

# Teaching *from* Zion

“...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah  
and the word of the Lord from  
Jerusalem.” -Isaiah 2:3



## Messiah in the Siddur

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## A Word from the Editor

*Beth Shulam*

This issue of Teaching from Zion is published in the fall of the year 2013. In the Jewish world, this time of year traditionally marks the beginning of a new year and a renewal of spirit and commitment to God. We ask for forgiveness from our neighbor and from God for the transgressions we have committed and repent and change for the better. One of the aspects of Jewish life that can easily be improved upon is a dedication to prayer. The Siddur is the order of prayer in the Jewish world. It is also the unifying document of the Jewish world. It is used every day. Daily prayer, blessings, special ceremonies, and holidays are all within its covers.

Siddur is Jewish life in words. There are a plethora of Siddur with differences mainly based on the part of the world your ancestors are from. Sephardic traditions hold to different forms than Ashkenazi. Chassidim and Reform each have their own Siddur variations. But the one unification of all these groups is the beauty that is found in the commonality of prayer. We all say the Shema. We all say the Amidah. We all recite the same prayers each Shabbat. We all delight in this “order” that structures our conversations with God.

The articles in this issue of Teaching from Zion attempt to bring to the

surface the hidden messages about the Messiah buried through the centuries. When we dig deep into our literature and pull Yeshua out of the dust, we move one step closer to reuniting Him with His people. This is truly one of our greatest callings as believers in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. May God bless this issue of Teaching from Zion and you the reader as you delve into the mysteries of the Siddur. Please pray for our brother Udi Zofef who, because of a serious fight with cancer, is unable to write and work for Teaching from Zion at this time. We pray for healing for Udi and all of our loved ones and friends that are afflicted with this terrible disease. ●



Photo by Chany Crystal

# Who Brings Forth the Horn of Salvation

*Joseph Shulam*

The prayers that are prayed in Jewish Synagogues around the world are a collection. This collection has both modern and ancient texts, some of which are composed by historical people, and others so ancient that their origin is unknown. The majority of Jewish liturgy in the Synagogues is comprised of a few standard prayers: The Shema (a recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 that begins with “Hear O Israel”), the Amida (that is also called Shemona Esre – Eighteen Benedictions), the Kaddish (A prayer recited several times during the prayer service and also during funerals and memorial services remembering the deceased relatives), and the Hallel (a recitation of Psalms 114-118). At the High Holidays there are special prayers, such as Kol Nidre on Yom HaKippurim (The day of Atonement) and Selichot (petitions for forgiveness) during the month of Elul and during the ten days of awe between Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim, and even more special blessings for Sukkoth and Passover.

The **Amida** (Hebrew: העמידה, *HaAmidah*) is also called the **Shmoneh Esre** (Hebrew: שמנה עשרה, *Shmoneh Esre* “The Eighteen”). It is called by this name because it traditionally had eighteen benedictions. It is called the Amida because people stand during the time that they recite this prayer. This prayer is found in every “Siddur” (the traditional Jewish prayer book.)

Religious Jews recite the Amida at each of three daily prayer services on normal weekdays and on every Shabbat and Holiday. This article is not concerned with all the eighteen benedictions of the Amida. This article is concerned only with the fifteenth benediction known as “The Blessing of David” in Hebrew “*Birkat David*.” This benediction is translated to English in many different forms.

## *The Amida, Blessing Fifteen: The Kingdom of David*

אֶת צֶמַח דָּוִד עֲבַדְךָ מִהֲרָה תִצְמִיחַ, וְקִרְנוֹ תָרוּם בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ  
בִּי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּינוּ כָּל הַיּוֹם.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מִצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן יִשׁוּעָה.

### *The first translation*

“The offspring of Thy servant David, quickly cause to flourish, and lift up his power by Thy deliverance; for Thy deliverance do we constantly hope. Blessed art Thou, Lord, who makes the glory of deliverance to flourish.”

### *The Second Translation*

“May the Seed of David Thy servant flourish speedily and may You exalt in Your salvation. For in your salvation do we hope all the day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who brings forth the Horn of our salvation.”

In order to understand the complexity of this prayer it must be understood that the word “SALVATION” in Hebrew is very similar to, and from the same root as the name of Yeshua. In Hebrew “Yeshua” is the original name of the Western transliteration, influenced by Greek, which became “Jesus” in English. The Hebrew noun for Salvation is actually “Yeshuah.” You can immediately see the closeness and relationship between the Hebrew word for Salvation (Yeshuah) and the name Yeshua. In Hebrew the difference is only one letter at the end of the word “Yeshua (h).”

The ending of this fifteenth benediction of the Amida is somewhat difficult to understand. Professor Solomon Pines of the Hebrew University was one of the pioneer researchers of early christianity and studied the relationship between Jewish followers of Yeshua and Judaism. Prof. Pines was among the earliest academics to notice that the benediction of the Amida is somewhat complex to understand. Professor Yehuda Liebes, of the Hebrew University succeeding Professor Pines noticed that the difficulties in understanding this prayer lie within the ending. The conclusion of this benediction does not really tie in with the main body of the benediction. The first part of the prayer is speaking about King David and has allusions to Biblical texts.

Here is a spread out of the prayer and the Biblical allusions:

The phrase “A branch (or plant) of David” is found in the following texts – all of which are clearly messianic texts:

Jer. 23:5 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “**That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.**” (See also: Jer. 33:15)

Psa. 132:17 “There **I will make the horn of David grow;** I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.”

The second phrase in the benediction is translated, “*Thy servant flourish speedily*” - it is a liberal translation of Psalm 132:17, “**make the horn of David grow**” - “Horn” here is like “the horn of plenty” in the Greco-Roman culture. In this text of Psalms 132:17, it is clear that the Psalmist is talking about the Messiah. The parallel phrase of the verse is: “I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed” - where “Anointed” is actually in Hebrew “Messiah.” All of this is spoken with reference to King David.

The third phrase in the fifteenth benediction is: “*For in your salvation do we hope all the day.*”

Is. 25:9 “And it will be said in that day: “Behold, this is our God; **we have (hoped) waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have (hoped) waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.**”

Is. 51:5 “*My righteousness is near, **My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will (hope) wait upon Me, And on My arm they will trust.***”

Psa. 25:5 “*Lead me in Your truth and teach me, **For You are the God of my salvation; On You I (hope) wait all the day.***”

Prov. 20:22 “*Do not say, “I will recompense evil”; **(hope) Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.***”

The last phrase is the one that is problematic: “**Who brings forth the Horn of our salvation.**”

Professor Yehuda Liebes presents a theory, that in this 15<sup>th</sup> benediction of the Amida there is a possibility that originally Jewish Disciples of Yeshua in the Galilee composed it. Professor Yehuda Liebes wrote an article for Professor Solomon Pines “Festschrift” for his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, and it was published by the Hebrew University. He points out that in the context you would expect to have “*The Horn of David*” like the text says in Psalm 132:17, or “*Who brings forth the Horn of our Messiah,*” or even it could work to say, “*The Horn of David our Savior.*” But this is not what is written in this ancient prayer. The phrase to “*bring forth the Horn...*” connects with a person not with an abstract noun like “*salvation.*”

In his article Professor Liebes also points out that in Biblical Language we have not seen the phrase “Horn of Salvation,” when the word “Salvation” is an abstract noun. Again, in the English translation of 2 Samuel 22:3, “*The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the **horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge; My Savior, You save me from violence.***” In the Hebrew this phrase is not like in the prayer, “Keren Yeshua” - קרן ישועה, but it is “Keren Yishei” - קרן ישעי. It has the same root, but the form is very different and speaks not of an abstract concept of Salvation but “**My Salvation**”, which is very personal, and gives context to the phrase in Psalm 22:3 that refers to God Himself as the “Horn of my Salvation” - קרן ישעי. Also in the Kaddish prayer we find an Aramaic phrase that speaks of “God Himself who makes Salvation grow and brings near His Messiah” - “ויצמח פורקניה ויקרב משיחא” (Va Yetzmach Purkane Va Yekarev Meshiche), but we don’t find Salvation as a concept, be it acting, receiving, or as a source. Professor Liebes argues that growing the Horn is always a question of giving strength to a person and for proof he brings the passages Psalm 132:17, Jeremiah 33:15, and Ezekiel 29:21.<sup>1</sup>

In Psalm 92:10-11, we find the phrase in its natural context and the meaning is “to give strength to the person

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 29:21 “In that day I will cause the horn of the house of Israel to spring forth, and I will open your mouth to speak in their midst. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.”

so that he can vanquish his enemies.”<sup>II</sup> In this text the exhalation of the Horn is in parallel with the anointing of fresh oil on the person who is speaking or singing this Psalm. In Deuteronomy 33:16-17<sup>III</sup>, we find in the blessing of Moses to the tribes a blessing for Joseph that “his horns like the horns of the wild ox”. (See also: 1 Chronicles 25:5<sup>IV</sup>) The Bible and Jewish literature’s stance with the phrase always refers to a person and not to an abstract concept, this strengthens the secondary nature of the phrase as it stands now in the Siddur (the Jewish Prayer books). By secondary nature Professor Liebes suggests that the original must have had a different meaning i.e. it was speaking of a person and not of a concept.

One of the Midrashic commentaries of the Tanach of the Byzantine period is Yalkut Shimeoni, which states that all the eighteen benedictions of the Amida are actually based on 1 Samuel chapter 2, Hannah’s prayer of gratitude for the son that God has given her. This is what Yalkut Shimeoni states: “And Hannah prayed. From this we learn that women must pray since it is clear that Hannah was praying the Eighteen Benedictions. We know this by the hint that she gave us when she said, *“My heart rejoices in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.”*<sup>V</sup>

There are several more linguistic considerations from Biblical texts and Second Temple Jewish literature that prove that the way the 15<sup>th</sup> Benediction of the Amida reads today is not the original text. Professor Yehuda Liebes states that this prayer makes more sense if those who composed the prayer meant the third phrase to be about a person and not an abstract concept. The most logical person to whom this phrase could refer would be “Yeshua” - because the text would

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II Ps. 92:10 “**But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox;** I have been **anointed with fresh oil.** 11 My eye also has seen my desire on my enemies; My ears hear my desire on the wicked Who rise up against me.”

III Deut. 33:16 “With the precious things of the earth and its fullness, And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let the blessing come ‘on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.’ 17 His glory is like a firstborn bull, And **his horns like the horns of the wild ox;** Together with them He shall push the peoples To the ends of the earth; They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, And they are the thousands of Manasseh.”

IV 1 Chr. 25:5 “All these were the sons of Heman the king’s seer in the words of God, **to exalt his horn.** For God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.”

V 1 Samuel 2:1, The Midrash commentary on Samuel, chapter 80, states that Hannah prayed the Amida. The Midrash connects the Amida with the phrase: *“My horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation.”*

only change slightly with the addition of the letter “ה”. They would at least hide the originally intended glorification and identification of the Son of David, the Messiah, and Yeshua. This not only happened in the ancient days of the Byzantine Empire, but it happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the prayer book of Rosh Hashanah. In the early days of the State of Israel, during the 1950s, most of the Ashkenazi Machzorim (Orthodox Prayer Books for Rosh Hashanah) had the phrase “Yeshua Sar HaPanim” - “Yeshua the Minister (or angel) of God’s presence.” Later on the “ה” was added to make the text read “Yeshuah – Salvation – the Minister (or Angel) of God’s face.” So, it is not a large leap to see Yeshua in this very messianic blessing of the 15<sup>th</sup> benediction of the Amida.

Whithin the Midrash and Talmud there is evidence that this prayer has been changed several times. In some periods the name of David was inserted a second time and the prayer read: “The God of David who makes “Yeshuah – Salvation” grow (Tsemach – צמח) for His people Israel.” These changes are a clear indication that there was some discomfort and dissatisfaction with the original 15<sup>th</sup> benediction.<sup>VI</sup> The question is who? When would such a benediction have been composed and who would want to make it more palatable for the Jewish Synagogues in the Land of Israel?

We have seen that after the phrase “מצמיח קרן” usually follows the name of a person. In the benediction case Professor Liebes proposes the possibility that it was “Yeshua”, and that the prayer was composed by Jewish Disciples of Yeshua, and later changed because Jewish tradition in the Synagogues rejected Yeshua and his Disciples. The quickest fix to the prayer, already a part of the liturgical tradition, was to add the “ה” and make Yeshua into Yeshuah – salvation.

In the New Testament we have a clear witness that this phrase is attributed to Yeshua: *“And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us Meaning the Messiah, whom God had now raised.”* (Luke 1:69) The Wisdom of Ben-Sirach has a very similar phrase like in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>VII</sup> It is clear that Luke and Ben-Sirach both see the idea of the horn of salvation as a reference to the messiah.

It is likely that this addition of the name Yeshua that turned into Yeshuah happened in the first century before the period of the Bar-Kochba rebellion in the first quarter of the Second Century A.D. In that period the Jewish Disciples of

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VI Midrash on Samuel 26:3, Martin Buber edition, Krakow, Poland, page 126. More on the same issue see Zeligman Bear’s book on the worship of Israel. There you find more Midrashic examples of the same in pages 97, 227.

VII Skehan, Patrick (1987) *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: a new translation with notes* (Series: The Anchor Bible volume 39) Doubleday, New York, p. 524, ISBN 0-385-13517-3

Yeshua were still very much Jewish and very much involved in the community and local Synagogue life. As the letter of James in the New Testament witnesses, the Disciples were worshipping in the Synagogues together with those Jews who did not accept and believe in Yeshua as the Messiah.

Professor Pines noted that the message of the Angel to Mary in Matthew chapter 1 was: “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name **Yeshua** (JESUS), for He will **Yoshiab** (save – in construct) His people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21) This phrase has to be understood from the Hebrew for in Greek translation you lose the play on words of Yeshua / Yoshiab. This use of the word “save” - **Yoshiab** in this verse is an indication of the way that His disciples saw Yeshua in the end of the First Century A.D. He was seen to be Son of David and Savior. The passages dealing with the “horn of David” (קרן דוד) and a “plant of David” (צמח דוד) are messianic by nature even in their original contexts in the Tanach.

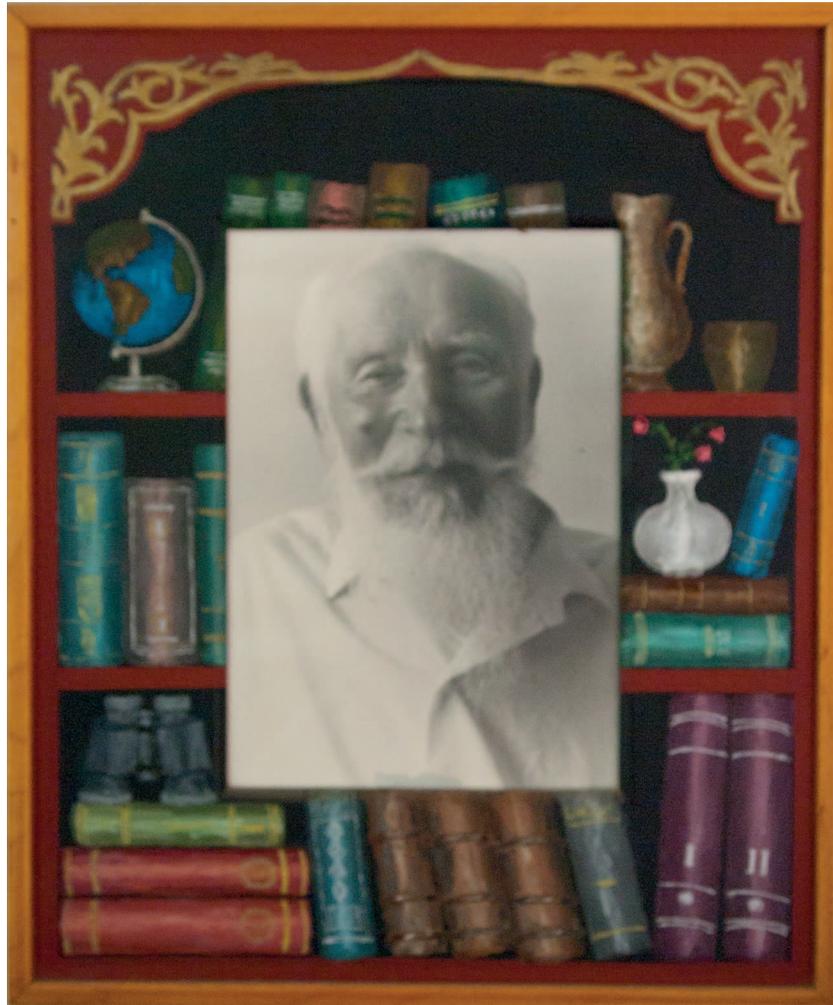
Professor Liebes also suggests the possibility that even very early in the history of the 15<sup>th</sup> benediction of the Amida the disciples of Yeshua may have added the “ה” at the end of the word “Yeshua” and made it into “Yeshuah.” The friction between the Jews who were disciples of Yeshua and those who were not inside the Synagogues may have needed pacify. One way to sooth the friction and still retain their belief would have been to mask the name Yeshua and make it the noun “Yeshuah.” David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister used a similar technique in the composition of Israel’s Declaration of Independence written on a Scroll. The Orthodox Jews wanted to include God in this important document, David Ben-Gurion objected to it, but in the end compromised and wrote in place of God “The Rock of Israel.” This satisfied the Orthodox Jews and also those who were secular. Using a word that says what you want said and

at the same time does not say it is like teaching with Parables. Those who need to understand the parables can understand them, and those who don’t need to use the parables will not.<sup>VIII</sup>

Professor David Flusser brought up a theory that this benediction was allowed in the Jewish Amida prayer because it was a political slap in the face of the Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the dead. So, by asking “The horn of salvation” to be raised it is a polemic against the Sadducees.

For the Jewish Disciples of Yeshua it would have been natural to pray together with all of Israel in the *Synagogues*. For the strengthening of David’s place as the prototype of the Messiah, for raising of the Horn of David as a “savior,” and for resolving the waiting for the Messiah, which is part of the controversial battles inside of Israel. Professor Liebes points out that in the land of Israel this benediction was omitted because the Jewish Disciples of Yeshua were well known and their participation in the Synagogues was the cause for the insertion of what is called “Birkat HaMinim” - the benediction of the heretics. This benediction was especially composed to exclude the Disciples of Yeshua from participation in the Synagogue prayers.

Since the Diaspora in Babylon, the 15<sup>th</sup> benediction has been continuously included to this very day in most of the Jewish Prayer Books around the world. Yeshua found His way into the most central of Jewish prayers, the Amida (the Eighteen Benedictions), the very core of Jewish prayer and the center of Jewish worship. Yes, the additional benediction against the heretics was added and that too continues to be recited in every Synagogue, but the memory of Yeshua and Salvation is not blotted out and it is our conviction that His name will be straightened and His Horn of King David will bring Yeshuah – Salvation to all of Israel. ●



## Amfian Gerasimov

### *A Righteous from Among the Nations*

In the Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations, which the Yad Vashem Institute published in 2007, our brother Amfian Gerasimov was introduced as follows;

“Amfian Gerasimov is a holy man of his own invention. He was fourteen when the Communists overthrew the Tsars in his native Riga, and ever since he has been searching for the God the Communists outlawed. His sparse, immaculate apartment in Talpiot, a Jerusalem Suburb, with its pictures of King David, could belong to a monk; he possesses the detachment of those who dwell in the life of the spirit. Speaking in Byelorussian, he resists answering questions directly, preferring instead to quote from the well-worn Bible that never leaves his hands. “Judaism and Christianity have

one book and I live according to it,” he says. (Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Publications, 2007.)

Following is part of Amfian Gerasimov’s interview with the Yad Vashem Institute:

“I was born in Riga in 1902. My mother was very religious, my father was a laborer and an alcoholic. Seven of their children before me had died because of him, so everyone was sure I would die too. When I was fourteen, I witnessed the Russian Revolution and I wondered why Communists hated religion and how atheism in the Soviet Union came to be. I was raised in the Russian Orthodox Church, but I soon

began studying all faiths. I was searching for a religion that would give me the security I hadn't found in my family.

There were Jews in Riga, but I had no contact with them. The first contact I had was with Judaism, not with Jews. In 1925 when I began studying all religions, I learned about Judaism as well. I learned that both Judaism and Christianity have one book, the Bible and I live according to it. In 1928, I married and had six children. I didn't really want to marry, but my mother had died and I didn't know how to cook. My wife was also seeking the truth. I read all the books about atheism and I didn't find the truth in them so I turned to religion.

The first Jew I met was my landlady, Mrs. Brill. She was a different class from my family. I was a poor mailman, but in 1941 the 'rich' people were suddenly our equals and we had the chance to play a part in their lives. Mrs. Brill had disappeared from our building, which was on the island near Riga, but soon her two daughters, Lila and Dora, who each had a husband and two daughters, took the apartment above ours. So there were two families occupying the same space. My family occupied one floor below. Life for me and my family was not easy. However, the lives of our new neighbors were much worse. My wife and I discovered that the Germans had evicted the Brill sisters and their families from the large apartments in which they had lived in the center of town.

In a few months the Germans had ordered them to move into the suburb where they had congregated all of the city's Jews into a ghetto of only six or seven small streets, an area of two square kilometers. When the families left, they asked us to keep a few suitcases from which they would want us to deliver packages to them from time to time. At first, before the barbed wire went up, my children delivered packages to them. Later I had to make complicated arrangements to meet them, always wearing my postman's uniform and carrying their packages in my pouch. These poor people were moved constantly, and when they could get messages to me, I met them wherever they told me.

For several months we had a plan to meet when they were returning to the ghetto, heavily guarded, after a day of work. One of the armed guards cooperated for a bribe by giving me a hand signal when the time was best. During these meetings we would hand them the packages, listen to the stories of daily experiences, exchange news between us and determine what to bring in the next package. One tragic night the Nazis did not allow Dora Brill and her two daughters to return to the ghetto, but instead took them outside the city together with the old, the sick and the children, and murdered them without mercy.

I continued to meet with Lila Brill and her husband, Isaak Mizroch, and her two daughters until Isaak was deported and executed. On one of these meetings I was stopped by the Germans for questioning. This was a frightening experience, but I managed to convince them that I was simply a postman delivering a package.

One of Lila's daughters, Evta (Yvette), had married Harry Niss, whom I was soon to meet and hide in my home. By that time, my wife and our children had gone to the country for safety and I was living at home alone. The front was nearing, and after only a few days, Harry was able to leave and join the approaching Russian army.

A few months after the Germans were expelled, I received a telegram from Evta in Poland, asking me about Harry's fate. When I wrote to say he was alive she quickly came to Riga and told me how she and her mother Lila, and her sister Evi, had been liberated from the Germans by the English. A short time later they all left for Haifa. I received letters from them, telling me that Harry had been killed in a work accident and Evta had remarried and moved to Canada. The letters stopped in 1950.

Many years later I started going to synagogue and decided to convert to Judaism. I had myself circumcised at the age of sixty-eight and managed to get an invitation to immigrate to Israel. But the Soviet Union wouldn't allow me to go without my wife, and she didn't want to go. The only way was for us to get a divorce. When I went before the judge, he said, 'You already have white hair. Its already time for you to die, not to get divorced. What do you need a divorce for?' I told him, 'I don't need a divorce; the government needs a divorce.' I finally got the permit to immigrate to Israel, and in 1975, we came to Israel, accompanied by one of my sons. When we arrived here, we found out that Lila lived in Tel Aviv. I visited this elderly mother – she's my age – several times, and she was very glad to see me. She was sick and almost blind, but she had maintained herself well and was full of memories of the past. But discussions of a moral or spiritual topic did not interest her. When I told her that the suffering of the Jewish people was a consequence of their deviation from the morals of the Torah, she seemed bored and tended to fall asleep, I find this a typical response of Jews when I mention the case of their suffering. In this way I think the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah is being fulfilled [Jeremiah 6:10]: 'Behold their ears are closed and they are not able to hear.'

I began going to synagogue every day after I arrived in Israel because I wanted to be accepted, but apparently it wasn't enough. Many of the people did not like the ideas I expressed and they started asking me if I was Jewish or Russian, and if I believed in Jesus. I told them that I am

Jewish and I do believe in Jesus, and they asked me why. I showed them the Old Testament, where it says that a Messiah will come and die for the sins of all people, and that's what Jesus did. Then I got threats on my telephone for three years, every night, until I finally notified the police and they were able to stop it.

I was awarded the Yad Vashem medal, and many people have asked me why I helped the Jews when the risk was so great. I answer them by quoting the Bible, the New Testament, John, Chapter 15: 'There is no great love than sacrificing your own soul for another's soul.' And of course, this passage comes directly from the Old Testament, Proverbs, Chapter 24."

Amfian, Gavriel his son and family have been associated with Netivyah and with our congregation since they immigrated to Israel in 1975. In May 2011, Zvi from Roeh Israel Congregation and I, drove to Petah Tikvah to interview Gavriel.

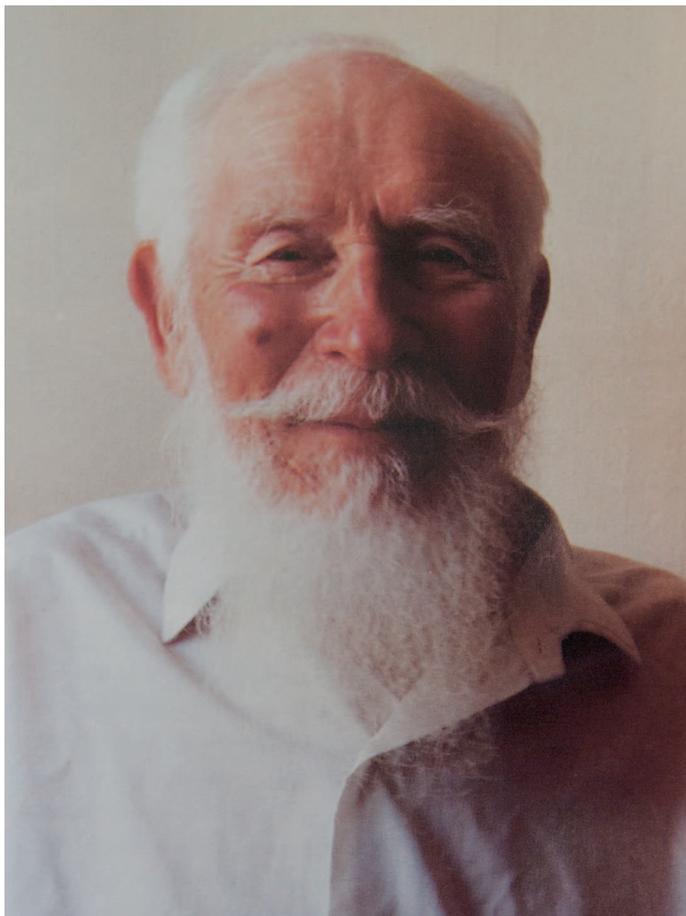
Amfian was a very faithful member of our congregation in Jerusalem. In fact he said once that after looking and investigating more than 20 religious groups he had finally found what he was looking for all through the years at

Netivyah. He found in Netivyah, at that time, a congregation of Jews who were committed to the Restoration of the First Century community of Yeshua's Disciples and to the principles of the Word of God as they are seen through the eyes of the Apostles in the New Testament. On a particular Sunday when Jerusalem was covered with thick snow, Amfian walked from his apartment in Talpiot (a Jerusalem neighborhood about 2.5 miles from our congregation) to the congregation. In Jerusalem, when it snows seriously there is no transportation, people don't go to work, and everything halts. Amfian was the only one that walked that Sunday afternoon to come and worship and we were only a congregation of two on that Sunday afternoon. Amfian did not know Hebrew, but he hired a private interpreter to come with him to the congregation every service to interpret for him in Russian. He did not miss a single prayer meeting or service in which the congregation gathered to praise and worship and learn the Word of God.

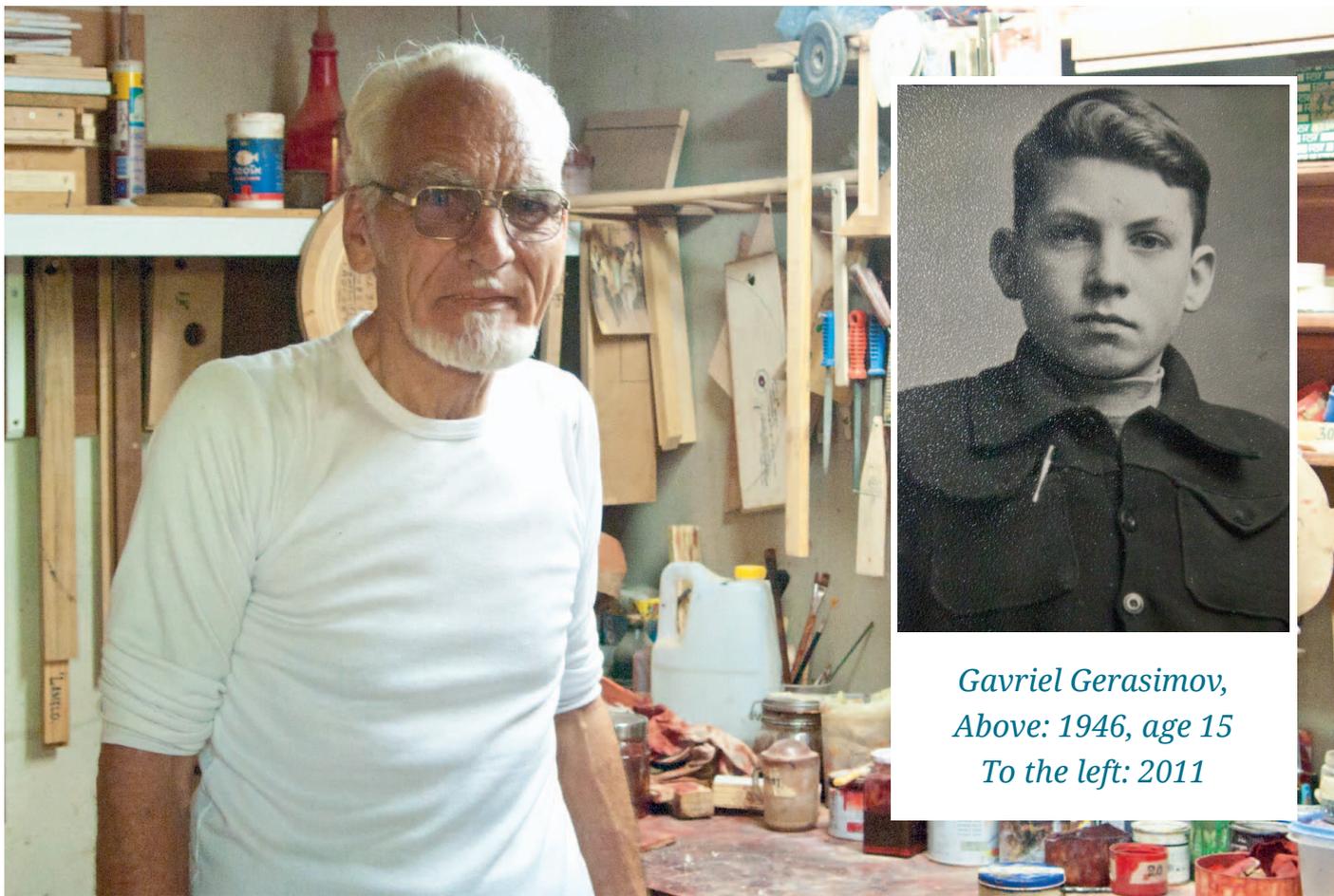
Gavriel, Amfian's son is also a Righteous from Among the Nations (חסיד אומות העולם) in his own right. When Gavriel was 14 years old, Amfian would send him into the Ghetto with packages and money to deliver to the leadership of the Jews. It was a dangerous task that only a young boy could carry out without being caught by the Nazi guards. Gavriel also told us about a summer cottage that Amfian had in the forest outside of Riga, Latvia. In that cottage Amfian kept and fed four Jewish families with their children for many months. He fed them and cared for them and helped them escape the Nazi Holocaust. Latvians were ever more cruel to the Jews than their German occupiers.

There are not many Righteous from Among the Nations that are living today. Amfian and his family are the only ones that we had the privilege to know personally. The most impressive thing about this family, who sacrificed and endangered their lives in order to save Jews, is their humility and simplicity. It is this humility and simplicity that enhanced their deep faith in God and in Yeshua the Messiah and gave them the strength to do what they did for the Jews during the Holocaust and the German occupation of Riga, Latvia. It is this same humility and simplicity that keeps them faithful and dedicated to do the will of the Lord and continue to serve the Kingdom of God and the Jewish people.

Amfian passed away in the late 1990's and is buried in Jerusalem. Gavriel is living in Petah Tikva not far from Tel-Aviv. Gavriel is well into his 80's and still doing volunteer work for the community and the Jewish people. He is a master carpenter and it is his hobby to build wonderfully beautiful cases for Torah Scrolls and give them to the



*Amfian Gerasimov, 1985*



*Gavriel Gerasimov,  
Above: 1946, age 15  
To the left: 2011*

Sephardic Synagogues. He is also building an extra room for his home and he is doing it alone, from mixing the cement to crafting the woodwork. He is a man that is nearing 90 years of age and is not idle, continuing to work physically every day.

It is the privilege of our congregation in Jerusalem to have known Amfian Gerasimov and to have Gavriel associated and in fellowship with us. When I asked Gavriel what motivated him and his family to endanger their lives and sacrifice for a few Jewish people during the Holocaust, Gavriel's answer was very simple, "It was the desire of our Lord to bless the Jewish people, and that is all that we could do for them at that time."

It is so refreshing and faith strengthening for the younger generation of our congregation and of Netivyah to remember Amfian Gerasimov. When I ask our young leaders what they remember of Amfian Gerasimov their faces light up with joy and say, "Sure! He is the old man that every week gave us a candy!"

In 1990, I had the privilege to visit the former Soviet Union before its demise. I visited Riga, Latvia, and visited Amfian's brothers and sisters who were still living there.

This amazing family were all doing well economically, but they were also walking with the Lord and active in their relationship with the disciples of Yeshua in Riga and still connected and seeking ways to be a blessing to the small post war Jewish Community in Riga. They were all faithful disciples of Yeshua. They survived the communist regime. They have raised second and third generations of Disciples of Yeshua despite the hard years of communism in the USSR. The secret of their happiness is very simple - they really believe the Word of God and are not sidetracked with the teachings of traditional Christianity. They were committed to the Restoration of the New Testament Church without "whys" and "buts" - just simply seeking to do the will of God. Not one of them said that it was an easy journey, but everyone said that it was the only way to know for sure that they are doing what pleased God. This is what Gavriel still says is his own model for living faithfully doing the will of God.

You can read and research more about Amfian Gerasimov's experience by following this link to Yad Vashem:

<http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4014992> ●

# Before All Beginnings

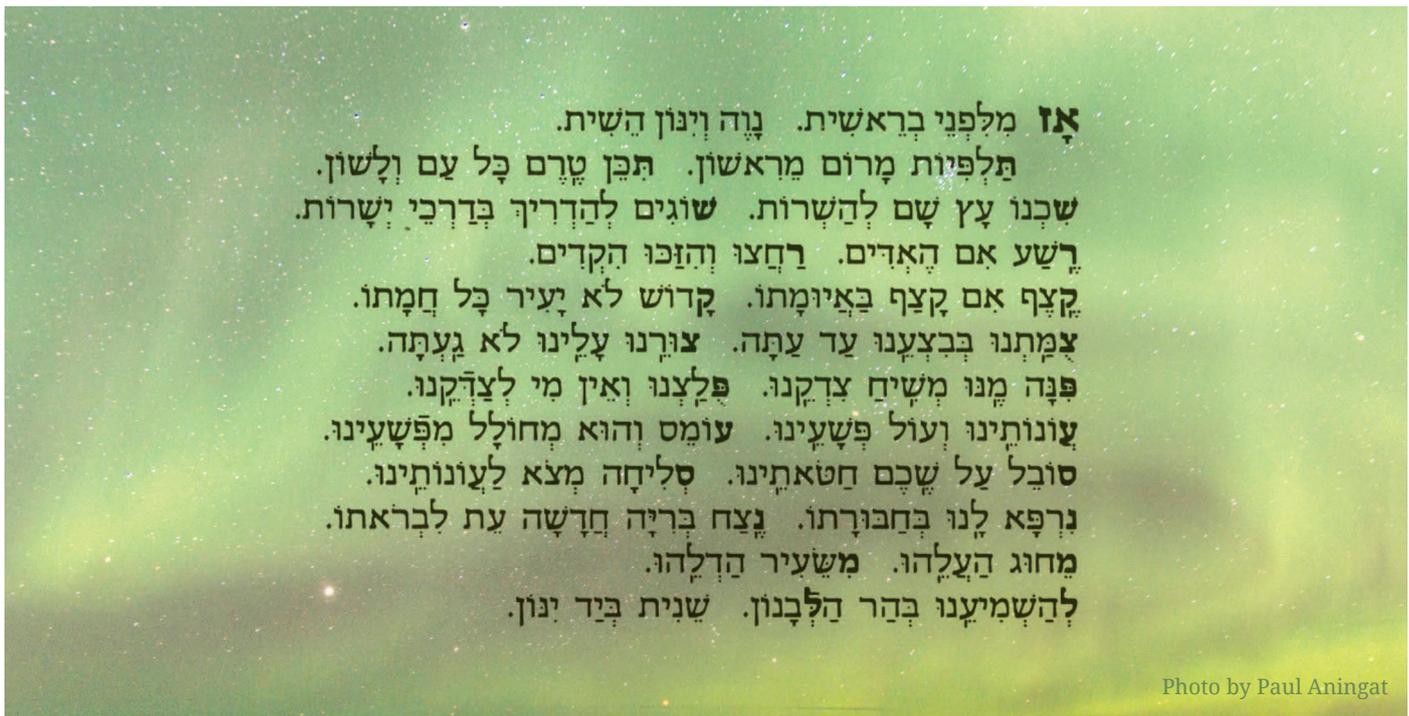
## *Ammikam Tavor*

According to our sages, “Six things have preceded the creation of the world: Some were actually created, and some were planned to be created. The *Torah*, the throne of glory - were created. The forefathers, Israel, the Temple and the name of Messiah were planned to be created. Rabbi Ahavah bar Ze'ira said, “Also repentance”, and some say, “also

the Garden of Eden and hell” (Bereshit Rabah 1).

Sometime in the middle ages, a series of four poems were written, based on this *Midrash*. All were written in archaic, poetic Hebrew and in rhyme. And all open with the same phrase and title: “אז, מלפני בראשית”, which, literally translated, means “Then, before the

beginning”. The third one of the four is of special interest to us, because it speaks about “the name of Messiah”. First, Let me quote the Hebrew text, as it appears in the Jewish prayer book for Yom Kippur available to every reader of Hebrew and worshipper on the Day of Atonement:



אז מלפני בראשית. נוה וינון השית.  
תלפיות מרום מראשון. תכן טרם כל עם ולשון.  
שכנו עץ שם להשרות. שוגים להדריר בדרכי ישראל.  
רשע אם האדים. רחצו והזכו הקרים.  
קצף אם קצף באיומתו. קדוש לא יעיר כל חמתו.  
צמתנו בכצענו עד עתה. צורנו עלינו לא געתה.  
פנה מנו משיח צדקנו. פלצנו ואין מי לצדקנו.  
עונותינו ועול פשעינו. עומס והוא מחולל מפשעינו.  
סובל על שכם חטאתינו. סליחה מצא לעונותינו.  
נרפא לנו בחבורתו. נצח בריה חדשה עת לבראתו.  
מחוג העלהו. משעיר הדלהו.  
להשמיענו בהר הלכנו. שנית ביד ינון.

Photo by Paul Aningat

A free translation of this poem from Hebrew says,

“Then, before the beginning – He has set the abode and *Yinon*. From the beginning, before planning any nation or language - He has planned the established Temple on high. He has counseled to emanate his holy Presence there to lead the erring ones on straight paths. When wickedness became as red as scarlet – he has preceded it with “wash ye and cleanse yourselves”. Even if He became indignant with His awe-

some One – The Holy One will not pour His entire wrath. We have been enslaved to our greed until now, but Our Rock did not raise Himself over us. Messiah of our Righteousness has turned away from us, we were perplexed and there is no one to justify us. He bears our iniquities and the yoke of our crimes upon himself. And was profaned (or: pierced) because of our iniquities. He carries our sins on His shoulder, to find forgiveness for our misdeeds. We were healed by His bruises

– It’s time to create the Eternal One anew as a new creation. Lift Him up from the circle (of the earth), draw Him up from Se’ir (=Edom), and make us hear of Him again on top of Mount Lebanon by the hand of *Yinon*.”

This beautiful piece of sacred literature is very special for several reasons. First, it tells us that the Messiah preceded the creation of the world. In John 17:24 we read, that God has loved the Messiah “before the foundation of the world” and in 1 Peter 2:19-20 it also says that “the precious blood of the Lamb was known before the foundation of the world”. God has established the Temple and the Name of Messiah – (“*Yinon*” is considered as one of Messiah’s names according to Psalm 72:17, which says, “His Name shall endure forever: His Name shall be continued as long as the sun.” The phrase translated into English as “His Name shall be continued as long as the sun” can also be rendered in Hebrew as following: “Before the sun [was made] – His Name [was] “*Yinon*”) before creating people and tongues in the world in order to direct the straying ones in right ways. Paraphrasing Isaiah 1:16-19, he says, “Wash, cleanse yourselves...” and only then, “Though your sins be as scarlet – they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson – they shall be as wool”, which means that the remedy was provided prior to the bruise, and forgiveness was granted even before the sin was committed. Also, the phrase, “Even if He became indignant with His awesome One – The Holy One will not pour His entire wrath” speaks about God’s special love for Israel, His beloved, as written in Song of Songs 6:4, “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible (or awesome) as an army with banners.”

But the most interesting part of this poem begins here: “Messiah of our Righteousness has turned away from us, we were perplexed and there is no one to justify us.” This startling confession reminds us of the great moment still to come, when, according to Zechariah 10:12, God will pour upon his people, the inhabitants of Judah and the dwellers of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they will look upon Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn upon Him... I believe that this great confession has already been quoted in Isaiah 53, which says,

*“Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath neither form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our grief and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bares the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

Many of the verses following these marvelous statements were taken right from Isaiah 53, such as “He bears our iniquities and the yoke of our crimes upon himself. And was profaned (or: pierced) because of our iniquities. He carries our sins on His shoulder, to find forgiveness for our misdeeds. We were healed by His bruises...” This brings us to the next problematic issue: Although the ancient Jewish Bible commentators have unanimously agreed that Isaiah 53 is a messianic portion, describing the atoning suffering and death for the sin of the world – most of the later ones – especially since the middle ages and even until today – insist that a different explanation must be considered, in order to avoid the option that Yeshua of Nazareth might have been that vicarious Savior. They interpreted the suffering Servant of God as the people of Israel, suffering scorn, torment and even martyrdom as the scapegoat of the world, and that the sins of all the gentile nations were laid on him. Now, since in many places the Messiah is so well identified with his people, that their histories are interwoven together in an inseparable manner, still they are not identical. Isaiah 53 definitely speaks of a personal, and not of a collective person. Although Israel as a nation has suffered much persecution and massacre by the hands of the nations, still it could not atone for her own sins as a holy and blameless sacrifice. Israel had to suffer for her own sins, while the sacrifice must be blameless and without sin, which has never been the case

with Israel as a nation. Moreover, Israel never kept quiet about her sufferings, and never acted as a lamb brought to the slaughter opening not her mouth, as did King Messiah. There is an interesting play on words in the Hebrew which adds an additional meaning to the verse “*and with his stripes we are healed*”. The same word rendered in Isaiah 53:5 as “וּבְחֶבְרָתוֹ”, which actually means “By fellowship with Him”, was rendered in the Septuagint and also in our text here as “בְּחִבּוּרָתוֹ”, namely “by His bruises, or “stripes”. Since both possibilities are legitimate, we accept them both without hesitation.

The poem ends with a series of prayerful requests: “It’s time to create the Eternal One anew as a new creation.” Messiah is a “new creation” indeed, since humanity has never experienced a person like Him, as sinless and divine in His nature. The following requests are not the least startling: “Lift Him up from the circle (of the earth), draw Him up from

Se’ir (=Edom).” Israel seeks from God to raise King Messiah from this world and from Edom. Edom has been the secret code name for the anti-Semitic western gentile world, and especially for hostile Christendom, which has systematically persecuted the Jews throughout history. Israel asks God to take Messiah out of the gentile, Christian church, and bring Him back home! “And make us hear of Him again on top of Mount Lebanon by the hand of *Yinon*.” How can God make us hear of the Messiah again, if he has not been here before? But as said before, “Messiah of our Righteousness (or, rather, “Our righteous Messiah”) has turned away from us”; He was here before and has left us without consolation and justification, so we seek God’s face to send him back to us again! What a wonderful prayer for the holiest day of the year, when all of Israel confess their sins to the LORD and ask for His forgiveness! ●

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## May Our Eyes Behold Your Return

*Elhanan Ben-Avraham*

As a Messianic Jew serving in the Israel Defense Force (IDF), one faces a number of challenges. Once that fact becomes open to our fellow soldiers, we are watched carefully until we prove ourselves. If one is a decent chap and does his job well, he is normally accepted as “one of the boys”, but that is just one of the challenges.

Once I was serving a stint of reserve duty at Beit El (Bethel) in Samaria. Bethel is the place the Bible describes Jacob fleeing to from his brother Esau, and there receives the dream of the ladder to Heaven, which later Yeshua alludes to as referring to himself. When it was discovered that I was an artist, I was given the task to paint a fairly large mural of “Jacob’s Dream” on a wall of the army base. I took the opportunity as an honor, and executed the mural between assigned guard duties and patrols. This had apparently earned me some credit with my fellow soldiers, and also opened up many an interesting conversation about the Bible, Jacob, and even Yeshua.

Being on duty for close to a month with a group of people leaves a lot of time together for conversation, as there is really not much else to do. My unit was made up of fellow

Jews, each one being from a different country on the planet, from Russia to Argentina to Iran to Morocco to Turkey to the USA and even Sweden. It was the actual fulfilling of the promise to Jacob at Beit El that his seed would be gathered from all the nations where they were scattered.

During off duty I would often spend time in the synagogue reading, praying and studying. This was some years ago and I was just becoming familiar with the Siddur. At Beit El, I was amazed to learn that one of the prayers in the Siddur, appearing several times, states, *May our eyes behold your return unto Zion in mercy, blessed are you o LORD, who returns his dwelling presence to Zion.*” This is prayed daily by orthodox Jews in synagogues around the planet.

I found the prayer so inspiring that one night, while guarding the walls of Beit El in the wee hours, I came up with a tune that I began singing under the same stars that our father Jacob, who was to become Israel, gazed upon from this very place. I was patrolling high above the base as a watchman upon its walls, tapping out the tune on my M-16 rifle. “*Ve techezeina eineinu b’shuvcha l’Zion b’rachamim. Baruch ata Adonai, ha machzir shechinato l’Zion.*” (Later, I

would sing that song with my guitar, and it would become a popular song of worship in Messianic congregations in Israel and elsewhere. It was also recorded professionally and sold as a cut on a CD available to Israelis.)

One day I found myself on the duty roster to guard the gate of Beit El with another soldier. My partner-in-arms turned out to be a very religious orthodox Jew named Moshe (Moses). He had heard that I was a believer in Yeshua, and simply could not wait to get at me. He started in almost immediately, not considering that the two of us would spend the next twelve hours together on duty.

“How can you accept the idea of the Messiah coming and going away and coming back again?!” Moshe said in Hebrew. “That is not Judaism, that is Christianity! Our *Mashiach* will come once.”

I looked at him, thinking of my newly acquired knowledge of the Siddur, and said, “Moshe, you are a religious Jew. Do you pray with the Siddur?”

“Of course,” he replied, “every day”.

I went on, “Do you *think* about what you are praying?”

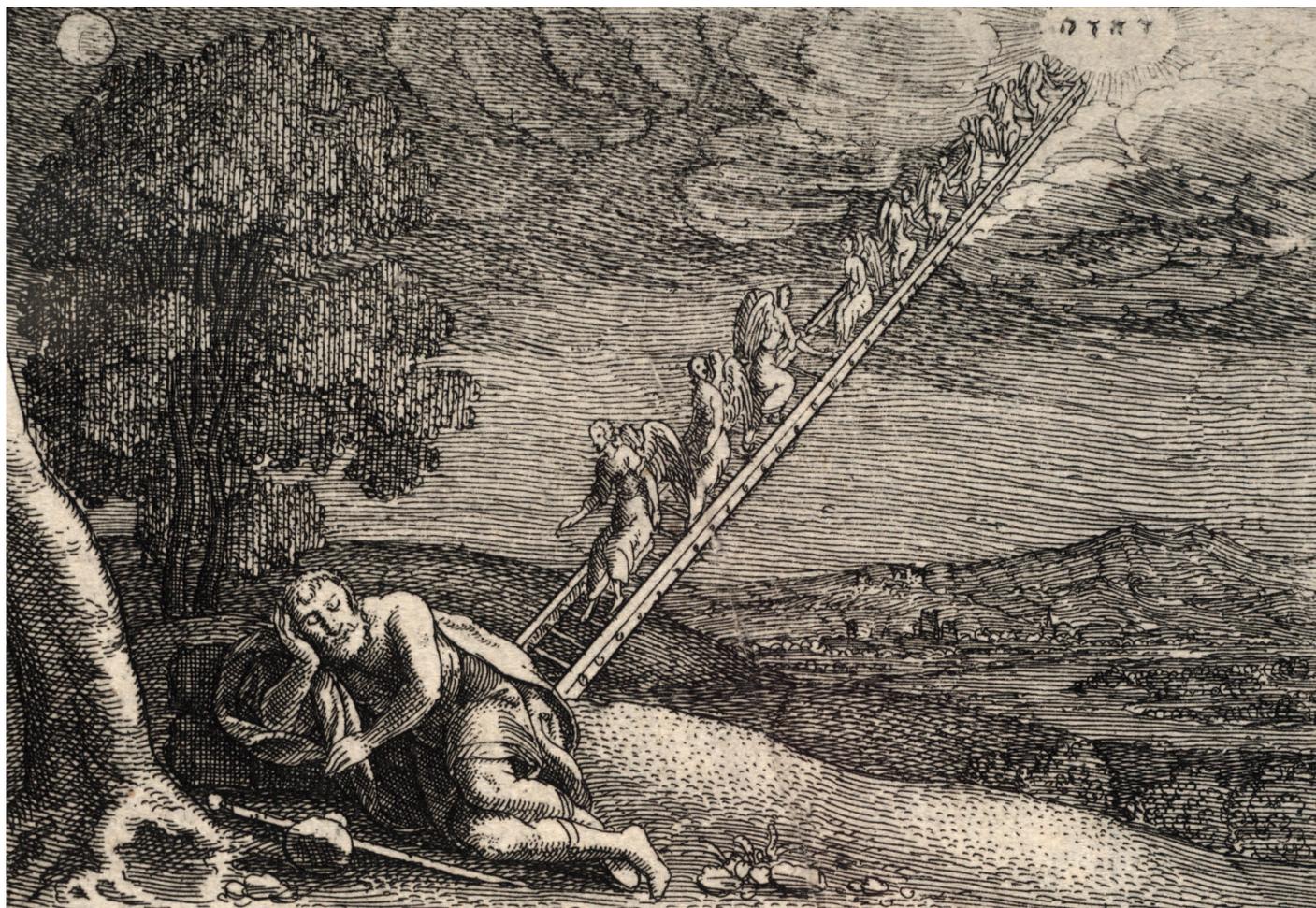
He looked at me a bit puzzled, and replied, “What are you trying to say?”

“You pray, ‘May our eyes behold your return unto Zion.’ *Return?*” I emphasized that word. I leaned forward into his face saying, “He *went away?* And he will *return?*”

Moshe was dazzled with new insight, straight from the Jewish prayer book that has been prayed for many, many generations of our people.

Needless to say, the rest of our long guard duty was passed in lively, friendly, passionate and fruitful discussion there at the gates of Beit El.

The Siddur is a treasury of deep and moving prayer and wisdom, of which most are taken from the Bible. It not only connects us with the God of Israel, it also connects us with our fathers who prayed during the many centuries of awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem and all of Israel. Many ancient prayers originate to the days of Yeshua. But it is also a treasure where there are hidden pearls speaking of Yeshua the Messiah. These pearls are just waiting to be uncovered and brought to light. ●



Jacob's ladder, by Wenceslas Hollar



## The Institution of the Synagogue and its Impact on Early Messianic Judaism

*Joseph Shulam*

During the era of the Second Temple period, the synagogue was an established institution in the Jewish community in both the land of Israel and in the diaspora. It was the place where the people assembled for the divine service. The synagogue also served as the center for all the community's cultural and religious activities. As Jews returned from the Babylonian and Persian exiles, they brought a new approach to the religion of their ancient forefathers. The diaspora was instrumental in developing a religion that centered on the community experience. During the First Temple Period, the levitical priesthood and the Temple were the exclusive centers of religious activity.

After the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent diaspora, the Word of God – the text of the Torah – became the most significant instrument for discerning the will of

the Almighty. The priesthood and the urim and tumim were replaced by the text of the Torah and the Prophets, which became the means by which a man could know what God required of him. We can see the signs of these changes in the book of Nehemiah, chapter 8. Ezra and the Priests read the Torah with the intent to obey it upon their return from the Babylonian exile. This knowledge and understanding of the Word of God became central in the Jewish community experience during the Second Temple Period. In Nehemiah the birthplace of the synagogue as the place of gathering for the main purpose of public reading and hearing the Word of God is found.

In what is commonly called the “Old Testament” there is no mention or hint of such an institution as the synagogue.



Capernaum Synagogue, photo by Israel-Tourism

The synagogue is strictly a Second Temple Period institution. By the time of Yeshua, however, it was already fully grown and developed. It is interesting to note that the Apostles recommend that even gentiles who believe in Yeshua attend the synagogue on the Sabbath day in order to hear “Moses” being read publicly.<sup>I</sup>

There is also a basic difference between the Temple worship and worship in the synagogue. The Temple is an innately holy institution that receives its holiness by virtue of the fact that God dwells therein and it houses the holy implements of God. The synagogue has no such holiness attributed to it. It is a place to conduct “public business.” The significance of the synagogue was in its regard as the assembly of the local Jewish community, giving expression to the civic and communal spirit of the people of that community. The word “synagogue” itself means “a gathering place.” It served as the rallying-point of the community in the land of Israel and in the diaspora.

By the beginning of the first century C.E., synagogues existed in most of the cities and villages of the land of Israel. The Gospels witness that there were synagogues in Nazareth, Capernaum, elsewhere in the Galilee, and in Jerusalem.

Josephus mentions synagogues in Tiberias, Dor, and Caesarea Maritima, while Philo of Alexandria says that there were many synagogues in Alexandria and in Rome. The book of Acts speaks of synagogues in Damascus, Antioch, and Salamis in Cyprus, Iconium, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth. Archaeologists have found inscriptions in Greek from Mount Ophel in Jerusalem, Corinth, Korazin, and Capernaum. The Jerusalem Talmud also speaks to a multitude of synagogues in Jerusalem.<sup>II</sup>

The origin of the synagogue is sometimes attributed to the Babylonian Exile and texts are brought from Ezekiel<sup>III</sup> and Jeremiah<sup>IV</sup> to substantiate this position. However, according to Prof. S. Safrai,<sup>V</sup> these texts do not have any connection with the institution of the synagogue. The synagogue was established during the third century B.C.E. for the main purpose of reading the Torah and teaching it to the people.

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II P.T. Megillah 3I, 73d

III Ezek. 11:16: “Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.”

IV Jer. 39:8: “the house of the people.”

V S. Safrai, *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Van Gorcum / Fortress Press 1987), 909-911.

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I See Acts 15:19-21.

It was as much an institution in the land of Israel as it was in the diaspora. The evidence shows that synagogues existed in Jerusalem side by side with the Temple and were not a replacement of the Temple following its destruction. The New Testament evidence supports this position. Thus we read in Acts 15:21, “from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogue.” Josephus and Philo further support the evidence from archaeological and Tanakhic sources that the main purpose for which people gathered in the synagogue was to read and study the Torah. We see in Luke 4 that Yeshua read from the Prophets in the synagogue in Nazareth and then sat down to expound on the text and explain its meaning.

The New Testament is consistent with evidence that other Jewish sources present, of the activities that took place in the synagogues of the first century.<sup>VI</sup> In the Theodotus inscription we read: “Theodotus the son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagogus, son of the archisynagogus and grandson of the archisynagogus built the synagogue for the reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments...”<sup>VII</sup> This inscription stands as unprejudiced evidence of the fact that synagogues were built for the purpose of the “reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments.”

What Yeshua and the Apostles did in the synagogues comes from the overwhelming evidence of New Testament scripture that they read from the Torah and taught or expounded upon its meaning to the crowd:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. (Mt. 4:23)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Mt. 9:35)

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”— That they might accuse Him. (Mt. 10:9-10)

And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? “And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?” (Mt. 13:54-56)

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, “Let *us* alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God! (Mk. 1:21-24)<sup>VIII</sup>

And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. (Mk. 3:1)

And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this, which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! (Mk. 6:2)<sup>IX</sup>

The New Testament speaks of the synagogue as a community meeting place. In fact, the letter to the Hebrews gives a warning to the readers “not to neglect to meet together”, (Hebrews 10:25.) The Greek word used here for “meet” is *ἐπισυναγωγῆναι*. In the New Testament the word “church” or *ἐκκλησία* is not used as a “place” but as a people or a community. The word *συναγωγή* is often used as a place of meeting.

It is my opinion that looking into the New Testament more closely will reveal the distinction today between the “church” and the “synagogue.” It is also my opinion that this difference is the key to understanding the relationship

VI T.B. Megillah 29a; P.T. Megillah 4, 75a, Philo, *De Vita Moses* II, 215-6; *De Opificio Mundi* 128; Josephus, *Contra Apion* 2.175.

VII R. Weill, *La cité de David* I (1920), 1ff; T. Reinach, “L’inscription de Theodotos,” in *REJ* 71 (1920), 46-56; CII no. 1404.

VIII The word “synagogue” appears several times in this chapter (cf. verses 21, 23, 29, 39).

IX We see the same context also in Luke 4:15 as well as other texts, reflecting the fact that Yeshua visited the synagogues in the Galilee to “teach” from the Word of God.

between the *ἐκκλησία* and the *συναγωγή*.<sup>X</sup> These two institutions were not mutually exclusive; they had a symbiotic relationship. The *ἐκκλησία* was “people”, and in its most common usage the *συναγωγή* was the place of worship. The *ἐκκλησία* could worship anywhere and there were times when it worshiped in the *συναγωγή* together with members of the Jewish community, who were not followers of Yeshua.

To demonstrate this point let us look at the letter of Jacob (James). We read in chapter 2:1-8:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well.

An analysis of this text from the letter of Jacob (James) reveals some interesting facts. The people who are addressed are followers of the Lord Yeshua our Messiah. They have an “assembly” – the Greek word is *συναγωγήν ὑμῶν* – “your synagogue.” The word *συναγωγή* is used here in its first century Jewish context.<sup>XI</sup> In the same “gathering”/ “synagogue” there are believers and non believers: “Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called.”?

The most common use of the word “church” today is for a building – not for a people or for a gathering of the community. In the New Testament, the word church never means a “building,” nor “an institution,” or “an organization” – it always means “a people.” The word for the gathering of

the saints in the New Testament is “synagogue.”<sup>XII</sup> Note that there is no terminology of “going to church” or “worshiping in church” in the New Testament. When the writer of the letter to the Hebrews wants to encourage the readers not to forsake their assembly he uses the word “*epi-synagogen*”<sup>XIII</sup>

Here are texts in the New Testament describing what believers did when gathered together in the context of the synagogue:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:43-46)

So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose nickname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, “You are beside yourself!” Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, “It is his angel.” Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. (Acts 12:12-16)

Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the

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XII See the previous footnote and the list of references there for the use of the word “synagogue.”

XIII See Heb. 10:25: μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς ἔθος τισίν, ἀλλὰ παρακαλοῦντες, καὶ τοσοῦτω μᾶλλον ὅσω βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσιν τὴν ἡμέραν.

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X The word synagogue appears 61 times in the Nestle Aland edition of the Greek New Testament.

XI Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (eds.), *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic domains*: “Synagogue.”

next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. (Acts 20:7-11)

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Cor. 14:26)

Examine what the believers of the first century did when they gathered together.

- They prayed.
- They broke bread together.
- They reported the miracles that God had done for them.
- They sang songs and psalms.
- They gathered money for the poor saints of Judaea.

The Jewish believers in Jerusalem also went to the Temple to pray. Paul was purified in the Jerusalem Temple from a vow he had taken, and he also offered sacrifices. The picture that the New Testament gives of the practices of believers when they gathered together and how they worshiped is not so different from the Jews who did not believe in Yeshua. What most evangelicals practice in their congregations today is very close to the things that happen in the synagogue. In the synagogue people pray, study the Word of God, give of their means, and sing. Are these not the very same things that people do in the Protestant and Evangelical churches today?

In the Second Temple Period there were two main models for worship and service to God. The standard model of the Torah was the "temple" and "priestly" model. In this model, the individual worshiper is dependent on the "temple" and the "priest" who links the worshiper to God. In this model there is a "holy precinct" which has innate holiness attributed to it. In order to have a "temple" you must have something that gives it "physical holiness." The buildings are holy, as are the tools and instruments of worship and service, and the priests who serve are also holy. The worshiper who goes to the temple has very little to do himself. The priest does the major part of the "work"/"service."

The synagogue, on the other hand, is the "assembly of the people." Each person can worship for himself. Each person can know the will of God by studying the Torah. Each person is equal to the person standing or sitting next to him. Each person can be a leader of the congregation and serve before the Lord. The centerpiece of holiness is the Torah itself and there is no need for a "relic" or a mystical presence to provide a cover of "holiness." The occasion and the people are holy in the synagogue and not the buildings or the precinct. The synagogue is a place – it has no ecclesiology. The people who gather there and make up the community are the "people of God" and the community! In the synagogue the community is the important element and the structure of the community is designed to function in every aspect of life, not only in "worshiping God." Because in Judaism there is no division between the common/mundane and the "spiritual," everything from the education of the children to the burial of the dead becomes a part of the community concern, i.e., the synagogue.

Eight pillars have kept the Jewish community alive even during the darkest of dark periods of Jewish history:

- Mikveh (for family purity laws)
- Torah schooling for children (Heder)
- Torah adult education (Beit Midrash)
- The soup kitchen (Beit Tamchui)
- The burial society (Hevra Kaddisha)
- Alms giving to the poor (Tzedaka)
- Slaughter House (for slaughtering kosher meat)
- Beit Din (a court for settling grievances in the community)

When we talk about New Testament ecclesiology, we should look at the community of the followers of Yeshua in light of the synagogue. The "ekklesia" did the following things – which churches today are just beginning to understand and implement, praise the Lord!

- They studied: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."
- They ate together and worshipped God: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."
- They took care of their poor by sharing their wealth: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common."
- They gave of their money for the poor.<sup>XIV</sup>

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XIV See 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9; Rom. 15:27.

We do not know much about the burial practices of the early church, but we do know that they had some organization for burial of their members. We can learn this from the story of Ananias (Acts 5). After he died the Word says: “And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.”

The early church’s function was nothing less than a synagogue. But it was also much more than a synagogue because it had additional dimensions provided by the Holy Spirit. These were related to the differences provided by faith in Yeshua and by the inclusion of the gentiles into the family of God’s children. These two areas of difference make the church of the New Testament much more than a manmade institution, like the pharisaic synagogue.

We should not forget that the synagogue is not a Torah. The Torah knows of no such institute as a synagogue. The Jewish community established the synagogue, without a direct command from God. If the synagogue has any divine sanction it was received *a posteriori*. When God poured out on the early church His Holy Spirit and opened His gates to the nations, the community of followers of Yeshua changed. Outwardly, the public gatherings and the functioning of the early church was no different than the synagogue, but inwardly these two new elements were greatly different and brought with it some problems.

If we look at the ecclesiology of the early church in the categories of sociology and theology, on both of these grounds similarity and great difference exist. The similarity of the early church and the synagogue is in “form” and “style.” The difference between the two is in theology and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which have enabled the church to communicate with God and serve the community with God’s power delivered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The synagogue was an important institution in the life of Yeshua the Messiah and in the life of the early church. But the question must now be asked: Do the Torah and the Pharisees (who put themselves as the guardians of the Torah) have any authority for us as followers of Yeshua the Messiah? This question could have some interesting answers if we ignore one very important passage from the words of Yeshua: “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (Mt. 23:1-3). Do these words of Yeshua have any meaning for us today? And if they do, how do they apply since Judaism and Christianity have developed seemingly beyond recognition from the reality of the first

century? These questions are not easily dismissed without major compromise of the respect the Word of God deserves.

The seat of Moses was a physical seat stationed in the synagogue – it can be compared to a pulpit in the church. The seat of Moses was where the Rabbi would sit when he explained the Torah and made halachic rules. Whatever these words of Yeshua mean, it is clear that they do give the Pharisees of the first century, at least, the authority to interpret the Scriptures in some binding way. In his doctrine Yeshua was a Pharisee. He believed that angels existed, and in the resurrection from the dead. The strong words that Yeshua had for the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and in other discussions were not words directed toward an enemy. Yeshua’s criticism of the Pharisees was from someone who cares for the “company.” Yeshua criticized the Pharisees because he wanted to see them doing the right things for the right reasons and with the right motives. According to this text, Yeshua believed that the Pharisees were teaching the true interpretation of the Torah – but they were not doing it for the right reasons.

The implications of the understanding of this text for the Messianic Jewish Movement are far-reaching. If Yeshua is giving the Pharisees the right to interpret Scripture with authority, it means that when they or their descendants interpret the Torah, their interpretation of halacha (because Yeshua said that his followers should **do** what they are told by them) has some meaning for us today. These people, who set the tone for faith, morality, and Jewishness today in modern Israel, are descendants of the Pharisees. They are the Jewish Orthodox community. The members of the Messianic Movement in America have attached themselves to the more “Reform” expression of Judaism because most of the Jews in the movement have come from a “Reform” background. It is my opinion that the “Reform” movement today is comparatively equivalent to the Sadducees, rather than to the Pharisees of the first century C.E. If the Messianic Movement wants to remain a Jewish movement, the model for worship and for expression of our faith in Jewish terms should come from the more traditional and more authentic Jewish community. This, of course, goes without question in Israel, where the majority of God believing Jews are Orthodox. The “Reform” and “Conservative” Jews in Israel are a minority and they are somewhat in the same situation as the Messianic Movement as far as civil rights are concerned. When we are talking about having Messianic synagogues and discuss the question of tradition, style, and interpretation of Scripture, should we not hear what Yeshua was teaching his followers in Matthew 23?

Note also that there is no record in the Word of God that the Apostles, the Elders, or the members of the church in Jerusalem or Corinth, Ephesus, Smyrna, or Rome, attended the local Baptist, Pentecostal, or Presbyterian churches. We do have record that the believers, Jews and Gentiles, attended the synagogue of their choice even after they were cast out of a few such places of worship. It was the custom of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, to attend the synagogue every Sabbath. The Book of Acts gives us ample evidence that this is what he did, even when he was away from home, and when he came into a new city.<sup>XV</sup> How would the Jews of the First Century have allowed the Apostle Paul to come into their synagogue looking “Christian”? Most particularly if he was dressed in a brown habit with a hood hanging on his back and a large olive wood cross on his chest. Can you imagine such a thing? The Jews invited him to read from the Torah and “reason with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead.” This happened only because the Apostle Paul looked like a Jew, acted like a Jew, and spoke Torah like a Jew.

Most of the contacts and conversions of the Apostle Paul were made through the synagogues. Believers were invited to preach and reason with the Jews about the Scriptures and what they taught about the Messiah. This was the case in Pisidian Antioch, as well as in Ephesus, Corinth, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Berea, Thessalonica, etc.<sup>XVI</sup> The “early church” was in their meetings and fellowships a synagogue. There is ample evidence both in the New Testament and in the Talmudic sources that Jewish believers and Jews who did not believe in Yeshua continued to worship together until well into the second century C.E. It is well established that what is called “Birkat haMinim” in the Amida prayer was composed after the Bar Kochba rebellion precisely for this reason. This prayer was composed to separate and expose those who believe in Yeshua as the Messiah and the Son of God from the crowd in the synagogue. There would be no need to compose such a prayer if the Jewish followers of Yeshua did not attend the synagogue with their “unfaithful” Jewish brothers. The relationship between the church and

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XV See Acts 17:1-2.

XVI Acts 13:14ff, “But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.”

the synagogue became complicated because the synagogue rejected the Jewish followers of Yeshua – not because the Jewish believers wanted to leave. The church has repaid the synagogue for this rejection a thousand times over with such animosity and hate that our fathers and mothers were sent into the gas chambers which smoked next to church steeples during the beautiful fall, and summer, and springs of Europe.

Although the synagogue did expel the followers of Yeshua from the Jewish community, the question to ask is; how should we make our way back to the synagogue and bring Yeshua home? Or even a more basic question is should we even return back to the synagogue or just join the “church” of our choice? In making the decision to join a church, we Jewish believers continue to propagate the myth that when a Jew believes in Jesus he stops being a Jew and his seed is lost from the commonwealth of Israel.

With the restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, we have a sign from God that He does not want the Jewish nation to be deleted from the face of His earth. If God’s purpose is truly to restore His people we must ask ourselves: What should the role of the church be in promoting and helping restore the Jewishness of the Good News that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel and the world? How can we – as Jewish believers – help bring unity and biblical faith to our Gentile brothers and sisters who are captive to their traditions just as we are of ours?

In the first century C.E. the synagogue was the place where Jews and God-fearing Gentiles gathered to discover the will of God, through the reading of the Torah.<sup>XVII</sup> The synagogue was where Paul met the Jews and the Gentiles who were interested in God and in His Word. Today, after traveling in more than 40 countries and teaching about the Jewishness of the New Testament, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is working in Gentile brothers and sisters all over the world who are looking again towards the synagogue and the Jewish followers of the Messiah. They want to rediscover their own connection and faith in the God of Israel and in the historical Jesus whose name in Hebrew is Yeshua. In the first century the synagogue provided the stage and meeting place for the early church in the diaspora. It was the only place where both Jews and non-Jews could go every Sabbath to hear the Word of God the Torah being read. It was the only place where followers of Yeshua could fellowship with people who were not “pagan” and to be among people who believed in the One and only God of Israel who created the world and everything that is in it.

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XVII See: Acts 15:19-21.

In the twenty-first century I believe that the Messianic synagogue, if it is authentic, can again become a bridge and conduit for both Jews and Christians. The Messianic synagogue can help both Jews and Christians find common ground and a path to return to our true faith and common heritage. God has preserved both the church and the synagogue for a reason. I believe that this is for the restoration of both peoples into His will and goal for all mankind. The church without the synagogue is only a shadow of itself, an empty shell that is easily swayed into idolatry rather than turning to the knowledge of God and Yeshua His Son. The synagogue without Yeshua is also a form without the true substance of God's Spirit and without any biblical means for atonement. These two great historical institutions need each other desperately – and the Messianic Jews are the bridge between them.

The challenge of the messianic movement today is not with the use of “semantics” and outward forms, but in building biblical communities in which the expression of Jewishness is authentic, true, and traditional so that both the Jewish community and the church can identify with us as Jews who believe and follow Yeshua as our Messiah.

I frankly do not see much hope in my generation that this challenge will be met. My generation of Messianic Jewish leaders is like the generation wandering in the wilderness. While we were educated and raised in Egypt we can build the infrastructure for those who follow us so they will not be a part of the Christian denominational world accommodating the divisions and creeds of those who have traditionally hated us. We can do this together with educational institutions by building congregations which are authentic and independent which will train the next generations of leaders to be 100% Jews and 100% followers of Yeshua.

I must say in closing, already many gentile Christians have realized these concepts and are giving of himself or herself to see them realized. If the Messiah Yeshua does not come back soon, the next generation of leaders in the Messianic Movement will hopefully be different, better, more authentic, and better educated in Judaism and in Bible than my own present generation of leaders. Let us all pray that God's plan will be known and accomplished for both the church and the synagogue because ultimately we are one in the Messiah as He and the Father are One. ●





## Netivyah Building Project

[www.netivyah.org](http://www.netivyah.org)

Praise God we have outgrown our old meeting place. For more than 10 years we have been struggling with legal battles and bureaucratic hurdles and in November 2012 we have finally received the building permit from the Jerusalem City Hall. The building was built in the 1920's and had no iron in the foundations or walls. Now we are strengthening the building with new standards of construction and making it earthquake safe.

The main part of the building project is the expansion of the auditorium and converting it to a typical Synagogue style. Like every new construction in Israel we have to build a safe-room (shelter) on each floor. The building will contain new offices, classrooms, meeting rooms, a library, and an additional fellowship hall.

Building is now in progress. Last month we actually started the construction work and it is progressing with full speed ahead. Our old beloved building is mostly dismantled and only the front and side walls facing the streets are still standing. The walls are held by big metal scaffolding. This week the first cement foundations were poured into place.

We also succeeded to purchase the shops that occupied the ground floor of our building. We now own the whole

building, but we have a shortage of funds due to using half a million dollars of the construction fund. We really did not have much choice because having the shops below us, would have caused endless litigation and delay. We have full confidence in the Lord that this building will be a big blessing to us in Netivyah, but much more important than this it will be a big blessing to the City of Jerusalem and to the citizens of Jerusalem as well as the Jewish and the non-Jewish Disciples of Yeshua around the world. The physical plant is only the box, but even the box is important and it is a window for the worth of what is inside it. We ask you to support this project both with your material means but above all with prayer. Pray for God to bless everyone who is working on this project, our builders both Jews and Arab workers, our planners and engineers, and above all the City of Jerusalem.

In the Words of Nehemiah as the answer to opposition:

“So I answered them, and said to them, “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build...” (Nehemiah 2:20) ●





## News from Netivyah

*Joseph Shulam*

We need to say a special blessing for publishing this Teaching from Zion. It has been a year since we have published the last Teaching from Zion magazine. There are many reasons why, but the main reason is that our dear Udi Zofef who is the editor has been very ill with cancer. Now we are finally beginning to publish the Teaching from Zion again and we hope that we will be able to keep up the pace for at least two issues per year and if we can more than two issues per year.

The Netivyah building located in Narkis Street in Jerusalem is now under construction. The old building has been taken down with the exception of the two walls that face Narkis Street and Ussishkin Street. We had to keep these facades because the City of Jerusalem wants to preserve the nature of the street. Most of the buildings on Ussishkin Street are 80 – 100 years old and many important people lived on this street and in the neighborhood. The congregation is meeting in our offices. Fortunately we had purchased a

few years ago two offices next door to our existing office and now they serve as a meeting place for the congregation. The expectation is that the construction of our building on Narkis Street will be finished in about a year and a half. We appreciate very much the prayers and contributions of so many of you for the building project. We are still in need of nearly \$500,000 in order to pay for and finish the building. So, please continue to pray for us and to make gifts of love for the Netivyah building that will be the first ever Synagogue for Jewish Disciples of Yeshua.

When I say “Jewish Disciples” I don’t mean to exclude non-Jewish Disciples from the Synagogue, but I do mean to say that the character and the culture and the liturgy will be 100% Jewish and 100% true to Yeshua. I realize that this might sound strange to many Christians. Christianity has divided into thousands of sects and denominations and most of them are actually connected to the traditions and



departures from Scripture of the Roman church and church fathers. We are committed to the First Century Disciples of Yeshua as we read the books written by them and for them in the pages of what is commonly called “The New Testament.” We believe that the only way to walk in God’s truth and in His Spirit is to return back to the original “blue print” and restore Yeshua as both Lord and King of God’s Kingdom and also to restore a healthy attitude toward all the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation.

The work of the Food Distribution Program (or as we used to call it, “The Soup-Kitchen,”) is going strong. We have just increased the program with another 30 seniors many of whom are survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. At present we give out food cards to 180 families that calculates to at least three times that many people. We are giving food cards now because without a building we don’t have kitchen or storage facilities. So, we give a type of credit card that is loaded with up to 400 NIS (about 120 US dollars) to people who have a family and they can use it in most of the supermarkets in the city to buy food. We have many families who are in deep poverty and in need of food from every background imaginable. The Municipality of Jerusalem’s Department of Social Welfare screens all the cases and recommends them to

us. The single most important facet of this Food Distribution Program is the obedience to the commandment of the Word of God to care for the poor Saints of Jerusalem. This is the main reason that Paul was collecting funds from Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. Paul plainly states in Romans 15:

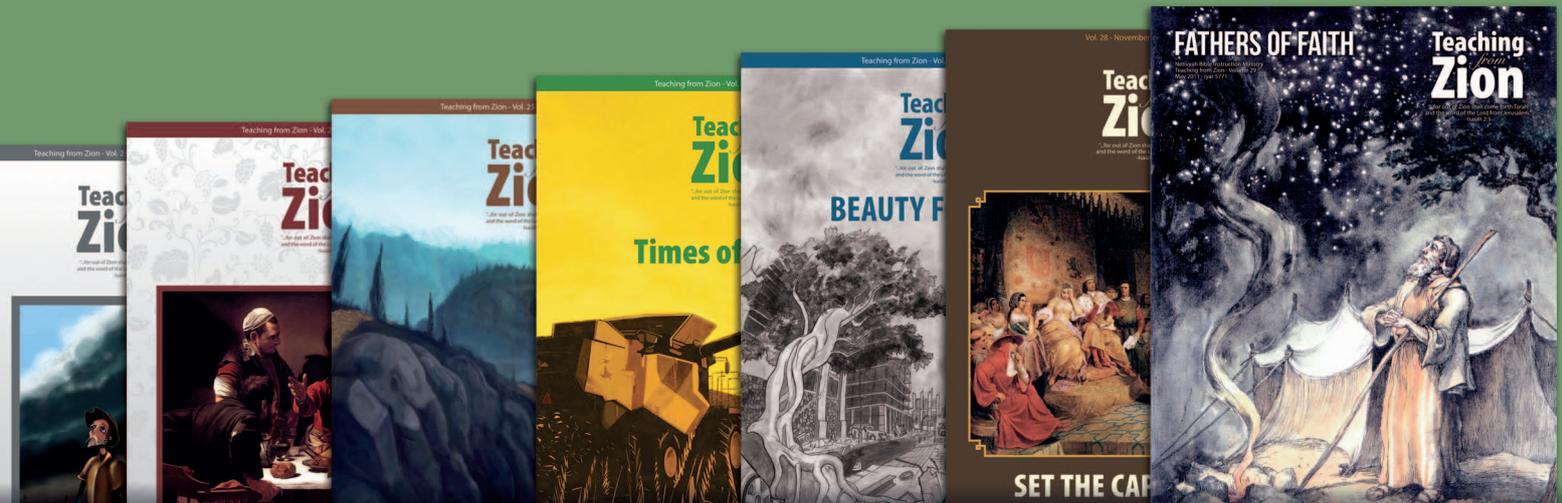
“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit,” (Rom. 15:25-28)

Our congregation in Jerusalem is going through a transitional period, both with the building construction, and with the congregational leadership transferring to the younger generation. We need your prayers and your support in every way so that this world wide influential service can continue to grow and do even more for Israel and for the Jewish people.

God bless you from Zion and bring you the peace of Jerusalem. ●

If you enjoyed reading this issue of *Teaching from Zion*, you are welcome to subscribe online and we will send you a package with the latest volumes by mail, free of charge.

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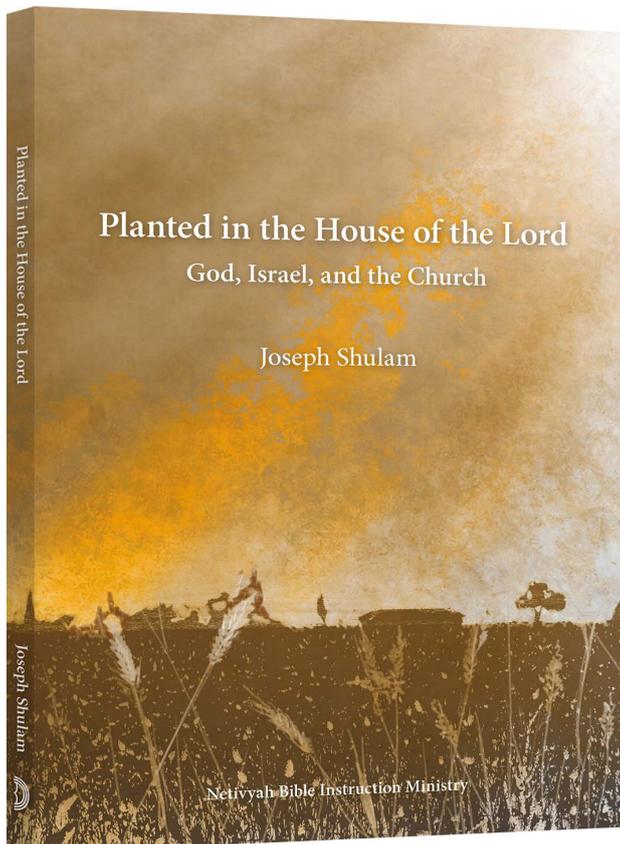


## Planted in the House of the Lord: God, Israel, and the Church

*Joseph Shulam*

This book is a must-read for all thinking believers who have ever asked themselves questions like the following: Who are God's people? Are the Jews still the chosen people, and if so, what is the Church? What are the spiritual callings of Israel and the Church, and have they been fulfilled yet? How does monotheism work out with the Trinity? Where can one find grace and truth in the Torah, and what did Yeshua (Jesus) say about the Written and Oral Law?

These pages investigate these questions and many others. Written from the unique perspective of Israeli Messianic Jews, it faces these old-age debates armed with the truth of the Bible and its Jewish context. It addresses the Jewish task of bringing monotheism to the world, the importance of Jerusalem, and the interconnected relationships between God, Israel, and the Church. Along the way we discover vital biblical models for identity, community, election, and lives of faith and good deeds. *Planted in the House of the Lord* is a reader-friendly book that explores the relationships God has with his people and their complementary roles in his great plan to redeem creation from idolatry and sin and to restore his kingdom to earth.



*Since its release in 2011, *Planted in the House of the Lord* has enjoyed resounding success among Messianic Jews and Christians all over the world. It has been the topic of seminars and articles and has been highly praised by its readers. It has already been translated into Dutch, German, Hebrew, Portuguese, Finnish, Japanese and Korean.*

*Order online for \$15 (including shipping)*  
[www.netivyah.org](http://www.netivyah.org)