

"WHO MAKES THE HORN OF JESUS TO FLOURISH"*

by YEHUDAH LIEBES

Dedicated to Professor Shlomo Pines, whose manifold contributions to scholarship include the discovery, identification and interpretation of original texts of the Jewish Christian sect.

"I do not believe that I will ever truly know the opinion of the Jews concerning Jesus until they establish a free and independent state, with their own schools and universities, where they shall be able to speak freely." – Jean Jacques Rousseau

The shoot of David your servant
speedily cause to flourish
and lift up his horn in your salvation
(for we await your salvation every day).
Blessed art thou, who maketh the horn
of salvation to flourish.

את צמח דוד עבדך מהרה תצמיח
וקרנו תרום בישועתיך
[כי לישועתך קוינו כל היום]
ברוך אתה ה' מצמיח קרן ישועה.

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הודעה ליבס, "מצמיח קרן ישועה", מחקרי ירושלים במחשבת ישראל ג' (תשמ"ד), 313-348.

* Due to the extreme length of this article, we were unable to publish it in full in *Immanuel*. However, because of its unusual relevance to the field of Jewish-Christian research to which this journal is devoted, as well as the considerable controversy generated by its publication, we felt that this paper could not be ignored. We are therefore publishing the author's own summary, which constitutes the final section of the Hebrew article, *ibid.*, 340-348. The interested reader is referred to the full Hebrew text, in which the author develops and argues his thesis in great detail. We have in some places added concise summaries of the most important points of argumentation contained in the main part of the article, as well as some of the footnotes there. Both of these are printed in smaller type and within brackets, to distinguish them from the main text. The translation and summary were prepared by Jonathan Chipman.

The blessing beginning with the words *Et Zemaḥ David* is an ancient one which, together with the other blessings of the Amidah, was formulated in Palestine during the Second Temple period; it is already alluded to in Chapter 51 of Ben Sirach. Its central theme is the prayer and hope for the coming of Messiah and the renewal of the Davidic kingdom, which is referred to in its original concluding formula, *mazmiah qeren le-David* ("who causes to spring forth the horn of David"). However, as neither the text of the blessings of the Amidah nor their concluding formulae were rigidly fixed during that period, prayer leaders were free to vary or alter the generally used text as they saw fit. In this way, there came into existence parallel versions of a number of blessings (albeit the majority of prayer leaders did not develop new formulae, but in fact used the accepted versions);¹ several different versions of *et zemaḥ David* have thus been preserved. Although their endings differ from the original *mazmiah qeren le-David*, all of these, with the single exception of *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*, mention the name of King David, suggesting that such a formulae was an essential part of the conclusion.

It was possible, within this atmosphere of flexibility regarding the text of the prayers, for people holding various different views, and even for members of different Jewish sects, to alter the prayer text in order to express their own particular outlooks. Explicit reference to such behavior of various sectarians in fact appears in the Mishnah, Megillah 4:9, which warns concerning certain prayer formulae that "this is the way of sectarians," while regarding other formulae it states that "one silences him (i.e., the prayer leader)" or even "one silences him with a rebuke." It is not clear whom these "sectarians" were, but it is not impossible that they were Jewish Christians; such a theory has been suggested by various scholars, noting that the earliest Christians did not separate themselves from the community of Israel, but worshipped in the same synagogues, and even served as prayer leaders.² One may therefore conclude that, during the first generation following Jesus, these Jews were not yet rejected nor perceived as a danger (the above mishnah was written at a later period). Essentially, there was no disagreement between them and other Jews save that concerning the identity of the Messiah, which was the kind of question over which internal Jewish disagreement was acceptable — much as there was disagreement on this score between R. Akiba and R. Johanan ben Torta concerning the messianic claims of Bar Kokhba.³ True, the Christians believed

1. See Joseph Heinemann, *ha-Tefillah be-Tequfat ha-Tannaim veba-Amoraim* (Jerusalem, 1964), 29-47; English: *Prayer in the Talmud; Forms and Patterns* [Studia Judaica., Bd. IX. (Berlin, New York, 1977)], pp. 37-68; [cf. L. Finkelstein, "Development of the Amida," *JQR* n.s. xvi (1925-26), 160 [pp. 1-43, 127-157]; on the history of this blessing specifically, see A. Mishcon, "The Origin of *et zemaḥ David* and its Place in the Amidah," *JQR* n.s. xviii (1927/28), 37-43; J. Heinemann, "The Blessing of *Boneh Yerushalayim* and its Changes" (Heb.), in his *Iyyuney Tefillah*, ed. A. Shinan (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 2 [3-11].]

2. See I. Elbogen, *ha-Tefillah be-Yisra'el be-hitpathutah ha-historit* (Tel-Aviv, 1975), p. 391, n. 18.

3. See JT, Ta'anit 4:7 (68d).

that their messiah had already left this world, but this did not affect their basic hope for the coming of the Messiah and the national redemption. As we know from many documents, the essential belief of the Jewish Christians crystallized around their hope for the Second Coming of Jesus, and through him the redemption of Israel (incidentally, even the belief that Israel had already "consumed" their Messiah in the past was a legitimate one in Rabbinic literature, for which there are spokesmen among the sages.⁴

Prof. Shlomo Pines has recently discovered evidence for such correct relations between Jews and Jewish Christians during the early years. In the following source relating the history of their sect, which originated among the Jewish Christians themselves, the situation following the death of Jesus is described as follows:

After him, his disciples were with the Jews and the Children of Israel in the latter's synagogues, and observed the prayers and the feasts of (the Jews) in the same place as the latter. (However) there was a disagreement between them and the Jews with regard to Christ.⁵

As Pines has shown, this situation corresponds to that described in the anti-Christian Jewish work, *Toldot Yeshu*.⁶ We also find a sympathetic attitude towards Jesus and his disciples on the part of Josephus Flavius, as shown in the authentic version of his description recently published by Pines.⁷ This situation continued until the period of the Destruction of the Temple or shortly thereafter, when Jesus' brother and the head of the Jerusalem Church, James the Just, was killed by Jews.⁸ The Jewish Christians saw this murder as precipitating a serious break and as a grave sin by reason of which, according to them, the Temple was destroyed (the Jewish Christians did not attribute the Crucifixion of Jesus himself to the Jews, but to the Roman authorities alone).⁹ The inter-sectarian rivalry and disturbances described in the above Jewish Christian source and in *Toldot Yeshu* began at this time.

4. i.e., Rav Hillel; see Sanhedrin 99a.

5. S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities*, ii [13] (1968), p. 250 [pp. 237-310].

6. Pines, *ibid.*, 277-279. For the text of *Toldot Yeshu*, see S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesus nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin, 1902).

7. S. Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications* (Jerusalem, 1971); see D. Flusser, "The Testimony of Josephus Concerning Jesus" (Heb.), in his *Yahadut u-Meqorot ha-Nazrut* (Tel-Aviv, 1979), esp. p. 78.

8. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, 200.

9. See Flusser, *op cit.*, p. 78; cf. S. G. F. Brandon, "The Death of James the Just: A New Interpretation," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* [Heb. and Eng.] (Jerusalem, 1968), 57-69. According to Brandon, Jacob was close to the circle of the Zealots, so that the circumstances of his murder were in fact connected with the rebellion against the Romans, which precipitated the Destruction.

It was natural enough that the Jewish Christians should wish to introduce a change into that prayer dealing with the coming of the Messiah son of David namely, the blessing *Et Zemaḥ*. What could be more natural than a Christian attempt to mention the name of Jesus within the framework of this blessing? Thus, the formula *mazmiah qeren le-David* was replaced by *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*. In so doing, the Jewish Christians did not intend to alter the original intention of this blessing, but merely to reinterpret it in light of their own views, utilizing the then-accepted option to vary the formulae of blessings. Neither did they remove David's name from the blessing entirely, but they retained the opening formula, "the shoot of David your servant speedily cause to blossom..."; they saw no reason to eliminate this, as they considered Jesus as the Davidic messiah. Nevertheless, the name of Jesus, which they alluded to in the word *yeshu'ah* ("salvation") in the concluding formula, and possible also in the body of the blessing, was stressed more than that of David — but neither is this surprising, as they considered Jesus, and not his forebearer David, as the long-awaited Messiah. It was this belief which they wished to disseminate among the Jews (there is other evidence, both in the New Testament and in Rabbinic sayings, of the Jewish Christian polemic concerning the preference of Jesus over David).¹⁰ They might have done so because they valued the personality of Jesus more highly than that of David; Jesus, according to the Gospels, emerged unblemished from all the trials presented to him by the Satan, while David did not even withstand the one test involving Bat Sheva. Such a reason may be alluded to in the Jewish Christian midrash which survives in fragmentary form in Numbers Rabba (see below). Possibly, this may also have been another variation of the Christian formula of blessing which contained the name of David alongside that of Jesus, to wit: *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah be-vet David*, which is similar to a formula appearing in the Benedictus in the New

10. [The entire question of the connection between Jesus and David was a central one in the early Jewish-Christian polemic. Thus, for example, one finds a motif in the Midrashim and early piyyutim in which *zemaḥ* is equated with David himself. The esoteric slogan used upon the sanctification of the New Moon, "David King of Israel lives!" (BT, Rosh Hashanah 25b) seems to bear the same polemic edge. From the Christian side, the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew, and the placing of Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem, seem clear attempts to establish Jesus' "Davidic" connection — a motif which persisted despite, e.g., the radical view placed in Jesus' own mouth that "there is one here greater than David" (Mark 12:35-37; cf. John 7:42). See on this S. Safrai and D. Flusser, "The Apocryphal Psalms of David" [Heb.], *Sefer Zikaron le-Yehoshu'a Meir Grintz* [Iyyunim. 2. (Tel-Aviv, 1982)], esp. pp. 96-98; Liebes' discussion in the Hebrew text here, p. 327ff.; cf. F. C. Conebeare, *Myth Magic and Morals* (London, 1909), 187-191; C. Burger, *Jesus als Davidsson* (Göttingen, 1970). The present formula, *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*, seems intended to strengthen the Christian argument both by placing Jesus above David as the Jewish Messiah, and by reestablishing his claim to being the son of David. As to the question as to why the Jewish Christians needed to pray at all for the coming of the Messiah, one must remember that the Second Coming of Jesus, and the complete redemption he would bring with it, were essential elements of their faith. This belief, and that in the "Second Millennium" which would follow, has its roots already in the Apocalypse, specifically in the Revelation of John, which clearly originated in Jewish-Christian circles. See D. Flusser, "Present Redemption and Future Redemption" [Heb.], in his *Yahadut u-Meqorot ha-Nazrut*, p. 406-414. This belief was widespread among such Jewish Christian sects as the Ebionites and the Elkesai, and was considered as "too Jewish" by many Church authorities.]

Testament.¹¹ Its appearance in that context further confirms the Christian origin of *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*.¹² But despite the fact that New Testament scholars have suggested that the Greek of the Gospels reflects an older Hebrew version of this hymn (one found in Maccabees, and which was “christianized” by the use of the word *yeshu'ah* alluding to Jesus), until now no one has suggested that the formula *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* in the Amidah was likewise of Jewish Christian provenance.

The formula created as a result of the Christian alteration, *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*, is a difficult one both in terms of its own usage of language and of its context, as I have hopefully succeeded in demonstrating at length in the Hebrew version of this paper (Indeed, it was this incongruity which first led me to my conclusion. Only after I felt the internal difficulty in this formula, and arrived at the conjecture of its Christian origins as a means of explanation, did I seek, and find, corroborative external evidence.)

(To summarize briefly the linguistic arguments supporting my thesis, which are expounded at length in the body of this paper:

The phrase *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* is itself a difficult one. Superficially, it seems to be composed of known biblical idioms, but in fact, while any two words in the phrase can combine with one another — i.e., *mazmiah qeren le-*, *qeren veshu'ah* and *mazmiah yeshu'ah* — the combination of all three is not a

11. [Luke 1:68-69; cf. Paul Winter, “Magnificat and Benedictus — Maccabean Psalms?”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* xxxvii (1954-55), 328-347. Winter has elsewhere suggested a Hebrew source for the first two chapters of Luke: see *NTS* i (1954-55), 111-121; the rejoinder of Nigel Turner, *NTS* ii (1955-56), 100-109; and H. Oliver, *NTS* x (1963-64), 202-226.]

12. (Subsequent to writing this article, I discovered a source in which the 19th century scholar N. Brüll suggests an identification between Simeon Cleophas, who headed the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem between 70 and 116, and the otherwise unknown Simeon ha-Pakuli, mentioned in Berakhot 28b (and in the same context in Megillah 17b) as the one who “arranged” the order of the 18 blessings of the Amidah before Rabban Gamaliel II (see *Jahrbücher für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* v-vi (1883), p. 200). Simeon Cleophas was known as a figure who combined faith in the messiahhood of Jesus (to whom he was related by blood, and whom he had heard preaching in his childhood) with a militant Jewish nationalism, along the line of the Zealots. It is not impossible that the name Cleophas was corrupted to ha-Pakuli in the Talmudic source; as a venerable and elderly sage, his testimony concerning the ancient liturgical traditions would have been acceptable to Rabban Gamaliel. At the same time, we may see a certain rebuke against his Christian faith in the immediate sequel, in which Rabban Gamaliel turns to Shmuel ha-Katan to ask, “Who will formulate *Birkat ha-Minim*?” From all of the above, we may reach the tentative hypothesis that the author of the formula *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* discussed in this article was Simeon Cleophas / ha-Pakuli; that it was originally formulated for use within the Jewish Christian Church; and that it found its way into normative Jewish usage when it was presented, together with the other blessings, before Rabban Gamaliel. See my “Addition to My Article “*Mazmiah Qeren Yeshu'ah*” [Heb.], *Mehqerey Yerushalayim* iv (1985), 341-344.]

successful one. What we seem to have is in fact a new and problematic formula camouflaged in the form of a number of routine and well-known expressions. Thus, *qeren yeshu'ah* does not appear as such in the Bible, but only *qeren yishti* ("the horn of my salvation" — II Sam. 22:3), which refers to God Himself as Saviour, and not to "salvation" as an independent entity which God causes to flourish. *Mazmiah yeshu'ah* in the second benediction of the Amidah does not refer to a "horn," but to "God's mighty acts" — specifically, the resurrection of the dead and the bringing down of the rain — and not to the Messiah.

The most important idiom used here is *mazmiah qeren*. Biblical precedents for this phrase never appear in combination with an abstract noun, such as *yeshu'ah*, but only in conjunction with the name of the individual whose horn flourishes (cf. Jer. 33:15, Ezek. 29:21; Ps. 132:17). This usage is a logical one in light of the source of the image. The "flourishing of the horn of so-and-so" implies his strengthening, just as the wild-ox becomes stronger as its horns grow and it becomes capable of goring its enemies (see Ps. 92:11; cf. Deut. 33:17). Thus, one cannot speak of the "flourishing of the horn" save in connection with a specific individual or group of people, as the whole point of the idiom is the strengthening of that person, and not that of an abstraction. The same applies to the two analogous idioms, *haramat qeren* ("uplifting of a horn") and its opposite, *gedi'at qeren* ("cutting off of the horn"); the Bible never speaks of "uplifting the horn" in the abstract, but only of the horn of one whose identity is known and mentioned in the verse. This is explicitly so for *haramat qeren* in ten out of eleven cases; in the one exception, I Chron. 25:5, the identity of the owner of the horn is understood from the context of the verse as a whole. Re *gedi'at qeren*, see Jer. 48:25; Lam. 2:3; Ps. 75:11.

The Biblical verses underlying the wording used in this blessing may be identified more precisely. This will assist our understanding of the text of the benediction, and constitute a more exact proof of the secondary nature of the phrase *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* (and possibly of another phrase used in the blessing, which we shall restore to its original version).

(1) The first phrase, "the shoot of David your servant speedily make to flourish" is based upon Jer. 33:15: "In those days and at that time I shall cause to flourish for David a shoot of righteousness." This is the only Biblical usage of the phrase *hazmaḥat zemaḥ*, and it connects the shoot to David, exactly as in the blessing. The nature of this "shoot" is clear; it is that which is to emerge in the future from the seed of David to become the King Messiah, who is referred to elsewhere in the Bible and in Rabbinic literature by the appellation "shoot."¹³

2) The second phrase, "and lift up his horn with your salvation," was clearly influenced by other syntactically similar verses as Ps. 89:18; Ps. 112:9; Ps. 89:25, but the use of *be-yeshu'atekha* here is not based on any Biblical source *per se*, suggesting the very tentative possibility that it was also a Jewish Christian

13. Compare Jer. 23:5; Zech. 3:8; 6:12; and possibly Isa. 4:2. According to the Rabbis, the name of the Messiah will be *Zemaḥ* ("shoot") or *Menahem*, which is its numerical equivalent; see Sanhedrin 98b. Cf. Liebes' Hebrew text, p. 326, n. 19, and compare also JT Berakhot 2:4, discussed below.

interpolation, intended to “accustom the ear” to this usage in the concluding formula (see Leibes, pp. 316-318, for a fuller discussion of this point).

3) The third phrase of the original blessing (the phrase shown in brackets at the beginning of this article is a later addition to the blessing, and not part of the tannaitic version), *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*, is based upon Ps. 132:17, “There I shall cause a horn to spring forth for my servant David, I prepared a lamp for my anointed one” (the phrase *azmiah qeren* also appears in Ezek. 29:21). This verse appears almost verbatim in the shortened form of the Amidah, *Havinenu*, as cited in BT Berakhot 29a.

What is meant by the phrase *qeren david*? We saw above that a person’s “horn” is a metaphor for his strength and might. But does this refer to strength only in the physical sense? It seems to me that the meaning of the phrase *qeren David*, which we believe to have been the original conclusion of the blessing, may be inferred through comparison with the opening — i.e., *zemaḥ David*. As we have already seen, the “shoot of David” refers to the sprout of his seed, i.e., Messiah son of David. The phrase *qeren David* may possibly bear the same meaning, as a person’s sons are the prime expression of his strength, as we see from Ps. 127:3-5; sons could easily be compared with the horns with which one gores one’s enemies. Indeed, we find such a usage for “uplifting of the horn” in reference to Heman in I Chron. 25:5; the uplifting of the horn of Hannah in the hymn quoted above refers to the birth of Samuel. If the horn referred to at the conclusion of this blessing refers to a son or descendant, then the word which follows ought to be the name of the father, namely, David. The substitution for that name of an abstract noun, *yeshu'ah*, is even more striking and evidently inappropriate. The word *yeshu'ah* would only be appropriate here if those who instituted it wished to allude to a personal name — namely, Jesus (*yeshu'a*). But in changing the ancient text of the blessing in this manner, it was no longer necessary to preserve the exact parallelism between *qeren* and *zemaḥ*; as we shall see below, the “horn of salvation” (or “horn of Jesus”) did not refer to Jesus’ son, but to his own power and dominion.¹⁴

Incongruities in these texts tend to be ignored, by dint of daily repetition. Nevertheless, if read with a critical eye, one would anticipate a concluding formula such as *mazmiah qeren le-David*, *mazmiah qeren le-meshiho* or *merim qeren le-David be-yeshu'ato*. The existing formula, on the other hand, lacks the essential element — either King David or the personal Messiah referred to in the opening sentence. While the conclusion, *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* is seemingly composed of phrases from the opening of the benediction, the syntactic relation among them is totally different. The opening of the blessing refers to the uplifting of “the horn of the Messiah”, with or through God’s salvation, not that of “salvation.” The difference in sentence structure brings in its wake a far-reaching change in meaning.

The argument that *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* is a shortened, elliptical form of *mazmiah qeren david be-yeshu'ato* or some such phrase is invalid, as the conclusion of the benedictions are simple, clear and unambiguous. It is inconceivable that the main element, namely, David, would be omitted.

14. For a full philological analysis of this blessing, see the Hebrew original of this article, pp. 315-319.

One might contend, against these Biblical-linguistic arguments, that the authors allowed themselves to deviate from the Biblical formula. Nevertheless, one must remember that the change in question appears nowhere else in the language of the time — i.e., the usage of the Sages and the Dead Sea Scrolls — and also that the formulators of liturgy very frequently preferred Biblical language. Indeed, I have shown that this blessing is confused and compounded entirely of Biblical verses. Thus, any deviation from this language must be defended on both ideological or linguistic grounds, or both. But the above arguments are not the only or even the principal ones for a Jewish Christian origin for this blessing. It is also based upon the contradiction between the wording of the body of the blessing and its conclusion, and the history of the blessing and its alterations, as shown below.)

Why did not the early Christians introduce an explicit reference to Jesus, such as *mazmiah qeren Yeshu'a*, which would have eliminated all these linguistic difficulties and explicitly conveyed the intention of its authors? It would appear that during this period the Christians still lived in peace with those Jews who did not believe in Jesus, and they therefore hoped to continue this coexistence until they could succeed in convincing their brethren of the veracity of their own views. They thus preferred a “diplomatic” formula which, while unmistakably alluding to Jesus, would nevertheless be acceptable to those who did not believe in him, who could bear in mind the more general sense of the abstract noun “salvation” while reciting it, without needing to silence the prayer leader. There is no lack of similar historical examples of such compromises.

This idyll quickly came to an end, as we have mentioned. We do not intend to survey here the process by which Christianity took shape as an independent entity, nor the origins of the schism between the two religions, processes which have been described in many books.¹⁵ At the end of this process, relations between Jews and Jewish Christians considerably worsened. One may assume that the success of the Christians among the Gentiles and their separation from Jewish teaching, both practical and theoretical, to the point that it even acquired an antisemitic character, also made the Jewish Christians suspect in Jewish eyes. The latter, in turn, began to lose their patience when they saw their limited success among the Jews, and began to participate in projects against their brethren. Evidence of the denunciation of Jews by Jewish Christians appears further on in the above-cited source: “The Romans reigned over them. The Christians (used to) complain to the Romans about the Jews, showed them their own weakness and appealed to their pity...”¹⁶ This treachery of the Jewish

15. For a good description of this process, see H. Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Hammondsworth, Eng., 1967), esp. Chapter I, “From Jerusalem to Rome”; [Readers of this journal may also wish to refer to David Flusser’s major article on this issue, “The Jewish-Christian Schism,” *Immanuel* xvi (1983), 32-49; xvii (1983/84), 30-39 — Ed.].

16. Pines, “The Jewish Christians” (op cit., n. 5), p.

Christians deeply angered the Jews, and helped to bring about the split between the two groups. From this point on, the Jewish authorities began to reject the Christians in whatever way possible, as evidenced by the various stories scattered throughout Rabbinic literature, which deal with extreme severity with a number of second century tannaim who had connections with Christian scholars¹⁷ — both the original closeness and the break thereafter — as well as by *Toldot Yeshu*, which is concerned with the devices used by the Jews to separate themselves from the Christians.

There was also a ritual expression to this break. The Sanhedrin, convened under the leadership of Rabban Gamaliel II in Yavneh at the beginning of the second century, introduced a number of changes directed against the Christians within the text of the prayers. The most striking and best-known of these changes was the introduction of *Birkat ha-Minim* as a separate, independent blessing, which was reformulated in an anti-Christian manner. According to the text of the Palestinean liturgy discovered in the Cairo genizah, this blessing speaks explicitly against the “apostates” and “Christians.” The parallel version used today, “let there be no hope for the slanderers...”, may also allude to the Jewish Christians, about whose slandering we learned from the above source. But this was not the only change introduced in the prayer book at that time. At that time the blessing *et zemaḥ* was removed from the prayer book, and from then on this blessing was no longer recited in the Palestinean ritual. This omission was not performed, as thought by some, to preserve the total number of eighteen blessings following the introduction of *Birkat ha-Minim*; such a reason would be inadequate justification for eliminating from the prayer text an important blessing, dealing with such a central principle as the coming of the Messiah. Moreover, this explanation seems inappropriate to the spirit of the Palestinean halakhah, which is flexible concerning the number of blessings. Nor does this consideration apply to Babylonia or to other Jewish communities, either then or since, in which nineteen blessings are routinely recited. The main motivation for the elimination of *et zemaḥ* was the same as that which led to the introduction of *Birkat ha-Minim* — namely, the distancing of Christianity. The sages knew that the Jewish Christians expressed their belief in Jesus in this blessing, and that one of its most widespread concluding formulae was even introduced by the Christians as an allusion to the name of their Messiah — as were also, possibly, the references to *yeshu'ah* in the body of the blessing. Therefore, they decided at Yavneh to eliminate this blessing entirely, with all the associations involved in it. This is not merely a theoretical conjecture, but is based upon the evidence of a midrash preserved in Numbers Rabba.¹⁸ This midrash states that two blessings

17. See Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, 1981), 46-50.

18. [Numbers Rabba 18:21. This midrash in turn alludes to *Midrash Shoḥar Tov* to Psalm 18, sec. 25, ed. Buber, p. 77b. For a full discussion of these texts, with reference to the opinions of earlier scholars, etc., see Liebes' Hebrew text, pp. 329-334.]

of the Amidah — *Birkat ha-Minim* and *et zemaḥ* — are excluded from the rubric of “Forgive all iniquity and accept that which is good (*tov*)” (Hosea 14:3 — *Tov* in gematria equals 17, which is the number of blessings left in the Amidah after one removes the above two), as it was introduced “after” Jesus Christ — that is, because of him or on his account. While Jesus’ name is not explicitly mentioned in this midrash, it may clearly be inferred there, not only because the subject and matter and the context require it, but also because of certain exact linguistic parallels in which his name is mentioned as such, albeit not in connection with *et zemaḥ* but only in relation to *Birkat ha-Minim*.

Another anti-Christian ritual change was made at Yavneh. Following the elimination of *et zemaḥ David*, no reference to King David remained in the Amidah. This was the opposite of the intention of the rabbis of Yavneh, whose main complaint against the Christians was precisely that they had removed David’s name from the conclusion of the blessing *et zemaḥ*, substituting for it the name of their messiah. Thus, those making these changes felt the need to restore David to his rightful place. But this could no longer be done in the separate blessing of *et zemaḥ*, because of its association with heresy; instead, the name of David was added to the previous blessing, concluding the blessing for Jerusalem with the formula, *Elohei David u-voney Yerushalayim* (“God of David, who rebuilds Jerusalem”). The Jerusalem Talmud,¹⁹ following the directive to behave thus in prayer, alludes to the political situation which brought about the institution of this version, emphasizing that the Messiah would be none other than David himself, to counter the view of those who had erased David’s name from the blessing and placed that of Jesus in its stead.

And perhaps yet another anti-Christian note was added to the prayer book at this time. *Et zemaḥ David* was among the set of blessings which followed the reading of the Haftarah (Prophetic Lection) on Sabbaths and Holy Days. As these blessings do not have the same liturgical centrality as those of the Amidah, the blessing *Et Zemaḥ* was not entirely eliminated from the Haftarah blessings, but was instead retained with certain far-reaching changes — the elimination of all Christian allusions (reinstating one of the older concluding formulae, *Magen David*, in its stead), on the one hand, and the reinstatement of the name of David alongside a bitter imprecation against those who would attempt to occupy his rightful place, on the other — “upon his throne there shall not sit any stranger, and others shall no longer inherit his glory” — again, a clear allusion to Jesus.

Thus, in Yavneh Christianity was declared as “heretical.” It should be noted that this was not due to the beliefs of the Christians, with which the Jews of the previous generation were able to make their peace, but rather to the political

19. JT Berakhot 2:4 (5a); Tosefta Berakhot 3:25; [cf. S. Schechter, *JQR* x (1898), p. 657; J. Mann, “The Origin and Composition of the Eighteen Benedictions with a Translation of the Corresponding Assene Prayers in the Epostolic Constitutions,” *HUCA* i (1924), p. 405.]

position taken by the Christians, which had become self-enclosed and alien to Judaism. Indeed, most of the sins enumerated in *Birkat ha-Minim* are not concerned with theological or ideological issues, but with slander, evil, wickedness and alliance with the evil kingdom. Of course, after Christianity came to be considered as a heretical sect, its beliefs likewise became viewed as *apiqorsut*; nevertheless, beliefs are not the essence of heresy. Are not the *minim* so called in Hebrew because they are a “species unto themselves,” being no longer part of the congregation of Israel and not accepting its religious-political authority. In the Palestinean Aramaic dialect of the early Christians, *mina* referred to a nation or people; the Christians used this term in the same manner to refer to themselves.²⁰ This is in fact the meaning of the Greek *heresis*, the source of the Christian term “heresy.” In my opinion, this same usage underlies a number of Rabbinic sayings dealing with matters of heresy.²¹

What became of the Jewish Christians? They continued to exist throughout most of the first millennium, but they did not have an easy existence. They frequently suffered from persecutions, and were at times even forced to live an underground existence.²² They were considered as aliens both by the Jews, following the period of Yavneh, as well as in the eyes of the Christian Church, which could not forgive them their Jewishness.²³ Indeed, it is extraordinary how quickly the Church completely forgot that their messiah and god had been delivered to death because he was meant to be the “king of the Jews,” and that it was this sin which was inscribed on his cross. Nevertheless, the attitude towards the Jewish Christians in certain heterodox Christian sects, such as the Nestorians, seems to have been somewhat more friendly.²⁴ The lot of the Jewish Christians was almost certainly better among the Jews than among the Christians. Although at Yavneh Christianity was declared heretical by the heads of the Sanhedrin, over the course of time the tension between these two Jewish sects seems to have relaxed somewhat. It may also be that, once the Jews saw that the Jewish Christians were also persecuted by the Gentile Christians for their Jewishness, they once again brought them somewhat closer. Thus, we find in the Talmud that R. Joshua b. Perahiah is criticized because he “pushed away Jesus with both

20. See F. Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum* (Berlin, 1903), pp. 109-110, which has extensive bibliography. A similar meaning is to be found in the use of $\mu\epsilon\nu\sigma\zeta$ by Josephus, which is an exact parallel.

21. The original meaning of the word $\alpha\rho\epsilon\sigma\iota\zeta\iota\varsigma$ “taking” (derived from the verb $\alpha\rho\epsilon\omega$, meaning to take). The concept underlying this usage is that heresy involves taking or choosing a particular path involving separation from the collectivity (for different meanings of the word see Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon*); thus, *heresis* is none other than a separatist sect. The various Jewish sects of the Second Temple were designated as such: the Essenes by Josephus (*Jewish Wars* II.8.3) and, in the New Testament, the Pharisees (Acts 15:5; 26:5), the Sadducees (ibid 5:17) and even the Christians (ibid., 25:5, 14; 28:22). It seems to me that the midrashic interpretation of Korach’s rebellion, based upon Num. 16:1, *va-yikah Korah* (“and Korach took”), is based upon a similar understanding of the word. [See Liebes’ discussion of this point in full in the Hebrew text, p. 346, n. 81.]

22. See Pines (op cit., n. 5), pp. 274-75.

23. See Chadwick, pp. 22-23.

24. See Pines, p. 279.

hands” and did not behave properly, for “let one always let the left hand push away and the right hand draw close.”²⁵ One may assume that this was in fact the case within broader, less learned circles of the folk, while among peripherally Jewish groups the friendship towards the Jewish Christians was even greater. As Shlomo Pines has shown, in its early years Karaism was also close to Jewish Christianity and was friendly towards it;²⁶ there also seems to be some basis for the hypothesis that the Jewish Christians were those who converted the Khazars.²⁷

The destiny of the concluding formula, *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah*, was far more fortunate than that of its Jewish Christian authors. While the blessing *et zemaḥ David*, including its ending, was abolished in the Palestinian rite, it was retained in Babylonia, where there were no Jewish Christians. Indeed, the Babylonians did not even know of them, and therefore had no reason to cast suspicions upon this formula, particularly as it was already widely accepted; they ruled in their Talmud that one should recite it. Thus, once the rulings of the Babylonian Talmud had become accepted among all Jewish communities, the entire Jewish people throughout the centuries recited the formula *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* three times a day, without knowing who introduced this formula or why. Indeed, they would have been unable to imagine a Christian origin for it, as by that time Christianity was only known to them as an alien and antagonistic religion, if not as an enemy and persecutor.

I do not wish to suggest here that knowledge of the identity of the origins of this prayer formula and their original intention should cast a shadow upon the text of the prayer as used today. Every individual worships according to his own views, and does not necessarily follow the intention of the author of the prayer text. Indeed, knowledge of the multitude of historical changes undergone by the various blessings, and the various intentions which our ancestors associated with them, each in his own generation, is liable to add a certain richness to the blessings in the eyes of the worshipper; the same applies to the memories they aroused of the various periods and changes in the history of Jewish Christian relations. It should be noted that *mazmiah qeren yeshu'ah* is far more indicative of the Jewishness of Christianity in its earliest years than of Christian influence upon the text of the prayer book. There is no more impressive testimony to this than the presence of the name of the Christian Messiah in the Amidah prayer, but this is not the only evidence of such. One who examines it attentively is liable

25. Sanhedrin 107b. This sentence is absent in contemporary editions due to censorship, but appears in the early editions, such as Venice 1520, etc.

26. See Pines, *op cit.*, p. 283-84.

27. Pines, pp. 284-286.

to discover many other remnants of the Jewish Christian spirit surviving in Jewish literature.²⁸

Note: Following its publication in Hebrew, several serious critiques of the thesis presented in this article appeared in the pages of *Mehqerey Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisra'el* iv (1985). Responses were offered there by Israel Ta-Shma, pp. 181-189; Menahem Kister, pp. 191-207; and Shlomo Morag, pp. 345-351, to which the author replied, respectively, on pps. 209-214, 215-217, and 353-354. He also offered a brief supplement to his article on pp. 341-344 (see note 12 above). Finally, Yehudah Muriel recently summarized the findings of this article, albeit without mentioning their source, in the Friday supplement to *ha-Zofeh*, 10 July 1987, p. 6.

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28. See, for example, *Otiyot de-Rabbi 'Akiva* and other fragments of midrash which were known to Raymond Martini, in some cases via the school of R. Moses ha-Darshan. The *Zohar* was also quite open to Christian influences; see my article, "Christian Influences in the Zohar," *Immanuel* xvii (1983/84), 43-67. There may be other such survivals in Jewish ritual, such as the angelic names recited between the Shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah in some rituals, which refer to *Yeshu'a Sar ha-Panim* together with Elijah and Metatron, a combination found in other sources as well. See now my article, "The Angels of the Shofar and Yeshu'a Sar ha-Panim" (Heb.) in *ha-Mistiqaq ha-Yehudit ha-Qedumah* [= *Mehqerey Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisra'el* vi:1-2] (1987), pp. 171-195.