



A Hebraic Inkling

C.S. Lewis on
Judaism and the Jews

P.H. Brazier



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For Hilary

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Foreword

A modern-day Kohelet might word the warning in the megillah a little differently—“Of making many books about C.S. Lewis there is no end.” In 2005, writing for *The New Yorker*, critic Adam Gopnik¹ takes the C. S. Lewis industry to task, deploring the extent to which the lovers of his work, conservative American Evangelicals in particular, have made of Lewis something akin to the deceased leader of a cult. Gopnik’s article, which points to Lewis’ less exalted reputation in Britain and takes quite a few pot shots at Lewis himself along the way, is written in a snide tone that displays an often-tone-deaf religious sensibility. Nonetheless, he has a point. Lewis’ life story has had numerous iterations in the form of books, plays, and film. I have read and seen a number of them myself. In the end, the interpreters of his life often unconsciously tell us more about themselves than about their subject.

So, why is this book different from all other books? I will admit that what drew me to the opportunity to contribute the foreword was the intriguing angle of approach: *A Hebraic Inkling—C. S. Lewis on Judaism and the Jews*. I had to admit I had not come across that one before.

I was attracted for two main reasons. The first is that I am and have been a Jewish believer in the gospel for close to fifty years. The second reason is that Lewis played a formative role in that faith decision. The privilege of supplying this forward is a welcome pretext to bring to mind my first encounter with Lewis as a young seeker and the effect he had on

1. Adam Gopnik, “Prisoner of Narnia,” *The New Yorker*, Nov 21, 2005: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/11/21/prisoner-of-narnia>

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me then, as well as from that point on as I read most of his books and have revisited many of them over the years.

I never encountered Narnia in my childhood years and had never heard of Lewis when someone loaned me a copy of *Mere Christianity* while my struggle to understand the Christian message was already under way. Pausing at the threshold, I came to realize later that I was seeking intellectual permission from myself to exercise a manner of faith that I have come to view as an epistemological category all its own. Lewis helped me get there, and it was not easy.

Although a religiously uncommitted Jew, like many of my peers I had nonetheless a well-formed commitment to the history and heritage of my people, as well as a cultural identity passed down as second nature by my parents and other relatives. Christianity was the bells of the Catholic Church and the crucifixes that seemed to greet my eyes virtually everywhere I looked. It was foreign and threatening. A child of the 1950s, I may have known the number six million before I could count to six and I think I must actually have believed at one point that the Nazis were a species of Christian who simply worked more efficiently to eliminate us than the others had.

This hedge of misunderstanding, suspicion, and distrust I had almost unconsciously erected around the gospel prevented me from encountering its message until a series of dance steps in what I like to call God's choreography upset my complacency. As I found myself increasingly attracted to the gospel's message of forgiveness and new birth, I was simultaneously terrified, wondering what would happen to my "*pintele yid*," the Jewish spark that animated my personhood. If I came too near Christians or their churches, would I have to learn to hunt and play golf or do whatever else gentiles did with themselves on weekends? At that point, a Jewish Jesus or any knowledge whatsoever of the Jewish context of what eventually emerged as Christianity was still unknown to me.

Like many others before me, I was much taken by the patient and friendly tone of Lewis' apologetic writing as he adduced the arguments to make his case. Almost despite myself, I was disarmed, then charmed, and finally convinced. That is, Lewis brought me to the place where I was able

to say I no longer had a justifiable reason to withhold my faith. And for that, I am eternally grateful. Over the years, Lewis' work has continued to delight, edify, and challenge me.

I also read enough about him to be at least somewhat aware of the path of his pilgrim's way and the milestones that marked its progress: the first gentle context of his childhood, the rude thrust from the nest brought about by his mother's death, the Orwellian horrors of the public school, rescue in the form of "Old Knock" Kirkpatrick, the war, the budding career of the young academic, his atheism, his romance with "Northerness" and myth, his encounter with McDonald's "goodness," his famous walk and talk with Tolkien and Dyson and his self-identification as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

Paul Brazier covers this familiar territory, as many other have done, but he has done so in a way that has provided insight into an element of Lewis' faith that has been, up to now, as far as I'm aware, quite overlooked. It is that not only did Lewis arrive by incremental steps to acceptance of the gospel, once he has accepted it, he seems to have come fairly quickly to the realization that the gospel he had surrendered to and the God he had encountered through it were integrally bound to the wider context of salvation history borne witness to by the children of Israel and their prophets. In short, because C. S. Lewis' God was integrally connected with the both the history and the destiny of the Jewish people, so was he.

And, of course, who would have dreamed that this seemingly insulated don would encounter the embodiment of this realization literally in the flesh in the person of Joy Davidman. Dr. Brazier truly brings Davidman to life. I frankly had no idea we had so much in common. She attended Hunter College; I attended Hunter College. She lived on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx; so did I, albeit when it was in a seedier condition. She had some of her formative spiritual experiences in Central Park as I did. Although she was a generation behind me, I clearly recognize the type of Jew she perceived herself to be prior to her faith decision. My own field of study has certainly taught me that the sub-culture of artistic, politically active, urban, secular Jews that flourished in New York in the early to mid-twentieth century is a world well worth

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exploring. And like her, my own understanding of Jewish identity was truly revolutionized after my surrender to Yeshua.

Dr. Brazier also brings to the fore the extent to which Lewis' reverence for the Hebrew Bible informs his understanding on the new covenant. One of his most penetrating analyses that draws upon this sensibility is that of the portrait of Frank and Sarah Smith in *The Great Divorce*. Here, as Brazier leads us to realize, Lewis has consciously echoed the style and cadence of the prophet Isaiah and the Book of Psalms.

Dr. Brazier's work is replete with well-researched, surprising nuggets. My favorite is Lewis' observation in his foreword to Davidman's *Smoke on the Mountain* that the Jewish follower of Yeshua (my preferred designation) is the only normal human being.

Who knew?

Alan Shore, PhD
Missionary, serving in Washington State
"Modern Jewish History and Culture"

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HEBRAIC

... of, relating to, or characteristic of the Hebrews
or their language, religion, or culture.

First used in the fourteenth century, from the Middle English *Ebrayke*, from Late Latin *Hebraicus*, from Greek *Hebraikos*, *Hebraios*. Thus, relating to the Jewish people, especially the Hebrews of ancient Israel, and to Judaism, the religion of the chosen people of God, the stories recounting God's dealings with the Jewish peoples: a student of Hebraic religion, the Hebrew people, and their religious literature.

Inkling

... a feeling that something is true or likely to happen,
although not certain.

The Inklings were a literary discussion group based in the University of Oxford from the early 1930s to c.1950. The Inklings were literary enthusiasts who praised the value of narrative in fiction and encouraged the writing of fantasy, and centered much of their discussion and belief on traditional

Christian belief: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams—and others—often meeting in pubs in the centre of Oxford, or in the college rooms of university lecturers. Participants read from works in progress, and much of their discussion fed back into countless published works, often religious and theological, especially by

J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis.

“ . . . to remind all us Gentile Christians—who forget it easily enough and even flirt with anti-Semitism—that the Hebrews are spiritually senior to us, that God did entrust the descendants of Abraham with the first revelation of Himself, to put us in our place”

C. S. Lewis writing to Mrs Johnson, May 14, 1955.

A Hebraic Inkling: C. S. Lewis on Judaism and the Jews

Introduction

“If we are not Christians we shall dismiss this with the old gibe, ‘How odd of God to choose the Jews.’ This is impossible for us who believe that God chose that race for the vehicle of His own Incarnation, and who are indebted to Israel beyond all possible repayment.”

C. S. LEWIS¹

1. C. S. LEWIS . . . AND THE JEWISH QUESTION

This work originated in a comment by an old and dear friend, an Anglican religious in her eighties, who commented that a guest staying within their monastic community dismissed C. S. Lewis as anti-Semitic. The guest, a seeker, had come to stay in visitors’ quarters, joining in with the chapel services and meals, but she slept separate from the enclosed contemplative community. There were many discussions, intense, as is the way with seekers, and the woman—who by the sister’s description was something of “a 1970s liberal Anglican”²—had categorized his whole

1 Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 24.

2 The term appears to have been coined by the Revd Andrew Wakefield (1956–2016), letter to *The Church Times*, July 21, 2006. In essence, a form of identity politics where Revd Wakefield identified himself as such and lamented how the progress represented by his education and training as “a 1970s liberal Anglican” was being eroded. The priest was looking back nostalgically at his theological education and formation in the 1970s, where the gospel was re-written to accommodate the socio-sexual, cultural-political revolution of the late 1960s. This also encompassed a liberal theological agenda that questioned the supernatural, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of the Bible,

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oeuvre and belief system as anti-Semitic on the basis of one line in Lewis's *The Great Divorce*. This belief about Lewis, it appeared, was a relatively ill-informed but common one amongst those who self-identify as liberal Anglicans. The seeker's comment was about a character in Lewis's story *The Great Divorce*, a hard-bitten character, a left-wing progressive who is dead, in hell, and rails against the Jews (and the Vatican and all political parties except the one he still ideologically believes in).³ The man is indeed a left-wing anti-Semite, but he does not reflect Lewis's views. In fact, the portrait is accurately presented as a *criticism* of such a man (with echoes of the anti-Semitism of the National Socialists in the early years of the political party, always blaming the Jews for whatever goes wrong). Indeed, the portrait, though written in the early 1940s, could equally apply to certain politicians in the British Labour party today, which is currently having to face accusations of endemic anti-Semitism in its policies and approach to Israel, Zionism, and Hebrew revelation.⁴ This anti-Semitism, wrote Lewis, in the character, is one reason, among others, why the man is condemned to an eternity in hell, and can no longer change his beliefs. There is another character later in the book who is Jewish, a young woman who is presented as saintly, altruistic, and Christ-like! That is, after Yeshua the Nazarene: Jesus Christ the Jewish Messiah. The two characters could not be more opposite: and one, the anti-Semite, is hell-bound by his own prejudiced political identity politics; the other, a Jewish woman, is beautifully, paradisiacally, heaven-bound; she will descend to the fringes of hell to attempt to draw some souls out of damnation into their own salvation. She is Jewish but hides not in identity politics.

These portraits are not painted by an anti-Semite. But what did Lewis have to say about Judaism and the Jews, the ancient Hebrews and the Jewish Bible (the church's "Old Testament"), supersessionism, replacement theology, identity politics, and Israel, and therefore the status before humanity of God's chosen people?

and refuted most of the propositions within the Creed. See also, on the perceived decline and threat to 1970s liberal Anglicanism, Revd Maggie Guillebaud, letter to *The Church Times*, Aug. 13, 2008. See also, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Christianity.

3 Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, ch. 7.

4 See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism_in_the_UK_Labour_Party.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this book is to examine precisely what C. S. Lewis believed and wrote about the ancient Hebrews, their scriptures, their status as God's chosen people, and about today's Jews. It also asks, what can we conclude about Lewis's political beliefs, particularly in regard to contemporary humanity's obsession with tribalistic identity politics?

Lewis commented about how many of his contemporaries, especially at Oxford (essentially British academics, a cultural elite, especially high-ranking Anglican clerics), considered it questionable that God chose the Jews for his people, especially in the context of the cursings and violence, vitriolic vindictiveness, even lasciviousness in the Psalms; often the criticism was that they were not "Christian"—or pertinently, the Jews did not hide behind polite pietism! Lewis's proleptic response was to assert how orthodox/traditional Christians, essentially Catholic-Evangelical, found no quarrel with this choice, ". . . God chose that race for the vehicle of His own Incarnation" therefore we are "indebted to Israel beyond all possible repayment."⁵ The key to humanity and the world comes through the Jews (not through the European Enlightenment), likewise a right understanding of fallen humanity before God comes from the ancient Hebrew tradition, salvation comes through the Jews, through a Jewish Messiah: "Jesus wasn't actually a Christian. He was a temple worshipping, kosher-keeping, circumcised, first-century Jew, who loved the Book of Isaiah and called God 'Abba.' . . . [He was a respecer of] God's promises as laid out in the Hebrew scriptures."⁶

Neither Lewis nor the detractors of Judaism fully understood the objection that questioned God's choice of the Jewish peoples: God did not "choose" the Jews as individuals; God selected, nominated, adopted, ordinary people—indeed an ordinary man: Abram—to be his chosen (Abraham) and Abra(ha)m's descendants to become the Jewish people, God's chosen. God did not choose a people that already existed; instead, through his election of Abraham, he created a people, whose very existence and identity was constituted by divine election. What the detractors should

5 Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 24.

6 Revd Giles Fraser, speaking on the "Thought for the Day" three-minute broadcast, as part of the Today news and current affairs radio program on BBC R4 (Mon–Fri, 06:00–09:00am; Sat, 0700–9:00). Broadcast, Jan. 1, 2018, 07:47–07:50. See, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00szxv6>. Archive of recordings: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00szxv6/clips>

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have said, in their pagan politicized prejudices, was that they, in their expertise, were not satisfied with God's creation of a chosen people. The Jews were not already in existence and subsequently chosen: did not God create them, mold and forge them from the stuff of ordinary humanity? As we shall see, Lewis's understanding of Israel in God's purposes may not be flawless—indeed, he failed to understand what “chosen” and a “created people” meant. Nevertheless, his stand against anti-Semitism was grounded in a deeper biblical appreciation of the Jewish people than many of his contemporaries. Therefore, there is a need to assess his understanding of the Jews and Judaism, the Hebrews and their scriptures.

It is important to remember against the backdrop of somber religion that there is an important thread of humor in the Hebrew Bible, a thread that continues through Jewish culture and tradition to this day. Perhaps most Christians fail to see the humor in the Bible, indeed, fail to see how humor can have a parabolic/analogic role to play in illumining God's truth; indeed, C. S. Lewis noted in correspondence to a Mr. Lucas that he had learned from his wife, Joy Davidman, who had been born and raised an American Jew, how God's chosen people see humor in the Hebrew Bible where we Christians do not. Or do we sometimes fail to perceive the paradoxical humor in a religious context?⁷ How important is this thread of humor to Lewis in his works? Does it give him a distance from the establishment at Oxford? Lewis understood this long before he met and married Joy Davidman because throughout *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) there is in every chapter a self-effacing mild humor in heaven amongst the redeemed whereas by contrast hell is defined by a cold, steel-hard, absolute deadly seriousness—thus, hell's inhabitants have made themselves unalterable, irredeemable. Generally speaking, Lewis believed that we must picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his or her own dignity, and particularly about advancement, where all have a grievance, a complaint, and where everyone subsists with deadly serious passions: envy and self-importance, superiority and resentment. Laughter in heaven can be self-effacing; it brings us down to size, keeps us in our place, defeats pride, where pride has been traditionally seen as the root and heart of irredeemable sin. As the senior tempter and demon Screwtape notes regarding the humor found in heaven, “Humor and laughter of this kind does us no good and should always be discouraged. Besides, the phenomenon is of itself disgusting and

7 “Lewis writing to Mr Lucas, Dec 6, 1956.” In Lewis, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 814–15.

a direct insult to the realism, dignity, and austerity of Hell.”⁸ Lewis may have been writing in the early 1940s—and could see something of this in the development of nationalistic socialist movements (Marxism in Russia; Nazism in Germany), but there is something of an epidemic of this deadly seriousness in the West since Lewis’s death in 1963 given the development of (individualistic) identity politics, often through tribalistic sexual identities.

Many Jews see humor and hyperbole in the sayings of Jesus. Hyperbole is also found in poetry (often known as *auxesis*), hence it can be found in the Book of Psalms, and also the Proverbs, to evoke strong feelings and impressions. Such is not meant to be taken straightforwardly but analogically. For example, Jesus’s use of the mustard seed,⁹ which is not actually, scientifically speaking, the smallest of all seeds and does not become the largest of trees, but the intention of Jesus is to draw attention to the contrast between the size of the tiny seed and that of the mature plant, and then to draw an analogy between this and how salvation and the kingdom of heaven develops from seemingly insignificant beginnings yet appears, in some ways, limitless.

Why speak of *A Hebraic Lewis*? Why we might talk of Lewis as Hebraic? Because this is something of a hidden side of Lewis that is quite distinct from your average Church of England theologian and philosopher (remembering that Lewis was an Anglican) and this element contradicts the implicit anti-Semitism that has marked the British political and religious establishment, to an extent. It is fair to say that today, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, we are, perhaps, more conscious of the need to see something of a balance between the Christian West (or what is left of it) and the Jews, the eternal Israel, and the ancient Hebrew witness and scriptures. Therefore, the aim and objective of this book is to uncover and analyze this Hebraic seam to C. S. Lewis: the man and his work.

8 Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 54; Chapter 11 features Screwtape’s complaint with the subject of humor as compared to the seriousness of hell, though the dialectic as such is spread throughout the work.

9 Matt 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; and Luke 13:18–19.

3. EXPLANATIONS, QUALIFICATIONS

A few terms need to be explained, and qualified in their use, before we proceed. Some readers familiar with Lewis's books may not appreciate the full meaning and use of the terms used here. Professionals familiar with these terms may still gain some understanding of the Hebraic context in which they are used in this book. Many Catholics and Evangelicals are familiar with these terms derived from New Testament Greek, and from *ecclesial* (i.e., church) Latin—ironically it is often Lewis's Anglicans who are ignorant of them.

Election

In a sense, this is a book about election: rhetorically we may ask, Who is elected, and for what? Elected to serve? Elected to represent? Elected to salvation? But first we must ask, who elects? God elects. Election is about God's search for humanity—fallen humanity; it is about those elected to demonstrate and guide humanity, those elected to salvation: but saved from what and to what? The ancient Hebrews were elected by God through Abraham to be a chosen people. What does Lewis say about this? Jews are elected to this status, and how does this affect us? Are we gentiles elected too, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah? The apostle Paul says much on this and how gentiles are enfolded into the election of the Jews. Lewis confirms this. The need for election originates with the fall—original sin: humanity separated themselves from God. The process of election starts in essence with one person: Abraham, and culminates with Jesus. Election is about atonement: how we are forgiven and thereby reconciled to God, and therefore no longer lost, but saved. There are many words and concepts here, but in essence Lewis sees the ancient Hebrew patriarchs as the root of atonement and election. Now, the conflicting and often contradictory propitiatory elements in doctrines of atonement have been, and still are, the cause of profound disagreements amongst the churches, and have caused much disagreement and deep puzzlement, as we will see in the young Lewis. Why should atonement focus down onto a dead Jewish religious man two thousand years ago? Yet, the gospel claims that through his death and resurrection we gentiles are enfolded into God's chosen and saved from ourselves to the glorious life of heaven, though only if we so wish! Many reject their election,

preferring the nihilistic chaos of hell. Or as Lewis said in relation to this, “All get what they want, they don’t always like it.”¹⁰

*A Rose by Any Other Name?*¹¹

At the center of this work is Jesus Christ. Jesus and Christ are modern English names, but are the same reality as their counterparts in Greek *iēsuos christos* (Greek) and *Yeshua Ha Mashiach* (Hebrew). Yeshua is Jesus’ proper name: Yeshua (“the one who delivers,” “rescues/rescuer”; “God is savior”) is what he was named shortly after he was born, the name above all names given to Mary by the messenger Gabriel. Yeshua is an ancient Hebrew name, all Jews are given Hebrew names, for it has been the language of Jews for nigh on 4,000 years! The name “Jesus” is simply Yeshua in an Anglicized form. *Ha Mashiach* means the Anointed One (derived from the ancient Hebrew tradition of anointing the king with oil). The word “Christ” (from *Christos*, the Greek translation of *Mashiach*) has taken on a global meaning in the West, and is often divorced from its Hebraic roots.

Like many ancient names that had cultural or religious meanings, the name Jesus, Yeshua—given to Mary by Gabriel, the angel/messenger at the annunciation—was known to those who heard it as signifying “God is savior,” or “Jehovah is savior,” “the one who delivers”; Christ means “Anointed One,” Messiah. The word Messiah was commonly used in the intertestamental era (i.e., the time between the end of the Old Testament and the start of the New), the concept of messiahship having developed in later Judaism from its earlier roots in the anointing of kings and priests. Messiah was not necessarily a name, but a label, an office, a role, essentially a title. By the time of Jesus of Nazareth, the title “Messiah” was often attributed to those set apart by God for certain roles, such as priests and kings (though there were no more Jewish kings after the exile). It’s not about those whom the people “like”—popular votes were nothing to do with it. However, to be the Messiah was to be the one anointed at the end of days, chosen to deliver and rule Israel. Jesus is taken by many of those around him to be the Messiah; hence the early attribution that he is the Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ, in name and title, was God’s salvation, the Anointed One. This is not to be confused with the idea that Jesus was

10 Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 162.

11 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene I

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the second person of the Trinity. The trinitarian perception, however, is part of the dawning realization in the early church, with ample pointers and examples of Jesus's divine nature in the books that became the New Testament (texts produced by the earliest church in the years after the resurrection and ascension): starting immediately after the resurrection with the concept, Son of God; the title "son of God" in the NT often simply means Messiah—as the Davidic king was the "son" of God (for example, Ps 2:7); later, based on Jesus of Nazareth's assertion that he was *Huios tou Patéra* (Son of the Father: to quote the Greek of the Gospel narrative, written later in the first century).

Around the time of Jesus's birth, messiahship carried expectations. Some saw the coming messiah as a political leader who would expel the Romans; others expected a messiah who would be a partisan revolutionary whose aims were unclear; to yet more, the messiah would return the temple religion back to a happier time, he would oversee the restoration of Israel. To an extent, these can be seen as purely human offices. During the intertestamental period there were many false messiahs, men raised up to realize a revolutionary, political, or religious role supported by a group or sect to save Israel in some way or other. However, false messiahs lapsed, disappeared, or were killed by the Romans or the Jewish religious authorities. The Jews were left still hoping.

The idea of redemption, of salvation, was part of these multitudinous expectations of a messiah figure during the intertestamental period—but saved *from what*, redeemed *to what*? The answers to those questions were as varied as the messianic expectations of these would-be messiahs. As a redeemer figure, expected and foretold, Jesus does not necessarily live up to the expectations of his fellow Jews. However, on reflection, the clues were there all along in Jesus's life and ministry, and crucially in the Old Testament. The ancient Hebrew priests and kings were anointed, they were messiahs (Exod 30:22–25); later, this messiahship became focused on one anointed by God as a leader, a king from the line of David. Therefore, Jesus of Nazareth was perceived by many who saw and heard him to be the long-awaited Messiah, with different and often subjective expectations as to his role. What is important is that *a posteriori*, after the event, the earliest church interpreted this messiahship in the context of Jesus's role as God descended to earth to judge and forgive humanity, hence the use of the Greek word *Christos* by the writers of the New Testament. Jesus is then the final Messiah of messiahs.

In Christian thinking, the Messiah/Christ is ultimately revealed to be a trinitarian truth: God anoints God, *his* Son, to descend to save his chosen people, in potential, along with all humanity, reascending with them into the divine life. Only in the fullness of the incarnation-cross-resurrection and the ascension is messiahship finally defined by Jesus. Then his life and ministry, his sayings and actions, take on new meaning, a significance and understanding veiled to many during his lifetime. Whatever the expectations of messiahship, Jesus of Nazareth is *the* Messiah (therefore, *the* Christ), not *a* messiah, political or otherwise. It is fair to say that some of the Hebrew expectations were blown away by God's final revelation; whatever people expected, it fell short of what was given by God in this Jesus. People could not see or fully understand what Messiah was to be, even though with hindsight the evidence was there in the Old Testament.

The witness of the apostles, disciples, and the early church is then a form of revelation equal to Jewish scripture. The early church tradition replaces the old Hebrew categories of messiahship; the expectations of the contemporaries of Yeshua, those who knew him, saw him, and spoke with him, were fulfilled by God's revelation (even if they did not fully realize his ontic status), but not necessarily in accordance with what they desired or expected. This divergence also extended to the interpretation of messiahship that the Jewish religious authorities held to in Jerusalem. For many years the Western church concentrated only on the early church tradition and the conclusions of the church councils in the fourth and fifth centuries, often, in effect, ignoring the Hebrew tradition that Jesus of Nazareth was born into. In recent years, many theologians and Bible scholars, for example the N. T. Wright, derive most of their conclusions about Jesus of Nazareth from an understanding of the New Testament's Jewish background, a setting in the life of the times in some ways. Perhaps the answer is to hold in balance the Hebrew tradition and categories, the perceptions of the earliest church, and also the conclusions of the later church councils, about the person and nature of Jesus. This is how to see and understand the term Messiah, the Christ. In his middle years, Lewis's work is, we may assert, dominated by Greek philosophical categories and concepts; this gives way more-and-more in his mature years to Hebraic categories and concepts.

It is the intention with this work to switch between the Hebrew and English names for Jesus Christ simply to emphasize that he is not simply

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an historic, English-speaking, religious professional! In addition, we err if we forget or marginalize the fact that Jesus is a Jew, and represents nigh on two thousand years of Hebrew culture and tradition, embodying a unique religious development as representative of God's chosen people: the flock of Israel.

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet," Shakespeare had Juliet say.¹² What underpins the name Yeshua, and its modern equivalents, is the same: Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, God's only Son, born in and through the chosen people.

"Hegelianism"

Another piece of contextual information we need to set in place is the philosophical background in Lewis' time. Hegelianism was the dominant philosophy and "religion" of C. S. Lewis as a young man, as an atheistic apostate. It is from Hegelianism that Lewis struggles to escape as, over years, the realization that "God is" dawns on him. Hegelianism was a philosophical system issuing from Georg Hegel and can be defined by the statement, "the rational alone is real."¹³ Therefore, to the young Lewis, only the rational categories existed. This absolute idealism dictated any religious beliefs he began to have an inkling of, so he began to invent his own pagan religion! But the Holy Spirit pressed on him—which is the story of the first chapter here.

"Revelation"

In the context of Lewis's philosophical roots, we need to be clear on his understanding of revelation. Revelation is personal, as in the realization of perception and understanding many people will have—a *eureka* moment when one finds something, or when something is revealed to an individual. But it is also more than that, more than the personal and subjective. Revelation is about God's self-disclosure to humanity. Lewis understood and accepted how God had revealed of God's own self to humanity in multifarious and diverse ways down the millennia and across vast geographical and cultural eons, but as an orthodox Christian

12 Juliet to Romeo: William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene I

13 "Vorrede: Was vernünftig ist, das ist Wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig." G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821): "What is rational is real; what is real is rational."