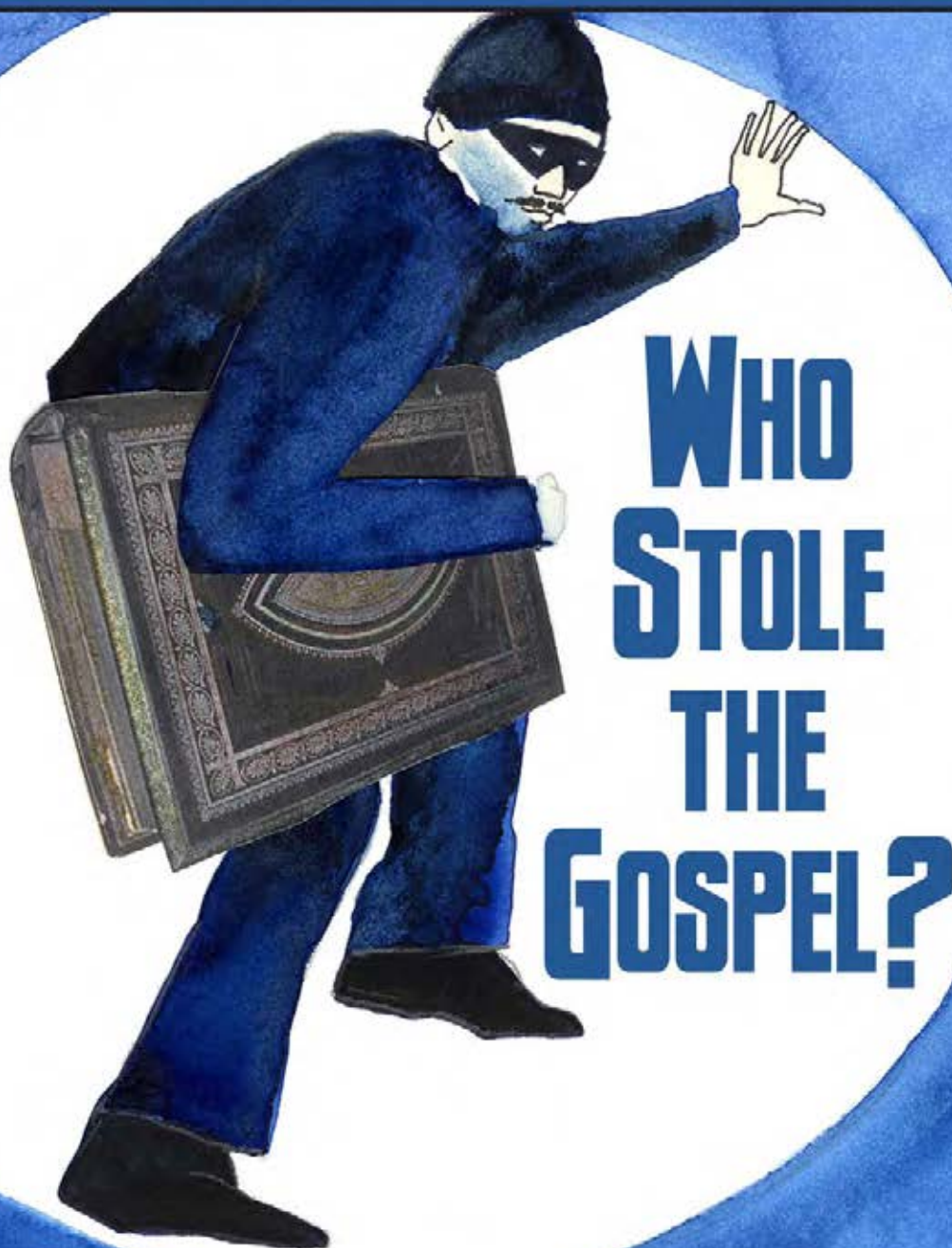


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# Christian Dissenter

Spring 2011



**FREE**

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and the Royal Priesthood  
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# Was the Gospel Stolen?



Well, it wasn't actually the *gospel* that was stolen. The gospel was lost. But it was the *word* "gospel" that was stolen and applied to a message that is *not* the gospel. What passes for the gospel today bears little or no resemblance to the message Jesus preached almost 2,000 years ago. Could that explain why what passes for the church today also bears no resemblance to the early church described in the Book of Acts? (See Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37)

Be that as it may, you might ask how we can be so bold as to claim that the gospel was stolen. What is the evidence that such a crime was committed? And when did the crime occur? And who is the suspected thief? And how can the goods, or shall we say, the good news, be recovered? What is its true nature, and how can we know when we have found it? These are the questions we will answer in this paper.

We have been working on this case for over 35 years, and we have made some amazing discoveries. Read on!



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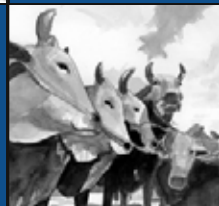
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# Where did the Gospel Come From



*What does the return  
of the Jews from Babylon,  
and Abraham's call to leave Ur  
and go to the Promised Land  
have to do with the Gospel?  
EVERYTHING!*

For forty years, the “weeping prophet” Jeremiah had warned his people of the judgment that was coming upon them for their idolatry and rebellion, but few heeded his message. When the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon finally surrounded and laid siege to the city in 586 BC, it was too late to repent. Jerusalem was laid waste, the Temple destroyed, and all but the poorest survivors were carried away to Babylon where Jeremiah had prophesied they would remain for 70 years.<sup>1</sup>

But Jeremiah had also given them the hope of returning to their land when their time of discipline was over, and it is thrilling to read of the Persian conquest of Babylon at the end of those 70 years, and their release from captivity by King Cyrus:

*In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel — He is the God who is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-3)*

What an amazing fulfillment of prophecy! You can

go on to read of their return to rebuild the Temple, followed by the exciting story of how Nehemiah rallied the people to rebuild the city walls in only 52 days, despite intense opposition. It would be quite reasonable to envision all the exiles bursting forth from their long captivity to return to their beloved city and rebuild her walls and restore her former glory.

## By the Waters of Babylon

But a closer look at history reveals the shocking fact that there were about one million Jews living in Babylon at the end of their 70-year exile, and fewer than 50,000 returned to Jerusalem. Less than 5 percent! Why did so few respond? The sad truth is that more than 95 percent preferred the comforts of their life in Babylon to the sufferings of returning and rebuilding Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> and restoring the life of God in the one place on earth He had chosen for His name to dwell.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The seventy years of Jeremiah's prophecy began with the “good figs” of Jeremiah 24 that Nebuchadnezzar carried away in his first conquest of Jerusalem. They were “the best and brightest Jews” the historian Ken Shapiro refers to below – King Jeconiah, his officials, and the craftsman and smiths of Jerusalem. The years would end in 536 BC with the edict of Cyrus recorded in Ezra 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Ken Spiro, “Crash Course in Jewish History #24 – Purim in Persia,” <http://www.aish.com/literacy/jewishhistory>. See also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (11.8).

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 12:13-14; 16:2,5,6; Nehemiah 1:8-9; 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21



As one historian put it, after arriving in the land of their exile, "... they forged a new national identity and a new religion."<sup>4</sup>

*In the first foray, the Babylonians did not destroy the Temple, nor send the Jews into exile. However, they did succeed in taking into captivity 10,000 of the best and brightest Jews. While it seemed like a terrible disaster at the time, these brilliant men, Torah scholars all, immediately established a Jewish infrastructure upon arrival in Babylon. A dozen years later when the Temple was destroyed, the Jews who were exiled to Babylon found there yeshivas, synagogues, kosher butchers, etc., all the essentials for maintaining a Jewish life...<sup>5</sup>*

... all except the Temple sacrifices, that is, which were their only means of being forgiven of their sins. Thus the synagogue was born to soothe the guilty consciences of a people banished from their land for their rebellion and idolatry, while their sins piled up as high as heaven. Once a week, they would gather to be led through a ritual of psalms, prayers, and readings from the Law which they had spurned and the Prophets which they had ignored. At first they mourned, as the psalmist wrote:

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept,  
when we remembered Zion.*

*On the willows there we hung up our harps.*

*For there our captors required of us songs,  
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,*

*"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

*How shall we sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land?*

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem,*

*let my right hand forget its skill!*

*Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,*

*if I do not remember you,*

*if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!*

*(Psalm 137:1-6)*

But somewhere along the way they stopped mourning, and moved on to making the most of their circumstances. Indeed, their fertile flocks, fruitful fields, and financial finesse carved out a comfortable niche for them in the land of their captivity. They built more schools and more synagogues that nurtured a new generation who were quite content with a mythical Jerusalem and a mystical religion far removed from the simple faith of their father Abraham who had left that very land so long ago.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Exile.html> <sup>5</sup> Ken Spiro, "Crash Course in Jewish History #43 – Jews in Babylon," <http://www.aish.com/literacy/jewishhistory>

## The Faith of Abraham

Abraham had looked up at the very same stars that shone over their heads, longing to know the One who had filled the expanse of heaven with such glory, and longing to know the purpose for his existence. He was not content with the rich life of Ur, nestled in the fertile floodplain of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, or even Haran where his family settled for a time. That is why his heart could be stirred by the Spirit of his Creator, and that is why he had ears to hear the voice that said, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."<sup>6</sup>

How fond and tender must have been the farewells of Abraham as he kissed his loved ones goodbye forever, placed his life in the care of his God, and set his face toward an unknown land! Abraham did not shrink back from leaving all behind — family, friends, and material security — to follow that voice to the land of promise. His faith caused him to obey God.

1,500 years later, that same voice called out to Abraham's wayward offspring to leave that same land of worldly comfort and return to the same land of heavenly promise, but only a few responded — only those whose hearts could still be stirred.<sup>7</sup> And just like Abraham, they left everything behind to follow that voice — family, friends, possessions, plans, comfort, and security — in order to restore the desolate heritage of Abraham and redeem the name of his God.

To the rest — almost a million Jews — the good news of release from their captivity did not sound so good. In

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:1 <sup>7</sup> Ezra 1:3,5





fact, it was the fragrance of death to them, not the fragrance of life.<sup>8</sup> Surely (or so they thought), their God was not so unreasonable as to expect them to *literally* leave everything they had worked so hard to establish, since He had so obviously blessed them, not only materially, but also with a rich social and religious life. It was fine for the adventurous few to risk their lives on a long and dangerous journey, and wear themselves out trying to restore what lay in ruins. But they could worship their God just as well in Babylon (or so they thought), and in their hearts they would take identity with their zealous brothers in Jerusalem, and send their tithes and offerings. After all, who would finance the work if they were all so reckless as to leave everything for which they had labored?

### The New Religion of the Jews

Meanwhile, the new religion of Judaism (not to be confused with the obedient faith of Abraham) continued to flourish in the land of Babylon, its spiritual center, independent of the restored Temple worship in Jerusalem. They even chose their own ruler from the line of King David, who, although he was not called a king, was recognized as their nobleman by the Persian government.<sup>9</sup> This new “Davidic dynasty” continued in Babylon for over 1,500 years.<sup>10</sup> By the end of that time, their rabbinic academy had compiled every jot and tittle of their new religion into what became known as the *Babylonian Talmud*, the most authoritative document of Judaism, eclipsing even the Torah itself. To them, only through the

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:16 <sup>9</sup> Ken Spiro, “Crash Course in Jewish History #43 – Jews in Babylon,” <http://www.aish.com/literacy/jewishhistory> <sup>10</sup> Until about 1000 AD.

lens of their published commentaries could the Torah be properly understood and applied.

The Jewish religion that had incubated in Babylon was inevitably carried back to Jerusalem by the courageous few who returned, so that even after the Temple was rebuilt and the ministry of the Levitical priesthood restored, what emanated from it was at best a diluted mixture — a few parts Abraham’s faith and many parts “essence of Babylon.” Five hundred years later, at the dawn of the first century AD, all that remained was lifeless ritual and a handful of faithful men and women suffering under the control of a religious elite who had carved out a comfortable niche for themselves under Roman rule.

### Virtual Babylon

Under Roman rule, the Jews were effectively exiles in their own land, a virtual Babylon, where they were allowed to practice their religion as long as it was no threat to their Roman overlords. And it was no threat as long as there were no prophets stirring up the people and reminding them of who they were supposed to be and what they were supposed to do as God’s holy people. The last true prophet of Israel had been Malachi, over 400 years earlier, who had denounced their corrupt priesthood and the lame sacrifices being offered up in the Temple only a few decades after its restoration, expressing the cry of God’s heart:

*“Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:10-11)*

It was a shocking thing to say, seemingly contradicting the clear instruction given in the Law that the priestly sacrifices could only be offered up in the one place their God had caused His name to dwell, namely in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> It was a “wake up” call to what was left of the holy nation, letting them know that if they didn’t repent He would look elsewhere for a holy people — beyond the borders of Israel.<sup>12</sup> He would do exactly what Moses himself had prophesied:

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 12:13-14; 16:2,5,6; 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21

<sup>12</sup> Malachi 1:5

*“They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.” (Deuteronomy 32:21)<sup>13</sup>*

Malachi went on to speak of a messenger who would come in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah. That messenger was John the Baptist, who had these opening words for the descendants of the corrupt priests of Malachi’s day:

*“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:7-10)*

John merely spoke the plain truth: Even though they were physically in the land and offering sacrifices in the Temple, spiritually they were just as far removed from the life and heart of God as if they were still in Babylon. Their lame sacrifices were not accepted and their sins were piling up to heaven. The sharp rebuke sent shivers through the sensitive few who hated the religious hypocrisy and economic injustice all around them. Their hearts were stirred by this prophet, and they longed for the Messiah whom John said would soon appear to bring the remedy.

### The Remedy

It is impossible to understand the purpose of Messiah’s coming, the meaning of His message, and the significance of His death and resurrection apart from the condition of Israel at that time, how it came to be that way, and how it was supposed to be. He did not come to provide a free ticket to heaven, but to redeem a people for His own possession who would do His Father’s will on the earth. And that will had not changed.<sup>14</sup> His will was still the same as it had been for Abraham coming out of Ur, and for the twelve tribes coming out of Egypt, and for the Jews coming out of Babylon: that He would have a dwelling place in a holy people who would be a light to the nations<sup>15</sup> around them,

<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:19; 11:11-14; 1 Peter 2:9-10 <sup>14</sup> Malachi 3:6  
<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 58:8,10; 60:3; Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 13:47 (“you” is plural in all these verses; it is the corporate light of a holy people)

showing them what He is really like by their love for one another.

As the prophet Isaiah put it, God wanted His people to be like a vineyard bearing the fruit of justice and righteousness.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in the last few days before the crucifixion, after driving the money-changers out of the Temple courts, Yahshua<sup>17</sup> retold Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard to the chief priests and elders,<sup>18</sup> recounting Israel’s repeated rebellion and extending it to how they would soon treat Him. Then He ended the story with the ringing judgment:

*“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” (Matthew 21:43)*

He went on to deliver a scathing condemnation of the fallen religious system in seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees, and to prophesy the utter destruction of the Temple.<sup>19</sup> At that point, they began to make plans to arrest Him. In demanding His crucifixion, they called a curse upon themselves and their children,<sup>20</sup> which has faithfully followed them down through the subsequent centuries.

But who was the nation to whom the Kingdom of God would be given, which was expected to bear the fruit of it? Did these words of the Messiah have anything to do with the gospel or “good news” of the Kingdom that He had been preaching since His baptism,<sup>21</sup> and which He said His disciples would also be preaching?

*“This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14)*

And could it have anything to do with the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 49:6?

*“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make You as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)*

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:6



<sup>17</sup> Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Messiah; see *The Name Above all Names* on page 36 for more about this.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 21:33-40

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 23:1-39; 24:2

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 27:25

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15

  
**Jesus  
did not come  
to provide a free ticket  
to heaven,  
but to redeem a people  
for His own possession  
who would do  
His Father’s will  
on the earth.**  


Since He told His disciples that everything written about Him in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled,<sup>22</sup> where and when was this prophecy fulfilled? Later, the apostle Paul quoted this very passage in support of his ministry,<sup>23</sup> and he also spoke of it in his defense before King Agrippa:

*“And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!”*  
(Acts 26:6-7)

Paul was in trouble with the Jews because the gospel he preached was raising up a twelve-tribed spiritual Israel<sup>24</sup> from among the Gentiles,<sup>25</sup> beyond the borders of the land of Israel.<sup>26</sup> It was exactly what Yahshua, the Messiah, had said would happen — the Kingdom would be taken away from the Jews and given to a nation that would bear its fruit.<sup>27</sup> And it would happen as a result of the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

### The Gospel of the Kingdom

*“This doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven, which was the main teaching of Jesus, and which plays so small a part in the Christian creeds, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought.”*  
~ H. G. Wells<sup>28</sup>

You may never have thought of the gospel as having anything to do with raising up a twelve-tribed nation in the midst of the nations of the earth to be a light to them. And you may never have considered that the gospel had anything to do with the Jews having been called out of Babylon to re-establish the physical nation of Israel. But in

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:44-45    <sup>23</sup> Acts 13:47

<sup>24</sup> Isaiah 49:6; Ephesians 2:12; Galatians 3:29; 6:16

<sup>25</sup> Acts 13:46 — Paul’s fervent hope was to move his fellow Jews to jealousy (Romans 10:19; 11:13-15; Deuteronomy 32:21), so that they would someday repent (Zechariah 12:10) and God could righteously fulfill His promise to give them the land, enemy-free, in the next age (Genesis 15:18-21; Luke 1:72-75).

<sup>26</sup> Malachi 1:5,11    <sup>27</sup> Matthew 21:43

<sup>28</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, vol. 1, p. 422 (1961)

reality, the gospel that Yahshua and His apostles preached had *everything* to do with *both*.

Yahshua came to call His people out of Babylon to rebuild the Temple and restore the walls of Jerusalem. Of course, it was not the historical Babylon or the physical temple and city walls, but rather the spiritual realities that they represented. However, *spiritual* does not mean *mystical* or *invisible*. The building materials were *spiritual* men and women, and the building was both visible and tangible, as the following verses describe:



*So the Jews said to Him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking about the temple of His Body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18-22)*

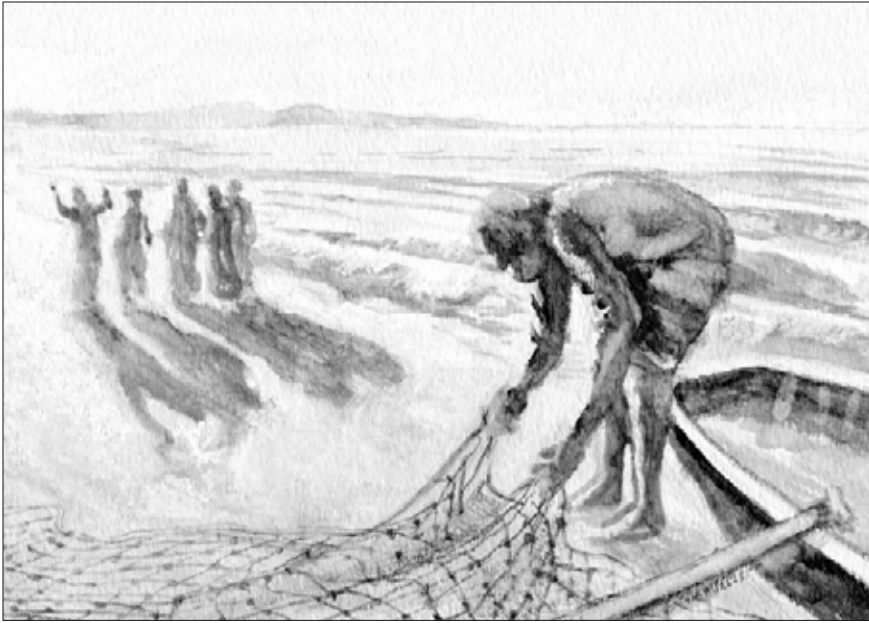
*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)*

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In*

*him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

*Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel... And the wall of the city*

  
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human thought.”**  
 ~ H. G. Wells  




*had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:9-14)*

But where did the building materials come from, and how were they gathered? The foundation stones came from the “Babylon” that Israel had become, and they were gathered in the same way that the Jews had been gathered out of Babylon of old: those whose hearts were stirred by the *good news* that it was time to restore the dwelling place of God on the earth forsook everything to follow the One who was leading the way. They left family, friends, careers, and possessions to follow Yahshua, responding immediately to His call:

*While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)*

That same response was required of all who would follow Him, a fact which even took His first disciples by surprise when they heard His command to a wealthy, religious young man who was seeking eternal life:

*And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow*

*me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”*

*And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God...”*

*And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Who then can be saved?” Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”*

*Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or wife or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:21-30)*

Just as surely as it was impossible for anyone to obey the call to rebuild the Temple while remaining in Babylon (or even to drag his possessions and his unwilling family members along with him on the arduous 700-mile journey to Jerusalem), so it was impossible to follow the Messiah without forsaking one’s life in this world, with all of its material and emotional trappings. And just as back then, most were unwilling to give up their comfort and security. But the Master’s words were unyielding to the excuses of the unwilling:

*A scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:19-22)*

*“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple... Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26,33)*



*“And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:38)*

*“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:25-26)*

## Rebuilding the Temple

It wasn't that Yahshua was being hard or unreasonable. It was all a matter of where He was going and what He was building: He was going to the cross and into death in order to redeem those whom He would build into an eternal dwelling place for the Holy One of Israel.<sup>29</sup> With all His heart He wanted His Father to get the faithful, holy nation He always desired, and He wanted the world He loved so much to be able to see the heart of His Father through the witness of that holy nation<sup>30</sup> — redeemed human beings living together in unity,<sup>31</sup> loving one another as He had loved His disciples<sup>32</sup> — which was twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. But in order for that to happen, they would all have to abandon their independent lives in “Babylon” and throw in their lot together in “Jerusalem.”

That is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Yahshua's ascension. Pierced to the heart by the words Peter spoke, 3000 people responded to his call to “be saved from this perverse generation”<sup>33</sup> by forsaking their old lives and banding together to form the nucleus of the new spiritual Israel:

*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple courts, and*

*breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart... The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35)*

Now, many Christians say that this common life did not last, or even that it was a mistake that God Himself had to break up by sending persecution.<sup>34</sup> The second claim is ironically absurd, considering the response the Master gave to Peter when he said, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”

*Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or wife or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, **along with persecutions**, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:29-30)*

What happened on the day of Pentecost was the very hundredfold blessing the Master had promised His disciples who had given up everything, and the persecution that resulted was part of His promise, not a punishment for their obedience. In fact, the Master had consistently taught them to expect persecution if they were faithful to Him.<sup>35</sup>

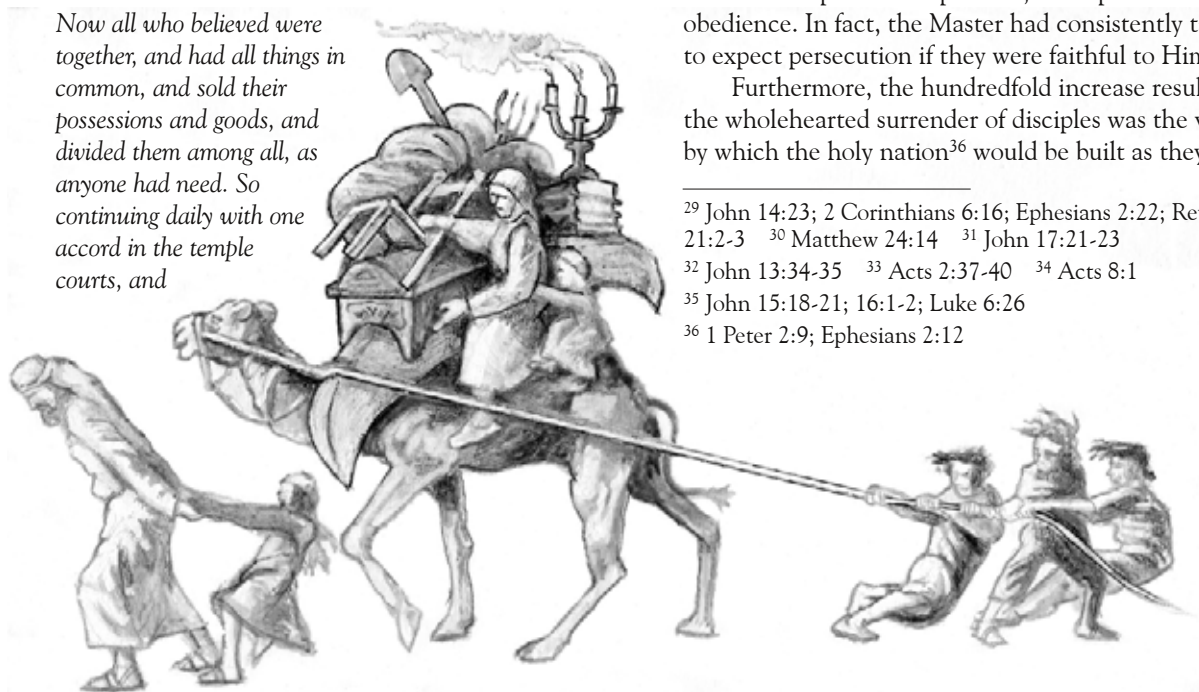
Furthermore, the hundredfold increase resulting from the wholehearted surrender of disciples was the very means by which the holy nation<sup>36</sup> would be built as they gave up

<sup>29</sup> John 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:22; Revelation 21:2-3 <sup>30</sup> Matthew 24:14 <sup>31</sup> John 17:21-23

<sup>32</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>33</sup> Acts 2:37-40 <sup>34</sup> Acts 8:1

<sup>35</sup> John 15:18-21; 16:1-2; Luke 6:26

<sup>36</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:12





*But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the outspokenness of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:6)*

## Yet Another Babylon

Not long past the end of the first century, Yahshua followed through on His warnings in the letters in Revelation to the churches: He spewed their lukewarm religion out of His mouth.<sup>50</sup> He came like a thief in the night and took away their lamp stands (the presence of His Spirit), and most of them didn't even notice.<sup>51</sup> The few overcomers died off,<sup>52</sup> and the rest went on with a form of religion that denied the power to love as they had in the beginning.<sup>53</sup> They had shifted off the rock they had been founded upon — the revelation that comes from obeying His commandments<sup>54</sup> — and as a result, darkness overtook them.<sup>55</sup>

In effect, spiritually they were carried off to Babylon. Their walls of protection had been breached because God could not hear their prayers over the clamor of their apostasy,<sup>56</sup> so the enemy came in like a flood and destroyed the Temple, stone by stone.<sup>57</sup> They were taken captive by the evil one to do his will.<sup>58</sup> But just as the Jews who were carried away to Babylon, they developed a whole new religion that did not depend on the Temple, that is, the corporeal<sup>59</sup> expression of the Body of Messiah — the daily laying down of their lives for one another,<sup>60</sup> the daily encouragement of their gatherings in which all prophesied,<sup>61</sup> and the visible unity and economic justice of their common life.<sup>62</sup>

their homes and farms, which were either sold to meet the pressing needs of existing communities<sup>37</sup> or became the open door to starting new communities. In the same way that a beehive, when it fills up, sends out a swarm to start a new hive,<sup>38</sup> so the early church multiplied, replicating the pattern of the first community in Jerusalem, and experiencing the same persecution as a result of it.<sup>39</sup>

As for the claim that the common life of the early church didn't last, that is sadly true, although it lasted much longer than most Christians think. What destroyed it was not persecution from without, but corruption from within. As long as all were full participants in their common life, with each member walking in the works prepared for him<sup>40</sup> and speaking the very utterances of God by the grace and strength He provided,<sup>41</sup> the spiritual temple continued to be built.<sup>42</sup> They were truly a spiritual priesthood<sup>43</sup> serving under a faithful High Priest,<sup>44</sup> and their spiritual sacrifices were acceptable to God.<sup>45</sup> But gradually, self-concern<sup>46</sup> crept in like a deadly cancer, cooling off their original fervent love for one another,<sup>47</sup> and taking away their confidence<sup>48</sup> and outspokenness<sup>49</sup> until they were no longer qualified to be called His house:

<sup>37</sup> Acts 4:37    <sup>38</sup> See *Like a Beehive* on page 16.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14    <sup>40</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>41</sup> 1 Peter 4:10-11    <sup>42</sup> Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 2:19

<sup>43</sup> 1 Peter 2:9    <sup>44</sup> Hebrews 3:1-2

<sup>45</sup> Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16

<sup>46</sup> Philippians 2:3-4, NRSV (other versions water it down)

<sup>47</sup> 1 Peter 4:8; Revelation 2:4    <sup>48</sup> 1 John 3:14,16-22

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:24-26

<sup>50</sup> Revelation 3:16    <sup>51</sup> Revelation 3:3; 2:5; Romans 11:22

<sup>52</sup> Revelation 3:4    <sup>53</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5

<sup>54</sup> John 14:21; Matthew 7:24-27

<sup>55</sup> Matthew 16:17-18 (see *Upon this Rock* on page 12)

<sup>56</sup> *Apostasy* is departure from the apostles' teachings; see also the article, *James, the Insurgent*, on our web site for more details on the condition of the church at the end of the first century. The following verses speak of what is required for one's prayers to be heard in heaven: 1 John 3:21-22; 1 Peter 3:12; Matthew 6:9-13; 1 Timothy 2:8    <sup>57</sup> 1 Peter 2:5    <sup>58</sup> 2 Timothy 2:26

<sup>59</sup> *Corporeal* means: 1) Having material or physical form or substance; 2) Affecting or characteristic of the body as opposed to the mind or spirit. Similar words for corporeal are the following: bodily, corporate, embodied, and incarnate.

<sup>60</sup> Luke 9:23; 1 John 3:16-17

<sup>61</sup> Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 14:24-26

<sup>62</sup> John 17:21-23; Acts 4:32-35

This new religion followed the Nicolaitan (clergy/laity) pattern<sup>63</sup> rather than the earlier Judean (one heart and soul) pattern.<sup>64</sup> The people were content to just attend a “worship service” one day a week, in which nothing was expected of them but to follow a ritual of prescribed prayers, rote responses, and solemn hymns, and to hear a sermon prepared by the appointed (or self-appointed<sup>65</sup>) leader.

The apostle Paul had warned of the emergence of such a system, as the seeds of it had begun to germinate even while he was still alive:

*“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...” (Acts 20:29-31)*

*“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)*

Messiah Himself, in His warnings to the churches, denounced these “synagogues of Satan”<sup>66</sup> that were beginning to appear as the first century was drawing to a close. Indeed, it was the exact counterpart of the synagogue system the leading Jews had developed in Babylon of old. They were led by those who claimed to be “Jews,” but did not have the obedient heart, faith, or deeds of Abraham.<sup>67</sup> And of course, their gospel<sup>68</sup> was not the same gospel Abraham had obeyed, the one Yahshua had preached, that called everyone to forsake everything to follow Him. Instead, the new gospel made the many comfortable living their independent lives in “Babylon” while giving their offerings to support the few who became the clergy. The “litmus test” for the faith ceased to be the response of love and obedience that produced community,<sup>69</sup> but was replaced by “right doctrine” (as if the two could actually be separated).<sup>70</sup>

Of course, this new mystical religion came to be called *Christianity*. And just as Judaism developed in Babylon of old, Christianity became increasingly ritualistic and rigid, even centralizing its authority in a succession of popes analogous to the “Davidic dynasty” that the Jews had

established in Babylon. Through its popes and bishops, Christianity repeatedly grabbed the reigns of the state to impose its will and to exact the support to feed its insatiable appetite for wealth and power, thus leaving a trail of blood stretching over 1,500 years. And lest anyone place the blame on the Roman Catholic Church alone, consider that her wayward daughters of the so-called Protestant Reformation exhibit the very same nature as their aged mother,<sup>71</sup> culminating in the utter confusion (*babel*) expressed in the 41,000+<sup>72</sup> divisions of Christianity today:

*And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” (Revelation 17:5)*

*“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.” (Revelation 18:2-4)*

If you are a Christian, your soul is in great jeopardy. You have received a false gospel that has given you the false hope of going to heaven when you die. You have received another Jesus,<sup>73</sup> not the True One,<sup>74</sup> Yahshua the Messiah, therefore you are still in your sins. But if you are willing to do the Father’s will, you can be released from your captivity, to serve Him where He is.<sup>75</sup> We invite you to come! ✨

*“Come out of her, My people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” (Revelation 18:4-5)*

<sup>63</sup> Revelation 2:6,15; the term *Nicolaitan* is derived from *nikao*, “to conquer,” and *laos*, “people,” hence, “people conquerors.”

<sup>64</sup> Acts 4:32; 1 Thessalonians 2:14

<sup>65</sup> 3 John 1:9-10 <sup>66</sup> Revelation 2:9; 3:9

<sup>67</sup> Romans 2:29; Galatians 3:29; John 8:39; Matthew 3:9

<sup>68</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4 <sup>69</sup> 1 John 3:14,16-18; 2:3-5

<sup>70</sup> See *The Shift from Community to Doctrine*, on our web site.

<sup>71</sup> See our freepaper *The Black Box* for a more thorough treatment of this topic.

<sup>72</sup> “When Jesus said, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,’ did he intend that the people called to bear his name in the world would eventually be divided into 39,000 competing denominations? That is the number of separate Christian bodies worldwide, according to missions statistician Todd Johnson of the World Christian Database.” Timothy George, “Is Christ Divided?” *Christianity Today*, July 2005. (That count was updated to 41,000 in 2010.)

<sup>73</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4 <sup>74</sup> 1 John 5:20 <sup>75</sup> John 12:26

# Upon this Rock

*Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:16-18)*

Many have quoted this verse to prove the impossibility of the gates of Hades (the realm of the dead) prevailing against the church. They assume that regardless of the spiritual and moral condition of the church, God has never withdrawn His Holy Spirit from her, for a body without a spirit is dead, and that would mean the gates of death had prevailed against the church. But this is not what Yahshua was promising to Peter that day.

What Yahshua confirmed in Peter was that he was hearing from the Father — receiving revelation — not merely repeating what other men might have said. Peter had heard in his heart that Yahshua was the Messiah, and that revelation caused him to pledge his utter devotion and obedience to Him. Now that was something Yahshua could work with — people who could hear from His Father and obey what they heard. Upon such revelation He could build an eternal dwelling place for His Father's Spirit, for that, after all, is what the church is supposed to be (Eph 2:20-22).

The Master said things like this to His disciples many times, such as in this familiar passage:

*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27)*

Hearing and obeying is the foundation of the house that will endure all that comes against it, and wise is the man who builds on that rock. But foolish is the man who builds his house on those who hear but *do not obey*. That house will not withstand the test. The floods of deception and the shifting winds of doctrine will prevail against that house.

So was Yahshua, the Son of the Living God, a wise man

or a foolish man? Was He contradicting Himself by saying that the house He was building would endure *regardless* of whether it was built on the foundation of hearing and obeying His words?

Many years later, in the waning days of the first-century church, the writer of Hebrews said these words to the church:

*But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:6)*

The Greek word translated as "confidence" literally means *freedom in speaking; unreservedness in speech*. It is an outspokenness that comes from the confidence that one is hearing and obeying Messiah's words. Such outspokenness characterized the gatherings of the early church (1 Cor 14:26), when they were devoted to the apostles' teachings, but as the first century drew to a close and the churches were drifting from the simplicity of their first devotion (2 Cor 11:3-4), their gatherings degenerated to rote ritual and a professional clergy. That is the record of history. So, were they still "His house" in spite of Hebrews 3:6?

Here is another promise the Master made to His disciples:

*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My*

*Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him... If anyone loves me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:21,23)*

Those who truly love Him obey Him, and He reveals Himself to them, which causes them to love and obey Him all the more. It is with such as these that He makes His home. He went on to say, "Whoever

does not love Me does not keep My words." What can be said about them? Are they also His dwelling place? ❄

*If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. (1 Corinthians 16:22)*





# LEAVE N T BECOME R

## Abraham, c. 2000 BC

Thousands of years ago, God found a man who was completely willing to do His will. His heart was longing for something greater than the life he was living. Then one day he heard a voice speak something very clearly to his heart.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country and your kindred and your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:1-2)*

This man's name was Abram. At 75 years of age, he heard this call from God and he obeyed without hesitation.<sup>1</sup> He immediately left the land of his fathers, and after a long and difficult journey, he entered into the land that God showed him and became a new creation in the land of promise.<sup>2</sup> God called this new man *Abraham*, because he would be the father of a great nation, for God wanted a whole nation of people with the same heart as this man. Abraham's response to God's call would forever be the foundation for all those who would come after him, desiring to follow their Creator.<sup>3</sup>

Abraham was called to *leave* one place and *enter* into another. Had he not left the land of his fathers, he would not have been qualified to be the seed of the nation God wanted to establish. He had to obey the call. Some 4000 years later, the same response is required of anyone who wishes to be saved from this perverted generation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 17:1-8

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11:8; John 7:17-18

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:40

## Babylon, c. 500 BC

Many years later, God called Abraham's wayward offspring, who had been in Babylon for 70 years of discipline, to leave and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.<sup>5</sup> Of the roughly one million Jews who were living in Babylon at that time, only about 42,000 returned.<sup>6</sup> Most had grown comfortable with their lives in Babylon. As Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian wrote in his chronicles, "...yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions."<sup>7</sup>

The journey back to Jerusalem was over 700 miles. It wasn't easy. The comforts of Babylon could not accompany those who left on the journey. But for those whose hearts were stirred by the call to return to the land that God had promised to their forefather Abraham, and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the suffering could not compare with the joy set before them. It was only the remnant who thirsted for their land that heard the call and obeyed.

## Galilee, c. 30 AD

These stories of Abraham, Israel, the Babylonian exile, and the return to rebuild were passed down from generation to generation until Yahshua<sup>8</sup> heard them from His mother and father, and from the rabbis. Surely, with His tender and pure heart, He must have asked His parents and teachers why so many stayed behind in Babylon. It must have been so difficult for Him to understand why anyone would not heed the call to return and rebuild their beloved city. Imagine the look on His young face when His parents had

<sup>5</sup> Ezra 1:3-5 <sup>6</sup> Ezra 2:64

<sup>7</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1.1-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Yahshua* is the Hebrew name of the Son of God. See page 36.

to explain to Him that it was because they had grown comfortable and didn't want to leave their possessions and unwilling family members. Why would anyone hesitate if their God was calling them? Why would anyone value "things" over doing God's will?

As time went by and Yahshua grew into a man, He found Himself extending the very same call to his fellow Israelites.<sup>9</sup>

*And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him." (Matthew 4:18-22)*

*After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him." (Luke 5:27-28)*

Yahshua called His disciples in the very same way that God had called both Abraham and the Jews out of Babylon. Those who were stirred in their hearts did not hesitate, but left everything to follow him.<sup>10</sup> It was consistent with the way His Father had always called those who were willing to do His will.

However, like the many who had stayed behind in Babylon, there were many in the Master's day who chose comfort over their salvation. When a well-to-do young man came running and knelt down at Yahshua's feet, asking what he must do to gain eternal life, Yahshua answered,

*"Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up your cross, and follow Me." (Mark 10:21)*

Though the rich young man heard the clear call just as his forefather Abraham had, his face fell.<sup>11</sup> He valued his possessions more than following the Master. He had a *cause* to not obey Him.<sup>12</sup> The dark shadow of the torment he would someday face in death slowly fell over his face with the deepest gloom. He would rather have heard another message, one that would have allowed him to hold onto his life and possessions, but this was not the command, nor had it been for Abraham or the Jews in Babylon.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their nets,<sup>13</sup> which were their profession and livelihood, to follow the Master. Paul also "suffered the loss of all things,"<sup>14</sup> counting it as rubbish. All who responded to the gospel left everything behind. The contrast between Mark 10:28-30 and verses 17-22 is chilling. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole entire world yet forfeits his own soul?<sup>15</sup>

In the same manner as Abraham, those who heard the good news on the day of Pentecost, *gladly* received the message and left everything.<sup>16</sup> Their possessions were used to establish the first community, as it is recorded:

*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45; see also Acts 4:32-35)*

So these steps are the steps of a faith that *works*. Abraham did it and started a whole new culture and nation. The first disciples did the same. Therefore, these same essential steps of *that* faith must be followed today by anyone who desires to be saved.<sup>17</sup> All those in the first century who were cut to the heart by the gospel they heard knew what they had to do before they could call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. They understood that the terms of the gospel were life for life, without compromise. If they wanted to drink of the living water, it meant forsaking their life, and all that it encompassed, and being immersed into the new culture that was before them.

## Here and Now

*Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:6-8)*

At the head of the list of those worthy of spending eternity in the lake of fire are the *cowardly and unbelieving*. They are those who, for the fear of losing their own life and possessions in this world, reject the gospel that they hear from a righteous sent one.<sup>18</sup> They do not overcome all that stands in the way of drinking the water of life. They are unwilling to leave their life in the fallen society. They have

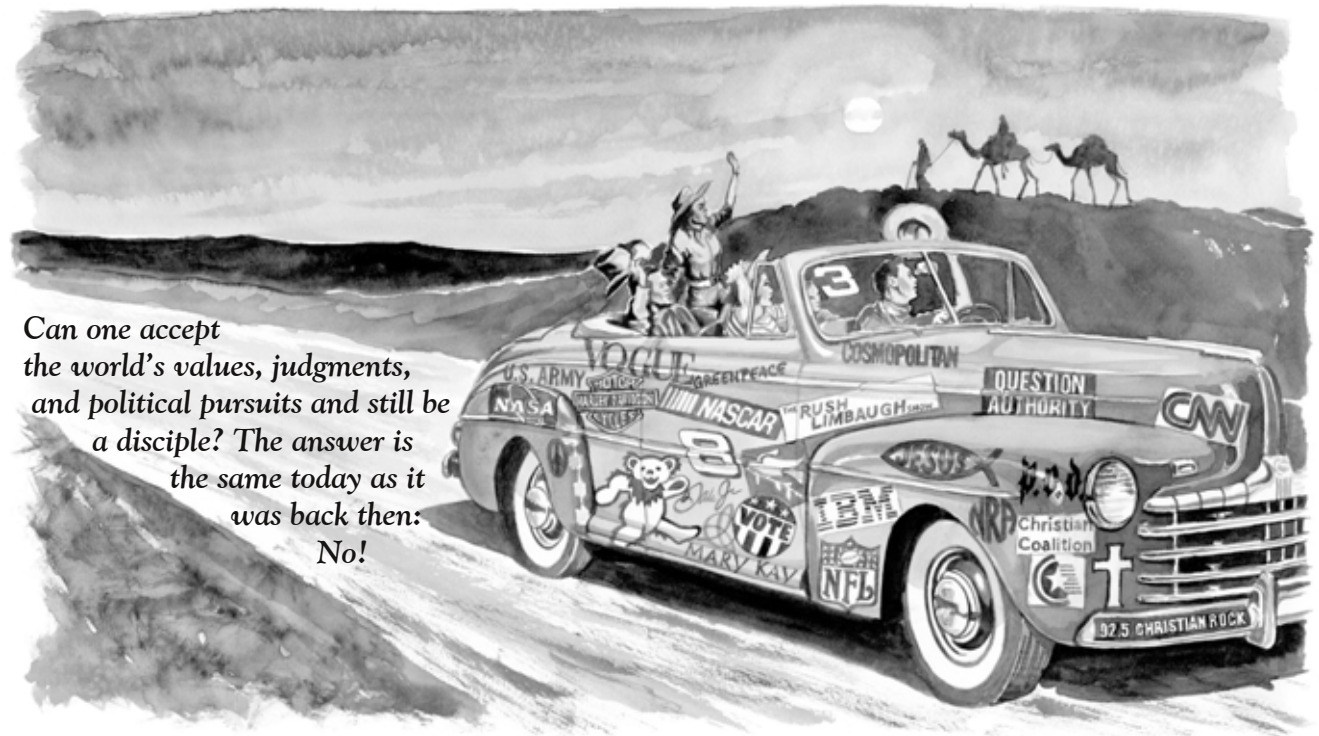
<sup>13</sup> Matthew 4:18-22 <sup>14</sup> Philippians 3:8

<sup>15</sup> Mark 8:36 <sup>16</sup> Acts 2:41

<sup>17</sup> John 8:39 <sup>18</sup> Matthew 10:40-41; John 13:20; 7:17-18

<sup>9</sup> Mark 1:16-20 <sup>10</sup> Mark 10:28-30

<sup>11</sup> Mark 10:22 <sup>12</sup> Revelation 22:17



Can one accept  
the world's values, judgments,  
and political pursuits and still be  
a disciple? The answer is  
the same today as it  
was back then:  
No!

a cause that is greater in their eyes than the call of Messiah and His Bride:

*“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17)*

The word translated *freely* literally means *without a cause* to hinder them from drinking. The word *come* means to leave one place and arrive at another.<sup>19</sup> So if anyone is truly *thirsty* for the water of eternal life, let him *overcome* anything that would hinder him, *leave* behind all that he possesses, and follow the Master in the same way the disciples did.<sup>20</sup> Those who are willing to do the will of the Father will *come* gladly, with great joy over the hope of gaining the thirst-quenching water of eternal life.<sup>21</sup>

### The First Step in Obeying the Gospel

Just as Abraham and the disciples of old obeyed, the first step in obeying the gospel is to *leave* one place and *enter* another.<sup>22</sup> You leave your old life in this world and are born again into a brand new culture, with a brand new heart that

is quenched of all thirst.<sup>23</sup> Abraham did what the rich young ruler would not do. He turned his back on his previous life. He did not cower back at the command to leave it all behind. He said his farewells, kissed his loved ones good-bye, and placed his life in the hands and care of the One who called him to the land of promise. None but the willing will *come* to this new place.

So can someone be a disciple, yet remain in Babylon? Can one become a disciple while remaining in his old life, at the same address, working the same job, enslaved to the same passions,<sup>24</sup> immersed in the affairs of this world?<sup>25</sup> Can one accept the world's values, judgments, and political pursuits and be a disciple?<sup>26</sup> Is it possible to wallow in the world's excesses, letting your children be trained by the world's standards and ideals,<sup>27</sup> being fully identified with the

<sup>23</sup> Acts 5:20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:36-45 <sup>24</sup> 1 John 2:1

<sup>25</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4 <sup>26</sup> John 18:36 <sup>27</sup> In a recent poll of Christian families concerning how they raise their children, the top goal that parents had was their children getting a good education.

Considering the words in Matthew 5:13-16, you may find the following quote surprising: “You might expect that parents who are born-again Christians would take a different approach to raising their children than did parents who have not committed their life to Christ, but that was rarely the case,” Barna explained. “For instance, we found that the qualities born-again parents say an effective parent must possess, the outcomes they hope to facilitate in the lives of their children, and the media monitoring process in the household was indistinguishable from the approach taken by parents who are not born again.” *Parents Describe How They Raise Their Children*, February 28, 2005, Barna Research Group.

<sup>19</sup> John 6:44 <sup>20</sup> Luke 10:16; Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26,33

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 13:44 <sup>22</sup> Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Paul was writing to those in *every place* (township) who were set apart in communities where they were being sanctified (purified) through the refining fire of their common life, since “all who believed were together and shared all things in common” as in Acts 2:44.

world, yet still claim to be following in the footsteps of Abraham?<sup>28</sup>

The answer is the same today as it was then: *No*.

### Leave, Enter, Become!

If you are willing to do the will of God, you will hear the call and come. You will *leave* your rotten, stinking life in this world and *enter* into the new life of love and forgiveness that

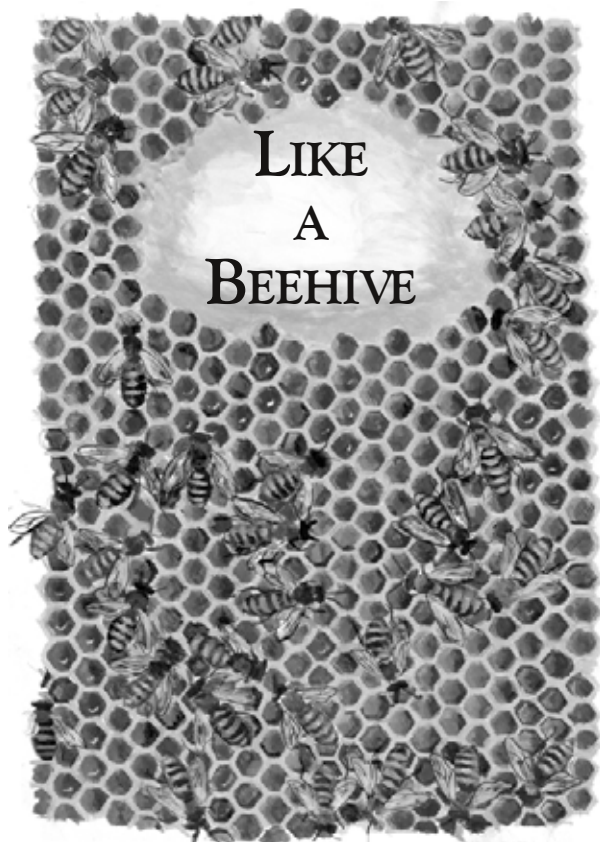
<sup>28</sup> 1 John 5:19

<sup>29</sup> John 13:34-35   <sup>30</sup> John 12:26   <sup>31</sup> Acts 26:7   <sup>32</sup> Hebrews 2:11

the Messiah, Yahshua, is establishing in these last days.<sup>29</sup> Only *there* can you serve Him<sup>30</sup> by serving your brothers and sisters, night and day.<sup>31</sup> And only *there* can you *become* one of those whom He is not ashamed to call His brothers,<sup>32</sup> who together are being built into an eternal dwelling place for God by His Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

We welcome any who are still thirsty to come. ✨

<sup>33</sup> Ephesians 2:21-22; 4:16



*The word for **community** in Hebrew is **edah**, which also means **beehive**. This word portrays the way a hive of bees live and work together with a common identity.*

*Bees have no concern for themselves,  
but only for the hive.*

*So it is with the communities of God.*

**H**ave you ever watched a beehive? It is fascinating seeing thousands of little bees working together to produce honey. As you come near the hive, you can hear an exciting buzz as they go about the many tasks necessary to keep the hive alive. The workers are responsible to collect nectar and guard the hive. The young bees keep the hive in good condition, feed the larvae, and support in other household chores. There is never a dull moment in the busy life of a little bee.

This is much like the life that we have. No matter what we do, we love to do it together. Daily we gather to thank our Master for His salvation, and to hear Him speak to us through one another. This gathering keeps alive a genuine love and care for each other. As we work, we take advantage of the daily situations, guarding ourselves from the selfishness and pride that would come in to separate us and take away our love. Our children are a vital part of our life. We not only educate them, but we work with them to accomplish the simple tasks necessary to maintain a family life. Our life is not a dull routine of chores, but is full of the warmth that comes from the sweet fellowship of friends speaking their hearts to one another, celebrating the Sabbath every week, and participating in weddings and festivals.

But there are a few things that differ in our life from that of a beehive. One is that we are not driven by instinct or controlled by something separate from our own will. Each of us is here because we chose to leave behind our own separate lives to increase the life of this hive. Our life is not enclosed like the hive of a bee, nor do we have a stinger to harm any uninvited guests. We welcome anyone to experience our life with us. Please come and see what it is like to be part of a beehive of people expressing the warmth and love of our Creator. ✨



# The “Sinner’s Prayer” versus Romans 10:17

(Does Faith Come by Reading or Hearing?)

It has become an unquestioned assumption of Evangelical Christianity that a person can be saved merely by reading a tract and sincerely reciting the “Sinner’s Prayer” printed on the back. After all, that’s why this prayer is printed on the back of virtually every tract — so the reader can respond to what he reads by asking Jesus into his heart, whereupon he is assured that his sins are forgiven and he will go to heaven when he dies. More than likely, this new “born-again” believer is then advised to find himself a “Bible-believing church” where he can go on Sunday and be taught how to think as a Christian.

Ironically, if he actually succeeded in finding a *truly* Bible-believing church, he would discover that according to the Bible he was *not saved*. For as the Apostle Paul labored to explain, the faith that saves comes by *hearing* (not by *reading*) the gospel from someone who is sent with the grace and authority to proclaim it:

For “*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*”  
How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?  
And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?  
And how shall they hear without a preacher?  
And how shall they preach unless they are sent?  
As it is written: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,  
Who bring glad tidings of good things!*”  
But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says,  
“*Lord, who has believed our report?*”  
So then, *faith comes by hearing,  
and hearing by the word of God.* (Romans 10:13-17)

The progression is clear: In order to be *saved*, one has to *call* on the name of the Lord, and in order to *call* on Him with this effect, one has to *believe*, and in order to *believe*, one has to *hear* the “gospel of peace” from a *preacher*, and in order to *preach* so as to impart *faith* to the hearer, that *preacher* has to be *sent* with “beautiful feet” so as to have authority to command *obedience* to the gospel. It takes *all* of

these ingredients in order for *saving faith* to be communicated to the heart of the hearer.

Jesus Himself put these ingredients in a nutshell when He spoke to some religious Jews who questioned His authority to teach:

“*If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*” (John 7:17-18)

Coming  
to faith is not  
merely a matter  
of receiving  
information.

The hearer has to truly be willing to do the will of God, or he will not recognize the truth when he hears it. Also, the preacher must be without any deceit or falsehood or concern for his own fame or fortune,<sup>1</sup> but concerned only with rightly representing the One who sent him so as to pass on His Spirit to the willing hearer.

Coming to faith is not merely a matter of receiving *information*. If that were the case, then reading would be a sufficient mechanism to acquire saving faith. But faith is the

persuasion of a *spirit* which is given voice by a human being who possesses that spirit. This is a spiritual principle which is true of any kind of faith, but in the case of *saving faith*, the spirit that persuades is the *Holy Spirit* speaking through a true believer who both possesses and is in fellowship with that Spirit.

That is why Jesus told His disciples, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”<sup>2</sup> He was sending them with the authority to act on His and His Father’s behalf, in the power of the Spirit that was upon them through their fellowship with Him. And later, after His resurrection, they received the Holy Spirit in their inner man (not just upon them), and He gave them authority not only to heal people but to impart the forgiveness He had purchased with His own blood.<sup>3</sup> It was

<sup>1</sup> See also 2 Corinthians 4:2-5

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 10:40; John 13:20; Luke 10:16

<sup>3</sup> John 14:17; 20:22

with *that* authority that they preached on the Day of Pentecost, offering forgiveness and the Holy Spirit to all who would repent and be baptized.<sup>4</sup>

With *many other words*<sup>5</sup> Peter kept on exhorting them to “be saved from that perverse generation” which had killed their long-awaited Messiah. Those who had received his words were baptized. We can read what happened in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. We do not know exactly Peter’s “many other words” — all we can see is the *result* that took place in the lives of those who heard his words.

The people were cut to the heart for crucifying the Messiah and cried out, “What shall we do?” So Peter obviously answered their question:

- 1) Having been cut to the heart, they must repent;
- 2) As a result of repenting they were to be baptized, calling on the name of Yahshua,<sup>6</sup> the Messiah;
- 3) As a result of being baptized, they would be forgiven for their sins;
- 4) As a result of being forgiven, they would be given the gift of the Holy Spirit;
- 5) As a result of receiving the Holy Spirit, they would continually devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching;<sup>7</sup>
- 6) As a result of the apostles’ teaching, “all who believed were together and had all things in common;”<sup>8</sup>
- 7) As a result of having all things in common, “they began selling their property and possessions and were equally sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.”<sup>9</sup>

Peter told them that in the water they would be buried with their entire former life and all its ties and involvements. They would be plunged deep into Messiah, the Crucified One. The water was like His blood, and in this death they would be cutting themselves off from all demonic

powers ruling this present age, demonstrating the victory of the Cross over them, and the removal of blood guilt from their heads.<sup>10</sup> In coming out of the water they would be the possessors of a new life in Messiah, having received the Holy Spirit to empower them to live in the victory and strength of the Risen One.



They made a complete break with all and everything that would keep them from wholly devoting their lives to their brothers and sisters — the Body of Messiah of which they were now a part, having become “bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh.”<sup>11</sup> From then on they were committed to live and to die for the cause they had embraced — a consecration unto death. In obedience to their confession made in baptism they came into such grave conflicts with their relatives (i.e., those who would not obey

the gospel) that households were dissolving, families were split, engagements were canceled, and marriages were torn apart.<sup>12</sup> They were hated by the world, especially the religious establishment, just as their Master Yahshua had promised.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the 3000 who were saved that day submitted their very lives and possessions to those who had preached the gospel to them, and the apostles took care of them, seeing to it that everyone’s needs were met.<sup>14</sup> Being “born again” wasn’t just a religious experience — it was the practical reality of their lives, for they were born as spiritual babes into a new family, never to return to the perverse society from which they had been delivered. They didn’t have to go “find a Bible-believing church,” for they

were immediately immersed into a full-time life of devotion to Messiah *in His Body*. “All who believed were together and had all things in common.”<sup>15</sup> *None who believed were alone*, living their own independent lives in the world and just going to church on Sunday.

Whoever has the Son has the Life. To have the Son, you must receive those whom He sends who already have His life.<sup>16</sup> This is surrender into the arms of His Body,

  
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<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:38,41

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:40

<sup>6</sup> *Yahshua* is the Hebrew name of the Son of God; see *The Name Above All Names* on page 36.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:44

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:45

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 27:25

<sup>11</sup> Mark 3:33-35

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:49-53; 14:26; Mark 10:28-30

<sup>13</sup> John 15:18-21; 16:2

<sup>14</sup> Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:44

<sup>16</sup> John 13:20

becoming totally vulnerable, which is the sustenance of eternal life. This is what it means to be “in Him.” There is no one saved apart from total vulnerability to all He is and says, without fear or doubt. It requires no less surrender than Luke 14:31-32, proven by verse 33.

<sup>31</sup> “Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

<sup>33</sup> So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

You can't receive the King by just saying the “Sinner’s Prayer.” To receive the King, you have to receive the delegation He sends. You have to consider their feet “beautiful” who bring the terms of peace,<sup>17</sup> laying everything at their feet.<sup>18</sup> If you receive the sent one, you receive the King; if you receive Him, you receive His Father.<sup>19</sup> If you reject the sent one, you reject the Son and the Father.<sup>20</sup>

Yahshua is the Mediator between God and man, but Yahshua’s disciples are the mediators or

ambassadors<sup>21</sup> who bring men to Messiah. If the thought that no one can be saved by the “faith” they receive through reading a tract or even the Bible upsets you, it *should!* Countless people have been bamboozled into thinking they are saved and going to heaven as a result of saying the “Sinner’s Prayer” all by themselves, or even as a result of hearing the preaching of someone who does not himself have the Holy Spirit or the true gospel, but is seeking his own glory.<sup>22</sup>

The simple fact is this: there is not a *single example* in the whole New Testament of a person being saved apart

from receiving a true, flesh-and-blood disciple with the true gospel on his lips.<sup>23</sup> That true disciple will bring the newly born-again believer into a true full-time life where he no longer lives by or for himself,<sup>24</sup> but is fully devoted to the One who died and rose again on his behalf.<sup>25</sup> So where is that full-time life of devotion to Messiah?

You can find it at all the Bible-believing communities listed on the back of this paper, where you are welcome to come and hear the Good News and see it being lived out day by day. ✱



<sup>17</sup> Romans 10:15

<sup>18</sup> Acts 4:34-35

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 10:40

<sup>20</sup> Luke 10:16

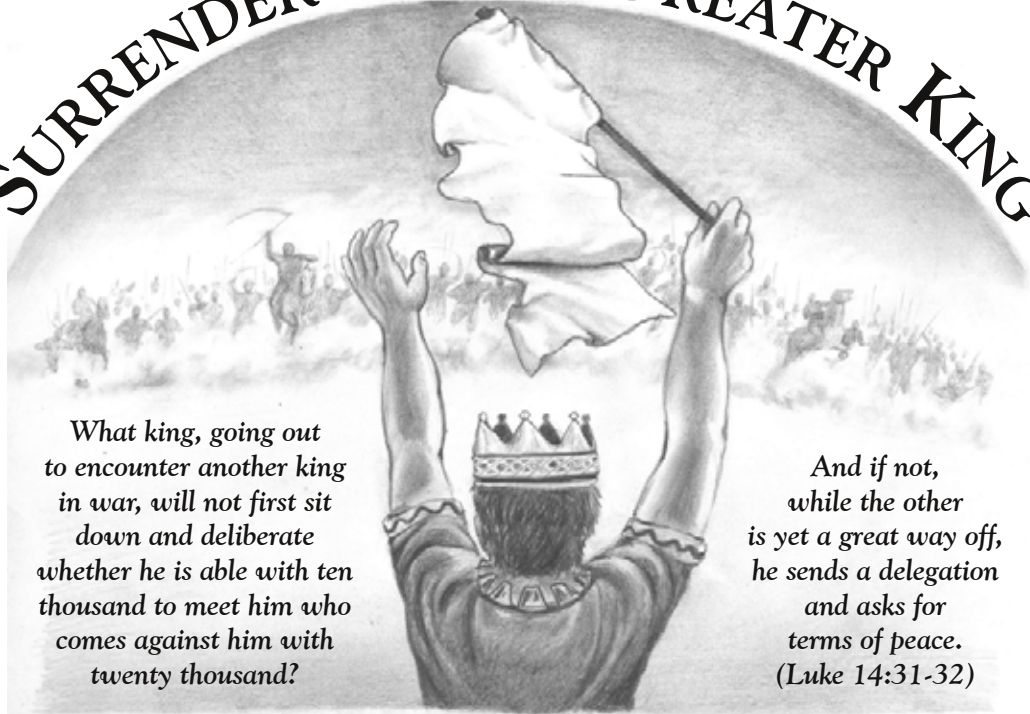
<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:17

<sup>23</sup> Even Paul had to receive the one sent to him in order to be saved in baptism (Acts 22:6-16).

<sup>24</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>25</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

# SURRENDER TO THE GREATER KING



*What king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not first sit down and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*

*And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.  
(Luke 14:31-32)*

The Good News is the message of love between God and man. God loves man with such an intense and compelling passion that He could only express it through *incarnation*. Only through divinity dwelling in humanity could God fully demonstrate His desire to be one with man — His highest and most precious creation. Love was the compelling force that caused the divine Word to leave behind all His divine rights in heaven to come to earth and take up residence in a man. Only in that way could He deal with the enmity that divided Him from those who were made in His very image and likeness.<sup>1</sup>

What did God see in us that compelled Him to make such a sacrifice?<sup>2</sup> It wasn't as if the sacrifice He made didn't come at a great cost to Himself, for it was this very thing that the gospel discloses about His true character and heart, which compels us in the same way to make that corresponding sacrifice of our own lives in surrendering all that we are and have to follow in His footsteps. Somehow, underneath all our accumulated layers of hardened callous, there lay a heart which He knew still had the potential of being reunited with Him to accomplish His purpose on earth — even when we were yet His enemies.<sup>3</sup>

The story of Jonathan and David gives us understanding of the essence of the gospel. Jonathan was

the son of Saul, the first king of Israel. As such, he was the rightful heir to the throne, though David was God's choice to be king in place of Saul. But Jonathan loved David more than his own right to the throne. If we can't comprehend the gospel in this story, *then we can't be saved*. We will never be united with God, for it is through the covenant of Jonathan and David that we can see the heart of Messiah and the heart of a true disciple and what is required of those who follow Him. It contains the very essence of the true gospel.

In 1 Samuel 18:1-4, Jonathan made a covenant with David (who represents Messiah) because he loved him *as himself*. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his armor and even his sword, bow, and belt. In doing so, Jonathan ratified his covenant with David in an act of total capitulation (surrender) to his coming kingship and kingdom,<sup>4</sup> giving himself to David as a servant. This was a sign of his recognition that David was the anointed king.<sup>5</sup>

Jonathan gave up *his* kingdom, his sovereignty, to the greater king. He laid down his arms and gave up his possessions — representing his very life. David was to replace Jonathan as heir to the throne, and Jonathan gladly gave David the preeminence. In giving David his robe, he

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:5-8 <sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:44 <sup>3</sup> Romans 5:10

<sup>4</sup> Luke 14:31-33 <sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 20:31; 23:17; Revelation 11:15

capitulated his own kingdom to the greater king. In giving David *his sword, his armor, his bow, and his belt*,<sup>6</sup> he showed that he was no threat to the authority of the coming king. Jonathan was fully surrendered to David.

David was not a usurper of Saul's kingdom, but the Spirit of God had come upon him to rule. Samuel had taken the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of God came upon David in power.<sup>7</sup> A small circle of witnesses to David's anointing assured its reality.

Evidently, Christians do not know a coming king who is worthy of unconditional surrender and capitulation. Luke 14:31-33 is meaningless to them. They do not see the worth of Messiah as Jonathan saw the worth of David.<sup>8</sup> His loyalty extended beyond earthly ties and loyalty to family — father and mother, wife and children, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Saul, in 1 Samuel 20:31-34, gave in to a Satanic impulse to kill David. Those who are under Satan's control do not recognize the Greater King, nor those who are sent from the King.<sup>10</sup> But like Jonathan's covenant with David, the New Covenant in Messiah seals our loyalty and enduring faithfulness to our King. Our only authority to represent Him is the reality of His Spirit working in our midst — the Spirit of love and unity, which is our only witness. Wherever the fruit of love<sup>11</sup> and unity is,<sup>12</sup> *there* the Spirit is poured out without measure,<sup>13</sup> and *there* is eternal life.<sup>14</sup>

Did second thoughts come to the woman who broke her costly alabaster vial of perfume and anointed Yahshua's body, or was it a *spontaneous* response of love for Messiah that she poured out (wasted) everything she had on Him?

Is there anything that can be compared with eternal life? How do we gain it? What could a man give in exchange for his soul?<sup>15</sup>

Like the story of Jonathan and David, Matthew 26:7-13 also expresses the very essence of the true gospel, exposing the false gospel. That is why what this woman did will also be spoken of in memory of her — not to just remember *her*, but to remember what kind of *response* the Good News brings about. That response is what saves us, for it indicates that our hearing of the Good News produced true faith.<sup>16</sup>

Our response to the demands of the Good News is actually what reveals our heart to God, whether we deem

Him worthy of our whole life. It brings out where our heart is — whether He is the only thing of worth to us, or we put Him on the scale with other things. Christians are taught to live by degrees of value and importance. It's common among Christians to say, "Well, it's Jesus first, then the family, next my job, then my home or farm, car, furniture, dog, etc." But if we see *His* worth, no such system of degrees exists, for *nothing can even be compared with Him*.

There are many degrees of service and love to Jesus in the system of Christianity, but no such degrees existed in the first church. It was all or nothing.<sup>17</sup> You either saw His worth or you didn't. The proof of recognizing His worth was revealed in your obedience to the call to forsake or forfeit family, possessions, your own life — everything you have and are. Whoever accepts these terms of peace<sup>18</sup> receives

100 times as much in return for everything he gives up in this life: homes, farms, families, etc., along with persecution, and eternal life in the age to come.<sup>19</sup>

In the story of Jonathan and David we can see the essence of the gospel, the message of *capitulation* — absolute and unconditional surrender to the Greater King.<sup>20</sup> Anything short of this response to the message of salvation does not recognize the worth of Messiah.

Many excuse themselves by saying they are only required to have a *willing attitude* in forsaking these things for His sake. But our

Master said in John 7:17 that if anyone is *willing* to do His will, then he will *recognize* it and, of course, *do it*. He won't reason it away. Our Master doesn't have to force recognition of His Kingship upon those who truly hate their own lives.<sup>21</sup> The gospel's demands simply expose our innermost heart — what we deem to be of greater worth than Him.

If the gospel you've heard did not communicate to your very heart the worth of Messiah, compelling you to give up all to follow Him,<sup>22</sup> then you aren't saved. If the gospel you heard *did* communicate that to you, then you will be loving as He loved.<sup>23</sup> It takes a 100% sacrificial response on both sides — His side and ours. That is what brings about the establishment of New Testament Community, because we are all on common ground through our common sacrificial response of love for one another. He gave up all — we give up all. In that way we become one in the Covenant Community of Messiah. That is how His Kingdom can come through the Good News. *Is it good news to you?* ❀

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 25:14-30 <sup>18</sup> Luke 14:32 <sup>19</sup> Mark 10:28-30

<sup>20</sup> Luke 14:31-33 <sup>21</sup> John 12:24-26 <sup>22</sup> Luke 14:33

<sup>23</sup> 1 John 3:16; 2:6

What  
can a man  
give  
in exchange  
for his  
soul?

<sup>6</sup> 1 Samuel 18:4 <sup>7</sup> 1 Samuel 16:13

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 23:15-18 <sup>9</sup> Matthew 10:37-39

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 14:13-14; Matthew 21:33-40; John 15:18; 16:2

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 3:14-16 <sup>12</sup> John 17:21 <sup>13</sup> John 3:34

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 133:1-3 <sup>15</sup> Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:35-37

<sup>16</sup> Romans 10:17



The cold grip of death tugs relentlessly at the soul of every man, no matter how lofty his ideals, as if to claim its fair wages in advance of his dying breath. The evil ruler of the unseen realm knows the Bible

all too well. Eager to exact the justice due him, he plays with the sin-sick souls of men as a cat plays with a mouse, holding them captive to the fear of death. For some, depression works best, for others, a manic denial of their sorry circumstances, or an unbridled obsession for sex, or money, or recognition — anything to capture the soul, crush the spirit, and silence the objective voice of man's conscience. Thus Satan feeds his insatiable desire for the destruction of God's image in man.

Yes, it is true: All men sin,<sup>1</sup> and the wages of sin is death,<sup>2</sup> therefore it is appointed to man to die once, and then comes the Judgment.<sup>3</sup> And yes, it is also true that the Messiah was offered once to bear the sins of many,<sup>4</sup> and set them free from their captivity to the evil ruler of this world.<sup>5</sup> So who are the "many" whose sins He bore? "But," you may object, "He bore the sins of the whole world!" And so it may seem from a casual reading of this popular verse:

*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:22)*

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>2</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 9:27

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 9:28

<sup>5</sup> Colossians 1:13; Romans 6:6-7; John 8:36

## THE END OF DEATH'S REIGN

*"Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses..."*

*(Romans 5:14)*

vices as the unbelieving society in which they are immersed.<sup>6</sup> How then can they claim to be saved from sin's dominion? For the Apostle Paul wrote of the profound effect *in this life* of having received the benefit of Messiah's sacrificial death:

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, **how much more** will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness **reign in life** through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)*

<sup>6</sup> Depression, and the taking of antidepressants, is as pervasive among Christians as in the broader society. And according to *The Barna Group* ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)), a conservative Christian research agency, the divorce rate among Christians in America is the same as that among non-Christians. One Barna project director admitted, "We have found that in a lot of ways Christians are not living different lives than non-Christians, when we look at their behavior... It's hard for Christians to understand because it seems contrary to what people think would happen... We would love to be able to report that Christians are living very distinct lives and impacting the community, but ... in the area of divorce rates they continue to be the same." (John Rossomando, "Born-Again Christians No More Immune to Divorce than Others, Says Author," *CNSNews.com*, January 21, 2002) Barna also reports that there is no difference between "born-again" and unchurched adults in the likelihood of viewing pornography on the Internet, or reading magazines or watching videos with explicit sexual content.

So whoever is still a slave to sin has obviously not received God's abundant provision of grace through Messiah's sacrifice, or His gift of righteousness, regardless of what he claims to believe.<sup>7</sup> Clearly something more than that kind of belief<sup>8</sup> is required on the part of the sinner in order for his sins to be borne by the Savior, releasing him from his slavery to sin.

Perhaps the key to understanding what is required can be found in the puzzling statement that Paul began his thought with a few verses back: "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses..."<sup>9</sup> Why didn't he say, "Yet death reigned from Adam to Christ"? What did Moses do to bring an end to death's reign? Well, it was through Moses that God gave the law, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system, and through these He provided a way for a man's sins to be atoned for, loosening death's grip on his soul. If we can understand how this sacrificial system worked, then maybe we can understand why Christianity today doesn't work — and where to find the faith that works.

It has been said of old Israel's animal sacrifices that enough blood was shed to float a battleship.<sup>10</sup> If even a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground without our Father taking notice,<sup>11</sup> how much more did He care about the lifeblood of all those animals that served His people? Was it all poured out in vain? The writer of Hebrews taught that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin,<sup>12</sup> yet it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.<sup>13</sup> So why did the Law require animal sacrifices? The key is found in what happened in a sensitive human heart during the shedding of that blood.

## The Sin Offering

This was the law of the sin offering for a common Israelite:

*If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and*



*kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar... Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. (Leviticus 4:27-31)*

Unless you happen to be a goat farmer, it will be very hard for you to put yourself in the place of this Israelite of old who must offer a sacrifice for his sin — a perfect female goat from his herd. Notice that it says *female*. It would have been easier if it had said *male*, for you don't get so personally attached to the bucks. You keep a few on hand for breeding, but you don't handle them so much. The extras you kill for meat. But it's the *females* that receive your tender care, for they are the most valuable. They provide milk to feed your family, and they bear kids every spring. And it's the ones without blemish that you value the most, not only because you want to increase your herd with their offspring, but also because they win your heart.

So there you are, an Israelite who has become conscious of your sin, because the Law has done its work of identifying your transgressions.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps you try to push it out of your mind for a time, but eventually the guilt of your sin weighs heavily upon you. Looking over your herd of goats, you pick out the yearlings<sup>15</sup> from among the females. They are so sweet and innocent. Knowing already which one is your favorite, you find yourself trying to justify choosing one of the other nice goats, which you reason would also be considered "without blemish" in anyone else's

eyes. The priest wouldn't know the difference, but you would, and your God would. You would just be fooling yourself if you didn't offer your best. Your sacrifice would not be acceptable, and your sins would not be forgiven.

So taking your best yearling doe, you head out on the

familiar but difficult path to Jerusalem to present yourself to the priest at the Temple. Along the way, the goat's innocent bleating causes you to grieve over your sin and the death it produces, taking its toll in your own life, and prematurely

<sup>7</sup> Romans 6:16-18

<sup>8</sup> John 2:23-25

<sup>9</sup> Romans 5:13

<sup>10</sup> For a small battleship of 10,000 tons, that would require well over two million gallons of blood.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 10:29

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 9:22

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 10:4

<sup>14</sup> Romans 3:20; 5:13; 7:7

<sup>15</sup> Numbers 15:27

ending the life of this beautiful animal. All too soon you find yourself at the Temple. Kneeling in front of the altar of burnt offerings and laying your hands gently on the head of the goat as the priest restrains it, you confess your sins in the simple faith that God will transfer your guilt to that innocent animal. Then the priest takes a razor-sharp knife and slits the animal's throat, and you watch helplessly as its lifeblood spurts into the waiting basin with each beat of its heart, until the goat collapses in its last spasm of death. The priest pours its blood out at the base of the altar, and tells you that your sin is forgiven. You realize that your heart is pounding more than the goat's was, and as you walk away, the cost of your

forgiveness causes you to cry out to your God to help you overcome the sin that keeps bringing you back to this place.

Was the guilt actually borne by the goat? Of course not. A goat is not a moral creature with an eternal soul that can bear guilt. But the goat, as an innocent and unblemished sacrifice, was a *type* or foreshadow of the

One who was to come. He would indeed bear the sins of all whose faith was expressed in giving their best in obedience and childlike trust, along with the sincere and complete confession of their sins. Our Father, seeing the honest and sincere heart of the offerer, covered his sins until the time when Messiah would come to give His life as the culmination of all the sacrifices offered in sincerity, and to release these captives waiting in "Abraham's bosom."<sup>16</sup>

## The Scapegoat

The sacrifice for personal sins was not the only type that looked forward to Messiah. Each year on the Day of Atonement, two male goats were chosen for a special kind of sin offering — for the sins of the whole nation. The high priest would kill the first goat in the customary way for a sin offering, but the second goat he presented live:

*And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he*

*shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:21-22)*

This is where the term *scapegoat* comes from. It became the custom in Israel that when the second goat was released, all the people would curse it, hurling insults, derision, and scorn upon the poor animal as it fled the angry mob, only to meet certain death by wild animals in the wilderness. It is not hard to see how this goat also

foreshadowed what would happen to Messiah at the hands of His own countrymen:

*But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." He*

*did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. (John 11:49-51)*

Just as happened to that innocent scapegoat, the Jews heaped their scorn and derision upon the innocent man, Yahshua, the Messiah sent to save them. They cursed Him and spat upon Him and treated Him shamefully, driving Him outside the gates of Jerusalem to the certain death that awaited Him. Little did they know, they were fulfilling the prophetic significance of all those poor scapegoats that gave up their lives for the nation each year on the Day of Atonement.

## The Passover Lamb

But probably the most familiar Old Testament foreshadow of Messiah's sacrifice is the offering of the Passover lamb, to which the Apostle Paul makes explicit reference:

*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the*



<sup>16</sup> Luke 16:22; Ephesians 4:8



*leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)*

Indeed, according to John's Gospel, Yahshua died on the cross at the same time as the Jews were killing their Passover lambs,<sup>17</sup> and ironically, the chief priests petitioned Pilate to break His legs so that He would die<sup>18</sup> and be taken down from the cross before evening, so as not to defile their ritual observance of the Passover.<sup>19</sup> But He had already died from the crushing weight of our sins which cut Him off from His Father,<sup>20</sup> so it was not necessary to break His legs, even as a Passover lamb's bones were not to be broken.<sup>21</sup>

For the Israelites of old, the Passover lamb was an expression of their utter trust and dependency upon the God of Israel to deliver them from death. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month,<sup>22</sup> each household was to take from their flock their best yearling male lamb, one without blemish, and "keep" it close to them until the 14<sup>th</sup> day:<sup>23</sup>

*...and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. (Exodus 12:6)*

The Hebrew word translated as "keep" in this verse is translated as "become" or "come to be" almost everywhere else it is used in the Old Testament. The implication was that they would become very attached to this sweet lamb so that they would really suffer to take its life at the end of that 14<sup>th</sup> day. In tears they would put its blood on the door posts and lintel of their house, and eat its roasted flesh with bitter herbs safe inside their house, trusting that the death angel would see the blood and pass over them.<sup>24</sup>

*The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:13)*

<sup>17</sup> John 19:14; Exodus 12:6

<sup>18</sup> A person being crucified was unable to breathe unless he could push himself up with his legs, taking the strain off his chest.

<sup>19</sup> John 19:31

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 27:46,50; Isaiah 53:10-11

<sup>21</sup> John 19:36; Exodus 12:46

<sup>22</sup> That is, the first month of the Hebrew calendar, which was the beginning of spring.

<sup>23</sup> Exodus 12:3-6 <sup>24</sup> Exodus 12:7-8

Their deliverance from the slow death of bondage in Egypt and the immediate death of their firstborn offspring would not come without shedding the blood of an innocent animal. On the scale of things, it was a small price to pay for their freedom, but in order for it to be acceptable and effectual it required their utter sincerity and unflinching obedience. Any who failed to choose their best lamb, or failed to let their heart pity it, also failed to receive the salvation they tried to weasel out of God, for God is not mocked.<sup>25</sup>

### Shut the Doors!

Over 400 years before the Messiah walked the dusty roads of Palestine, the prophet Malachi cried out to the backsliding nation of Israel,

*"When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor;*

*will he accept it or show you favor?" says the LORD of hosts... "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will not accept an offering from your hand." (Malachi 1:8,10)*

After Malachi's death, no prophetic voice was heard in Israel until the days of John the Baptist, four centuries later. Although the Levitical priesthood continued to go through the motions of offering the ritual sacrifices in the Temple, most of that blood was shed in vain. But finally, in the fullness of time, our Father found a handful of sincere Israelites who were looking for the consolation of Israel, longing for the promised Messiah to come and deliver them from their bondage.

Through a miracle conceived in the heart of God before time began, a poor Hebrew virgin named Miriam<sup>26</sup> became pregnant and gave birth to a child whom she was told to call *Yahshua*, which means "Yahweh's Salvation," for He would save His people from their sins.<sup>27</sup> He was the "only begotten" Son of God in that the seed that caused conception in Miriam's womb was a pure human seed

<sup>25</sup> Galatians 6:7

<sup>26</sup> Or *Mary* in English.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 1:21

preserved by God from before the Fall, not the fallen seed of Adam through her betrothed husband Yoceph.<sup>28</sup> Therefore Yahshua did not inherit the sin nature common to all who are descended from Adam.

## The Lamb of God

When John the Baptist first saw Yahshua coming down to the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit spoke through him the prophetic words, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>29</sup> Those words would echo in the minds of sensitive ones who witnessed the willing sacrifice of His life on the cross only a few years later. Indeed, this man, Yahshua of Nazareth, was to be the fulfillment of all the sacrifices offered in faith by sincere Israelites since the Law was given through Moses.

Not only was Yahshua born without blemish, but He lived His entire life in unbroken communion with His Father in heaven, doing all the Father's will, not once succumbing to any temptation. He never took a thought for Himself, but instead was always concerned for others, loving even those who hated Him, even to His dying breath. That is why the Father loved Him so much.<sup>30</sup> He was the very best that the Father had to give, which is why the most famous verse in the Bible is so significant:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

God did not expect His people to do what He was unwilling to do Himself, therefore He did not withhold His very best — His beloved, only begotten Son with whom He had sweet communion — but gave Him to be slain as a sacrifice for our sins.

Like all the sacrifices sincerely offered before Him, Yahshua was an innocent lamb without blemish, but unlike all those sacrifices, He had a human soul that could actually bear the guilt of all who would "lay their hands" on Him. Therefore, in the last moments of His life, the guilt of all the sins that had been confessed by sincere Israelites as they laid their hands on the heads of their sacrificial lambs was placed upon Him, along with the guilt of all the sins confessed by His true disciples up until the day of His return. He literally

became our sin,<sup>31</sup> and His Father, from whom Yahshua had never experienced one moment's separation, turned away from Him.<sup>32</sup>



It was the weight of our sins and the separation from His Father that finally snuffed out His life, not the excruciating physical suffering on the cross. Although His body was placed in the grave, His soul was put to grief in Sheol,<sup>33</sup> the realm of death, a place of torment<sup>34</sup> where for three days and three nights He paid the full wages of our sin.<sup>35</sup> When Death had exhausted its fury on Him for the guilt of our sins, it was no longer possible for Him to be held by its power.<sup>36</sup> That is when His soul and spirit returned to His body, which was waiting without decay in the grave,<sup>37</sup> and He rose triumphant over Death.

## The Witness of the Resurrection

So after the untold millions of gallons of innocent blood shed by sacrificial animals, and after the Father's heart-wrenching sacrifice of His beloved Son, and after the Son's unimaginable suffering in death on our behalf, what should be the outcome? Will Yahshua see the fruit of the anguish of His soul in death and be satisfied?<sup>38</sup> What is the credible witness of His resurrection? Where are those whose life of love and unity is a living testimony to the end of death's reign? They could be found in the first century:

*All of the believers were united, heart and soul; no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common. And with great power they gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:32-33)*

They can also be found today, not among the 41,000 denominations of Christianity, but at the addresses listed on the back of this paper, where all have truly laid their hands on the Lamb of God and obtained the forgiveness of their sins. The love of Messiah controls them, because they have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.<sup>39</sup> This is eternal life, and it begins as soon as death's reign comes to an end. ✨

  
**Will Yahshua see  
the fruit of the anguish  
of His soul in death  
and be satisfied?  
(Isaiah 53:11)  
What is the credible  
witness of His  
resurrection?**  


<sup>28</sup> Or Joseph in English.

<sup>29</sup> John 1:29

<sup>30</sup> John 10:17; Mark 1:11

<sup>31</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-12

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 53:10 <sup>34</sup> Luke 16:28 <sup>35</sup> Matthew 12:40

<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:24 <sup>37</sup> Acts 2:27,31 <sup>38</sup> Isaiah 53:11

<sup>39</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

# Fascination

He knew that no man had ever made it through the ordeal. Like an obstacle course through a desert, each hurdle, each almost insurmountable obstacle tested whether he would win the prize that held his heart spellbound. Each day the sun came up and each night it set brought him closer. Nothing could hold him back — neither fire, nor water, nor test after test. Like a man in the twilight working feverishly to finish before nightfall, he raced on, drawn by his love for something more precious than life itself.

What was it? Wealth? Fame? Power? Pleasure? Were these what claimed his heart's energy? Or was it something deeper, longer lasting, something living and

eternal? It had to be. For he knew, as men have always known, that once this brief life on earth is over, we face an age so long that no one, not even the wisest among us, can grasp more than a tiny piece of it. Here we live our few short years that make all the difference where we will be forever. If he could complete the ordeal, if he could run the course, then he would not be alone. Others would follow, ones like him who would be with him in that unending future.

On the last day he faced his final obstacle. Death itself had come to test him. Like a scapegoat<sup>1</sup> thronged about by those eager to cast their sin upon it, he passed through a gauntlet of his own people, a crowd lining the streets, hurling abuse and scorn and curses. Beyond that came a second, more dreadful torture. All his spiritual enemies had gathered round and formed a gauntlet, too: two long rows of savage beasts armed with long rods, swinging at his back as he passed between them — to break his spirit, to cause him to give up, to drive him to his knees, and into the ground, and down into death.

Like the scapegoat wandering around in the wilderness until thirst or hunger or wild animals killed it, he took the

sins of the whole world far away into the fiery darkness in the core of the earth. In that wild landscape he finished the agonizing ordeal. In a tossing sea of volcanic sulfur and molten stone his soul received the storm of Heaven's full wrath against sin. Like a helpless victim drowning in the flood, he passed through a suffering too great for us to



understand. A universe of hurt and shame, of unpayable injuries and ruined lives, of corruption and perversity was paid for, one crime at a time, in that brief three-day eternity. Finally it ended!

What had given him the strength to go on and on? Love, for certain; only love grants such strength to endure. But wasn't there something more? Something

else that had captured his heart and was the center of all his attention? What could have fascinated him so?<sup>2</sup> Who was it?

It could only have been those who would follow him and be like a bride married to him. They were the reason why he felt compelled to die. He wanted to save them from the horrible agony of unending death. He knew that once they heard what he had done for them, they would respond to his love with the same fascination he felt toward them. They would willingly give up everything for his sake — family, career, wealth, ambitions, dreams, comforts, even their very own life and interests.<sup>3</sup> This sacrifice, on their part, would come from their genuine response to his sacrifice, and would bring about a new nation of twelve tribes. Though his ordeal is over, hers is yet to come. Through all the labor that will take place, she won't lose heart, for he is her fascination. ✨

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 16:21-22

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:44-46

<sup>3</sup> Luke 14:33

# The Golden Calf, the Gospel, and the Royal Priesthood



The gospel proclaimed by Yahshua, the Messiah, was a radical message that cut right to the core of what separated man from His Creator. Those who received His message were bound together in a radically committed life, which demonstrated Yahshua's victory over the power of sin and death. Yahshua's gospel was not something He came up with on His own, but was consistent with the demand that God has always made on those who would serve Him — complete loyalty and devotion. So to really understand the gospel in its fullness, one must understand the history of God's dealings with man.

There is a very significant and heartbreaking story in the Old Testament that few Christians even know, and fewer still understand, though its message is the very foundation of the Gospel. It is the story of the fall of Israel from its original calling to be a whole kingdom of priests, not just one tribe of priests and eleven tribes of laymen. Here is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, spoke through Moses to the entire twelve tribes after they came out of Egypt, and their response:

*“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among*

*all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that Yahweh had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that Yahweh has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to Yahweh. (Exodus 19:5-8)*

God's deep desire for Israel was that they would be a shining light amongst all the nations around them. He wanted them be a witness to the nations of what He is like by their unity as a commonwealth of twelve tribes, and by their life of righteousness and justice.<sup>1</sup> For that is what it means to be a priest, and to be a priesthood: to represent God's heart and nature to man, not only in word, but also in how they live before the nations around them. They stand between God and man, reconciling man to his Maker. But if they compromise their priesthood by giving their affection to other gods, they forfeit their priesthood, for they no longer represent the one true God. Without a priesthood there is no way for man to be reconciled to God.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 18:19; Isaiah 5:7

Tragically, that is exactly what happened with Israel not long after they vowed to be God's holy priesthood. The poignant story is told in Exodus 32. Moses had gone up on Mt. Sinai to hear from Yahweh, who had miraculously delivered them from the oppression they were under in Egypt. There he received the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, but he was gone for longer than the people expected. In their restless anxiety, thinking Moses to have perished on the mountain, they pressured Aaron to make them a god to worship. It was going to take a lot to win their hearts back from the idolatry and sensual worship they had been immersed in for generations in Egypt.

Seeing their waywardness, Yahweh sent Moses down the mountain to deal with his people. Moses found the Israelites dancing around a golden calf, having totally abandoned themselves to their idolatry. Amazingly, Moses expressed God's great mercy by giving them another chance to respond to His call:

*When Moses saw that the people were running wild (for Aaron had let them run wild, to the derision of their enemies), then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Who is on Yahweh's side? Come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered around him.*

*He said to them, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor.'" The sons of Levi did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand of the people fell on that day.*

*Moses said, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of Yahweh, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day." (Exodus 32:25-29)*

Sadly, only the Levites responded to the call to serve Yahweh — but not all of them. Therefore those who responded were commanded to take their swords and kill their fellow tribesmen who were not willing to forsake their idolatry. Thus the tribe of Levi was cleansed that day, and those who remained became Yahweh's holy priesthood. They had "ordained themselves" to this priesthood at the cost of their unwilling kinsmen. Speaking of this pivotal event in the history of Israel, Moses later writes:

*At that time Yahweh set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to stand before Yahweh to minister to him and to bless his name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. Yahweh is his inheritance, as Yahweh your God said to him. (Deuteronomy 10:8-9)*

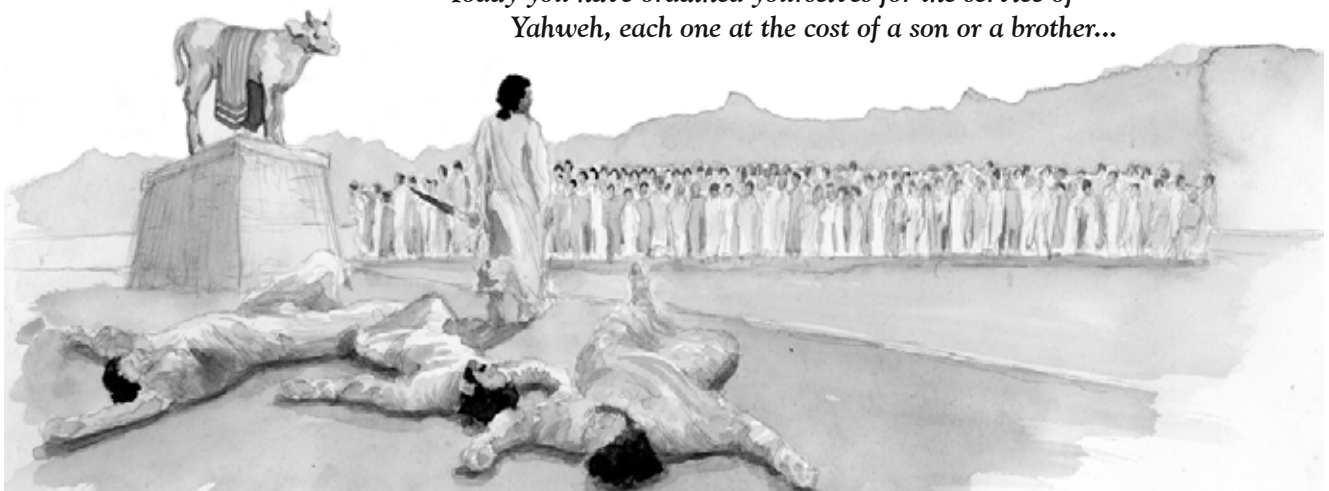
### The Life of the Royal Priesthood

Not only did the Levites have to totally forsake their unwilling relatives, but they also forfeited any personal material wealth they could have claimed in the land, for they would live a life of total devotion to Yahweh. He saw fit to gather them into priestly "cities" where they would be utterly dependent upon Him to provide for them:

*Command the people of Israel to give to the Levites some of the inheritance of their possession as cities for them to dwell in. And you shall give to the Levites pasture lands around the cities. The cities shall be theirs to dwell in, and their pasture lands shall be for their cattle and for their livestock and for all their beasts. (Numbers 35:2-3)*

These priestly "cities" were not as one would think of a city today. They were actually small walled villages about two-thirds of a mile in diameter, with a narrow band of

*Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of Yahweh, each one at the cost of a son or a brother...*



shared pasture land around them.<sup>2</sup> Within those walls the Levites lived together as a close-knit community, working together on their shared lands for their common good. Each of the men had allotted times when they would serve in the Temple in Jerusalem,<sup>3</sup> knowing that their wives and children would be well cared for back home in their priestly communities.

The Levitical priesthood was a type or foreshadow of what the New Covenant priesthood would be like, from the radical manner of their calling to their set-apart life and their ministry in the Temple. As the Apostle Peter wrote to the early church, taking Exodus 19:6 and applying it directly to them:

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

Indeed, they were “called out of darkness” to be His holy priesthood just as decisively as the Levites were called out of the idolatry that Israel had fallen into in Exodus 32. It is no mere coincidence that the Master’s words echo the words of Moses:

*“Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.” (Matthew 12:30)*

*“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:34-37)*

*“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple... Likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26,33)*

### Yahshua’s Obedience to the Gospel

Yahshua did not call His followers to literally kill their unwilling relatives, but He did call them to sever their ties to their former lives, including unwilling family and friends,<sup>4</sup> and be immersed into a new spiritual family. As an example

to all who would follow Him, Yahshua cut off the influence of His own mother and brothers when they sought to restrain His “madness”<sup>5</sup>:

*And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When His family heard it, they went out to restrain Him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ... Then His mother and His brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you.” And He replied, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” And looking at those who sat around Him, He said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:20,21,31-35)*

This was the “sword” that pierced Mary’s heart, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Simeon at Yahshua’s dedication in the Temple:

*Then Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2:34-35)*

That sword did its work, as Yahshua’s mother and brothers were evidently cut to the heart by His words that day, and later were numbered among His disciples. Others wanted to follow Him conditionally, but His command was as clear as that of Moses:

### The Cost of Following Yahshua

*To another He said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

*Yet another said, “I will follow You, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-62)*

And perhaps the most well-known example is that of the “Rich Young Ruler” who came running after Yahshua

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 35:4-5 <sup>3</sup> 1 Chronicles 9:25; 24:19; Luke 1:23

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 10:28 <sup>5</sup> Mark 3:20-21

and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The Master’s command was clear:

*“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:21-22)*

Many Christians would say, “That was only for him, since he was so attached to his possessions.” Even Yahshua’s disciples were surprised, perhaps because they had been poor and hadn’t had so much materially to leave behind, but the Master was calling even the rich to abandon their riches. Peter spoke for them all, and the Master’s response made the “Good News” crystal clear:

*Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.” So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:28-30, NKJ)*



Yahshua did not envision just a little rag-tag band of disciples such as they were then, but a spiritual nation bursting forth from the hundredfold increase that would result from each disciple’s unconditional surrender of his life and possessions — for Yahshua’s sake and the gospel’s sake. He envisioned nothing less than the “priestly cities” of the New Covenant holy priesthood — communities of disciples sharing a common, set-apart life together as a light to the perverse society around them.

### **The Restoration of the Twelve Tribes of Israel**

It was not “out of the blue” that Yahshua had told His disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”<sup>6</sup> And it was not a mere coincidence that He chose *twelve* apostles to pour this vision into, for He had in mind the restoration of the twelve-tribed royal priesthood that Israel was supposed to be.<sup>7</sup> But this time it would be tribes of a common *spiritual* stock, not necessarily the same physical bloodline. It would be the extended family of those who *do* the will of God.<sup>8</sup> Their priestly “cities” (communities) would be filled with grateful disciples who

love one another just as He loved them,<sup>9</sup> who daily lay down their lives for one another,<sup>10</sup> and who daily encourage one another,<sup>11</sup> continually making sure that no one is falling short of the grace of God.<sup>12</sup>

Yahshua’s apostles clearly took on both His gospel and His vision, for when the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost, that gospel is what they spoke with much passion, as is evident from the results of their preaching. In the same spirit of Moses and Yahshua, Peter exhorted the people, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” And 3,000 people responded by forsaking everything and banding together as a spiritual brotherhood:

  
**It was not a mere coincidence that Yahshua chose twelve apostles to pour His vision into, for He had in mind the restoration of the twelve-tribed royal priesthood that Israel was supposed to be.**  


*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. (Acts 2:44-46)*

*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was*

*upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)*

This vibrant community would be the first of many priestly communities established all over Judea according to the same pattern as the community in Jerusalem, and then throughout the Mediterranean world.<sup>13</sup> Within about 30 years, the Apostle Paul was able to describe this emerging holy nation as “our twelve tribes who earnestly serve God night and day”<sup>14</sup> — His New Covenant royal priesthood. The apostles frequently exhorted the communities to be faithful in their priestly service:

*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual*

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:14 <sup>7</sup> Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Isaiah 49:6

<sup>8</sup> Mark 3:34-34 <sup>9</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>10</sup> 1 John 3:16

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 3:13 <sup>12</sup> Hebrews 12:15

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Acts 1:8 <sup>14</sup> Acts 26:7

sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence... I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without wrath or dissension... (1 Timothy 2:1,2,8)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable [priestly] service. (Romans 12:1)

## The Demise of the First-Century Church

But the very strength of Paul's exhortations is an indication that the church was already in decline in the latter part of the first century. Indeed, there are many indications in the apostles' letters that the church was losing its set-apart, priestly way of life, and falling back into the ways of the world around them.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the first century, Yahshua Himself wrote to the church through the Apostle John:

*"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."* (Revelation 2:4-5)

Yahshua warned of the impending judgment that was coming upon the early church. The loss of their "lampstand" was tantamount to the loss of their priesthood, for they ceased receiving the illumination of the Holy Spirit and became as natural men, incapable of being a light to the surrounding darkness. Woefully, not long into the second century, that darkness consumed them,<sup>16</sup> as is evident from the apostate condition of the church described in the letter of James,<sup>17</sup> chronologically the last letter of the New Testament.

<sup>15</sup> For example: 2 Timothy 2:4; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 11:3-4; 1 John 5:21 <sup>16</sup> John 9:4

<sup>17</sup> See the article, "The Insurgent," on page 29 in the freepaper *A Felled Tree Sprouting*, available for download from our web site: <http://www.twelvetribes.org/publications/-freepaper-archive.html>

## Bloody Church History

Gone were the priestly communities of outspoken disciples<sup>18</sup> consumed with a fervent love for one another that had caused their lives to be knit together into holy commonwealth,<sup>19</sup> which Paul had once been so bold as to call "The Israel of God."<sup>20</sup> They were replaced by what Yahshua Himself called "Synagogues of Satan,"<sup>21</sup> where a lukewarm<sup>22</sup> and silent laity<sup>23</sup> were presided over by supposed ministers of righteousness who were in fact Satan's servants.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, these "Nicolaitans"<sup>25</sup> soon came to be called priests, and indeed they were, but not for Yahweh, the God of Israel. He could not hear their prayers over the discordant noise of their divided and soon-to-be warring factions.<sup>26</sup>

1900 years of discord, persecution, murder, genocide, immorality and injustice among Christians have come and gone since the first-century church fell from its priesthood. Today there are some 39,000 Christian denominations<sup>27</sup> that abundantly fulfill the prophetic words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, having the appearance of godliness but lacking the power to live a priestly life together in love and unity. They are far from bearing the fruit of the Kingdom which Yahshua longed for when He pronounced old Israel cut off from its holy root:

*"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."* (Matthew 21:43)

The fruitless branches of Christianity are merely the tragic evidence that Paul's warning to the early church went unheeded:

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 3:6 <sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:12

<sup>20</sup> Galatians 6:16 <sup>21</sup> Revelation 2:9; 3:9 <sup>22</sup> Revelation 3:16

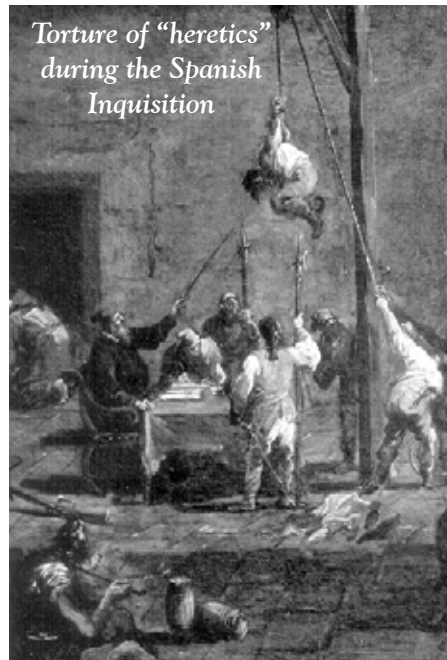
<sup>23</sup> *Laity* — In Christianity, members of the religion that do not have the priestly responsibilities of ordained clergy.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:14-15

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 2:6,15 — The word *Nicolaitan* is derived from *nikao*, meaning "to conquer," and *laos*, meaning "people," hence, "people conquerors" — the clergy who do all the speaking for the silent laity. For more on this subject, see the article "The Incumbency" on page 22 in the freepaper *A Felled Tree Sprouting*, available for download from our web site: <http://www.twelvetribes.org/publications/-freepaper-archive.html>

<sup>26</sup> 1 Timothy 2:8; Galatians 5:15; James 4:1-2

<sup>27</sup> *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 8.





For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:21-22)

## The Restoration of Israel in these Last Days

The good news is that in these last days a little sprig has sprouted from the ancient and holy root of the “olive tree” Paul spoke of.<sup>28</sup> It is growing into a new spiritual Israel of twelve tribes, a holy priesthood that is again earnestly serving God night and day for the hope of His promise to Abraham.<sup>29</sup> We live together in communities in twelve geographic regions around the world, striving to love one another and guard our unity with great diligence. We have forsaken everything to be grafted into this life, just as did

the disciples of old. And we are earnestly searching for all of our brothers and sisters who are still lost in the confusion of Christianity and Judaism, and the futility of their independent lives in this fallen world, but who are willing to do our Father’s will. Perhaps you are one of them.

If your heart is stirred by what you are reading in this freepaper, please drop what you are doing and visit one of the locations listed on the back cover. ❀

*And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.<sup>30</sup> (Revelation 22:17)*

<sup>28</sup> Romans 11:17; Job 14:7-9 <sup>29</sup> Acts 26:7; Revelation 21:9,12

<sup>30</sup> The word *freely* here means without any cause to hold back from drinking deeply.

Once there was a farmer who planted an olive tree in his garden. He carefully watched over the tender green shoot, watering it and pulling the weeds that threatened to choke the life out of it. As it grew into a proud tree, he anticipated the day when it would begin to bear its precious fruit in abundance.

Outside the garden grew a wild olive tree. It did not receive the care that the gardener lavished on the cultivated olive tree. Its branches were scrawny, its leaves small, but in its wild and haphazard way it produced a steady but sparse crop of small, bitter olives.

As the cultivated olive tree matured, its branches grew strong and luxurious with leaves, but no olives appeared. Year after year passed, and still the gardener waited in vain for a harvest. He rebuked the olive tree, saying it deserved to be cut down and burned. But with compassion he dug around the tree and worked fertilizer into the ground, watered it, and waited again. Still it failed to produce the oil-laden fruit that the gardener desired.

Brokenhearted, the gardener took his ax and began to cut away the barren branches. Then he carefully grafted in branches from the wild olive tree, and again fertilized and watered his tree. To his delight, this hybrid olive tree soon began to bear rich, succulent fruit, both from its cultivated and its wild branches. But alas, its fruitfulness was short-lived. In a few years its once bountiful crop dwindled away to nothing. Gradually the farmer cut away the worthless branches, and eventually the entire tree.

## THE OLIVE TREE A Parable



Many years passed. The stump withered and its roots dried up in the ground. But the farmer never ceased longing for his tree and the abundant fruit that he intended for it to produce. Others came into the garden and took the cut-off, withered branches and stuck them into the ground. They decorated them and hung ornaments on them and boasted about them. People began to give credit to the gardener for the beautiful arrangements of dead branches that surrounded the place where his olive tree should have been. In time everyone forgot about the olive tree.

Everyone, that is, except the gardener — he never forgot. In his own time he returned to the garden. Ever so slowly he began to sprinkle a little precious water around the base of the stump, just enough to soak into the parched ground and not be wasted. Faithfully he continued to saturate the ground with life-giving water. And ever so slowly the life that lay dormant in that old, dry root began to respond. When no one was looking, a tiny green sprout peeked timidly from the side of the stump. No one was looking, that is, except the gardener. He saw that tender shoot and great joy welled up in his heart. How lovingly he watches over that little stem! What do you think will become of that new olive tree? Will it fail or flourish? ❀

*For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations. (Isaiah 61:11)*

According to 1 Kings 19:19-21, Luke 9:59-62, and Matthew 8:21-22, loyalty to Messiah must be first and foremost. He takes first place — preeminence over all other loyalties.<sup>1</sup> This is how our Master Yahshua,<sup>2</sup> the Messiah, trained and taught His disciples, and He told them to teach this to others.<sup>3</sup> This is clearly recorded in the Gospels, and is to be proclaimed to the whole world, indiscriminately.<sup>4</sup> The gospel makes the distinction between those who are willing to serve God and those who are not willing. It is the perfect test for all who hear it.<sup>5</sup> Yahshua's good news separates the sheep from the goats. It reveals the secret intentions of the hearer's heart.<sup>6</sup> It divides those who are willing to do the will of the Father from those who are not willing.<sup>7</sup>

Yahshua demanded that anyone He called into service as a disciple give his undivided attention to serving Him in the Community of the Redeemed as a member of His Body. As he said in Luke 9:62, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."<sup>8</sup> To turn away from giving your undivided attention disqualifies you from the Kingdom of God in exactly the same way as a would-be disciple who does not want to obey the gospel is disqualified. Anything less than undivided attention is half-hearted discipleship. Divided loyalties make a person unfit for service in the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

According to Ephesians 4:16, each part works together to build up Messiah's Body. This cannot be done back

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:18 <sup>2</sup> Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Savior; see *The Name Above All Names* on page 36 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:20 <sup>4</sup> John 7:17 <sup>5</sup> John 7:17; Matthew 7:21

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 4:12 <sup>7</sup> John 10:14,27-29

<sup>8</sup> Luke 14:26 <sup>9</sup> Luke 9:62

*So Elijah departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth.*

*Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said,*

*"Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."*

*And he said to him, "Go and return to me, for what have I done to you?"*

*And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate.*

*Then he arose and went after Elijah and served him.*

*(1 Kings 19:19-21)*



## ELIJAH & ELISHA

home, carrying on business as usual.<sup>10</sup> That's why Yahshua called His disciples to leave everything behind.<sup>11</sup> The demand of giving supreme loyalty to Messiah eliminates the "waste" or the useless things from the Body. Anyone who is half-hearted will be disqualified<sup>12</sup> because he doesn't build up the Body. He is worthless as far as the kingdom is concerned, unfit for service. Half-hearted disciples will not enter the kingdom because they are not using all their talents.<sup>13</sup> They are not able to be used by their Master to the maximum,<sup>14</sup> thus they do not glorify the Father in heaven by bearing much fruit.<sup>15</sup>

There is no time for going back home and taking care of anything,

which would consume your time and energy, preventing you from serving Yahshua to the utmost. The spiritually dead are to bury or take care of mother and father until they die.<sup>16</sup> Even though he forfeits his earthly inheritance, a disciple's loyalty to his Master Yahshua must be greater than his loyalty to his parents. This is another test to see whether someone's faith is genuine. Someone who obeys the gospel shows that he has genuine faith.<sup>17</sup>

### Doing the Father's Business

Disciples have the urgent business of carrying out their fore-ordained works in the Body. This is their occupation. This is the reason they were chosen.<sup>18</sup> The master told his servants, "Do business until I return."<sup>19</sup> Even as a youth,

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 22:5; Revelation 19:9; Matthew 22:8

<sup>11</sup> Luke 14:26,33 <sup>12</sup> Matthew 13:48 <sup>13</sup> Matthew 25:30

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 <sup>15</sup> John 15:8 <sup>16</sup> Luke 9:60

<sup>17</sup> John 3:36 <sup>18</sup> Ephesians 1:4; 2:10; 4:12,16 <sup>19</sup> Luke 19:13

Yahshua said, “Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house, in His affairs, doing His business?”<sup>20</sup> By the time He was 12 years old, Yahshua had become a son of the commandment, a true *bar mitzvah*.<sup>21</sup> He had become responsible to keep the commandments. That’s why He had gone to Jerusalem to that particular Passover feast. The Law required every male to appear three times a year before Yahweh in the place He had chosen for His name to dwell.<sup>22</sup> The Passover was one of those designated times.<sup>23</sup> So as a true *bar mitzvah*, it was totally normal that He would know that from then on He would engage in the affairs of His Father. Luke 2:50 indicates that His parents did not fully recognize the depth of this boy they were raising, and what they were raising Him for.

Whether one understands Luke 2:49 and 19:11-27 or not depends on whether it is only a nice parable to him or a revelation of one of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven — whether his heart is dull or he actually understands with his heart.<sup>24</sup>

### Elijah’s Mantle

Just as Elisha did greater works than Elijah, so Yahshua was also looking for someone who would do greater works than He.<sup>25</sup> Elijah threw his mantle on Elisha, designating, electing, or choosing one who was willing to do his will.<sup>26</sup> This signified that Elisha was to receive the authority and power of Elijah’s anointing. 1 Kings 19:20-21 clearly reveals the ransom that Elisha had to give in order to follow Elijah. Elisha had to forsake his occupation, possessions, family, etc., for the sake of Yahweh and His word. Elisha broke with his past vocation, even as Yahshua’s disciples left their nets and their fathers and mothers.<sup>27</sup>

After Elisha gave up his past life, his “business,” he set out to follow Elijah as his attendant. Elisha became the disciple of Elijah, the one who served Elijah. The Hebrew word used in 1 Chronicles 15:2 is *sharat*. It means to wait on, to serve, to minister, to attend. Just as Yahshua said in John 12:25-26, to be His disciple, one must utterly forsake his former life, occupation, and location and serve the



Master *where He is*. You cannot *attend* to His needs if you are not *with* Him. *Sharat* is the occupation of a disciple of Yahshua. That’s what Yahshua meant when He said, “Go and make disciples.”<sup>28</sup>

Unless you do exactly as Elisha did, leaving everything behind to be completely devoted, you cannot be Yahshua’s attendant, minister, or disciple. Apart from doing this you do not have the *ability* to be a disciple of Yahshua. Luke 14:33 is the gospel you must practically obey. If not, you remain in God’s wrath.<sup>29</sup> So the word *sharat* refers to the closest servants of Yahweh or the King, who are *with* Him, carrying out His good pleasure.<sup>30</sup>

It was only after Elisha sacrificed all he had that he could follow Elijah as an attendant. Yahshua drew from this when He said in Luke 14:33, “If anyone wants to be My disciple he must ‘kiss his old life good-bye.’” To “kiss your old life good-bye” is what Luke 14:26,33 and Mark 10:28-30 are all about. 1 Kings 19:20 says the same thing, as well as Matthew 10:37-38. Elisha did both verse 37 and verse 38 to be worthy of Elijah.

Today in Christianity, the word *minister* amounts to the same as in 2 Corinthians 11:15 — a *minister of Satan*, which is only hucksterism in the eyes of those who are willing to do God’s will.<sup>31</sup> Those who are willing know the difference between someone who is sent from God and someone who comes in his own authority.<sup>32</sup> If a person comes in his own authority, it permits Satan to put *his* mantle on him. The true meaning of the word *minister* has been maligned even as the name of God has by Christianity. In reality, the word *minister* implies discipleship, being yielded to the will of God, servanthood, and obedience to the gospel.

Elisha became Elijah’s minister, servant, attendant, or disciple in training to take Elijah’s place.<sup>33</sup> In 1 Kings 19:20, Elijah said “Go and return to me.” Since he had already cast his mantle on Elisha, he could say, “Go and return to me, for I have *anointed* you, for I have done something very important to you.”<sup>34</sup> Elijah’s approval to let Elisha kiss his parents good-bye was an indication of his assurance that

  
**Unless you do  
 exactly as Elisha did,  
 leaving everything behind  
 to be completely devoted,  
 you cannot be Yahshua’s  
 disciple.  
 Luke 14:33 is the gospel  
 you must practically  
 obey.**  


<sup>20</sup> Luke 2:49

<sup>21</sup> A *bar mitzvah* in fact, that is; the ritual use of the term in Judaism didn’t come until much later.

<sup>22</sup> Ezra 6:12; Exodus 34:23 <sup>23</sup> Deuteronomy 16:16

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 13:10-17 <sup>25</sup> John 14:12

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 53:10-11; John 7:17; 1 Kings 19:16

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 4:20-22; Luke 14:26,33

<sup>28</sup> Luke 14:26-33; Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>29</sup> John 3:36

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 39:4; Exodus 33:11 <sup>31</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:17; John 7:17

<sup>32</sup> John 7:18 <sup>33</sup> 1 Kings 19:16-17; 19-21

<sup>34</sup> Only the *Complete Jewish Bible* gets the right sense of this verse: He left the oxen, ran after Eliyahu and said, “Please let me kiss my father and mother good-bye; then I will follow you.” He answered, “Go; but return, because of what I did to you.”

Elisha had come under his anointing and authority. Elisha gave a farewell feast to his family. From this point on he did not turn back from serving Elijah, just as Joshua was Moses' successor, attendant, and servant.<sup>35</sup> This is in contrast to what happened when Yahshua said virtually the same thing to the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21, "Go, sell everything you have... and come, follow Me."

To be Yahshua's *disciple* requires the very same devotion and loyalty as these attendants or disciples of the Old Covenant. This exactly is the meaning of what Yahshua commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, and of the many other words in Acts 2:37-41. The gospel brings you into discipleship, into total devotion and loyalty to Messiah, which causes His life to be made known.<sup>36</sup>

1 Kings 19:19-21 makes it absolutely clear that before Elisha could be Elijah's *disciple* or attendant he had to make

the sacrifice — paying the *ransom*, as it were, with everything he had. This is where Yahshua got much of what He taught. He had only the Old Covenant scriptures to read and to draw from in order to form the new spiritual nation that would carry out the will of His heavenly Father here on earth. Until He sees the tangible fruit of that kingdom, He will not be satisfied, even 2,000 years later.<sup>37</sup>

Can we imagine that the Son of God would demand any less loyalty to His cause than Elijah would? How then do we think we can be half-hearted disciples? In Matthew 24:40-41, which one was wholly devoted, and which one was half-hearted? ❄

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 24:13; 33:11; Deuteronomy 1:38; 3:38; 31:14; 34:9; Joshua 1:5

<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:44-45; 4:32,35

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 21:43; 24:14; 28:20; Isaiah 53:11

## THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews was Hebrew. So, when the angel Gabriel brought the good news to the Hebrew virgin, Miriam (or *Mary* in English), that she would give birth to the Savior of the world, and told her what His name would be, what language do you suppose he spoke? Hebrew, of course! And certainly Miriam and Yoceph (or *Joseph* in English) named the child just as the angel had commanded them — *Yahshua*.

In Matthew 1:21, your Bible probably reads, "...and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." But the name *Jesus* is a modern English adaptation of the Greek name, *Iesous*, which is itself a corruption of the original Hebrew name *Yahshua*. The name *Jesus* or *Iesous* has no meaning of its own, but the Hebrew name *Yahshua* literally means *Yahweh's Salvation*,<sup>1</sup> which makes sense out of what the angel said in Matthew 1:21, "...you shall call His name Yahshua [*Yahweh's Salvation*], for He shall save His people from their sins."

If you look in an old King James Bible, you will find the name *Jesus* in these two passages:

*Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David... (Acts 7:45, KJV)*

*For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. (Hebrews 4:8, KJV)*

However, if you look in any modern translation of the Bible, including the New King James, you will find that in place of the name *Jesus* they use the name *Joshua*, for in the context it is clear that it is speaking there of Moses' successor and not the Son of God. But in the Greek manuscript the name in both of these verses is *Iesous*.

You see, *Joshua* is the popular English transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yahshua*. Joshua of the Old Testament had the same name as the One called *Jesus* in the New Testament, for Joshua was the prophetic forerunner of the Son of God, bringing Israel into the Promised Land and leading them to victory over their enemies. But since the translators obviously know this fact, why do they only translate *Iesous* as *Joshua* in these two verses, and as *Jesus* everywhere else?

The NIV New Testament even has a footnote supporting this fact under Matthew 1:21: "*Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*."

But the fact is, the name of God's Son was not even written or pronounced as "Jesus" in English until the

(continued on page 42)

<sup>1</sup> *Yah* is the personal name of God, and *shua* is from a Hebrew root word that means "to save." God identified Himself to Moses as YAH (meaning "I AM") in Exodus 3:14, as in Psalm 68:4 ("whose name is *Yah*"), and as most familiar in the word *Halleluyah* ("Praise *Yah*"). And in John 5:43 and 17:11, Yahshua says that He came in His Father's name, "the name which You have given Me" (NASB), so it is not surprising that the Father's name would be incorporated into the Son's name, *Yahshua*.

# JEPHTHAH'S



# DAUGHTER

*Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah... And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."*

*Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands... When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was his only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter.*

*When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."*

*"My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites."*

*So she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions."*

*So he said, "Go." Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made.* (Judges 11:29-39)

The tragic story of Jephthah's daughter has troubled Christians and Jews alike for thousands of years. Countless commentaries have attempted to explain away the haunting specter of Jephthah killing his precious only child and offering her up as a burnt offering. They say it was a *rash*<sup>1</sup> vow, which God would not expect Jephthah to literally fulfill. Surely God wouldn't condone human sacrifice, would He?

## Jephthah's "Rash" Vow

Consider how the story begins: "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah... and Jephthah made a vow to the Lord." How then could it have been a *rash* vow unless we are ready to accuse God Himself of being rash? But why would the Spirit of God inspire a man to make such a vow? And what kind of young woman was Jephthah's daughter to willingly give herself to such a fate? These are very deep questions whose answers touch the very foundation of God's eternal purpose for mankind.

While it is doubtful that Jephthah expected his daughter to be what would come first out of his house when

he returned from battle, considering his reaction when he saw her, neither can it be assumed that he was confident it would be a sheep or a goat instead. God chose Jephthah because of his heart, knowing that he would withhold nothing from Him, not even his only child. And when His Spirit came upon Jephthah to deliver Israel from being snuffed out as a nation, Jephthah's response confirmed why he was chosen.<sup>2</sup> He would give anything to secure the victory, and God saw fit to test him. Does that remind you of someone else?

*After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ...*

*Then they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of*

<sup>1</sup> Rash — done impulsively, without careful consideration.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:32



the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:1,2,9-12)

There can be no doubt that Abraham was actually in motion to take his son's life, being fully persuaded that his God was able to raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill His promise.<sup>3</sup> But God did not require it of him, providing instead a ram for the burnt offering. It was a great test, and Abraham passed the test. So why did God not provide a substitute for Jephthah's daughter?

He wanted to teach us something very important about vows, about love, and about a willing sacrifice.

Jephthah had made a vow to his God, and a vow is not to be broken:

*If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:2)*

There is an old and true expression that very few people in this day and age understand: *A man is only as good as his word.* Gone are the days when men could have confidence in an oral agreement sealed merely by a handshake. Today, words are cheap and carry little weight unless they are backed up by a written legal contract, and that with economic teeth behind it. But God does not change, nor will He forget a single word that we speak:

*"I tell you, on the Day of Judgment men will give account for every careless [inactive, useless] word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37)*

The sobering truth is that a man's worth is measured by his faithfulness to keep his word, for he is made in the image of the One whose word is true and unchangeable.<sup>4</sup> A man who breaks his word misrepresents his Creator and undermines the very foundations of human civilization. This understanding escapes modern man, but it was not lost on Jephthah... or on his daughter.

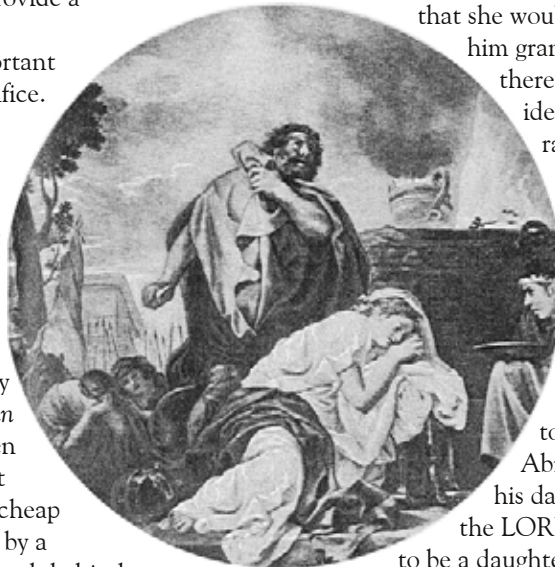
For Jephthah to shrink back from fulfilling his vow would have broken something in the core of his being. It was not a matter of his own personal pride, but of the very fabric of his humanity, and not only his, but also the integrity of his people. Even his great love for his daughter could not nullify his vow to his God.

Jephthah's daughter was a completely willing sacrifice. She did not whimper or bemoan the outcome of her father's vow. Who is like unto her? The Bible does not record her name, and she would be content just to be identified by her father's name. But we will call her *Ishshah*, a Hebrew word that means both *woman* and *burnt offering*.

Ishshah did not consider her own life to be worth more than her father's integrity. She loved him more than her own life. To shrink back from giving up her life to enable him to fulfill his vow would break something in the core of her being. She would not be able to go on living. Even her request for two months' time to "weep over her virginity" was not for her own personal loss, but for grief over the fact

that she would not be able to give him grandchildren. It was there that she found her identity as a woman — to raise up godly offspring and pour her life into them — and once she had closed that door in her heart, she presented herself to her father to give her life as a burnt offering.

Jephthah proved to be a true son of Abraham who trained up his daughter in the way of the LORD, and Ishshah proved to be a daughter who had received



<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11:17-19

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 119:160; John 17:17

her father's heart. She would withhold nothing from him, just as he would withhold nothing from his God. What was the significance of her short life? Why is this short and seemingly tragic story preserved for us?

### God's "Rash" Vow

There is another Father who made a grave vow, which if He did not fulfill it, would result in the literal ripping apart of His very being. It was God Himself, and His vow was to Abraham:

*And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."*

*But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"*

*He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other... And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him...*

*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites." (Genesis 15:7-21)*

What was the significance of this peculiar animal sacrifice? How did it answer Abram's question, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" The shocking solution to this puzzle is found in a passage far away in the prophecy of Jeremiah:

*And the men who transgressed My covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before Me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts... I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. (Jeremiah 34:18,20)*

This passage shows the terms of a very serious kind of covenant, something that was understood by the ancient Hebrews. The initiator of this kind of covenant would pass between the halves of an animal split in two, saying by that action, "May it happen to me just as to this animal if I do not keep my promise."

In other words, God answered Abram's question by saying, "If I do not give your descendants this land, may the fate of these animals come upon Me." God Himself would be torn asunder! It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the universe is at stake in what happens to this land.

So considering what is at stake, why hasn't God already fulfilled His promise? Some might say, "What's the big deal? The Jews are already back on their land!" Well, for one thing, take a closer look at the boundaries. The Jews are

occupying only a small portion of that promised land, and it seems rather unlikely that they are going to gain the rest of it anytime soon, by force of arms or any other means. But even if they or their allies conquered the entire Arab world and seized their land, still it would not be the blessing of God, for God, who does not change, has made it very clear what is required of Abraham and his descendants in order for Him to give them the land:



*For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him. (Genesis 18:19)*

The Bible records very clearly that Abraham's descendants after Jacob did not do this. They rebelled and gave themselves to all manner of idolatry, injustice, and wickedness. Because of their disobedience, God could never deliver the entire land into their hands, and even had to drive them out of the portion they once possessed, swearing that He would not bring them back to the land until...<sup>5</sup>

*"... you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul..."*  
(Deuteronomy 30:2)

<sup>5</sup> Please see all of Deuteronomy chapters 28 through 30 for the full context.

No one who knows anything about how the Jews got back to Palestine, and what their moral and spiritual life is like there, can be under any illusion as to what force is sustaining them. It is certainly not God's blessing on account of their national repentance and righteousness! No, it will take something of an entirely different nature to enable this heavenly Father to fulfill His vow. It will take a woman like Jephthah's daughter. It will take an *Ishshah* — a willing burnt offering.

## The Daughter of Zion

That is why Israel is so often called the “daughter of Zion” in the Scriptures,<sup>6</sup> and the church, as the spiritual Israel, is characterized as a virgin betrothed to Messiah.<sup>7</sup> There is a purity of devotion, a self-sacrificing quality, that is so pleasing in a woman who finds her identity in serving her father or husband. That is an unpopular point of view today, but, like it or not, it is clearly the viewpoint of the Bible. Our heavenly Father has always desired a people for His own possession who would be like a pure virgin daughter to Him, to be prepared as a bride for His Son, Yahshua<sup>8</sup> the Messiah. And just as He willingly gave up His life as a sacrifice for her, she also must willingly give up her life for Him, to bring about His Father's will on the earth.

This is not just the pretty symbolic language of the Scriptures, but must be the practical reality of every disciple's life. The apostle Paul understood this and continually called the first-century believers to this standard:

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your **reasonable service**. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)*

They were each to daily<sup>9</sup> present their individual bodies as one corporate sacrifice, as one *Ishshah*, to bring about the will of their Father. If anyone is not willing to present

<sup>6</sup> Zephaniah 3:14; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:2

<sup>8</sup> See *The Name Above All Names* on page 36

<sup>9</sup> Luke 9:23; Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 15:31; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25

himself in total surrender, it shows that he is not ready to have communion with Him.

Paul made it clear in his defense before King Agrippa that their *reasonable service* had everything to do with bringing about God's promise to Abraham:

*And now it is for the hope of the promise made by God to our forefathers that I stand here on trial, which promise our twelve tribes, by devotedly serving Him day and night, hope to see fulfilled for them. It is for this hope, your Majesty, that I am accused by the Jews. (Acts 26:6-7)*

By “our twelve tribes” Paul meant the church, the spiritual Israel that was being raised up largely from among the Gentiles, to be a light to all nations, showing them the fruit of being truly connected to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul knew all too well that Abraham's physical descendants had not produced that fruit, and therefore what Yahshua had said to the religious leaders in Jerusalem had come upon them:

*“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a **nation** bearing the fruits of it.” (Matthew 21:43)*

That nation to whom the kingdom would be given would be the fulfillment of this prophecy of Isaiah, which Paul applied to his life's work:<sup>10</sup>

*He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)*

The “You” here is the Messiah, and His Body, the twelve-tribed spiritual Israel<sup>11</sup> that He would raise up through His twelve apostles, to be a light to the nations so that His salvation would reach the ends of the earth. But if you look two verses later, you will see the *purpose* of the restoration of a twelve-tribed spiritual nation:

*Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; and I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages.” (Isaiah 49:8)*

<sup>10</sup> Acts 13:47; Romans 9 - 11

<sup>11</sup> See also 1 Peter 2:9-10



This new spiritual Israel must bear the fruit that old Israel did not bear, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets<sup>12</sup> for them (including Genesis 18:19, quoted above), so as to move Abraham's physical offspring to jealousy,<sup>13</sup> ultimately bringing a remnant of them to repentance.<sup>14</sup> This will release their God to righteously give them their desolate heritage in the next age,<sup>15</sup> the enemy-free land He promised to Abraham, so that God Himself is not cursed along with the land.<sup>16</sup>

Sadly, just as old Israel, the new spiritual Israel that came to birth in the first century, went astray<sup>17</sup> and ceased to bear the fruit of the Kingdom. Though she began as a pure virgin, characterized by self-sacrificing love and devotion,<sup>18</sup> she became a harlot, characterized by selfishness, strife, jealousy, immorality, and violence, using worldly power and influence to sustain herself.<sup>19</sup> Rather than being a light to the nations, she has brought great darkness to the whole earth, though smugly, she calls it light.<sup>20</sup> That is why, after almost 2000 years, Messiah has not returned, and the Father's promise to Abraham has not been fulfilled.

So now the earth's darkest hours are upon us. Fallen man and fallen religion are steering a steady course toward the utter destruction of the earth and its inhabitants and, unthinkable, of its Creator. Unless there is a rebirth of that spiritual Israel that will bear the fruit of the Kingdom, truly being a light to the nations so that His salvation can reach the ends of the earth, then there is no hope.

### Jephthah's Daughter Reborn

In the days of old Israel's decline, the prophet Malachi had foretold:

*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children*

*to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse."* (Malachi 4:5-6)

The first coming of "Elijah" was through the ministry of John the Baptist,<sup>21</sup> who prepared the way for the Messiah's first coming, piercing the hearts of sincere Israelites to see that they had drifted far from the heart of their God. But after John the Baptist had lived and died, Yahshua still said, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things."<sup>22</sup> What did He mean? What His disciples could not understand then is abundantly clear now: Through Yahshua, the Holy Spirit spoke of a time far in the future when the religious system again would be utterly fallen and "Elijah" would

come again to prepare a people for Messiah's second and final coming.

That prophetic voice is on the earth again today to "restore all things" before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. It is nothing less than the rebirth of the holy nation of twelve tribes — an entire people with the heart of Jephthah's daughter, each one living a life of self-sacrifice by laying down his or her life daily to serve their Father by serving one another. The first thing to be restored was the true gospel, the Good News of the Kingdom, that gave us the faith to utterly and literally abandon our old lives in this world<sup>23</sup> because it revealed to us the true Messiah and His kingdom, worth more than our own lives. Our death in

baptism was as real as it could be, short of our physical death. When we truly died with Yahshua in baptism,<sup>24</sup> we were truly forgiven, and only then could we present our bodies as an acceptable daily sacrifice.<sup>25</sup>



A burnt offering is an offering that is given without any reservations. The entire personality is consumed on the altar, as in the example of our Master Yahshua. He did not come just to help us out of trouble, but to take over our life. We are His purchased possession. He bought and paid for us by dying and receiving the wages of our sin in death, so the total surrender of our lives is the only reasonable response.

This true gospel restores the true church: the community that resulted when we all gave up everything<sup>26</sup> — possessions, homes, jobs, unwilling relatives, etc. — and clung to one another in love and gratitude for our salvation. This common life together gives us the practical daily context for loving one another just as our Master loved us,<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14 <sup>22</sup> Matthew 17:10-12; Mark 9:11-12

<sup>23</sup> John 12:25-26 <sup>24</sup> Romans 6:4-5 <sup>25</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>26</sup> Luke 14:26-33; Mark 10:28-30 <sup>27</sup> John 13:34-35

  
**Yahshua did not  
come just to help us  
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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 5:17 <sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 32:21; Romans 10:19; See also the article *Foolish Nation*, on our web site:

<http://www.twelve-tribes.org/publications/foolish-nation.html>

<sup>14</sup> Zechariah 12:10; 13:8-9; Romans 11:12-15 <sup>15</sup> Matthew 19:28

<sup>16</sup> Malachi 4:6 <sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3 <sup>18</sup> Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 17:1-5; 18:2-5; Isaiah 1:21 (Ironically, the time on earth called "The Dark Ages" is when the fallen church held the greatest influence and power.)

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 6:23; John 9:41

for being purified and healed of all our selfish ways,<sup>28</sup> and for growing to full stature in every aspect of our personalities<sup>29</sup> to be made ready as a bride for Him.<sup>30</sup>

But most importantly, the Spirit we have received is turning the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, to fulfill Genesis 18:19 so that our faith and vision does not die after one or two generations. We are raising sons and daughters to have the heart of Jephthah's daughter, not living for themselves, but finding joy in laying down their lives day and night to bring about our Father's will on the earth.

We know that our Master will not return until He has a people on the earth who have put all of His enemies underfoot<sup>31</sup> — that is, the spiritual forces that work through our iniquities, fears, and selfish desires, seeking to divide and thus destroy us. And we know He will not return until He has a people who are keeping the righteous requirement of the Law by the Spirit He has given us.<sup>32</sup> When the light of that spiritual life empowers the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached throughout the whole earth as a witness to all nations, then the end of the age will come,<sup>33</sup> and Yahshua

the Messiah will return to restore the promised land, enemy-free, to Abraham's natural offspring,<sup>34</sup> fulfilling the promise of His Father.<sup>35</sup>

All this can only come about when our Father has a people with the heart of Jephthah's daughter who no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died and rose again on their behalf.<sup>36</sup> He will be pleased with the "burnt offering" of their lives, and will give them the grace to become that spotless bride for whom His Son will gladly return. If this prophetic vision stirs your heart, and you hate your life in this world, please come and help us bring this evil age to an end. ✱

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)*

<sup>28</sup> 1 John 3:2-3; James 1:21 <sup>29</sup> Ephesians 2:10; 4:11-16

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 5:26-27; Revelation 19:7-8 <sup>31</sup> Hebrews 10:13

<sup>32</sup> Romans 8:4; Matthew 5:17 <sup>33</sup> Matthew 24:14; Isaiah 49:6

<sup>34</sup> Acts 3:21; Matthew 19:28; Isaiah 49:8

<sup>35</sup> Genesis 15:18-21 <sup>36</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

*(The Name Above All Names, continued from page 36)*

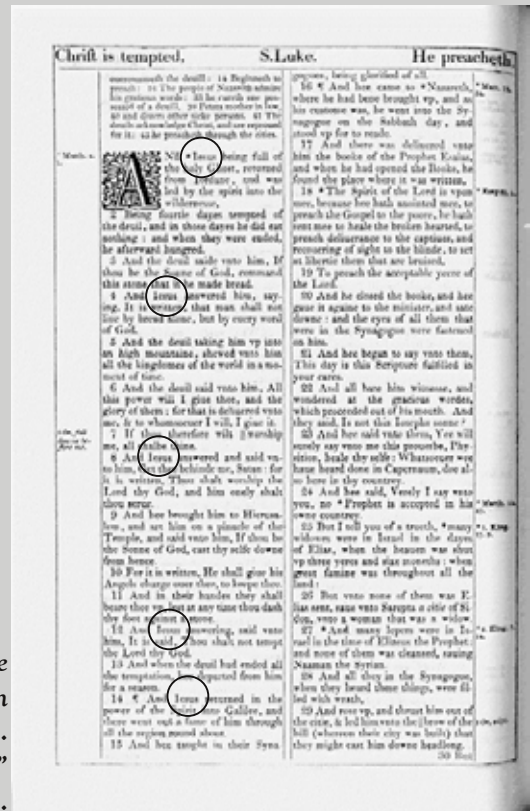
1600s, simply because there was no "J" sound or letter in English before then.<sup>2</sup> The modern letter "J" developed from the letter "I" which began to be written with a "tail" when it appeared as the first letter in a word. So in old English the name now written as *Jesus* was actually written and pronounced much like the original Greek *Iesous*. Eventually the hard "J" sound crept into the English language to accompany the different way of writing the initial "I" in the name.

You may also find it interesting that in Acts 26:14-15, it says that the apostle Paul heard the name of the Son of God pronounced "in the Hebrew tongue" by the Son of God Himself, so he certainly didn't hear the Greek name *Iesous* or the English name *Jesus*, but rather the Hebrew name, the name above all names, *Yahshua*.<sup>3</sup> ✱

<sup>2</sup> *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1496,1507

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:9; Acts 4:12

*A page from the  
1611 Authorized Version  
(King James Bible).  
Note the lack of a "J"  
in the Savior's name.*



**Y**ou brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

thundered Yochanan, son of Zechariah, as he stood waist-deep in the Jordan River and watched the religious leaders of Israel gather on the riverbank.<sup>1</sup> It wasn't what they wanted to hear, nor were they expecting it. After all, they were God's people, weren't they? So why this scathing rebuke?

It was obvious to Yochanan that the ax was already laid at the root of their fruitless branches — the time for reform had passed.

The tree was dead, and Yochanan had been born for the very purpose of pronouncing it so, and preparing the way for the Messiah, as his father had prophesied,

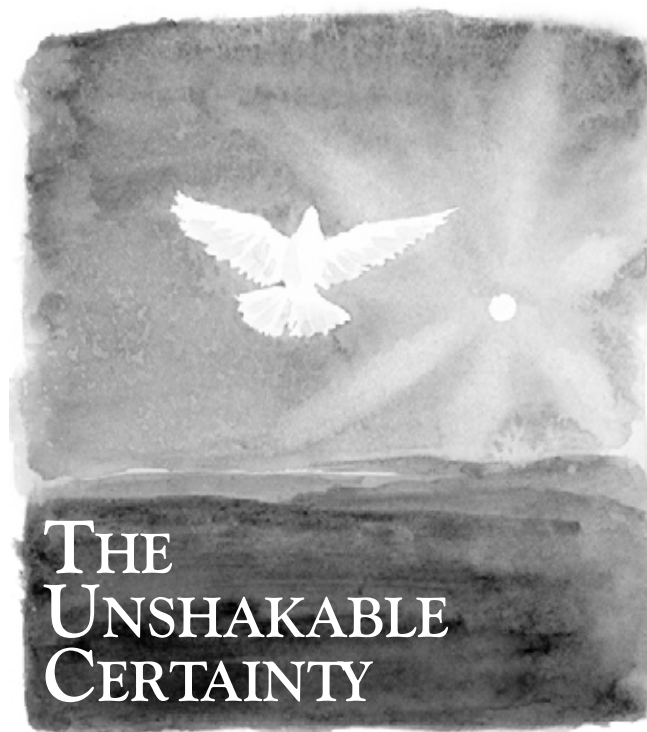
*“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79, ESV)*

Zechariah, an aged priest at the time of his son's birth, had known well the condition of Israel. His people were in dire need of salvation, for in spite of their great heritage they were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. His heart ached for his people. And in the thirty years since he had spoken those words, the darkness of their fallen religion had only increased. How Zechariah's heart would have pounded if he could have seen and heard his son that day.

But when Yochanan saw Yahshua<sup>2</sup> of Nazareth, whom he knew to be the Messiah, coming down the riverbank toward him to be baptized, his confidence was shaken. Who was he to baptize the Messiah? His objection received only the cryptic response, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:1-17 is one account of the ministry of the man commonly called “John the Baptist.”

<sup>2</sup> Yahshua is the Hebrew name which is commonly rendered as Jesus in English. See page 36 for a more in-depth explanation.



is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” At that, he immersed Yahshua into the muddy waters, and as He emerged, Yochanan saw what appeared to be a dove alight upon Him, and heard a voice from heaven saying, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>3</sup>

Why did the Messiah Himself need to be baptized? And why did the Father speak those words audibly to His Son as soon as He emerged from the waters? The answers to these questions touch the very nature and purpose of the Son of God — His humanity and divinity. In past centuries

many have died over questions such as these, and even today there are some who would call for our blood, if they could, for writing what you are about to read. But for those who love the truth, these words will ring true and answer some of the deepest questions of your heart.

### God or Man?

It is a well-established doctrine in Christianity that Jesus is both fully God and fully Man, but what exactly does this mean? What are the practical implications for those who look to Him as their Savior? Most of us have grown up with the image of baby Jesus with a halo on his head, and pictures of a striking, handsome adult Jesus. Even the typical pictures of the crucifixion show a fair-skinned, unblemished man with a little slit in his side and a placid expression on his face. Who can identify with such a Jesus, so beautiful in his perfection, unaffected by sufferings?

But the scriptures give quite a different picture. They tell of a man who was physically unimpressive,<sup>4</sup> the son of a poor Hebrew woman,<sup>5</sup> who for most of His life worked as a carpenter.<sup>6</sup> Although He was miraculously conceived, few people took notice of this fact. And although there are fanciful things written about Him in apocryphal writings,

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22    <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:2-3

<sup>5</sup> Luke 2:24 shows that Joseph and Mary gave the offering permitted in the Law (Leviticus 12:8) for those who were too poor to offer a lamb.    <sup>6</sup> Mark 6:3

the Bible gives only a small but essential glimpse of His upbringing.

His family had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover and discovered on their way home that Yahshua was not in their company. Evidently He was a trusted son whom they assumed was serving in some way amongst their caravan, perhaps helping care for the animals. They returned to Jerusalem and searched for several days before they found Him in the Temple, amazing the teachers with His understanding of the scriptures. He seemed surprised that they hadn't known where to find Him, and they were equally surprised by His question, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Although His parents knew that He was destined to be the Messiah of Israel, clearly they did not expect Him to come into that role so young, nor did they understand what it entailed. But this brief snapshot of His life shows His fascination with the scriptures and how He gave Himself to the task of understanding them. This story begins and ends with two similar statements that show a progression taking place:

*And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:40,52)*

Yahshua was not born with the awareness of who He was or what lay ahead of Him. He was born a human baby just like any other healthy baby, except for two invisible qualities: first, that He had not inherited Adam's fallen nature,<sup>7</sup> and second, that His human spirit was one with the divine Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Neither of these differences from the rest of humanity would be readily apparent, however, in a newborn baby. The effects of the Fall take time to be manifested in human babies, and the



<sup>7</sup> The ovum in Mary's womb had been fertilized by a preserved pure human seed, untainted by the fall of Adam, miraculously implanted in her womb by God. This is implied by Luke 1:35, and confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:45, where the apostle Paul calls Yahshua the second or last Adam. Just as the first Adam was created sinless, so the second Adam was born in that same pure state, unaffected by the first Adam's fall.

<sup>8</sup> The eternally existing Word of God (John 1:1), who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was "enfleshed" (John 1:14) in the human body prepared for Him (Hebrews 10:5) in Mary's womb. This is the miracle called *incarnation*. In John 18:37, Yahshua spells it out: "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world..." A human son was *born*, and in the same event, the eternally existing, divine Word of God *came into the world* to dwell in that human son.

soul's awareness of the spiritual realm also takes time to develop. So although He must certainly have been a remarkably peaceful baby, He was yet a baby, with a baby's soul — intellect, will, and emotions. From that point He grew, both physically and in the maturity of His soul.

## Soul and Spirit

Human beings are spiritual creatures. A man's soul is like the sails on a ship, designed to be filled with a spirit just as a ship's sails are filled with the wind, so as to propel his life on a course. The human spirit (distinct from the soul) was designed as his vital connection to the Spirit of man's Creator, the means by which man (male and female) could orient his soul so as to be filled with that Spirit. Adam was created with this vital connection intact, with the infinite potential of having his soul (intellect, will, and emotions) fully available to his Creator so as to fulfill his created purpose. But when Adam fell, that vital connection was severed. Man's spirit lay dormant, and his soul lay vulnerable to whatever spirit he was exposed to, just like a ship adrift in the sea.

There are both good and evil spirits at large on the earth. The good spirits have commonly been called *angels*, while the bad have been called *demons*. They are both normally invisible; just like the wind, their presence can only be discerned by their effect. Most people are not sensitive enough to realize when they are being propelled by a spirit, and some even deny their very existence. But spiritual creature that he is, a man's soul is always being affected by spiritual forces.

Fortunately, he has a conscience by which he instinctively knows good from evil. The conscience is like a compass by which a man can orient his "ship" so as to spill an errant wind from his sails, or to fill them with a fair breeze, according to where he wants his life to go, or what effect he wants it to have on others. But the tragic reality is that man's fallen inclination to satisfy his short-sighted selfish desires makes him at best an imperfect helmsman and at worst a menace to all afloat on the "sea" of life. As a result, all men's souls are ravaged and in eternal peril.

## Son of Man and Son of God

Enter the Son of Man, conceived by means of an unfallen human seed and possessor of a human spirit vitally connected, indeed fused together with the Spirit of His heavenly Father. His soul, as it developed and matured, was always sensitive to that Spirit, fully yielding to the divine Word within Him. It was not that He had no choice in the

matter. He had a free human will with which He had to make choices, just as any human being. He had to face the temptations common to all men, and overcome them by the strength of His communion with His Father. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes this fact:

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same... Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18)*

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)*

*In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him... (Hebrews 5:7-9)*

These verses are meaningless if He was not fully human, having a free will by which He could choose to obey or disobey both His earthly parents and His heavenly Father. It says He *learned obedience* through what He suffered. It does not mean that He was ever rebellious and had to suffer the consequences, for He did not ever sin, but His obedience was perfected as He gave Himself to it. It was not an effortless matter for Him to overcome temptation. All His life, from His childhood until the day He died, He suffered greatly to make the right choices, to deny what would be pleasant or comfortable to His flesh when it was in conflict with the will of His earthly parents as a child, or His heavenly Father as an adult. As a child, the temptations that came to Him and the suffering required to resist them were those common to children. But as He grew up, the temptations were greater and the suffering greater. He increased in His capacity to give Himself to the suffering and surrender His will to His Father's will.<sup>9</sup> This was the

*learning*<sup>10</sup> that prepared Him for the greatest suffering of all — the cross and the agonies of death. It was out of love that He gave Himself to His suffering.

### For the Joy set before Him



The Spirit that was in Him bonded Him to the heart of His Father and gave Him the courage and determination to fulfill His purpose. But just as overcoming temptation wasn't automatic for Him, neither was it automatic or effortless for Him to understand who He was or the cause for which He was born. He began life as a human baby, and His mind at birth was ready and waiting to be filled, just as that of any other human baby. He did not have a "crystal

ball" with which to see into the future. Even in the last days of His time on earth He did not know the day or the hour when He would return; only the Father knew that.<sup>11</sup> But what He clearly did know by that time was "everything in the Scriptures concerning Himself."<sup>12</sup>

Yahweh, the God of Israel, very carefully selected the best possible mother and foster-father to raise His Son. He chose the most humble and most spiritual man and woman from the line of David out of the small remnant who were truly "waiting for

the consolation of Israel."<sup>13</sup> He sent His chief messenger, the angel Gabriel, to prepare both Miriam and Yoceph<sup>14</sup> for the responsibility that was being given to them, making it perfectly clear to them that this miraculously conceived child entrusted to them was destined to be the Messiah.<sup>15</sup>

But far from being puffed up or boastful about their Son's destiny, they quietly shouldered the awesome responsibility to raise Him in a way that would help prepare Him for that destiny. Surely they filled Him with the stories of their people: of the faith of Abraham and the promise made to him; of his sacrifice of Isaac; of Jacob and his twelve sons; of their deliverance from Egypt; of Moses and the Law; of the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle and the sacrifices; of the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Canaan; of the judges and kings of Israel; of the words of the prophets and the consequences of not heeding them, and of course the wisdom of the Proverbs. And surely as Yahshua learned to read the scriptures for Himself, He filled His soul with them, praying earnestly for the wisdom and

  
**Yahshua had to  
face the temptations  
common to all men, and  
overcome them by the strength  
of His communion  
with His Father  
in heaven.**  


<sup>9</sup> Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42

<sup>10</sup> The Greek word translated as *learned* means to increase; to learn by use and practice. <sup>11</sup> Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7

<sup>12</sup> Luke 24:27 <sup>13</sup> Luke 2:25 <sup>14</sup> "Mary and Joseph" in English.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 1:21

insight to understand their meaning, struggling to know who He was and what the prophets had spoken of Him. The divine Spirit in Him revealed to Him who He was very gradually as He matured and as He earnestly sought to know His Father's heart and mind. That is how the Spirit is with all His own people — He hides Himself so that they will diligently seek Him, just as King David taught his son Solomon:

*“As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.”*  
(1 Chronicles 28:9)

Yahshua also observed the troubling realities of life among His people. He saw the grinding poverty of many, and the callous disregard of it by the wealthy few who were often among the religious elite. He saw the lame and blind animals the merchants were selling in the temple courts, and observed who bought them. He took note of the long and pretentious public prayers of the Pharisees, and the humble masses of the common people, like sheep without a shepherd, longing to be led out of the futility of their lives.

### Set like Flint

Compassion for His people and the compelling urgency of the Word of God welled up in His soul in steadily increasing measure and clarity over the years that He labored as a carpenter in Galilee, waiting for the fullness of time. When He heard that Yochanan had begun preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight,” echoing the words of the prophet Malachi,<sup>16</sup> His heart began to pound. “Was this the time? Was He really the one?” Many “messiahs” had come and gone before Him. All had thought that they were Israel's liberation, but proved to be just thieves and robbers, leaving the people drowning in disappointment and despair. Was He ready to walk the prophetic path that lay before Him? He was under no illusion as to where it would end. The words of the prophet Isaiah were engraved in His heart:

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 3:2-3; Malachi 3:1

*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? (Isaiah 53:3-8, ESV)*



Having made His decision, Yahshua walked down the banks of the muddy Jordan River, His face set like flint<sup>17</sup> to accomplish the purpose for which He was born. His countenance bore the mark of that inner struggle and the determination of His soul. He had us in mind. In the Jews who came to be baptized by John, the Law had done its full

work — they came because of their sense of sin and guilt, which the ritual sacrifice of the blood of goats could not extinguish. Sin drove them to the voice of hope. They felt their need for God and the forgiveness of God, for freedom from the consciousness of sin and guilt.<sup>18</sup> In His baptism, Yahshua identified Himself with sinful man; He took upon Himself their sorrow, their contrition,<sup>19</sup> their search for God, and became one in heart with the men He came to save.

To every man comes the moment within his heart and soul of a little shiver of doubt, a faint question mark, the terrible feeling that he may be mistaken, the grim possibility that he may be on the wrong road. Yahshua's baptism was the moment when the last of these questions perished forever. As He emerged from the waters, the voice that He most desired to hear rang out loud and clear, audible for the first time to His natural ears, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>20</sup> In that moment He knew in the deepest recesses of His heart that His Father was God and He was His Son. He received the utter conviction of the approval of His Father, of the certainty of His will for Him

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 50:4-7 <sup>18</sup> Luke 7:29-30 <sup>19</sup> Isaiah 57:15; 53:4

<sup>20</sup> Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

  
**As gruesome and terrible  
as His dying on the cross was,  
it was in death, which is  
unimaginably worse, that He  
actually paid for man's sin.**  


— the unshakable certainty that He was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, as revealed in the Prophets.

It was not for the sake of the crowd that His Father spoke in an audible voice, but to confirm in His beloved Son the absolute truth of all that He had understood in His years of preparation, and to give Him the unshakable certainty that He was on course to do His Father's will. His preparation was over and the task had begun. The Holy Spirit rested upon Him like a dove to empower Him for all that lay ahead of Him, beginning with the first test:

*And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry... (Luke 4:1-2)*

It was no accident that the first challenge from the evil one was to His very identity: "If you are the Son of God..." He needed the unshakable certainty of who He was in order to endure this

testing. Had He given in to the evil one's taunting to seek His own comfort or glory, He would have sinned and disqualified Himself from being the sacrifice for our sins. Instead, by maintaining His communion with the Holy Spirit even at the end of His physical strength, He overcame the persistent temptations of the evil one, and when He had passed the test in the wilderness, angels came to nourish and strengthen Him.<sup>21</sup>

The test was real, with the real possibility of failure. It was not a performance by God masquerading as a man. It was the very real suffering of a very real man who overcame through the spiritual communion He maintained with His Father in heaven based on the unshakable certainty that He was a son doing His Father's will. That is how He lived His entire life, and that is how He expects His followers to live their lives, overcoming by the means of grace He opened up for them.

Because He overcame as a man, He was able to take man's place in death. On the cross He said, "It is finished."<sup>22</sup> He had finished the course<sup>23</sup> He had begun at His baptism, having maintained vital communion with His Father, never committing sin to His dying breath. Never once did He have a complaint against His Father. He knew who He was and what He was to do. Then, in the final moments of His

life, the full weight of our sins came upon Him.<sup>24</sup> In that instant, His Father turned His face from Him for the first time in His life. He cried out, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME!" Then He went into death — as a man, alone, without the help of His Father — which is exactly what awaits all who die without a sacrifice for their sins. As gruesome and terrible as His dying on the cross was, it was in death, which is unimaginably worse, that He actually paid for man's sin.<sup>25</sup>

His unblemished life was an acceptable sacrifice, the spotless Lamb of God that paid for our sins.<sup>26</sup> Just as He took identity with us in His baptism, utterly committing His life to die for us, so also in our baptism we must be united with



Him in His death,<sup>27</sup> utterly committing our lives to live for Him.<sup>28</sup> Apart from the total surrender and abandonment of our lives, we cannot have the unshakable certainty that we are sons of God who are doing His will by the grace and strength He provides. And apart from that unshakable certainty we will not overcome the temptations of the evil one, but will instead seek our own comfort and glory.

There must be a people who will walk in the same way in which He walked,<sup>29</sup> having the same unshakable certainty that He had, in order for the evil ruler of this age to be bound and for Yahshua the Messiah to return and establish His kingdom on this earth.<sup>30</sup> Do you long for that unshakable certainty that you are His son, doing His will in His Body on earth? He lives in every place where His people dwell together in unity, lifting up holy hands without wrath or dissension.<sup>31</sup> That is where He honors His sons who serve Him by the grace and strength He provides.<sup>32</sup> ✨

<sup>24</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6,10,11 <sup>25</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>26</sup> John 1:29 <sup>27</sup> Romans 6:1-7,28 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

<sup>29</sup> 1 John 2:6; Colossians 1:10

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 10:13; Revelation 19:7; Acts 3:21 — This speaks of the restoration of all things in the next age, after Messiah's return, when the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled, restoring the land to Abraham's descendants, ruled over by Messiah and His apostles from the first century, as He prophesied in Matthew 19:28.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Timothy 2:8; John 17:20-23 <sup>32</sup> John 12:25-26

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 4:11 <sup>22</sup> John 19:30

<sup>23</sup> Luke 13:22,32 (ESV, RSV)

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471 Sulphur Springs Rd.  
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