

Toward Jerusalem Council Two: A Prophetic Vision

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I have been personally involved in the initiative Toward Jerusalem Council Two since its birth in 1996. It is not the same as “The Road to Jerusalem” or Brother Yun’s vision, though it is not in contradiction with them. It is a vision first received by a Messianic Jew, Marty Waldman, rabbi of Baruch HaShem messianic synagogue in Dallas, Texas. It is a vision for the **reconciliation** of Jewish and non-Jewish believers and believing communities in the body of Christ, or as the Messianic Jews say, the body of Messiah. Because for most of Christian history Jewish communities of believers in Jesus did not exist this is also a vision for the full **restoration** of a Jewish expression of faith in Jesus (Yeshua), the church from the circumcision. The key passages in the New Testament that inspire this vision are Acts 15, recounting the first Council of Jerusalem; Romans 11; and Ephesians 2: 11 - 11 - 3: 6. From the last passage comes the image that dominates this vision, the image of “the one new man” of Jew and Gentile made one through the cross with the wall of hostility between them destroyed.

The vision speaks in its title of a second Council in Jerusalem. As a Messianic Jew, Marty Waldman suffered from the rejection of the Messianic Jews by the Jewish community, as being no longer Jews when they believe in Jesus. But they also suffer from much misunderstanding and sometimes rejection from the side of the Churches with the stated or implied question: Why can’t you just become normal Christians? Some go further and accuse Messianic Jews of Judaizing because of their common conviction that they are to live as Jewish disciples of the Lord and Savior. Marty Waldman’s vision is that a second Council of Jerusalem would be as generous to the Jewish believers as the first Council in Acts 15 was to Gentile non-Jewish converts.

I want to approach this vision under three headings.

1. The Vision keeps getting wider, bigger and deeper.

When Marty Waldman received this vision in 1995, he assumed it meant gathering as many Evangelical and Pentecostal believers as possible in Jerusalem with as many Messianic Jewish leaders as possible and making a solemn proclamation. Initially his idea was to call it “Jerusalem Council Two” and to hold it at Pentecost, 1997. Consulting and praying with some colleagues, it was decided to form a steering committee of 14 leaders, 7 Messianic Jews and 7 Gentile Christians. I was asked to be one of the 7 Gentiles. Why? Because Dan Juster, one of the first Messianic leaders with whom Marty shared his vision, had read a book of mine called *The Glory and the Shame* (1994) that was saying that Christian unity is impossible without the Jewish people and noting the prophetic significance of the appearance of the Messianic Jewish movement. But I replied that as a Catholic I could not join a movement calling itself “Jerusalem Council Two” and that assumed it could itself call a Council of the whole Church. But I said “If you add the word **Toward** to the title, I can and will join. The committee agreed with this, aided also by a member from the Episcopal Church.

This decision produced the first widening and deepening of the vision. With the inclusion of an Episcopalian and a Catholic and the change in the title, it was clear that the event could not be held in 1997. In fact, Marty Waldman consulted Richard Wurmbrand, who was

Jewish and by then was living in the USA, who told him, “Marty, this is a lifelong task.” My inclusion meant that the vision has also to include the Catholic Church in communion with Rome, which of course made it less easy to “sell” to Marty’s envisaged constituency of Evangelicals and Pentecostals. For myself, I was very conscious that at that point I was a lone Catholic priest without any church support for my participation. I knew that the only way my inclusion could be significant would be when the vision is taken seriously within the Catholic hierarchy. This was one of the examples of wider and deeper that happened with amazing speed, as I shall mention.

The expansion of the vision had two immediate consequences in the decisions of the committee: 1. The recognition of a diplomatic side that would require us to go to significant church leaders to present the vision; in practice this had to begin with telling them who the Messianic Jews are; (2) The acceptance of the need to confess the sins of the Church against the Jewish people and particularly against Jewish believers in Jesus. The first led to a journey by 5 of us to 5 European nations in May 1997. During that trip, my own bishop in Northampton, England, approved of my participation. The most significant meetings on this trip were with two leading Eastern Orthodox theologians in Paris, Olivier Clément (who has since died) and Nicolas Lossky (who has since been ordained priest) and with the Catholic archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Schönborn, soon to be Cardinal. The first meeting led to a decision to keep a place on the committee empty (one Gentile member had dropped out) until we found the right person from the Orthodox Church. That took several years, but resulted in Fr Vasile Mihoc, a New Testament professor at the University of Sibiu, Romania, joining the committee in 2005. The second meeting produced immediate fruit. Msgr Schönborn was deeply impacted by the vision and has supported it since that date, coming for at least one session to later consultations we held in Vienna. Also my friend Johannes Fichtenbauer from Vienna who arranged that evening was won over and the following year became a second Catholic member of the committee, but differently from me as Cardinal Schönborn’s representative.

The first prayer journeys of repentance took place in 1998 - 99 following a vision given to Rick Ridings, who saw four city gates that he identified as the Alhambra Gate in Grenada, Spain; the Arch of Titus in Rome; a gate in Nicaea, Turkey; and the Golden Gate in Jerusalem. We went to all these places. Telling you about each would take too much time. But now we understood that the Lord was taking us back through history to heal all the wounds of history. During our visit to Rome, 9 members were able to meet with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who agreed to see us after a phone call from Cardinal Schönborn. After the Messianic brothers had given their testimony, Cardinal Ratzinger said: “The Church is made up of the *ecclesia ex Judaeis* and the *ecclesia ex Gentibus*, and the Church is not complete without both.

The vision has widened further since then. In 2004, we went to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where several of the committee met with Patriarch Paulos of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Ethiopia. This is a Church not in communion with the Orthodox churches of Constantinople, Greece and Russia, as it separated in the 5th century. We discovered that it has retained more Jewish practices than any of the other historic churches. They also believe that they were converted to Christianity from Judaism. In 2009, a small group of Messianic leaders in Jerusalem fully endorsed the TJCI vision, and two of them joined the

committee. This filled a real gap, for as they told us, this vision requires a welcoming Jewish presence in Jerusalem. In the last two years, it became clear that we have to deal also with the Jews within the Christian churches. This became a pressing issue in Europe.

2. This vision connects with several key biblical themes

I will outline these briefly. I have found that these themes have opened up the whole Scriptures for me in a wonderful way.

- a. The fidelity of God to his promises. “O give thanks to the LORD for He is good! For His mercy endures for ever.” (Ps. 136: 1 et seqq.) “Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.” (Ps. 89: 33 - 34).
- b. The continuing relevance of the distinction between Israel and the nations (*goyim*, *ethnoi*): compare Matt. 19: 28 with 25: 31; mission to Israel during his earthly ministry (Matt. 10; 15: 24) and mission to the nations (Matt. 28: 19); Peter as “apostle to circumcision” and Paul “apostle to the nations” (Gal. 2: 7 - 8); Rev. 7: 4, 9.
- c. The centrality and importance of covenant. This is obvious in the Old Testament, where the election is sealed in covenant. One of the major promises of the coming Messiah is that the Lord will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer. 31: 31). The new covenant is not made with a different people. The new covenant is in Jesus, and his blood will be “my blood of the covenant” (Matt. 26: 28) evoking Exodus 24: 8.
- d. The Jewishness of Jesus. Human identity: son of David, son of Abraham (Matt. 1: 1); circumcised on eighth day (Luke 2: 21); “out of Egypt I have called my son” (Hosea 11: 1; Matt. 2: 15; cf with Ex. 4: 22); accepts baptism of repentance from John; suffering servant, who is both Israel (Is. 44: 1 - 2, 21; 49: 3) and one man embodying Israel.
- e. The bipolar model of the Church. The NT position is not so much that the Jews have to enter the Church, but that the Gentiles enter Israel, not in the legal sense but are admitted to “the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2: 12) to become “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2: 19; see also Eph. 3: 6). This is how the new covenant made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah is opened to all peoples.
- f. The eschatological fulfillment requires the entry of Israel. “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 22: 15 - 16). “Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness.” (Rom. 11: 12). This is also the teaching of the Catholic Church: heading “The glorious advent of Christ, the hope of Israel”. See CCC, para. 674: “The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment

of history until his recognition by 'all Israel' for 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel' in their 'unbelief' toward Jesus."

3. This vision depends totally upon the leading of the Holy Spirit

Toward Jerusalem Council Two was born through a "vision" of some kind, and its development has had a strongly charismatic character. The Messianic Jewish movement is predominantly charismatic though not exclusively, a characteristic most evident in its worship, in the creativity of its musicians and in its dance. But from the beginning we were aware that such an initiative could only be charismatic, because this road is a road never travelled before. When we were on a bus on the way to Nicaea in September 1998, we received a word that no group had trodden this road before, and we could not depend on our previous competence and any sense of know-how, but be totally led by the Holy Spirit.

There have been several points at which key decisions have been made as a result of prophetic words, sometimes leading us to change plans already made. The first major example of being led by the Spirit was the series of prayer journeys following the four-gates vision of Rick Ridings. The prayer journeys have at their heart a confession of the evils that occurred in those places. For this to be a shared and communal experience, it requires a freedom in expression of our hearts, of how we are being stirred by the Holy Spirit in these places and a seeking out of relevant passages from the Scriptures. In October 2001 we met in Ventura, California at the time of a French presidential election, in which the run-off second vote included a very anti-Semitic and racist politician, Le Pen. In prayer we were led to go to Paris for our meeting in spring 2002, which was where we had a meeting with Cardinal Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris. In 2004, we were planning to go to Africa, with a discussion as to Nairobi, the natural hub for East Africa, or Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the country with the strongest Christian presence through the centuries. Before we went there one Messianic member of the committee received a word that there was a treasure hidden in Ethiopia for the Messianic Jews that would bring them something they need. No one knew what this meant, but we could begin to have some sense after our visit.

Another example of charismatic leading concerned our spring meeting in 2006. When we opted to go to Addis Ababa in '04, we decided to go to Nairobi in spring '06. We had been planning for an international prayer gathering in Jerusalem for fall '09, but a year before we received the word "The road to Jerusalem passes through Antioch". So we knew we had to go to Antioch in May '06. What happened there was very interesting. I expected that there would be a further degree of Gentile repentance, but what in fact happened was a deep confession of the Messianic Jews. We started by reading all the passages of the New Testament that mention Antioch. As we began to pray after, the Messianic Jews were led to repent of their sins against the unity of the body, because they saw there were three significant conflicts at Antioch, all between Jewish believers. The first, the Jews who came from Jerusalem saying all the Gentiles had to be circumcised and become proselytes if they were to be saved, the dispute that occasioned the first Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15: 1). The second, the dispute between Paul and Peter, mentioned in

Galatians 2. The third, what is described as a “sharp contention” between Paul and Barnabas about taking John Mark on their second missionary journey after he had abandoned them on the first (Acts 15: 39). So Barnabas took John Mark, a relative, and Paul chose Silas. Here Barnabas disappears from the story. The Messianic brothers realized what a terrible example all this was to the young Gentile believers. And they were led into a deeper repentance for the divisions and rivalries within the Messianic Jewish movement. We also saw more clearly in Antioch that the church of the one “new man” came into existence in Antioch not in Jerusalem. This showed us why we had to visit Antioch before Jerusalem. In fact, there was a rupture in Jerusalem between the enforced departure of all the Jews in 135 following their defeat in the Bar Kochba rebellion, and the appointment of the first Gentile (Greek) bishop in the year 138. But there had been no such break in the church of Antioch. We also prayed close to where Seleucia, the port of Antioch, had been for the whole mission *Ad Gentes*, which had begun there with the sending out of the Jewish “prophets and teachers” (to quote Acts 13: 1).

The other major “intervention” of the Holy Spirit came to some Messianic brothers from Jerusalem. In February 2003, we held a TJCII European consultation in Vienna. The day before it began, we received a phone call in Vienna from three brothers in Jerusalem, who asked if it was too late to come for the Consultation. We said “No, it is not too late” so the next day they arrived. They told us that the Lord had told all three to come. None of them wanted to come, it was inconvenient for all three. But as one said I could not sleep until I had said Yes to the Lord. They told us they would keep quiet and just observe and take in what was going on - probably not very typical Messianic behavior. Near the end, the 3 brothers from Jerusalem met with the 4 TJCII committee members there. The main point they made was: for us who live in Jerusalem, it is rather strange that an initiative that has “Toward Jerusalem” in its title has no base in Jerusalem and is not in significant touch with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. We had not fully grasped the depth of our loss when our original member from Jerusalem died in the year 2000 at the age of 43. The 3 brothers knew the Lord was telling them to come to our next committee meeting which was in Dallas so they came. The fruit of this obedience took 5 years, as it was not until 2008 that the Jerusalem Olive Tree Fellowship fully identified with TJCII and two of the three became members of our committee. The struggles of these five years revealed once again that the spiritual battle is strongest in Jerusalem, where all unity is under constant attack. This is also clear from the constant and unedifying squabbles at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, divided between 5 ancient church traditions, where each is strongly possessive of their own territory. Having a presence of brothers in Jerusalem is a preparation for Jewish - Christian reconciliation in Jerusalem.

In the last three years, the Lord has been highlighting for us the words “Toward Jerusalem”. We know that we are at some point to move our international office from Dallas to Jerusalem, and that we are to have a more visible presence in Jerusalem, maybe including a place for prayer. At present the four prayer centers in Jerusalem are all Evangelical - Pentecostal - charismatic and without any real historic church participation. That is where TJCII is unique.