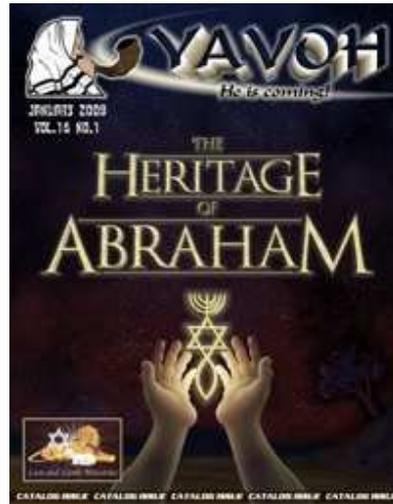


The Heritage of Abraham / January 2009



There is a story told of a father who only had one son left in his family. The father had been successful in his business and had acquired much wealth. He was also very devout and loved the LORD. His son, on the other hand, rejected the faith of his father and wanted only to go and live his own life. He also wanted some of his father's wealth, but his father had refused, fearing that he would depart from him completely.

The time came that the father passed away and the son met with the executor of the estate.

"Your father instructed me to give you this." It was his father's Bible.

The son was very angry and left with the Bible. Years passed. The son married, raised his own children, and worked hard. Then one day, he was going through some old things and discovered his father's Bible. Opening it for the first time, he discovered an envelope. The contents of the envelope directed him how to receive his father's business and wealth.

Many believers today have a father from the past who has left them an inheritance that they know nothing about. His name is Abraham and inside the pages of the Bible are the contents of that inheritance.

Abram was the first Hebrew. He "crossed the river" and came into a land promised by God. He was different from the local people, so they referred to him as "Hebrew" meaning "from across the river." God promised Abram that he would become the father of many people, that kings and other nations would come from him. In the course of events, his name was changed to "Abraham," meaning the "father of many nations." Thus, Abraham began to develop an inheritance that would be for all of his descendants. In fact, the Scripture says that this inheritance would be large enough that "all the families of the earth" would receive the blessing.

Today, Christians have heard of Abraham, but to them he is merely a part of the Old Testament, how Israel and the Jews came to be. Since Christians are from the Gentile nations and part of the church, they do not at all see themselves as part of Israel or the Jews in particular. This stereotype is re-enforced by Christian and Jewish theology. The world is divided into Jews and Gentiles. Some Gentiles are Christians. The two don't mix, except when a Messianic believer shows up...

Back to Abraham - Abraham was not a Jew. He was a wandering Aramean who became a Hebrew. All Hebrews are not Jews. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not Jews. The first Jew who was not even called that was Judah, the son of Jacob. "Jew" is a shortened term for "Judah." The first use of the word "Jew" in the Scripture does not appear until the book of Esther (2:5). The prophet Jeremiah also used the term (Jeremiah 34:5) in reference to the Hebrew brethren living in the land of Judea under the authority of the House of Judah. The Gospel of John uses the term identifying those Hebrews who live in the land of Judea at Jerusalem.

Let's get our definitions straight. Jews are a segment of the Hebrew people, descending from Abraham. Therefore, all Jews are Hebrews, but not all Hebrews are Jews. Israel, a name given to Jacob, represents all of the tribes of the children of Israel. The "children of Israel" were never called "Jews." "Jews" are a small segment of Israel. Therefore, all Jews are part of Israel, but not all of Israel are Jews.

This is an important distinction because Messianic believers are not all Jews. Some Jews are Messianic believers. I, myself, am of Jewish descent. My birth name from my fathers is Judah. Many leaders in the Messianic movement are also Jews, thus the term "Messianic Jews." However, not every Messianic is Jewish nor trying to be Jewish.

When a person becomes a new Messianic believer, because of the stereotyping, many Christians assume that observing Sabbath, keeping kosher, and learning about the Torah is the process of becoming Jewish. It is an understandable thought process, but it is not correct. All of those things have to do with Hebrew things and "the children of Israel."

So, who exactly are the true Hebrews and the true "children of Israel?" With everyone mixed throughout the world through the many generations who were exiled into the nations before us, who can say who are Hebrews, Israel, or Jews for that matter? Actually, this is not as difficult as it might appear. The Jews are a pretty distinctive ethnic community. Hitler didn't have any problem defining who the Jews were. The question of who else is part of Israel or the Hebrew people is a bit more debatable. But the Scripture doesn't have a problem with the "mixed multitude," which is what the "children of Israel" were called when they left Egypt on the exodus. Nor do the Scriptures specify that it can only be the physical descendants of a particular father or mother. The Apostle Paul refers to Israel as the "children of promise," those who can descend from Abraham but who lay claim primarily to the promises of God given to Abraham.

Based on Paul's definition, he says that a believer of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ in Greek) is the "seed" of Abraham through which "all the families of the earth" would be blessed. New Messianic believers are not trying to become Jews. They are returning to their Abrahamic and "children of promise" birthright. They have not left their faith in the Messiah; they have instead chosen to endorse it the way Abraham and Moses expressed it, and how Yeshua fulfilled it.

What exactly did God promise to Abraham and his descendants? What have we inherited that we have been ignorant of, hidden in the pages of our Bible?

God promised Abraham the "promised land." This is the same "promised land" given to Israel, "a land of milk and honey." Today, we know that land to be the land of Israel. He also promised him that those who blessed him would be blessed and those who cursed him would be cursed. God also promised that through Abraham all of the families of the earth would receive this blessing.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 12:1-3

These words and promises are profound. But this is only the beginning. God promised more.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great."

Genesis 15:1

At that time, Abram had no children. The only member of his house that could possibly receive anything from him was his faithful servant Eliezer of Damascus. But God said that "one coming from his body" would be his heir.

And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:5-6

God promised that Abraham's heirs would be more numerous than the stars that he could see. Abraham's faith in God's promises also revealed something more

than a large number of descendants, it defined our faith in God and the righteousness of God.

Let me quickly summarize for you what God really did with Abraham in defining our heritage from Abraham.

Faith is counted for Righteousness; Righteousness has kissed Justice; Justice demands Sacrifice; and with Sacrifice you receive Salvation. These are common terms referred to by the Messiah in His ministry, but how can we know what they mean?

Abraham believed the promises of God (the land, the blessings, children and heirs). This is the definition of *faith* – believing the promises of God. *Righteousness* is defined as “doing the right thing.” What is the right thing? Answer: believing what God has said. *Righteousness* and *Justice* are inseparable; they are intimate friends. *Justice* is *Righteousness* balanced with mercy and truth. *Justice* demands payment or a substitution in order to bring about resolution. *Sacrifice* is something of value that is given as payment or substitution. Once the *Sacrifice* is given and accepted, *Salvation* is received. Salvation is life.

Now how did Abraham teach us all of that? You can know the answer to how Faith and Righteousness were taught by referring to Genesis 12 and 15. Now, consider this: what he taught about justice, sacrifice, and salvation.

Abraham had lunch with three angels (it was actually the LORD in the form of three men). After the lunch, God revealed that He was going to Sodom and Gomorrah to render Justice. Abraham appealed to God based on the number of Righteous people there. You will remember that Abraham succeeded in negotiating to the number of ten Righteous. Righteousness and Justice are intimate friends; they are inseparable. Justice must consider Righteousness to go forward, just as God considered the requests of Abraham.

When did Abraham teach us about *Sacrifice*? After Abraham had received his long-awaited son Isaac, God instructed Abraham to take his son to the place where He would show him and sacrifice him back to God. Abraham followed God’s instructions in faith and took Isaac, the wood, and the fire to Mount Moriah (Jerusalem of today). On the way, Isaac commented about the lack of a Sacrifice. This is when Abraham revealed a promise of God to us.

And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

Genesis 22:7-8

The lamb that was to be provided by God is called “the lamb of God.” This is a clear promise by Abraham to his son (and us) that the “lamb of God” would be a substitute for all of us (Abraham, Isaac, and all who follow).

As you know, the rest of the story goes on to explain how God stopped Abraham and Isaac was spared (Salvation). Another sacrifice was substituted. A ram whose head was caught in the thorns of a thicket was offered. Abraham summarized this great promise by stating that the very place where Isaac was taken would be the same place where God would fulfill His promise.

And Abraham called the name of that place the LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”

Genesis 22:14

The Messiah (a promised son) came to us as the “lamb of God.” God provided Himself to be the Sacrifice (the payment for the Justice required). Like the ram, the Messiah’s head was in a crown of thorns as well. He offered Himself in the very same place – Jerusalem, Mount Moriah.

The Apostle Paul summarized all this taught by Abraham by saying that our justification is by the example of Abraham, by faith. He simplified the process by saying that we are saved by faith through grace. But to get from Faith to Salvation, you must go through Righteousness, Justice, and Sacrifice. All of these too were accomplished by the Messiah (by the Grace of God).

Before we move on, we need to mention a couple of other things that Abraham also taught us. Hospitality leads to Intercession. Abraham’s works were hospitality. This is what enabled Abraham to intercede on behalf of the Righteous in Sodom. Still further Abraham showed us that obedience is what leads us to the blessings.

Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Genesis 22:15-18

The heritage of Abraham is about the land, blessings, and the Messiah. It is also about Faith, Righteousness, Justice, Sacrifice, and Salvation. So how does Torah and the Law fit into all of this? Answer: the Torah is defined as the “instruction” of Abraham (the promises and principles). It also is our instruction in Righteousness, answering the question “what is the right thing to do?”

Because of *Faith*, we want to do the right thing. But we need to be instructed in the basics from God. We need a straightforward definition from God to know how to cooperate with one another as to what is clean and unclean, holy and profane, pure and impure in God's eyes. Without these simple definitions, we cannot do this together. Apparently, these definitions were understood by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But since there are more of us now, we need a common set of instructions. This the reason why the Law (translators changed "instructions" to "law") was given to all of Israel through Moses. I will refer to it as the "Torah."

From Genesis chapter one, In the Beginning, the Torah defines man and animal. It defines time (a day, a month, and a year) by the orbits of the Earth, Moon, and Sun. A week is defined by the Sabbath (the last day of the week). It defines the relationship we have with God as our Creator. It also defines the relationship of a man and his wife. These are basic elements to all that follows.

The Torah defines sin and transgression. It also explains what is an acceptable substitute for payment of a sin or transgression. The Torah also teaches us about grace and mercy. These terms are not New Testament terms. Grace is receiving something you did not deserve and mercy is not receiving something you did deserve.

The Torah also teaches us how to come before God and worship Him. It explains how to offer a gift to God and how to celebrate life with God. It was Moses who first built the Tabernacle with the instructions given in the Torah.

The centerpiece of the Tabernacle and our fellowship with God is the construction of an altar. Abraham and other patriarchs worshiped and did business with God by way of erecting altars. Altars are still an important part of our faith, despite what any churchman might argue.

This is probably one of the strongest reasons why most Christians have been told not to be a part of Israel and the Law of Moses anymore. The altar is the sacrificial platform, the table where God does business with man. The Torah explains altars, how they are made, how they are used, and what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Every table has a protocol. There are rules and they define what is holy and unholy. At my Grandmother's table, I learned that elbows on the table were unholy, just like you did. I learned how I was to eat properly and how to use my napkin. I learned how to wash my hands and offer thanks first and to excuse myself upon leaving. The rules of a dinner table are similar in intent to the rules of an altar before God. Yet, an altar to God has something even more powerful about it. It is God's ownership symbol of the world. Maybe you didn't know it but the words of Psalms 24 are said first over an altar to God and every first day of the week.

(A Psalm of David.) The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers. Who may ascend into the hill of the

LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Thy face— even Jacob. Selah.

Psalms 24:1-6

King David wrote this psalm and is the man responsible for purchasing the land upon which the permanent tabernacle (the temple) with the permanent altar was erected. This is also the same place and altar that the Lamb of God fulfilled the promise given to Abraham and his descendants.

Those who teach against the temple in Jerusalem and altar service, while proclaiming the Messiah, are like the son who rejected his father's inheritance (the envelope) in his Bible. They work hard and miss out on the real wealth of their father.

Messianic believers have discovered the heritage of Abraham. They have discovered that it clearly enriches their faith in the Messiah, causing their faith to grow to much greater heights of understanding and joy. They have also learned about the altar in their hearts built by the Messiah. Another example of that enrichment can be illustrated in keeping the Passover.

Passover is one of the Appointed Times of the LORD. It is a memorial to when the children of Israel left Egypt. Moses instructed all Hebrews (the children of Israel) who left Egypt to keep the Passover.

Just to review quickly: This commandment was not just given to the Jews. It was given to all those who believed God and put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. It was for all those who wanted to be passed from death to life. According to Scripture, the children of Israel were not just the physical descendants of Jacob (the original 70 that went down to Egypt). The Scripture says that a "mixed multitude" came out of Egypt. This included slaves from other nations taken by Egypt including some Egyptians who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is who the Torah was given to. This is who is commanded to keep the Passover.

If you believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob then the Torah was given to you. It is not the exclusive property or right of just the Jewish people. *And if any man tells you different, he is a liar.*

A traditional Passover Seder (which means *order*) includes four cups of wine, unleavened bread and other food elements representing the story of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Two of the four cups are offered before the meal while the remaining two are after. The cups are named: Sanctification, Instruction, Redemption, and Praise. The cup of Sanctification separates the Passover meal from all other meals. The cup of Instruction is the retelling of the story to our children about how God delivered us. The cup of Redemption explains what the

Lamb did for us in giving up His life and paying for our freedom from slavery. The cup of Praise is directed toward God with thanksgiving and joy.

Most Christians do not understand this but the cup the Church calls *Communion* is the cup of Redemption from the Passover. Churchmen have substituted their traditions for the commandments of God, pushing the teachings and messages of Moses and the Messiah away because they were too “Jewish.” The truth is that Passover is part of the heritage of Abraham. But here is something more significant than just understanding the elements of Passover. On the same date that Abraham received the promise of a son who would come from his own body and that his descendants would go down to Egypt and be brought back by the LORD the Passover would be commanded to be observed. Moses recounts that it was 430 years to the day that the promise was given that Israel left Egypt.

And it came about at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:41

Then Moses instructed the commandment of Passover based on the day when the promise was given to Abraham and fulfilled by God.

And Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten. On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.”

Exodus 13:3-4,10

Passover is part of the heritage of Abraham (the promises of God). This is the context and background for the Messiah to fulfill the Passover for us (the children of promise).

There are three ceremonial pieces of bread eaten at the Passover Seder. They are stacked together forming the “Unity.” The first piece is eaten by the leader of the Passover, the father. The second piece is broken with the best part wrapped in white linen and stored as the dessert (best part of the Passover). The third piece is eaten with the bitter herbs to “comfort” the taste. But let’s focus a bit more on the second piece. It is called the *Afikoman* which means “it is fulfilled” or “it is finished.” The Afikoman, wrapped in the linen napkin, is “buried.” Actually, they place it away from the Passover table and put a pillow over it. The pillow is called the “stone.”

The children play a traditional game at Passover. Sometime during the meal, the children remove the Afikoman leaving the cloth and pillow. After the meal, the father calls for the resurrection of the Afikoman, for the bread to come forth to be the best part of the meal. It is then reported to the father or leader that the “stone has been moved and all that was found was the linen cloth.” Messianics understand that this tradition is actually a picture of the Messiah and His disciples. The Messiah said that His body would be broken for us. It was. He was wrapped in the cloth, He was buried, the stone was put in place, and then... the stone was moved and all that was found was the cloth. This truly is the bread of the resurrection. Maybe this why Yeshua’s words were “afikoman” – it is finished.

Messianics keep the Passover to remember their ancestors coming out of Egypt according the promise given to Abraham and to commune with the Lamb of God as He became the bread of life and the cup of Redemption for us.

The Apostle Paul emphatically taught, just as Moses instructed us to tell our sons, that all of our fathers came out of Egypt. The commandment actually says that when I lead a Passover Seder that I am to tell my son that I, personally, in the house with the lamb’s blood, came out of Egypt, was under the cloud, crossed the Red Sea, etc.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was the Messiah.

I Corinthians 10:1-4

And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, “What is this?” then you shall say to him, “With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

Exodus 13:14

Passover is a one-day observance filled with heritage and rich spiritual meaning. Instead of teaching our children as God instructed us, the church brethren has them color eggs, according to a pagan (non-Christian) tradition.

During Yeshua’s ministry, there was in conflict with the religious leaders of His day. They took issue with Yeshua when He did not follow their traditions or teach their precepts. Yeshua explained that they had departed from Moses and the commandments of God (Torah).

Many Christians think that the religious leaders were following the Law (Torah) and that Yeshua was departing from it. It is the exact opposite. Yeshua was keeping

the Torah and doing what it said. The Pharisees and Sadducees were doing their thing. While speaking to them, Yeshua said the following:

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

John 5:45-47

Yeshua said that believing in Moses was the same as believing in the Messiah. He said that you would not understand His teachings if you did not first understand the teachings of Moses. The first teachings of Moses are about Abraham. Maybe this is why Yeshua emphasized His background with Abraham when arguing with some other religious Jews a little bit later.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Yeshua said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am."

John 8:56-58

We know that the Messiah is the pinnacle of our faith in God. He is the promised Son of God and the Lamb of God. But what is the foundation of our faith? It all begins with our father Abraham.

Let me conclude this article by going back to the story I shared at the first with the father and the son. Do you know how rich people in the world generally get their riches? Very few actually go out and earn it in their life times. Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, created his wealth from his software company. He is an exception. But, where do the vast majority of other rich people get their riches?

They inherit it. Had the son listened to his father and followed his counsel, he would have received it much quicker than he did.

I don't know where your walk is with the LORD. Maybe you are seeking the LORD the best you know how. I would recommend that you seek the Heritage of Abraham. He received a reward that was exceedingly great. He has passed it on to us if we will simply look in the book for our inheritance.

Monte

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