

Teaching *from* Zion

"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

-Isaiah 2:3



The Parables of Yeshua



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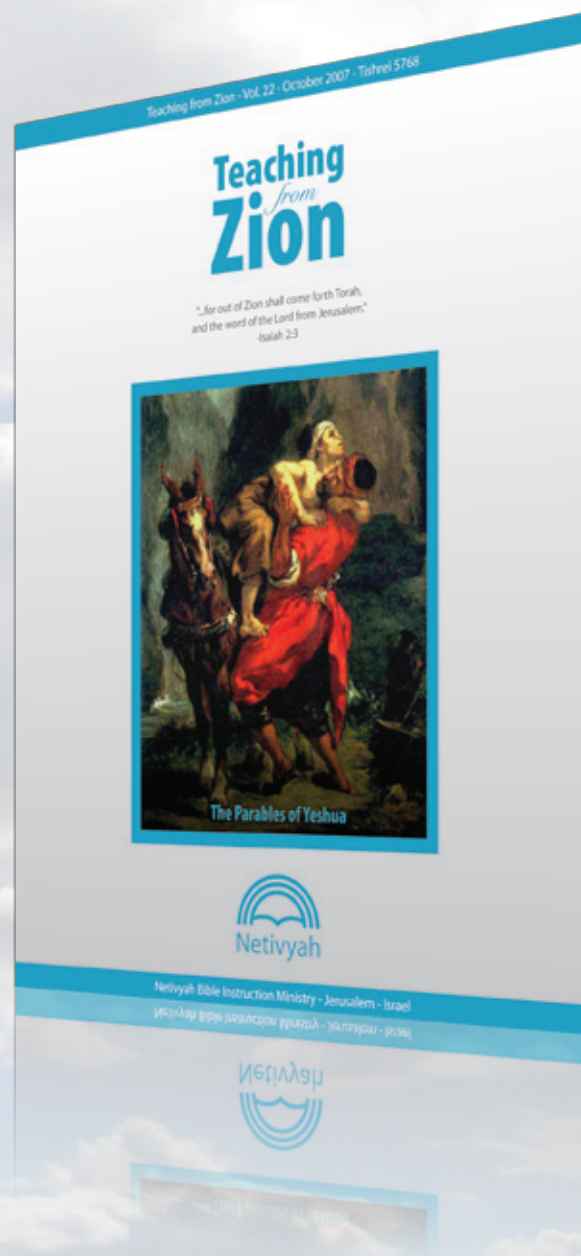
A Word from the Editor

For this New Year 5768 edition of Teaching from Zion, we have chosen the theme of Yeshua's parables. A great deal of Yeshua's teaching, especially in Matthew and Luke, takes the form of parables, so it is important that we understand these stories if we want to understand His central messages about His Messianic mission and the Kingdom of God. In this magazine edition, we will address both the "why" and the "how" of this beautiful literary form as well as examining some specific parables very closely to see how their historical and cultural Jewish context can help us unravel some confusion and find deeper levels of meaning within them.

Brad Young, a contemporary New Testament scholar, praises the artistry of the parables in recent book *Parables* with these words: "Parables use rich imagery of language to catch the listener unaware. At first it all seems so familiar, and then a shift develops in the plot of the story. The ordinariness of the parable is transformed by a surprising twist. A consciousness of God and his way of viewing the world enters the commonplace scene to communicate the divine message... In the creative genius of the parable teacher's imagination, the listener is catching glimpses of the divine character. The shadow is an inexact representation of the substance. But in the shadow one discovers a clear outline of many features in reality. In many ways, God is the ultimate reality, providing the substance for the shadow in the word-pictures of a parable." Each one of Yeshua's masterfully crafted parables contains enormous potential for spiritual growth and learning, and we hope this magazine will inspire you to study these parables for yourselves and to dig deeper in your own personal study of these artistic texts.

We are experimenting with a new, more modern format for this issue of Teaching from Zion, so please contact us at tfz@netivyah.org.il and tell us what you think about it. We also welcome your questions and comments about the content, and we would love to hear from you.

-The editors



Rabbi Yeshua

Joseph Shulam

This title alone would make some Christians and Jews upset. Yes, Yeshua is the Messiah, our Savior and Redeemer, the Son of God, equal to the Father, divine and human at the same time. Yeshua is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who bears many other titles and honors but Yeshua is also a Rabbi! We had better get used to this idea because it is honorable to respect the biblical and historical truth. It is better to know, love, and praise the real Yeshua, the one that lives and rules from the Right Hand of God, the One who is coming back to redeem the faithful, than to live in the fog of ignorance.

The term "Rabbi" really means "my teacher" or in archaic English "my master." The moment one admits that Yeshua had "disciples" or "students," one has actually confessed that he is a "Teacher" or "a Rabbi." In fact, the Gospels show that the common people and even Yeshua's disciples called him "Rabbi" most of the time. In the Gospel of John alone, one sees that people called Yeshua "Rabbi" eight different times. The New Testament only records one instance in which one of Yeshua's disciples called him "the Messiah, Son of the Living God." In this case from Matthew 16, Yeshua told Peter, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you; you received this from My Father who is in Heaven." In other words, the major title that is used for Yeshua today "the Christ" or "the Messiah," is something that one receives only by revelation.

Here are a few examples from the Gospel of John. There are many others.

John 1:38- "And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi, (which translated means Teacher), where are you staying?'"

John 1:49- "Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!'"

John 3:2- "A man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.'"

The Gospels call Yeshua "Teacher" a total of 25 times. The epistles never refer to Yeshua as either "Rabbi" or "Teacher," and after Acts 21:16, one no longer sees the word

"disciples" used either. Why did this happen? One possible explanation is that the image of Yeshua that developed after the resurrection emphasized different aspects of His character. The memory of Yeshua as a Teacher of the Torah and as a rabbi faded as His disciples were dispersed and martyred. The people who knew Yeshua personally and sat under Him as their teacher and rabbi remembered Yeshua and wrote their memories in documents that today we call the "Gospels." The next generation who did not know Yeshua personally emphasized different aspects of His mission, diminished his role as a rabbi, and stopped using the word "disciples."

Yeshua's teaching was the first thing that impressed me about him as a Jewish child raised in Jerusalem. Today so many of those who claim to follow Yeshua have forgotten this important aspect of his Messianic character. He was a great rabbi who gave the Word of God life and light that still shines brighter than all of the rabbis and teachers who have ever touched the human mind and spirit. Yeshua will remain the master teacher as long as he has disciples that study and repeat the Good News as God's eternal truth. I am proud to be a disciple of Rabbi Yeshua, the Son of the Living God, the Messiah of Israel, and the Word of God who became flesh and came to dwell among us as a man.

As a rabbi, Yeshua made profound use of one of the most common rabbinical teaching tools, the parable. In the first centuries B.C.E. through C.E., the rabbis taught a great deal using parables in the same way that Yeshua did, as He Himself said it best: *"And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'"* (Matt. 13:10-13)

The Parables were tools for the rabbis that gave them the ability to address difficult religious subjects and political issues without total exposure to their enemies and critics. In fact, this is what Yeshua actually said to his

disciples when He told them, *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."*

A full comparison between the use of parables by Yeshua and by the rabbis could easily require a book of 1000 pages, so I will not try that in this small article. In order to give a taste of Rabbi Yeshua in Israel in the First Century, however, let us open some of Yeshua's parables and some rabbinic parables to see how much common ground there was between the rabbis and the teaching of Yeshua. All of Yeshua's parables and exegetical methods from beginning to end take Torah teachings and give them a different twist. Nevertheless, all of his teachings are very Jewish and rabbinic.

The Narrow Path

"Rabbi Judah ben El'ai said: 'One who makes the words of Torah primary [iqar, lit. "the root"] and other matters secondary will be made primary in the world (to come). (But one who makes) the way of the world primary and the words of Torah secondary will be made secondary in the world (to come).' He composed a parable [mashal]: 'To what may this be likened? To a clearing that lies between two paths, the one of flame the other of frost. If one walks along the flame, one will be burned by the flame; and if one walks along the frost one will be stricken by the cold. What is one to do? Let him walk between them and watch out for himself, lest he be burned by the flame or struck by the cold.'" *Aboth de R. Nathan* 28.10

Similarly, the New Testament says, *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."* (Matt 7:13)

Rewards of the Righteous

"R. Judah ha-Nasi said, 'To what may this be likened? To a king who made a banquet to which he invited guests. He said to them, "Go, wash yourselves, brush up your clothes, anoint yourselves with oil, wash your garments, and prepare yourselves for the banquet," but he fixed no time when they were to come to it. The wise among them walked about by the entrance of the king's palace saying, "Does the king's palace lack anything?" The foolish among them paid no regard or attention to the king's command. They said, "We will in due course notice when the king's banquet is to take place, because can there be a banquet without labor [to prepare it] and company?" So the plasterer went to his plaster, the potter to his clay, the smith to his charcoal, the washer to his laundry. Suddenly the king ordered, "Let them all come to the banquet." They hurried

the guests so that some came in their splendid attire, and others came in their dirty garments. The king was pleased with the wise ones who had obeyed his command and also because they had shown honor to the king's palace. He was angry with the fools who had neglected his command and disgraced his palace. The king said, "Let those who have prepared themselves for the banquet come and eat of the king's meal, but those who have not prepared themselves shall not partake of it." You might suppose that the latter were simply to depart, but the king continued, "No, [they are not to depart], but the former shall recline and eat and drink while these shall remain standing, be punished, and look on and be grieved.'" (*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 9:8)

Matthew 22:2-14 also contains a parable about a king who gave a great feast. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."*

What Did You Do?

"Open to me the gates of righteousness' (Ps 118:19). In the world to come a man will be asked: 'What deed did you do?' And if he says: 'I fed the hungry' [cf. Isaiah 58:7a], they will say to him: "'This is the gate of the LORD.'" (Ps 118:20). You who fed the hungry may enter it.' And if he says: 'I gave drink to the thirsty,' they will say to him: "'This is the gate of the LORD.'" (Ps 118:20) You who gave the thirsty drink may enter it.' And if he says: 'I clothed the naked' [cf. Isaiah 58:7b], they will say to him: "'This is the gate of the LORD."

(Ps 118:20) You who clothed the naked may enter it.' And thus too will they say to him who raised the fatherless and to those who gave alms or did gracious deeds." *Midrash Tehillim 118:17*

We find a slightly longer version of this parable in the New Testament in Matthew 25:31-46.

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.... Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me...' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me...'"

Here we have just read three parables taken from rabbinic writings. Although the Midrashim were all written significantly later than the words of Yeshua and are different in their scope and level of ethics, it is not hard to see that they employ the same "raw-materials" with which Yeshua dealt. These parables were baked in the same oven as the parables that Yeshua used in order to teach His disciples and also the general public about tough subjects during the First Century.

Let us take a further look at one of Yeshua's better known parables. *"Another parable He put forth to them, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.'" (Matt. 13:30-31)* Yeshua also employs the motif of the mustard seed as a symbol in another parable. *"So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea," and it would obey you.'" (Luke 17:6)*

In the Matthew parable, Yeshua is not speaking of "faith" at all, and he seems to totally ignore the plain botanical truth that the mustard seed is definitely not "least" or the "smallest" of all the seeds. Besides that, the mustard plant in our region of the world never grows into a "tree" big enough or strong enough for "the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." So the question arises that if the mustard seed in the parable in Matthew does not represent faith, what is he actually talking about?

In order to answer this question, we will have to assume some points.

- 1 - Yeshua must have known that the mustard seed is not the smallest of all the seeds.
- 2 - Yeshua must have known that the mustard plant does not grow big enough for birds to make nests in it.
- 3 - Yeshua is saying something important about the Kingdom of God in this parable.
- 4 - Yeshua is hiding something that he does not want everyone to know when they hear the story because this is his reason for using parables.

Now with these presuppositions, let us approach this parable and try to understand it as a first century Israeli Jew would have. The first key to this parable is that the word "seed" / "זרע" is the classic word used to describe the people of Israel in the Bible. Here are several examples.

Is. 41:8- "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend."

Is. 45:25- "In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

Jer. 31:37- "Thus says the LORD, 'If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done,' says the LORD."

Israel is also known in the Scriptures as the "least or the smallest of all the nations." Put together with the idiom of the "seed of Israel," the inclusion of these two ideas together makes it easy to see that this parable is not speaking about a literal "mustard seed" but of the "seed of Israel," which like a mustard seed, is not sweet. In truth, it can be sharp and unpleasant if eaten alone.

The prophet Ezekiel speaks about Israel's future and calls her a branch that was broken by the Lord from the top of a high and lofty cedar tree and replanted. This broken branch then grows and bears fruit and becomes a majestic cedar, and birds of every kind come to dwell under its branches. *"On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it."* (Ezek. 17:23-24) Yeshua makes this same point on many different occasions when he says that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Yeshua spoke the parable of the mustard seed to Israel and connected it with the Kingdom of Heaven during a time when Israel was under Roman occupation, Jerusalem

was in bondage, the priesthood was corrupt, and the nation was losing hope of redemption. Consequently, the parable said to those who would understand it: "You, Israel, are a small and unpleasant nation, sharp, critical, and small, but you have a great future promised to you. In spite of your low estate, the nations of the world will finally come and dwell under your branches." There is no doubt that the Jews who heard these words of Yeshua understood exactly what he meant to tell them. This is a parable of hope for a people who dwell in darkness and cannot see when and how they will ever be delivered from the oppression of Roman occupation. Yeshua is reminding them that there is another Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, which operates according to the promises of God, the source of Israel's hope, strength, and future.

Let us study one last simple parable "the Lump of Leaven" in Matthew 13:33. *"Another parable He spoke to them: 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of dough till it was all leavened.'"* Because of the oppressive political situation, much of the Jewish population in the Land was fomenting rebellion and liberation from the yoke of Rome and the corrupt leadership of Jerusalem and the Temple. Therefore, Yeshua told the people parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of God was an alternate Kingdom which the Romans and the corrupt leadership of Jerusalem and the Temple could not touch, conquer, stop, or even find. Yeshua told his followers that the Kingdom of Heaven would spread

without people even noticing, seeing, or smelling it. It would be the victory of the small, the few, and the peaceful over the powerful. It would spread peacefully without visible violence, without major and sudden upheaval, like leaven in a lump of dough.

It is so important that we understand Yeshua's teaching in light of the cultural and historical context in which He lived. In so doing, we too may understand His deeper meaning. I suppose we all can learn more and more from the Master Teacher, Yeshua our Lord.

Maurici Gottlieb - Jews praying on Yom Kippur



The Secrets of the Kingdom

Hidden & Revealed

Udi Zofef



Chapter 13 in the gospel of Matthew has a sequence of parables, and among them we find two passages in which Jesus, (in one passage), and the author, (in the second), relate to the reason of Jesus' use of this form of art. Jesus talks about hiding secrets from those who are apparently unworthy of having those secrets revealed to them:

"And the disciples came, and said unto him, 'Why speakest thou unto them in parables?' He answered and said unto them: 'Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; But whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables because they seeing see not; and hearing hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which saith: 'By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should repent and be healed'" (Matthew 13:10-15).

Matthew uses a different source to explain the use of parables by Jesus: *"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them; That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundations of the world'" (Matthew 13:35).* A mistranslation of the source in Psalm 78:2, (which in fact should read "I shall open my mouth in a parable, I shall utter riddles of old"), may give the English reader the impression that Matthew actually relates to Jesus' parables as a means for revealing those secrets of old, as opposed to what Jesus himself says. It is of course quite "kosher" to come to this understanding, too. Esoteric texts have a dual purpose of hiding information from some readers while containing keys of revelation to others.

These two passages are the obvious starting point to any analysis of the art of parables used by Jesus so frequently in his messages. We may miss a lot, however, if we presume that this "technique" of hiding or revealing the secrets of the kingdom is unique to only those passages that would be classified according to what literary science

terms "parables." There are two main reasons. The first is that the purpose of many of Jesus' parables is didactic, that is, to turn abstract ideas into something simple that even an "AM HAARETZ," (someone uneducated, untrained in rabbinic teachings), can understand. The motivation of these parables is to reveal secrets. The second reason is that Jesus was not the original inventor of many of these parables. We can find parallels to many of Jesus' parables in other Second Temple period literature. Most of the content of these books was passed on orally in his time and only took the form of literature later. Sometimes these parallel parables have a slightly different style or moral attached to them, but the form and content of conveying spiritual messages in this way was common practice among the sages of the time and is hardly esoteric in nature.

In light of these facts, the next question we should then ask ourselves is where can we find those sayings that both Jesus and Matthew are hinting at that reveal or hide, (to the "goodies" and from the "baddies" respectively), the secrets of the kingdom? In fact, these sayings appear all over the place and are certainly not limited to the form of parables. Truthfully, much of what Jesus says can be considered parabolic in the sense of being indirect ways of conveying secret messages.

It is quite evident that Jesus is referring to the texts of the "Old Testament" as parables. He alludes to them by adding small hints that act as keys to lead us to the old texts in the first place and then open their true meaning to show their relevance to himself and what type of Messiah he is. We could illustrate the inter-relations between the sayings of Jesus and the previous layers of biblical text as the relation between the pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. Without the pieces that Jesus is holding in his hand, the pieces, (from Old Testament sources), that we already hold in our hands may lose their value since they do not connect to make the full picture. This is exactly what Jesus means when he says: *"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; But whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."* The context of this saying is the understanding of hidden messages, and it must therefore be clear that Jesus is talking about an intellectual gain or loss and not about a loss of blessings or something material.

Here are a few of the many examples:

The Angel of the Face

The concept of The Angel of the Face (מלאך הפנים) is the core of the Messianic idea of the New Testament, the heart

of Christology itself. Nevertheless, it is hardly present in the text of the New Testament, just as it is esoterically manifested in the text of the Old Testament. Even the term itself never appears in the New Testament. One has to work hard to put the pieces of this idea together and figure out how it relates to the Messiah. Jesus could have saved us all a lot of exegetical work by simply declaring: "I am the 'Angel Of The Face' that the prophet Isaiah 63:9 talks about and that Moses talks about in Exodus 23:20 and 33:14 and who makes several other dramatic appearances in the biblical text, such as to Jacob (Genesis 32:31), to Gideon (Judges 6:22), and to Samson's parents (Judges 13:22)." (Although these chapter and verse divisions did not exist in the time of Jesus, I use them here for the convenience of the reader).

All these angelic appearances share two common principles: the "angel" or "messenger" speaks in the first person as if he was God himself and acts as a revelation of God's "face." Jesus only relates to this matter indirectly saying, "He who sees me has seen the father" (John 14: 9), leaving us figure out this radical saying by putting the picture together with Old Testament texts. Once we make this effort, we will be amazed to find the many similarities between the paragraph that contains this statement, (along with "I am the way, the truth and the life"), and the paragraph in Exodus 33:14 where Moses asks to know God's "Ways" and is told about the "face" that will go before him.

The Cornerstone

Another main issue in the Messianic idea of the New Testament is the Messiah's identity as the rejected cornerstone of Psalm 118, which was the last biblical text recited by Jesus and his disciples on the night of his arrest on the Mount of Olives. While this verse and other verses that contain the word "stone" as a messianic hint appear few times in the New Testament, Jesus only indirectly relates to the full meaning of this Old Testament symbol in statements that do not mention that stone. In fact, all of Jesus' sayings which refer to the idea of His unity with the Father are based on the symbol of the stone. Isaiah 28:16 says, *"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation."* This particular English translation is not accurate here because Isaiah is not talking about a tried or a tested stone, but of a *testing* stone. In other words, this cornerstone, the same one the builders rejected in Psalm 118, is an "object" used by God for testing something. Its purpose is to test our faith in him.

It is important to note in this context that the word

stone in Hebrew - אבן – contains the presence of both father - אב -and son - בן – which is not a vain play on letters. This is *the* factor that gives this messianic symbol its highest value. This factor also gives Jesus the authority to utter such statements as "I and my father are one" (John 10:30), "I am in the father and the father is in me" (John 14:10), "He who hates me hates the father" (John 15:23), and other such claims that are based on his understanding of his identity as the "testing stone" of Isaiah. In other words, the Messiah is *the* criteria for God's judgment on who is with Him and who is against Him. Jesus does not explain all of this very important issue to us or to his disciples in a clear manner, however. Once more, he leaves it to us to put the pieces of the puzzle together for the very same reason He speaks in parables in the first place. He wants only those who believe what He says to make this effort and find His hiding places in the Old Testament, knowing that those who do not believe what He says would not bother.

The Son of Joseph

"Messiah Son of Joseph" is the title of a major concept in the later Jewish literature, especially in Hassidic traditions based

on Kabbalah. The rare appearance of this messianic type in the Talmud appears in connection to Zechariah 12:10, *"And I will pour on the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn."* The New Testament quotes this verse twice in the context of the crucifixion. The sages of the Talmud say that this mourning is for "Messiah Son of Joseph who was killed." The title "Son of Joseph" reflects the understanding that the biblical figure of Joseph is an archetype, a foreshadowing of the Messiah, (not to be confused as a reference to Jesus' earthly father Joseph).

The Joseph narrative has many parallels to the Messiah's life in the gospels. Some of these parallels are Joseph's bold declarations of his rule over his brethren, followed by their hatred and his rejection by them, their betrayal and their attempt to get rid of him, Joseph going into exile and becoming the ruler of the greatest pagan superpower of his time, his brethren following him into exile and not recognizing him until the very end of the story, and so



on. It is not only the outline framework narrative that fits, however. Every detail in Joseph's story matches, including Jacob's blessing to the tribe of Joseph (Genesis 49:22-26), which contains a handful of messianic hints, among them the very important symbols of the Vine and the stone.

Jesus never teaches directly about the story of Joseph and never teaches his disciples about its relevance to the messianic idea, unless he did so within their closed circle, and they never told us. Naturally, Jesus did not skip such a major issue without leaving at least a hint, which he does in the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21, Mark 12, Luke 20, based on a very similar parable in Isaiah 5). The end of this parable says, *"Then said the lord of the vineyard, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; it may be they will reverence him when they see him.' But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying: 'This is the heir, come let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours.' So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him"* (Luke 20:13-15). This is a clear allusion to Genesis 37:18-20, *"And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, 'Behold this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit...'"* Since the vine is a common symbol for both Joseph and Jesus, it makes sense that he planted this hint in a vineyard. In short, Jesus expects us to pay attention to the hidden presence of Joseph in his parable, to go back to the Old Testament story, and to learn it well in the light of the messianic context.

The Song of Songs

Jewish mystical writings say that out of all the biblical texts Solomon's "Song of Songs" most intensely shows the theme of salvation. This sometimes romantic and even erotic piece of poetry was never taken at face value by our sages. Both ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters identified the "beloved" characters of the book as God the redeemer and his redeemed people, characterized as bridegroom and bride. While the former identify the bride as "Knesset Israel," ("The Assembly of Israel"), the latter identify her as the ecclesia, the church in its wider sense.

To the best of my memory, the New Testament does not have a single direct reference to this text which had such a vital influence on messianic interpretation. It does contain some indirect hints to the Song of Songs, however, suggesting that Jesus would certainly want us to look carefully into this "parable." To start with, Jesus describes himself more than once as the bridegroom, in addition to numerous times that the motif of bridegrooms or weddings appears in his parables, (and in Revelation chapters 18 and

19). All references to this picture of a wedding / bridegroom are obviously inspired by the symbolic infrastructure of the Song of Songs, but strangely enough, the two direct allusions Jesus makes to this book are not at all in the context of the wedding or bridegroom parables.

One of these allusions appears in John 14, within what we could describe as Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples: *"In the house of my father there are many habitations. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am you may be also"* (John 14:1-3). This speech is based on an old custom, which some societies still practice, where between engagement and the actual wedding, the bridegroom prepares a place for his bride to live. After the wedding, the bridegroom takes his bride to that place he has prepared in his father's house where they will live happily together. So in this passage, Jesus again declares himself to be the bridegroom without explicitly saying it. Even more importantly, however, he explains the purpose of his "First Coming," that is to become engaged to his future wife. His "Second Coming" in the latter days will be the wedding itself.

Yet another interesting reference to the Song of Songs is hidden in these verses as well. When Jesus talks about the many habitations that are in His father's house, I believe He is intentionally hinting at one of the first verses of this book, "The king hath brought me into his chambers" (Song of Songs 1:4). Another important hint can be detected in Jesus' farewell speech from his words "I am going to prepare a place for you." This phrase references one of the jobs of the "Angel of the Face" that Exodus 23:20 describes, to "Bring thee into the place which I have prepared."

When a group of crying women followed him on his way to the cross, Jesus turned and said to them: *"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children"* (Luke 23:28). Most likely the majority of the ladies involved were not actually Jerusalemites but Galileans, so the reason he addressed them as "Daughters of Jerusalem" has something to do with Song of Songs. This book instructs them in a way that has much to do with the circumstances in which the Galileans of Jesus' day find themselves now: *"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake love until it pleases"* (Song of Songs 8:4).

In conclusion, just as it is said of King Solomon that he spoke 3,000 parables (1 Kings 5:12), so it can be said of Jesus that he spoke thousands of parables, even more than those that we often recognize as the official literary genre of "parables."

The Rich Fool(s)

Elizabeth Wakefield



"I will tear down my barns and build larger ones..."

Since the parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21 has a relatively simple basic message, few interpreters have attempted to probe any deeper layers of meaning that may lie underneath Yeshua's story. Most interpretations of this passage have focused on the dangers of trusting in one's material wealth and have neglected the major issue that Luke uses to frame the parable: the sin of covetousness. Since covetousness involves desiring someone else's possessions, often to the point of plotting ways to harm the original owner in order to steal from him, it is possible that Yeshua had specific contemporary examples of covetousness leading to death in his mind when he told this story. I would like to propose that one layer of this parable's meaning condemns the political-historical background of deceit and false diplomacy in which Second Temple Period Judea's rulers engaged in order to increase their own fame and prosperity. Predictably, their actions eventually led to their own destruction as well as that of the independent Jewish state.

Let us first of all examine the text itself: *"Someone in the crowd said to him [Yeshua], 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide*

the inheritance with me.' But he said to him, 'Man, who made me judge or arbitrator over you?' And he [Yeshua] said to them, 'Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' And he told them a parable saying, 'The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And will say to my soul 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'"

Jewish exegetical tradition speaks of four levels of interpretation that can be applied to sacred texts. These interpretive methods are arranged into an acronym that spells out the Hebrew word *"pardes,"* "orchard." These four levels are *peshat* (literal or literary), *remez* (hint), *drash* (expounding), and *sodi* (secret). Although this is not the time to attempt to find four levels of meaning in this

parable, I simply mention this idea to show that finding multi-levels of meaning in a text, (or an oral tradition), was a practice common to Yeshua's contemporaries and that he also could have had multiple themes and layers in mind for this parable. Yeshua plainly states the *peshat* or literal meaning of this parable in verse 15, "*Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" So the literal meaning of this parable is that coveting is not only a complete waste of time, but also a sin.

On a *peshat* level, even from the earthly, cultural perspective of the Ancient Near East (ANE), the behavior of the rich man in stockpiling his possessions was socially aberrant. One article on this parable states that the reason wealth was so respected in the ANE was not merely about *being* wealthy but about *sharing* one's wealth with others. "Prestige, or a 'good name,' derives from the domination of persons rather than things. Hence, any concern people show for the acquisition of goods stems from their purpose of gaining honor by generously disposing of what one has acquired among equals or socially useful lower-class clients. In other words, an honorable name is acquired through beneficence, not through the fact of possession and/or the keeping of what one has acquired (see Luke 12:16-20). Thus money, goods, and any sort of wealth are really a means to an honorable name, and any other use of wealth is considered foolish. One must 'make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon' (Luke 16:9); there is no honor in simply being called 'the richest man in the world.'"¹

The Rich Fool's behavior was also insulting to his neighbors in their cultural context, as another article points out. "By building larger barns he wanted to secure his position and store grain for periods of scarcity and hunger. Thus he would make the villagers more dependent on him when in needy times they would have to buy the grain at a high price."² This action showed a total lack of compassion and moral concern for the well-being of others.

From a heavenly perspective, this parable warns us that trusting in our possessions is folly because we do not even know if we will live another day to enjoy them. Yaakov 4:13-15 also addresses this idea: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit;' yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that...'" Instead of amassing possessions for themselves, Yeshua's followers must "be rich toward

God" (Luke 12:21), using their resources for good deeds of charity and the purposes of God's kingdom.

Moving on now beyond the *peshat*, I think that this parable is also meant to be an ironic political commentary on the failure of the Hasmonean Dynasty. These Jewish descendants of the Maccabees won Judea's freedom from the Syrian-Greeks only to lose the kingdom to the Romans after less than a century of self-rule because of the covetousness of two brothers who each wanted the throne for themselves. The narrative frame of the parable about a dispute between two brothers over their inheritance, as well as the plot within the parable itself, evokes the memory of the Hasmonean Civil War that brought about the downfall of the independent Jewish state and its conquest by the Roman Empire in 63 BCE. This event was one of the most traumatic in the Jewish history that immediately preceded Yeshua and would have been quite fresh on his listeners minds. Here is a brief recounting of those events so the connection between them and Luke 12 will be easily apparent:

The Hasmonean Jewish King Alexander Jannaeus and his wife Salome Alexandra had two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, and when their father died, Alexandra reigned as Queen, while Hyrcanus served as High Priest. Being the oldest son, Hyrcanus was also in line to receive the throne, but while their mother lay on her deathbed, the younger son Aristobulus secretly recruited an army and captured 22 military strongholds throughout Judea in preparation for seizing the throne. After hearing what Aristobulus had done, Alexandra and Hyrcanus held his wife and children hostage in Jerusalem and prepared their own army. After Alexandra's death in 67 BCE, her sons began a civil war and fought many battles against one another, one stage of which ended with Hyrcanus conceding both the throne and the high priesthood to his younger brother. After some time, however, Hyrcanus' "friend" and advisor Antipater the Edomite, told him that his brother wanted to assassinate him and convinced him to break his treaty with Aristobulus. By promising the Nabatean Arabs in Petra, (in what today is Jordan), the rule of several Jewish cities, Hyrcanus and Antipater allied with them and restarted the war. They nearly destroyed Aristobulus, except that while they were besieging him in Jerusalem, the Roman general Pompey and his vast army arrived in the area. Immediately, both brothers sent emissaries to him with all sorts of promises and bribes, begging him to intervene on their behalf.

After a long series of bribes, political intrigues, and broken peace agreements and treaties with each other

that involved the Nabateans and the Romans, Pompey finally had enough of the whole situation and ordered Aristobulus to turn all his military forces and strongholds over to Rome. When he then retreated with his army to Jerusalem, his brother Hyrcanus actually helped the Roman army besiege him in the Temple and the Holy City. In 63 BCE, this tragic battle ended with the death of thousands of Jews and Pompey and his generals entering the Holy of Holies itself, a place that was forbidden to everyone except for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. After they captured Jerusalem, the Romans made Hyrcanus High Priest again but annexed Judea to the Roman province of Syria. Antipater the Edomite bought the right to the political rule of Judea as proconsul from the Roman Emperor. The Romans carried Aristobulus into captivity and eventually poisoned him in response to his involvement with a number of political intrigues and attempts to renew the war in Judea. Not many years later, Antipater was also poisoned, and Aristobulus' son Antigonus allied with the Parthians, seized Jerusalem, and cut off Hyrcanus' ear so that he could no longer serve as High Priest, (since the Torah forbids a priest with any physical blemish). This terrible war continued until Antipater's son, Herod the Edomite, killed Antigonus, the last ruler of the Hasmonean line, and bought the throne of Judea for himself from Rome.³

The pride, greed, and covetousness of these two Jewish brothers destroyed everything that they and their forefathers the Maccabees had worked so hard for. Not only were their lives and kingdom taken away from them, but their broken treaties and insistence on involving foreign nations in the war caused Judea to be handed over to foreign rule for nearly 2100 years. It was not until 1948 that Israel was ever again to be an independent Jewish state.

Now, let us review over the elements of the parable one by one that match up with this tragic epoch in Jewish history. First, Luke's narrative occasion for this parable appears in verse 13 when a man in the crowd around Yeshua asks him to intervene in an inheritance dispute between him and his brother, just as Hyrcanus and Aristobulus were fighting over their inheritance. Yeshua's answer shows that he considers this case to be outside his jurisdiction, since he refuses to even hear the evidence. Unfortunately, when the two Hasmonean brothers went to a completely foreign source to solve their dispute, the Romans' answer did not match Yeshua's response, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" The Romans' greed caused them to become involved in a dispute in which they did not have any right to intervene and eventually led to untold amounts of problems for the Roman Empire as well. No other province

of the Roman Empire rebelled as often or gave them so many headaches as Judea. Instead of appointing himself judge over this case, Yeshua warned the man about the dangers of covetousness and told this parable that hints at the Hasmonean destruction and shows the personal as well as the political consequences of not being content with what one already has.

The rich fool in the parable could represent both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, who being the princes of the Hasmonean family had more than enough power, money, and influence without betraying each other as a means to more worldly possessions.

When the rich fool noticed the great abundance of his crops, instead of thanking God for blessing him and sharing his wealth, he decided "to tear down his barns and build larger ones." Metaphorically speaking, this action could be compared to tearing up old peace agreements and treaties and making new ones, (more expensive and dependant on foreign powers). Both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus and their children repeated this process multiple times against each other and with the Nabateans, the Romans, and the Parthians until it led to their complete destruction. Logically speaking, the rich man could have left his old barns standing and simply built enough new ones to hold the rest of his produce, but his odd decision to "tear down the old barns and build larger ones" hints at the fact that there is some other, more subtle metaphorical meaning behind this action.

Once he acquired what he wanted, he then planned to sit back and "relax, eat, drink, and be merry" for many years without knowing about the impending destruction of his life and empire. Similarly, each of Hasmonean brothers made and broke agreements with each other and others and then sat back to enjoy what they captured, not knowing that their time of peace was to be brief until their jealous sibling would attack them again with the help of some other empire. The end of the parable accurately reflects the despair of the end of their lives and reigns when Judea fell to the Romans and the Jewish throne was sold to Herod the Edomite, as verse 20 mocks the rich fool. "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" Just as Hyrcanus and Aristobulus' lives and empires ended abruptly and tragically with their kingdom being handed over to another, so too this rich fool ended his life both spiritually, morally, and physically bankrupt because of his greed.

Yeshua commands his followers instead to be content with what they have and "to be rich toward God," as

Proverbs 11:4 says, "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but *tzedaka* [righteousness] delivers from death." Contemporary Judaism makes a word play with this verse based on the fact that the Hebrew word for charitable giving is also *tzedaka*. One way to be rich toward God is to joyfully give to those in need, storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Paul continues the theme of this parable in 1 Timothy 6:6-8 when he says, "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." Instead of constantly striving against other human beings in an attempt to gain more temporal possessions, let us resolve at this new year to be wealthier toward God and toward others in our physical and spiritual *tzedaka*.

¹ Malina, Bruce and Jerome Neyrey. "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts." *The Social World of Luke-Acts*. Ed. Jerome H. Neyrey. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991, pp. 33-4.

² Moxnes, Halvor. "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts." *The Social World of Luke-Acts*. Ed. Jerome H. Neyrey. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991, p. 255.

³ For more details about the Hasmonean Civil War, see Josephus Flavius and his works, *Jewish Antiquities* Book 14 and *The Jewish War* Book 1.



"Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!" -Luke 12:24

Pillars *of* Zion

The Life of Ahuva Ben-Meir



We had the privilege and the joy of interviewing Ahuva at her Jerusalem home on one of the hottest days of the year. When we arrived, we were greeted by vivid and colorful flowers in window pots on her porch. Then, we were warmly greeted by Ahuva with her twinkling blue eyes, shock of white hair, and ready smile. One of the amazing things about this remarkable lady is her unshakable faith and optimism. Ahuva told us at various times during the interview that she doesn't worry about the current situation in Israel, because "Yeshua and the prophets never spoke of the State of Israel, only about the Kingdom of God." This, she says, is her focus, her faith, her hope, her joy, and her confidence. The following is the story of

her life, in her own words:

I was born with the name Lempi Hilja Virtanen in the middle of Finland in the county of Hankasalmi in the village of Venekoski on September 12, 1923. Although I have a twin, my brother Vyljo Armas emerged from the womb around 10:00 pm, and I was not born until 6:00 am the next morning. Because my mother's life was in such great danger, the doctor had already decided to remove me from the womb in pieces, and I barely escaped death. We twins were the firstborn in our family, and afterwards came a sister and two brothers until we had a family of seven. We had a small farmhouse that was not really big enough to

support our family, and my father worked at a sawmill 15 kilometers away. He often was only able to come home on Sundays, and as a child I would always pray that he would come home this week. He was such a good man except for once in a while he would come home on Sunday drunk, and he was a completely different person. He would bring other men over who were also drunk, and anything could happen. It was at those times that I really began to pray as a child. We kids played with the cows and chickens and picked berries from the forests.

My family was very poor, so when I was only thirteen years old, I left home and went to work in the central village where there was a telephone switchboard. I helped the old couple that took care of it and did homework. After I spent three years there, I decided to go to a vocational school in a nearby city. I began to study there on September 1, 1939, which was a very fateful day for the world.

On that same day, Germany attacked Poland, and World War II began. Then Russia attacked Finland on December 1, and there were six years of war. It was the most difficult time ever in Finland's history and in my life as well. When the war finally ended in 1945, I traveled to Helsinki to continue my studies in social science. Tragically, at the end of my first year, my twin brother died suddenly, and I had to leave my exams to go to his funeral.

Afterwards I found summer work in Lapland, Pudasjarvi, where I believe that for the first time, the Lord called me in a vision. I was walking to the mid-summer feast thinking that it was all right to go dance there, despite the fact that it was so soon after my brother's death, when I suddenly saw before my eyes two roads- one very dark and dreadful and the other full of bright light. Then I heard a voice calling, "You are going the wrong way!" I began to cry, but then another voice said to me, "You are a fool; go where you are going." This vision was completely unexpected, and I had no idea what it meant. Meanwhile, I went to the mid-summer dance and forgot the vision but soon afterwards felt that my life was empty and lacked purpose.

I returned to Helsinki, where I felt the second call four or five months later. After WW2, there was a great revival among the young people in Finland. A fellow student invited me to a revival meeting, and as soon as I entered the room and heard the singing, I felt the Holy Spirit calling me so strongly that I began to cry immediately and could not stop for the rest of the evening. It was all so dramatic that I had no choice; that night I gave my life to my Savior Yeshua. It was October 19, 1946, and I was 23 years old. I began to walk in the Right Way, remembering my first vision. The next day I wanted to buy a Bible but did not have

enough money, so I only got the New Testament. My aunt later gave me an entire Bible. I started to read, and it was like an open book to me. I became very excited because it was like honey in my mouth. I read it every night and suddenly found Israel there in the Scriptures. After the war, there was a big revival among the young people of Finland, and I became a part of it. My entire life was changed, and I wanted to do something for the Lord. Through the Bible, I found Israel, and I realized that it was time for the Lord to gather Israel from the four corners of the earth.

During the time of the war, we had no idea in Finland what was happening to the Jews in Europe because of the censorship in the news. The first time I ever even heard of the Holocaust was in 1947 when I read a book about it by a Jewish pastor from Finland. When I read about the Holocaust, it entered very deeply into my heart, and I could not forget about Israel. There were all kinds of churches in Helsinki, and for four years I went around visiting all of them because I was hoping to hear something there about Israel. Yet I never heard anything in any of them about Israel until one day I unexpectedly saw an ad in a newspaper for an "Israel night" at one church. I immediately felt like I absolutely had to go there, and it was the turning point of my life. When I went to the meeting, the speaker was a woman who worked for the Carmel Society. This organization had only been founded in 1949 in Finland and was still very small. It only had a board and one worker at that time, but its motto was "For the Bible and for Israel." I subscribed to their magazine and began to follow their work. In 1951, I went with a group of Finnish people from the Carmel Society to a meeting in Norway for people from all over Scandinavia with the same vision. Every morning they raised the flags of all the Scandinavian countries together with the flag of Israel, and it excited me so much. We are in the process of the Great Redemption and the Kingdom of Heaven. I do not believe in political Israel; I believe in the Kingdom of Heaven. The state of Israel is a part of it, but it is not the final goal. When Yeshua started his work, he talked all the time about the Kingdom of God, not about a political State of Israel.

Then in 1953, I traveled to Israel for the first time. It was, in fact, the first time I had ever flown on a plane, and I traveled alone. When I descended from the plane in Tel Aviv, I heard a voice in my heart say, "Now you have come home." Since then I have never felt strange in Israel. It was spring time, and the land of Israel was full of flowers and good smells. I was in an ecstasy of delight. I was lodging in the Haifa Scandinavian Seaman's Home along with some other Finnish people and a large Norwegian tour group. I

therefore had the opportunity to travel with them and saw the whole country for the first time. I spent two weeks in Israel, returning to Naples on a boat named *The Jerusalem*, and then to Finland by train.

During the next year, 1954, I was full of first love for Israel, and I got no rest until I was ready to leave my good municipal job in the city of Furku, my home, and everything I had. I had studied to be a government secretary and had always loved my job, but when I began to teach some children Sunday School after I came back from Israel, it lit an unquenchable fire in me. I stopped caring about progressing in my government job and then began to work for the Carmel Society instead. I began to travel around "For the Bible and Israel," as I became the Secretary of Schools for the Carmel Society. With my driver and co-worker Kalle Jurvanen, we visited hundreds of schools all around Finland and spoke to thousands of children about Yeshua and Israel. We had some pictures and short films, and doors opened for us everywhere. Finland had been so destroyed during the war that there were not very many modern educational materials, so the doors were wide open for us with our films to come and share our message to the children. Sometimes the children and teachers found it very hard to believe us that there actually still were such places as Jerusalem and Bethlehem. They thought all those places were just fairy tales. The State of Israel was such a new thing that they could hardly believe it was real. It was very difficult to travel around in Finland in the winter with our old, cold car, sleeping every night in a different place. After I did it for six years, I felt very tired and decided it was enough.

I made my second trip to Israel in the summer of 1956, which was a great adventure. Our group of 26 people traveled in a long, Finnish bus from Helsinki to Jerusalem, which took a month and a half. Together with another woman named Kerttu Vainikainen, who was the director of the Bible school, I guided the group. We had two drivers who were brothers, eight tents, and a gas kitchen, in which we cooked our meals. We slept in the tents as we drove through twelve countries from Europe to the Middle East, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and finally Israel. By the time we arrived to Israel, however, we only had a week left in which to tour it.

My third trip to Israel was in 1959 with a group of nineteen people from Finland. The trip was supposed to be for three weeks, but I ended up staying for two years and three months. Although I had no prior plans to stay that long, God's guidance was wonderful during that time. My greatest desire was to study Hebrew and to practice

my English, and I got the opportunity to do both. In 1959, I spent a year in the Galilee in a little village called Poria, north of Tiberias, where I had to speak English with my neighbors. I was house-sitting for someone who had returned temporarily to Finland and helping people around me when I got a chance. Then I went to Haifa and worked in the Seamen's House for 3 months.

Then finally I received an invitation to Jerusalem. I was a housekeeper there in Dr. H. Ward's home, which was a lot of work and did not leave much time for study. At last I got to study Hebrew in ulpan for five months, and after that I spent four months in the American Institute practicing English with the American students. During the last month of my stay, I was surprised to get an invitation to work on the Kibbutz Kiryat Anavim. During a meeting with the Finnish Carmel tourist group, someone asked if it was possible for non-Jews to work on kibbutzim. They responded positively and said that if we sent 30-40 young people, they would allow them to work and support them here for one year. The secretary of the Carmel Society sprang up, held out his hand and said, "Next year we shall send the group!"

And so it happened. After spending a year in Finland, I returned to Israel as the guide and teacher of a group of 38 young people in 1962. I lived in Kibbutz Kiryat Anavim four years, and each year a new group came to volunteer. This rotation of Finnish volunteers on Israeli kibbutzim lasted forty years! The last group in which I participated came to Kibbutz Gevim in 1969 and became the foundation group of Yad haShemonah.

I left this group after six months, however, to marry Moshe I. Ben-Meir, the very well-known pioneer of Messianic Judaism in Israel. We bought a house in the Kiryat Yovel neighborhood of Jerusalem, where I have been living for 36 years. In 1974, we were founding members of what later on became the Netivyah Society. Our marriage lasted only nine and a half years until Moshe, (of blessed memory), was taken to be with the Lord on Nov 3, 1978. I have tried to be faithful to the Lord's work in Netivyah- Roeh Israel to this day.

The role of Israel in these last days will involve the fulfillment of the prophetic word of Zechariah 12 and Hoses 3:5 and the coming of the Lord for his people.

The greatest challenge to the new generation of believers is overcoming the spirit of this world and the overwhelming propaganda against faith and to stand upon the foundation of the whole Word. Everything in today's world is changing so fast that my head cannot even keep up with it all anymore, but our faith always remains the same. One good thing about all this modern machinery is

that it gives people very easy access to study the Word of God.

I want to thank all my sisters and brothers, especially Joseph and Marcia, for all my years in Kehilat Netivyah-Roeh Israel. Before Moshe and I got married, I became Jewish. My late husband's dream was to establish a Messianic Jewish synagogue in Jerusalem, and that is what we have been doing ever since. I am thankful for all the studies, Shabbats, feasts, family meetings, etc, in which I have participated. I am the Biblical "*ger, yatom/ almana*" [resident alien, widow/ orphan], and Netivyah has been my home. I have no relatives here except for my late husband's daughter and grandchildren who live in the northern part of the country. Netivyah has given me so much through Jewish customs and festivals and making connections with believers around the world, however. Everything I have is what God gave to me, and when He asks me to give up my life and come home to heaven, I will offer it to Him in return gladly. In the meantime, I am totally happy with my life. May God bless our congregation and lead us until the coming of the Messiah.

Upon leaving, we asked Ahuva if she was happy and satisfied. She laughed her ready laugh, smiled that warm and wonderful smile of hers and said, "I have everything. It's all been from God, and I wouldn't change a thing if I could. I am satisfied, my health is good enough, and I am content." We left Ahuva's home with her smiles and her warmth enveloping us, and her faith and confidence inspiring us. She promised to pray for a situation in my life which, already, a day later, has improved. We thank God for this wonderful and precious lady, whom we love and honor so much.

R.K and E.W.



Ed. note: This is the first article in a series of life stories of some of the older "pillars" of our Jerusalem congregation. We hope to publish one story in each of our future editions of Teaching from Zion so that their lives can be an encouragement to you all as they have been such a huge blessing to us.

For anyone who has not yet read it, we have recently published the Autobiographical Sketches of Ahuvah's late husband, Moshe Ben Meir in English. See the back cover of this magazine for instructions about how to order this fascinating story.

God Looks at the Heart

Rittie Katz

A parable is, according to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, "a short simple story from which a moral lesson may be drawn." Parables are often used to teach children, and it would therefore seem appropriate that God would also use parables to instruct us, His children.

Some of the parables of Jesus are so commonly known that people may see them as mundane. They have filtered into common usage and evoke clear and universal images. Only mention "the Prodigal Son," and everyone immediately sees the image of a returning rebel. Anyone who enjoys doing good deeds is called "a Good Samaritan," regardless of national origin.

Matthew 13:34 explains, "...Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables, and without a parable He did not speak to them." The obvious question is: why? Then in the verse immediately following, we have our answer. "I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35).

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He is the will of God and the exact representation of God. God does not want us to be ignorant of His will for our lives, nor does He want us floundering in darkness. Therefore, He sent His Son, the Light of the World, so that we may be blind and deaf no longer.

The parables of Jesus go straight to the heart. As is the case with children, if one wants to make an emotional point or teach a moral lesson, it is not enough to intellectually discuss a principal. In order to create an emotional reaction so the lesson is truly learned, an object lesson is often necessary. The same is the case with us. Most of us have enough Bible knowledge to get us into all sorts of doctrinal trouble. Nevertheless, we know when a scripture has become illuminated to us, when a previously held prejudice melts away due to the light and warmth of Truth, and when we have been set free.

Jesus was not the first to use parables. In II Samuel 12:1,



we find the prophet Nathan confronting David about his sin with Bathsheba. As is also often the case with us, sin had darkened David's mind and made his heart cold with regard to his estrangement from God. Nathan painted a vivid word picture of a poor man who had one little lamb he had loved "like a daughter," but then a rich man stole the lamb and prepared it for a traveler.

David became enraged! He was so upset he threatened execution for the rich man, and in one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture, Nathan thundered,

"You are the man!" The prophet went on to explain exactly what David had done, exactly how the Lord felt about it, and exactly what the consequences would be. There was nothing more to be said and no more room for justification or posing. David had been convicted and sentenced with justice as well as mercy. Although he suffered severe consequences, he did not die, and over the course of time, his fellowship with the Lord was restored in fullness. The parable had pierced his heart, and he saw his sin.

Jesus, therefore, used parables to clarify, to explain, and most importantly, to paint vivid pictures that would enter into the hearts of man and bring them to the Father. In one of His most beautiful portrayals, He spoke of the prodigal son. Not only is this a stirring picture of salvation, but it is also a wonderful picture of Man rediscovering his true self and his destiny as he returns to his Father.

It is only in returning to our roots and acknowledging our inability to fulfill our destinies apart from our Father that we can truly experience the life God has fashioned and formed for us before the foundations of the world and our worth as sons and daughters of the most High God. As we look to this New Year, may we allow the truth of His love to pierce our hearts anew. May we rouse ourselves from our lethargy in which we accept so much less than He has for us. May we return to our Father and thus to ourselves, and find His outstretched arms and welcoming heart.

The Hidden Treasure of Salvation

Yehuda Bachana

"May our eyes behold your return to Zion in Compassion..."

The parables of the pearl and the hidden treasure in Matthew 13 are pictures of the importance of salvation for Israel and for the rest of the world. Let us begin with the second of the two parables and then go back to compare it with the first. Matthew 13:45-46 says, *"Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went on and sold all he had and bought it."*

This is a very short parable about a man who is a pearl merchant. This merchant is spending his life searching for the perfect pearl. He sells, buys, and trades until along comes a perfect pearl. He understands that his search is over, and he has found what he was looking for. In order to have it, however, he has to sell everything he owns.

The pearl represents salvation, a ticket into the Kingdom of God, and the merchant symbolizes a man who is looking for the truth. Today we can compare that merchant to the people of Israel. The people of Israel have tried and indeed are still trying almost every belief and every way. They have literally tried everything from idolatry to Buddhism to atheism and socialist Zionism. At the present time, it seems clear that Israelis are "looking for love in all the wrong places." As it says in Jeremiah 2:13, "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns-broken cisterns that can hold no water." Even though they have tried all these religions, they still feel that something is missing, however. None of these things have satisfied them, and they do not feel whole with them.

Not too long ago there was a big article in one of Israel's biggest weekend newspapers. Almost every Israeli buys a newspaper, at least over the weekend. That article contained interviews with almost all the political and cultural leaders of our country. They proudly talked about the witch doctors, fortune tellers, and kabalistic rabbis to whom they go for advice. They proudly talked about their good luck charms which they acquired from weird places. Almost every other soldier goes to India or the Far East to search for the meaning of his or her life after they

are released from the IDF. So it seems clear that Israel is searching for something.

Now let us go back to the first parable and compare it to the one about the pearl. Matthew 13:44 says, *"Again the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."*

This parable talks about a man who found salvation by chance. He was wandering, walking on roads, climbing mountains, and meandering in the fields. Then he found it- the treasure of salvation! He was not looking for it or searching for anything in particular, but then he found it. Nevertheless, in order to own the treasure, the man had to sell everything he had and buy the field where the treasure was. We also have a lot of people who have found salvation without really "looking" for it, but someone taught them, so they found it.

Returning to the parable of the pearl merchant, we see that as soon as he finds the perfect pearl, he understands that all of his previous possessions do not compare to the treasure he has just found. All of his previous beliefs are nothing in comparison to the value of the truth he has found. So he gets rid of everything that he previously had. He disposes of all that belonged to his previous life so that he can acquire this pearl. He knows that the pearl is worth it. All that the merchant had until then was temporary, replaceable, less precious, and less important. It gave only half-truth or temporary satisfaction. All of that was gone when he found the pearl, which is salvation, the kingdom of God, and everlasting life. Nothing can compare to it.

The gospel pictures the end days where all of Israel shall recognize the Messiah. The half truths, idolatry, and endless mazes will be a thing of the past, and every knee shall bow to the truth. *"Therefore, God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua, every knee shall bow..."* (Philippians 2:9-11). As it is written in 2 Corinthians 3, the veil will be removed, and the children of Israel will see Yeshua as their Messiah and Savior. We await that glorious day. Amen!

...Blessed are you our Lord who restores his presence to Zion."

Israel: A State of Mind

Shana Tova Friends:

The way I have felt over the last few months is a bit like Dorothy caught up in the tornado out of Colorado and seeing very odd folks and things flying past the window, then dropping down into Oz, Munchkins and all, (which happens to be the name of the congregational youth group here). We are definitely not in Colorado anymore, Toto.

That being said, where we now live is a bit like Colorado with pine forests and mountains, and our new house is a bit like the garden of Eden with fish pond and fruit trees galore. (We've been gorging ourselves on Julie's fresh apple pies from our trees). As for changes in Israel, I find things much more advanced than they were ten years ago. Life is pretty good, service much better, and the shops and markets are filled with every necessity and more. The food is excellent. Also, I find a change in the people, (or perhaps it is in me), in that they seem to be more patient and even more kind. Could it be? Of course there are still a few of the old-timer-holdover jerks around.

Overall, I'd say there is a definite sense of the reality-of-life here that is harder to experience in the American Dream, (or as Bob Dylan put it, "Ya gotta be asleep to dream"). Yes, that's it: a sense of LIFE, (rather than the illusion of life). As my son David put it, here you see old people walking in the streets, (along with children playing and soldiers eating ice cream cones and immigrants playing music in the streets to make a few shekels...). Their faces are full of character that is engraved into their faces from life experiences of war and peace, sweetness and bitterness, etc, while in the USA everything seems to be hidden away somewhere under a shallow smile. Perhaps there the old folks are deposited by

their kids into institutions so as not to interfere with their own "self realization" or to spoil the landscape.

We visit our lovely new granddaughter Danielle while passing through roadblocks "manned" by young, black, (and pretty), Ethiopian girls with M-16 rifles. One sees Arabs in shops and restaurants and hospitals and workplaces together with their Jewish counterparts not making any news whatsoever.

Life is full of surprises here. The most odd recent thing that happened to me was when I went to a local Arab shop to check faucet prices and saw the young Muslim shopkeeper praying on his mat toward Mecca. I waited for him to finish, and then he arose and said pleasantly in Hebrew, "Can I help you?" I asked the price of the faucet, and he told me what I thought was too high a price. When I told him I had seen a similar one somewhere else for much less, he looked at me and said emphatically, "Don't you love the State of Israel?!" Rather surprised, of course I affirmed that I did. Then he told me that the cheaper one was imported but that his faucet was made in Israel by an Israeli company and that I should buy Israeli products. Well, go figure that one out.

Yep, we are back in the Holy Land, which pretty much defies description and is nothing like the media would report. It is a land of extreme contrasts where King David's words, written somewhere off my front porch some 3000 years ago, "He prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies" take on a reality elsewhere unavailable. Israel is, in fact, a State of Mind.

Saba (Grandpa) Elhanan



Ed. Note: After 10 years of absence from Israel, our dear brother Elhanan Ben Avraham and his wife Julie have returned to live here and be a part of our congregation again. The following letter contains some of his personal reflections on what it is like to be back in the Land again, and we thought you might be interested to read a little bit about daily life here in this country. On behalf of all of Netivyah, we would like to extend a hearty "Bruchim Hashavim" [welcome back] to the Ben Avrahams and "Harbei Brachot" [Many blessings] on the recent birth of their first granddaughter Danielle.

News from Netivyah

It has been a very busy past few months of growth and ministry for Netivyah. Since our last issue of Teaching from Zion, we have hired three new workers, one to work for radio and as a graphic and website designer, one for the soup kitchen, and another office worker as well. We hope to soon be able to increase our publishing output, update our website to make it more "user-friendly," and make more of Joseph Shulam's teaching available both in a written and audio form. He has literally been around the world and back again several times this year speaking about the Jewish roots of the Scriptures and the Biblical Restoration movement in congregations all over the world. He has had the privilege to be with many of you in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Germany, Finland, Holland, and the United States during the last few months. He also recently traveled to Portugal with some of our co-workers from Brasil to find the descendants of "the B'nei Anussim," the Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Inquisition but who still practice Judaism in secret in their homes. They were able to speak with many people about Messianic Judaism and how it is possible to restore their full Jewish identity while still remaining believers in Yeshua. We are excitedly awaiting future developments in Portugal as we contemplate how to plant a successful and healthy Messianic congregation among these "children of the forced ones."

Our soup kitchen has grown to the point where we are serving over 7000 meals a month, and so we have had to do some basic reorganization among our staff so that they can keep up with the increased demand. We are still maintaining our Kol Ha-Yeshuah radio broadcasts and are working on converting the old programs onto an MP3 format so we can make them available via our website and easier for people to order copies of. We also had the joy of publishing the English autobiography of one of Netivyah's

founders, Moshe Immanuel Ben Meir, this spring. We had a wonderfully blessed High Holiday season at our *Roeh Israel* congregation with many old friends and new visitors in addition to our "regulars." It is such a privilege to be able to celebrate the feasts of the Lord in his Holy City and look forward to the day when the whole world will serve the one true God and his Messiah Yeshua in Jerusalem.

The congregation is also going through some growth and changes and desperately needs more space to accommodate the people who want to worship with us. We are currently engaged in a long and frustrating legal battle with the Municipality of Jerusalem in order to get a building permit so that we can expand. We need to add another floor so we can have the auditorium on the entire bottom floor and put the soup kitchen on a separate floor and the children's classrooms on the third floor. We have met with a lot of opposition from a particular anti-missionary organization who has stirred up a number of our neighbors against us, however, and they have influenced the city to drag their feet on a case that should be relatively simple. They are now saying they will make the decision at some unknown future date in a "closed door" hearing, so we ask you to please keep this matter in your prayers.

One of the best new developments here is that we have recently rented a small office and turned it into a fantastic youth clubhouse for our "Munchkins" youth group to be able to hang out, study God's Word, and receive guidance from Yehuda. The kids have a great time there, and it is a true blessing from God that they now have a special place of their own.

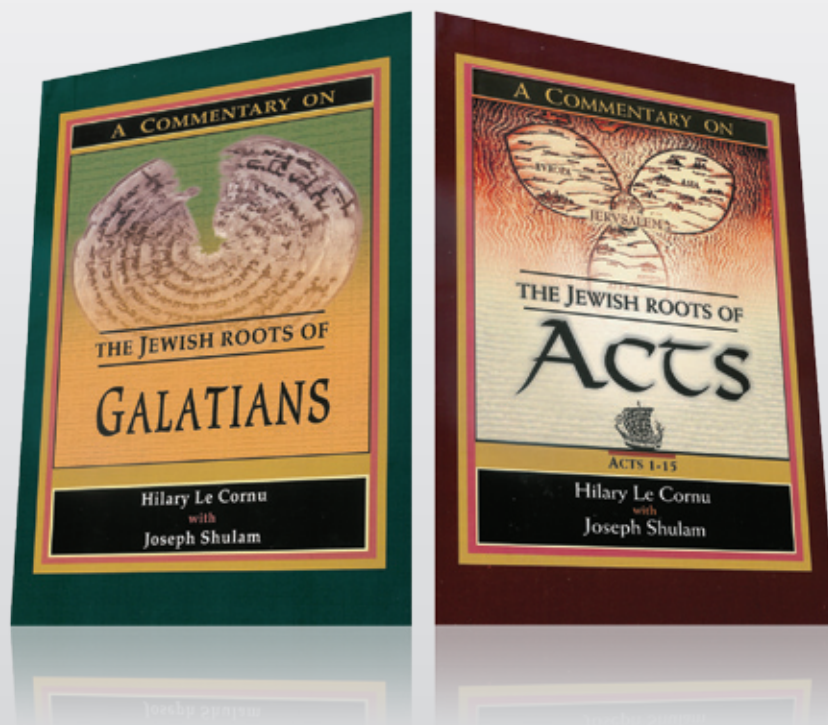
Netivyah depends on the prayers and support of friends like you from around the world, and we thank you for your vital role in helping us continue to minister in Yeshua's name in the Land of Israel.

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