

Samuel Fisher's Letter to the Jews: 'To All the House of Jacob'

Michael Birkel
Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, Indiana, USA

Abstract

In the 1650s, Samuel Fisher addressed an undated letter 'To All the House of Jacob', inviting Jews to attend to the light in their hearts. Composed in Hebrew, it consists almost entirely of allusions to the Jewish Scriptures or Christian Old Testament, much of it organised by clusters of images drawn from biblical sources. The letter is a call to repentance, drawing on the threats of divine wrath, particularly from the Psalms and the prophets. Since no English translation from Samuel Fisher's time is known, one is offered here.

Keywords

Samuel Fisher, Quakers and Jews, Early Quaker Writings, Hebrew, Early Quakers and the Bible

An undated letter of Samuel Fisher from the 1650s is addressed 'To All the House of Jacob scattered upon all the face of the earth so that they might listen to the voice of the light that in the hearts and turn from their evil ways.'¹ It was written as part of a larger Quaker effort to engage the Jews of the Netherlands. If the work was ever translated, the effort has not survived the centuries. This essay is an effort to fill that gap.

1 The source of the original text is in Friends Library in London, Tracts Volume 133, Tract 38A. I am grateful to Stephen W. Angell for bring this document to my attention—in fact, placing a photocopy into my hands—and encouraging me to translate it in order to make it available to historians of Quakerism who may not have access to Hebrew. This article has benefited from conversation with him at various points.

Quakers and Jews

Interest in Jews was widespread in England in the mid-seventeenth century. Some Christians wanted the Jews to be allowed to settle once again in that country, from which they had been expelled by royal decree of Edward I in 1290. In the eschatological fervour of the seventeenth century it was thought that the readmission of the Jews, who it was hoped would then convert to Christianity, would help to usher in the Second Coming. In some ways, this is akin to twenty-first-century Evangelical Christians' support for the modern state of Israel. Many who shared such apocalyptic views, in both historical periods, were not sympathetic towards actual, living Jews, or for that matter much interested in Jews except as an abstraction that was necessary for an end-time scenario. Early Quakers could be on both sides of this issue. Friends such as George Keith, who at one point had a great interest in both Jewish Kabbalah and in apocalyptic timetables,² showed interest in the conversion of the Jews as an eschatological phenomenon but no inclination to meet living Jews. Others, such as Samuel Fisher, William Caton, John Perrot and John Luffe, met with actual Jews to bring them the Quaker message and to turn them to the Light.³

Since Quakers were hardly structured as a separate sect in the 1650s it is questionable whether they were seeking to convert Jews to Quakerism as an identifiable Christian denomination. They were devoted to the idea of converting Jews to the Light in their consciences, which in early Quaker understanding was Jesus Christ. Samuel Fisher and John Stubbs reported in a letter from Venice on the 18th day of the 4th month (that is, June) 1658 that they received a 'quiet hearing' from

especially the Jewes, who though Zealous of their circumsision, yet deny not the light in y^e conscience to be the chiefe teacher without obedience to which all outward observations avayle not, nor yet deny us accesse to speake as freely as wee can desire, both in their synagogues & elsewhere, but rather desire discourse with us. Loving us not a little in that they see us against the Popish superstitions, fopperies, and Images, with some or other of them we have dayly discourse upon

2 See, for example, his correspondence with the German polymath and translator of Kabbalah, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Wolfenbüttel Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod. Guelph extrav. 30.4, fol. 16, viewed at <http://diglib.hab.de/mss/30-4-extrav/start.htm?image=00039> [accessed 04/10/20] and ff.

3 See Hull, W., *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam*, Swarthmore College Monographs on Quaker History, No. 4; Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1938, p. 13, and Braithwaite, W. C., *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, rev. Henry J. Cadbury; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1955, pp. 421–22, 427–28. Early Quaker eschatological fervour issued forth in an urgent sense of obligation to spread the Quaker message. George Fox, for example, wrote an exhortatory letter to the emperor of China—though there is no evidence that it was translated into Mandarin or that it reached China. See Fox, G., *For the Emperor of China, and His Subordinate Kings and Princes*, in Fox, G., *Works*, vol. 4; Philadelphia, PA: Marcus Gould, 1831, pp. 252–54. The text was, however translated into Latin: Fox, G., *Pro Imperatore Chinensi: Ac Omnibus Ejus Regibus et Principibus Subordinatis; A Populo Dei in Anglia, Vocato Anglia Quakers*, London: R. Wilson, 1660.

the change as we are made to meete them who delight to hear of any hopes of an admission for them to live in England, which might tent much to the conversion of some among them, if such a thing might come to passe.⁴

Similarly, in a letter from Rome dated 'the 7th day of the 6th moneth 1658' (that is, 7 August) Fisher and Stubbs report of their positive experiences among the Jewish communities from Amsterdam to Rome.⁵

Samuel Fisher's Letter 'To All the House of Jacob' was published in Hebrew. While very rare, this was not a singular effort to reach Jews in their ancient language. Margaret Fell composed *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham*⁶ in 1656, which was printed in a facing-page edition of English and Hebrew. In fact, she had hoped that Fisher, who was one of the few early Friends acquainted with Hebrew, would translate that treatise,⁷ but he did not prove up to the task.⁸

Samuel Fisher's grasp of Biblical Hebrew was, nonetheless, impressive. Prior to his joining the dissenters (first the Baptists, later Quakers), he had earned a master's degree at Oxford. He used his scholarly prowess to produce the enormous work for which he is best known: his *Rusticus ad Academicos*.⁹ This lengthy work is a profound work of textual criticism as well as an effort to articulate a Quaker understanding of Scripture, in which he challenges notions of a divinely preserved biblical text and subordinates the scriptures to the divine source, the Light of Christ, that inspired them, a source still directly available to believers. This Light was the only infallible teacher, because the scriptures had been miscopied and mistranslated across the centuries.¹⁰

4 Cited in Villani, S. *Tremolanti e Papisti*, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996, p. 183. See also Carroll, K. L., 'Quakers in Venice, 1657–1658', *Quaker History* 92 (2003), pp. 22–33.

5 Villani, *Tremolanti e Papisti*, p. 187.

6 N.p., n.d.

7 In a letter to Fisher composed on 17 March 1656 she wrote 'in the Eternell Spirit and power I have writen unto thee, it hath bene In mee a prety while to ly before thee for the seeds sake A Booke of myne, to translaite into Ebrue, which the Lord moved for the Jues'. Letter 48 in Glines, E. F., *Undaunted Zeal: the letters of Margaret Fell*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2003, p. 174.

8 The general opinion is that Baruch Spinoza was the translator. See Popkin, R. H. and Signer, M. A., *Spinoza's Earliest Publication? The Hebrew translation of Margaret Fell's a loving salutation to the seed of Abraham among the Jews, wherever they Are scattered up and down upon the face of the Earth. Philosophia spinozae perennis*, vol. 7; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987.

9 Fisher, S., *Rusticus Ad Academicos, Or, the Country Correcting the University and Clergy*, London: Robert Wilson, 1660. Page references in Samuel Fisher's other writings are taken from his collected works, *The Testimony of Truth Exalted: by the collected labours of that worthy man, good scribe, and faithful minister of Jesus Christ, Samuel Fisher who died a prisoner for the testimony of Jesus and word of God, anno 1665*, London, 1679.

10 See Angell, S. W., 'Renegade Oxonian: Samuel Fisher's importance in formulating a Quaker understanding of scripture', in Angell, S. W. and Dandelion, P. (eds), *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought, 1647–1723*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 137–54.

Contents of the Letter

Even though the Bible was relegated to a secondary status in authority, it was still valuable and reliable insofar as it was accurately handed down. Fisher's appreciation for scripture is evidenced in his Letter: almost the entirety of the text consists of biblical quotations and allusions.

Fisher's Letter is shaped by repeating themes. Some are deeply eschatological: day (as in the Day of the Lord), judgment, burning and fire. Related to judgment are recurring themes of divine anger and mercy. He makes constant contrast between the righteous or good, on the one hand, and the wicked or evil, on the other. He points out a way or path to righteousness and calls his readers to walk in it. In the biblical Hebrew that he employs the chief term for interiority is 'heart', which appears some 15 times. The light to which he beckons his readers dwells in the heart. The 'light in the heart' is his way of translating the early Quaker expressions 'the light within' or 'the light in the conscience'. Samuel Fisher urges his readers to wait, to seek this light and to return to it. In biblical Hebrew the heart is the seat of intellect and the organ of moral discernment. Consonant with ancient understanding, the seat of feelings in Samuel Fisher's text is the kidneys, as seen in his use of Jer. 17:10.

Other repeating terms include those that refer to exterior religious practices, such as burnt offerings, sacrifices, incense and circumcision. As a Quaker, he rejects such outward observances and summons his readers within. Quakers were just as dismissive of Protestant or Catholic rituals and practices as they were of ancient Jewish customs. Finally, his language of judgment should be noted. Echoing particularly the prophets, he refers to his audience as stubborn and rebellious. God cries to them, but they do not listen. As a result, unless they change their ways, when they call to God, God will not listen to them. These words are directed to Jews, but early Quaker writings more often directed such sharply judgmental language to other Christians.

One scholar has described the text as 'written in Fisher's inimitable style, one run-on sentence, with many digressions'.¹¹ Fisher's style may have been inimitable in that no other early Quaker is known to have composed in biblical Hebrew, but it is not in fact one run-on sentence. The phrases can be lengthy, but the text is regularly punctuated with the colon-like *sof passuq* (:) that marks the end of a verse in the Hebrew Scriptures and here serves the function of a period or full stop. As for digression, this is hardly inimitable. Like many early Quaker texts, Samuel Fisher's Letter is a patchwork of biblical quotations. In this case, scriptural

11 Popkin, R., 'Spinoza and Samuel Fisher', *Philosophia* 15 (1985), p. 220. There is a 'summary translation' of Fisher's Letter in Popkin and Signer, *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?*, but it is incomplete and rather deficient, in part because it does not recognise many of Fisher's references to biblical sources, leading to a misunderstanding of the original at points.

references make up nearly the entire composition. These writings were often organised by clusters of biblical words and images, and those noted above, such as judgment, good and evil, and the day of the Lord, provide structure to Samuel Fisher's writing. Also as is found in early Quaker writings,¹² sometimes the subject turns upon images in one verse that effect a transition to another focal image. In the following example the word 'wicked' is a central motif, but the word 'cup' is a pivot point upon which attention turns from Ps. 11:6 to Ps. 75:9. The image of chaff serves as a kind of *inclusio* or envelope structure.

The **wicked** will be like chaff that the drives away; the **wicked** will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For God knows the way of the righteous, and the way of the **wicked** will perish. [Ps. 1:4–7] The wicked shall be turned to hell, and all the peoples that forget God, both the Jews and the gentiles. [Ps. 9:17] Upon the **wicked**, God will rain snares of fire and brimstone; a scorching wind will be the portion of their *cup*. [Ps. 11:6] For ready is a *cup* in the hand of the Lord and the wine is red, full of mixture, and he will pour out from it; but all the **wicked** of the earth will drain its dregs and drink it. [Ps. 75:9] Therefore hear this word which I am speaking to you from the Lord, for I love your souls, sons of Jacob, the word which the Lord calls through the hand of the prophets of old, saying, 'Gather yourselves together, gather, before the decree comes to be and a day has passed like chaff, before the Lord's anger comes upon you.' [Zeph. 2:1–3]

In a second example the word 'light' is dominant, but the occurrence of 'path' in Ps. 119:105 takes Fisher's attention to Jer. 6:16.

And now, house of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the **light** of the Lord, [Isa. 2:5] no longer in darkness and in paths of darkness as in the former days. Rather in the **light** of the Lord who is in the heart, and he is **enlightening** everyone one who is in the world. Behold this **light** is come to you in your heart, the one enlightening and the one who judges every word of your mouth and every thought of your heart. This is the law of God that is a lamp for your feet and a **light** for your *paths*. [Ps. 119:105] And the **light** will bring you to the ways and *paths* of old. This is the good way, which the Lord spoke for love of you by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ask for the *paths* of old. Where is the good *path*? and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. [Jer. 6:16]

A comparison of Fisher's Letter with Margaret Fell's *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews* reveals common themes: the coming Day of Judgment, walking in the Light, the Light in the conscience, circumcised hearts,

12 For a fuller description of this writing style based on associative imagery, see Birkel, M., *Engaging Scripture: reading the Bible with early Friends*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2005. I am grateful to Stephen Angell for pointing out to me that the ideas proposed here have an affinity with the findings of Michael P. Graves, whose research attends to early Quaker sermons and the 'key metaphors' that he finds there. Graves, M. P., *Preaching the Inward Light: early Quaker rhetoric*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009, see especially pp. 183–201.

rejection of sacrifices and burnt offerings, the inward law (though this looms much larger in Margaret Fell's treatise), divine nearness, a stubborn or rebellious people and a gathering of nations (again, a much more central theme in Margaret Fell's work). It is likely that Samuel Fisher had seen Margaret Fell's tract—as noted above, her correspondence suggests that she had hoped that he would translate it into Hebrew,¹³ which he did not do—but this is not conclusive evidence of direct influence on his Letter.

Scriptural Verses that Appear Elsewhere in Samuel Fisher's Writings

A search of Samuel Fisher's other uses of the biblical verses that appear in his Letter yields surprisingly limited overlap. His magnum opus, *Rusticus ad Academicos*, shares only three: Ps. 11:6, Isa. 55:6–7 and a very brief allusion to the new moon, Sabbaths and solemn assemblies of Isa. 1:13.¹⁴ In the 15-page *Christ's Light Springing*—half of which space is taken up by the Latin translation of the work in facing columns—three other verses appear: The 'great and terrible day of the Lord' of Joel 2:31 is briefly mentioned, as is the cup of red mixed wine of the Lord's wrath of Ps. 75:9 and the people's refusal to hearken to the trumpet of the Lord's warning from Jer. 6:16.¹⁵ Given that the biblical references in *Christ's Light Springing* are overwhelmingly from the New Testament, the appearance of these three verses may suggest that they are particularly attractive to Samuel Fisher when he is concerned to threaten divine judgment, as he is in both *Christ's Light Springing* and in his Letter.

The Translation

Letter from Samuel Fisher.

To All the House of Jacob scattered upon all the face of the earth so that they might listen to the voice of the light that in the hearts¹⁶ and turn from their evil ways.

Listen, sons of Israel, House of Jacob, give ear, repent, and turn from the wickedness of your ways, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, which all the evil and the doers of iniquity do not know. For behold, the day is coming to burn as an oven and all the arrogant and all doers of evil will be stubble. And the day comes that will burn them up and will not leave them root or branch.¹⁷ The great

13 See note 5 above.

14 Fisher, *Testimony of Truth Exalted*, pp. 561, 629 and 120, respectively.

15 Fisher, *Testimony of Truth Exalted*, pp. 781, 781 and 784, respectively.

16 'In their hearts' could also be rendered as 'in the inner person' or 'in their consciences'.

17 Mal. 4:1: For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. (Biblical quotations in these notes are from the Authorised or King James Version, which, along with the Geneva Bible, was in common use among early Friends.)

and terrible day of the Lord is coming,¹⁸ and the Lord will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with his truth,¹⁹ who with it²⁰ searches the heart, testing the inward parts.²¹ He comes to bring every deed into judgment, against every concealed thing, whether it is good or evil,²² to give to a man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. Happy are the righteous, for [God] is good to them on that day, for they shall enjoy the fruits of their deeds.²³ Woe to the wicked, for it will be will with him, for the reward of his hands will be given to him.²⁴ Woe to those who proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul, for they have rewarded themselves [with] evil.²⁵ The wicked will be like chaff that the wind drives away; the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For God knows the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked will perish.²⁶ The wicked shall be turned to hell, and all the peoples that forget God, both the Jews and the gentiles.²⁷

Upon the wicked, God will rain snares²⁸ of fire and brimstone; a scorching wind will be the portion of their cup.²⁹ For ready is a cup in the hand of the Lord and the wine is red, full of mixture, and he will pour out from it; but all the wicked of the earth will drain its dregs and drink it.³⁰

Therefore hear this word which I am speaking to you from the Lord, in my love for your souls, sons of Jacob, the word which the Lord calls through the hand of

18 Joel 2:31: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.

19 Ps. 96:13: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

20 That is, truth, righteousness.

21 Literally, the kidneys; cf. Jer. 17:10: I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

22 Eccl 12:14: For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

23 Prov. 1:31: Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

24 Isa. 3:11: Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

25 Isa. 3:9: And they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.

26 Ps. 1:4–7: The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

27 Ps. 9:17: The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

28 Recent versions uses 'coals' instead of 'snares'. The latter was retained because this was Fisher's understanding of the verse as verified in his *Rusticus ad Academicos* in *Testimony of Truth Exalted*, p. 561.

29 Ps. 11:6: Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

30 Ps. 75:9: For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.

the prophets of old, saying, Gather yourselves together, gather, before the decree comes to be³¹ and a day has passed like chaff, before the Lord's anger comes upon you. Seek the Lord, seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's anger.³² You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped iniquity, you have eaten the fruit of lies; because you trusted in your own way.³³ And now sow for yourselves for in righteousness and reap according to mercy.³⁴ Break up your fallow ground; it is time to seek the Lord, until he may come and rain righteousness upon you.³⁵

Therefore, house of Jacob, arise, arouse yourself, and return to your God. Keep mercy and justice, and wait continually upon your God.³⁶ Wait upon the Lord and he will strengthen your heart.³⁷

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, who will abundantly pardon.³⁸ The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.³⁹ Who is the one who desires to see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears to their cry.⁴⁰ They cry and the Lord hears and delivers them from all their troubles.⁴¹

31 Literally, 'is born'.

32 Zeph. 2:1–3: Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

33 Hos. 10:13: Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.

34 Hebrew: *chesed*, often translated as 'loving-mercy' or 'steadfast love'.

35 Hos. 10:12: Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

36 Hos. 12:6: Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

37 Ps. 27:14: Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

38 Isa. 55:6–7: Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

39 Ps. 34:18: The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

40 Ps. 34:22–25: What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.

41 Ps. 34:17: The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

For the face of the Lord alone is against evildoers, to cut off remembrance of them from the earth.⁴² And now, house of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the Lord,⁴³ no longer in darkness and in paths of darkness as in the former days. Rather in the light of the Lord that is in the heart, and he is enlightening everyone one who is in the world.⁴⁴ Behold this light is come to you in your heart, the one enlightening and the one who judges every word of your mouth and every thought of your heart.

This is the law of God that is a lamp for your feet and a light for your paths.⁴⁵ And the light will bring you to the ways and paths of old. This is the good way, which the Lord spoke for love of you by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ask for the paths of old. Where is the good path, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. And they said, we will not go and hearken to the sound of the trumpet. And they said we will not hearken. The Lord will bring evil upon you, fruit of their thoughts, for they have not hearkened to my word or my law but have rejected it.⁴⁶ And the Lord will reject your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, saying,

Of what use to me is incense that comes from Sheba or sweet cane from a distant land?⁴⁷ Know that if you do not truly amend your ways and your doings, if you do not truly execute judgment between a person and one's neighbor,⁴⁸ and if your hands are full of bloodshed and your hearts are full of deceit and oppression and violence, then your burnt offerings will not please the Lord, and your sacrifices will not be sweet to him. Incense is an abomination to him, the Lord cannot endure new moons and Sabbaths and the calling of assemblies, and solemn assemblies with iniquity.⁴⁹ If you multiply prayers, he will not

42 Ps. 34:16: The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

43 Isa. 2:5: O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.

44 Although Samuel Fisher does not mention Christ, this phrase echoes Jn. 1:9, which speaks of the 'Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'.

45 Ps. 119:105: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

46 Jer. 6:16: Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.

47 Jer. 6:22: To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me.

48 Jer. 7:5: For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour.

49 Isa. 1:13: Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

hear.⁵⁰ The Lord called and there was no answer; he spoke and you did not hear; but you did evil in his sight and did not choose that in which he delighted, but rather you chose your ways and your detestable things and the delight of your souls.⁵¹ And you, do not trust deceptive words that cannot profit,⁵² saying, We are the circumcised. The ark of the covenant of the Lord, Temple of the Lord, Temple of the Lord.⁵³ Does the Lord take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and your sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen [is better] than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.⁵⁴

The day is coming in which they will no longer say ‘the ark of the covenant, the temple of the Lord’ and it will not come to mind, but they will not remember it and will not visit, and they will no longer act and will no longer walk after the stubbornness of their heart to do evil. Rather, circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and remove the foreskins of your heart, lest the anger of the Lord come forth like fire and burn, and none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.⁵⁵ For thus says the Lord to the wicked, What does it mean for you to recite my statutes or to take up my covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline and cast my words behind you.⁵⁶ I will reprove and lay a charge before you. Consider this, you who forget God, lest he rip you apart and there is none to deliver you.⁵⁷ All the meek of the earth, who have done justice,⁵⁸ all who listen to the voice of

50 Isa. 1:15: And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

51 Isa. 65:12: Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.

52 Jer. 7:8: Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

53 Jer. 7:4: Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these.

54 1 Sam. 15:22–23: Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

55 Jer. 4:4: Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

56 Ps. 50:16: But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.

57 Ps. 50:21: These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

58 Zeph. 2:3: Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.

the Lord and walk in the light of the Lord in the heart and to the word of the Lord and to the commands of the Lord, which [word] is not distant but rather very close, in the mouth and in the heart, so that you may do it.⁵⁹ They will be hidden on the day of the Lord's anger.⁶⁰ Then God will punish and judge against all the circumcised with the uncircumcised. And the wicked nations are the uncircumcised of flesh, and the Jews the uncircumcised of heart.⁶¹ And all the uncircumcised of the ears [are those] who are unable to attend and whom the word of the Lord to them is as a reproach and they refuse to attend and they turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears from hearing. And they set their hearts as an adamant stone, not to hear the law,⁶² which it pleased the Lord to send, with his spirit and he gave into their hearts. And there will come for them a great wrath from the Lord and because he called and they did not listen; thus they will call and he will not listen. And know that the Lord of hosts tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and lover of violence.⁶³

Consider, please, and be turned, sons of Israel, and remember that you are stubborn.⁶⁴

From a lover of your soul,⁶⁵ whose name is
Samuel Fisher

59 Deut. 30:14: But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

60 Zeph. 2:3. See note 41.

61 Jer. 9:25–26: Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.

62 Zech. 7:11–12: But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.

63 Ps. 11:5: The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

64 'Rebellious' or 'turned aside' are other possible meanings for this word.

65 'A lover of your soul' was a common expression among early Friends. See, for example, Fox, G., 'To The People Of Uxbridge', in *Works*, vol. 4, p. 207; Blackborrow, S., *A Visit to the Spirit in Prison: and an invitation to all people to come to Christ the light of the world ...*, London, 1658, p. 5; Fell, M., *Call unto the Seed of Israel*, London, 1658, p. 35. Samuel Fisher used the expression elsewhere, such as at the end of *Christ's Light Springing*, in *Testimony of Truth Exalted*, p.787.

Author Details

Michael Birkel is Professor of Christian Spirituality at the Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, Indiana, USA. His works include: *Silence and Witness*; *'A Near Sympathy'*; *Engaging Scripture*; *Genius of the Transcendent*; *Qur'an in Conversation*; and *Quakers Reading Mystics*. He has contributed to the *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*; *Early Quakers and their Theology*; and *Quakers and Mysticism*.

Mailing address: Earlham School of Religion, 228 College Avenue, Richmond, IN, 47374, USA

Email: birkemi@earlham.edu