

# Teaching *from* Zion

Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, Jerusalem, Israel

"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah  
and the word of the Lord from  
Jerusalem." – Isaiah 2:3

# FAITH

*"Faith comes from hearing,  
and hearing through the word of Messiah."*

*Romans 10:17*



**Netivyah** נתיביה  
Teaching from Zion

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#### About Netivyah

Netivyah in Hebrew means "the Way of the Lord." "The Way" was one of the names by which the early community of believers was known in the Brit Chadashah (New Testament). Paul says, "I worship the God of our fathers in accordance with the Way (which they call a sect). I continue to believe everything that accords with the Torah and everything written in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14 CJB). As followers of "the Way," we believe in the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We try to be faithful to God's law (the Torah) and to the rest of Scripture—the Prophets and the Writings. We believe that the Messiah promised in God's word is Yeshua (Jesus), the one who "saves His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

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# News from Netivyah

**Dear friends,**

The second half of 2020 just started and we all pray that it will be better than the first half. Despite the many challenges we all experienced on global, national, and individual levels, there have also been many opportunities, some of which we sought out and others that "fell into our lap". We had the opportunity to help the poor and needy of Jerusalem (as we have been doing for decades) during a time when many of them lacked even the little that they are used to surviving on. Our student scholarship program which helps about two dozen Messianic students each year with a large grant covering about half of their tuition costs was able to operate fully during the COVID19 situation, and when many students lost their jobs we were there to support them, reminding them that even in hard times God is always near! The academic year 2020-2021 is around the corner, so we are distributing new application forms to all the congregations in Israel for them to disseminate to their students. Over the 20+ years we have been doing this, we have been blessed to help hundreds of young believers become part of a strong Israeli society of professionals including lawyers, nurses, engineers, archeologists and many more. It is truly a privilege to be able to help the Messianic body in Israel become better, stronger and integrated into mainstream society as influential specialists. As usual (and before COVID hit hard), we gave out the Purim Soldiers packages to over 200 believing soldiers serving in the IDF.

Hamotzi was able to run without interruption through the lockdown here in Israel due to a special permit from the city welfare offices that we acquired. We currently provide much needed nutritional security to 165 of the poorest families in Jerusalem. Sadly, many of our travel plans were canceled or delayed. We greatly miss seeing our brothers and sisters from around the world in person, having fellowship, worshipping the Lord together, and eating a good steak! We have had the opportunity to advance our work digitally; Joseph has been doing teaching almost daily (often more than one) on Facebook, and we broadcast our congregational services over Zoom for the members that could not attend. I hope that even as the restrictions lessen, we will be able to continue with the online broadcasting and even develop it further.

On a more personal note, I feel as though we are traversing a barren wasteland, and we are in the middle of an incredible challenge. But Yeshua has already traveled this road, he has already gone through the hardships, and he is with us, comforting us, guiding us, and encouraging us.

I cannot conclude without saying that none of our work would have been possible without the prayers and support from brothers and sisters around the world like you! Thank you for allowing us to continue to do God's work in Israel and around the world.

Blessings,

*Netivyah Staff*

# TRANSLATIONS OF FAITH

By Jared Seltzer

*Faith is arguably the most foundational subject of the Bible to believers, but it is also arguably one of the most misunderstood.*

I have lots of tools, but occasionally I find myself trying to assemble or fix something with an inadequate or makeshift tool because I simply do not want to take the time to walk to the garage to retrieve the appropriate one. Basically, a tool is an instrument designed to aid in the completion of a specific task, but what good is a shoddy or defective tool? Sure, in a moment of desperation in a crude predicament, it may very well manage to get the job done, but when it comes to precision craftsmanship, it is worth little more than a fancy paperweight.

I would like to draw a parallel to this: how often do we use a mediocre tool to understand God's Word? Like it or not, a Bible translation is a mere tool—think about it. Yeshua, our Master, never spoke a single word of English. In fact, the English language did not yet exist when He walked the Land of Israel. Yet we believers read and quote the precious teachings of our Savior by means of centuries-removed, modern speech laden with culture and context-based

biases which readily obfuscate the original thrust of an arbitrary Biblical passage. Just consider, how many times have you been surprised by the meaning of a verse by studying the original? Or has someone

presented a Bible verse to support his peculiar interpretation only to find out later on that the context or original language does not support it?

If we were all scholars who dedicated immense study to mastering Biblical languages and to understanding the original Hebrew culture and context of the Scriptures, we would have little need of translations. Alas, that is not the present case, so we have little option but to rely heavily on translations and on clergymen who heavily rely on them. But a translation is nothing more than man's interpretation of a concept from one language, transformed into another. Formally, the translated language is simply limited by its versatility and related culture to represent an original language perfectly. But beyond this formal inadequacy, it is imperative to remember that translations are

interpretations which themselves are at the mercy of the training, ignorance, misunderstands and biases of the translator, be they innocent or deliberate.

While we are tremendously indebted to these translators and hope or believe that their work is for the most part dedicated to accurately conveying the Biblical message, we would be imprudent not to wonder if and where the translator's interpretation was inaccurate, or worse, where it deferred to preexisting theological standards? I am afraid the pillar that we call "Faith" is precisely such an example.

Faith is arguably the most foundational subject of the Bible to believers, but it is also arguably one of the most misunderstood, and we have a long history of subpar translations to thank for it. The idea of "faith" is largely

*Has someone presented a Bible verse to support his peculiar interpretation only to find out later on that the context or original language does not support it?*

understood as the mental exercise of believing. Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary includes 12 definitions for "faith," the first eight of which are roughly summarized as "the assent of the mind to the truth of what is declared by another." Only in the last several lines, it is afforded the definition "fidelity; a strict adherence to duty and fulfillment of promises." It is clear that by the 19th century, faith was, by and large, a mental activity. For comparison, the cognate "faithfulness" in that same dictionary is described as "fidelity, loyalty, truth; firm adherence to allegiance and duty; strict performance of promises." The less common definition of "faith" and the primary definition of "faithfulness" are nearly identical.

Everyone knows what bait-and-switch is: you call the store to see if they have a certain product in stock, but then when you arrive to purchase it, the crooked salesman laments that he actually does not have that item, but then he tries to peddle some other usually more inferior product. He knows that since you came all the way to the store, you are probably

*The Bible pounds out a single consistent message: pistis is a loyal commitment to God and to the truth of His Word that is apparent in our actions.*

going to buy even if it is not what you asked for. Well, the translators have pulled a bait-and-switch concerning “faith.” Allow me to substantiate this assertion.

The primary (if not original) language of the Apostolic Writings (the so-called New Testament) is Greek. The original language of the Tanakh (the so-called Old Testament) is Hebrew. While comparison

Yeshua (even though other versions did appear afterward) and every thorough translation of the Bible consults the Septuagint. But the key here is that the Septuagint and Apostolic Writings are in the same language (so-called koine Greek, or better termed “Jewish-Greek”), so we can be more certain in drawing parallels.

In the Septuagint and Apostolic Writings,

for Yeshua and His apostles, and so, it should be imperative for us to correctly understand it.

If we rely too heavily on certain translations, however, we will find the word “faith” translating pistis 239 times in the New Testament and yet only twice in the Old.<sup>1</sup> One of these two, however, is quoted multiple times in the New Testament (Hab. 2:4, cf. Rom.

*While comparison of the two Testaments yields much valuable insight, in the end, they are written in different languages, so their comparison is akin to comparing apples to oranges.*

of the two works yields much valuable insight, in the end, they are written in different languages, so their comparison is akin to comparing apples to oranges. For an apples-to-apples comparison, allow me to direct you to the family of Greek translations of the Tanakh, broadly termed “the Septuagint.” Arguably, all of the Septuagint was translated before

the Greek word πιστις (pistis) appears plenty of times. This is the term that most translations render as “faith” or “faithfulness.” In the Tanakh it appears 32 times (although cognates of it appear over 100 times), and in the Apostolic Writings, although the compilation is roughly a quarter of the size, it appears 244 times. It was certainly a big issue

1:17, Gal. 3:1, Heb. 10:38) so it was probably rendered “faith” for the sake of consistency. The other appearance is a divine rebuke of Israel (Deu. 32:20, “children in whom is no faith”) which may read this way to emphasize preconceived supersessionist sentiments.

On the other hand, we would find

“faithfulness” 19 times in the Old Testament and not once in the New.<sup>2</sup> Remember, these are all translating the exact same Greek word pistis, but the translational disparity defies probability; it must have been intentional. Why is the English word that relates to “works and doing” appearing exclusively in the Old Testament, and the English word that refers to a mental exercise excessively conspicuous in the New Testament? Maybe because of the notion that Judaism was a “works-based religion” whereas “Christianity is based on belief.” In this particular case, the exceptions help clarify the rule on how pistis should be translated.

Of the 244 instances of pistis in the Apostolic Writings, one is rendered “assurance” (Acts 17:31) in reference to the resurrection of Messiah, and the other is “fidelity” (Titus 2:10) in reference to how a servant executes his duty to his master. If we who are loyal to Yeshua exhibit pistis the same way that a slave serves his master, then faith is not merely a mental activity; it is a lifestyle evidenced by our actions.

This same pistis over in the Septuagint

describes workmen who are trustworthy with money (2Ki. 12:15), the diligent duty of gatekeepers (1Chr. 9:22) and of other officeholders (v.31), and the reliability of God’s works (Ps. 33:4). It even calls “failing water” (streams that sometimes flow and sometimes dry up) as water without pistis (Jer. 15:18). The Tanakh which is the foundation on which the Apostolic Writings are based is very clear, and most English translations are accurate concerning “Old Testament Faith”. It conjured the idea of reliability, loyalty, certainty, and trustworthiness.

The question then becomes how this connotation could have vanished in the Apostolic age according to early English translations. Did this Greek word not still refer to consistency and fidelity when Ja’akov (James) declared that “faith without works” is like a body without a spirit—dead? When Yeshua called His disciples “Little-faith,” was it not because their actions did not express trust in Him? When it comes to “faith,” our translations are too often flawed.

Newer translations tend to avoid this phenomenon. The NIV, NET, and ESV

translations are much more balanced in their handling of “Faith,” but of special note is the Complete Jewish Bible. The CJB consistently takes the original Hebrew context of the Bible into consideration and translates pistis quite often with “trust,” a commitment evidenced by deeds.

To set the record straight, no one is arguing that people are righteous in God’s eyes because of good works. But the harmony of the whole Bible pounds out a single consistent message: pistis is a loyal commitment to God and to the truth of His Word that is apparent in our actions. So, if your translation fails to convey the full meaning of pistis, then you are working with a subpar tool, and you might wonder how else it misrepresents the Scriptures. While it would be great to embark on a course in Biblical languages to have a better handle on proper exegesis, that is not always possible, so at least consult multiple and various translations, as a toolbox with a variety of quality tools, to get a more balanced reading of the original languages of scripture.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jared Seltzer is a content writer and editor for Netivyah, holds degrees in biblical history, culture and languages, and loves both to learn and to teach especially about the intersection of nascent Christianity with Second Temple Judaism.

<sup>2</sup> For KJV, NKJV has two, NASB has three, NIV has five, all dealing with contexts that undeniably demand more than a mental exercise.

<sup>1</sup> For KJV and NKJV, NASB has four, NIV has 15.

# WHAT IS FAITH

By Gary Webster

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 defines it thusly, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (KJV) Does this definition leave you scratching your head? The author thought you would, so he gives a myriad examples of people who lived and walked by faith. I would like to offer a contemporary example to you.

I wish to tell you about a married couple. We will call her Miriam and her husband, Gershom. Miriam and Gershom have been married for over thirty years. They currently reside in Israel. They are new immigrants to the land. This couple has been living out the verse, “we walk by faith not by sight.” Their faith-walk started with their marriage. It is a cross cultural and cross ethnic relationship. Miriam is Jewish, the daughter of a holocaust survivor. Gershom is Caribbean-American. They met in New York City at a place called Emmanuel Fellowship. They fell in love and eventually married. Gershom’s salary as a public-school teacher was just enough to pay the rent and buy food. Would it be enough to support a family? Miriam and Gershom had decided that he would go out to work and she would stay home with the children. They also decided to tithe ten percent of their salary from the gross. They had two boys in rapid succession and Miriam was pregnant with another child. The apartment in which they were living was too small for the four of them, much less for a third child. They decided to go looking for a house. They found a lovely two-bedroom house on a quiet street with a large back yard and

a finished basement. The only problem, they did not have the \$23,000 needed for the down payment. What were they going to do? Well, Gershom’s parents contributed some money and Miriam’s dad contributed some money, but they were still short of the mark. They needed help. That is when supportive members of their faith community stepped in and put their money where their mouths were. Miriam and Gershom signed promissory notes for all those who lent them money to reach the down payment. The house was bought, and money to pay the mortgage and buy food was sufficient. Eventually, they repaid the monies that they borrowed, and some contributors even forgave their loans. Wow! Was that faith or folly?

The next big step for this family of six was whether they should join a Messianic congregation. Their children had been raised in an evangelical milieu for ten years. They knew nothing of their Jewish heritage. As a family they celebrated all the Christian Holidays but none of the Jewish ones. It was time for a change. They started to celebrate Purim, Passover, and Chanukah. Then they left their evangelical community and started attending a Messianic one. What a paradigm shift! Worship on Saturday instead of Sunday and eating kosher food. They started following the Jewish calendar, and they observed God’s appointed feasts. They read and meditated on the weekly Torah and Haftarah portions. It left Gershom’s family a bit confused, but for Miriam’s family it was a God send. Miriam’s sister, Chayah had once professed faith

*They wanted to send their eldest son to a college preparatory school, but how could they on a public-school teacher’s salary?*

in Yeshua but now she was not going anywhere or doing anything. Once she heard that Miriam was attending services on Saturday and observing the Jewish Holidays, she wanted to come. Around this time, Gershom was accepted into a Master of Education program. It was one year long, six months of which was an internship. Gershom would have to take a sabbatical from work. He would have to live on 70% of his regular salary. Would they be able to do it? Yes, they did! They even gave 10% of that money as tithe. Faith or folly?

Their relationships at the Messianic congregation grew stronger, and with time Miriam’s father, the holocaust survivor, wanted to come. Then Chayah’s estranged son wanted to come. Their time at the Messianic congregation was redemptive for her dad and for Chayah’s son. They both professed faith in Yeshua and went through a mikveh. While this was going on, Miriam and Gershom’s children were getting ready for high school. Where were they going to go? Public or private school?



They wanted to send their eldest son to a college preparatory school, but how could they on a public-school teacher’s salary? Wonder of wonders, their son miraculously received a scholarship to attend, and the parents only had to pay what they could. Miriam and Gershom had another decision to make. How could they send one child and not all to this school? In the end, all four children were able to attend the school. Having had four children within five years, three attended this high school at the same time. It was financially tight back home, but the mortgage still got paid each month and there was still food on the table. All four children graduated from that high school with honors and completed college as well. Amazing! Gershom retired from the New York City Department of Education, and he kept himself busy helping out at their Messianic congregation.

Miriam had nurtured within her heart a desire to make Aliyah to Israel since her trip in 2007 with Gershom. How was this going to happen? Her dad was still alive, and she had several children still living at home. One by one, the doors started to open for them to go to Israel. Sadly, her dad died on St. Patrick’s Day three years after her trip to Israel. Their youngest son finished his undergraduate work and

wanted to do his master’s out of state. So, he left home and got engaged to be married. Miriam and Gershom decided to put their house on the market after their son’s wedding. The wedding took place in the summer, and in the fall, the house was put up for sale. They told the last child who was still living at home of their decision to sell the house, and he found an apartment in short order. After five short weeks the house was sold for more than the asking price. They were ready to make Aliyah, but their dog was not. She had to get clearance to travel, and that took longer than they thought. What were they going to do? They would be homeless right after closing. They asked their faith community if anyone would be willing to put them up for a short spell until the dog’s paperwork came through. One family stepped up and said they could stay in their finished basement. Gershom, Miriam, and the dog stayed there for over a month.

In the dead of winter, they left America and arrived in Israel. They were transported to a small apartment with all of their luggage and the pet by loving friends who lived in Israel. Their stay there was brief; only five days. They found a garden apartment which was suitable for them and the dog. (She hated

elevators.) They settled into a routine. Ulpan three nights a week and service on Shabbat. They were adjusting to Israeli life. They had to overcome some health and economic challenges, but they did this with help from the faithful prayers of their congregation. After a year and a half of renting they bought a new apartment with the money from the sale of their home and Gershom’s retirement monies. That was not as easy as it sounds. The bank would only give them a fifteen-year mortgage because of Gershom’s age. The bank also required Gershom to get life insurance because of his health issue. (Sarcoidosis). Would he get the life insurance? Would his pension be enough to pay the mortgage and monthly expenses? The answer was a resounding yes! They tithe from the pension and have been able to pay the monthly bills for the last two years. Hallelujah!

What does the future hold for these two? Only God knows. In the meantime, they are faithfully praying for their children and loved ones to make Aliyah. They are helping their congregation to minister to the needy in their city. They are using the resources God has given them to help others. They continue to “walk by faith not by sight.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary and his wife, Melanie are new immigrants to Israel. They live in Jerusalem and attend Roeh Yisrael. They are parents to four wonderful children and grandparents to two darlings. They are both retired teachers. Their current mission is to prepare the way for those wanting to make Aliyah.

# God-Given Faith

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1*

By Betsy Ramsey

In the meditation that follows, I will attempt to clarify what God-given faith is, and why it is of major importance for anyone who is earnest about following Yeshua. The best way to describe faith is to look at the description of the Apostle Peter when Yeshua came to his disciples walking on the water (Matt. 14:25-31). Peter wanted to try walking on water himself. So, the Lord told him to come to him on the water. What the Lord thus proposed that Peter do defies all logic from the human point of view. Normal logic tells us that if you get out of a small fishing boat in the midst of a storm and take a few steps as though to walk, you are most likely to sink and probably drown unless you're a very good swimmer. However, since Peter saw that the Lord Yeshua could walk on the surface of the water, defying the laws of nature and of gravity, he wanted to do the same and he believed he could! Clearly, that is faith! But when his focus broke from Yeshua and he saw the huge waves rolling toward him, he was frightened. At once he lost his total reliance on Yeshua's supernatural power

to keep him on the surface of the sea, and he began to sink! That is when Yeshua asked Peter, "Hey little-faith, why did you doubt?"

Yet it is just such a step of faith that Yeshua may also ask us to take, often in a crisis situation, where, humanly speaking, we see no possible way out of our difficult circumstances. On such occasions we need to trust Him so completely and believe that He can enable us to do whatever He tells us we need to do, no matter how impossible it may seem.

In I Cor. 13:2, the Apostle Paul speaks in another context about having faith to remove mountains. Again, this is something that would seem an impossible feat but is, indeed, another example of what faith is about. It is like a small child jumping into his father's arms from a high ladder because he needs to get down safely, and he knows that his father whom he knows better than any other person can be trusted to catch him! So how can we obtain the

faith that the Lord desires to find in our hearts? I can suggest three different ways that will help us grow in faith.

In Romans 10:17, we read that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. This means that firstly we can grow in faith as we read God's word and meditate and pray over it. Secondly, our faith will grow stronger as we listen to the preaching of a sermon truly based on what the Word of God teaches. And thirdly, we will grow stronger in faith every time we experience for ourselves our Lord's faithfulness to hear and answer our prayers. Finally, if we truly believe that our God hears us when we pray and that He is almighty, then it should not be hard to believe that He is the God of the impossible!

Some years ago, I knew a young Arab lady named Amal in whose family home I had stayed for a few nights. This was in connection with a conference in the north of Israel for Arab Christians and Jewish believers in Yeshua. It was a very interesting and upbuilding time for me

*So how can we obtain the faith that the Lord desires to find in our hearts?*

as well as for the others. It gave us all an opportunity to get acquainted and make friends with believers belonging to quite a different culture from our own. Although those few days were enriching, they were not entirely easy. Not much else besides our common faith in Yeshua bound us together. Nonetheless, after the conference my hostess, Amal and I kept in touch. Then one day, we met again quite unexpectedly at another conference, this time a gathering for believers from different congregations all over Israel.

Amal was happy to see me again and took me aside on one occasion to confide in me about her present, very difficult situation. Her husband, the father of her two young daughters, had recently passed away. He had been a drug addict and spent his last years in prison. Sadly, he had accumulated over the years a heavy burden of debts that were still unpaid. So, as it turned out, after his death the National Welfare Service of Israel rolled over his entire debt burden on his widow, Amal. She was being required to pay all his debts, and she shared with me her distress. She worked hard as a

caregiver but had a very modest income and barely earned enough to take care of her own needs and those of her children.

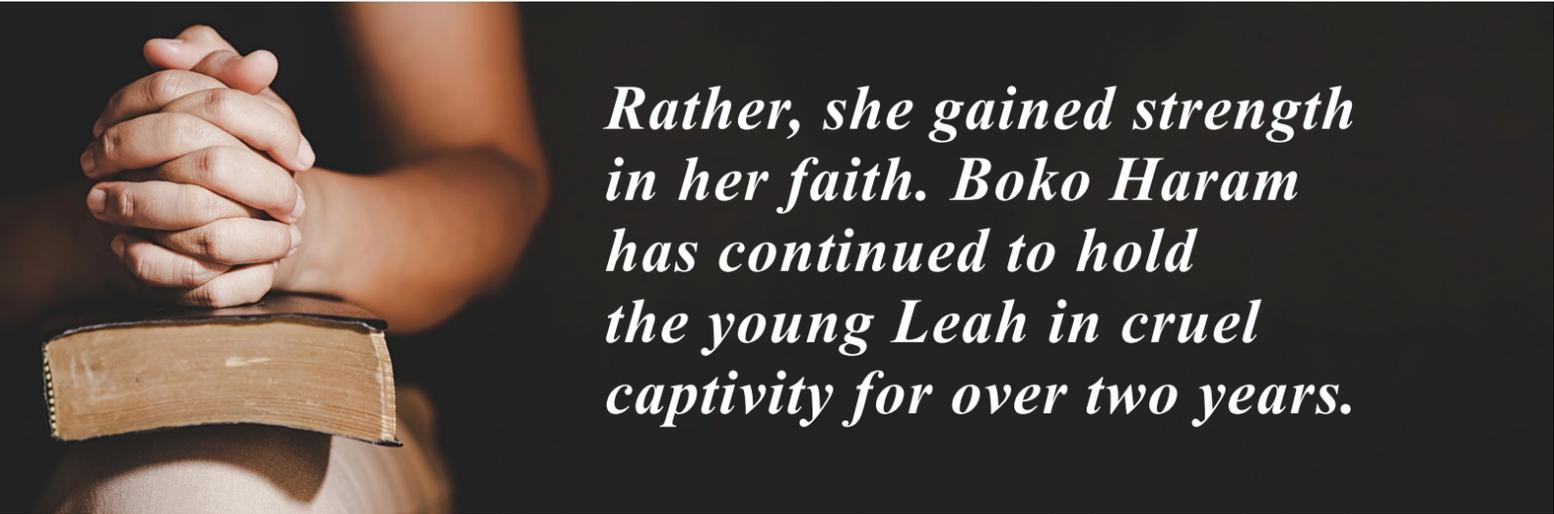
At that time, we prayed to the Lord together about the whole matter and asked Him to meet her needs with this mountain of debt for her to deal with. After praying, I assured her that our Lord would help her, but I had no idea how He would do it. Well, the Lord heard our prayer and she shared with me before the conference was over how He had given her the restful assurance that He would help her. One of the messages she had heard a day or so before we got

the oil as she poured it into one pot after another. In the end, there was enough valuable oil for the widow to sell, pay off all her debts, and have enough funds left over to support herself and her two children.

For Amal this was a remarkable message because it spoke directly to her own situation. It gave her the strong assurance that the Lord would surely clear up her debt situation in every bit as wonderful a way as He had done for the widow in the story; and He did! First of all, she lodged an appeal with the National Welfare Service making it known to

story. He insisted that unless he were to see Him for himself and could feel the holes in His hands and side, he would not believe (John 20:24-29).

So then, Yeshua knowing what had taken place, appeared to the disciples again eight days later when they were all present. This time addressing the doubter directly, He invited Thomas to feel the scars in His hands and the wound on his side. He continued, “do not be faithless but believing!” Again, in John’s Gospel, we hear Yeshua saying, “Thomas, because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are they who have not



***Rather, she gained strength in her faith. Boko Haram has continued to hold the young Leah in cruel captivity for over two years.***

together again at the conference centered on the story of the widow woman and the prophet Elisha in II Kings 4:1-7. The story shows how Elisha helped this widow supernaturally to deal with her own heavy debt burden after her husband had died and left her destitute. In her case this woman told the prophet Elisha that she had basically nothing of value in her home except a small pot of oil. Then the prophet instructed her to go to her neighbors and borrow as many pots as possible. She and her sons borrowed many pots and brought them all home. Then from the widow’s one pot of oil, God had supernaturally multiplied

them, among other things, that she and her husband had not been co-habiting for some time, and with this in mind they partially reduced her debt. Likewise, a number of good friends came to her aid with generous money gifts. So, in this manner, the Lord graciously enabled her to come out on top! Here we see an example of God-given faith at work in a real-life crisis!

The Bible has many ways of describing faith. When the apostle Thomas heard that the resurrected Yeshua had appeared to the other disciples when Thomas was not present, he refused to believe their

seen and yet have believed” (John 20:24-29). So here again, we see the enormous emphasis that Yeshua puts on God-inspired faith, and how time and again, He reprimands His disciples for falling short of the faith that the circumstances demanded.

There is another aspect of faith that is well worth considering. Today, in various parts of the world, believers in Yeshua are being subjected to suffering and torture because of their faith in Him. We see this in Muslim countries generally like Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, and also in China. Persecution

## ***Why is faith so important? Because without it, it is impossible to please God.***

should not come as a surprise to anyone who has decided to follow Yeshua. The word of God tells us, “Whosoever will live godly in Yeshua the Messiah will suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:12).

In view of what this scripture tells us, I ask myself at times what is wrong with my faith walk when I quite rarely experience persecution. While this is my private struggle, we all need to think and pray about this. The word of God is clear in telling us to sow [the word] beside all waters (Isaiah 32:20) and to preach the word, being ready in season and out of season (II Tim. 4:2).

Nonetheless, even if we are not suffering persecution for our faith, we do need to support our courageous brothers and sisters in the faith in various parts of the world who are being subjected to cruel persecution and need much prayer. Through testimonies, I have heard from one or another of those who have suffered much for their faith, who have

refused to deny their trust in Yeshua even under torture, and how these brave believers highly valued the support given them in prayer by people they didn’t even know. They affirmed that they often felt the power of those prayers and were strengthened and encouraged not to give up!

On the subject of persecution, only a few days ago, I received notice about a 16-year-old Christian schoolgirl in Nigeria who recently “celebrated” her sixteenth birthday in cruel captivity. Leah Sharibu and 109 of her classmates had been kidnapped by the Islamic militant group, Boko Haram. Of the 110 abducted girls, five were killed, and the rest eventually could return to their families. However, Leah remained in captivity. She resolutely refused to denounce Christianity and return to Islam at the behest of her captors. Rather, she gained strength in her faith. Boko Haram has continued to hold the young Leah in cruel captivity for over two years. For Leah, the only good news is that many are praying for her and there are some also who are working to have her released.

In the book of James, we read that “the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16b). For the love of the Body of Messiah, do not ever think that your prayers will not make a difference! At the same time, none of us should think that we have done something ourselves to earn the right to be called a

“righteous” person, because we haven’t. It is all the result of the obedience and faithful love of our Savior Yeshua when he took the full punishment for our sins on the cross. That, and only that, gives us the privilege to be called “righteous”!

Now while we are on the subject of praying for and loving persons we have never seen, let us turn to the Apostle Peter where he is addressing believers scattered throughout Asia Minor. He is commenting on how much they love Yeshua on the basis of faith alone since they have never actually seen Him. Likewise, by faith, they “rejoice with joy unspeakable and being glorified.” They feel so blessed to have received Him into their lives. And where is all this leading? It is leading, ultimately, to the salvation of their souls (I Peter 1:8-9).

To round off this meditation, we need to ask ourselves again, why is faith so important? Because without it, it is impossible to please God. If you truly want to draw close to the Lord, you need to first believe that He exists, and next you will need to believe that He will reward your efforts as long as you wholeheartedly seek to know Him.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

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### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Betsy Ramsay, American-born journalist, author, and teacher resided with her family in Sweden before moving to Israel in 1987. Betsy has authored twelve books, four of which are collections of her own, original poetry, and two are historical novels for children. She also has three full-color picture books for smaller children, for adults a personal memoir as well as the story of her Aliyah to Israel, and finally a story based on her German, Jewish grandfather’s account from the Holocaust both in English and in German.

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By Joseph Shulam

In the Hebrew Bible the root word א.מ.ן has become a famous word in all languages that Christians and Jews speak. This root word is a word that is used both by Jews and Christians to end every prayer, AMEN! In Jewish tradition there are many commentaries and explanations of what this word AMEN means. One that is rather interesting is looking at this word as an acrostic א = El, מ = Melech-King, נ = Ne'eman. In English you would say: The LORD is a King who is faithful (-אל-מלך-). However, the simple explanation is that the root word אמן, Amen, has the basic meaning of trust-worthy, true, and faithful. Words like אמונה=faith, אמין=trust-worthy, אומנה = the pillar that is holding the roof, אמינות = trust-worthy

all come from this root. The word that is simply faith = אמונה appears in the Hebrew Bible in the following verses. I have marked the Hebrew Word אמונה = Emuna in bold to show you how it was interpreted in English. This will demonstrate the semantic range of this word that is so popular and often misused in the translations and even more abused by many Christian contexts.

*Exodus 17:12*, But Moses' hands became heavy; so, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were **steady** until the going down of the sun.

*The semantic field of the word Amen in the translations is not an innocent mistake. It was chosen by the Christian Church.*

*At times, the word Emuna (along with its various grammatical forms) indicates an experience of something meaningful to your life.*

*Deuteronomy 32:4*, He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are **justice**, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.

*2 Kings 22:7*, However there need be no accounting made with them of the money delivered into their hand, because they deal **faithfully**."

*Isaiah 11:5*, Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and **faithfulness** the belt of His waist.

*Isaiah 25:1*, O LORD, you are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are **faithfulness** and **truth**.

*Isaiah 59:4*, No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They **trust** in empty words and speak lies. They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

*Jeremiah 5:1*, "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem. See now and know; and seek in her open places if you

can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the **truth**, and I will pardon her."

*Jeremiah 5:3*, O LORD, are not Your eyes on the **truth**? You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock. They have refused to return.

*Jeremiah 7:28*, So you shall say to them, "This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. **Truth** has perished and has been cut off from their mouth."

*Jeremiah 9:3*, "And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the **truth** on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me," says the LORD.

*Hosea 2:20*, "I will betroth you to Me in **faithfulness**, and you shall know the LORD."

*Psalms 33:4*, For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in **truth**.

*Psalms 37:3*, Trust in the LORD, and do good. Dwell in the land, and feed on His **faithfulness**.

*Psalms 119:30*, I have chosen the way of **truth**. Your judgments I have laid before me.

*Psalms 119:75*, I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in **faithfulness** You have afflicted me.

*Psalms 119:86*, All Your commandments are **faithful**. They [the proud ones] persecute me wrongfully. Help me!

*Psalms 119:138*, Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very **faithful**.

*Proverbs 12:17*, He who speaks **truth** declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit.

*Proverbs 12:22*, Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal **truthfully** are His delight.

*1 Chronicles 9:26*, For in this **trusted** office were four chief gatekeepers. They were Levites, and they had charge over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God.

*1 Chronicles 9:31*, Mattithiah of the Levites, the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the **trusted** office over the things that were baked in the pans.

*2 Chronicles 19:9*, And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, **faithfully** and with a loyal heart."

*2 Chronicles 31:12*, Then they **faithfully** brought in the offerings, the tithes, and the dedicated things. Cononiah the Levite had charge of them, and Shimei his brother was the next.

*2 Chronicles 31:15*, And under him were Eden, Miniamin, Yeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, his **faithful** assistants in the cities of the priests, to distribute allotments to their brethren by divisions, to the great as well as the small.

*2 Chronicles 34:12*, And the men did the work **faithfully**. Their overseers were Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to supervise. Others of the Levites, all of whom were skillful with instruments of music.

*2 Kings 18:16*, At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the

*A person could have a very deep relationship with God, be totally dedicated and even willing to suffer for his faith in the Messiah, and sacrifice much, but if he does not agree with the doctrines of his church he will be defined as unfaithful and exclude.*

**pillars** which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

What is very clear in all these places in the whole Old Testament is that there is not one place that the word “אמונה” = Faith is used for a set of doctrinal statements that one has to believe or check a box in order to be considered as a faithful disciple of Yeshua, i.e., a “Christian”.

Faith, in all the cases of use in the Hebrew Bible, means truth, faithfulness, or trust. At times, the word Emuna (along with its various grammatical forms) indicates an experience of something meaningful to your life. There are 25 verses in the Hebrew Bible that use the root AMEN – אמן. This root word (AMEN – אמן) like most of the roots in the Hebrew language has an extremely broad semantic field as seen in the examples above. When this rich semantic field is reduced into a one-word translations in English Bibles, FAITH, the space for misunderstanding grows exponentially. The result of such translations is an impoverished text. The mountains are made into valleys,

and the valleys are made into low hills.

The semantic field of the word AMEN-אמן in the translations is not an innocent mistake. It was chosen by the Christian Church, at least since the 4th century of the Christian Era as a tool to promote the agenda of the Church through the centuries. Making the word “Faith” mean doctrine, the teaching of the church, it becomes a tool to force compliance among the generally ignorant, newly born church, a tool of the new Constantinian empire. If someone would have checked with Jewish bishops or Hebrew scholars, or even if they would have had honor toward the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), they could have avoided this flat and monochromatic translation of the Hebrew Word Emuna. Someone could challenge this thesis that I am proposing that the “Church” chose to use the Greek word “pistis” to translate all the places in the Hebrew Bible that use Emuna – אמונה or the root AMEN – אמן. However, the fact is that we have very, very few surviving texts of the Bible that are earlier than the 4th century after Christ. The spread of so-called “Christianity” and the need for more Biblical copies

increased greatly after Constantine, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, declared his empire Christian. The Word of God had to be provided to all the new churches that were formed by converting the pagan temples dedicated to the Greek and Roman gods into “Christian” Churches. From a word that could mean faith, faithful, true, trustworthy, steady, or a pillar that is holding the roof of a building, into one meaning “faith = belief.”

Now let us look at the Greek word that is translated in the New Testament “faith” or “faithfulness.”

We have examined the use of the root אמן and its derivatives (אמונה, אומנה, אמין, אמינות) in the Hebrew Tanakh. We have seen that the semantic field of this root is much broader than the normal use of the word “Faith” pistis in Greek and from there the adaptation of this Greek word in the Christian texts. If the Christian Church would have wanted to translate the Greek word pistis with the same broad semantic field as in the Hebrew, they could have done this. In Pagan literature in Greek you find the same broad semantic field as in the Biblical Hebrew.

“Faith” becomes a Christian word that is the test for self-definition of who is a Christian and who is not a faithful Christian. Faith is an agreement with the dogma of the church. Just about every Christian denomination has “faith” defined with a set of doctrinal statements that if you do not agree with their doctrines, then you do not have faith. Such a person is defined as a heretic. A person could have a very deep relationship with God, be totally dedicated and even willing to suffer for his faith in the Messiah, and sacrifice much, but if he does not agree with the doctrines of his church he will be defined as unfaithful and excluded. Generally



*In the Roman-Forum in the city of Rome. The Pagan Temple of Antoninus and Faustina is converted to be a Roman Catholic Church dedicated to San Lorenzo of Miranda.*

speaking, for the church, the word “faith” is what defines who and what is a Christian. From the early 4th century C.E., orthodoxy formed and outlined what is required for being a “faithful” Christian. The church counsels created doctrines and required every one to accept these man-made doctrines, and if someone did not accept the decision of the church counsel, he was a heretic. In the second Nicaean Counsel (333 A.D.), whoever did not agree with the decision of the counsel (like Arius and his disciples) was simply poisoned by Athanasius and his followers.

The Greek Septuigent (LXX) translates with unusual consistency the Hebrew words from the root A.M.N. with Greek words with the root pistis. There are a few exceptions to this rule. One of these exceptions is from Jeremiah 25:8, correctly translated in the English:

“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not **heard** my words.” In the Septuigent (LXX) it was translated with a word with the root pistis – as trust.

In the New Testament (especially in the Pastoral Epistles) the theological language of Christianity relieved itself of ideas originally influenced by Judaism and went back more strongly to religious ideas traditional in Greek. However, early Christianity (the church and the church dogma) understood pistis (**Faith**) as “faithfulness.” When the center of the Western church became Rome in the 4th century the Greek word pistis was

simply translated in Latin as fides (the root of words like fidelity)!

What is important to note and interesting to consider is that Yeshua did not talk much about faith – pistis/emuna. Here is a survey of the four Gospels where the word “faith” (pistis/emuna) is used with my comment following each verse.

*Matt. 6:30* “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little **faith**?”

*Yeshua did not encourage “faith” in the classical Christian and church fathers’ sense.*

It is clear that “little faith” is not meant as a compliment but its appearance here does not establish any doctrine, dogma, or teaching. The next three verses are like this one.

*Matt. 8:26* “But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little **faith**?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.”

*Matt. 14:31* And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little **faith**, why did you doubt?”

*Matt. 16:8* But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, “O you of little **faith**, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread?”

*Matt. 8:10* “When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great **faith**, not even in Israel!”

The context of this statement is Yeshua’s comparison of the assurance / trust of the Roman Centurion from Capernaum to the level of assurance / trust that He has seen in Israel.

*Matt. 17:17* Then Jesus answered and said, “O **faithless** and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”

Here it is a display of no trust in God and security in the power of God to do His Work.

*Matt. 17:20* So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Here Yeshua is not talking about “faith as a mustard seed” about the size of the mustard seed. Here He is speaking about the quality, the taste, the sharpness of the mustard seed. In other words, if you would have the quality of the mustard seed—sharp, spicy, and hot—then your trust in God would be spicy—bold, audacious, and aggressive. Nothing would be impossible for you.

*Matt. 21:21* So Jesus answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have **faith** and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.”

This text is a key text for understanding the way Yeshua is using the word “faith”. Faith for Yeshua is assurance, security, trust; you could move a mountain. We have a story of moving a tree from its place in the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metziah 59b). “On that day R. Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but they did not accept them. Said he to them: ‘If the halakhah agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!’ Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place — others affirm, four hundred cubits. ‘No proof can be brought from a carob-tree.’”

In the Gospel of Mark, you have two similar texts to those in Matthew. For brevity’s sake I will not repeat them here.

*Luke 7:9* This is a synoptic (parallel) text to Matthew 8:10.

*Luke 9:41* Then Jesus answered and said, “O **faithless** and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.”

This is the same as “those of little faith.” Here too “faithless and perverse

generation” is a generation that has seen so many great works of God and still does not trust God’s ability to perform healing miracles.

*Luke 12:28* If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little **faith**?

Same as Matthew 6:30.

*Luke 17:5* And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our **faith**.”

I understand “increase our faith” as “help us trust God and you more.”

*Luke 17:6* So the Lord said, “If you have **faith** as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

This parallels what is in Matthew.

*Luke 18:8* I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find **faith** on the earth?

*John 20:27* Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be **unbelieving** but **believing**.”

In this verse is one of the last encounters between Yeshua and His disciples where Thomas wants to see proof that this is the same Yeshua that was crucified earlier. He wants to see the hand of Yeshua with the evidence of the nail-scarred hands. In this context Yeshua says to Thomas to be accepting and not be a doubter.

So, what we see here, like in the Hebrew Bible and in early Rabbinical literature, the word “faith” has the connotation

## *This text is a key text for understanding the way Yeshua is using the word “faith”. Faith for Yeshua is assurance, security, trust; you could move a mountain.*

of “trust” and “accept.” Yeshua did not encourage “faith” in the classical Christian and church fathers’ sense. There is one place in the Gospel of Matthew 18:6, and Mark 9:42, to insert “believe in Me,” that gives a scent of the classical Christian use of the word “faith.”

Matt. 18:6 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

The question that some scholars ask is if this text is one that has been edited and coordinated and influenced by the text in Mark 9:42.

In conclusion, the essence of faith in the Bible is to put our security and trust in the Lord. The time that such faith is needed most is when disciples of Yeshua are required to persevere in times of serious challenges, tests, or danger. This is how faith is displayed in the Gospels and in the words of Yeshua.

How does this relate to us and our brothers today in the age of internet and technology that crosses borders of state and geography and connects us with brothers and sisters in the faith from the world over. Entrusting our lives to God is an essential byproduct of our close relationship with the Almighty to the point that He is our supplier of life, all that we have, and all that we need. To

have faith is to have a relationship of trust and assurance of His faithfulness.

The agreement with the church’s dogmas and teaching is not a part of the use of the word “faith” in the Bible. This use of the word “faith” is a development from the traditional churches that were born and started in the 4th century, and it was enhanced with the Creeds of the Church which had to be reinforced by forcing people to bend their views and their understanding to be in symphony with the official church. Examples of this are the Inquisition which condemned “heretics” to death and, more recently, the doctrinal trials even into the 20th and 21st centuries where academics have been excommunicated because of some criticism or teaching that is not biblical.

The Bible (from Genesis to Revelation) is our only creed, and we do not have a need or any reason to accept and believe any of the man-made creeds that were

produced by the historical churches. The man-made creeds have produced division and alienation between fellow disciples of the Messiah with no added value to the Kingdom of God. According to the judgement scenes in the Bible, we are concentrating on what we do with our faith in Yeshua our Messiah and Master much more than any creedal statement that was produced in the history of the “churches.” We will not be judged for what is written in the Christian denominational creeds! We will be judged for our deeds and the good that we do based on our faith in God and in Yeshua. There will be a judgement day, and there will be a resurrection from the dead. In the Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22, There will be no Christian denominations; there will be only people who have demonstrated their faith in God and in their Messiah-like actions. For this reason, let us all trim our lamps wicks and fill them with oil, ready to welcome the Bridegroom back home to Zion.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Joseph Shulam was born in Sofia, Bulgaria on March 24, 1946 to a Sephardic Jewish Family. In 1948 his family immigrated to Israel just before the establishment of the State. While in high school he was introduced to the New Testament and immediately identified with the person of Yeshua. In 1981 Joseph and the small fellowship that was started in his house established one of the first official non-profit organizations of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua in Israel – Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry. Joseph has lectured extensively and has assisted in encouraging disciples around the world. He and his wife Marcia have two children and two grandchildren.

# SAVED TO OBEY

Matheus Zandona Guimarães

Christians, today, of many denominations struggle to understand how the forgiving grace of the Eternal One could walk together with obedience to his laws. Many get lost because of the lack of context in which to place the various discourses of Yeshua and especially of His disciple Shaul (Paul). Without context, the gospel becomes a gospel without power, without a search for holiness, without good fruit, without good works. As a consequence of this, we are seeing one of the greatest problems with Christianity in our days: people do not have a problem accepting Jesus (Yeshua) as God, but they are not willing to accept Him as king. Kings demand faithfulness and obedience, just as Yeshua requires of us. The poor understanding of the work of the Messiah and His grace has obfuscated the importance of obedience in Christian circles. However, Yeshua clearly emphasizes the necessity of striving for holiness and obedience to express thanks towards G-d who gives us His grace. We cannot “sweep” this teaching under the rug, as many theologians attempt to do.

When we receive Him as our Lord, we also receive a measure of faith and grace to continue in good works. Whoever does not exert himself and give his best does not honor the sacrifice that Yeshua made for him. It is like I always say: I do not obey G-d to BE saved; I obey G-d because I AM saved.

Soteriology without the knowledge of its Biblical roots has caused an erroneous impression of what it means to “be saved” by the grace of G-d. The reformers of the 16th century preached the notion of predestination even though it was strange to the Bible and to the teachings of Yeshua. They defended it in Protestant circles with religious fervor. However, contrary to medieval teachings, Yeshua does not compromise when he teaches us about the value of our calling and our salvation: “If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32).

There is another text spoken by G-d Himself to the prophet Ezekiel that

*Kings demand faithfulness and obedience, just as Yeshua requires of us. The poor understanding of the work of the Messiah and His grace has obfuscated the importance of obedience in Christian circles.*

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sheds light on the understanding of this salvation-and-obedience question.

“And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.’ When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. But when I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and he turns from his sin and practices justice and

righteousness, if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live. Yet your fellow citizens say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right,’ when it is their own way that is not right. When the righteous one turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it.” (Ezekiel 33:12-18).

Thus, we learn from the prophets of Israel and from Messiah Yeshua that salvation is the gift of G-d but can be lost in the case of a person who returns to his transgression and sin. It is true that all of us sin and are in need of the grace of G-d, but this should not be used to live a life of sin, without newness of life, without holiness and without offering our very best to G-d. Yeshua was clear when he said,

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” (John 15:2-4)

In other words, after having attained salvation by the grace of G-d we are ordained to remain on the pathway of salvation, a lifestyle of obedience and faithfulness to G-d and His commandments. Paul affirms: “Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal

life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:21-23)

Let me be clear to all the readers: we are not saved by works. Nevertheless, works are expected from those who have been saved.

There is no way to get away from this principle. Whoever is in the vine should bear good fruit. We were not saved because we deserved it, but once granted salvation by G-d, good fruit is expected from us. The text of Ezekiel 33 is plain and clear: WE ARE SAVED BY GRACE TO WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE. Whoever is saved by grace and opts to return to the ways of sin, should repent and return, because if he remains in sin, in sin he will die. G-d is love, but He is righteous as well. He knows that we will never be able to be 100% righteous, but He judges our heart and our attitude. I am not perfect, but I strive to do my best unto G-d until the day I die! This should be the heart intention of those who seek the righteousness of G-d, the true “kavanah” that the sages of Israel teach us about so much. Whoever loves obeys and fights to be irreprehensible to please the one who saved us. “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15) And still, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” (John 14:21) According to Yeshua, love without obedience and sincerity of heart doesn’t exist.

This is the goal of the one that has been saved by grace: a life of LOVE, OBEDIENCE and the pursuit of HOLINESS. Salvation is a gift, and as with every gift, it can be neglected and disdained by the one who received it. The author of Hebrews expresses this very well, “For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth

## *Love without obedience does not exist, in the same way that faith is dead if it is not accompanied by good works.*

vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Hebrews 6:7-12)

He who has ears to hear, listen! May we always seek the understanding of the Word of G-d in its original context, without sophisms or distortions of men, living out the revelations of the Spirit of the living G-d.

“Whoever loves me, keeps my commandments.”

The word in Hebrew for commandment is מצוה (mitzvah). It comes from the root צוה “tsivah”, which means “to command”, but also “to direct” and/or “to point”. In the Scriptures, there are according to traditional counting 613 mitzvot (commandments) of which 248 are positive commandments (mitzvot ta’aseh or acts of commission) and 365 are negative ones (mitzvot lo ta’aseh or acts of omission). It is as if through keeping and studying them, the commandments point us in the direction of G-d. They reveal to us G-d and His character and cause us to live a celestial reality with divine and unfathomable principles, here and now on Earth in our day-to-day lives.

The Mitzvot were created by G-d to be fulfilled and not just studied. It is interesting to note that in some circles,

many ignore conditional clauses of the Scriptures. The words of G-d and His Son Yeshua always emphasize the “if”. In other words, “if” we are faithful to the commandments of the Lord, He will bless us. Let us just look at a few examples: “IF you obey the Lord your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul in all that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His

## *Obedience alone is not able to produce fruit. Love and obedience should walk together.*

ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.”

(Deuteronomy 30:10, 16).

“...and IF My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their

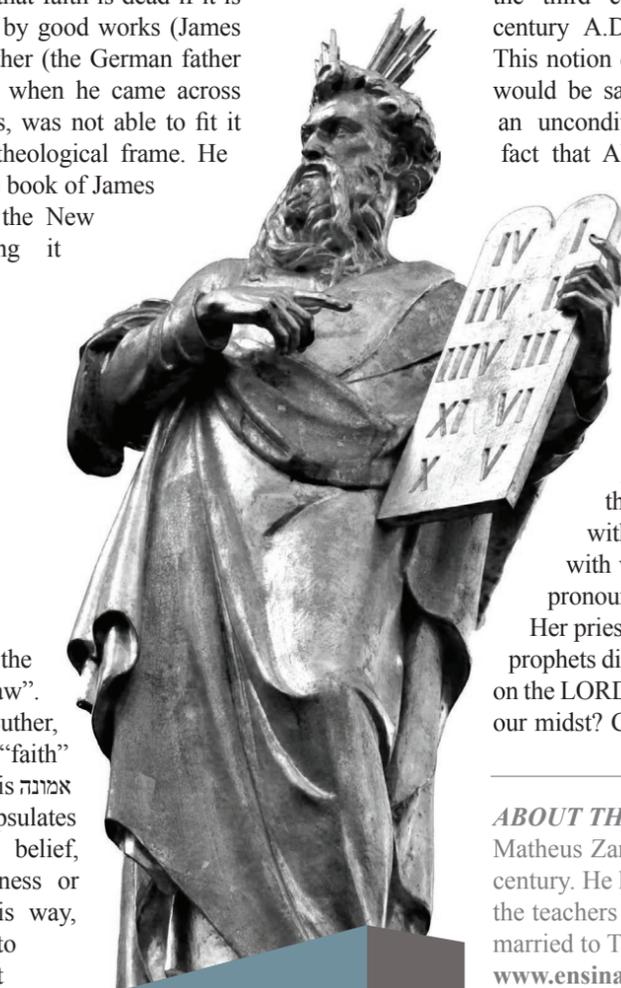
wicked ways, THEN I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

(II Chronicles 7:14)

Another classic example cited by Christians of every denomination is this, “and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32) But people forget that Yeshua established a condition, an “IF” that must be met before that truth could free us; we see this in the preceding verse: “IF you continue in My word, THEN you are truly disciples of Mine”. (John 8:31b)

Love without obedience does not exist, in the same way that faith is dead if it is not accompanied by good works (James 2:17). Martin Luther (the German father of Protestantism) when he came across this text of James, was not able to fit it in his reformed theological frame. He suggested that the book of James be taken out of the New Testament, giving it

the nickname the “letter of straw”. Unbeknownst to Luther, that the word “faith” which in Hebrew is אמונה (emunah), encapsulates not only mental belief, but also faithfulness or obedience. In this way, it is impossible to obey G-d without



expressing this obedience through fruit, that is, good works. Many believe that having confessed Yeshua in public, and repeated a certain prayer after the pastor, they inherit an unconditional form of salvation, like life insurance. But this is not the attitude in the Scriptures, even less so what Yeshua Himself taught. Yes, salvation is a free gift granted by the grace of G-d, yet, after that moment, a lack of holiness or good works in our lives can jeopardize it.

Yeshua certainly admonished some religious people of His time for not producing good fruit (good works). They aligned themselves with the line of thinking very common in Israel between the third century B.C. and the first century A.D. called “Zion Theology”. This notion defended the idea that Israel would be saved and blessed by G-d in an unconditional form by the simple fact that Abraham (the first Jew) and

his descendants were chosen. Some prophets of Israel had already exhorted the people about this position, such as Malachi, “Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice. Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe. Her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, ‘Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon

## *If one side of Christianity developed a theology of “unconditional salvation”, some Jewish circles had centuries earlier already developed a similar version.*

us.’ Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest.” (Micah 3:9-20)

We even see how John/Yochanan leads with this attitude, “So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father,” for I say to you that from these

stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. Indeed, the ax is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Luke 3:7-9)

If one side of Christianity developed a theology of “unconditional salvation”, some Jewish circles had centuries earlier already developed a similar version.

But how can we produce good fruits for the Lord? How can we conduct our lives in a way pleasing to G-d? Is it possible that simple obedience to the commandments guarantees the production of fruits acceptable to the Father? The answer is no! For this reason, Israel, even with the 613 commandments of the Torah, does not have the fruits of obedience guaranteed. It is because of this that obedience alone is not able to produce fruit. Love and obedience should walk together. Yeshua Himself teaches people who have already been freed how to produce good fruits that will be accepted by G-d: “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:3-5). Once again, I say: I do not obey to be saved, I obey because I am saved. There is an immense difference!

May we always be able to have the words of Mashiach Yeshua in our hearts and minds, that we may produce good and acceptable fruits to HaShem!

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Matheus Zandona Guimaraes is a descendant of Italian and Portuguese Jews who immigrated to Brazil in the end of the 19th century. He has a bachelor’s degree in Social Communication and has studied Hebrew and Jewish Culture in Israel. He is one of the teachers at Har Tzion Synagogue, in Belo Horizonte, BRAZIL and president of Teaching from Zion Ministries. Matheus is married to Tatiane and has two beautiful sons, Daniel and Benjamin.

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By Jaimani L. Rubens

I had a dramatic conversion from Hinduism to Christianity within a day while I was desperately trying to find a job and had four credits towards my computer information systems degree. I attended a church, went through the formalities, and had to make a commitment to serve, so I joined the women's group.

Every day, I looked for employment in the papers and all the positions that suited me were open only for Whites. Then I saw one opening for a Christian. I had all the credentials except I had just accepted the faith, and I did not think I was suited for the position but sent in my resume anyway. I was called for an interview and was told that they will get back to me as soon as the Lord told them whom to employ. Surprise! Surprise! The Lord speaks to people. Will the Lord speak to me, will the Lord forgive my

sins? I was staunch Hindu for 35 years. I was successful. He has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

Betty often invited me to women's meetings, but I always declined. One day she called, "There is a meeting, and I need you to assist me with doing the charts. I will fetch you at 8:00, and please bring some lunch to share." I knew instantly that I had to attend this meeting.

I had the most wonderful day learning the Bible and enjoying fellowship. When she dropped me off at home, I gave her the jar of left-over pickles, and she said, "I am not a lover of pickles, but my daughters and husband will enjoy them."

Betty called later saying, "My husband is not home, but between my daughters

and me, we have polished off the jar. You have to come and teach us how to make these vegetable pickles." I said I will during the coming holidays. She had some appointments but would be free on my birthday, January 13th, and I confirmed that I would come.

Betty, her mother, and daughters were there to make pickles. They wrote down the recipe and thoroughly enjoyed making them. We had lunch, and Herby prayed before the meal. Betty said to me, "I have been invited to a conference in Singapore, and I would like you to join me." I declined, but she said, "Think about it. It's in April, and we can travel through India as I want to spend one weekend with Mother Teresa before going to Singapore." I had never been to my ancestral home of India.

That evening, I told my spouse that all

## *I am a South African Indian holding a South African passport. Everywhere I go, I get interrogated.*

went well and that Betty invited me to travel with her. He retorted, "You are a liar trying to prove yourself, because that sophisticated family would never want to travel with a nobody like you. You are just a clerk." I did not utter a word but thought of the scripture, He redeems your life from the pit, he surrounds you with grace and compassion (Psalm 103:4). Every night from that day, I prayed, seeking the Lord, and telling him, "I know you speak to lots of people, especially to Bonzo all the time. Please talk to me."

During my lunch breaks, I enquired about flights and prices and began planning. One morning, I left my spouse at work and was driving to the hairdresser to have my hair soft permed for travelling. While driving, I was talking to the Lord saying, "I will go to the bank when I finish and enquire regarding a loan." Then I heard a voice saying, "Don't go; it will be denied." I wondered if this was the Lord speaking to me, but I was angry about the response, and this was the only thing I could think about at the hairdresser.

Afterward, I drove to the bank and enquired regarding a loan. The lady looked at me and retorted, "It will be denied." I pressed her, "You have neither viewed my account nor conferred with anyone." But she snapped again, "It will be denied!" Wow! These were the same words that I heard that morning. The tears welled up and then flowed down my cheeks. I went

to the ladies' room to cry, then I washed my face and drove back to work.

I prayed every night seeking forgiveness from the Lord for not believing Him, and that in the future, I would listen to His voice in obedience. Later, I called the bank and he scheduled an appointment. As I walked in, the representative asked, "must I sit down, how many thousand do you want? I know you will pay it back." I looked at him with shock, and I remembered that the Lord always confirms. I told him I will get back with the final amount, and later I received the cheque.

The itinerary was, Durban, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Mumbai, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mumbai, Mauritius, Durban. The travel agent called to say that if I fly to Mumbai via Mauritius I will save R500.00, but I declined. That weekend a sister visited from Johannesburg, gave me some food and an envelope, and said, "Enjoy India." The envelope had R500 cash.

Betty and I checked in together, so that she did not have to pay excess baggage fees. We had a connecting flight from Nairobi to Mumbai. We boarded our flight to Nairobi and landed safely at 10:00pm. We went through the transit gate to wait for our connecting flight and were told the flight was in 27 hours. Holding a South African passport, we were taken to a very dirty waiting area. My friend asked me to wait with our belongings, and she found a piece of cardboard, brought it over, and said I will lie down on this, but I cannot sit on the dirty couch.

We wanted a cup of tea, so I told her I would walk around and see what I could find. I wondered off to the shopping area and heard someone speak Gujarati. I went in and asked if he could cash a traveler's cheque since we were stuck for

27 hours and needed some tea and meals. He said he would cash the cheque but not to buy a meal; he would get hold of the airline to provide us with meals.

A lady asked if I was going to the transit lounge as we walked together back to Betty. This woman said, "This is not the place. Come, there is a much better lounge where we can be together until my morning flight to Zimbabwe." The lady was a missionary from Europe. Hearing of our plight, she bought us breakfast, and we shared a wonderful time of fellowship.

We had morning tea, snacks, and sufficient food for lunch as well, plus, the airline did send us dinner in the evening. We did much chatting, reading and prayer before our flight to Mumbai.

Due to the delay in Nairobi, Betty could not go to Calcutta, nor I to Gujarat. I thought the Lord was so kind to me that I will not have to face persecution from family. We went to the Cathedral meeting on Sunday and then she left. I collected my internal travel ticket from the agent for travelling to Delhi, Kashmir, Varanasi, Calcutta, Chennai, Bangalore, and Mumbai.

I experienced pleasant encounters. Even though I had not booked accommodation in advance, all the accommodation was very comfortable, and the food was excellent. We left Delhi where it was 45°C (113°F) and arrived in Kashmir where it was -9°C (16°F) to a wonderful snowy experience. I survived with summer clothes, no jacket, and no socks, spending the day on the ski resort which doubles as a golf course during the summer.

I did end up meeting Mother Teresa. Even though I was told she is usually abroad and hardly ever in Calcutta, she was there, and I spent the latter part of the morning with her. I saw map of the world with all the homes opened by the Sisters of

## *I saw the scriptures come alive, as there were European youth, Chinese women, and the patients were Indians.*

Charity, and South Africa stuck out like a sore thumb. Mother Teresa told me that she can come to South Africa but only with Commonwealth sisters. She had refused before since her pair of hands alone could not do all of the work. Every home opened in any part of the world is opened with Indian sisters, so I must ask everyone that I know to pray to Jesus, and if all of us pray together Jesus will answer.

She took me to the chapel, knelt and prayed. I was served lunch and offered a bed to rest in; only on Sunday the sisters had an hour rest after lunch. I went to look for film for my camera to get a photo with her. On Sunday in India, it is a normal working day, but in Calcutta, everything is closed. However, I was fortunate to find one little kiosk and managed to get the film.

I had been told that I will go with the sisters in the afternoon by ambulance and work at the home for the dying. I agreed. As I walked the streets, I spoke with the Lord, "I am on holiday, I would have loved to work with children, as they make you laugh. I do not want to cry." We went to the home for the dying, and I was surprised to see volunteers from around the world already there. The sisters knew some of them. Women worked with women, and men worked with men. I did not have to shed tears; I saw the scriptures come alive, as there were European youth, Chinese women, the patients were Indians. "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your might, and your neighbor as yourself." (Matt 22:37-39)

The French youth had been in India for

a while and knew most of the patients.. They worked for a week and then toured a week. I discerned from one lady's name that she was Muslim, and I could speak her language. They asked to try to get her to take her medicine, so I chatted with her. She asked me why I had taken so long to come, and I told her I was busy but now I had a break so I could visit. She looked at my plain blue cotton apron and asked me, "Will you please give me this when you leaving as it is so cold and I don't have a jersey?" I told her I will (it was 42°C or 108°F). I told her please take this medication and she took it. I noticed that nothing is wasted, and that what is served in the mother house was also served in the street.

I was the only passenger on the flight to Bangkok without a box of mangoes. The gentleman next to me asked me why I was not taking mangoes to my family in Bangkok, so I replied that I am a tourist from South Africa. He told me I can ride with him in the taxi and share the bill, and he also suggested good accommodations. I enjoyed all the beautiful tours, especially the coral reefs and getting to church on Sunday.

My flight was at 11:00. I waited in the Cathy Pacific section and wondered why there were no people. I enquired and was told that the flight left early. I had to see the manager who booked me on a Thai flight to Hong Kong, and I was presented with an orchid on entering the plane and a delicious seafood meal.

Hong Kong airport was on strike, having only a handful of workers, so people were jumping from queue to queue. I stood in the queue during the long wait, a lady said to me, "I have been watching

the people jump around and change queue and yet you are so calm. Tell me, how can you be so calm?" I said that I am a South African Indian holding a South African passport. Everywhere I go, I get interrogated; first, the flight delays first in Nairobi, then arriving in Calcutta four hours late, but blessed to have spent time with Mother Teresa, then missing my flight to Hong Kong as it left early. She confided in me that she was an American Catholic who believed Mother Teresa is holier than the Pope. We smiled and hugged.

I was allocated a taxi, and when I showed him the address, he just shook his head. He took me there and stopped, and a gentleman in the street took my luggage for me, and I went with him. It was the cheapest, convenient, best central location. I was advised to take a free bus to the airport. I enjoyed lots of cruises and meeting many believers, good food, and shopping. The host kept a larger room for my return from Taiwan and also took care of my luggage.

Taiwan was wonderful, I had business associates of my employer meet me at the airport. We went to a very plush restaurant for lunch and then headed to the YMCA where I stayed. Both of the associates were believers; their companies were "Five Plus Two" and "Laud Enterprises." We enjoyed good fellowship and visited all the fascinating places, such as snake alley which opens at 11:00 pm, and I could not believe what I saw. There was good fellowship at the YMCA as well.

In Hong Kong the Lord said to visit Gujarat, so I adjusted my flight from Singapore. My host helped me with all the baggage to the airport, and while there, I went to a shop for a Yamaha Synthesizer, a Nikon attachment for an F3 camera, and the salesman recommended I buy an F301 camera so I will not have to pay duty. It even came with a free Nikon

camera bag.

The flight to Singapore was pleasant and I was happy to see Betty, Hope and Jonah. Jonah took me to church there, and it was a good meeting followed by a Mothers Union meeting. I managed to visit Tiger Balm gardens and the biggest mall, but the Christian store was closed since it was Sunday. Hope bought me a tating shuttle and cotton, and we had dinner at the airport before my flight to Mumbai.

It was 2:30 am when I arrived in Mumbai. Customs official became suspicious with the synthesizer and camera bag. After much negotiation, I had to leave the synthesizer in the states warehouse, but finally, I reached my uncle's home and had a good rest. I arranged with my aunt to visit Gujarat, and while there, I was blessed sharing the Good News with those who had never heard. I was wonderful meeting family and seeing the home where my father, grandfather and great grandfather were born.

I took a train back to Mumbai and got back to the airport. I went directly to the manager of the airlines and spoke in Gujarati instructing them to take my baggage so I could fetch the synthesizer. I had quite a hard time trying to get my synthesizer from the states warehouse, as they wanted to collect a double excess fee, but I was back in time as the flight was closing and everything was put into the hold without having to pay baggage fees. I was so glad to see Betty on the flight, and I had a good rest on it.

The flight, food, and company were all good and we arrived at Mauritius in the morning. I met Phyllis and her friend who took us to her home; she was the head of Mothers Union. We spent the day with other members that afternoon, and I had the opportunity to share my experiences from my MU

## *I was no more a prisoner in my own home, I had a duty to perform. Eighteen months later Mother Teresa was in South Africa, and I met her three times.*

meeting in Singapore. The next day Phyllis' husband took us on a tour of the whole perimeter of the island, travelling counterclockwise along the shore with its beautiful beaches and the resorts. We stopped at one of the beaches and enjoyed the beautiful waters

and the white sand. Sunday, we went to church and met the Bishop and other members. Lunch afterward was prepared by the man of the house and it was thoroughly enjoyed by all. We spent our final day with MU members, and I was presented with an MU badge and was accepted as a MU

member.

On the last leg of our journey, my excess baggage was taken in without charges, and we had a pleasant flight across the Indian Ocean.

All thanks to the Lord for a most wonderful journey, seeing all his beautiful handiwork and his opening doors for sharing His good news and favor in every situation. The door was now open to share the good news, I will no longer be a prisoner in my own home. Rejoice in union with the Lord always! I will say it again, rejoice! (Phil 4:4)

I was no more a prisoner in my own home, I had a duty to perform. Eighteen months later Mother Teresa was in South Africa, and I met her three times. When she was handing out medallions, I went to her from behind and whispered in her ear that I had worked at Nirmal Hirday and she answered me in Hindi, "thank you my child". Why, every hair on your head has been counted! (Luke 12:7)

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jai is a retired Accounting Officer from South Africa. She loves cooking and all handicraft work. She uses them as encouragement and outreach wherever possible. Jai resides in Jerusalem with her husband Baruch.



# REBECCA

By Julia Blum

One of the most beautiful stories in the Torah is a love story. Yet what is fascinating is that before it became the story of love that it is, it was a story of faith. In fact, it took the faith of multiple people for this story to become a story of love.

## Faith

“Faith is the evidence of the things not seen.”<sup>1</sup> First of all, Abraham’s faith is amazing since he had no doubt that God Himself would take care of selecting a wife for Isaac. Abraham said, “The Lord God of heaven...will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.”<sup>2</sup>

This story certainly demanded great faith from Abraham’s senior servant (probably Eliezer, though his name is not mentioned in this chapter). Admittedly, he must have already witnessed many miracles by this time that the Lord had performed in his master’s life, but it would still have taken a good deal of faith to even undertake this journey and to trust that the Lord would send him to the right girl. When he arrives and stands by the well outside the city, he prays for success (“good speed” or “good fortune”, depending on translation). If translated literally, he is asking God

to “cause to happen/meet before me today” (הִקְרָה-נָא לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם). “O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that this is the very first prayer for divine guidance that we find in the Bible.

The servant prays for a kind and humble girl. Pay close attention: he is not asking for her to have good looks or wealth. In his prayer, his condition focuses on her kind and serving attitude and behavior. We know that his terms were met immediately and precisely, and we also know that he was absolutely overwhelmed by this immediate answer. “And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.”<sup>4</sup> We really have to be able to recognize God’s signature in our life and the feeling of awe that fills us in such a moment in order to understand the feelings of this servant. Like a double-exposed roll of film with its images overlapped, he is seeing God’s as-of-yet invisible reality showing through this seemingly routine episode, and he is absolutely overwhelmed by this invisible reality.

The word translated here as “remained silent” could very well be translated

*The most amazing part of this story is the faith of this young woman, and quite honestly, I can think of no faith stronger than that which Rebecca portrays here.*

“to be silent, to be speechless.” I think that was exactly what was happening to Eliezer; not only was he silent, he was absolutely speechless as he saw God’s handwriting in this story!

It is even more amazing to see this invisible reality of God’s presence

and guidance becoming so visible and obvious to everyone, even to those who do not know God. Rebecca’s family, after they had heard the servant’s testimony, say surprising words (one can imagine that the servant was absolutely shocked to hear these words from non-believing people): “Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, ‘The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you either bad or good.’”<sup>5</sup>

Mi-Adonai Yatza Ha-Davar – “this thing came from the Lord!” How obvious the Lord’s presence must have been for people who did not know Him to speak these words!

However, the most incredible character here is undoubtedly Rebecca herself. The most amazing part of this story is the faith of this young woman, and quite honestly, I can think of no faith stronger than that which Rebecca portrays here. When the servant appears from nowhere and presents before her the choice of her

The character and faith of Abraham is constantly admired, and rightly so. At the age of 75, he willingly left his home to go the Land that God promised to show him. However, we rarely hear similar praise for Rebecca, who made the same choice, and even more decisively and drastically. We do not know for sure the length of time between Abraham first hearing God’s command and when he actually left his home. It could have been days, weeks, months, or maybe even years. We only know that he did go, and we applaud him for that. But we do know for sure that Rebecca made this crucial choice and left her home, in one day. Imagine: they did not have phones or internet, they did not have cars or planes, and for her to leave her home like this meant to leave it for good and probably never see her family again. The fact that she was able to make such a definitive decision to leave behind everything and everyone she knew and loved, bears witness to an absolutely outstanding character! Not only did she make the decision that

*She wanted God in her life and therefore she followed the footsteps of His flock. She followed Eleazar by faith, having surrendered her whole life to God.*

life—whether she will go with him to be a wife for Abraham’s son—she says “yes.” “Then they called Rebekah and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go.’”<sup>6</sup> This is yet another “yes” to God as we see many times throughout this book—yet another story of entering into God’s plan and God’s blessings to those who surrender their life to Him.

changed her life forever within one day (and, by the way, it changed the life of the whole of humanity as well), but the very next morning, instead of begging for a merciful delay, she was ready to go.

Let us try to understand what Rebecca went through. I remember perfectly well how it was in my life. A man who brought me a message about the living God – and

the message from the living God – also appeared before me from nowhere. I remember this strange feeling that there was somehow more to this person who was standing before me than meets the eye. This was not just a man who stepped into my life, but rather Somebody much greater than he who somehow was in him. I knew that Somebody claimed my life, and from that moment on, I felt there was nothing accidental in this life.

Rebecca had to feel something like this. She didn’t grow up in a family of believers as Isaac did, she didn’t know God as Isaac did, but when Eliezer appeared before her that day, out of nowhere, somehow she knew that it was not just this servant, but Somebody in him and beyond him. Somebody much more than he who stepped into her life and claimed her life. “My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him.”<sup>7</sup> As in the Song of Songs, her heart too began to pound. I suppose, like all young girls, she was interested in marriage and in her future husband, but she knew almost nothing about him and had never seen him, so he was still not very real to her. However, that ‘Somebody’ who touched her heart through Eliezer and made her heart pound was so real that she decided at once that she wanted Him in her life. I have always loved this Scripture from the Song of Solomon: “Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock?... If you do not know, O fairest among women, Follow in the footsteps of the flock.”<sup>8</sup> It is exactly what she is doing: she wanted God in her life and therefore she followed the footsteps of His flock. She followed Eleazar by faith, having surrendered her whole life to God through this amazing life-changing decision, made so simply and so quickly, and I believe she never looked back.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. 11:1 | <sup>2</sup> Gen. 24:7-8 | <sup>3</sup> Gen. 24:12 | <sup>4</sup> Gen. 24:21 | <sup>5</sup> Gen. 24:50 | <sup>6</sup> Gen. 24:58 | <sup>7</sup> Song of Solomon 5:4 | <sup>8</sup> Song of Solomon 1:7, 8

# *If we do not know Hebrew, this name means nothing, but one who understands Hebrew will be astounded by its profound meaning: The Well of The Living One Who Sees Me.*

## *Love*

And now we are approaching that glorious moment in the story where the invisible begins to shine through the visible. All this happens in Genesis 24, and at the very end of this long and eventful chapter, we witness a fascinating scene. When Rebekah sees Isaac for the first time coming up out of the desert, just at that moment, she literally falls off her camel. In English, it is usually translated as “alighted” or “dismounted,” however, the English expression, she dismounted from her camel,<sup>9</sup> does not correctly render the original Hebrew: ותפל מעל הגמל “and she fell down/off the camel.” The Jewish commentaries discuss here precisely this verb, ליפול, juxtaposing it, for example, with the words of Psalm 37:24: “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand.”

Why did Rebekah fall? In order to understand why, let us recall the events of Genesis 22, the Aqedat Itzhaq. Some of my readers might know that Aqedat Yitzhaq, the story of the binding of Isaac, contains (among its many other enigmas) one more mystery that our sages have long pointed out. After everything that

happened on Mount Moriah—after the raised knife was stopped by the voice from heaven—Genesis 22:19 states: “So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.” Isaac is not mentioned there at all. Where did he disappear to? What happened to him after the Aqedah?

Historically, this circumstance has triggered numerous discourses and speculations which are laid out in a wide variety of works by our sages and rabbis. Where did Isaac go? Wouldn’t it be right for us to expect, after the trauma the son had experienced, for Abraham to have remained obsessively close to him, showing him even greater love and concern? Especially since ultimately, Abraham himself (though not by his own will, but by God’s) had caused his son such trauma? Wouldn’t it be right for us to expect a story about how the father and son, after undergoing their joint testing, would have returned home together to the worried sick Sarah? (Remember, back in those days, there were no phones, and Sarah would not have had the slightest idea what had transpired on Mount Moriah.) But we find nothing of the sort here: no expressions of the

family’s emotions on the occasion, and no description of a cheery unity between the jointly tested father and son. The Scriptures inform us only about Abraham’s return. In the next chapter, Sarah dies (out of worry for Isaac, Jewish tradition says). However, Isaac is nowhere to be seen, he has vanished, and he next appears in God’s Word only at the end of Genesis 24, in the scene that we are witnessing now, right before the first meeting with Rebekah, his future wife. Where had Isaac been?

This is a wonderful example of the things that can only be understood in Hebrew. Genesis 24:62 tells us that Isaac came from the way of Be’er Lahai Ro’i. If we do not know Hebrew, this name means nothing, but one who understands Hebrew will be astounded by its profound meaning: The Well of The Living One Who Sees Me – that is how I would translate it. This profound name occurs for the first time in Genesis 16 when Hagar gives this name to the well where the Angel of the Lord met her. Since the

***Rashi writes about Rebecca and this initial meeting that “she saw his majestic appearance, and she was astounded by him.”***

***It is plain to see, he loved her! Not only do we hear these amazing words now, but this is actually the very first time when the Torah uses the verb “love” (in Hebrew, אהב ahav) in order to describe a relationship between a man and a woman.***

name is connected to Hagar, Midrash Genesis Rabbah suggests that Isaac had gone there to bring Hagar to Abraham his father, that he should marry her.<sup>10</sup> However, I think this name means much more than that in Isaac’s story. It tells us that, even after the Aqedah, after what

he had experienced on Mount Moriah, when Isaac disappears from both his family and from our field of vision, when no one could see Isaac or knew where he was, the Lord still saw him. While Isaac disappeared from everyone else’s sight, he did not disappear from God’s sight. God had His Own reason and plan for Isaac’s temporary absence, surely a time of very close relationship between Isaac and the Lord, a time when not his earthly father, but his Heavenly Father Himself, restored him after the terrible shock he had gone through—The Living One Who Sees Me.

Now, back to our original question: Why did Rebekah fall? I believe that, after Isaac’s experience at Mount Moriah and after the healing time he had spent with God when God was the only One who saw him, Isaac must have been resplendent with God’s light and shining with God’s glory. Rashi writes about Rebecca and this initial meeting that “she saw his majestic appearance, and she was astounded by him.” When the heart humbles itself before God in the fire of testing, it is cleansed and filled with God’s glory. Isaac is coming up out of the desert radiating God’s light.

Another aspect to consider comes from Genesis 24:65 where we read, “So she took her veil and covered herself.” Of course, we all know that she covered herself out of modesty and as a token of subjection to her future husband. After all, according to Oriental custom, the bride has to be brought veiled into the presence of the bridegroom. However,

the very fact that she fell down from the camel hints that there was even more to it than that. Isaac was dazzling Rebekah as she laid eyes on him for the first time, and both her falling down from the camel and her covering herself begin to make more sense if we think of Isaac radiating God’s glory as he approached her.

Finally, let us witness that great finale, that real triumph of faith, where things not seen become visible: “Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her (יאהבה). So, Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”<sup>11</sup>

It is plain to see, he loved her! Not only do we hear these amazing words now, but this is actually the very first time when the Torah uses the verb “love” (in Hebrew, אהב ahav) in order to describe a relationship between a man and a woman. This is the very first occurrence of this verb in the Torah in a romantic sense and the second occurrence overall. The first time we find this root is in Genesis 22, where God says to Abraham, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.” It is truly remarkable, that on both first occurrences of the verb “to love” are attached to Isaac. He was the one who was loved in Genesis 22, and he is the one who loves in Genesis 24. Isaac’s feelings for Rebecca must have been very strong indeed if the Torah finds it necessary to use this verb here. Indeed, the story of faith became the story of love.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Julia Blum is a teacher and writer working for Israel Institute of Biblical Studies (formerly Teacher) as well as an independent writer and lecturer. She regularly appears as a speaker at various international Christian and Messianic conferences and writes Bible commentaries for different sites. Julia and her husband Victor live in Israel, having immigrated there from Estonia almost 30 years ago. They live in a small town, Mevasseret Zion, next to Jerusalem. (The name of the town comes from Isaiah 40:9 and means: “Bringing good news to Zion”). They have three wonderful children.

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 24:64 | <sup>10</sup> Gen. Rabbah, 60:14 | <sup>11</sup> Gen. 24:67

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