

Yovel

10th issue / August 2019

"When once the existence of God guaranteed the existence of Israel, today the continued existence of the people Israel guarantees the existence of God."

Emil Fackenheim

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ISRAEL, THE GOD-WRESTLER

SIGNS OF THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

Part VI

A moment in prayer in the wilderness of Ein Gedi. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

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"Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan."

(Lev. 25:9-10)

In Hebrew the fiftieth year is called **Yovel**, a celebration year, jubilee. It is the year of the blowing of the ram's horn. Thus Yovel got its name from the shofar announcing the beginning of the year.

The sound of the Yovel declares the beginning of a new era, the era of God's favour towards Israel. In Hebrew the word yovel can be read in two ways. Either "yovel", which means a ram or a ram's

horn like a shofar, or in passive voice "yuval", is led or was led, like in Isaiah 53: "he was led like a lamb to the slaughter... for the transgression of my people he was punished."

Like a lamb which has a desire to follow its shepherd humbly, to be led, "yuval".

The three names of the shofar are like a road signs on our salvation path: **Keren**, which is the name including the personal calling, rose up in smoke with the sacrificed ram instead of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). On Mount Sinai the Israelites heard the sound of that horn, **Shofar**, for the first time when it called the people to make the change, a turn a round, teshuva.

The nation learned the sound of the shofar when The Lord himself blew the horn (Ex. 19:16).

From that point on the Israelites

were commanded to blow themselves on the shofar (Lev. 25:9), until The Sovereign Lord himself blows it, this time the shofar called **Yovel** (Zech. 9:14).

Then He will announce freedom, liberation, a jubilee to all nations, to all of those who will hear His voice.

Yeshua the Messiah, Jesus Christ, started his ministry in the synagogue declaring with the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

Proclaiming the jubilee, which is The Messiah himself.

In Him is the heritage restored, the one we lost in the garden of Eden. In Him is the essence of Yovel. (<http://torah-art.net>)

Markus Nurmesniemi



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Editorial

Europe is Limping towards the Sunset



Guy Millière writes on the site of Gatestone Institute how France is slowly becoming the greatest threat to freedom of speech in the world ("France Slowly Sinking into Chaos, 8.3.2019). He refers to the law passed by the French parliament which gives the police the power to arrest anybody they might suspect of having any intention to take part in a manifestation. The arrest is valid without court decision and the party concerned has no right of appeal. On July 14, the Bastille Day, three "yellow vest" leaders were arrested "for preventive cause" on grounds of this law. The yellow vest manifestation was stopped immediately after it had started at the end of the parade.

The same day, however, anarchists were given a free hand to set in fire and destroy infrastructure. Arabs, seemingly celebrating the victory of the Algerian football team, emerged from the suburbs shouting "Death to France" and "France belongs to us". The police didn't do much to interfere, all that they did was to watch and prevent the event from spreading out.

Two days earlier a group of people consisting of hundreds of illegal African immigrants made its way into the Panthéon. This is the church where many French prominent persons have been buried. Inside the Panthéon the invaders declared the birth of the "Black Vest movement". They demanded the regularization of status of all illegal immigrants as well as free housing for everybody. The police showed up but did not interfere. Just a couple of persons were arrested for having insulted the police. As for the "yellow vests", they have risen against the fuel tax and other decisions that increase costs of living made by the French President Emmanuel Macron. The protesters think that the French government has been favouring wealthy people at the expense of others. They have also demanded the resignation of President Macron.

The yellow vests are the thorn in President Macron's side. In June, the French Parliament passed another law which permits to pass a severe punishment to anybody who says or writes anything that might be considered as "hate talk". The American legal scholar Jonathan Turley finds this new law so vague that "France has now become one of the biggest international threats to freedom of speech".

The main concern of President Macron and the French government is not the ever increasing anarchism, general discontent (according to the survey of December 2018, 72% of the French support the yellow vests) or islamization and its consequences. Neither are they worried about the deminishing presence of Christianity. Their greatest concern is the climate change.

One cannot but wonder at the tactics of the French police who stop the gatherings of reasonably calm manifestators, but let anarchists and radical Muslims rage in front of the limiting police force.

Christianity is vanishing at high pace from the country. A majority of non-muslim French citizens identify themselves as other than Christians. Every week we read reports on vandalized churches, while the wide audience stays indifferent. During the first half of the year 2019 as many as 22 churches were burnt to ashes. There is no need to even mention antisemitism here; in France, like in the rest of Europe, persecutions of the Jews have increased rapidly.

The case of Kobili Traore and a Jewish family may be taken as an example. Kobili Traore murdered Sarah Halimi in 2017, chanting suras from the Koran and shouting that the Jews are "sheitan" (Satan in Arabic). He was pronounced not guilty of murder. Traore had evidently smoked cannabis before committing the murder, which, according to Le Télégramme, caused the court to pronounce Traore not guilty of murder. Traore will soon be released from prison, and Guy Millière asks, with reason, what will happen if he chooses to smoke cannabis again?

Three weeks after the murder of Sarah Halimi, three members of a Jewish family were attacked. Le Figaro writes that they were tortured and held hostage in their home by five men. These men said that "Jews have money" and "Jews must pay". The men were arrested, all of them Muslims according to the paper. The judge declared that their actions were "not antisemitic".

President Macron is not interested in order and discipline. Most Arabs and Africans live in no-go zones, apart from the rest of the population. The presence of other than Arab and African people is getting day by day less tolerated in these areas. They don't identify

themselves as French, except when they claim that France belongs to them. According to Mr Millière, the reports show that their great majority has rejected France and the Western values. An increasing number of them put religion before nationality, which leads to radicalism and fanaticism.

President Macron, however, has chosen another way. According to Le Figaro his aim is to establish Islam permanently in France. Some three months ago the Muslim Association for Islam of France (AMIF) was created. One of its line of activities is to work for the cultural expansion of Islam, and "fight against anti-muslim racism". Another line is in charge of the education of Imams and the building of mosques.

This coming autumn "Council of Imams of France" will be founded. Guy Mellière claims that the leaders of AMIF are, or were until recently, members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood has been declared a terrorist organization in Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – but not in France.

France has been seen as the flagship of liberty, fraternity and equality in Europe and globally. Now that flagship is sinking, and it is taking the entire Europe with it. This does not come as a surprise to us, for signs of it have been for all to see in the Nordic countries, especially in Sweden where social stability is being shaken in some parts of the country. This will have a direct impact on the relationship of Europe and Israel, as those who know their Bible are well aware.

"At the root of the collapse of the West there is a cultural and identity crisis. The West no longer knows what it is, because it does not know and does not want to know what shaped it, what constituted it, what it was and what it is. (...) This self-asphyxiation leads naturally to a decadence that opens the way to new barbaric civilizations." (An African Cardinal Robert Sarah, The Evening Comes, and already the Light Darkens)

In the midst of all this we hear the comforting words of our Lord: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Be blessed,
Markus Nurmesniemi, Editor-in-chief



When the Cross Became a Sword

The History of Persecution by the Church



Concrete columns on the shores of Haifa, kind of like the three crosses on the Calvary. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Written by:
John D. Garr, Ph.D.

The first three centuries of the Common Era were fraught with danger for both Jews and Christians. After the debacle of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, the Jewish population of Palestine was decimated; however, Jews in the Diaspora learned to take what Rome would give them as a *religio licita* (1, the official recognition granted to Judaism because of its status as an ancient religion). They were generally tolerated with at least some degree of respect. Christians, on the other hand, were attacked viciously by the Roman authorities, with some emperors scapegoating them for their own mistakes and shortcomings and generally using them to vent their anger against subversives in the empire. Because it was a new faith, Christianity

was not considered to be a legitimate religion by Rome. Under the Caesars Nero, Domitian, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Maximus, multiplied thousands of Christians were executed by crucifixion. Others surrendered their lives in the Roman Games where they fell to gladiators' swords or were torn asunder by wild animals—all for the entertainment of an increasingly bloodthirsty Roman populace.

As the fourth century began, however, a dramatic shift began to occur. In AD 312, Constantine I, who would later be called Constantine the Great, was preparing for the Battle of the Milvian Bridge against his bitter rival, Maxentius. As he looked up toward the sun, he saw a cross of light above the sun with the Greek words *en tou, tw ni, ka* (*en toto nika*),

meaning "In this, conquer," (1 displayed above the cross. Apparently Constantine did not understand what he had seen. On the following night, however, he had a dream in which Jesus explained to him that he was to use the sign of the cross to conquer his enemies. The next day, with the sign of the cross now displayed on his armaments, Constantine won the battle handily, enabling him to consolidate his power over the western half of the Roman Empire. Then, because of his vision and ensuing victory, Constantine became the first Roman emperor to accept nominal conversion to Christianity. (2

At that time, Constantine was being advised in religious matters by Lucius Caecilius Lactantius, an early Christian author, who recorded the story of Constantine's vision in his *De Mortibus Persecu-*

torum. (3 With Lactantius' influence, Constantine legalized Christian worship in 313 with what has been called the Edict of Milan, and he decreed that Christians should be treated benevolently in the western half of the Roman Empire. (4 Then, in 325, Constantine presided over the Nicene Council where he attempted to settle debates over theology and Christology that had long raged in the church. In this instance, the pontifex maximus of the Roman world actually sat in judgment over the debates of the church's leaders!

At that time, after enduring three hundred years of unrelenting persecution, Christianity experienced an amazing transformation from an illegitimate religion that was constantly tormented into an officially recognized religion. Finally in 380, Nicene Christianity

was proclaimed the official religion of the Roman Empire when the Edict of Thessalonica was confirmed by Emperor Theodosius I. Very quickly, the leadership of the church descended into plots of political intrigue and theological infighting in which Christians persecuted other Christians—and often violently—for their beliefs and practices. The Arian (5 and Sabellian (6 controversies created deep divisions within Christianity, some of which remain to this time.

The famous dictum that Cicero used to describe the Greeks became a perfect depiction of Christianity at that time: “Mere logomachy is the bane of these pitiful Greeks who thirst for contention rather than for truth.” Pitched battles were waged over literally one iota in the conflict between two Greek words, *o`moiou,sioj*—*homoiousios* (“of a similar substance”) and *o`moou,sioj*—*homoousios* (“of the same substance), as they related to the nature of Christ in relationship to God.

In this case, Christianity was divided literally by the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet! Debate over whether, in trinitarian theology, the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only or from both Father and Son, the so-called filioque (8 controversy, produced the schism of Eastern and Western Christianity that has continued to the present day. (9

It is easy to see that Christianity became so preoccupied with theological technicalities that it drifted from the vision that Jesus had charted for the community he established.

When Christianity was recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire, it essentially established hegemony over its former persecutors. The power was heady, giving bishops and church leaders a kind of swagger. Theological and Christological controversies became wedge issues with which church leaders tried to consolidate power and influence. In effect, official Chris-

tianity became little more than a religiopolitical machine that often placed greater emphasis on church politics and on efforts to dominate civil politics than it did on demonstrating true biblical faith and virtue. (10

Tranquil Times

During the time that Christians were preoccupied with their newfound power and their intense debates, battles, and even armed conflicts over theological issues, the Jewish people enjoyed a time of relative peace which continued through the rest of the first millennium of the Common Era. Rodney Stark confirms that the five centuries from AD 500–1000 were relatively tranquil times for the Jews with only one confirmed instance of Christian anti-Jewish violence in 554 in Clermont when many Jews were killed, and five hundred accepted forced baptism. (11

Léon Poliakov notes that during this time, “Kings, nobles, and bishops granted Jews a broad autonomy. . . . Talmudic scholarship flowered again on the banks of the Rhine and the Seine at the very period when it was falling

into decay in Babylonia. . . . [The Jews] continued to mix freely with the Christian populations and to live on excellent terms with them.” (12

For those Jews who had retreated into Europe in an effort to escape the onslaught of the Roman violence in Palestine, living in relative peace must have seemed odd and virtually like experiencing life from the dead. The tranquility was to be short lived, however, for danger and death were lurking on the horizon of the immediate future that would bring centuries of misery to the Jewish people.

Christians, whose spiritual forebears had suffered such unimaginable persecution, torture, and murder at the hands of the Roman Empire, had become accustomed to the power and privilege that they had previously enjoyed when the church had learned to ride the iron-toothed Roman monster.

Instead of infusing the empire with Christian grace and mercy, church leaders had assumed the power and perquisites that civil rulers and pagan priests had enjoyed for centuries. They had be-

come experts in the political intrigue of the remnants of ancient Roman dominion, for the church itself had become essentially little more than a political empire, (13 and it was intent upon establishing the kingdom of God on the edge of the sword if necessary so that Christianity could fulfill its perceived mission to dominate the entire world.

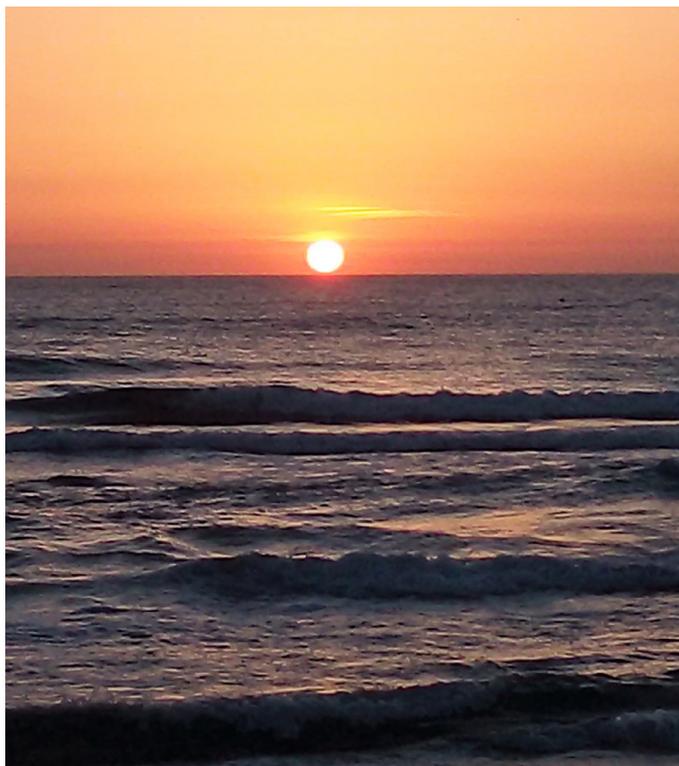
The times were changing, however. Christians who had expended their energies fighting one another and advancing the City of God (14 would soon be blindsided by a whirling dervish of political and religious fervor from a totally unexpected source. Then, the church would turn its fury upon those new infidels—and that could mean only one thing: trouble for the Jews.

Onward, Christian Soldiers!

During the seventh century AD, a new religion had arisen in the Middle East. Having been rejected by the Jews and the Christians when he sought inclusion among them, an Arabian named Mohammed created his own religion, Islam, which spread across the Middle East and northern Africa, usually being advanced on the edge of the sword.

Shortly after the turn of the millennium, a group of Muslims that was led by Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the very basilica that Constantine, at his mother Helena’s request, had erected to enshrine the site of the tomb in which Jesus was interred before his resurrection. When word of this desecration reached Europe, Christian passions became inflamed. Even though a measure of calm was restored when al-Hakim was assassinated by his political rivals, it was not long before new rulers, the Turks, seized control of the Middle East.

Unlike their predecessors, the Turkish Muslims were fundamentalists who saw the stream of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem as



Sunset at Haifa beach. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

easy marks for extortion, torture, and even slavery. Because of their fundamentalism, they discounted the general economic benefit of thousands of pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Reports of the restrictions that these Turks placed on pilgrimages and the atrocities that they regularly carried out against Christians enraged Europeans so much that when Byzantine emperor Comnenus appealed to them to rescue the embattled Orthodox Christians, Pope Urban II determined that it was time for action.

On November 27, 1095, the pope made an impassioned oration to a throng of people at the Council of Clermont calling for vengeance against the infidels—namely, the Muslims. He spoke of the atrocities, murders, and rapes that had been inflicted upon Christians by Muslims, and he stressed the fact that Christianity's holiest shrine was being continually desecrated by being under Muslim control. Urban ordered both nobles and base, rich and poor to mount a campaign to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslim Turks, (15 promising that "whoever goes from pure devotion and not desire for earthly profit to liberate the Church of God in Jerusalem, his journey will be considered a substitute for all penance." (16

The stage was set. The First Crusade to liberate the Holy Land from the Muslim "infidels" (1095–1099) was underway.

With passions running high against the Muslims who controlled Jerusalem and Christianity's holiest sites, someone came up with a bright idea which gained increasing traction throughout Europe: "Why should we travel thousands of miles to kill infidels when we have infidels living right among us—the Jews." (17

This very diabolical idea immediately touched off the Rhineland massacres of Jews,(18 which were spearheaded by Christian leaders like Peter the Hermit and

Count Emicho,(19 and it also produced other violent attacks against Jews in other parts of Europe.

The conduct of these and other "Christian soldiers" was reprehensible at best and downright abominable at worst. Along with others like them, they pillaged, raped, and murdered their way across virtually all parts of Europe, through Constantinople, on to the Holy Land, and right into Jerusalem, as well. In short, this Crusade was "a hideous chronicle of human suffering, fanaticism, and cruelty,"(20 and the Jews in its path were among the victims who suffered the most from the mob violence inflicted upon them.

No one was safe from the Crusaders' blood lust and greed. They were simply not satisfied with fulfilling their quest to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslims. Their fury was carried out on virtually everyone and everything in their path. Over the course of all the crusades, these European Christians destroyed and stole so much Eastern Church treasure that Orthodox Christianity remained impoverished for centuries thereafter.(21

The toll on the Jews was equally, if not exponentially more devastating. As they traversed along the way to Jerusalem, the Christian soldiers regularly pillaged, tortured, raped, and murdered Jews and others. Then, when the Crusaders finally took Jerusalem in 1099, all the surviving Jewish men, women, and children of the city were herded together into the great synagogue and burned alive while the Crusaders, with their crosses held high (21 marched around the burning building and drowned out the Jewish screams and cries of agony with their chanting of the a cappella anthem, "Christ, We Adore Thee."(21

After the news of such atrocities reached Europe and after it was calculated that over 5,000 Jews

had been slaughtered in Europe during the First Crusade, Pope Calixtus II issued a bull entitled *Sicut Judaeis* (the "Constitution for the Jews"), which was designed to protect the Jews by forbidding Christians from coercing them to convert, from harming them, from taking their property, and from interfering in their festivals on pain of excommunication.(22

This and further efforts by popes and bishops went largely unheeded, however, for the seeds of deep-seated hatred had already been imbedded in the Christian heart. This antipathy and utter contempt for the Jews demanded revenge against them for the crime of deicide against Jesus.

The Second Crusade (1146-1149) was a miserable failure which resulted in the defeat of the armies of both Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany by the Seljuq Turks. It also led to the fall of Jerusalem and set the stage for the Third Crusade (1188-1192).

This Crusade, also known as the King's Crusade, featured the Europeans' attempt to reconquer the Holy Land from Saladin. Though they conquered most of Palestine, the Crusaders' effort to retake Jerusalem was thwarted. Ultimately, King Richard the Lionheart finalized a treaty with Saladin that left Jerusalem in Muslim control but allowed Christian pilgrims and merchants to visit the city.

Then, in 1202, a fourth Crusade was then launched with the goal of retaking Jerusalem; however, this quest was diverted to Constantinople where soldiers, after breaching the walls of the city, were given three days in which to rage through the streets, raping, killing, and pillaging.(23

Dean Eyerly notes concerning this event that "Pope Innocent III . . . could not conceal his satisfaction when he contemplated this victory over the Eastern Orthodox Church, which had refused to submit to the Western Pope."(24

The destruction of Constantinople was one of the final acts of the Great Schism that divided Eastern Orthodoxy from Roman Catholicism and severely weakened the Christian presence in the Middle East.

Finally, the last crusade, called the Shepherds' Crusade, was launched in 1320. It was led by a teenage shepherd who, with his brigands, marched through southern France, attacking everything in sight but focusing on Jews, including the 300 who were killed at Montclus. Hundreds of other Jews suffered violence or perished in the utter madness that was masked as righteous indignation.

All in all, the Crusades, though glamorized in Western Christian lore, were some of the vilest examples of non-Christian conduct in ecclesiastical history. With the complicity and downright encouragement of popes and bishops, Christian soldiers launched unbridled campaigns of violence and mayhem, torturing and murdering countless Muslims, Jews, and other Christians. The violence that was so specifically targeted against the Jews was a prime example of Antisemitism at its worst.

In his *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism*, Rodney Stark gives a detailed—but chilling—outline of the Crusader's violent acts against the Jews in the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries.(25

The record of the history is indelible. It has left a scar on the face of the Christian church that will never be eradicated, one which should demand that a cry should forever echo through the ivy-covered ecclesiastical and academic halls of Christianity: "Never again!"

Black Death

No sooner had the Crusades and their dreadful toll on Jewish life ended than another specter arose and swept across the face of

Europe, again bringing death and destruction to the Jews. The cause of this outbreak of Antisemitism was the Black Death, one of the most devastating pandemics in human history that ultimately resulted in the death of as much as 60% of Europe's entire population.(26

This malady was also called "bubonic plague," after the Greek word *boubon*, which means "groin," because the bacterial infection from the *Yersinia pestis* enterobacteriaceae attacks the lymph nodes, particularly in the armpits and groin.

The plague is highly aggressive and extremely painful, for the lymph nodes rapidly become necrotic, leading to the decomposition of the skin while the victim is still alive. Death is almost inevitable, and it follows in very short order after a person has been infected with the bacteria.

In 1347, the disease that had originated in Mongolia made its way to Europe, carried by fleas that infested the rats that were common on merchant ships in that day.(27

Because sanitation was not a particularly important issue at that time, people were easily infected by bites from plague-carrying fleas. With healthy people cont-

racting the plague and dying in agony within days, terror and confusion swept across Europe, and people began to look everywhere for someone or something to blame. "The horrors of the pestilence . . . unleashed humanity's darkest impulses."(28

And it was not long before the long dark finger of death pointed directly at the great scapegoat of history, the Jewish people, and they were marked for violence, mayhem, and murder.

Jews were accused of poisoning the wells of Christians. Leaders of cities proclaimed that the plague was not natural but of "human artifice," and they blamed "evil men, sons of the Devil," a popular designation for the Jews.(29

One German Franciscan monk, Hermann Gigas, wrote in 1349, "Some say . . . the Jews planned to wipe out all the Christians with poison and had poisoned wells and springs everywhere."(30 Christian political and religious leaders alleged that in order to complete their conspiracy against Christians, the Jews "used black magic to concoct the plague-causing poison from such ingredients as frogs, lizards, spiders, the hearts of murdered Christians, and the skin of a basilisk, a mythical and highly deadly snake."(31 Another factor that contributed

to the suspicion that Jews were the agents of the Black Death was the fact that the Jewish population generally "did not use water from the common wells of towns and villages."(32

Additionally, Medieval cities were filthy places without sewers or garbage collection, making them perfect environments for rats and other vermin which were allowed to live in close contact with humans.(33

This was also a time when most of the population of Europe, including the wealthy and powerful, "viewed bathing as unnecessary and even unhealthy and rarely washed their bodies, clothes, or bedding."(34

This general absence of concern with matters of cleanliness and personal hygiene(35 also made the general populace ready hosts for the fleas that carried the bubonic plague. The Jewish people, however, lived by the commandment that Jacob had given to his household, "Be clean, and change your garments,"(36 and they knew that rats were "unclean" animals with which they were not to have contact. Jews, therefore, were not exposed to the plague to the degree that others were.

The small percentage of the Jewish population that contracted

the Black Death was, therefore, believed to be incontrovertible evidence that the Jews were poisoning public and Christian wells.

For the next three years, Jews across Europe were targeted for violence and mayhem. In southern France, they were dragged from their homes by angry mobs and burned alive. In Basle, Switzerland, "the city's entire Jewish population were taken to a nearby island, locked in a specially constructed wooden building, and incinerated."(37 In Mainz, 6,000 Jews were murdered in a single day in 1349. In Strasbourg, 2,000 Jews were publicly immolated on a wooden platform.(38 By 1351, "more than sixty major Jewish communities in Germany had been completely exterminated."(39

All of the violence and murder that was directed against Jews was systematically orchestrated by civil authorities and was supported by ecclesiastical leaders.

Inquisitions

Beginning in twelfth-century France, a group of institutions was initiated within the judicial system of the Roman Catholic Church that were designed to combat heresies by suppressing Christian groups that dared to challenge canon law and official

Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi



church doctrine.

This was the Inquisition, a program that was led primarily by the Dominican Order to bring officially church-sponsored persecution and violence first to Christians and also to Jews.

In the sixteenth century, the Inquisition was greatly expanded in response to the Protestant Reformation. Its purpose was detailed in a 1578 handbook for inquisitors: "Punishment does not take place primarily and per se for the correction and good of the person punished, but for the public good in order that others may become terrified and weaned away from the evils they would commit."⁽⁴⁰⁾

Agents of the Roman Catholic Church were authorized by Pope Innocent IV's 1242 papal bull *Ad extirpanda* to use torture for extracting confessions from heretics.⁽⁴¹⁾

Thinking to absolve the church of responsibility for the violent penalties that were exacted upon heretics, the church decided that those who were convicted of heresy by the Dominican Inquisition tribunals should be remanded to custody of civil authorities for the imposition of penalties for their religious crimes.

These verdicts could include life imprisonment, banishment, and death by burning. Thus, a centuries-long reign of church-initiated and church-sponsored terror swept across Europe that impacted the lives of both Christians and Jews.

Superstition ruled the day. When what has come to be called the Little Ice Age⁽⁴²⁾ began to impact Europe in 1350, ecclesiastical and civil leaders became convinced that the freezing weather and the mass starvation it prompted had been produced by magicians and witches in Germany.

Pope Innocent VIII, therefore, issued a papal bull, *Summis Desiderantes*, in which he authorized the inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and Jacobus Sprenger to engage in a campaign for eradicating wit-

ches from the populace.⁽⁴³⁾

These Dominican friars were inveterate misogynists—probably gynophobic as well—as is evidenced by their 1486 manual for witch hunts, *Malleus Maleficarum* ("Hammer of Witches").

It has been estimated that as many as 100,000 people, most of them women, were systematically tortured to extract "confessions" from their own lips, convicted of being witches, and summarily burned at the stake in this part of the inquisition.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Some of the surviving implements of torture that the inquisitors used to inflict pain on women are hideous beyond description.

In 1478, the Roman Catholic monarchs Ferdinand II and Isabella I replaced the Medieval Inquisition in Spain with the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. This Inquisition was intended largely to ensure adherence to orthodoxy by those who had converted to Christianity from Judaism and Islam, especially after the royal edict of expulsion in 1492 had ordered Jews and Muslims to convert to Christianity or to leave Spain.

The major purpose of this Inquisition was to discover and punish crypto-Jews, the so-called conversos, anusim,⁽⁴⁵⁾ or, more pejoratively, marranos⁽⁴⁶⁾ who had officially converted to Christianity but continued to practice Judaism in secret. Of the 80,000 Jews in Spain at the time, half had chosen emigration over conversion. Those who did choose conversion were to be hounded, examined, and tortured by the worst of all the Inquisitors, the Segovian Dominican Tomás de Torquemada.

From 1480 until 1530, over 2,000 Jews who were convicted of being crypto-Jews were executed in what had come to be called "autos-da-fé"⁽⁴⁷⁾ wherein the condemned were burned at the stake.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The fact that the Spanish Inqui-

sition specifically targeted Jews is established by statistics which confirm that over 90% of all those who were executed in that inquisition were Jewish.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The monarchs and church leaders of Spain, therefore, wreaked havoc on countless Jewish communities all across the land, torturing and killing Jews at will.

Parallel with the Spanish Inquisition was the Portuguese Inquisition. The motive for both was the same: rooting out those who had converted to Christianity from other faiths but did not abide by Catholic orthodoxy. The 40,000 Jews who emigrated to Portugal after they had been expelled from Spain were suspect and were pursued vigorously.

In the end, over 31,000 people, most of them Jews, were subjected to the punishments of the Portuguese Inquisition. This number included the more than the 2,000 Jews who were publicly executed, and almost half of them suffered death in the agonizing flames of autos da fé while the Christian citizens of the cities where the executions were carried out jeered and taunted the hapless victims of the violence.

Confiscations and Expulsions

Jewish wealth and property were a constant target for political confiscation in Medieval Europe. Often, expulsions from nations were used as a means of seizing Jewish assets. "In addition to confiscatory taxes on Jews during the Middle Ages by kings and princes, there were attacks on, and confiscations of, synagogues" which were, in fact, "often instigated by the local bishop" to benefit the church.⁽⁵⁰⁾

To aid confiscations, monarchs frequently issued edicts of expulsion, ordering all the Jews to leave their nation. Such was the case in 1290 when King Edward I expelled all Jews from England. After being the first among the European nations to require Jews to wear an identifying badge,⁽⁵¹⁾

the English monarch proceeded to seize all Jewish property and then decreed that all outstanding debts owed to Jews would be payable instead to the king's treasury.

Jews and Jewish assets were easy targets for absolute monarchs who obviously were lacking in Christian conscience.

The monarchs of Spain and Portugal also issued edicts of expulsion; however, their orders were based on demands for Jews to convert to Christianity or leave those nations.

While the primary motive was religious, the secondary pecuniary motive was not lost on the monarchs. Both Spain and Portugal profited greatly from the seizure of Jewish assets. As a matter of fact, Isabella was said to have used a large part of the assets confiscated from Jews to finance the voyages of Columbus.⁽⁵²⁾ Such confiscation was nothing new, for across Europe for centuries before and after,⁽⁵³⁾ it was common for monarchs to seize Jewish property and other assets to enrich the royal treasuries and to support their own ambitions while reducing the Jews to poverty and deprivation.

As history stretched into the sixteenth century, matters only became worse for the Jewish people. "Jews were depicted as avaricious, cheating, treacherous, and sadistic; they were impure and displayed repulsive physical abnormalities; they were heretical and sacrilegious, and they conspired against Christians and Christianity."⁽⁵⁴⁾

With such evil caricatures engrained in the very corporate psyche of Western society, the Jewish people continued to be easy targets for persecution, violence, and murder by Christians of virtually every sort. The Christian reign of terror on the Jews was systematic and unrelenting because contempt for the Jews had become enshrined in both secular society and in the Christi-

an church at large.

The Renaissance that had begun to make great strides in moving Europe out of the Dark Ages by restoring elements of classical culture did virtually nothing to diminish the vile hatred that European Christians had for the Jews.

The focus on reviving Greek and Latin literature and philosophy was not extended to the even more ancient Hebrew culture. The Renaissance, therefore, did not represent a “rebirth”(55 of civil attitudes and relationships toward the Jews.

Indeed, one of its greatest scholars, Desiderius Erasmus, had utter contempt for the Jewish people and their literature. Though subsequent scholarship has called Erasmus the “Prince of Humanists” and “the crowning glory of Christian humanism,”(56 he did not extend his “humanism” to the Jews by arguing for even their basic human rights. Instead, he summed up the prevailing attitude of virtually all Renaissance scholarship toward the Jews when he said, “Is there any one among us who can be accused of lukewarmness in cursing that unhappy race [the Jews]? If it is the mark of a Christian to hate the Jews, we are all of us the very best of Christians in this

quarter.”(57

Even the Protestant Reformation did little to stem the tide of contempt for the Jews. This was ironic because this movement was actually birthed from the matrix of scholarship produced by Christian Hebraists, who had insisted that no one could understand true Christian faith unless 1) he was immersed in the Hebrew text of what had come to be almost pejoratively called the “Old Testament” and in the Hebrew thought and Hebraisms that pervaded the text of the Apostolic Scriptures (commonly called the “New Testament”) and 2) he was familiar with the history and culture of the Jewish people, to whom, through whom, and for whom Holy Scripture had been given in the first place.

The *veritas Hebraica* (Hebraic truth) that the Christian Hebraists espoused demanded interpersonal relationships with Jewish scholars and rabbis so that Christians could receive accurate understanding of the biblical texts. These understandings precipitated the Protestant Reformation and produced what came to be known as the Reformation Hermeneutic, the grammatico-historical method of biblical interpretation. If the Reformation had pursued the Hebraic empha-

ses that birthed it, the new movement could have changed the tide of history and saved countless Jewish lives. Unfortunately, this was not to be.

Though the founder of the Reformation, Martin Luther, was initially strongly philosemitic, he became virulently Antisemitic(58 when it became clear to him that the “obdurate Jews” would never convert to Lutheranism.(59

Early in his career, Luther produced a tract, “That Jesus Christ was born a Jew,” which was written a year after he had translated the New Testament into German. In this document, he “pointed to Jesus’ scandalous particularity as a Jewish man, and he urged humility and Christian love when relating to the Jews, reminding Christians that Jews are blood relatives of Christ and that ‘God committed Holy Scripture to no nation but the Jews.’”(60

Near the end of his career, however, Luther also wrote *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in which he advocated the burning of Jewish synagogues and schools, the razing of houses owned by Jews, the forcing of Jews to live in agricultural outbuildings, the execution of rabbis who refused to abide by an edict requiring them not to

teach, and the confinement of the Jewish population as agricultural slave laborers.(61

Pogroms

Concurrent with the persecutions of the Jews in Western Europe, waves of anti-Jewish violence swept across Eastern Europe in the form of pogroms.

A pogrom is a violent riot focused on persecution and massacre of an ethnic or religious group. The English term pogrom is actually the Russian word *pogrom*, which is derived from *pogromit*, which literally means “destruction.”

For centuries, pogroms have been the Russian and Eastern European version of organized massacres of the Jews, particularly the nineteenth- and twentieth-century attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire. A large portion of the pogroms took place within the Pale of Settlement, the area staked out in 1791 by the Empress Catherine the Great as a space for confining Jews in order to keep them out of Russia.(63 The land mass for the Pale included what is now Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus.

Catherine’s predecessor Elizabeth had tried to expel from Russia all the Jews would not convert



At the David’s falls in Ein Gedi. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

to Russian Orthodox Christianity, and Catherine merely undertook the effort to complete the action that her predecessor had begun.

When all the Jews in Russia had been summarily forced to relocate to the Pale, this region's Jewish population reached a height of five million, 40% of the worldwide Jewish population at that time.

The geographical, political, and economic restrictions of the Pale were difficult for the Jewish people. Living in shtetls ("small towns"), they experienced extreme poverty.

Additionally, they were easy targets for the irrational religious fervor and hatred of the non-Jews around them. With the support of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government, organized mob violence of pogroms was continually staged as long as the Pale existed.

As it was throughout Europe, the days that were most dreaded on the Jewish calendar in the Pale were the Christian holy days, especially Good Friday and Easter when "Christians" regularly vented their anger against Jews for being "Christ-killers."

The most devastating of all the pogroms took place between 1881 and 1883 and then later between 1903 and 1906. During these vicious attacks, hundreds of Jewish communities were utterly overrun by Antisemites, resulting in pogroms that produced extensive property damage and the murder of thousands of Jews. These included the particularly devastating pogroms of Warsaw in 1881; Kishinev in 1903 when 2,000 Jews were killed on Easter Sunday with Orthodox priests leading crowds that chanted, "Kill the Jews"; Kiev and 660 other towns in 1905; and Bialystock in 1906.

Even beyond that time, pogroms in Lwów in 1918 and Kiev in 1919 resulted in great loss of Jewish life. Violent mob actions against the Jews like these continued well into the twentieth century, as evidenced in the 1941 pogrom in the Romanian city of Iasi, where over 13,000 Jews were murdered. Each of these mob actions was organized by governmental authorities and was encouraged by the Russian Orthodox Church, which for centuries has been one of the major hotbeds and bastions of Antisemitism.

Such action was yet another example of the way in which the cross became a sword in the hands of utterly intolerant, hate-filled "Christians" who were determined to exterminate the "Christ-killing" Jews who for centuries had been blamed for all the ills and maladies of societies throughout Europe.

Universal Judaophobia, Anti-Judaism, and Antisemitism

Across all of Christian Europe, then, the second millennium of the Common Era was a time of unrelenting violent attacks on Jews, featuring pillage, rape, and murder. Some of the tragic events were spontaneous; however, most were well-organized, government-endorsed, and church-sponsored efforts to exterminate the Jews from Christian kingdoms.

Jews who had fled the Roman persecutions and settled across Europe where they had enjoyed a time of tranquility during the last half of the first millennium were subjected to systematic efforts to bring about their genocide for nearly all of the second millennium.

The Christian church, which should have been the prime example of the grace, mercy, and tolerance which Jesus taught and which should have served under

the humility of the cross, instead turned the cross into a sword and used it to inflict unimaginable suffering on countless Jewish men, women, and children.

The movement that was designed by Jesus to be an instrument of life became the foremost instrument of death for Jewish people who, through no fault of their own, just happened to live in proximity to Christians. The details of the complicity of Christian church leaders and civil authorities in the ongoing Jewish suffering can never be eradicated from history nor from the corporate memory of the Jewish people.

Christianity itself has been forever disfigured by this evil, and contemporary Christians can only repent in sackcloth and ashes for the sins of the fathers and vow in their hearts that they will never allow the same atrocities to be repeated. Eternal vigilance is essential, for, as Daniel Goldhagen, says, Antisemitism and the "antisemite's eliminationist" plans are "the devil that never dies."⁶⁵

The only way to avoid repeating history is to study it and learn from it. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.⁶⁶

It is vital, therefore, for every Christian to undertake a personal study of readily available historical research in order to know personally the extent of Christian-sponsored violence against the Jewish people. One of the best texts that would aid such a review is *Codex Judaica: Chronological Index of Jewish History, Covering 5,764 Years*, Máttis Kantor's exhaustive listing of the suffering and loss of life that Jews have experienced through history, with hundreds of entries in short, succinct statements of historical fact.⁶⁷

Cases of violence against the Jews from the eleventh century to the

turn of the twentieth century cover 89 pages of condensed, straightforward, and shocking historical text that should be read by every Christian in the world. It is a chilling account of the ceaseless and senseless terror and cruelty that were continually imposed by nominal Christians upon Jewish men, women, and children for virtually an entire millennium.

Throughout the unrelenting barrage of violence against the Jewish people, however, the indomitable Jewish spirit has always come to the fore. Their simple and quiet confidence in the God of Scripture has buoyed their spirits to believe that their God, the sovereign of the universe, loved the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with an unending love and that he was irrevocably committed to their survival.

Against all the laws of history concerning the assimilation of conquered people, the Jews have maintained their separate identity as God instructed them. Right in the face of death, they have confessed their faith in the one who is Lord of death and life.

For countless Jewish martyrs, the last words that escaped their lips were, "Shema, Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad" ("Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One"). Even in death, the Jewish people have always been triumphant, for they have known that their God is the one who is always faithful even, and especially, to those who sleep in the dust of the earth because he will most assuredly bring them forth in life from the dead.

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The references of the article "When the Cross Became a Sword":

- 1) The Greek has been rendered in Latin as *In hoc signo vinces* ("In this sign, you will conquer").
- 2) Constantine's lifestyle, in which he ordered the execution of his wife and son and was involved in other acts of violence, was anything but "Christian." Constantine did not receive Christian baptism until shortly before his death.
- 3) Literally, "On the Death of the Persecutors." Patit P. Mishra, Andrea L. Stanton, Edward Ramsay, and Peter J. Seybolt, eds., *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa: An Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), pp. 59–60. Also Ame Söby Christensen, *Lactantius the Historian: An Analysis of the De Mortibus Persecutorum* (Viborg, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1980).
- 4) If anything, Constantine's rival in the East, Maximinus Daia, redoubled his persecution of the Christians in the territories under his control.
- 5) Arius taught that Jesus was less than God—a created being whom God exalted to deity because of his obedience and faithfulness to the mission that God assigned him. This was an early form of Unitarianism. Arian teaching was the major theological issue that severely divided the Christian church for generations.
- 6) Sabellius taught that Jesus was God the Father by using a form of Modalistic Monarchianism which proposed that God was manifest sequentially as Father in the Old Testament, as Jesus in the incarnation, and as the Holy Spirit after the resurrection and ascension.
- 7) Cicero, *De Oratore*, i. 11, 47.
- 8) The Latin phrase *filioque* means "and the son."
- 9) A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 10) For an intriguing discussion of ecclesiastical politics, see Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Epic Fight over Christ's Divinity in the Last Days of Rome* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 1999).
- 11) Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 135.
- 12) Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Volume One: From the Time of Christ to the Court Jews*, tr. Richard Howard (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 35.
- 13) Daniel R. Woolf, *Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing: A–J* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1998), p. 906. Also Thomas J. Koziski, *The Political Problem of Religio-us Pluralism: And Why Philosophers Can't Solve It* (Lexington, KY: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 53.
- 14) Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 9.
- 15) Sylvia Schein, *Gateway to the Heavenly City: Crusader Jerusalem and the Catholic West (1099–1187)* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2005), pp. 9–11.
- 16) Robert Somerville, *The Councils of Urban II: Decreta Claromontensia* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Adolf M. Hakkert Publishing, 1972), vol. 1, p. 74.
- 17) Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, UK: Belknap Press, 2006), pp. 103–106.
- 18) David Nirenberg, "The Rhineland Massacres of Jews in the First Crusade, Memories Medieval and Modern," in Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary, eds. *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, and Historiography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 279–310. Also Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996), p. 125; and Shlomo Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 1996), p. 192.
- 19) Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade: Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 55–60.
- 20) Karen Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 258.
- 21) Dagobert David Runes, *The War against the Jew* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), p. 37. Also, Arthur Blech, *The Causes of Anti-Semitism: A Critique of the Bible* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), p. 360; Hillel Halkin, *Yehuda Halevi* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 111; and Brown, p. 126.
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- 23) Rex Lentz, *An Abridged History of World Religions* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2002), p. 71.
- 24) Dean R. Eyerly, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Historical Jesus* (Mustang, OK, Tate Publishing, 2009), p. 312.
- 25) Stark, pp. 129–133.
- 26) William Duiker and Jackson J. Spielvogel, *The Essential World History, Seventh Edition* (Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 341.
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- 29) Byrne, p. 82.
- 30) J. G. Meuschen, ed., *Hermannii Gygantis, ordinis fratrum minorum, Flores Temporum seu Chronicon Universale ab Orbe condito ad annum Christi MCCCXLIX* (Leiden, 1750), pp. 138–139. See Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 207.
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- 34) Slavicek, p. 33.
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- 36) *Genesis* 35:2, KJV.
- 37) Slavicek, pp. 61–62.
- 38) Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization: Alternate Volume: Since 1300* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2006), p. 312.
- 39) Spielvogel, p. 311.
- 40) *Directorium Inquisitorum*, Book 3, p. 137.
- 41) Jordan Bishop, "Aquinas on Torture," in *New Blackfriars*, vol. 87, Issue 1009, May 2006, p. 229.
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- 43) Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006), p. 55.
- 44) Sandra Sider, *Handbook to Life in Renaissance Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 40.
- 45) *Anusim* is the Hebrew word for "forced," indicating that the Jewish conversions were "forced" baptisms.
- 46) The term *marrano* is derived from the Arabic word *muharram*, which means "forbidden." In Spanish it meant "pig," originally because of Jewish and Muslim abstinence from eating pork. The word *marrano* still means "pig" or "dirty" in Spanish.
- 47) The term *auto-da-fé* meant "act of faith," referring to the penance that preceded the punishment.
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- 50) Robert Michael and Philip Rose, *Dictionary of Antisemitism from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishing, 2007), p. 104.
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- 54) Susan Sarah Cohen, *Antisemitism: An Annotated Bibliography* (München, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), vol. 19, p. 366.
- 55) The word *renaissance* is translated from French into English as "rebirth."
- 56) Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 661.
- 57) Desiderius Erasmus, quoted in Robert Blackley Drummond, *Erasmus, His Life and Character* (London, England: Smith, Elder & Co., 1873), p. 30. Erasmus was particularly exercised against the legal defense that Christian Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin had mounted before Maximilian, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, against efforts to destroy all Jewish books, including the Talmud, Kabbalah, Midrash, and Sefarim. It seems that Erasmus despised the literature of the Jews more than he hated the Jews themselves. See Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy, and Burn All Jewish Books*, Peter Wortsman, tr. and ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), pp. 31–51.
- 58) Mortimer Ostow, *Myth and Madness: The Psychodynamics of Antisemitism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing, 1995), p. 14.
- 59) Luther's "love" for the Jews was predicated on their being willing to act out the part that he had devised for them in his eschatological scenario. Luther believed that Christ would come in his day, and he believed that all the Jews would have to convert to Christianity, particularly to Protestant Christianity, before Jesus could return.
- 60) Deanna A. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), p. 121.
- 61) Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, tr. Martin H. Bertram in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).
- 62) The word *pale* literally means "stake."
- 63) The *Pale of Settlement* encompassed roughly 20% of European Russia.
- 64) Sara Bender, *The Jews of Bialystok during World War II and the Holocaust*, Yaffa Murciano, tr. (Boston, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008), pp. 91–92.
- 65) Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *The Devil that Never Dies: The Rise and Threat of Global Antisemitism* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2013), p. 142.
- 66) George Santayana in *Reason in Common Sense, Vol. 1: The Life of Reason* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1980).
- 67) Mätis Kantor, *Codex Judaica: Chronological Index of Jewish History* (New York: Zichron Press, 2005), pp. 185–274.

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The God-Wrestler

From Jacob to Israel



Echoes of Jom Kippur-war in the Valley of the Tears, Golan. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Written by:
John D. Garr, Ph.D.

Subsequent to the Akedah, when Abraham had become a “very old man,” the patriarch of faith understood that it was not in the best interest of the Chosen People for his son Isaac to marry one of the local Canaanite women. He made plans, therefore, to send his servant to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac.¹⁾

When Abraham’s servant arrived in Aram-naharaim, circumstances that God had orchestrated fell into place for him to meet Rebekah, a young woman of grace and beauty who was a part of the Abrahamic family and who reflected the Abrahamic ideals of justice, deference, and mercy. With the approval of her family, Rebekah agreed to accompany Abraham’s servant to Canaan to be married to Isaac. When they neared the

Abraham family complex, she saw Isaac at a distance, veiled herself, and prepared to be joined to her beloved in marriage. Shortly thereafter, Isaac “brought [Rebekah] into his mother Sarah’s tent . . . and she became his wife, and he loved her.”²⁾ So began the next chapter in the saga of the Chosen People. Isaac had walked with God alongside his father for decades. Now it was his turn to take the lead in the walk of faith and faithfulness. With the perspicacious Rebekah at his side, he was prepared for what would come in the continuing dynamic saga.

Eventually, when Isaac was sixty years old, Rebekah gave birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Before their birth, Rebekah had wondered why the two fetuses continually struggled in her womb. When she inquired of the Lord, she received this stunning answer:

“Two nations are in your womb . . . one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.”³⁾ Even before the birth of her two sons, Rebekah’s prophetic vision gave her insight into what would occur decades later. With this definitive prophetic word from God, she was prepared for a long and eventful journey of faith, and she was determined to ensure that God’s specific and explicit words were fulfilled.

Esau was a “man’s man,” brash and powerful, a skillful hunter and outdoorsman. He was a daddy’s boy. On the other hand, Jacob was a simple, quiet man who preferred to stay at home among the tents of the family compound. He was a mamma’s boy. As could have been expected, the potential for trouble was great when two young men of such different temperaments

and inclinations lived in the same household, vying for the attention of their parents. The situation was only exacerbated when Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob,⁴⁾ making family conflict almost inevitable.

A Matter of Birthright

The prophetic word that Rebekah had received from God was authoritative and final: “The older [son] will serve the younger [son].” This was not the outcome that she had sought or preferred, for any mother would welcome peace in her household. The message was not, therefore, the product of her contriving. But, how could this be? The law of primogenitor dictated that the oldest son of the household would receive the father’s blessing and birthright, would inherit the family estate, and as a consequence would “rule over” the rest of the

family. From their birth, therefore, the stage had been set by the customs of the land for Esau to dominate Jacob.

Like her mother-in-law Sarah, however, Rebekah was a strong prophetic voice, and she had no reservations about doing whatever was necessary to see that the word that God had given her would come to pass. Sarah had seen that Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, was completely unqualified—and, indeed, was not chosen—for leading the Chosen People. Likewise, Rebekah understood from Esau's lifestyle that he was not the one who had been anointed to carry the Abrahamic vision into the next generation. So, Rebekah waited to see what God would do and how he would do it.

One day, Esau came from the open country to the family compound exhausted and famished. "Quick, let me have some of that red stew!" he said to Jacob.⁽⁵⁾ Having been schooled by his mother in the spiritual details of what had been taking place since he was an infant, Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."⁽⁶⁾ Astonished at the request, Esau responded in exasperation: "Look, I am about to die [of starvation]. . . . What good is the birthright to me?" When Jacob insisted, "Swear to me first," Esau did so, and in the process finalized "the sale of his birthright to Jacob."⁽⁷⁾

In this casual, almost flippant, act that was driven by appetite

and emotion, Esau "despised his birthright," considering it to be of minor importance compared to the immediate demands of his hunger. This emotional bent made it clear that Esau was not the man for the job of leading the Chosen People. Indeed, instead of following the Abrahamic custom of returning to ancient family ties when searching for marital companionship, he later took wives of the Canaanites, who became a source of great misery for both Isaac and Rebekah.⁽⁸⁾ Esau had certainly not followed the pattern of conduct that had driven the lives of both his father and his grandfather as they had walked with God. He was a man of the world, a man of passion and self-indulgence, and nothing could constrain him.

With the birthright sworn to him, Jacob had only to wait until the time was fulfilled for him to receive what he had purchased. Working in concert with his mother, Jacob prepared to receive the right-hand blessing from his father that would transfer the rights of leadership and property from father to son—in this case, to the younger son. Since Isaac was virtually blind by that time, Rebekah knew it was possible that he could be induced to bless Jacob while thinking that he was blessing Esau. She and Jacob prepared one of the meals that Esau had traditionally made for his father, and they brought the food to Isaac. Rebekah saw to it that Jacob was disguised to resemble Esau as nearly as possible, inclu-

ding covering his hands and arms with sheepskin to simulate Esau's hairy anatomy. The results, however, were not entirely successful, for the puzzled Isaac observed, "The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are Esau's." Finally, Isaac was convinced that it was indeed Esau who was before him, so he conveyed the blessing of primogeniture to Jacob, including the prayer that his brother would serve him.⁽⁹⁾ What God had predicted at the birth of the brothers and what Rebekah had orchestrated on God's behalf finally came to pass.

When Jacob had scarcely removed himself from his father's presence, Esau rushed in from his hunting expedition. When he realized what had occurred, he was furious. His father was crestfallen and angry. How could he have been so deceived? Though Esau pled with his father, "Don't you have even one blessing for me?" Isaac could only moan, "I made him lord over you. What can I possibly do for you, my son?"⁽¹⁰⁾ From that moment on, Esau "held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him." Consequently, "he said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'"⁽¹¹⁾

Obviously mamma's boy was no match for his muscular, swaggering, and violent brother who was skilled in the arts of confrontation and conflict. What was Jacob to do? The obvious answer? Run for your life! And, so he did. On

his mother's advice, he fled to Haran, to his uncle Laban's family compound. The only comforting thought for Jacob was his mother's assurance, "When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there."⁽¹²⁾

Jacob was separated from his parents, but he still had hope. It is true that Jacob acquired Esau's birthright in the bargain of the millennium, exchanging a mere bowl of lentils for the rights to the Isaac family fortune. Because he had bought the birthright, he rightly deserved the blessing of primogeniture from his father even though his mother and he had had to engage in deception and trickery to ensure Isaac's cooperation in the actual transfer of the rights that he had duly purchased. On the surface, Jacob and his mother appeared to be acting fraudulently at best or to being thieves at worst. How could a wife be so duplicitous with her own husband? How could a son deceive his father so treacherously? How could such a feud develop in God's chosen family?

The answer is that Rebekah had heard the word of the Lord even before her sons were born: "The older will serve the younger." Being a prophet, she did not doubt God's Word and merely stood on his promise. Jacob trusted his mother and her spiritual wisdom, so he acted accordingly, following her advice explicitly. This did not, however, diminish



Echoes of Jom Kippur -war in the Valley of the Tears, Golan. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

the scorn that was heaped upon the young man. “Heel,”⁽¹³⁾ “Grabber,” “Leg-Puller,”⁽¹⁴⁾ “Thief!”⁽¹⁵⁾ “Deceiver,”⁽¹⁶⁾ “Supplanter”⁽¹⁷⁾ —Jacob had heard all these stinging epithets that were implied by his name and that had been confirmed by his actions.

His mother, too, was seen as a conniving, deceitful woman whose moral and ethical standards were at the least very flexible when it came to actions that helped achieve her expectations for her son. Still, both mother and son were only following and working out the divine instruction, “The older will serve the younger.”

Success in a New Environment

Jacob’s journey back to Haran released him into a different environment where he was to thrive. Filled with fear and consternation, he experienced his first personal encounter with God when he overnighted at Bethel. There, in a vision, he saw a ladder stretching between heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending.⁽¹⁸⁾

When he awoke, he knew that he had experienced a divine visitation, so he used the stone that had been his pillow to construct a pillar to remind him of God’s blessing.⁽¹⁹⁾

He called the place Bethel, the “house of God,” and he promised to tithe all of his increase to the Lord.

When Jacob finally reached Haran, he saw right away that his life would change dramatically. First he met the love of his life, the darling Rachel. In an act of rash, romantic love, he promised to serve his uncle for seven years if Laban would give him Rachel’s hand in marriage.⁽²⁰⁾

But, in Laban, Jacob had met his own match when it came to deception. He let down his guard in a moment of passion and, as a result, he awakened the next morning to discover that he was married to Leah, Rachel’s sister.

Not to be denied, however, Jacob promised another seven years of service to Laban in order to be joined also to his beloved.⁽²¹⁾

In this state of affairs, it was finally Jacob who won the contest of wills, manipulation, and business negotiation. He became wealthy because of his relationship with Laban in the land of Haran. By contrivance and deception, he had gained the transgenerational blessing through the laying on of hands of his father Isaac and, in doing so, he had supplanted his brother. He had also paid dearly for his subterfuge and bravado, accepting self-exile from his family and voluntary servitude in the house of another. Life was good, however, and he had no complaints. Still, something was nagging at his heart. He knew that the Abrahamic covenant of which he was the rightful heir was not to be fulfilled in Haran. Indeed, God had specifically commanded his grandfather Abraham to leave that place and go to the land where he would send him. Jacob could not help himself: he was a Hebrew, one of those who had “crossed over” and had achieved a new forensic status before God as the Chosen People.

The chosen status was not, however, some amorphous thing that had no real substance. It was a status preconditioned on a name and a land. The name was Sons of Abraham; the land was Canaan, the systematic and continuous promise of God to Abraham and his descendants forever. For this reason, Jacob knew that he would have to leave Haran as his grandfather had done and journey to the land promised by God to the Chosen People.

There was an unquenchable yearning in Jacob’s heart to return to his own family, a yearning that was tempered with the fear of fraternal retribution that could mean his own death. But, he was driven, so on he went. The problem was that when he would reach that land, he would

again encounter his brother Esau who had been intent upon killing him. So, there before Jacob was set out the continuing challenge that had been established for all human beings: life or death, blessings or curses. Which would he receive?

An Unexpected Encounter

When Jacob reached the ford of the Brook Jabbok, he knew things would never be the same. He might well die at his brother’s hand, but he had to pursue the inheritance that God had promised him. Being a thoughtful and calculating businessman, he made as many preparations for possible contingencies that might arise as he plunged into the unknown, unsure of his brother’s intentions. He even sent his family and offerings from his fortune ahead of him in hopes that if Esau were still in an evil mood, he would accept the gestures and spare his life. Despite the circumstances, whether for life or for death, Jacob simply had to move forward.

For Jacob, Jabbok was a place of surrender, a place for saying to God as Jesus did generations later, “Not my will, but your will be done.”⁽²²⁾

Jacob was a third-generation participant in a divine vision that had consumed the lives of his father and grandfather. He had heard all the promises, seen all the struggles, and even shared in the dream at Bethel; however, he desperately needed first-hand evidence—a face-to-face encounter with God that would confirm the fact that he was far more than a supplanter, that he was, indeed, the one whom God had elected to lead the Chosen People.

Finally, at Jabbok, Jacob faced the same decision his grandfather Abraham had faced. He had to cross over, and crossing over was precisely what it meant to be a Hebrew. He had to leave comforts behind and take on a new and life-threatening challenge. But before he could journey on,

he would have to engage in a night of agony, struggling within himself and against doubts and fears, grappling with himself and with God’s direction for his life. Jacob engaged in the action that produced his new name and the name of all his descendants. He became a God-wrestler.

All night long, the struggle continued. Did Jacob wrestle with a man, with an angel, with God? Jacob was never told who his antagonist was. He had to decide. Jacob and God formed a tag-team to wrestle against Jacob. Jacob struggled with an unknown man.⁽²³⁾

Jacob grappled with an angel, the angel of the Lord.⁽²⁴⁾ And when it was all over, Jacob realized that his protagonist was actually God himself.⁽²⁵⁾

As morning began to dawn, Jacob threatened the one with whom he had locked horns: “I won’t let you go until you bless me.”⁽²⁶⁾ And, bless him God did; however, he did so with a significant provision: Jacob’s hip was dislocated so that afterward he walked with a limp which served as a humbling device to help him keep everything in proper perspective and constantly remind him of his encounter with the Divine.

Finally, God gave Jacob a new name: Yisrael, meaning, “God-wrestler,” “I contend with God,” or “I prevail with God.” The Hebrew word Yisrael (Israel) is a combination of the verbal root *lisrot* (“struggle” or “wrestle”) and *El* (God). Taken together, the name simply means “God-wrestler.”⁽²⁷⁾

God’s new name for Jacob stuck, not only for Jacob but also for all of his progeny in generation after generation of God-wrestlers! It remained not only as the man’s name but as the name of the people and the nation that came from him. The Chosen People were to be a God-wrestling people, a God-prevailing people, a people who were not content

with anything less than the blessing of God and the opportunity to serve, albeit often with the limitations of handicaps similar to Jacob's dislocated hip.

Life Emerging from Death

When dawn came, Jacob's wrestling partner vanished into thin air. No longer present, God was still not absent, for the blessing and the name that he had left behind were powerful elements that would prevail not only in Jacob's life but also in the lives of his descendants for millennia to come. Jacob was utterly astounded when his mind grasped the full significance of his night of struggle.

He had seen God face to face and had prevailed with him. And, he was still alive! Impossible? Yes! But it was true. As a memorial to this death-defying struggle and the profound new life that had emerged from the contest, Jacob named the place of the contest, "Peniel," meaning, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved," or "I have encountered God, and I live."

Perhaps the word Peniel was a synopsis of a simple, yet utterly irrational truth: those who see God face to face are the only ones who are truly alive! "Jacob had feared to see Esau's face, but instead saw God face to face and lived."(28

"Jacob's life is changed. Hereafter, physically he literally limps; and

the post-Peniel Jacob is a much more subdued and cautious person."(29

The legacy of Jacob's experience of life emerging from the clutches of death continued on in the children of this Yisrael, this God-wrestler. "The community of Israel, as descendants of this god-wrestler, is depicted as a group that successfully strives with God and humans."(30

It is no wonder that "in the Bible, Israel is the chief name for God's people. By definition, to belong to God is to be a 'God-wrestler'!"(31 To be an Israelite is to be a contender with God to receive a blessing and to be a blessing.

A Contention and a Blessing Shared by Christians

By adoption into the family of God (32 and by naturalization into the commonwealth of Israel,(33 Christians share in the same description of the children of Israel. They too participate in the experience that makes the Chosen People true Israelites. They have joined the Jewish people as contenders for the divine blessing. They know what it means to fight the good fight of faith—to lay hold on eternal life. (34 They know that to gain life, they must surrender it.(35

Their understanding is based on the word of a good Jewish teacher, Jesus himself, who, in the face of hell, stood firm, resting on the secure foundation of the very words of God. They follow

his example: "Not my will but thine be done!"(36 They are God-wrestlers.

Christians who share in the divine calling alongside Israel are never free to "know," to understand everything by the power of their own intellect. They must always "believe" as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did and as all of their faithful lineal descendants after them did and continue to do. They can never subject the infinite to finitude, even when they are desperate to know God's name. By faith they understand.

They daily wrestle with inner conflicts and insecurities, but they dare to wrestle, to contend for the blessing, knowing that in doing so they make themselves vulnerable and sometimes bring upon themselves life-long, incurable handicaps. Such Yisraelites are not God-seekers; they have found him! They are not God-chasers; he is not trying to escape from them!

They are God-engagers, God-wrestlers.

Whatever the cost, Yisraelites do not rest on the laurels of the past, on the great stories of ancestral accomplishments. They keep fresh fire on the altar of their hearts rather than idolizing the ashes of yesterday's fire.(37

They seek fresh anointing, fresh insight, fresh direction(38 even though they clearly understand the cause for which they stand and to which they are unflinchingly committed. Yisraelites simply have to see God, to know

God, to experience God for themselves; therefore, they venture into the unknown, struggle in the void of nocturnal darkness, expose themselves to the terror of the indescribable. They never give up. They contend with themselves, with humanity, and even with God himself. When they do not know, they believe! When they do not understand, they obey. Whether Jew or Christian, they are Abraham's children, believing God and being justified for their faith. They are Yisraelites: God-wrestlers, contending and prevailing with God!

Back to Jabbok: Back to Peniel!

The foundation of the Chosen People was laid on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of Scripture proudly identifies himself in this manner: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Each of the three patriarchs of the biblical faith encountered God in life-and-death faith struggles, and each of them prevailed. They had seen their God face to face, and their lives were preserved. They experienced what every believer in the God of Israel has the power to achieve. They were the beneficiaries of unending the Gevurot blessing of "life from the dead.

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Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi



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- 1) Genesis 24:1–5.
- 2) Genesis 24:67.
- 3) Genesis 25:23.
- 4) Genesis 25:28.
- 5) Genesis 25:30, NIV.
- 6) Genesis 25:31, NIV.
- 7) Genesis 25:32–33, NIV.
- 8) Genesis 26:35.
- 9) Genesis 27:18–29, NIV.
- 10) Genesis 27:34–37, NIV.
- 11) Genesis 27:41, NIV.
- 12) Genesis 27:45, NIV.
- 13) Jacob (Ya'akov) can mean "heel-catcher," a name applied at his birth because he came from the birth canal holding his brother Esau's heel.
- 14) Jacob was a "grabber" or "leg-puller" because he had "grabbed" the heel and "pulled the leg" of his brother when they were being born.
- 15) In Genesis 27:36, Esau said that Jacob "took" or stole his birthright.
- 16) In Genesis 27:35–36, Isaac said to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing," prompting Esau to reply, "Is he not rightly named Jacob?" making a clear allusion to the fact that the name Jacob implied that he was a "deceiver" and a "thief."
- 17) Jacob can also mean "supplanter" because Jacob took the place that had been rightly reserved for Esau.
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Old battle trenches in the mist on top of mount Ben Tal, at the front of Cafe Anan. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Did God Reject Israel?

After all?



Jewish cemetery from the Temple Mount perspective. Cemetery locates on the slopes of Mount of Olives. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Written by:
Kalle Venäläinen

"I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2, NIV).

Despite this very strong affirmation, we read a few lines later in verse 15:

"For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"

Every time I have read this verse, I have wondered what this "rejection" might be. In my mind I have tried to relate it to the affirmation given to us in the beginning of the chapter - that God has not rejected his people. I heard someone explain, on the basis of the

original text, that rejection here means only temporary putting aside, as if to wait for the time of re-acceptance. It is true that in the original Greek the first word for rejection is the verb *apootheo*, while in the verse 15 the noun is *apobolee* (rejection, throwing away) from the verb *apoballoo*. Both words are translated into Finnish and English as meaning "rejection".

A few years ago I asked my son-in-law, who is German, how he understood these words "their rejection". He said: "It means that the Jews rejected Jesus." Though his answer sounded good to me, I wondered if he understood Finnish well enough. I still remember this conversation although I couldn't take in its whole meaning at once. I was accustomed to reading the verse in the sense that God was the one who rejected - even though Paul assures

the opposite in the beginning of the chapter.

This issue was brought up again a bit later when I read a Messianic commentator's text about God's relation to Israel. He writes:

"Nowhere in the New Testament do we find rejection of Israel. In fact, the only time the biblical text speaks about any rejection of Israel, it emphatically affirms that God has not rejected them. 'Has God cast away his people?' (Rom.11.1) Paul asks. His answer is clear and unambiguous: 'Certainly not!' And his response 'Certainly not' is all the more significant as it occurs after the Crucifixion, even after the first 'Jewish' resistance to the 'Christian' proclamation." (Doukhan, J.B, *The Mystery of Israel*, p. 27, 2004;USA)

"Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the rejection of Israel."

I made up my mind to finally explore this matter as thoroughly as possible. Does not even this verse 15 speak about it? I remembered my son-in-law's interpretation. I decided to check it from the English version of the Jewish Bible and its commentary made by a Messianic Jew, David Stern.

I discovered something significant - and that my son-in-law had been right. David Stern demonstrates that the original Greek words *he apoboleen auton* mean exactly what it says in our Bible, "their rejection". But a question arises: who rejects or who are the ones who reject, and who is or are the rejected one(s). This phrase can be understood either way: that God has rejected the Jews or the Jews have rejected their Messiah. Both interpretations are possible. What decides which idea is right? Isn't it the context? In the beginning of

the chapter Paul has assured that God has not rejected his people! But have the Jews, or a part of them, rejected their Messiah? Yes, they have.

Psalm 118:22 predicts that the builders of Israel would reject the Cornerstone:

"The very rock that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

(Stern)

John 1.11,12 reads:

"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"

(NIV).

God has, therefore, in no instant rejected his people. The text further reveals that, as it is true that the people rejected their Messiah, the rejection was only partial because not all rejected Jesus. Those who rejected him were the leaders of that time, "the builders of Israel".

What were the consequences of "their rejection"? That God, for his part, rejected them? No! What is the consequence according to our text? "The reconciliation of the world!" What a wonderful God we serve! The whole world was reconciled with God, because "their rejection (of

their Messiah)" brought Jesus to the cross, where all nations were reconciled with God, the sins of every human were paid for, and we were redeemed from the power of sin, death, and devil. Hallelujah!

Paul doesn't leave it here, though, as awesome as this is. He goes on and takes next the Greek word *proslambano*, which is the opposite of "rejection", i.e. "acceptance". If those who rejected were the unbelieving Jews who rejected their Messiah, the logical conclusion, and also in accordance with the immediate context, is that they will one day accept Yeshua as their Messiah.

What will it bring forth? Paul tells us emphatically: "Life from the dead" or, as some translations put it: "the dead will rise up."

I conclude with David Stern's translation of Romans 11.15:

"For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting him mean? It will be life from the dead!



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Israel

- the Apple of God's Eye



Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Written by:
Keijo Lindeman

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1Cor.13.9).

The eye provides us with one of the five senses of our body. Vision, the ability to see, is crucial to man's ability to take action. Especially important is the pupil or the apple, the central part of the eye, the lens in the round opening in the iris, the coloured part of the eye, through which the light enters into the eye causing the eye to see.

This lens may become cloudy due to cataract, which blurs the vision making it harder to see clearly, and in the worst case, can lead to complete blindness. In the spiritual realm there is one very important pupil - Israel, the Apple of God's Eye.

"For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling was-

te, he shielded him and cared for him, he guarded him as the apple of his eye" (Deuteronomy 32.9-10).

Israel – the apple of God's Eye – had her origin in Abraham whom God called out of the heathen city of Ur of Chaldea to follow His way and instructions. Ever since Abraham, blessing and cursing were included in the calling of Israel. Who blessed Israel, was blessed, and who cursed Israel, was cursed (Numbers 24.1,9).

When Joseph, the second youngest of Jacob's sons, was the second-in-command in Egypt, the entire family of Jacob went to Egypt because of the famine, 70 people in all (Genesis 46). In the beginning their life there was comfortable, but after the death of Joseph Israelites were made work as slaves for 400 years, and they were brutally oppressed.

In the days of Moses God delivered Israel from the slavery of Egypt and led them to Sinai, whe-

re He made them a priestly nation and a holy nation (Exodus 19).

It was at Mount Sinai that the Lord made the first (so called Old) Covenant ,i.e. the Torah (or Law) Covenant with the people of Israel, and gave the people the Torah with its commandments and statutes for the Israelites to walk righteously before the Lord and people. At the same time Israel became God's Kingdom on the earth (Psalm 114.1-2).

During the Old Covenant Israel and the Jewish people disobeyed the Lord's commandments many times falling away in sin and apostacy. Many times God had to discipline His people by enemy attacks, 70-year captivity in Babylon, and exile (Amos 3.1-2; Luke 21.20-24).

However, God has not rejected His people, though they have been disobedient. As long as the sun keeps rising, will Israel, God's own people, stand before the Lord (Jeremiah 31.35-37). The

Apostle Paul affirms accordingly that God has not rejected Israel (Romans 11.1-2,28-29). (Individually Israelis – Jews – will be saved by faith in Yeshua the Messiah, like any other people; Acts 3.22-26; 10.34-35; 15.11; Rom. 2.9-11; 3.21-31.) Israel is the Apple of God's Eye whom He protects. The pupil of the eye is a sensitive spot in a human body, likewise Israel is a sensitive and tender spot to God, and it is dangerous to touch it with evil intentions, for judgment will follow promptly.

End Time Exodus and the Apple of God's Eye

"Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north, " declares the Lord, " for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven, " declares the Lord. "Come, O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon!" For this is what the Lord Almighty says: "After he has honoured me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you – for whoever

touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2.6-8, NIV).

"However, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them. 'For I will restore them to the land I gave to their forefathers. But now I will send for my fishermen," declares the Lord, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks" (Jeremiah 16.14-16, NIV).

Biblical prophecies tell us that Israelis, who have lived in diaspora for two thousand years, will be gathered to their own country, the land of Israel, from all the corners of the earth. First the fishermen will tempt them to come to Israel, the land God has promised them. And many have heard and moved to Israel; the number of these Exodus-people and their descendants is now over six million (2019). Then finally comes the time of persecutions where the hunters will force the rest of the Jews to flee from among the nations to their own land, so that no Jew will be left among the nations. (Ezekiel 39.28-29). The focus will then be on 'the land of the north', which means the area north of Israel: the former Soviet Union, Europe, and the Nordic countries. Increasing global antisemitism and Israel-hatred are signs of approaching End time Exodus.

What is, in those times, the role of gentile believers who bless Israel? To help the Jews as they journey towards the land of Israel in those days of difficult times and great distress, the days of the second Woe -cry (Isaiah 49.22, 11.12-15; Matthew 24.3, 20-31; Revelation 9.12-21). During that great Exodus in the middle of distress, God will perform gre-

at wonders, equal to those He made when He brought Israel out of Egypt (Micah 7.15-17). God's eyes are then set upon Israel – the Apple of His Eye has His special attention and believers who love Israel must remember to treat them accordingly. The Prophet Obadiah has given a royal instruction on how to treat the Jews on the days of their flight.

"You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble. The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head" (Obadiah 12-15, NIV).

During World War II, Mr Aarne Ylppö felt the Lord speak to him through these verses of Obadiah that Finland must not hand over its Jews to Nazi Germany. Mr. Kalevi Marin told this to the Archbishop Erkki Kaila, who phoned to General C.G.E. Mannerheim, read him the passage of Obadiah, and forbade him to hand over Finland's Jews. General Mannerheim did as he was asked, and did not hand over Finland's Jews to Nazi Germany, and, by grace of God, Finland preserved its independence, and was not annexed to Stalin's Soviet Union like Estonia, for instance. Only eight Jews were handed over to Nazi Germany, and as a kind of a punishment, Finland had to cede large areas to the Soviet Union. To the memory of those eight Jews Finns founded near Jerusalem a kibbutz called Yad Ha'Shmonah, which is nowadays primarily a community of Messianic Jews. We do well to remember Obadiah's words in these days of End time Exodus,

if we want to escape judgment in the maelstrom of the End time.

Return of Anusim Jews

"This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far Zarephath; and the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev" (Obadiah 20, NIV).

Obadiah speaks about End time Exodus on the Day of the Lord, in the great distress (Isa.13.9-13). He speaks of exiles living in Sepharad who will come to Negev. Sepharad, or Spharad, means Spain in Hebrew. The two main Jewish ethnic groups are the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi Jews.

Ashkenazi Jews live mostly in northern, central, and eastern parts of Europe, while Sephardi Jews live mostly in southern Europe – Spain and Portugal – and in South America. In the Middle Ages, during the reign of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, Jews were exiled from Spain and from Portugal in 1492.

The Jews were given three choices: exile, conversion to Catholic faith, or death. Many Jews gave in and converted to Catholic Christianity, but in secret remained faithful to their Jewish traditions such as Shabbat, Feasts, Kosher food, etc. If a converted Jew was caught practising Jewish religion, he was tortured and even murdered by the inquisitors of the Catholic Church.

Many Jews fled then to Brazil and other parts of South America. These Jews are called 'Anusim', which means 'converted'. Gentiles often call them by the name of 'Marranos', swine. In Belo-Horizonte, Brazil, there is an Inquisition Museum to remind of the times when the inquisitors of the Catholic Church were persecuting them. Many of these Anusim-Jews believe in Yeshua, but they have preserved their Jewish identity. The main issue now is for them to have the right to return to Israel without being forced to convert to Orthodox Judaism. In

May 2019 a second conference was held in Portugal, where this issue of their return to Israel without conversion was the main theme. Joseph Shulam wrote as follows in his prayer letter from December 2018:

"I ask you to pray for the conference in Portugal. It is impossible to estimate the importance of this conference to you and to Anusim/ Marrano Jews who suffered under the Inquisition of Spain and Portugal, and the amount of benefit it will bring to these people and their descendants. Our goal is to wake up Jewish people and the state of Israel to open up the gates to these lost Jews and restore them to the land and the nation of Israel. According to San-Paulo University scholar, Dra Anita Novinsky, the numbers are shocking. She estimates that there are 60 million Anusim in Southern and Central America. Even if only 10% of them moved to Israel, the entire Middle East complex would undergo a change."

Obadiah's prophecy tells us that Sepharad Jews will return to Israel and settle in Negev. A small number of Anusim Jews already live there. Difficult, but interesting times lie ahead of us. Let us be ready for the days when Exodus Jews need our help.

The Eye is the Lamp of the Body

"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is no darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you" (Luke 11.34-36,, NIV).

"The body is a unit, though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to

drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many... And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12.12-14,16-17,27,NIV).

"For the mitzvah (command, good deed) is a lamp, Torah (teaching, instructions, doctrine, law) is light, and reproofs that discipline are the way to life" (Prov. 6.23, CJB)

"Your word is a lamp for my foot and light on my path" (Psalm 119.105, CJB)

The Bible pictures God's ecclesia as the body of the Messiah, i.e. Christ. The body of the Messiah includes all those who have turned to God repenting their sins, accepted Yeshua the Messiah in faith as their Redeemer and the Lord of their lives, and follow Him obeying the instruc-

tions of God's word. That is when we are baptised in the Holy Spirit and become members of the body of the Messiah.

For the body to function in an orderly and complete way, each member has their own task in the body. The eye has an important task in the body of the Messiah. The eye illuminates the whole body so that Torah and the word of God can shed their light to the body and guide its path according to the will of God on the basis of New Covenant grace and freedom.

If Israel – the Apple of God's Eye – has the place due to her in the body of Messiah, God's Torah can light up the entire body of the Messiah, i.e. the church of God, so that it does not walk in darkness. That is when Israel's cause has been understood and restored in the body. That is when we will bless Israel, pray for her, and work for her.

Then will the Lord's commands be the guiding principles for the church – the Lord's Shabbat will be kept (Gen.2.1-3;Mark 2.27), the original Feasts of the Lord celebrated as they should, etc.

(Lev.23; Acts 20.6; 1Cor.5.6-8). The pure water of God's word will wash the wedding gown of the church body white as snow, leaving it without stain or wrinkle, and make her ready for the Lord's coming and the taking up (Eph. 5.25-27; Rev. 19.7-9).

Visually impaired Laodicea – End Time Christianity

"To the angel of the Messianic Community in Laodicea write: Here is the message from the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God's creation:

"I know what you are doing: you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth! For you keep saying, 'I am rich, I have gotten rich, I don't need a thing!' You don't know that you are the one who is wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked! My advice to you is to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich; and white clothing, so that you may be dressed and not have to be ashamed of your nakedness; and eye salve to rub on your eyes, so that you may

see. As for me, I rebuke and discipline everyone I love; so exert yourselves, and turn from your sins! Here, I'm standing at the door, knocking. If someone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he will eat with me. I will let him who wins the victory sit with me on my throne, just as I myself also won the victory and sat down with my Father on his throne. Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities" (Rev.3.14-22, CJB).

The second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation contain a message for seven churches located in the south-western part of today's Turkey. Many tourists have visited the archeological ruins of these churches.

The message of the Book of Revelation concerns all churches of all ages all over the world, and also in the End time. Furthermore, the message to the churches is a prophetic cross-section extending from the times of the early Apostolic church of Ephesus to the last, lukewarm church of Laodicea of the End time, which



Green valley seen from Haifa's Zoo. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

the Lord reprimanded severely. (This cross-section of the church age concerns mainly churches in Europe and in the Middle East.)

The name of Laodicea means "the people's tribunal" or "democracy". It describes aptly this age of a Laodicean church, beginning from the early twentieth century to the last hours of this dispensation and the Lord's coming.

During this Laodicean age, the Protestant Christianity of the age of Sardis and the Christianity of the revivalist movements of the age of Philadelphia have broken away from the truth of God's word to the lukewarmness of a "democratic" people's church. The focus is not in seeking what the will of God is, and what God has said in His Word and commands, but in how to get people's favour. If, in the name of equality, people want to have women as pastors and bishops, their will be done, no matter what the word of God says (1 Tim.3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9).

If "the people" wants homosexuals to have the same rights as heterosexual married couples, they will have the right to register their homosexual relationship and, as a bonus, they will get the blessing of "the people's church" to their union.

If the people wants to have, "in the name of love, equality and prevention of discrimination," homosexual pastors and bishops in "the people's church", so be it. God's word and commands are ignored because, according to liberal theology, they belong to Pauline intolerant and narrow-minded age and culture, not to our modern time (Gen.19; Ezek.16.49-50; 2Pet.2.6-8; Luke 17.28-30; Lev.18.22, 20.13; Rom.1.18-32; 1 Cor. 6.9-11).

To the Laodicean lukewarm "people's church" the Lord of the church makes Himself known as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler and the Beginning of God's creation, who



At David's Falls in Ein Gedi. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

fights against His enemies with the sword of His word. This is a serious reminder of the Creator to the Laodicean age of apostasy and lukewarm Christianity immersed in Darwin's evolution theory which has expelled God as Creator. Evolutionists don't need God as Creator because all things have come about through natural selection, and man himself has developed from apes in the course of millions of years.

It is to these Laodicean evolutionist Christians that the Lord of the church says that God has created all things in the Messiah, i.e. Christ (be-reshit, in the beginning), and in Him all things stand (Isa.40.12-26,45.12; Rom. 1.19-24). The Messiah holds the entire universe together, without Him the universe would collapse.

"Because in connection with him (Messiah) were created all things – in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; whether thrones, lordships, rulers or authorities – they have been created through

him and for him. He existed before all things, and he holds everything together" (Col.1.16-17, CJB).

The Messiah rebukes the Laodicean church of being lukewarm and complacent, of boasting of its riches, of not needing a thing. According to the Lord's diagnosis Laodicea is also blind. The apple of the eye of the Laodicean church body has been clouded by cataract so that they do not see their misery, poverty, and nakedness.

Laodicea's visually impaired church is afflicted with spiritual cataract. Its spiritual vision has been clouded, because a veil covers the apple of its eye, i.e. the place of Israel in God's Kingdom. If we try to speak of Israel to the church of Laodicea, they immediately refer to the Replacement theory and say, "There is nothing special about Israel, the church is the new spiritual Israel."

If we try to speak to the Laodiceans about the Torah, God's

teaching, doctrine, and law, they tell us, "That belongs to the Old Covenant; you judaists, you are returning to the slavery of the law of Moses, but we are saved by grace and are part of the Christian church."

If we try to speak to them about the Shabbat, they say, "That is Old Covenant stuff, it's for the Jews under the slavery of the law. Jesus abolished the Shabbat, and we Christians have Sunday, the Day of Ascension. (If we study the Bible, we will see that Yeshua did not abolish any command, Matt.5.17-19.)

If we speak of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is the Messiah's true time of birth, and of other feasts of Israel to the Laodicean church, their answer is, "What difference does it make, when he was born, we Christians have Christmas," etc. This attitude is caused by the clouding of the apple of the eye of the Christian church, which, in turn, causes spiritual blindness and leaves the church body in apostasy and darkness (Luke 11.33-36).

They do not see the truth that God has revealed in His word about the times of the early Apostolic church; how the church kept the Shabbat, the original day of rest that God had given mankind, and the original feasts of the Lord that the early church kept also in gentile Greek and Asian regions (Mark 2.27-28; John 7; Acts 2.1-4, 17.1-4, 20.6; 1Cor.5.6-8).

To the Laodicean church body afflicted by cataract Sunday is the day of rest and Christmas is a feast - both established by the Roman church – and they have other unbiblical feasts and traditions of Roman origin as well.

The tragedy of the visually impaired Laodicean church is that the church is not a fellowship of born-again Christians, who have accepted Yeshua the Messiah as their Saviour and King, but the membership is gained through natural birth in flesh, without

faith. Obedience to God's word and commands is secondary, and you may live as you please as long as you pay your church taxes.

The Laodicean church does not live up to the standards of a true church of God; it has lowered its standards to match up with the harlot of Babylon (Rev.17-18).

The Bible tells us that a visually impaired priest, descendant of Aaron, may not come near the altar to offer God's bread. They may eat of God's bread, but not present it as offering, for that would desecrate the sanctuary (Lev.21.16-23).

In these days of the Laodicean church, "visually impaired" priests offer God's bread on the altar. They preach the word of God, often founded on unbiblical doctrines and traditions, although they are spiritually blind, and in so doing they desecrate the church, the sanctuary of the Spirit of God of the New Covenant.

"When a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit," Yeshua says of those who walk and teach people according to unbiblical traditions nullifying thus God's Word and commands (Matt.15.6-14).

Yeshua tells the blind Laodicea to buy from Him salve to put on the eyes so that they may see again.

"But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. Then one of the soldiers

told him, "Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, 'Cursed be any man who eats food today!' That is why the men are faint." Jonathan said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey" (1 Samuel 14.27-29, NIV).

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward (Ps.19.8-12, NIV).

The visually impaired Laodicean church should start tasting the honey of the Torah that would brighten their eyes. The honey of the Torah can be applied to blind eyes also outwardly. And then one can see clearly that the New Covenant never abolished God's Torah, but confirmed it (Matt.5.17-19; Rom.3.31).

If we taste the Torah's honey, we will see that in the New Covenant no one lives as slaves to the Torah, not even Messianic Jews, but, saved through grace, we have the joy to obey, in the Spirit of the New Covenant, those divine commands given to keep us from harm, and serve God in the Spirit's new way, saved by grace (1 Cor 9.20-21).

The Messiah counsels the Lao-

dicean church to repent, otherwise He will spit them out of his mouth. There is a similar expression in the Torah where Israelites are told not to practise immorality such as adultery, infidelity, incest, homosexuality, and sexual relations with animals, otherwise the land of Israel will vomit them out of its mouth (Lev.18; 20.10-23).

Sadly this Laodicean age has been largely infected with immorality and other kinds of sinful behaviour, and if people don't repent and turn from their bad ways, the Messiah will spit the immoral and lukewarm church out of His mouth.

The Messiah is Knocking at Laodicea's Door

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev.3.20, NIV).

Eating together is the sign of a very close friendship and brotherhood in mid-east culture (Gen.43.25; 2 Sam.9.7; compare Matt.9.11; Luke 15.2). A meal also depicts a close relationship with God (Ex.24.1-11; Isa.55.1-3).

According to traditional interpretation those who open their hearts to the Lord will experience this intimate fellowship of grace with the Saviour. He comes to their hearts to live there and eats with them, and they can eat the bread of God's word and drink of the refreshing Spirit at the Lord's table (1Pet.2.1-3; Heb.5.11-14; John 7.37-39).

However, if we look at the text

above in broader context, it seems that the Lord of the church is knocking at the door of a global, lukewarm, and fallen away Laodicean church of the End time. In the midst of all formal and lukewarm activities, Yeshua has been forgotten and, in some cases, altogether left standing outside the church door.

But if someone in the Laodicean church hears Him knocking and opens the door, the Lord will come in and eat with him or her, even if no one else were interested,

Promises to those who overcome

"I will let him who wins the victory sit with me on my throne, just as I myself also won the victory and sat down with my Father on his throne. Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities" (Rev.3.21-22, CJB).

Those of Laodicea who overcome, those who have opened their hearts to the Lord in the age of apostasy and lukewarm Christianity, have the promise of the right to sit on the throne with the Messiah.

It means that they will reign in the coming Kingdom of Peace of the Messiah as well as in the ultimate age of new heavens and new earth (Rev.20.1-6, 22.1-5).

It is wise to fight a good fight of faith to be in the Messiah's Kingdom, among the ones who have overcome.



Prophetical Perspectives

Signs of the Coming of the Messiah - part VI



A scenery from the Oulanka Nationalpark, Kuusamo, Finland. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Written by:
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The Ten Virgins

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor.13.9)

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their

lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our oil lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matthew 25.1-13, NIV).

Yeshua's parable of the ten virgins speaks about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, where we enter by grace, by faith

in Yeshua the Messiah. The primary message of the parable is that we are to keep watch and be ready for the coming of the Messiah. This subject is particularly relevant now that lawlessness, apostasy, and sleepiness have taken over the Finnish Zion, as well as a large part of global Christendom, especially in the western world.

We should, however, take a closer look at the message of the parable, and ask why the lamps of the foolish virgins went out when the bridegroom was a long time in coming. Why were they so foolish that they did not make preparations for the bridegroom's coming? Why will 50% of the bridesmaids be left out of the wedding banquet? We will start with the characters in this parable of

the ten virgins, and go on to study the meaning of the lamp (or menorah) and the oil. Let us also keep in mind that the message of the parable is based on Israeli wedding tradition; we will study the parable in the light of the Bible as well in the light of Israeli wedding ceremony.

There are Many People in the Wedding of the Lamb

"Jesus spoke to them again in parables saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come'" (Matthew 22.1-3, NIV).

"For I am jealous for you with

God's kind of jealousy; since I promised to present you as a pure virgin in marriage to your one husband, the Messiah" (2 Cor. 11.2, CJB).

The parable of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, is about the heavenly Father, who prepares a wedding banquet to his Son, Yeshua, the heavenly Bridegroom (John 3.27-30).

The Bride is the church which is composed of the believing Israel of God and the believers from other nations who have been grafted in the olive tree of Israel, who have been betrothed to the heavenly Bridegroom, Yeshua the Messiah (Isaiah 54.1-7; Hosea 2.19-20; Rom. 11.17-29). The friend of the Bridegroom acts as the master of ceremonies, according to the Israeli example.

"To this John replied, 'A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less'" (John 3.27-30, NIV).

John the Baptist, who was a restorer anointed with the spirit of Elijah, called himself a friend of the Bridegroom (Luke 1.13-17; Matthew 17.11). In the wedding banquet of the Lamb these "masters of ceremonies", restorers anointed with the spirit of Elijah, are needed to prepare the church Bride for the coming of the Bridegroom (Eph. 5.25-27).

Angels will be the "pages" who accompany the Bridegroom to fetch his Bride (1 Thes. 1.7).

The ten virgins will escort the bride as bridesmaids and trainbearers; five of them are wise, and five of them are foolish who were not ready for the Bridegroom's coming.

Kingdom of Marital Canopy and Tabernacle

"In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding-place from the storm and rain" (Isaiah 4.2-6, NIV).

Isaiah writes that over all the glory there will be a "chuppah", a marital canopy and a "succah", a tabernacle to give shade from the heat of the day and to shelter from storm and rain. What does this mean?

When, at his coming, Yeshua establishes his Millennial Messianic Kingdom of Peace on earth, he will create over Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, and over its assemblies, a cloud during the day and a flaming fire for the night. The tabernacle, "succah", will then be there to shelter from sun and rain and storm. The Messiah's Millennial Kingdom of Peace will be the Kingdom of the Tabernacle, the prophetic fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23.33-44; Zechariah 14.16-19). (The eighth 'additional' day after the feast, which is not a part of the proper feast, is a shadow of the eternity of the new heavens and the new earth. Revelation 20-21.)

What is, then, the meaning of the marital canopy, "the chuppah", Isaiah sees over all the glory? It means that the Millennial Kingdom of Peace is very likely also the time of the wedding banquet

of the Lamb. It is my belief that the wedding of the Lamb will begin on earth with the last revival. When the Messiah comes, the church will be taken up in rapture and it sits to judge the nations and establish the Kingdom of Peace on earth with the Messiah. Messiah's Thousand-year Kingdom will be a continuous wedding banquet of the Lamb. It will be the Kingdom of "succah" and "chuppah", where the Israelis will obviously be guests of honour.

The Difference Between a Bride and a Bridesmaid

"All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold. In embroidered garments she is led to the king, her virgin companions follow her and are brought to you" (Psalm 45.13-14, NIV).

"There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, as well as young women beyond number, but my perfect one, is unique, her mother's only child, the darling of the one who bore her. The daughters see her and call her happy, the queens and concubines praise her" (Song of Songs 6.8-9, CJB).

In the Hebrew New Testament the word used for 'bride' is "betula". The bridesmaids are called "alma" (Matthew 25.1-13). The bridesmaids, or the trainbearers, escort the bride, as we read in the Messianic Psalm 45. The Bride, the Church Bride, is one – one heart and one soul, according to the model of the Apostolic early church, with no separating "sect-pens" (Acts 2.38-47; 4.32).

The Bride has washed her wedding dress in the blood of the Lamb and the water of God's word, living up to the word of God so that there is no stain nor wrinkle in her wedding gown (Eph. 5.25-27; Rev. 7.14; 19.6-9). In Israel, prior to the wedding, the bride immerses in the mikveh in order to wash and prepare herself for her bridegroom. Likewise, the Bride of the Lamb takes a cleansing mikveh bath to

purify and prepare herself for her Bridegroom Yeshua. (Rom. 6.3-6), The Bride is awake, waiting for her Bridegroom, while the bridesmaids fall asleep as the Bridegroom tarries. (Song 5.1; Rev. 22.17). The virgins in Matthew's parable of ten virgins are bridesmaids who accompany the bride and take part in the wedding banquet, if their lamps are burning.

Menorah – the Bridesmaids' Seven-Branded Lampstand

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the Lord from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the Lord must be tended continually'" (Leviticus 24.1-4, NIV).

"The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Rev. 1.20, NIV).

The menorah, the seven-branded lampstand, is Israel's symbol in the Old Testament.

It was Aaron's, the high priest's, duty to take care that the lamps were burning from evening till morning. The wicks had to be trimmed from time to time lest the lamps should begin to smoke and burn badly (Exodus 25.37-40). During the apostasy the lamps of the menorah had gone out in the Temple of Jerusalem. The menorah is the symbol of the Nation also in Israel's coat of arms. In the New Covenant it is also the symbol of the church (Rev. 1.20).

According to the Hebrew New Testament the bridesmaids are carrying menorahs, the seven lamps of which must be kept bur-

ning continually while waiting for the Messiah Yeshua to come and fetch His church to the Lamb's wedding.

The menorah, with its base, shaft, branches, and decorations, was to be made of one piece of pure gold – a picture of the oneness of Israel and the church (Ex.25.31-40). The menorah has seven branches, at the top of each branch a lamp burning.

These seven lamps are, according to the Bible, as follows:

1. The lamp of the Lamb (Rev.21.23). This lamp is burning, if we have dedicated our life by faith to Yeshua the Messiah. Only then does the blood of Yeshua, the Lamb of God, cleanse us from all sin (Rev.7.9).

2. The lamp of God's word (Psalm 119.105). This lamp will give its light, if we study God's word and walk in faith according to its instructions.

3. Man's spirit is the Lord's lamp (Proverbs 20.27). We should walk before God with a sensitive and responsive heart, praying and listening to what the Lord wants to say to our spirit.

4. Israel's lamp (2 Samuel 21.27). We should have Israel,

God's own people, close to our heart, so that we bless Israel, pray for her, and support her even in the middle of difficult times, when antisemitism and hatred for Israel invades the world (Genesis 12.1-3). If we then stand with Israel, we will be blessed, too.

5. The lamp of the word of the prophets (2 Peter 1.19). While waiting for the Messiah to come we must take heed of the prophetic word in these darkening times when apostasy increases and darkness and chaos fill the world.

6. Elijah's lamp, or the lamp of restoration (Jean 5.33-35; Luke 1.17; Matthew 17.11; Acts 3.19-21; Malachi 4.4-6). John the Baptist was a burning and shining lamp, a restorator anointed with Elijah's spirit. On the eve of the Lord's Day Elijah's spirit will be poured out on faithful servants to prepare God's people for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, Yeshua the Messiah.

7. The commandment is a lamp; the Torah (teaching, instructions) is a light (Proverbs 6.23). We have to pay attention to God's commandments and follow them according to the Messiah's interpretation and teaching

letting the teaching of the Torah shine as a light that comes from grace and freedom of the New Covenant, and not from slavery.

All these lamps must be burning while we are waiting for our Bridegroom, Yeshua the Messiah, to come and take us to the Lamb's wedding.

The Meaning of the Oil

What, then, does oil mean? In the Bible oil is the symbol for the following:

1. Oil of the Holy Spirit (Zech.4.1-6)
2. Oil of brotherly unity (Psalm 133.1-4)
3. Oil of correction – humility (Psalm 141.5)

The wise bridesmaids took enough oil, all kinds of oil, to the lamps and to oil jars so that there would be enough oil until the coming of the Bridegroom. They made sure they had the Holy Spirit's oil by being connected to Yeshua on a daily basis through prayer and Bible study. Those who were wise also had fellowship with other believers in perfect harmony, without contro-

versies or sectarianism. The wise maids submitted themselves to correction, humbling themselves, which was like oil on their heads. But the foolish maids did not take oil in oil jars, and as the Bridegroom was a long time in coming, they ran out of oil, and their lamps went out.

The Process of Producing Oil

"Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning" (Ex. 27.20,NIV).

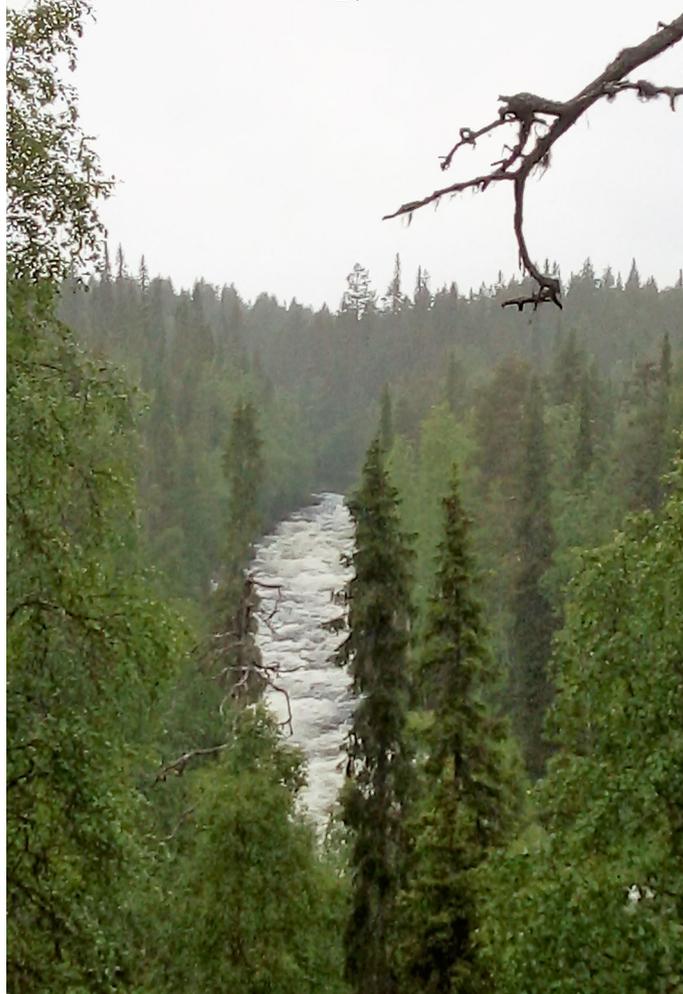
Let us see how the oil is produced. We get oil from olives, the fruit of olive trees. In biblical symbolism Israel is the olive tree, the land of natural olive tree (Deuteronomy 8.7-8; Jeremiah 11.16). This is the teaching of the apostle Paul in the NT as well (Rom.11.17-29). Israel is the natural olive tree with natural branches - Israelis who believe in Yeshua the Messiah. Branches of a wild olive tree have been grafted in the natural olive tree; these are believers of other nations who have become part of the natural olive tree of Israel, God's Israel, through faith in Yeshua.



A scenery from the Oulanka Nationalpark, Kuusamo, Finland. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

When we are branches in the olive tree of Israel, we are supposed to bear fruit of the spirit (Gal.5.22). These fruits of the spirit of the olive tree are those olives. We bear these fruits of the Spirit – olives – only if we stay in the Messiah (John 15.1-6). The heavenly gardener prunes fruitless branches, and cleanses branches that bear fruit, so that they would bear fruit even more abundantly.

How does one recolt the olives from the olive trees? It is done by shaking the tree. You can hit the branches with a stick, or nowadays machines are used to shake the trees, so that the olives fall in a net or tarpaulin spread under the tree (Deut.24:20; Isaiah 24.13). In the end times the olive tree of Israel will be shaken, nor will other nations be spared. Believers grafted in the olive tree will also be shaken. If you feel you are being shaken, it means the time to collect the olives has come for you.



A scenery from the Oulanka Nationalpark, Kuusamo, Finland. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

The olives are then taken to the oil-press, where they are crushed and ground in order to squeeze the oil out of them. In Hebrew the oil press is Gat Shmanim, that is Getshemane. Yeshua went through that oil-press, the agony of Getshemane (Mark 14.32-38). The believers of the end time are taken to the oil-press, so that we would have enough oil in this thickening darkness and grief. If you are beaten and squeezed in the end time, it will be like oil on your head (Ps.141.5). My friend, if you feel you are in the oil-press in Gat Shmanim, remember that this painful crushing produces pure oil for the needs of the end time.

What do we need oil for in the end time? To begin with, we need it for the lamps, menorahs, for we need the light of God's word when darkness covers the world (Ps.119.105). We need the light of God's word when we are waiting for the coming of the Messiah and the rapture. We need oil for the anointing of the end time (Ps.23.5). We need oil to heal the

sick in the revival of the end time (Mark 6.13). Oil is needed to nurse the wounds and blows of beaten believers (Isa.1.6). Oil is needed to bake cakes of bread mixed with oil, so that we can serve God's word anointed with Holy Spirit Oil in the end time (Lev. 7.12). We also need oil to do business when the wise maids come to buy it from us to be ready in good time. The foolish ones come too late. A time will come when the Messianic message and restoration are manifest in a powerful way throughout the world, and because of that Messianic believers need to have oil to share.

One Wife – the One Who Sells Oil

"A wife (Hebrew isha achat, one woman) of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.' Elisha

replied to her, 'How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?' 'Your servant has nothing there at all', she said, 'except a little oil.' Elisha said, 'Go round and ask all your neighbours for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.' she left him and afterwards shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, 'Bring me another one.' But he replied, 'There is not a jar left.' Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, 'Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left'" (2 Kings 4.1-7, NIV).

In this story of Second Kings we meet a woman who sells oil. In the original Hebrew this oil merchant is Isha Achat – one wife. One wife, the bridal church

of Yeshua with one heart, the Lamb's wife, is the oil merchant. The Bride is called "perfume poured out" (Song of S.1.3). Why did one wife have oil to sell? Because there was the prophet Elisha, restorer, who had received a double anointing of Elijah's Spirit, as it reads in 2 Kings 2. Elisha had been given the task of restoration. In the end time, when the Lord's Day and the Lord's coming are close at hand, God will pour out the Spirit of Elijah, the Spirit of restoration, on his servants all over the world in order to restore Israel and the church (Acts 3.19-21; Matt.17.11). The church will be restored to holiness, pureness, one-heartedness, love, and obedience to the Word of the early Apostolic church. There will be one restored group of believers, who have turned away from unbiblical traditions of Rome and back to the Jewish roots of Christianity according to the model, teaching, and practice of the early Apostolic church. One wife, the restored bridal church of the Messiah, will follow the example of the early church in keeping the Messiah's commandments, biblical Shabbat, and the original feasts of the Lord (Lev.23).

Where the spirit of Elijah reigns, it gives birth to a single-hearted group of believers who have separated from the unbiblical doctrines and practices of the apostate Christianity of the great Babylon of Revelation 17-18 to be obedient to God's word the way the early church was. This group of people, this one wife of the Lamb, does not lack oil, indeed, she can sell oil to all believing bridesmaids who humble themselves to buy oil in good time before the midnight cry. The wise bridesmaids were wise because they went to buy oil in good time from the one place where there is one wife and the Spirit of Elijah, spirit of restoration. Why then was the destiny of the foolish maids what it was? Why were they not ready? They were foolish enough not to go in time to the oil merchant. They drifted into sleepiness, lawlessness, and apostasy, when the coming of the Messiah was ap-

proaching.

Zechariah's Vision of the Branches of the Olive Tree

"Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. He asked me, 'What do you see?' I answered, 'I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.' I asked the angel who talked with me, 'What are these, my lord?' So he said to me, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.'

Then I asked the angel, 'What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?' Again I asked him, 'What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?' He replied, 'Do you not know what these are?' 'No, my lord', I said. So he said, 'These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth'" (Zech.4.1-6, 11-14, NIV).

More insight into the mystery of the olive tree and the oil is shed to us in Zechariah's vision. In the vision the two olive trees are the natural olive tree of Israel and

the wild olive tree of gentile nations (Rom.11.17-29). This vision is about believers in Israel and believers in the nations. Oil is poured out from two branches to the menorah, i.e. the church, in Israel and in the nations. The two branches are the two anointed ones who stand before the Lord of all the earth. The vision in Revelation 11 tells a similar message of two witnesses clothed in sack-cloth, who stand before the Lord of all the earth, doing same kind of wonders as Moses and Elijah did. Moses and Elijah were prophets who were standing before the Lord of all the earth (Numbers 4.12; 1 Kings 17).

In the end time, servants who remain faithful to God's word are anointed with Elijah's Spirit for the purpose of restoration and the end time revival, just like Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist in their days (Mal.4.4-6; Luke 1.17; Matt.17.11; Acts 3.19-21). According to Zechariah's vision the two branches of the olive tree, the two witnesses anointed with oil, will be the ones who pour the golden oil into the menorah in Israel and in the nations. They proclaim the authority of the Torah (Word of God) in the spirit of the New Covenant, based on grace and freedom, to this apostate Christian world. They proclaim the message of restoration – the return to

the teaching and practice of the early Apostolic church of the first century, about which we read in Acts and Epistles in the New Testament. These people, these restorers anointed with Elijah's Spirit, will have to face the shaking of the olive tree and the oil-press, Getschmane, for the golden oil to flow into the menorah church of the end time, and for the light to shine in the increasing darkness of the end time. If this way of restoration is ours, let us not be surprised if we are crushed. That is how the oil is provided for the needs of the end time.

The Lamp of the Lawless Will Go Out

"The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out" (Proverbs 13.9, NIV).

To have a more complete picture of why the lamps of the foolish bridesmaids went out, we need to study it in the light of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. The Hebrew word Torah means teaching and instructions. It is usually translated with the word 'law', which is not the best translation. The Torah does contain God's commandments, but its primary purpose is to give us advice on how to live in the world God has created. The Greek equivalent for

Torah is nomos, law. Its opposite is annomos, lawlessness, which means an attitude where God's Torah, teaching, instructions, and law, is rejected and trampled underfoot. When speaking about the signs of the Messiah's coming, Matthew 24.12 says that when annomos, lawlessness and wickedness, increases, the love of most will grow cold.

When the coming of Yeshua is near, Christendom will be largely in the state of apostasy and wickedness, despising the Bible. God's word and commands will be ignored, and Christianity will be mostly entertainment based on unbiblical teachings of Rome. God's commands are not respected nor obeyed, in matters of marriage for example. The Hebrew word corresponding the Greek word annomos is rasha, which means ungodly, lawless; the plural reshaim, the ungodly, the lawless. Proverbs 13.9 uses this very word reshaim for those whose menorahs go out.

The reshaim, the lawless, will reject the Torah (teaching, instructions, and advice) and their lamps will go out (Psalm 119.53).

The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp (menorah) of the wicked will go out. The foolish bridesmaids will fall away in the end time's general



Majestic quietness lies over the Kivitunturi, Savukoski region in Laplan. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

atmosphere of sleepiness and apostasy, in the eve of the Lord's day and coming. They drift with the mainstream and let go of God's Word's authority, which causes them to fall away and reject God's word and commands, and thrusts them right into the maelstrom of the entertainment religion of Babylon the Great mixed with Rome. The foolish bridesmaids will all plunge into lawlessness along with the apostasy of prostitute Babylon, and the lamps go out.

The Cry in the Night – the Bridegroom is Coming, Go to Meet Him

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess.4.13-18, NIV).

In the heart of the night a cry is heard: "The bridegroom is coming, go to meet Him." What does this cry mean? It relates to the Messiah's coming and the taking up of believers. The answer is given in the letter to Thessalonians; the taking up of the dead in Christ and those who are still alive will happen with a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God.

According to the original Greek text it is the archangel who calls out a loud command, as a commanding officer would. The let-

ter of Jude, verse 9, tells us that this archangel is Michael. Let us see what the Bible tells us about Michael and the end times. The Book of Revelation speaks about the archangel Michael and war in heaven (12.1-9). In the middle of the great distress of the end time Satan will persecute the women Israel who is in birth-pains, and that is when Michael, the archangel, will give his loud commands to God's angels who fight against Satan's angels.

There will be war in the heavenly realms and war on earth. This same description of the end time's great distress is found in Daniel 11.40-12.3. There will be war in the Middle East; Israel – land of milk and honey – will be attacked. Great tribulations and agony all over the world, but Michael and his angels will protect Israel and believers in the midst of that distress.

When the great tribulation comes and the war breaks out, the voice of archangel Michael is heard, a voice that will awaken the believers of the sleeping Christianity. The ten bridesmaids will wake up and realize that the coming of the Bridegroom, Yeshua the Messiah, is near.

What they need to do, is to get quickly ready and go to meet the Bridegroom. It is time to trim all the lamps of the menorah; use the wick-trimmers and cleanse soot and card from all the seven branches for all the lamps to burn brightly, and welcoming joyfully the Bridegroom.

The wise bridesmaids get their lamps burning soon enough, because they have oil. The lamps of the foolish ones go out, because they have no oil in the jars. The foolish ones ask the wise ones for oil, but these have oil only for themselves.

The foolish ones have to go and buy oil for their lamps, but it is too late. You cannot get to your destiny with someone else's oil. The wise bridesmaids had bought oil in time; they were ready.

I Do Not Know You

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Mt.7.21-23, NIV).

The foolish bridesmaids went to buy oil from the oil merchant, to the place of one wife and the spirit of Elijah, the spirit of restoration. When they came back and wanted to get to the wedding banquet, it was too late. The door was shut, and the Lord's answer was harsh: "I do not know you." (Mt.25.1-3)

The foolish bridesmaids were not admitted to the Lamb's wedding (taking up). In Matthew 7 the Lord's answer is even harder. He speaks to people who have prophesied, driven out demons, and performed miracles in the Lord's name, but he calls them 'evildoers' and tells them: "I never knew you!" Let us take care that we don't walk in lawlessness and wickedness. Let us keep watch and pray to be ready for the Messiah's coming and the taking up.

How Can We Be Ready?

"After that I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendour. With a mighty voice he shouted: 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.' Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her

sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues... The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again, your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray'" (Rev.18.1-4,23,NIV).

What should we do to avoid the destiny of the foolish bridesmaids?

The Book of Revelation gives an answer (Rev.17.1-6, 1 Cor.6.15-17). The time has come for us to walk out of Babylon the Great, for the light of the menorah has gone out there because of apostasy and lawlessness.

If we don't, we will share its destiny. How do we walk out of Babylon?

We must make sure that the spirit of the apostate harlot of Babylon does not control our minds or hearts. What is the use of walking out if one's heart still remains under Babylon's influence. We must take care that we keep away from the spirit of Babylon, on whose paths the lights have gone out (Ps.119.105). We must watch our daily walk and cultivate intimate relationship with God through faith in Yeshua the Messiah. Let us not forget to go and buy oil from where one wife and Elijah's spirit reign, so that we have enough oil to keep our lamps burning.

And why not enter wholeheartedly the road of restoration and return to Christianity's Hebraic roots and the teaching and practice of the early Apostolic church on the basis of the New Covenant's grace and freedom? Then we will belong to the number of those who keep watch and pray, who have one wife, a restored Apostolic, Messianic Church of the end time.

We won't run out of oil, but we'll have an abundance of oil to share with others in the power of Elijah's spirit. May the God of Israel bless you all with this grace in Yeshua's holy name!

*** Yovel ***

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”...that all of them may be one (echad)...” Joh. 17:21

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