, are physically linked to ancient Israel. On the other hand, in recent decades, the 1978 priesthood revelation has accelerated the universalist tendency. While physical lineage is still widely affirmed, it has also been perceived as leading to racist practices and doctrines (especially regarding Blacks, who prior to the 1978 change were negatively stereotyped and excluded from the ranks of priesthood).[32] And so the tension continues in Latter-day Saint teaching, and Green concludes that the late twentieth century reconfirmed the original "unsettled openness" and "multivalence" present in Mormon thought going back to the Prophet Joseph Smith.[33]

31. Johnson and Leffler, *Jews and Mormons,* 209. Orson Hyde's language here is a paraphrase of Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26, passages understood by Jews as referring contextually and explicitly to Jewish national restoration (cf. Ezekiel 11:17) and to renewed Jewish fidelity to the Torah and observance of its laws (cf. Ezekiel 11:20), and not in terms of Christological faith or of a new covenant replacing the Torah.

32. Green, "Gathering and Election," 222–27.

33. Green, "Gathering and Election," 195.

A similar tension continues down to our own day in Jewish teaching. According to ancient rabbinic law (*halakhah*), Jewish identity is conferred to one born to a Jewish mother. It is, in the parlance of the nineteenth-century origins of Mormonism, a matter of "blood" (although, following Nazi racist doctrine, most Jews today would have a strong aversion to such terminology). In that regard, Jewish identity is, or resembles, nationality. One is born a Jew; with the exception of converts, no ceremony is required to confirm that identity. An infant boy does not become a Jew because he is circumcised—rather, he is circumcised as a sign of his being a Jew and thus a member of the covenant community. Girls at the age of twelve and boys at the age of thirteen respectively become bat-mitzvah or bar-mitvah ("daughter of the commandment" or "son of the commandment"), meaning legally responsible for their own behavior as adults and, as responsible adults, liable to observe the commandments, regardless of whether they celebrated the occasion with some religious ceremony or social party. Conversely, Jewish identity, while a matter of birth, is also religious in character (although many, perhaps most, Jews today, affirm their religion minimally, if at all). The national and religious components of Jewish identity, while organically inseparable, create a certain tension, paralleled by a conflicting emphasis on particularism and universalism in Jewish teaching. For all the concern for universal justice in the teachings of the biblical prophets of Israel, much of rabbinic Judaism is overtly particularistic in its outlook—which is not a value judgment (especially since I regard the universal and the particular to be correlative and not contrary concepts), but a simple recognition of historical facts. In rabbinic teaching, the commandment to "love your neighbor" is overwhelmingly understood to refer specifically to a fellow Jew, not in general to any other human.[34] In much of rabbinic opinion, even the principle that "saving life (*pikuaḥ nefesh*) takes precedence over the Sabbath"—namely, that the Sabbath must be violated when there is danger to life—technically applies only to

34. See the discussion by Ernst Simon, "The Neighbor (*Re'a*) Whom We Shall Love," in *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice,* ed. Marvin Fox (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 29–56.

saving the life of a Jew (although virtually all authorities would extend that technicality on other grounds to all people). So which element more truly represents Judaism—the particularist or the universalist? Who is correct—those thinkers, like Judah Ha-Levi, who regarded the capacity for prophecy to be an inborn, biological trait only of Jews (what a friend of mine has termed "hardware"), or those thinkers, like Maimonides, who regarded the truth as essentially universal and who believed that Jewish identity is fundamentally a matter of affirming the truth (what my friend has termed "software")?

In short, Jews, like Mormons, continue to live with a dynamic tension: at any given point in their lives as individuals and as a community, which element becomes dominant—birth or belief, physical lineage or spiritual affirmation, or particularist focus on the chosen people or universalist extension of concern to outsiders?

In all these tensions, we discern similarities between Jews and Mormons. These similarities, however, at the same time illustrate the fundamental differences between the two communities. For Mormons, the "unsettled openness" exists only so long as "continual revelation" has not yet decided the issue one way or the other, as it did with the 1978 priesthood revelation. For the Jews, the tensions have remained unresolved for many centuries, and the absence of revelation as an active category precludes their being resolved. Therefore, in the words of the rabbis, "an argument which is for the sake of heaven will continue without end (*sofah le-hitkayyem*),"[35] and "these and those are the living words of God (*elu va-elu divrei elohim ḥayyim*)."[36]

35. Mishnah *Avot* 5:17.
36. Babylonian Talmud *Eruvin* 13b; *Gittin* 6b.