

Why Should I Study My Hebraic Roots?

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INTRODUCTION

We are of all generations most privileged to be living in the day of prophesied restoration. Ours is the opportunity to receive revelation that has been reserved for what the Bible calls “the last days” or “the end of the age.” With this supreme privilege comes also a challenging responsibility to seek and embrace truth with all our hearts.

Anyone familiar with church history knows that numerous practices and beliefs have become an accepted part of Christian experience which on closer examination are seen to be pagan and/or humanistic, rather than biblical. Virtually all of these aberrations are a direct result of the failure of medieval and modern scholarship to remain true to the Hebraic nature of the Scriptures.

The Bible, from cover to cover, is a Hebraic book, given by the God of Israel to His chosen people through His sages, prophets and apostles. One will never fully understand the Scriptures if they are interpreted apart from the culture, people and nation to which they were given. For example, “And when Yeshua¹ was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper . . . ,” according to Mark 14:3 KJV. Now serious students of the Bible know that lepers were not permitted to live within city limits (Leviticus 13:46), and that observant Jews, such as Yeshua, would never have entered the house of a leper. This error in translation, reflected in most modern English versions, stems from the Greek New Testament which calls this man “Simon the Leper.” However, the New Testament was not originally written in Greek, contrary to the teaching found in most modern seminaries and Bible Schools. Thanks to the extensive research of such scholars as James Trimm, C. C. Torrey and others, we now know with certainty that the

¹ We use the Hebrew name, Yeshua, rather than Jesus. Yeshua is His correct name and is preferable. Lest someone think that Jesus is simply a translation of Yeshua, it is not. Yeshua translates to Joshua and the name means “salvation.” Jesus is a Greek appellation, related linguistically to the name of the god, Zeus.

Gospels and letters were written first in Hebrew and Aramaic, the everyday language of the people of Israel in the first century. Going back to our translation problem in Mark 14:3, since both ancient Hebrew and Aramaic were written without vowels, the Greek translators of the original manuscripts did not distinguish between the Aramaic words *gar'ba* meaning leper and *garaba* meaning jar maker or jar merchant. To be consistent with Hebraic or Israeli life and biblical commandments, the verse should have been translated, “When Yeshua was in the home of Simon the jar merchant”

Another example is John 12:11. “Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Yeshua.” In this case Greek translators did not understand the Aramaic word *'ezal* which can mean to depart but was frequently used idiomatically in every day Aramaic to mean “more and more.” Therefore a closer rendering of this verse should read, “Because many of the Judeans, on account of him, were trusting more and more (*'ezal*) in Yeshua.” This same word *'ezal* also appears in the Aramaic text in John 15:16 which the KJV renders “. . . that ye should go and bring forth fruit” More correctly it should read, “. . . that ye should bear fruit more and more”

While these examples may not appear to have major implications, there are others that do as you will see later here.

During the first century, Hebrew was the language of those Hebrews living in Judea. Aramaic remained a secondary language and was more commonly used by the people in the Galilee, although there were some among the Galileans who preferred Hebrew. One thing is certain, the first century Hebrews did not speak Greek. A tradition among Jewish people says that it was better to feed children pork than to teach them Greek. Knowing the aversion to pork products because of the Kosher dietary laws, that is a strong statement.

The well known first century historian, Josephus, confirms that Hebrew was the language of the first century Jews. Regarding the language of his people he wrote: “I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understanding the elements of the Greek language although I have so long accustomed

myself to speak our own language, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness: for our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations.” (Ant. 20:11:2) If a noted scholar such as Josephus did not know Greek, you can be certain that the likes of Matthew, Mark, John and Peter most assuredly did not! Josephus makes it eminently clear that the first century Hebrews could not even speak or understand Greek but spoke “their own language.” Archeological finds in Israel have repeatedly confirmed this as well. Inscriptions on coins, walls and columns, as well as ancient manuscripts are all in Hebrew. Not one is in Greek.

Charles Cutler Torrey (1863-1956), one of the pioneers in the research into Hebrew and Aramaic New Testament manuscripts wrote in his book, “Our Translated Gospels,” “The material of our Four Gospels is all Jewish and the language in which it was originally written is Aramaic . . . “ Numerous church fathers, including seminaries . . .

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. . . The essence of “knowing” in Hebrew thought is that you practice in your life that which you have learned. May we all be found doing so!

CHAPTER 1

WHY STUDY THE JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY? (To be renamed)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable . . .

While Christians in churches . . .

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. . . May these serve to make you hungry for more, even as they bring illumination that you will find exciting and inspiring.

CHAPTER 2

WHY STUDY THE JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY? (To be renamed)

“Remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root that supports you.”
Romans 11:18

There are a group of people on the earth who comprise less than 1% of the world’s population and should not therefore by all human standards significantly affect the rest of the world. Many nations and kingdoms have tried to exterminate them: Pharaoh, Assyria, Haman, the Philistines, Rome, the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition and Hitler who killed six million of them.

How have they survived? Why have they survived? There is only one reason: because more than 5000 years ago, God set them apart to testify of His integrity and give credence to the absolute authenticity of His scriptures. We call them the Jews. Psalm 12 1:4 *“He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps...”*

God is serious about Israel and the church was *not* created to replace her but rather to enlarge her. Consider carefully the words penned by the apostle to the Gentiles in the city of Ephesus: *“Therefore, remember that formerly you Gentiles in the flesh remember that you were at that time separate from the Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in this world.”* Ephesians 2:11-12 The church is not an independent creation. We have been grafted in to Israel, to that unique people with whom God made covenant and through whom He has imparted to the world His truth, His grace and His love in His written and Living Word. Therefore, *“Remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the*

root that supports you.” Romans 11:18 **You can never have a flourishing branch if it is grafted into a withering root.** Judaism is not a withered or dead root; it is living and essential to our true biblical identity! At the very foundation of this nation of people is an everlasting covenant with Abraham; a covenant initiated by God Himself. The reader would do well to spend some time reading and meditating on the scriptures found in Genesis 12 through 17. This covenant between God and Abraham was and is binding, unconditional, everlasting and literal. It includes the three fold provision of land (Gen. 15:18, Numbers 34:1-12, Joshua 1:1-4. Ezekiel 47:15-20), establishment as a nation (Gen. 17:18-19, 22:17, 28:13-14, 35:10-12, II Sam. 7:12-13) and supernatural blessings (Gen. 22:18, Jer. 31:31 -34, Zech. 12:8-10, 13:1,8-9).

Since the fourth century the Church has been divested of her Jewish heritage and consequently significant issues of Biblical interpretation, doctrine and theology have been handicapped. Catholic scholar, Edward H. Flannery rightly declared, *“An over-Hellenized, over-Latinized Christianity needs a re-Judaizing process to bring it back to its founding Jewish roots and renew it more in keeping with its own inherent ideals.”*

On the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, the community of believers that we now commonly call the Church, was born by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the promise of Yahshua just before His ascension. This community was intrinsically Jewish, its members steeped in the teaching, the culture and the traditions of the Judaism that Yahshua Himself followed when He walked this earth, the Judaism that had been created by His Father. While there may be numerous religions on the face of the earth besides Christianity, only one was created by the same God we worship as Christians. Judaism was born in the heart of God and given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Therefore Christianity is essentially Jewish, having been birthed from the root of Judaism. The Bible is not about things Jewish or Christian. It is about things divine, eternal and universal and therefore applicable to all. However understanding it correctly requires, even demands, a deep awareness and comprehension of the people, nation and culture through whom God chose to reveal His

ways and His Word. Therefore, the more biblical you become, the more Jewish you will appear.

The study of the Jewish Roots of Christianity is not some new fad; neither is it some divergent trail from the heart of biblical theology. It is a major thrust in the restoration of all things which is happen in the last days as prophesied by Peter in his great sermon recorded in Acts 3.

Why study the Jewish Roots of Christianity?

A. ‘Jesus’ was a Jew. His true Hebrew name is Yahshua which means “salvation of God.” He was born, raised, lived and ministered as an observant Jew, obedient to the commandments of the Father given on Mt. Sinai to Moses. Yahshua observed carefully and diligently every instruction given to the nation of Israel. Without understanding the nation, the culture and the people among whom He lived and ministered, we will never fully understand all that the New Testament teaches and will in fact, as shown by church history, seriously misinterpret significant portions of it. In the course of our study, remember this important principle: Our purpose and goal *is to make us more like Him, not less; it is to bring a greater humility and deal with our “Christian” arrogance. (Romans 8:28-29 “...to be conformed into the image and likeness of His son..” and Romans 11: 18 “...but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who support the root but the root supports you. “)*

B. The Church was born in Jerusalem and from there the Messiah will rule and reign in time to come. The first members of the newborn community were all Jewish; they lived a Jewish lifestyle and continued to attend synagogue. Nowhere in scripture do we find that they abandoned their unique identity as the chosen people of God, the lifestyle that set them apart from the other nations. For the first three hundred years of its life, the church was uniquely Jewish. It was not until the “great divorce” demanded by Constantine in the fourth century that the church and Israel went their separate ways. The day of restoration has come!

C. To rightly divide the Word of Truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 If the apostle felt it necessary to exhort his disciple, Timothy, to study in order that he would rightly teach the Word of God, then there must be a great potential to wrongly teach the Word of God. You cannot take the scriptures out of their context and correctly present your exegesis. As we proceed through this course of study, this principle will be abundantly demonstrated but let us consider at this point one simple example of incorrect thinking. In many theological circles, Judaism is virtually considered a synonym for legalism. However, Romans chapter 4 makes supremely clear that Abraham came to God by FAITH, four hundred years before the Torah (the Law) was given to Moses. The foundation of Judaism is faith, not legalism. The Torah is the body of instructions God gave to His people; not a legalistic set of rules to enslave them. We shall study this in greater detail in chapters 4 and 5. The Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, given to us in the form of a Jewish book and must be studied as such. To attempt to interpret it through 21st century western eyes and mentality is spiritually and intellectually inappropriate.

D. To equip ourselves to fulfill the exhortation to provoke to jealousy. Romans 11:13-14 The giving of the Torah is celebrated every year at Shavuot (Pentecost) as the greatest gift God gave to the Israelites, that He should reveal His ways and His heart to them. The Scriptures are a deeply sacred trust which are to be studied and obeyed. In Jewish thinking, knowing is doing. Academic knowledge of the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms is not enough. What matters is what you put into practice in your life.

Evangelical Christians are prone to declare their allegiance to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. We quote portions by heart and vehemently defend this doctrinal position. But how consistently are we living that which we have learned? The Corinthian church was told “*Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.*” I Cor. 8:1 What does it mean to “provoke to jealousy”?

When your life and mine become such a visible demonstration in word and practice of the truths of God’s precious Word that our example provokes someone to come to us and ask, “Why do you live like you do?” we have then “provoked to jealousy.” The context of

this exhortation in Romans 11 is clearly with relationship to Israel, but not limited to them. The bottom line is this: My relationship to God should be of such a nature that my very life makes others hungry to know Him in a deeper way. Where are the Baptists provoking the Presbyterians to a deeper love of God? Where are the Methodists provoking the Pentecostals? To make it more personal, whom are you provoking to good works, to a passion for the Lord by your everyday life?

Israel's population today is in fact largely secular but within her ranks are some of the most deeply spiritual and committed believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that I have ever met; men and women who provoke *me* to a deeper walk with God. Thousands of Christians visit the land of Israel yearly. Tragically, many only see the sights and never interact with Israelis, never have the precious opportunity to express love and extend friendship to the local people. Some are admittedly hesitant to do so knowing that they have no basis for conversation because of their ignorance of Judaism and the Jewish way of life. The opportunity to be among those who begin to heal the breach and bridge the gap between Christians and Jews is one of the *most important* reasons for studying the Jewish roots of Christianity. To major in the multitude of issues that unite us rather than the few that divide us is enlightening and inspiring. It will also equip us to become "provokers" not only to the Jew but equally to fellow believers within the Christian community and to the world around us whatever nation we come from.

Allow me also to make the following abundantly clear: To "*provoke to jealousy*" is to encourage and inspire another to rediscover and re-commit to their precious and awesome identity, calling and relationship to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to stir a hunger for a deeper relationship with the God who has kept and preserved the Jewish people through the centuries and for the truths of His word first delivered to them. It is *not* a license to stuff their hands with tracts and attempt to "convert" them to a westernized, Hellenized Christianity. That is called 'proselytizing' and is essentially selfish; it focuses on 'what I have accomplished' rather than on sincere and genuine love towards others. With Jew or Gentile alike, your purpose and mine is to let our lives so exhibit the joy, the peace and the power

of a living and growing relationship with the Lord that others who observe us are stirred to seek that same relationship and the promise of the Scripture is unmistakably clear: "*If you seek Me with all your heart, you shall surely find Me.*" With the help of God, may our lives make others thirsty for His presence and as they seek Him, He Himself will lead them into all truth.

YOUR TURN

1. Consider the statement: "*The more biblical you become, the more Jewish you will appear.*" How would you explain this statement to a friend?
2. Why must we study the Jewish Roots of Christianity?
3. Explain the term "grafted in."
4. At this point in your life, before proceeding further into our study, what is your personal understanding of Judaism? We will evaluate this understanding at the end of the course and you will have opportunity to comment on your own initial comprehension and how it will be changed and/or modified.

CHAPTER 3

COVENANT, FOUNDATION FOR RELATIONSHIP

“When Abraham was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty. Walk in My presence and be pure-hearted. I will make a covenant between Me and you, and I will increase your numbers greatly.’ Abraham fell on his face and God continued to speak with him.- ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram (exalted father), but your name will be Abraham (father of many), because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you’.” Gen. 17:1-6

Covenant - such a sacred word in Hebraic and biblical thinking, yet such a casual concept in western thinking. In simple terms, a covenant is a binding, indissoluble agreement between two people or two groups that contains promises made on the part of each to the other. Biblically speaking, it absolutely cannot be broken. Speaking of his covenant with David, God says in Psalm 89: 30-36 *“If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, If they violate My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off My loving kindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness, I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me.”*

The concept of covenant between God and His people is one of, if not *the*, most important, theological truth of the Scriptures. Biblically speaking, it implies much more than a contract or legal agreement. Contracts are limited by time while a covenant has an eternal quality. In biblical times, a covenant between two people lasted to the third and fourth generation of their descendants. Thus we see in II Samuel 9 that many years after the death of his covenant friend,

Jonathan, King David inquires if there be anyone left of Jonathan’s lineage to whom he may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake. When informed that Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth, is still alive, he sends for the young man, re-locates him to the royal palace and restores to him all the lands that belonged to his father and grandfather, not for Mephibosheth’s sake, but for Jonathan’s, his beloved covenant friend.

In biblical times there were nine steps in the making of a covenant. When two people agreed to share covenant friendship, they would meet at an assigned place on an assigned day to effect this pledge. **The first thing they would do would be to exchange robes or cloaks.** The outer garment in Jewish thought represented the person, his life, his being. And so we read in I Samuel 18: 3-4 *“Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David...”* In so doing he would say in effect to David, *“I’m giving you my life; all that I am and all that I have.”*

Let us take note who it is that says these words Jonathan was the crown prince, son of King Saul, destined for the throne. From birth he had been trained, schooled, groomed for kingship He had everything to live for, possessions beyond our imagination, money, prestige and a future to be envied But at the moment that God touched his heart with a love for David, the Anointed One, he was ready to give it all away This was no small thing Can you imagine a crown prince today making such an exchange with a simple commoner from his kingdom? A teenage sheep herder with no formal education?

This is precisely what the Crown Prince of Heaven did The Son of God loved us with a love more powerful and redemptive than the love of Jonathan for David, as great as that was He left the indescribable beauty and unspeakable glory of the eternal realm and walked among us to make covenant, to give us His robe, to clothe us with Himself Isaiah prophesied this very thing when he wrote *“For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness”* (Isaiah 61 10) God commits His life to us through our personal relationship with His Son, the Lord Yahshua And so Paul exhorts us in his letter to the Ephesians 4 24, “that you

put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” This is covenant language which the people of that day understood far more deeply than we generally do today Paul was emphasizing to them that their had been an exchange of life when they were born again and that being the case, they were to walk in Another Man’s garment, taking on His identity, reflecting His nature, manifesting His goodness.

Following the exchange of robes, they would exchange belts. Look again at I Samuel 18:4. *“And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.”* In those days, a man’s belt was the place where his personal weapons of defense were fastened; his bow with its arrows, his knife, his sword and whatever else he may have carried for defensive purposes were attached to his belt. When he surrendered his belt, he surrendered his ability to defend himself against attack. His entire defense was now in the hands of his covenant friend. In the giving of his weapons, he deliberately made himself vulnerable and he also rendered himself incapable of hurting his friend. He said by this gesture, “I now give to you everything with which I could ever hurt you. And I place myself at your mercy. If I am attacked, unless you defend me, I am defenseless. And in receiving your belt with your weapons, I recognize that you have also surrendered to me everything with which you could ever hurt me. I’ll fight your battles for you, I’ll defeat your enemies for you and you will do the same for me.”

We read in Deut 20:4 *‘for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’* This is our covenant partner, the Lord Himself, who is committed to fight our battles, be our defense and preserve us to everlasting life. How tragic that any born again child of God should be unacquainted with the provisions of the covenant and continue to live like one who must fight his own battles, not realizing that God is committed to our defense. We can trust Him completely for He will never violate His covenant.

Thirdly, they would “cut” the covenant. An animal was chosen, slaughtered by being cut in two down the middle. They would

separate the two halves, laying them side by side with just enough room between the two sections for the two men to stand in the pool of blood that would quickly form in the middle. Claspng their hands together, they would commit to each other in words similar to these: *“I choose this day to die to myself and live to bless you, my covenant partner. I will make my decisions and order my life with you in mind from this day forward; seeking always what is best for you ahead of myself”* His friend would repeat the same pledge back to him and then together they would look down at the blood in which they stood, ankle-deep, and say *‘May God do this to me and more if aught but death part you and me.’*

Still standing in the pool of blood, each of them would make a small cut on the back of the wrist, then clasp their hands together in such a fashion that their blood would mingle. Knowing that in the book of Leviticus, we are told, *“The life is in the blood,”* this was a vitally important part of the covenant making process. It was in this act that they realized what every step up along the way was pointing to: the exchange of their very life. As their blood mingled, they committed to the reality that their lives were now mingled and become one, for who can separate the blood once it is mingled together? No longer was each a separate individual, but they were one life.

Significant numbers of people across the world refuse blood transfusions even when medical need dictates it, for fear of what may be introduced into their bodies with such a procedure. Some have died because of receiving blood from a person infected with hepatitis, AIDS or some other disease.

Consider now the spiritual ramifications of being cleansed by the sacred Blood of the New Covenant, the Saving Blood of the perfect Lamb of God. The songwriter said it well, “The Blood will never lose its power.” This exchange of life is what Calvary is all about. His death is far more than a deliverance from the fires of hell. It is an exchange of life; the avenue by which we surrender our life in order to take on his and walk as He walked.

The fifth step was the exchange of names or what we today would call power of attorney. Each gave to the other the right and authority to use his name as his very own with no restriction or limitation. To act in another's name was to do what they would do, think like them, behave like them.

Names are very important because they carry meaning, association and identity. For instance, who of us would name our infant son, Judas? Or our infant daughter, Jezebel?

Years ago I heard the son of a prominent evangelist illustrate this principle in an unforgettable way. As a young man he went through a period in his life when he was yearning to "be himself" and not "the son of..." Deciding in his early twenties that he wanted to purchase a new car, he set aside one weekend to accomplish this goal. Beginning early one morning, he visited one auto dealership after another with no success. It was not for lack of desirable automobiles. In fact, he chose one in the very first place but was turned down for the loan because of a lack of credit history. This scene repeated itself in 7 different dealerships until finally, weary and frustrated, he looked at the Credit Manager in the 8th dealership and said, "Would it help if I told you that my father is?" In minutes he was driving away from the lot in his new car. The power of using a name!

Shortly before his death, Yahshua said to His disciples and through them to us, "*Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" John 14:13 And again, "*You did not choose Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.*" John 15:16

To truly understand the amazing privilege that Yahshua has commanded us to pray "in My name" is to fill us with an awesome respect and godly fear of the Lord. This is a covenant privilege we must not take lightly. This Name must never be used flippantly as if it were just a formula or ritual. It is powerful, yes, even to the tearing down of strongholds, but it is also a sacred trust which we must handle in holiness.

Having exchanged the authority to use each other's name, the two partners would then rub salt and hyssop into the cut that had just been made on their wrists. This had a two-fold purpose. It would serve to form a scar on the wrist that would never fade away. That scar was to serve as a lifelong reminder of the covenant rights and responsibilities to which they had committed themselves. The scar took this covenant out of the realm of emotions, feelings and circumstances and into the realm of assurance of a covenant relationship.

The story is told of the great African missionary, Dr. Livingston, who in traveling throughout that great continent, going into areas not previously seen by another white man, cut covenant with more than 50 tribal leaders. Each time he encountered a new tribe, the row of scars on his arm instantly communicated to them that this was not simply one lone stranger standing in their presence, but one who was in covenant with hundreds of other tribesmen, no doubt many from rival tribes. They understood that each scar on his arm represented thousands of arrows flying directly at them if they mistreated him many way. This highly motivated them to also enter into covenant with this white man, knowing that it would assure protection and freedom from attack from any of these other tribes. Marvelous way to put an end to tribal wars!

The seventh step was to read aloud the covenant terms, still standing in the pool of blood. They would pledge to each other full access to all their assets, property, money, etc. You receive all the other person's assets, and also his liabilities. When the Father cut covenant with us through His Son, we received all of His assets and He took all our liabilities. What a glorious exchange!

Once this was completed, they would walk away from the slaughtered animal, wash their feet and sit down to **share a Memorial Meal**. The sharing of food has carried spiritual significance from time immemorial. In every culture this principle is applied in one way or another.

Bread would be broken and shared between them, as well as a cup of wine from which both would partake, symbolizing and expressing that their lives were permanently entwined.

Finally, after the meal, they would take a sapling, a very young tree, and plant it at the place where they had cut the covenant. It would be sprinkled with some of the blood of the covenant sacrifice and watered that it might grow. From that day forward, the tree, along with the scar on the wrist, was to serve as a permanent reminder of their covenant, two witnesses to this awesome relationship between individuals or groups. Very often they would choose an almond tree as many believed that the tree of life in the Garden had been an almond tree.

As a tree grows and bears fruit, it was a fitting symbol that this relationship was also to grow and bear fruit, to withstand the storms of life and the winds of adversity, becoming even stronger because of them.

It was only after making such a covenant that you could rightly call someone your “friend.” Biblically speaking, this is a very serious and deeply meaningful word. It was not used in that day in the casual manner in which we employ it today. A “friend” as biblically understood, truly “loveth at all times,” is utterly reliable and unquestionably loyal throughout life. **THIS** is covenant!

YOUR TURN

1. Define Covenant as it is biblically understood. Support your definition with at least three scriptures.
2. What are the nine steps in a biblical covenant? In what way does each step portray the work of the promised Messiah?
3. Read Acts 4:32-25 and describe what aspects of covenant you find expressed.
4. Give two examples from the Life of Yahshua in which He employs covenant thought in teaching on a specific truth(s).

CHAPTER 4

ISRAEL, MORE THAN A COUNTRY!

Although such a tiny nation in the Middle East, Israel boasts the third largest press corps in the world. Why does this small piece of real estate command such world attention? When we hear the word *Israel* in our day, it most often refers to this nation. However, the name *Israel* encompasses more than the tract of land about the size of the state of New Jersey in the United States. For this reason, some explanation is in order.

The State of Israel

Hanging in my office is one of my most treasured possessions, an original front page of the then Palestine Post declaring the establishment of the modern state of Israel. The newspaper is dated May 14, 1948. This declaration followed the decision in November of 1947 of the United Nations to divide Palestine into two sectors. The land we today call Israel was re-born in the territory where the history of God's people took place as outlined for us in detail in the Hebrew scriptures, which modern Christians call the Old Testament.

The move toward the founding of the State of Israel initially came at the end of the 19th century with the birth and growth of a movement called Zionism, whose most famous leader was Theodor Herzl. Anti-semitism and persecution in Europe and the Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews later in the century proved the necessity of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State became a matter of life or death for the children of Abraham.

In its short history, it has fought too many wars, buried too many of its young people in uniform and suffered devastating terrorist attacks which have claimed the life of innocent civilians, adult and children alike. Yet despite all of this, Israel today is a prosperous, high-tech nation, with impressive accomplishments to its credit. Her

economy is strong, diamond exports were up by 36% in 1999 and her land is yielding such abundance that Israel now exports more roses than Holland exports tulips. The World Health Organization recently named Israel the second healthiest nation in the world.

Israeli citizens are not only Jewish, but also Christian and Muslim Arabs as well as Druse, a small sect consistently loyal to Israel, living primarily in the Galilee highlands. However, Israel is often termed the "Jewish State" because of its primary purpose: to provide a homeland for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The state of Israel exists today, however, for another very important reason. As true as it is that the Jewish people needed a homeland, and no one would rationally argue that need, it must be recognized that the State of Israel exists today and has survived the numerous attacks against it in the last fifty years because it stands as a testimony to the nations of the world that God's Word is true. Throughout the Old Testament, prophecies abound that foretell the re-birth of the nation after its people would scattered to the ends of the earth. For a considerable time during church history, many theologians spiritualized these promises as referring to the Church alone and discounted the literal, geographical and political re-establishment of a state as impossible. Given the status of world affairs, it is understandable that such conclusions were drawn if one was to base one's judgment on what can be seen with the eyes and heard with the ears. But God's Word does not fail. As the prophet Habakkuk wrote: "*For the vision is yet for the appointed time, -it hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail, Though it tarries, wait for it for it will certainly come, it will not delay.*" Hab. 2:3

Year after year, century after century, the dispersed of Israel celebrated Pesach, the Passover, and would cry out, "Next year in Jerusalem!" when those words fell to the ground like a balloon without air. But Zion kept calling to them in their hearts and God proved Himself faithful.

There is no other nation on earth which is promised a national restoration in the Bible. God claims title deed to the land which He gave to Abraham and to his seed forever and since it is His land, He

was well able to rule and over-rule in the affairs of nations and in due time, call that nation forth again.

Oh that world leaders today would understand the true significance of the existence of this tiny nation and respect her True Owner. God makes this eminently clear in Leviticus 25:23: *“The land moreover shall not be sold permanently for the land is Mine, for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.”*

Israel, a People

The name Israel also defines a group of people whom God calls His chosen ones and who trace their ancestry to the patriarch Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel by the Lord Himself. (Genesis 32) The nation was comprised of twelve tribes who descended from the twelve sons of Jacob. This people has been bound together throughout the centuries by their common faith in the One True God who delivered them from bondage in Egypt, made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, gave them His Torah and brought them into the Promised Land.

About 922 BC, the kingdom of Israel which David and Solomon had built, split into two kingdoms which came to be known as the Kingdom of Judah (southern region of the nation with Jerusalem as its capital) and the Kingdom of Israel (northern region.) After the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 721 BC, only Judah remained. It was at that time that the designation *Jew* began to be used to identify the citizens of Judah, rather than Israelite. This designation has remained to our day.

Despite repeated attempts throughout history to annihilate the Jewish people, they have survived by the help and grace of God. God has a purpose which will not be abrogated and the Jews stand as a testimony to the world that God is faithful and will never violate His own word.

Zionism

Zionism, as defined by Walter Laqueur in his landmark volume, *A HISTORY OF ZIONISM*, is the belief in the existence of a common past and a common future for the Jewish people.

Biblical Zionism adds an important dimension to this definition. Biblical Zionism is that conviction that Almighty God chose a land and a people through whom He desired to express Himself to the world and therefore, men from every nation who love God and His purposes support with prayer and practical service the people and nation of Israel, particularly Jerusalem, the holy hill, Mount Zion. Zionists have a deep love and concern for the city of Jerusalem, seeing it as the scripture describes it, the “City of the Great King.” Psalm 48:2. In fact, Psalm 48 is a key passage of scripture to every Zionist, Jew or Christian.

For many years, Zionism was considered a Jewish issue but in more recent years evangelical Christians have begun to realize the very serious responsibility to foster what many have called “a Zionist heart.” From city to city, church to church, we hear people saying, “God has put this great love in my heart for the Jewish people and the land of Israel. What am I to do? Where can I go to learn more?” This is nothing short of a work of the Holy Spirit and another evidence of the prophetic times in which we live. Consider the following scriptures:

Isaiah 14: 1 *“When the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, then foreigners will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob...”*

Isaiah 49:22 *“Thus says the Lord God, Behold I will lift up My hand to the nations and set up My standard to the peoples; And they will bring your sons in their bosom and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.”*

Isaiah 56:6-8 *“Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices*

will be acceptable on My altar for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord God who gathers the dispersed of Israel declares, Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered.”

Zechariah 8:20-23 “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities and the inhabitants of one will go to another saying, Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will also go. So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

YOUR TURN

1. To whom does the land of Israel belong? Support your answer with scripture.
2. What are the biblical borders of the land of Israel as given by God? Describe and give scriptural reference.
3. How did the modern state of Israel come into being? Give a brief synopsis of the history of modern Israel. (400-500 words on separate sheet of paper).
4. Develop a definition for Zionism in your own words. Describe the vision, mission and goals of Zionism both to Jews and Christians.

CHAPTER 5

JUDAISM, FACT AND FICTION

One of the greatest evidences of how far the Church has drifted from her Hebraic foundations is the widespread misconceptions (and virtual ignorance in many cases) within her ranks of the basic beliefs and practices of Judaism. If you were asked today by a neighbor or co-worker, “What is Judaism all about? What do Jews believe anyway?” what would be your answer? I have posed this question to many Christians from various denominations and almost without exception it was met with an uncomfortable embarrassment on the part of the person asked. This ought not to be so.

Judaism was established by the One True God, the same God that Christians worship. This simple truth is very often forgotten and a dichotomy of thought exists in the minds of so many that somehow the God of the Old Testament was a different God than that of the New. Nothing could be further from the truth. We would do well to remember the exhortation of Paul: “*All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable....*” 2 Tim. 3:16 From the first verse of Genesis to the last of Revelation, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob speaks to us; the Almighty Everlasting One whose name is Holy.

To help correct and clarify such prevalent misconceptions, in this Chapter we will address the following questions:

1. What do Jews believe in general?
2. What are the principal tenets of Judaism?
3. What is the Jewish understanding of sin?
4. Do Jews believe in the grace of God?
5. Do Jews believe in life after death?
6. What do Jews believe about the coming of the Messiah?
7. What are the major differences between Judaism and Christianity?

Get ready! Some of the answers to these questions may surprise you! Others may challenge your own walk with the Lord!

What do Jews Believe in General?

Methodically minded theological students who derive great enjoyment from neatly defined categories of doctrine will encounter great frustration in the study of Judaism for Judaism defies a simple definition. Judaism has always been a living faith - constantly growing and changing as does everything that has life!

To understand Judaism, the student must abandon the desire for absolutes in dogma and embrace instead a mindset that to a Jew, religion is not a system but a relationship. What Jews believe about the Bible, about miracles, about eternity, etc. is secondary to their unshakeable confidence in the living God who chose them, communicated with them, led them and has kept them through the centuries because of His undying love and faithfulness. It is after all in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) that we read the beloved verse: “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love and therefore have I drawn you to Myself.*” Jeremiah 31:3 This verse which has brought such comfort and peace to countless myriads of Christians through the years was first addressed, not to Christians, but to the Jewish people.

Judaism at its best understands the reality of God, the eternal covenant that the people of Israel have with their God, the guidance, solace and wisdom of the Torah, God’s body of instructions for a holy life as delivered to Moses. They are keenly aware that the Almighty commands a deep respect and that it is out of the godly fear of the Lord that true love and devotion are born. For **without the fear of the Lord, love for God can easily become sentiment rather than surrender, familiarity rather than obedience.** Perhaps we already need to admit that the Church would do well to adopt these same attitudes!

Jews, then, believe in God; a personal God whose ways often exceed our comprehension but whose very Person makes the difference between a life with purpose and one that is meaningless.

Jews believe that all human beings are made in the image of God and are therefore uniquely important; and that despite our frailties and failings, each of us has the potential for greatness. Jews also believe that greatness can only be achieved in the context of community. Judaism knows nothing of private or individualistic religion.

Jews believe in the Torah, commonly (*and unfortunately*) called The Law by most Christians. The Torah is a continual source of revelation to the Jew and it has been said at times that one could sum up all of Jewish belief in these three words: **God, Torah, and Israel**. If faith in any one of these is lost, the others quickly perish.

Because of this basic emphasis in Judaism on relationship with God, in Jewish thought, behavior is far more important than correct doctrine. The great Rabbi of the first century, Hillel, when asked to sum up Judaism, replied, *“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is all there is in the Torah. All the rest is mere commentary. I suggest you study the commentary.”* A century later, Rabbi Yochanan asked five of his most ardent students to give their summation of the essence of Judaism. The best answer was simply a quote from the prophet Micah: *“Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”* The rest of the questions we discuss in this chapter may be in the words of Hillel, “only commentary.”

What are the Principal Tenets of Judaism?

Jews believe in the eternal existence of a God who cannot be accurately conceived, described or pictured in human words or thought. He is worthy of unlimited honor and respect and in Jewish thought, we most genuinely honor God when we imitate the qualities that are godly. As God is merciful, we must also cultivate compassion and kindness towards others. As God is just, we must also seek to be just in our interpersonal dealings. As God is faithful to His word, we must also be faithful to ours, trustworthy and reliable.

Judaism is intensely practical. At its heart is this principle: ***you only truly know that which you do***; i.e., that which you put into practice on a regular basis in your life. There are only three things that

Judaism considers of paramount importance: study of God’s word, worship and godly behavior. From early childhood, every Jew learns that God is to be worshiped from a heart of love, The central prayer of Judaism is the Sh’ma which reads, *“Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might...”* Deut. 6:4-5 Love of God is the single most important force in Judaism.

This love motive is translated into practical life through study of the Torah in order to observe its commandments thereby giving birth to good deeds. In centuries past, young children were fed honey cakes made in the shape of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet so they would associate learning with sweetness, so important is the matter of study and learning the Torah to the Jewish community. But education was never intended to be a matter of the mind only. There is one supreme purpose for learning: *to do* what you have learned in the Torah.

Kind actions that stem from a heart desirous to manifest the love of God are described by the word **tzedakah** which means “righteous giving”. These good deeds, also called **mitzvot** (acts of kindness) are born out of the belief that all we have on this earth is really God’s and only passes through our hands during the brief window of time that we call “our life” for the purpose of making us a blessing to those around us.

No one is exempt from showing kindness and to the Jew, there are no racial or religious borders in true charity. The highest form of charity is anonymous, showing a genuine compassion for others and rejecting the desire for self-aggrandizement. Not unmindful of the human tendency to pride and self-promotion, Jewish teaching argues, *“We encourage people to give even if their motive is wrong for though they may do something good for the wrong reason at first, the joy of doing it may lead them to do it for the right reason eventually”*

Therefore we see that study of the Word of God and obedience to it is considered the highest application of worship. True Judaism knows nothing of standing in the synagogue, singing or praying aloud with great enthusiasm but neglecting to incorporate the instructions of

God's word into one's life on a daily basis. To do so would be considered the highest form of treason towards the Almighty and hypocrisy at its zenith.

To sum up, the basic tenets of Judaism are three:

- 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.
- 2) Study His Torah and hold it precious in your life.
- 3) Practice in your life that which you have learned.

Is this so different from what true Christianity should be? Not at all!

What is the Jewish understanding of sin?

Jews do indeed believe in sin as they also believe in the great promise of atonement and forgiveness. They are described in terms of two inclinations called the **yetser hara** (the bad inclination) and the **yetser hatov** (the good inclination.) All are given free will to choose between good and evil. They believe that the commandments of the Torah are not impossibilities although being imperfect human beings, we will necessarily fall short from time to time. But for those who seek to love the Lord with increasing devotion, they believe there will also be moments when one can do exactly what God wills and do it well.

The traditional teaching on sin makes a distinction between those sins against other people and sin against God. Transgressions against our neighbors are forgiven by God, only if we first seek out forgiveness from the people we have wronged. One quickly recalls that Jesus made this understanding a vital part of what we commonly call the Lord's Prayer.

On the other hand, when there is sin against God, only true repentance avails. The Hebrew word *t'shuvah*, which literally means "return" signifies the heart sorrow of one who realizes he has offended a holy and loving Father and his deep regret births a new resolve to devote his energy to walking in greater likeness to his God.

The most vivid definition of sin that has been spoken in recent years by the Rabbis is this: **Sin is temporary insanity**. When asked why this was so, a Rabbi answered: *"To know this wonderful God and all that He has done for you, and then to sin against Him, must mean you have lost your senses - at least temporarily!"*

Do Jews believe in the Grace of God?

While grace is not a word that is often spoken by a Jew, nevertheless Judaism does believe in grace and defines it as *"God's freely given acts of love towards us."* Even a casual reading of the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book, will reveal numerous references in Jewish prayer to the concept of grace as a necessary empowerment from God for holy living. It is consistent with Jewish thought that observing the Torah is impossible without the grace of God enabling the individual.

Do Jews believe in life after death?

Jews have traditionally believed in some kind of life after death although their concepts of exactly what that may be are varied. The Rabbis of the Talmud were firmly convinced of life after death and the resurrection of the righteous when the Messiah arrives. There have been varying speculations about the nature of the reward stored up for the righteous but there is no definitive "doctrine".

The scriptural record of Enoch and Elijah speak clearly of going on to a heavenly dwelling and provide a firm biblical foundation for the Jewish belief in life after death.

What do Jews believe about the coming of the Messiah?

Fervent hope and expectation of the coming of the Messiah, a descendant of the House of David who will redeem all humanity and establish the reign and rule of God on the earth, has been a vital part of Jewish belief and tradition from its earliest days. The word Messiah is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one". This same word is used with reference to the ceremony of being anointed with oil by which kings were chosen in ancient Israel. The Messiah is thus seen as

the pre-eminent of these biblical characters; the final ruler who will usher in the very reign of the Almighty.

Traditional teaching portrays the Messiah as a man of very strong gifts: strong leadership, great wisdom and deep integrity. For generations the promise of the Messiah has been a literal truth to every Jew. Today the Orthodox are the ones who primarily cling to the expectation of this literal fulfilment - the appearance of a personal Messiah. However the expectation varies from one group of Jews to another, the traditional teaching is that the Messiah is a human being, not divine.

What are the major differences between Judaism and Christianity?

As we have progressed through the topics in this chapter, it has become quite apparent that Judaism and Christianity is not so far apart as some have insisted. Certainly the understanding of the Messiah is the most crucial difference since Christians believe firmly in Yahshua of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel who came to give His life as the perfect Lamb of God, fulfilling all the types and shadows of the Old Testament, and through His atoning death and subsequent resurrection, destroying the power of sin over humanity and restoring fellowship between God and His people. To accomplish this total reconciliation and atonement for sin, Christianity teaches and believes the Scriptures support the truth that Yahshua was the only One who could bridge humanity and divinity and make full atonement to satisfy the judgement for sin. On the issue of the divinity of Yahshua, Christians and Jews seriously differ. However, many a Jew today carries a deep respect and admiration for Yahshua as a prophet and a man of God so to say, as some have suggested, that Jews hate Yahshua is false. Not too long ago a good friend of mine from Israel said to me with tears in his eyes, *“I love Jesus; every time I think of him on that cross, I just want to cry for what he went through.”* These are words spoken by a conservative Jew who does not profess Yahshua as Messiah but speaks of Him with great tenderness and love.

Apart from this vital issue, we must agree that the emphasis in Judaism on study of the Word and subsequent obedience to it is more

than desirable for Jew and Christian alike. Would that more of our Christian colleges and universities, seminaries and Bible Schools had such a strong emphasis on character building, holy living and self-discipline according to the Word of God instead of the more common priority that is given to academic accomplishment.

The Church has much to learn from our Jewish brethren, especially regarding the fear of the Lord and the genuine love that produces the good fruit of godliness in daily life - an understanding very dear to the heart of every devout Jew.

Perhaps after our multitudes of doctrines and dogmas, we would do well to return to the words of the prophet quoted by the Rabbinical student of Rabbi Yochanan: “Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly before your God.”

YOUR TURN

1. Why have there arisen such misconceptions in Christianity regarding Judaism?
2. What are the principal tenets of Judaism? What similarities and differences do you find between Judaism and Christianity?
3. Given the Jewish conviction regarding the importance of godly behavior, how does this impact your understanding of appropriately relating to a Jewish friend?