

A JUDAIC STUDIES CENTER FOR LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Tom's Perspectives
by Dr. Randall Price¹

In January 2007, Liberty's late Founder and Chancellor Dr. Jerry Falwell invited Dr. Randall Price to the campus to direct the establishment of a Center for Judaic Studies that would include an initial faculty comprised of Dr. Thomas Ice, Dr. Harold Willmington, and Dr. Ed Hindson. Dr. Falwell's vision was for a new school that would continue the recognition that Israel and the Jewish people were part of God's future program and that the Christian response to this in the spiritual and political realm was essential to God's present blessing. Dr. Falwell's own legacy with respect to this position is well known, as Merrill Simon's book *Jerry Falwell and the Jews*² and frequent appearances in the media have demonstrated. As a Christian Zionist, Dr. Falwell was both lauded by the Jewish community for his unqualified support for the Jewish state and feared for his uncompromising evangelical commitment (which they rightly interpreted as calling for evangelism toward Jews). Nevertheless, Dr. Falwell was encouraged to start the Center by a prominent Jewish rabbi who understood the need for an evangelical alliance with the Jewish community in order to ensure Jewish survival within a historically hostile Christian world. This hostility often made Dr. Falwell and Liberty University a target of attack, painting his pro-Israel stance as intolerant and bigoted, and his Christian Zionism as a dangerous apocalypticism that would attempt to fulfill its own prophecies by hastening the advent of Armageddon in the Middle East.

NEED FOR THE CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES

The need for the Center is both biblical and practical. *Biblically*, the divine program revealed in scripture is centered on Israel and the importance of the Jewish mission (the choice of one people to bless the rest of mankind). The proclamation of the Gospel to the Jewish people is bound up in the very nature of the gospel itself: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew *first*, and also to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). Despite this ethnic priority, the Church historically has reinterpreted this program in light of the Gentile mission and generally ignored the distinctive role of the Jewish people. *Practically*, in order for Christians to impact their world they must engage their culture by reaching those who shape the culture. To this end, Christians must have an interest in and knowledge of the Jewish people who impact our culture to a disproportionate degree. One impediment to success by Christians in this regard is the widespread anti-Semitism in the prevailing culture, endemic supercessionism in the Church, and a political bias against Israel in the modern media that has adversely affected the Christian position toward the Old Testament, the Jewish people, and the State of Israel.

Moreover, the majority of graduate programs in denominational colleges and seminaries have abandoned a biblical priority and are antagonistic toward the Jewish people in general and Zionism in particular. Few evangelical Bible colleges or seminaries recognize the distinctive purpose of the Jewish people or offer any acquaintance with Jewish studies within their course of studies for the preparation of ministers, teachers, and missionaries. Even schools that were once traditionally dispensational and generally promoted a positive perspective toward the Jewish people no longer are consistent with respect to the essentials of this interpretation (the distinction between Israel and the Church) and have become agnostic toward social and political issues related to the modern State of Israel. As a result, the views of local church pastors and their congregations are either ambivalent or have been negatively

influenced by the modern media. In addition, the on-going crises in the Middle East and our administration's war on terrorism, has created an international fear that Christians who interpret the prophecies of the Book of Revelation literally and advocate support for the State of Israel against the religious rage of the greater Islamic world, are dooming this generation to an apocalyptic outcome. This is at the current root of hostility against the Christian Zionist position as embodied by Liberty's Founder. It is imperative in this context for the Christian to address the issues of the day from an informed biblical perspective. Such a perspective must necessarily embrace an understanding of the historical and religious issues relating to the Jewish people and the Land of Israel that lies at the center of the conflict. Given Liberty's past leadership role in Christian Zionism, it is necessary that it impact the educational mainstream, and especially the evangelical community of which it is a part, with a clear corrective to present misunderstanding and equip this generation of Christian students with a positive passion to support the Jewish state and reach the Jewish people with the gospel of their Messiah.

PURPOSE OF THE CENTER

Only a focused program of education from a Christian world-view that embraces Israel as the center of the divine purpose can effect a practical change in the Christian academic communities. The Center will seek to accomplish this purpose by providing the means for the student preparing for Christian ministry or service to gain a biblical perspective of the Jewish mission and help equip the Church in making a biblical response to the Jewish people and the modern State of Israel. A special purpose will be to provide instruction to students at the undergraduate level and especially to prepare graduate students for Jewish ministries and for doctoral programs with related foci.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CENTER

The theological perspective of the Center for Judaic Studies upholds the biblical teaching that the Abrahamic Covenant with the Jewish people (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:5-7, 18; 17:4-11, 19, 21) has continuing validity, while understanding that both Jew and Gentile share in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant made with Israel (Jer. 31:31) and inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah (Heb. 9:15). It further holds and promotes a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture that is dispensational, premillennial, and pretribulational. Its faculty will believe and teach that a personal relationship with God is possible only through faith in the atonement provided by Jesus the Messiah (Acts 4:12).

PROGRAM OF THE CENTER

The academic program of the Institute will offer a graduate degree in Jewish studies with varying areas of concentration and will offer courses that can be integrated into other graduate programs. In like manner, those pursuing a degree in Jewish studies will be required to take prerequisite courses in Biblical Hebrew offered in the seminary curriculum. Courses currently under development that will comprise the core curriculum will be:

- History and Culture of the Jewish People
- History and Geography of Israel
- Study Tour of Israel (two-weeks, prerequisite: History and Geography of Israel)
- Israelology³ (integration of Israel within Systematic Theology)
- Israel and the Jewish People in Prophecy
- Messianic Prophecy
- Messianic Christology in the New Testament

The Life of Jesus the Messiah in its Jewish Context
 Christian Zionism (Historical Development, Theological & Political Perspectives)
 Dispensationalism (History and Hermeneutics)
 Supersessionism (historical development and religious & political ramifications)
 History of Middle East Civilization (3000 B.C. - modern era)
 History and Analysis of the Middle East Conflict
 Ancient and Modern Judaisms
 Rabbinic Theology and Literature
 Intercultural Issues and Communication in a Jewish Context
 Islamic Theologians on Jews and Judaism
 The Jewish Temple in History and Prophecy
 Introduction to Biblical Archaeology
 Archaeology in the Land of Israel

THE CENTER'S RESEARCH LIBRARY

To serve the specialized needs of students and researchers in the fields of Jewish studies and biblical archaeology a dedicated library of primary, secondary, and periodical sources is now located within the Center. Dr. Price transferred 20,000 volumes to Lynchburg, 10,000 of which are housed in the Center in three rooms: a reference room for Judaic studies, a research room for biblical archaeology, and a rare book room. These volumes are made available to faculty and students and on an in-house, non-circulating basis. Included in this library is a digital collection of technical reference works in Hebrew and Greek, Old and New Testament background and commentary, Jewish literature, a digital library of periodicals in theology and archaeology, and a digitalized collection of archaeological photographs. In addition, Dr. Ice's 8,000 volumes for research in eschatology are also located in the Center.

THE CENTER'S LECTURESHIP BUREAU

In order to facilitate the necessary biblical instruction concerning Israel and the Jewish people and to allow the Christian community at Liberty to engage in interaction with Jewish viewpoints, the Center will host several lectureships each year. The design of these lectureships is to invite prominent Jewish and Christian leaders in all fields to address the faculty and student population. The intention is to particularly include governmental leaders from Israel as well as political leaders in the U.S. who can discuss foreign policy affecting the State of Israel as well as rabbis and Jewish-Christian scholars who can help Christians understand the theological differences that separate Jews and Christians and promote healthy dialogue between these viewpoints.

PROJECTS TRANSFERRED TO THE CENTER

Several on-going programs that were under sponsorship of other universities and organizations were transferred to the Liberty campus to become a part of the Center for Judaic Studies. These include archaeological excavation projects in Israel and Turkey and an exhibition of ancient artifacts from the biblical lands. The first of these has now become wedded to an academic course in Field Archaeology and it is envisioned that the others will also play a significant role for the Liberty academic community. These programs are planned to become a part of the Center's academic program.

CONCLUSION

We at the Center are excited about the potential for training a whole new generation of evangelicals in Jewish studies. As the Lord provides donations, the Center will also establish a Biblical Museum (architectural plans for a building have

already been drawn). The Center can be contacted at (434) 592-3249 Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Dr. Price's e-mail address is jrprice4@liberty.edu. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Dr. Randall Price is a guest writer for Thomas Ice in this issue of Pre-Trib Perspectives.

² Merrill Simon, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1984).

³ Dr. Price and Dr. Ice will be teaching this course for both the undergraduate and graduate programs at Liberty during the Spring 2009 semester.