

# SEVEN LESSONS FROM PURIM

Dr. Daniel Botkin

This year there are two Purims, a "Purim Katan" (Little Purim) in Adar Aleph (February 16-17), and the main celebration in Adar Bet (March 18-19).

The story of Purim is in the Book of Esther. Most readers are familiar with the story. However, before we look at the seven lessons, let us first look at a brief summary of the story for the benefit of readers who are not familiar with it.

Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians, and a remnant of the Jews in Babylon returned to Israel. Esther, a young Jewish orphan who had been raised by her cousin Mordecai, was among the Jews who stayed in the land of the Medes and Persians, under the reign of King Ahasuerus. Queen Vashti, the wife of Ahasuerus, was deposed from her throne for insubordination, and King Ahasuerus was seeking a new bride to be his queen. The king ended up choosing Esther to be his queen. He did not know that Esther was Jewish, and she did not tell him, because Mordecai had told her not to tell.

Mordecai worked in the king's palace and happened to overhear two men plotting to kill the king. Mordecai told Queen Esther and she told King Ahasuerus. The two men were executed and the matter was recorded in the royal records.

After this, Haman the Agagite was promoted to a high position of authority, and the king ordered all the other servants in the palace to bow to Haman. Mordecai refused to bow, which infuriated Haman. When Haman found out Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to find a way to kill all the Jews. Being a superstitious pagan, Haman wanted to know when would be the luckiest time to put his plan into motion. This was determined by casting lots, called *purim*.

Haman told the king that there was a certain group of people in the kingdom who refused to obey the king's laws. These people needed to be put to death, Haman said. Of course Haman did not mention that he was talking about Mordecai's people, the Jews. The king trusted Haman and, probably without realizing what he was doing, signed a

decree authorizing the extermination of all the Jews, including little children and women, to take place on the 13th day of Adar.

The Jews went into mourning and fasting, weeping and wailing, and put on sackcloth and ashes. Queen Esther sent a message to Mordecai to find out what was going on. Mordecai sent word back to Esther telling her that she had to go to the king and persuade him to do something to prevent the genocide that was soon to take place. Esther sent a message to Mordecai explaining that no one, not even the queen, was allowed to approach the king uninvited. It was a crime punishable by death. If the king held out his golden scepter to a person who approached uninvited, that person would be pardoned. Otherwise, the uninvited person would be executed.

Mordecai's response to Esther was as follows: "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther told Mordecai to ask all the Jews to join her in three days of fasting, and she would go into the king. "And if I perish, I perish," she said.

When Esther approached the king, he held out his scepter and asked her what she wanted. "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him," she said.

At the banquet, Esther invited the king and Haman to join her again the following day. After the first banquet, Haman went home and bragged to his wife and friends about how great and important he was. "Yet all this availeth me nothing," he fumed, "so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Haman's wife and friends urged him to build a gallows and ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai on it. Why wait til the 13th of Adar? So Haman

ordered the gallows to be built and then went to talk to the king about hanging Mordecai.

The king was already in bed but was having trouble sleeping, so he called for someone to read to him from the royal records. The reader happened to read the section that told about Mordecai's exposing of the two men who had plotted to kill the king.

"What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?" the king asked.

"Nothing," the servant answered.

Haman was outside the room waiting to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai. The king called Haman in. Before Haman could say anything about Mordecai, the king asked him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?"

Haman naturally thought that the king wanted to honor *him*, so he suggested a pompous parade with a noble crier going ahead of the honored man, crying, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor!"

"Great ideal" the king said to Haman, "Get my royal robes and crown, put them on Mordecai the Jew, and mount him on my royal horse. And you be the crier to go before him, Haman!"

So instead of hanging Mordecai, Haman was forced to exalt him. Then Haman went to Esther's second banquet, and this time Esther told the king about Haman's plans to slaughter all of her people, the Jews. The king had Haman hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. Then the king wrote letters giving the Jews permission to defend themselves against the attacks that were planned for the 13th of Adar. He also promoted Mordecai the Jew to a high position. The Jews rejoiced. The non-Jews got scared. "And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (Est. 8:17). The people who still dared to attack the Jews were defeated. Afterwards, the Jews decided to have an annual celebration of this deliverance. They agreed to "keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as

the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor ... And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed" (Est. 9:21f, 28).

Now let us look at seven lessons from Purim.

### I. REMEMBER THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL

God is not mentioned anywhere at all in the entire Book of Esther. Yet it is obvious that He was quietly at work behind the scenes, setting up the downfall of Haman and the deliverance of His people. We can see how He orchestrated all the events which were necessary for the fulfilling of His plan -- the removal of Queen Vashti, the king's choice of Esther, Mordecai's discovery of the assassination plot, the king's insomnia, the servant's choice of what to read to the king that night, and the timing of Haman's arrival.

The story of Purim reminds us that God is Sovereign and often works in ways that are not apparent to the natural eye. Sometimes we look at a situation and it seems as though God is not at work at all; it seems like He is entirely absent and totally indifferent. Years later we may come to realize that God was indeed at work. He was just doing His work behind the scenes, in ways that we could not see at the time. Let me share an example.

About a year or so after I became a disciple of Jesus, a Christian friend and I ran into an old friend of ours from our high school days. We sat at a restaurant and talked with him a while, and told him how we had found the Lord. He listened politely, but did not seem very interested or impressed. A few years later I saw him again, and this time he was a believer. He told me that he had come under horrible conviction when we spoke to him at the restaurant that night. The fear of God was gripping his heart. He was terribly shaken by our testimony and tormented by the knowledge that he

was not right with the Lord. This brief, chance encounter set "the hound of heaven," the Holy Spirit on him. The hound of heaven soon caught up to him and brought the quarry home.

Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of Yahweh, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." Just as a gardener uses trenches, barriers, and walls of earth to make water flow the direction he desires, so Yahweh uses Divinely-appointed circumstances to turn people's hearts the direction He desires them to go. This truth is clearly seen in the way He turned the heart of King Ahasuerus. We have to trust that Yahweh is at work in people's hearts even when we see no immediate outward evidence.

### II. BE SLOW TO JUDGE OTHERS

It would be easy for us to criticize Esther and Mordecai's behavior. After all, King Ahasuerus was a heathen and had a harem of concubines. What was a nice Jewish girl like Esther doing marrying someone like him? And why did Mordecai tell her to assimilate and keep her Jewish identity a secret? Weren't they compromising their faith?

Under normal circumstances it would have been wrong for Esther to do what she did. However, we do not know all the details about the situation. The Scripture does not say that Esther married the king of her own free will. As a matter of fact, the Talmud claims that Esther was taken against her will. (Sanh. 74b) If this is true, it would explain why Mordecai told her to keep her Jewish identity a secret. If the king found out she was Jewish, it could make a bad situation even worse.

We need to be very careful about judging the actions of others, especially when we do not know all the details. Sometimes actions appear to be wrong only because we jump to conclusions, assume the worst, and judge according to appearance. For example, Pastor Pureheart is seen entering a sleazy bar, and Gertie the Gossip gets on the phone to tell everyone all about it. She doesn't know that the pastor was just going in there to get change for the parking meter.

We need to be careful about judging people even when their actions are wrong. Actions have reasons behind them. Reasons do not always justify or

excuse actions, but they can explain why people do wrong things. In one sense it was wrong for Esther to marry a heathen king, but apparently God brought Esther to the throne "for such a time as this." This situation was very similar to Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman. Samson's parents rightly opposed this marriage. "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines" (Jdg. 14:4).

Judgment of others is in the hand of the Lord. There are times when we need to confront people about their sins, but after we have confronted them, we have to leave their judgment in the hand of God. He is the One who knows the reasons, the motives, and the thoughts and intents of people's hearts.

### III. BE FAITHFUL TO GOD

Mordecai told Esther to hide her Jewish identity, but he made no effort to hide his own identity. On the contrary, he told his co-workers in the palace that he was a Jew, and he risked his life by refusing to bow to Haman according to the king's commandment. (The Torah does not forbid bowing to a king or king's official. Jewish commentators believe that Mordecai's refusal to bow was possibly because Haman had declared himself Divine and/or because Haman had idolatrous images on his clothing.)

Mordecai's faithfulness to God got him into trouble and brought the threat of annihilation to all the Jews. However, it was also Mordecai's faithfulness that ultimately caused God to act. This same pattern can be seen in other situations, such as the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den. The New Testament tells us that it was by faith that the saints of old "stopped the mouths of lions [and] quenched the violence of fire" (Heb. 11:33f). The New Testament writer of this passage goes on to point out, though, that other faith-filled saints were *not* delivered. They were tortured and killed in spite of their faith and their faithfulness. And in the post-Biblical centuries, God did not stop the mouths of the lions that were loosed on the faithful Christians in the Roman Colosseum, nor did He quench the fires that the Roman Catholics lit beneath Protestants tied to the stake.

So the lesson from Mordecai's faithfulness is two-fold. First, it teaches us that being true to our faith will probably get us into trouble at some point in our lives. The second lesson is to be faithful to God, whether we get deliverance in this life or die as a martyr. Either way, we win in the end.

#### IV. KNOW THAT YOU HAVE A PURPOSE

When Esther was reluctant to go to the king, Mordecai told her that if she did not do it, then deliverance would come "from another place." Then he asked the rhetorical question, "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

In a general sense, we each need to realize that we have been brought into the world at this point in history "for such a time as this." God was the One who decided when you would be born. It was His will that you be alive in this present generation, not in the generation of a hundred years ago or of a hundred years from now. He put you into this current period of history, and He has a destiny for you to fulfill. Whether you fill a major or minor role in the big picture, you have a role to play. Whether you are small or great, you have a purpose, just as every part of the human body has a purpose, whether small or great.

In a more specific sense, we need to realize that God often brings us into specific situations "for such a time as this." The situations may or may not be dangerous to us, and they may or may not be of major historical importance in the eyes of the world. They may be situations as simple as an opportunity to help a brother in need or an opportunity to point a lost soul to the Lord. If God brings you to such situations "for such a time as this" and you refuse to do your part, then "deliverance will arise from another place." In other words, God will use someone else to do the job, and that person will receive the eternal and temporal rewards that could have been yours.

#### V. RESPECT THOSE IN AUTHORITY OVER YOU

Esther was under the authority of the king as both a wife and a subject of the kingdom. The fact that she was the king's wife did not remove or diminish the need for her to submit to the king's

authority as a subject. If anything, her position as the king's wife made it especially important that she submit to the king as an example to all the other subjects of the kingdom. Pastors' wives, take note!

Pastors' wives are not the only ones who can learn something from Esther's attitude toward authority. We can all learn a lesson from her example of respect, humility, and submission. Esther was going before the king to make an appeal. There is a proper way to make an appeal to people who are in authority over us, whether we are talking about a king, a husband, a pastor, or an employer. Bill Gothard wrote an excellent study about making a proper appeal to people in authority. Gothard listed "Seven Basic Requirements For an Effective Appeal." They are as follows:

1. We must be in right standing with God.
2. We must have the right motives.
3. We must appeal at the appropriate time.
4. We must give accurate information.
5. We must have the right attitudes (reverence, loyalty, gratefulness; not rebellion and resignation).
6. We must use the appropriate words.
7. We must display the right response if our appeal is rejected.

These seven requirements can be seen in Esther. If people had Esther's attitude toward authority and followed her example, it would prevent a lot of unnecessary trouble.

#### VI. BEWARE OF THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

Haman was hanged on the very gallows that he had built for Mordecai. The Bible teaches that when the wicked try to harm the righteous, the plan often boomerangs, and the wicked end up suffering the exact same harm which they had intended to inflict on the righteous. "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate" (Ps. 7:15f).

Haman is a perfect example of this, as are the men who had Daniel cast into the den of lions. After Daniel's deliverance, those men, along with their wives

and children, were cast into the same den of lions, "and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den" (Dan. 6:24).

We need to beware of harming other people, in word as well as in deed, because we will reap whatever we sow. If you gossip about someone, someone else will gossip about you. If you insult people, other people will insult you. If you betray a friend or loved one, a friend or loved one will someday betray you. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2).

We need to beware of the boomerang effect. We also need to remember that the boomerang effect will work to our advantage when we have been unjustly attacked or harmed. Knowing about the boomerang effect makes it easier to not seek revenge, but to wait for God to avenge us and vindicate us.

#### VII. TRUST GOD TO TURN SORROW INTO JOY

If Haman had succeeded, the 14th and 15th of Adar would have been days of mourning for the Jews -- if any Jews had survived. Instead, these days became days of joy and feasting and gift-giving. Approximately 2,500 years have passed since the first Purim, and Jews still celebrate their deliverance from Haman every year. If Haman had not tried to kill the Jews, there would be no Festival of Purim. The irony of this is expressed in a Purim song that says of Haman: "And don't forget we owe him thanks/ for this jolly Feast of Purim."

If we trust God and are faithful to Him, He will eventually turn our sorrow into joy -- if not in this age, then in the age to come, when we will have all eternity to rejoice. In the meantime we can rejoice as much as possible under the circumstances in which we presently happen to be. We can celebrate Purim to commemorate God's past deliverance of His people and to express our faith that He will ultimately deliver us from all future Hamans.

Celebrating the Lord's deliverance of His people usually includes feasting, and Purim is no exception. As someone once remarked, "Most Jewish holidays can be summed up in just three sentences: 'They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat!' □

# ABIMELECH

Dr. Daniel Botkin

*The seventh in a series of articles on  
the Book of Judges*

Immediately after Gideon's death, the Israelites repeated the cycle of Apathy, Apostasy, Anomianism, and Anarchy: "And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not Yahweh their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubaal, namely Gideon; according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel" (Jdg. 8:33ff).

Before Gideon died, he begat seventy sons, "for he had many wives." In addition to these many wives, Gideon also had a concubine in Shechem, and she bore him a son named Abimelech. Abimelech was a natural-born leader. He knew how to gain people's confidence and allegiance, and he knew how to lead an army to victory. Unfortunately, Abimelech did not grow up to be a righteous Judge like his father Gideon. Abimelech grew up to be a murderer.

Abimelech had leadership qualities and probably could have been a Judge if it were not for his lust for power and control. He was not content to be a mere Judge; he wanted to be the king of Israel. His father Gideon had turned down this role when the people tried to enthrone him and crown him king and establish a dynasty. "I will not rule over you," Gideon had said, "neither shall my son rule over you: Yahweh shall rule over you" (Jdg. 8:23).

Unlike his father, Abimelech wanted to be king. But first he had to get rid of his seventy brothers to eliminate any rivals for the throne. To do this, Abimelech first persuaded his mother's family in Shechem to convince the men of Shechem to recog-

nize him and accept his leadership, reminding them, "I am your bone and your flesh." The men of Shechem agreed to follow Abimelech, and they gave him seventy pieces of silver from their pagan temple. Abimelech used this money to hire "vain and light persons" to follow him. With his mercenary army, Abimelech murdered his seventy brothers, and the men of Shechem proclaimed him king.

Abimelech was not a true Judge. The true Judges were called by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit to lead. Abimelech serves as an illustration of false leaders in the Body of Messiah. Looking at the methods Abimelech used can help us recognize false prophets and teachers who use similar methods to establish their own authority in the Body of Messiah. Let's consider what Abimelech did.

In contrast to the true Judges who were called by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit, Abimelech's authority was established by his own selfish, power-hungry ambition. This can be seen in his political manipulating of people in private, beginning with his relatives. Like Abimelech, false leaders in the Body often begin secretly by first getting the loyalty of those closest to them. These people

then persuade others to follow with them in recognizing their Abimelech.

Abimelech's hiring of vain and light persons to follow him shows us how false leaders will "buy" the loyalty of people who are spiritually shallow and undiscerning. The hired followers of today are usually not paid with silver, though. They are bribed with promises of "better worship" or "closer fellowship" or positions of power.

Abimelech's murder of his seventy brothers shows us how false shepherds will go to any length necessary to establish their own authority. If Abimelech must verbally murder his brothers with slander and back-biting and with murmuring against those whom God has put into positions of authority, so be it. "Follow me, not my brothers!" is the cry of Abimelech. A true shepherd may say, "Follow me." Our Chief Shepherd Yeshua said it to people. Even Paul, who was an undershepherd, said it. Paul wrote the words "Be ye followers of me" at least three times (1 Cor. 4:16 & 11:1; Ph'p 3:17). A true shepherd may call people to follow him, but he will not be one who has gained his position of leadership by betraying his innocent brothers as Abimelech did.

What Abimelech did not know was that he had missed one person in the massacre of his brothers. Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, had hidden himself and escaped. Jotham pronounced a curse on Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and God eventually brought Abimelech's reign and life to an end in direct fulfillment of that curse. (See Jdg. 9:56f.) Jotham himself did not destroy Abimelech. After Jotham spoke his curse, he went away and waited for God to act. Three years later God acted:

"When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: that the cruelty done to the

threescore and ten sons of Jerubaal [Gideon] might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren" (Jdg. 9:22-24).

Thus Abimelech was forced to fight against Shechem: "And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies" (9:34). Abimelech defeated the Shechemites. About one thousand men and women of Shechem who survived the initial attack fled to the top of a tower. Abimelech and his soldiers took wood and set the tower on fire, burning all the people to death. This was a very literal fulfillment of Jotham's curse to "let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem" (Jdg. 9:20).

It is interesting that Abimelech was forced to fight against the Shechemites, those who first empowered him. This is what often happens to presumptuous, self-willed leaders who use the methods of Abimelech to establish their own authority. They eventually end up having serious doctrinal disputes with the very people who first empower them. Abimelech fought against Shechem "by night." False leaders walk in spiritual darkness, and like Abimelech, they are in darkness when they fight their doctrinal battles. And just as Abimelech destroyed the Shechemites, so false shepherds often destroy the faith of those who first empower them.

Abimelech finally met his end when he attacked the next city, Thebez. When Abimelech came, all the inhabitants of Thebez locked themselves up in the city's tower, just like the Shechemites had done. Abimelech tried to set this tower afire, too. However, God had other plans for Abimelech: "And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull."

Abimelech was still conscious but knew he could not survive long, so he quickly called his armourbearer.

"Draw thy sword and slay me," Abimelech commanded, "so that men

say not of me 'A woman slew him.'"

The young man obeyed Abimelech's command, but that did not stop people from saying that a woman slew him. About a century and a half after his death, it was still said of Abimelech, "Did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez?" (2 Sam. 11:21).

When Abimelech's destruction came, it was swift and final. Peter tells us that false prophets and false teachers likewise "bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:1). Abimelech was unaware of the woman about to drop a millstone on his head. False shepherds are unaware of the fact that "their condemnation has long been hanging over them" (2 Pet. 2:3 NIV).

It is significant that the Lord used a woman with a millstone to destroy Abimelech, because God still uses a "woman" with a "millstone" to destroy the heresies of modern-day Abimelechs. The woman is the Bride of Messiah, His faithful remnant. The millstone speaks of grinding out the grain of God's Word on the treadmill of truth. (See 1 Cor. 9:7-11 & 1 Tim. 5:18.) God used a woman with a millstone to crack open Abimelech's head and expose his brain. God uses the Bride of Messiah to drop the millstone of His Word and expose false teachings. The Bride does not need to drop the entire Word. The woman dropped only "a piece of a millstone" on Abimelech's head. Sometimes just a single piece of Scripture is all it takes to expose a false teaching. And just as Abimelech was ashamed that a weak, defenseless woman destroyed him with something as foolish as a millstone, so false prophets are ashamed when the Bride of Messiah, weak and defenseless by human standards, destroys false teachings with something as "foolish" as the plain truth of God's Word.

False teachings are like Abimelech's skull. They seem firm and solid to people who do not have a good knowledge of all the Scriptures, Old Testament as well as New Testa-

ment. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). False teachings seem as firm and as solid as Abimelech's skull until they encounter the millstone of God's Word. When they start butting heads with the millstone of God's Word, one of them is going to crack. The weight of God's Word eventually splits open the skull, revealing the error and weakness of the teaching, and exposing the true motives and true nature of the false teacher. He is exposed as a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The Lord used an unnamed woman with a millstone (and a good aim!) to free His people from Abimelech. Today the Lord is using ordinary people who know how to handle the Word of God. God doesn't need a bunch of famous bigshots who have years of seminary training and lots of money and powerful denominational backing. He can use the formally-educated, famous bigshots if He wants to, and sometimes He does. However, it seems like He delights more in doing most of His work at the grassroots level, using common, ordinary people to do uncommon, extraordinary exploits for His glory.

The reaction of the Israelites to Abimelech's death is recorded at the end of the story: "And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place" (Jdg. 9:55). Here is a simple yet wonderful description of what a true Messianic Israelite does after he sees the millstone of God's Word expose the error of false teachings and the true nature of false shepherds. The true Messianic Israelite departs and goes unto his place, for he knows that his place is no longer with Abimelech. He abandons the confusing, destructive Babylonian forms of Christianity, and returns to "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). This is the place where he truly belongs, in the Messianic faith of Yeshua and the Apostles. Let's pray that more of our Christian brothers and sisters will see that their true place is not in Babylon but in the Israel of God. □

# "WOE, LO, GO!"

Daniel Botkin

About thirty years ago I heard a taped sermon by Leonard Ravenhill. I remember very few details of the sermon's content, but I still remember the main point of Ravenhill's message. It was based on Isaiah's vision of the Lord and the seraphim in Isaiah chapter 6, with an emphasis on the three words *Woe, Lo, and Go*.

Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and he heard the seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory!" The doorposts shook, the house was filled with smoke, and Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts." Here is the *Woe*.

One of the seraphim took a live coal from off the altar with tongs and laid it on Isaiah's mouth, saying, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Here is the *Lo*.

Then Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

"Here am I," Isaiah answered.  
"Send me."

"Go," the Lord said. Here is the *Go*.

The call to go into the world and make disciples is a universal call that applies to all disciples. We should all be involved in some way in disciple-making. We may be a teacher in a position of leadership in a local body, or we may be someone who helps new believers one-on-one as they start their walk on the path of discipleship. We may go across the ocean to make disciples, or we may just go across the street. The position we occupy in the local body and the distance we go is not the important thing. The important thing is that we go and get involved in making disciples.

Getting back to Ravenhill's sermon: Ravenhill's main point was that before

we *Go*, we should first experience the *Woe* and the *Lo*. These will prepare us and equip us to go. We need to have a revelation of Yahweh's holiness that will cause us to see ourselves as undone and make us cry out, "Woe is me!" When we understand that Yahweh is truly "holy, holy, holy," we see that "the whole earth is full of His glory." We see His glory in all of creation, in a common, tiny pebble as well as in the towering, majestic mountains. We can look at the details in a blade of grass and weep for joy at the wonders of God's creation.

When we behold the beauty of His holiness, we become aware of how ugly and unholly our fallen human nature is. We realize that there is no "Divine spark" inside an unrepentant, unregenerate heart until He ignites the heart. He kindles our spiritual passion with fire so holy that even the seraphim, the "burning ones" who burn with holiness, are not allowed to take that fire from off the altar with their hands. They must use tongs, lest they touch the holy altar.

After we have experienced our *Woe* and our *Lo*, we know that our iniquity is taken away and our sin is purged. This puts us in a position to hear the voice of the Lord, because purging produces spiritual sensitivity. It sharpens and refines our spiritual perception so that we can hear the voice of the Spirit more clearly. Then the commandment to "Go" will no longer be some vague, general instruction that leaves us confused and wondering where we're supposed to go, how we're supposed to get there, and what we're supposed to do

to make disciples when we get there. We will know the where, the how, and the what. We won't know everything, but we will know enough of the details to at least get started, and the Holy Spirit will continue to lead us as we go forward and fulfill our destiny.

Ravenhill shared a story about a group of ministers who were talking with each other about how much time pastors spend on sermon preparation.

"Leonard," one of them said to Ravenhill, "how much time do you think a preacher needs to prepare his message?"

"About twenty-five years," Ravenhill answered.

Understanding your call and your destiny usually does not come overnight. It usually comes after years of testing and trials to purge you and shape your character and personality to fit the calling you have.

I started seeking the Lord when I opened my Bible in the summer of 1970. I was saved in January 1972, and it has only been in the past seven or eight years (since I started Gates of Eden bimonthly and Gates of Eden Messianic Congregation) that I feel like I'm really plugged into what the Lord was preparing me for. The years prior to 1995 were not unproductive or unfruitful, but I believe that much of what I experienced between 1970-1995 was preparation for what I'm doing now and for what I will do in the future, God willing.

If you are young in the Lord, be encouraged to seek your *Woe* and your *Lo*. Don't just sit around doing nothing except waiting for it to happen, though. Get involved in helping to make disciples in whatever small ways you can. "For who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10) Greater responsibility is given only to those who are faithful in the small things. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Lk. 16:10). □

# THE SHEPHERD IN THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Daniel Botkin

Man has a God-shaped void, a longing in his heart that can only be permanently satisfied when Yeshua is invited to enter the heart and take up residence there. Even after the Lord has come into a person's heart, that person can still feel a longing for something more, a craving for a deeper relationship and a closer walk with the Lord. When these deep spiritual longings are not satisfied, a truly saved person can sometimes still feel lost -- not lost in the sense of being dead in sins, but lost in the sense of not knowing what direction to go.

This frustration of an aimless sheep who longs for something more is expressed by the Bride when she cries out to her Shepherd-Lover in the Song of Solomon: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" (1:7)

This is the cry of one who is not satisfied with her present spiritual experience. She has a genuine relationship with the Good Shepherd, but she is seeking something more. Her longing for a place of closer intimacy with the Lover of her soul is expressed in the question *Where?* She knows that there must be a place in the spiritual realm that she has not yet entered, a place where the Shepherd causes His flock to find rest even at noon, when the heat is its fiercest and shade is rare. She knows she has not yet entered such a place, because she is restless. She fears that if she does not find that place of rest, she might be tempted to "turn aside" and drift away from the Shepherd.

She is not content to be like the flocks of sheep who get all their spiritual revelation second-hand, from the Chief Shepherd's companions, the under-shepherds. She wants to find that place where the Chief Shepherd

Himself will give her first-hand revelations and spiritual experiences by the Holy Spirit. She wants to do more than read about great saints of the past who knew the Shepherd intimately. She wants to be a great saint of the present who knows the Shepherd intimately. She wants to know Him as the great I AM, not as the great I WAS. She is a love-sick sheep consumed with a holy desire to find these pastures of purity. "Tell me," she begs the Shepherd, "where is that place, how do I get there?"

The Shepherd answers her in the very next verse: "If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents. I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots" (1:8f).

Though the path is often hard to travel, it is not that hard to find. The Shepherd's opening line "If thou know not" implies that the way should be obvious. "You mean you don't know?" The Shepherd is somewhat surprised, but He gives her directions. The first thing she must do is "Go" (גֵּךְ, literally, "go out"; "exit"). She must leave Egypt so that she can no longer be likened to one of Pharaoh's horses. She must get herself untangled from the world so that she will no longer be like "a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh" (NIV).

After she has broken off her love for the things of this world, she must go in the footsteps of the flock. She must find a flock of sheep to whom she can join herself. There she can "feed her own kids" under the authority of faithful under-shepherds, beside the shepherds' tents. As she takes opportunities to minister to other kids in the flock, she will find those pastures where the Chief Shepherd gives first-hand revelations and spiritual experiences. She will learn that the only people the Chief Shepherd brings into these places are people who are

willing to leave Egypt, join a flock, and minister to others beside the tents of the under-shepherds, because revelations and spiritual experiences are given to benefit the whole flock, not just to thrill the individual.

Those who remain harnessed to the chariots of Egypt will never find these pastures of purity. Nor will sheep who refuse to join a flock and labor alongside the under-shepherds.

"But how do I find faithful under-shepherds?" some ask. "There are so many false shepherds out there. How do I recognize a true shepherd?"

Yeshua said you will know them by their fruits. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" He asked. Thorns and thistles draw blood; grapes and figs are sweet. The sweet fragrance of a true shepherd is expressed in the description of the Shepherd in the Song of Solomon 6:3. The Hebrew text describes the Shepherd as *ha-ro'eh ba-shoshanim* -- "He who grazes His sheep in roselike pastures" (Stone Edition Tanach).

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser's comment on this verse in the 12/6/02 Jewish Press provides a good description of our Chief Shepherd. It is also a good guideline for recognizing true under-shepherds. Goldwasser writes:

"There are different methods which shepherds use to keep their flocks in line. One shepherd may yell in a loud voice. A second will hit them with a stick. A third might bring in sheep dogs to keep the flock from straying.

"However, there is also the shepherd who leads his flock merely by holding nice roses, and the flock runs after him. This is the shepherd who is *ro'eh ba-shoshanim* -- who grazes his flock in rose-like pastures. He doesn't raise his voice; he doesn't lift his hand; he doesn't need to employ various punishments. He leads them with pleasantness and sweetness. That is the true shepherd who knows how to take care of his flock." □

# FRIENDSHIP

Daniel Botkin

Anyone who has ever been a part of a closely-knit congregation for very long has probably seen it happen. A new family joins a local congregation. They start spending time with the other members and soon develop close relationships. The father and mother find true friends in the congregation. The children become friends with the other children of the congregation. Everything seems to be fine. Then the father and/or the mother become dissatisfied with something, and they decide to leave the congregation. This decision ends the friendships that they and their children had developed.

More often than not, these friendships are flushed down the toilet for trivial, petty reasons. Of course the reasons do not seem trivial or petty to the people who choose to leave. But the truth of the matter is that usually the reasons are indeed trivial and petty compared to the value of the friendships.

Differences of opinion and doctrine are going to exist even among the godliest of men and women, because we all "see through a glass darkly" and we all "know in part, and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13:8 & 12). There are some immature people who cannot tolerate this fact of life. They confuse unity with uniformity. If they cannot persuade everyone (or at least the leadership and key people in the congregation) to see things their way, they throw away friendship because they cannot get their own way.

Sometimes there are legitimate reasons to leave a congregation. However, before leaving over differences, a person should ask himself some important questions: "Are my reasons for wanting to leave really more important than my friendship with these people? Which is more important to the Lord, preserving the unity of the Body, or having my own way in these matters?" Some other questions that need to be asked: "In

what way will my family and I be better off by leaving and severing our ties with these people? Will leaving the congregation strengthen or weaken my family? How will it affect my children?"

If people realized the value of friendship, they would not be so quick to throw friendships away over petty differences. Ben Sirach, the writer of the Apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, wrote some touching words about friendship:

"A loyal friend is a powerful defense. Whoever finds one has indeed found a treasure. A loyal friend is something beyond price. There is no measuring his worth. A loyal friend is the elixir of life, and those who fear the Lord will find one..."

"Do not desert an old friend; the new one will not be his match. New friend, new wine; when it grows old, you drink it with pleasure" (Sirach 6:14-17; 9:10).

Friendship in the Body is precious, yet some people throw it in the mud because the local body is not measuring up to their expectations. They throw away the gold coin of friendship to grab hold of a gilded lead slug. Sooner or later they find out that the gilded slug does not measure up to their expectations, either.

The friendship of David and Jonathan is beautifully described in 1 Samuel 18:1. It says that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David." True friendships are formed by the knitting together of souls. When the individual souls in a local body are knit together by the Holy Spirit, a new thing emerges. That new thing is a manifestation of the Son of God in a united, local body of dis-

ciples. When yarn is knitted together into a sweater, people see the sweater as one new thing. They no longer see it as a pile of loose, unconnected strings. In the same way, when the Lord knits together the souls of His disciples, people see that congregation as a united body, not as a group of separate individuals who are disconnected from one another.

The sad thing is that some people who are in the process of being knitted together with other souls spoil the Lord's work. "I don't like the way this sweater is turning out," they complain. "It's not measuring up to my expectations. It doesn't look the way I think it should look." Then they proceed to unravel the sweater and undo the knitting that the Holy Spirit has done. They separate themselves from the body and unravel others in the process, all because they place a higher value on their trivial personal preferences than on their friendships with the people.

Make no mistake about it. Satan's goal is to unravel any knitting together of souls that the Holy Spirit does. Satan attempts to separate friends by first magnifying our trivial personal preferences and petty complaints, and then by minimizing the value of our friendships. Satan puts our complaints and differences under a microscope and says to us, "Look how big and important these things are!" Then he puts our relationships with friends at the end of an inverted telescope and says to us, "Look how far and remote you are from these people! See how small and unimportant this relationship is!"

The knitting together of Jonathan's and David's souls was not something they did of their own accord. The verb is in the passive ("the soul of Jonathan was knit [נִקְרָשָׁה] with the soul of David"). Jonathan and David did not do the knitting. The knitting together of their souls took place spontaneously because of what they had in

common. Both men loved God and both men wanted the will of God. Jonathan wanted the will of God so much that he was willing to give up the throne. Jonathan was the son of King Saul, and under normal circumstances he would have been the king after the death of Saul. However, Jonathan knew that David was Yahweh's anointed, and that it was God's plan for David to be king. That is why Jonathan said to David, "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee" (1 Sam. 23:17).

Jonathan was willing to take second place because he recognized who the Lord had chosen and anointed to lead His people. And right here is where most congregational difficulties come from. Most divisions happen because of people's failure or refusal to recognize who it is that the Lord has chosen and anointed to lead the congregation. We have too many people wanting to rule like kings, and not enough Jonathans who are willing to take second place and be one of the leader's right-hand men.

Sometimes another scenario develops. People will acknowledge the chosen leader as the chosen leader, but they don't really want him to lead. What they really want is for the leader to do what they say, like a puppet. That way they can really be leading the congregation without having to endure the heavy burdens and responsibilities and fiery trials that come with leadership. They can let the puppet deal with all that stuff.

People who flush friendships down the toilet over trivial differences and personal preferences are the real losers. They lose true friends and all the benefits of having true friends. And if they destroy the friendships of others in the process, they will also lose the blessing and favor of the Lord, because one of the seven things Yahweh hates is "he that soweth discord ['strife,' NASB] among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19). Such a man is called "an abomination unto Him." This should tell us how much value the Lord places on friendship between brothers. Let's make sure we value it highly. □

## Tefillin and Acupuncture

Daniel Botkin

Acupuncture is the ancient Chinese practice of puncturing the skin with needles to treat illnesses and to relieve stress and pain. Practitioners of acupuncture have the human body mapped out so that pressure can be applied to key points on the body for the desired results. For example, applying pressure to the spot at the nape of the neck is said to directly stimulate and nourish the brain. Pressure under the pinkie on the side of the wrist is used to treat all psychiatric diseases.

Whether or not acupuncture really works may be debatable. It is interesting, though, that when tefillin (phylacteries) are tied in the traditional way, they apply pressure to the very key points of the body which, according to practitioners of acupuncture, relax and elevate the mind, improve mental concentration, and treat mental disorders. The lead article in the October 2002 *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, "Tefillin: An Ancient Acupuncture Point Prescription For Mental Clarity," discusses this fascinating parallel.

The author is Dr. Steven Schram, an American Jewish chiropractor and acupuncturist. Schram was attending a seminar on using acupuncture to treat psycho-emotional disorders when he realized that the pressure points mapped out by acupuncturists are the very same places where pressure is applied by the tightly-wound straps of tefillin.

For centuries Hasidic Jews have claimed that the mere wrapping of tefillin -- a practice based on Exodus 13:9 & 16 -- can elevate the spirit of man. One ancient Jewish text states that "a man wearing tefillin is enveloped by the supernal mind, and the Divine Presence does not depart from him." In his 1975 book *Tefillin*, author Aryeh Kaplan wrote: "When a man wears tefillin and also contemplates their significance, his very thoughts are elevated close to God. But even the physical act in itself can bring man to the loftiest heights."

If a man contemplates the significance of the tefillin long enough, he will see that the deeper meaning of the tefillin concerns God's sacred calendar. (See *The Phylacteries of God*, *The Phylacteries of Satan* and "Magic Squares, 666, & The Mark of The Beast." Both items available through Gates of Eden.) The details of the tefillin commandment are not spelled out in the Bible. It is even questionable whether the command was originally intended to be understood in a literal, physical way. Nonetheless, it now appears that wrapping them in the ancient, traditionally-prescribed manner may actually raise a person's spiritual consciousness and sharpen the spiritual senses. And that's a benefit we all could use. □

Source: Aliza Phillips, "Tefillin and Acupuncture: The Magic Touch?" *The Forward*, 13 Dec. 2002, p. 13.

# TAKING HOLD OF THE FRINGE OF YESHUA

## -Daniel Botkin-

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"Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments for all generations to come, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. And it shall be a fringe for you, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which have led you to play the harlot. This will remind you of all My commandments; do them, and be holy to your God.'" Numbers 15:37-40

Having men wear *tsitsit* ("fringes" or "tassels") is not a man-made tradition. It was God's idea, indeed, a command; therefore the question of whether or not the practice has any value is not even open to debate, for obedience to any of God's commandments has value, whether we perceive the benefit with our natural senses or not.

The fringes are to serve as a reminder to us to obey our Heavenly Father's commands. It is similar to the way a parent sometimes ties a string around a child's finger so the child will be reminded to do some chore or errand. The Talmud relates a story about a man who was about to commit an immoral act, but upon noticing his *tsitsit*, he was reminded that he would have to give an account to his Creator for his sin, and thus he did not yield to the temptation.<sup>1</sup>

The written Torah does not prescribe how the *tsitsit* are to be tied, but an elaborate system of knots and windings, full of beautiful symbolism, has been handed down by Jewish tradition. Orthodox Jewish men traditionally fulfill the Biblical command during morning prayer, when they wear a *tallit*, a fringed cloak that is sometimes called in English a prayer shawl. Pious Jews also wear a *tallit katan* (small *tallit*) under their shirt at all times and let the fringes hang outside the pants.

We know that Yeshua (Jesus) wore a *tallit* with fringes: "And behold, a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch His cloak, I shall get well'" (Matt.

9:20f). "Even today," a modern writer tells us, "a similar sight can be observed in Jerusalem in some of the ultra-Orthodox sections. Women who are sick will reach out to touch the fringes of a great rabbi in expectation that they will be healed."<sup>2</sup>

I started wearing *tsitsit* some years ago, when I came to the conclusion that a disciple of Yeshua has no reason not to follow Torah as Yeshua followed Torah. Some will argue that the commandment to wear fringes was addressed only to "the sons of Israel," and, therefore, it is irrelevant to non-Jewish disciples of Jesus. However, Yeshua commanded His disciples to obey Torah (Matt. 5:17ff). Then He told them to go and teach all nations (*goyim*, the Gentiles) "to observe *all* that I have commanded *you*" (Matt. 28:19f). Obedience to every jot and title of the Torah (even the wearing of *tsitsit*) is included in that word "all." In addition, the New Testament teaches that Gentiles who have put their faith in Israel's Messiah become, in God's eyes, part of Israel. (See, e.g., Rom. 11:13ff; Gal. 3:26-29 & 4:6; Eph. 2:11ff.) These Gentile believers in no way replace Israel. Rather, they are joined to Israel and share a common destiny, a common Torah, and a common Messiah. Most Jews and Christians do not like this idea, but it is what the Bible teaches.

Zechariah 8:23 speaks of a time when "ten men of all the languages of the nations (*goyim*) shall take hold of the garment of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" The Talmud comments on this verse, "Whoever scrupulously observed the law of the fringe was worthy that 2,800 servants should attend upon him."<sup>3</sup> (The 2,800 is obtained by the 10 men x the 70 nations x the 4 fringes of the garment.)

In recent times, some have used this prophecy of Zechariah to suggest that Christians should go to a synagogue and sit under the teaching of a rabbi. While I have found a wealth of interesting and useful information in extra-Biblical Jewish writings, I do not believe that going to just any rabbi is the main point of Zechariah's prophecy. It is not written that the Gentiles

will take hold of "Jews," plural, but of "a Jew," singular (*ish y'hudi*, "a Jewish man"). It is the fringes of one specific Rabbi that the nations are beginning to take hold of in our generation, and that Rabbi's name is Yeshua of Nazareth.

"But," some will object, "Gentiles have been taking hold of Jesus for centuries. Zechariah seems to be speaking of a specific time in the latter days." This is true. For nearly 2,000 years people from many nations have been finding their way to God through Jesus. However, it is only in very recent decades that Gentiles are taking hold of Jesus as "him that is *a Jew*."

Christians are waking up to the overwhelming significance of the fact that this One in whom they believe was not a Greek or a Roman, but a Jewish Rabbi who commanded His followers to obey Torah, and then instructed these followers to teach the nations the same thing.

Of course the Church has always known that its Savior was a Jew, but the implications of this fact have been ignored for most of the Church's history. Now the Jewishness of Jesus, and all it implies, is having a profound impact on those Gentiles who take hold of the fringes of Yeshua of Nazareth, "a Jewish man," and say to Him, "We will go with *You*" - not with the Gentilized, false Christ that has for so many centuries been promoted by the anti-nomian, anti-Semitic Church - "for we have heard that *God* is with *You*," the Torah-observant, Torah-promoting Messiah of Israel.

The sick woman who reached out and touched the fringes of Yeshua was miraculously healed of her affliction. All previous, human efforts had only made her situation worse. The Church has been sick for most of her history from a disease known as anti-nomianism, which in turn leads to anti-Semitism. All human efforts to heal and restore the Church to her original purity and glory have failed. It is time for the Gentile Church to take hold of the *tsitsit* of its Rabbi, Yeshua of Nazareth, a Jewish Man. When Gentiles do this in faith, as the sick woman did, they will experience the same power that went out from Yeshua. That power enabled the woman to walk in newness of life, and it will do the same for all who take hold of the fringe of Yeshua. □

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Men. 44a

<sup>2</sup>Little Sanctuaries (Jerusalem-San Diego: Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, 1988), 35.

<sup>3</sup>Shab. 32b.

# JEPHTHAH

## Dr. Daniel Botkin

The eighth in a series of articles on the Book of Judges

In the previous article in this series, we looked at Abimelech, a man who was not anointed by Yahweh to be a Judge. Abimelech was a wicked man motivated by selfish ambition, and he established his authority by hiring followers to help him murder his seventy brothers. In this article we will look at Jephthah, a man who, unlike Abimelech, was chosen and anointed by the Spirit to be a Judge, but was rejected by his brethren.

### JEPHTHAH'S REJECTION, LATER FOLLOWED BY A PLEA FOR HELP

It is interesting that people were quick to follow Abimelech, who was not a true Judge, but they were slow to follow Jephthah, who really was a true Judge. Jephthah's own brothers rejected him and thrust him out, so he fled to the land of Tob and gained a following of uncultured boors. But when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead realized they had made a serious mistake. They needed Jephthah's help, so they humbled themselves and asked him to return and lead them against the Ammonites.

This pattern of behavior seems to be repeated quite often in the Body of Messiah. People are quick to follow the flashy, charismatic Abimelechs who gain positions of power through greed, manipulation, and selfish ambition. People are slow to recognize and follow the leaders whom God has truly chosen and anointed to lead His flock. They reject the true shepherds, but like the Gileadites, they realize their mistake when the enemy attacks. Sometimes they humble themselves and ask the leader to help them. This pattern can be seen in the lives of Joseph, Moses, Jephthah, and the Messiah Yeshua.

Many people in the Messianic camp, whether they are leaders or not, can relate to this experience of rejection by brethren. We don't fit in the Christian world because of things like Sabbath

and dietary laws. If we go to a typical mainstream church, we are like a square peg in a round hole. We don't fit in, and we are not welcome (at least not on a long-term basis) because of our lifestyle and our way of worship. We may be told in plain terms that we are not welcome, or we may be told by subtle hints. Either way, it becomes obvious that we cannot stay in the church world. Like Jephthah, we are forced to leave the camp of our brethren.

This rejection and separation can cause sadness, but the story of Jephthah (and of Joseph, and of Moses, and of Yeshua) should give us hope for the future. Those who currently reject us because of the truths that we hold and practice may someday wake up and see their mistake. Jephthah's brothers saw their mistake when the enemy attacked them. Perhaps our Christian brothers will see their mistake when they come under spiritual attack. When they really need help and call out to Yahweh, He may open their eyes to see where the real anointing of the Spirit is. Once they see that God gives the Spirit "to them that obey Him" (Acts 5:32), we may be the ones they will come to for help -- provided we have consistently obeyed the truths for which we were rejected.

When this happens to us, how should we react? Jephthah rubbed it in their noses a bit by reminding them that they had sent him away. "Did not ye hate me, and expel me from my father's house?" he asked. "And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?" If Christians who now reject us later come to us for spiritual help, we

may be tempted to say "I told you so" like Jephthah did. However, a more godly response would be to help them without gloating. (To Jephthah's credit, his gloating does not appear to have been extreme or lengthy.)

Jephthah agreed to help his fellow Israelites. He tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Ammonites, but they were determined to go to war. The Spirit came upon Jephthah and he led the Israelites to victory.

### JEPHTHAH'S VOW

Jephthah is well known for the vow which he made. As he went into battle, he made a foolish promise: "And Jephthah vowed a vow unto Yahweh, and said, 'If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be Yahweh's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering'" (Jdg. 11:30f).

Apparently Jephthah expected a goat or sheep or bullock to be the first thing to meet him. Instead, his daughter, his only child, came out to meet him.

"Alas, my daughter!" Jephthah cried. "Thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto Yahweh, and I cannot go back."

The obvious lesson here is to not make hasty vows. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God," Solomon warned. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:2, 5).

### THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS VOW

How did Jephthah fulfill his vow? Did he actually tie his daughter to an altar, slit her throat, and literally offer her up as a burnt-offering? Some people believe he did. This view has been presented in plays, dramas, and musicals. Others believe that Jephthah offered his daughter as a sacrifice only in a figurative sense, by having her

remain unmarried, a perpetual virgin devoted to prayer - something akin to a Jewish nun.

Those who believe that Jephthah actually killed his daughter point out that the Bible says that Jephthah "did with her according to his vow which he had vowed" (Jdg. 11:39). This was a time in history when there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes, so one could argue that he fulfilled the vow in a literal sense. Theoretically one could argue that in Jephthah's eyes an unfulfilled vow was a more serious sin than the killing of one's own innocent daughter.

It seems more likely, though, that he fulfilled the vow figuratively. The Judges were imperfect men who did imperfect things, but it seems very unlikely that a Judge who had been anointed by the Spirit of Yahweh could murder his own innocent daughter. If an anointed man of God today did something like that, we would consider him an extremely wicked and cruel person. We would certainly not expect to see such a man included in the list of heroes of the faith in "the faith chapter," as Jephthah is. (See Hebrews 11:32.) The perpetual virginity view seems more likely, and is suggested by the fact that Jephthah's daughter spent two months "bewailing her virginity" with her friends. It is also suggested by the statement "and she knew no man." This statement appears after Jephthah had fulfilled his vow, not before. So we can infer from this that after Jephthah had fulfilled his vow she was probably still alive, but had to remain a virgin.

Whether the vow was fulfilled in a literal or figurative sense is not the main point. Either way, Jephthah suffered the consequences of dying with no hope of ever having any descendants, because his daughter was his only child. Because of his hasty vow, Jephthah's line died out when he died.

#### THE JEALOUSY OF THE EPHRAIMITES

After Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, some hot-headed Ephraimites showed up and chewed Jephthah out for not inviting them to join the battle. "Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee?" they

asked. Then for good measure they added a threat. "We will burn thine house upon thee with fire," they said.

Jephthah reminded the Ephraimites that they had not come to help him earlier when he needed their help, so he had gone ahead without them. Jephthah took the risk and the Lord gave him victory. "Wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?" Jephthah asked them.

The Ephraimites would not listen to reason. They were determined to pick a fight with Jephthah. So the Ephraimites got their war and were defeated by Jephthah's army.

There are still some jealous, hot-headed Ephraimites among God's people today. If you sit back and do nothing for the Kingdom, these Ephraimites won't criticize you. But if you see a spiritual need and try to do something to fill that need, these people get upset with you. Even if you use your own money to establish a ministry and even if you assume all the personal risks, these do-nothing hot-heads act like you should have consulted them and gotten their approval and instructions before trying to do anything. Often their objections are the result of jealousy or feelings of guilt due to their own lack of action. They are afraid that your action will make them look like lazy, apathetic, do-nothing talkers who are doing nothing for the Kingdom. And sometimes that's exactly what they are.

#### SHIBBOLETH OR SIBBOLETH?

After the battle, those Ephraimites who had escaped needed to cross the Jordan to return home. When Jephthah and the Gileadites would catch a man trying to cross the Jordan, they would ask him, "Art thou an Ephraimite?" If he answered no, they ordered him to say the word *shibboleth* (a word that means an ear of wheat). The Gileadites knew that the Ephraimites could not pronounce the "sh" sound. So if the man said *sibboleth*, they knew he was an Ephraimite and killed him.

The word *shibboleth* found its way into the English language from this story. In English the word is used to refer to any catchword or slogan that identifies a person as belonging to a particular group.

Even the Messianic movement has

its own shibboleths: *Yeshua* instead of "Jesus"; *Messiah* instead of "Christ"; *congregation* or *assembly* instead of "church," etc. These shibboleths help to remind us of the Hebraic nature of our faith. However, we must be careful that we do not do what the Gileadites did, and murder our brothers who do not use the same terminology that we use. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer," John wrote (1 Jn. 3:15), and there are some extremists in the Messianic movement who hate their Christian brethren who say "Jesus Christ" instead of "Yeshua the Messiah." For these extremists, what a person says - and even how he says it - is more important than what he does. How a person pronounces certain shibboleths becomes the test for acceptance and fellowship. For some really extreme extremists it even becomes the test for salvation.

According to Matthew 25, when the King returns and separates the sheep from the goats, He will not do it on the basis of their vocabulary. He will separate them on the basis of what they did or did not do to the least of those His brethren. He will not ask them to say *shibboleth* and then send them into the everlasting fire if they can't pronounce it the right way. It would be well to remember this when we encounter people who have hang-ups about the precise pronunciations of words and names. Paul described such men as "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, [and] evil surmisings (suspicions)" (1 Tim. 6:4).

Many people who have an excessive preoccupation with the precise pronunciations of names and words are exactly as Paul describes them in this warning to Timothy, full of envy and strife. Envy and strife were also included in Paul's description of "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21), which are listed in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit in the very next verse: "Now the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22f).

The vocabulary that a man uses is not nearly as important as the fruit that his life bears. □

# THE DUALITY OF THE UNIVERSE

## *The Two Planes of Man's Existence*

Dr. Daniel Botkin

### THINGS MADE WITH HANDS AND THINGS NOT MADE WITH HANDS

The Scriptures make a clear distinction between those things which are part of the physical, created order and those things which do not belong to this created order. The heavens and the earth of this creation are called God's "handywork" (Ps. 19:1) because "the heavens are the work of Thy hands" and "His hands formed the dry land" (Ps. 102:25 & 95:5). In contrast to this physical universe created by God's hands, the Bible also speaks of things *not* made with hands, i.e., things which are not part of the created order. Hebrews 9:11 states that there is "a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation." Colossians 2:11 says that in the Messiah we receive "the circumcision made without hands." In Daniel 2:34 King Nebuchadnezzar saw the Messianic Kingdom grow out of a stone which had been "cut out without hands." In 2 Corinthians 5:1 Paul refers to our future resurrection body as "a house not made with hands."

All of these things not made with hands - the greater and more perfect tabernacle, the circumcision of the heart, the stone representing Messiah, our future resurrection bodies - all these things not made with hands have their parallel counterparts in things which are made with hands, i.e., in things which are part of the created order. For example, the Bible calls the earthly tabernacle and all of its rituals "the patterns of things in the heavens" while the greater and more perfect tabernacle and its rituals are called "the heavenly things themselves" (Heb. 9:23). "For Messiah is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figure of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24).

Notice that "the things made with hands" are "the figures of the true." In other words, what we see in the created realm is a shadow, a reflection, a symbolic representation of things that exist and events which are happening (or will happen) in the uncreated spiritual realm. And it is not only the physical matter of this creation which is a shadow of spiritual realities. Even time itself is a shadow of spiritual realities. This is why Colossians 2:17 refers to holy days, new moons, and sabbaths as "a shadow of things to come" - not for the purpose of belittling sacred time, but to affirm the existence of the substance (i.e., the Messiah) which casts the shadow. That is why holy times are still important. The existence of the shadows verifies the existence of the substance and reminds us that it is not just the physical plane of existence which is important. The spiritual plane of existence is also important to life.

### THE TWO PLANES DESCRIBED

These two planes of existence can be described with various pairs of contrasting words: substance and shadow;



spiritual and physical; eternal and temporal; invisible and visible; higher and lower. The existence of two realms - what we could call the duality of the universe - is suggested at the very beginning of the Bible in the first week of creation. The higher and lower realms are suggested by pairs of contrasting phenomena, first "in the beginning" (heaven and earth), and then on all seven days: light and darkness on the first day; waters above and waters below on the second day; seas and dry land on the third day; the greater light and the lesser light on the fourth day; fowl to fly above earth and creatures to swim under the waters on the fifth day; land animals to be dominated and man to dominate them on the sixth day. On the seventh day, God did no more creative work, but He did do exactly two things on the Sabbath after He "rested" (i.e., ceased creating). He blessed the day and sanctified it.

### DUALITY IN THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Hints of the duality of the universe can also be seen in several Hebrew words which take the dual ending. First, a word of explanation about the dual ending. The regular plural endings in Hebrew are *-im* for masculine nouns and *-ot* for feminine nouns (*talmidim*, male disciples; *talmidot*, female disciples). For items that come in pairs or that consist of two parts, there is a dual ending, transliterated into English as *-aiim* or *-ayim*. When this ending is attached to a word, the number two is not necessary to state, because it is understood. Thus the word *yomayim* would be understood as "two days." (The word *yom* means "day.") This dual ending is used for body parts (hands, feet, eyes, ears), for measurements of time (*sh'vuayim*, two weeks; *p'amayim*, two times, *al'payim*, two thousand), and dual objects (eyeglasses, scissors, pants, shoes, socks). There are a few nouns which do not normally appear in the singular form,

and they always take the dual -ayim suffix as part of the word itself. Even though these nouns are singular or non-countable in meaning (mass nouns), they are structurally dual. The reason these particular words are in the dual form is not immediately apparent, but the reason can be discovered with a little thought.

### SOME "SINGULAR" DUAL WORDS

Let's consider a few of these words that grammatically express duality in their natural state for no apparent reason. The first is the well-known Hebrew word for life, *chayim*. Why is the word for life in the dual form? Probably to express the fact that man's life is lived on two planes, the physical and the spiritual, and because man has two lives, a temporal life in this age and eternal life in the age to come (assuming the man repents and is born again from above).

Another word which expresses duality is the word for water, *mayim*. There is physical water in the physical realm. It is a reflection or symbol of the "living water" that exists in the spiritual realm, the rivers of living water that flow from the heart of disciples who are filled with the Spirit. (See John 7:37-39).

There are two places on earth that bear names with the dual -ayim ending: *Yerushalayim* and *Mitzrayim*, Jerusalem and Egypt. Jerusalem represents God's Presence and freedom; Egypt represents Satan's oppression and slavery. The duality of *Yerushalayim* reminds us that there is not only earthly Jerusalem here below, but also "Jerusalem which is above, [which] is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26).

The duality of *Mitzrayim* may originally have been due to the fact that there were two Egypts, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. The existence of an Upper Egypt and a Lower Egypt suggests that just as there is a Jerusalem below and a Jerusalem above, so there is an Egypt below and an Egypt above. The earthly Egypt that enslaved God's people is a reflection of spiritual Egypt. Spiritual Egypt can be defined as those places in the spiritual realm where God's people find them-

selves oppressed by the evil ruler of this world system and enslaved to sin. Moses delivered God's people from physical Egypt. The Messiah delivers us from spiritual Egypt. But where is the Messiah now?

### WHERE DID THE MESSIAH GO?

The Bible says that when Yeshua ascended "a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Well, what happened after that? Did He stay in the cloud? Or did He continue rising and pass through the cloud and pop out of the top like a jack-in-the-box? If so, what happened after that? Did He continue to float up, up, up like a helium balloon, soaring through outer space until He finally arrived at a physical planet named Heaven?

He did go to "heaven," but what does that mean? The Hebrew word for heaven is *shamayim*, another dual word. There is the physical *shamayim*, the sky of this created order which contains the sun, moon, and stars. There is also the spiritual *shamayim*, that heaven which is not of this created order. I believe it was into this *shamayim* that the Messiah entered when He left this earth. I believe that when a cloud received Him out of their sight, He simply slipped into the spiritual dimension at that moment and disappeared from view. This would explain how He was able to appear, disappear, and reappear at various places after His Resurrection. He did not need to "leave heaven" in order to show Himself to people living on the earth. Stephen was still on earth when he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Stephen was not viewing this scene through a powerful telescope focused in on some planet millions of light years away. This scene of heaven was within the range of Stephen's eyesight. The Lord did not need to take Stephen soaring into outer space to show him heaven; He just had to open the heavens.

Even before His Resurrection, it appears that Yeshua dwelt in both realms at the same time. To Nicodemus He said, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that

came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13). Here was the Son of man on earth, telling Nicodemus that the Son of man "is in heaven." His spirit was dwelling in heaven while His physical body was on the earth.

Yeshua's ability to dwell in both planes of existence simultaneously also explains how He was able to constantly refer to the Father as being "in heaven" and yet say in John 10:38 "the Father is in Me" - "and I in Him" (!). Where was He, where was the Father, where was heaven? If we view the universe from a one-dimensional perspective and try to geographically place heaven, the Father, and the Son, it can be a real mental challenge. But if we consider the duality of the universe and the two planes of man's existence, geographical concerns become less confusing.

### DWELLING IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES

The Son of man and the Son of God dwelt in both planes of existence. As sons of men and sons of God, we too should experience life in both planes. The Apostle Paul said that God "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Messiah" (Eph. 1:3). Notice that it's already done. God "hath blessed us," not "God will bless us some day in the distant future after we die and go to heaven." All the spiritual blessings have already been given, but they are located in the heavenly places. If we want to bring those spiritual blessings into the earthly realm where they can do some good, we have to go into the heavenly places to obtain them. We have to experience the reality of the spiritual plane of existence in order to fully benefit from the spiritual blessings that are there.

Paul also stated that God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Messiah Yeshua" (Eph. 2:6). Like the giving of the spiritual blessings, this act is something that God has already done for us. But if we want to fully benefit from this gracious act of God, we have to experience life in the heavenly places where the Messiah is seated. We won't see things from heaven's

perspective if we don't experience life in the heavenly places.

#### SEEKING THINGS ABOVE

"If ye then be risen with Messiah," Paul wrote, "seek those things which are above, where Messiah sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1f). When Paul says to seek the things that are "above," he is not just speaking geographically. If that were the case, then we should seek the sun, moon, and stars. Paul is telling us to seek the higher, loftier, nobler things of life, the things that are of true and lasting value.

What are these higher, loftier, nobler, more valuable things? Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, provides lots of clues to answer that question. Psalm 119 is a lengthy hymn that extols Yahweh's commandments, ordinances, precepts, laws, testimonies, statutes, and judgments. In other words, Yahweh's Torah, His instructions for His redeemed people. "The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. 119:72).

Why are the instruction's of God's Torah so precious? Because when we follow God's instructions, good things happen. Obedience brings blessings.

#### FOR EVERY EFFECT THERE IS A CAUSE

If we believe in a wise, loving, all-powerful Creator, then we must believe that everything that happens has a cause behind it. God does not arbitrarily bless and curse people for no reason. Blessings come from obedience and curses come from disobedience. This truth is stated over and over again in the Torah. This does not necessarily mean that every single bad thing that comes our way is due to some sin we have committed, but it does mean that disobedience sooner or later has consequences.

Sometimes a person will knowingly disobey one of God's commandments, but he sees no immediate or apparent harm that results from his disobedience. "I continually profane the Sabbath, but nothing bad happens to me because of it." With all due re-

spect, you do not know what happens as the direct result of your disobeying of God's commandment, whether it be the commandment to keep the Sabbath or any other commandment. Disobedience sets forces into motion in the spiritual realm, and those forces bring curses into the physical realm. Oftentimes we do not see the connection between the curse and the sin which caused it, and the Devil wants to keep it that way. As long as he can keep us blinded to the disobedience which is the cause of our suffering, he can keep us enslaved to sin so that we are not a threat to him.

Obedience likewise sets forces into motion in the spiritual realm. Obedience enables us to experience the reality of the heavenly places. When we experientially dwell in the heavenly places where God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings and seated us with the Messiah, we can obtain those spiritual blessings and bring them into the physical realm. We do not need to understand exactly how or why obedience to certain commandments makes any difference. If we love and trust our Heavenly Father, we will be happy to obey Him even when we do not understand the reason for the command. It is enough for us to know that Yeshua promised a manifestation of Himself to those who obey: "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him" (Jn. 14:21).

The measure of our obedience will determine the measure of the manifestation of Yeshua that we will experience. If we love Him, this should inspire us to obedience like nothing else.

Just as we do not always see the connection between curses and the specific sins which caused them, so we do not always see the connection between blessings and the specific acts of obedience which caused them. Let me close by sharing one such blessing that I experienced years ago on the happiest day of my life.

#### THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE

It was sometime in 1984 or 1985. I

was working as a driver for a company that delivered small packages. Every workday was basically the same for me: get up at 5 a.m., spend about 45 minutes in prayer, drive to work, then drive my 300-mile delivery route and return home. On most mornings I groggily stumbled out of bed when the alarm clock jolted me from my deep slumber. But on this morning of the happiest day of my life, something was different. When the alarm clock awoke me, I arose filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I awoke feeling mentally, emotionally, and spiritually alert. It was exhilarating.

*Why am I so happy? I asked myself. Why do I feel so good?* As I washed up and brushed my teeth, I tried to figure out why I was feeling so outrageously happy. Was there something special I had forgotten about? Had something wonderful happened yesterday that slipped my mind? No. Had I temporarily forgotten about some plans for something I was looking forward to? No. Had I been dreaming about something wonderful before the alarm clock went off? No. Had I just gotten more sleep than usual? No. Nothing that I could think of could account for the joy I was feeling.

Still puzzled, I started down the stairs, the intensity of my joy increasing with each step. I felt so happy it was almost frightening! *Maybe I'm just dreaming,* I thought to myself. *Or maybe I'm just losing my mind. If I am, it's certainly a wonderful experience!*

Needless to say, my prayer time that morning was influenced in a positive way by the rapturous state of mind I was in. I remained in that state of mind the entire day. As I drove from place to place and did my work, I felt like I was in heaven - because I was! As the afternoon wore on, the intensity of my joy gradually diminished. By evening my mind had pretty much returned to its usual state. I went to bed that night with a peaceful mind and a thankful heart. It was a day blessed with a glorious manifestation of the Lord. I do not know why He chose to bless me that way on that particular day, but it motivated me to continue walking in whatever spiritual light the Lord would give me in the future. □

# THE THIRD DAY

Daniel Botkin

When Paul described the essentials of the Gospel, he stated that the Messiah rose from the dead "the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). To what scriptures was Paul referring? To the Old Testament, of course, but where does the Old Testament say that the Messiah would rise from the dead specifically on the third day?

When Peter preached about the Resurrection on the Day of Pentecost, he cited Psalm 16:10 as a prophecy of the Messiah's Resurrection, but Psalm 16 does not specify the third day. Which Old Testament scriptures clearly specify the third day when prophesying the Messiah's Resurrection? If a reader looks in the Old Testament for a direct statement that plainly announces "the Messiah will be resurrected the third day" (or words to that effect), he will search in vain for any such statement. So how could Paul have said that a third-day Resurrection was "according to the scriptures"?

A truth does not have to be plainly stated in the Bible in clear, easy-to-understand language in order to be "according to the scriptures." The rabbis of Paul's day knew this, and today's rabbis know this. The rabbis even teach that there are four levels of understanding when studying the Scriptures. The four levels are *peshat* (פְּשָׁת), the simple, literal meaning of the text), *remez* (רֵמֶז, hint, allusion, allegory), *derash* (דְּרַשׁ, exposition, homiletical commentary), and *sod* (סֹד, mystery, secret, esoteric teaching). The initial letters of these four Hebrew words form the acronym פָּרְדֵּס - PaRDeS, the Hebrew word for garden, and the source of our English word *paradise*.

The Messiah's Resurrection on the third day is not prophesied in the *peshat* form, but it is prophesied in the *remez* form, and is therefore, as Paul put it, "according to the scriptures." It is interesting that the Talmud speaks

about a relationship between the third day and the resurrection of the dead. Alfred Edersheim, in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, wrote that "the Rabbis insist on the importance of 'the third day' in various events connected with Israel, and specially speak of it in connection with the resurrection of the dead, referring in proof to Hosea 6:2 ['After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight']" (p. 631).

Apparently this connection between the third day and the resurrection of the dead was understood even before Yeshua's Resurrection. When writing about the customs of First-Century Jews, Edersheim states that "the relatives and friends of the deceased were in the habit of going to the grave up to the third day (when presumably corruption was supposed to begin), so as to make sure that those laid there were really dead... In mourning also the third day formed a sort of period, because it was thought that the soul hovered round the body till the third day, when it finally parted from its earthly tabernacle" (p. 631).

Other than the Hosea 6:2 passage, on what basis did the rabbis see a connection between the third day and the resurrection of the dead? Edersheim does not go into detail. The only other passage he mentions is Genesis 22:4, which states that it was "on the third day" when Abraham saw the place where he was to offer Isaac. This is interesting in light of the fact that Father Abraham's offering of his son, followed by the son's rescue from off the altar, is a prophetic picture of the sacrifice and Resurrection of the Son of God.

There are many other Old Testament references to the third day, and some hints of resurrection can be seen quite easily in some of these. The very first reference to the third day is in Genesis 1:13, when "the evening and the morning were the

third day." On the third day of this first week of creation, the grass, herbs, and trees emerged from the earth. New life bursting forth out of the earth is an obvious picture of resurrection. The traditional Jewish blessing over bread also points us back to this first occurrence of the third day, when God first brought forth life and life-giving grains from the earth: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." This was probably the blessing Yeshua spoke over the unleavened bread immediately before He said, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Mt. 26:26) at His last Passover. Prophetically He was telling His disciples, "Just as My Father brings forth bread from the earth (something He did on the third day of creation), so He will bring forth My body from the earth on the third day. This resurrection life will be the life of the new creation. Just as you receive physical life from the bread of this creation, so you will receive spiritual life through My Resurrection in the new creation."

The story of Joseph in Egypt includes two events that occurred on the third day. Pharaoh's butler was released from prison and restored to his former position (unlike Pharaoh's baker, who was executed). (Gen. 40:20ff) It was also on the third day that Joseph released his brothers from prison and said to them, "This do, and live..." (Gen. 42:18). Release, restoration, and life after prison, all on the third day, can be seen as a picture of resurrection on the third day.

In Exodus 19:11 & 15, the children of Israel were told to be ready on the third day, "for the third day Yahweh will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai." The manifestation of the glory of Yahweh on the third day at Sinai parallels the manifestation of the glory of Yahweh on the third day at the Tomb when the Messiah rose from the dead in Resurrection glory.

## The Purest Kind of Praise and Worship

Bob Briner

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A generation after the giving of the Torah, when Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, they prepared to cross the Jordan "after three days" (Josh. 3:2). Crossing the Jordan after three days and thus going from the wilderness into the Promised Land is another picture of resurrection. This picture in Joshua is especially vivid to those who know that Jesus' Hebrew name was the same as a shortened form of Joshua's name. In Nehemiah 8:17, Joshua's name is written יְשׁוּעָה - Yeshua.

Here are just a few other events which suggest a connection between the third day and resurrection. King Hezekiah was healed on the third day and thereby given a Divine reprieve (a resurrection of sorts) after an earlier Divine death sentence had been pronounced against him (2 Kings 20:1-5). When the Jews left Babylon to rebuild ("resurrect") the Temple, it was finished on the third day of the month (Ezra 6:15; compare John 2:19-21, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But He spake of the temple of His body"). It was on the third day that Queen Esther approached King Ahasuerus to request that the lives of her people be spared ("resurrected") from the irreversible death sentence which had been decreed against them (Esther 5:1).

Of course the one Old Testament event which foreshadows Yeshua's Resurrection in a very obvious manner is the sign of Jonah. Yeshua Himself pointed to Jonah's experience as a prophetic sign of His own Resurrection. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:39f).

The Apostles and the hundreds of other eyewitnesses of the Resurrected Messiah did not need the Scriptures to convince them that the Resurrection had happened. They knew from first-hand personal experience that their Rabbi and Lord had risen from the dead. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you," John wrote (1 Jn. 1:3). "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables," Peter wrote, "...but [we] were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). On the Day of Pentecost Peter said, "This Yeshua hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

These first-hand eyewitnesses of the Resurrection did not need the Scriptures to convince them of the reality of the Resurrection. Those of us in later generations do not have the opportunity to be among those First-Century eyewitnesses, but the prophecies of the Scriptures confirm that which the inward witness of the Spirit tells us - that Yeshua of Nazareth rose from the dead on the third day. □

HERE is a praise and worship technique for your consideration. Praise and worship, as I am sure you know, is the dominant feature of the church these days. More attention is given to it than to most other aspects of most services of most churches. Praise and worship is big.

The growth of praise and worship, or as my Nashville friends in Christian music call it, "P and W," has spawned new careers and even entire new companies. The most prominent praise and worship leaders travel full time leading "P and W" at big events around the country, and they travel with a full array of sophisticated sound equipment and recorded background "tracks." They are to this decade what itinerant evangelists were to earlier years.

Entire companies in Nashville exist to provide "P and W" music to churches across the country.

Overhead projection equipment has become a growth industry because real praise and worship music is not sung from hymnals, but from lyrics projected onto a screen. Every up-to-date church must have this projection equipment so the praise and worship leader can lead a "P and W Team" as they direct and inspire the congregational singing. Praise and worship is big. Many churches advertise praise and worship as the most attractive and compelling feature of what they do as a church. When you see "Contemporary Service," that means "P and W."

As Christians saved by grace, we have many reasons to praise and worship. It certainly should be a vital part of our lives of faith. With this in mind, I want to ask you to consider one of the most under-used and yet most compelling of all praise and worship techniques. It is certainly the most joyous. Also, it requires no special projection or amplification equipment. No one needs to come from Nashville to lead it. This wonderful praise and worship technique is called obedience. It is the truest, purest form of praise and worship.

Obedience is the basis for all real praise and worship. How can we possibly sing songs of praise and worship when we have not been willing to obey our wonderful Lord? Personally, I can't sing "How majestic is your name in all the earth," if I have not been obedient. "I love you, Lord" sort of sticks in my throat if I have not been willing to obey the universal imperatives of Scripture.

Obedience is the most basic of all praise and worship techniques, and the most basic way to be obedient is to teach obedience by making disciples. When I am regularly, systematically and very deliberately involved in making disciples, the joy of true praise and worship is mine.

Obedience is the ultimate in praise and worship. Try it. No special equipment, music, or professional leadership required. You and the Holy Spirit can be the most effective of all "Praise Teams" as you allow Him to lead you into obedience. □

*Bob Briner was the Consulting Editor of Pen & Sword until his death in 1999.*

# THE MYSTERY OF THE CLOSED MEM

Daniel Botkin

Reprinted from Gates of Eden 1-2

The letter *mem*, which corresponds to our English letter *M*, is one of five letters in the Hebrew alphabet that takes a final form. In other words, the letter is written one way, מ, when it occurs at the beginning of a word or anywhere inside a word, but it is written a different way, מ, when it is the last letter of a word. In words such as מֶשֶׁח (mashiach = "messiah"), or אֱמֶת (emet = "truth"), it is written in its normal form, מ. This is sometimes called the open mem, due to the small opening in the lower left corner of the letter. In words like מֵאָם (em = "mother") or שָׁלוֹם (shalom = "peace"), where it is the final letter, it is written in its final form, מ, sometimes called the closed mem.

According to the rules of Hebrew grammar and spelling, a closed mem can appear only at the end of a word. A closed mem is a final mem, and can be used only as the final letter of a word. There is one place in the Hebrew Bible, however, where a closed mem occurs inside a word. This entry, which defies the rules of Hebrew grammar and spelling, is found in Isaiah's famous prophecy of the coming Messiah:

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on his shoulders; and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore" (Isa. 9:6f).

The closed mem appears within the word לִמְרְכָּה (*l'marbeh*), which is translated by the phrase "to the increase." The reader can see that the second letter of this word (reading from right to left) is a closed mem. The first letter, ל (L), is a prefix trans-



lated "to the." The main part of the word, מְרֻכָּה (*marbeh* = "increase"), is spelled with a closed mem. This word, *marbeh*, is found several other places in the Hebrew Bible, always in the form the reader expects it to be, with an open mem at the beginning. The only place where *marbeh* appears with the closed mem is in Isaiah's passage about the birth of this very special Child, a Son who is given Divine titles and who will rule as Messiah Ben-David.

Rabbis associate the letter mem with the womb (Sefer Yetzira 3:4, Bahir 85, Etz Chaim, Shaar HaYereach 3, p. 176). A closed mem is a closed womb; an open mem is the womb opening to give birth (Bahir 84). What does this tell us about the child in Isaiah's prophecy? It tells us that this Child will be concealed inside a closed womb, i.e., the womb of the Virgin spoken of in Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel [God with us]."

It is interesting to note that there is a Hebrew word for womb which begins with mem - מעָה (*me'eh* = "womb"). This word appears in the story of Ruth, one of the few women listed in the genealogy of the Messiah in Matthew chapter one. It is also interesting that the Virgin Mother, who descended from Ruth, had a name that begins and ends with the letter mem. Christians know her as Mary, but her Hebrew name was Miriam.

Of course the rabbis do not see

any hints of Miriam in Isaiah's prophecy, but they are aware of this mysterious closed mem and of its Messianic implications. The rabbis teach that when it is time for the Redemption, the closed mem of Isaiah's *l'marbeh* will open for the coming of the Messiah (Radak, Isa. 9:6).

In light of all this, we can see why the Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to break the rules of Hebrew grammar and spelling by writing לִמְרְכָּה (*l'marbeh*). The purpose is to draw our attention to the letter mem, where we see the initial of Miriam, the mother of this Child. We also see it as the initial for *me'eh*, "womb," which in this case is a closed womb - the closed womb of the Virgin Miriam, which opened at the time of Redemption to give birth to the Child spoken of in this prophecy. □

Richard Wurmbrand once showed this closed mem in Isaiah's prophecy to a rabbi. "I asked the rabbi if he could explain this, but he could give me no answer. I then told him of the Kabalistic tradition, that Isaiah put a מ in the middle of the word, in order to show the reader who was destined to understand it that the Divine Child of whom this prophecy speaks would be born of the closed womb of a virgin. Many other arguments, which I personally consider more conclusive, would have made a far smaller impression on the rabbi than this one. He had no further counter-argument when I told him that the Messiah is the man who was born of the Virgin Mary...."

From *Christ on the Jewish Road*,  
page 106

# SAMSON

Dr. Daniel Botkin

The ninth in a series of articles on the Book of Judges

Of all the stories in the Book of Judges, the story of Samson is the one story with which church people are most familiar. What most church people do not realize is that the story of Samson is the story of the Church.

In Samson's youth the Lord blessed him, and "the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon him" (Jdg. 14:6). Samson brought deliverance to God's people, but he had a roving eye: "And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines ... Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her ... And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah" (Jdg. 14:1; 16:1 & 4). And Delilah was his downfall, as any Sunday-school child can tell you. Samson fell asleep in the lap of Delilah and was stripped of the seven Nazarite locks of hair which marked him as one set apart to Yahweh. With the stripping away of his locks came the stripping away of his power. Then the Philistines put him in bonds he could not break, blinded him, and forced him to grind grain in the prison house. Finally, they praised their pagan gods and mocked Samson in his weakened, defeated state.

Is this not the sad history of the Church? In the Book of Acts we see the Church in its youth, filled with the Holy Spirit. Just as young Samson was able to tear apart a roaring lion with his bare hands, so the Early Church was able to tear apart its "adversary the devil [who was] like a roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8). And just as Samson soon afterward enjoyed sweet honey out of the carcase of the lion, so the Church enjoyed its sweet victories over the devil -- until it developed a roving eye. Peter had warned the Church to "be sober, be

vigilant" because of the roaring lion, the devil. But the Church ignored Peter's warning and let itself be attracted to idolatrous pagan ideas which eventually enslaved the Church, just like Samson was attracted to pagan women and ended up enslaved to the Philistines.

Samson grinding grain in the enemy's prison house is a sad, pathetic picture of many people's lives. Their life is a rut, an endless cycle of moving forward but with no direction or progress or purpose. They are like a hamster running on his exercise wheel. They are running like crazy and think they are going somewhere, but they are not really going anywhere. Their existence makes no significant difference in the world. The purpose of their existence is to perpetuate their existence. They exist to pay their bills, and do little else. They live and they die, and the world and eternity remain unchanged, as if they had never been. Remember the Beatles' song *Nowhere Man*? "Doesn't have a point of view, knows not where he's going to, isn't he a bit like me and you?"

This is the enemy's goal for us -- a defeated, meaningless life that makes no impact on the world or eternity. If we wish to thwart the enemy's plan, we must heed Peter's words and be sober and vigilant. We must not let ourselves be seduced by the outward beauty of this Delilah-like pagan world, like Samson was. Samson embraced Delilah, but we must refuse to embrace a world system that is at enmity with God. We cannot get comfortable in the lap of the world and let the devil bewitch us and sing us to sleep with his lullabies. If we do, we will be at the mercy of the devil, just like Samson was at the mercy of the Philistines. We will be in bondage to sins we cannot overcome, we will be robbed of our spiritual vision, and we will be enslaved to this world's grain mills.

People today read the Book of Acts

and wonder why the Church isn't like that anymore. Why are miracles and supernatural events so rare after the First Century? Where did the holiness and godly fear and power go? Why do we not see anything that even remotely resembles the awesome power which that Early Church had? Sure, miracles still occasionally happen, but if we are honest, we have to admit that they are extremely rare compared to what we see in Acts. What happened?

With hindsight we can see what happened. Just as Samson fell asleep in the lap of Delilah, the Church fell asleep in the lap of the world -- the lap of luxury and ease which comes by obtaining worldly political power. Samson let himself be seduced and bewitched by a wicked woman's outward beauty, and the Church did the same thing. It listened to the world's soothing lullaby and fell into a deep spiritual slumber. Then, just as the Philistines stripped away Samson's power, so the enemy stripped away the Church's power.

Let's consider the significance of Samson's Nazarite locks. It is obvious that the locks themselves did not inherently contain some magical power. Yet when the locks were stripped away, the power of God departed from Samson. This is very significant. The locks were important because they were the outward sign that marked Samson as a Nazarite, one set apart for the Lord. They were the mark of his separation, the thing that showed he was called to be different. Not all of God's people are called to be Nazarites in a literal sense as Samson was, but all of God's people are called to be set apart. Furthermore, Yahweh has given various outward signs which are supposed to mark His people as a people set apart for Him.

Christians are quick to point out that our most important identifying mark should be love, and this is true:

"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). However, love itself is not exactly an outward sign. It is an inward quality that motivates and inspires us to perform actions which will please the one we love. The loving action is the outward sign, the evidence of our love. This is why outward signs are important. They serve as the visible evidence of the invisible spiritual realities.

Outward signs also show ownership. Samson's Nazarite locks showed that he belonged to Yahweh. Nazarite locks are not a universal sign; only Nazarites need to wear the locks of a Nazarite. However, there is a universal sign which Yahweh has declared to be the outward sign of the relationship between Him and His people, and that sign is the Sabbath:

"Verily My sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am Yahweh that doth sanctify you ... Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:13, 16f).

When God's people let the enemy strip away the outward signs that denote their set-apart status, the Lord's power and protection gradually depart. A careful reading of Judges 16 shows that Samson's strength gradually weakened each time Delilah seduced him. He went from being able to break the bonds "as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire" to merely "like a thread." The third time he was bound, he had to flee with the bonds still on. The fourth time, he awoke from his nap on Delilah's lap and said, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself." The next statement is probably the saddest statement in the story: "But he knew not that the LORD was departed from him."

If we study Church history, we see that the Church's power gradually

weakened as she let herself be seduced away from the Torah in general, and from the Sabbath in particular, to embrace a counterfeit Sunday Sabbath. In A.D. 321 Constantine, the sun-worshipping Emperor of Rome, made the official decree for Christians to "rest upon the venerable Day of the Sun," viz., Sunday, the first day of the week. Constantine wanted Christians to "have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd" (See Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, 3d period, ch. 7, sec. 75, p. 380, fn. 1 and Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3, 18-19.) The Church had been drifting toward this seduction for quite some time, and when Church leaders foolishly agreed to Constantine's decree, the Church's Nazarite locks were finally stripped away. This left the Church like Samson at the mercy of the Philistines -- bound to the world, robbed of spiritual vision, and enslaved to a Roman system that honored pagan gods and mocked the God of Israel.

"But there's no inherent power in keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day," some people object. "Anybody, even a heathen, can keep the Sabbath if he wants to."

There was no inherent power in Samson's locks, either, yet when they were stripped away, the power of the Lord departed. And a heathen Philistine could have grown seven Nazarite locks just like Samson's, but it would not have brought the power of God into his life. For the outward sign to be of any value, the call to a set-apart status must also be there. And to receive the full benefits of the set-apart status, the outward sign has to be there and be honored.

The good news in the story of Samson is that "the hair of his head began to grow again," and his strength was restored. The good news today is that the hair is beginning to grow again on the Body of Messiah. As more and more Christians are beginning to learn how to honor the Torah, the seventh-day Sabbath is being restored as an outward sign of our set-apart status. Along with the Sabbath, God is also

restoring other Torah-based outward signs that proclaim His ownership of His people -- things like the celebration of Biblical Feasts and New Moons, dietary laws, fringes on men's tallits, modest dress and head coverings on women, etc. Samson's strength was gradually restored as his locks grew back, and the Church's power will gradually return as we allow the Lord to restore the Sabbath and these other outward signs that mark us as Yahweh's people.

Christians may argue and insist that outward "ritual" things like the Sabbath make no difference. But the fact remains that Samson's strength was not restored until the visible mark of his set-apart status was restored. What gives us the right to expect the Church's power to be restored without the restoration of the visible signs that make us different from the rest of the world? If Samson had continued to trim his hair in prison, he would have remained weak and defeated, and he would have continued going in circles around the grain mill, in the service of the Philistines. Christians who resist the things which God is restoring can expect to remain spiritually weak and defeated. They can expect to stay bound to the world's grain mills, going in circles, with no hope of escape from the rut they are in.

It is sad to see so many of God's people in a rut, bound to sinful habits they cannot break, serving the enemy against their will as Samson did. Let me close by making this appeal, patterned after the Apostle Paul's appeal to the Romans:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your local bodies as a living sacrifice, and let the Nazarite locks grow back. Let the Lord restore the Sabbath and the other outward signs of His ownership and of our set-apart status. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. Don't view these things like the world does, as something archaic and irrelevant to modern life. Let the Lord renew the way you think about these things, and your life will be transformed. □

# OUR CALL TO GOOD WORKS AND THE PERIL OF SPIRITUAL LAZINESS

Daniel Botkin

Summer is fast approaching. Passover is over and the spring holy days will culminate with the arrival of Shavuot/Pentecost in late May. After Pentecost we await the arrival of the fall feasts at summer's end. Those who are familiar with the prophetic significance of the Biblical Feasts know that the spring feasts point to the Messiah's first coming, and the fall feasts point to His second coming. About 2,000 years ago Yeshua of Nazareth came and fulfilled the prophetic aspect of the spring feasts. He died as the Passover Lamb of God on Passover, He was buried on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, He rose as the firstfruits of the resurrection on Firstfruits, and on Pentecost, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, He sent the Holy Spirit to write the Torah on our hearts. Now we await His return to fulfill the fall feasts. He will arrive with the sound of the trumpet (probably on the Feast of Trumpets), bring atonement for all Israel (probably on the Day of Atonement), and set up a Kingdom to which all nations will come for the Feast of Tabernacles (probably on the Feast of Tabernacles).

In ancient Israel the summer months between the end of the spring feasts and the beginning of the fall feasts were months for laboring in the fields. On a grand historical scale, we are now (and have been since the First Century) at this in-between time of Messianic history. These are the "summer months" of history, the centuries between the first and second comings of the Lord. Just as the ancient Israelites had to work during the in-between summer months, so we are called to work in our Heavenly Father's fields as we await our Master's return in the fall season of history. We have not been saved to just sit in idleness waiting for the Lord's return. We have been saved to serve the Lord. As we await His return, He expects us to labor for Him

by doing good works.

In evangelical Christian circles, the phrase "good works" often raises a red flag in the minds of some people. If a person starts talking about the necessity of doing good works, many Christians feel an obligation to remind us that good works won't save us.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith," they say, quoting Ephesians 3:8 & 9, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast!"

This is a wonderful truth, but if it is the only thing a Christian ever hears about good works, it can give the impression that good works are not important, or maybe even dangerous. After all, if you do good works, you might be trying to earn your salvation! Better to trust in God's grace and not be concerned about good works.

It would help to clarify things if the people who are fond of quoting Ephesians 2:8 & 9 would memorize and quote the very next verse, which tells us what God expects us to do after we have been saved by grace: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Faith and good works are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, true faith begets good works. "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, described faith and good works this way: "Faith and works should travel side-by-side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works: and then faith again, and works again - until you can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other."

We have been saved by grace through faith, but we have not been saved to just sit around waiting for the Magic Rapture Bus to take us zooming off to heaven. We have been saved to do good works, not to sit in idleness or to pursue goals which are foolish and of no lasting value. God has planned out a destiny for each one of us, and that destiny involves good works which He has foreordained. It is our responsibility to find out what those good works are, and to walk in them. As we do this, the Lord shapes us into His "workmanship," His work of art. The Greek word translated "workmanship" is *poiema* (*ποιημα*), the source of our English word *poem*. Each life is a work in progress, a poem that the Master Poet is writing. Because we are "laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9), how the poem turns out will depend partly on us, on whether or not we walk in the good works which God has foreordained for us to walk in.

The people of ancient Israel were expected to work during the summer months, and the Lord expects us to work during the summer months of history. It is easy to get spiritually lazy in the summer. We can get preoccupied with summertime things like yard work, sports, travel, fairs, etc. If these things cause us to ignore the work of the Lord, we can fall into a spiritual drowsiness and slumber. When that happens, we need to hear another passage from Paul's Epistle to the

sages can help us guard against spiritual laziness. Consider these words of wisdom:

- “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?” (Prov. 6:6-9)
- “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.” (Prov. 13:4)
- “The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.” (Prov. 15:19)
- “He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.” (Prov. 18:9)
- “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.” (Prov. 19:15)
- “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.” (Prov. 20:4)
- “The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.” (Prov. 21:25f)
- “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.” (Prov. 22:13)
- “As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed.” (Prov. 26:14)
- “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I

#### Ephesians:

“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Messiah shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:14-17).

We are told to “redeem the time” because our time is not our own. Our time is the Lord’s because our life is the Lord’s, and our life consists of the time He has given us. The reason a man expects an hour’s wages for an hour’s work is because an hour of his time is an hour of his life. If you waste an hour of a man’s time and give him nothing in return, you have in effect taken away one hour of his lifespan.

Our use of the time the Lord gives us is important, and we will give an account for how we have spent it. This does not mean that every second of our time must be spent praying, studying Scripture, preaching, singing hymns, etc. That would be unrealistic. The needs of life require us to perform mundane tasks like mowing the lawn, washing dishes, and taking out the trash (not to mention earning a living to pay the bills). And the pressures of life require occasional relief in the form of rest and recreation. We redeem the time by using our time wisely, as those who will give an account. Our eternal reward (or lack thereof) will be determined by what we do with what we have been given. Good stewardship is not just about the use of our talents and money, it’s also about the use of our time. As someone once said, “Your life is like a coin. You can spend it any way you want, but you can only spend it once.”

There are several verses in Proverbs that speak about sloth and laziness. Meditating on these pas-

looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.” (Prov. 24:30ff)

Solomon looked at the vineyard of the slothful and received instruction from it. Consider Solomon’s description of this vineyard, and ask yourself some questions about your own vineyard, your personal walk with the Lord. Is your walk with the Lord like a well-kept vineyard, cultivated and bearing fruit, with strong walls of protection around it? Or is it more like the vineyard that Solomon saw -- neglected, all grown over with weeds and thorns, bearing very little fruit, and surrounded by the rubble of broken relationships?

If your life is more like the vineyard Solomon saw, then do something about it. Quit making excuses for your spiritual laziness. Awake out of your spiritual slumber, arise, and get to work. Clear out the weeds and thorns and rebuild the broken walls. Get the sin and apathy out of your life, mend any relationships which need mending, and get yourself into a flock that will provide you with a wall of protection from the enemy who has ravaged your vineyard. Then start planting, cultivating, and watering the seeds which will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Get into prayer, get into the Word, and then be a doer of the Word by walking in the good works which God has foreordained you to walk in. □

# HOLY CONVOCATION

## A Divine Imperative

### Dr. Daniel Botkin

*Some keep the Sabbath going to church;  
I keep it staying at home,  
With a bobolink for a chorister,  
And an orchard for a dome.*

-Emily Dickinson

### STAYING HOME ON THE SABBATH

Some people think like Emily Dickinson. They want to keep the Sabbath by just staying home. However, people who keep the Sabbath without a holy convocation are not really keeping the Sabbath. They may be abstaining from working and from buying and selling, which is good. However, abstinence from working and buying and selling is not the only thing required to keep a Biblical Sabbath. According to the Bible, Sabbath-keeping also requires the assembling of ourselves together with others for a holy convocation. The Bible makes this very clear in Leviticus 23. (See the Hebrew and Greek Word Study on the next page.)

The New Testament Scriptures warn us about "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25). Assembling together for worship and fellowship can be done on any day of the week, but the Sabbath is the one day of the week on which we are required to assemble together. The Book of Hebrews was written to Hebrew disciples. That's why it's called Hebrews. These Jewish believers had been familiar with Sabbath-keeping all their lives. They knew which day of the week it was, and they knew that Sabbath-keeping required assembling with others for worship at the synagogue. The word *synagogue* can even be seen in this command to assemble in Hebrews 10:25. The Greek word translated "assembling" is *episunagoge* (*επισυναγωγη*). The *epi-* prefix is the preposition which points us in the direction of our destination, and the *sunagoge* tells us where our destina-

tion is: in the synagogue, the place of worship.

Unlike these First Century Messianic Hebrew disciples, most people in today's Messianic community did not grow up keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Most of us came out of the Sunday church system. Because we did not learn Biblical Sabbath-keeping in our childhood, we have to learn it as adults. Learning to keep the Sabbath is like learning a foreign language. It is more difficult for adults than it is for children. This is because adults have already established regular modes of thinking and habitual patterns of behavior from years of experience. Adults become set in their ways, or, to put it in linguistic terms, "fossilized."

### INTERFERENCE & TRANSFER OF PREVIOUSLY LEARNED HABITS

Foreign Language (FL) learning can show us some things about learning to keep the Sabbath. Linguists who study how people learn a FL point out that one of the things that makes FL learning so difficult for adults is Native Language (NL) interference (also called NL transfer). A young child who has spoken his Native Language for only a few years can learn a Foreign Language as easily and as naturally as he learned his Native Language (if he is equally exposed to the FL), because the young child's mind has not yet fossilized. An adult, on the other hand, has already established linguistic patterns in his mind. His mind has unconsciously locked into the linguistic rules that govern his Native Language. When he tries to learn a Foreign Language, he discovers that the FL (or TL, Target Language) is not always governed by the same linguistic rules of grammar, word order, sentence structure, inflection, etc. If he wants to learn to speak the TL, he must try to ignore the rules which govern his NL. This is easier said than done. An

English-speaking adult who has always placed adjectives before nouns may find it difficult when he is told that the TL requires him to place the adjective after the noun -- and to also make sure the adjective form agrees in number and gender with the noun that it modifies (something which English does not require).

Our NL interferes with our learning of a FL when we transfer the linguistic rules of our NL to the TL. A similar phenomenon occurs in learning to keep the Sabbath. If we grew up going to church on Sunday (our NS, "Native Sabbath"), we are apt to transfer the rules of Sunday-keeping to the seventh-day Sabbath (our TS, "Target Sabbath"). In other words, we will view Saturday in much the same way that we formerly viewed Sunday, and we will conclude (usually erroneously) that we are keeping the seventh-day Sabbath -- just like some foreign students I have met who thought they were speaking English.

If all we have done is to transfer a half-hearted allegiance from one day of the week to another day of the week, we are not keeping the Sabbath. This is not to imply that all Sunday Christians are half-hearted in their faith. They are not. However, most Sunday Christians are half-hearted in their observance of Sunday as the Sabbath. Sunday is viewed as the one day of the week when a good Christian ought to go to church, but if he occasionally misses for some minor, petty reason, it's no big deal. And if he works or buys or sells after the Sunday morning church service, no one accuses him of Sabbath-breaking. That would be considered legalistic. Besides, most Christians see nothing wrong with buying or selling or even working on Sunday, as long as the person attends a Sunday church service. The fact that restaurants are crowded with church people every Sunday afternoon speaks volumes about the contemporary

Christian view of Sunday.

Many, probably most, Messianic believers came out of churches that view Sunday in this way. After coming out of the Sunday church, they transfer the rules of their NS ("Native Sabbath," i.e., Sunday) to their TS ("Target Sabbath," i.e., Saturday). They think it's okay to buy and sell after the Saturday morning service. And they think it's not necessary to attend a holy convocation every Sabbath. They think that attending once in a while is sufficient, just enough so they still "feel connected" to the local body. This is not Sabbath-keeping. It is Sabbath-breaking, because it ignores the commandment about having a holy convocation.

There are times when unforeseen circumstances of an urgent nature come up, of course. Things like sickness, infirmity, bad weather, and family emergencies sometimes prevent us from attending the holy convocation. In a serious emergency, we might even have to buy something. If the ox falls in a ditch on the Sabbath, it is not a sin to get it out. These are the exceptions, though, and we are not talking about the exceptions. We are talking about people who stay home on the Sabbath when they could attend a holy convocation in a local assembly in their area.

#### THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SUNDAY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH-KEEPERS

Seventh-day Sabbath-keepers of previous generations probably did not have to deal with this problem of NS ("Native Sabbath") transfer as much as we do, because faithful Sunday Christians of past generations actually treated Sunday as a Sabbath. (See the information about Sunday "Blue Laws" on the next page.) Until a few decades ago, virtually all Bible-believing Christians were in universal agreement that God wanted Christians to keep the Sabbath. They were not in universal agreement about which day (Saturday or Sunday), but they all agreed that Christians should keep the

## HEBREW & GREEK WORD STUDY

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of Yahweh, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings." (Lev. 23:2f)

In the KJV, the Hebrew word *mikra* (מִקְרָא) is translated "convocation." In modern English the word *convocation* evokes visions of formal, solemn, high-church assemblies in Episcopal churches. However, the general, primary meaning of *convocation* is "the act or process of convoking." The verb *convoke* simply means to call people to assemble together for a meeting. The *con-* prefix ("with" or "together") provides the "togetherness," and the *-voke* (related to words such as *vocal* and *voice*) provides the "calling." Therefore a convocation is an assembly of people who have been

called to come together for a specific purpose. In the context of the Sabbath, that purpose is for congregational worship.

The word *convocation*, though rarely used in modern English, is an excellent choice for translating the Hebrew word *mikra*. The stem of *mikra* is the verb K-R-A (קָרָא), which means "to call," often in the sense of proclaiming or calling out. The verb is used in the well-known phrase "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." This is why Strong's Concordance correctly defines *mikra* as "something *called* out, i.e. a public *meeting*..."

The Greek New Testament word translated "church" also carries the idea of calling. The church is the *ekklesia* (εκκλησία), the "called-out" assembly. The *ek-* prefix means "out of" and the rest of the word provides the "calling." We are a called-out people who have been called to assemble together every Sabbath for worship.

Sabbath. Even if they called it "the Lord's Day" instead of "the Sabbath," they still believed that the principles of Sabbath-keeping should be transferred to Sunday. I am old enough to remember a time when virtually all businesses and stores and restaurants were closed on Sundays. No sporting events or school activities were held on Sundays. Everything, even gas stations, closed down for the (Sunday) Sabbath.

I believe the reason the Church has gotten away from keeping Sunday as the Sabbath is because there is no Biblical basis for keeping Sunday as the Sabbath. Preachers have to really twist the Scriptures and yank them out of context to present the case for a Sunday Sabbath. Even with their twisted Scriptures, they can only present it as an alleged custom, not as a commandment, because there is no Biblical authority for a Sunday Sabbath.

The positive result of this is that

more and more Christians are coming to realize that the seventh day of the week is the only possible day that can rightly be called the Sabbath. The negative result is sloppy Sunday-keeping, which results in sloppy seventh-day Sabbath-keeping. People decide to start keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, but they treat Saturday no differently than they formerly treated Sunday. If they bought and sold on Sunday, they buy and sell on Saturday. If they attended Sunday morning services sporadically, they attend the Saturday holy convocation sporadically. If they sometimes stayed home from Sunday services because they were tired, or wanted to clean their garage, or wanted to watch a football game on TV, they will stay home from the Sabbath services for these same reasons.

If we truly believe in keeping the Sabbath, we are obligated to keep it as the Sabbath. This means not only abstinence from working, buying, and

selling. It also means attending a holy convocation.

Even if we are out of town on the Sabbath, we are still obligated to honor the Sabbath. I tell people in our congregation that if they are out of town on a Sabbath, they should try to find a Sabbath-keeping congregation and attend their holy convocation. Messianic and Sabbath-keeping directories (in printed form or online) can help you find fellowship on the Sabbath. If no congregation can be found in your area, at least gather your family together in the motel room (or wherever you are) and have a time of prayer, Bible reading, singing, etc. Regardless of where we are, we should at the very least have a time of worship and fellowship every Sabbath. Many families who live in rural areas, isolated from other believers, have learned to do this. Modern technology also makes it possible for isolated people to use teaching tapes and videos or to go online for fellowship in chat rooms. It's not as good as fellowshipping with others in person, but it's better than nothing.

#### WHAT ABOUT EXODUS 16:29?

Some seventh-day people stay home on the Sabbath not out of rebellion or laziness, but because of a sincere but erroneous understanding of Exodus 16:29. "See, for that Yahweh hath given you the sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."

Some people believe that the above verse *requires* them to stay home on the Sabbath. There are several reasons why this understanding is erroneous. Let's look at some of these reasons.

First of all, we must remember that in order to understand the Biblical view of any particular subject, we must look at everything the Bible says about that particular subject. We must get "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). If we base our understanding of a topic on one single verse, isolated and divorced from its context, and ignore

#### SUNDAY "BLUE LAWS"

The following excerpt is from Don Voorhees, *The Book of Totally Useless Information* (New York:MFJ Books, 1993), p. 151f.

"Blue laws or Sunday laws are government imposed restrictions on the sale of certain products or services on Sundays. They have their origins in early colonial American legislation requiring puritanical standards of Sunday observance on the part of the general public. Blue laws were the first printed laws of the New Haven Colony in Connecticut. They are called blue laws because they were originally bound in blue paper.

"The first 'Sunday' laws in what is now the United States were enacted in Virginia in 1617. They called for the punishment of persons failing to attend Sunday church services, with a fine payable in tobacco. The Virginia militia was authorized to force colonists to attend Sunday Anglican church services.

"Other colonial blue laws included the prohibition of work, travel, or recreation on Sundays, as well as many other restrictions, including such mundane activities as cooking, shaving, cutting hair, sweeping, and making beds. It was also illegal to have sexual intercourse on the Sabbath. The Puritans believed that a child was born on the same day of the week as it was conceived. Therefore, a woman who bore a child on a Sunday was fined for violating the blue law nine months earlier. *[Editor's note: Sarah Edwards, the wife of the famous Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, gave birth to eleven children. Six of them were born on Sundays, causing tongues to wag.*

-DBJ In fact, mothers were forbidden to kiss their children on Sundays!

"New York State punished blue law violators with a fine of six shillings and eight pence or two hours in the stocks. Massachusetts law even forbade men and women from wearing lace or precious metals on Sundays.

"In the nineteenth century, laws requiring Sunday church attendance began to disappear because they 'violated citizens' rights to religious freedoms.' The other restrictions, however, including those banning sporting events and travel, continued...."

everything else the Bible says about that topic, we are almost certain to come to an erroneous conclusion about that topic.

If Exodus 16:29 were the only thing the Bible said about the Sabbath, one might have an argument for staying home on the Sabbath. However, that is not the case. The Bible contains approximately 150 verses about the Sabbath, and these verses must be taken into consideration if we want a Biblical understanding of what God expects of His people on the Sabbath.

The Bible must be interpreted in a way that makes different passages harmonize with one another and not contradict one another. If Exodus 16:29 is viewed as a commandment for everyone to stay home on the Sabbath, then we have a major problem with contradictions. First of all, this view contradicts God's command to have a holy convocation on the Sabbath (Lev. 23). If everyone

just stays home, it is obvious that there can be no community gathering for congregational worship. Secondly, it is obvious from the Scriptures that God's people did not stay home on the Sabbath. They left their homes and went to the synagogues to worship. In the Gospels, Yeshua went to the synagogue every Sabbath "as His custom was" (Lk. 4:16). In the Book of Acts, the Apostles went to synagogue every Sabbath, and they even expected Gentile believers to do so. (See Acts 15:21 in context.) Even where there was no synagogue building available, Jews left their homes and gathered in public places on the Sabbath: "And on the sabbath, we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither" (Acts 16:13). Also in Old Testament times people left their homes and gathered for worship on the Sabbath. This can

be inferred from the statement made by the husband of the Shunammite woman as she was leaving to go see the Prophet Elisha. Her husband said, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath" (2 Kings 4:23). This is clear evidence that it was normal for people to leave their homes and assemble with others on new moons and Sabbath.

To arrive at the correct understanding of Exodus 16:29, we must consider two things. First, we must realize that it cannot be understood as a commandment to stay home on the Sabbath, because this view contradicts many other passages about the Sabbath. This view even makes Yeshua into a Sabbath-breaker, because He did not stay home on the Sabbath. It was His custom to leave home and go to the synagogue.

Secondly, we must look at the context of Exodus 16:29. God had just started giving manna to the children of Israel. They had gone out and gathered manna six days in a row, gathering a double portion on the sixth day of this first week of miraculous provision. On the seventh day, Moses warned them not to go out looking for manna, telling them, "Today ye shall not find it in the field." Some people went out manna-hunting anyway, which angered the Lord. It was in this context that Yahweh ordered the people to "abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." The obvious meaning (and the only one which does not contradict the rest of Scripture and make the Messiah into a Sabbath-breaker) is that the people were not supposed to leave their tents to go looking for manna. But they could certainly leave their tents to assemble for worship after the Tabernacle had been constructed and set up. In the same way, we should not leave our homes on the Sabbath for the purpose of earning our daily bread. But we can and should leave our homes to assemble with others for worship. God's people have done this since Biblical times, and if we want to keep the Sabbath wholly holy, we will do the same. □

## FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT SATURDAY IS DEFINITELY THE 7TH DAY OF THE WEEK & THEREFORE THE SABBATH

-Daniel Botkin-

When I studied Russian years ago, I learned that the Russian word for Saturday is *subbota*. I had studied Spanish in high school, and I remembered that the Spanish word for Saturday was *sábado*. I recognized in both of these words the striking similarity to *sabbath*, and I suspected that there might be other languages that had similar-sounding words to designate Saturday. If so, this Hebrew-derived S-B-T/D word root would be linguistic evidence that Saturday has always been the true and universal Sabbath in the seven-day weekly cycle which God instituted at creation.

This spring my suspicions were confirmed by an article in *The Sabbath Sentinel*. The article, reprinted from the very first issue of *The Sabbath Sentinel* in 1950, is titled "Universality of the Biblical Sabbath Confirmed by the World's Ancient and Modern Languages," written by George A. Main, who was the Secretary of the Bible Sabbath Association. The writer presents a listing of the words for both Saturday and Sunday in fifty major languages, along with the additional meanings of those words in their respective languages.

In most of the languages, the words used to designate Sunday mean "one" or "first," which indicates that Sunday has been universally regarded as the first day of the week since ancient times. None of the words used for Sunday mean "sabbath" or "rest." On the contrary, in some of the languages the words used for Sunday mean "market day" or "business day." (Consider 1 Corinthians 16:2 in light of this information. See also *Gates of Eden* 7-2, "A Sunday Sabbath in 1 Corinthians 16:2, An Example of Eisegesis.")

In all fifty languages that the writer lists, the words used to designate Saturday are obvious cognates of the Hebrew *shabbat* (שַׁבָּת, SH-B-T). Sometimes the SH- becomes S- or Z- or the -B- becomes -P-, or the -T becomes a -D or -TH. The reason for this is understandable to anyone with a little basic knowledge of linguistics. Many languages do not have the SH sound, and must use the closest-sounding letter they have, usually S or sometimes Z. The B and T sounds also vary from language to language. When two sounds differ in only one regard, linguists refer to them as minimal pairs. The only difference between minimal pairs like S-Z, B-P, or T-D is whether the sounds are "voiced" or "voiceless," i.e., whether or not the vocal cords vibrate. Put your fingers on the sides of your Adam's apple when you make these sounds and you can feel the vibrations of voicing with Z, B, and D, but not with S, P, and T.

The writer of the article in *The Sabbath Sentinel* does an excellent job of summarizing the impact of this linguistic information:

"In our study of the many languages of mankind we not only find that in the majority of the principal languages the last, or seventh, day of the week is designated as Sabbath, but we also learn that there are no languages which designate any other day than the seventh day as 'day of rest.'

"From these facts we may conclude that not only those people who called the last day of the week 'Sabbath,' but all other peoples and races, as far as they recognized any day of the week as Sabbath, rested on the seventh day. In fact, it was recorded by the great historian, Socrates, that in his time the whole known world, with the exceptions of only Rome and Alexandria, observed the seventh day of the week." □

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# TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY

Daniel Botkin

Tolerance and Diversity are popular buzzwords nowadays. Christians and other people with strong convictions about right and wrong sometimes get tired of hearing intolerant people push for tolerance and diversity. The problem is not tolerance and diversity per se, but the recent redefining of these terms by today's politically-correct culture. Tolerance and diversity have now come to mean obligatory approval of sin. If a Christian says it is sinful for people to have sex outside of marriage, the Christian is accused of being an intolerant, diversity-hating bigot.

I believe in tolerance and diversity when these qualities are viewed from a Biblical rather than from a worldly perspective. God is certainly very tolerant of His misguided, misbehaving children. He puts up with a lot of nonsense from us. He is patient, slow to anger, and loves us in spite of our flaws. If God were not tolerant, none of us would survive for very long.

The fact that God is tolerant does not mean that He condones or ignores sin, though. If sin is not immediately followed by deep, sincere remorse and repentance, God eventually deals with the sin, sometimes quite harshly. He does not disown us, but He lets us reap the bitter fruit of our folly. He lovingly corrects us with painful chastisement so we will repent and be brought back into fellowship with Him. God's tolerance is shown in the fact that He gives people space to repent before He lets judgment fall. The Lord can be seen like a parent giving a final warning to His children in passages such as Jeremiah 17:24-27 and Revelation 2:21-23.

God's delight in diversity can be seen throughout His creation. He did not create just one or two kinds of trees. He did not create just a few forms of animal life. If you doubt God's delight in diversity, meditate on the fact that He created over 2,000 species of African dung beetles. There's diversity for you!

God delights in diversity within the human race, too. From a scientific view, there is only one species or "race" of people, namely the human race. Yet within the human race, God has created a great diversity of sizes, shapes, personality types, facial features, skin colors, hair textures, and hair colors. Ethnocentric bigots who feel uncomfortable worshipping with people from other cultures had better get used to the idea. John's vision of the

## AN EXAMPLE OF TOLERANCE REDEFINED

Some people redefine tolerance in a way that demands our approval of sinful behavior. Others go even further and suggest that true tolerance requires our participation in activities that Yahweh calls abominations. Activities like idol worship, for example. Sister Charlene Altemose, a well-educated nun who teaches theology and has been the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship and a Christian Leadership grant, writes about tolerance in her book *Why Do Catholics...?* Sister Charlene says that the fences that separate different religions need to be removed.

"The fences need to be replaced with bridges of acceptance, understanding, and tolerance," she writes. To clarify what she means by "tolerance," she then quotes a writer who says that intra-religious dialogue must include more than just

coming Kingdom included "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9). Heaven's population will include more than White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Republicans. If we do not learn tolerance for others and do not delight in diversity, heaven may be quite a shock for us.

While I believe in tolerance and diversity from a Biblical perspective, I cannot condone sin. Today's politically-correct world makes the fatal error of thinking that God's delight in diversity extends to delight in diverse sexual orientations. It doesn't. God calls homosexuality an abomination. Abomination is the extreme opposite of delight.

If I have a co-worker who is a sodomite, I can tolerate his presence in the workplace. I can be civil to him and treat him with kindness, but I can never, under any circumstances, condone his sin. The Creator has declared his behavior to be an abomination, a word reserved for those sins which are especially disgusting and despicable in the eyes of God.

To agree with what God says does not make a man an intolerant bigot. If anyone says it does, then they are calling the Creator an intolerant bigot. In fact, they

talking. If we want to have true tolerance of a different religious expression of faith, "we must take it up and integrate it into our own faith." Sister Charlene then tells how she did just that:

*I recall participating in a Hindu's "puja" worship. As Saroj, dressed in her finest sari, prayed, incensed, and bathed the statuettes, I knelt by in rapt wonder. Although the ritual was strange, and since Saroj recited the prayers in Sanskrit, I felt I was on sacred ground, and God was so near.* (page 161)

A Roman Catholic nun kneeling before pagan idols in rapt wonder does not show mere tolerance. It shows a total disregard for the commandments of God. With people like this teaching theology, it's no wonder there is so much moral confusion in the Church.

are accusing God of being even more intolerant and bigoted than man, because it was His idea, not man's, to declare homosexuality an abomination.

When people accuse us of being intolerant because of our agreement with what Yahweh has declared in His Holy Scriptures, we need to explain to these people the difference between tolerance and approval and, by extension, the difference between disapproval and intolerance. Disapproval of a person's sinful behavior is not intolerance. To tolerate a man simply means that we allow him the freedom to do what he wishes. We can condemn his sinful behavior in the strongest words possible, yet still allow him the freedom to make his own choices. Furthermore, we can be civil to him and treat him with kindness while we wait and hope and pray that he will repent of his sin. This is true tolerance.

Tolerance does not require the approval of sin, and delight in diversity does not have to extend to diversity of sexual orientations. So don't let anyone tell you that you are intolerant or diversity-hating for believing what God says. If they want to argue about it, tell them their argument is with God, not with you. □

# Micah of Mount Ephraim

Dr. Daniel Botkin

The tenth in a series of articles on the Book of Judges

Micah lived during the time of the Judges, but he was not a Judge. He was a man of Mount Ephraim who, with his mother's help, created a false religious system that consisted of a house of idols and a hired priest to preside over his man-made religious system. All this was financed by money which had allegedly been dedicated to Yahweh. And Micah expected God's blessing because he had hired a Levite to be his priest. "Now know I that Yahweh will do me good, seeing I have a Levite for my priest" (Jdg. 17:13). Sound familiar? If not, read on.

What Micah the Ephraimite did on a small scale for just his own household is a prophetic picture of what Ephraimites of later generations would do on a larger scale. When the Ephraimite Jeroboam became the first king over the ten northern tribes, he set up two calves of gold and changed the feast of the seventh month (Tabernacles) to a man-ordained, counterfeit feast to be celebrated in the eighth month. This was done to discourage the people from going to Jerusalem. (See 1 Kings 12:25ff.) All the Israelite kings who succeeded Jeroboam continued to maintain this false religious system. This led to the captivity of the ten tribes, who were eventually assimilated among the Gentiles. Centuries later some of the descendants of these Ephraimites, who had lost their Israelite identity through assimilation, were being grafted back into the house of Israel through faith in Israel's Messiah. (See Hosea ch. 1 with Rom. 9:24-26 & 1 Pet. 2:9f.)

These Ephraimite descendants eventually fell back into the same error as the Ephraimites Micah and Jeroboam. Departing from Biblical patterns of worship, they perverted the original Messianic faith and turned the Church into a house of idols with a hired priesthood. And just as Micah expected God's blessing because of his hired priest's link to Levi, so these church leaders expected God's blessing

because of an imagined link to Peter through "Apostolic Succession."

Like Jeroboam, they set up gods of gold to discourage the people from looking toward Jerusalem. They also followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam by changing the feast of the seventh day to a man-made, counterfeit feast on the following day, a day they called "the eighth day" (which was actually the first day of the week). It is ironic that post-Apostolic church leaders referred to Sunday as "the eighth day." (See *The Epistle of Barnabas* ch. 15.) By their own words they thus testify that they were walking in the pattern of Jeroboam, who changed Yahweh's appointed time of the seventh month to his own appointed time of the eighth month.

The Bible mentions four kinds of idols that were in Micah's house of gods: a graven image, a molten image, an ephod, and teraphim. Let's consider these four types of idols and see if they can show us some things about idolatry that exists among God's people today, keeping in mind that any false concept of God which we have created with our vain imagination is an idol of the mind.

## GRAVEN IMAGES

Graven or carved images were made by starting with something whole - a tree or a stone - and carving away portions of it until it assumed the desired shape.

Some people today use this method to create a "God" in their minds. They start with something whole, the whole of Holy Scriptures, and carve away the parts they don't like. Just as the idol-makers of old had a mental picture of what they wanted their carved images to look like, so today's idol-makers have pre-conceived notions about God. When they read something in the Bible that conflicts with their own personal opinion about how God ought to behave, they delete that portion of Scripture. They do not take scissors and literally cut the offensive passage out from their Bibles, but the effect is the same. In formulating their view of God,

they give absolutely no consideration to the verses they don't like, thus rendering those verses irrelevant and meaningless.

A sculptor uses a hammer and chisel to chip away any part of the whole that stands in the way of revealing what the sculptor wants to see. Modern idol-makers use all sorts of tools to remove Scriptures that stand in their way, and every one of these tools could be categorized under the heading of Lame Excuses: "That doesn't make sense... I don't like that... That's too hard... That's inconvenient... Nobody takes that seriously... That's too old-fashioned."

We have the 2nd-century heretic Marcion to thank for this pick-and-choose, cut-and-paste theology which still afflicts the Church after nearly two millennia. (For more information about Marcion, order *The Ghost of Marcion*.)

## MOLTEN IDOLS

Molten idols were created by first forming soft clay into the desired shape, then covering it with plaster, which hardened into a mold. The hardened mold was removed and filled with molten metal which, when hardened, was an exact replica of the original clay figure.

This kind of idol-making goes on in the minds of people who have pre-conceived ideas about God but do not want to carve away the Scriptures like the makers of graven images do. Like a sculptor who starts with clay, these people take something "of the earth, earthly" - namely their carnal imaginations - and create their pre-formed "God," tailor-made to fit their personal preferences. Then after the mold has hardened and their hearts have fossilized, they try to melt the word of God by blurring the meaning of Scriptures, and they try to press the Word of God into their mold.

They do not deny the truth of God's Word, they just interpret it in a way that will force it to conform to the shape of their hardened hearts. Instead of changing their views and their habits to

conform to the Scriptures, they force the Scriptures to conform to their own wishes. They find verses to use as proof texts to support their erroneous views, and they are not bothered by the fact that these verses are yanked out of context, divorced from their historical background, and interpreted in a manner that contradicts what other passages of the Bible clearly and plainly state about the subject in question. That way they can serve their molten idols and still call themselves Bible believers.

## EPHODS

The Hebrew word *ephod* usually refers to a garment similar to a girdle-vest combination that was wrapped around the waist. When the word *ephod* refers to an idol, it refers to an image which was first carved and then covered with a thin outer coating of silver or gold. (The fact that the image was "wrapped" in a metal coating may explain why the same word is used for the garment that was wrapped around a man's waist.)

This procedure describes how some people form ephods in their minds. They first carve away Scripture verses that they find objectionable, just like the makers of graven images do. The makers of ephods go a step further, though. They don't like the looks of a "God" whose Word has been deemed partially unreliable, so they cover their idol with a thin outer coating of glitter and sequins to make it sparkle and shine. They use flashy gimmicks to distract people and prevent them from seeing what their "God" is really made of. The gimmicks and glitter may take the form of Christianized pagan customs such as tinsel-laden pine trees in December. They may take the form of Judaized pagan customs such as the occultic elements of kabbalistic magic. Or they may take the form of secular worldliness by aping Hollywood and the world of celebrities.

On the surface an ephod looks pretty, but the discerning eye can see through the surface. The glitter and glamour of Gehenna and the sparkling sequins of Sheol do not have as their source the glory of God's holiness, but the counterfeit light of deception that shines when "Satan himself is trans-

formed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

## TERAPHIM

Teraphim were small household idols, similar to good-luck charms, and normally shaped like a man. People who trusted in teraphim expected them to bring prosperity and health. (The word *teraphim* is believed to be derived from *rapha*, "to heal.")

Some preachers of today's "prosperity gospel" preach a "God" who appears to be very much like the teraphim of old. He expects very little of his worshippers, and if they will just trust him, he will bless them with health, wealth, and prosperity. After all, that's his primary job; that's what he's there to do.

Yahweh, the true God, does bless His people with health, wealth, and prosperity. However, the problem with today's "prosperity gospel" is that it is like the man-shaped teraphim of old - it is man-centered instead of God-centered. The emphasis is on the temporal and material things God can give to man.

Teraphim differed from other idols in a few ways. For one thing they were smaller. Another difference is that they were not public idols; they were household idols for the family.

Both the small size of the teraphim and the private nature of teraphim-worship probably made them seem harmless. Even Rachel harbored teraphim which she had stolen from her father's house. The small size and the privacy of teraphim-worship probably made them seem harmless to her. In like manner, we tend to think that if we privately harbor small misconceptions about God, they are harmless. We cannot know everything about God, of course, but if we firmly believe things about Him that are not true, then we are on the verge of worshipping a false god, regardless of our sincerity.

The fact that teraphim were household gods for the family probably made it extremely difficult for Yahweh's people to see the need to abandon the teraphim. After all, if your parents and grandparents had always paid homage to the teraphim, had always given them a place of honor in the house, and trusted them to bring good luck, how could they be wrong?

Religious rituals performed since childhood give warm, fuzzy feelings of joy and nostalgia, especially if the rituals were performed in the home with the family. Who doesn't enjoy fond childhood memories of home and family?

The teraphim in our minds are the misconceptions about God that come from our family's religious traditions. These are the idols that are probably the most difficult to abandon, because family ties are strong. They run deep and have a very powerful hold on us.

"We've always done this in our home," a man says. "Our family has always belonged to this denomination."

And if that man had been born and raised in India, he would be a Hindu; if he had been born in a Moslem country, he would be a Moslem. Basing our beliefs about God on nothing more than the circumstances of our birth and the religion of our ancestors is a form of teraphim worship. It is trusting in our "household gods" - our family traditions and the words of our parents - more than in the Word of God. We are certainly supposed to honor our parents, even if they are unbelievers, but we must honor God and the Messiah far above our parents. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).

## THE FATE OF MICAH'S IDOLS

Six hundred men from the tribe of Dan eventually came along and stole Micah's gods - and his priest, too - and moved everything to Laish. Micah was very upset about it, but that's what happens when a man worships gods that can be stolen away from him.

The story ends with these words: "And they [the men of Dan] set them up Micah's graven image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh" (Jdg. 18:31).

Two systems of worship were going on simultaneously, one true and one false. While the Danites were worshipping Micah's false gods in Laish, there was a remnant of true worshippers worshipping at Yahweh's Tabernacle in Shiloh. It has been that way throughout history, and it will be that way until the return of the Lord. Let's make sure we are worshipping at the true Tabernacle in Shiloh, and not at the idolatrous shrines in Laish. □

# **HEAD COVERINGS ON PRAYING MEN**

## **Necessary, Wrong, Or Optional?**

### **Daniel Botkin**

Many readers are familiar with my booklet *The Validity and Value of the Woman's Head Covering*. But what about head coverings on men during prayer and worship? Are they necessary, wrong, or a permitted option?

Orthodox Jews consider it improper and disrespectful for a man to pray without some kind of head covering, which is why Jewish men wear kippahs (skullcaps). Of course if you ask them where the Bible talks about this, they will admit that it is not a Biblical (or even a Talmudic) commandment. Theories have been offered to try to explain the origin of the custom, but they are just educated guesses with no real proof. Nothing is certain. It is simply a tradition of uncertain origin. As Tevye says in *Fiddler on the Roof*, "You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you - I don't know!"

Some Christians believe the exact opposite of what Jews believe. These Christians consider it improper and disrespectful for a man to pray with a head covering. They believe that a man who prays with a hat or kippah on his head is violating the Biblical instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:4 & 7, which says, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head ... For a man indeed ought not to cover his head..."

I have heard of hatted men being approached in churches by concerned Christians. The concerned Christians gave them a quick mini-lecture from 1 Corinthians 11, and asked them to remove their hats. (Funny, though, that these concerned Christians were not bothered by the fact that all the women in the church were ignoring 1 Corinthians 11 by worshipping bare-headed.)

I know of a brother who believed very strongly that a man should never have his head covered when he prays. This brother was planning a long motorcycle trip, and he was looking forward to praying while he rode his motorcycle. Only one problem. In the state where he was going to travel, the law required motorcyclists to wear helmets. This resourceful brother found an easy way

to solve his dilemma, though. He took a hacksaw and sawed off the top of his helmet. Then he hit the road and prayed to his heart's content.

I once heard about a Messianic Jew who was questioned about the propriety of his kippah by some Christians who happened to believe very strongly in the woman's head covering. The Messianic Jew took the small knitted kippah off his head, held it up, and asked, "If my wife were wearing this, would you say she was wearing a head covering?" The Christians admitted they would not. "I rest my case," he said, and returned the kippah to his head.

Consistency is an important factor that must be kept in mind when formulating a Biblical view of a subject. If we want to know what the Bible teaches about a subject, we have to take into consideration all the verses that speak about the topic. Then we have to arrive at a conclusion which will not contradict or deny any of the passages that address the subject. Our conclusion must not result in different Bible verses contradicting each other. We must have an interpretation which will allow all of the verses to speak and to harmonize and agree with each other.

It is for this reason that I cannot agree with the Christian view that says a kippah or hat is wrong. If 1 Corinthians 11:4 & 7 were the only verses in the Bible that said anything about head coverings on men, we might be persuaded to accept this Christian view. However, the Bible mentions head coverings on men in other passages.

We know from history and from the Scriptures that in Biblical times it was common for men to wear turbans, caps, or other headgear. There is nothing that suggests that Moses and the Prophets removed their headgear when praying. In fact, we see the opposite. Priests were *required* to wear turbans (KJV, "bonnets") when they ministered. (See Exodus 28:40.) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were wearing hats when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. I think it is safe to assume that they prayed (I would have

prayed, wouldn't you?), yet the Bible does not say they removed their hats as soon as the ropes burned off their hands. When King David fled from Absalom, he "had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that were with him covered every man his head" (2 Sam. 15:30). In the next verse David prayed, and God answered this prayer, a prayer that was prayed by a man with a covered head.

If Paul meant to condemn all head coverings on praying men, what was his basis for this view? Such a view contradicts the above Scriptures. The only way I know to interpret Paul's statement in a way that will harmonize with these other verses is to understand Paul to mean that a man should not cover his head with a *woman's head covering*.

It is the *woman's head covering* that seems to be the primary focus of 1 Corinthians 11. In that context, Paul would be saying, "A man should not wear *that* kind of covering, i.e., a *woman's head covering*." Thus Paul would be affirming the prohibition against a man wearing a woman's garment in Deuteronomy 22:5. His teaching would then be based in the Torah instead of contradicting the Torah. And considering Corinth's reputation for sexual perversion, it is highly likely that some new believers had to be taught and/or reminded not to wear garments that pertained to the opposite sex ("[fornicators, adulterers, effeminate]... And such were some of you," 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

When Paul tells men not to cover their heads, he uses the Greek term *katakalupto*, a word consisting of *kata* ("down") and *-kalupto* ("cover"). Strong's defines it as "to cover wholly, i.e. *veil*." This describes a woman's head covering, not a kippah or turban or cap. Viewing a man's head covering as a permitted option (provided it is not a woman's scarf) is consistent with the Greek term and with the other Bible passages that mention head coverings on men. This allows the Old and New Testament verses to harmonize and not contradict one another. □

# THE LEVITE AND HIS CONCUBINE

Dr. Daniel Botkin

*The eleventh and final installment in a series of articles on the Book of Judges*

As pointed out in the first installment in this series of articles, the period of the Judges was a period marked by Apathy, Apostasy, Anomianism, and Anarchy. The spiritual condition of Israel at this time is summed up in the Bible by this statement: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (See Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.) The moral confusion which results during such times can be seen in the story of an unnamed Levite and his unnamed concubine, a story which takes up the final three chapters of the Book of Judges.

A Levite who dwelt in the foothills of Mount Ephraim took a concubine out of Beth-lehem of Judah. The concubine "played the whore against him" and deserted him and returned to her father's house. Four months later the Levite and his servant went to the house of the concubine's father to retrieve her. The concubine's father was glad to see the Levite. After several days of hospitality at the father's house, the Levite and his servant left with the concubine and headed for home.

On the way home, they stopped to spend the night in Gibeah, a town in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. An old man there invited the three travelers to spend the night in his home. That night while they were making their hearts merry, some "sons of Belial" showed up at the old man's door, demanding that the Levite be given to them so they could "know him."

The old man went out and spoke to the sodomites of Benjamin. "Nay, my brethren, nay," he said. "I pray

you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them will I bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing."

The sodomites of Benjamin refused the old man's offer. They wanted to sodomize the Levite, not rape women. However, the Levite pushed his concubine out the door, and they satisfied their lust by raping her. After they "abused her all the night until the morning," they let her go and she lay at the threshold of the door. When the Levite came out in the morning and tried to awaken her, he discovered she had died from all the abuse in the night.

The Levite hauled his dead concubine home, took a knife, and divided her body into twelve pieces. Then he sent the twelve chunks of bloody flesh and bone throughout the borders of Israel to publicize the evil deed of the Benjamites of Gibeah. All the tribes of Israel were outraged by what the Benjamites had done. As a result, there was a civil war between Benjamin and the other tribes.

As this story demonstrates, when there was no king in Israel, men did what was right in their own eyes. When God's people today do not allow Yeshua to reign as King and Lord in the Messianic Community, every man does what is right in his own eyes, just as the Israelites did in the days of the Judges. At that time, as now, the people of God had a vague awareness of their status as a holy people. They knew that Levites were different from non-Levites; they avoided spending the night in a Gentile city (Jdg. 19:12); the Levite worshipped at the house of Yahweh

(Jdg. 19:18); they knew that letting a mob of perverts sodomize the Levite would be "wicked" and "vile." Yet when confronted with a serious problem, they showed how bizarre their system of values really was when they offered to let the perverts have the old man's virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine.

Things were going okay for these Israelites when they were just eating, drinking, and enjoying good fellowship in the old man's home. Likewise, things go okay for us when we just eat and drink and have fellowship. But the real test comes when the Devil stirs up some "sons of Belial," some demonic spirits that come pounding on the door of our heart, demanding that we agree to be party to some perverse act.

The old man in Gibeah thought that letting the perverts rape the women would be less wicked and vile than letting them sodomize the Levite. The old man apparently viewed heterosexual rape as something more "natural" and less perverse than homosexual rape, and therefore less evil. It was probably this reasoning that led him to offer the two helpless women to the mob.

Like the old man in Gibeah, we may refuse to yield to the demands of demonic spirits to partake in the perverse act that they suggest. But out of fear, we agree to partake in some *other* perverse act that is different from the one originally suggested - something that is less perverse, but perverse nonetheless.

For example, someone may say, "I won't yield to the temptation to get high on illegal *synthetic* drugs. But I'll use 'natural' drugs like marijuana, hashish, and peyote."

Or a married man says, "I won't commit adultery with *that* woman. She's married! But I *will* commit

adultery with this *single* woman."

Or a single man says, "I won't commit fornication. I'll masturbate instead."

A man who thinks he is exercising self control just because he chooses his own sins is deceiving himself.

The Levite who surrendered his concubine to the sons of Belial ended up losing her forever. There are precious things a believer can end up losing if he surrenders them to Satan. One thing a man can lose is his mind. We are commanded to love God with all of our mind. If a man allows the Enemy to fill his mind with ideas that are contrary to God's Word, that man's mind will be abused, raped, and destroyed, just like the Levite's concubine was. Some people allow things like fear, doubt, worry, jealousy, and self-pity to penetrate their minds. They end up being mentally raped and abused, robbed of their joy and peace, and sapped of all their spiritual strength.

Another precious thing we can lose if we hand it over to wicked men is the Bible. Some believers have surrendered the inspired Scriptures to so-called "higher criticism." They let modern-day sons of Belial rape and abuse God's Holy Word. When the higher critics give the Bible back to these believers (actually former believers), it is a Bible that is not inspired, not reliable, and therefore not authoritative. For these people, the Bible is as dead as the Levite's concubine was. So they end up butchering the Bible and cutting it up, just like the Levite did to his dead concubine. The different parts of their butchered Bible bear labels such as "legend," "spurious," "unreliable," "later addition," "interpolation," or "just for the Jews."

Other people allow their faith to be raped and abused by "oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith" (1 Tim. 6:20f). Like the Levite who surrendered his concubine to the sons of Belial, they surrender their faith to the scrutiny of

man-made scientific observation, forgetting that faith does not rest on observable scientific data but on Divine revelation. These people allow the scientific sons of Belial to abuse their faith until it is as dead as the Levite's concubine.

Another precious, holy thing that some people end up losing because of compromise is their calling and ministry. We can all think of famous televangelists whose ministries were destroyed because they gave in to temptation. Their ministries were ruined beyond repair, like the Levite's concubine. The only thing these fallen ministers can do is to follow the example of the Levite, who cut up his concubine's body and sent out a message blaming evil men. They take what is left of their ministry, divide it up, and send out a newsletter blaming the Devil for the demise of their ministry.

There are many other precious things we can lose if we surrender them to Satan through compromise. If we allow our children to be abused by various evils in the public school system, or by the wrong TV programs, we can end up losing them. If we waste our time and money through compromise, we allow Satan to rob us of potential blessings. If we ignore God's dietary laws and His prescription for rest on the Sabbath, we can end up surrendering our health to the Enemy.

The Levite had no right to surrender his concubine to the mob of perverts. She was set apart exclusively for him. We as disciples of the Lord have no right to surrender to the Devil the things which God has given us. Our lives, our families, our children, our faith, our time, our money and possessions are to be set apart and used for the glory of God.

If the Levite and the old man of Gibeah had resisted the sons of Belial, they might have had a battle on their hands. However, if they had trusted God, they might have remembered what happened when a

similar scene took place a few hundred years earlier in Sodom. When a mob of perverts surrounded Lot's house in Sodom, the Lord struck the sodomites blind. If the Levite and the old man had remembered this, they might have had the faith and courage to take a stand for righteousness.

If we trust God during times of strong temptation, the Holy Spirit will often remind us of times when the Lord supernaturally intervened to deliver His people from situations similar to the one we are in. This builds our faith and gives us the strength we need to do the right thing. But the Levite and the old man were not interested in doing the right thing. They wanted to avoid a battle so that they could continue to eat, drink, and be merry. Unfortunately, many of God's people who compromise today do so for this very same reason.

The Levite and the old man found a quick, temporary solution to their problem, but it resulted in a terrible loss of life. Not only was the concubine killed, but many lives were lost in the civil war that resulted from this incident. The Bible says that 40,000 Israelites and 25,000 Benjamites were killed (Jdg. 20:21, 25, 46).

Only 600 men of Benjamin survived the war. This presented a problem, because there were no wives for these 600 surviving Benjamites. Now that peace was restored, the other tribes were grieved over the fact that one of the tribes of Israel might die out for lack of wives.

"O Yahweh God of Israel," the Israelites prayed, "why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?"

These Israelites could not offer any of their daughters as wives for the Benjamites, because during the war they had sworn an oath, saying, "Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin." (Jdg. 21:1, 18).

The Israelites came up with a partial solution by raiding Jabesh-

(*Two Crusaders, Fitzurse and De Bracy, are conversing.*

*The first speaker is Fitzurse.*)

"What on earth dost thou purpose by this absurd disguise at a moment so urgent?"

"To get me a wife," answered De Bracy, coolly, "after the manner of the tribe of Benjamin."

"The tribe of Benjamin!" said Fitzurse. "I comprehend thee not."

"Wert thou not in presence yestereven," said De Bracy, "when we heard the Prior Aymer tell us a tale in reply to the romance which was sung by the minstrel? He told how, long since in Palestine, a deadly feud arose between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the Israelitish nation; and how they cut to pieces wellnigh all the chivalry of that tribe; and how they swore by our blessed Lady that they would not permit those who remained to marry in their lineage; and how they became grieved for their vow, and sent to consult his holiness the Pope how they might be absolved from it; and how, by the advice of the Holy Father, the youth of the tribe of Benjamin carried off from a superb tournament all the ladies who were there present, and thus won them wives without the consent either of their brides or their brides' families."

"I have heard the story," said Fitzurse, "though either the Prior or thou has made some singular alterations in date and circumstance."

gilead and procuring 400 young virgins, whom they handed over to the Benjamites. This still left 200 men in need of wives. The final few verses in the Book of Judges tell how the Israelites helped these 200 Benjamites obtain wives:

*Then they [the Israelites] said, "Behold, there is a feast of Yahweh in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah."*

*Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; and see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren*

*come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, 'Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.'*"

*And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.*

*And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

Surrendering holy things to the Enemy in order to avoid battles is a dangerous strategy. It provides only

short-term solutions, and leads to trouble later on down the road. In the end, we find ourselves robbed of our blessings, just as the Levite was robbed of his concubine. We end up being forced into battles that are even worse than the original battle that we temporarily avoided by our compromise. Innocent victims are injured, and extreme measures are later taken to try to undo the damage that was done. The extreme measures are often contrary to the Biblical norm - like the Benjamites' manner of obtaining wives - but when the Messiah is not reigning as King in Israel, every man does what is right in his own eyes.

Let's be a generation that learns from the mistakes of the Israelites who lived in the days of the Judges. Let's allow the Lord to reign as King in our hearts, and let's do what is right in *His* eyes instead of what is right in our own eyes. □

# WHY I AM NOT A ROMAN CATHOLIC

Daniel Botkin

I know that I have a few Roman Catholic readers on my mailing list. Let me state from the very beginning that I am not writing against Roman Catholics. I am writing against Roman Catholicism. There is a difference. Roman Catholics are the people. Roman Catholicism is the religious system, along with its doctrines, its rituals, and its view of the Scriptures.

Protestant writers have written extensively about the various errors of Roman Catholicism. Probably the most widely-known book is Alexander Hislop's *Two Babylons* (subtitled *The Papal Worship Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and his Wife*), first published in 1853.

Protestant writers often point out Roman Catholic errors by showing how various Roman Catholic teachings contradict what the Bible says. This approach works when you are dealing with a Protestant, because a Protestant expects true doctrine to be based on the Scriptures, to agree with the Scriptures, and to be proven by the Scriptures. However, this approach will not always work with a Roman Catholic, especially if he is informed about and adheres to the Roman Catholic view of the Scriptures and the alleged authority of Catholic tradition.

In 1998 I knew a young man who was a zealous, born-again, Protestant Christian. He fell in love with a girl who was a devout Roman Catholic. To make a long story short, he converted to Roman Catholicism and married her. I had lost contact with him a few years prior to this, when he moved away. When he was in the process of converting to Roman Catholicism, I wrote him a letter. I am publishing it here. Readers may want to copy and share this information with

Roman Catholic friends. Perhaps it will help some Roman Catholics to hear the call to "Come out of her, My people" (Rev. 18:4).

As a footnote, let me point out that Revelation 18:4 indicates that some people in "Babylon" are, indeed, truly God's people. Otherwise, God would not say, "Come out of her, My people." They certainly need to hear the call to come out, but we need to remember that some of the people in Babylon are God's people. "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). This is why we must be careful to distinguish between the people ensnared in the Roman Catholic system and the system itself. With that thought in mind, here is the letter I wrote to my friend.



Dear \_\_\_\_,

I heard that you are in the process of converting to Roman Catholicism. I'm writing this because I have a genuine concern for the safety and well-being of your soul.

I won't go through the long list of errors that the Catholic Church teaches. I just want you to be aware of the one error which is the basis for all of the erroneous teachings. Please be patient with me and read this as a letter from an old friend. I'm not into "Catholic bashing." I have nothing against Catholic people. My in-laws (Teresa's family) are Catholic.

As you know, there are many differences in Catholic and Protestant teachings and practices. All these differences are based on one major difference, and that difference is this: The Protestant position is *sola scriptura* ("only the Scriptures"). In other words, the Bible is the final authority for determining true doctrine

and worship; church leaders do not have the authority to change the commandments of God which are written in the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, says that true doctrine and worship are determined by the Scriptures AND decisions and declarations made by the Church. Catholicism teaches that Christ gave authority to the Church to make new laws, even laws that contradict Scriptural commandments. This is why they believe that the Church had the right to change the Sabbath. See page 6 of the enclosed pamphlet ["Roman Catholic and Protestant Confessions About Sunday"]. I can find other Catholic quotes to verify what I am telling you, if you want me to.

So the question you must face is this: When Christ gave authority to the Church to "bind and loose" (i.e., to forbid and permit certain things), did this authority give the Church the right to forbid things which the Scriptures allow and the right to permit things which the Scriptures forbid? Think about this very carefully, for this is the whole crux of the matter. The Catholic Church says, "Yes, this is why we can forbid priests to marry and why we can permit the abolition of the 7th-day Sabbath."

Years ago, when I learned that the Catholic Church believes that Christ gave authority to go beyond what the Scriptures command, I wondered if perhaps Christ did give this kind of authority to the Church. We know He gave authority to the Church, but how do we prove whether or not this authority gives us the right to change the commandments written in the Bible?

I found my answer by "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." You see, when Jesus was on earth, He was in a situation very similar to ours. God's people had the Scriptures. They also had their traditions, based on decisions and rulings that had been made at "church councils" in the past. The Pharisees insisted that their established traditions were just as binding as the commandments of the Scriptures.

Some of them went so far as to claim that the traditions had even more authority than the Scriptures. And if anyone questioned their right to "bind and loose" and to establish un-Biblical traditions, the Pharisees appealed to Deuteronomy 16:18 & 17:8-13 as the proof of their authority. Even Jesus recognized the fact that the religious leaders of Israel had been given authority: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat [i.e., seat of authority]. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:2f).

It is obvious in the Gospels that Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for abusing their God-given authority: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men ... You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mark 7:8f) The Pharisees, as the religious leaders of Israel, really did have authority from God, but they overstepped that authority when they replaced the commandments of God with their own traditions. The Roman Catholic Church has made the very same mistake. By their own admission, they have let go of the Sabbath command of God and replaced it with their own Sunday tradition. And, as Catholic writers point out, most Protestants blindly hold on to Sunday.

Jesus made it very clear that religious leaders, even though they are authorized by God, do NOT have the right to change the commandments of God. Jesus recognized the written Scriptures as the final authority. He is my example, so I must do likewise. He refused to recognize the validity of those traditions which were contrary to the Scriptures, and I must likewise refuse to recognize Catholic and Protestant traditions which are contrary to the Scriptures. I sincerely love Catholic and Protestant people, but I cannot accept their practice of letting go of the commandments of God in order to hold on to their own traditions.

I'm not writing this letter to scold you or rebuke you. I'm writing it to

inform you. \_\_\_\_ said you told him that you have studied this whole issue of Roman Catholicism, but I don't think you've even scratched the surface. The Bible says (2 Thes. 2) that God Himself will send strong delusion to those who do not love the knowledge of the truth. This should put the fear of God in you, because if you do not really sincerely want to know the truth at any cost, you are in great danger of deception. And if God Himself sends the deception, what hope is there for you to be delivered from deception? If you really want to know truth at any cost, study the other side of the Catholic issue, with people who do have answers which other Protestants couldn't give you. I don't claim to be a know-it-all, but I do know enough about the Bible and Roman Catholicism to make an informed choice. The fact that you are in the process of converting is proof that you do not know enough to be making an informed choice.

If you are willing to hear the other side, I will be glad to talk to you. As I said, I'm not into Catholic-bashing. I love Catholic people, but the Catholic system is condemned by the Bible. That is why I'm writing. I hate to think of you getting sucked into a system that God condemns, because it will rob you of the blessing of God.

Paul warned of those who were preaching "another Jesus" other than the true Jesus. You have to decide which Jesus you are going to follow. A Jesus who gives authority to the Church to establish traditions which are contrary to the Scriptures? Or a Jesus who expects the Church to uphold and obey the written Scriptures? If you are following the first, then I'm afraid you are following a counterfeit Jesus.

I'm not trying to anger you or insult you. Please do not let your emotions blind you. Think carefully about the things I've written, and read and think about the enclosed pamphlet. If I don't hear from you, I won't bother you again.

Daniel Batkin

# ORAL TORAH

## That Which is of Man & That Which is of God

Dr. Daniel Botkin

### JEWISH ORAL TORAH

Orthodox Judaism is based on the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Written Torah consists of Genesis through Deuteronomy. Oral Torah, as defined by Orthodox Judaism, consists of all the extra-Biblical Jewish traditions which the rabbis established over the centuries, based on their interpretation of the Written Torah. In the New Testament, this body of Oral Torah is called "the traditions of the elders" (Mt. 15:2; Mk. 7:3, 5), or, when spoken of in a negative sense, "your (own) traditions" or "the traditions of men" (Mt. 15:3, 6; Mk. 7:8f, 13; Col. 2:8).

In New Testament times, the Pharisees considered these traditions of the Oral Torah to be every bit as binding as the commandments of the Written Torah. According to Hebrew Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim, these traditions were actually regarded by the Pharisees as "not only of equal, but even greater obligation than Scripture itself." (Emphasis mine) Edersheim quotes a few rabbinic writings which prove his assertion: "The sayings of the elders have more weight than those of the prophets' (Jer. Ber. i.7) 'An offence against the sayings of the scribes is worse than one against those of Scripture' (Sanh. xi.3) ...it is inferred from Jer. ix.12, 13, that to forsake the law - in the Rabbinic sense - was worse than idolatry, uncleanness, or the shedding of blood" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book I, page 97f).

### YESHUA AND THE ORAL TORAH

Yeshua did not condemn all extra-Biblical Jewish traditions, but neither did He condone them all. This fact is obvious from passages such as Matthew 23. He always strongly upheld the Written Torah, but He did not always abide by all the traditions of the Oral Torah.

The great majority of Messianic believers today follow Yeshua's

example in their attitude toward the Oral Torah. They may incorporate some traditional customs into their worship (provided the customs do not violate Written Torah), but they do not consider Oral Torah authoritative or binding. (See "Is the Oral Torah Binding?" by Dan Levine, and "Oral Torah According to Moses" by Walter Lieber, *Gates of Eden* 6-4 & 8-1.)

### THE GENUINE "ORAL TORAH"

Even though Messianic believers rightly reject the binding authority of the rabbis' Oral Torah, there is another "Oral Torah" which should have authority over us. The "Oral Torah" that we must heed consists of the instructions which are communicated to us "orally" by the voice of the Holy Spirit at various times. Yeshua made it clear that the Holy Spirit is imparted to us to teach us, to remind us, to guide us, to speak to us, and to show us things to come:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.... I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (Jn. 14:26 & 16:12f).

If we do not listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit to teach us, to remind us, to guide us, to speak to us, and to show us things to come, we are depriving ourselves of the one genuine "Oral Torah" that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh.

The Written Torah is certainly a very important guide for us, and we should always heed the instructions of the Written Torah as best as we can understand them. But the Holy Spirit is an equally important guide that often

seems to be neglected in some Messianic circles. Some people get so bogged down in trying to understand the minutiae of the Written Torah on a mere intellectual level that they forget about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They end up establishing their own "fences" around the Torah like the rabbis did. Their interpretations of the Written Torah, though sometimes different from the rabbis' interpretations, end up being a substitute for the Holy Spirit. Instead of listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit, which should be their real "Oral Torah," they focus on their list of rules they have established, based on their personal interpretation of the Written Torah. The rules and interpretations of these Messianic believers may be good - maybe even superior to the Jewish Oral Torah - but if the Messianic believers focus on these things as a substitute for the Holy Spirit, they are missing out on the genuine, Holy Spirit-spoken "Oral Torah."

### LOGOS AND RHEMA: THE "WORD" OF GOD

In the New Testament there are two Greek terms translated "word." These terms are *logos* (λόγος) and *rhema* (ῥῆμα). *Logos* means "word" in a general sense. It is the verbal expression of a thing or the thing itself (similar to the Aramaic *memra* or the Hebrew *davar*, which means "word" or "thing"). *Logos* is used when referring to a subject in general. A borrowed form of *logos* can be seen in the *-ology* suffix used in many English words that refer to general subjects: psychology, anthropology, archeology, etc. *Logos* can also be seen in English words such as *logic*, *logical*, and *logistics*. In the first chapter of John, it is the *logos* ("the Word") that was in the beginning with God, and was God, and became flesh.

*Rhema*, like *logos*, also means "word." However, *rhema* is often used

to describe a word that is more specific rather than general. We could think of *logos* as the general word of God, or the thought that God communicated in the beginning, and *rhema* as the word which God is speaking now, in a specific situation for a specific purpose. The *rhema* does not contradict or supplant the *logos*.

Rather, the *rhema* is the *logos* quickened by the Holy Spirit, so it becomes "a word spoken in due season" (Prov. 15:23).

A few examples of how *rhema* is used in the Scriptures can help clarify its meaning and show how it functions as a sort of "Oral Torah" for those who hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament shows that the *rhema* serves at least five functions. It is the "word" that goes out when the gospel is preached; it is the "word" which produces faith; it is the "word" by which we live; it is the "word" that washes us; it is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." As we look at these five functions, we will see how the *rhema* can be viewed as an "Oral Torah" for disciples of the Messiah.

#### I. THE WORD THAT GOES OUT WHEN THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED

Peter quoted Isaiah 40:6-8 from the Septuagint: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word [*rhema*] of the Lord endureth forever" (1 Pet. 1:24, 25a). Then Peter added: "And this is the word [*rhema*] which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:25b).

When we proclaim the gospel, we should mix our preaching with faith, believing that God will activate the message we preach so that it will become *rhema* and put faith into the hearts of the hearers. Otherwise, the preaching of the *logos* is of no profit: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word [*logos*] preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2).

Peter understood that the *rhema* must go forth because of what he witnessed when he preached the

gospel to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. The three men Cornelius sent told Peter that Cornelius had been "warned from God by a holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words [*rhemata*] of thee" (Acts 10:22). Peter went and preached the gospel. The Holy Spirit was at work and faith was at work to activate the *logos* that Peter spoke, and transform it into the life-giving *rhema*: "While Peter yet spake these words [*rhemata*], the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word [*logos*]. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God" (Acts 10:44-46).

The gospel is preached as the general *logos*, but when the Holy Spirit activates the word, it becomes the life-giving *rhema*, and puts faith into the hearts of the hearers. We could say that the listener must hear the gospel "orally." In other words, the listener must hear and recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit in the words.

#### II. THE WORD THAT PRODUCES THE HEARING THAT PRODUCES FAITH

It is the Spirit-activated *rhema* that produces saving faith: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word [*rhema*] of God" (Rom. 10:17). Many Christians believe on the basis of this verse that simply reading the Bible will produce faith. There is an element of truth in this, provided the reader has a hungry heart and is "hearing." But we cannot conclude from this verse that faith will automatically come from merely reading the Bible. There are atheists and agnostics who have read the Bible more thoroughly than most Christians, yet their knowledge of Scripture has not resulted in a single ounce of faith. They die in their sins with a head full of Bible knowledge but no faith.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the *rhema*, when the Holy Spirit quickens the message and makes it personal. (See Watchman Nee's explanation above.)

The *rhema* produces not only saving faith; it also produces the charismatic gift of faith: "If ye abide in

Me, and My words [*rhemata*] abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7). Here is another verse that is often misunderstood. On the surface, in our English translation, it sounds like we can request and receive anything, so long as our minds are filled with Scripture. Sometimes sincere Christians pray for something and base their faith and their prayer on their understanding of this verse. However, notice that it is not the indwelling of the more general *logos* which gives us the right to ask and receive whatsoever we will. It is the indwelling *rHEMA*, the word activated by the Holy Spirit, which gives us the gift of faith to believe that we will receive the thing for which we ask. The *rHEMA* produces the charismatic gift of faith, viz., a Divine revelation that gives us absolute assurance that our prayer will be answered. When we have a supernatural Divine revelation which lets us know that God will agree to do a certain thing for us, then we can ask and receive. This gift of faith is a sort of "Oral Torah" which authorizes us to ask and receive. We know we are in agreement with the specific steps God wishes to take in the carrying out of His will, and therefore we have the faith to receive our request.

### III. THE WORD BY WHICH WE LIVE

In both Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4, Yeshua said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [*rHEMA*] that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." A person's spiritual life is not sustained by the dead letter of the law, but by the living, active, *rHEMA* that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The translators of the Septuagint understood this when they translated Deuteronomy 8:3, the verse Yeshua quoted here. They supplied the Greek word *rHEMA*, even though no Hebrew word for "word" appears in Deuteronomy 8:3. (The Hebrew text reads עַל-כָל-מֹצָא פִי-יהוָה [al-kol-motsa pi-YHWH], "by/according to all that goes out of the mouth of YHWH.")

The *rHEMA* which proceeds out of the mouth of God to impart life to us may or may not be a word directly

from the Bible. Often the Holy Spirit will remind us of a particular Bible verse that is the perfect word/*rHEMA* for the situation we are in, but sometimes the Holy Spirit will speak a word which is not a direct Bible quote. Nonetheless, it will be a word that is exactly what is needed. We see examples of this in the Gospels when Yeshua answered difficult questions with a word of wisdom that silenced His accusers. (For example, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," and "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?")

The translators of the Septuagint also used *rHEMA* when they translated Isaiah 55:11: "So shall My word [*rHEMA*] be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Some well-meaning Christians think that this verse in Isaiah means that simply putting a Bible or a gospel tract into the hands of a sinner will result in something spiritually positive. We should do whatever we can to get the written Word into the hands of sinners, because it often does result in something spiritually positive. However, let's not fool ourselves into thinking that merely possessing the written Word by itself guarantees positive spiritual results. Millions of Americans have Bibles in their homes, yet the Bibles have no effect whatsoever on many of these people.

Even if a sinner reads the Bible or a gospel tract, there is no guarantee that it will affect him. It is only the word "that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh" that imparts spiritual life to either saint or sinner. Until the Holy Spirit quickens the written Word, it remains a dead letter to the reader.

It is this word by which we live, and it is this word that leads us to experience the life described in the very next verse of Isaiah's passage: "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field

shall clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12). If we wish to experience this joy, we must heed the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us orally as our "Oral Torah."

### IV. THE WORD THAT WASHES US

Paul compared the relationship between the Messiah and His people to the husband-wife relationship. Paul said that Messiah gave Himself for His Bride so that He might sanctify and cleanse her "with the washing of water by the word [*rHEMA*]" so that she might be glorious and holy, without spot or wrinkle or blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Just as the *rHEMA* is instrumental in producing our saving faith and in imparting spiritual life to us, so it is the *rHEMA* which washes away our spots, wrinkles, and blemishes. On one level, our sins are washed away by the blood of the Lamb, Yeshua. The blood makes an atonement and removes our guilt and spares us from the penalty we deserve for the sins we have committed. However, the removal of our guilt does not automatically and immediately remove all of our character flaws - our "spots, wrinkles, and blemishes." These things are gradually removed by the washing of water by the *rHEMA*.

As we spiritually grow and draw near to the Lord through prayer and the study of Scripture, the Holy Spirit will activate the word and speak to our hearts about areas of our lives that need washing. Washing does not involve the addition of something, but rather the removal of something. The Holy Spirit may speak a word to us, a *rHEMA*, urging us to get rid of something - a habit, a hobby, a possession, a personal relationship. It may be something which is not inherently sinful, but something which is detrimental to our spiritual health, or something which is causing a spot, wrinkle, or blemish on our testimony. When we hear the Holy Spirit dealing with us in this way, we are hearing the *rHEMA* as Holy Spirit-spoken "Oral Torah." If we want to be a holy and glorious Bride, we must heed the voice of the Holy Spirit and allow the Lord to wash away our spots, wrinkles, and

blemishes by the water of the *rHEMA*.

## V. THE WORD AS THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

The "whole armour of God" described in Ephesians is all defensive except for one item: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word [*rHEMA*] of God" (Eph. 6:17). When we are under spiritual attack, we need the *rHEMA* to drive away the Enemy. It is not enough to have just the general word, the *logos*. When Yeshua was tempted in the wilderness, He did not just make a general statement like "I believe the Bible." He quoted specific Scriptures which were relevant to the specific situation. For each of His three temptations, He quoted passages from the Torah, and all three times the word in His mouth became a sword, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the *rHEMA* of God."

This is the one "Oral Torah" that Satan fears, the Spirit-inspired word that is spoken to orally oppose him, whether that word is a direct Scripture quote or a word of wisdom given by the Holy Spirit. This word is a sword that can hack Satan's accusations and lies to ribbons. In Revelation, John saw Yeshua with a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of His mouth. When we are under spiritual attack, we should ask God to put this same sword of the Spirit in our mouths.

Let me close with a personal testimony about the sword of the Spirit. Nearly thirty years ago, when I was a fairly new believer, I did something that I knew I should not have done. I do not remember exactly what it was, but it was something wrong enough to make me feel guilty. I was accustomed to spending a few hours in prayer every night. (I worked nights and had nothing to do all night but be there, so I was able to pray and study the Scriptures all night long.) That night when I went to prayer, I confessed my sin to the Lord, repented, apologized, and thanked Him for His mercy and forgiveness. I wanted to put it behind me and move on to pray about other concerns.

When I tried to move on in prayer, though, I could not do it. Every time I

tried to pray about something, I felt the Accuser throwing my sin back in my face, even though I had thoroughly repented and knew I was forgiven. It was as though the Accuser was telling me, "You can't pray tonight. You may be forgiven, but that doesn't mean that you can have a good prayer time like you normally do. You need to stew in your guilt and grovel for a long while before you try to draw near to the Lord in prayer."

I re-confessed my sin and went through prayers of repentance three or four more times, but the voice of the Accuser would not be silenced. It was very frustrating. I felt the presence of the Lord, but I also felt the presence of the Accuser. Even though my sin was nothing as serious as adultery, I felt like the woman taken in adultery who was brought by her accusers to the Lord. She was in the presence of the Lord, but her accusers were also there, testifying of her guilt.

As I thought about the story of this woman, I saw a vision in my mind's eye. The Bible says that when the woman's accusers testified against her, the Lord stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. The Bible does not say what He wrote, but what I saw the Lord writing for me was a list of the sins of my Accuser. I saw Him write the words *liar, father of lies, thief, robber, murderer, rebel, evil one...* These words became a sword in my mouth. I realized that the Accuser had no business accusing me, because his sins were far more serious and more numerous than mine. Furthermore, he had not repented, as I had! I recited the sins of my Accuser and threw his own sins back in his face, and I felt his presence fade.

Then I heard the Lord ask me, "Where is your Accuser? Who has condemned you?"

"No one here, Lord," I answered.

"Neither do I condemn you," He said. "Go, and sin no more."

That night I had an especially glorious time in prayer, because the Enemy had been defeated and driven away by the sword of the Spirit, the *rHEMA* of God. □

# "YOU ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW"

Daniel Botkin

What did Paul mean when he said believers are "not under the law"? The standard Christian explanation runs something like this: "We don't need to obey Old Testament laws anymore -- unless they happen to be repeated somewhere in the New Testament." Christians who hold this erroneous view require God to repeat Himself if He expects them to obey a command, regardless of how many times He commanded it before Christ came.

David Stern, in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, discusses at considerable length the meaning of "not under the law." Stern concludes that being "under the law" means operating from a legalistic viewpoint which perverts the Torah into mere legalism, something God never intended. Thus Stern translates "under the law" as "in subjection to the system which results from perverting the *Torah* into legalism" (Gal. 3:23). That, Stern says, is the "law" that we are not "under."

My explanation of what it means to be "under the law" has focused on the significance of the preposition *under*. If a man is "under" the law, that means the law is outside that man and above him. We who come into the new covenant have God's law internalized, written on our hearts. (Jer. 31:31-34) Thus the law is no longer outside us and suspended above us like a sword, ready to condemn us. It is inside us, written on our hearts. Therefore we cannot possibly be "under" the law. And because the law is internalized, we obey it from an inward motivation, not because of some external pressure. Our new nature wants to obey the Torah once we see its beauty.

I recently heard a slightly different explanation from a sister in our congregation. About twelve years ago, this sister was taking a course in business law at a community college. The law professor, an attorney who had taught at prestigious universities, asked the students, "How many of you are under the law of the United States?"

All the students raised their hands. The professor asked the students, "Are

you under indictment or just under arrest?" The students looked puzzled, so the professor explained what it means to be "under the law."

To be "under the law" means that you have either: (a) been arrested because someone has accused you of a crime and/or the police have reason to suspect you of a crime; or (b) you have been indicted, i.e., the court has determined that there is enough evidence to warrant putting you on trial. In other words, if you are "under the law," you have been accused of breaking the law and you are waiting to see if the court will find you guilty or not guilty. If you are declared guilty, you will be punished; if you are declared not guilty, you will not be punished. We are all required to *obey* the law, the professor explained, but that is not the same as being "under the law." To be "under the law" means to be under arrest or indictment and awaiting the verdict.

This sister went home and considered the Apostle Paul's statements about not being "under the law" in the light of this legal definition. The phrase "you are not under the law" took on a brand new meaning for her. She realized that Paul simply meant that we are no longer under arrest or indictment in the courtroom of God. We have already received a "not guilty" verdict, because the penalty for our crimes was paid by our Advocate, the Messiah, when He died as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. Yet we are still expected to obey God's law, the Torah, even though we are not "under the law."

The sister shared this legal information and her new understanding of Paul's statement with her Lutheran pastor, a highly-educated man who was normally very patient.

"That's stupid," he replied.

To determine the alleged stupidity of this understanding, let us look at Paul's statements about not being "under the law."

"For sin [i.e., law-breaking: 'for sin is the transgression of the law' (1 Jn. 3:4)] shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law [not under arrest

or indictment for breaking God's law], but under grace [declared 'not guilty' by God's mercy]. What then? Shall we sin [break God's law] because we are not under the law [not under arrest or indictment] but under grace [declared 'not guilty']? God forbid!" (Rom. 6:14f).

"But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise of faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law [under arrest or indictment for breaking God's law], shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. [NIV, 'we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.] Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified [declared 'not guilty'] by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster [no longer under arrest and indictment and awaiting our verdict]" (Gal. 3:22-25).

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage to the elements of the world [natural superstitions about the physical world which led to the breaking of God's law - see Tertullian, *Against Marcion* V.4]: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made [literally, 'becoming'] under the law [was brought under indictment at His Crucifixion, when He bore the penalty for all the law-breaking done by others], to redeem them that were under the law [all those arrested and indicted for breaking God's law], that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:3-5).

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law [desire to be judged by the law, which will result in your arrest and indictment, 'for all have sinned' (Rom. 3:23)], do ye not hear the law [don't you know the law will condemn you if you are 'under the law']? (Gal. 4:21).

"But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law [not under arrest or indictment for breaking God's law, because the Spirit will not lead you to break God's law]" (Gal. 5:18).

I guess that Lutheran pastor can call me stupid, too. □

# THE JOY OF LIVING WATER & THE DANGER OF BROKEN CISTERNS

Dr. Daniel Botkin

*This year at our Feast of Tabernacles, on "the last day, that great day of the feast," I shared this message. Several people came up to me afterwards and said that they thought it was an especially powerful and moving message. Because several people responded this way, and because I believe it is a very timely message, I am presenting it here.*

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Yeshua stood and cried, saying, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Yeshua was not yet glorified.)" (John 7:37-39).

Yeshua spoke these words on "the last day, that great day of the feast." How did the Jews celebrate the last great day of Tabernacles when the Temple stood in Jerusalem? One Jewish writer describes it this way:

"Rams' horns wailed and bands paraded through the narrow streets of the Holy City. In the courtyard of the Temple three giant candelabra blazed with such intensity that their light illuminated the entire city. Holy men and scholars sang and danced, accompanied by choruses of priests. Great rabbis performed pushups, hand stands and acrobatics on the Temple Mount. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel, head of the Sanhedrin, juggled eight flaming torches; he was accompanied by thousands of musicians playing flutes, harps, castanets and drums. In a climactic finale, thousands of Levites sang the 15 Songs of Ascents from the Psalms - one for each large stair - as they climbed from the Courtyard of the Women to the Courtyard of the Israelites in front of the Temple. Women watched the festivities from special balconies in the Women's Courtyard."<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of all this wild celebration, the Jews carried out the *Simchat Beit Hasho'eva* celebration, "the joy of the water-drawing." Water was drawn

from the Pool of Siloam and carried up the hill in a golden flagon through the Water Gate. As everyone cheered, sang, shouted, danced, and blew on shofars, the water was poured on the altar as an expression of the people's faith that God would answer their prayer for rain. The Mishna says that anyone who has never seen the Celebration of the Water Drawing has never seen real joy (Succa 5:1).

It was on this day of the Celebration of the Water Drawing when Yeshua stood and proclaimed Himself to be the Source of living spiritual waters which would flow from the innermost being of those who come to Him and drink. When He spoke these words, the Holy Spirit was not yet given, John says, because Yeshua was not yet glorified. However, Yeshua is glorified now. The proof of His glorification came on the Day of Pentecost fifty days after His Resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came into the upper room like a rushing, mighty wind and filled every single one of the 120 individuals present with a mighty baptism of the Spirit, causing them all to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance (Acts 2). This was the fulfillment of the promise He gave on that last great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and that promise is still for us! "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Yeshua's promise of living water should motivate us to come to Him and drink. We should not be satisfied with trickles of stagnant water when He has promised rivers of living water. We should not be satisfied with shallow, timid prayers and praise when He has promised something that will spring up and flow like a river from the depth of our being. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Yahweh," the psalmist wrote. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts" (Ps. 130:1 & 42:7).

If the Lord's people want to move beyond shallow, surface religion, they must learn to cry out to the Lord audibly

from the depths. Throughout the Psalms there are verses that speak about crying aloud, lifting up the voice, pouring out the heart, praising Yahweh with a loud voice, with the high praises of God. God's people must overcome the things that hinder them from experiencing worship from the depths. Hindrances such as shyness, pride, self-consciousness, inhibition, introversion, the fear of man's opinions, etc. must be crucified. "Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" the psalmist exclaimed four times in Psalm 107.

"But Daniel, what if I get so caught up and emotionally carried away praising the Lord, that I do something that seems foolish - like (gasp!) speaking in tongues!?"

If this happens, praise the Lord! This should, in fact, be the normal thing to expect, for this flowing out of a new language from your innermost being is the beginning of the rivers of living water which Yeshua promised. John Quincy Adams (a 20th-century preacher, not the 19th-century U.S. President) wrote these words of instruction to people seeking this baptism of the Holy Spirit:

"Praise continuously as if turning on a hydrant, leaving it open (instead of cutting it on and off, on and off), and soon you will catch God's ear. He touches your offering, and the praises that hitherto were unfelt and were sacrificial, may now become joyous. You think you started to stammer, and you straighten up your words. DON'T DO THIS, 'Quench not the Spirit' (1 Thes. 5:19). It is HIS beginning to change your language gradually. That is why at first it is but a stammer, but soon it will be other languages. Child of God, yield more, do not straighten up that stammer. Very soon it will be definitely a word that you did not start with, it is already another language, the Comforter has come! While He is so speaking through you, continue on, even if it continues the same one word. Let Him pray through on that and then

He will change it. While He is so praying through you, continue on thus for a long time, and you will ever afterwards be free to pray thus at will.”<sup>2</sup>

There are many believers who never experience the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water flowing out from the depth of their being. For many of these believers, the Holy Spirit is merely something theoretical and theological. Depending on which creed they happen to believe, they just think of the Holy Spirit as either “the third Person of the Trinity” or “the active force by which God does His work.” They have very little experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives.

The reality of spiritual experience is something we had better have, though. And it had better be a regular, ongoing experience, not just a one-time experience. “I was filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues ten years ago,” some people say. That’s wonderful, but what else has happened over the past ten years since that initial experience? Experiencing the Presence of the Almighty should be a continual, daily experience, something which results in our having a constant awareness of the Lord’s Presence with us and in us. I don’t know about other people’s experience, but when my prayer life is healthy and I’m walking with the Lord as I should, I live in a constant dream-like state. One Bible teacher (A.W. Tozer, I think) once said that a man who is filled with the Spirit should continually experience a joy that resembles “mild inebriation.”

“Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation,” Isaiah wrote (Isa. 12:3). In the Hebrew text, the wells of salvation are the wells of *yeshuah* - the word from which the name *Yeshua* is derived. Why is it so important that we experience the reality of the Holy Spirit? Because if we are not drawing living water from the wells of *yeshuah*, we might end up forsaking *Yeshua*, the Source of living water, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns that hold no water. “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13).

Without the reality of spiritual

experience, mere academic and intellectual knowledge is a dead letter. Without the Holy Spirit, even knowledge about the Torah is a dead letter. The New Testament says that we are “ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6). The letter of the law without the spirit is not enough. The Pharisees had the letter of the law, and they killed the One who had the spirit. The Romans performed the execution, but this did not absolve the Jewish leaders of their part in the Crucifixion. “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified,” Peter said to them, and, “that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified” (Acts 4:10 & 2:36).

In the First Century, Jews persecuted and opposed those who believed that *Yeshua* was the Messiah. In later centuries, Christians persecuted and opposed Jews for not believing in Jesus. The religious freedom in modern-day America allows the criticism against the opposing view to come from either side. Christians are free to criticize and oppose Jewish beliefs, and Jews are free to criticize and oppose Christian beliefs. Religious freedom is great, and I would not want to return to the days when freedom of religion did not exist. However, we need to be aware of the fact that freedom of religion means that Jews are just as free to oppose the New Testament Scriptures and proselytize Christians as Christians are free to oppose Judaism and proselytize Jews.

Judaism today generally discourages Jews from trying to convert Christians to Judaism. Nonetheless, conversions from Christianity to Judaism do happen, and in recent years conversions have been happening at an alarming rate. A great number of these converts are Messianic Christians who are drawn to Orthodox Judaism via the Jewish “anti-missionaries.” The anti-missionaries are Jews who aggressively speak and write against the belief that *Yeshua* is the Messiah. They try to discredit the New Testament Scriptures in order to persuade Jewish believers to quit believing in *Yeshua*. In the process, they also convince many ignorant, unstable Messianic Gentiles to deny *Yeshua* and thereby forfeit eternal life.

Below is a letter I recently received from a reader:

*My step-dad is a Messianic minister. The congregation broke up about a year ago, where he had been minister through several years of change from independent Baptist, to charismatic non-denominational, to Sabbatarian, and finally Messianic.*

*Since the break-up, my mother began attending an Orthodox Jewish synagogue, and the anti-missionaries began to work on her. Mom was always full of life - a prayer warrior, full of zeal for *Yeshua*. Now it seems she's aged overnight (in a year's time). The light in her eye is not the same. She shuns anything in the name of *Yeshua*. She hasn't converted yet, but really wants to put Judaism on the throne of her life. This is an intelligent woman - educated, very knowledgeable of the Scriptures. She's put them aside and is more into Judaism, especially on the internet. This is someone who, if you knew her two years ago, you would say is the last person who would turn away from *Yeshua*.*

*Last night my step-dad spoke to Mom and told her all the things that several of us had going through our minds but had not verbalized to her. He spoke to her and detected a spirit in there (in her) that was not the wife he knew. He told it that he was not going to give in or give up, but he was going to fight for his wife until the end. He then reminded Mom of *Yeshua*'s words that whoever denied Him before men (as you know, a part of any formal conversion to Judaism) that He would deny them before His Father, and reminded her that it was a most serious sin. Mom's love for *Yeshua* turned from getting out of Babylon (a good thing), to loving the Jews (a good thing), to studying in an Orthodox synagogue where *Yeshua* was not welcome (a bad thing), to where she is now - almost ready to get disowned.*

*Please pray for my step-dad to remain strong and not lose hope or give up, for Mom to have the scales off her eyes and the light of *Yeshua* to return to her...*

●  
I love the Jewish people, and I am ashamed of the way Christians of past centuries persecuted them in the name

of Jesus. It grieves and sickens me. Nonetheless, the inadequacy of Judaism must be pointed out to Jewish people and to Messianic Gentiles who are being drawn to Judaism.

Judaism is not a pagan religion, because it does have its roots in Divine revelation. However, the corrupting influences of paganism, worldliness, and carnality have seeped into Judaism just as they did into Christianity. At the risk of sounding anti-Semitic, I will go on record as stating that modern-day Judaism, as a system that deliberately excludes Yeshua, is a broken cistern that holds no water. Let me elaborate.

First, Judaism holds no water in regards to its soteriology (its theology of personal salvation). Ask a secular or Reform Jew what it is that will determine whether he goes to heaven or hell, and he will probably tell you he doesn't believe in hell.. He might not believe in any kind of afterlife at all. If he does believe in the *olam haba*, the world to come, he will probably tell you he doesn't know for sure what will gain him entrance. Or, he may say that enough good works will earn him a place in heaven. Ask a Conservative Jew, and you will probably get a similar answer. You might even get a similar answer from an Orthodox rabbi. If you do not believe this, let me quote from a recent article by a prominent Orthodox rabbi in *The Jewish Press*. The rabbi was discussing some of the differences between Judaism and Christianity, and extolling the superiority of Judaism over Christian beliefs. "Jesus is so much less complicated than the Jewish G-d," the rabbi writes, "promising a place in eternity through a simple act of faith... But for all my admiration of Christianity, I would rather rot in hell than go to a heaven I hadn't earned."<sup>3</sup> Tragically, this rabbi will most assuredly get his wish and rot in hell if he continues to believe that he can earn a place in heaven. (His statement reminds me of Bar Kochba's prayer before he went to battle against the Romans: "O Lord, do not help the enemy; as for us, we need no help."<sup>4</sup>) Let's pray that this rabbi will see that the idea of a heaven that can be earned is a broken cistern that holds no water. Judaism cannot save. For that matter, neither can Christianity. Only Christ can save.

Judaism is also a broken cistern when it comes to transforming a person's actual constitution, his character and personality. Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis has worked in the Jewish community for many years, successfully laboring to bring non-Orthodox Jews to an observant lifestyle. Yet she made this revealing statement in *The Jewish Press*:

"Over the years, I have, *Baruch Hashem*, had the privilege of bringing countless people to *teshuva* [repentance], but I have seldom seen personality changes take place. While people can master the disciplines of *Shabbos*, *Kashruth*, etc., with great ease, they find it almost impossible to learn new character traits. For example, the secular Jew with a miserable temper, upon becoming a *Ba'al Teshuva* [a Jew who embraces Orthodoxy], will most likely become a religious Jew with a miserable temper. Indeed, our sages teach us that it is more difficult to alter one character trait than to absorb intricate passages from the Talmud."<sup>4</sup>

This frank admission of Judaism's inability to transform a person's character is in stark contrast to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit declared in the New Testament and demonstrated in the lives of countless Christians.

The one big flaw in Judaism that keeps the cistern of Judaism in its broken condition is its anti-christ spirit. "What do you mean 'anti-christ spirit,' Daniel? That certainly sounds anti-Semitic!" I am not saying that all non-believing Jewish people are consciously opposed to Jesus Christ. Many non-believing Jews admire Christ, and some even have the courage to publicly say so. The anti-christ spirit does not exist in all Jewish people, but there is an anti-christ spirit that exists in the Jewish religion. Consider what the Apostle John says about the spirit of anti-christ:

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Yeshua is the Messiah? He is anti-christ, that denieth the Father and the Son ... And every spirit that confesseth not that Yeshua the Messiah is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist ... For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Yeshua the Messiah is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist..." (1 Jn. 2:22 & 4:3; 2 Jn. 7).

Consider these words of the Apostle John in view of the fact that for many Jews, the main defining factor of Jewish identity is "not believing in Jesus." It was vividly demonstrated to me a few years ago, right here in Peoria, that denial of Jesus is an important mark (and for some Jews, the only necessary theological mark) of Jewish identity. A synagogue in Peoria put on an event called "A Taste of Judaism," a series of lectures and discussions about the basics of Judaism. It was geared for non-Jews who wanted to learn about Judaism and for Jews who did not know much about their religion. A few people from our Messianic congregation attended some of these meetings. On one of the nights, the rabbi explained that in Judaism it is not real important what you believe theologically. Unlike Christianity, Judaism places more emphasis on deeds than on creeds.

"Jewish identity is not determined by what you believe," the rabbi explained. "If a person is born to a Jewish mother or undergoes an Orthodox conversion, he's Jewish."

"But what is the bare minimum that a person *has* to believe to be a Jew?" a man in the audience asked.

"Nothing, really," the rabbi answered. "There are things a person *ought* to believe. He ought to believe in God. But there's nothing he *has* to believe to be a Jew."

"What about Jews who believe that Yeshua of Nazareth is the Messiah?" one of the brothers from our congregation asked.

"They are no longer considered Jewish," the rabbi flatly stated.

"Why not?"

The rabbi mumbled something about a decision being made by the Jewish sages, and that's just the way it was.

I later realized that this rabbi's statement that you don't have to believe in anything to be Jewish was not quite accurate. There is one thing that a person *has* to believe to be considered a Jew by this rabbi. A person has to believe that Yeshua was *not* the Messiah. A Jew can believe in Buddhism, secularism, humanism, atheism, or any other -ism and still be a Jew. He can believe that the late Rabbi Schnerson was the Messiah and still be a Jew. Jews of the past who

believed in false messiahs like Bar Kochba, Shabbatai Tzvi, and Jacob Frank are now regarded as merely misguided Jews. But Jews who believe in Yeshua are regarded as non-Jews. A recent Jews For Jesus newsletter describes the Jewish community as "a community that has defined itself by not believing in Jesus."<sup>6</sup>

This anti-christ spirit that exists in Judaism has risen up in recent years. In response to the Messianic Jewish movement, Satan has anointed Jewish anti-missionaries with the spirit of anti-christ to publicly and proudly deny the Messiahship of Yeshua. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Yeshua is the Messiah? He is antichrist," John wrote (1 Jn. 2:22).

Messianic believers need to realize that if they deal with the anti-missionaries, they are not dealing with flesh and blood. They are dealing with the spirit of anti-christ. The term "anti-missionary" is actually a misnomer. The anti-missionaries should more accurately be called "anti-christs." Some people might think that sounds too harsh or anti-Semitic, but it is not. These deceivers have an anointing of evil. They are of the same spirit as Elymas the sorcerer, who tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith. Paul called this anti-christ "thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness" (Acts 13:10). They are of the same spirit as the anti-christs to whom Yeshua said, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

The devil is a liar, and so are the modern-day anti-christs. They will tell you that Isaiah 53 is not speaking about the suffering Messiah, yet they know full well that Jewish sages of the past considered Isaiah 53 to be a prophecy of the Messiah's suffering. I have a little book I picked up at a bookstore in Jerusalem in 1976, *The Messiah of the Targums, Talmuds, and Rabbinical Writers*. This book has 47 quotes from ancient Jewish writings that declare the Isaiah 53 passage to be speaking of the Messiah. When the late Rabbi Schneerson was near death, I was living in New York. I picked up a Jewish newspaper and saw a full-page ad that some of Schneerson's disciples had placed in the paper. The purpose of the ad was to assure the Jewish

community that Schneerson was indeed the *Moshiach*, in spite of his grave medical condition. In fact, the ad declared, Schneerson's present sufferings were actually prophesied in the Bible. Guess where? Isaiah 53. Schneerson's disciples quoted from Jewish sages of the past to show that Isaiah 53 was a prophecy of Messiah's sufferings, and they claimed that Schneerson was at that very time fulfilling this prophecy of the suffering Messiah.

Today's anti-christs also lie about what Judaism teaches in regard to atonement. If a believer says something about the Messiah's death atoning for our sins, the anti-christs will claim that such a concept is foreign to Judaism. They will say that one person's death cannot atone for the sins of other people. However, this past September, a headline on the cover page of the Orthodox *Jewish Press* stated: "Sometimes Hashem Takes Our Tzaddikim ["righteous ones"] As Atonement." On the inside of the paper, the headline above the story says: "Sometimes Hashem Takes Our Tzaddikim To Atone For Our Sins." In the text of the story it says: "Sometimes Hashem takes our tzaddikim to atone for our sins and thus spare us even greater tragedy."<sup>7</sup> In this single issue of *The Jewish Press*, this is stated three times. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses let every word be established."

Given the fact that Judaism without Yeshua and without the Holy Spirit is a corrupted, broken cistern, why are so many Messianic Gentiles wanting to deny Yeshua and convert to Judaism? In most cases, the only reason these Gentiles ever had any interest in the Torah in the first place was because Yeshua pointed them to the Torah. So why do they want to go to the broken cisterns where Yeshua is not welcome, and deny the One who first gave them spiritual drink and pointed them to the Torah in the first place? Because man is a rebel at heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). When man's rebellious heart is presented with an opportunity to rebel against God in a way that makes him appear to be making spiritual progress,

rebellious man is deceived by the pride of life. Satan appears as an angel of light, and his bait is the promise of spiritual elevation: "Ye shall be as gods." Though in this case, he says, "Ye shall be as Jews."

Non-Jewish believers who have a close walk with the Messiah are secure in their spiritual identity. There is "neither Jew nor Greek" in Messiah (Gal. 3:28), so they know that in their heavenly Father's eyes they are just as much a part of the Israel of God as Jewish believers are. Therefore, they do not feel a need to convert to Judaism in order to gain the acceptance and approval of the non-believing Jewish community. If the entire Jewish community refuses to recognize them as a part of Israel, they are willing to "go forth unto Him [Yeshua] outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13). Yeshua will eventually be welcomed into the Jewish camp, and it will be on His terms. But until then, He dwells outside the camp of Judaism, and if we go forth unto Him, we can expect to be outside the camp, too.

It is not just non-Jewish Messianics who want to be accepted by the Jewish camp. There are many Jewish believers who are not willing to bear the reproach of being outside the camp of Judaism. This fall's issue of *Havurah*, a Jews For Jesus publication, discusses the obsession that some very prominent Messianic Jewish leaders have with Jewish identity and with the fact that the non-believing Jewish community refuses to affirm Messianic Judaism. The article, written by Rich Robinson and Ruth Rosen, rightly points out that our core identity should first and foremost be in Messiah, as a part of the Body composed of all true believers. "Yet some in our movement are saying that Messianic Jews should identify first and foremost as Jews," the article states, "and secondarily as part of the entire body of Christ. In fact, some statements seem to suggest that we should identify first and foremost as Jews, and secondarily as followers of Jesus!"<sup>8</sup>

A case in point is the title of a recent booklet by Messianic Jewish leader Mark Kinzer. The booklet is titled *The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species*.

Biologically speaking, the genus is the larger, primary division which tells what an organism primarily is. The species is the "biological classification ranking immediately below the genus."<sup>9</sup>

Kinzer's book title ranks the "Messianic" aspect of his identity below his identity as a Jew. Unless I am missing something, it seems that Kinzer is saying that being a Jew is more important to him than being a follower of the Messiah. Robinson and Rosen seem to agree. "Kinzer's booklet essentially reverses the place that following Jesus is to occupy in our lives," they write.<sup>10</sup> Robinson's and Rosen's apprehension about this attitude is also evident in a question they ask: "What would it mean if our primary identity is not with a community of believers, but with a community that has defined itself by not believing in Jesus?"<sup>11</sup>

What it would mean is that Judaism must increase and Jesus must decrease. It would mean that Jews don't need Jesus. Nor would Gentiles, for that matter. They could just convert to Judaism instead of following Jesus. Kinzer says, "I believe it's still as possible for a Jew who doesn't know Yeshua to have a living relationship with God, just as a Christian [does]."<sup>12</sup> Robinson and Rosen write: "This is clearly an example of two-covenant theology, which says that Jews already have a covenant with God through Abraham and so do not need Jesus in order to find salvation."<sup>13</sup>

Other Messianic Jewish leaders in the UMJC (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations) recently made statements which imply that Jews do not need Jesus. Two delegates of the UMJC (one of them the president of the UMJC) were asked by a *Jerusalem Post* newspaper reporter if Jews who don't believe in Jesus are doomed to hell. "No, absolutely not," the delegates responded (by their own admission, "almost simultaneously"). So the *Jerusalem Post* story stated: "He [the delegate] said that the UMJC... does not believe that Jews who have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah are doomed to hell."<sup>14</sup>

Granted, the reporter's question was loaded, and the UMJC delegates wanted to avoid the embarrassment which could have resulted if the reporter

had misrepresented them in print. "But which should we worry about more?" Robinson and Rosen ask. "Someone who does not know Y'shua representing us unfairly - or we, who do know Y'shua, misrepresenting God's only means of salvation out of concern for our own image, be it an individual or corporate image? Regardless of the intent of the delegates, their answer was misguided, for it implied that Jews do not need Jesus for salvation."<sup>15</sup>

Messianic Jewish leaders who are currently headed this direction are making Judaism look like an acceptable alternative to Jesus. This will only encourage more non-Jewish Messianics to deny Yeshua and convert to Judaism. After all, if a person can have a good relationship with God through Judaism, who needs Jesus? Without him, we can find acceptance from both God and from the Jewish community.

"A shipwreck begins with a small deviation from the set course," Robinson and Rosen write. "We have seen too many people whose faith has been shipwrecked because they allowed some wind or other to take them off the course of what Scripture teaches."<sup>16</sup> We can shipwreck our faith on the rocky coast of any -ism - Buddhism, paganism, humanism, even Judaism - and the eternal consequences will be the same. We will be shipwrecked, lost, marooned from the Presence of our Maker.

Judaism has many wonderful things to offer. When it comes to understanding the value of things such as community, separation from the world, the Biblical calendar, and dietary laws, Orthodox Judaism often surpasses Christianity. We can learn a lot from the Jewish sages, and there are many beautiful Jewish traditions and customs which are suitable for Messianics to practice. Christians should love and bless Jewish people, but we cannot and must not bless a religious system which is a broken cistern. We must not let our love for Jewish people and Jewish things stop us from speaking the truth about Judaism's inability to save and transform a person's character. We must speak the truth about the inadequacy of Judaism without Yeshua. If a person could be saved and transformed

by simply being a good Jew, Yeshua would not have needed to die. To say that we do not need Jesus makes His death meaningless. Such a concept comes from the stagnant waters of a broken cistern.

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again," Yeshua said to the Samaritan woman at the well. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Jn. 4:13f).

He is the One who gives us the water of eternal life. Let's come to Him outside the camp and drink, so that we will not be drawn away to broken cisterns that hold no water. □

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Moshe Dann, "Water Music," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 21 Sept. 1991, p. 16A.

<sup>2</sup>John Quincy Adams, "What Must I Do to Receive the Holy Spirit's Baptism?" From a pamphlet published by The Little Children of Jesus Christ, Pocahontas, AR.

<sup>3</sup>Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, "Dr. Laura: Fair-Weather Jew," *The Jewish Press*, 29 Aug. 2003, p. 7, col. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Nathan Ausubel, *Pictorial History of the Jewish People* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1953), 90.

<sup>5</sup>Esther Jungreis, "Can I Take Him As He Is?" *The Jewish Press*, 22 April 1994, p. 26, col. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Rich Robinson & Ruth Rosen, "Us and Him," *Havurah* 6:3, Fall 2003, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Naomi Klass Mauer, "Sometimes Hashem Takes Our Tzaddikim To Atone For Our Sins," *The Jewish Press*, 19 Sept. 2003, p. 10, col. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Robinson & Rosen, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1983), 1132.

<sup>10</sup>Robinson & Rosen, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

# SOME FACTS ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER

Compiled by Daniel Botkin

- Bowling enthusiasts can thank Martin Luther for the game. He is said to have been the first to place nine *kegels* (clubs carried by German men for protection) into a diamond shape and standardize the game, called *Kegelspiel*, or ninepins.
- More books have been written about Martin Luther than about any other person in history, with the exception of Jesus Christ.
- Luther's writings fill 102 large volumes.
- The Reformation officially began on October 31, 1517, when Luther nailed his *95 Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.
- It was claimed that there were enough relics in the Castle Church in Wittenberg to get pilgrims 1,902,202 years and 270 days knocked off of their time in purgatory.
- Pope Leo X responded to Luther's *95 Theses* by saying, "Luther is a drunken German. He will feel different when he is sober."
- Luther experienced more opposition from other Reformers than he did from Roman Catholics.
- Rudolph Carstadt, Luther's friend and

fellow Reformer, urged the Reformers to reject Rome's claim of Sunday sacredness, and return to the 7th day Sabbath. Luther opposed this "radical" idea, even though he admitted Carstadt's learning was superior to his own.

● Luther and other Reformers were united with Roman Catholics in their hatred of Anabaptists. During 25 years of persecution, thousands of Anabaptists were executed for their faith. Catholics usually burned them at the stake, and Protestants usually drowned them.

● The first major split among the Reformers came as the result of Luther's and Zwingli's inability to agree on the nature of the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Luther and Zwingli agreed on 14 of 15 articles of faith, but after much long and harsh debate, they parted company over the issue of communion - an act that was supposed to depict the Christian unity for which Christ prayed.

● Luther commissioned artist Lucas Cranach to illustrate his book *Against the Papacy at Rome, Founded by the Devil*. The drawings that Luther commissioned were criticized even by Protestants for their crudeness and vulgarity. One drawing shows a man with his pants pulled down, defecating into the Pope's inverted crown. Underneath are the words "The pope has treated the kingdom of Christ just as his crown is here being treated." Another drawing shows two men standing before the enthroned pope. The men's backs

are to the pope, their pants are down, and clouds of gas are blowing out of their rears toward the pope. "Don't frighten us, pope, with your ban," the men say. "Otherwise we shall turn away and show you our rears."

● Luther married Katharina von Bora, a nun who had escaped her convent by hiding in the empty herring barrels of a merchant Luther had sent. Luther's biographer, Richard Friedenthal, describes Luther's wedding night: "On the evening of 13 June 1525, according to the custom of the day, (Luther) appeared with his bride before a number of his friends as witnesses. The Pomeranian [Johann] Bugenhagen blessed the couple, who consummated the marriage in front of the witnesses. [Justus] Jonas reported the next day: 'Luther has taken Katharina von Bora to wife. I was present yesterday and saw the couple on their marriage bed. As I watched this spectacle I could not hold back my tears.'"

● Luther and his wife had 6 children. The October 1983 *National Geographic* published a photo showing some of Luther's descendants who still live in Germany.

● Luther died at 62 years of age. He is buried beneath the pulpit of the Castle Church in Wittenberg - the same church where he first posted his *95 Theses*.

(Compiled from many sources. Sources available on request. -DB)

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## LUTHER'S ANTI-SEMITISM AND ITS FRUITS

The painting to the right, *The Fall of Martin Luther*, is patterned after Jewish artist Marc Chagall's painting *The Fall of the Angel*.

*The Fall of Martin Luther* is based on the following statement by Luther: "You [Jews] are not worthy of looking at the outside of the Bible, much less of reading it. You should read only the Bible that is found under the sow's tail, and eat and drink the letters that drop from there."

This painting is part of the "Penance" project, an exhibit of paintings by Daniel Botkin to educate the public about the Christian roots of anti-Semitism.

### Some excerpts from Luther's *Against the Jews and Their Lies*

Luther referred to Jews as "these dreary dregs, this stinking scum, this dried-up froth, this moldy leaven and boggy morass of Jewry... [Jews] are nothing but rotten, stinking, rejected dregs of their fathers' lineage!"

"Therefore, whenever you see a genuine Jew," Luther wrote, "you may with a good conscience cross yourself and bluntly say: 'There goes a devil incarnate.'"

Luther's "sincere advice" for dealing with the Jews: "First, their synagogues should be set on fire... Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed... Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds... Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach anymore... Fifthly, passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews... Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury... Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, the spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses... We ought to drive the rascally lazy bones out of our system... Therefore away with them... if this advice of mine does not suit you, then find a better one so that you and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden - the Jews."

"...let us emulate the common sense of other nations," Luther wrote, "...then eject them forever from the country. For, as we have heard, God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse... Therefore in any case, away with them!"



### Some Results of Luther's Anti-Semitism

*Kristallnacht* ("Night of Broken Glass") was the night in 1938 when Nazis broke the windows of Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues. Buildings were burned and Jews were brutalized. This is now considered the event that launched the Holocaust in its full fury. The date chosen by the Nazis for *Kristallnacht* was November 9, the eve of Martin Luther's birthday, to honor the great Reformer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who opposed the Nazis (and was martyred for his opposition), wrote the date of *Kristallnacht* in the margin of his Bible by Psalm 74:8 ("They said in their hearts, 'Let us destroy them together': they have burned up all the synagogues in the land.")

At the Nuremberg War Crimes trials, Julius Streicher, one of Hitler's officials who pushed the hardest for the extermination of the Jews, quoted from Luther's writings to defend The Final Solution.

Some good news: On the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, the World Lutheran Federation repudiated Luther's anti-Semitism with the following statement: "We cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews. The sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks and the violence of his attacks on the Jews must be acknowledged with deep distress, and all occasion for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches... Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther's utterances against the Jews" (*Jerusalem Post Magazine*, Nov. 11, 1983, p. 9).

# THE TWO MESSIAHS IN JUDAISM

Dr. Daniel Botkin

Judaism teaches that there will be two different Messiahs, *Mashiach ben David* and *Mashiach ben Yosef* (Messiah son of David and Messiah son of Joseph). When most people hear the title *Messiah*, they usually think of Messiah son of David, the one who will inaugurate and rule over the Messianic Kingdom. The rabbis were (and are) very aware of this aspect of the promised Messiah. The Scriptures speak about the coming Redeemer who will be victorious and rule forever over the Messianic Kingdom in a renewed earth. But the Prophets also wrote about the Messiah suffering and dying. To explain this seeming contradiction, the rabbis concluded that there must be two different Messiahs, one who will suffer and die and one who will reign as King. To the suffering Messiah, the rabbis gave the title *Mashiach ben Yosef*, to distinguish him from the reigning Messiah, *Mashiach ben David*.

*Mashiach ben Yosef* is not talked about as much as *Mashiach ben David*, but "a good number of [Jewish] commentators do refer to him briefly or at length," according to Rabbi Jacob Immanuel Schochet. Schochet devotes nine pages to *Mashiach ben Yosef* in Appendix II of his 110-page book *Mashiach*. Much of the information for this article is gleaned from Schochet's book. Page numbers in parentheses reference Schochet's book.

Schochet's summary of what the rabbis taught about *Mashiach ben Yosef* is fascinating when one considers the similarities between Yeshua of Nazareth and some of the things the rabbis said about *Mashiach ben Yosef*. It is even more fascinating when one considers the fact that Jacob Immanuel Schochet, the rabbi who has compiled and summarized this information about *Mashiach ben Yosef* is *not* trying to make a case for Yeshua of Nazareth. As a matter of fact, Schochet is actually an anti-

missionary, and is therefore strongly opposed to the suggestion that Yeshua was the Messiah. (Schochet's anti-missionary activity was briefly mentioned by another writer in *Gates of Eden* 8-3, page 8.) When information comes from a witness who is hostile to your case, it makes the evidence even more compelling. With that thought in mind, let's consider some of the things that Jewish commentators have said about *Mashiach ben Yosef*, and compare their description of this Messiah to Yeshua of Nazareth.

The rabbis dubbed this Messiah "son of Joseph" because they believed (erroneously) that he would be a descendant of Joseph, of the tribe of Ephraim, and a descendant of Joshua. With this belief, they could just as easily have dubbed him "ben Ephraim" or "ben Joshua," but they chose to call him *ben Yosef*. This is interesting in view of the fact that 1) Yeshua's earthly foster father was named Yosef; and, 2) Joseph's rejection and betrayal by his brothers, and his later exaltation among the Gentiles in Egypt, is an exact pattern of what Yeshua experienced in His role as *Mashiach ben Yosef*. Though Yeshua was not a physical descendant of Joseph, He can be viewed as a descendant in a figurative, symbolic, prophetic sense. As a matter of fact, one rabbi drew "an analogy between the role of Joseph in Egypt and the role of the *Mashiach*" (page 96, fn. 7).

The "suffering and dying" aspect of *Mashiach ben Yosef* presents the most striking similarity to Yeshua. Amazingly, the rabbis point to Zechariah 12:10 as a prophecy of the suffering Messiah, *Mashiach ben Yosef*: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in

bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (KJV). The New Testament references this verse to the piercing of Yeshua (in John 19:37 & Revelation 1:7). That such an idea accords with what rabbinical commentators said about Zechariah 12:10 is obvious (the following quotes are not printed in Schochet's book, but he does refer to "Sukkah 52a, and parallel passages" in footnote 12, without quoting these parallel passages):

● Sukkah (52a): "It is well according to him who explains that the cause (of the mourning [in Zech. 12:10]) is the slaying of the Messiah the son of Joseph, since that well agrees with the Scripture verse: 'And they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced: and shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son.'"

● Rashi (and also Radak): "Our rabbis interpreted it as referring to *Mashiach ben Joseph*."

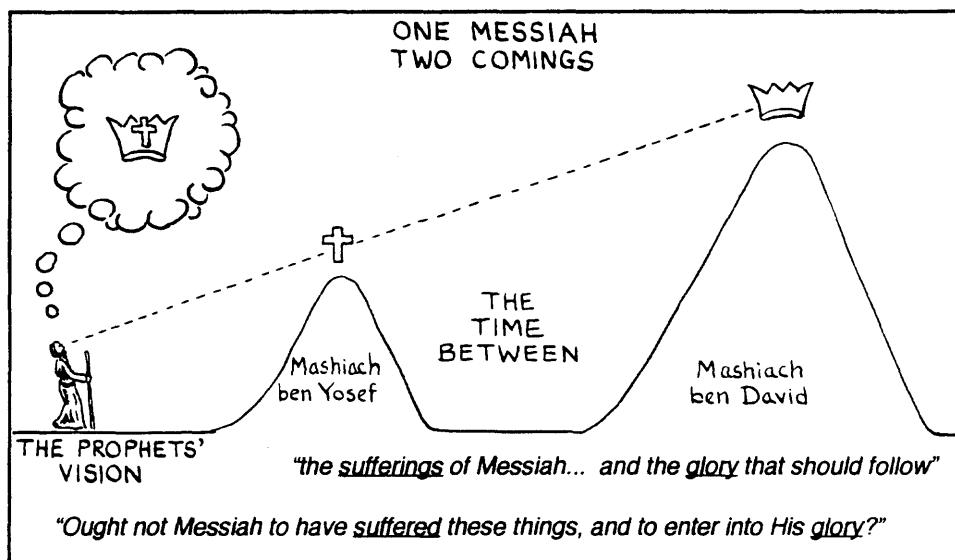
● Rabbi Moses Alshech: "'They shall look unto me,' for they shall lift up their eyes unto me in perfect repentance, when they see him whom they have pierced, that is *Messiah*, the son of Joseph; for our rabbis, of blessed memory, have said that he will take upon himself all the guilt of Israel, and shall then be slain in the war to make atonement in such manner that it shall be accounted as if Israel had pierced him, for on account of their sin he has died; and, therefore, in order that it may be reckoned to them as a perfect atonement, they will repent and look to the blessed One, saying that there is none beside him to forgive those that mourn on account of him who died for their sin: this is the meaning of 'They shall look upon me.'"

The rabbis not only said that *Mashiach ben Yosef* would suffer and die; they also said he would be resurrected shortly after his death (page 98). The rabbis believed that *Mashiach ben David* would come and resurrect him. The rabbis' under-

standing of the details and sequence of events was somewhat off, but they did see a Messiah who would suffer and die and be resurrected soon after his death. Rabbi Saadiah Gaon, the greatest Jewish sage of the 10th century, actually taught that the sequence of events was not definite, but contingent upon "the spiritual condition of the Jewish people at the time the redemption is to take place" (page 98). In other words, if Israel repents at the appointed time of the Redemption, the suffering and death of Messiah ben Yosef might not have to take place; if Israel does *not* repent at the appointed time, Messiah ben Yosef will have to suffer and die. (The rabbis even admit that some of the events relating to Messiah ben Yosef *"may have occurred already!"* [page 100; emphasis Schochet's.].)

This idea of contingency can also be seen in a similar answer that Rabbi Joshua gave to those who asked whether the Messiah would come "with the clouds of heaven" as Daniel said (Dan. 7:13), or "lowly and riding upon an ass" as Zechariah said (Zech. 9:9). Rabbi Joshua said, "If they are meritorious, he will come with the clouds of heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon an ass" (Talmud Sanh. 98a). We know that Yeshua's death was necessary to atone for the sins of the world - He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Nevertheless, the possibility that the fulfillment of some prophecies might be contingent is suggested by Yeshua's words in Matthew 11:14 when He spoke about John the Baptist. "If ye will receive it [or, 'him'], this is Elijah, which was for to come." This idea of contingency ("If ye will receive") explains how John the Baptist could answer "No" when asked if he was Elijah (John 1:21), yet Yeshua could say that John the Baptist was Elijah - at least potentially ("If ye receive") - but "they knew him not" (Matt. 17:10-13). (Perhaps even John himself did not realize he was [potentially] Elijah.)

Some rabbis taught that Messiah ben Yosef would regather the exiles and re-unite the tribes of Israel. "The



harmony and cooperation between Mashiach ben David and Mashiach ben Yossef signifies the total unity of Israel, removing the historical rivalries between the tribes of Judah and Joseph" (page 94). Anyone with an understanding of the Two Houses and Ezekiel's two sticks and Hosea chapter 1 should be able to see Yeshua fulfilling this role as He brings Ephraim and Judah together. (See "The Two House Teaching," *Gates of Eden* 8-3.) Descendants of the ten northern tribes (called "Ephraim" or "Joseph") are included somewhere in those great multitudes of Gentiles who are being gathered together in the Messiah Jesus. And as more and more Christians are being drawn to the Torah, while more and more Jews are being drawn to Yeshua, Ephraim and Judah are drawing closer together. Even Jews who do not believe in Yeshua (and Christians who do not believe in following the Torah) are coming to realize that Bible-believing Christians and Jews have a lot more in common than they formerly thought.

Those of us who have had the glorious revelation that Yeshua is the promised Messiah know that there are not two different Messiahs. Rather, there is one Messiah who comes at two different times in history. He came the first time "lowly and riding on an ass"; He will come the second time "with the clouds of heaven." The possibility of Messiah ben Yosef and Messiah ben David being one and the

same person is even suggested in Schochet's book: "R. Isaac Luria (*Ari-zal*) notes that the descendant of Joseph, by being the precursor of the ultimate Mashiach, is in effect *kissey David*, the 'seat' or 'throne' of David, i.e., of Mashiach. Thus when praying in the daily *Amidah*, 'speedily establish the throne of Your servant David,' one should consider that this refers to Mashiach ben Yossef..." (page 99). If, as Isaac Luria taught, "Your servant David" truly "refers to Mashiach ben Yossef," then it would follow that Mashiach ben David and Mashiach ben Yosef are one and the same person.

Peter says that the Prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings of Messiah, and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). When Yeshua scolded two of His disciples after His Resurrection, He said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Messiah to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:25ff). The eyes of these two disciples were opened to recognize their risen Lord and Messiah when He sat down at the table with them, blessed the matzah, then broke it and shared it with them. Let's pray that our Jewish friends will recognize Messiah ben Yosef (and Messiah ben David!) as we sit down and share with them the good news of Yeshua ben Yosef, the suffering Servant whose body was broken for all of us. □