

TORAHSCOPE: Bereisheet (In the beginning)

by Mark Huey posted 24 October, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 1:1-6:8
Isaiah 42:5-43:10

“Return to Foundation”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3).

With the joy of celebrating the Fall holidays and *Simchat Torah* behind us, we now have the privilege of returning to the weekly Torah portions for more spiritual nourishment. For most Messianics who have begun the discipline of consistent Torah study in the past decade, the arrival at “In the Beginning” presents another opportunity to dig deeper into the mysteries of God. For centuries, our Christian forefathers were denied the consistency of reviewing these foundational building blocks of our faith by focusing much of their teaching on the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). The justification for this is understandable because of the blessing received, when the sacrifice required for the sin discussed in these opening chapters, has been completed in the Person of the Messiah. One of the earliest prophecies of the Bible declares this, as the Seed of the woman (Yeshua) has indeed crushed the head of the serpent, defeated death, and was bruised for our transgressions at His crucifixion:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Genesis 3:15).

For this completed prophecy we are eternally grateful, but it should never give us a license to avoid our responsibilities to our Creator. Now that through confession, repentance, and belief in the sacrifice of the Messiah, where by faith we can be born from above with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, true Believers have the opportunity to be restored to a relationship with their Creator. Understanding that He desires to fellowship with the creatures that He formed in His likeness and image, then following through on what He created us for is imperative, if we are going to maximize our limited time in our Earthly tabernacles:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Reviewing the first five books of the Bible, or the Torah, I believe is essential if we truly want to please our Heavenly Father. This might sound a little prejudicial, but the fact remains that humans have an inherent tendency to allow the inclination of the “flesh nature” we inherited from Adam to dominate, even though the Ruach HaKodesh can take residence in a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). The Jewish people, who were entrusted with the oracles of God (Romans 3:2), understood this reality and accordingly devised a systematic way of study that many Messianic Believers are now embracing. Knowing and understanding the very basic truths about our human nature and how we have had a perpetual propensity to let our flesh control choices and decisions, has resulted in an annual review of what our spiritual forefathers did during their respective sojourns. The wisdom in repetitive study is self-explanatory.

We need to remember that the Prophet Isaiah, in this week’s corresponding Haftarah selection, makes it abundantly clear what the responsibility is for the people who have inherited the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom that comes forth from the Word of God:

“Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, ‘I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from

the prison. I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you” (Isaiah 42:5-9).

Clearly, followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are to be a “light to the nations” of the world. The same God who created the Heavens and Earth and gave breath to people, also gave the Spirit to those who walk in it. He called believing Israel to be a righteous covenant people responsible for turning the eyes of an unbelieving world toward Him. Now if this is truly one of our primary responsibilities, then would it not be prudent to have a deeper working knowledge about the foundational building blocks of our faith as seen in the Torah?

I have concluded that it is and I again relish the opportunity to see what the Holy Spirit is going to teach me during my next journey through the Torah. Inevitably, I have discovered that it is never the same from year to year. After all, if we are pursuing a relationship with the Almighty with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, then where we are today in our respective walks should circumstantially be different from where we were one year ago. Hopefully, we have grown more mature in the past twelve months as we are moving from the various stages of maturation, as detailed by the Apostle John:

“The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:9-17).

The Apostle John defines three levels of maturation in our walk with the Lord. First, we discover that little “children” in the faith at least “know the Father,” but implicitly, because of their youth are consequently “forgiven their sins for His name's sake.” I do not know if this exclusively refers to young children or simply those who are young in their faith. But the encouragement we should all receive is that we should be growing to greater levels of maturity. The “young men” in the faith have obviously matured to a place where they are overcoming the evil one. In other words, through the strength of their convictions and as the Word of God abides in them, they are putting their love for the Father above the temptations to love the world and the things of the world. Finally, the “fathers” have matured to a place where they “know Him who has been from the beginning.” This might be a reference to a fuller understanding of the totality of the Holy Scriptures and could be a veiled insinuation that a consistent study of the Torah will naturally inculcate the principles that are profoundly articulated in the pages of the whole counsel of God. One has to conclude that the “fathers” have already overcome the evil inclination and are now in a position to teach the young children and young men by their examples of a faithful walk with the Creator.

This brings me back to a few verses that caught my attention when I was reading the lengthy accounts in *Bereisheet*. If you will recall, after all of the created works are completed and the fall of humanity and commensurate punishments are meted out, the message turns to the mundane recitation of family life in the house of Adam:

“Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with *the help* of the LORD.’ Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came

about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:1-7).

This is the infamous story about Cain and Abel and the first recorded fratricide. Considerable volumes of literature have been inspired by this morbid transgression against a brother. Nevertheless, for all to read, the depiction of Cain’s violent action against Abel reveals the true nature of unredeemed man. Here is the first recorded case of a person who was trying to please God with his own efforts, rather than understanding the basic principle that the Father requires a blood sacrifice in order to best please Him. The example was established in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When they discovered that they were naked and ashamed, they tried to cover their private parts with fig leaves. At that point, the Holy One instead used the shedding of blood via the death of an innocent animal to take the skins to cover them. This example demonstrates the need that blood must be shed, and points to the ultimate sacrifice of His Son Yeshua, to atone for the sin of fallen humanity.

Lamentably, Cain never understood this principle. Hence, when the offerings were presented to God, the grain fruit of his human labors were not regarded by the Almighty, and yet, Abel’s offering from his flocks was regarded. Here, another pattern of the firstborn not necessarily receiving His blessing is established. Many other things can be gleaned from this incident, but what struck my thoughts this year was the comment that God made to Cain as He was admonishing him:

“If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7).

Here, in a firm but loving way, the Lord gives the “young child” Cain some sound advice. If you do what is acceptable, you will be “lifted up,” “forgiven” (ATS), or “accepted” (NIV). The Hebrew term used to describe this is *se’et* (שִׂעַת), meaning “exaltation, dignity” (BDB).¹ An intriguing place it is used is in a Messianic psalm of David:

“For the choir director; according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David. My soul *waits* in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken. How long will you assail a man, that you may murder *him*, all of you, like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence? They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position [*se’et*]; they delight in falsehood; they bless with their mouth, but inwardly they curse. Selah. My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory *rest*; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God” (Psalm 62:1-7).

The same Hebrew term used for “lifted up” in Genesis 4:7, *se’et*, is repeated when David is describing the way “a man” will be murdered from his “high position.” This clearly is a reverence to the Messiah, because He received the delight of falsehoods while His opponents blessed God with their mouths, but inwardly cursed Him. The parallels with Cain can certainly be seen, as he apparently never comes back to his Creator, preferring the banishment and isolation of doing things his own way. The encouragement to do good is overwhelmed by doing his “own thing,” which inevitably finds “sin crouching at the door, with its desire for you.” This is a sobering comment that we should all take to heart.

Since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, is it sensible that we should internalize this admonition? In our human condition, we all have the potential to be as wicked as

¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 673.

Cain or anyone else who has ever lived. However, our Heavenly Father gives us a solution to the problem innate in our flesh nature: **we must master sin**. It is our responsibility to overcome the sin that may indwell us.

Cain appears to fail in his assignment, but it is one that we should take to heart. This is one of the reasons why the Jewish Rabbis spend an inordinate amount of time referring to the good inclination versus the evil inclination. But choosing good over evil may only allow one to live a life that is perhaps only outwardly pleasing. True Believers understand more from what we learn by the example of Abel and the willingness he had to offer up a blood sacrifice from his herds.

For whatever reasons, Abel followed the pattern established in the Garden. He recognized that all of his human efforts were not sufficient to please his Creator. He rested in the offering that he personally had nothing to do with, because the animals he was herding were created beyond his efforts, and he did not have to play a direct role in their procreation. By studying the Torah, we too will discover that a blood atonement for our transgressions is absolutely required for redemption. Throughout the course of studying the words of Moses, we will be given example after example of indications about why the Holy One had already decided from the “foundation of the world” that He was going to have to sacrifice His Son to atone for the sin committed in the Garden of Eden. Before the creation of time, God consciously knew what would be required. Can you imagine that kind of love? Can you begin to understand why we are told by the author of Hebrews that we should enter into the rest of His truths as epitomized in His resting on the seventh day?

“For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: ‘AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS’; and again in this *passage*, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’ Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:3-12).

The author of Hebrews describes why we should enter into the rest that the Father has accomplished that was required for our salvation. But he also points out the importance of studying the Word of God. As we let His active Word penetrate into our hearts, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit will help divide between what comes from Him and what is generated by our soul. As we study the Torah and other teachings that come from the heart of our Father, we can move from being “little children” in the faith and become “young men” who overcome evil. In time, perhaps through a consistent study, we can attain the status of being called a “father” in the walk. At that point, I believe we will not only know the Father from the beginning, but we will be walking in His rest and not seek to be lifted up—following the example of our Messiah, who was humble in His walk before others in the world.

This is one of the reasons that I appreciate studying the Torah, because I believe it will direct us to rest upon the foundations of our faith. For down at the footings of our spiritual structure is where we will be more closely attached to the bedrock of our salvation. Of course, that rock is the Rock that David alludes to in his psalms so often:

“My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory *rest*, the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God” (Psalm 61:6-7).

May we all take refuge in the Rock as we learn more and more about Him this year, as we cycle once again through the Torah and the rest of the Scriptures that the Spirit points us back to our foundation.

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