

Teaching *from* Zion

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

PROGRESS

Teaching *from* Zion

(25)

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The Long and Winding Road

"Return for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 44:22) contains an important principle for understanding the concept of redemption. The redeeming act, immanent in God's merciful character, is only a starting point, not the finishing point, of the history of redemption. We still need to return even after having been redeemed. "O Israel, return **unto** the Lord your God" (Hosea 14:2). The word "unto" is the Hebrew "*ad*" (עד) which has the sense of "until," meaning there is a way to go in order to get there. This applies both to the redeemed individual and the redeemed collective.

Followers of Yeshua, while being very much aware of the importance of "the Body of Messiah" as a collective unity, still often see their own personal salvation as the main story. Yet the Prophets' vision of redemption for the Jewish people is most clearly a collective/ national one¹. Paul's burning desire is for all Israel to be saved (Rom. 11:26). This verse is not a burst of wishful thinking, but a confirmation of what he knows: the promise of the restoration of Israel. The Prophets envisioned Israel's return to God and return to the homeland as parallel events. The physical restoration and creation of the state of Israel was only "the beginning of redemption," the first necessary step for spiritual rebirth rather than the final goal.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, one of the most influential spiritual leaders on modern Israeli history, shaped a new national-religious conviction for

¹ Based on Ezek. 36, and it does not preclude individual salvation.

generations to come, based on the understanding that a genuine spiritual renaissance could only take place in a Jewish homeland and that the initial goal would better be achieved by earthly political means than not at all. This turned the secular efforts of building and planting in the Holy Land into something sacred and, in his eyes, sanctified even the deeds of the "rebellious" socialist pioneers. This fresh and unique acceptance of the "heretical" elements within the Jewish nation reflected the understanding that the redemption of Israel was a progressive process that needs to grow into maturity. The rebirth of Israel in "body and soul" respectively, drawn from the vision of "the valley of the dry bones" (Ezekiel 37) is one of the many expressions of the progressive nature of the redemption of all Israel as one body.

In this issue of TFZ, we will examine the idea of spiritual progress on the personal, national, and historical levels in the light of the understanding that redemption is not a singular event in time, but an ongoing process. Socrates once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Similarly we believe that the unexamined theology is not worth having, which is why we have chosen to examine this sensitive subject. We realize that the issues raised in this magazine may challenge some of our readers' most deeply cherished beliefs, but we would like to encourage you to honestly examine these issues with an open mind and heart. We wish all of our readers a year of peace, health, and spiritual growth as we travel the road of redemption together.

Days of Redemption and Hope

Haim Ben Haim

What is this process of redemption that we are seeing in our days? Many people who visit Israel only experience the tourist sites and the history of the country, but there is much more happening underneath the surface.

This nation was founded on the Zionist ideals of a homeland for the Jewish people that would allow us to be a nation like any other nation, but today we are beginning to understand that God designed us to be a set-apart nation in a set-apart location where we can go up and serve God. From this place of redirection, we are able to encourage the nations to come up as well and serve God in this place of His choosing in the renewed Jerusalem.

Slowly but surely many Israelis are discovering what it means to be a Jew. Thousands have made *teshuvah* (return-repentance) and desire to walk a life faithful to our Creator. In a world where so many things have been shaking lately, it is reassuring to see Israelis choosing to place their trust in the only sure strength: *Tzur Yisrael* (the Rock of Israel). One

midrash says that this Rock moved along with the people wherever they went and provided drinking water during the journey in Sinai desert after leaving the servitude of the Egyptians. Rav Shaul seems to be dealing with this *midrash* in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. *"Moreover, brethren, I would not have you be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Mashiach."*

If we look at Ezekiel 36-37's prophecy of the dry bones, we see a reality of corporate restoration and salvation that comes upon the Jewish people as we are first brought back by God according to His infinite grace and mercies. Second, He works to wash off the defilements of the many centuries of exile. Then the returnees, having been made into ONE people, return to the ways of His Torah, follow



His *mitzvot* and directives, and then we see Him reveal the identity of the Mashiach. This whole process of restoration has salvific power. God is doing the work of changing our hearts and revealing truth in this dark world. We need to learn to recognize the signs of God's work of restoration among the Jewish people and encourage these processes of repentance. *Teshuvah* must happen not with *them*, the Jewish people, but with *us*, the Jewish people, since none of us have truly arrived to God's desire for a greater commitment and zeal for His purposes. The path of Torah, which He gave Israel long ago, was not a mistake. He calls us to live faithfully according to His Torah and to recognize that He has preserved our people, not despite Rabbinic leadership, but through the Jewish leaders, who would not let our people assimilate.

People have always called for the Jewish people to be like the other nations, yet in fact, encouraging the lowest common denominator of secular or nominal Jews is the face of rebellion to God's plan for our people. On the contrary, God is calling for a faithful return. We might find it easier to align ourselves with secular Jews, since they are less offended by the existence of Jewish followers of Yeshua, but God wants us encourage these Jews to make *teshuvah*, not to another religion, but to the faith of our

Fathers. As we return to God and are made into one people, He will be faithful to reveal the identity of the Mashiach. We as a people have not been able to recognize Him, as He has been garbed in the dress of the nations, like Joseph in Egypt, whose identity was hidden from his brothers.

As our young men and women fight to protect us from the terror of radical Islam in the south, all of us think and pray for their safety. The melting pot of the IDF, the only Jewish army in the world, is at work creating another generation of dynamic and strong Jews, faithfully protecting the Promised Land. This is a place of restoration. No other army in the world fights with the moral values that we bear, often at a high cost to our own forces, yet we refuse to bow our knees to the ways of the nations, who while masking themselves in humanism, often act barbarically toward one another.

Not all is perfect here in Zion; instead we are in a process of *teshuvah*. God is at the controls, and He is drawing us back. We are coming to the needed realization that we cannot put our trust in the nations. We must draw near to the Rock of hope and strength from which springs forth living water. Let us keep our eyes open so we can recognize this work of redemption and hope and take part ourselves in Israel's true *teshuvah*!



Photo by Eric Hart



Israel's Salvation: A Process

Joseph Shulam

Progress is a word that implies process, and process is something that has a beginning and a continuum up to a set goal. Progress at times is visible and sometimes invisible, just like Yeshua's parable of the leaven in the lump (Matthew 13:33). The whole point of this parable is that the leaven works invisibly and quietly inside the lump of dough. At some point, the progress ought to be seen, even in the case of leaven that works in dough. Modern culture desires instant and immediate gratification, but life still wants to see PROGRESS. Even in one of the more complex processes of life here and in the hereafter, that is the process of salvation, the modern Christian world wants instant and immediate resolution. Nevertheless, this process starts with faith and continues and perseveres until the end through important stations that are absolutely imperative for those who continue to live and believe. Faith is followed by confession of our sins, which is followed by repentance, which is followed by baptism for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is followed by a life of service and praise and holiness in honor of God and Yeshua.

Even the mere desire for salvation is a process that requires development. The Psalms have many passages that express the writer's desire and expectation and aspiration for God's salvation. *"Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation"* (Psalm 62:1). *"My soul faints for your salvation, but I hope in your word"* (Psalm 119:81). One related passage that appears in the New Testament is in Hebrews 10:14, *"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."* The verbs in these passages clearly indicate that there is a process of sanctification taking place." Note that the verb "being sanctified" is in the present tense. In this process, there can be stages of deliverance, purification, and salvation from both physical and spiritual dangers that all lead to the final and eternal salvation and redemption after Judgment Day in front of God's throne.

Here is one New Testament verse that includes this process, although its exegesis is rather complicated. *"Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."* (Romans 8:30 NKJV) The process is clear in this verse: God predestined, God called, God justified, and God will glorify.

A close examination of Romans 8 shows that Paul uses two different pronouns, "you" and "we." These pronouns cannot refer to the same people, and Paul uses these pronouns very consistently in all of his writings. Paul uses "you" when he speaks of the non-Jewish disciples of Yeshua, and he uses "we," "us," or "ours" when he means Jewish disciples of Yeshua. There are rare exceptions to this rule, and the context is often clear enough to make them stand out. Therefore, in Romans 8, it is clear that Paul is speaking to the non-Jewish disciples in verses 10–18, and he uses the pronoun "you" to show that the non-Jewish disciples of Yeshua share in the inheritance and sonship to God through Yeshua. (Verse 12 might be an exception that includes both Jewish and non-Jewish disciples of Yeshua as debtors, just like Ephesians chapter 1:12-13, 2:1-5 and other passages that equalize the difference between Jew and non-Jew in the Messiah). This concept is important for understanding Paul's letters and the New Testament in general.

Romans 8 is an introduction to chapters 9-11. Paul speaks in Romans 8:29-37 about the Jewish disciples representing the whole Jewish nation. He gives an explanation of the process of salvation that in the end will bring all of Israel to be more than conquerors, despite their suffering in the present situation. Even in their suffering, the grace of God will produce a victory, and all things will work out for the good of those who love the Lord. Those whom the Lord loves will vindicate His love in Yeshua the Messiah.

Photo by C.J.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Messiah who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Messiah? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:29-37)

Romans 8:36 is a quotation from Psalms 44:22, which is a confession and request for the Lord to save and redeem Israel. Paul uses this quotation from Psalms in Romans 8 specifically because this passage speaks of "us" and "we," and in both contexts it speaks of Israel. Here is the continuation of the quote in Psalms. *"Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever. Why do You hide Your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our body clings to the ground. Arise for our help, and redeem us for Your mercies' sake." (Psalms 44:23-26 NKJV)*

In Romans 11, Paul draws a very complex and interesting picture that often is either spiritualized or ignored altogether by Christian exegetes. This passage shows that Israel's fall and restoration is intimately connected to the salvation of the world. The progress of this process is seen throughout Romans 9-11 in stages. First a person must hear the Good News, accept it, and then finally there will be salvation. In fact, if one reads the text in its simplest form, he sees that Paul draws from the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 when he states that the task of the non-Jews in the Church is to provoke Israel to jealousy. God has waited 2000 years to see this happen, but unfortunately, instead of provoking Israel to jealousy, the Christian churches have managed over and over again to provoke Israel to anger and hate and alienation from Yeshua the Messiah. It is important for the Church to get back in step with the truth of God's Word in this matter.

"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall

is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:11-16 NKJV)

Israel is an integral part of the process of salvation of the world, as is also clear from Yeshua's words to the Samaritan woman at the well, *"Salvation is of the Jews"* (Jn 4:22). According to Romans 11, the salvation of the non-Jews is a by-product of the fall of the Jewish nation, the fall of Israel. Non-Jews in the Church are supposed to provoke Israel to jealousy. This too is a process, and in our days we are fortunate to see progress on this road. First, there is the return of the Jewish people to the land of our forefathers. Second, tens of thousands of Jews are giving their lives to God and believing that Yeshua is their Messiah, Savior, Lord, and Master of their lives. Third, many Christians are filled with love for Israel and have a very different attitude toward Israel and the Jewish people than their fathers and grandfathers had 60 years ago. This is a visible point of progress in the Kingdom of God and the process of restoration.

The first Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Kook declared before the State of Israel was established that we are witnesses to the "footsteps of the Messiah." The progress is also visible physically in the land itself. The land was desolate, and many of the areas that are now green were desert before 1948 and even well into the 1960's. Now these areas are blooming gardens that produce fruit and vegetables that are sold and eaten even in Northern Europe. The return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is a historical phenomenon second to none in the annals of men. The building of a state in the middle of a sea of enemies, while we survive, thrive, and produce science and industry to the envy of all our neighbors and much of the world is measurable progress. With every house that is built and every mile of desert that is conquered, there is a clear sense of progress toward the fulfillment of God's promises to the people of Israel – a return to the land, a change of heart, a change of spirit, and a receiving of King David, i.e. of the Messiah, as their leader.

Both the Church and Israel are in the process of salvation, which can be seen even with the naked eye. This process is leading to the salvation of Israel and the world. May we all join in this process and contribute to its development until the Messiah returns, and all of God's promises are fulfilled.

Go Slowly for the Sake of the Children

Udi Zofef

The obscure nature of Messianic prophecies has led to more than one concept of redemption in the thought of the early sages and in Jewish tradition. Naturally, the most striking example of two different interpretations of the Messianic idea which emerged from the same early sources is the division between Judaism and Christianity, but even within Jewish tradition itself, there exist a variety of readings.

The nature of expectation often goes hand in hand with that of the tribulation that demands redemption. Historically, a common Jewish view of redemption was rather political, since the enemy to be liberated from was regularly a political one. From the times of the judges up to the periods of Greek and Roman rule and onward, the land of Israel was frequently invaded and occupied. The two thousand years of exile that followed presented many more moments of intense need to be redeemed. Consequently, during the ruthless occupations, the redeemer was expected to lead a battle against the oppressor, and likewise, during the hard times in the Diaspora, he was expected to

gather the scattered flocks of Israel and bring them home. One of the many reasons for the Ultra-orthodox objection to Zionism was exactly that. In light of the expectation for a miraculous Messianic restoration to the homeland, the secular attempt to reach this goal by political means made Zionism appear to be a false messianic movement. Messianic affairs were a hot political issue from ancient to modern times.

The Gospel's view of redemption is partly metaphysical, since it deals with a rather abstract idea: delivery from sin. Nevertheless, even Yeshua's closest disciples were still touched with the common "folkloric" expectation and asked Him when He would restore the throne of David in Jerusalem.

In later Jewish thinking, there are two main redemptive categories: the "progressive" and the "catastrophic." The first suggests that redemption is a process taking place in history, while the other expects a single event that will follow a global crisis, the end of the world as we know it. This view seeks the dramatic end of ungodly systems



("Babylon,") following a great battle that will leave the world in ashes, yet ready for a new beginning for the chosen who remain, (although they will have a terrible mess to clean up before they can start enjoying their new dawn).

Gershom Scholem, the renowned scholar of Jewish mysticism, thought that classic Jewish tradition emphasized the catastrophic nature of redemption alone: "The messianic idea in our early and classic sources has nothing of the principle of progress. The prophets and the sages knew nothing of the sort. It is a twist or an interpretation added to their message. They knew of a new world reality, a new state of redemption, that has nothing to do with the previous state, that is not an ongoing development of past events. According to them there is a gap between the unredeemed world and the world in the state of redemption. In the view of the prophets and the sages, redemption will come as a consequence of a world shake, of a world revolution, of catastrophes, of unparalleled tribulations, in which history is shattered and collapsed."^I

It is true that some are still yearning for an apocalypse, while others look back and mark the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, the exile, or even the fall of man in Eden as the beginning of their troubles and the very catastrophe that a state of redemption will heal. In either view, Messianic expectations were and still are characterized by a rather pessimistic outlook. Yet Scholem's sweeping dismissal of a prophetic expectation for progressive redemption can be disputed on many grounds, starting from a beautiful Talmudic passage that Scholem himself includes later on in his essay.

In this story, Rabbi Hiya and Rabbi Shimon Ben Khalfa are walking at sunrise in the valley of Arbel, which opens onto the shores of the sea of Galilee, the right place in which to experience a breathtaking sunrise. Watching the sun, (which is also one of the biblical symbols of redemption), peeping over the top of the Golan mountains, draws this enthusiastic remark from Rabbi Hiya: "So it is with the redemption of Israel: It first peeps through slightly, then it shines more, then it multiplies."^{II} According to Rabbi Hiya, the light of Messiah cannot be clearly seen at once by all men. It is first seen by the few who stand in the right spot at the right time; only later, at high noon, is it seen by all. While Rabbi Hiya and Rabbi Shimon are blessed with the warmth of the first rays of sun on the shores of the sea of Galilee, their cousins in Brooklyn are still in the dark. This

is an interpretation of the following vision: "Arise, shine for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:1-3). There is a definite mark of progress within this view of redemption, and it is very fitting that the first light of redemption is seen by the two sages in the very spot where Yeshua embarked on His worldwide mission.

Progress is a foundational element in the perceptions of the New Testament writers. There are also expressions of end-time tribulations that can well match the "catastrophic" scenario, yet these do not signify an opening act of redemption but rather a closing one, which brings the history of redemption into its final phase. One common Jewish argument against Christianity is that the Christian emphasis has been shifted from the historical and the concrete to the metaphysical, from national salvation to the individual, and so forth. Even if this is the case today, it was a later development in Church doctrine that missed the political and national aspects of the New Testament text.

The New Testament is actually very political, in the sense that it draws a scenario of redemption that is due to have a grip on history. A lot of the political contents of the book are well disguised in the **seemingly legendary** layers of the text, such as the virgin birth of the Messiah and the miracles ascribed to Him. The reader needs to be familiar with Jewish ways of interpretation to be able to peel the grain (message) out from the layers of chaff enveloping it. The motivation for this "trick" of writing between the lines should be obvious considering the circumstances. We are dealing with a subversive move bound to destroy the pagan kingdoms of the earth, including the Greco-Roman civilization, the very people addressed in the texts. Revealing the true intentions of the writers would have been quite dangerous. Many New Testament readers and even some of the more educated scholars fail to realize that the writers of these texts were highly trained in the Midrashic reading of the biblical texts. They did not read them at "face value" and did not write at "face value" either. Ignoring this fact is unconstructive for serious New Testament hermeneutics.

Planting and Building: Signs of Messianic Progress

Now let us examine more closely Scholem's claim that the prophets knew nothing about progressive redemption. There are at least two key symbols in prophetic imagery

I Scholem, Gershom. *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976, p. 196.

II *Jerusalem Talmud*. Berachot 81A.

that undermine this statement. The two appear side by side in Zechariah 6:12-13. *"Behold the man whose name is the Branch [lit. Plant], and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the Temple of the Lord."* The name of the man in Hebrew (צמח) is not actually "branch," but a "plant" of any variety. The reason for calling the Messiah a plant is clear upon checking all the occurrences of the verb צמח (which has the primary meaning of "to grow") in Messianic prophecies. One finds, *"Behold the former things are come to pass and new things do I declare. Before they spring forth (תצמחנה) I will tell you of them"* (Isaiah 42:9). Similarly we see, *"Remember ye not the former things neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring (תצמח) forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert"* (Isaiah 43:18-19).

The prophets foretold this "growing" redemption so that when Israel saw it grow, they would be able to recognize the hand of the Lord in the making. This is one striking sign of the progressive nature of redemption. From the seed being sown to the tree bearing fruit is a long process that also involves an effort on the part of man. The semantic field of Messianic prophecy frequently uses "botanical" imagery to convey this sense of growth. Like the description of Joseph (a key Messianic pre-figure) as a vine overflowing the boundaries of its vineyard (Genesis 49:22), the same vine appears again in Psalm 80 as something so overflowing that its shadow covers the mountains. This vine, clearly symbolizing the growth of God's kingdom on earth, is a further indication of this progressive notion.

Yeshua identifies Himself as "the True Vine" at the opening of John 15, hinting at the blueprint of Messianic history folded in the Joseph narrative. When He describes His disciples as the branches of that same vine, He implies the pattern of vine and branches in Jacob's blessing to Joseph: *"Joseph is a fruitful vine, even a fruitful vine by a well; whose branches run over the wall"* (Genesis 49:22). The vine and the branches are called in the Hebrew text "ben" (which is also "son") and "banot" (which is also "daughters"). Thus the vine represents the Messiah, and the branches are "the daughters of Zion", who are expected to be fruitful and multiply in this parable. Yeshua's injunction to His disciples that they, the branches, ought to remain connected to Him, the vine, goes over their heads and over the heads of generations upon generations of believers worldwide and still stands firm before us today. We will be fruitless unless we are connected through the vine and roots to the spring that issues pure water. In the mindset of the common Jew, both before and after Yeshua, water and wine represent the high spiritual values of Torah and God's blessings.

Another important aspect of Zechariah's prophecy of the "plant Messiah" is the description of him as a builder of a house to the Lord. This is one source for the Jewish expectation for the Third Temple to be built in the days of Messiah. The Messiah is not an architect or a building constructor, yet He is described as the builder of that house, (*"He shall build the Temple of the Lord"*) pointing to His active role in this project. The New Testament interpretation of this issue is metaphysical; the house is the people, the bride. Each member of the ensemble is likened to a stone in that structure, with the Messiah being the cornerstone.

This is another evident presence of the principle of progress in the affairs of redemption. Building a house, just like growing a plant, is a process. Once the cornerstone is set in place to ensure that the house does not come out all crooked, the foundations are laid, and then from ground level to rooftop the house comes into shape slowly and gradually. Similarly, redemption is a history-long building project. With these two principles in mind, Paul says to the fresh Corinthian believers: *"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one... For we are laborers together with God: You are God's husbandry, you are God's building"* (1 Cor 3:6-9). It is quite likely that the aforementioned description given by Zechariah, which combines these two elements, the Messianic title "the Plant" and the building of the house of the Lord, is in the subtext of Paul's words.

This imagery database is most evidently reflected in Yeshua's parables of the sower, where He describes Himself as the one planting the good seed, from which a huge tree-God's kingdom- will grow. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a person who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the plants sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared. So the slaves of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?' He said, 'An enemy has done this.' So the slaves replied, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, since in gathering the weeds you may uproot the wheat with them.'" (Matthew 13:25-29)* Here is another example. *"He gave them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest garden plant and becomes a tree, so that the wild birds come and nest in its branches.'" (Matthew 13:31-32).* The meaning of these parables is later explained to the disciples alone, after they

have departed from the multitude. He answered, *"The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world and the good seed are the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. As the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the age"* (Matthew 13:37-40). When we look far ahead into the future, the historical context of these parables is clear.

From Childhood to Manhood: A Messianic biography

Further expressions of the principle of progress to be found in Messianic prophecies are the "biographic" signs given in the Messianic titles "child" (יָלֵד) "boy" (נֶעַר) and "man" (אִישׁ). These terms are used to describe the Messiah in key prophecies such as Isaiah's well known picture: *"For unto us a child is born [lit. is caused to be born], unto us a son is given"* (Isaiah 9:5). The shadow of this vision clearly falls on Luke's words: *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is the Messiah, the Lord"* (Luke 2:11).

It is very well to think that Isaiah is talking about the fact that the Messiah was born, and Luke confirms that He was indeed born. Merely looking at the English translation, however, makes one wonder what is so special about announcing that a child will be born. The Hebrew word for "is caused to be born" (*yulad*) in Isaiah 9:5 is a strong passive compared to the regular word for "is born" (*nolad*). This intensely passive word "*yulad*" hints to an outside force that had to push forth this un-natural birth. Referring this principle to the virgin birth only tells part of the story because, along with the redeemer, a nation was born to carry the Messianic torch into history, generation after generation to the end of time.

The creation or "birth" of the Church (in the widest sense of the word), is the real story here. *"Shout for joy, O barren one who has not given birth! Give a joyful shout and cry out, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one are more numerous than the children of the married woman," says the Lord. 'Make your tent larger, stretch your tent curtains farther out! Spare no effort, lengthen your ropes, and pound your stakes deep. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your children will conquer nations and will resettle desolate cities'"* (Isaiah 54:1-3). This prophecy echoes the blessings to the fathers of Israel that their seed would spread forth east and west, north and south, and bless all the nations of the world. *"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles... He shall bring forth judgment and truth. He shall*

not fail nor be discouraged, till he sets judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law" (Isaiah 42:1, 3-4). Here we see again a clear description of a process. God's servant has to endure some unspecified hardships in his mission to bring God's judgment and truth to the Gentiles, but he will succeed. Eventually even the remotest isles of the sea will be *waiting* for his law. This goal is not something that can be reached within a man's lifetime; it is a history-long adventure.

God's servant who will carry out this task is indeed a nation, personified in the Messiah. *"And that day you shall know that I am in my father, and you in me, and I in you"* (John 14:20). "That day" never shone over the heads of the people addressed by Yeshua, and they could not understand how this was possible. It is our generation that can see this in hindsight as Messianic history is drawing to its close. One must not try to break the triple cord that binds the God of Israel, the Redeemer, and His people.

The biographical road marks that are given in the Messianic titles, from "child" to "man," show their deeper meanings as coordinates that shape the time framework of Messianic progress. Those prophecies where the Messiah is a "child" conform to the initial stages of Messianic process, while the other titles that relate to later stages of adolescence and manhood conform to the more advanced phases of history. One way to tell that these titles relate to the timing of redemption instead of a person's physical age is when the word used (child, young man, etc) does not fit the actual age of the person described. For example, when baby Moses, (a leading redemptive figure), was found by Pharaoh's daughter in the basket it says, *"And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and behold, the baby [lit. young man] wept"* (Exodus 2:6). The Hebrew word translated "baby" is actually "*na'ar*" which is much older than a baby. In Modern Hebrew, this word describes a teenager, but the Bible uses the term much more flexibly. It is used here for a three month old baby, but in Genesis 22:5, Isaac is also referred to by this term when Abraham almost sacrificed him on Mt. Moriah. Isaac was 37 at that time according to Jewish tradition. It is also used to describe Joseph when he was 17 (Genesis 37:2), but verse 39 of the same chapter calls him "*yeled*" (child), which is younger than "*na'ar*," later in the story when Joseph is thrown in the well, presenting a chronological disorder.

The ambiguous age definition of "*na'ar*" fits straight into one of the classic Messianic pictures in Isaiah 11:6-7. *"For the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child [lit. young man]*

shall lead them." The word for "child" here is again *"na'ar"*. According to Jewish interpretation, this *"na'ar"* is not just any young boy, but rather a codename for the Messiah Himself who leads the nations symbolized by the beasts. This interpretation is much more metaphorical than the "face-value" reading of this prophecy, which presumes that in the Last Days the wild beasts will become so peaceful that even an inexperienced child could easily handle them. This challenging Jewish interpretation takes the title *"na'ar"* from the chronological context into the symbolic. It is clear that the Messiah is not a young boy at the time He leads the nations, just as Isaiah 9:5's prophecy that the "child" will *"bear the government upon his shoulders"* does not mean he will be a child at the time of his kingship. There would not be a point to having a passage to tell us that this king had been a child in his past or that he was born, so there must be a deeper meaning here. According to Isaiah, that child-Messiah is there to *prepare* God's kingdom and to establish it. It will take Him thousands of years to become a man, for His "Church" to stand upright, united and firm, and for Messianic progress to bear fruit. These kinds of biblical passages where a literal interpretation do not make sense are the reason for thousands of years of complex Jewish (and Christian) hermeneutics.

It is noteworthy that one of the main texts that call the redeemer a "man" is the story of Jacob's wrestling match with the supernatural "man" on his return from Aram (Genesis 32:25). Jewish sources often read the conflict between Jacob and Esau allegorically, as a sign of the historical conflict between the synagogue and the Church, both claiming the birthright. As opposed to Esau, who rushed towards him with 400 armed men, Jacob remained steadfast in his course, saying he had to *"go slowly for the sake of the children"* (Genesis 33:14). Jacob sees not only his immediate family when he talks about "the sake of the children," but also all the future children that will be saved, (as long as we go slowly about it). It is even more interesting in this light to find mystical interpretations relating to this *"ish"* (man) that struggled with Jacob on his return from exile specifically as "the Prince of Esau," which has no meaning other than Yeshua.

A Prime Model of Redemption: Deliverance from Egypt

The foundational biblical model of redemption is the deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Both the schools of "progressive" and "catastrophic" redemption can find what they are looking for in this scenario. The Exodus from Egypt, brought about by God's supernatural and violent intervention that shattered world order,

inspired not only Hollywood film makers, but also the "catastrophic redemption" theorists. Nevertheless, this single, metaphysical event of liberation was not the end, but only the starting point of God's redemptive act. For the redeemed, it was the beginning of a process, a long journey into the wilderness that offered them many high moments as well as many challenges, dangers, and setbacks, just like the life of every individual believer. In truth, some classic Jewish thought says that the battles described in the Bible between Israel and her enemies are merely shadows of the internal spiritual battles that individuals have to go through in their lives, in which the oppressors, whether they are Egypt, Babylon, or the seven pagan nations of Canaan, represent the evil forces within. This type of reading is paralleled in the mystical layers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, too.

The model of redemption from Egypt is one of collective redemption. The encounter with the Divine was not only a personal experience for Moses, but also a national one. Significantly, this very metaphysical revelation at the feet of Mount Sinai did not inspire mystical writings or philosophic observations about heavenly matters at first. Instead it resulted in a very down-to-earth social covenant that legislates the most banal details of daily life, from how to treat a neighbor's donkey to what to do with a borrowed garment, which we find unfolded in the portion of "Mishpatim" that follows the Sinai encounter. The initial impact of "seeing God" in all His awesome glory was shaped into a moral conclusion: humans, all created in God's image, should not be enslaved to one another, but to God alone. This is not only a consequence of the revelation, but also a lesson well learned from the experience of brutal slavery in Egypt.

This principle of liberty and responsibility gives a definite, political face to redemption for here and now on the earth. This is a type of redemption for man to handle, a redemption that starts at home and sends ripples all around, to the family, the tribe, the nation, and the world. This is how the growth and multiplication principle expounded by the prophets in many different ways is manifested in reality. The people of Israel are obligated to retell the tale of their deliverance from slavery year in and year out, forever, as their leading national narrative. The purpose of doing so is not only for the sake of memorizing the miracles of the past but for living the reality of liberation in the present, building a society that is based on the values of justice, equality, and all those nice ideas that fueled more than one revolution in world history. Unfortunately, man-made political initiatives to turn this world into a better place

usually end up in a mess as long as the people that design and perform them fail to live up to their nice theories and remain materialistic, vain and selfish at their core. Individual salvation and national salvation go hand in hand.

In the same way that the Sinai revelation had immediate consequences for the behavior patterns of a whole nation, so was the new revelation of a redeemer in Zion more than a thousand years later a starting point for a new social order. Very little attention is given in Christian world-views to the fact that Yeshua's followers established what could be counted as one of the first "Kibbutzim." When former Soviet president Gorbachev visited Israel, he stood on the ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum and felt he was closing a circle of 2000 years of Communism, when he described himself as the "last Communist" paying tribute to the "first Communist" (Yeshua). As usual, the responsibility for all the mishaps of humanity lay on the feeble shoulders of the Jews... In truth, neither Yeshua nor His followers were designers of new social paradigms. They simply followed the principles set before them in the "Law of Moses," the

law of liberty. *"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free,"* says Yeshua to each of his followers. "The truth," something Yeshua identifies Himself with in first person, is not some attribute that He invented for Himself but a well-known truth that the people of Israel lived with since the Sinai revelation.

How sad it is that "The Law of Moses" received such a bad reputation in Christian thinking, traditions, and doctrines, being treated as a yoke of some boring "anti-life" restrictions suitable for people of low spiritual profile, and better eliminated altogether if we really want to reach the spiritual heights of the Word of God. What they fail to realize is that we already need to be at a high spiritual level in order to see the cosmic aspect of our brother's garment. To reach that height we have to go through the many lows that a child has to experience in his progress towards manhood. After all, the real spiritual height will only come when the whole world has been repaired, and it seems there is still a long way to go.



"The Road Goes Ever On and On..."

Elizabeth Wakefield

I have lasting memories of one particular class discussion in Bible college about whether "being saved" requires a particular day and time in which we asked Yeshua to forgive our sins and take over our lives, after which we would be completely and dramatically changed, (a "crisis conversion"), or whether it is possible to raise a child in a believing home in a way that he or she has "always believed" in Yeshua. My teacher, who was raised in a South American country where a major distinctive between the Protestants and the Catholics is precisely this element of having a particular date of acknowledging Yeshua as Savior, was advocating the importance of a crisis conversion.

Next to me sat a good friend who had been raised on the mission field with his family and who was training to be a missionary himself. As the discussion continued, I noticed that he was looking increasingly uncomfortable. Finally, he raised his hand and blurted out, "I know I'm a believer, but I can't remember ever praying a prayer like that. I can't remember a time that I didn't believe in Jesus and want to serve Him."

The teacher looked shocked and simply asked, "Are you sure you're saved?"

My friend looked aghast, ground out an exasperated "yes" through gritted teeth, and stayed very quiet through the rest of the class.

It was at that moment that I realized, beyond what I could have learned from dozens of theological discussions about what it means to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," (Philippians 2:12) that "being saved" is a process, not a merely a point in history. A person may have a specific date in which he began to trust Yeshua to redeem him, but that redemption itself is far more than walking up an aisle to answer an altar call and praying the Sinner's Prayer, which is so common in Evangelical circles. Redemption is a transformative process that takes a lifetime and then some to complete. This is not to discount the possibility of "getting saved on one's deathbed," since Yeshua's acceptance of the thief on the cross's belief clearly proves that deathbed repentance can be accepted by God. Whether it is a journey of two minutes or a hundred years from initial belief to our deaths, however, our complete redemption is not accomplished until after our arrival into

eternity.

With all this said, it must be noted that although one may be able to attain a ticket to eternal life though a one-time decision to trust Yeshua to forgive his sins, there is a great deal more to redemption than simply "going to heaven." We must ask ourselves this question: will we be ready for heaven and for being in the presence of a holy God once we arrive there? There is an oft-quoted (but not taken seriously enough) expression in the Christian world that, "God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way." Our redemption is a journey toward perfect obedience to and fellowship with a perfectly holy God, and we should never settle for being "close enough" to Him or holiness. Our sanctification is an inseparable part of our complete redemption. We must not be satisfied with the fruit that redemption is producing in our lives now but always press on to become closer and closer to the perfection He has required of us in the Torah.

As C.S. Lewis noted, "The command 'Be ye perfect' is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command... The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less." Deuteronomy 30:11-14 puts it this way, *"For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."* In other words, this obedience and fellowship with our creator is not unattainable. In fact, we must never stop seeking to attain it. That journey of faith toward the Heavenly City, including our many falls and restarts and times of rest and refreshment, is the story of our lives.

The English writer and preacher John Bunyan wrote his classic work *The Pilgrim's Progress* while serving a prison sentence for preaching without a license in the late 1600's. This book is an allegory of the life of the believer as a

¹ Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*.

New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, p. 205.

journey from death to eternal life, a journey that takes him through many joys and much suffering before the end. This book used to be very popular in the Christian world and inspired even secular writers such as Louisa May Alcott to use it as a unifying theme in their own works. In today's culture of instant self-gratification, however, any story that predicts that a believer will suffer or that true redemption takes time has lost much of its appeal.

The story begins with a man named Christian who leaves the City of Destruction to seek salvation and chronicles his journey to the Celestial City through many adventures, sorrows, and times of happiness and bliss. During his journey, he suffers from many troubles, including falling into the Slough of Despond and nearly sinking to his death until being rescued by Help; being tempted and led off the path by Mr. Worldly Wiseman; walking through roaring lions; fighting the dragon Apollyon, who severely wounds him with his fiery darts in the Valley of Humiliation; having a terrifying journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death; being imprisoned and beaten in Vanity Fair, where his traveling companion Faithful is martyred; straying off into the By-path Meadow and being captured and imprisoned in Doubting Castle by Giant Despair; being led off the path by Flatterer until he and Hopeful are entangled in a net only to be released (and chastised) by an angel; and finally nearly drowning in the river that lies between them and the Celestial City. Of course, this pilgrim also experiences periods of rest and blessing during his journey, such as having his burden fall off his back and roll away, staying at Palace Beautiful, where he is armed for his battle with Apollyon, and having a journey of peace through the Delectable Mountains; but most of these times of rest come to refresh him after a time of suffering or to prepare him for his next adventure. Indeed the most memorable adventures that lie between him and his final redemption in the Celestial City involve fear, suffering, and hardship. This pilgrim needs each one of those trials to teach him and bring him closer to his redemption, and even his straying off the path leads him to repentance, a greater understanding of how to proceed, and a complete transformation of his life.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, Samwise and Frodo have an interesting discussion about the nature of life's great journeys during one of the darkest moments of their adventure. Sam comments, "And we shouldn't be here at all if we had known more about it when we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things

the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have just been landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten."^{II} It is precisely our daily decision to press forward and not to turn back on our path to complete redemption, regardless of the circumstances, that builds character in us, transforms us, and changes the world.

In a discussion of Deuteronomy 30's portrayal of the extended process of Teshuvah (repentance/ turning), the contemporary Rabbi Alan Lew writes, "Most of us only embark on the difficult and wrenching path of transformation when we feel we have no choice but to do so, when we feel as if our backs are to the wall, when the circumstances of our lives have pushed us to the point of a significant leave-taking, when we have suffered a loss or death, divorce, or unemployment. Transformation is just too hard for us to volunteer for. Interestingly, God is depicted as the one who is doing the pushing here. We are in the predicament that has brought us to the point of transformation because God has driven us there. In other words, that predicament is part of the process. It is a gift, the agent of our turning..."

"Transformation is not something that happens once and for all time... Transformation does not have a beginning, a middle, or an end. We never reach the end of Teshuvah. It is always going on... And it may never be clear to us that the work of transformation has borne fruit. This is usually the case in the realm of spiritual practice. Real spiritual transformation invariably takes a long time to manifest itself in our lives. Spectacular, immediate results—sudden changes in aspect or in the way we see the world—are always suspect, and usually suggest a superficial rather than a profound transformation. Profound transformation only manifests itself over time. When Jacob has his great vision of the ladder and realizes he has been visited by God, he exclaims out loud, 'My God! God has been in this place all along and I never knew it!' From this moment of epiphany, we expect he will be changed. We are disappointed when he continues to behave like the same manipulative schmo he has always been. But when we look at the larger arc of Jacob's life, we see that this vision really does effect

^{II} Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Two Towers*.
New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994, p. 696.

a profound change in him. It's just that this change isn't evident right away. It takes more than twenty years for it to take root."^{III}

Even Jacob's transformation demanded that he suffer many things first: having to flee from his brother Esau who wanted to kill him; being cheated and lied to time and time again and finally pursued by his father-in-law Laban; seeing his wives' hatred and rivalry for one another; wrestling with God; being crippled; fearfully facing the prospect of meeting Esau's army; suffering the loss of Rachel and then the loss of his favorite son, who was sold into slavery by his other sons; having one of his wives stolen by his son Reuven, and many other betrayals. Nevertheless, all these tragic events were steps in Jacob's life that helped him grow into the man God wanted him to be.

When we think of our personal redemptive process as a journey, the Israelites' lengthy journey through the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land immediately comes to mind. To the average Israelite, it seemed like they spent forty years going around in circles, (and from a strictly geographical standpoint this is true). From God's higher perspective, however, each stage of their journey had a purpose to train them for possessing the land and serving Him in faith. The forty years in the desert are popularly perceived as strictly a punishment and a way to kill all the adults who had rebelled when God first told the Israelites to go up and take the land. If God's only interest was killing the rebellious adults, however, He could have done so with a plague in one day; He certainly did not need forty years to eliminate a generation. Rather, those forty years were also a journey of training, growth, and learning to prepare the new generation for the greater level of holiness and faith they would need to conquer and settle the Land of Israel. From God's higher point of view, He could see their whole journey as spiritually progressive despite its many geographical setbacks and tragic events.

The Rambam (Maimonides), the great Twelfth Century Rabbi and philosopher, wrote about the journey through the wilderness in a similar light. "The sole object of all the trials mentioned in Scripture is to teach man what he ought to do or believe; so that the event which forms the actual trial is not the end desired; it is but an example for our instruction and guidance.... 'God has first trained you in the hardships of the wilderness, in order to increase your welfare when you enter the land of Canaan.' It is indeed a fact that the transition from trouble to ease gives more

pleasure than continual ease. It is also known that the Israelites would not have been able to conquer the land and fight with its inhabitants if they had not previously undergone the trouble and hardship of the wilderness... Ease destroys bravery, whilst trouble and care for food create strength; and this was [also for the Israelites] the good that ultimately came out of their wanderings in the wilderness."^{IV}


Similarly, 1 Peter talks a great deal about suffering in the life of the believer as God's tool to refine and redeem us until we become like Him. After a long discussion about how we can have hope in our own suffering because of the Messiah's suffering for us, Peter ends on this ringing hope. "*And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Messiah, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*" (1 Peter 5:10) Yaakov even has the temerity to tell us that we should rejoice in our sufferings. (Please note, however, that rejoicing in suffering is not the same as idealizing, seeking out, or being prideful about our sufferings). He says, "*Count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" (Yaakov 1:2-4)

Paul describes the transformation brought about by suffering as a chain in Romans 5:3-5. "*More than that we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*" These words are similar to those of the Second Century CE Rabbi, Phineas ben Yair. "From this R. Phineas b. Yair adduced: Torah leads to watchfulness, watchfulness leads to zeal, zeal leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to separation, separation leads to purity, purity leads to saintliness, saintliness leads to humility, humility leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to holiness, holiness leads to [the gift of] the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead."^V This *Baraita* is the basis of the Eighteenth Century Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's (the Ramchal's) famous *mussar* book *Mesilat Yesharim* or *The Path of the Just*, which describes this list as ascending steps or gates toward holiness and eternal life. The attainment of this chain of characteristics only comes as part of a process or a spiritual journey to create steadfastness in us so we will be ready for eternal life.

III Lew, Alan. *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared: the Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation*. London: Little, Brown, and Company, 2003, pp. 153-155.

IV Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide to the Perplexed XXIII*. Translated from Arabic by M. Friedlander. New York: Dover Publications, 1956, pp. 304-305.

V Babylonian Talmud. *Avodah Zarah* 20b.


 Painting by Erin Zofef

Another word for "steadfastness" is "faithfulness," which is one of God's ultimate goals to produce within us as part of the transformative process. The purpose of this process and lengthy journey towards redemption is to inspire faithfulness in us. Faith without faithfulness is not faith at all, and we must continue the journey in order to prove to ourselves that our faith is worth something and to be perfected and molded back into the perfect image of God that was broken at the Fall. This transformation can be painful, and many times we find ourselves questioning our sanity in ever allowing Him to lay a hammer to our lives before the end of the journey. C.S. Lewis describes part of the reason for the believer's path through trials in this way: "God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him in situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us."

"I find I must borrow yet another parable from George MacDonald. Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But

presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."^{VI}

Whether we know a particular date on which our redemptive journey began, or whether it has been progressing for as long as we can remember, every follower of Yeshua is on a journey of transformation toward complete redemption and perfect fellowship with God. Even Paul knew he had not "made it" yet, and we would all do well to dedicate ourselves to the journey of transformation, just as he did. *"Not that I have already obtained all this or am already made perfect, but I press on to make it my own because the Messiah Yeshua has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in the Messiah Yeshua."* (Philippians 3:12-14)

^{VI} Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*, p. 205.

Pillars of Zion - Irene Levy - Part 2

Rittie Katz, Elizabeth Wakefield

In the last issue of Teaching From Zion we told the first part of Irene Levy's story up until the end of Israel's War for Independence. At the end of the 1948, Irene and her husband Stanley found themselves living in East Jerusalem. Here is the continuation of Irene's story in her own words...

With a station wagon we bought from a friend named Dr. Lambie, we traveled from camps to tents, to caves, and even to holes in the ground, visiting the war refugees. We were given honor by the Jordanian authorities for our work. Since we gave a double portion of flour and powdered milk to the pregnant women, many women disguised themselves with a pillow to look pregnant and get more food. I often told Bible based, flannel-graph stories (translated by Stanley, who also gave out the Word of hope in their despair). My "best Christmas dinner ever" was a pita sandwich in Bethlehem that year, after we chugged up the war-torn Jerusalem/Bethlehem Road and then had to walk the last stretch by foot up to Manger Square. We lived alongside other refugee believers in a one room apartment in Amman, where we had children's meetings and meetings for fellowship with other believers.

Once we travelled to Iraq, and on the long desert stretch we ran into a dust storm that forced us to stop, tighten the windows, and wait for the storm to cease. At the border, they discovered I had a book in Hebrew and asked me about it. I volunteered, "I have another one..." and explained that it was the Bible in its original Hebrew and my English translation. I wanted to let them know that the Hebrew was even more important to me than the English translation.

In Iraq we stayed with some missionaries near the "White Palace" government in Baghdad and entertained many young Jewish visitors to whom we taught the Bible. When we passed out some tracts in Baghdad, we were taken to the police station where we passed a lot of prisoners on our way to the chief's office. I started to be afraid that we would end up among the prisoners ourselves, but the chief said, "Oh, I have a New Testament; it is ok." Stanley asked for this in writing in case we were stopped again, and I got permission to distribute tracts to the prisoners on our way out. In many instances, being suspected as spies turned

out to be a blessing and an opportunity to share the Good News, as we did in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and Cypress.

Near the end of 1949, we returned to Amman but continued to pray about going to the Jewish side of Jerusalem where we felt called to be. One day while Stanley was in the Ramallah refugee camp, I got a sudden feeling that something in the weather would change things, so I drove to the American consulate in East Jerusalem and presented a request to visit West Jerusalem. A sudden snow storm prevented an immediate return to Amman, so I repeatedly visited the consulate and explained that the God of Israel had burned a passion into my heart, entreating me, like Ruth, not to leave.

We were given three days to cross to West Jerusalem and be there, and we decided I should go first and from there work on permission for Stanley to follow. Eventually I worked out permission for us to stay longer than three days and for Stanley to come with our many of our things in the station wagon. Meanwhile we prayed together via the telephone between the two sides of Jerusalem. Once Stanley arrived, we stayed in a room at the Scotch Hospice overlooking Mt. Zion.

We used the same station wagon to transport Jewish immigrants from one transit camp ("ma'abara") to another. At one time, some schools and libraries from Sweden sent thousands of complete Hebrew Bibles to Israel, and since we were free, we transported them all over the country and gave talks about the Bible to the principals, teachers, and children. Some did not want them because they included the New Testament, but many were impressed that this Bible which originally came from Israel and had gone out to the world was now coming back as a gift to the land of its origin. We also distributed hundreds of New Testaments with lists of Old Testament prophecies in many languages, which we kept on the shelves in our garage. We replenished the Bibles into pockets labeled with the appropriate languages in our car.

George T.B. Davis and his wife Rose helped us distribute these along with Hebrew-English pamphlets, which we took all over Israel along with immigrant hitchhikers who were welcome to help themselves to the New Testaments. Our station wagon held up until the last bunch of Bibles

was delivered, and then it got a flat tire. Different people wrote about their experiences in this "chariot." Once it even pulled a house trailer from Safed to Tiberias.

During this time, we studied Hebrew in an ulpan together with the new immigrants. We held weekly prayer meetings in English, taking turns between the different denominations' facilities. We also held a United Gospel meeting at the YMCA. For a while, I oversaw the C&MA cottage, which later became a Bible shop and meeting place. Bernice Gibson and I conducted a summer Bible school for children, (mostly immigrants from India), using Isaiah booklets at the C&MA building.

In those days (the 50's), there was extreme austerity here. There was rationing, and we had to wait hours in line to get a rare piece of meat or care packages.

We took a trip to England, the USA, Jamaica, and Canada for about a year in the late 50's. We spoke in lots of churches about our experiences and met many individual Jews and Arabs and ministered to them along the way. We also worked a while with Jewish believers in Florida at the Haven of Grace.

From 1960-1968, I served as the principal of a school for believers' children in Haifa. The home in which we held it overlooked the Mediterranean and had been started as a memorial for Jewish children who had been killed in the Holocaust. In the seven years the school existed, there were many blessings. We had classes with Israeli teachers in Hebrew in the morning with the same curriculum as American schools. In the afternoon, we had English classes, and the students would write letters to America and see visitors from abroad. We took regular trips throughout Israel, learning nature, geography, and history, spending time with other believers, singing, and camping. On one trip we traveled all the way from Afula to Eilat. At the Haifa base, we kept the feasts and invited guests, including parents for programs and plays. At one time, the director of the home, Solomon Birnbaum, conducted a Bible school. Talented Messianic men took turns teaching the teachers, and all doors opened for three generations to sing, pray, and start the day. Neighbor children came during summer vacation for Bible and crafts, to swim in the pool, etc.

There were three such schools- one in Haifa, one in Tel Aviv, and one in Jerusalem. One day, in an organized protest, all three schools were visited by Orthodox Jews who did not like Jewish children learning the Gospel. Throughout the disruption, the children practiced praying and forgiving, as they had been taught to do. Eventually, we were forced into a court hearing, and though we had many character witnesses, the schools were closed and the

children under fourteen were not allowed to stay.

During the 1967 war, some of our teachers were called up to the army. The Book of Esther was very real to me then, and I did double duty, continuing to work at the school while also engaging in three days of prayer and fasting about Israel's future along with some of the other believers at the school. After three days, Jerusalem was unified, and victory reigned. Nevertheless, the soldiers were still fighting in the Golan, so I continued to fast and kept noticing the phrase "*Adonai Tzvaot*" which is translated, "the Lord of the Armies" all over the Bible. During one communion meeting there, the believers started singing, "It is finished, it is finished was His cry," and at that moment, I knew the war was finished. Later I learned that the war really had ended at that time and was not surprised because it was the same assurance that had come to me years before when I became sure of my salvation.

Both during and after the war, I spent a lot of time giving soldiers rides and told them about our prayers for them. I explained that the One who had finished the sacrifices, shed His blood on the cross, and defeated the enemy Satan is now alive and rules over the armies of heaven and earth. I continually pray that fewer soldiers will have to shed their blood because of the mighty soldier, Captain Yeshua, who defeated Satan by His blood. At the Shavuot which followed the war, we took a carload of people to Jerusalem to join the thousands of people going to the Western Wall.

About that same time, Stanley, who had been on a world preaching tour (by faith), began to be in failing health, so I left the school to care for him. We returned to Florida and stayed at the D. and D. homes in St. Petersburg, which was a place for missionaries on furlough. I taught Hebrew there to many of the other missionaries.

While I was in Haifa, I met a young teacher from Romania who told me about Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand and his wife Sabina. They were Jewish believers who had suffered for years in Communist prisons for their faith. He spoke at a church close to where we were in Florida, and I went to see him. He made a deep impression on me, and I began to show his film *Tortured for Christ* when I went on tour. When they came to Israel, I drove them around to speak in different venues. They later sent books and their magazine the *Voice of the Martyrs*.

When Stanley passed away in 1969, I had a clear leading to return to Jerusalem and was asked by the Koffsmans to oversee their church and Bible shop while they were abroad. Across the street from the shop, two people were killed by a terrorist on a day when we had just put up a new map of the united Jerusalem along with the Scripture, "*Oh*



Irene - on the right - with the Wurmbrands

Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather you together..."

A new song called "The Ballad of the Chovesh" was written at this time about a medic who was killed during a battle while he was trying to take care of a wounded soldier. In the song, the wounded soldier cries out "Oh, my brother!" and talks about Isaiah 61. (This is such a clear prophecy of the Messiah and how he will heal the broken hearted. The word "heal" there in Hebrew is "*chovesh*," the same word for "medic" in Modern Hebrew). I always loved the story of Joseph, since he exemplifies the picture of a mourning brother. On the day the song came out, I wrote a song about Joseph and his brothers.

After the Koffsmans returned and Jerusalem became united, I rented a large apartment in an Arab neighborhood called Sheikh Jarrah because I believed the city should stay united. I let believers and tourists stay in this apartment and pay as they were able. We showed films, studied the Bible together, and had Hebrew lessons with Jewish and Arab children together. All were blessed in "Abraham's Tent."

One Jewish believer in Tel Aviv was a teacher at a Jewish school there and came to my apartment close to Passover together with mothers and children. There we read parts of the Bible together with some Arab children from a Jerusalem Christian school. Anita K., who did filming, made this part of a movie *Shalom-Salaam*, which was about Jewish-Arab cooperation. We also did other Jewish-Arab reconciliation projects in both schools and together in a Haifa club called Meditran, where youth from both groups

came together. We had many joint second-hand clothing sales together all over Jerusalem. We learned each other's feasts and languages too.

Little by little, other guest apartments fell into my lap from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian landlords. I rented these out and used them as guesthouses throughout Jerusalem for people from many nations, with "Irene" ("peace") at the door. We had a projector and film called *His Land* about Israel left over from the Haifa school, which we showed in the guest apartments and in schools where I taught English on a volunteer basis. When I showed the film to neighbors and students, I explained, "This is how Christians see prophecy being fulfilled here."

While overseeing these guest apartments, I rented a room for myself with Ada, who was Eliezer Ben Yehuda's daughter. We became very close friends, and she used to say we were like Ruth and Naomi. Many tourists came to hear her talk about her father, and then she would turn them over to me to talk about prophecy. Ada's sister Dola and I had Ben Yehuda's biography *Tongue of the Prophets* reprinted. Ada used to go with me to the tourist apartments and all over the land to talk about her father. Even though she was not a believer, she thought it was important that the neighborhood believers meet together, and she even let us use her apartment sometimes. Ada and I used to read the New Testament together in Arabic every morning because we both wanted to learn Arabic. An Arab who

I the founder of Modern Hebrew.

wanted to learn Hebrew came over once a week to study with us, and I was impressed by the similarities between these Semitic languages. For example, the root for "lamb" in Arabic means "compassion" in Hebrew. I really think that Jews and Arabs can work together and bless the world.

I had many interesting experiences as I took Israeli soldiers from the New Gate to their base in Jericho and to other bases, and then I would return to Jerusalem to play the organ in an Arabic church, where I would ask them to pray for the soldiers. Another ministry opened up where we would pick up Lebanese civilians at the "Good Fence" at the Israeli-Lebanese border who needed medical care. Many of them could not get all the way to Beirut, so Israel allowed them to come here for medical treatment. It was marvelous for the Arabs to see Jews compassionately caring for their wounds in the hospital. When we had room, we also would pick up soldier hitchhikers, and they would ride with us and the South Lebanese, where we would talk about Yeshua together in both languages. I also used to take the tourists from my guesthouses up to the Galilee on my way to pick up the Lebanese.

I volunteered in several Bible bookstores, and one day in the early 80's a Messianic Jewish immigrant from Egypt named Lou Elijah Levi came in. He knew nine languages, and we had a connection with each other because we discovered that one of the teachers who had been at the Bethel (Mt. Carmel) school in Haifa was his son. Lou invited me out for a cup of tea, and soon afterwards I accepted his proposal for marriage. We were married in 1982. Lou used to sit on benches around the city and strike up conversations with people about the Lord in the many languages he knew, so we jokingly called it his "bench ministry." We were together for 14 years, after I had been a widow for 14 years. We had given up our guest apartments by then and said, "We've had enough of washing the disciples' sheets." Lou passed away in 1996 at the age of 77.

One day, the people who owned my apartment told me they were about to sell it. I had the "first right of purchase" but had absolutely no money to buy it, so I thought I might have to move again. I went to my local assembly and simply asked for prayer from one of the elders. He referred me to one of my favorite brothers in the Lord who bought the apartment, and I have been able to rent and live there in peace and security ever since. This centrally located place has blessed many visitors, too. Using my charts, poems, songs, and an easy Hebrew newspaper, I still teach a weekly free Hebrew class across the street from my home.

A recurring theme in my life has been Handel's *Messiah*, and it was always my vision and heart's desire

to hear it sung in Hebrew. While I was living in Haifa, one of the school faculty members, Amikam Tavor, translated most of it in return for chicken dinners, which I cooked for him regularly. Years later the vision for Israel to hear it in Hebrew came to fulfillment. Arie Bar David perfected the Hebrew and conducted the first performance at Passover in Jerusalem in 2007. (I even had the privilege to sing in it!) David Loden wants to continue holding performances but needs financial help and many prayers in order to do so.

One of my favorite verses is Genesis 24:27, "*As for me being on the way, the Lord led.*" When we start out, we never know where the Lord is going to lead, but as we go along, He drops things into our lap and leads us. We need to trust not man, but God. A lot of things I had never planned simply fell in my lap. I went to Bible school thinking I had a burden for India and this love and burden for Israel came to me that was and remains unshakable. The Lord has supplied all my needs. I have stumbled many times, but He sustains me. "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,*" and do not worry about organizations. God has never let me down this way.

I believe very firmly in reconciliation and in doing all we can to bless the Jewish people, and then we will be blessed back! We also need to visit the local Arabic congregations and vice versa so we can form relationships and begin to see our common roots. When we focus on our love for the Messiah and what we have in common, rather than what separates us, we can begin to build bridges of understanding rather than walls of separation.

I study about Israel and the Scriptures at Netivyah every week and take part in regular neighborhood prayer meetings. God has given me the blessing of being with or even helping some special people who I would like to honor here: Richard Wurmbbrand, the family of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, Valentie Vester and family members of the founders of the American Colony in Jerusalem, David Ben Gurion, Dr. and Mrs. Lambie, Corrie ten Boom, Jim and Gwen Shaw of the "End Time Handmaidens," Roy and Dora Whitman of Amman and the Arabic Assemblies, and many other congregation leaders in Jerusalem and Haifa. If anyone is interested in hearing more about my experiences with these wonderful people, you can contact me through *Teaching From Zion*.

Irene is truly a remarkable and wonderful woman. It was a great privilege to be able to share excerpts of her extraordinary life. Since the last issue, she has celebrated her 89th birthday with the exuberance and love for life that characterize her so strongly. We love you, Irene. May you continue to go forth in strength, optimism and unbridled faith which seem to exemplify your life.

Salvation: One-Time Event or Lifelong Process?

Guest Perspectives

Ariel Ben Ami

Six years ago, studying the Tanakh and Judaism brought me into the Catholic Church. When I tell this to Messianic believers, they usually tell me, after recovering from their initial shock and concern about the well-being of my soul, that such a thing cannot be. For everyone knows, they say, that Catholicism is completely unbiblical. For me to claim to believe in the Bible and to be Catholic at the same time is to them an unthinkable oxymoron, tantamount to saying in the same breath that I am a vegetarian who eats meat. I do not intend to write about my whole journey of faith here, but only about how my study of the biblical concept of redemption and salvation led me to the conclusion that the Catholic view of salvation as a process in time, where man's works cooperate with God's grace, is actually closer to the Biblical and Jewish view than the common evangelical positions of "salvation by faith alone" and "once saved, always saved," which are also commonly espoused in many Messianic congregations.

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). This verse understandably does not get much attention in many Evangelical and Messianic circles. In the days when I was a Protestant evangelical believer and before my entrance into the Church, James 2:24 disturbed me, and eventually caused me to question one of the great pillars of the Protestant Reformation: the principle of *sola fide*, or salvation by faith alone. When I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior in 1995, the idea of salvation by faith *alone* appeared supremely attractive. I thought I could be saved by trusting exclusively in the Messiah's redemptive work at the cross and that this had nothing to do with the extent of my sins or my good works. All I had to do was to "receive" the gift of salvation. No matter what I did thereafter, I could not lose it because it was a gift from God, independent of my own actions.

As attractive as this idea of salvation was, however, I could not deny that James 2:24 clearly contradicted it. Paul also exhorts us to *"work out our salvation in fear and*

trembling" (Phil 2:12), and even the great apostle does not take his own salvation for granted when he writes: *"I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified"* (1 Cor 9:27). How could these Scriptures be reconciled with the idea of salvation by faith alone and the concept that we cannot lose our salvation after having been once "saved?"

An Evangelical View of Salvation

According to common Evangelical tradition, one is saved by "receiving Jesus as personal Lord and Savior," or being "born again." These two expressions are usually viewed as synonyms, (although nowhere in Scripture is it written that to be "born again" specifically means to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior). Evangelical Christians typically say things like "I was saved on such and such a date" or "before I was saved..." with the implication that salvation is received as a one-time event in our life. Once we have sincerely repented, having "received the Lord" and confessed our faith in Him, we are considered part of the "elect," the chosen children of God. Those who have never done this are the "unsaved" or the "lost." Naturally then, the most emphasized event in Evangelical meetings is the altar call, where the unsaved have an opportunity to receive the Lord. The process of sanctification is expected to follow, of course, but it is often treated as another issue, distinct from salvation itself. The problem with this Evangelical concept of salvation, however, is that it does not show the complete biblical picture.

The first problem I had with it was of a very practical nature. When I committed my life to Jesus in 1995, I believed that I had become one of the elect, and I was now to dedicate my life entirely to God. I thought that all other born-again believers, having made the same commitment to the Lord, would show the same wonderful fruit of a consecrated and godly life. Most Catholics, on the other hand, had not been born-again and therefore were not expected to behave

like “real believers.” The reality, however, was different. In the many years that I spent in Evangelical and Messianic circles, I have seen believers who apparently had been born-again but who then completely backslid into sin and even unbelief. I have seen strife, selfishness, lack of love, dishonesty, arrogance, pride, and betrayal in just about every “born-again” church that I have attended (and even observed some of these unflattering qualities in myself!) On the other hand, I knew Catholics who were a constant example of humility, love, self-sacrifice, and faithfulness to God. My point is not to say that one side is better than the other, but rather to question the difference between a “born-again-backslidden-believer” and a “baptized-as-an-infant-Catholic” who has “*endured to the end*” in his faith in Messiah (Mt 10:22). Who is saved here according to Evangelical theology? These questions confused me until I began to study what the Bible really says about salvation.

Salvation: One-Time Event or Continual Process?

Evangelicals often have a rather narrow view of the term “salvation,” equating it with forgiveness of sins and assurance of going to heaven. The Bible, however, presents a much wider meaning, both with the Hebrew word *yeshuah* or the Greek *soteria/sozo*. The Hebrew term refers to the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians (Ex 14:13), victory over the enemy in time of war (1 Sa 11:13), temporary deliverance from death, or even physical healing. In the New Testament, when Jairus comes to Jesus to plead with Him to heal his daughter, he tells Him “*Come and lay your hands on her, that she may **be saved***” (*sozo*, usually translated “*be healed*”), and she will live” (Mk 5:23). In the same chapter, the woman with an issue of blood says: “*If only I may touch [Jesus]’ clothes, I shall **be saved***” (*sozo*, NKJ translates *be made well*) (Mk 5:28). After she is healed, Jesus tells her “*Daughter, your faith has **saved you***” (*sozo*, NKJ: *has made you well*). Even though the only issue here is physical healing, with no talk about forgiveness of sins or of receiving Jesus as savior, the verb *sozo* is used throughout to describe the healing. These examples demonstrate that salvation in the Bible does not only describe spiritual justification before God but also a complete restoration of man, be it in the physical, emotional, and/or spiritual realms.

Furthermore, the New Testament presents salvation not as a one-time event, but rather as a *continual process* over the course of our lives. Paul sees salvation as a *past experience*: “*For we **were saved***” (Rom. 8:24, cf. also Eph. 2:5-8). It is also a *present process*, conditional upon our faithfulness. Believers are “*among those who **are being***

saved” (2 Cor. 2:15), and “*You **are being saved**, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you*” (1 Cor. 15:2). Yet salvation is also a *future event*, even for believers: “*We have hope that we **shall be saved***” (Rom. 5:9-10, 1 Cor. 3:12-15). Salvation is clearly a process and not a one-time event. Consider Romans 13:11: “*For now our salvation is **nearer** than when we first believed.*” Even though the Roman believers were saved when they repented and were baptized, Paul makes it clear that their salvation is not yet completed as long as they are alive.

The Covenant with Israel: Circumcision

It is easier to understand the concept of salvation in the New Covenant by studying the ideas of election and covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Tanakh, God’s plan of salvation was initiated through the covenant of circumcision with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3, 17:1-12). Circumcision was a grave matter; the male child who was not circumcised had broken God’s covenant and was to be cut off from his people (Gen 17:14). Yet circumcision was never meant to be *only* an outward covenant: Already at the time of the desert wanderings God also commanded Israel to “*circumcise the foreskin of your heart*” (Deut. 10:16). Paul confirms this when he writes, “*He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter*” (Rom. 2:28-29).

God’s covenant with Israel is both individual and collective. It is individual because every Jew is responsible for his actions before God, but it is also collective because God redeemed a people and not just a bunch of individuals. Jewish children are automatically circumcised on the eighth day and included into the people of God; nobody asks for their permission or for a profession of faith. This does not dispense with personal responsibility for their actions and lives though. Circumcision embraces a child into the covenant but does not guarantee justification before God. In the Tanakh, a circumcised Israelite who transgressed important commandments was to be “cut off” from his people and put to death.

Ezekiel makes it clear that salvation was not only dependant upon circumcision or one’s good standing with God *in the past*, but also upon one’s *present* heart attitude, faith, deeds, and a perseverant avoidance of sin and keeping God’s commandments: “*If a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be*

remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live... But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die" (Ezek. 18:21-24).

In the Tanakh, salvation, in the sense of forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life, is hidden because the Messiah had not yet come. In the covenant of circumcision, however, we see a type and a shadow of the greater salvation that was to come, where justification before God is not dependant upon faith alone, but also upon an obedient response expressed in good works. Abraham was justified by faith. He *"believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness"* (Gen. 15:6, Gal. 3:6). Yet he was also *"justified by works when he offered Isaac on the altar."* His faith was *"working together with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect"* (Jam. 2:21-22).

The New Covenant: Baptism

With the coming of the Messiah and His establishment of the New Covenant, God's plan of salvation was fully revealed. The New Covenant's equivalent of circumcision is baptism. Paul calls it the "circumcision of Messiah." *"In [Yeshua] you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Messiah, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith"* (Col. 2:11-12).

Although there are many parallels between circumcision and baptism, Yeshua has given us a better covenant (Heb. 9:22). Unlike circumcision, baptism has true salvation power. *"In [Noah's ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also"* (1 Pet. 3:20-21). If we look at the true biblical context of the expression "to be born again," we discover that it is associated with baptism and not with a profession of faith. To Nicodemus' question of how he should be born again, Yeshua answered, *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (Jn 3:5). Paul speaks in similar terms in Titus 3:5-6. *"According to His mercy [God] saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus the Messiah our Savior."* We see in these passages a direct connection between the washing through water and salvation.

Baptism imparts the grace of God and opens the door to salvation but in no way diminishes one's accountability before God, the necessity of coming to personal faith, the importance of one's actions, or the consequences of one's sins. This is why Paul tells us that we should *"work out [our] salvation in fear in trembling"* (Phil 2:12) and not take it for granted (cf. 1 Cor 9:27). Even after baptism, we are not immune from the risk of being cut off. *"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"* (Rom 11:22). This is in perfect harmony with Yeshua's words, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven"* (Mt 7:21). Our lives and works are important because they are our response to God's covenant with us.

Since circumcision was generally performed on infants, it was natural for the early Christians that baptism, the "circumcision of Messiah," should also be available to infants. This is why Peter preached at Pentecost, *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children"* (Acts 2:38-39).

Covenant, Faith Working through Love, and Perseverance until the End

If we have willfully betrayed the Lord's gift of grace and salvation and have become alienated from Him, even after having been "saved" in the past, we run the risk of forsaking forever our eternal destiny. If we have persevered until the end and reached the finishing line of our race in a state of grace, forgiveness, and friendship with God, having striven to grow in faith, hope, and love throughout the course of our life, we will be on our way to heaven and to the eternal home He has prepared for His children.

It is interesting that Yeshua precisely told us that He is *"the way, the truth and the life"* (Jn 14:6). He did not say "I am the point" or "I am the goal," (though He certainly is that too), but *"I am the way."* If we go on a long journey, a way is a road on which we must travel for the entire course of the trip. It is not good enough to start off on the right path. We must take heed to not miss any turns, run out of gas, remain idle on the road, or worst of all, start going backwards. How many believers have started out strong in their journey of faith at the time of their initial conversion, but have at some point stalled on the way or taken a wrong turn so that they have long ago stopped growing and responding in obedience to the Lord's calling?

Photo by Code Poet / Jim



Receiving Jesus as my Lord and Savior had been a genuine experience of freedom as I responded in faith to God's all-surpassing grace. I now realize that believing in salvation by faith alone made me imagine that I could get away with some "minor" sins though. I believed that my works had nothing to do with my salvation, despite the fact that the New Testament clearly and repeatedly states that every man will be judged according to his works (Mt 16:27, Jn 5:29, Ro 2:6, 2 Cor 5:10, Rev 2:23, 20:12).

Conscious of this, I now have a healthier fear of God that motivates me all the more to *"continue in His goodness"* and not *"otherwise be cut off"* (Rom. 11:22). I am redeemed,

and to the best of my ability I am *"working out my salvation in fear and trembling"* (Phil. 2:12), with hopeful confidence in the promises of the Messiah (Rom. 5:2, 2 Tim. 2:11-13), but not with a presumptuous, "absolute" assurance about my own ability to persevere (2 Cor. 13:5). No one will be justified by works alone, but neither are we saved by faith alone. Should we not agree with the Bible and with the beliefs of ancient Israel that we are saved by grace through a living faith working in love (Gal. 5:6)?

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News from Netivyah

As we prepare this issue of TFZ, we are fighting a war in Gaza and southern Israel as hundreds of rockets fall on Israeli towns, and the IDF attempts to stop Hamas' terror tactics. There also have been a handful of rockets fired at Northern Israel from Lebanon, so we are all praying we will not have to fight a war on two fronts at once. We hope that by the time you receive this magazine, this war will be long over, but in any case, we ask for your prayers for our soldiers and the residents of the south.

Netivyah recently sent 85 backpacks filled with snacks, personal items, and menorahs to believing soldiers with whom we have contact in the IDF as a special gift for Chanukah. There are a number of soldiers fighting in Gaza at this very moment with backpacks that say "From Netivyah with Love" on them. We already received a number of thank you letters from grateful soldiers, and we are very happy to be able to bless our troops in the name of Yeshua. Our teenagers had a great time packing the boxes, as several of them are already serving in the army and many more of them will begin their term of service in the next year or two. We have several new families with teenagers in the congregation, and there are so many of them now that there is not even enough room for them to sit in the youth clubhouse where they meet to study the Bible and have fun activities!

Joseph Shulam and Yuda Bachanah recently returned from a teaching trip in Japan and Korea, where they taught seminars on the subject of "Jesus the Jew." By the time you get this magazine, Joseph will be in Brazil with Elhanan ben Avraham teaching seminars on the subject of Yeshua and the Torah. He will also teach a seminar series in Holland on the Days of Elijah and teach in a number of churches in the United States during this trip. We are also hosting a theology seminar here in Israel with several Japanese guests in March.

We have appealed to the Israeli court system about the religious discrimination we are experiencing with the municipality in our attempt to get a building permit to renovate and expand our congregation building. This expansion is an absolute necessity. A few weeks ago, we

had a Bat Mitzvah, and people were literally standing on top of each other in the corners and in the entryway in order to celebrate with us. The first hearing will take place within the next month, so we ask you to stand with us in prayer for a positive outcome and the honouring of our civil rights. This is a time of political transition here in Israel, as we are having national elections on February 10th, and the outcome is still very much uncertain.

We are in the middle of re-organizing our soup kitchen system. In the wake of the current world financial crisis, we are receiving new requests to be added to our distribution list almost every day, and we simply cannot feed them all. Therefore, we are asking all our recipients to update all their information with us so we can re-evaluate their economic situations and make sure we are helping those who are the neediest.

We are continuing our daily radio broadcasts in Hebrew on Kol haYeshuah radio and have uploaded many of these programs onto our website. We have recently rebuilt and redesigned our website, so we hope you check it out and can use some of the teachings and resources we have uploaded.

We hope you enjoy this TFZ issue and that it will inspire you to continue with strength and courage on the path that will lead to the redemption of each of us as individuals, of Israel, and of the world. May we all merit to complete redemption and a fuller understanding of the grace of God through Yeshua speedily and in our days!



Mashiach ben Yoseph

In the Jewish worldview, Joseph the Patriarch has long been understood to be a prototype of Messiah. This book by Elhanan ben Avraham gives a detailed, step-by-step comparison between the lives of Joseph and Yeshua of Nazareth. The parallels with the story of Joseph bring great prophetic hope for the soon completion of the redemptive process through Yeshua the Messiah.

Mashiach ben Yoseph משיח בן יוסף

10\$



Elhanan ben Avraham

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15\$

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