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JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS
AS REFLECTED IN JACOB BEN REUBEN'S MILCHAMOT HA-SHEM

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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PREFACE

My interest in Jewish-Christian relations in the middle ages grows out of my personal experience as a Jew living in a non-Jewish society. From childhood on I found myself defending my commitment to Judaism in the presence of my Christian friends. Looking back on those early years, I realize how interfaith discussions forced me to evaluate and clarify my stance as a Jew.

In medieval times our ancestors were faced with a similar challenge. However, their conversations with Christians had far-reaching effects. Jewish-Christian encounters in past centuries had to take into account the Christian intent to convert the Jew to Christianity. During my childhood none of my Christian friends entertained such a notion. Yet now the times appear to be changing. While friendly intellectual dialogue continues in many circles, the American Jewish community must also face a growing challenge from proselytizing Christians. It is with this recognition that the following paper is presented. While this work by Jacob ben Reuben has been available in Hebrew, it is my hope that its arguments and ideas will now receive attention from an English speaking audience.

In preparing this paper I have received assistance from many quarters. My thesis advisor and learned professor Martin A. Cohen has guided me through the year-long process of analyzing and evaluating primary and secondary sources.

Taking into account my often erratic travel schedule, he has made himself available by phone, letter and in person. His guidance, particularly in the process of preparing this paper, made the experience smoother and easier.

Special thanks also go to my reader and editor, Rabbi Gary Glickstein. He put in many hours to help make this a clear and concise paper. While any criticism of the content of this paper must be addressed to the writer alone, Rabbi Glickstein's efforts have made it easier to perceive that content.

To my special friends, Judi and Paul Reichenbach, must go a large measure of thanks. Their presence at 60 Riverside Drive in New York made my time away from home easier to bear. Paul's sense of humor and Judi's typing skills made the completion of this paper seem effortless. Little Sara added comic relief.

Lastly, to my life's partner, Peter A. Weinrobe, I owe the greatest debt. He was always ready to listen and advise, encouraging me without pushing. He has made our marriage a warm and wonderful haven from all pressures and crises. His endless patience made all the difference.

Debra R. Hachen
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INTRODUCTION

Jacob ben Reuben's Milchamot Ha-shem (מלחמות השם) presents one of the earliest and most vituperative attacks on Christianity by a medieval Jew. According to three of the extant manuscripts,¹ Jacob ben Reuben wrote this work in 1170. It is known under various titles, including ספר המלחמות, ספר המלחמה, and ספר המלחמה והמלחמה.² The author himself refers to it as ספר המלחמה והמלחמה at the end of his introduction.³

Before World War II manuscripts of this work existed in the British Museum, Breslau, Leningrad, Oxford, Paris and Vienna. After the war the Leningrad and Breslau manuscripts were missing.

Several publishers in the middle to late nineteenth century printed parts of Milchamot Ha-shem. These sections included the Introduction, part of Chapter II, part of Chapter V, Chapter XII, and bits and pieces of other chapters. In 1913 Adolf Posnanski finished preparation of the entire work for publication. He died before seeing the fruit of his labors. His work was later deposited at the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus.⁴ A full Hebrew edition edited and introduced by Judah Rosenthal was published in 1963 through Mosad Harav Kook. It is the critical edition to which later scholars refer.⁵

There were several authors with the name Jacob ben Reuben living around the twelfth century.⁶ First, there was the Karaite author who wrote ספר המלחמות, a commentary on Later Prophets and Writings. This could not be the same

person because the author of Milchamot Ha-shem quotes from Rabbanite scholars and sources which a Karaite would never mention.

Another Jacob ben Reuben is the author of a book on מלחמת ירושלים also called by the title תולדות ירושלים. Only eleven pages of this book are extant. Little is known of this writer, and it is possible that he is the same as the Jacob ben Reuben of Milchamot Ha-shem. Within the text of Milchamot Ha-shem, Jacob ben Reuben refers to having explained Psalm 23 in another place.⁷ Since it was not mentioned elsewhere in Milchamot Ha-shem, he must have meant it was in another work. This could very well be תולדות ירושלים. There was also a person called יחזקאל הכהן (Jacob the Poet), who travelled extensively, ending up in Morocco. He was also called יחזקאל, a name used for Jacob ben Reuben in one of the Milchamot Ha-shem manuscripts.

According to two of the Milchamot Ha-shem manuscripts,⁸ Jacob ben Reuben was born in 1150. Another manuscript gives 1136 as his year of birth.⁹ Jacob ben Reuben himself notes that he is young to be writing such a work when he states that he is not well-suited for the task כי אני איש צעיר ("because of the ignorance of youth").¹⁰ Throughout the work the author refers to himself as one who has learned from the סופרים (sages) and גדולי (great ones) of his generation. The 1150 date fits such evidence, making him twenty years old when he wrote this work.

Jacob ben Reuben's place of birth and residence at the

time he composed this work are unknown. In the Introduction he writes of events having occurred when he was in the region of *ל'ק'ל'ע* in exile.¹¹ Although it is clear that he came to this place from another region, he does not mention his present location by name. Various manuscripts spell this name as *ל'ק'ל'ע*, *ל'ק'ל'ע*, *ל'ק'ל'ע*, or *ל'ק'ל'ע*.¹² Henri Gross in Gallia Judaica identifies the location with Huesca, Spain which is normally written in Hebrew as *ק'ל'ע* or *ק'ל'ע*.¹³ Rosenthal feels the manuscript spellings have more in common with Gascony in Southern France. One way to approach the question of Jacob ben Reuben's residence at the time of Milchamot Ha-shem's composition is to look at the various contemporary sources and scholars mentioned in the work. Ibn Ezra is quoted and mentioned by name in the text. It is known that Ibn Ezra travelled in Southern France around 1147, visiting the region of Provence, proceeding to Northern France, and returning in 1161 to Narbonne in Provence.¹⁴ Since Gascony borders on the region of Provence, Ibn Ezra's writings could easily have spread from one location to the other over a short period of time. A young man studying in Gascony in the 1160's could have had access to Ibn Ezra's work.

Jacob ben Reuben also mentions the physician and writer Joseph ben Meir Ibn Zabara. Ibn Zabara was born around 1140 in Barcelona. He travelled extensively in Spain and in Provence.¹⁵ During these travels it is possible that Jacob ben Reuben met him. It is also possible that Ibn Zabara's earliest writings reached Gascony before the writing of Milchamot Ha-shem.

It is possible that Jacob ben Reuben was originally in Spain, moved to France during the expulsion by Almohades, then returned to Spain at a later date. This would follow the pattern of the more famous Tibbon and Kimhi families.¹⁶

However, Jacob ben Reuben's place of residence is less important than the audience for which he wrote. Whether in Gascony or Huesca, his Jewish audience was the same. His fellow Jews in both locations were confronted with the identical challenge: Christian proselytizing of Jews. As Jacob ben Reuben himself viewed it: *כִּפּוּר חַ"ג דְּסִפּוּר דְּעוֹנוֹת יִהְיֶה וְיִקְרָא רַחֲמֵי* *דְּרַבִּי יוֹרְגֵי דְּמַחְשָׁבָה דְּעוֹנוֹת יִהְיֶה*.¹⁷ ("We have to explain Christian errors and words to the masses of our people, because not all of them are wise enough in the depths of their minds.") To this end Jacob ben Reuben composed Milchamot Ha-shem, consisting of an introduction and twelve chapters. The work's structure is straightforward. The first chapter deals with rational arguments about Christian and Jewish doctrines. The following nine chapters analyze passages from the Hebrew Bible which the Christians use as proofs of their beliefs. Chapter XI is the author's direct attack on the New Testament, emphasizing the Gospel of Matthew. In the final chapter the author clearly states his beliefs about Judaism and the coming of the messiah.

Jacob ben Reuben sets the stage for his work by describing his encounter with a priest learned in both theology and philosophy.¹⁸ At this priest's insistence, Jacob ben Reuben responds to theological questions. The first ten chapters of the work

are organized as the record of the debate between this Christian and Jacob ben Reuben. The priest is called *q̄h̄n̄n̄* (the Denier) by the author, while he calls himself *q̄h̄'n̄n̄* (the Unifier, or Believer in one God). While the Denier begins each section of the debate, the Believer does more than just answer the challenges. He often brings in new points of debate. The author at times interrupts the debate to give a short introduction to some new issue. At these points he refers to himself as *ḡh̄n̄n̄*, the editor. In the last two chapters, where Jacob ben Reuben completely takes the offensive, he drops the dialogue form and writes directly from his own point of view.

The following chapters will examine the discussion between the Believer and the Denier. This discussion is divided into three parts. The first part consists of the controversy over proper exegesis of texts. The second is an examination of Christian doctrines with their refutations by Jacob ben Reuben. The concluding chapter discusses Jacob ben Reuben's knowledge of various sources, his style, and his purpose in creating this work.

CHAPTER ONE

As previously mentioned, the first ten chapters of Milchamot Ha-shem are in the form of a dialogue between a Christian called הַדֹּנֵי, the Denier, and the Jew referred to as הַבּוֹטֵחַ, the Believer. The major portion of the discussion between these two characters focuses on exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. This work contains some criticism of the New Testament found toward the close of Milchamot Ha-shem as an addendum to the dialogue between the two characters.

While the central chapters are divided according to the order of the books of the Hebrew Bible, verses from any Biblical book are interspersed among the various chapters. Several major exegetical themes permeate the discussion. The author's first concern is to bring out the difference between the literal exegesis of Bible and a more figurative, even allegorical, approach. The second aim of the author is to refute Christian claims that Biblical passages refer to Jesus. The author's final point is that Jesus has not fulfilled obvious prophetic passages.

The author clearly identifies the Jewish exegesis as a literal form of Biblical interpretation. While according to the Believer some allegory is acceptable in Jewish circles, the overwhelming approach is to emphasize the פשוט (the literal meaning) of a Biblical passage. The Christians, on the other hand, look for faults or contradictions within a literal approach so that they may buttress a more figurative stance.

The Jewish response to Christian interpretation re-establishes the logic and consistency of the passages in their literal sense.

Milchamot Ha-shem presents five cases which demonstrate the proper Jewish response to Christian allegorical interpretation. In the first instance the Denier claims there is a contradiction in the second chapter of Genesis when God first allows man to eat from all trees (Gen.2:16) and then forbids eating from the tree of knowledge (Gen.2:17).¹⁹ The Believer explains that this is simply the way of human speech which cannot give both commands simultaneously.²⁰ As we read, we should understand these verses as if God commanded the two together: the general given simultaneously with the exception.

The second example is when the Denier points out a contradiction between Genesis 1:31 and Leviticus 11.²¹ In the first verse God calls all creatures *ṭob meod* (very good), but in Lev. 11 God labels some as *toev* (defiled or impure). The Denier understands this allegorically: all creatures are very good when it comes to eating them, but some are defiling to use as work animals.²² The pig is given as an example of this two-fold approach. The Believer answers that there are four ways one can defeat the Denier's approach.²³ The first he attributes to Ibn Ezra, namely that within each individual created thing one finds mostly good. Therefore God could say all were "very good" while each may still have contained some bad qualities. The second refutation is to understand "very good" as referring to the majority of all creatures when they are

added together. The sum of creation then is mostly good. The third answer is that paired opposites are necessary in order for us to identify and appreciate the good in the world. That is, for good to exist there must be evil. The Believer's last answer is a refutation of the Denier's allegorical solution concerning the pig. In Leviticus 11:8 God specifically forbade the eating of pig.²⁴ Christians cannot change direct Biblical commands. A second explanation concerning the issue of the pig is that whatever is forbidden to sacrifice is also forbidden to eat. This would also prohibit the eating of pig. At this juncture the author turns from the Bible to attack Christians more severely. He notes that even the Moslems forbid the eating of the pig, leaving the Christians as the minority in this custom. Finally, the Believer notes that the dog and the pig are treated as parallels within the Bible. He then rhetorically asks why the Christians do not encourage the eating of dog.²⁵

A third argument put forward by the Denier is the seeming contradiction between God commanding Moses to build the altar a certain way and Moses taking it upon himself to change the materials and the size of the altar.²⁶ Christians understand this to be an allegory showing that the proper way to worship God can change, and that the Christians now possess that proper way. The Believer bases his defense of the literal interpretation on three points.²⁷ First, Moses is only following commands as given by God in Exodus 27:1-2 and Exodus 30:1-2. This shows he must build two different altars. Moses does not

deviate from God's commands. Secondly, the Believer points out God's ⁸⁷⁶777, acting in a way to make the command more palatable and acceptable to people. God first asks only for an earthen altar. He then allows stone to be used as long as it was not hewn stone. Lastly, God allows the people to incorporate precious materials in the altar under the rubric of a free-will offering. Therefore God did not change His mind about the composition of the altar, but rather revealed His plan slowly. The Believer bases his last argument on the practical use of the two altars. The Christian questioned the difference in the size of the two altars Moses built. The Believer explains that one was for animals which needed more room, the other for spices which required less space.²⁸

The fourth case in which the Christians question the literal approach is understanding Deuteronomy 22:10 in which God forbids using the ox and ass to plow together.²⁹ The Denier asks why other kinds of cooperation are allowed between these two animals since they are a mixture of a ^{16N6} (defiling) animal and a ¹⁷⁷⁶ (pure) one. Secondly, the Denier wants to know why only these two animals are mentioned. The Denier's own answer is to interpret this allegorically. He explains that animals are often considered to represent leadership types. The Deuteronomy passage indicates that there are certain kinds of people who should not be leaders, the ^{16N6} (defiling) types. The Denier explains that he is basing this argument on Paul's³⁰ exegesis of the rules found in Lev.11:2-8 regarding animals.³¹ The Believer explains that God's mercy

is behind this commandment.³² Since the ox chews its cud, the ass would suffer from hunger while they stood side-by-side working together plowing. All other kinds of work can be done together because one would be in front of the other, so the ass would not see the ox "eating." The Believer also corrects the Denier about animals being *ḵn̄* or *ḵn̄*. He explains that live animals have no such qualities; animals can only defile when they are dead.³³

The last case juxtaposes God prohibiting idol-making (Ex.20:3-4) and God commanding Moses to make a snake idol (Numbers 21:8).³⁴ The Christian allegorical solution sees the snake as a symbol of sin. Since only a snake can defeat a snake, Jesus must take that form to defeat sin. When Moses makes the snake image he is really presenting Jesus to the people as their savior from sin. When the people demonstrate their belief in the snake, Jesus heals them. For the Denier the pole on which the snake symbol is placed is a clear reference to the cross on which Jesus died. The Believer first refutes this by explaining what the prohibition of idol-making really meant. The prohibition did not include any rule against making decorative forms.³⁵ It forbade any form intended as an object of worship. To the Believer the snake represents the punishment God brought upon the people. The purpose of the snake symbol was to induce the people to recognize that God has the power to heal just as He has the power to harm.³⁶ The placing of the snake on the pole was not to represent a cross, but rather to force the people to look upward in recognition of

God's power over them.

The author's second area of concern in connection with Biblical exegesis is that of Biblical passages which Christians have traditionally interpreted as referring to Jesus. The majority of these are in the book of Isaiah, though other prophetic books and even some of the *כתובים* (Writings) are examined. The following paragraphs present the detailed arguments between the Denier and the Believer about such passages.

The earliest passage in Isaiah identified by the Denier as describing Jesus is Isa.11 which opens with, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Yishay, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."³⁷ The passage goes on to describe how this person will contain God's spirit. He will judge other people and mete out proper punishment. The Denier identifies the branch as Jesus, the savior and judge.³⁸ The Believer's response is threefold.³⁹ First, he points out that if one continues on in the chapter to verses 11-12, one finds that when this judge arrives, the remnant of Israel will be gathered from all over the world. Since that did not take place in Jesus' time, the rest of the chapter could not apply to him. Second, the message of the chapter is a consolation to the people of Israel after Asshur had destroyed so many of them. As a final response to this argument, the Believer agrees with one point the Denier makes, that verse six describing the wolf and lamb lying down together is meant as an allegory.

Another verse cited by the Denier⁴⁰ is Isa.28:16, "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious

corner stone...." The tried stone is identified with Jesus. The Believer's answer⁴¹ is to continue on with verses 17 and 18 which show that the coming of this tried stone heralds a time when death and destruction will come to destroy the wicked. The stone then brings death and not salvation, so if Jesus is the stone he is not a savior.

In Isa.30:20 the prophet describes a teacher, saying, "thy teacher shall not withdraw himself anymore, but thy eyes shall see thy teacher." To the Denier this is Jesus.⁴² The Believer⁴³ counters that the history of Jesus' own life contradicts such an application. Jesus did withdraw himself by originally fleeing from his people. Secondly, he was not a real teacher because he never taught the sages of Israel. Lastly, Jesus is labeled by the Believer as *ḥḏḗ ḡḡḥ*, a person lacking in intelligence. Taking all this into account, Jesus could not be the teacher in the verse.

The next citation is Isa.33:13-17 which describes the coming of a totally righteous king. While the Denier⁴⁴ says this is Jesus, the Believer⁴⁵ points out that in verse 14 the sinners are afraid of this king. If Jesus came to save sinners, would they not rejoice rather than fear him? The meaning according to the Believer is that only the righteous person will be able to see this king.

In Isa.42:1-4 we have the first case of a passage mentioning a servant (*ʔḡḏ*) is identified with Jesus.⁴⁶ In verses 1-3 the servant who brings judgment is described. In verse 4, the Christians read "and the isles wait for his Torah" as a

reference to the new law which Jesus brings to replace the old one. The Believer⁴⁷ refutes this by pointing out that the Denier has previously identified Jesus as a great and powerful figure, connecting him with Isa.35:4, "...your God will come with vengeance...." In Isa.42:1-4 the person is described as a humble servant. He cannot be both. Obviously the verses do not describe Jesus. Moreover, the Denier cannot take the plain word תּוֹרָה (Torah) and say that it now means a new Torah. The Torah is the same one given to Moses and it does not change. Lastly, the Believer presents the Jewish reading of these verses.⁴⁸ They describe the coming of Cyrus to power. The phrase "isles wait for Torah" indicates that strangers will also have a share in the Torah.⁴⁹

The Christian equation: Torah = new Torah, is continued in Isa.51:4-5 "for Torah will proceed from me."⁵⁰ Again the Believer says that the use of the word Torah does not mean a new Torah. And, if one continues in this chapter through verse 12, the sense of the chapter is that no mortal man can endure. Therefore applying this section to Jesus would be denying his immortality.

The crucial passages used by the Denier to identify Jesus as the "suffering servant" are found in Isaiah chapters 52 and 53. The Believer refutes this identification on five counts. First,⁵¹ there is the contradiction between verses there which describe Jesus as ugly and versus cited elsewhere by the Denier as showing Jesus' physical beauty. Two examples of such verses are Psalm 45:3, "fairer than the children of

men" and Jeremiah 11:16, "fair with goodly fruit." He cannot be both ugly and fair. Secondly, God's nature is to be always exalted.⁵² Though it is true that this ugly servant becomes exalted in Isa.52:13 and 14, "he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high," his visage remains marred (verse 15). God can never be marred, so this servant cannot be God. The Believer's third proof⁵³ is that Isa.53:3-4 refers to a man who is constantly ill, *נִרְמָז עָלָיו*. Jesus' history is not that of a sick man. Further, the illness and afflictions of the servant in Isaiah are caused by God. Jesus' afflictions were caused by men. A fourth counter to the servant being Jesus is that in Isa.53:4 it is clear that God has smitten this person.⁵⁴ If Jesus is God, this cannot fit. God cannot be smitten by God. Lastly, the fifth argument by the Believer points out the Jewish reading of *עַבְדִּי*, "my servant." It cannot apply to God because God is never anyone else's servant. It is the name God gives to Israel.

Another interesting application of an Isaiah passage to Jesus is 53:3-5 where the Denier focuses not on the servant nature of the person described but rather on his suffering bringing salvation to others.⁵⁵ The Believer points out that from within this passage one can see that Jesus' soul cannot save anyone else's soul. In 53:10 it reads, *וְעַל פִּלְעֵי נַפְשׁוֹ יִשְׁלַח*, "if his soul shall consider it a recompense for guilt," meaning he was a guilty person himself with an unclean soul. Then in 53:12 it says, "he has poured out his soul to death," meaning his soul itself dies.⁵⁶ The Believer asks how anyone

who is a sinner and whose soul dies can save other souls. If Christians take this to mean that the souls of other people depend on Jesus then there are other examples in the Bible where people's souls depended on other persons.⁵⁷ One example would be Gen.12:13 where Sarah has the power to save Abraham by lying and saying she was only his sister, as Abraham puts it, "and my soul shall live because of thee." Another case is Gen.19:19 when Lot indicates that he owes his life to the men who removed him from Sodom before the destruction saying, 'לְבַרְכָּתְךָ אֵלֹהִים אֲנִי יָדָעְתִּי כִּי אֵלֹהִים אַתָּה ("thy mercy which thou hast shown to me in saving my life"). So the servant's saving souls or lives in Isaiah does not make him divine.

In Isa.62:10-11 the Denier explains that the phrase *הִנֵּה יְשׁוּעָה* ("behold, they salvation comes") means "behold Jesus comes."⁵⁸ the Believer's answer is that one cannot change the word *יְשׁוּעָה* to *יֵשׁוּעַ*.⁵⁹ The Believer then points out Isa.63:1-3,⁶⁰ where the Denier reads *דָּמָא* as the color red which symbolized Jesus' blood pouring out for the people. First the Believer counters that one cannot change *דָּמָא* to *דָּמָא*. Further, in verses 2 and 3, it is other people's blood that gets sprinkled, not this person identified as Jesus. The Believer also attacks the Denier for taking up Jerome's error of always reading *דָּמָא* (blood) as *חַטֹּאת* (transgressions).⁶¹ The Believer even offers examples where this cannot be so. Lastly he points out that if the Denier extended this interpretation, Isa.63:6 would

mean that Jesus kills innocent people, for he "trods down people in anger" and "poured out their lifeblood upon the earth."⁶²

In one last Isaiah reference the Denier identifies Jesus through verses 65:1-5 and 65:8. The Denier⁶³ sees verses 1 and 2 as describing Jesus' attempts to seek out the people: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me...." In verse 8, he interprets the wine as referring to Jesus. The Believer's refutation is that firstly the wine can be understood in its literal sense, referring to a cluster of grapes that are the first fruits, therefore containing a special blessing.⁶⁴ Secondly, the Jewish reading of these verses is that God saves Israel.

The Denier's arguments move on to other books of the Bible: Psalms and prophetic works. However, there are a few comments on the Torah and other writings. In Deut. 18:15 the Denier⁶⁵ identifies Jesus as the prophet who "God will raise up to thee... from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like me...." The Denier says that Jesus is the one who most closely fits a Moses-like description, since he too was a lawgiver. The Believer refutes this, arguing that the new prophet described by Moses must also match Moses by being human and mortal.⁶⁶ If Jesus is this person, then Jesus is not divine. The phrase "like me" does not mean the new prophet will also be a lawgiver, but rather he will be a believable prophet.⁶⁷

In Daniel 9:24 there is reference to the coming of a prophet and the anointing of the Holy of Holies. The Denier

quotes this verse as reading *וְכָל הַיְּהוּדִים יִשְׁמְעוּ* ("when the Holy of Holies comes your messiahship will remain.") This the Denier applies to Jesus' messiahship. The masoretic text extant today reads *וְכָל הַיְּהוּדִים יִשְׁמְעוּ*. The Believer states that the Denier has a corrupt text. The Believer identifies⁶⁸ the error as coming from Augustine who added extra words to the verse.

The Denier then examines Proverb 4.⁶⁹ Here there is talk of the "Father's Son" giving instruction, even Torah. The Believer answers⁷⁰ by applying the continuation of the passage. This son clearly needed teaching (v.4) and needed to live by the law, as his father told him: *וְהָיָה לְךָ חַיִּים* ("keep my commandments and live"). Also, this son clearly had brothers. The Believer bases this point on v.3 where his text reads

'N/C 'JPD Q'H'I meaning the first or special one among the sons of my mother. The masoretic text we have today reads instead

'N/C 'JPD Q'H'I, "the only one is the sight of my mother."

There are several possible explanations for this difference. Jacob ben Reuben could have been working from a different text.⁷¹ He could have known the reading as we have it today, yet chosen to change the word because it fit the Christian argument too well. It is also possible that the text was in a state of flux and he chose a reading which fit his polemic. Research on twelfth century manuscript differences in Proverbs might answer this more definitively.

The Denier emphasizes passages in Psalms as identifying Jesus. He begins with Psalm 45. According to the Denier's

view,⁷² verse 3 describes Jesus' beauty, "Thou art fairer than the children of men." Verses 7-8 show Jesus' divinity, "Thy throne O God is for ever and ever...therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Lastly, the Denier read verses 10-12 as describing Jesus' mother, "upon thy right hand stands the queen in gold of Ofir...." One Jewish answer⁷³ is to point out that the Denier vacillates between describing Jesus' appearance as beautiful and as ugly. Secondly, the Believer points out the phrase in verse 8, *לֹא הָיָה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים*, "therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee." If Jesus were God himself, how could another god anoint him? Could another god control our God? Also, the throne mentioned is the throne from God, not God's own throne. Lastly the Believer cites verse 17 in which the person described in the preceding verses is referred to as having children. Since Jesus had no children, he cannot be the one described.

Psalms 46-50 are treated next. In 46:11 the Denier⁷⁴ takes the word *אֶרְאֶה* ("I will raise up") to mean *אֶרְאֶה* ("was lifted up"). This then would refer to Jesus' exaltation and sacrifice. He also applies 48:4-6 where kings are described as assembling: *יִשְׁמְעוּ* (witnessing). The Denier relates these to the kings who witnessed Jesus' birth. The Believer's answers are threefold.⁷⁵ First, *אֶרְאֶה* means going up not coming down. Therefore it cannot be used to mean God's coming down to be among the people or to be on earth. Secondly, the word does not have to mean witnessing an unusual event like the

birth of Jesus. The word is often used in connection with acts done by kings. Lastly, these kings do not fit with the ones witnessing Jesus' birth. Here in Psalms the kings are trembling, but why would they be afraid of Jesus? Also, the place they visit is Jerusalem, but Christian history places Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Either way, the kings do not fit a Christian interpretation.

In Psalm 68 two verses are applied to Jesus.⁷⁶ Verse 2 *אֵלֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים* is taken to mean Jesus' ascension. Verse 21 *אֵלֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים* is read to mean that Jesus can save us from the issues (*מִלְּבָב*) of death. The Believer⁷⁷ refutes this first on the grounds that the entire chapter is set at Sinai. He further points out that the Jewish reading of *מִלְּבָב* is that Torah laws can save the soul. This is not very clear but Jacob ben Reuben may be reading *מִלְּבָב* as "against death (are) the saving laws."

Psalm 72 describes a king and judge. The Denier⁷⁸ identifies him as Jesus, especially noting verse 6, "May he come down like rain upon the mown grass." Two verses are used by the Believer to disprove this connection.⁷⁹ Verse 1 begins with the word *מִלְּבָב*, which the Believer takes as meaning that the following verses describe Solomon. And, verse 11 says that "all kings fall down before him; all nations serve him." The Believer points out that this would well apply to Solomon at the height of his rule. It cannot apply to Jesus for only one nation, the Christian, bow to him or serve him.

The last two psalms the Denier cites are Ps.87 and Ps.110.⁸⁰

In the first, verse 5 says that $\text{אִישׁ-וְאִישׁ} \text{ עָלָה} \text{ עָלָה}$, literally "man and man was born in her" (referring to Zion). The Denier argues that the two references to עָלָה are a hint at Jesus' two parts: divine and human. The Jewish answer⁸¹ is that the grammar in the following verse shows the psalm is talking about a single person: "this man was born there." In Psalm 110:1 God says to someone "sit thou at my right hand." To the Denier this means Jesus. To the Believer, that would mean that the Son would have less power than God Himself, since the Son sits to one side. Therefore, Jesus could not be divine. Secondly, the Denier ignores the apparent meaning of the psalms as referring to David. The word שָׁבַע does not mean that David should come and sit at God's side, but rather that he should "remain" there. שָׁבַע also means "remain" in Deut.1:46 and Gen.13:18. Later verses of this same psalm reinforce the interpretation that it is talking of David whom God will protect from all his enemies.

A few other citations from various prophetic books are used by the Denier to prove that Jesus was predicted in the Hebrew Bible. Hosea 6⁸² in which verses 2 and 3 talk of being raised up on the third day is connected by the Denier to the resurrection of Jesus. The Believer⁸³ points out first that the Bible actually says $\text{וְהָיָה} \text{ וְהָיָה}$, meaning that he will raise us, not he will rise himself. The Believer then asks how Jesus could revive himself if he died. If he were truly dead he could not act to revive himself. If only his body died, as some Christians might claim, then the messiah was half-dead

and half-alive. The Believer finds this to be a ridiculous stance.

In Hosea 10:12 the Denier⁸⁴ takes the phrase *ה' י/ר/ד* to literally mean God will physically come to earth. The Believer⁸⁵ points out that the verb *י/ר/ד* does not have to mean a physical coming. Examples of more figurative uses of the word can be found in I Samuel 3:10, Isaiah 19:1, and Exodus 11:4.

Turning to the book of Jeremiah, the Denier cites two major passages.⁸⁶ In Jer.11:16 the olive tree is taken by the Denier as Jesus, as is the unknowing lamb being led to slaughter in verse 18. The Believer⁸⁷ answers that the olive tree is destroyed by God. That would mean that God destroyed Jesus purposefully and because He hated him. In regards to verse 18, if Jesus were divine, he could not be "unknowing" like the lamb mentioned there. God must be omniscient. As the Believer sees it, the burned olive tree means the punishment that will come to those who worship Baal. The lamb is the prophet Jeremiah himself, fleeing from the men of Anatot.

The second Jeremiah passage used by the Denier is Jeremiah 23. The chapter talks of a king who will be a descendant of David and whose name will be *יהוה י/ר/מיה* ("the Lord is our righteousness"). For the Denier this is a good example of the blending of the human and the divine in Jesus: he comes from David (human) but his name includes *יהוה* (divine). To the Believer⁸⁸ Jesus cannot fit the description in Jeremiah. First, the person described should save Judah and Israel, but

Jesus did neither. Secondly, the Believer suggests that the word אֱלֹהִים might not really be part of a name. If it is, it would not mean that the person had to be divine, for many names include God's name. As examples he cites Gen.35:7 and Ex.17:15. Lastly, from the whole passage it is clear to the Believer that this king has not yet come.

A few other prophetic passages are mentioned by the Denier. In Joel 2:23 he reads the word מִלְכָּם as meaning teacher.⁸⁹ (Its usual meaning is "the former rain.") This teacher is the messiah, Jesus. The Believer⁹⁰ holds that God is giving this מִלְכָּם , therefore the מִלְכָּם cannot be divine. If it is Jesus, then Jesus is not divine. This same argument is used to refute any reference to Jesus in Habakkuk 1:12⁹¹ where the Denier identifies "the established one" (יְהוָה) as Jesus. Since God established him, he himself cannot be all powerful and therefore cannot be divine.

Lastly, in Malachi 2:6 we read of a person upon whose lips is the Torah of truth, who turns away many from iniquity.⁹² The problem with calling this person Jesus is that in Malachi it is clearly a person who is a descendant of Levi. Jesus was supposed to be of the house of David.

To summarize, Jacob ben Reuben's criticism of Christian exegesis spells out the errors of the Denier. First, the Denier ignores the פְּשָׁט (simple meaning) of the verse in question. Then, verses he chooses to interpret as referring to Jesus conflict with other Biblical passages. Thirdly, the Denier takes phrases or verses out of context. He misreads

words and sometimes even adds words. He ignores the logical consequences of interpreting the verse a certain way.

In various places Jacob ben Reuben points out that certain prophecies that the messiah should have fulfilled are ignored by the Denier. While the author devotes more attention to this point at the end of the work, many instances are examined within the chapters dealing with exegesis. Events which should have occurred were Jesus the true messiah include: the people should have been ransomed (Isa.35:10);⁹³ trees should have grown in the wilderness (Isa.41:12-30)⁹⁴ people should have dwelt peacefully after his coming (Isa.30:20);⁹⁵ he should have trod upon other peoples' princes (Isa.41:25-27);⁹⁶ have ended all wars (Isa.2:4);⁹⁷ rebuilt Jerusalem (Isa.45:15);⁹⁸ been a king riding a donkey (Zech.9:9);⁹⁹ ruled from Bethlehem (Micah 5:1);¹⁰⁰ redeemed the people and the city (Isa.62:12);¹⁰¹ freed the captives (Isa.61:1);¹⁰² built the wastes (Isa.61:4);¹⁰³ redeemed Zion (Isa.59:19-20);¹⁰⁴ bound up Israel's breach (Isa.30:20);¹⁰⁵ saved Judah and Israel (Jer.23);¹⁰⁶ destroyed all the enemies (Zech.12:10).¹⁰⁷ None of these prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus.

The other part of Jacob ben Reuben's work which focuses on exegesis is his examination of Christian writings. All of chapter XI is the author's refutation and criticism of New Testament passages. He analyzes the following fourteen passages.

Matthew 1:1-16 presents the genealogy of Joseph who

married Mary, mother of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ Joseph's line is traced back to King David. The first criticism offered is that the few mothers mentioned in this genealogy are mostly negative female characters. They are Rahab, Tamar and the mother of Solomon (Bathsheba) who were adultresses, prostitutes, or tricksters. Mary then is included among evil women. Further, since Joseph is Davidic, Mary cannot be of the same tribe. A woman had to marry outside her tribe. Since the Christians claim that Joseph was not the progenitor of Jesus, the child cannot claim Davidic descent.

In Matthew 3:13-17 the Gospel talks of Jesus' baptism and of the spirit of God descending upon him. Jacob ben Reuben¹⁰⁹ points out that this would mean that Jesus lacked the holy spirit before he was baptized. He therefore could not be divine. Moreso, if Jesus were created out of the holy spirit, he should not have needed baptism.

The fasting of Jesus for forty days told in Matthew 4:1-11,¹¹⁰ depicts Jesus as famished. Satan challenges him to turn stones into bread and eat it for food. The author argues that the state of hunger would be impossible if Jesus were divine. Moreso, Moses was able to fast for forty days without becoming hungry, yet he was human.¹¹¹ So Jesus was not as great as Moses. Further, if Jesus were divine, he could have done what is described in verse 4: live on God's words. Lastly, this passage in Matthew suggests that one is not to test God. Jacob ben Reuben cites many instances where such testing occurred: Moses performed signs (Ex.4:1);

Elijah challenged God to light the altar fire (I King 18:24); Elisha tested God (II Kings 5:8); God commanded his own testing (Malachi 3:10); and Gideon tested God (Judges 6:37,39).

Jacob ben Reuben goes on to attack the Gospel in Matthew 5:33-39.¹¹² He accuses Jesus of both destroying the Torah and adding to it. The destruction occurs when Jesus tells the people not to use oaths containing God's name. This is directly contrary to the Bible which says *וְשָׁבַעְתָּ בְּשֵׁם יְיָ* ("and thou shalt swear by His name") in Deut.6:13. Jesus adds to the Torah by telling people to "turn the other cheek". This goes beyond the Biblical command of an eye for an eye. The author continues this same criticism of Jesus in Matt.5:43-44. Here Jesus again changes the law, adding a command to love one's enemies. Jacob ben Reuben points out four faults in this command. Firstly, it goes against Lev.19:18 which specifies only loving "thy neighbor as thyself." Secondly, a statement like Jesus' shows that he rejects the Torah as a Torah of mercy. By this, Jacob ben Reuben probably means that Jesus misreads the Torah, for otherwise he would find mercy within it and not need to invent new laws outside of it. Thirdly, he notes that this law has not helped the Christians because they still fight with each other. Lastly, he accuses Jesus of encouraging the Christians to do "forbidden things" in their churches as a result of this law. It is not clear exactly what ritual acts the author refers to here. Perhaps he means the persecution or forced baptism of Jews.

A short comment on Matt.11:25-27¹¹³ notes that when Jesus

thanks the "Father" for hiding certain ideas from the learned, and revealing them to the simple, and for entrusting knowledge to the "Son," the Gospel is admitting that there is a separation between the knowledge of the "Father" and the knowledge of the "Son." Jacob ben Reuben builds much on this kind of separation in other places where he seeks to show that the trinity cannot be a unity.¹¹⁴

Turning to Matt.12:1-8,¹¹⁵ one reads the story of Jesus allowing his disciples to eat from the fields on Shabbat, a practice that clearly breaks Jewish law. Jesus defends this practice on the grounds that David had once eaten sacred bread which he should not have touched. He also defends himself on the grounds that the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, yet are held innocent. Jacob ben Reuben criticizes this passage on four counts. First, if Jesus were divine he should have forbidden his disciples acting this way on the Sabbath, based on the commandment in the Torah to work six days and rest on the seventh.¹¹⁶ The second criticism is of Jesus' attempts to base this action on David's breaking the law. Jacob ben Reuben points out that David's act was punished by his having to flee. Also, David acted only once: he did not try to change the law. Further, if Jesus were to allow imitation of David even when David broke the law, Jesus would have to allow adultery! As a third criticism of this passage, Jacob ben Reuben shows that the law concerning fire did not apply to the priest. In Ex.35:3 the commandment is to have no fire *אש בכל מקומותיכם* (in all your dwellings).

Since the sanctuary was not the priests' dwelling, the law did not apply there. Lastly, Jacob ben Reuben accuses Jesus again of adding to Moses' words. He changes a law handed down by Moses, even though in another place in the Gospel (Matt.5:17) Jesus claims he did not come to abolish the law.

Another internal contradiction is brought up by Matt.8:1-4¹¹⁷ in which Jesus commands a leper whom he has cured to go and make the proper sacrifice. This contradicts other passages of the New Testament. It contradicts Matt.9:13 where Jesus says that mercy, not sacrifice, is required of people. Jesus also tells the leper to keep the matter secret. This contradicts three other places in the New Testament where he commands people to spread the word (Luke 8:39, Mark 5:18-20, and Matt.10:32).

In Matt.26:36-39 Jesus is praying to God. Jacob ben Reuben spells out five problems with this.¹¹⁸ How can God pray to God? If Jesus were divine, how could he be afraid? If one tries to say that only the body was afraid while the soul was not afraid, this cannot be. It is assumed that when a body is in pain, the soul is also in pain. Jesus himself admits that his soul is involved when he tells his disciple: "אני נפשי נדא עד מוות" (my soul is grieved unto death). Why does Jesus complain about his impending death when so much is said about him taking on this act willingly? Finally, the passage implies that Jesus lacks the power to save himself. Jacob ben Reuben points out that the men in the Daniel story were saved

by their faith alone, and Jesus therefore is not as good as they were (Dan.3:27).

In Matt.21:19 Jacob ben Reuben finds an indication that Jesus is lacking in many ways.¹¹⁹ In this story Jesus sees a fig tree from afar, but when he approaches it he finds no fruit. He curses it and it withers away. This shows that Jesus was not divine, for he lacked omniscience. He should have known whether the tree had fruit or not. Also, Jesus appears a fool when he destroys a defenseless fruit tree simply because it did not please him. This contradicts his earlier statement of "love your enemies."

In Matt.28:16-19¹²⁰ Jesus talks of being given the kingdom: "לְכֻלָּהּ יְהוָה יִתֵּן." The author here points out that if it was given him, there was some higher power who gave it. Again, Jesus cannot be divine.

Turning to Matt.15:21-25,¹²¹ Jacob ben Reuben quotes the story of a Canaanite woman whom Jesus refused to help because he was sent only to the house of Israel. The author notes that this contradicts Christian doctrine in which Jesus was sent to the whole world. It also contradicts the prophets who make it clear that God desires the repentance of every sinner. Another case similar to this is in Matt.13:10-13 where Jesus says that the parables he tells are only for a few, not for all people.

In Matt.12:30-32¹²² Jesus himself differentiates between slander spoken against the Holy Spirit and slander spoken against the Son. For the former there is no forgive-

ness, while the latter will be forgiven. Jacob ben Reuben points out that this would mean there is no unity within the trinity. Further, such a statement would lead to the ultimate absurdity; where would one's soul go after death if the Holy Spirit would not grant forgiveness, while the rest of God would? This passage cannot be interpreted rationally.

Lastly, Jacob ben Reuben brings up some comments made centuries earlier by Nestor Ha-Komer.¹²³ Nestor Ha-Komer¹²⁴ mentions that Jesus had to be either the " *niḥel*" (sent) or the " *niḥel*" (sender); he could not be both. Then Nestor cites passages from the Gospel in which Jesus himself admits to being a messenger, not God Himself. However, all the passages are summaries or paraphrases. They cannot be found in our present version of the New Testament.

Jacob ben Reuben not only criticizes the Gospels but is aware of arguments of other Christian writers. One of these is *oi ὁδοι* (Paul)¹²⁵ whom the Denier quotes¹²⁶ as saying that the Jews believe in a God containing both good and bad. The Believer answers¹²⁷ that Paul, an enemy of the Jews, cannot be an authority on what Jews believe. Secondly, there cannot be good and bad incidents in God. Incidents only affect man and other changing objects. Since God must be changeless, God cannot be affected by incidents. Rather, God created incidents. God only created the good and is not the source of bad. However, good creations involve themselves in circumstance¹²⁸ which brings evil. God gave man only goodness, but just as wine can turn to vinegar when

left alone, so man can turn to evil. Lastly, God cannot contain good and evil because God is *א'ל* and *א'להים* (the First and the Last). Since good and bad are created things, they cannot be part of God's essence. God is beyond creation, not part of it.

Though exegesis comes into play throughout the entire work, it is most clearly the basis of argumentation in the areas examined above. The Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the words of a Christian writer are criticized by Jacob ben Reuben. Another area which uses exegesis is that of historical arguments. Certain historical expectations are seen by the Christians as having been fulfilled by the Jews, as witnessed by the Hebrew Bible. The Jews, on the other hand, also use the argument of history to show Jesus to be false.

One of the main Christian arguments is that the Jews rejected God. History proves this because the Jews suffer. According to the Denier, God makes unbelievers suffer. Therefore, the Jews' suffering proves they have been rejected by God as unbelievers.¹²⁹ To buttress this, the Denier also quotes from Isa.45:8-10 where the prophet rages against one who would say to his father "What begettest thou?" (v.10).¹³⁰ The Denier says this is about the Jews who question the offspring (Jesus) of the divine "Father." The Believer offers no answer.

A second Christian attack is that the Jews killed God;¹³¹ specifically, they sold Jesus. To prove the selling the Christian turns back to the Hebrew Bible. The first passage

read this as meaning that when משיח comes, Judah's rule ends. The Believer's answer¹³⁸ points out that the coming of Shiloh means the destruction of the altar at Shiloh. This event is seen as initiating the coming of a Davidic king. Also, the coming of the messiah is supposed to confirm the Davidic kingship. Further, if the coming of Jesus is seen as the event which destroyed the kingship, then the Christians are confused. Herod, the king in Jesus' time, was not a Davidic king. Lastly, the Believer insists that descendants of David are still alive to take up the kingship.¹³⁹

While Jacob ben Reuben is usually on the defensive, in this area of historical argumentation he takes the offensive. From history itself one can see that Jesus did not carry out the expectations from a messiah. In the last chapter¹⁴⁰ he quotes Saadia's list of unfulfilled prophecies.¹⁴¹ This list is divided into three parts. The first includes internal Biblical contradictions which preclude Jesus being the messiah. The second contains physical changes in the world which should have come about if Jesus had been the messiah. Lastly are those predictions in the Bible which common sense shows have not been fulfilled.

Saadia bases the first part of his list on passages from Ezra and Nehemiah. It seems that Saadia along with writers of his time took these passages to describe the period in which Jesus lived. The confusion of periods five hundred years apart can perhaps be attributed to the underlying Jewish idea that in the Bible

משיח יבוא ויבנה בית המקדש.

"there is no earlier or later time." Also, since Ezra and Nehemiah are from the beginning of the Second Temple period, Saadia assumes that their words can be applied to the whole period which includes Jesus' time. There are five contradictions based on Ezra and Nehemiah. First, in Ezekiel 39:28 all of Israel was to be gathered in at the time of the messiah. Ezra 2:64 states that only 42,360 people were present during the Second Temple period. A second contradiction is that Isa.11:11 states that exiles were to be gathered from the isles. There is no indication in Ezra or Nehemiah that this happened. Thirdly, in Isa.60:10 we read that the non-Jews fought against Jerusalem. The fourth example is that in Isa.60:11 the gates were to be always open. Yet in Nehemiah 7:3 the gates are closed daily. Lastly, in Isa.60:12 all nations are said to serve Israel when the messiah comes. In Neh.9:36 Israel clearly serves them instead.

The second section of Saadia's list shows that certain prophecies about physical changes in the world have still not taken place, namely that the forest would fall without cutting (Ezek.39:10), the river would dry up (Isa.11:15-16), the Mount of Olives would split in half (Zech.14:4), the Temple would be expanded (Ezek.40), new rivers would be formed flowing from the Temple (Ezek.47:1), and fruit trees would grow which would bear medicinal fruit (Zech.14:8).

In the third part of Saadia's list are happenings predicted in the prophets which common sense tells us have not taken place. If the messiah had already come, then all

peoples would now believe in the same God and worship only Him. This was prophesied in Zephaniah 3:8-9, Psalm 86:8-10, Isaiah 45:23, and Zechariah 14:9. Also, Israel would now be free from all enemies as in Isaiah 62:8-9. Common sense shows us that Israel is not free, but is controlled by other nations. Then, in Isaiah 2, we are told that when the messiah comes there would be no more war. But contrary to Isa.2:4 there is now (according to Saadia) more war than ever. In Isaiah 11:6-9 the animals were supposed to live peacefully with each other. Yet common sense tells us they still fight. Lastly, in Ezek.16:53-54 it was told that Sodom would return to its original flourishing state. Yet it is still covered with salt water.

To summarize, Jacob ben Reuben has shown that the Hebrew Bible stands fast as the true testimony of the beliefs of the people of Israel. He has offered various defenses to show that it does not support Christian contentions. He has tried to prove that the Bible is to be taken in a literal sense in most cases. He has also demonstrated that the New Testament itself has such internal difficulties that it can in no way be counted on to replace the Hebrew Bible. Lastly, using Saadia's thought, he demonstrates that while the Bible does contain prophecies about a messiah, those prophecies were not fulfilled by Jesus. The Jews still await the true messiah.

CHAPTER TWO

While most of the above is a defense of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish doctrines, Jacob ben Reuben is not afraid to go on the offensive. Throughout the book he challenges Christian doctrines. Such attacks center upon the Trinity, Incarnation, and the Virgin Birth.

The basic Christian belief in the Trinity as expounded by the Denier is that God is three in "Persons" and one in "Substance".¹⁴² All are then equally God, and God remains a unity. Therefore Christianity upholds the belief in monotheism. As the Denier explains, "He (Jesus) gives birth and was born; he is the father and the son; the one who is called by two names and was three; and the trinity is still a unity; and the unity remains a trinity called the father, son and spirit; and one who does worship in the name of the three has not left the worship of the one."¹⁴³ The Denier tries to prove this to the Believer in several ways. First he gives proof of this doctrine taken from the Hebrew Bible. For example, Genesis 1:26 God says *לננוצו לננוצו ננוק ננו*: "let us make man in our form, like our image." The Denier¹⁴⁴ interprets the plural form as being God the Father addressing the Son. Also, since making man in God's image is mentioned three times in Genesis chapter 1, this is a hint about the Trinity. Gen.2:7 says man is made from dust, somehow taken to indicate God's unity.

Another proof text used is Gen.18:1-3 where the three

messengers come to visit Abraham.¹⁴⁵ When Abraham bows to them he is recognizing the Trinity. Then when he addresses them in the singular, 'אֱלֹהֵי ("my Lord"), he is recognizing God's unity. Another example¹⁴⁶ of Trinity and Unity in one phrase is the opening of the Bible: אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית (Gen.1:1). The plural אֱלֹהִים shows God is three in Person, while the singular form אֱלֹהִים shows that in Substance God is a Unity.

In discussing Isa.6:1-3 the Denier¹⁴⁷ identifies the phrase קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ, "holy, holy, holy", as a reference to the Trinity. Then the following phrase יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵאכֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ, "the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory," which refers to God in the singular, demonstrates His simultaneous Unity.

Less obvious references to the Trinity are presented by the Denier. In Deut.32:39¹⁴⁸ God says אֲנִי twice. This is taken to mean that there are two persons in God. Then in Habbakuk 3:2 the Denier¹⁴⁹ reads the words בְּקִרְבִּי אֲנִי as בְּקִרְבִּי אֲנִי meaning that the Father and the Son are two united. The Denier reads Psalm 2:7 בְּנִי אַתָּה אֲנִי הָאֵל, the Father and the Son and the Spirit which comes out between them. He seems to be basing this on the three cases of the use of the first person in the sentence. Lastly, the Denier¹⁵⁰ brings up Prov.30:4-5, מִהְיָ וּמִהְיָ וּמִהְיָ כִּי תִדְעַ, "what is his name and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" He interprets this plus the following verse, "Every word of God is proven: he is a shield to those who put their trust in him," as mentioning God's three Persons and then his Unity. It is

not clear how he divides the phrases to get this interpretation.

The Denier tries to explain the Trinity doctrine by explaining Jesus' generation: how he came to be the Son. Here the Denier talks about incarnation. Connected to the Trinity doctrine is his contention¹⁵¹ that Jesus was the Son even before his birth, so there was never a time when the Son was not part of the Trinity.

A third explanation of the Trinity is through comparison to the Jewish concept of God's attributes. The Denier¹⁵² notes that the Jews know God as *אֱלֹהִים*, *יהוה*, *אֱלֹהֵינוּ*, *אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ*, and *אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* among many other terms. The Denier says that these attributes represent independent principles. He explains that this is the same as the Christian idea of separate Persons in God.

The last argument attempting to convince the Believer of the Trinity is the Denier's use of analogy. The Denier admits that "unless you understand the root of the matter, the idea of three being one is unbelievable. Therefore I will teach it to you...I will bring proofs from created things."¹⁵³ He then proposes the analogy of burning coal. The coal is first a Unity, one substance. However, it can be compared to the Trinity in that it is composed of three parts: *גורם* (cause) *אש* (the resulting fire), and *להבות* (the flame).

The Believer's refutation of the Trinity must be culled from various places within Milchamot Ha-shem. The refutation can be grouped as arguments based on separation precluding Unity; God as unlimited; the impossibility of Jesus'

generation from the Father; the difference between attributes and the Trinity; criticism of analogies; and the Denier's exegetical errors.

First there is the Jewish refutation based on the fact that separation between two of the persons indicates a difference in their power.¹⁵⁴ They then cannot also be a Unity. Examples of this based on earlier texts, which the Denier said described Jesus, include the Father making the Son;¹⁵⁵ one advising the other as in Gen.1:1 וְיָצַק:¹⁵⁶ one sending the other;¹⁵⁷ one showing mercy to the other;¹⁵⁸ and one anointing the other.¹⁵⁹ In the last case one was in heaven and the other on earth: again showing that they were not a real unity.

The Trinity doctrine is refuted by the Believer on the ground that it would go against the philosophical requirement that God be unlimited.¹⁶⁰ God must be unlimited first in time: God is the creator and never the created. So one of God's persons could not be a creature. Also, God cannot be limited in space. God must be formless, substanceless and changeless.¹⁶¹ The Trinity doctrine would contradict all of these, especially the last.

Another challenge to the doctrine is the problem of Jesus' generation from the Father. Linguistically, one can only be called a son after birth.¹⁶² Further, the fact of the birth of part of God means that God changes. Yet God cannot change. Again, the creator cannot be created: הוֹלֵךְ precludes being a הוֹלֵךְ.¹⁶³ Jesus is a created being, so he cannot be God.

Jacob ben Reuben answers the Denier's example about God's attributes with Saadia's explanation.¹⁶⁴ Saadia says that we cannot describe God's essence because human language is limited. Whatever we say is not to be taken as the truth about God. Secondly, man's *סכל* (rational faculty) understands that behind all these words is a belief in God's unity. The names are an attempt to clarify that unity. God's true essence is unity, and that is unchangeable and constant as in Zech. 14:19, *אח"כ ונש/ך אלהי יהוה יהיה אחד* ("on that day the Lord shall be one and His name one.")

To answer the analogy of the coal,¹⁶⁵ Jacob ben Reuben offers two solutions. First, the parts within the coal are not exclusive to the coal. One can find flame in other substances. Therefore this does not prove a unity that is intimately and exclusively connected to a trinity. Also, there are other natural objects which have more than three parts. Are we then to understand that God has five parts, or ten or even more?

The author lastly finds many exegetical errors in the Christian interpretation of Biblical passages. First, not every plural has to be a trinity. Perhaps it could be a case of brother to brother when God says *אנכי*.¹⁶⁶ Why must it be father to son? A plural could also be a larger number, greater than three.¹⁶⁷ The real meaning of plurals when used by God is to indicate authority. This can be seen in Gen. 42:30 *אדוני הארץ* ("the lords of the land") when only Joseph is being described to Jacob. It is also the case in

Isaiah 19:4 *קשה יהוה* ("a hard lord") when the prophet describes a harsh king who will make the Israelites suffer. In addition, as Saadia has noted, human kings employ the plural in speaking of themselves. How much the moreso would God use it in speaking of Himself. Another exegetical error cited by the Believer¹⁶⁸ is the Denier claiming that the double use of *אב* referred to the father and the son. If doubled words were all read that way then *אב אב* ("my father, my father") in II Kings 2:12 would mean two fathers. In II Samuel 19:1 *בן בן* ("my son, my son") would mean there were two Avshaloms. Another error is when the Denier claims that Jesus calls God *אב*, my father, indicating that he is then God's son. The Believer¹⁶⁹ points out that others call God *אב*. David does this in Psalm 99:27 and Solomon in II Sam.7:14. They used this term without meaning they were literally the son of God. Related to this, the Believer criticizes the Christian for saying that God calls Jesus *בן* (my son), indicating a special relationship. He points out that the term *בן* is applied by God to Israel in Ex.4:22 in a figurative sense. It too does not have to be taken literally. Lastly, there is clearly something amiss in the Christian interpretation of the story of Abraham and his three visitors. According to Jacob ben Reuben¹⁷⁰ if Abraham had recognized these three as the Trinity he would have known they were God; he would not have offered them food since God does not eat. Since he offers them food, he does not see them as divine. The Denier would have to admit that either they were not God, or

that Abraham did not recognize God. If they accept the latter the whole argument falls through, for Abraham cannot recognize God. If they accept the latter the whole argument falls through, for Abraham cannot recognize the trinity within the unity if he does not see God at all.

The second doctrine which comes up often in Milchamot Ha-Shem is the Christian belief in incarnation. There are several parts to this belief. First, the Denier¹⁷¹ tries to prove that even the righteous are destined for hell. He supports this with several verses. In Isa.52:5 it says they are "taken away for nought." In 57:1 it says "the righteous is lost, merciful men are taken away."¹⁷² In Job 4:21¹⁷³ it reads "they die for they are with wisdom." Even the patriarchs are not saved from this fate, according to the Denier's reading of Gen.15:15 and 37:35¹⁷⁴ where Abraham joins his fathers who were evil and Jacob speaks of his descending to She'ol. The next step in this doctrine is that because of all people being sent to hell, God chooses to come to earth to save man. The Denier supports God's coming to earth with four passages: Isa.7:14,¹⁷⁵ Isa.40:3,5,10,¹⁷⁶ Isa.8:23-9:1,¹⁷⁷ and Isa.9:5.¹⁷⁸ God's death on earth then saves mankind. Biblical references to this include Gen.48:13¹⁷⁹ in which Jacob's switching of the sons Ephraim and Menasseh shows that the usual fate of people will be changed as God's death brings life. Also mentioned in this connection are Hosea 13:14,¹⁸⁰ Ps.48:14-15,¹⁸¹ and Isa.42:5-7¹⁸² where the prison is interpreted as hell. Also important to this doctrine is the belief that

God brings salvation in this manner purposefully. The Denier offers the example¹⁸³ of a king who acts without his servants to carry out an important task. He also offers an analogy to explain how God can do this without changing His divine nature. He compares¹⁸⁴ God's incarnation to the sun when it passes over garbage. The sun does not absorb any of the filth of the garbage just as God is not changed through becoming human. God chooses this way to accomplish the goal of saving man from Satan because God loves us. The Denier gives the analogy of a white bird who must become a different color in order to approach other creatures. So it is with God who in order to come close to us to save us has to become like one of us.

The Believer answers the doctrine of incarnation in five ways. First, it would be unbecoming to God to be incarnated into a person's body. God must always act like a king.¹⁸⁵ A king has a certain kingly way to behave, and if he deviates from this his followers will become confused. Entering a womb, a dark closed-up place, would be an unkingly act. A fuller analogy of a human king to God would be a case in which a¹⁸⁶ king has an insignificant servant who does evil and influences others to do evil. According to the Denier's way of looking at it, the king's response would be to bow down before the servant and ask to be sacrificed so that the servant will not harm anyone else. To the Believer this is irrational. The great should not be giving in to the small. The king should punish the servant, even execute him. Just so, God would not bow down to Satan. Another reason incarnation would be unbe-

fitting to God would be that in a body God would have to have emotions.¹⁸⁷ These would detract from God's perfection. The second criticism of the doctrine of incarnation is that God must remain formless and imageless. In this connection the Believer cites¹⁸⁸ Isa. 44:6,8-13, Isa.45:21-22, Isa.46:5, and Isa.46:9. A third response is that God does not need to be incarnated to save man. God's will is sufficient to accomplish anything.¹⁸⁹ Incarnation assumes that God does not have the power to act in the physical world without entering it physically. The fourth area of criticism is an attack on the exegesis the Denier uses to prove the incarnation. The Believer points out the real meanings of passages twisted by the Denier. First,¹⁹⁰ when Abraham talks of joining his ancestors, he is referring to joining his good ancestors. They were not all bad people as the Denier would have one believe. When Jacob talks of going to She'ol it is because he senses that his sons have become murderers, killing Joseph. When he finds out Joseph is alive, he realizes he will not be punished that way. He then asks his sons to bury him with his ancestors. When the Denier read Gen.48 as hinting at God's death giving life, he missed the real meaning of the switch of the two brothers. It meant simply that Ephraim would be the more important person, and Jewish experience bears this out according to the Believer. The Believer disputes the Denier's¹⁹¹ interpretation of Isa.42 and 43 on the grounds that it is really talking about Israel.¹⁹² Isaiah 52:5 is disputed¹⁹³ because the bad person referred to there is not Satan but Asshur.

In Isa. 57:1¹⁹⁴ there is no proof of incarnation because the righteous do not perish as the Denier had thought. The use of Hosea 13:14 is challenged by the Believer on three grounds.¹⁹⁵ Firstly, the Denier had to rearrange words to get a meaning he liked. Secondly, the verses surrounding this one show negative happenings, not salvation. Also, this passage is addressed by the prophet to the wicked who deserve death for breaking the covenant; it is not a message about salvation. Three other passages used by the Denier are also rejected because in context they do not fit Jesus: Zech. 9:11¹⁹⁶, Job 4:16¹⁹⁷, and Ps. 46-50.¹⁹⁸ The fifth argument used against the doctrine is that it entails logical errors.¹⁹⁹ If God willingly dies He should not be crying out 'למה עזבתני' ("why have you forsaken me.") Also, if Jesus' death saves people from Satan, why does Satan still kill people?²⁰⁰ Where is the salvation? Thirdly, as mentioned once before, God is the king. It is only logical that when the king dies the people will flee in fear from his enemies.²⁰¹ Lastly, the Denier had presented an analogy about how a king would consent to descent into a pit to save his own son. He would not let a servant do the dangerous part of the task. The Believer labels this analogy as unnatural.²⁰² When the king is risking his life for his son he is not acting in his kingly role, but rather as a regular person. He is filled with fear for his own life. God cannot be compared with this, for God has power over everything and fears nothing.

The doctrine of the virgin birth is discussed by the Denier

and Believer several times throughout Milchamot Ha-Shem.

One of the Denier's explanations of this miracle is through the analogy to a prism.²⁰³ As God passes through Mary He

leaves the girl virginal. This is analogous to the sun

passing through a prism leaving the prism unchanged. The

Believer answers²⁰⁴ that this analogy holds true only with transparent objects. Two related cases are mentioned.

Parchment allows light to pass through it, but the flame itself cannot go through a shade. Secondly, when there is wine

in a glass the color can pass through but the wine itself

remains inside. In both cases the substance cannot pass

through the object. God, then, could not pass through the

womb without effecting it: the womb is not transparent.

A second basis of the Christian argument is interpreting

the Hebrew word *עַלְמָה* to mean *בְּתוּלָה* (virgin). The Believer

counters²⁰⁵ that a woman is only called a *בְּתוּלָה* before she

has ever encountered a man. Moreover, in Prov.30:20 the

עַלְמָה is referred to as an adulteress. That is far from

being a virgin.

Jacob ben Reuben challenges the Christian use of Biblical texts to support the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

Three examples are examined in detail. First, the Denier

says²⁰⁶ that Isa.66:6-7,9 describes the unusual process

of Mary giving birth: "Before she travailed, she brought

forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man

child...." The Believer answers²⁰⁷ by quoting verse 8 which

states that "as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth

her children." It was Zion, not Mary, that gave birth. Also, in verse 9 the Denier changed the word $\text{q'd}/\text{lc}$ to $\text{q'd}/\text{c}$, so that the verse would mean God gave birth rather than God caused to give birth. A second disputed passage is Joel 2:15-16. Here the verses talk of a bridegroom going forth from his chamber and the bride out of her pavilion. The Denier interprets this²⁰⁸ as the messiah groom who at his birth makes his mother into a bride. The Believer points out²⁰⁹ that in verse 17 the priests begin to weep and cry to God unhappily. If the savior was just born, why the unhappiness? Secondly, in verse 20 the enemy of the people is chased away by God. This did not happen at the time of Jesus' birth or during his life. Lastly, the entire passage read as a whole describes a time of sadness and low position for Israel, not the happy time that would accompany the birth of the messiah. One last passage applied to this doctrine is Ezekiel 44:1-2. It describes a gate that is shut and never entered by any man. For the Denier²¹⁰ this means that no man had sexual relations with Mary after Jesus' birth. The Believer explains²¹¹ that the xl (gate) mentioned here is simply a continuation of talk about a gate in Ezek. 43:4. In that verse the $\text{q'd}/\text{lc}$ (glory of God) was coming toward the gate, not God himself. This same glory is meant in 44:2 when it says $\text{q'd}/\text{lc}$ - $\text{q'd}/\text{lc}$, "God entered it." God's glory had entered the gate, not God Himself. What is really described is how God's glory approaches the prophets, not how God came to earth. Also, it would be absurd to apply

this passage to Jesus and Mary. If one did, then verse 3 would have to be read to mean that Jesus went back to the womb to eat bread. This would be a ridiculous thing to say about one's messiah.

In summary, Jacob ben Reuben through the words of the Believer rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Incarnation, and the Virgin Birth. He uses arguments based on philosophy, exegesis and analogy.

In the final chapter of the work, the author turns to a positive presentation of Jewish beliefs. Most of this is not original to Jacob ben Reuben, but paraphrased or copied from other Jewish philosophers. This first section on the Jewish understanding of resurrection is lifted directly from Saadia²¹². The second belief presented is the proper understanding of the world's nature and how it will be affected by the coming of the end of days. Here he makes several points. First, the world was created by God as *ל' מ' ע' (matter from nothing)*. This means that God has complete control over the world. God's power makes the world eternal. God sustains it, and God would only destroy it if there were a reason for the destruction²¹³. If the world could be destroyed in any other way, that would negate God's omnipotence. Just as the world is eternal, Jacob ben Reuben holds that the chosenness of the people Israel is eternal²¹⁴. Here he quotes Isaiah 66:22, "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name

remain." Along with the eternal world and eternal people, the details of nature will also endure²¹⁵. Man-made details may disappear, God's creations will remain: some to punish the wicked, others to reward the righteous. Also in the end of days the resurrected bodies will be able to survive on God's glory alone. However, the earth will still be a part of God's plan. Any verses which might imply that the earth will vanish really mean that the inhabitants of earth vanish. What God creates can never be destroyed.

The third section on necessary Jewish beliefs describes the nature of God²¹⁶. Again, the most important point is that God creates from nothing. This means that in the beginning there was nothing but God. God then is one. God Himself is not a creature: nothing was there before Him to create Him. This also means that He had no fellow creators.

This section continues with a philosophical discussion on the relationship of 'ס' and צ' (formlessness and form). Aristotle is criticized in these pages. Also, the author presents his own theory²¹⁷ of the four true מ' / ו', the basic elements out of which God made the world: fire, wind, water and dust.

While this last chapter is interesting in its revelation of the beliefs held by a medieval Jewish thinker, it does not come as a specifically anti-Christian polemic. It serves rather as a positive statement to Jewish readers. After refuting Christian beliefs, Jacob ben Reuben offers positive Jewish beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Jacob ben Reuben was very well-informed for his time. His knowledge of Christian and Jewish sources was extensive. He also displays familiarity with Greek philosophers.

In the area of Christian knowledge he quotes from the Church Father Jerome and the medieval Paul. He refers to Augustine and knows of Augustine's version of the book of Daniel. However, Jacob ben Reuben may not have known of these people through first-hand access to their writings. It is possible that their names and ideas were much talked about, and Jacob ben Reuben picked up their arguments through discussion with Christians of his time. He certainly had some copy of the New Testament before him when he quotes from it in Chapter XI. His translations of Matthew passages, one of the earliest extant in Hebrew, indicates a direct translation rather than a paraphrase.

As for his knowledge of Jewish sources, it has already been stated above that Jacob ben Reuben was a Rabbanite. He quotes directly from the Talmud in Chapter XII, citing Hagiga 14b and Brachot 17a.²¹⁸ He also uses ideas lifted from the Talmud, notably in Sukkah 11b,²¹⁹ Baba Batra 75a,²²⁰ Shabbat 152b,²²¹ and Baba Kama 141b.²²² It is possible in these last cases that the author knew the ideas without knowing the particular references. However, his ability to quote two passages directly suggests he had access to the full Talmud. Jacob ben Reuben relies heavily on other Jewish scholars.

He mentions by name Saadia,²²³ Avraham bar Hiyya,²²⁴ Ibn Ezra,²²⁵ Yitzhak Ha-Yisraelyli (Isaac ben Solomon Israeli),²²⁶ and Yosef ben Zabara Ha-rofey (Ibn Zabara).²²⁷ He also mentions the convert to Judaism who wrote an earlier anti-Christian work, Nestor Ha-Komer.²²⁸ Rosenthal points out²²⁹ that Jacob ben Reuben uses the arguments of Radak without mentioning him by name. He also relies heavily on Ibn Ezra without always giving him credit.²³⁰ According to Rosenthal's comparison of texts,²³¹ Jacob ben Reuben has access to Saadia's ideas only through a paraphrase attributed to Berachiah Ha-Nakdan. He used this rather than Judah ben Saul Ibn Tibbon's translation of Saadia into Hebrew. It is unlikely that Jacob ben Reuben did not know of the translation, since Ibn Tibbon lived in Southern France. He probably used Berachiah's work because it was the more popular of the two. It was also more understandable.

As for Greek philosophers, Jacob ben Reuben mentions Pythagoras,²³² Plato²³³ and Aristotle.²³⁴

The Hebrew Bible used by Jacob ben Reuben differs in several places from the masoretic text we use today. In discussing Isaiah 11:12²³⁵ he quotes the text as saying

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁלַח יָדָם לְקַח מִן הַיָּם, while today's version reads וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁלַח יָדָם לְקַח מִן הַיָּם. According to Biblia Hebraica, there is no extant manuscript tradition like this reading. Jacob ben Reuben also quotes Proverbs 30:5²³⁶ as reading in part, וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁחַדּוּ מִן הַיָּם. The masoretic text used today reads simply וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁחַדּוּ מִן הַיָּם. Again, the Biblia Hebraica offers

no alternative version that would match Jacob ben Reuben's rendering. Considering that Jacob ben Reuben quotes from the Hebrew Bible over five hundred times, it is remarkable that he only misquotes these two times. As mentioned before, the author quotes Proverbs 4:4²³⁷ as saying 'Nlc 'Jpδ q'h'v, instead of the accepted reading 'Nlc 'Jδδ. The Biblia Hebraica notes that many manuscripts have the 'Jpδ reading. Jacob ben Reuben was obviously working from one of those versions.

Jacob ben Reuben's style includes dialogue, philosophical essay, and poetry. His introductions to each chapter display poetry based on phrasings in which couplets end in the same vowel sound. Sometimes three phrases will match in their final sound. There does not seem to be any attempt to follow a strict meter in these sections, though some metric consistencies might crop up for a line or two. Sometimes Jacob ben Reuben uses this poetic form for introductory statements made by the Denier or the Believer.²³⁸ Within such poetic passages the writer also includes excerpts from Biblical verses.²³⁹ Another poetic form the author employs is the acrostic. He uses this only once, as a preface to his introduction. The first half of the poem he presents there²⁴⁰ is an acrostic in which the first letters of the first twenty-two words spell out his Hebrew name, with each letter of *יבן רעובן* doubled. A further convention used by Jacob ben Reuben is the way he spells the name Jesus in Hebrew. When the Denier is speaking, the name is written as *יע*.²⁴¹

When the Believer answers, he records the name as *l'e'*. He also adds in parentheses *עצמותיו יאכלו אש* (May his bones be ground into powder in Gehinnom). This was a common curse on wicked people.

Most of the work is in dialogue form. The Denier presents challenges to the Believer. These may continue for several paragraphs, even pages. Then the Believer answers each challenge with as many counter-arguments as possible, adding his own new challenges to the Christian position. The difficulty for the reader is knowing whether this is a record of a real dialogue or not. Literary dialogues, in which the author pretends to be reporting an actual debate, are not uncommon in medieval literature. On the other hand, there were Jewish scholars who indeed recorded their debates after the fact. The most famous of these is Nahmanides' record of a disputation at Barcelona with Brother Paul Christiani.

To solve the question of historicity, one must look more closely at the atmosphere in which Milchamot Ha-shem was composed. Southern France at this time saw the proliferation of Christian heresies of many types, culminating eventually in the Albigensian heresy. In an atmosphere where differences among Christians were tolerated, Jewish scholars would be much more free to discuss their differences with Christians. Yet at the same time that a Jew might not be punished for expressing rejection of Christianity, he was subjected to pressure to accept Christianity. Jews were forced to listen to Christian sermons. Debates between

Christian and Jewish scholars were arranged and held in public. In addition, even though the Jews in twelfth century Southern France may have been tolerated, they knew that in other places Jews were persecuted and oppressed. When someone like Jacob ben Reuben wrote an anti-Christian polemic, he was not thinking only of his immediate neighbors. His audience could conceivably be all of Spain and most of Western and Central Europe. Jews everywhere were confronted with some level of Christian missionizing. Jacob ben Reuben's work could be used in many regions.

Still, how far would a medieval author go in attacking Christianity? Urbach²⁴² contends that violent anti-Christian language was never used in an actual disputation; it was inserted later in the redaction. This language was a revenge on the Christians. Since the Jews could not publicly express their outrage at the poor treatment they received from Christians, they used the printed word to convey hatred and anger. While Urbach may be partially correct, the violent language did more than express bottled up hatred. It was also a weapon used by writers like Jacob ben Reuben to inspire his Jewish readers to resist Christian missionizing. In the case of Milchamot Ha-shem, the taunts and insults leveled at the Denier also provide some entertainment value.

If Jacob ben Reuben actually studied with a Christian priest and debated with him, it is unlikely that he recorded their discussion word for word. The debate would have had to take place over a long period of time, yet the written record

makes it appear that they moved smoothly from one topic to another. The poetic passages are a literary form; they would not have been evident in a spoken debate. Yet Jacob ben Reuben had to pick up his knowledge of Christianity somewhere. Lasker contends that most Jews did not study Christian theological treatises.²⁴³ They were mostly exposed to Christian oral polemicizing, which was not a detailed articulation of the Christian religion. An example Lasker gives is the use of the Christian argument that God's attributes can be compared to the persons of the Trinity. While this was a minor point in Christian theology, it was a major doctrine among Christians trying to convert Jews.²⁴⁴ Jacob ben Reuben then must have been exposed to Christian polemicizing. This could very well have taken place as he himself describes it, that is, while studying with a priest. He could also have picked up the Christian arguments from what he heard in public. However, if he was really only twenty years old when he composed this work, it would seem that he needed an intense education about Christianity in just a few years. Rosenthal is then correct when he advocates that there is a seed of historical truth in the dialogue. That seed however may be very small. Jacob ben Reuben may well have studied with a priest, yet never have had a formal debate with him.

In writing Milchamot Ha-shem the author was not merely recording a debate. His primary purpose was to prepare a sourcebook which would explain to his fellow Jews the faults in the Christian arguments. A secondary purpose mentioned

already, was to ridicule the Christian in the eyes of the Jewish reader. Attacks in the work range from subtle to outright insult. In one place the author attacks those "lacking in wisdom"²⁴⁵ who cannot accept the prophets and therefore try to change or read into what the text says. In another place he tells the Christians that they do not have the new (law) or the old (law) or a proper path to follow, but only *חִנּוּסִי פֶּלֶח* - darkness and the shadow of death.²⁴⁶ This image of the Christians being in darkness is applied in other places, as when the Believer states: "Your words have no basis except that you go from mountain to hill to valley to the lowest 'depths of darkness' (Job 10:21-22)." A more biting comment is made when the Believer explains to the Christian, "I am not saying these things to mock my friend, but to show him that what his ancestors taught him is emptiness."²⁴⁷ He is even more direct when he calls the Christian a false witness.²⁴⁸ The Believer accuses the Christian sages of being vain and going after emptiness as "they seek the living among the dead" (Isa.8:19).²⁴⁹ He even calls Christians fools, because they follow empty ideas and believe in an imaginary person, Jesus.²⁵⁰ The two most violent attacks on the Christians can be found in Chapters II and IV. In the first,²⁵¹ the Believer attacks the Denier for bringing up a particular question. He says, "If your early sages asked it, it would be good advice to put your pen across it (ignore it). If you ask it from your own knowledge, be silent, for you did not ask about this out of wisdom." The author thus rejects any

Christian teachings, and at the same time accuses the Christians of being stupid. In Chapter V's introduction he repeats these criticisms in a poetic form. He advises the Denier to *סגור פיך והלשון כי לא דברת נכון*, "close your mouth and be silent for you do not speak rightly."²⁵² At the end he adds *ואללפך/חכמה ובינה*, "I will teach you wisdom and understanding." In the same paragraph he accuses the Denier of blasphemy: *כתב הקדש חללה* "you blaspheme the holy writings." To a Jewish reader, this would be the ultimate insult aimed at the Christian.

It is hard to know whether Jacob ben Reuben's work fulfilled its original purpose. We have no way to measure its effect on Jews who were considering apostasy. We do know that it created enough of a stir outside the Jewish community for Abner of Burgos to write a Christian response to it. Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut wrote a polemic against Abner of Burgos, defending Jacob ben Reuben's arguments. He quotes specifically from Milchamot Ha-shem, though he incorrectly identifies its author as Isaac Kimchi. Many other Jewish polemicists used parts of Milchamot Ha-shem. The Christian polemicist Nicolas de Lyra also knew of it, and wrote a refutation of the arguments about the New Testament contained in Chapter XI. Schoars are not sure whether Nicolas de Lyra had access to an original copy of the work or a simplified copy adapted by another Jewish writer.²⁵⁸ In either case, Jacob ben Reuben's writing had far-reaching effects. While late works may have been better organized or more complete, he broke new ground

by putting into writing an entire collection of anti-Christian arguments.

Whatever Jacob ben Reuben accomplished in his own time, later generations must view him as a scholar who was willing to apply his scholarship to a pressing issue of his day. His arguments may rest on people like Ibn Ezra and Saadia, but they include original ideas as well. These original responses to Christian missionizing were picked up by later writers. Carried through the centuries, the words of a twelfth century Jew can still be relevant today. While the majority of Christian-Jewish dialogue has moved away from debate over biblical verses and simplistic renderings of Christian doctrines, there are still those elements in Christianity which debate with Jews as if we were living in 1170. For those who must respond to such Christians, Jacob ben Reuben is excellent reading material. Not only does he give us specific answers to Christian challenges, but he reminds us that we have confronted such challenges in the past and emerged with dignity and strength.

APPENDIX

List of Biblical verses cited in Milchamot Ha-Shem.Genesis

1:1-4,11,20,24,26-27,31
 2:7,10,16,17,19,22
 4:4
 7:2,5
 8:20
 11:1
 12:13
 13:8,10,16,18
 15:15
 18:1-3,4,5,8,9,10,22
 19:1,2,19
 25:5
 28:11
 35:7,29,35
 41:14,40
 42:30
 44:28
 45:28
 47:30
 48:13,14,17,18,19,20,21
 49:10,29,30

Exodus

3:1,4
 4:1,22,25
 8:15
 11:4
 15:3,14
 16:10
 17:15
 19:4
 20:3-4,5,21,22
 21:33,34
 22:1,2,24
 23:25
 25:2,8
 26:1,31
 27:1-2
 30:1-2
 32:4
 34:19,29-30
 35:3
 37:25
 38:1

Leviticus

11:2-8,9,31
 19:2,18,19

Numbers

2:5
 10:35
 13:22
 15:16
 16:5,32,33
 21:5,6,7,8,30,39
 22:6
 23:1,2,4,14,21,23,30
 32:17

Deuteronomy

1:28,46
 4:17,35,39
 5:12-13
 6:13-25
 7:7
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7:8,10,13-17
8:18,19;8:23-9:1,8:20
9:2,4,5,6
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28:15,16-18
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33:10,13-16,17,18,20,21
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35:102,3-4,5-6,10
40:3,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,17-20,18,25,26
41:4,14,19-20,25-27

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43:5-11,10,13,19-22,25
44:2,5,6,8-13,9,18,26-28
45:1-6,7,8-10,11,13,21-23
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49:10,18
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52:5-8,11-12,13-15
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57:1-2,15
59:15-21
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61:1-9
62:5,10-11,12
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FOOTNOTES

1. Judah M. Rosenthal, " " to Milchamot Ha-shem (Jerusalem:1963), p.viii, notes.
2. Ibid. p.viii.
3. Jacob ben Reuben, Milchamot Ha-shem, ed. J. Rosenthal (Jerusalem:1963), p.6. (This work will be referred to as M.H. in following footnotes.)
4. Judah M. Rosenthal, "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of Milhamot Adonai of Jacob ben Reuben" in PAAJR 26, 1957, p.136.
5. Daniel J. Lasker, author of Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages (New York:1977) quotes and translates from Rosenthal's edition.
6. Rosenthal, " " p.vii.
7. M.H., p.171.
8. Rosenthal, " " p.vii.
9. Rosenthal identifies these as Oxford ms.2146 and the Vienna ms.
10. M.H., p.116.
11. M.H., p.4.
12. Rosenthal, " " p.ix.
13. Henri Gross, Gallia Judaica (Paris:1897), p.144.
14. Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem:1972), Vol.8, p.1165.
15. Ibid. p.1211-1212.
16. Rosenthal, " " p.x.
17. M.H., p.4.
18. M.H., p.4-5.
19. M.H., p.23-24.
20. M.H., p.31-32.
21. M.H., p.24-25.
22. M.H., p.27.
23. M.H., p.32-33.
24. M.H., p.37.
25. M.H., p.39.
26. M.H., p.25.
27. M.H., p.34.
28. M.H., p.35.
29. M.H., p.26.
30. Rosenthal (M.H. p.116, n.1) says that this is not Saul of Tarsus, but a Christian theologian named Paul from the Middle Ages. Rosenthal cannot identify him.
31. M.H., p.29.
32. M.H., p.35.
33. M.H., p.36.
34. M.H., p.55-56.
35. M.H., p.56.
36. M.H., p.57.
37. Translations of Hebrew Bible passages are based on the Koren Bible
38. M.H., p.85.
39. M.H., p.90-91.
40. M.H., p.91-92.
41. M.H., p.95-96.
42. M.H., p.92.
43. M.H., p.96.
44. M.H., p.92.

45. M.H., p.96-97.
46. M.H., p.94.
47. M.H., p.98-99.
48. M.H., p.100.
49. M.H., p.101.
50. M.H., p.95.
51. M.H., p.106.
52. M.H., p.107.
53. M.H., p.107.
54. M.H., p.107.
55. M.H., p.104.
56. M.H., p.108.
57. M.H., p.108.
58. M.H., p.105.
59. M.H., p.112.
60. M.H., p.112.
61. M.H., p.113.
62. M.H., p.114.
63. M.H., p.105.
64. M.H., p.114.
65. M.H., p.59.
66. M.H., p.60.
67. M.H., p.61.
68. M.H., p.135-136.
69. M.H., p.139.
70. M.H., p.139.
71. According to Biblia Hebraica many medieval mss. read נרס.
72. M.H., p.67-68.
73. M.H., p.68-69.
74. M.H., p.69.
75. M.H., p.70-72.
76. M.H., p.72.
77. M.H., p.63.
78. M.H., p.73.
79. M.H., p.74.
80. M.H., p.73.
81. M.H., p.75.
82. M.H., p.126.
83. M.H., p.127.
84. M.H., p.126.
85. M.H., p.127.
86. M.H., p.77.
87. M.H., p.78.
88. M.H., p.78.
89. M.H., p.129.
90. M.H., p.129.
91. M.H., p.131-132.
92. M.H., p.134.
93. M.H., p.97.
94. M.H., p.98.
95. M.H., p.96.
96. M.H., p.98.
97. M.H., p.91.

98. M.H., p.101-102.
99. M.H., p.133.
100. M.H., p.130.
101. M.H., p.112.
102. M.H., p.111.
103. M.H., p.111.
104. M.H., p.110.
105. M.H., p.96.
106. M.H., p.78-79.
107. M.H., p.133.
108. M.H., p.141-142.
109. M.H., p.143.
110. M.H., p.144-145.
111. Deut. 9:9.
112. M.H., p.146.
113. M.H., p.147.
114. See below, p.38.
115. M.H., p.147-148.
116. In the index, the author gives a paraphrase of Deut.15:12-13.
117. M.H., p.149.
118. M.H., p.150.
119. M.H., p.151.
120. M.H., p.152.
121. M.H., p.152-153.
122. M.H., p.153.
123. Daniel Lasker, Op.Cit.,p.17, describes Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer as an anonymous work of unknown date, attributed to a priest named Nestor who converted to Judaism.
The work may have been from the sixth century and was possibly originally written in Arabic.
124. M.H., p.155.
125. See n.30 above.
126. M.H., p.117.
127. M.H., p.118-119.
128. M.H., p.120.
129. M.H., p.59-60.
130. M.H., p.94-95.
131. M.H., p.116.
132. M.H., p.132-133.
133. M.H., p.133.
134. M.H., p.129.
135. M.H., p.129-130.
136. M.H., p.66.
137. M.H., p.49-51.
138. M.H., p.54.
139. M.H., p.55.
140. M.H., p.157-161.
141. See above, Conclusion, p.50, for Jacob ben Reuben's use of Saadia.
142. M.H., p.40.
143. M.H., p.7.
144. M.H., p.43.
145. M.H., p.46-47.

146. M.H., p.40.
147. M.H., p.84.
148. M.H., p.131.
149. M.H., p.63-64.
150. M.H., p.139.
151. M.H., p.10-11.
152. M.H., p.120-121.
153. M.H., p.7.
154. M.H., p.132.
155. M.H., p.8.
156. M.H., p.44.
157. M.H., p.155.
158. M.H., p.55.
159. M.H., p.8-9.
160. M.H., p.9-10.
161. M.H., p.12.
162. M.H., p.121-123.
163. M.H., p.10.
164. M.H., p.121-123.
165. M.H., p.10.
166. M.H., p.44.
167. M.H., p.41.
168. M.H., p.61-62.
169. M.H., p.64.
170. M.H., p.47-48.
171. M.H., p.95.
172. M.H., p.104.
173. M.H., p.137.
174. M.H., p.49-51.
175. M.H., p.84.
176. M.H., p.93.
177. M.H., p.184.
178. M.H., p.184.
179. M.H., p.49-51.
180. M.H., p.126.
181. M.H., p.69.
182. M.H., p.94.
183. M.H., p.18.
184. M.H., p.14-15.
185. M.H., p.15-17.
186. M.H., p. 20.
187. M.H., p.12-13.
188. M.H., p.99-100.
189. M.H., p.12-13.
190. M.H., p.51-52.
191. The Believer's answer is taken from Tosafot according to Rosenthal. See M.H., p.53, n.45.
192. M.H., p.101.
193. M.H., p.102.
194. M.H., p.109.
195. M.H., p.127-128.
196. M.H., p.133.
197. M.H., p.138.

198. M.H., p.71-72.
199. M.H., p.66-67.
200. M.H., p.12-13.
201. M.H., p.19.
202. M.H., p.19-20.
203. M.H., p.11.
204. M.H., p.13.
205. M.H., p.87.
206. M.H., p.105-106.
207. M.H., p.115.
208. M.H., p.128.
209. M.H., p.129.
210. M.H., p.123-124.
211. M.H., p.124-125.
212. M.H., p.161-164.
213. M.H., p.169.
214. M.H., p.171.
215. M.H., p.170-171.
216. M.H., p.177 ff.
217. M.H., p.165-167.
218. M.H., p.172.
219. M.H., p.173.
220. M.H., p.173.
221. M.H., p.110.
222. M.H., p.110.
223. M.H., p.136 and other places.
224. M.H., p.136.
225. M.H., p.136,177.
226. M.H., p.176.
227. M.H., p.177.
228. M.H., p.155.
229. M.H., p.109-110.
230. Rosenthal, Op.Cit., p.xvii and M.H. p.75, n.33 and many other places.
231. Ibid. p.xvii.
232. M.H., p.177.
233. M.H., p.178.
234. M.H., p.183; see footnote 75, p.183.
235. M.H., p.91.
236. M.H., p.139.
237. M.H., p.139.
238. M.H., p.12,14 ff.
239. See M.H. p.12 (Job 20:2) and p.3 (built on Jeremiah 10).
240. M.H., p.3.
241. M.H., p.112.
242. E.E. Urbach, "Etudes sur la Litterature Polemique au Moyen Age" in REJ Vol.C, 1935. p.60 ff.
243. Lasker, Op.Cit., p.162.
244. Ibid. p.163.
245. M.H., p.85-86.
246. M.H., p.146.
247. M.H., p.63.
248. M.H., p.102.

- 249. M.H., p.39-40.
- 250. M.H., p.3.
- 251. M.H., p.33-34.
- 252. M.H., p.95.
- 253. Bernard Blumenkranz, "Nicolas de Lyre et Jacob ben Reuben" in JJS, Vol. 16, 1965. p.47-51.

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