



**COUNTER-MISSIONARY  
SURVIVAL SEMINAR**

**Session #3**

**The Real Messiah – Part Two**

# MIRACLES

## HOW IMPORTANT ARE THEY?

### EXODUS 7:8-13;19-21

<sup>8</sup>The L-rd said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>9</sup>"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a wonder,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'" <sup>10</sup>So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the L-rd had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. <sup>11</sup>**Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts.** <sup>12</sup> Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. <sup>13</sup> Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the L-rd had said.

<sup>19</sup> The L-rd said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water - so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'" <sup>20</sup> Moses and Aaron did just as the L-rd commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, <sup>21</sup> and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the

Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt.

### EXODUS 8:5-7

<sup>5</sup> And the L-rd said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" <sup>6</sup> So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> **But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt.**

### MATTHEW 24:24

For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

### DEUTERONOMY 13:1-3

<sup>1</sup> If prophets or those who divine by dreams appear among you and promise you signs or wonders, <sup>2</sup> and the signs or the wonders declared by them take place, and they say, "Let us follow other gods" (whom you have not known) "and let us serve them," <sup>3</sup> you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the L-rd your G-d is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the L-rd your G-d with all of your heart and soul.

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# *Mishpochah* *Message*

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Spring 1991  
Ruth Rosen, Editor

In preparing for this issue of the *Mishpochah Message* we invited you all to send in accounts of any miraculous healings that have taken place in your lives. We also asked that independent verification be provided for these healings. We received a number of inspiring testimonies. Yet there was no one who had an instance where a medical test had been made to diagnose a condition with a corresponding test made later to show that a healing took place that was contrary to the laws of nature. One person on a regular mailing list (who does not receive the *Mishpochah Message*) claimed to have a healing where a diagnosis was made and recorded (bone cancer) and that tests were done after the alleged healing showing that the cancer had disappeared. In fact, the person explained that the doctor himself had been healed of the cancer. When we called to verify this with the doctor whose name had been supplied, he was quite adamant in telling us that he had no idea what we were talking about and that he didn't "hold to that sort of thing." Sadly, this type of experience is all too common.

When a good friend of mine, a Jewish believer who is a medical doctor, heard that we were considering miracles for this Forum article he wrote a word of caution. Apparently my friend had done some personal investigation to verify the miracles in a number of books written concerning signs and wonders. He read the books thinking that God might be calling him into a healing ministry, but to his dismay he found each of the instances where healing was claimed to be questionable. My friend knows and loves the Lord and believes that God works in the lives of people today. He believes in the miracles of the Bible and believes that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. His caution was based on his own experience and training as a medical doctor as well as the conclusions he drew from researching various believer's claims to the miraculous.

This does not mean that some of you have not experienced miraculous healing! But such miracles are not commonplace. I know I would do well to take seriously his note of caution. Proper questioning of claims to the miraculous is not a sign of unbelief; truth is never threatened by honest questioning.

What don't I believe? I don't believe in those who promise healing, material prosperity, and the salvation of lost loved ones in exchange for "faith shown by a check" made out to their ministry. I don't believe in miracle-promising fundraisers who make pre-Reformation excesses look honest by comparison.

**Why I don't believe in these claims and promises? One reason is that it is not clear their best results are any different than the experiences of non-Christian religions. Spontaneous, unexplainable recoveries are not restricted to Christian crusades or networks. Miracle healings have long been claimed by Christian Science, New Agers, and pagan cults.**

I believe in a God who can use all of us in spite of ourselves. I am thankful for the good He does, sovereignly and mercifully, through those who trade false promises of miracles for dollars. But how can we not be deeply concerned about the dishonesty of an industry that has frown on the back of consumer fraud and false prophecy?

The Old Testament is clear about the danger handing over those who use God's name to make predictions or claims which do not turn out to be true.

Do I discount all reports of those who have experienced relief from arthritis, high blood pressure, or stomach ulcers? No. Do I discount all claims of visions and voices in the night? No. Do I discount the experiences of godly people who seen God do amazing things in their lives? No. I discount the claims of brothers and sisters who do not deliver what they are promising, while building crusades and media conglomerates on the basis of false advertising and wrong doctrine.

How can I dismiss the claims of so many of God's people? How do I dare risk quenching the Spirit and closing my eyes to the work of God in these last days? I can do so because it is *not* true that God wants all of His people to experience material prosperity and physical health in this life. It is *not* true that God is handing out promises of healing, prosperity, or salvation of loved ones in exchange for generous love gifts to money-raisers. Nor is it true that physical healing for this life is part of the atonement.

**But aren't waves of first-century miracles sweeping over Canada, the United States, and the British Isles? Not to my knowledge. In spite of rumors and claims to the contrary, I don't know of anyone who had been wheeled into a healing meeting with shriveled legs and walked out whole. Wheelchair-bound quadriplegics brought by loving parents and friends leave the same way they came. What is different is that now they have the additional burden of wondering what could have happened if they would have more faith.**

**While people with invisible afflictions walk out of a meeting claiming their healing as a necessary requirement of receiving it, those with observable maladies leave only with the reality of a condition that has not been changed, and which cannot be denied.**

Father, forgive us for believing more and less than the truth. Please give us the ability to believe without being gullible, to hope without presumption, to love without lies. Help us to trust You for whatever You choose to give or withhold. Help us to trust you when you say, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thes. 5:19-22).



## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION:

1. How is it possible to reconcile the conflicting accounts of the resurrection story found in the Gospels? Many Christian apologists have argued that it is similar to a traffic accident that is viewed by four different witnesses – each will see it from a different perspective. This might be a tenable idea if the evangelists were actually on the scene, and watched the story unfold as the women approached the tomb. Yet this was not the case. Not only were the Gospel writers not eyewitnesses, they didn't even write their accounts of the story until at least 40 years after it allegedly took place. Moreover, most of the inconsistencies in the resurrection narratives (ie. date, time, place) can't be explained away as differences in perspective.

There is, however, a more significant issue here: according to II Timothy 3:16, the Gospels are the revealed word of G-d, and not the product of human agents. G-d doesn't suffer from human fallibility and certainly wouldn't present such a garbled account of what Christians consider the most crucial event in world history.

2. Why would the compilers of the New Testament allow contradictory accounts to remain if they were responsible for the story? Could they have been so careless? Perhaps – it is certainly possible. We'd certainly be naïve to accept testimony as reliable in spite of the fact that it is riddled with inconsistencies.

3. A solid case can only be built on the testimony of witnesses who provide very clear testimony. If they can with 100% certainty pick a suspect out of a lineup, their

testimony inspires confidence. If they view the suspects and don't recognize any of them, and later change their minds, the defense counsel will certainly bring this up at the trial. One would think that the witnesses to history's greatest event would have no doubts about what they saw. However, in the Gospel accounts, the post-resurrection Jesus is not even recognized by his closest disciples.

4. If, as Paul claims, the resurrection of the Messiah is the most important concept in the Bible, isn't it strange that in the entire Tanach, there isn't one clear reference to it? An indication of this conspicuous absence is that none of Jesus' disciples were aware that he was supposed to be resurrected. Not only were they not expecting Jesus to be resurrected (Matthew 16:21-22, 17:23; Mark 8:31-32, 9:31-32, Luke 18:33-34), but when they find the empty tomb, they assume that someone moved the body (John 20:2). Subsequently, they refuse to believe early rumors about the resurrection (Mark 16:11-13, Matthew 28:17, Luke 24:11, and John 20:3,13). Is it possible that the predictions of the crucifixion and resurrection were put into Jesus' mouth by the Gospel writers to give more credibility to their belief that he rose from the dead?

5. Matthew 27:52-53 claims that at the time of Jesus' passion, the graves in Jerusalem were opened and the bodies of many righteous Jews were resurrected appearing to many people. If this actually happened, it would have been one of the greatest news stories of its day. If Matthew's story took place as reported, it's strange that Josephus, who wrote a detailed history of that time,

failed to mention it. Not only does it not appear in any contemporary Jewish sources, but this fantastic occurrence isn't mentioned by the other Gospels. Is it possible that Matthew fabricated the entire story?

6. In Matthew 12:38-40, the scribes and Pharisees are said to have asked Jesus for a sign. He said that the only sign they would receive would be the sign of Jonah: he would rise after being in the grave for three days (Cf. Mark 8:11-12). If the resurrection was supposed to be a sign for the Jewish religion leaders, why didn't Jesus appear to them? Isn't it convenient that he only appeared to people who were his followers. Joseph Smith also claimed that there were witnesses who saw the golden plates used to write the Book of Mormon. Of course his story would be more credible if he would have showed the plates to people other than his best friends.

7. What should our reaction be to the reports that Jesus appeared to 500 people after his resurrection? What is our reaction to the thousands of Catholics who yearly claim to see the Virgin Mary? People claim many things; that in itself doesn't mean it is true.

8. Was Jesus resurrected in the flesh (John 20:17,26-27; Luke 24:39-43; Acts 2:31, 13:35) or was only a spirit resurrected? (I Corinthians 15:44,50; I Timothy 2:5, I Peter 3:8) One wonders why there is such a fundamental disagreement over such a critical element of the story.

9. If the guards weren't sent to the tomb until sometime on Saturday (Matthew 27:62-66), how do we know that the body

wasn't removed on Friday night or early Saturday morning?

10. A red flag should go up when we realize that the idea of a divine savior who suffers a brutal death and ascends to heaven was very common among Pagan and Gnostic religions at the time of Paul? (This was especially true from regions around Tarsus, his hometown.) Roman mythology had a widespread belief that notable mortals returned from the dead. See accounts of Romulus, Apollonius of Tyana, Drusilla, Claudius, Dionysus-Bacchus, Tammuz-Adonis, Mithra, Osiris, Krishna, and Buddha.

11. Why would the disciples willingly die for their belief in the resurrection if it weren't true? Every religion has martyrs who are killed for the beliefs they hold. Some of Muslims enthusiastically blow themselves up each year in their hope to join their prophet Mohammed, who they believe ascended to heaven in the presence of many witnesses. The willingness to suffer doesn't substantiate a false belief.

## Unfulfilled Prophecies and Disappointed Messiahs

Leon Festiger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter

(From "Expecting Armageddon – Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy", Edited by Jon R. Stone, pp. 33-53 )

**A** man with a conviction is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point.

We have all experienced the futility of trying to change a strong conviction, especially if the convinced person has some investment in his belief. We are familiar with the variety of ingenious defenses with which people protect their convictions, managing to keep them unscathed through the most devastating attacks.

But man's resourcefulness goes beyond simply protecting a belief. Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to this belief, that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it; finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before. Indeed, he may even show a new fervor about convincing and converting other people to his view.

How and why does such a response to contradictory evidence come about? This is the question on which we focus. We hope that we will provide an adequate answer to the question, an answer documented by data.

Let us begin by stating the conditions under which we would expect to observe increased fervor following the disconfirmation of a belief. There are five such conditions.

1. A belief must be held with deep conviction and it must have some relevance to action, that is, to what the believer does or how he behaves.
2. The person holding the belief must have committed himself to it; that is, for the sake of his belief, he must have taken some important action that is difficult to undo. In general, the more important such actions are, and the more difficult they are to undo, the greater is the individual's commitment to the belief.
3. The belief must be sufficiently specific and sufficiently concerned with the real world so that events may unequivocally refute the belief.
4. Such undeniable disconfirmatory evidence must occur and must be recognized by the individual holding the belief. The first two of these conditions specify the circumstances that will make the belief resistant to change. The third and fourth conditions together, on the other hand, point to factors that would exert powerful pressure on a believer to discard his belief. It is, of course, possible that an individual, even though deeply convinced of a belief, may discard it in the face of unequivocal disconfirmation. We must, therefore, state a fifth condition specifying the circumstances under which the belief will be discarded and those under which it will be maintained with new fervor.
5. The individual believer must have social support. It is unlikely that one isolated believer could withstand the kind of disconfirming evidence we have specified. If, however, the believer is a member of a group of convinced persons who can support one another, we would expect the belief to be maintained and the believers to attempt to proselytize or to persuade nonmembers that the belief is correct.

These five conditions specify the circumstances under which increased proselytizing would be expected to follow disconfirmation. Given this set of hypotheses, our immediate concern is to locate data that will allow a test of the prediction of increased proselytizing. Fortunately, there have been throughout history recurring instances of social movements which do satisfy the conditions adequately. These are the millennial or messianic movements, a contemporary instance of which we shall be examining in detail. Let us see just how such movements do satisfy the five conditions we have specified.

Typically, millennial or messianic movements are organized around the prediction of some future events. Our conditions are satisfied, however, only by those movements that specify a date or an interval of time within which the predicted events will occur as well as detailing exactly what is to happen. Sometimes the predicted event is the Second Coming of Christ and the beginning of Christ's reign on earth; sometimes it is the destruction of the world through a cataclysm (usually with some select group slated for rescue from the disaster); or sometimes the prediction is concerned with particular occurrences that the Messiah or a miracle worker will bring about. Whatever the event predicted, the fact that its nature and the time of its happening are specified satisfies the third point on our list of conditions.

The second condition specifies strong behavioral commitment to the belief. This usually follows almost as a consequence of the situation. If one really believes a prediction (the first condition)—for example, that on a given date the world will be destroyed by fire, with sinners being destroyed and the good being saved—one does things about it and makes certain preparations as a matter of course. These actions may range all the way from simple public declarations to the neglect of worldly things and the disposal of earthly possessions. Through such actions and through the mocking and scoffing of nonbelievers there is usually established a heavy commitment on the part of believers. What they do by way of preparation is difficult to undo, and the jeering of nonbelievers simply makes it far more difficult for the adherents to withdraw from the movement and admit that they were wrong.

Our fourth specification has invariably been provided. The predicted events have not occurred. There is usually no mistaking the fact that they did not occur and the believers know that. In other words, the unequivocal disconfirmation does materialize and makes its impact on the believers.

Finally, our fifth condition is ordinarily satisfied—such movements do attract adherents and disciples, sometimes only a handful, occasionally hundreds of thousands. The reasons why people join such movements are outside the scope of our present discussion, but the fact remains that there are usually one or more groups of believers who can support one another.

History has recorded many such movements. Some are scarcely more than mentioned while others are extensively described, although sometimes the aspects of a movement that concern us most may be sketchily recounted. A number of historical accounts, however, are complete enough to provide an introductory and exploratory answer to our central question. From these we have chosen several relatively clear examples of the phenomena under scrutiny in an endeavor simply to show what has often happened in movements that made a prediction about the future and then saw it disconfirmed. We shall discuss these historical examples before presenting the data from our case study of a modern movement.

Ever since the crucifixion of Jesus, many Christians have hoped for the Second Coming of Christ, and movements predicting specific dates for this event have not been rare. But most of the very early ones were not recorded in such a fashion that we can be sure of the reactions of believers to the disconfirmations they may have experienced. Occasionally historians make passing reference to such reactions, as does Hughes in his description of the Montanists:

Montanus, who appeared in the second half of the second century, does not appear as an innovator in matters of belief. His one personal contribution to the life of the time was the fixed conviction that the second coming of Our Lord was at hand. The event was to take place at Pepuza—near the modern Angora—and thither all true followers of Our Lord should make their way. His authority for the statement was an alleged private inspiration, and the new prophet's personality and eloquence won him a host of disciples, who flocked in such numbers to the appointed spot that a new town sprang up to house them. *Nor did the delay of the second advent put an end to the movement. On the contrary, it gave it new life and form as a kind of Christianity of the elite, whom no other authority guided in their new life but the Holy Spirit working directly upon them. . . . [Italics ours.]*<sup>1</sup>

In this brief statement are all the essential elements of the typical messianic movement. There are convinced followers; they commit themselves by uprooting their lives and going to a new place where they build a new town; the Second Advent does not occur. And, we note, far from halting the movement, this disconfirmation gives it new life.

There is somewhat better documentation of millennial movements in more recent history. For example, the Anabaptists of the early sixteenth century believed that the millennium would occur in 1533. As Heath puts it:

But these high thoughts were obscured by Hoffmann's prediction that the end of all things was at hand. Strassburg, according to him, had been chosen as the New Jerusalem; there the magistrates would set up the kingdom of righteousness, while the hundred and forty and four thousand would maintain the power of the City, and the true Gospel and the true Baptism would spread over the earth. No man would be able to withstand the power, signs and wonders of the saints; and with them would appear, like two mighty torches, Enoch and Elias, who would consume the earth with the fire proceeding from their mouths. The year 1533 was the time in which, Hoffmann declared, the great fulfillment would begin.<sup>2</sup>

This adventist prediction was apparently proclaimed with vigor and was accepted by many persons who then acted accordingly, that is, they began to prepare for the Second Advent and the end of the temporal world. Heath says, for example:

The followers of Rothmann [a disciple of Hoffmann], were at this time, as was their leader, distinguished for earnestness and self-sacrificing devotion. They sought to exemplify equality and brotherhood in their lives. Well-to-do Brothers and Sisters gave all their goods to the poor, destroyed their rent-rolls, forgave their debtors, renounced worldly pleasures, studying to live an unworldly life.<sup>3</sup>

Such was the situation in 1533, when the end of the world was due. Many people had accepted this belief and some were even disposing of their worldly goods. What happened as the end of 1533 approached and, indeed, when 1534 arrived, without the Second Coming having materialized?

From all accounts it would seem that instead of dampening the ardor of the Anabaptists, the disconfirmation of the predicted Second Coming increased their enthusiasm and activity. They poured greater energy than ever before into obtaining new converts, and sent out

missionaries, something they never had done before. The following excerpts from Heaths study illustrate this increase of enthusiasm and activity following the disconfirmation:

. . . The year 1533 was almost at an end, the half-year during which it had been prophesied Hoffmann should be imprisoned had nearly elapsed, the two years' cessation from baptism had nearly run out when a new prophet [Matthysz] arose.

The Dutch Baptists felt that a leader had risen up amongst them, and they yielded themselves to his guidance. Matthysz began by sending out apostles ... These apostles went forth announcing, among other things, that the promised time had come, that no more Christian blood would be poured out, but that in a short time God would overthrow the tyrants and blood-shedders with all the rest of the wicked. They travelled through many states and visited many cities, going to the gatherings of the faithful, and offering them the kiss of peace. They baptized, and ordained bishops and deacons, committing to the former the duty of ordaining others.

The new tide of enthusiasm rose higher than ever. Jakob van Kampen, who, assisted by Houtzager, worked among the poorer homes in Amsterdam, baptized in February, 1534, in one day, a hundred persons. About two months later it was estimated that two-thirds of the population at Monniaendam were adherents of Jan Matthysz, and it is said to have been the same in the neighbourhood of most of the great cities of Holland.<sup>4</sup>

Another, and rather fascinating, illustration of the reaction to disconfirming evidence is provided by the messianic movement of which Sabbatai Zevi was the central figure.<sup>5</sup> Sabbatai Zevi was born and raised in the city of Smyrna. By 1646 he had acquired considerable prestige through living a highly ascetic life and devoting his whole energy to the study of the cabala. Indeed, though he was only twenty years old, he had already gathered around him a small group of disciples. To these disciples he taught and interpreted the highly mystical writings of the cabala.

Prevalent among Jews at that time was the belief that the Messiah would come in the year 1648. His coming was to be accompanied by all manner of miracles and the era of redemption would dawn. Sometime in 1648 Sabbatai Zevi proclaimed himself as the promised Messiah to his small group of disciples. Needless to say, the year 1648 passed and the era of redemption did not dawn and the expected miracles were not forthcoming.

There is but scant information about immediately subsequent events but apparently the disconfirmation of his messiahship did not daunt Sabbatai or his disciples. Indeed, it seems that after 1648 he made his claim known to the community at large. Graetz writes: "When Zevi's pretensions became known some years later, the college of rabbis, at their head his teacher Joseph Eskapha, laid him and his followers under a ban ... Finally, he and his disciples were banished from Smyrna [about 1651]."<sup>6</sup> The significant point for our interest is that it was *after* the year 1648 had passed and nothing had happened that Zevi proclaimed his messiahship to people outside his small circle of disciples.

His banishment, however, certainly does not end the story. About this time some segments of the Christian world were expecting the year 1666 to usher in the Millennium, and Sabbatai Zevi appears to have accepted this date. From 1651 until the autumn of 1665 he moved about among the cities of the Near East which had large Jewish communities, making known his claims to be the Messiah and gradually acquiring more and more followers even though the rabbinate continued to oppose him. By 1665 his following was very large and a number of disciples had helped him spread his name and pretensions throughout the Jewish world. The

atmosphere in Smyrna had so changed by the autumn of 1665 that when he returned to his native city in that year he was received with great joy. In September or October of 1665 he proclaimed himself the Messiah in a public ceremony in Smyrna:

The madness of the Jews of Smyrna knew no bounds. Every sign of honor and enthusiastic love was shown him... All prepared for a speedy exodus, the return to the Holy Land. Workmen neglected their business, and thought only of the approaching Kingdom of the Messiah. . . . These events in the Jew's quarter at Smyrna made a great sensation in ever widening circles. The neighboring communities in Asia Minor, many members of which had betaken themselves to Smyrna, and witnessed the scenes enacted in the town, brought home exaggerated accounts of the Messiah's power of attraction and of working miracles, were swept into the same vortex. Sabbatai's private secretary, Samuel Primo, took care that reports of the fame and doings of the Messiah should reach Jews abroad.<sup>7</sup>

The movement gradually spread to almost the whole of Jewry, and Sabbatai was accepted and heralded everywhere as the Messiah. Furthermore, since this was no idle belief, people took steps to prepare for the promised events. They neglected their work and their businesses, and many prepared for the return to Jerusalem.

Since one of the predicted events was that the Sultan would be deposed (a necessary preliminary to the return of the Jews to the Holy Land), at the very beginning of the year 1666, Sabbatai together with a number of followers set out for Constantinople to accomplish this task. The party landed on the coast of the Dardanelles, where Sabbatai was immediately arrested by Turkish officials and was brought in fetters to a small town in the neighborhood of Constantinople. Graetz writes:

Informed by a messenger of his arrival ... his followers [from Constantinople] hastened from the capital to see him, but found him in a pitiable plight and in chains. The money which they brought with them procured him some alleviation, and on the following Sunday [February 1666] he was brought by sea to Constantinople—but in how different a manner to what he and his believers had anticipated!<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, we may regard his arrest as a serious disappointment to the followers of Sabbatai and a disconfirmation of his predictions. Indeed, there were evidences of shock and disappointment. But then there began to emerge the familiar pattern: recovery of conviction, followed by new heights of enthusiasm and proselytizing. Graetz describes the ensuing events very well:

For some days they kept quietly at home, because the street boys mocked them by shouting, "Is he coming? Is he coming?" But soon they began again to assert that he was the true Messiah, and that the sufferings which he had encountered were necessary, a condition to his glorification. The prophets continued to proclaim the speedy redemption of Sabbatai and of all Israel. . . . Thousands crowded daily to Sabbatai's place of confinement merely to catch a glimpse of him. . . . The expectations of the Jews were raised to a still higher pitch, and the most exaggerated hopes fostered to a greater degree.<sup>9</sup>

The very fact that Sabbatai was still alive was used by the Jews to argue that he was really the Messiah. When he was moved to another jail and his incarceration became milder (largely through bribery), the argument was complete. A constant procession of adoring followers visited the prison where Sabbatai held court, and a steady stream of propaganda and tales of miracles poured out all over the Near East and Europe. Graetz states:

What more was needed to confirm the predictions of prophets of ancient and modern times? The Jews accordingly prepared seriously to return to their original home. In Hungary they began to unroof their houses. In large commercial cities, where Jews took the lead in wholesale business, such as Amsterdam, Leghorn and Hamburg, stagnation of trade ensued.<sup>10</sup>

The memoirs of a contemporary European Jewess vividly confirm Graetz's assertions:

Our joy, when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them were addressed to the Sephardim who, as fast as they came, took them to their synagogue and read them aloud; young and old, the Germans too hastened to the Sephardic synagogue.

Many sold their houses and lands and all their possessions, for any day they hoped to be redeemed. My good father-in-law left his home in Hameln, abandoned his house and lands and all his goodly furniture and moved to Hildesheim. He sent on to us in Hamburg two enormous casks packed with linens and with peas, beans, dried meats, shredded prunes and like stuff, every manner of food that would keep. For the old man expected to sail any moment from Hamburg to the Holy Land.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, in an effort to cope with the problem, without making a martyr of Sabbatai, the Sultan attempted to convert him to Islam. Astonishingly enough, the plan succeeded and Sabbatai donned the turban. Many of the Jews of the Near East still kept faith in him. Explanations were invented for his conversion and many continued their proselytizing, usually in places where the movement had not previously been strong. A considerable number of Jews even followed his lead and became Moslems. His conversion proved to be too much for most of his followers in Europe, however, and the movement there soon collapsed.

The Sabbataian movement strikingly illustrates the phenomenon we are concerned with: when people are committed to a belief and a course of action, clear discontinuing evidence may simply result in deepened conviction and increased proselytizing. But there does seem to be a point at which the disconfirming evidence has mounted sufficiently to cause the belief to be rejected.

In the preceding examples many of the facts are not known, others are in dispute, and much is vague. There is, however, a more recent movement about which considerable detail is known—the Millerites, who flourished in mid-nineteenth-century America. Many of the original documents of the Millerite movement have been preserved and there are two fairly lengthy summary accounts available. One, by C. E. Sears,<sup>12</sup> tends to ridicule the Millerites while the other, by F. D. Nichol,<sup>13</sup> is a careful and vigorous defense of them.

William Miller was a New England farmer with a belief in the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy. In 1818, after a two-year study of the Bible, Miller reached the conclusion that the end of the world would occur in 1843. Nichols account reads:

Specifically, he put his first and greatest emphasis on the prophetic declaration, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Daniel 8:14.

Believing that the "cleansing" of the sanctuary involved the purging of this earth by fire, the "days" in symbolic prophecy stand for years, and that this time prophecy began about 457 B.C., he reached this final conclusion: "I was thus brought, in 1818, at the close of my two years' study of the Scriptures, to the solemn conclusion, that in about twenty-five years from that time all the affairs of our present state would be wound up" (William Miller, *Apology and Defense*, p. 5).<sup>14</sup>

For another five years he continued to study the Bible and to check his calculations before he acquired the confidence to talk much about it to others. Even then he talked only to his neighbors and to a few ministers, none of whom seemed to manifest much interest. He continued talking about his views, however. By 1831 he had evoked enough interest to receive invitations to address various groups. For eight years Miller continued to devote a great deal of his time to giving lectures in which he explained the basis for his prediction of the millennium in 1843. He gradually persuaded more and more people, including a number of ministers, of the correctness of his belief. In 1839 he met and convinced Joshua V. Himes, who helped change the movement from a one-man affair into an organized activity. A newspaper was started, and in 1840, only three years before the Second Coming was due, a general conference of interested ministers was called. Proselytizing activity increased and Miller's views began to spread as the adventist prediction became the focus of a mass movement.

Many of the leading figures in the Millerite movement had still not fully accepted the specific date of 1843 as the time of the Second Coming. In the spring of 1842, a general conference was held in Boston. Nichol states:

In this conference the significance of the time element in the preaching of the advent came definitely to the front as indicated in this resolution that was passed:

"Resolved, that in the opinion of this conference, there are most serious and important reasons for believing that God has revealed the time of the end of the world, and that that time is 1843" (*Signs of the Times*, June 1, 1842, p. 69).

The very fact that an increasing emphasis was being placed on the time element meant that all who accepted this phase of the teaching felt an increasing sense of urgency in discharging their responsibility to warn the world. They believed that the time had come to proclaim with vigor what they described as "the midnight cry."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, as the year 1843 approached, belief in the correctness of the predicted date grew stronger. At the same time, activity in spreading the word was on the increase. The general conference had decided to hold a series of camp meetings during the summer of 1842, and these were almost all highly successful. In four months, ending the middle of November, the Millerites held thirty camp meetings at which the attendance was in the thousands. The number of adherents was growing steadily.

In addition to the newspaper *Signs of the Times*, which had been started in Boston in 1840, the Millerite leaders now started another, *The Midnight Cry*, in New York. Many other newspapers were published in various cities for shorter periods of time, usually in connection with a special series of lectures being given locally:

For example, the *Philadelphia Alarm* was started in 1843, as an adjunct to a series of lectures. Thirteen numbers were issued. Thus a local color could be given to the literature in any city while an initial endeavor was being made there. Afterward the more

permanently established publications could be used for promotion and educating the believers in the movement.<sup>16</sup>

While the movement was growing the opposition was also increasing. By the beginning of 1843 many ministers were preaching against the Millerites and newspapers were ridiculing them. Rumors were current and printed widely in the newspapers of the day that Millers followers were fanatics and that his doctrines drove people insane. A single example should suffice to show the kind of attack directed against the movement:

The Millerites have very properly been shut out of the buildings in which they have for some time been holding their orgies in Philadelphia, and we are happy to learn that the grand jury of the Boston municipal court has represented the great temple itself as a dangerous structure. After some half-dozen more deaths occur and a few more men and women are sent to madhouses by this miserable fanaticism perhaps some grand jury may think it worth-while to indict the vagabonds who are the cause of so much mischief.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of such opposition, the movement continued to attract believers—so many that it became difficult to find a hall large enough for general meetings. Early in 1843, therefore, the leaders decided to erect a tabernacle in Boston. It was dedicated before an audience of some 3500 people—a capacity crowd that included a number of clergymen of the city. The new building made it possible to speed the word to even larger audiences in the city, while the campaign of pamphlets and newspapers continued unabated.

As one might expect, the beginning of 1843 coincided with an upsurge of interest in the specific date of the Advent. Until the beginning of the year, Miller had usually referred to the Second Coming as taking place "about the year 1843." On January 1, 1843, Miller published a synopsis of his beliefs, and therein stated his expectations about the date:

I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for His coming. And I am fully convinced that sometime between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come, and bring all His Saints with Him; and that then He will reward every man as his work shall be.<sup>18</sup>

Nichol comments:

Miller set no date or day within this period. The leaders who were associated with him likewise refused to name a specific date. In the first issue of January, 1843, the *Signs of the Times* declared, in refutation of a widely circulated charge that the Millerites had set on a certain day in April: "The fact is, that the believers of the second advent in 1843, have fixed

NO TIME in the year for the event. And Brethren Miller, Himes, Litch, Hale, Fitch, Hawley, and other prominent lecturers, most decidedly protest against... fixing the day or hour of the event. This we have done over and over again, in our paper." (*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 4, 1843, p. 121. See also issue of Jan. 18, 1843, p. 141, in which George Storrs, another Millerite minister, protests against the fixing of any day; also issue of April 5, 1843, pp. 33-35, 37.)

It is true that individual preachers or limited groups here and there sought to find a Scriptural analogy or by a certain reading of the prophecy a warrant for predicting the advent on some particular day during the year."<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Miller had specified an interval of time, namely, March 21, 1843, to March 21, 1844, rather than a single day, tended to be temporarily overlooked by many followers. Two predictions of specific days had some currency, although it is impossible to be sure how widely they were believed. Some Millerites expected the Advent to occur on April 23, 1843, although the leaders never endorsed this date. Those who had given credence to the April date reacted to its passing in the following way:

At first there was evidence of surprise and disappointment among the Millerites, but it quickly gave way to renewed confidence. "After all," they reminded one another, "there is a whole year in which to look for the Coming;—we looked for it too soon, that was all."—and the singing and exhorting took on a new fervor.<sup>20</sup>

Here once again we note the appearance of increased enthusiasm and conviction after a disconfirmation.

In spite of the official position of the leaders, that the end of the period in which the Second Coming was expected was March 21, 1844, many Millerites placed their hopes on the end of 1843. The leaders took note of this specific expectation and, early in 1844, issued statements concerning it. For example, the opening paragraph of a New Year's address by Miller goes as follows:

"Brethren, The Roman [year] 1843 is past [the Jewish sacred year would end in the spring of 1844] and our hopes are not realized. Shall we give up the ship? No, no ... We do not yet believe our reckoning has run out. It takes all of 457 and 1843 to make 2300, and must of course run as far into '44 as it began in the year 457 before Christ."<sup>21</sup>

The situation generally at the beginning of 1844 is described by Sears:

Then a fluttering of doubt and hesitation became apparent in certain communities, but soon those were dispelled when it was recalled that as far back as 1839 Prophet Miller had stated on some occasion, which had been forgotten in the general excitement, that he was not *positive* that the event would take place during the *Christian* year from 1843 to 1844, and that he would claim the whole *Jewish* year which would carry the prophecy over to the 21st of March, 1844. An announcement to this effect was sent broadcast, and by this time the delusion had taken such a firm hold upon the imaginations of his followers that any simple explanation, however crude, seemed sufficient to quiet all doubts and questionings.

Having accepted this lengthening of the allotted time, the brethren who had assumed the responsibility of sounding the alarm entered into their work with renewed energy and outdid themselves in their efforts to terrify the army of unbelievers into a realization of the horrors that awaited them and to strengthen the faith of those already in the ranks.<sup>22</sup>

Again fervor increased; Millerite conferences in New York and Philadelphia were thronged, and, in Washington, there had to be a last-minute change to a larger hall. Popular interest greatly exceeded even the leaders' expectations.

But March 21, 1844, also came and went with no sign of the Second Coming. The reaction of the non-Millerites was strong and unequivocal:

The world made merry over the old Prophet's predicament. The taunts and jeers of the "scoffers" were well-nigh unbearable. If any of Miller's followers walked abroad, they ran the gauntlet of merciless ridicule.

"What!—not gone up yet?—We thought you'd gone up! Aren't you going up soon?—Wife didn't go up and leave you behind to burn, did she?"

The rowdy element in the community would not leave them alone.<sup>23</sup>

There was strong and severe disappointment among the believers, but this was of brief duration and soon the energy and enthusiasm were back to where they had been before and even greater:

The year of the end of the world had ended, but Millerism had not.... Though some who had been only lukewarm in the movement fell away from it, many maintained both their faith and their fervor. They were ready to attribute the disappointment to some minor error in calculating chronology.<sup>24</sup>

But in spite of the failure of the prophecy, the fires of fanaticism increased. The flames of such emotions cannot be quenched at will; like all great conflagrations they must burn themselves out. And so it was in 1844. Instead of decreasing, the failure seemed to excite even greater exhibitions of loyalty to the expectation of the impending Judgment Day.<sup>25</sup>

By the middle of July things were at a new fever pitch and the energy expended to convert more and more people was greater than ever. Miller and Himes traveled as far as Ohio to make converts, something that had never before been done. Himes described the general attitude of followers toward the Advent: "I have never witnessed a stronger, or more active faith. Indeed, the faith and confidence of the brethren in the prophetic word was never stronger. I find few, if any, who ever believed on Bible *evidence*, that are at all shaken in the faith; while others are embracing our views."<sup>26</sup> Following a visit to Philadelphia, Himes, still very much aware of the disconfirmation in March, showed his elation at the revival of belief: "The trying crisis is past, and the cause is on the rise in this city. The calls for lectures in the vicinity were never more pressing than now. The minister in charge of the Ebenezer station, Kensington (Protestant Methodist), has just come out on the doctrine in full."<sup>27</sup>

As Nichol puts it:

From Cleveland, Himes wrote early in August of his plan to go to England in October, "if time be prolonged," for the purpose of quickening the interest already present there. Literature had been sent out. Various ministers in other lands had taken up the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." But Himes thought that now he and others with him from America should go forth to strengthen the endeavors abroad. Said he:

"If time be continued for a few months, we shall send the *glad tidings* out in a number of different languages, among Protestant and Catholic nations....

"A press shall be established at London, and lecturers will go out in every direction, and we trust the Word of the Lord shall have a free course and be glorified. What we shall accomplish we can not tell. But we wish to do our duty" (*The Advent Herald*, Aug. 21, 1844, p. 20).

Thus even as Himes and Miller moved westward expanding the work, they envisioned a still greater work overseas.<sup>28</sup>

About this time more and more Millerites were accepting a new prediction first promulgated by one of their number, the Reverend Samuel S. Snow, who believed that the date of the Second Coming would be October 22, 1844. Although it might not seem possible for the enthusiasm and fervor to exceed what had already been shown in the first few months of 1844, that is just what happened. The two partial disconfirmations (April 23, 1843, and the end of the calendar year 1843) and one complete and unequivocal disconfirmation (March 21, 1844) served simply to strengthen conviction that the Coming was near at hand and to increase the time and energy that Millers adherents spent trying to convince others:

Perhaps not so much from the preaching and writing of Snow, as from a deep conviction that the end of all things could not be far away, some of the believers in northern New Hampshire, even before summer began, failed to plow their fields because the Lord would surely come "before another winter." This conviction grew among others in that area so that even if they had planted their fields they felt it would be inconsistent with their faith to take in their crops. We read:

"Some, on going into their fields to cut their grass, found themselves entirely unable to proceed, and, conforming to their sense of duty, left their crops standing in the field, to show their faith by their works, and thus to condemn the world. This rapidly extended through the north of New England" (*The Advent Herald*, Oct. 20, 1844, p. 93).

Such conviction naturally prepared men to give a sympathetic ear to the proclamation that the day of the Lord would come on October 22. By midsummer a new stimulus had been given to Millerism in New England. Backsliders were reclaimed, and new ardor controlled those Adventists who accepted Snow's reckoning, as they went out to proclaim the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him." Indeed, Snow declared that only now was the true midnight cry being given.<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting that it was the insistence of the ordinary members of the Millerite movement that the October date be accepted. The leaders of the movement resisted it and counseled against it for a long time, but to no avail. A Millerite editor, writing in retrospect, commented:

At first the definite time was generally opposed; but there seemed to be an irresistible power attending its proclamation, which prostrated all before it. It swept over the land with the velocity of a tornado, and it reached hearts in different and distant places almost simultaneously, and in a manner which can be accounted for only on the supposition that God was [in] it....

The lecturers among the Adventists were the last to embrace the views of the time. ... It was not until within about two weeks of the commencement of the seventh month [about the first of October], that we were particularly impressed with the progress of the movement, when we had such a view of it, that to oppose it, or even to remain silent longer, seemed to us to be opposing the work of the Holy Spirit; and in entering upon the work with all our souls, we could but exclaim, "What were we, that we should resist God?" It seemed to us to have been so independent of human agency, that we could but regard it as a fulfillment of the "midnight cry."<sup>30</sup>

In the period from mid-August to the predicted new day, October 22, 1844, things reached an incredible pitch of fervor, zeal, and conviction:

Elder Boutelle describes the period thus: "The 'Advent Herald', 'the Midnight Cry', and other Advent papers, periodicals, pamphlets, tracts, leaflets, voicing the coming glory, were scattered broadcast and everywhere like autumn leaves in the forest. Every house was visited by them. ...A mighty effort through the Spirit and the word preached was made to bring sinners to repentance, and to have the wandering ones return."

The camp meetings were now so crowded that they were no longer orderly as they had been. If there had been a time when an undesirable element could be kept out, it was now impossible to do so; and as a matter of fact the world was so near its end, as they claimed, whatever precautions were taken before seemed hardly worth while any longer.<sup>31</sup>

The most active endeavors were made by the Millerites during these closing weeks to broadcast what they believed was the truth concerning the exact time of Christ's advent. Extra issues of *The Midnight Cry* and *The Advent Herald* were published. The editor of *The Midnight Cry* stated that in order to provide the literature needed they were keeping "four steam presses almost constantly in motion."<sup>32</sup>

Further evidence on the extent of the conviction and the drive to persuade and convert others is the fact that now even many of the leaders were advocating partial cessation of normal activities on the part of believers so they would have more time to convert others and spread the word. An editorial in the final issue of *The Midnight Cry* proclaimed:

Think for eternity! Thousands may be lulled to sleep by hearing your actions say: "This world is worth my whole energies. The world to come is a vain shadow." O, reverse this practical sermon, *instantly!* Break loose from the world as much as possible. If indispensable duty calls you into the world for a moment, go as a man would run to do a piece of work in the rain. Run and hasten through it, and let it be known that you leave it with alacrity for something better. Let your actions preach in the clearest tones: "The Lord is coming"—"The Time is short"—"This world passeth away"—"Prepare to meet thy God."<sup>33</sup>

A news story in *The Midnight Cry* stated:

Many are leaving all to go out and warn the brethren and the world. In Philadelphia, thirteen volunteered at one meeting (after hearing Brother Storrs) to go out and sound the alarm. ... In both cities [New York and Philadelphia], stores are being closed, and they preach in tones the world understands, though they may not heed it.<sup>34</sup>

And Nichol points out:

There were several reasons why the believers in a number of instances sold their possessions in part or in whole. First, they wished to have more money with which to support the cause. It took money to support four presses running constantly, pouring out literature on Millerism. Second, they wished to have all their dealings with their fellow

men honorably concluded before the advent, including full payment of all their debts. Third, with the fervent love for others, which true religion certainly ought to generate in the hearts of men, Millerites who owed no debts themselves sought to help others pay their debts. Some Millerites, stimulated by the realization that soon earthly gold would be worthless, and warmed in their hearts with a love for their fellow men, wished to make gifts to the poor, both within and without the faith.<sup>35</sup>

But October 22 came and went, and with it all the hopes of the Millerites. This was the culminating disconfirmation and, at last, conviction was shattered and proselytizing was stilled. The plight of the heavily committed followers was pitiable indeed. They had to bear the taunts and jeers of a hostile world and many were left pauperized. Their cruel disappointment and the hardship are well attested to. Nichol quotes two extracts from the writings of convinced believers that tell the sad story:

Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn. I mused in my own heart, saying, My advent experience has been the richest and brightest of all my Christian experience. If this had proved a failure, what was the rest of my Christian experience worth? Has the Bible proved a failure? Is there no God, no heaven, no golden home city, no paradise? Is all this but a cunningly devised fable? Is there no reality to our fondest hope and expectation of these things? And thus we had something to grieve and weep over, if all our fond hopes were lost. And as I said, we wept till the day dawn.<sup>36</sup>

The 22nd of October passed, making unspeakably sad the faithful and longing ones; but causing the unbelieving and wicked to rejoice. All was still. No *Advent Herald*; no meetings as formerly. Everyone felt lonely, with hardly a desire to speak to anyone. Still in the cold world! No deliverance—the Lord [had] not come! No words can express the feelings of disappointment of a true Adventist then. Those only who experienced it can enter into the subject as it was. It was a humiliating thing and we all felt it alike. ...<sup>37</sup>

The disconfirmation of October 22 brought about the collapse of Millerism. It had taken three or perhaps four disconfirmations within a period of eighteen months, but this last one was too much. In spite of their overwhelming commitments, Miller's followers gave up their beliefs and the movement quickly disintegrated in dissention, controversy, and discord. By the late spring of 1845 it had virtually disappeared.

The history of the Millerites shows again the phenomenon we have noted in our other examples. Although there is a limit beyond which belief will not withstand disconfirmation, it is clear that the introduction of contrary evidence can serve to increase the conviction and enthusiasm of a believer.

Historical records are replete with further instances of similar movements of a millennial or messianic character. Unfortunately for our purpose, however, in most instances the data which would be relevant to our hypotheses are totally absent. Even in cases where considerable data are available, there will frequently be some crucial point which is equivocal, thus destroying the cogent relevance to our hypotheses. The best instance of such a movement where there is one single controversial point on a crucial issue is the very beginnings of Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

There is quite general agreement among historians that the apostles were both convinced and committed. None would question that the apostles fully believed in the things Jesus stood for and had altered their lives considerably because of this belief. Burkitt, for example, states that Peter, at one point, "exclaimed that he and his companions really had left all to follow Jesus."<sup>39</sup> Thus, we may assert that the first two conditions which we stated early in the chapter are fulfilled.

There is no denying that the apostles provided support for one another and that they went out to proselytize following the crucifixion of Jesus. Thus, we may accept as fact that the fifth condition we mentioned is satisfied, and that there was a point at which proselytizing increased.

But the third and fourth conditions remain in doubt. Was there, in essence, something in the belief system that was amenable to clear and unequivocal disconfirmation and, if so, did such disconfirmation occur? In spite of many things which are not disputed, the major issue is shrouded in disagreement among various historians. There is general agreement that Jesus, in various ways, implied that he was the Messiah or Christ. More importantly, it is also clear that his disciples recognized him as such. For example, Scott states: "When directly challenged by Jesus, Peter speaking for the group of disciples said, 'Thou art the Messiah.'"<sup>40</sup>

It is also clear that, at least so far as other Jewish sects of that day were concerned, the Messiah could not be made to suffer pain. Thus Simpson states: "With equal certainty it may be affirmed that no department of Judaism had ever conceived of a suffering Messiah."<sup>41</sup> If this were all there were to it, then one would assert that the crucifixion and the cry Jesus uttered on the cross were indeed an unequivocal disconfirmation.

But this is not all there is to it. Many authorities assert unequivocally that it is precisely on this question that Jesus introduced new doctrine. Jesus and the apostles, these authorities state, did believe that the Messiah had to suffer, and Jesus even predicted that he would die in Jerusalem. Burkitt says: "... we end with Peter declaring, 'Thou art the Messiah' and with Jesus saying, practically, in reply, 'Yes, and I go now to Jerusalem; but whoever wants to follow Me there must renounce all ambitious hopes and accompany Me—to execution.'"<sup>42</sup> If this view is maintained, then the crucifixion, far from being a disconfirmation, was indeed a confirmation of a prediction, and the subsequent proselytizing of the apostles would stand as a counterexample to our hypotheses. The authorities we have quoted from above accept this latter interpretation and, in fact, they are in the majority.

But not all authorities agree. At the other extreme of interpretation is Graetz, who states:

When the disciples of Jesus had somewhat recovered from the panic which came upon them at the time he was seized and executed, they reassembled to mourn together over the death of their beloved Master.... Still, the effect that Jesus produced upon the unenlightened masses must have been very powerful; for their faith in him, far from fading away like a dream, became more and more intense, their adoration of Jesus rising to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. The only stumbling-block to their belief lay in the fact that the Messiah who came to deliver Israel and bring to light the glory of the kingdom of heaven, endured a shameful death. How could the Messiah be subject to pain? A suffering Messiah staggered them considerably, and this stumbling-block had to be overcome before a perfect and joyful belief could be reposed in him. It was at that moment probably that some writer relieved his own perplexities and quelled their doubts by referring to a prophecy in Isaiah, that "He will be taken from the land of the living, and will be wounded for the sins of his people."<sup>43</sup>

Was it or was it not a disconfirmation? We do not know and cannot say. But this one unclarity makes the whole episode inconclusive with respect to our hypotheses.

There are many more historical examples we could describe at the risk of becoming repetitive and at the risk of using highly unreliable data. Let the examples we have already given suffice.

We can now turn our attention to the question of why increased proselytizing follows the disconfirmation of a prediction. How can we explain it and what are the factors that will determine whether or not it will occur?

Since our explanation will rest upon one derivation from a general theory, we will first state the bare essentials of the theory which are necessary for this derivation. The full theory has wide implications and a variety of experiments have already been conducted to test derivations concerning such things as the consequences of decisions, the effects of producing forced compliance, and some patterns of voluntary exposure to new information. At this point, we shall draw out in detail only those implications that are relevant to the phenomenon of increased proselytizing following disconfirmation of a prediction. For this purpose we shall introduce the concepts of consonance and dissonance.<sup>44</sup>

Dissonance and consonance are relations among cognitions—that is among opinions, beliefs, knowledge of the environment, and knowledge of one's own actions and feelings. Two opinions, or beliefs, or items of knowledge are *dissonant* with each other if they do not fit together—that is, if they are inconsistent, or if, considering only the particular two items, one does not follow from the other. For example, a cigarette smoker who believes that smoking is bad for his health has an opinion that is dissonant with the knowledge that he is continuing to smoke. He may have many other opinions, beliefs, or items of knowledge that are consonant with continuing to smoke, but the dissonance nevertheless exists.

Dissonance produces discomfort and, correspondingly, there will arise pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. Attempts to reduce dissonance represent the observable manifestations that dissonance exists. Such attempts may take any or all of three forms. The person may try to change one or more of the beliefs, opinions, or behaviors involved in the dissonance; to acquire new information or beliefs that will increase the existing consonance and thus cause the total dissonance to be reduced; or to forget or reduce the importance of those cognitions that are in a dissonant relationship.

If any of the above attempts are to be successful, they must meet with support from either the physical or the social environment. In the absence of such support, the most determined efforts to reduce dissonance may be unsuccessful.

The foregoing statement of the major ideas about dissonance and its reduction is a very brief one and, for that reason, it may be difficult to follow. We can perhaps make these ideas clearer to the reader by showing how they apply to the kind of social movement we have been discussing, and by pointing out how these ideas help to explain the curious phenomenon we have observed.

Theoretically, what is the situation of the individual believer at the pre-disconfirmation stage of such a movement? He has a strongly held belief in a prediction—for example, that Christ will return—a belief that is supported by the other members of the movement. By way of preparation for the predicted event, he has engaged in many activities that are entirely consistent with his belief. In other words, most of the relations among relevant cognitions are, at this point, consonant.

Now what is the effect of the disconfirmation, of the unequivocal fact that the prediction was wrong, upon the believer? The disconfirmation introduces an important and painful dissonance. The fact that the predicted events did not occur is dissonant with continuing to

believe both the prediction and the remainder of the ideology of which the prediction was the central item. The failure of the prediction is also dissonant with all the actions that the believer took in preparation for its fulfillment. The magnitude of the dissonance will, of course, depend on the importance of the belief to the individual and on the magnitude of his preparatory activity.

In the type of movement we have discussed, the central belief and its accompanying ideology are usually of crucial importance in the believers' lives and hence the dissonance is very strong—and very painful to tolerate. Accordingly, we should expect to observe believers making determined efforts to eliminate the dissonance or, at least, to reduce its magnitude. How may they accomplish this end? The dissonance would be largely eliminated if they discarded the belief that had been disconfirmed, ceased the behavior which had been initiated in preparation for the fulfillment of the prediction, and returned to a more usual existence. Indeed, this pattern sometimes occurs, and we have seen that it did happen to the Millerites after the last disconfirmation and to the Sabbataians after Zevi himself was converted to Islam. But frequently the behavioral commitment to the belief system is so strong that almost any other course of action is preferable. It may even be less painful to tolerate the dissonance than to discard the belief and admit one had been wrong. When that is the case, the dissonance cannot be eliminated by giving up the belief.

Alternatively, the dissonance would be reduced or eliminated if the members of a movement effectively blind themselves to the fact that the prediction has not been fulfilled. But most people, including members of such movements, are in touch with reality and cannot simply blot out of their cognition such an unequivocal and undeniable fact. They can try to ignore it, however, and they usually do try. They may convince themselves that the date was wrong but that the prediction will, after all, be shortly confirmed; or they may even set another date, as the Millerites did. Some Millerites, after the last disconfirmation, even ventured the opinion that the Second Coming had occurred, but that it had occurred in heaven and not on the earth itself. Or believers may try to find reasonable explanations, and very often they find ingenious ones. The Sabbataians, for example, convinced themselves when Zevi was jailed that the very fact that he was still alive proved he was the Messiah. Even after his conversion some staunch adherents claimed this, too, was part of the plan. Rationalization can reduce dissonance somewhat. For rationalization to be fully effective, support from others is needed to make the explanation or the revision seem correct. Fortunately, the disappointed believer can usually turn to the others in the same movement, who have the same dissonance and the same pressures to reduce it. Support for the new explanation is, hence, forthcoming and the members of the movement can recover somewhat from the shock of the disconfirmation.

But whatever explanation is made it is still by itself not sufficient. The dissonance is too important and though they may try to hide it, even from themselves, the believers still know that the prediction was false and all their preparations were in vain. The dissonance cannot be eliminated completely by denying or rationalizing the disconfirmation. But there is a way in which the remaining dissonance can be reduced. *If more and more people can be persuaded that the system of belief is correct, then clearly it must, after all, be correct.* Consider the extreme case: if everyone in the whole world believed something, then there would be no question at all as to the validity of this belief. It is for this reason that we observe the increase in proselytizing following disconfirmation. If the proselytizing proves successful, then by gathering more adherents and effectively surrounding himself with supporters, the believer reduces dissonance to the point where he can live with it.

In the light of this explanation of the phenomenon that proselytizing increases as a result of a disconfirmation, let us take another, more critical look at the historical examples we have offered in evidence. There are a number of grounds for feeling unsatisfied with them as proof.

In the first place there is a scarcity of data of the sort required by our analysis. It is an understandable lack, for the people collecting historical records were not concerned with our particular problem, but it is a lack nonetheless. Even our best documented example, the Millerites, contains little evidence on actual proselytizing behavior, especially among the mass members. Statements about proselytizing must be inferred largely from evidence about the number of adherents and the size and frequency of meetings. But such signs as these are dependent not only on the effort made to proselytize—the desire to convince others—but also on the effectiveness of the efforts and on the state of mind of prospective converts.

Even where there is direct evidence about proselytizing attempts, such as the number of speeches made, the fact that Miller and Himes traveled widely, or that the Millerite presses worked twenty-four hours a day, these are activities of the leaders. There is very little concrete evidence of the proselytizing activities of the ordinary members, whose behavior is most significant for our purposes. Leaders of a social movement may, after all, have motives other than simply their conviction that they have the truth. Should the movement disintegrate, they would lose prestige or other rewards.

And if the Millerite case is inadequately documented for our purposes, our other examples are even more poorly supported. On the Sabbataian movement we have virtually no data concerning the initial disconfirmation in 1648, for the very good reason that the movement attracted little attention (and, hence, there were few records of it) until it became very large and important.

A second reason for considering historical data alone as inadequate is the small likelihood that this kind of data could challenge our explanation. Suppose we could find record of a mass movement that had apparently collapsed immediately after disconfirmation. In the absence of adequate measurement, we might well conjecture that the members' commitment to the belief was small—so small that the dissonance introduced by disconfirmation was enough to force the discarding of the belief. Alternatively, if the commitment could be demonstrated to have been heavy, it is still possible that there were attempts to proselytize following disconfirmation, but that these attempts had been unsuccessful. This would be a tenable contention since it is the results of proselytizing efforts that generally find their way into historical records rather than the efforts themselves.

There is a type of occurrence that would indeed disprove our explanation—namely, a movement whose members simply maintained the same conviction after disconfirmation as they had before and neither fell away from the movement nor increased their proselytizing. But it is precisely such an occurrence that might very well go unnoticed by its contemporaries or by historians and never find its way into their annals.

Since the likelihood of disproof through historical data is small, we cannot place much confidence in the supporting evidence from the same sources. The reader can then imagine the enthusiasm with which we seized the opportunity to collect direct observational data about a group who appeared to believe in a prediction of catastrophe to occur in the near future. Direct observations made before, during, and after the disconfirmation would produce at least one case that was fully documented by trustworthy data directly relevant to our purpose.

One day in late September the *Lake City Herald* carried a two-column story on a back page, headlined: PROPHECY FROM PLANET. CLARION CALL TO CITY: FLEE THAT FLOOD. IT'LL SWAMP US ON DEC. 21, OUTER SPACE TELLS SUBURBANITE. The body of the story expanded somewhat on these bare facts:

Lake City will be destroyed by a flood from Great Lake just before dawn, Dec. 21, according to a suburban housewife. Mrs. Marian Keech, of 847 West School street, says

the prophecy is not her own. It is the purport of many messages she has received by automatic writing, she says. ... The messages, according to Mrs. Keech, are sent to her by superior beings from a planet called "Clarion." These beings have been visiting the earth, she says, in what we call flying saucers. During their visits, she says, they have observed fault lines in the earth's crust that foretold the deluge. Mrs. Keech reports she was told the flood will spread to form an inland sea stretching from the Arctic Circle to the Gulf of Mexico. At the same time, she says, a cataclysm will submerge the West Coast from Seattle, Wash., to Chile in South America.

The story went on to report briefly the origin of Mrs. Keech's experiences and to quote several messages that seemed to indicate she had been chosen as a person to learn and transmit teachings from the "superior beings." A photograph of Mrs. Keech accompanied the story. She appeared to be about fifty years of age, and she sat poised with pad and pencil in her lap, a slight, wiry woman with dark hair and intense, bright eyes. The story was not derogatory, nor did the reporter comment upon or interpret any of the information he had gathered.

Since Mrs. Keech's pronouncement made a specific prediction of a specific event, since she, at least, was publicly committed to belief in it, and since she apparently was interested to some extent in informing a wider public about it, this seemed to be an opportunity to conduct a "field" test of the theoretical ideas to which the reader has been introduced.

In early October two of the authors called on Mrs. Keech and tried to learn whether there were other convinced persons in her orbit of influence, whether they too believed in the specific prediction, and what commitments of time, energy, reputation, or material possessions they might be making in connection with the prediction. The results of this first visit encouraged us to go on. The three of us and some hired observers joined the group and, as participants, gathered data about the conviction, commitment, and proselytizing activity of the individuals who were actively interested in Mrs. Keech's ideas. We tried to learn as much as possible about the events that had preceded the news story, and, of course, kept records of subsequent developments. The means by which the observers gained entree, maintained rapport, and collected data are fully described in the Appendix. The information collected about events before early October is retrospective. It comes primarily from documents and from conversations with the people concerned in the events. From October to early January almost all the data are firsthand observations, with an occasional report of an event we did not cover directly but heard about later through someone in the group of believers who had been there at the time.

The next three chapters are a narrative of events from the beginning of Mrs. Keech's automatic writing up to the crucial days in December just before the cataclysmic flood was expected.

These chapters provide background material. They will introduce the members of the group, describe their personal histories, their involvement in the movement, and the preparations they made for the flood. We shall also describe the ideology accompanying the prediction and some of the other influences to which the group was exposed. Such background is necessary to make understandable some of the behavior and the events that led up to the night of December 21. Much of this material is not directly relevant to the theoretical theme of the book, but we hope that these details will re-create for the reader some of the vividness of these months.

## NOTES

1. P. Hughes, *A Popular History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1954), p. 10.

2. Richard Heath, *Anabaptism: From Its Rise at Zwickau to Its Fall at Munster, 1521-1536* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1895), p. 119. This is one of the *Baptist Manuals: Historical and Biographical*, edited by George P. Gould.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.
5. In describing the Sabbataian movement we shall follow the account given by H. Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1895), vol. 5, pp. 118-167. This, in our judgment, is the best single source.
6. Graetz, p. 122.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 137.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
11. *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*, translated by Marvin Lowenthal (New York: Harper, 1932), pp. 45-46.
12. C. E. Sears, *Days of Delusion — A Strange Bit of History* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1924).
13. Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Company, 1944).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.
17. *Brother Jonathan*, February 18, 1843, quoted in Nichol, p. 130.
18. *Signs of the Times*, January 25, 1843, p. 147, quoted in Nichol, p. 126.
19. Nichol, p. 126.
20. Sears, p. 119.
21. Nichol, p. 160n.
22. Sears, pp. 140-141.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
24. Nichol, p. 206.
25. Sears, p. 147.
26. *Advent Herald*, July 17, 1844, p. 188, quoted in Nichol, p. 208.
27. *Advent Herald*, July 24, 1844, p. 200, quoted in Nichol, p. 208.
28. Nichol, pp. 209-210.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
30. *Advent Herald*, October 30, 1844, p. 93, quoted in Nichol, p. 216.
31. Sears, pp. 156-157.
32. Nichol, p. 231.
33. *The Midnight Cry*, October 19, 1844, p. 133, quoted in Nichol, p. 236.
34. *The Midnight Cry*, October 3, 1844, p. 104, quoted in Nichol, p. 238.
35. Nichol, pp. 238-239.
36. Hiram Edson, fragment of ms. on his life and experience, pp. 8,9, quoted in Nichol, pp. 247-248.
37. Luther Boutelle, *Lift and Religious Experience*, pp. 67-68, quoted in Nichol, pp. 248-249.
38. Unless otherwise identified, all quotations used in our discussion of Christianity are taken from essays in the collective work *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (London and Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1929). The specific essays from which quotations have been taken are the following: Francis Crawford Burkitt, F.B.A, D.D., "The Life of Jesus," pp. 198-

256; Rev. Charles Anderson Scott, D.D., "The Theology of the New Testament," pp. 337-389; Rev. Canon David Capell Simpson, M.A., D.D., "Judaism, the Religion in Which Christ Was Educated," pp. 136-171.

39. P. 335.

40. P. 350.

41. P. 165.

42. P. 226.

43. Graetz, vol. 2, p. 166.

44. The theory of dissonance and its implications are set forth in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* by Leon Festinger, Stanford University Press, 1957.

# Long Islanders followed bizarre ‘Jewish’ cult

*Clad in tallis, charismatic Baptist led a flock of Christians and Jews*

By ELENORE LESTER

“My wife and I are going to be observant Jews. This experience has brought us to it. I don’t say that it was the right way or that the ends justified the means. I can only say this is the way it happened.”

The voice on the other end of the telephone was low and tense with emotion. The speaker would not meet the reporter in person, nor would he reveal his name. He would not state his profession for fear that he might be identified through it. He would only say that he was 28 and a college graduate. He was ashamed and pained because his eyes had been opened to the true nature of the cult group with which he had been involved for the past ten years.

“Chaim.” As the voice on the phone identified himself, was one of hundreds of former members of a Long Island spiritual community, who today are trying to adjust to the loss of an illusion around which they had long centered their lives. They had been practicing a bizarre version of Judaism promulgated by a charismatic leader, 50-year-old Jack Hickman.

Hickman was born and raised a Baptist and came to St. John’s Lutheran in North Massapequa to work as a youth pastor in 1961. He became immensely popular, drawing members of other congregations to hear his sermons. As his popularity grew he began to bring Jewish elements into services. He covered himself with a tallis when he prayed. He introduced a prayer for Israel at the end of the service. He talked to an inner circle about his claim to Jewish ancestry, stating that he belonged to a family called the Abensurs, descended from the family of Jesus. He said his family had the task of preparing for the return of the Messiah. In pursuit of this goal he promoted strict observance, including following Jewish dietary laws and going to the mikvah (ritual bath). However, his knowledge of these laws was distorted and he added elements which wrought havoc with the private lives of his congregants.

## 1000 followed him

Hickman emphasized that Jesus “lived and died as a Jew,” and encouraged his flock to follow Jewish

teachings in order to draw closer to God. Most of the 1,000 followers were Christians. About 100 were Jews who were attracted to the warmth and enthusiasm of the community. Some of them had little or no knowledge of Judaism. Chaim was one of those who had some Jewish background.

“I attended Hebrew school for five years,” he said. “I had a Bar Mitzvah in a Conservative synagogue. I used to go to the synagogue for high holiday services, but I just never felt involved.”

A friend introduced Chaim to Hickman’s congregation and he was immediately attracted. He was then only 18. He became involved in an outreach program working from a storefront.

Today he feels distressed, not only for himself, but for those he misled.

“All I can say is that we believed that we were doing right,” he declared.

Chaim, along with any others in the group began to doubt several months ago after a series of revelations within the community. First, it was reported that the prophet, as some believed he was, had had sexual contacts with a 17-year-old male member of the group years earlier. This led the congregants to investigate other facets of Hickman’s life. They learned from Hickman’s sister that he had deceived them on an essential issue. He had not been raised as a “secret Jew” by his grandfathers. Both had died before he was born.

Exploration of the community’s inner circle revealed that there were secret societies of “princes” and their *mishpochehs* (households). Some of their activities had been to train with bows and arrows and to study survival techniques for the “end-times”. Some men from the inner circle had been beaten and humiliated for misdeeds.

## Secrets exposed

On August 15 a lengthy detailed article on the activities of the group appeared in the magazine of the Long Island newspaper, *Newsday*. This was followed by a radio and TV account. Thus, secrets of which thousands of middle-class families in Long Island had long been vaguely aware, were suddenly exposed before the world.

Today, a few hundred congregants remain loyal to Hickman. Among them is a sprinkling of Jews. According to Mrs. Nancy Boles of Freeport, a Gentile member of the congregation, who was

brought into the sect as a youngster and is now a 31-year-old mother, the men and women who remain are bitter against those who exposed the story. “They feel it should have been discussed among ourselves,” she said.

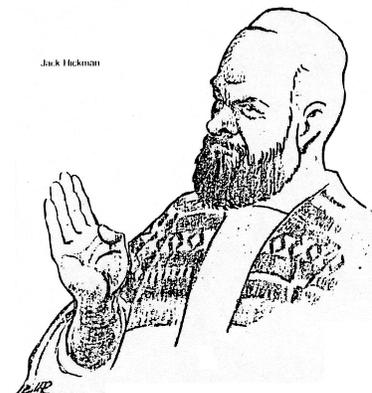
Hickman was inventive in responding to accusations made against him, according to Mrs. Boles. In response to charges of immorality with a minor, he said he was engaging in an ancient kabbalistic ceremony, known as “the passing of the seed.” This ceremony (for which there is no basis in Jewish law) was supposed to enable Hickman to have an heir who would be a prophet. When he was confronted with discrepancies in the stories of his life, he produced the Jewish injunction against *loshen hora*, or slander.

Mrs. Boles confessed that she found it difficult to understand why any Jews would remain in the group at this point.

“For the Christians, something has been taken away,” she said. “We thought we were Jewish and we discovered we weren’t. The Jews remain Jews and they can go elsewhere to be observant.”

However, what seems odd to Mrs. Boles is better understood by two rabbis who have helped Jews exit from the group and have provided information and advice to Christians with a sincere desire to convert to Judaism. They are Rabbi Tuvia Teldon, director of the Lubavitch Hassidim in eastern Long Island and Rabbi Avi Weiss of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, as well as a counselor on the anti-missionary commission of the Rabbinical Assembly.

“These people are emotionally and psychologically trapped,” said Rabbi Weiss. “For years they believed they were involved in a holy cause. It isn’t easy to give it up. Among those I’ve talked to – both Jews and Christians – I have seen an incredible spiritual hunger, a depth of feeling and sincerity that calls for some strong response.”



Jack Hickman

# The Resurrection Belief of the Earliest Church: A Response to the Failure of Prophecy?

*Hugh Jackson*

My purpose in this paper is to take a fresh look at the possibility that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus had its origins in a failure of prophecy.

I shall argue that the crucifixion of Jesus cut across his disciples' expectations of the coming of the kingdom and placed their faith in jeopardy. I shall further suggest that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus might be explicable as a creative response to the disconfirming event of the crucifixion, whereby the disciples were able to maintain their faith in a modified form.

The substance of this argument is not new,<sup>1</sup> but there is value, I think, in trying to put it on a firmer basis. It needs to be defended against the charge that it is psychologically implausible. Ulrich Wilckens has stated this objection with admirable clarity: . . . it is quite impossible that the disciples of Jesus should have reacted to the catastrophes of his death by the conviction suddenly dawning upon them that he had been raised from the dead—which had never previously been asserted in Israel of any mortal. . . ."<sup>2</sup> This objection has been very influential and needs to be met by anybody who seeks to argue as I do. In order to give it proper consideration I shall try to develop my argument about the origins of the belief in Jesus' resurrection in a much wider context than is usual. I shall examine this question of how the disciples responded to the crucifixion in the light of an important development in social psychology, the theory of cognitive dissonance. I shall also be referring to a seventeenth-century messianic movement in which the expectations of believers were contradicted by the actual course of events.

The reason I wish to discuss the origins of the resurrection belief in this wider context lies in the nature of the historian's task. The historian's first duty is to his documents. However, it is foolish for a historian to pretend that he can approach his documents without assumptions and even more foolish to think that these assumptions are never in need of critical examination.

These general considerations apply with particular force to the aftermath of the crucifixion. Here the New Testament evidence is so unsatisfactory that our assumptions about human behavior are bound to play a decisive role if we seek to understand the origins of the belief in Jesus' resurrection. Wilckens and others have assumed that the disciples could not have responded to the crucifixion by developing a belief in the resurrection of their leader. Let us see if this assumption is well founded.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brilliant statement of this argument, see Alfred Loisy, *The Birth of the Christian Religion*, trans. L. P. Jacks (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), pp. 95-98. Loisy, along with other scholars of his generation, also emphasized the visions which he thought accompanied the earliest form of the resurrection belief. However, he did not regard the visions as the underlying cause of the resurrection belief, and his explanation does not stand or fall according to whether he was correct on this point. On the visions or appearances, see W. O. Walker, Jr., "Postcrucifixion Appearances and Christian Origins" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 2 (June 1969): 157-65. For other types of psychological explanations, see, e.g., Wilhelm Bousset, *Kynos Christos*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1970), pp. 50-51; Maurice Goguel, *The Birth of Christianity*, trans. H. C. Snape (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), pp. 73-75; Ernest Renan, *Les Apotres* (Paris, 1866), chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, ed. C. F. D. Moule, trans. Dorothea M. Barton and R. A. Wilson (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 61.

## I

I begin with the theory of cognitive dissonance. Since it received its first detailed statement by Leon Festinger in 1957<sup>3</sup>, this has been perhaps the most influential of a number of theories of cognitive inconsistency developed by social psychologists in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

The theory of cognitive dissonance, though quickly summarized, is very wide in its scope. The theory states that whenever an individual holds two cognitions (beliefs, ideas, opinions) which are psychologically inconsistent, he will experience a drive to reduce this inconsistency. Dissonance may be reduced by changing either or both of the existing cognitions or by adding new cognitions which reduce the conflict by putting it in a new perspective.

It is important to note that, according to dissonance theory, when a person is led to modify dissonant cognitions, he is concerned to reduce his psychological discomfort rather than to bring his cognitions into line with reality. The theory "does not rest upon the assumption that man is a *rational* animal; rather, it suggests that man is a *rationalizing* animal—that he attempts to appear rational, both to others and to himself."<sup>5</sup>

One of the problems about dissonance theory is that it is sometimes difficult to know whether the cognitions under consideration are in fact psychologically inconsistent so that dissonance-reducing activities may be predicted. Again, in a particular situation, we are not able to predict which of a number of possible modes of dissonance reduction will be taken. Dissonance theory has been, and is being, refined in order to answer such questions as these. However, the theory has already added significantly to our knowledge of human behavior through the many experiments it has inspired.<sup>6</sup> This experimental evidence suggests that where there is acute psychological inconsistency between cognitions, significant changes in either beliefs or behavior may result.<sup>7</sup>

## II

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957). See also Stephen T. Margulis and Elaine Songer, "Cognitive Dissonance: A Bibliography of Its First Decade," *Psychological Reports* 24 (1969): 923-35.

<sup>4</sup> The various theories are discussed in *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook*, ed. Robert P. Abelson et al. (Chicago: Rand-McNally & Co., 1968); hereafter cited as *Theories*.

<sup>5</sup> Elliot Aronson, "Dissonance Theory: Progress and Problems," in *Theories*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> For useful descriptive summaries of dissonance experiments, see Festinger (n. 3 above); Aronson (n. 5 above); Jack W. Brehm and Arthur R. Cohen, *Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> For a judicious assessment of the theory of cognitive dissonance and other theories of cognitive consistency, see Jonathan L. Freedman, "How Important Is Cognitive Consistency?" in *Theories*, pp. 497-503.

In 1956 Festinger and two of his associates, Reicken and Schachter, examined the possible relevance of dissonance theory to religious movements which undergo a failure of prophecy.<sup>8</sup> They claimed that where there is a clear failure of prophecy, believers who have committed themselves to that prophecy experience a high degree of dissonance. Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter even went so far as to claim that under certain specified conditions the drive to reduce dissonance consequent upon the failure of prophecy will have the paradoxical effect of producing an increase in proselytizing. While this last hypothesis has apparently been discarded,<sup>9</sup> the basic proposition still appears to have merit: namely, that where an individual is a fervent believer and where he has committed himself publicly by word and deed to beliefs which are patently refuted by the actual course of events, then that individual will experience a very high degree of dissonance. Two sets of cognitions are in acute conflict: the prophecy and the beliefs of which it forms a part, and the failure of the predicted event or events to occur.

There is, in my opinion, considerable evidence that the disciples of Jesus experienced an acute conflict of cognitions as a result of the crucifixion of their leader. They had committed themselves to a belief in Jesus as one who had a special role in the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God: the crucifixion made a mockery of their beliefs and their hopes.

It is generally accepted by scholars that the center of Jesus' message was the dawning of the kingdom of God. How Jesus understood the kingdom of God has, of course, been much debated. Nevertheless, whatever else remains uncertain, it seems safe to conclude that Jesus taught that the arrival of the kingdom would see a most radical change in the existing order of things, a change which would be obvious to all.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Jesus and his disciples committed themselves to a prophecy which was open to disconfirmation.

It also needs to be emphasized for our purposes that Jesus and his disciples publicly committed themselves to the belief that the coming of the kingdom was imminent. It is true that Jesus apparently warned against calculating the time of the kingdom's arrival.<sup>11</sup> However, he did proclaim that the reign of God was pressingly near, and it is precisely this fact which seems to have given such urgency to his message. It was because God's reign was breaking in that he proclaimed the poor to be blessed, issued the call for repentance, and stressed the need for watchfulness.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956). The authors of this very stimulating book did consider (pp. 23-25) the question of whether the crucifixion of Jesus was an instance of the failure of prophecy, but were unable to decide. Unfortunately, they only discussed the issue in terms of whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Allyn Hardyck and Marcia Braden, "Prophecy Fails Again: A Report of a Failure to Replicate," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 65, no. 2 (1962): 136-41, esp. p. 139, n. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 160-85; S- G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 337.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 17:20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Frazer McLuskev with James Robinson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), chap. 4.

Furthermore, the evidence of the New Testament suggests that Jesus and his disciples continued to believe fervently in the imminent arrival of the kingdom right up until the crucifixion. There are signs of eschatological fervor in the way in which Jesus entered Jerusalem shortly before his death.<sup>13</sup> One of the last-supper sayings is also charged with eschatological expectation: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."<sup>14</sup> If this saying is authentic, the implication is plain—at the last supper Jesus expected the kingdom to come in the very near future. It is also possible that in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus urged the disciples to watch that very night for the arrival of the kingdom.<sup>15</sup>

We have, then, a picture of Jesus and his disciples filled with hope of the kingdom's arrival on the eve of the crucifixion. It is true that, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus had warned his disciples on a number of occasions that he was going to be crucified. However, it is probable that these prophecies are *vaticinia ex eventu*.<sup>16</sup> If the disciples had been taught to expect their leader's crucifixion as being in accord with God's eternal purpose, why are they represented in the Gospel tradition as resisting his arrest? And why are they portrayed as numbed by the shock of the crucifixion? Certainly, it is by no means improbable that Jesus and his disciples expected trouble when they went up to Jerusalem, but the most likely hypothesis would seem to be that on the night before his death they were expecting a supernatural vindication as the issue of this trouble, not a crucifixion. If they had been expecting a crucifixion, the words of Mark 15:34—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—are incomprehensible.<sup>17</sup>

Enough has been said so far to suggest that there was a marked inconsistency between what the disciples expected and what happened. However, to grasp the full measure of the inconsistency between expectations and eventuality, we have to bear in mind the special relationship which the disciples considered to exist between Jesus and the kingdom.

As far as we can tell, Jesus himself thought that the coining of the kingdom was very much bound up with his own person. The key text here is Luke 11:20: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The relationship between Jesus and the kingdom stated explicitly here is implied again and again in the parables. According to the parables, men and women have to decide in the here and now what is to be their fate for eternity. And this decision depends, in turn, on whether they align themselves for or against Jesus and his message.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus' practice of consorting with tax gatherers and sinners is also an indication of the link that he made between himself and the kingdom. In his parables Jesus often used table fellowship as a symbol of life in the new age and of acceptance by God. By sitting at table with the tax collectors and sinners, Jesus was saying in effect that the age to come was already being manifested among them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mark 11:1-11, esp. verses 9-10; see D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 293-94.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16, 18.

<sup>15</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK Press, 1967), pp. 47-48.

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1965), 1:29-30.

<sup>17</sup> It may be that Mark 15:34 is the creation of the early Church and that it has to be understood in conjunction with the closing words of Psalm 22. Even if this is the case, the verse still testifies to a memory that the crucifixion cut across the expectations of Jesus and his disciples.

<sup>18</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> Bornkamm, p. 81.

It is clear that the disciples also made the closest of links between Jesus and his message: it is they who treasured the memory of Jesus' parables and how he brought the fellowship of the age to come to tax gatherers and sinners. They would therefore have thought of themselves, not just as those who accepted the message of the coming kingdom, but as followers of a person, in whom the kingdom, in some sense, was already present. Certainly it is doubtful whether the disciples had a death defined idea of the relationship between Jesus and the kingdom; nevertheless, it is very likely that they did in some way correlate the two. For them, the coming of the kingdom was to be a triumph for the cause of Jesus.

The crucifixion, therefore, must have been acutely psychologically inconsistent with the disciples' expectations. Put simply, they had believed that the kingdom of God was dawning in Jesus. How could this belief be squared with the fact that Jesus, when arrested, had not manifested the power of God and had proved impotent in the face of his enemies?<sup>20</sup> They had expected a triumph: they witnessed a humiliation.

If we are prepared to grant that the crucifixion was acutely inconsistent with the expectations of Jesus' followers, we ought to consider the possibility that their behavior or beliefs were modified as a result of a drive to reduce this inconsistency. In particular, we ought to consider the possibility that the belief in Jesus' resurrection had its origins in such a drive. It is true that dissonance theory in its present state does not allow us to predict what form dissonance-reducing activity will take in a complex situation. Therefore, needless to say, there can be no question of asserting that inevitably the crucifixion produced the resurrection. What I do contend, however, is that, given that a belief developed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, this belief is explicable in terms of dissonance theory.

Put briefly, my argument is that the faith of at least some of Jesus' disciples may have been sufficient to surmount the disconfirmation of their beliefs provided by the crucifixion.<sup>21</sup> According to dissonance theory, it would have been impossible for the disciples to continue to hold the cognition that Jesus had a special relationship to the coming of the kingdom along with the cognition that he was dead. Since for these disciples dissonance was not to be reduced by abandoning faith in Jesus, they were therefore led to modify the cognition regarding his death, and the belief in the resurrection was the result.

### III

The basic assumption of my argument is that the faith of some of Jesus' followers may have been sufficiently strong to survive the shock of the crucifixion. Is this assumption justified?

There are, in fact, many examples that can be cited from the history of religion of the astonishing resilience of religious faith in the face of disconfirmation. This resilience has been especially remarkable in those movements in which believers have committed themselves to specific prophecies which have failed dramatically.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See 1 Cor. 1:22-23.

<sup>21</sup> It seems to be almost universally accepted that all of Jesus' inner band of disciples recovered their faith. The evidence provided by the New Testament is hardly a satisfactory basis for this view, since our sources might be expected to pass over any instance of a close follower of Jesus permanently abandoning faith.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Festinger et al. (n. 8 above); Hardyck and Braden (n. 9 above); P. E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church* (New York: Kings Crown Press, 1946). Shaw, unfortunately, does not sufficiently emphasize the degree to which the Catholic Apostolic Church had its origins in

Nor will it do to argue that the crucifixion is *sui generis* because on no other occasion has there been such a catastrophe for belief. There is the well-documented story of the Sabbatian movement, in which, if anything, the challenge to belief was even more severe than that provided by the crucifixion.<sup>23</sup>

Sabbatai Zevi was born in Smyrna in 1626. He was a Jew, strongly influenced by cabalistic ideas, and apparently of manic-depressive character. In 1665 he came under the influence of Nathan of Gaza and was proclaimed as the Messiah. At the beginning of 1666 he set out on a journey to Constantinople amid wild enthusiasm, having aroused the most extravagant expectations in Jews throughout Europe and the Near East: he was going to overthrow the sultan, liberate his people, and restore creation to its paradisaical harmony. Before Sabbatai Zevi reached Constantinople, he was seized and brought to Adrianople. There he was offered a choice by the Turkish authorities—either apostatize or be tortured to death. Sabbatai apostatized.

It would seem inconceivable that any Jew would continue to believe in a Messiah who had abandoned the faith of his fathers and so obviously failed to fulfill the expectations of his followers. And yet many of them did. Sabbatianism was still influential in Judaism until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Even if it be granted in principle that a fervent religious faith might have survived the crucifixion, it might be argued that the evidence of the New Testament shows that the disciples' faith was destroyed.<sup>25</sup> The short answer to this argument is that the evidence shows no such thing. Recent study of the resurrection traditions has underlined just how unsatisfactory they are from the point of view of the historian concerned to reconstruct what happened.<sup>26</sup> The New Testament sources in fact shed only the most oblique light on the immediate aftermath of the crucifixion. Confident assertions about what happened are therefore out of the question.

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the failure of a prophecy made by Robert Baxter. For this prophecy, see Robert Baxter, *Narrative of Facts . . .*, 2d ed. (London, 1833), pp. 15-19. Shaw, pp. 40-42, casts some doubt on the accuracy of Baxter's version of the prophecy he made in January 1832, but for important corroboration of Baxter, see the letter of Edward Irving, January 27, 1832, quoted by Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* (London, 1862) 2:235-36.

<sup>23</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973); for a convenient summary of Scholem's reconstruction of the movement, see his article "Shabbetai Zevi," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth et al. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971-72) 14:1219-54.

<sup>24</sup> Scholem, "Shabbetai Zevi," p. 1253.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W.J. Montague and Wilfred F. Bunge (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 114; Bornkamm (n. 12 above), pp.184-85.

<sup>26</sup> Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1970); Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (London: SPCK Press, 1972); C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1970). The following comment by Evans is especially significant: "The events themselves. . . both the resurrection appearances and the empty tomb, lie so deeply concealed within the traditions that they can be glimpsed only very indirectly, so that the principal difficulty here is not to believe, but to know what it is which offers itself for belief" (p. 130).

As an example of the difficulty of reconstructing the attitudes of the disciples following the crucifixion, we might take the Emmaus story. Luke's account can be interpreted as providing evidence that the faith of the disciples was completely destroyed. It is significant that the disciples talk about their past hopes to the stranger: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."<sup>27</sup> However, it is difficult to estimate the value of the Emmaus story as evidence. In the first place, it is possible that this story, like others in Luke, has its origins in the literary artifice or theological purposes of the evangelist and therefore tells us nothing at all about the postcrucifixion state of mind of the disciples.<sup>28</sup> In the second place, even if the story has its origins in a pre-Lucan stage of the tradition, it might represent only a memory that there was a temporary loss of faith along with the belief that God had been responsible for faith's resurgence. If this second alternative is the correct one, what conclusions ought we to draw? We might be prepared to allow that the disciples suffered a temporary loss of faith without accepting the early church's explanation of faith's resurgence. It is at least possible that the disciples' faith was never completely extinguished and, despite a period of doubt and disillusionment, survived in a modified form.

I would submit, therefore, that, while Jesus' followers were presumably badly shaken by the crucifixion, there is no satisfactory evidence for asserting that their faith was utterly destroyed.

#### IV

Let us assume, then, that the faith of the disciples was not shattered by the crucifixion. We have seen how the disciples believed that Jesus had a special relationship to the coming of the kingdom. There was an acute psychological inconsistency between this conviction and the fact that Jesus had been crucified. If dissonance theory has any validity, it could provide a satisfactory explanation for the development of the disciples' belief that Jesus was in some sense still alive. It is hard to imagine situations in which the drive to reduce dissonance would be as strong and therefore in which such a striking change in cognitions might be a possible result. The disciples could not continue to believe that the kingdom was dawning in Jesus if he were dead. His had to be a continuing role.

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 24:21.

<sup>28</sup> Fuller, p. 105, n. 13.

Furthermore, we know that there were available to the disciples at least two ways of envisaging such a continuing role. There was a belief that some of the great figures of the past, such as Abraham and Elijah, had been assumed bodily into heaven.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, there was a precedent for associating the hero who had been assumed into heaven with the coming of the kingdom; Moses and Elijah, in particular, had been expected in some circles to precede or usher in the kingdom of God.<sup>30</sup> Alternatively, the disciples may have drawn upon the belief that the dead, or some of them, would be raised at the coming of the kingdom of God. There is some dispute about how prevalent this belief was, but extant apocalyptic literature leaves little doubt that there was a strong school of thought which looked forward to resurrection in some form (and there was a bewildering variety of forms) as a feature of the age to come.<sup>31</sup> The situation may therefore have been as follows: the disciples, under pressure of the crucifixion, came to believe that, in the case of their leader, the resurrection of the end time had been moved forward, and that Jesus, from above, rather than from below, would usher in the kingdom of God. It is consistent with this hypothesis that Paul insisted that the resurrection of Jesus could not be divorced from the general resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

There is no precedent in a controlled experiment for cognitive readjustment of the order that I am suggesting for the aftermath of the crucifixion. However, it must be remembered that in no controlled experiment has there been induced anything like the degree of dissonance which was probably experienced by the disciples. Although the laboratory does not provide analogous situations, the history of religion does, and here we find plenty of evidence that failure of prophecy may be followed by the most striking changes in cognitions.<sup>33</sup>

I shall review one such case of the failure of prophecy to illustrate just how striking cognitive readjustment can be. It will be useful to cite again the Sabbatian movement, both because it approximates primitive Christianity in so many respects, and because its history is so well documented.

In the generation preceding the advent of Sabbatai Zevi, a spiritualization of messianic thought had developed.<sup>34</sup> The role of the Messiah had been broadened from that of primarily a national liberator to include that of the restorer of the spiritual world to its original purity. The political activity of the Messiah was thought of as an outward symbol of the inward, spiritual regeneration that he would effect.

Many thousands of Jews believed that they had experienced spiritual regeneration during the messianic revival of 1665-66. The apostasy of 1666 therefore opened up a gulf between the inward and the outward realms. Many would not, could not, doubt that they had experienced God-given spiritual regeneration, and yet the Messiah had acted in a totally unexpected way.

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<sup>29</sup> William O. Walker, Jr., "Christian Origins and Resurrection Belief," *Journal of Religion* 52 (January 1972): 51-52.

<sup>30</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965), pp. 46-49.

<sup>31</sup> Evans (n. 26 above), pp. 14-20; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), chap. 14. The Synoptic Gospels do not allow us to say with absolute certainty that the disciples before the crucifixion shared the hope of resurrection; see Evans, pp. 30-33.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Cor. 15:20-28. For evidence that this attitude to the resurrection of Jesus continued into the second generation and beyond, see Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma*, trans. S. G. F. Brandon (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1957), pp. 31-39.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., the early history of the Catholic Apostolic Church (n. 22 above), in which Baxter's original prophecy underwent a series of reinterpretations; Festinger et al. (n. 8 above), pp. 139-215; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Seeker & Warburg, 1957), chap. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Scholem, "Shabbetai Zevi" (n. 23 above), pp. 1220-22.

Startling doctrinal developments took place in the wake of the Messiah's apostasy. These developments were many and various but they were ". . . all motivated by a similar purpose, namely, to rationalize the abyss that had suddenly opened between the objective order of things and that inward certainty which it could no longer serve to symbolize, and to render the tension between the two more endurable for those who continued to live with it."<sup>35</sup> These developments were, of course, congruent with dissonance theory.

Of all the responses to Sabbatai's apostasy perhaps the most significant from our point of view was the docetic one. Some of Sabbatai's followers believed that the Messiah had not apostatized at all but had been assumed into heaven. A contemporary source described this view as a belief ". . . that *Sabbatai* is not turned Turk, but his shadow only remains on Earth, and walks with a white head, and in the habit of a Mahometan; but his body and soul are taken into Heaven, there to reside until the time appointed for the accomplishment of these wonders. . . ."<sup>36</sup> Here we note both the persistence of prophecy—Sabbatai will be manifested in his glory at a future time—and the development of strikingly new cognitions.

Our sources do not allow us to say how many of those who persisted in their faith adopted this view or for how long. But we do have evidence here of just how creative a deeply held faith can be. Also, *prima facie*, it would seem easier to develop the idea that a dead man has been raised to heaven than that a live one has been—a dead person offers less evidence to the contrary! If some of the Sabbatians came to believe that their leader had been assumed into heaven, we ought to allow the possibility of a comparable development after the crucifixion.

My conclusion, therefore, is that perhaps the origins of the resurrection belief are to be found in a failure of prophecy. It is at least possible that in order to maintain their eschatological expectations, which centered on Jesus, the disciples were led to assert a continuing role for their dead leader, using in some form current beliefs about postmortem existence.

It may be objected that this conclusion is a common-sense one and that in order to reach it the New Testament scholar does not need to draw upon the work of social psychologists or the history of religion. My answer to this is that many scholars have claimed that disciples, left to their own resources, could not have responded to the crucifixion by developing the belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. In so doing, they are obviously making certain assumptions about human behavior. It has been my purpose to suggest that these assumptions are of dubious value, since they do not square with important findings from outside the sphere of New Testament studies.

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<sup>35</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, trans. Michael A. Meyer and Hillel Halkin (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (n. 23 above), p. 703; cf. p. 605; see also p. 723 for evidence that this view was held at one time by Sabbatai's brother, Elijah.

### **ACTS 5:34-39**

<sup>34</sup> But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. <sup>35</sup> Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. <sup>36</sup> For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. <sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. <sup>38</sup> So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"

### **MAIMONIDES 12th Century MISHNEH TORAH; LAWS OF KINGS CHAPTER 11**

But it is beyond the human mind to fathom the designs of the Creator; for our ways are not His ways, neither are our thoughts His thoughts. All these matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelit (Mohammed who came after him, only served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord, as it is written, "For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent" (Zeph. 3:9). Thus the Messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics— topics of conversation (among the inhabitants) of the far isles and many peoples, uncircumcised of heart and flesh. They are discussing these matters and the commandments of the Torah. Some say, "Those commandments were true, but have lost their validity and are no longer binding"; others declare that they had an esoteric meaning and were not intended to be taken literally; that the Messiah has already come and revealed their occult significance. But when the true King Messiah will appear and succeed, be exalted and lifted up, they will forthwith recant and realize that they have inherited naught but lies from their fathers, that their prophets and forebears led them astray.