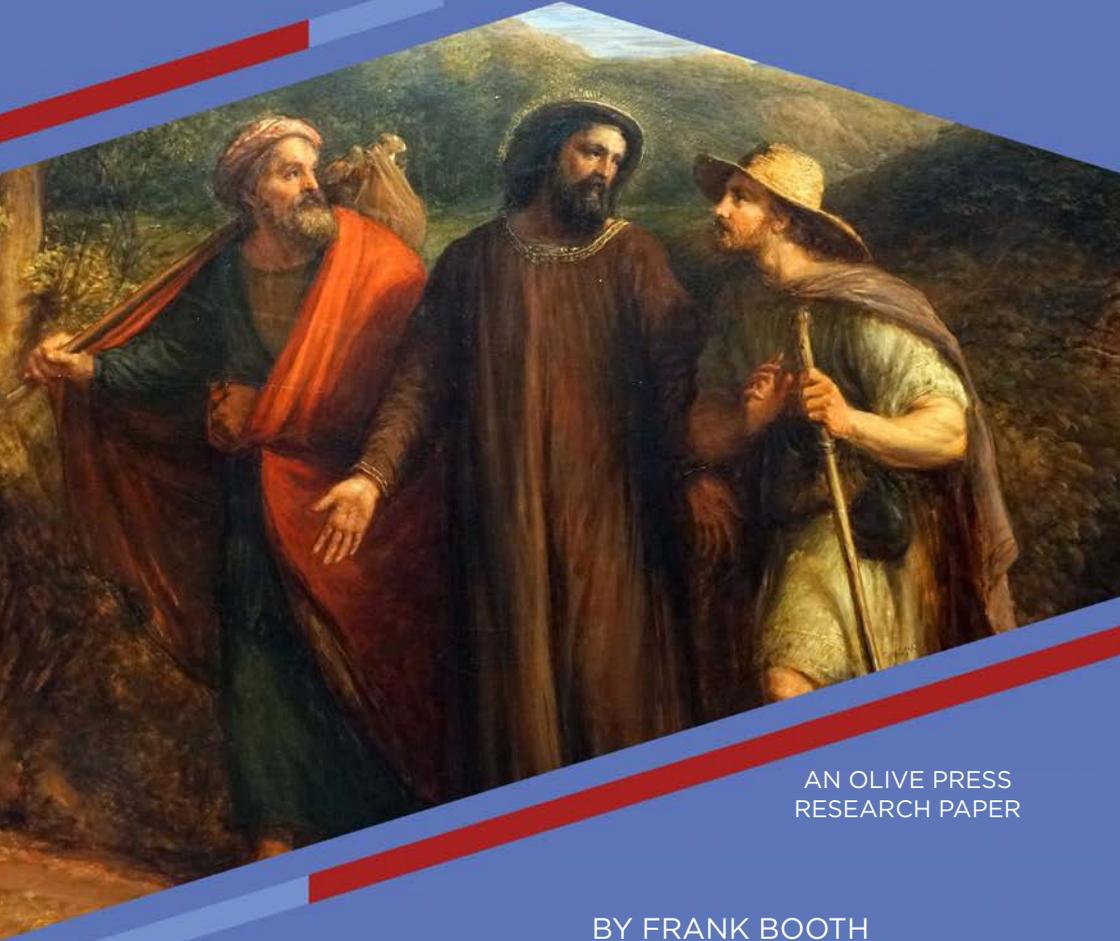


Emmaus and Beyond



AN OLIVE PRESS
RESEARCH PAPER

BY FRANK BOOTH

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CMJ UK is a working title of The Vincent Society, a charitable incorporated organisation, England & Wales Registered Charity Number 1153457

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Introduction

This paper will offer a fresh look at the well-known story in Luke's Gospel of Jesus' Resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus, followed by some observations about the role of Jesus' family in early church affairs, and a brief comment on minor characters in the New Testament.

The Road to Emmaus

The story of the Road to Emmaus is well known. According to Luke, early on the Sunday morning various women went to the tomb and found it empty (Luke 24:1-10; 22-24). Later in the day Cleopas and a companion were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. During their walk the risen Jesus joined them, listened to their story, then began to explain all that the Scriptures had said about him, but they did not recognise him until he broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-35).

The story raises a number of questions. Who were the mysterious pair walking to Emmaus? Why did Jesus meet with them before his inner circle of disciples? Why were they important to him? Why does Luke go into so much detail about an incident which Matthew ignores, and Mark barely mentions (Mark 16:12-13)? Why does Luke include the story at all? What is its significance? And where did Luke get the story?

Once we think about it in these terms, it seems likely that Jesus must have had a particular reason for meeting Cleopas and his companion before his inner circle of disciples, and that Luke had a very good reason for including the story and giving it so much space.

Who was Cleopas?

We normally speak of the two companions as *disciples*. However, neither Mark nor Luke use this term, both use the phrase *two*

of them. Who are the 'they' to whom the phrase *two of them* refers? In Luke's account 'they' seem to include those close family members who were with Jesus for the Passover (Luke 24:9-11). Alex Jacob reminds us that "Cleopas, in some [early] Christian traditions, is understood to be the brother of Joseph and therefore the 'uncle' of Jesus".¹

At one time, scholars were not very sympathetic to this view, holding that Clopas and Cleopas were two different people.² However eminent scholar Richard Bauckham writes: "*There seems no plausible reason for naming [Cleopas] other than to indicate he was the source of the [account] ... The story Luke tells would have been essentially the story Cleopas himself told about his encounter with the risen Jesus*". Bauckham concludes that "*Clopas is a very rare Semitic form of the Greek name Cleopas, so rare that we can be certain that this was the Clopas who, according to Hegesippus, was the brother of Jesus' father Joseph, and the father of Simon, who succeeded his cousin James as leader of the Jerusalem church*"; and that "*Cleopas was doubtless one of those relatives of Jesus who played a prominent role in the Jewish Christian movement*".³

Based on this understanding, we can imagine a close relationship between Cleopas and Jesus from his earliest days. Since there is no mention of Joseph during Jesus' ministry, it is generally assumed that Joseph died some time between Jesus' visit to Jerusalem aged 12 (Luke 2:42-52) and the beginning of his ministry. Cleopas and his wife were presumably supportive to his sister-in-law Mary and her family when she became a widow. Depending on how old Jesus was when Joseph died, Uncle Cleopas may very well have been someone Jesus turned to as a close relative while he was in his teens or early twenties.

¹ Alex Jacob *100 Days With Luke* (CPI 2018) p137

² John Wenham *Easter Enigma* p100

³ Richard Bauckham *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* p47; see also Bauckham *Gospel Women* p208 for an expanded treatment.

Mary, the wife of Cleopas, is mentioned by name (John 19:25) as one of the women at the cross, indicating that she and Cleopas were part of the small inner circle of family members who were with Jesus (and his disciples) for the Passover. Since no other close male relative is mentioned, it seems that Cleopas was the senior male member of the family party gathered for Passover, a very significant role in Jewish families.

In this light, Jesus has not just chosen to appear on a whim to some random disciples before he even appears to the Eleven, which is how we tend to see the passage. Rather, he 'reports in' to the head of the family, putting family before friends as any good Jewish boy should. Jesus even allows Cleopas to break the news to the Eleven, before he himself appears in their midst (Luke 24:36). Jewish family protocols are being respected. Jesus' first priority is to reassure his grieving family before consoling his friends.

Mary, Wife of Cleopas (Clopas)⁴

The next question is, who was Cleopas' companion? One popular suggestion which has gained much support is that his companion was his wife. The idea would be that she was travelling back home with her husband, but Luke for whatever reason does not mention her by name, perhaps because as a woman her testimony does not count as much as her husband's. But Luke has specifically named other female witnesses to the resurrection (Luke 24:10), so why not here?

John deliberately names Mary the wife of Clopas as being one of the women at the cross (John 19:25), so why is she not named here? Given these considerations, it would seem to me that Cleopas' wife was probably not his companion on this journey, that she was still back with her sisters-in-law in Jerusalem. We must look elsewhere.

Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem

In later years, Cleopas' son Simeon (or Simon) was the acknowledged leader of the church in Jerusalem. Simeon seems to have come into leadership sometime after the death of his cousin James in 62AD, eventually suffering a martyr's death himself around 107AD.⁵ This raises a possibility – could his son Simeon have been Cleopas' companion on their journey home to Emmaus?

There is very good support for this from the early church. One of the earliest church historians, Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (c265-339), endorses this view.⁶ Eusebius understood Cleopas to be Joseph's brother, and he identifies his companion on the Emmaus road to be his son Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem. Eusebius follows Origen, a renowned early Christian scholar who lived in Caesarea prior to Eusebius. Origen (c 185-254) himself identified Cleopas as Joseph's brother and his companion to be his son Simeon.⁷ This would mean that if Origen and Eusebius are correct, even 70 years after Jesus' death the church in Jerusalem was still being led by someone who was not only a close relative of the earthly Jesus, but also a living witness of his resurrection.

We might remember that the apostle John was also a cousin of Jesus, possibly a similar age to Simeon. Tradition places John as living in Ephesus at an advanced age towards the end of the first century. This would mean that up to the end of the first century, 70 years or so after Jesus' death, there were still two first-person witnesses in the church, one in Jerusalem and the other in Ephesus, both of whom were members of Jesus' own family, and both of whom were also witnesses to his resurrection.

⁴ Bauckham discusses Mary of Clopas in some detail in *Gospel Women* p203-223

⁵ F F Bruce *The Spreading Flame* p263

⁶ James Edwards *The Gospel According to Luke* p717

⁷ Bauckham *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* p43

Why does Luke include the Emmaus Story?

We have found probable answers to the questions posed earlier: *Who were the mysterious pair walking to Emmaus? Why were they so important to Jesus? Why did Jesus meet with them before his inner circle of disciples? And where did Luke get the story?* Jesus met with his close relatives, his inner family members before his friends. He reported to his favourite uncle, the “Patriarch” of the family, before his work colleagues. Since it is often assumed that Luke obtained a great deal of eyewitness testimony from Mary the mother of Jesus and from the other women in Jesus’ family, it should be no surprise to find him using an eyewitness story from the male side of the family.

So why does Luke include the story, and what is its significance?

The Emmaus story is structured as a key component in Luke’s identification of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Luke has laid down many such markers already, significantly in the birth narrative, then subsequently (in chapters 4 and 7) showing how Jesus fulfils the Messianic requirements of Isaiah 61, and so on. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus identifies himself to two witnesses who were well known to the early church, as being the one who fulfilled the Messianic hope of Israel: *“beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”* (Luke 24:27) Luke then emphasises the same point when the risen Jesus meets the apostles: *“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”* (Luke 24:44)

Luke therefore ends his Gospel with two deeply significant incidents which would empower the most highly regarded leaders of the early church not only to bear powerful testimony to the resurrection, but also to the way that Jesus fulfilled all the Scriptures regarding the Messianic hopes of Israel. Luke emphasises that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Scriptures, as expounded to Cleopas and then to the Eleven,

using it as a fitting conclusion to his Gospel and as a bridge to his story of the early church. We see Luke following the same theme in Peter's sermon in Acts 2, that Jesus from Nazareth has fulfilled the Messianic promises in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Matthew does not need to tell the Emmaus story, because he anchors Jesus' identity as the Messiah of the Scriptures in a different way, by constantly referencing the Hebrew Scriptures throughout his narrative. It is more than likely that many of the Scriptures which Jesus identified as concerning himself in his conversation with Cleopas and Simeon are ones which Matthew uses in his Gospel. Jesus surely repeated this teaching many times during the forty days while he was with his disciples in Galilee, giving Matthew ample opportunity to note the Scriptures which he uses in his Gospel account.

Have we ever wished we could have been there on the road to Emmaus to hear the wonderful in-depth Bible study Jesus gave concerning himself? Why did such a wonderful sermon go to waste? Well, there is every reason to suppose that these insights were not lost but are found, not only in Matthew's Gospel but elsewhere throughout the New Testament, wherever the early church refers to Hebrew Scriptures which identify Jesus as Israel's Messiah.

Rather than referring directly to the Hebrew Scriptures as Matthew does, Luke instead includes the powerful account of the Emmaus encounter as evidence that the risen Jesus testified to the Scriptures concerning himself.

Family and Passover

As a Jewish feast, Passover is very much a family affair. We tend to think of Jesus celebrating Passover with his disciples, because that is what the Gospel accounts tell us. However, if we take a closer look we realise that many of those around Jesus during

Passion Week were his own family. Some had come with him from Galilee to celebrate Passover, others perhaps like Cleopas, may have lived around Jerusalem anyway. If Cleopas was Joseph's brother, and we know that Joseph came from Bethlehem, there is no reason to suppose that Cleopas ever lived in Galilee. Another reason for the Galileans to make a family trip to the feasts was to meet up with their Judean relatives.

It is interesting to note the various women who appear in the Passion and Resurrection accounts. There are those who seem to be a regular part of the retinue of disciples, others are family members who are there for the Passover. In either case, we should assume they are named because they were known within the early church. Those who regularly travelled with Jesus include Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susannah. The family members include his mother and aunts. Mary the wife of Cleopas was Jesus' aunt on Joseph's side. Zebedee's wife was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, so James and John the sons of Zebedee were Jesus' cousins.

When we come to the first accounts of the early church in Acts, even before Pentecost we find the women meeting to pray with the men. We find that among those who were constantly meeting to pray were Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers, together with the other women who were there with them (Acts 1:14). Both the women followers and the family members were intimately involved from the beginning, and were part of early church activities from then on.

Family and Mission

The normal way we think about Jesus' ministry and the subsequent mission of the church is that Jesus trained twelve followers who took over his work when he was gone. So it comes as something of a surprise when we see how much his own family was actually involved in the beginnings of the early church. We



understand from the Gospels that his family was not initially very supportive of his early ministry. Indeed, Jesus makes a point that those who respond to his teaching and those who do the will of God are his true 'family' (Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21).⁸ However by Acts 1:14 things have changed greatly, for here his mother and brothers are very much involved in the communal prayer meetings after his ascension.

When we think of Jesus' mission, we tend to think of him starting his mission in Galilee, then handing over to the apostles after his death, who base their ministry in Jerusalem. We may note with surprise family names popping up in the book of Acts, but we pass over them without thinking. However, the first three leaders (or bishops)⁹ of the church in Jerusalem were in fact family members, personal relatives of Jesus.

The Eleven apostles by contrast tend to disappear quite quickly from the recorded history of the church. Some of them leave no trace that we know of. Actually, this fits in very well with their designation as *apostles*. The word comes from a root meaning *sent ones* or *sent out*: what today we might call *missionaries*. That was the role Jesus had modelled for them, and it was the ministry they followed. They became itinerant teachers, preachers and evangelists, leaving the leadership of the Jerusalem church to others.

Philip went through Judea and Samaria with a powerful anointing to evangelise. He was even nicknamed "the Evangelist", suggesting his anointing to evangelise, for a period at least, surpassed even the others. Thomas, according to tradition, ended up in India. Matthew, it seems, ministered to the Jewish diasporas in Alexandria and Persia, as well as shepherding believers in his

⁸ See James Dunn *Jesus Remembered* p594-599 for a useful discussion on this point.

⁹ There are various views about the term sometimes translated as leader, elder or bishop in the early church, often 'bishop' is used for simplicity; see F F Bruce *The Spreading Flame* p263

home territory of Galilee. (Hence his inclusion in his Gospel of the visit of the Magi from Persia, and the flight to Egypt, both incidents which would be of great interest to the communities to which he ministered.)

At the beginning of Acts we find Peter and John teaching daily in the temple. However, by the end of their lives we understand Peter to be in Rome and John in Ephesus, leaders in the communities there. Meanwhile despite Peter's leading role on the day of Pentecost, the effective leader of the Jerusalem Council was James bar Zebedee. James, of course, was not just one of the twelve, but one of the inner group of three, Peter, James and John, who were especially close to Jesus. However, what is significant for this study is that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were Jesus' cousins.

When James bar Zebedee was killed by the Sanhedrin, he was succeeded as leader of the Jerusalem church, not by another of the Twelve, but by his cousin James, Jesus' own brother. Dunn summarises the accepted view that *James the brother of Jesus was the leading figure in the Jerusalem church from the early 40's to the early 60's*.¹⁰ When he was killed in 62 AD, he was followed by Simeon son of Cleopas, who as we have seen was also one of Jesus' cousins, this time on his father's side.

A "High-Priestly" Family?

Why, we might ask, this focus on Jesus' flesh-and-blood relatives? Why the persistence on "keeping it in the family", so that throughout the First Century, the Jerusalem church was led by Jesus' family after-the-flesh?

We know that the early believers began to see in Jesus the fulfilment of their long-held and long awaited theological and Messianic hopes and expectations. One of these expectations which we tend to pass over because it doesn't mean much to us,



was Messiah as the Great High Priest. The Book of Hebrews in particular covers this at length. The expectation of a priestly figure of Messiah was extremely strong in Second Temple Judaism. We know from the Dead Sea Scrolls that some were looking for either of two Messianic figures: one a priestly Messiah, the other a kingly or military figure. Others hoped that both expectations might be combined in the same person. Whatever the details, the priestly element was a constituent part of Messianic hopes.

The high priestly role in Judaism at this time was very much a family affair.¹¹ The role often stayed within the same family (or select group of noble families), sometimes being passed from father to son, sometimes both father and son seeming to share the title at the same time. So is it possible that a fervent belief in the identity of Jesus as the true high priest, replacing the corrupt and despised ruling elite at the temple, signified to his early followers that leadership in the Jerusalem church must come from the “priestly family”? It may seem strange to us, for whom the idea of Jesus as high priest is something of a theological technicality, interesting but not especially relevant to us today. However, in first century Judaism it was a massively significant part of their culture, a key component of their spiritual identity.

Moreover we know that Mary the mother of Jesus came from a priestly family, since her close relative Elizabeth was married to a priest. Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah was actually ministering in the holy of holies in the temple when the angel Gabriel appeared to him right at the start of Luke’s narrative (Luke 1:5-11). Luke specifically tells us that Zechariah *belonged to the priestly division of Abijah*, and that his wife *Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron*, meaning she too was of a priestly family. In fact “the ancestry of the prospective wife of a priest was carefully researched in order to verify that the woman was, ideally, the daughter of a priest or Levite”.¹² Since Mary was Elizabeth’s close relative (Luke 1:36),

¹⁰ James Dunn *Beginning in Jerusalem* p1078-1083

¹¹ See Dunn *Beginning in Jerusalem* p173-175

then it is fair to assume that she too came from the same Aaronic descent as Elizabeth.¹³

Given this background, is it too far fetched to suggest an underlying expectation that whatever happened elsewhere, leadership of the believing community in Jerusalem must remain in the "high priestly family", meaning Jesus' own flesh and blood? Maybe it was assumed rather than debated, but it would explain the cousin-sibling-cousin succession which we find dominating the leadership of the Jerusalem church throughout the first century. F. F. Bruce seems to be thinking along these lines when he refers to James, the brother of Jesus, as "*the undisputed leader of the Jerusalem church, perhaps the president of the Sanhedrin of the new Israel*".¹⁴

There is further supporting evidence for this idea in early Christian writings. One writer, Epiphanius,¹⁵ claims that James "*was Joseph's eldest born and consecrated. Moreover, we have found that he exercised a priestly office according to the old priesthood. Wherefore it was permitted to him to enter once a year into the holy of holies, as the law enjoined the high priests in accordance with the Scriptures. For it is so recorded concerning him by many before us, Eusebius and Clement and others*".¹⁶

This appears to be based on a previous statement by Hegesippus¹⁷, quoted by Eusebius, that "*To him alone it was permitted to enter the holy place, for he wore nothing woollen, but linen garments, and alone he entered the sanctuary; and was found on his knees asking forgiveness on behalf of the people, so that his knees became hard like a camel's*".

¹² Edwards *The Gospel According to Luke* p33

¹³ Edwards considers the Greek "signifies a kinswoman in the same tribe or clan". p49

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce *New Testament History* p211

¹⁵ Epiphanius was bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, c 310-403.

¹⁶ Richard Bauckham *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* p43

¹⁷ Hegesippus was a Jewish Christian writer, c 110-180.

Bauckham discusses whether this should be taken to imply that James was literally a high priest, which seems extremely unlikely, or rather "*that because of his ascetic sanctity and because he dressed like the priests in linen, was the only man other than the priests who was allowed to enter the holy place*".¹⁸

It would seem therefore, that there is good historical evidence that the early church associated James, the Lord's brother, as being allowed a special privilege of exercising a degree of priestly function, though presumably not actually the high priestly office. Or as Bauckham puts it, "*James, although not appointed high priest, was permitted to officiate as high priest*".¹⁹

At any rate, from our point of view, it supports the contention that there was a high degree of correlation in the minds of the early Jewish believers between the leadership of the Jerusalem church and a priestly or high priestly function, leading to the emphasis on family succession.

Minor Characters in the New Testament

We have seen what can happen when we look at an obscure character like Cleopas in the New Testament and dig a little deeper. There are many such minor characters, some we know by name, folk like Jairus, Nicodemus, Joanna, and Susannah. Others who appear in well-known stories are not named, like Cleopas' companion, or the woman at the well in Samaria.

Those who were named were mentioned as witnesses. The author was saying that such and such a person was there: they were a witness, you can ask them. If the person mentioned was not immediately available in that community, they may have had friends or relatives who were. They were mentioned as recognised figures in the early church community, whose testimony can be

¹⁸ Bauckham *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* p44

¹⁹ Bauckham *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* p44



accessed if necessary, and above all can be relied on. We should assume that the different authors mentioned those whom they expected their readers (or audiences)²⁰ to recognise.²¹

The Gospel writers were not primarily writers or historians. Their initial motivation was not to set out historical accounts for our benefit. They were primarily travelling evangelists and preachers. The accounts they have left us were written down in the first instance for the communities they visited. The Gospels were not written for posterity. The Holy Spirit knew of course, and he inspired and informed the writers for our benefit, but that is a different matter. As far as the Gospel writers were concerned, they were writing for their contemporaries. Each writer had a specific audience in mind, so the various witnesses they quoted would have been those whose names meant something to the congregations they visited and for whom they were writing. Possibly some of those named travelled with them from time to time.

Mark's churches were those of the Eastern Mediterranean area which he and Barnabas had founded. Luke was Paul's companion and without doubt had Paul's missionary congregations in mind. Matthew was probably writing primarily for Galilean audiences, together with the wider diaspora in Alexandria and beyond. John, who was writing later than the others, probably had all the churches in mind, although even here he may have predominately thought of Ephesus and the surrounding churches, where he and Mary (Jesus' mother) spent their later years.²² They named those characters who, in whatever way, could be considered as relevant witnesses to their intended audiences.

²⁰ Why 'audiences'? When the Gospels were first written, it is far more likely they were intended to be read aloud to church groups meeting in homes, rather than just by single individuals.

²¹ Bauckham discusses this at length in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* p45-47

²² The views expressed here are my own; different scholars have varying views as to when the Gospels were written and why, but this is not the place for that discussion.

Summary

The two companions on the Road to Emmaus were not just random disciples, as we usually think. They were Jesus' close relatives. Certainly one was Jesus' uncle, the patriarch of the clan. The other was very likely Cleopas' son Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem until about 107AD. After his Resurrection, like any good Jewish son, Jesus reassured his family first, and then it was his family members who were to predominate in the leadership of the Jerusalem church throughout the First Century.

Many of the minor characters we come across in the Gospels would have been known to the early church communities, with intriguing stories of their own. They were cited as witnesses who would have been accessible, either directly or indirectly, to the audiences the writers had in mind.

Frank Booth MA (May 2022)

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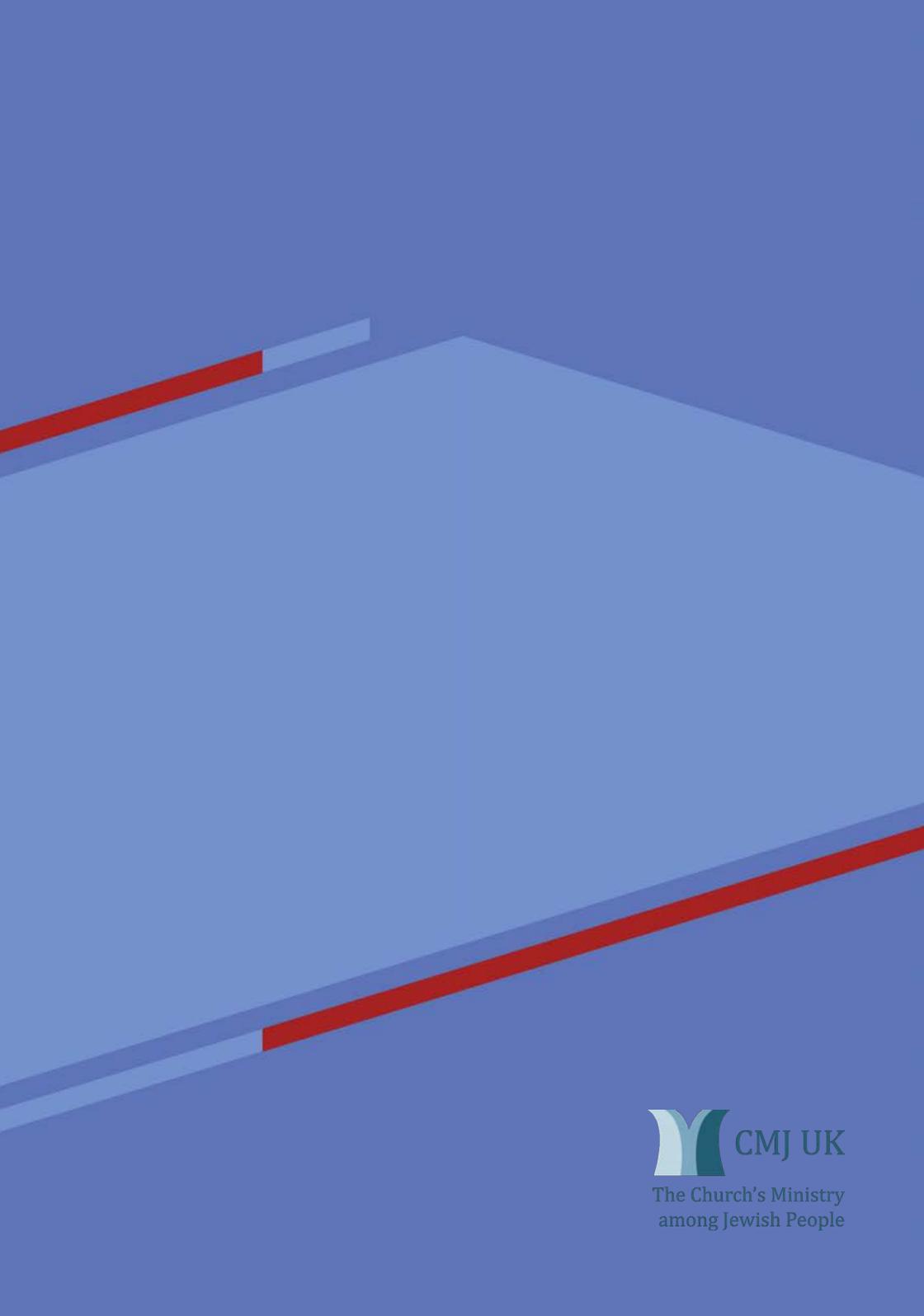
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