



**Edjan Westerman: *Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations:
Learning to Read God's Way Anew***

"In *Learning Messiah*, E J Westerman invites—and equips—us to learn the entire biblical narrative, from creation to consummation, anew. He guides us in reading this vast narrative with Israel and its priestly calling at the very center, from the beginning until now, and into the Age to Come. *Learning Messiah* boldly explores the role of Messiah Yeshua as High Priest and King of the Jews, along with the ramifications of that role not only for biblical theology, but also for biblical living among those who profess faith in him. Westerman explores all this with an evident love for the people Israel, for the Jewish people and their way of life throughout history. It's altogether fitting for *Learning Messiah* to be introduced to the followers of Messiah Yeshua living and serving in the Land of Israel today."

**Rabbi Russ Resnik, editor
*Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism***

"Edjan Westerman, now retired, has served as a pastor in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. With *Learning Messiah*, he joins the postsupersessionist discussions now taking place in academic circles. The book has been enthusiastically endorsed by Kendall Soulen, Mark Kinzer, Richard Harvey, and others who are involved in the conversation — the latter two are Messianic Jews — and so I thought I'd better have a look. I'm glad I did. ...

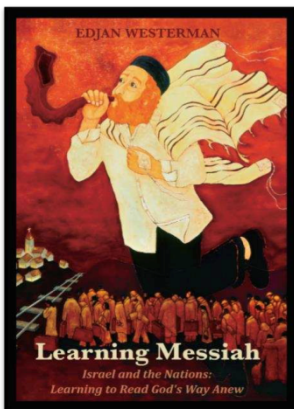
I am glad to see that Edjan Westerman recognizes the contributions of Messianic Jews at several points throughout his book. As a North American, I am also grateful to hear from a European perspective. The book's focus on narrative plausibly shows what a postsupersessionist perspective can look like when applied to the entire storyline of the Bible; others in the postsupersessionist discussion may write the story differently. I commend *Learning Messiah* as stimulating, paradigm-challenging, forward-looking, and thought-provoking."

Rich Robinson,

Learning Messiah: A Review, Mishkan 82: Spring 2020.

Rich Robinson is a senior researcher with *Jews for Jesus*, USA.

"... a recent release by Dutch Christian theologian Edjan Westerman deserves particular attention. In *Learning Messiah*, Westerman endeavors to unveil the collective blindness that has characterized Christian reading of the Bible as it relates to the Jewish people. ...



Echoing Kendall Soulen's diagnosis of the church's flawed canonical narrative, Westerman offers a thorough and thoughtful treatment of "the deep, underlying, foundational relationships between God, His Messiah, and Israel." Also in line with Soulen's thought, Westerman approaches Scripture through a "creation-consummation" lens, following the trajectory of God's work through the people of Israel as God's means for bringing the world to completion.

This departs from standard Christian biblical interpretation, which tends to employ a "sin-salvation" lens, often relegating most of the Old Testament and the people of Israel to a mere extended illustration of humanity's sinfulness and need for a savior. In an impressive work of biblical theology, Westerman demonstrates compellingly that the coming of Jesus and the New Testament

can only be rightly understood as the outworking of God's covenant with Israel and its particular contours."

**Jennifer Rosner – *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism*.
Issue 38: Winter/Spring 2021.**

Jennifer Rosner is Affiliate Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary; she teaches also at the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute and The King's University.

Learning Messiah serves as a required text book for the Tanakh course at The King's University, Southlake, TX, USA

Learning Messiah can be ordered through The Bible Society in Israel, 17 Jaffa Street, Jerusalem, POB 44, Jerusalem 91000 ; Phone: +972-2-6251849

For more about the book and its reception visit: www.learningmessiah.com or www.messiasleren.nl . For contact through e-mail: ejwesterman@hetnet.nl

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Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations:

Learning to Read God's Way Anew

by Edjan Westerman

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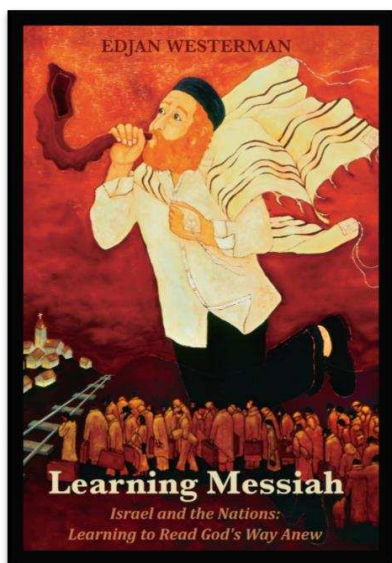
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New Title from Edjan Westerman

Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations: Learning to Read God's Way Anew

Israel's election, calling, and history make up a big part of Scripture. It could be said that they belong to the "DNA of the Bible." But why is it then that the Christian narrative about the Messiah, Israel, and the nations, often seemed to have and sometimes even still has a different "genetic structure"?



Does Israel—together with its election and promises—leave God's stage through a side door, when Jesus appears on stage? Does a changing of roles take place, within a different story? Does the Messiah function within it as some kind of "black hole" in which the eternal election and calling of Israel disappear?

How do we read God's way?

The Holocaust made us realize that our de-Jew-ized reading and preaching of Scripture contributed in various ways to this catastrophe.

And we find ourselves confronted by the question: How does the narrative of the Bible then look when the whole of Scripture plays a decisive role, and the faithfulness of God toward Israel stays in the center?

This book presents an answer to these questions, calling us to learn to read God's way anew, and to walk in it.

Edjan Westerman studied at the Theological Faculty of the Free University, Amsterdam (Old and New Testament). Following a period as a staff worker for the Dutch branch of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, he served as a pastor within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The Dutch edition of Learning Messiah appeared in 2015, and was welcomed by a broad readership from all denominations. To find out more, also visit www.learningmessiah.com.



Interview with Edjan Westerman

Could you characterize your book in one sentence?

Against the dark background of nearly 2000 years de-Jew-ized reading of Scripture this book forms a kind of biblical theological study of the prevailing Christian narrative about the Messiah, Israel and the nations. It offers a comparison between the "genetic structure" of the traditional canonical narrative and the "genetic structure" of the Scriptures. It shows the necessity of us learning to read God's ways anew, in a new manner.

What do you mean with "genetic structure" of Scripture and the Christian narrative?

Israel's election, calling and history make up a big part of Scripture. It could be said that they belong to the "DNA of the Bible." But when we ask people to summarize the message of Scripture, we very easily end up with a synopsis in which this "DNA of the Bible" is not to be found. History is also filled with examples thereof. Our Christian narrative thus seems to have a different "DNA," a different "genetic structure."

Could you focus somewhat more on the problems of this difference in "DNA"?

The history of theology and interpretation of Scripture has shown, that, when we think that it is possible to narrate the story of Scripture, while leaving out the DNA-components of Israel's election, calling and its God-given history, we become twisted in our views of God, His Messiah, and His ways with Israel and the nations. At that, the faithfulness of God is at stake too, and the Messiah mostly functions then within our narrative as some kind of "black hole" in which the eternal election and calling of Israel disappear. And don't think that this was something of the past, for we can observe this still happening today.

Do we then need to learn to tell the story of the Scriptures in a new manner?

Certainly! And this is an arduous task, because we are so used to our age old paradigms of reading and narrating. The question we face is: How does the narrative of the Bible really sound when the whole of Scripture plays a decisive

role, and the faithfulness of God toward Israel continually stays in the center? In order to be able to tell this Scripture story we really need to learn to read Scripture in a new manner, and we must learn to understand the person and meaning of the Messiah from within the streambed of the whole of God's revelation given to Israel.

How can your book help in this learning process?

It provides a rendering of the narrative of Scripture to which the faithfulness of God is central, and from which every bit of replacement thinking/supersessionism has been removed, so that also the underlying structure of the narrative is marked by God's faithfulness toward His elected people. It thus offers an alternative to the traditional Christian narrative, that so often has been characterized by replacement thinking and supersessionist narrative structures. The book also shows what consequences a new rendering of the canonical narrative has.

In what ways differs your book from other books in this genre?

It challenges the whole Christian faith community to learn to read in a new manner the ways of the God of Israel, and to reconsider one's own long held opinions regarding the ways that God has walked and still walks. At the same time it offers one continuing story in which God, Israel and the Messiah, as well as the nations, the journey of the whole of Israel through the centuries, and the ways of the Christian church underway toward God's future have been brought together. It helps readers to rediscover this ongoing story and to learn to tell it themselves.

Is it a book just for scholars?

No not at all! The book has been written in such manner that not only theologically educated readers could read it and benefit from it. In the words of Prof. Dr. R. Kendall Soulen: "Learning Messiah by Edjan Westerman is a full scale biblical theology ... A wonderful theological treatise: accessible, insightful, detailed, engaging, and often profound ... very few such works exist in any language ... It is a text that could be read by lay, clergy, and divinity students."

Is it a book just for Christians or could also others, par example Jewish readers, benefit from it?

Learning Messiah wishes to serve the worldwide Christian church. It is a book that invites Christians of whatever denomination or spiritual color to join looking in the mirror and to act upon what we see. Other readers, however, also my Jewish friends, are invited to see themselves as looking over my (and our collective) Christian shoulder, and to encounter and witness in this manner a thorough reconsideration happening on our side. So yes, this book is first written for Christians, but my hope is that it will contribute to improving and deepening an encounter with Judaism and God's people Israel as a whole.

Since this English edition is a translation of the Dutch original of 2015, you have experienced already reactions to the book. How have they been?

It shows that a broad readership from all denominations, both scholarly and non-theologically trained readers appreciates the book and what it stands for. It is being studied in groups, has been put on a recommended reading list for RC-priests students in the Southern part of the Netherlands, and plays a role in preparation for study tours to Israel, to give some examples. It has received endorsements from all denominational backgrounds (found at www.learningmessiah.com).

Of course also discussion has been generated, since the book challenges long held patterns of thought and a deep-rooted paradigm.

An Excerpt from Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations: Learning to Read God's Way Anew

(1.5) A narrative in which Israel functions only as the “manger” from which the Christ has to appear—a crib that can be discarded afterwards when it is no longer needed—ultimately contributes to the discarding of the people of God. If the election of Israel as God’s own people and God’s choice of the land and the city of Jerusalem are not eternal and permanent, than of course the Messiah, Jesus Christ, also has nothing to do with the people, the land, and the city. In that case nations and also Christians until today can behave as they please with regard to the Promised Land and the promised city. The return of God’s people to the land is then not an act of God fulfilling His promises and there is no biblical fundament for Zionism. Israel becomes just a people like all other peoples, although they had a special history. (...) In such a narrative the prideful arrogance can take its own course. The receiving of blessing out of Zion has given way to some sort of de- Jew-ized salvation. When the Christian confession of the incarnation means the end to the mediation of salvation through Israel and a new divine beginning of an universally oriented salvation, than the clinging of Israel to its own election is resistance to the Most High God Himself.

(15.2) The words of John (...) speak of the “incarnation” of the Word. Often this “incarnation,” literally “enfleshment,” has been interpreted from within dogmatic categories marked by the antithesis of God and man, Spirit and flesh. John, however, speaks of an “enfleshment” within Israel. (...) (God) wishes to be there and to reveal His glory in their midst. At Sinai He uttered this wish and granted His people His Presence. In a manner unknown until now, the (...) people again receives the Indwelling of God: the flesh of Israel, in the actual body of Yeshua/Jesus, is the place of His indwelling. This “enfleshment” shows that God did not choose a totally different route with respect to the gospel of Yeshua/Jesus. God would never walk in ways that invalidated His previously-spoken words. This “enfleshment” in Israel means that both Israel’s election and calling are completely assumed and confirmed. The manner of God’s dealings with Israel remains valid.

(16.9) In all things He is the Firstling. Before anything else He is the Firstling of Israel, the firstling of the “harvest” of Pessaḥ in the land. His resurrection means

that on His behalf there is also passage for Israel, a passage from the death of sin to life. This also implicates the fulfillment of the promise of the return from the diaspora to the land. His resurrection means (...) a nearing to the complete fulfillment of the calling the people received at Sinai. Here everything hinges on a full understanding of the meaning of the "enfleshment in the flesh of Israel." In this He has been appointed by God as the First one, the Firstling and substitute for Israel. By it He ultimately draws the whole people after Him as He breaks through before them. In Him the fulfillment of all promises for Israel precedes the fulfillment of all promises for the nations and creation. Here also it is "first the Jew and then the Gentile."

As the Firstling of the nations, however, as Israel-in-One He also is the representative of the offspring of Adam, that is, the nations. (...) Therefore to the nations He too can show the way ... (of serving God).

**Praise for Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations:
Learning to Read God's Way Anew**

"This new volume by Edjan Westerman is an impressive and ambitious rereading of the bible as a whole, with the aim of articulating its coherent narrative in a way that does justice to the enduring significance of the Jewish people and to the unique salvific role of Jesus. While demonstrating knowledge of scholarly currents, Westerman presents his material in a popular and accessible fashion."

**—Mark S. Kinzer,
President Emeritus of the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute**

"E. J. Westerman has written a very important book that revolutionizes our understanding of both Israel and the church. In the case of the latter, a more deeply rooted biblical identity of the church arises on the basis of a new canonical approach to biblical theology. This new canonical approach restores the ongoing meaning of Israel to God's purpose in creation and consummation and hence the unity of purpose for Israel and the church."

**—Daniel C. Juster,
director of Tikkun Ministries International**

"Ever since the Holocaust Christian theologians have reexamined previous Christian thinking about Israel. Most have rejected one aspect of supersessionism, that which posited an end to God's covenant with the Jewish people. Now theologians are wrestling with Israel as a body politic, and its role in God's story of the peoples of his creation. EJ Westerman provides us with a retelling of the biblical story in which Israel and her Messiah are at the center. This retelling sheds much new light on not only the Bible but the meaning of Israel and the nations. This is an important and helpful book for Christian theology, the Church, and Israel today."

**—Gerald R. McDermott,
Beeson Divinity School/Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama**

