

THE
Menorah

FROM THE BIBLE TO
MODERN ISRAEL



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7

Illuminating the Path to Armageddon

Religious radical fringes, Christian and especially Jewish, show considerable interest in the menorah. A rather classic example of the former occurred in the former Soviet republic of Moldova on Hanukkah, 2009, when a large-branched Hanukkah menorah was ceremonially dismembered and set upside down before a statue of Stephen III of Moldavia, known simply as Stephen the Great (d. 1504, sculpture installed 1928). Created to replace a statue of the czar, this sculpture suffered a fraught history through the Soviet period. It is located opposite the main government building in the capital Chisinau, a place of considerable Moldovan national significance. The *Jerusalem Post* narrated the scene:

The Anti-Defamation League on Monday condemned the “despicable” removal of a *Hannukiah* in Moldova, apparently led by an Orthodox priest. Video footage of the event, uploaded to YouTube, shows a group of dozens of people looking on as the menorah is pulled down with hammers and iron bars and replaced with a cross. Officials in the Moldovan capital of Chisinau said that the 1.5-meter-tall ceremonial candelabrum was retrieved, reinstalled and is now under police guard. The video shows an Orthodox priest, identified by Moldovan media as Fr. Anatoliy Chirbik, leading the Sunday demonstration at Stefan the Great Square and saying, “We are an Orthodox country. Stephan the Great defended our country from all kinds of kikes, and now they come and put their menorah here. This is anarchy.”¹

Illuminating the Path to Armageddon

Naturally, the Moldovan government deplored this sacrilege and acted against it, though Moldovan law did not provide a vehicle for prosecution. Father Chirbik was fined the equivalent of fifty dollars, as the government pressed the Moldovan Orthodox Church to sanction the priest. More importantly, this sort of incident has not been repeated. To me, what is fascinating about this event was its ritual performance. In a video uploaded to YouTube, Father Chirbik appears in full clerical robes, leading a group that carries a large eight-branched Hanukkah menorah modeled on the Arch of Titus menorah—the sort common in modernizing Eastern European synagogues before World War II. The Orthodox Christian clergyman fumigated the menorah and sprinkled holy water as his followers broke it in two, separating the base from the branches. Then they carried it to the base of the statue of King Stephen and left it upside down there. The World Jewish Congress website added significant details and a haunting response to the event:

The Russian Orthodox Church in the former Soviet republic of Moldova has indirectly blamed the Jewish community for the recent anti-Semitic march by Christian fundamentalists in the capital Chisinau in which a public menorah was dismantled. A church statement said: “We believe that this unpleasant incident could have been avoided if the menorah had been placed near a memorial for victims of the Holocaust.”

On Chanukah, some 200 fundamentalist Christian protestors, led by a priest of the Orthodox Church, marched through Chisinau and removed the 5-foot-tall menorah, using hammers and iron bars from a major downtown square. “The Jews can try to kill us, to traumatize our children, but Moldovan Orthodox believers will resist,” the priest told the crowd, many of whom carried large crosses. Moldova, he said, was an Orthodox country, and Jews were trying to “dominate people.” Allowing the menorah to be set up had been “a sacrilege, an indulgence of state power today.”²

Members of the group carried a large banner that declared “Moldova is an Orthodox Country,” and others carried the flag of czarist monarchists. Clearly Father Chirbik and his followers, and to some extent the official church, were offended by the seeming brashness of local Jewish leaders who

placed the menorah in the most public space possible, often at the center of local, regional, or national power. To Father Chirbik's telling, the Jews (expletives deleted) had overstepped into the public—Christian—square, apparently with the approval of a government that Chirbik did not support. As in antiquity, Chirbik's actions were carried out on a local level, but this kind of protest had serious implications for the nature of contemporary Moldova. As in the past, this testing of power relationships was carried out to the detriment of the local Jewish community. To me, the fascinating—and chilling—thing about this event is how closely it holds to the kinds of scripts known from antiquity and the Middle Ages for the destruction of synagogues by Christians, led by their priests. We have already seen graphic evidence of this from Laodicea, in Asia Minor, where a cross was superimposed on a menorah—a transformation in stone that might well have been associated with the kinds of prayers, incense, and sprinkling of holy water that we have seen in Moldova. Did Father Chirbik know that he was breaking up a menorah modeled on the Arch of Titus lampstand, or at least the symbol of the State of Israel? If he did, he didn't say so. Whatever the case, this sort of rightist behavior is generally held at bay by local governments, in part as a litmus test of their status as non-anti-Semitic, that is, civilized, countries.

Far more ominous than the Moldova incident was a little-noticed procession that took place in Jerusalem on the second night of Hanukkah, December 6, 2007—preserved on YouTube by its organizers. On that day the leadership of Jerusalem's *Mekhon ha-Miqdash*, the Temple Institute, staged a procession through the streets of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, carrying a large seven-branched menorah, bronze but plated with 42.5 kilograms of gold (at an estimated cost of \$1,000,000), provided by Ukrainian-Jewish businessman Vadim Rabinovitch. The lampstand was carried from the rather nondescript place in the excavations of the Byzantine Cardo—today a shopping area in the Jewish Quarter—where it had been exhibited since 2000 to a broad landing on the main staircase leading down to the Western Wall—a site with a brilliant view directly opposite the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The site had recently been designated “Menorah Square,” so there was no ambiguity as to its purpose. The large, and apparently quite heavy, menorah—which looks roughly like that of the Arch of Titus, was lifted into a protective glass case with stepped benches surrounding it—a spot that invited tour groups and other tourists to rest en route up the steps from the Western Wall—a “tourist destination” in the

Illuminating the Path to Armageddon

making. Soon it spawned a large number of tourist trinkets, all for sale at the Temple Institute, just a few meters up the hill on the next stoop in the stairway.

It was a fascinating, if rather understated procession, attended by well-wishers and American post-high-school “gap year” yeshiva students—a crowd that can always be counted on to sing and dance exuberantly, and like most students their age, with varying levels of nuance and understanding. The ceremony culminated in the blowing of two silver horns, crossed before the menorah in clear reference to the horns of the Arch of Titus relief. The menorah is almost home, the rhetoric went. Zionism brought it back to the Land of Israel, this parade proclaimed, but did not go far enough. The state has failed in its messianic mission of settling the entire land, restoring the Temple, and bringing the messiah. Beginning with the Oslo Accords (1994), which agreed to redivide the Land of Israel between Israelis and Palestinians, and continuing with the evacuation of Gaza in 2005, the State of Israel is no longer seen by this rightist polity as an instrument of redemption—for some, it is now an impediment. It is up to us, so the reasoning goes, those who truly are committed to the Land of Israel and the Temple of God, to finish the task. This procession is a microcosm of a larger process of movement from exile to redemption. It has a liminal existence that has continued after the State of Israel moved beyond its most explicitly messianic rhetoric, stuck in the “door-frame” between unfulfilled redemption and the end of time. Thus, this celebration brought the menorah—the redeemed and redeeming “Arch of Titus” menorah—within sight of the Temple Mount itself. This procession gave expression to an increasingly sectarian form of post-Zionism—not its well-known leftist expression, but its less discussed and sometimes violent rightist variant.

The Temple Institute was founded in 1987 by Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, whose influence is pervasive to this day and whose biography is widely known. Ariel, originally Stieglitz (Ariel is one of the biblical names for Jerusalem), a former student of the ultranationalist Merkaz ha-Rav Kook Yeshiva, was one of the soldiers involved in the capture of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif during the Six-Day War in June 1967. He is a follower of Rabbi Shlomo Goren (d. 1994), a major thinker and actor of the religious Zionist “Land of Israel” movement and a former chief rabbi of the military and of the State of Israel. Goren was well known for his messianic stance. According to Uzi Narkiss, the commander of the Jerusalem District in 1967,

THE MENORAH



Temple Institute Menorah, Menorah Square, Jerusalem, 2013, photograph by Olivier Lévy, Wikimedia Commons

Illuminating the Path to Armageddon

Goren urged that the Israel Defense Forces “blow up the mosques” and begin rebuilding the Temple (a claim refuted by others, but consonant with Goren’s general approach). Since then, Ariel has held leadership roles on the fringe of the Israeli body politic. An extreme voice who called on soldiers to refuse orders to evacuate the Sinai settlement of Yamit in 1982, Ariel went on to serve as number two on the Knesset list of the Kach Party of the radical American immigrant Rabbi Meir Kahane during the early 1980s, before the party was barred from the electoral system for violation of racism laws in 1988. Indicative of his often impassioned rhetoric is Ariel’s eulogy for Baruch Goldstein, an American immigrant doctor who, in 1994, entered the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron with his military-issue M-16 and gunned down twenty-nine Arab worshippers on the Jewish festival of Purim, mostly shot in the back as they prayed. Ariel is reported to have said that: “‘Baruch Goldstein is from now on our intercessor in heaven.’ The rabbi added that ‘this was not an individual act.’ According to the rabbi, Goldstein ‘heard the cry of the land which is being stolen each day by the Ishmaelites.’ Rabbi Ariel concluded: ‘The land will not be procured through peace agreements, but only through [the shedding of] blood.’”³

Ariel leads an organization dedicated to the rebuilding of the Temple in the near future, which in fact believes that it has already begun the construction with the fabrication of the Temple service vessels. Avoiding the kinds of illegal activities carried out by others on the radical Right (including a 1984 attempt to bomb the Dome of the Rock, Goldstein’s attack in 1994, and the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995), Ariel and the Temple Institute began an educational campaign to insinuate their naturalistic messianic vision—it has been correctly called an “alternate memory”—into the religious Zionist, fervently Orthodox, and “secular” mainstreams. Sarina Chen, who has written extensively about the religious program of the Temple Institute, has insightfully noted that even the Hebrew name for this organization, *Mekhon ha-Miqdash*, expresses the ambiguity of its messaging and project. *Mekhon ha-Miqdash* represents a kind of double entendre fitting for this organization. Derived from biblical Hebrew usage, the Modern Hebrew word *mekhon* has the secular meaning simply of a public institution. In biblical Hebrew—the underground and almost covert code where the Temple activists derive meaning—however, the verb root *k.n.n.* has given messianic overtones. We see this, Chen notes, in Exodus 15:17: “Thou bringest them in, and plantest them in the mountain of

Thine inheritance, the place [*mekhonz*] of your dwelling, an act of the Lord, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established [*komenanu*].”⁴ Eschewing the kinds of protests that characterized his youth, Ariel has chosen an incremental approach to achieving his messianic vision. As he explained in another context: “If you make things happen on the ground, people feel that you are the address, and this draws people. This in itself establishes authority” (my translation).⁵

The Temple Institute, up the stairs from the menorah, displays a model of the Temple as it was and will be once rebuilt and various Temple vessels built in accord with Jewish legal traditions that they claim may actually be used in the Temple. These are the result of studies carried out by a research institute led by Ariel dedicated to establishing exactly what Jewish law has construed as rules for the fabrication of the Temple instruments, which range from the priestly garments to all manner of shovels and pans, the showbread table, and the menorah. While these texts were essentially an academic exercise for millennia, the authors never lost faith that they would eventually have practical import. For Ariel, the moment for their practical implementation has arrived. Elements requiring Divine input or miracles that Jewish tradition considers necessary for the fabrication of the vessels are limited and overcome through reinterpretation. For example, while the stones of the priestly breastplate are to be carved by a stone-eating mythological creature known as the Shamir, the scholars of the institute have found legal ways to circumvent the Shamir, allowing human artisans to carve the stones.

The vessels built by the Temple Institute—first among them the menorah—are not just models, meant to be display items, even as they build on display techniques that were used for model Temple vessels that go back to the nineteenth century and were embraced by Zionism. In fact, they were favorite features of local exhibitions and the Palestine pavilions organized by the Zionist Organization at international fairs throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Such models have been rather common in Christian, particularly Anglophone Protestant, circles for generations, and displays of such items can be visited across the southern United States today (most expansively at the Holy Land Experience, a Christian theme park near Disney World in Orlando, Florida). Rather, the Temple Institute vessels are actual Temple vessels, built to serve in the rebuilt Temple. Thus, the priestly garments are occasionally worn by priests in practice ceremonies in preparation for their service in the Temple sacrifices. According to

the rhetoric of the Temple Institute, preparation of these artifacts—and of the personnel to use them—is the first step in the replacement of the mosques with the Temple and the resumption of the Jewish sacrificial regimen.

In the spring of 2014, for example, the Temple Institute staged practice sessions for priests conducting a mock Paschal sacrifice, which was strangely reminiscent of the well-publicized Samaritan Passover sacrifice that many Jews observe on the assumption of its biblical authenticity.⁶ These events, overseen by Ariel and accompanied by priests in white robes and the blowing of silver horns, were presented in a Hebrew video geared to an Israeli religious audience and in an English video intended for Jews and Christians. They were covered with curiosity by major press outlets. These are likely to become large and very public events, intentionally rivaling the Samaritan Passover. Similarly, in a YouTube video filmed on Hanukkah 2013, “Rabbi Yisrael Ariel Conducts Holy Temple Menorah Lighting Rehearsal,” Ariel promises the assembled crowd that a large, purpose-built, wooden seven-branched menorah is suitable for use in the Temple “this very evening.”⁷ A priest, in full regalia, is shown next to the menorah and recites a blessing based upon the Hanukkah liturgy but composed by the Temple Institute: “Blessed are you, Lord [*Hashem*] our God, King of the Universe, who has commanded us, through the sanctity of Aaron, to light the menorah of the Temple.” In this instance, the Temple Institute attempts to usurp contemporary public menorah-lighting practices (best known through Chabad’s public lighting ceremonies), while transforming standard liturgical texts for sectarian purposes. Thus, the widely known Hanukkah blessing, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah lights” has been turned into a Temple blessing of recent vintage (though of ancient parts). This radically new ceremony—like the sacrifice of the paschal lamb—“looks” kosher and stays just within the line separating the permitted from the forbidden in traditional Orthodox practice. It even includes a costumed priest.

The Temple Institute sees itself as preparing the Israeli public for this redemptive eventuality—which Ariel carefully states will occur “as soon as the government allows.” Its educational programs and publications are intended to help open Israeli society to their project. Not surprisingly, much of the support for the Temple Institute comes from American evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, who see the rebuilding of the Temple as a

part of their own apocalyptic vision—as a necessary prelude to the Second Coming of Christ. In fact, many of the graphics prepared by the institute are reminiscent of nineteenth-century Protestant Bible illustration of a sort still well represented within these Christian communities, and the Temple Institute works closely with a network of Christian supporters and partners—particularly in the United States, but worldwide. Funding also comes from the rightist government of Benjamin Netanyahu. According to a 2013 study, “The State of Israel directly funds various Temple movement activities. In the years 2008–2011, the Ministry of Culture, Science and Sports and the Ministry of Education supported the Temple Institute and the Midrasha [advanced school for women] at an average rate of NIS 412,000 [approximately \$137,000] per year. In 2012, the Midrasha, the educational arm of the Temple Institute, received NIS 189,000 [approximately \$63,000] from the Ministry of Education.”⁸ In 2013, Army Radio reports, the Temple Institute received a total of NIS 416,000, approximately \$139,000, in direct government funding. These sums do not include intangibles, such as staffing by women who fulfill their national service through work at the institute. Ariel’s publications—a primary form of outreach—are published by Carta Press, a well-known Jerusalem publisher of academic publications and atlases, as well as tourist publications—mostly directed toward Christian evangelical pilgrims. In recent years, the Temple Institute has successfully integrated itself and its vision within the nationalist “Modern Orthodox” polity, having recently negotiated for the publications to appear with the prestigious, and previously apolitical, Koren Publishers. Its most significant publications are a series of prayer books and study editions of rabbinic texts that provide glossy images of the Temple service and a commentary that connects directly the many aspects of Jewish prayer that focus on the Temple and its sacrifices to the current activities of the Temple Institute. The unstated claim is that Ariel’s reading of biblical and rabbinic sources represents both historical and eternal truth (these books contain no reference to Second Temple period literature that is external to the rabbinic canon, nor modern scholarship). The Temple Institute has vigorously sought to regularize its menorah, using it as a symbol for the movement and populating *Wikipedia* articles in Hebrew, English, and many other languages with the image of their lampstand.

The menorah in “Menorah Square” is the centerpiece of Ariel’s project. The process leading to its fabrication by artisan Chaim Odem is documented in a large and beautifully produced coffee-table book and in a

video presentation. Ariel's fascinating study of the menorah discusses each element of the lampstand, and this work serves as a guide and explanation for his process of building a menorah that will serve in the Temple. The design of the volume is meant to evoke modern—if not academic—credibility. It is printed on glossy paper, with numerous color illustrations interspersed. It also uses the tools of scholarship—footnotes, indices, image captions, and clear, thesis-driven chapters. This volume uses the language of the academy, and Ariel's followers seek to participate in academic conferences. The book systematically sets out Ariel's agenda that it is possible—and indeed a Divine imperative—to construct a usable menorah. Ariel argues for the use of archaeological discoveries as legal evidence—an approach generally frowned upon by contemporary rabbinic jurisprudence. The Temple Institute, a kind of eschatological post-Zionist “Orthodoxy” (it might even be “post-Orthodox”), pushes both Zionist/Israeli realpolitik and Orthodox Judaism toward messianic fulfillment. The religious Zionist notion that the State of Israel is “the first sprouts of our redemption” is thus provided with a guidebook for those advancing the actual creation of vessels suitable for service in the Temple.

Ariel begins his menorah book by setting out his sense that the biblical commandment to create and light the menorah is not specific to any particular period but is an imperative for the present. He even goes so far as to suggest that the making of a usable Temple menorah requires the recitation of a specific blessing, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has commanded us regarding the fabrication of the holy menorah.”⁹ Ariel spends considerable effort arguing against Maimonides's imagined straight-angled branches on the menorah and for the rounded ones that Jews have accepted since the Second Temple Period. Further, Ariel's numerous fellow travelers within the Chabad movement and other fervently Orthodox groups have of late accepted Maimonides's proposition and as a result have branded their own recognizable menorah. Coming from the Zionist branch of Israeli Orthodoxy, Ariel, clearly was committed to the rounded “Arch of Titus” branches of the menorah and engaging archaeology as a source for religious decision making, argues directly against the Maimonides interpretation. His goal throughout is clearly a menorah that is as similar to the arch menorah as it appears on the national “symbol” as possible. Thus, Ariel reproduced the arch menorah base, though he removed the mythological creatures, replacing them with pomegranates, and added three small feet. In fact, this menorah bears a striking resemblance

to the smaller brass menorahs used by Zionists, B'nai B'rith, and Masons at the turn of the twentieth century. It is the supersized version. Solving a major technical problem, Ariel argues that a menorah built without messianic supervision may be built of materials of lesser value than “pure gold.” This follows on a tradition in the Babylonian Talmud *Menaḥot* 28b (and parallels) that we earlier encountered, with its description of a lead Maccabean menorah built upon the cleansing of the Temple in 164 BCE, and the menorah’s continual upgrade from lead to silver to gold throughout the Hasmonean Period. In fact, Ariel’s menorah, built of brass and gilded, has the appearance of pure gold, though by 2013 the gold was peeling from the lampstand.

On a recent public tour of the Temple Institute (July 2013), the English-speaking guide, fulfilling her national service, explained that “we believe that the menorah is hidden at the Vatican. Until it is returned, we will light this menorah when the Temple is rebuilt.” Another member of the Temple Institute community, Rabbi Mordechai Persoff, made a similar claim, enthusiastically endorsing Rabbi Shtencel’s efforts in trying to retrieve the menorah from the Vatican, in an article dated August 22, 2014, that appears on the Temple Institute website. More recently, on October 4, 2014, clearly in response to my public questioning of the whole notion of the menorah at the Vatican (my *Wall Street Journal* piece also appeared in Hebrew translation), a spokesman tried to distance the Temple Institute from this broadly disputed contention. The “International Director” of the Temple Institute, American-born Rabbi Chaim Richman, who has considerable media savvy, was cited in a newspaper oriented to the nationalist Orthodox community, *Makor Rishon*, to the effect that: “Even if there are vessels in the Vatican, this does not release us from the contemporary imperative to prepare the vessels of the Temple. Even if we could search and compare [the Vatican vessels to] the vessels that we are creating at the Institute for Ancient [Temple] Vessels and if it became possible to use in the Temple some of the original vessels—if and when they will return—we prefer to act according to the traditions available to us and to progress to the extent that we can” (my translation). The Vatican connection is clearly a side issue for their apocalyptic, yet gradual, project of rebuilding the Temple.¹⁰

As I described earlier, the Temple Institute has placed their menorah as close as they can to the Temple itself. The placement of the menorah on Menorah Square was orchestrated as a public procession, with silver horns

similar to those of the arch crossed and blown before the approaching lampstand. While Zionism had succeeded in bringing the menorah “home” to Israel, the Temple Institute was intent upon taking up the metaphor, creating an actual Temple menorah and completing its transfer to within sight of the Temple Mount. In fact, through the branches of the menorah, the domes of the two mosques can readily be seen, bringing the replacement of the mosques—whether by divine, messianic, or human hands, that much closer. This positioning of the menorah, together with the vast array of literature, videos, and images created by the Temple Institute that show the rebuilt Temple in place of the golden dome, might clearly—and clear-sightedly—be seen as a threat both by those looking outward through the windows of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and by mainstream Israel as well.

Messianic rhetoric, so central to Zionist and early Israeli identity, has been maintained and enlivened by Israelis and diaspora Jews who inhabit the rightist side of Jewish politics—some of them religious, many not. Secular and Left-leaning Israel has generally relegated this kind of imagery—together with rhetoric relating modern Zionism to such epic heroes as the Maccabees, the Zealots of the Jewish War, and Bar Kokhba—to elementary-school curricula. It is for them a piece of the national civil religion, the stuff of children’s books, but not the motivating factor it once was. Archaeology, once a central national interest, is thus not a process of discovering a “deed” in the land as it once was, with each discovery at a Jewish site seen as strengthening a Jewish claim to the land. This claim is already self-evident to many. This distancing from nationalist symbols is part of a larger Western disconnection from nationalism, particularly in Western Europe, but with a very local twist. In Israel it is a response developed since the period of the Oslo Accords, with their promise of “two states for two peoples” and acceptance of Palestinian claims to pieces of historical Eretz Israel/Palestine. As the Israeli Left has distanced itself, however, the Right has moved in the opposite direction. For this community, Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza was and is not just a security decision—though that position is well represented, but a nationalist and religious one. It is a direct continuation, they argue, of the earlier Zionist program of settling the land “from the Sea to the Jordan” and, for followers of Jabotinsky, in all of Mandatory Palestine—which includes the territory of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

If the impetus for the Temple Institute and its very public menorah was the Oslo process, further radicalization of the menorah within the Zionist

religious Right was caused by the 2005 evacuation of the Jewish settlements in Gaza (organized collectively as Gush Katif) under Ariel Sharon—a general who has been described as the “architect of the settlement movement.” The level of disappointment among many of the settlers about their removal from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria in August 2005 was deep and active. Symbolic of this angst was the destruction of synagogues and the removal of Torah scrolls and other sacred items into Israel proper. This removal was seen by many as a forced exile, and imagery drawn from Jewish descriptions and depictions of exile were well reported in the Israeli media. Perhaps the most dramatic—or at least the most staged—removal ceremony took place at the village of Netzarim, the last Gaza settlement to be evacuated. There a large menorah was ceremonially removed from the roof of their synagogue and carried back to Israeli territory, eventually to the Western Wall and now to a memorial site and community center called the Gush Katif Museum in a Jerusalem apartment block.

This procession from Netzarim was filmed by Israeli television, and like the others that we have examined in this chapter, it was posted on YouTube.¹¹ It began with the removal of the menorah from the roof of the synagogue by a group of men. The video then shifts to a kind of ritual procession, with clearly anguished supporters lining the way. The procession begins with an elder, with a large white beard, holding a Torah scroll. Behind him is a large group carrying the Menorah, which rests on two planks in a manner that resonates with our Arch of Titus panel. The scene merges two well-known icons of Israeli civil religion—the Arch of Titus relief, with “Jews” bearing their holy objects into exile, and Samuel Hirszenberg’s often-reproduced painting *Exile*, which shows a group of Jews walking into an unknown exile, led by a bearded elder carrying a Torah scroll. This painting, now lost, is nonetheless well known in Israel, owing to its frequent reproduction and artist Nathan Rapoport’s rendition on the Warsaw Ghetto memorial (both in Warsaw and in its iteration at Yad Vashem, Israel’s central Holocaust memorial, in Jerusalem). The marchers of Gush Katif may also have had in mind the well-known photograph of the capture of an Israeli soldier at the Suez Canal by Egyptian forces in October 1973, who was carrying a Torah scroll with him. The procession was likely seen as a rendition of both.

The procession from Gaza likely influenced the Temple Institute’s Hanukkah procession two years later. The event in Gush Katif, however, was



Evacuation of Netzarim, Gaza Strip, August 19, 2005, photograph by Yossi Zeliger

far more complicated. Like the Hanukkah event, the Netzarim procession was sparked by the religious calendar, which is of central significance to religious Israel, but at times less noticed by secular Israel—particularly such dates as the fast of the Ninth of Av. The infusion of Temple/exile imagery at Netzarim was exasperated by the unfortunate—I would say Jewishly tone-deaf—decision of the Sharon government to carry out the Gaza withdrawal in July and August. It was originally to be concluded on August 1, 2005—the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av—which is known as Tisha B’Av and observed as the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and by Titus in 70 CE. It is the day that Jews traditionally commemorate the destruction of synagogues and their communities throughout history. Recognizing the error too late, the disengagement was moved to the day after, which just was not sufficient, owing to the generally negative associations that the three

weeks before the fast, and all of the month of Av, have in Jewish life. As the ancient Rabbis wrote, “When Av enters, joy decreases.”¹² The Sharon government inadvertently wrapped the destruction of Gush Katif into this mix of lamentations. To this day, more than a decade later, Israeli and American Wikipedia pages still list the “exile” from Gush Katif among the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people in the month of Av, and some Jewish settler communities recite specially written liturgical lamentations (*kinot*), modeled upon ancient prayers for the Temple, in memory of Gush Katif.

The symbolic value of this unfortunate choice was obvious to observers who viewed the events through even the most minimally traditional Jewish lenses, and it provided an opportunity for the messianic community and its broader constituency to think in larger metaphors than they might have were the withdrawal to have taken place in some religiously more neutral time of year. This circumstance was not missed by Aharon Shevo, a Holocaust survivor and well-known designer of stamps, medals, and coins for the Israeli government, as well as illustrator of his own Pass-over Haggadah. In the days before the evacuation of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005, Shevo published a protest poster showing the Arch of Titus panel. The panel is rolled like a scroll on its lower edge, and the legs of the men carrying the menorah are replaced with those of Israeli soldiers. Below is written in Hebrew the Jewish date—Tisha B’Av, 5765. According to Shevo, the poster represents the Jews carrying the menorah into exile, and Israeli soldiers (who by sectarian definition are not “Jews”) forcing the “Jews” of our own day, those of Gush Katif, into “exile” from their homes. The secular state is thus seen as interfering in the messianic process of redemption, and so this theme has been used in Israeli political discourse. This interpretation is in line with the interpretation intended for the pamphlets that accompanied the Medal of Liberation that was first minted in 1958—the standard to which Shevo responds. It represents real disillusionment with the claim imbedded deep in Israeli civil religion that the founding of the state brought the menorah home and that this redemption was carried out by Palestinian Jewish soldiers out of the ashes of the Holocaust.

Perhaps the most evocative, and in an Israeli sense, threatening, use to which Shevo’s image was put during the Gaza withdrawal was on a poster calling on soldiers during the Tisha B’Av fast to refuse to participate in the evacuation of Gaza. The accompanying text well expresses

Illuminating the Path to Armageddon

the spirit of Shevo's image, connecting the events of 2005 to this iconic Jewish tragedy:

Eikha—Whence?

Two thousand years ago Jews were exiled from their land,
Settlements in the Land of Israel were destroyed.

Then this was done by Romans.

Jewish soldier.

Do you want to join them?

This is not why you enlisted.

The poster provides hotline numbers for soldiers to call for support in refusing to participate in the withdrawal—a real red line in mainstream Israeli civil religion. While I have presented the procession at Netzarim and Shevo's visual appropriation of the Arch of Titus in succession, moving from Netzarim to Shevo as far as cause and effect, the historical reality may have been quite different. Shevo claims—my guess, correctly—that his posters served as the impetus for the Netzarim event. Thus, the *tableau vivant* performed at Netzarim, the reenactment of the Arch of Titus bas-relief, was prompted by an intermediate step—Shevo's powerful poster.

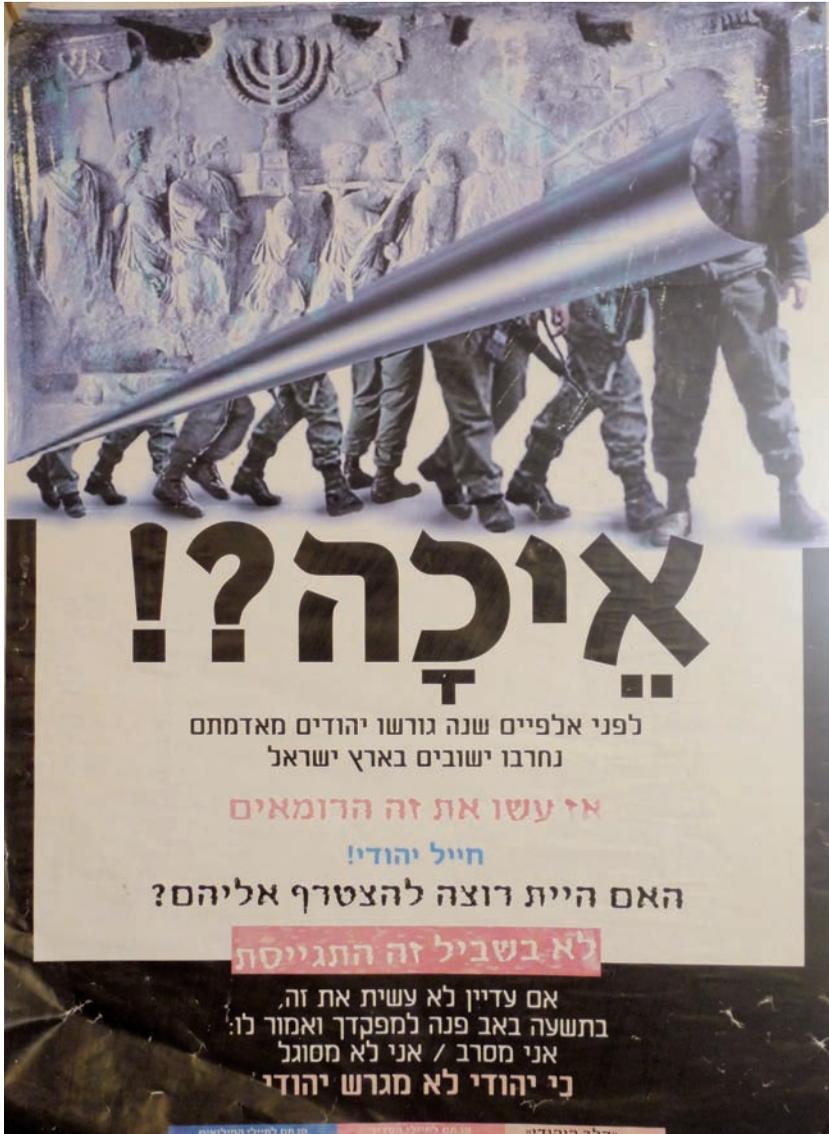
The procession at Netzarim was a refutation of the validity of the State of Israel and parallels a trend within the messianic community to avoid or alter the "Prayer for the State of Israel" and its claim that the state is the "first sprouts of our redemption." These attitudes, which have always confused the line between Judaism and the civil religion, are embedded in liturgical poetry that continues to be recited among the aggrieved a decade later. One lamentation, *kinna*, composed by a resident of Shilo in the West Bank, Yehoshua Buch, recalls each of the Gush Katif and northern West Bank (Samaria) communities that were removed in turn. Regarding Netzarim he wrote:

He [referring directly to Sharon] oppressed all of my gallant [ones]
to crush youths,

They pursued her and captured her *bein ha-metsarim* [literally,
"between the straits," the three week semimourning period
between the breach of the walls of Jerusalem on 17 Tammuz in
586 BCE and the Ninth of Av];

Oppressors saw her, they mocked heroes;

They became as foreigners, the sprouts of Netzarim.¹³



Poster calling on soldiers to resist service in Gaza, with Aharon Shevo's Arch of Titus poster, August 2005, collection of Leah and Steven Fine

Illuminating the Path to Armageddon

In Buch's poem, Ariel Sharon and the Israeli army take the place of Roman oppressors, using the same terminology used in ancient poetry for these enemies. As the author explains, "The *kinna* [poem] blames all Jews who took part in the *churban* [destruction] and expulsion and describes them in harsh words such as 'enemies,' 'pursuers,' etc." Whereas in antiquity, gentiles destroyed Jerusalem and occasionally synagogues, here, as in Shevo's interpretation of his art, the oppressors—those who cause the *churban*—are Jews who act against the "redemption." This complex story is rooted deep in the polemics and mutual miscomprehension of the secular Left and the messianic and nationalist Right in contemporary Israel, especially since the Oslo Accords. For now, however, I point out the sophistication with which the Israeli religious Right has transformed the Zionist menorah. No longer a metaphor to be "returned," the arch menorah is now a cipher for the messianic community and its practical steps toward settlement of the land and the rebuilding of the Temple—steps that are supported financially by Israel's current rightist government. For the Israeli messianic Right, the menorah is a symbol that reaches from Roman and Christian exile to Zionist return, to "leftist" Israeli "betrayal," and, for the most extreme, onward toward apocalyptic fulfillment.