

FATHERS OF FAITH

Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry
Teaching from Zion - Volume 29
May 2011 - Iyar 5771

Teaching *from* Zion

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



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Special thanks goes to Elhanan ben Avraham for allowing us to use several of his beautiful biblical paintings.

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* This is my last TFZ. It has been a pleasure being able to write for all of you, our readers, and to get to know some of you over the years. I wish you all many blessings and success on your journeys of life and faith. -Elizabeth Wakefield

** Pillars of Zion is on vacation.

A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

“The deeds of fathers are a sign for the sons” is an ancient rabbinic saying, relating primarily to the educational responsibility of the parents to set a good example for their children. This proverb also holds a deeper meaning when it becomes one of the many guidelines for the Jewish sages in their attempt to learn important principles of God’s kingdom from biblical stories. In this context the deeds of the fathers become shadows of future events that will occur in the history of their sons, the people of Israel.

Rabbinic exegesis gives special attention to the hints found in the ancient texts about the salvation of Israel, presuming that the secret of redemption is the main theme hidden between the lines and that once we put together the huge jigsaw puzzle of biblical sources in the right way we can expose this secret. In this way biblical figures emerge from the frame of their local stories and become part of the big picture of the Redeemer. For example, it is very common for our sages to draw parallel lines between the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt and that of the salvation to come and to see Moses as a pre-figure of the Messiah. Not only Moses, but also all the actors that perform on the Old Testament stage take part in the show. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph, Samson, King David, and King Solomon, to mention just a handful of prominent figures, all become “aspects” of the Messiah. This means that not only their character, but also the events of their lives become an allegory of sorts, a shadow of things that will come to light as Messianic history unfolds.

It is extremely important for New Testament readers to be aware of this very Jewish tendency to excavate treasures

of knowledge and to search for deep insights in the Holy Scriptures in this manner, sometimes at the expense of the straightforward meaning of the text. To those who are remote from this way of thinking, it may seem anything from adventurous to suspicious and dangerous. Yet the fact is that the authors of the New Testament were highly trained in the same school of thought and interpretation as their contemporaries and drew their spiritual water from the same wells that fed the Jewish Messianic idea. It is therefore a matter of great interest for us to explore the lives and deeds of the Fathers (and Mothers) of our faith in order to grant us a wider and deeper view of the New Testament’s concept of salvation. Abraham, whose picture graces the cover of this issue, is a perfect illustration of the meeting point between the redemption story in the Old and New Testaments, being truly *“the father of all those who believe.”*

Besides the Messianic themes found in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, a careful exegesis from a more literary perspective can also reveal many important lessons for our own lives, as we learn from both the positive and negative examples of our ancestors in the faith. This issue of TFZ has chosen to examine some lesser-known or rarely studied aspects of certain biblical figures, in what at first glance, may seem to be an eclectic collection of characters and approaches. Yet we hope that these stories will give our readers strength and encouragement to hold fast to our faith and to strive to apply the important principles we learn from them to our own lives. May you be blessed with a summer of peace.

-The Editors

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REVEALED, CONCEALED, AND REVEALED AGAIN

A Messianic Narrative Hidden in the Story of Joseph

Nearly every child in the Western world is well acquainted with the colorful story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who is counted among the patriarchs of the Jewish nation and who has a unique place in its spiritual heritage. Fourteen chapters, over a quarter of the book of Genesis, are dedicated to his story, from the beginning to its “happy ending.”

The Bible does not reveal the lives of any of the other patriarchs to this extent and detail and in such an orderly record of their history. It is no wonder, therefore, that for the Jewish sages and interpreters of the Bible, Joseph became, alongside Moses and David, a prime model of a redeemer and that the events of his life drew important guidelines for Messianic history, from beginning to end. Consequently, it should be even less surprising that we find a dense network of allusions to the story of Joseph in the New Testament, which grants him a key role in its concept of salvation. This use

of the Joseph story also vividly illustrates the way the New Testament uses traditional Jewish hermeneutics.

In truth, Joseph’s name is hardly ever mentioned in the New Testament text, but when the reader digs in between the lines, he exposes the ends of strings that lead to his otherwise hidden presence. This fact should not be surprising either, for Joseph’s basic orientation is a person in hiding. For most of his “ministry,” from when he was a teenager to his becoming the mighty ruler of a great nation of Gentiles, there was a state of separation between him and his brothers, who must have assumed him dead. Even when they stood before him in Egypt without recognizing him, he still kept playing hide and seek with them and talking to them through an interpreter, as if he did not know their language. This part of Joseph’s story parallels the disturbed communication between Yeshua and most of the Jewish people today, as they see his foreign

Above: Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh’s Granaries, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1874

appearance, being clothed in an unfamiliar robe, and speaking to them in terms that they cannot possibly comprehend.

Indeed, when we read this story with the *remez* (the hidden hints within the text) interpretive method, as many of the sages in the post-Hellenistic period did, it is easy to see how the Messianic scenario of the New Testament echoes the Joseph narrative. Yeshua, as Joseph, is the chosen son who was sent by his father to check on his brothers. The brothers, who hate him for his delusions of grandeur, desire to get rid of him. They do, and in a purely natural perspective, this should have been the end of the story. Yet God had a different idea; He turned the evil plot of the brothers into the very agent of their salvation. “Now therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither. For God did send me before you to preserve life.”^I By creating the complex circumstances that led Joseph to his new position, God guaranteed the salvation of his people, even though they were unaware of the master plan all along, until Joseph decided to reveal himself to them.

The French Catholic thinker Blaise Pascal also noticed the parallels between Joseph and Yeshua: “Jesus Christ is characterized by Joseph. Being his father’s favorite son, he is sent by his father to check on his brothers, etc. Being without sin, he is sold by his brothers for twenty pieces of silver, and in this way becomes their master, their redeemer and savior of others, of the whole world – something that would not have happened without their intention to get rid of him and without the disgrace that they imposed on him.”^{II}

The similarity in situations is quite clear, but the parallels go far beyond these general plotlines of the story. In his book *Mashiach Ben Yoseph* (Messiah Son of Joseph),^{III} Elhanan Ben Avraham points out over seventy paragraphs in the New Testament that show deep and meaningful allusions to the story of Joseph. This massive presence clearly indicates the level of “midrash” in the New Testament text. Rather than repeat the book, this article will explore only one aspect of this wide and rich phenomenon and focus on one of the main symbols associated with both Joseph and Yeshua – the vine. This symbol will help illustrate some of the Messianic principles that the authors of the New Testament saw in the story of Joseph.

Let us first look into some source texts from the Hebrew Bible about the vine. The blessing of Jacob to his twelve sons first describes Joseph as a vine: “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even

a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall.”^{IV}

The Hebrew of this verse contains a meaningful wordplay that is a vital key for its Messianic exegesis. The word for “bough” is *ben*, which is also the Hebrew word for “son.” The word for “branches” is *banot*, which also means “daughters.” These terms actually picture the stem and the branches of an unspecified plant, which is commonly understood as a vine. A strong support for this reading comes from Psalm 80, which relates to Joseph in its opening and addresses God with the words, “Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock...”^V In this case “Joseph” is a title given to the flock, so it defines a collective entity called “Joseph” and not the individual person. This psalm also speaks of a vine, which is driven out of Egypt to be planted in God’s vineyard. Then, after great growth and expansion, just as in the case of the poetic parable of Isaiah 5, the vine has its fences broken. Here also the vine is given the same title “*ben*” – a son. The central theme of this Psalm is salvation; the people of Israel ask God to “shine his face” upon them and deliver them three times in its text. Verses 14-15 say, “Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son [vine] you have raised up for yourself.” In this text the vine represents Israel.

The bottom line of this discussion rests on these facts. The term *ben* has a double meaning of “son” and “branch” (more precisely “stem”), and the term *banot* also has a double meaning of “branches” and “daughters.” The title *banot* refers symbolically to the Gentile nations in some Messianic prophecies, such as the description of Israel (the bride) in the Song of Songs. “The daughters saw her, and blessed her.”^{VI} Psalm 72 ends its magnificent picture of the Messiah by saying, “All nations shall call him blessed.”^{VII} Both these texts use the same very particular Hebrew word for “blessed,” and putting them together with other verses that use the same terminology clearly gives the branches (*banot*) of the vine in Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 49 the flavor of “daughters” in the human sense of the word. It is a common phenomenon in Messianic language to describe God’s salvation plan in human and botanical terms that tell the same story.

In the light of this interpretation, we might gain a deeper understanding of what Yeshua says to his disciples in John 15:1-4. “I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, he purges, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken

I Genesis 45:5

II Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1976, p. 178.

III Ben Avraham, Elhanan. *Mashiach Ben Yoseph*. Jerusalem: Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, 2009.

IV Genesis 49:22

V Psalm 80:1

VI Song of Songs 6:9

VII Psalms 72:17

unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can you, except you abide in me.” This text leans heavily on Jacob’s blessing to Joseph. Yeshua is the *ben*, both in the sense of being the Son and in the sense of being the stem of the vine, the “True Vine,” as opposed to that which is only a parable. His disciples are the branches / “daughters.” This gives his saying much depth and a span that goes far beyond the place and the time of its utterance. Yeshua was not only talking to his Galilean disciples that were gathered around him, but also to all his disciples at any place and any time. The vital message here for any follower of Yeshua is that without the stem, through which the plant is fed clear and pure water from the springs of salvation, the branches will dry out and die. Paul also understood and expanded this message in his similar description in Romans that uses the same logic with the example of an olive tree that refers to Israel as its trunk and to the nations as its branches. This point is for all the nations as well. If they cut themselves off from the spiritual heritage of Israel, in which the Gospel is deeply rooted, there is no life for them.

There is another important hint to the story of Joseph in one of Yeshua’s well known parables, which is another calculated appearance of this biblical figure in a vineyard. *“Hear another parable: There was a certain master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and let it out to husbandmen and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the tenants took his servants and beat one and killed another and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first, and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him. Therefore, when the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do unto those tenants?”*

“They said unto him, ‘He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other tenants, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.’ Yeshua said unto them, ‘Did you never read in the scriptures, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”^{VIII}

This parable is based on three recognizable biblical texts from Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms. These three sources are interrelated in a way that makes it easy to understand why Yeshua talks about them simultaneously. He opens

VIII Matthew 21:33-42

with a direct quote from the parable of the vineyard in the beginning of Isaiah 5. In the same words the disappointed Lord is rhetorically asking what to do to his vineyard, which symbolizes Israel. There is no “happy ending” to that one. According to Isaiah 5, the Lord is going to utterly destroy the vineyard and leave its fences broken for all the beasts of the field (i.e. the gentile nations) to enter the desolate ground and keep it in ruins. There is no perspective for recovery whatsoever at any future time in Isaiah 5, which seems to prophesy a very grim future for Israel.

Yeshua’s version is more optimistic, however. He does not predict a total destruction of the vineyard, but rather a new shift of workers. The vineyard stays, but God is going to hire new tenants to do the job properly. According to a widely held Christian view, Yeshua Himself sowed the seeds of “Replacement Theology” here. Merely according to the text itself this would be a wrong observation, but it is not our aim to go any further into this delicate matter here. In any case, the point is that these new recruits who will do the job properly and bring God’s vineyard to fruitfulness are the followers of the Messiah, whether Jews or Gentiles. This understanding fits well with the prophet’s vision, *“And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.”*^{IX} Some people tend to read this prophecy rather simplistically and see its fulfillment in the shape of the many foreign workers that work in Israel, especially in agriculture. Yet this is not what the prophet meant; he referred to spiritual things that were planted in God’s fields and vineyards and to the role of the Gentiles in his plan of salvation.

Another direct allusion to the story of Joseph is hidden in verses 38-39 of this parable: *“But when the tenants saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him.”* This text echoes, nearly word for word, Genesis 37:18, *“And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, ‘Behold this dreamer comes. Come now therefore, and let us slay him and cast him into some pit...”*

Another recognizable source that is included in Yeshua’s parable is Psalm 118:22, *“The stone which the builders refused has become the cornerstone.”* The stone is a well known Messianic symbol. The Hebrew word *even* “stone” combines the words “father” and “son” in a way that they cannot be separated. This would be the strongest foundation for many sayings of Yeshua about the unity of the Father and the Son. The same stone is also present in Jacob’s blessing to Joseph in

IX Isaiah 61:5

Genesis 49:24, which refers to God as “*the shepherd, the stone of Israel.*” Thus, Psalm 118 adds another angle to the people of Israel’s rejection of salvation by saying that the dismissal of the Son is the dismissal of the Father.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Yeshua twice alludes to the story of Joseph when He hints at these very developments, the gathering of the nations and the new branches that grow and bear fruit in God’s vineyard. His use of the biblical story falls well within the framework of the Jewish hermeneutics of his contemporaries. The title *Mashiach Ben Yoseph* (the Messiah son of Joseph), which we have already mentioned, is one of two different titles commonly referring to the Messiah in the Midrash. The other one is *Mashiach Ben David* (Messiah son of David). Neither of these titles relates to a person. They both reflect different aspects of God’s plan of salvation, in accordance with the different and opposing descriptions of Messiah portrayed by the prophets- the exalted ruler on one hand and the lowly and underestimated figure of prophecies such as the famous Isaiah 53, on the other.

In short, *Mashiach Ben Yoseph* is a concept that contains important principles that operate in reality in Messianic history. Our sages formulated these principles as two different expressions that tell the same story. One talks about the Messiah being revealed and then concealed, to be revealed yet again in the latter days. The other principle is “descent for the sake of ascent.” Both of these definitions have a lot to do with the story of Joseph, which the sages took as a model for the savior. Joseph is revealed in the beginning of the story by his dreams of being the future ruler, for which his brothers become envious and hateful toward him. He is then concealed

from them for a time and reveals himself to them again in due time. When Genesis 39:1 says, “*And Joseph was brought down to Egypt,*” it is taken as a sign for the descent of Israel in the bad times of exile and persecution. The sages understood that this was not an accident, but rather a necessary part of the plan that was meant to open the way for the Gentiles to enter God’s kingdom. These same principles also exist in the story of Moses, the leading archetype of a savior. He too was rejected by his brothers when he first wanted to interfere in their business. He then went into forty years of exile in the desert, saving the seven “daughters” of the pagan priest Jethro before he was called again to go ahead and save his own people. (“*The last shall be first, and the first shall be last*”).^X The book of Revelation’s message to the seven Gentile churches also reflects these seven “daughters” (*banot*).

To conclude this short review of a very small portion of a huge puzzle, it is easy to see how all these principles work together in the Messianic scenario of the New Testament. It is also encouraging to know that we are currently living through the last phases of this scenario and are coming close to the reunion of the people of Israel with their long lost brother, who has been playing “hide and seek” with them for much too long. If we take the biblical story of Joseph as a precedent, we should understand that the initiative for this new revelation of the Savior will be all his, and it will happen when He can no longer “restrain himself” (Genesis 45:1). This reunion is not going to occur as a result of our own efforts, but in God’s own timing.

X Matthew 20:16

\$10

Mashiach
ben Yoseph
משיח בן יוסף



Elhanan ben Avraham

Elhanan ben Avraham

Mashiach ben Yoseph

Elhanan ben Avraham

This book by Elhanan ben Avraham gives a detailed, step-by-step comparison between the lives of Joseph the Patriarch and Yeshua of Nazareth. Both of them were the beloved sons of their fathers who were betrayed by their brothers, separated from their families, raised to greatness among the Gentiles, and eventually restored to their brothers to bring redemption both to the nations and salvation to their own people. (Of course, Yeshua’s restoration to his brothers and complete redemption of the world is still to come). The parallels with the story of Joseph bring great prophetic hope for the soon completion of the redemptive process through Yeshua the Messiah. This book will be beneficial for anyone who is interested in understanding the greatness of both Joseph the Patriarch and Yeshua’s purposes in the history of the Jewish people and the world as a whole.

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*Price includes shipping.



MARTYRDOM AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

In these days of turmoil all over the Middle East, it seems appropriate to re-examine the proper role of the believer in times of political unrest and when the laws of the government conflict with the laws of God and the dictates of one's conscience. This controversy that has engaged believers ever since the New Testament era stems partly from the apparent contradiction between two New Testament passages on this subject. In order to clarify this problem, we will first quote the relevant passages and then turn to the book of Daniel's perspective on this matter.

Romans 13:1-7 seemingly prescribes unequivocal obedience to political authorities with these words: *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment upon themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong,*

be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes. For the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes, pay taxes, if revenue, then revenue, if honor, then honor."

Part of the controversy with this passage concerns when exactly it was written and which Roman emperor was ruling at that time. Nevertheless, even the "good" Roman emperors, along with the rest of their peers, practiced idolatry, committed great sins, and made laws against God's moral standards. How then, can this passage demand absolute obedience to such rulers? Unfortunately, many "Christian" political and religious authorities have used this passage to allow them to commit terrible injustices and frighten their subjects out of opposing them. Without diving too deeply into the passage, let us briefly focus on verse 7, which is the key to the whole question. Paul's statement *"give everyone what you owe him"* obviously originates from the words of Yeshua in Matthew

22:21 in answer to the Pharisees' test question about paying taxes to Caesar, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." In other words, we owe both God and our earthly rulers obedience. The question that then remains is what happens when simultaneous obedience to both those powers becomes impossible.

The other relevant New Testament passages here appear in Acts 4:18-20 and 5:27-29. In both of them the Sanhedrin arrests Peter and the other apostles for preaching about Yeshua in the Temple. First we read, "Then they [the Sanhedrin] called them [the apostles] in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Yeshua. But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" The next time the apostles are arrested for preaching and have to defend themselves to the Sanhedrin, Acts says, "Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.' Peter and the other apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than men!'"

The apostles' famous answer became a rallying cry for all kinds of revolutions and various protest movements in history. It is very clear in the context of Acts that the apostles' chose correctly to continue preaching the Gospel, even though they had to defy the earthly authorities to do so, and this story was presented as a First Century model of "civil disobedience." These words mandate the important principle of placing obedience to God at the head of a believer's priorities, even if it means breaking the law of one's land. What is unfortunate, however, is that this principle has too often been twisted and misused for all kinds of worthy and unworthy earthly causes, which do not actually demand disobedience to the law of man in order to obey the Law of God. In the United States and other Western countries, where people tend to confuse their political rights with heavenly mandates, this principle has been misused for all sorts of atrocities, such as abortion clinic bombings, and other nicer causes, such as prayer in schools, the public display of nativity scenes, the 10 commandments, or other religious symbols, which are not demanded by God's Law. On the other hand, in other tragic situations, such as in Nazi Germany, most believers sat by idly and watched the government murder and destroy millions of innocent people because they feared to oppose the earthly powers.

How, therefore, is one to know when to stand up and actively oppose the policies of the government and when to obey the laws while praying for change? Let us examine the words of one great American thinker and user of these

principles, Martin Luther King Jr., on this issue. In April of 1963, King chose to go to Birmingham, Alabama, to lead a series of active protests for the sake of African-American civil rights, which had been promised by national law but withheld by certain states. These non-violent but still illegal protests led to his arrest and some time in jail for him, during which he wrote a famous treatise on non-violent civil disobedience called "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." He writes, "One may well ask: 'How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?' The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.'" "Unjust" may be a difficult term to define precisely in all circumstances, but the Bible at least clearly delineates what the Law of God demands from his people in worshipping Him alone in holiness (and all the laws that fall under that heading) and in walking in righteousness in our interactions with others (and all the commandments that fall under that category).

King followed the example of many biblical heroes and ancient martyrs as well as more modern activists and expanded his opposition to unjust laws to include active resistance through peaceful protests, boycotts, and sit-ins. In a totalitarian regime, civil disobedience can lead to martyrdom, and even in a representative democracy, obeying one's conscience over the laws of men brings consequences, just as King and many other activists experienced during their time in jail or sometimes through their deaths. Civil disobedience is never convenient and is often dangerous, but sometimes it is what the law of God commands. What men of peace like Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi discovered is that non-violent protests and civil disobedience can move mountains that thousands of suicide bombers could never even hope to crack.

The book of Daniel presents three examples of times when civil disobedience, even to the point of near martyrdom, became necessary, so we will now turn to examine it for guidance on this important subject. The book of Daniel portrays its central character as an enigmatic figure, a young Judean nobleman who was carried away captive from his homeland, perhaps forcibly sterilized, and then placed into a training program to become a court official for the most powerful pagan king of his time. We are told nothing of what happened to the rest of his family, but there in Babylon this young man whom the Hebrew text describes as a "child" (*yeled*) had to begin his life anew, uprooted from

everything he had ever known. Although essentially a slave with no rights of his own in a foreign land, Daniel did not succumb to the depression, grief, or “culture shock” that he had every excuse to suffer. Who knows how many broken dreams and hopes he had left behind on the burned ruins of his homeland and what he had actually wanted to become? Yet like the patriarch Joseph, he chose to push forward in faith and do the best he could with the gifts he had for the glory of God and in order to rebuild his life.

Instead of merely putting all his new Jewish captive slaves to manual labor, the king decided to take the ones who seemed the smartest and the most handsome to train as court officials. Every ancient king knew that the success of his kingdom depended on having competent officials to manage the daily details he did not desire to do himself. Jews like Joseph, Mordechai, and the heroes of the book of Daniel proved themselves to be exactly the kind of valued official that every king desired to have in his employment. Therefore, Daniel 1:3-5 declares, *“And the king said to Ashpenav, the captain of the eunuchs, to take out from among the children of Israel and from the royal family and from the nobility young men without any physical defect and of handsome appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.”* Daniel was chosen to be in this group along with three other young Judeans named Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah (otherwise known by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego).

It seems that Daniel and his friends had no objection to being trained in all the worldly wisdom available in their day or even to serving one of the wickedest pagan kings the Jews had ever known up until that time. Nevertheless, there was a serious problem involved in their experience at “Babylon University”- the cafeteria. No doubt, from a Babylonian perspective, being given the same food to eat as the king was considered a great honor, but it created a dilemma for these four Jewish students. The Torah forbids eating meat that has not been slaughtered in the kosher manner, that is, by cutting the jugular vein and completely draining all the blood out of the animal, because eating blood is a terrible abomination. Additionally, in the ancient pagan world, it was customary to sacrifice all animals to idols when slaughtering them, and the Torah also forbids eating meat sacrificed to idols. Obviously, it was also likely that the Babylonians would serve food that the dietary laws in Leviticus forbid, such as pork and other

unclean mammals, birds, and fish. Therefore, the king’s meat was forbidden to these Jewish courtiers-in-training on three counts. They also could not drink his wine because Jewish law forbids drinking Gentile wine on the assumption (which was correct back in ancient times) that it was also sacrificed to idols.

Instead of yielding to necessity because of their fear of starvation or of offending the all-powerful king, they politely refused to eat it and intelligently proposed a test period to keep the chief eunuch from being punished for their disobedience. Daniel 1:8-13 describes the events this way, *“But Daniel resolved himself that he would not defile himself with the king’s food or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief eunuch to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, ‘I fear my lord the king who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king.’ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, ‘Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables only to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king’s food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see.’”* This test was risky for the Jews who proposed it, but they had faith that God would honor their commitment to his laws by keeping them nourished, even on such a limited diet. This text is not meant to say that God demands a strictly vegetarian diet in most cases, but it teaches that one has to submit even the choice of the food he eats to God’s Law in faith that He will care for those who follow Him. Daniel, of course, had no way of knowing that God would preserve him and his ability to follow the Jewish dietary laws, but he still acted on the assumption that God would be faithful to those who remained faithful to the covenant.

God indeed honored their obedience, as Daniel 1:14-19 explains. *“So he [the steward] listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days, it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s food. So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore*

they stood before the king. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.” God rewarded the faithfulness of the young Jewish courtiers-in-training by granting them great wisdom and skill in the subjects they were supposed to learn and even gave Daniel the special talent of dream interpretation, which is yet another similarity he had to Joseph the Patriarch. Ancient people thought dreams had great significance and the power to predict the future, so anyone who could accurately interpret such dreams was a valuable resource to the king of Babylon. Their loyalty to the laws of God could have cost them their lives, but they knew they should obey God instead of men for the sake of God’s Law and maintaining their Jewish identity.

The next story of civil disobedience in Daniel occurs in chapter 3 and concerns Daniel’s three friends who were faced with a choice to participate in idolatry or die. The narrative begins with this introduction: “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image...” (3:1-2) Since the text is long and repetitive, we will simply summarize most of the rest of it, which says that the king ordered everyone to bow down and worship the idol when a certain musical signal was given, on the pain of being burned alive in a fiery furnace if they refused. Most of the people obeyed, and it appears that the king did not notice that three of his young Jewish courtiers did not comply. Yet some of their jealous and angry co-workers decided to inform against them to the king in order to harm them. These other courtiers went to the king, flattered him, reminded him of his order to kill the disobedient, and then made this accusation. “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O King, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” (3:12) As the jealous courtiers expected, the king was infuriated and ordered the non-compliant Jews to be brought before him. He gave them another chance to worship the idol and clearly promised that the punishment for refusal was immediate death in the fiery furnace. He then rhetorically asked them with great pride and hubris, “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” (3:13) This “question” was meant to crush any hope of divine rescue and to force them to obey him out of despair and fear, just as any ordinary subject of

his would have done. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael could have decided that it was a convenient time to kneel down and adjust their sandal straps. After all, they and God would know that they were not worshipping the idol, but it would create a convenient illusion of compliance in the eyes of the Babylonian officials and save their lives.

Nevertheless, the response of these three valiant men was anything but expected, on an earthly level. “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O King. But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.’” (3:16-18) Most ancient Jewish martyrdom stories contain a defiant speech that the martyrs give to the persecuting authority when they are given the choice between breaking the Torah or death, and this speech is one of the first prototypes. In it they declare that their first allegiance is to God and his laws and that they will therefore obey Him, no matter what the cost. They also say that God has the power to rescue them by a miracle, but that even if He does not, there is nothing which will weaken their decision to repudiate idolatry.

They were aware of the punishment they would incur, and although they had faith that God would save them, they were ready and willing to face that punishment if He chose not to intervene. Civil disobedience usually comes with a cost, but blessing is promised to those who suffer for the sake of righteousness. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” declares, “One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.” Likewise, in all natural circumstances, the three young men knew they would die, but they also knew it was worth the cost to uphold God’s Law and sanctify his name in public through their martyrdom.

On a side note, the Jewish active disobedience in this story is peaceful and non-violent, which proves their innocence and purity in their death. When the choice to engage in idolatry came to them, they chose to stand up for righteousness and to die rather than break God’s commands. It is a good thing they resisted at this point, too. Since only the government officials attended this dedication, there is little doubt that all of the common people would have similarly been forced to comply soon afterwards. Without

their opposition at this stage, it would have brought disaster for the exiled Jewish community in Babylon.

The king's reaction to the speech of defiance was only to become more angry, order the furnace to be heated even hotter than usual, and have his men throw Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah bound with ropes into the furnace, which was so potently hot that it instantly killed the guards appointed to throw them inside. From all obvious appearances their death was assured, and they were probably praying what they thought would be their last living words as they fell in. Then in what was one of the most astounding miracles of the Bible, we read these words. *"Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, 'Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?' They answered and said to the king, 'True, O King.' Then he answered and said, 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.' Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace. He declared, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here!' And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him and set aside the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God...'"* (3:24-28)

This miracle in response to the faithfulness of the three young men catapulted their memories into history and literature, from many works of the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament, the early Church fathers, and Rabbinic literature to many more modern compositions as well. Their choice to sacrifice their bodies rather than their souls became an example for generations of Jewish and Christian martyrs who chose to die rather than bow to idols. Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked king whose pride knew no bounds, was so impressed by their sanctification of God's name and the miracle that followed that he forbade anyone to even speak badly of the God of Israel in his entire kingdom. Yet this test of the Jews' compliance with the negative command of not worshipping other gods is not the end of the story of martyrdom and civil disobedience in the book of Daniel. There still remains one more narrative about a test of the Jewish captive's obedience to the positive commands to worship God.

Daniel 6 opens with Daniel's promotion within the

Babylonian government to be one of the three highest officials in the land, which aroused great jealousy from the other officials. They therefore conspired to bring about his downfall through the only way they knew they could trap this righteous man, through his devotion to the Jewish Law. (May we all merit to be so righteous that no one could think of any other way to ensnare us than through our obedience to God)! The narrative tells us, *"Then these men said, 'We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.'"* (6:5) Then the conspirators convinced King Darius to sign a law forbidding all prayers, petitions, and offerings to any other god or man other than the king for a month because they knew Daniel would have to disobey. All they had to do then was to hide near Daniel's house and just wait to witness him breaking the new decree in order to destroy him. The penalty for disobedience was being eaten alive by the king's wild lions.

Daniel's response is incredibly interesting. He did not storm into the palace to protest the new law, stand in the middle of the government buildings praying loudly, or provoke arrest in an obnoxious way. On the other hand, neither did he cower in his closet to hide from the king's guards and the punishment he knew he would incur. Instead, he went to his own dwelling (more or less private space) to break the king's law and followed his custom of praying privately but in a location and in a manner that anyone watching him would clearly understand what he was doing. He knew the law was irrevocable and that despite his high position, the king could order his death at any moment. Yet the text continues, *"When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God."* (6:10-11) Not surprisingly, the conspirators informed against Daniel and forced the king to follow the law they had convinced him to enact by having Daniel thrown into the lions' den. Both Daniel and the king knew he had no natural chance of surviving such a punishment, but both of them had faith that God would deliver him through a miracle. Daniel was fed to the raging beasts, a punishment which many Christian martyrs endured in early Church history during the persecutions of the Roman Empire.

After a sleepless night for the king (and probably Daniel too), we read, *"Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, 'O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God,*

whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions?’ Then Daniel said to the king, ‘O King, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut up the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him. And also before you, O king, I have done no harm.’ Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions- they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.” (6:19-24) This ending is not meant to rejoice at the downfall of Daniel’s enemies nearly as much as it proves that Daniel’s rescue was a miracle. The lions truly were hungry enough to eat him, since they ate all those other victims immediately. God really had saved Daniel by shutting their mouths. The result of Daniel’s sanctification of God’s name through risking death rather than submitting to the king’s unjust law against prayer (even privately) was that the king wrote a letter to all his subjects praising and exalting God. Daniel’s sacrifice resulted in glorifying God’s name to thousands of people who had never heard of Him previously, and he also became an example to many martyrs who came after him.

Hebrews 11:33-34 praised Daniel and the three young men anonymously along with the many other martyrs of the Maccabean era persecutions with this description of heroes, “who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight...” Their undying memory of courage and obedience to God inspired and encouraged generations of God’s people to stand up for the right and to choose to “obey God rather than men” whenever obedience to God conflicted with obedience to earthly decrees. Their example should also inspire us in our own day to knowingly choose to obey God, to worship Him alone, to extend aid to the oppressed, and to pursue righteousness, even at great personal risk and cost.

Let us conclude once more with the words of Martin Luther King Jr., and may we all have the moral courage to heed this exhortation. “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.”

Daniel in the Lion’s Den, Peter Paul Rubens, 1615



ZERUBBABEL AND YESHUA

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judea during the Persian rule of Judea between 538 and 520 BCE. He was the grandson of Jehoiachin, the next to the last king of Judea. At the end of the exile, Zerubbabel led a group of 42,360 Jewish captives from Babylon back to Judea. In Hebrew this period is called *Shivat Zion*, “the Return to Zion.” He was the protégé of Cyrus, the king of Persia, whom Isaiah praised as God’s messiah, despite the fact that he was a Gentile king and an idol worshiper, because he released the Jewish captives and allowed them to return to the Land of Israel. The Hebrew Bible normally mentions Zerubbabel together with the High Priest, Joshua (Yeshua) the son of Jozadak because they were the leaders of the second wave of return from Babylon. In the first wave two other men, a political leader and a priest, led the people. Nehemiah was the politician, and Ezra was the priest and religious leader. Together these four leaders composed the leadership of the Jewish people during the return from the Babylonian Exile and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the House of the Lord.

King Darius I of Persia appointed Zerubbabel as governor of Judea. When Darius’ power at home began to weaken due to revolts and unrest, it opened the opportunity for the Jewish leaders to work on rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple.

Although the books of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah mention Zerubbabel, they do not clarify many details about his life. Nevertheless, one clear fact is that Zerubbabel was related to the family of King David and was even a descendant of the royal line. For this very reason Zerubbabel appears both in Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies for Yeshua. In I Chronicles 3:19-21, appears the genealogical list of Zerubbabel’s family. “*And the sons of Pedaiah: Zerubbabel,*



and Shimei. And the sons of Zerubbabel: Meshullam, and Hananiah; and Shelomith was their sister; and Hashubah and Ohel, and Berechiah, and Hasadiah, Jushabhesed, five. And the sons of Hananiah: Pelatiah, and Jeshaiah; the sons of [Jeshaiah]: Rephaiah; the sons of [Rephaiah]: Arnan; the sons of [Arnan]: Obadiah; the sons of [Obadiah]: Shecaniah.”

Despite Zerubbabel’s ancestry, his ascent to power was not free from controversy. In the book of Ezra, one sees another governor of the Persian province of Judea named Sheshbazzar. Very little is known about him, but Ezra reports that Sheshbazzar was the prince of Judah into whose hands the gold Nebuchadnezzar captured from the Temple in Jerusalem was entrusted.¹ In fact, Ezra 5:14-16 even

¹ Ezra 1:8, 11- “*And Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah... All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.”*

says that Sheshbazzar brought this gold to Jerusalem and personally laid the foundation of the new Temple.¹¹ Yet the words of Haggai and Zechariah give a clear impression that Zerubbabel and Joshua returned the exiles and rebuilt the Temple without any mention of Sheshbazzar.

What then was actually happening in Jerusalem during the Return from Babylon? There were probably several parties involved and several waves of exiles who returned to the Land of Israel, each one with its own leaders who sought supremacy over and credit for all the work of restoration. Unfortunately, that is how things work here in the Middle East, all the way from ancient times up until today. Even today governments pass laws that no one has any intention to keep and have unrealistic political aspirations that no one can fulfill. In those days idealistic proto-Zionists like Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, and Joshua had purist desires that were not realistic and were therefore never accomplished.

One of the major projects Ezra initiated was to convince the Israelite men to put away their foreign wives. Ezra was alarmed when he came to Jerusalem and saw so many mixed marriages. The second wave of immigration that came with Zerubbabel had many more men than women, so when there were not enough Jewish women to go around, the men married local pagan and Samaritan women. Ezra legislated that all these women should be put away, but it never happened because the public could not tolerate it. The Rabbis also learned later that you cannot legislate something that the general public cannot or will not keep. The conflict between Judaism as a universal faith and race and Judaism as a small, restricted, and sectarian religion is one that is still raging in this land and in the living-rooms of many Jews around the world.

One reason God actually elected Israel was because of their spiritual and physical weakness. Nehemiah 8 shows this weakness in its account of the public reading of the Torah to the people who could not even understand it anymore. The people in this story acted as if the commandments in the Torah were totally new for them. They had been in Exile for seventy years, and most of them were born in Babylon and did not know Hebrew. This ignorance of the Word of God was the main cause for their spiritual weakness. Yet on the other hand, they were all full of zeal for the building projects

II *“Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon — those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor... Then the same Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished.”*

of the walls and of the House of the Lord. They were willing to build, to contribute, and even to fight the enemies of Israel who opposed the return of the Jewish people to the land and the rebuilding of its defenses.

The situation then was very much like our own times. There was and still is a strong sense of secularism and spiritual weakness at the same time that there burns a great zeal and patriotism for the rebuilding of the land. Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua/Yeshua were the perfect combination of the politician who represents the nationalistic aspirations and the religious leader that represents the spiritual aspirations of the people. The artificial separation between Church and State was not a part of the biblical model of perfect government. We have both bodies and souls, and we cannot separate them without death and destruction. A political body without any spiritual, moral, ethical, and cultural aspirations has no moral basis to rule and impose any moral, ethical, or political rules of law upon the people.

Zechariah the son of Brachia who wrote the book of Zechariah says that Zerubbabel and Yeshua received a special revelation from the LORD through an angel, who said, *“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”* (Zech 4:6) One could say that this is not exactly *realpolitik*, in terms of our world’s normal political struggles and solutions, but this principle was the opening salvo of instructions which God gave them. This principle is the main weapon the LORD gave them and is intimately connected with the promise given to Yeshua the High Priest in Zechariah 3:8-9. *“Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.’”*

Any prophecy that contains the words “branch,” “stone,” and “my servant” is inherently a Messianic prophecy. The Messianic connection to “branch” is most clear in Jeremiah 23:5-6, *“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. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’”* The Jewish tradition of interpretation on this verse is very interesting, so here are a couple of examples. Rabbi David Kimchi (RADAK) said on this verse, *“‘A Righteous Branch’- This is the Messiah, and He is called a Branch because He came into the world like a plant of the field that has multiplied and became a multitude. And*

He is righteous; my people will become righteous.” Another great Jewish commentator, the Malbim, says about verses 4-5, “And I will raise upon them (Israel) shepherds, in the Second Temple period because there were no real kings only shepherds... I will raise to David a Branch of Righteousness—as Isaiah says, *‘There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.’* For this reason He is called a Branch, that by his righteousness He will reign as King. He will not be a shepherd, but He will be a great King... and in his days, *‘Nation will not raise a sword against nation.’* In his days, in the days of the Messiah, Judea will be saved.” Both the Radak and the Malbim interpret this passage as speaking about the Messiah. This is the reason why according to traditional Jewish textual interpretation, Zerubbabel and Yeshua the High Priest foreshadow the Messiah. The revelation that it was not by might nor by physical strength that salvation would come to Israel, but by the Spirit of the Lord was true both in the time of the *Shivat Zion* and now.

The term Messiah, *mashiach*, which is translated into Greek as *christos* or “Christ” in English, is used in the Bible for priests, kings, and, of course, the Messiah. Messiah means “anointed,” and every office that God authorized and ordered was inaugurated and authorized by the ceremony of anointing with oil. For this reason The Bible calls many different people “messiahs.”

Here are some examples from the Scriptures. Leviticus 4:3 says, *“If the anointed [mashiach] priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering.”* In 1 Samuel 2:10 it says, *“The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed [mashiach].”* Later it says, *“And he [David] said to his men, ‘The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed [mashiach] of the LORD.’”*^{III} Daniel 9:26 says, *“And after the sixty-two weeks messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.”* In the New Testament, let us take some examples from John. *“He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah [christos].’”*^{IV} Then later in John 4:25, *“The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming,’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’”*

III 1 Sam 24:6

IV John 1:41

Zerubbabel is called the messiah, as well as King Saul and the priests from the family of Aaron, because priests, prophets, and kings were all anointed with the anointing oil. Of course the MESSIAH Yeshua was ultimately above all the other figures. The eschatological figure of the Messiah was supposed to embody in his nature and character all three of these anointed offices and to be a priest, a prophet, and a king. Yeshua is the only one who is actually anointed to be all three.

A complete understanding of what was happening during the Return to Zion is hard to attain, but Zerubbabel and Yeshua were obviously engaged in a great struggle for the return of the Jewish people to their homes. This struggle involved outside neighbors, like Sanbalat the Arab, and also internal problems such as the people’s ignorance and the contradictory aspirations of the different leaders. Ezra, Nehemiah, the priests, and the Levites came up with one solution for the ignorance of the people, which was to read the Word of God to the public and let it wash, convince, and convict the people of their sins and motivate them to turn to God and do his will. Nehemiah 8 relates that this was exactly what happened. The leaders gathered all the people and set up a reading platform so that the masses could see and hear the Word of God. As they read the Torah aloud, the leaders also explained, interpreted, and commented on the text since most of the people did not know Hebrew. When the people heard the Word, they became so sad that they cried. Ezra and the other leaders then told them not to cry but to celebrate because, *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”* (Neh 8:10)

From that day the people started keeping the commands of God. The first command they undertook was to keep the feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles), and they did it as it had not been done for many generations. There is a clear principle of restoration in this story. There was a physical restoration to the land along with the physical rebuilding of the city and the wall, but there was also a spiritual restoration of the souls of the people through hearing the Word of God, repenting, and committing to do his will.

The first thing we learn from the partnerships of Zerubbabel with Yeshua and Ezra with Nehemiah is that working with others and not alone is crucial. The executive branch and the priestly branch needed to work together in partnership. Zerubbabel was from the royal Davidic line, and Yeshua the son of Jozadak was a priest from the Aaronic line. They worked together to accomplish what was good and right for the people on multiple levels. It is not enough for the Jews to return home physically; we must also return home spiritually before that restoration and return is a true re-establishment of God’s rule in Israel. When the

leaders read the Torah publicly, the people heard, repented, and changed. The power of the Word of God cannot be underestimated. The power is not in the preacher; it is in God's Word. Ministers need to learn to work two by two in teams, just as Yeshua the Messiah sent his disciples out in the First Century. This is a lesson that is important to me personally because I worked alone during most of my ministry, and it is only in the last few years that I started to learn to work with others in partnerships

Zechariah also teaches the lesson that God is always zealous for Zion and for the fulfillment of his promises to his children. Zechariah 8 promises that God will return to Zion and dwell in her, and whether one understands this text as literal, modern day Zion or as the Heavenly Jerusalem, it will still be Jerusalem. God's faithfulness to keep his Word is beyond reproach. One of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Bible is found in Zechariah 12:10-12, which predicts how Israel will come to faith in Yeshua the Messiah. *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves."*

Here is what some Jewish Rabbinical commentaries say about this text. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th Century) says, *"I will pour out a spirit of grace and supplication on the citizens of Jerusalem:'* Before this happens, first there will be trouble because the Messiah son of Joseph will be killed, and the Almighty will destroy all the nations that are coming to attack Jerusalem. This is what it means *'and they will look upon me...'* At that time all the nations will look upon me to see what I shall do to those who pierced the Messiah son of Joseph, and they will mourn for him." The Malbim comments on this passage, *"I will pour out on the house of David a spirit of grace and supplication'* - For by this they begged God for grace and mercy, and they received grace and supplication from God. For by this they saw the Messiah who is a precious Spirit fallen in the war, and they will wake up in repentance and prayer. *'And they will look upon me whom they have pierced.'* They will look and respond and see that He died for the sins of the generation."

The period of the return of the exiles was one of great tumult and changes in the makeup of the Jewish nation. Those who returned to Jerusalem hungered for the salvation

of the nation no less than we do today. Additionally, the leaders then were far from being perfect people, and they had their problems from within and without. Zechariah 3 describes Yeshua son of Jozadak as having unclean clothing that needed to be changed. This text reveals that God can use us even with the limitations and the sinful character that trouble all of us. Despite all these problems, the Lord calls Zerubbabel greater than a major mountain and a cornerstone that will be praised. The Rabbis even say that anyone who thinks that he is greater than Zerubbabel in his mission to restore the people of Israel to their land will be humbled and brought low.

Referring to a person as a stone is another Messianic motif that springs from Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16. *"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not be dismayed.'"* This motif became a parable for the Messiah in Jewish Second Temple literature and in Qumran texts. The stone that had been rejected became the cornerstone and a foundation in Zion for those who believe. Zerubbabel's identification with these metaphors also makes him some kind of "messianic figure." Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra says about Zerubbabel and Yeshua the High Priest in his comments on Zechariah 4:14, *"For he is the messiah (anointed one) sitting on the throne of Israel for it is written, 'He shall rule from his throne.'* Yeshua is anointed because he is a High Priest. It is written that, *'There will be a counsel of peace between the two, and there will be no jealousy between them.'"*

Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and those who returned after seventy years in Babylon were very much like those who returned from the 2,000 years of Exile in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Each one came with his own baggage of Diaspora culture, and if they spoke Hebrew, it was with a Babylonian accent. Each one came with his own understanding of what should happen and how things should develop for the good of the nation. Zerubbabel led the political wing and emphasized the administrative side of rebuilding the civil authority in Judea. One could equate him to David Ben-Gurion or Menachem Begin in that era. Ezra and Yeshua were much more like Rabbi Kook, who established the national religious party in Israel and emphasized both the physical and spiritual restoration of the land and the people. We can learn much from the return from the first Diaspora in Babylon that would help us deal with some of the stumbling blocks we face today in the return from the second Exile after 2,000 years.



ELIJAH - A PICTURE OF GRACE

Elijah is an immensely important figure in Jewish and Christian tradition, as well as in Scripture. They bestow honors on him which no other prophet merited to receive. An examination of those honors, as well as how he merited to receive them, reveals a vital key, which the people of God need today to move into their destiny and to walk in the fullness of their calling and God's blessing.

Malachi 4:5-6 says, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers." One of the incomprehensible honors bestowed upon Elijah is that he would be the

forerunner to the Messiah. He had the great honor to be given the task of preparing the hearts of the people for *both* comings of the Messiah. He had such an understanding of the heart of God that God trusted him to prepare the people to receive his own Son. While every prophet, from Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam down to John the Baptist, pointed the way for Yeshua, this promise was given to no other prophet. Even about John the Baptist, who was the first fulfillment of this prophecy, Yeshua said, "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." (Matt 11:13-14)

The second major honor bestowed upon Elijah was his exit

Above: Elijah fed by an Angel, Ferdinand Bol, 1660-1663

from the world. The Scripture tells us, *“As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.”* (2 Kings 2:11) Out of everything that occurred to Elijah, even including Malachi’s prophecy concerning him, I am personally convinced that this verse is the key to understanding it all. He achieved what only one other man is biblically recorded to have achieved, that is, to pass from this world without tasting death. The implications of the simple reality that he passed from this world without dying are major, and they need to be examined.

In order to understand fully what these implications are, we must first understand why it is that man, under the current order of things, does taste death. Starting in Genesis 2:16-17, *“And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”* Also Genesis 3:22 says, *“And the LORD God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’”* Here we see that one of the primary elements of the curse that came upon all of mankind after the Fall was that man would die and would be cut off from the tree of life, which is Yeshua. This curse was so certain that even Yeshua, the perfect Son of God was subject to it when He emptied himself of his divinity and took the form of man. *“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so the Messiah was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.”* (Hebrews 9:27-28)

What are we to say? Elijah somehow managed to escape the most basic destiny of all mankind in the current age, death. He managed to escape a curse which entrapped even Yeshua himself. Legalism and religiosity would tell us that Elijah himself did something to deserve this end and that his own selfless service to the King of Kings somehow elevated him above all mankind. For a good portion of my own life, I labored under that same delusion until I realized its full ramifications.

Let us explain this a little bit. Even considering the finished work of the cross, the vast majority of mankind is still under the sentence of death. Somehow before Yeshua hung on the cross for all mankind, however, Elijah not only, as is obvious from his ascent into heaven, managed to secure a place in the world to come, but also fully shook loose the bonds of the curse of the Fall. To say or to think that Elijah somehow managed this by his own actions or that his own work accomplished this is to negate the need of the Messiah’s sacrifice.

Human deeds are incapable of attaining any form of righteousness for mankind. *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”* (Isaiah 64:6) There is no righteousness that we can generate within ourselves that will make us acceptable in the eyes of God. The Scripture states concerning man, *“What is a mortal that You should bear him in mind, and a child of mankind that You should consider him? For You have caused him to be made little lower than the angels, yet with glory and honor You have crowned him.”* (Psalm 8:4-5) Here we see that, for whatever reason, humanity was created on a level even lower than God’s holy angels. At our best, even before sin entered mankind, the angels were still somehow on a higher level than humans. So then let us look at the place which the angels themselves occupied. *“Behold in His servants He cannot place trust, and to His angels He ascribes error.”* (Job 4:18) Even the Lord’s present heavenly servants and angels have no integrity in his sight and are filled with error. Later it says, *“Behold, He can put no trust in His holy ones; even the heavens have no merit in His eyes.”* (Job 15:15) Quite simply, if man was created lower than the angels, and if even angels are charged with error by God, then mankind also would have to be impure and filled with error in God’s sight. Whether in its current fallen state or in the pre-Fall state, mankind simply needs something to lift it high enough to have a full relationship with God. If even God’s holy habitation, the very heavens, are not worthy of Him, fallen humanity does not stand a chance.

Nor are we able to say that Elijah was somehow perfect and never sinned. The Scripture is clear in this regard, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”* (1 John 1:8) In another place it is written, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by the Messiah Yeshua.”* (Romans 3:23-24) Our own sinfulness as well as that of Elijah is sure. Only self-deception would lead us to think that we are free of sin, and only deception of some sort would lead us to believe that Elijah was without sin. The only remedy to human sin is the finished work of Yeshua the Messiah. What then can we say about Elijah?

Before the New Covenant was established, Elijah somehow managed to receive such an impartation of grace, so that under its cover, he was able to enter into his reward. Somehow, foreseeing the finished work of the Messiah as yet far away, he managed to latch onto it and be justified by it. James 4:6 states, *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* God has always and will always resist every form of human pride, which includes the ability for man to boast in his own self-worth or his own deeds. God also has always and will always extend his grace to the humble.

Humility does not mean some sort of self-degradation or self-deprecation. Nor does it come from mental or emotional self-flagellation. True humility comes from accurate and honest self-assessment. James also writes, *“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”* (4:8) True humility in relation to God is understanding exactly who and what we are in relation to Him, thus realizing how distant we are from Him and how much we need his grace.

“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) Walking humbly with God is really the only way to walk with God. Walking humbly with God is to recognize our fallen state and to open ourselves to receive his mercy and grace. Thus we find, *“Enoch walked with God and then was no more, for God took him away.”* (Gen 5:24) To walk with God is to ever be seeking more of his grace and mercy and to come to know more of his love.

If this level of grace was available to those of the Old Covenant, how much more is it available to those of us living under the New Covenant. *“But the ministry Yeshua has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.”* (Heb 8:6) We have a better covenant with better promises. Paul also tells us, *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”* (1 Cor 2:9) Now that the work of the Messiah has been fully revealed to us, and we have witnessed the fullness of God’s grace through the cross of the Messiah, we no longer see simply shadows of the things to come as the prophets, even Elijah, did. Rather, we have the ability to see fully the awesome grace of our God and thus to receive this grace.

Laying hold of this grace is a vital key to growing in maturity in the Messiah, in our gifts, and in our callings. *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.”* (Rom 12:6) The Greek word translated “gifts” here is *charismata*, the plural of *charisma*, which means special grace. The gifts of the Spirit are further developed in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul writes, *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.”* (v. 4) The word “gift” here is the Greek word for grace. Then Paul writes, *“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”* (v. 7) The Greek word translated here as “manifestation of the Spirit” is *pneumatika*, which is better translated “spiritual manifestation.” The main idea is that the operation of the spiritual gifts is the manifestation of the overflow of God’s grace in us.

This is by no means a new idea. For nearly the first thousand years of Church history, the writings of the

Church fathers reflected this. One of the desert fathers¹ named Nikitas Stithatos discussed spiritual maturity and 1 Corinthians 13 in these words, “Of those granted the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of various gifts, some are still immature and imperfect with regard to these gifts, while others are mature and perfect, enjoying them in their fullness. The mature and perfect having attained the summit of the knowledge of God’s love, cease from exercising partial gifts, such as prophecy or of distinguishing spirits, graces of healing, helps, and so on. Once you have entered the palace of love, you no longer know in part the God who is love, but, conversing with him face to face, you understand him fully even as you yourself are fully understood by him.” These words may seem a bit of a stretch to modern minds, but for at least the first thousand years of Christianity, this was how the gifts were understood. They were simply manifestations of the grace of God indwelling his people.

As both Nikitas as well as numerous others have explained at great length, a spiritual gift is nothing more than simply an out-flowing of grace to fill an immediate need. Thus it was only the immaturity of not knowing fully the love and grace of God that limited each believer to operating only in the gift of prophecy or discernment or healing, and so forth. This is in no way meant to demean or discount the offices of the five-fold ministry found in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Nor is it my intent to cast any sort of condemnation on most believers or the Church. Rather I would like to help form a proper system of measurement by which we can gauge our own spiritual maturity or lack thereof.

It may be a radical redefinition of spiritual maturity to some people. Throughout the majority of my own walk with the Messiah, I was often told that true spiritual maturity could be gauged by the formation of the spiritual disciplines and holiness within my own life. However, I have come to see that as simply religiosity and legalism as a result of my journey through Orthodox Judaism. Only once I subjected myself to the amazing strictures of and devotion to the spiritual discipline found within Orthodox Judaism did I realize how it failed to help me attain spiritual maturity and closeness to the Messiah. In fact, at times I felt that it was in reality *harder* to live a spiritual life, since often the temptation was there to measure my spiritual life by what I did. This does not mean that I abandoned Orthodox Judaism, but I learned its limits in helping with spiritual growth. The reality

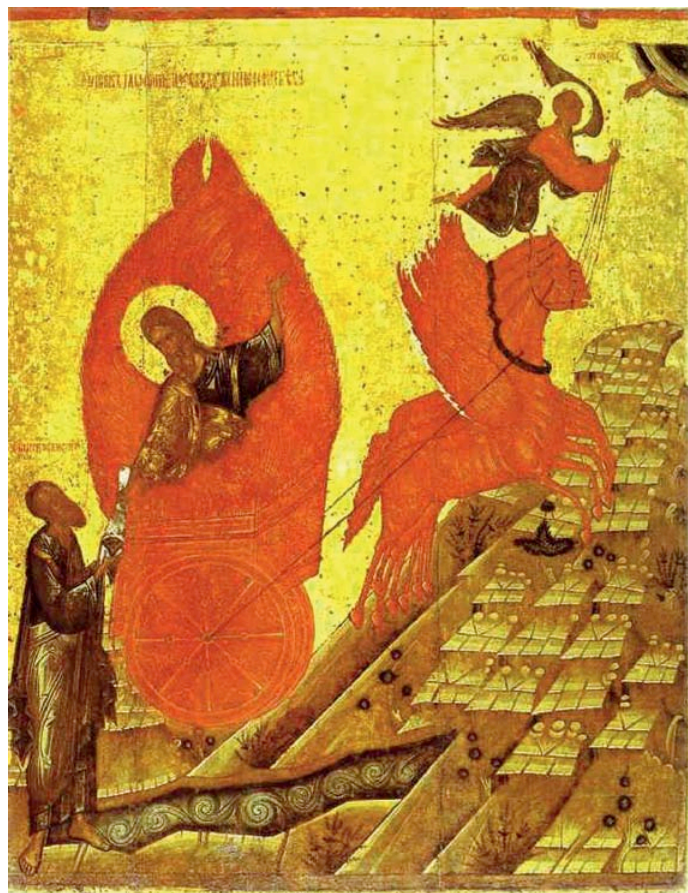
¹ The desert fathers were early Christians who became disgusted with the degradation of the Church following its forced institutionalization under Rome and left the cities to live in deserts in small communities or hermitages in order to be free to follow the Messiah instead of a politicized Church and its excesses.

is the opposite. Such exterior things will only ever be exterior things. They will only ever have true value if they are the out-flowing of what is taking place internally and the out-flowing of the love and grace of God residing in me.

The purpose of all spiritual development and the end goal of all spiritual growth, ultimate maturity, is as it is written, *“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of the Messiah may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of the Messiah.”* (Eph 4:12-13) The ultimate maturity that we are seeking is the whole measure of the fullness of the Messiah, that is, to become like the Messiah ourselves. On his final night on earth, Yeshua prayed for us all and said, *“I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”* (John 17:26) Essentially, He was praying that we would know the Father’s love as He knew the Father’s love. Thus in his own ministry Yeshua said, *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; He can do only what he sees his Father doing”* (John 15:19). Yeshua knew the Father’s love and grace like no man has ever known it before and, possibly, like no man will ever know it. His ministry was based on knowing the Father’s love and letting the grace of the Father flow out to meet that need. Ministry at that level and, more importantly, the relationship with the Lord that is behind it, is the pinnacle of spiritual maturity.

This is the solution to yet another paradox. I have often heard the verse, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”*¹¹ interpreted to mean that we should seek the giver and not the gift. This interpretation says we should seek only God and not the gifts of God. In counterpoint to this belief, we find the verse, *“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.”* (1 Cor 14:1) This verse could equally be translated to say, *“Zealously seek after spiritual gifts.”* If we understand the gifts properly as the grace of God dwelling within us, however, then there is no contradiction. If we are seeking after God and seeking to know Him, his love, and his grace in our lives, which is the only thing that will bring us to righteousness, then naturally we will also see manifestations of that growth in grace in the form of the gifts.

If we are not walking in the level of spiritual power or authority that we desire in our lives and if we are not seeing the fullness of the New Covenant in our lives, it is not because of some deed or work that we have yet to do. It is not on account of some external act or work that we



“AS THEY WERE WALKING ALONG AND TALKING TOGETHER, SUDDENLY A CHARIOT OF FIRE AND HORSES OF FIRE APPEARED AND SEPARATED THE TWO OF THEM, AND ELIJAH WENT UP TO HEAVEN IN A WHIRLWIND.” (II KINGS 2:11)

need to manifest within our lives. As valuable as holiness and spiritual disciplines are, they will be a natural outflow of that love affair with the Lord if we seek to love God. Relying upon these things unto themselves to form us into spiritual beings will only bring us into bondage to legalism and religion. It is the closeness of our walk with the Lord or the lack thereof that makes us holy or not. Instead, the only true marker of that walk is the extent to which his love and grace dwells within us. Let us then set aside our manmade external measurements of spiritual maturity and seek rather the love and grace of God to fill our hearts and lives to the point that it overflows from us to meet the needs of our hurting, dying world, as we walk in the spirit and power of Elijah.

11 Matt 6:33

THE CONTROVERSIAL ONE

He was the only son of his barren mother. She was alone in a field when a mysterious man of God appeared to her and informed her that she was going to bear a very special son. Her husband asked for further proof, and as an answer to his request, the man of God appeared to them again the following day and repeated his message. He also proclaimed that the newborn would be a Nazarite unto God from birth. Nazarites are prohibited to enjoy anything that comes from the vine, to touch any corpse, to eat anything unclean, or to shave their hair. When the happy father-to-be offered his guest a young kid and saw that he refused to eat it, but rather disappeared into heaven with the flames, he understood that an angel of God had visited him. Before the year was over, a son was born to the couple, and they named him Shimshon, which means “a little sun.”

Shimshon grew up to be a thin weakling with weak muscles and frail body, but every now and then, whenever the need arose, a terrific change occurred in him. The Spirit of God would rest on him and fill his small body with supernatural powers, which enabled him to perform great and mighty deeds. Nevertheless, an uncontrollable desire for foreign women, especially the daughters of the Philistines, who



Samson and the Lion, Francesco Hayez, 1842

were Israel's arch-enemies in those days, arose in the young Nazarite.

Shimshon was entangled in various love affairs with some of the Philistine girls, yet he was delivered time and again by means of his supernatural powers. These powers perplexed all those who met him because they could not understand how an apparent weakling could muster such strength. Once, when he was on his way to the Philistine town of Timnathah in order to meet a young girl whom he wanted to marry, he overcame a hungry young lion and slew it with his bare hands. A few days later as he went back through the same vineyards, he went to visit the dead lion and discovered that bees had built a hive in the carcass and produced honey in it. He took of the honey, ate some of it, and gave some to his parents to eat, too. This action broke the laws of the Nazarite, which forbade touching or meddling with any dead body. As a result of this incident, during his wedding party, Shimshon presented thirty of his bride's friends with a riddle. "Food has come out of the eater, and sweet – out of the strong one," it said. He even made a bet with them to give each one of them a set of garments and a linen sheet if they could solve the riddle. The frustrated guests laid tremendous pressure on the bride to squeeze the answer out of her husband, and after seven days he finally gave in and revealed his secret to her. When she revealed it to her friends, he furiously went down to Ashkelon, slew thirty Philistines, and gave their garments and sheets to the "winners" of the bet. Later he returned angrily to his parents' home, and his father-in-law gave his daughter to another man.

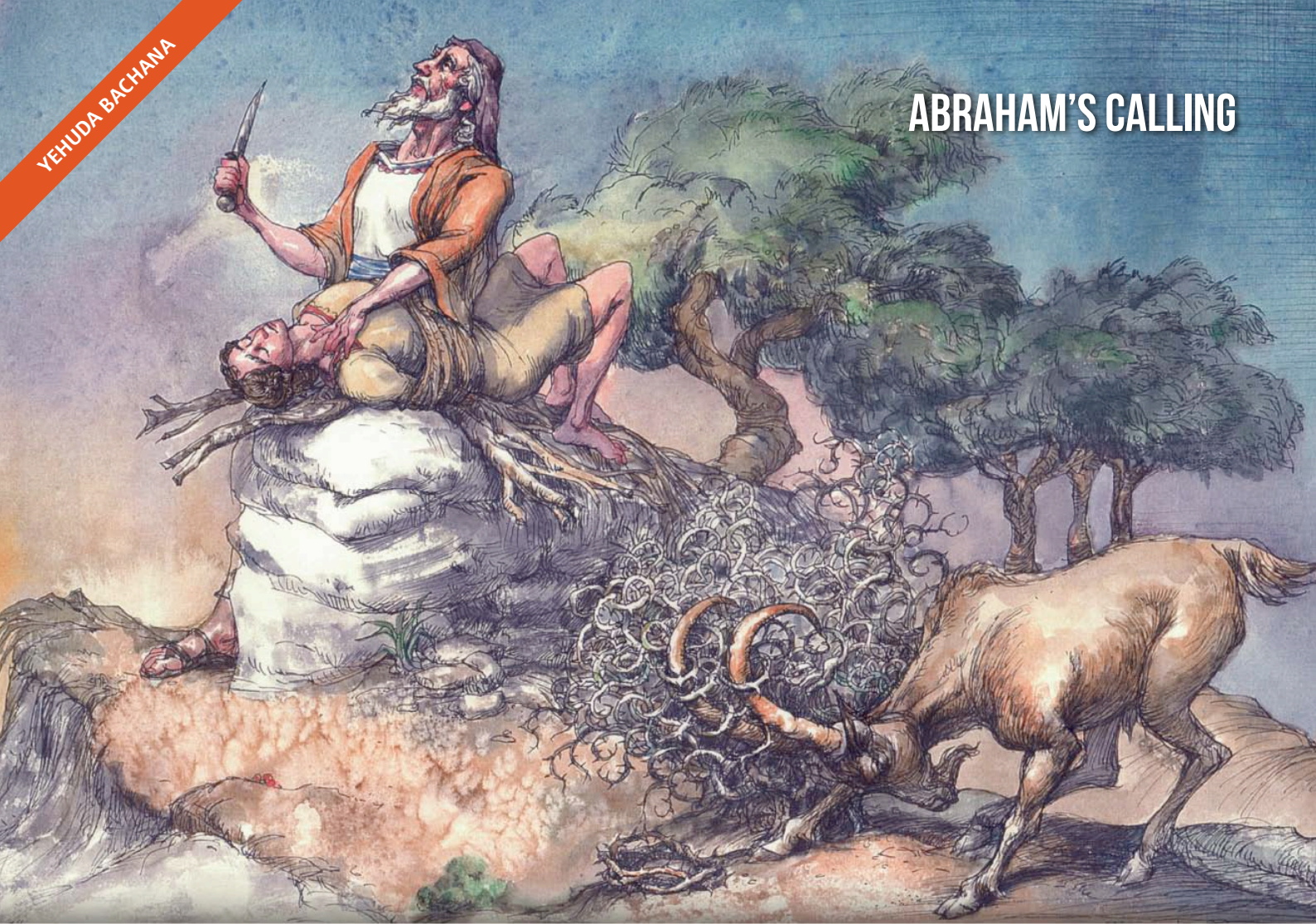
Several months later Shimshon went back to Timnathah to visit his wife, but her father refused to let him into her room and offered him her younger sister instead. The furious bridegroom caught three hundred foxes, tied them together two by two, attached a burning torch to every set of tails, and set them loose into the fields of the Philistines in order to burn their crops. The Philistines, in turn, burned Shimshon's wife to death in her house in an escalation of the violence. As a counter reaction, Shimshon slew many of them and then escaped to the rock of Eitam.

The infuriated Philistines demanded that the people of Israel deliver Shimshon into their hands so they might have their vengeance. The latter turned to him and asked him to hand himself over to his enemies. He agreed to let them bind him with fresh ropes and deliver him over to the Philistines, but then he broke loose and fought his foes. With a jawbone of a dead donkey (another Nazarite violation), he killed one thousand of his enemies. Later, as he grew thirsty, he asked God for water, which He provided to him miraculously from that same jawbone.

Some time later, Shimshon went down to Gaza to spend a night in the arms of a local prostitute. The men of the town laid an ambush for him, but he tricked them by rising at midnight and carrying the heavy gates of the city on his back all the way to the far-away hills of Hebron. Later, he fell in love with another Philistine woman named Delilah. The officers of the Philistines asked her to co-operate with them and deliver him into their hands. Delilah, tempted by the money they had offered her, started nagging Shimshon and asking him to reveal to her the secret of his great and mysterious strength. After several attempts he finally succumbed to her and told her that he was a Nazarite of God and thus had never shaven his hair. Delilah laid him down to sleep in her lap and shaved his hair, and called his enemies in to capture him. She yelled, "The Philistines are upon you, Shimshon!" but his strength failed him. His enemies laid hands on him, tore his eyes out, and turned him into an enslaved wheat grinder in their prison.

The Philistines joyfully convened at the temple of their god Dagon to celebrate their victory over Shimshon. Many gathered at the huge temple; three thousand of them were crowded onto the roof alone. They brought the blind Shimshon out to the front of the crowd in order to mock him, but he asked the lad that led him to set him just between the two main pillars that supported the whole building. He stretched out both his arms, shouted, "Let my soul die together with the Philistines!" and pushed the pillars so hard that the whole temple collapsed and fell on top of him and all the people that were in it. Shimshon's body was taken out of the ruins and buried in his father's tomb, between Tzor'ah and Eshta'ol.

Shimshon was the most controversial of all the judges who ruled over Israel in his days. On one hand, he was a man of God, anointed from his mother's womb to be a sanctified Nazarite to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He was even endowed with special and supernatural powers, which enabled him to execute his duties. Yet on the other hand, he was a man of weak character, drawn after his carnal lusts, who tried to pull the rope to the end of his abilities. He succumbed to his weaknesses instead of trying to overcome them, and therefore his end was worse than his beginning. Shimshon was an example of the men of God who try to see how far they can go in playing around with sin, instead of seeking to escape sin and to cleave to God's ways. A man should not ask himself, "How far can I mess around with sin before I fall into Satan's trap?" but rather, "How can I run away from sin as from the plague?" May Shimshon's story serve as a lesson to us all!



One might characterize the ancient world, before Abraham and even Noah, as a natural world, which was managed according to the laws of nature. Such a world did not know any doubts or indecisions, nor was there a moral imperative given to mankind. Good and evil did not come into question, nor did commandment and violation or reward and punishment, at least in the way these issues exist nowadays.

This ancient world is one which the Torah describes clearly in its description of the first man, both during and after his life in the Garden of Eden. It is greatly tempting to imagine and hope for such an ideal world, in which the course of life flows naturally and in which life is subjective only to nature's laws and to man's nature. This is probably the reason why so many major philosophical systems represented the "natural world" as the first ideal situation for human society instead of the modern world. One must ask if the ancient world was truly ideal, however.

One of the lessons that the first stories of Genesis teach is that such a world has no worth, no purpose, and no chance to exist. The weekly Torah portion *Beresheet* describes the

creation of the world and mankind, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden and the sin that resulted in their exile from Paradise. This Torah portion continues speaking of this era of man's deterioration, including murder and rape, as the lowest point of this "natural society." In contradiction to what philosophers think so highly of, it was the wicked generation of the Flood that followed their natures, even when they damaged the nature and desires of their neighbors. The result was inevitable as, "*The earth was filled with violence through them*" (Genesis 6:13), which led to the Deluge and the erasing of the Ancient World.

After the Flood a better and improved world was supposed to have evolved. Mankind had learned a lesson and had limited the individual's former nature and natural desires for the benefit of the other members of society. Yet the continuation of our history is described in the Torah portion *Noah*. Instead of achieving the building of a better world and learning from their experience, mankind fell quickly. Although this era was relatively peaceful and lacked the hatred and violence which led to the Deluge, the problem

occurred when people played god and became afraid of the Lord. Mankind built the Tower of Babel in order to play lord over others and to escape from the true God. A world without the true God at its center cannot exist either.

Then the subsequent Torah portion *Lech Lecha* tells us how God chose Abraham. Through him God started building the people whom He commanded to spread the Torah throughout the whole world as well as the virtues of ethics, morality, love, mercy, grace, and benevolence. This choice of Abraham leads us to the questions of why God chose Abraham specifically and if there is any importance to being one of his descendants. In order to clarify the second question, this article will examine whether it is more important to be Jewish, and therefore a biological descendant of Abraham, or to engage in the spreading of the Torah and its morals throughout the world.

This Torah portion *Lech Lecha*, which literally means “go forth,” begins with choosing Abraham from the rest of humanity. God promises to bless Abraham and to “*multiply [him] exceedingly*” (Genesis 17:2). The Scripture does not tell us why Abraham specifically was chosen, however. Unlike other biblical figures, the Bible does not speak of Abraham or his character explicitly. God chose Noah to be saved from the Flood because he “*was a just man, perfect in his generation. Noah walked with God*” (Genesis 6:9). The Bible also mentions Moses before he is called to be a leader and shows him standing up to protect the weak, whether it was the Hebrew man from an Egyptian or the daughters of Jethro from the shepherds at the well. Abraham does not demonstrate any such qualities before his calling, however.

The Jewish sages multiplied legends about Abraham in order to explain his choice. These legends say that Abraham broke his father’s idols and struggled to the point of near martyrdom against other idol worshippers. The Torah does not even mention such legends, however. The Torah omits this information because it did not matter who Abraham was or what his character was like on his own power. His task was to make God known to the world with God’s power. In order to be worthy of such a calling, Abraham needed to disconnect from his past, from his country, family, and even from his father’s house (Genesis 12:1). Abraham broke with his past by wandering from place to place, being different from others, and being willing to be unwelcome and even expelled from certain places for the sake of his calling. Therefore, Abraham’s first trial to “go forth” was a hard one. The Torah does not find the need to speak much of Abraham’s past in order to qualify him for the task. Rather, it is Abraham’s future and his steadfastness in times of trial that qualify him.

One of the key elements of God’s promise to Abraham

is the statement in Genesis 12:3, “*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” As believers in Yeshua, we cannot read this verse without seeing our Messiah and Savior in it. This promise also brings other nations besides the Jews into the redemption plan.

The second issue we will treat in this article is whether it is preferable to be Jewish in order to spread the Torah and its morals throughout the world. In the New Testament’s account of John the Baptist’s baptism of Israel’s spiritual leaders in the Jordan River, this thought is refuted. In Matthew 3:7, 9, John calls the Pharisees and Sadducees “*a brood of vipers*” and then says that they should “*not think to say to [themselves], ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*” This statement opposes the idea that Jewish identity equals salvation. Moreover, John opposes the general consensus that every Jew has a place in heaven and that Abraham waits at the gates of hell to save every Jew who arrives there accidentally. John warns that one should not rely solely on one’s biological heritage. Instead, one should rely upon faith, the keeping of the laws and commandments, and the requirements of the God of Abraham.

John the Baptist continues speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:10-12. “*And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*” These words are still relevant for us today.

Truly, one should never rely solely upon his birth as Jewish, Christian, or Messianic to gain God’s favor. It is our task, like it was Abraham’s, to withstand difficulties and trials. Perhaps we will need to break with our past or even with the future we have planned for ourselves. In the meanwhile, we must live the destiny that came along with the choice for Abraham. This destiny is to spread God’s name throughout the world, to proclaim that a purposeless world, one without Torah, laws, morals, and God as the proprietor, cannot exist. Finally, we must spread the Torah’s ideals of love, mercy, charity, and pity. Mishna Pirkei Avot states, “On three things the world stands: on Torah, on labor, and deeds of loving kindness.” Truly, Genesis shows us that without the Torah, benevolence, and, in my opinion, manual work the world cannot exist.

NEWS FROM NETIVYAH

A great deal has happened in Israel and with Netivyah since the last TFZ on the B'nei Anussim. In December 2010 we held an international conference in Portugal on restoring the lost heritage of the hidden Jews of Portugal and Spain. The conference took place in the city of Castelo de Vide in cooperation with the authorities and the support of City Hall, the mayor, and the Chamber of Commerce. Marcelo Guimaraes and the staff of the ABRAJIN (Association of Brazilian Descendants of the Victims of the Inquisition) and Netivyah worked hard to make this conference a success. It was the largest conference ever held on the issue of the Anussim up to this day. We had people from fifteen different countries including Japan, Korea, Finland, Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain, the United States, Bulgaria, Portugal, England, Switzerland, Brazil, France, and Israel. Even an emissary of the Pope attended from Rome. Several young professors and some very distinguished older ones from Portugal and Brazil, along with representatives of the Jewish community in Portugal and Brazil, attended, as well as politicians and Church leaders from several countries. The conference called out for Israel and the worldwide Jewish community to restore and receive these Jews who had to hide and suffer for their identity for so many years without forcing them to re-convert to Judaism. At the end of the conference in Castelo de Vide, the participants almost unanimously declared their desire to

continue this battle by having another conference with the same goals and a greater impact in 2012 in Israel. After the conference, about fifty participants joined a tour to places that were significant as centers of the Portuguese Inquisition. In the city of Trancoso, Mayor Sarmento received us with warmth as he spoke to the group and gave his support to the declaration of restoration for the Portuguese victims of the Inquisition. The tour group witnessed first-hand the physical remains and the silent witnesses carved on the walls and the door posts of the houses of the lost Jews who suffered so much for their secret identities.

Our plan is to hold another much larger conference in December 2012 on the same topic, with many of the same speakers, as well as even more influential ones, to demand that the State of Israel and the Jewish and Christian communities restore the last remnants of the Anussim back to their natural identity as Jews. This conference is an outcry from people who care for human rights, freedom from religious oppression and persecution, and above all the correction of a great historical injustice perpetrated by the Church and those who called themselves Christians. We will call for the State of Israel to open its doors to these Jews, to accept them as they are, and to allow them the freedom to decide their own identity and future. Netivyah has produced a DVD with a half hour documentary of the Castelo de Vide conference.





RESTORING THE LOST HERITAGE

DOCUMENTARY OF THE CASTELO DE VIDE CONFERENCE, PORTUGAL 2010

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Anyone interested in receiving it can request it for free from our webpage or write us an e-mail with your postal address.

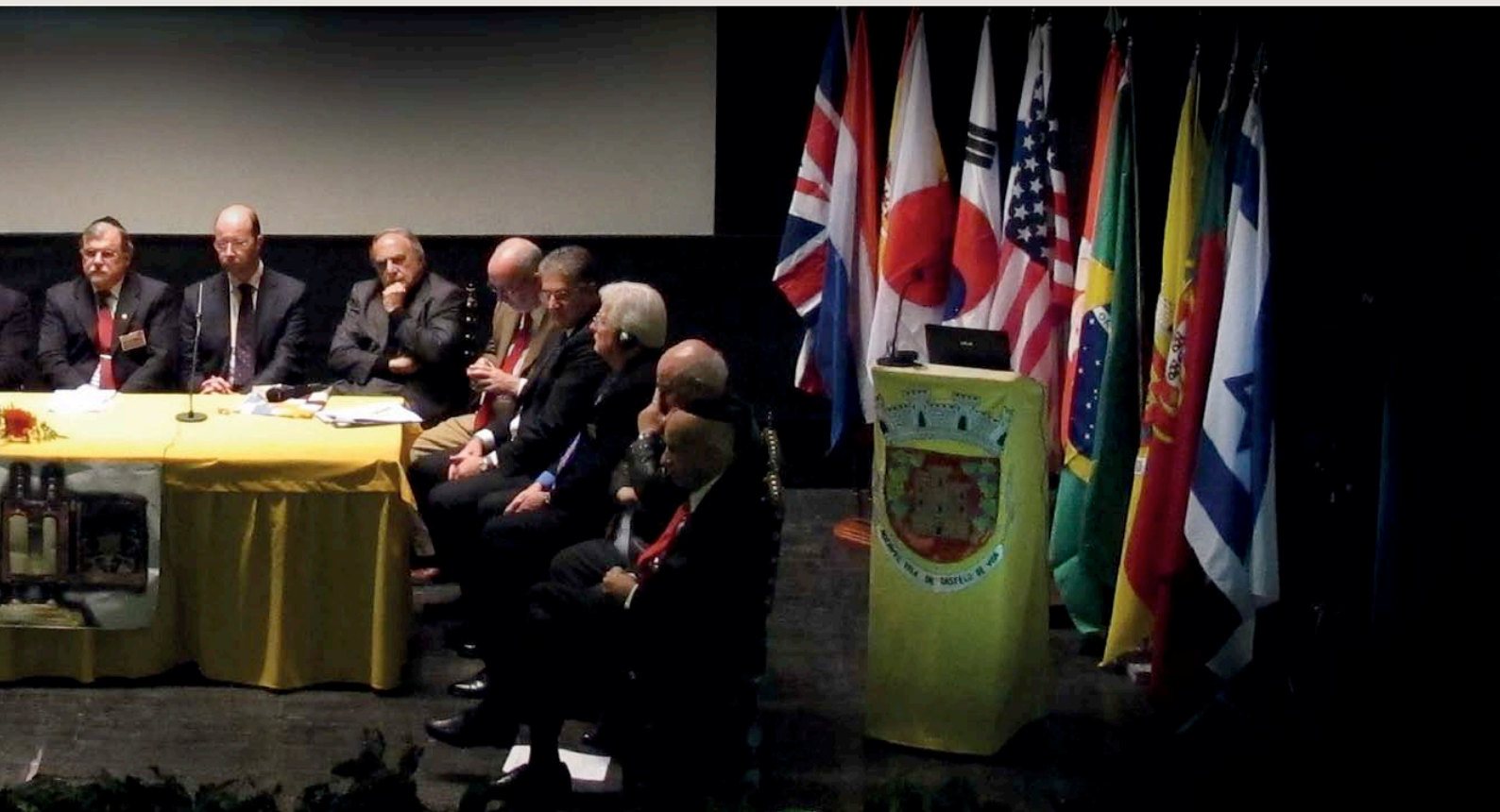
Last month Netivyah just released a new book in English titled *Planted in the House of the Lord: God, Israel, and the Church*. A Hebrew version is also available, and it is currently being translated into German, Dutch, and Korean as well. See the back of this magazine for ordering information.

Unfortunately, the Israeli High Court once again postponed our hearing about our right as Jewish believers to get a building permit to expand our congregation building in Jerusalem. Right now it appears that we will have to wait until Fall before we have a chance to defend our civil rights. The congregation desperately needs this building to be expanded so we can continue to grow and serve the believing community of Jerusalem.

Additionally, we are working together with the Israeli social services to feed 100 of Jerusalem's most needy families through our food distribution program. Netivyah's influence in Israel is also growing because of the wonderful projects that our youth group, the Munchkins, is doing for the Body of the Messiah in this land. The Munchkins recently packed

100 backpacks full of goodies and necessity items which were distributed to believing Israeli soldiers from all over the country this year at Passover. Teachers from Netivyah have also been teaching and spreading the Good News in many congregations and ministries in Israel with the unique message that one can be 100% Jewish and 100% a true disciple of Yeshua, while being faithful to every word in the Bible. We continue to bear this flag of restoration both in the Church and Israel. We are increasing our zeal in Radio Kol HaYeshuah by speaking a bolder message to our listeners in Israel and throughout the Middle East. Our broadcasting time was decreased from 60 minutes to 30 minutes every night, so we have to make the best of it and present a bold, clear, and very live program that will attract and inspire the listeners to stay, hear, learn, and accept the message of Yeshua. We just celebrated the broadcast of our four thousandth program!

Every area of Netivyah's ministry depends on the grace of God and supporters like you from all over the globe. Please keep us and the State of Israel in your prayers for safety during these times of great turmoil in the Middle East. May you have a safe, blessed, and peaceful summer of growth in faith and good deeds.



SEPTEMBER 5-15

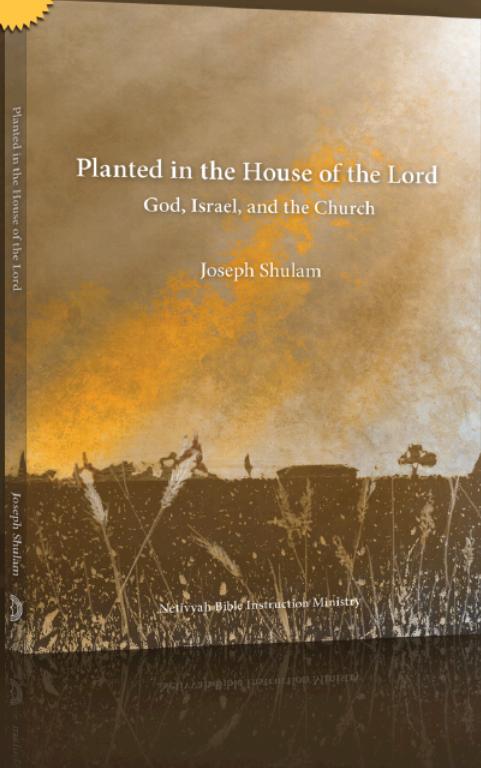
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NEW

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.

Available for order online:
www.netivyah.org

Or by mailing a check to:
PO Box 8043, Jerusalem 91080, ISRAEL.

*Price includes shipping.