

Jonathan David Lawrence

Statement of Research Interests

For quite some time I have been intrigued by the interactions between Christians and Jews, both ancient and modern. This interest deepened during college as I helped organize interfaith activities including Holocaust Remembrance Services and Thanksgiving celebrations, leading up to a chance to live in Jerusalem for a year after college. During that year, the interplay of ancient traditions and artifacts with modern life intrigued me. In Jerusalem, and the rest of the Middle East, modern buildings and ancient remains intersect, a constant interaction of history and modernity. I returned to the United States enthusiastic about studying the ancient world and pursued a Masters of Divinity degree at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. While there I took electives in Jewish-Christian Dialogue, Biblical Archaeology, and ancient languages, worked at their archaeological museum and participated in the 1996 excavation at Sepphoris in Israel.

At Notre Dame, my dissertation topic was inspired by a puzzle from Sepphoris where we found many structures resembling *miqva'ot*, or Jewish ritual baths. However, most of these structures do not match officially recognized *miqva'ot* in their style and there are many more than would normally be expected for a city of its size. In addition, I heard anecdotal accounts of *miqva'ot* at Jewish sites which are nearly identical to baptismal fonts at Christian sites. I chose to examine these issues, to determine whether the styles of *miqva'ot* and baptismal fonts indicate ongoing interaction between Jews and Christians, long after the two communities supposedly separated.

In 2000 I returned to Sepphoris for another excavation season, followed by stays at the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman and the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. I had planned to visit as many sites with *miqva'ot* or baptismal fonts as possible in Israel and Jordan, but the political climate made such travel impossible.

My dissertation focused on the textual and archaeological evidence for the development of ritual bathing, leaving the later interactions between Jews and Christians for another time. It places ritual bathing for purity in a larger context by examining descriptions of ritual bathing along with the use of bathing for initiation and in symbolic contexts. Although many scholars have implied that Christians rejected Jewish ritual bathing for purity and replaced it with baptism for salvation, I argue that Jews and Christians both drew upon a spectrum of understandings of

bathing which encompassed ritual bathing, symbolic uses, and initiation. When the two communities diverged, they initially selected from this common tradition, rather than intentionally rejecting one another's bathing practices. The polemics and criticism came later.

Now that my dissertation is finished and has been accepted for publication with the Society of Biblical Literature's *Academia Biblica* series, I would like to pursue several areas of ongoing research. First, I would like to return to the larger study of Jewish *miqva'ot* and Christian baptismal fonts which I began in Israel and Jordan in the Summer and Fall of 2000. I have done much of the background work for this project, and will focus on the later development of baptism and ritual bathing as evidence of interaction between Jews and Christians.

Second, there are several side issues growing out of my dissertation which I would like to examine further. I would like to research the significance of several Jewish bathing installations in Jordan which have largely ignored, along with a new archaeological site, al-Maghtas, on the Jordan River which has been identified by some as the place where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. In addition, there is a need for an updated study of baptismal fonts in Jordan. Finally, I would like to see if there are additional resources for my project among unpublished excavations awaiting completion under the Israel Antiquities Authority. If so, I will try to acquire rights and permissions to that material.

While much of this research focuses on the ancient interactions of Jews and Christians, it has implications for their modern relationship as well. Eventually I hope to write on the modern application of ritual bathing and baptism in the various groups within modern Judaism and Christianity.

Finally, my research and teaching on Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust has inspired a book idea on theological responses to tragedy throughout history, from the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the Babylonian Exile up to the events of September 11, 2001. I have received positive feedback from a publisher and hope to complete a manuscript by Summer 2005. These projects help me integrate my interests in ancient and modern relationships between Jews and Christians and should provide material I can use to get my students excited about the study of religion as well. In addition, I am working on turning some presentations on teaching and learning into publishable articles.