

The Trilogy

by
Neil Snyder

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Preface

In the early summer of 2017, I wrote *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?* When I started working on the project, I had no idea that I was writing a trilogy—hence the title of this book.

Almost immediately after I completed *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?*, I started another writing project. The title of that book is *Press on to Maturity*. When I finished it, I still had no idea that I was writing a trilogy.

After a short break, I began yet another writing project. Its title is *The Faith of Abraham*. That project was well underway before I realized that the three books were connected. Thus, I combined them under the title *The Trilogy*.

The original version of *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?* is not identical to the one here. Over time, Yahweh clarifies things. It's called progressive revelation. The changes are small but significant.

The most significant difference between *The Trilogy* and its predecessors pertains to a statement I made several times in *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?* I said that true Christianity is

Judaic. In a perfect world, that would be correct, but we don't live in a perfect world.

Judaism as it is practiced today is a facsimile of the faith of Abraham. In *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?*, I said that Halacha has become a religion. That is correct. Part 1 of *The Trilogy* addresses that problem.

Yahweh made promises to Abraham and extended them to all believers through Isaac and Jacob/Israel. David became king over a united Israel, but after the death of his son Solomon in 931 BC, Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Israel rebelled against Yahweh immediately. As time passed, things got worse. In the 700s BC, things were so bad in Israel that Yahweh allowed the Assyrians to overthrow them and take them captive.

Eventually, Israel was dispersed among the nations.¹ Today we refer to them as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel because they assimilated and lost touch with their Israeli identity. They remain descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob/Israel nonetheless.

¹ "Goyim" is the Hebrew word for the nations. In most Bibles, it is translated either as "the nations" or as "Gentiles". Yahweh divides the human population into two groups: the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob/Israel and everyone else. Israel's rebellion against Yahweh caused Him to remove His Divine protection from Israel, and they had to assimilate to survive. Today, most of them have no idea that they are part of Yahweh's "chosen people".

The tribe of Benjamin was small, so it was absorbed by Judah. That's why together Benjamin and Judah are called as Judah.

Judah rebelled against Yahweh, too. In the 500s BC, Yahweh allowed the Babylonians to overthrow Judah and take them captive, but they never lost touch with their identity as Judeans. While Judah was in captivity in Babylon, the Judaic religion morphed into Halacha.²

Jewish religious leaders in Babylon realized that following the Temple's destruction in 586 BC, the religious practices that Yahweh required could no longer be performed—especially animal sacrifices at the Temple for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, they instituted Halacha as a substitute.

From a human perspective, that made sense, but from Yahweh's perspective it did not. Halacha is a form of rebellion against Yahweh. It is not a substitute for faith in Yahweh and it never will be.

After 70 years of exile, Judah returned to the Promised Land and rebuilt Yahweh's Temple, but they brought Halacha with them and combined it with the religious practices that Yahweh required. That was not done with Yahweh's consent.

In 70 AD, Roman forces destroyed Yahweh's Second Temple, and it has not be rebuilt. Following the

² Part 1 of *The Trilogy* deals with Halacha.

Second Temple's destruction, Judah completely abandoned most of the religious practices that Yahweh required, and Halacha became the Jewish religion that we know today.

Most contemporary Jews do not realize that Halacha is a religion. They see it as Jewish tradition, but it is a religion pure and simple. Their sages taught them that they had the authority to make wholesale changes to Yahweh's commands, and for the most part, Jewish people bought their logic.

The sages were wrong. Halacha did not come from Yahweh. It is just as man-made as Roman Catholicism. Halacha bears practically no resemblance to the faith of Abraham, and the faith of Abraham is what Yahweh requires. Returning to the faith of Abraham is what this book is about.

About the Author

Neil Snyder earned a Ph.D. degree in strategic management from the University of Georgia in 1979. He taught leadership and strategy at the University of Virginia for 25 years.

He retired from UVA in 2004 and is currently the Ralph A. Beeton Professor Emeritus at UVA.

In 2009, he created *SnyderTalk*, a blog that focuses on Israel and the Middle East. The URL for *SnyderTalk* is www.snydertalk.com.

Snyder is the author of many books including *His Name is Yahweh*, *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*, *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?*, *Press on to Maturity*, *The Faith of Abraham*, *What Will You Do with the Rest of Your Life?*, *Stand!*, *Falsely Accused*, *Vision, Values & Courage*, and *The Will to Lead*.

Part 1:

Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?

The apostle Paul gets a bad rap. Most of the time, people who read his letters to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, for example, miss essential points that he was making.

The reasons are many, but this much is certain. Paul never intended to create a new religion.

True Christianity isn't a religion at all. It's based on faith³ and obedience to Yahweh. It's the same faith that Yahweh requires from everyone—Jews and Gentiles. That's not my opinion. That's what the Messiah said. Paul said the same thing. I believe them. You should, too.

Before proving those points, I want to say a few words about a critical moment in human history when a perverted form of "Christianity" was transformed into a religion by a tyrannical ruler with sinister motives.

³ I call it "the faith of Abraham".

Constantine and the Great Divide Between Jews and Gentiles

In the 300s A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine did create a new religion. We know it as the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church is huge. According to the Vatican, there are about 1.2 billion Roman Catholics in the world today.⁴

The following statistics on Catholicism were reported 7 years ago:

“As of 2010, there are nearly 1.1 billion Catholics, up from an estimated 291 million in 1910. Catholics comprise 50 percent of all Christians worldwide and 16 percent of the world's total population.”⁵

Because of its size, influence, and vast wealth, the world sees the Catholic Church as the legitimate representative of Christianity. Just as disturbing, they think the pope speaks for all Christians.

That's not true, but most people believe it anyway. They have no idea that Catholicism is a man-made religion. It was introduced by a despot, and it has

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-21443313>

⁵ <http://www.livescience.com/27244-the-world-s-catholic-population-infographic.html>

developed into a religious/political organization with serious moral problems.⁶

Constantine's animosity toward Jewish people knew no bounds. He did everything in his power to drive a wedge between Judaism and his new church. For instance,

1. Constantine forbade Passover and substituted a festival for the fertility goddess Ishtar in its place. Hence, the name "Easter".
2. He introduced Christmas to coincide with the annual Sun god festival, because Sun god worship was central to Roman culture.
3. He also abandoned Yahweh's 4th Commandment to honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy and substituted in its place first day or Sun Day Sabbath, because it coincided with the traditions of Sun god worshipers.

Under Constantine's rule, anyone who rejected his new religion and the traditions he imposed was treated harshly. Jewish believers were Constantine's first victims. They refused to accept Easter, Sun Day Sabbath, and Christmas.⁷ Many of them paid for their faithfulness with their lives.

⁶ <http://yournewswire.com/pope-francis-absolves-pedophile-priests/>

⁷ Christmas was introduced to coincide with the annual Sun god festival that pagans in the Roman Empire observed to mark the winter solstice. The Messiah was not born December. He was born in the fall, probably

The Protestant Reformation was an attempt to come out from underneath the Catholic umbrella, but it didn't go far enough. Vestiges of Catholicism remain important attributes of Protestant churches today. Right now, higher-ups in the Catholic hierarchy regard Protestants as Catholic because they still indulge in Sun Day Sabbath.⁸ I think they are onto something.

Contrary to popular opinion, Constantine was not a Christian.⁹ He was a sun worshiper. He simply used the Catholic religion to solidify his hold on power. It worked politically, but the effects on Christendom have been profound.

Thanks largely to Constantine's influence, the great divide between Christianity and Judaism persists to this day. But the dividing walls are coming down as more and more believers are being led by Yahweh's Spirit to search for the truth.

Thankfully, most "Catholics" are Catholic in name only. They were raised in a "Catholic" family and went to a Catholic church from time to time when they were children. That's the extent of their Catholicism.

Most Catholics have no idea what Yahweh said or what He expects from us. If they did, they wouldn't deify Mary, the Messiah's mother. That violates the 1st

in late September or early October during the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot.

⁸ <https://www.sabbathtruth.com/free-resources/article-library/id/916/catholic-church-admits-they-made-the-change>

⁹ <http://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/was-constantine-christian>

Commandment and is as basic as it gets. It's called idolatry, and it's a serious offense.

That's just one example of Catholic perversion. There are many others.

Leaders in the Catholic Church intentionally misrepresented what Paul said and made their distortions of what he said central to their religion. Paul didn't do that and never would have done it because he had no intention of creating a religion.

The Sect of the Nazarenes

The first Christians were Jews. They were a sect of Judaism known as the Sect of the Nazarenes. Their beliefs were based on faith in Yahweh and obedience to His word and the leading of His Spirit.

The most significant difference between Nazarenes and other Jews was that they understood that through the Messiah Yahweh had accomplished what He promised to do: redeem and save us.

Nazarenes did not introduce anything new much less start a new religion. They simply understood correctly what Yahweh had been saying all along.

Paul was a Pharisee. He was a protégé of Gamaliel¹⁰ and a rising star in Rabbinic Judaism that is based on Halacha, not the Tanach. I'll say more about

¹⁰ Gamaliel was a leading authority in the Sanhedrin in the early 1st century AD.

Halacha later, but for now, I want to point out that at first Paul was the nemesis of Nazarenes.

The Messiah's teachings threatened the existing Pharisaic power structure and put the livelihoods of the priestly class in jeopardy. Most of them were Pharisees. Paul did their bidding by hunting down Nazarenes and bringing them to Jerusalem for trials before the Sanhedrin. Paul even participated in Stephen's murder.¹¹ He held the outer garments of those who stoned Stephen to death.

The priestly class in Israel at the time of the Messiah lived large. They stood to lose a lot of wealth, power, and social standing if Yahweh's principles were applied. That's why they hated the Messiah so much and that's why they tried to stamp out the young and growing Sect of the Nazarenes.

In *SnyderTalk*, I have included a video that I took in the Wohl Museum in the Old City of Jerusalem.¹² It shows the remains of priestly dwellings near the Temple Mount at the time of the Messiah.

They lived like kings. It's no wonder that Pharisees were threatened by the Messiah and His faithful followers, the Nazarenes.

Interestingly, the priests' way of life came to an abrupt halt on the 9th of Av in 70 AD when Roman forces

¹¹ Acts 22: 20.

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7lQNSHh_bM

sacked Jerusalem and destroyed Yahweh's Temple. I'll say more about that later because it's important.

Driving Nazarenes from Synagogues

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and Yahweh's Temple, the number of Jewish people believing in the Messiah grew rapidly. Their numbers continued to grow, and they were regarded as a serious threat by the rabbis.

In 70 AD, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakki asked the Roman general in Jerusalem, Vespasian,¹³ for permission to open a small school in the seacoast town of Yavneh. Vespasian consented, and Zakki, along with a small group of leading rabbis, went to Yavneh and modified a Jewish benediction in an attempt to drive Nazarenes from the synagogues. They were fearful that the Nazarenes' practice of fraternizing with Gentiles would eventually lead to the assimilation of most, if not all, Jews.

According to the Babylonian Talmud,

"Our Rabbis taught: Simeon ha-Pakuli arranged the eighteen benedictions in order before Rabban Gamaliel in Jabneh. Said Rabban Gamaliel to the Sages: Can any one among you frame a benediction relating to the Minim [Nazarenes]? Samuel the Lesser arose and composed it."¹⁴

¹³ Vespasian eventually became Roman Emperor. He founded the Flavian dynasty.

¹⁴ Berakoth 28b-29a.

The benediction they modified is known as the *birkat ha-Minim*. This is how the modified portion read after changes were made:

“And for Nazarenes let there be no hope, and let all wickedness perish as in a moment; let all thine enemies be speedily cut off, and the dominion of arrogance do thou uproot and crush, cast down and humble speedily in our days. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who breakest the enemies and humblest the arrogant.”¹⁵

Jewish people were expected to recite this benediction three times a day. When called upon, they were expected to read it aloud in the synagogue. Obviously, Nazarenes could not read it or recite it, because it was a condemnation of them and the Messiah.

When they refused to read or recite it, they were identified as Nazarenes and were no longer welcome in synagogues. Thus, for the most part, the *birkat ha-Minim* achieved the primary goal of the rabbis meeting in Yavneh. It divided Nazarenes from other Jews—a situation that persists to this day.

Contemporary Jews will not recognize the modified language in the *birkat ha-Minim* because it was changed again once Nazarenes were effectively driven from the synagogues. This is how it reads today:

¹⁵ Moore, Phillip. *The End of History—Messiah Conspiracy, Vol. I*, Atlanta: Ramshead Press International Corporation, 1996, p. 337.

“And for slanderers let there be no hope, and let all wickedness perish as in a moment; let all thine enemies be speedily cut off, and the dominion of arrogance do thou uproot and crush, cast down and humble speedily in our days. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who breakest the enemies and humblest the arrogant.”¹⁶

In his book *Judaism: The Evolution of a Faith*, Rabbi Phillip Sigal said that the rabbis meeting in Yavneh did what they did for political reasons.¹⁷ They wanted to unify the Jewish people and establish a hierarchy with themselves at the top of the pyramid.

Obviously, Nazarenes could not accept what the rabbis wanted to accomplish. The Messiah, Yahweh, alone was at the top of their pyramid. Thus, they were effectively excluded from Jewish life.

Rabbi Akiva Drove Another Nail in the Coffin

Rabbi Akiva¹⁸ is one of the most prominent Jewish sages of all time. He was a major contributor to the Mishnah and to Mishnah Halacha.

During the Bar Kochba Rebellion (135 AD to 137 AD), Nazarenes fought alongside other Jews to oust the Roman occupiers from the Promised Land. At first,

¹⁶ Moore, Phillip. *The End of History—Messiah Conspiracy, Vol. I*, Atlanta: Ramshead Press International Corporation, 1996, p. 337.

¹⁷ Sigal, Rabbi Phillip. *Judaism: The Evolution of a Faith*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, p. 80.

¹⁸ <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/rabbi-akiba/>

things went well for Bar Kochba's forces. That prompted Akiva to declare that he was the messiah.¹⁹

Akiva's declaration infuriated Nazarenes, because they knew the Messiah. They could not continue to support Bar Kochba under that condition. Not long after Nazarenes withdrew their support, Roman forces defeated Bar Kochba.

Akiva blamed Nazarenes for Bar Kochba's defeat and declared that they were not Jewish. But he didn't stop there. He forbade any contact whatsoever between Jewish people and other Jews who belonged to the Sect of the Nazarenes.

In Akiva's eyes, it was as though Nazarenes ceased to exist. That tradition is still in effect today, but it is much less troublesome than it was when Akiva made his pronouncement because most Jews don't take Judaism seriously.²⁰

Akiva's proclamation was outrageous. Jewishness is not determined by beliefs or by actions. It's based solely on lineage.

According to Lawrence Schiffman, author of *Who was a Jew?: Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism*, the rabbis meeting in Yavneh never questioned the Jewishness of Nazarenes. Rabbinic law at the time prescribed the conditions under which people

¹⁹ <http://www.jewishhistory.org/bar-kochba/>

²⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/01/us/poll-shows-major-shift-in-identity-of-us-jews.html>

were considered Jewish. Either their mother had to be a Jew or they had to convert to Judaism. For males, conversion required immersion, acceptance of the Torah, and a sacrifice. If a person met those conditions, he was considered Jewish no matter what he believed and no matter what he did.²¹

Akiva's shameless pomposity was breathtaking. It defied logic, common sense, and Halacha. Even so, he did what he did, and it was enthusiastically supported by the majority of Jewish people living in Israel at that time.

In the years that followed, more and more Gentiles became believers, and Nazarenes who had been driven out of the synagogues and declared non-Jews became a minority of believers. Keep in mind that Nazarenes never tried to present their beliefs as a new religion. They always understood that their beliefs were based on Yahweh's word, the Tanach or Old Testament.

Constantine was born about 150 years after Akiva died. As I said, for political reasons, Constantine did manufacture a new religion called "Christianity". It worked for him politically, but it had terrible consequences for believers, particularly Nazarenes.

Ironically, Nazarenes who had been reduced to non-Jewish status by Akiva became targets for Constantine because of their Jewishness. They refused to betray Yahweh, so they became his mortal enemies.

²¹ Schiffman, Lawrence, *Who was a Jew?: Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism*, KTAV Publishing House, Hoboken, NJ, 1985, p. 51-54.

Many of them were murdered for adhering to Yahweh's commands.

Constantine and Akiva have done more harm to Jewish believers than anyone else in human history. Akiva was first by more than a century.

More Wedges between Jewish people and the Messiah

In the Middle Ages, Rabbis Shlomo Yitschaki (Rashi) and Moses Maimonides (Rambam), two of the greatest rabbis ever to have lived, looked upon the Messiah as a "stumbling block." They believed that Nazarenes helped to bring about all the atrocities inflicted on the Jewish race after His death and led most of the known world to worship someone other than Yahweh.²²

Today, most, although not all, rabbis look upon the Messiah as someone very much like the anti-Messiah referred to in the New Testament. They see Him as a counterfeit and a deceiver. They have such low regard for Him that they continue to reject the Jewishness of His Jewish followers.

Ironically, they regard atheistic Jews as real Jews. Their logic is difficult to comprehend because it is so convoluted, but it is true nonetheless.

Hatred of the Messiah runs deep in Jewish tradition, Halacha. That's an irrefutable fact.

²² Scherman, Rabbi Nosson, *The Stone Edition Tanach, The ArtScroll Series®*, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, New York, 1996, p. 1806.

Getting Back to Paul

One day, Paul had a personal encounter with the Resurrected Messiah, Yahweh, on the road to Damascus. Yahweh opened his eyes literally and figuratively so that he could see, and He gave Paul an assignment. Paul would become the apostle to Gentiles.

Paul did his job. The problems we have today with his letters have nothing to do with him or with what he wrote. They have to do with the fact that over the centuries people have misused and abused Paul's letters to create a religion.

The first culprits were Jewish religious leaders. Next came Constantine and those who adhered to Catholicism. Protestants are guilty, too, because they have done far too little to distance themselves from Catholics.

As I said, true Christianity is not a religion at all. Its basic precept is that Yahweh became a Man and did what He told Moses and the prophets that He would do. That was the crux of Paul's message, and it came straight from the Tanach.

Now let's turn our attention to Halacha.

Yahweh's Law vs. Halacha

Most people today who claim to be Christians don't understand that Paul talked about two laws. One of them is from Yahweh. It's called the Law, and it's

presented in the Tanach—i.e., the Torah, Prophets, and Writings or the Old Testament.

The other is man-made law. It's called "the law", too, but it's also referred to as the traditions of the Jews, the Oral Tradition, and Halacha. It is not from Yahweh.

It's impossible to understand what Paul wrote unless you differentiate between Yahweh's Law and Halacha.

In the minds of religious Jews dating back more than 2,500 years to the time of the Babylonian captivity, Halacha has had precedence over Yahweh's Law in much the same way that Supreme Court decisions have precedence over laws passed by legislative bodies. That is something Yahweh did not instruct and will not condone.

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Paul's letter to the Romans is arguably the best recitation of the Gospel in the New Testament. In it, Paul laid out the foundation for faith in Yahweh, and he used the Tanach (Yahweh's Law) to prove every point he made.

Look at Romans 1: 1-6. In those introductory verses, Paul explained the purpose of his letter:

"Paul, a bond-servant of Y'shua the Messiah, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of Elohim, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning

His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of Elohim with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Y'shua the Messiah our Master, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His Name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Y'shua the Messiah." (Romans 1: 1-6)

Paul's introduction in Romans makes these points clearly:

1. Y'shua is the Messiah. He is the descendant of David who was promised by Yahweh to redeem and save/deliver us.
2. Paul's message is from the Scriptures (i.e., the Tanach/Old Testament). His purpose was to show that the Scriptures point to Y'shua as the Messiah.
3. Paul did not introduce anything new. His goal was "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." It's the same faith that Abraham had, not a new faith.

Stated simply, in his letter to the Romans Paul did not add anything to Scripture. He simply explained what the Scriptures say. Nazarenes did the same thing.

Regrettably, most believers today are not as familiar with the Tanach/Old Testament as they should be, so they don't realize that Paul was quoting Scripture to prove his points.²³ Bible publishers, editors, and translators contribute to the problem. Typically, they do a poor job of connecting the Old and New Testaments.

Even study Bible's with notes, concordances, and cross references tend to focus on the way the New Testament holds together across different writers, but they ignore the fact that every New Testament writer holds together with what Yahweh told us in the Tanach.

In Romans 10: 1-4, Paul alludes to Halacha:

“Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to Elohim for them [Jewish people] is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for Elohim, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about Elohim's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of Elohim. For the Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10: 1-4)

Jewish religious leaders demonstrated their zeal for Yahweh by creating a vast array of laws called Halacha. They are far more restrictive than the laws that Yahweh gave to Moses and the prophets.

²³ Paul quoted the Tanach more than 80 times in Romans.

According to Paul, they didn't understand Yahweh's plan for our redemption and salvation. Therefore, they did not "subject themselves" to His righteousness. Instead, they established their own righteousness, codified it, and enforced it as law. That was a terrible mistake.

Making matters infinitely worse, they referred to the Messiah as a pagan "god-man" and ridiculed those who believed what Yahweh told Moses and the prophets. They even created a new name for Him. They called Him Yeshu instead of Y'shua because Yeshu means "may His Name and memory be blotted out."²⁴

That was a deliberate slur that Jewish people who don't know any better continue to parrot to this day. It was and is a serious mistake because the Messiah is Yahweh.

Halacha is problematic because many times it blatantly contradicts Yahweh's explicit commands in the Tanach. The best example of this is the prohibition in Halacha²⁵ against saying Yahweh's Name even though Yahweh commanded us repeatedly to declare His Name to the world.

As I said, the Tanach points to the Messiah.²⁶ In his letters, that was Paul's primary focus. He was

²⁴ <http://www.ariel.org/qa/qyname.htm>

²⁵ See Sanhedrin 7: 5.

²⁶ See *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition* by Neil Snyder for details.

attempting to undo the damage done by Halacha and to give Yahweh's word (the Tanach), its proper place.

For instance, Psalm 118: 19-24 refers to the Messiah:

“Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to Yahweh. This is the gate of Yahweh; the righteous will enter through it. I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is Yahweh's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which Yahweh has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118: 19-24)

The Messiah is “the Stone which the builders rejected”, and He “has become the chief corner stone” just as the Psalm says. Paul used Psalm 118: 19-24 to support his points in Romans.

Yahweh's Law is instruction in righteousness, and it is good. In the end, it shows us that no one is righteous, not even one, and that we need a Redeemer and Savior.

That's exactly what Psalm 14: 1-3 says:

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no Elohim.’ They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. Elohim

looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek Elohim. Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Psalm 14: 1-3)

Paul used Psalm 14 to buttress his arguments in Romans.

Since no one is righteous, no one is qualified to be our Redeemer and Savior. Yahweh solved that problem by becoming a Man to take the penalty for our sins upon Himself. He is not a pagan "god-man". He is El Shaddai, El Elyon, Yahweh.

This is how Isaiah explained it in Isaiah 53: 6:

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." (Isaiah 53: 6)

The Messiah is the "Him" referred to in Isaiah 53: 6. We know that His Name is Yahweh because Yahweh told Jeremiah the Messiah's Name.²⁷

In Romans, Paul refers to Isaiah's prophecies repeatedly to prove his points, including Isaiah 53: 6.

Romans 10: 13 is the heart and soul of Paul's message. He said,

²⁷ See Jeremiah 23: 5-6.

“Whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.”

Believers know that Paul is talking about the Messiah in Romans 10: 13, but most of them think he is referring to the name Jesus. They are wrong.

In Romans 10: 13, Paul quoted the prophet Joel. This is what Joel said:

“Whoever calls upon the Name of Yahweh will be saved/delivered.” (Joel 2: 32, Joel 3: 5 in the Tanach)

Since we are incapable of perfect obedience to Yahweh’s Law, it should be obvious that we are even less capable of adhering perfectly to an even more stringent set of man-made laws. Pursuing righteousness by anything except faith in Yahweh is counterproductive.

That’s what Paul meant when he said,

“I say then, Elohim has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. Elohim has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with Elohim against Israel? ‘Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.’ But what is the divine response to him? ‘I have kept for

Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to Elohim’s gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” (Romans 11: 1-6)

The “works” referred to at the end of that passage from Romans 11 is a reference to Halacha. Paul is saying that strict adherence to Halacha (i.e., works) is not a substitute for faith in Yahweh and His sacrifice on our behalf.

Of course, Yahweh wants and expects us to do good works for Him, but works that Yahweh calls “good” stem from faith in Him and obedience to His word and the leading of His Spirit. Anything else, no matter how good it may appear to be, doesn’t pass Yahweh’s test.

Paul Abided by the Law and He Taught All Believers to Follow His Example

Paul was a Law-abiding believer. If you have any doubts, look at Acts 21: 17-26:

“After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which Elohim had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And when they heard it they began glorifying Elohim; and they said to him,

‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs [traditions].

What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.’

Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.” (Acts 21: 17-26)

Initially, Yahweh's Laws contained in the Tanach had to be applied differently to Gentile converts. Acts 15: 6-11 provides a glimpse of what I'm talking about:

"The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them,

'Brethren, you know that in the early days Elohim made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And Elohim, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put Elohim to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of Master Y'shua the Messiah, in the same way as they also are.'" (Acts 15: 6-11)

In Acts 15: 6-11, Peter was commenting on criticism that had been leveled against Paul by a group of Pharisees who had become believers in the Messiah. They mistakenly thought that circumcision was required for salvation. Peter was making the point that we are saved by grace through faith in Yahweh. That's the same point Paul made in Ephesians 2: 8-9.

It has always been true that faith comes first. In Genesis 15: 6, we are told that "Abraham believed

Yahweh [had faith in Yahweh] and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” In other words, salvation is based on faith in Yahweh. The obedience that Yahweh requires flows from a faithful heart.

Circumcision, as important as it is, is an outward sign, but faith is a matter of the heart. Saving faith has to do with Yahweh writing His Law on our hearts so that we want to obey Him because we love Him and because it’s the right thing to do. Yahweh really wants circumcised hearts.

Circumcision is like baptism in this regard. Baptism saves no one, but baptism is required. People are baptized to symbolize their union with the Messiah through His death, burial, and resurrection into a new life. Hence, the phrase “being born again”. The old self is put away, and a new life begins.

Circumcision is required, too, and it, too, is symbolic. Is circumcision just for Jewish people? I don’t think so.

If you think circumcision is not important, look at what Yahweh did when Moses failed to circumcise his son:

“Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that Yahweh met him [Moses] and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ So He [Yahweh] let him [Moses]

alone. At that time she said, 'You are a bridegroom of blood'—because of the circumcision." (Exodus 4: 24-26)

According to Yahweh's Law, circumcision is to be performed on 8-day-old male children, long before they can manifest faith. Clearly, it is symbolic.

New Gentile believers were not babies. They could reason and make the conscious decision to become faithful followers of Yahweh. In due course, the Holy Spirit would show them what they needed to do.

Since circumcision is important to Yahweh, one would expect that the Holy Spirit would lead new Gentile believers to be circumcised as an act of obedience. Nothing is said about that, though.

Again, Peter and Paul were making the point that symbolic acts are not substitutes for faith, and they were putting circumcision and other symbolic acts in their proper place. They were not disputing what the Law says about circumcision.

In his notes on 1 Corinthians 7: 18-19 in the *Aramaic English New Testament*, Andrew Gabriel Roth addressed this problem. Let's look at that passage in the New Testament:

"Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of Elohim.” (1 Corinthians 7: 18-19)

This is what Roth said about those verses:

- Verse 18: “Perhaps an odd statement to modern ears. During the conquests of Ptolemies, Seleucids, and the Romans, Jews were under pressure to assimilate into the Gentile societies. One of the ways Jews assimilated was to compete at the Olympic Games.... Since all athletes competed in the nude, a circumcised Jew faced an obvious dilemma. And so, many Jews made the unfortunate decision to reverse the appearance of their circumcision! Ironically, if they had been inspected at the Temple, they would have been barred.”²⁸
- Verse 19: “This is the key verse of the whole discourse in this chapter. Making circumcision into a tradition and distorting it into something other than what is intended by YHWH is to bring it to ‘nothing.’ Most Christians tend to read ‘circumcision is nothing’ and stop there, as if that is the message Rav Shaul is sending out. But they fail to grasp the last line, because if keeping Elohim’s commands is what counts,

²⁸ Andrew Gabriel Roth, *Aramaic English New Testament*, Netzari Press, 2009, p. 510.

circumcision is most definitely one of these Commandments! The Renewed Covenant (Jeremiah 31: 31-34 and Hebrews 8: 8) was given to the house of Israel and Judah, but includes all others who join, meaning the Renewed Covenant is not just a 'Jewish thing' nor is there a division between what Jews observe and what 'Elohim Fearing' non-Jewish disciples of Y'shua observe. The Kingdom of Elohim is open for all souls to enter, and we are all called into His Kingdom on His terms, not ours."²⁹

Again, this is the key point: the obedience that Yahweh requires flows from a faithful heart. Of course, obedience is important, but we need to put first things first, and faith is first. It always has been and it always will be. That's what Paul and Peter said. In his explanation about 1 Corinthians 7: 18-19, that's what Andrew Gabriel Roth said, too.

Halacha is a Religion

As I said, adding a vast array of even more stringent man-made laws only made matters worse. It was the same as creating another religion. It demonstrated clearly that the people doing it didn't understand what Yahweh wants and expects.

There are many examples of this, but I'll provide just one. The Torah forbids boiling a kid in its mother's

²⁹ Andrew Gabriel Roth, *Aramaic English New Testament*, Netzari Press, 2009, p. 510.

milk.³⁰ That's straightforward and simple, but over the centuries rabbis have come up with many laws relating to that command and imposed them on Jewish people through Halacha.

For instance, Jewish people aren't allowed to eat cheeseburgers because of that command, and they must have two refrigerators and two areas for preparing meals because of that command. For all practical purposes, that means Halacha requires Jewish people to have two kitchens in their homes.

In Israel, kosher homes have two kitchen areas — one on one side of the room and one on the other. A visitor who is unfamiliar with Jewish tradition can create a brouhaha in an instant in a religious Jew's home by inadvertently preparing something on one side of the room that should have been prepared on the other.

I've seen it happen. Thankfully, I wasn't the one who did it, but I could have been.

The list goes on and on. Halacha can be ridiculous. Even so, religious Jews adhere to Halacha because they think it pleases Yahweh.

They are wrong. Yahweh will not allow us to create a religion with all sorts of do's and don'ts and substitute man-made rules for faith in Him.

³⁰ Exodus 34: 26, Exodus 23: 19, and Deuteronomy 14: 21.

That's what Paul and the other writers of the New Testament were saying. All of them pointed to the Tanach as Scripture. So did the Messiah.

Therefore, except for Revelation, the New Testament isn't Scripture, and writers of the New Testament didn't present it as Scripture. That's a hard pill for many churchgoers to swallow.

Paul's Testimony before King Agrippa

What better witness about Paul's beliefs and about what he was trying to accomplish could we have than Paul himself? This is what he told King Agrippa:

"In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by Elohim to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve Elohim night and

day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you people if Elohim does raise the dead?

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Y'shua of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

[According to Halacha, blasphemy simply means saying the Name "Yahweh".³¹ Paul was a promising, young Pharisee, and Pharisees were strong believers in Halacha. In the beginning, so was Paul.]

While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, my

³¹ Sanhedrin 7: 5.

Master?’ And our Master said, ‘I am Y’shua whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to Elohim, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to Elohim, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So, having obtained help from Elohim, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Messiah was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26: 2-23)

Paul's message was straight from the Tanach. This is precisely what he said:

"I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place." (Acts 26: 22)

We must completely ignore Paul's personal testimony to conclude that he added anything to Scripture. He went out of his way to say that he didn't.

The truth is what it is. My job is to tell it. If you think that I've gone too far, search the Bible and you will see that I haven't.

What did the Messiah say?

Looking at what the Messiah said is a good place to start. His Sermon on the Mount is the most succinct presentation in the New Testament about the primacy of Yahweh's word, the Tanach, and the foolishness of subordinating it to anything especially Halacha. It's presented in Matthew chapters 5 through 7.

For example, in Matthew 5: 17-20, the Messiah explained His mission:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the Tanach]; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone

who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands [the Tanach] will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law [Halacha], you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The Messiah made clear that He came to fulfill “the Law and the Prophets” (the Tanach). He said that they are still in effect and that they will be in effect until “heaven and earth disappear”.

That hasn’t happened yet, so they still apply.

Then He differentiated between Yahweh’s Law (the Tanach) and Halacha twice:

- “Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 5: 19) The Pharisees set aside Yahweh’s commands and taught people to obey Halacha instead.
- “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (Halacha), you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5: 20) The righteousness of the Pharisees was based on strict adherence to Halacha. Yahweh’s righteousness

is based on faith in Him and obedience to His word and the leading of His Spirit.

Pharisees and other teachers of Halacha did not understand the true meaning of Yahweh's word, the Tanach. They did not comprehend the extent to which Yahweh expects us to apply His logic in our daily lives. Thus, they created a form of righteousness, Halacha, enforced it as law, and substituted it for Yahweh's word, the Tanach.

The Messiah went on to explain how all-encompassing Yahweh's word is. For example, look at Matthew 5: 21-22:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca' [you good-for-nothing], is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

The Messiah said that Yahweh's command "do not murder" extends to anger, because anger is one step removed from the act of murder. In other words, Yahweh looks at our hearts and judges our thoughts, attitudes, and intentions, not just our physical acts.

Since all of us have been angry, we are guilty of breaking Yahweh's Law. Thus, all of us need a Redeemer and Savior.

The Messiah came to pay the price for our sins. He accomplished that with His death, burial, and resurrection. He is our Redeemer and our Savior.

The Messiah Distinguishes between Yahweh's Law and Halacha

In John chapter 8, the Messiah addressed the distinction between Yahweh's Law and Halacha specifically. Let's take a look.

The Messiah was on the Temple Mount engaging in a discussion with a group of people who believed in Him, but many religious leaders (Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes) were there as well. They didn't believe in Him.

The scribes and Pharisees confronted the Messiah by bringing a woman to Him who was "caught in adultery, in the very act". (John 8: 4) They said,

"Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" (John 8: 5)

The Messiah's response is well-known, but not well-understood. He said,

"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8: 7)

Obviously, the woman was guilty according to Yahweh's Law. If she was caught in "the very act" of adultery, so was a man. He was guilty, too, but they didn't bring him to the Messiah.

Why not? The Law applies equally to men and women.

The scribes and Pharisees were testing the Messiah to see if He would violate Yahweh's Law or suggest that violating the Law was of no consequence. His response stopped them dead in their tracks.

He didn't deny their claim about the Law, but He pointed to their attempt at trickery by telling them that the first person to throw a stone at her should be sinless.

All of them were guilty, and they knew it. They just walked away. When they were gone, He turned to the woman and said,

"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more." (John 8: 11)

He forgave the woman and told her to repent. That's what "sin no more" means.

The crowd didn't disperse. The Messiah addressed these remarks to those who remained:

"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (John 8: 12)

That's one of the Messiah's "I Am" statements. The Name Yahweh derives from the Hebrew verb *hayah*. It means "to exist". By using the definition of the Name, He was claiming to be Yahweh.

Most Bible translations use "I Am", but "I Exist" is more accurate. That's a minor point for purposes of this discussion.

The Messiah made the same point again in verse 18:

"I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me." (John 8: 18)

The miracles that the Messiah performed were testimony from the Father. No one could do what He did unless there was Divine intervention. The fact that He performed miracles is well-documented in the New Testament and in the Talmud.³²

Large crowds flocked to the Messiah for healing. Most of the people who were with Him that day on the Temple Mount wanted to receive healing or they wanted to watch someone being healed, but the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes were looking for an opportunity to condemn Him.

The Messiah gave the religious leaders (His adversaries) some ammunition in verse 24:

³² See *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*.

“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” (John 8: 24)

Clearly, the Messiah was saying that if they didn’t believe He is Yahweh they would die in their sins. He did not say the Name “Yahweh”. Instead, He used the definition of the Name.

According to Halacha, only religious Jews could say “Yahweh” and only on special occasions. As I said, if everyday people uttered His Name, it was considered blasphemy, and the penalty was death.

The Messiah’s religious adversaries got the message:

“So they [the religious leaders] were saying to Him, ‘Who are You?’ The Messiah said to them, “What have I been saying to you from the beginning?” (John 8: 25)

When they asked Him “Who are You?”, they were trying to trick Him again. They wanted Him to say “Yahweh” so they could accuse Him of blasphemy and kill Him. Eventually, they would accomplish their mission,³³ but not that day.

The Messiah gave His adversaries more ammunition in verse 28:

³³ See Matthew 26: 65.

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He....” (John 8: 28)

The Messiah was referring to His crucifixion. He said that they would discover His true identity after they killed Him.

The Messiah’s crucifixion, burial, and resurrection were foretold in the Tanach.³⁴ Those things had to happen for our redemption and salvation. As Isaiah said, the penalty for our sins fell upon Him:

“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.” (Isaiah 53: 5)

Pay close attention to John 8: 30-31, because the Scriptures are His central point:

“As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. So the Messiah was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’” (John 8: 30-31)

He addressed that remark to people who believed Him. In other words, they believed what He told them, and He told them that He is Yahweh. Then,

³⁴ See *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*.

He said that they should “continue in My word” because it’s the truth.

“My word” must refer to the Tanach. In other words, He was talking about Yahweh’s Law, not Halacha, and He wasn’t adding anything to Scripture. He certainly wasn’t talking about the New Testament because it didn’t exist at that time.

The Messiah said that Halacha is evil. See John 8: 44:

“You [the religious leaders] are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.” (John 8: 44)

By referring to the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes as sons of the devil, the Messiah made clear where Halacha came from.

In Matthew 15: 3, the Messiah asked the religious leaders a question that illustrates my point:

“And why do you break the command of Elohim [in the Tanach] for the sake of your tradition [Halacha]?” (Matthew 15: 3)

The answer is simple. They broke Yahweh’s Law because they were following the devil. Satan inspired them to believe that their traditions (Halacha) were more important than Yahweh’s word, Scripture.

In effect, their teaching rendered Yahweh's word null and void. From Yahweh's perspective, that is a sin of the highest magnitude.

The same problem persists to this day. Jewish religious leaders study and teach Halacha instead of the Tanach. They call themselves "Torah scholars", but that's absurd. They are Halacha scholars, and the Messiah told us where Halacha came from.

So, what is the New Testament?

I believe the last two verses of John's Gospel tell us plainly what the New Testament is:

"This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Y'shua did many other things which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (John 21: 24-25)

If that's not convincing enough, John made it crystal clear in 1 John 1: 1-4:

"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we

have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Y'shua the Messiah. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”
(1 John 1: 1-4)

The only logical conclusion is that the New Testament is eyewitness testimony about what the Messiah did and said. It is not Scripture.

That conclusion begs this question: is the New Testament Yahweh inspired?

The answer is absolutely, positively YES! But is it Scripture? No.

The New Testament tells us who the Messiah is. He is the manifestation of Yahweh who came to redeem and save us. That was the apostles' message to the world.

How did the apostles show their readers and those with whom they came into personal contact that the Messiah really is Yahweh?

In their writings, they quoted Scripture. In their personal contacts, they quoted Scripture and performed miracles.

What Scripture did the apostles quote?

They didn't quote the New Testament, because it didn't exist at that time. They quoted the Tanach, the Old Testament.

The Tanach is loaded with evidence that the Messiah is Yahweh. For example, Yahweh told Jeremiah the Messiah's Name:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares Yahweh, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, 'Yahweh our righteousness.' [Yahweh Tsidkenu]" (Jeremiah 23: 5-6)

The Messiah is David's righteous Branch. About that fact, there is little or no dispute even among the most religious of religious Jews. Speaking to Jeremiah, Yahweh made clear that the Messiah is Yahweh and that Yahweh is "the Name by which He will be called".

So, as I said, the New Testament is eyewitness testimony, and it's crucial for that reason. Testimony stands on the strength of corroborating witnesses who have first-hand accounts to share. The New Testament provides that kind of evidence in abundance.

The New Testament is also history. It provides important information about what was taking place in the Promised Land before, during, and after the Messiah's time with us.

Pointing out what the New Testament is should not be interpreted by anyone as a criticism of it. Any criticism that I have is focused on people who have misused the New Testament by making it out to be something that it isn't.

Yahweh has used the New Testament in my life to draw me close to Him. I know that it is inspired by Yahweh, but that doesn't make it Scripture.

Besides, the New Testament should be called the Renewed Covenant. Yahweh made a covenant with the Children of Israel which they broke. That's why they needed a Redeemer and Savior. We do, too.

Yahweh's covenant with His people is discussed exhaustively in the Old Testament/Tanach, and Yahweh told Jeremiah about His plan to renew the covenant:

"Behold, days are coming," declares Yahweh, "when I will make a new [renewed] covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares Yahweh. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares Yahweh, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying,

'Know Yahweh,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares Yahweh, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31: 31-34)

In his note on Matthew 26: 28 which talks about the Last Supper in the Upper Room, Andrew Gabriel Roth explained the importance of the Renewed Covenant. The key point and the point that I want to emphasize is that the New Testaments that most Christians read are presented as being something that they are not:

Both Aramaic "**khawdata**" and Hebrew "**chadasha**" means renewed as in Psalm 51: 10, "*renew a right spirit within me*", Lam. 5: 21 "*renew our days as of old*". "**Chadasha**" can also be "*new*" or "*repair*" as in Isaiah 61: 4 "*repair the waste places*." YHWH spoke of the Renewed Covenant in Jeremiah 31: 31-37 that He would "*put my Torah in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...the seed of Israel also shall never cease from being a nation before Me for ever...says YHWH...*" This is the "Renewed Covenant"; however, even in Paul's day, the Kingdom that Y'shua offered was being violently counterfeited by religious traditions into something very contrary. Successive Greek theologians (like Marcion) replaced the meaning and importance of "Renewed Covenant" with the term "New Testament" and made a division of "Old and New" Testaments. Torah was and is taught by mainstream Christians to be either for Jews only, or completely abolished; thus, the

“New Testament” became laden with anti-Semitism. The hierarchical values of “modern” pagan cultures were syncretized by Greek Gnostic philosophies into the teachings of Y’shua and Paul to the point that modern day Christianity would be unrecognizable by the original followers of Y’shua as the “*Faith which was once delivered*” (Yehuda [Jude] 1: 3).³⁵

In this book, I will not attempt to explain fully the differences between New Testament translations that are based on original Greek and Aramaic manuscripts, but I will say this. The original New Testament was written in Aramaic, not Greek, and the New Testaments that most Christians read today are based on translations from the Greek manuscripts.

Virtually all seminary trained preachers have been taught as an article of faith that the original New Testament manuscripts were written in Greek, not Aramaic. They are wrong, but most of the ones that I have talked with reject the truth and refuse to research the issue.

That’s a serious problem and one that needs to be addressed. For a complete explanation, see *Ruach Qadim: Aramaic Origins of the New Testament* by Andrew Gabriel Roth.

Be that as it may, all the writers of the New Testament including Paul told us that Yahweh completed

³⁵ Andrew Gabriel Roth, *Aramaic English New Testament*, Netzari Press, 2009, p. 78.

a vital part of His plan when He became a Man and died for our sins. The Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection inaugurated the Renewed Covenant, not the New Covenant, the same way that Yahweh inaugurated the Covenant with Abraham.³⁶

Controversy Abounds

I started out by saying that Paul gets a bad rap. Because of what people have been taught, telling them the truth about the New Testament can generate a lot of controversy and heated discussion.

Most believers, even those who are opening up to the truth, still hold onto vestiges of the past in much the same way that believers who should know better hold onto Christmas, Easter, and Sun Day Sabbath even though they are Satanic in origin because they have fond memories of those times.

Paul never intended for us to believe that Yahweh's Law was "nailed to the cross". It's alive and well. Our sins, not the Law, were nailed to the cross because our Redeemer and Savior paid the price for our transgressions.

Thankfully, Yahweh took care of that Himself. He's the only One who could do it and He did it, but His Law is still in effect. That's what He said.

³⁶ See Genesis chapter 15.

Controversy abounds. It extends far beyond the New Testament.

A few years ago, I was explaining the importance of Yahweh's Name to a church group in Texas. I told them that Yahweh's Name has been edited out of their Bibles, even the *King James Version* of the Bible. Since Yahweh's Name appears almost 7,000 times in the Old Testament alone, there are at least that many errors in the Bibles that most of us use.

That's a factual statement. Anyone who is interested can check it out for himself. I've made it easy for everyone. Read *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*. It's based entirely on Scripture.

Even so, the preacher of the church told me later that many people in his congregation turned me off when I told them that there are errors in the *King James Version* of the Bible. He said that many of them believe the *KJV* is the only inspired version of the Bible and that it is error free.

As a community of believers, we resist the truth because we have a hard time letting go of erroneous things that we have been taught. That must change.

We Have a Problem and It's not what Most People Think it Is

It started out as a dispute among Jewish people about the primacy of Yahweh's word, the Tanach. The Messiah, His disciples, and the Nazarenes rejected

Halacha, but none of them attempted to create a new religion.

Since Halacha diverges from Yahweh's word drastically, it amounts to the creation of another religion.

Because they believed Yahweh and rejected Halacha, Nazarenes were driven from synagogues. Even so, they still didn't attempt to create a new religion.

In his letters, Paul explained what the Tanach says about the Messiah. He never attempted to create a new religion.

During the Bar Kochba Rebellion, Rabbi Akiva declared that Nazarenes weren't Jews and forbade contact with them. It was a foolish, spiteful move. It had nothing to do with religion. It was based on personal hatred and nothing more.

In the 300s AD, Constantine transformed "Christianity" into a religion. He and those who followed him misused and abused Paul's letters to help in that regard.

In the Middle Ages, the most prominent Jewish sages, Rambam and Rashi, continued to victimize Jewish believers.

The Protestant Reformation didn't go far enough in distancing Protestants from Catholics. That problem persists to this day and that's why leaders in the Catholic Church still regard Protestants as Catholics.

As I said, true Christianity is not a new religion. It's based on faith in Yahweh and obedience to His word and the leading of His Spirit. That's what Paul was talking about when he said,

“For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?” (Romans 11: 24)

Yahweh's Word is Supreme

We are still fighting over the primacy of Yahweh's word—i.e., the Tanach/Old Testament. Religious Jews prefer Halacha. Most Christians prefer the New Testament and virtually ignore Yahweh's word. Both groups are wrong.

There should be no doubt about where we will end up when Yahweh weighs in on the matter. He will make it clear to everyone that His word is still the Law.

Nothing that I have said should be interpreted to mean that I minimize the importance of grace in the lives of believers. I am simply saying that grace does not nullify Yahweh's Law. And nothing that I have said should be interpreted to mean that I believe the New Testament wasn't inspired by Yahweh's Spirit. I know that it was.

Believers should think long and hard before taking sides against Yahweh.

Jewish People Do Not Have to Convert to “Christianity” to be Saved

The belief that Jewish people must convert to Christianity to be saved is patently absurd. As I said, true Christianity isn't a religion. It's the same faith that Abraham had.

True Christianity is based on faith in Yahweh, obedience to His word and the leading of His Spirit, and nothing else. No one “joins” a Christian church, and no one “converts” to Christianity. Salvation is based on a relationship between Yahweh and an individual.

All that Jewish people need to do is turn to Yahweh, have faith in Him, and obey Him. That's what Abraham did. It's in the Tanach, not Halacha. That's what Paul was saying.

Prophecy is Being Fulfilled in Front of Our Eyes

The nascent Sanhedrin in Israel recently chose Rabbi Baruch Kahane to serve as *Kohen Gadol*, high priest. That's an important step toward Yahweh's return.

This is what one news report announcing his selection as high priest said about Kahane:

“Rabbi Kahane is a prominent scholar, knowledgeable in the complicated laws pertaining to the subject of the Temple Service.

He is part of the Halacha Berurah Institute, established by Rabbi Avraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, which deals with the elucidation of Jewish law from its Talmudic sources (Oral Law) and commentaries. He has played a prominent role in all the reenactments of the Temple services performed to date.”³⁷

For almost 2,000 years, rabbis in Israel have been fighting against Yahweh. Interestingly, as I said before, in 70 AD, forty years after the Messiah’s crucifixion, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and Yahweh’s Temple, and the Temple has never been rebuilt.³⁸

The Temple’s destruction was significant. In his book *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*, this is how Gershom Gorenberg explained it:

“Until 70 C.E., Judaism centered on the Temple and burnt offerings. Strikingly, the two Jews most responsible for post-Temple religion are remembered as predicting the sanctuary’s destruction. ‘There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down,’ the Gospels quote Jesus as declaring. That was about 40 years before Titus. ‘Forty years before the Temple’s destruction,’ says the Talmud, a crimson ribbon that miraculously

³⁷ <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/74772/sanhedrin-appoints-high-priest-preparation-third-temple/#McK4cz8TeLi8uzzi>.⁹⁷

³⁸ Daniel 9: 26.

turned white each Yom Kippur ceased doing so—that is, the ritual inside Herod’s edifice had gone hollow—and the doors of the sanctuary opened by themselves, as if to allow enemies to enter. ‘Sanctuary, Sanctuary,’ said Yohanan ben Zakkai, a leading rabbi of the time, interpreting the signs, ‘I know that your destiny is to be destroyed.’”³⁹

The exact quote from the Talmud that Gorenberg referenced reads as follows:

“During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-coloured strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the Hekal [the Temple] would open by themselves....”⁴⁰

30 AD to 70 AD was a critical interval in the history of the world. In 30 AD, the year the Messiah was crucified, Yahweh sent a powerful message to the Children of Israel. Every year on Yom Kippur until 30 AD, the high priest would tie a crimson ribbon around the neck of the scapegoat,⁴¹ and miraculously it turned white after the sacrifice of the goat whose lot was to die.

That event symbolized Yahweh forgiving the sins of His people, and it is not a folktale. It really happened

³⁹ Gorenberg, Gershom. *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*, New York, The Free Press, 2000, p. 68.

⁴⁰ The Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39b, p. 186.

⁴¹ See Leviticus 16: 7-10.

every year on Yom Kippur until the Messiah was crucified in 30 AD. Leading rabbis and Jewish sages who lived during that time confirm it.

Yahweh's message was clear. The sacrifices for sin required by the Law, which were only symbols of the ultimate sacrifice that Yahweh would make Himself, were no longer acceptable to Him. The Messiah's death on the tree fulfilled the requirements of the Law concerning sacrifices for sin for all time.

His was the perfect sacrifice. It will never be repeated. According to Paul, Yahweh "wiped out the record of our debt to the Law, which stood against us" (Colossians 2: 14 from *The New Jerusalem Bible*) by nailing it to a tree.

In 30 AD, the priests understood that their sacrifices were no longer pleasing to Yahweh, but they continued making sacrifices anyway until the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. In that pivotal year, the rabbis eliminated the sacrificial system altogether, and it has not been reinstated to this day.

Rabbi Kahane was installed as high priest because religious leaders in Israel believe that the time is right for reinstating animal sacrifices on the Temple Mount and for rebuilding Yahweh's Temple. They know that the Messiah will play an important part, but they don't know who He is, what He has accomplished, or what comes next.

To do his job properly and to avoid a direct confrontation with Yahweh, Rabbi Kahane must overcome his reliance on Halacha and turn to Yahweh and His word for guidance. That's a tall order, but it will happen in due course, if not to Rabbi Kahane, then to someone else who is willing to follow Yahweh.

The day is coming when Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem will entreat Yahweh for help and know who they are addressing. This is how the Messiah explained it:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of Yahweh!'" (Matthew 23: 37-39)

The conditions that Jewish people in Israel will face when that day comes will be frightful. When their backs are against the wall, they will finally realize that they have no other alternative except to turn to Yahweh for help, and they will. That's what Yahweh said.

This is how Yahweh explained it to the prophet Zechariah:

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and

of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12: 10)

That day may be closer than you think. It could happen at any time.

Jewish People Have a Big Problem

It’s not easy for Jewish people to abandon Halacha. Rabbis have been teaching hatred of the Messiah, Yahweh, for almost 2,000 years, and they have done it well. It’s deeply embedded in Halacha.

In effect, rabbis have created a religion around Halacha, and they are very proud of it. For all practical purposes, Halacha is their Golden Calf.

Religious Jews who understand the importance of the Golden Calf⁴² should pay attention to my warning. Halacha is not what they think it is.

Given what Yahweh said in the Tanach, it is discomfoting to watch intelligent Jewish people try to justify their reliance on Halacha. If they understood the Tanach, they would not be so foolish. The fact that they still turn to Halacha, tells me that they are ignorant about Yahweh’s word.

⁴² See Exodus 32.

As I said, the rabbis have done their job well, and they will be held accountable. I'm not guessing. That's what Yahweh said.

What Do We Know?

The New Testament provides all the evidence we need to draw some astonishing conclusions that challenge things most Christians have been taught:

1. Y'shua is the Messiah.
2. The Messiah is Yahweh.
3. True Christianity isn't a religion. It's the same faith that Abraham had. So is true Judaism. That means true Christianity and true Judaism are the same.
4. With the exception of Revelation, the New Testament isn't Scripture. It's eyewitness testimony and history.
5. New Testament writers didn't present it as Scripture. They wrote to show that Yahweh's promises in the Tanach about the Messiah's atoning sacrifice were fulfilled by Y'shua. He is our Savior and Redeemer.
6. Yahweh's Law is still in effect.
7. Halacha is not from Yahweh, but it has become a religion. It is not the faith that Abraham had.

8. Jewish people don't need to convert to Christianity to be saved. All they need to do and all that any of us need to do is have faith in Yahweh and be obedient to Him just like Abraham did.
9. Grace does not nullify Yahweh's Law. Grace means "unmerited favor". Yahweh bestowed His grace on us when He became the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Grace does not mean that we are free to do anything we want with impunity. As Paul said, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of Elohim, these are sons of Elohim." (Romans 8: 14)
10. Being led by Yahweh's Spirit means being obedient to His leading in our lives. Absent that, a person is not saved no matter what he thinks.
11. Being led by Yahweh's Spirit doesn't mean we are perfect. It means that our thoughts and actions are being aligned with Yahweh's will. The technical term for that is "sanctification". It's a process that plays out over time.

Closing Comment

I want to close with this quote from C.S. Lewis:

"God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in

our world quite realise what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realised it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”⁴³

All of us, Jews and Gentiles, have a choice to make. Will we make the right choice? I hope and I pray that the answer is yes.

⁴³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster Touchstone, 1996), pp. 65–66.

Part 2:

Press on to Maturity

“For ground that drinks the rain which falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from Elohim; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.” (Hebrews 6: 7-8)

Yahweh wants us to open our hearts to Him and allow Him to lead us where He wants us to go. Salvation is not something to be taken lightly. It’s a life changing experience.

Connecting salvation with being led by Yahweh is not my idea. Keep reading.

In a conversation with Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader and a man who was very knowledgeable about the Scriptures, Y’shua explained salvation this way:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of Elohim.”
(John 3: 3)*

In John 3: 16, Y’shua talked about salvation again:

“For Elohim so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3: 16)

When a person is “born again” he has a new life in the Messiah — an eternal life. It doesn’t begin in the sweet by and by. Eternal life starts the instant we put our faith in Yahweh — when we believe in Him. In the truest sense, Salvation Day is our birthday. It’s the commencement of our new life with Yahweh.

Salvation is the Beginning, not the End

In one sense, salvation is like an M.D. degree or any other professional degree. Those degrees are required for entrance into a profession the same way that salvation is required for admission to heaven. They are tickets to the game. They are NOT the game itself.

When you are saved, the game begins. You take your position on the field, and the Coach takes charge. Paul explained it like this:

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of Elohim, these are sons of Elohim.” (Romans 8: 14)

In John 3: 36, Y’shua explained it a little differently:

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of Elohim abides on Him.” (John 3: 36)

The kind of obedience that the Messiah and Paul were talking about is not limited to adherence to the Ten Commandments and all the other laws in the Bible. The obedience they were discussing has to do with being led by Yahweh. That doesn't minimize the importance of Yahweh's written word, but it does raise the leading of Yahweh's Spirit to the appropriate level.

Evidence of our new birth will become apparent in due course. The changes in our lives may be slow and difficult to see, or they may be dramatic and easy to see. Whatever the case may be, Yahweh knows and that's what matters.

Yahweh's Laws are the Rules of the Game

Consider this analogy. Think about the laws in the Bible as the rules of the game — a game like football for instance. To avoid penalties, Yahweh wants us to play by the rules, but winning the game requires scoring points. Sometimes, the most penalized team wins. In fact, that happens a lot.

I'm not saying that penalties are irrelevant because they can prevent us from achieving victory, but when the clock ticks down to zero, the winning team will be the one with the most points. There is no place on the scoreboard for yards penalized. You'll have to wait for

newspaper reporters' accounts of the game to get that statistic, or you can go to the internet and get it right after the game.

To the coaches, the players on the field, and the fans, the only statistic that matters at the end of the game is the one that tells us who won.

Legalism is Offensive to Yahweh and Everybody Else

It's Yahweh's job to lead us to victory. It's also His job to teach us how to play by the rules. That doesn't happen all at once. It takes practice, practice, and more practice over time. It's the same as learning to play any sport.

Yahweh doesn't call a timeout or postpone the game temporarily until we're perfect. Quite the opposite, we take the field; the whistle blows; the battle gets underway; and we learn to play as we go about our life.

Perfection isn't required or even expected at this point. We won't achieve perfection until we give up our mortal bodies and take on the immortal ones that Yahweh has prepared for us.

Legalists will go berserk when they read the last paragraph. They will point out very quickly and probably with a holier-than-thou tone in their voices that the Bible says, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48)

If legalists would look in the mirror, they would see how far off the mark they are. I guess they don't use mirrors. If they do, they must look at their images through rose-colored glasses.

In Matthew 23: 24, Y'shua aimed this remark at the legalists who followed Him around from place to place trying to find something that they could use against Him:

"You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matthew 23: 24)

That was hyperbole, but He was making an important point. The crowd probably erupted into spontaneous laughter at the thought of the immaculately attired religious leaders in their long, flowing robes chomping down on camels. I think Y'shua purposely ridiculed them in front of others to teach them a lesson and to show the crowd how hypocritical and ridiculous they were.

In Luke 6: 41-42, Y'shua said,

"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see

clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye." (Luke 6: 41-42)

Y'shua left no room for doubt in anyone's mind about where He stands when it comes to legalism. He's against it.

Even so, Matthew 5: 48 is correct. We are supposed to be perfect, but the perfection Y'shua was talking about in that verse is a perfection that only He can confer. It wasn't by accident that the Messiah delivered that message as a part of His Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁴ The primary purpose of that oration was to reveal Yahweh's perspective on right living.

More than anything else, The Sermon on the Mount teaches us two things:

1. We don't understand completely what Yahweh wants and expects from us. In fact, we're so far off the mark that it isn't even funny. Stated another way, Y'shua was saying that Yahweh's view of perfection is beyond our ability to comprehend.
2. Yahweh is our Judge.

The apostle Paul had an interesting take on this subject. He's a more credible witness than any of the legalists I know:

⁴⁴ Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7.

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of Elohim has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of Elohim through faith in Y’shua the Messiah for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of Elohim, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Y’shua; whom Elohim displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. (This was) to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of Elohim He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, (I say,) of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Y’shua. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”
(Romans 3: 21-28)

That is one of the most important passages in the New Testament. It tells us in plain language that what men and women have longed for since the creation — i.e., holiness, righteousness, and salvation — can’t be obtained by obeying the Law. That’s why Paul emphasized that righteousness was manifested apart from the Law. The Law and the prophets (i.e., the Bible and more precisely, the Old Testament) merely point in

the direction of the One who delivered righteousness to us.

Paul summed up his argument perfectly:

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” (Romans 3: 28)

It’s as simple as that. If you have a problem with it, then you need to accept the fact that you have a problem with Yahweh’s plan of salvation. Paul didn’t make that up. He was explaining what the Law and the prophets say.

Follow the Leading of Yahweh’s Spirit

Trying to get to Yahweh by obeying the Law is like trying to drive from Atlanta, Georgia to Charlotte, North Carolina by taking I-75.

I-75 doesn’t go to Charlotte. In fact, it doesn’t come close to Charlotte. If you take I-75 out of Atlanta, you’ll have to get off the interstate somewhere and take an alternate route that includes lots of back roads with which you’re probably not familiar.

You will need a guide. Yahweh is that Person.

According to Y’shua and Paul, faith is the only way to Yahweh, and people who have saving faith are led by Yahweh’s Spirit. You can’t sermonize those facts away.

I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again anyway because I'm purposely butchering a sacred cow. I'm not suggesting or implying that obedience is unimportant. I'm simply pointing out that obeying the laws in the Bible will not lead to salvation. On the other hand, our attitude toward those laws says a great deal about our faith.

Saving faith wants to please Yahweh. Since it pleases Yahweh when we obey Him, it makes sense that saving faith is accompanied by a desire to be obedient. But that's a far cry from believing that we are saved because of our obedience or that Yahweh owes us something if we obey Him.

There's a hymn that most Christians are familiar with, and the chorus goes like this:

"Where He leads me, I will follow. Where He leads me, I will follow. Where He leads me, I will follow, follow where He leads."

Yahweh's children are led by His Spirit. Over time, being led by Yahweh's Spirit touches every facet of our lives as He works to shape us and make us into the people He created us to be.

In the truest sense, Yahweh teaches us to play by the rules as we follow Him. That involves our hopes, dreams, and aspirations, and everything we think, do, or

say. That means it includes many things that you won't find in the Bible.

How do I know?

I know it because there isn't a single verse in the Bible that has my name in it.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "Thus says Yahweh, Neil Snyder write a book titled *His Name is Yahweh* and take that message to the world." Yahweh's Spirit had to lead me in that direction, and my willingness to obey Him is similar to Abraham's obedience when Yahweh told him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar.

I'm not trying to puff myself up. Abraham believed Yahweh and obeyed Him. That's what I did, too. According to Y'shua and Paul and the prophets, that's what every other child of Yahweh does. If you refuse to follow Him, if you won't open your heart and listen to His voice, you don't belong to Him.

Following the rules can't make up for failing to follow Yahweh's Spirit.

Stated simply, you can obey every law in the Bible to the best of your ability as if your salvation depended on it; you can go to church every week without fail; you can read the Bible three times a day, teach a Bible class, serve as a deacon in your church, tithe religiously, sing in the choir, lead an upright life, even make a

profession of faith, and still not be a child of Yahweh. Y'shua explained it like this:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name cast out demons, and in Your Name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7: 21-23)

That statement is as amazing as it is frightening. Y'shua said that there are people who prophesy in Yahweh's Name, who cast out demons in His Name, and who perform miracles in His Name who will be denied admission to heaven because they did not do the will of the Father. He said it so clearly that you need help to be confused. There's no room for misinterpretation.

What happened? Where did they go wrong?

It's obvious that they were performing miraculous feats. Y'shua said so. They probably received lots of praise and admiration from men. Some of them must have written bestselling books telling about their exploits for “the LORD”. Others probably charged hefty speaking fees and toured the countryside giving talks to captivated audiences. Still others built megachurches where they pranced around on potted plant laden stages in front of television cameras and adoring fans, and they

pontificated about the things to come as if they actually knew.

According to the Messiah, they did all of those things in Yahweh's Name, but they were not saved.

Some of those people are going to be stunned when the Messiah looks them in the eye and says, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." The look on their faces at that moment will be sheer terror because no one will need to tell them what comes next.

This is what you need to grab hold of. If you put your faith in the Law, you can't win, but if you put your faith in Yahweh, you can't lose. It's as simple as that.

Don't try to make it any harder than it is. You'll have enough trouble dealing with the ridicule that comes your way for believing and following Yahweh.

Salvation is by Grace or it's not Real

Paul explained salvation this way:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, (it is) the gift of Elohim; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2: 8-9)

Yahweh will not be our debtor. He set things up that way in the beginning so that our salvation can't be

payment for our good works. Our salvation is and always will be totally and absolutely dependent on His grace because even our faith is a gift from Him. There is no room for pride — none at all.

In Hebrews 11: 6, Paul went even further:

“And without faith it is impossible to please (Him), for he who comes to Elohim must believe that He is and (that) He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” (Hebrews 11: 6)

When it comes to salvation, it’s either all Yahweh and none of us, or it’s all us and none of Yahweh. There is no in-between. No one can save himself. That’s something that only Yahweh can do.

No matter how good we are, regardless of how hard we try to please Him, we simply can’t earn our way to Yahweh because we’re not perfect, and perfection is required — His perfection. That’s why we have a Redeemer. He is our atoning sacrifice. He paid the price for our sins and declared us perfect, righteous, and holy. He covered us completely with His shed blood and wrapped us in His perfection as a gift for having faith in Him.

Jeremiah 23: 5-6 says that Yahweh is our righteousness and that the Messiah is Yahweh Tsidkenu — Yahweh our Righteousness. Without Him we have no righteousness.

Isaiah 64: 6 says,

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”
(Isaiah 64: 6)

That message is all over the Bible, and it’s central to salvation. You reject it at your own peril.

Despite what the Bible says, some people can’t accept the fact that salvation is by grace through faith. They insist on believing that they can, that they should, that they must earn their way to Yahweh. It’s ironic because simply trying to earn your way to Him is sinful. People who do it may as well stand on the rooftop and yell as loud as they can, “I don’t have a clue what salvation is.”

Trying to earn your way to Yahweh is stumbling over the Stumbling Stone.⁴⁵ It’s unfortunate that the thought of earning salvation is so seductive and compelling. It makes sense from a human perspective because most of us think that no one would ever give us anything.

But Yahweh isn’t like us. He’s our Redeemer, and He loves us enough to die for us — to pay the price

⁴⁵ See Isaiah 8: 14-15.

for the sins that we've committed and will commit with His shed blood.

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians because they had drifted toward legalism. Below are a few excerpts from Galatians that illustrate these points:

“Grace to you and peace from Elohim our Father and the Lord Y’shua the Messiah, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our Elohim and Father,....., I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of the Messiah, for a different gospel; which is (really) not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of the Messiah. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!.... For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but (I received it) through a revelation of Y’shua the Messiah.... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Messiah Y’shua, even we have believed in Messiah Y’shua, so that we may be justified by faith in the Messiah and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.... For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to Elohim. I have been

crucified with the Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but the Messiah lives in me; and the (life) which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of Elohim, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of Elohim, for if righteousness (comes) through the Law, then the Messiah died needlessly.... You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Y'shua the Messiah was publicly portrayed (as) crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?.... Now that no one is justified by the Law before Elohim is evident; for, 'the righteous man shall live by faith'.... Is the Law then contrary to the promises of Elohim? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.... But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Y'shua the Messiah might be given to those who believe." (Galatians 1: 3-4, 6-8, 11-12; 2: 16, 19-21; 3: 1-3, 11, 21-22)

Paul was irate because the Galatians had substituted obedience to the Law for faith in Yahweh. In other words, they had become legalistic. He said that whoever spread that nonsense was cursed. Paul even went so far as to call the Galatians "foolish", and he asked them who had bewitched them.

Anyone can be deceived or seduced into believing that strict obedience makes us special in Yahweh's eyes, but it doesn't. The only thing that makes us right with Yahweh is faith in the Person who made the atoning sacrifice for our sins. That Person is Yahweh.

Next comes obedience, and it's not limited to obedience to the Law. In fact, following the leading of Yahweh's Spirit is the highest form of obedience.

Remember the football metaphor. Playing by the rules doesn't necessarily put points on the scoreboard. When the game is over, the team with the most points is the winner.

We score points with Yahweh by faithfully following the leading of His Spirit. For that, there is no substitute.

Legalism is Not a New Problem

I think legalism is the biggest problem we face today as a body of believers in the Messiah. The prophets dealt with it too.⁴⁶

So, legalism isn't a new problem. Since the creation, legalists have been making the classic mistake of believing and teaching others that we need to earn salvation by doing good works. Typically, they take great

⁴⁶ For example, see Amos 4: 4-5, Isaiah 1: 11-17, Isaiah 58; and Malachi 1-3.

pride in their accomplishments because they think that's what sets them apart from other less devout believers.

Make no mistake. Legalists think they have a special place in Yahweh's kingdom — i.e., that they're better than everybody else. They'll deny it vehemently if you say something to them about it, but their words, actions, and the smug looks on their faces give them away.

They remind me of a person that Ray Stevens sang about in his song "Mississippi Squirrel Revival". Her name was Sister Bertha Better-than-you. If you're not familiar with the song, you can watch it on YouTube.⁴⁷ You'll be glad you did. When I hear those lyrics, I think about all the legalists I know and laugh.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

In the Garden of Eden, there were many trees. Adam and Eve were free to eat from all of them — except one. Yahweh told Adam,

"From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2: 16-17)

Why did Yahweh tell Adam and Eve to avoid eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? The answer is so simple that it's almost scary.

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K16fG1sDagU>

Yahweh wanted them to have an intimate, personal relationship with Him and to follow Him. If they had followed Yahweh, they wouldn't have needed the fruit from that tree because Yahweh's path always leads to good.

Yahweh wants us to follow Him. That's what He has wanted since the beginning.

Satan tempted Eve. She took a bite from the apple and shared it with Adam. Their sin set in motion the rebellion against Yahweh that has continued to this day. It all started with a desire to know good and evil, right and wrong.

Do you get the point? Adam and Eve wanted to know all the laws in the Bible.

Eve's desire wasn't innocent. I'm sure you recall how Satan seduced her. He said,

"For Elohim knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3: 5)

Eve wanted to be like Yahweh. That's what the Bible says. She didn't want to be dependent on Him for anything.

Remember what Jeremiah 23: 5-6 says. Yahweh is our righteousness, so we are totally dependent on Him

for salvation. Nothing we do can change that, and we should be thankful that He has covered us with His perfect righteousness. Literally, we have no righteousness apart from Him.

Satan's modus operandi hasn't changed. He's still trying to seduce us. Don't be deceived by his evil tricks. Legalism is just as wrong now as it was then.

Self-Righteousness is a Prelude to Disaster

In Matthew 21: 31-32, Y'shua said,

"...Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of Elohim before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing (this,) did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him." (Matthew 21: 31-32)

Was the Messiah condoning prostitution and thievery? Not a chance! He was pointing out that the most despicable people in Israel (tax collectors and prostitutes) believed John the Baptist's message; they repented; and they were saved by faith. The most religious people in Israel rejected John's message.

Why? Pay careful attention because the answer is very important. They thought they didn't need to repent. They believed that they were on the pathway that

leads to Yahweh already and that John the Baptist was a lunatic.

No one is on the right path unless he receives Yahweh by faith. Nothing else will do, so ignore the legalists and get on board with Yahweh's plan.

Now, look at the Messiah's closing comments to the religious leaders. If you believe Him, these remarks will warm your heart. If you tend to be self-righteous, they should chill you to the bone:

"Y'shua said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner (stone); this came about from Yahweh, and it is marvelous in our eyes?' Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of Elohim will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.'" (Matthew 21: 42-44)

The Messiah is the Stone that Y'shua mentioned in these verses, so don't take this message lightly. Yahweh doesn't. In essence, He is the Stumbling Stone. Either you will fall on Him and be broken, or He will fall on you and you'll be crushed to smithereens.

Now, look at Matthew 21: 45-46:

“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.” (Matthew 21: 45-46)

The chief priests and Pharisees understood the Messiah correctly. He was saying that the kingdom of Elohim would be taken away from them, not the Jewish people, and given to others.

Some Christians have interpreted Matthew 21: 42-44 to mean that Yahweh’s kingdom was taken away from the Jewish people. That’s simply not true. He removed His mantle from the religious leadership.

Bearing Fruit Isn’t Our Job

I’ve heard lots of believers talk about the importance of “bearing fruit for the LORD”, but bearing fruit isn’t our job. Bearing fruit is Yahweh’s job. He uses us in the process if we follow Him.

Only Yahweh can lead people to Him or do anything else that He calls “good.” Anything that we do to assist Him is out of the generosity of Yahweh’s heart. Don’t make the mistake of believing that Yahweh depends on people like you and me to bear fruit for Him. He doesn’t. It’s our privilege to be a part of His work. That’s the correct way to think about it.

According to the Messiah,

“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then you will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7: 16-20)

But Paul said,

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.” (Romans 7: 18)

Those apparently contradictory passages from the New Testament are easy to reconcile when you understand that only Yahweh is responsible for bearing fruit. Paul suggested as much when he inserted the phrase “in my flesh” in Romans 7: 18.

You will bear fruit (notice that I said *will* — not *might*) if you follow the leading of Yahweh’s Spirit, and you won’t have to try to bear fruit any more than a peach tree has to try to produce peaches. It happens automatically.

Yahweh makes sure that peach trees bear peaches, not thorns and thistles, and all the orchard

owner has to do is kill a few weeds, prune the trees, and pick the fruit. Yahweh makes sure that His children bear fruit as well. That's His job, not ours.

Speaking about Yahweh's children, Psalm 1: 3 says,

"He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers." (Psalm 1: 3)

You *will* bear fruit in your season if you follow Yahweh. Just like the peach tree, there are times when you aren't expected to bear fruit. Rest assured that when your season comes, you will be ready if you are following the leading of Yahweh's Spirit. It's His job to prepare you to bear fruit, and it's His job to actually bear the fruit. We assist Him, and we can thank Yahweh that He allows us to help.

No matter how hard you try, if you don't follow the leading of Yahweh's Spirit, it's impossible to bear fruit that He calls "good." As Paul said, in your flesh you can do nothing. The Messiah said it this way:

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15: 5)

When you abide in Yahweh, or let Him take control, He can do seemingly impossible things through you. Your goal should be to abide in Him and to let Him abide in you. There is no other way to bear fruit that Yahweh calls “good.”

Stop trying to bear fruit for Yahweh and learn to abide in Him. Then He will bear fruit through you. He knows how to bear fruit, and He is able to prepare you to bear fruit for Him if you will let Him.

If you don't abide in and follow Him, you won't bear fruit. According to the Messiah, if you don't follow the leading of Yahweh's Spirit and bear fruit, He will cut you down and throw you into the fire.⁴⁸ That's not where you want to end up.

Back to the Basics

Please remember that I'm not saying or implying that the laws in the Bible are unimportant, and neither was Y'shua. He was simply putting the laws in the proper perspective.

We should study the Scriptures. We should do our best to be obedient to Yahweh's word. We should seek to do good deeds, but our goal, our quest, our mission must be to follow the leading of Yahweh's Spirit. As I said, for that there is no substitute.

⁴⁸ Matthew 7: 19.

Our good deeds, no matter how good we think they are, simply don't stand up under close scrutiny. They could never earn us a spot in heaven. Remember what Isaiah said about our righteousness:

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”
(Isaiah 64: 6)

By the same token, nothing we do can take away our spot in heaven once it's been granted. Paul explained it this way:

“(For I am) confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Messiah Y'shua.” (Philippians 1: 6)

That's Yahweh's job, and He's good at it.

Beyond Salvation

Hebrews is one of my favorite books in the Bible. I can't explain why, but the first time I read it, it touched me in a powerful way. Each time that I've read it since then, it's had a similar effect.

Paul wrote Hebrews to Jewish people. It begins by explaining who Y'shua is:

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent Name than they.”
(Hebrews 1: 3-4)

It wasn't until the year 2000 that I really understood the meaning of those verses. Y'shua is Yahweh, and the Name He inherited that is much better than the names of the angels is Yahweh.

As a believer, I knew that Y'shua is Elohim the Son, but I had no idea how important that was. Eventually, Yahweh directed me to write a book about His Name, and the process of writing it proved to be the most rewarding experience of my life.

I'll never forget a day in October 2000. I already knew that I was supposed to write the book, but for some reason I wasn't allowed to begin. That's a big deal for me, because the secret to writing a book is getting started.

Once a writing project is underway, finishing it isn't a problem for me. But Yahweh wasn't ready, and I didn't know why. That day in October 2000 stands out in my mind because I decided to schedule an entire day to get the ball rolling. Early that morning, I went through my normal routine, but nothing happened.

After several hours of praying and thinking about the book, I finally gave up and went out to play golf. I lived on a golf course, so I didn't have to go very far. In fact, I had a golf cart in my garage. All I had to do was drive it to the first tee.

On the third hole, it happened. A thought came into my mind, and I knew immediately that it wasn't my thought. Actually, it was a question: "Do you know why you haven't been permitted to start writing the book?"

I didn't know the answer, and I said, "No." Immediately I got the answer: "Before you can write about My Name, you must understand what an honor it is to be selected for this purpose."

Tears came to my eyes immediately as I began to grasp the awesome privilege that Yahweh had bestowed on me. His Name is the Name that is above every name.⁴⁹ It's the Name to which every knee will bow when He returns,⁵⁰ and it's the only Name "under heaven by which we must be saved."⁵¹

On the third hole at Glenmore Country Club in Keswick, Virginia as I was preparing to make my approach shot to the green, John 3: 18 came into my mind. It's a somewhat obscure verse, especially when compared with its nearby neighbor — John 3: 16:

⁴⁹ Philippians 2: 9.

⁵⁰ Philippians 2: 10 and Isaiah 45: 23.

⁵¹ Acts 4: 12.

“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of Elohim.” (John 3: 18)

When I became a believer, I thought that John 3: 18 refers to the Name “Jesus”, but I was wrong. Jesus is the English transliteration of the Greek word “Iesous”, but the Name He was given at birth was “Y’shua”, not Jesus. Now I was getting further clarification.

The Name of the Son of Elohim by which we must be saved isn’t Jesus or Y’shua or Yahshua. It’s Yahweh. Then Isaiah 43: 11 came into my mind: “I, even I, am Yahweh, and there is no Savior besides Me.”

His Name is Yahweh

Before I go any further, I want to repeat an important point. Salvation is by grace through faith in a Person, and that Person is Yahweh. For years we’ve mistakenly called Him Jesus, but as I said, His Name at birth was Y’shua, not Jesus. Moreover, the Messiah is Yahweh; Yahweh is our Savior and our Redeemer; and Yahweh will return at the End of Days.

In the 2nd century BC, Jewish rabbis forbade the use of Yahweh’s Name ostensibly to prevent Jewish people from blaspheming His Name. In the 4th century AD, vowel markings were introduced in the Hebrew language, and the Name of Yahweh in Hebrew was altered intentionally by Jewish rabbis by placing the

vowel markings for the Hebrew word “Adonai” (meaning Lord) on the Name “Yahweh”.

That produced a word with the sound “YeHoVaH,” and that is how we got the Name “Jehovah.” Their goal was to prevent Jewish people from accidentally reading Yahweh’s Name aloud.

In the 17th century AD, the King James translators of the Bible continued this tradition by rendering the Name “Yahweh” as Jehovah, and they adopted the practice of disguising Yahweh’s Name in the Scriptures by substituting “the LORD” or “the Lord GOD” where the Name “Yahweh” actually appears in the Bible. The *New American Standard Bible* and the *New International Version* follow that tradition as well. That’s why most Christians today have never heard the Name “Yahweh,” and that’s why the true identity of the Messiah has been obscured.

His Name is Yahweh was written specifically to deal with that problem.

Again, salvation is by grace through faith in a Person, and that Person is Yahweh. This is a serious issue, because Yahweh intends for us to know His Name and to declare it to the world. Those facts are as firmly rooted in the Scriptures as the plan of salvation. If they’re new to you, then you’ve got some work to do.

I urge you to get a copy of *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*, and read it carefully. You can download a copy of it in PDF format for free at www.snydertalk.com

or you can buy it in paperback or eBook from Amazon. Check everything in it against the Scriptures, and pay attention to what the Bible says about Yahweh's Name.

The Authentic Swing

Playing golf that day in October 2000 was very peculiar because my mind was racing through Bible verses and passages that Yahweh had impressed upon me years earlier. All of them were connected in my mind, and they related to me personally.

Yahweh was leading me down a path that would result in my writing *His Name is Yahweh*, this book, and other books. It was a completely different path for me. The path that I had been on for decades was coming to an end.

I guess you could say that I had a choice to make. I could obey Yahweh by following His leading, or I could decide to continue doing what I had been doing successfully for years. But it didn't seem like I was being offered a choice. It felt like Yahweh was giving me specific instructions about a job that I was born (or created) to do. At that moment, the only thing that mattered to me was doing what Yahweh wanted me to do.

Many people who enter academia dream about getting tenure at a great university and becoming chaired professors. That was never my dream. I used to tell the

students in my leadership class, “I still don’t know what I want to be when I grow up.”

They got a kick out of that, but my point was that our journey in life isn’t complete until we stop breathing. As long as we’re alive, we still have work to do, and it may not be the work we’re doing now.

I never thought that my destiny in life was to teach business at a university. I was letting my students know that they should be prepared to follow their passions and dreams wherever they lead without regard for their age or their level of success in their current profession.

I was tenured in 1981 after three years at the University of Virginia; I became a full professor in 1987; and I became a chaired professor in 1991. Yahweh was leading me to walk away from things that most university faculty work a lifetime to accomplish but never attain.

None of that mattered to me. Walking away from university life was one of the easiest decisions I’ve ever made. Just as important, my wife Katie was excited about the change we were about to make. Yahweh had taken care of every detail. All I had to do was follow Him. Like I said, I guess I could have decided not to follow Yahweh’s leading, but that was out of the question.

Several years earlier, John Welborn, a friend from Charlottesville, Virginia, had given me a book to read. John is a very good golfer, and he played on the

University of North Carolina golf team. Frequently, John and I talked about the similarities between golf and life, and the book he wanted me to read dealt with that issue.

The book was *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. It's a good book. I enjoyed reading it very much. Bagger Vance's description of "the Authentic Swing" stood out in my mind:

"I believe that each of us possesses, inside ourselves, one true Authentic Swing that is ours alone. It is folly to try to teach us another, or mold us to some ideal version of the perfect swing. Each player possesses only that one swing that he was born with, that swing which existed within him before he ever picked up a club. Like the statue of David, our Authentic Swing already exists, concealed within the stone, so to speak."⁵²

If you haven't read the book, you should. Robert Redford bought the rights to make the book into a movie, and he directed it as well. The movie is good, but nowhere near as good as the book.

In the movie, Will Smith plays Bagger Vance; Matt Damon plays Rannulph Junah; and Charlize Theron plays Adele Invergordon. Although Adele Invergordon is a major character in the movie, she makes little more than a cameo appearance in the book.

⁵² Pressfield, Steven. *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, William Morrow & Company, New York, 1995, p. 68.

Rannulph Junah was a great amateur golfer before he fought in World War I. The war disrupted his life, sent him spiraling out of control, and destroyed his interest in the game. In the book, Bagger Vance befriended Junah in Europe following a battle during which Junah was severely injured, and he spent a lot of time with Junah helping him discover his “true self” — the person he was created to be.

Most of the book is a running dialogue between Vance, Junah, and Vance’s helper, a young boy named Hardy Greaves, during a golf match that Adele Invergordon arranged to save The Links at Krewe Island from financial ruin. It’s a fictitious golf course and resort that her father built near Savannah, Georgia.

The match is between legendary golfers Bobby Jones and Walter Hagen and the hometown war hero from Savannah — Rannulph Junah. Bagger Vance is an elderly black man who caddies for Junah. Throughout the match he gives Junah advice that eventually restores him to health.

It isn’t perfectly clear in the movie, but in the book, it’s crystal clear. Bagger Vance is Yahweh, and He uses the golf match to help Junah confront and deal with the demons in his life. More than anything else, Bagger focuses Junah’s attention on discovering his Authentic Swing — or as Bagger would say, allowing his Authentic Swing to find him.

The moral of the story comes straight from the Bible. Each one of us was born for a specific purpose, and our quest should be to let that purpose find us. The only person or thing capable of preventing that from happening is us.

It reminds me of a caption in a Pogo cartoon that I saw several years ago:

“We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

You are the only person capable of preventing Yahweh from doing through you what He created you to do. If you stand in His way and resist His attempts to move you down the path that you were created to follow, you’ll only hurt yourself.

Steven Pressfield, author of *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, used golf metaphors to drive that point home. He depicted Yahweh as a gentle Servant guiding and directing his player — Rannulph Junah. Junah had to play the game, but Yahweh had to guide him each step of the way.

That’s the way it’s supposed to be. As Vance told Junah, and I’m paraphrasing, “I’ve been with you all along, and I’ll never leave you.” That’s a great way to explain how Yahweh operates.

Press on to Maturity

On the 3rd hole at Glenmore Country Club, my whole world changed in ways that I couldn't have imagined at that time. I was about to leave the comfort of a world that I knew and take a completely different path with which I was totally unfamiliar. Today, I still don't know precisely where my path leads or how I will get to the end, but I do know Who I am supposed to follow.

For the first time in my life, I felt like I was on the right path. That seems strange coming from me. I've always been a goal-oriented person, and I have a Ph.D. degree in strategic management. I understand setting goals and developing strategies and tactics to achieve them as well as anyone I know.

Up to that point, my whole life had been about setting and achieving goals, but in October 2000 for the first time I really understood that Yahweh's goals are supposed to be my goals. I also understood that I can't achieve my goals without Him. In fact, trying to achieve them without Him is actually disobedience because He said that He expects to be intimately involved with us each step of the way. If He isn't, then we're on the wrong path.

As I said, Hebrews has meant a great deal to me over the years, and Yahweh used it in October 2000 to teach me a lesson that every one of us needs to learn. It's time to press on to maturity — to move beyond traditional notions about obedience.

This is important, so it bears repeating. The obedience that Yahweh demands is more than strict adherence to all the laws in the Bible. As Paul said, saving faith is faith that is willing to go where Yahweh leads.

We can't get to our destination on our own. If we want to reach it, we must have faith in Yahweh and go where He leads.

This passage from Hebrews deals with what I'm talking about:

“Concerning Him (Y’shua) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of Elohim, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the Word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Messiah, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward Elohim, of instructions about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if Elohim

permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of Elohim and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of Elohim and put Him to open shame.

For ground that drinks the rain which falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from Elohim; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned." (Hebrews 5: 11-6: 8)

To understand Hebrews 5: 11 through 6: 8 correctly, you must put it in context. Paul had just explained that the Children of Israel who participated in the Exodus from Egypt were eyewitnesses to the ten plagues; they walked across dry land when Yahweh parted the Red Sea; they were led day and night by Yahweh who appeared in the form of a column of smoke by day and a column of fire by night; they ate manna from heaven and drank water from a rock; they watched while Yahweh descended from heaven to the top of Mount Sinai; and they heard His Voice as He proclaimed the Ten Commandments.

The Children of Israel had witnessed the most spectacular events in the history of the world, and they

weren't just casual observers. They were actively involved in the whole process and in close physical proximity with Yahweh Himself.

More than any other group of people in the history of the world, they should have had faith in Yahweh, but they didn't. The advantage of being so close to the action and to Yahweh Himself didn't help them one bit.

Making matters worse, they rebelled against Yahweh again and again in the wilderness. Because they lacked faith in Him, they were not permitted to enter His rest or the Promised Land.⁵³

In Hebrews 5: 11 through 6: 8, Paul was telling Jewish people not to follow their example. They were attempting unsuccessfully to please Yahweh by obeying all the laws in the Scriptures, and all the while they were ignoring the one thing that Yahweh requires—faith in Him.

Yahweh wanted their hearts, and He longed for them to demonstrate faith by following Him. Absent that, Paul said they would fail miserably just as surely as their predecessors had fallen short in the wilderness.

The obedience that Yahweh requires is based on faith in Him. As I said, it's a higher form of obedience than simply complying with the Law — even the Ten Commandments.

⁵³ Hebrews 3: 7-19.

Paul didn't say or suggest that the Ten Commandments and the other laws in the Bible are unimportant or that people can disobey them without fear of consequence. As I've explained, I'm not saying that either.

Paul simply said that Yahweh expects much more from us than that. He wants us to follow Him and to allow Him to make us into the people that He created us to be. Since we can't do that on our own, faith in Yahweh is an absolute must. Again, there is no substitute for faith.

Our primary objective must be to do Yahweh's will.⁵⁴ In Hebrews 6: 7-8, Paul presents two possible outcomes for our life's journey:

“For ground that drinks the rain which falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from Elohim; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.” (Hebrews 6: 7-8)

Yahweh blesses people who follow Him, but those who continually soak up His blessings and produce nothing to advance His agenda will suffer a different fate. Paul wasn't prone to levity when He made references to hell, so I urge you to take him seriously.

⁵⁴ Matthew 7: 21, John 3: 36, and Romans 8: 14.

It's time to exercise faith and press on to maturity. As tempting as it is for us to think that we can please Yahweh by adhering strictly to all the laws in the Bible, that is not the path to success.

Salvation is by grace through faith in Yahweh that is evidenced by our willingness to actually follow the leading of His Spirit. Nothing else will do.

Yahweh is not a hard taskmaster. He said,

“For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
(Matthew 11: 30)

The only sensible thing for us to do is to follow Him.

Part 3:

The Faith of Abraham

My journey with Yahweh began in McRae, Georgia when I was a young boy. It picked up a head of steam about two decades ago in Charlottesville, Virginia when He led me to write *His Name is Yahweh*.

Yahweh is Elohim's⁵⁵ Personal Name. It's referred to as the Divine Name and the Unspeakable Name, but Yahweh's Name is not unspeakable. In fact, He said that He wants us to remember Him by the Name Yahweh and to call Him Yahweh forever.⁵⁶

We have Salvation in Yahweh's Name

Yahweh is the only Name in which we have salvation. That's what Yahweh told Joel. Years later,

⁵⁵ Elohim is a Hebrew word that means "strong one". In most Bibles, it's translated inaccurately as "GOD" (all caps) when it refers to Yahweh. It's translated as "god" (no caps) when it refers to humans, false deities, and inanimate objects of worship. Although "GOD" has become a substitute for Yahweh's Name, it's the name of a pagan deity that is also spelled Gad, Gaud, and Gawd. "LORD" (all caps) is also used inappropriately as a substitute for Yahweh's Name.

⁵⁶ Exodus 3: 15.

Peter and Paul delivered that message to believers in the early days of the church:⁵⁷

“Everyone who calls on the Name of Yahweh will be saved/delivered.” (Joel 2: 32, Acts 2: 21, and Romans 10: 13)

This is how Yahweh explained it to Isaiah:

“I, even I, am Yahweh, and there is no savior besides Me.” (Isaiah 43: 11)

Peter explained it this way:

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4: 12)

The Messiah is Yahweh

Acts 4: 12 is arguably the most misunderstood verse in the New Testament. Peter was referring to the Name “Yahweh”.⁵⁸ He could not have been referring to any other name. Since Peter was talking about the Messiah, he was also saying that the Messiah is Yahweh.

⁵⁷ *Ekklesia* is the Greek word that’s translated as “church”. It refers to people who believe in and follow Yahweh. It does not mean an institution or a religion. Literally, it means “called out ones”.

⁵⁸ The misunderstanding of Acts 4: 12 stems from the fact that believers have elevated the name Jesus and think Peter was talking about that name. He was not. The Messiah’s Name at birth was Y’shua. It was never Jesus. Y’shua means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation”. For more details, see *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*.

The fact that the Messiah is Yahweh is not a New Testament revelation. It's all over the Tanach/Old Testament. For instance, this is what Yahweh told Jeremiah:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares Yahweh, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His Name by which He will be called, 'Yahweh our righteousness.'" (Jeremiah 23: 5-6)

The Messiah is the Supreme Sovereign and the Creator

More than anything else, the Tanach/Old Testament is about the Messiah. He is the Supreme Sovereign and the Creator.

Genesis 1: 1 is the first verse in the Tanach/Old Testament that talks about Him:

"In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1: 1)

Elohim is a plural word. Thus, Genesis 1: 1 points to the fact that Yahweh has more than one manifestation.

El is the singular form of Elohim. If Yahweh had just one manifestation, “El” would have been used in Genesis 1: 1 instead of “Elohim”.⁵⁹

The Messiah is the human manifestation of Yahweh. He appears in Person throughout the Tanach/Old Testament. That’s especially relevant for this discussion since Yahweh appeared in Person to make the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel that all believers rely on for salvation. The fact that Yahweh has human form is irrefutable.⁶⁰

The Tanach/Old Testament also refers to Ruach Yahweh, or the Spirit of Yahweh.⁶¹ He is another manifestation of the Creator. The Father, Son, and Spirit are One.⁶² The three of them were together at the creation. Hence, the use of the word “Elohim” in Genesis 1: 1.

The New Testament emphasizes the Messiah’s role as our Sovereign *and* His role as our Savior and Redeemer. This is how Paul explained His role as Sovereign:

⁵⁹ El and Elohim are not names. They are titles. Yahweh is a Name.

⁶⁰ See *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition* chapter 5 for a detailed explanation.

⁶¹ Most Christians refer to Ruach Yahweh as the “Holy Spirit”. In Hebrew, it’s Ruach haKodesh. He is also called Ruach Yahweh or the Spirit of Yahweh.

⁶² The word “Trinity” is used by many believers to explain the three manifestations of Yahweh, but that’s not correct. The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Scriptures. The correct Hebrew word is Echad. It means “One”. Yahweh is One, Echad. He is a singular Being with three manifestations. See *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition* for more details.

“For this reason also, Elohim highly exalted Him [the Messiah], and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name [Yahweh], so that at the Name of the Messiah [Yahweh] every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Y’shua the Messiah is Yahweh, to the glory of Elohim the Father.” (Philippians 2: 9-11)

Yahweh is the Name that is above every name. Yahweh bestowed His Name on the Messiah.⁶³ He is Yahweh the Son. The Messiah is the One to whom every knee will bow, and He is the only Yahweh that anyone will ever see.

GOD is not a Substitute for Yahweh

Several years after I wrote *His Name is Yahweh*, Yahweh’s Spirit led me to revise the book so that it would reflect the extent to which He detests the use of the word “GOD” when it’s applied to Him.

Traditionally, LORD and GOD are used as substitutes for Yahweh’s Name,⁶⁴ but GOD is particularly problematic because it’s the name of a pagan deity. *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition* addresses that problem.

⁶³ Jeremiah 23: 5-6.

⁶⁴ To understand why this happened, see *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition* chapter 2.

Later, Yahweh led me to explain several other important but controversial truths. The most important of them are

1. True Christianity isn't a religion.
2. The New Testament isn't Scripture.⁶⁵

Tradition doesn't make it Right

Because of tradition dating back almost 1,700 years, those truths are difficult for many churchgoers⁶⁶ to accept. I wrote *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?* to address that problem.

In the book, I showed that the Christian religion was created by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 300s AD for political reasons. Contemporary Christianity descends from the Roman Catholic Church, and it remains a vestige of Constantine's creation to this day.

Interestingly, Constantine's mother, Helena, probably was a believer, but Constantine was not. He was a sun worshiper.

It's rumored that Constantine made a deathbed confession of faith, but his eternal destiny remains a mystery. This much is certain, though: Constantine's

⁶⁵ Revelation is Scripture, but the rest of the New Testament is not.

⁶⁶ I used the word "churchgoers" instead of "believers". Contemporary churches are loaded with unbelievers who call themselves "Christians". Because of tradition, even believers have a difficult time letting go of false teaching. That must change.

religion, Roman Catholicism, was not sanctioned by Yahweh.

The Catholic Church elevated to “Scripture” historical documents and letters explaining that Y’shua is the Messiah referred to in the Tanach/Old Testament. Leaders in the Catholic Church called those documents collectively “the New Testament”.

Except for Revelation, the New Testament isn’t Scripture. It’s important and inspired, but it’s not Scripture.

Only Yahweh has the authority to elevate anything to Scripture. He did not delegate that authority to anyone.

The Protestant Reformation was an attempt to come out from under the Catholic umbrella, but it didn’t go far enough. To this day, Protestantism carries a lot of Catholic baggage.

What we call “Christianity” today diverges from Yahweh’s word so much that it barely resembles what He has in mind for His children. That’s beginning to change as more and more believers are being led by Yahweh’s Spirit to search for and accept the truth.

In *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?*, I showed that Jewish people do not have to convert to Christianity to be saved. Anyone who wants

to be saved, Jews or Gentiles, must demonstrate *the faith of Abraham*.⁶⁷

This is the heart of the matter: salvation is not about religion. It's about faith. More precisely, it's about faith with legs. That's been true all along. I call it *the faith of Abraham*.

The Faith of Abraham

Next, Yahweh led me to explain that the obedience He requires is not about strict devotion to traditions and laws. Some of those traditions and laws come from the Scriptures so they are important, but most of them are nothing more than man-made tradition.

Most of those traditions are unimportant. In fact, they stand in the way of progress because it's so easy for people to see them as substitutes for faith. Many people have done that to their own detriment.

Yahweh did not create us to obey rules. He created us to love Him and to work with Him on the implementation of His plan.

I wrote the book *Press on to Maturity* to address those issues. Our participation with Yahweh on the implementation of His plan is called "following the

⁶⁷ Calling on the Name of Yahweh means more than saying His Name. It means demonstrating faith, i.e. believing that He rewards those who seek Him. Saving faith comes from the heart, and it involves action that is consistent with believing.

leading of Yahweh's Spirit". That's the highest form of obedience, and it's the kind of obedience that Yahweh requires.

This is how Paul explained it:

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of Elohim, these are sons of Elohim." (Romans 8: 14)

The Messiah explained it this way:

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of Elohim abides on him." (John 3: 36)

Obedying the Son means following the leading of Yahweh's Spirit. Stated another way, it means doing what Yahweh tells you to do.

According to the Messiah, the penalty for not obeying the Son is severe, so this is a serious matter.

There is No Substitute for Faith

Obedying Yahweh's written commands is important and Yahweh's Spirit will never lead us to do otherwise. Even so, devotion to rules is not a substitute for faith in Yahweh or for following the leading of His Spirit.

Think about it this way. We are not good citizens simply because we don't lie, cheat, steal, or murder, for

example. We are good citizens if we contribute something to society.

In other words, good citizenship is more about doing than not doing.

Conforming our actions to the rudimentary principles of good behavior is the bare minimum that's expected of anyone. It keeps us out of jail, so to speak, but little else. To make a difference in society and to add value, we must do things that improve people's lives.

The same is true about faith. It's more about doing than not doing. Abraham was regarded highly by Yahweh because of what he did, not because of what he didn't do.

Abraham is one of three people mentioned in the Bible who stand out in my mind because of what Yahweh said about them, and Abraham was the first. Yahweh called Abraham His "friend".⁶⁸ That indicates a special bond between them.

Moses⁶⁹ was called Yahweh's friend as well, and David was called a man after Yahweh's own heart.⁷⁰ According to Paul, this is what Yahweh said about David:

⁶⁸ Isaiah 41:8, II Chronicles 20:7, and James 2:23.

⁶⁹ Exodus 33: 11.

⁷⁰ 1 Samuel 13: 14.

“I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” (Acts 13: 22)

Abraham, Moses, and David were willing to do what Yahweh wanted them to do and to go where Yahweh wanted them to go. In other words, they heard Yahweh’s voice, and they acted on it. That requires faith, the faith of Abraham.

There were no written rules for Abraham to obey. Yahweh gave us the Torah⁷¹ hundreds of years after he died. Abraham had to follow Yahweh’s leading each step of the way. That’s what every child of Elohim must do.

Stated simply, the faith of Abraham has legs that are willing to go where Yahweh leads. It’s not about religion. It’s about faith, the faith of Abraham.

The Hall of Faith

Hebrews 11 talks about people mentioned in the Tanach/Old Testament who possessed the faith of Abraham. It’s not an exhaustive list, but it’s a good one. I call it “The Hall of Faith”.

Before providing that list of Yahweh’s faithful followers, Paul admonished his readers not to follow the example set by the Children of Israel as they were coming

⁷¹ The Torah is the 5 books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They are the first 5 books in the Tanach/Old Testament.

out of Egypt during the Exodus. They lacked faith in Yahweh and were not willing to follow Him. As a result, they had to spend 40 years in the wilderness.

Only two adults traveling with Moses during the Exodus were permitted to enter the Promised Land: Joshua and Caleb. They stood out because they demonstrated faith in Yahweh.

Hebrews 11 is below in its entirety:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of Elohim, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

By faith Abel offered to Elohim a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, Elohim testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because Elohim took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to Elohim.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to Elohim must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

By faith Noah, being warned by Elohim about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is Elohim.

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having

welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore Elohim is not ashamed to be called their Elohim; for He has prepared a city for them.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." He considered that Elohim is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type [of the Messiah].

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of Elohim than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of the Messiah greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of

David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because Elohim had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11: 1-40)

The Faith of Abraham Sets Us Apart

Yahweh made promises to Abraham that every believer relies on for salvation. He extended those promises to us through Isaac and Jacob/Israel. Yahweh appeared in Person to make those promises, and those

promises secure the future of the Israeli people, the Promised Land, and the salvation of all believers.

Now, let's turn our attention to Yahweh's promises. They are crucial.

Abraham's Call and Yahweh's Promise to Bless all the Families of the Earth

Yahweh told Abraham to leave his home and his country and go to a place that He would show him,⁷² and Abraham obeyed. Then Yahweh said,

"I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12: 2-3)

Yahweh's promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham refers to the Messiah and His redemptive work on our behalf. It also refers to the Children of Israel who have been a special blessing to all humanity.

Throughout history, the willingness of men and women to ignore the odds against them and do what Yahweh told them to do has resulted in tremendous blessings for all of us. The next time you catch yourself thinking that nothing you do matters, remember

⁷² Genesis 12: 1.

Abraham. He may have had similar thoughts, but he did not let his fear and insecurity prevent him from obeying Yahweh.

Abraham was an ordinary man that Yahweh used to do extraordinary things. His life made an enormous difference. Yours can too.

Yahweh Explains His Covenant with Abraham Further

When Abraham entered the Promised Land, he was traveling with his nephew, Lot. Both had large herds of animals. Since the land could not support the herds of both men traveling together, Abraham suggested that they separate, and he told Lot to take the land he wanted.

Lot looked at the valley below the hills on which Jerusalem rests and saw that it was well-watered and fertile. Thus, he took the valley for his possession. Abraham took the hilly region that includes Mount Moriah—the hill beside which Jerusalem was built. Today, we know Mount Moriah as the Temple Mount.

After Abraham and Lot parted company, Yahweh made this promise to Abraham:

“Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if

anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." (Genesis 13: 14-17)

In Genesis 15: 18-21, Yahweh gave Abraham a more precise description of the Promised Land's boundaries:

"To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt [the Nile River] as far as the great river Euphrates; the land of the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Gergashite and the Jebusite." (Genesis 15: 18-21)

Later, Yahweh told Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, and He confirmed that the Promised Land would belong to his descendants forever:

"For My part, this is My covenant with you: you will become the father of many nations. And you are no longer to be called Abram; your name is to be Abraham, for I am making you father of many nations, and your issue will be kings. And I shall maintain my covenant between Myself and you, and your descendants after you, generation after generation, as a covenant in perpetuity, to be your Elohim and the Elohim of your descendants

after you. And to you and to your descendants after you, I shall give the country where you are now immigrants, the entire land of Canaan, to own in perpetuity. And I will be their Elohim.” (Genesis 17: 4-8)

Then Yahweh explained that even though Abraham would become the father of many nations, His covenant would pass to future generations through Isaac’s descendants:

“As regards your wife...Sarah....I shall bless her and moreover give you a son by her. I shall bless her and she will become nations: kings of peoples will issue from her....Yes, your wife Sarah will bear you a son whom you must name Isaac. And I shall maintain My covenant with him, a covenant in perpetuity, to be his Elohim and the Elohim of his descendants after him. For Ishmael too I grant you your request. I hereby bless him and will make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous. He will be the father of twelve princes, and I shall make him into a great nation. But my covenant I shall maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear you....” (Genesis 17: 15-16 and 19-21)

A “covenant in perpetuity” is eternally binding. Yahweh bestowed those blessings on Abraham because he heard Yahweh’s voice and obeyed Him. I call that “the faith of Abraham”.

Nothing has changed. Yahweh still requires faith and obedience.

Yahweh Extends His Covenant to Isaac

In Genesis 26: 2-5, Yahweh confirmed His covenant to Isaac:

“Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My Laws.” (Genesis 26: 2-5)

Yahweh made clear that Isaac was the beneficiary of His promises “because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My Laws.” In other words, the faith of Abraham is key.

Yahweh Extends His Covenant to Jacob/Israel

In Genesis 28: 13-15, Yahweh said that the Promised Land belongs to Abraham's descendants through Jacob:

"I am Yahweh, the Elohim of your father Abraham and the Elohim of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give to you and your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised." (Genesis 28: 13-15)

Yahweh told Jacob who He is by Name. Then, He explained that He is "the Elohim of your father Abraham and the Elohim of Isaac". That means Abraham and Isaac had the faith of Abraham.

Yahweh repeated His promise in Genesis 35: 10-12:

"You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name....I am El Shaddai; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land

to your descendants after you.” (Genesis 35: 10-12)

Yahweh Extends His Covenant to the Children of Israel

Yahweh told Moses that He would rescue the Children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land, and He tied that promise to His Name:

“I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your Elohim; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a permanent possession; I am Yahweh.” (Exodus 6: 6-8)

As the Children of Israel were preparing to leave Mount Sinai and go to the Promised Land, Yahweh told them that He would send His Angel before them.

That Angel was no ordinary messenger. The Angel of Yahweh referred to in Exodus 6: 6-8 is the same Angel who appeared to Moses in the burning bush.⁷³ In

⁷³ Exodus 3: 2.

other words, He is Yahweh, and He established Israel as a nation:

“Behold, I am going to send an Angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before Him and obey His voice; do not be rebellious toward Him, for He will not pardon your transgression, since My Name is in Him. But if you will truly obey His voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them. You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces. But you shall serve Yahweh your Elohim, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst.” (Exodus 23: 20-25)

In Exodus 23: 27-31, Yahweh explained how He would drive out the early inhabitants of the Promised Land, and He gave another description of its boundaries:

“I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. I will send hornets ahead of you

that they may drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land. I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines [i.e., the Mediterranean Sea], and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you." (Exodus 23: 27-31)

We know that Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Moses had the faith of Abraham. All of them were willing to go where Yahweh told them to go and to do what He told them to do.

That wasn't true for all the Children of Israel in Egypt. Many of them lacked faith. That would become evident during the Exodus.

Yahweh extended His promises to those who had the faith of Abraham, not to those who didn't. Most of the book of Exodus tells about Yahweh showing the Children of Israel that they could have faith in Him and that He would bless them if they demonstrated faith.

Again, faith is key, the faith of Abraham.

The Covenant of Yahweh

If I made a list of the most important chapters in the Bible, Genesis 15 would be at the top of my list. It presents Yahweh's Covenant with His people. As you will see, a covenant is a special kind of promise, and the Covenant is really special.

The Covenant in Genesis 15 has never changed, and it points to the Renewed Covenant.⁷⁴ Genesis 22 also provides essential insights into the Renewed Covenant. It portrays Isaac as a type of the Messiah renewing Yahweh's Covenant with His children.

Genesis 15 begins with this statement:

"The Word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision...." (Genesis 15: 1)

Genesis 15: 1 does not mean that Abraham only heard the spoken Words of Yahweh. The "Word of Yahweh" referred to in Genesis 15: 1 is the Messiah.

The Messiah is Yahweh's human manifestation. He appeared to Abraham in a vision, and He ratified the Covenant on which we all depend for our redemption and salvation.

Yahweh told Abraham,

"Do not fear...I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great." (Genesis 15: 1)

⁷⁴ Jeremiah 31: 31-34.

Abraham responded by saying, "I have no children. How can this be?"⁷⁵

Look at what happened next:

And He [Yahweh] took him [Abraham] outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He [Yahweh] said to him [Abraham], "So shall your descendants be." Then he [Abraham] believed in Yahweh; and He [Yahweh] reckoned it to him [Abraham] as righteousness. (Genesis 15: 5-6)

Obviously, literal words didn't take Abraham outside. Yahweh did, and He confirmed the promise that He made to Abraham earlier.

When Yahweh said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them...So shall your descendants be,"⁷⁶ He as telling Abraham that despite the fact he was childless at that moment, he would have many descendants. Eventually, Abraham learned that he would have a son, the child of the Covenant (Isaac) through whom the Messiah would come into the world. In Genesis 22, Abraham learned that the Messiah would become the sin offering for all mankind.

⁷⁵ This is a paraphrase of Genesis 15: 2-3.

⁷⁶ Genesis 15: 5.

Genesis 15: 6 tells us that Abraham believed Yahweh and that Yahweh declared him righteous. Abraham's righteousness was based on his faith in Yahweh and nothing else. His obedience flowed from his faith. Saving faith is the faith of Abraham.

The Covenant that Yahweh made with His children is not dependent on our effort in any way whatsoever. Faith in Yahweh and His sacrifice on our behalf are essential. Our willingness to obey Him simply proves that we have the kind of faith that He expects and requires: the faith of Abraham.

Ratification of the Covenant

Most believers do not have a good understanding of the Covenant that Yahweh ratified with Abraham. Thus, most of us do not fully appreciate what Yahweh did for us or what He expects from us.

In Genesis 15: 9-10, Yahweh told Abraham,

“Bring me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.” (Genesis 15: 9-10)

In Abraham's day, people ratified covenants in the following way. First, they would slaughter animals and cut them in two. Next, they would place the parts of

the slaughtered animals in two lines on the ground, and the people entering into the covenant would walk between the lines of animal parts together.

Ratification of a covenant signifies that the people walking between the animal parts are committing themselves to fulfill the covenant's terms—every one of them no matter what happens.

For instance, if you and your friend enter into a covenant such as the one that Yahweh entered into with Abraham, both of you are agreeing to live up to the covenant's terms even if the other one fails to keep his word. Ratifying a covenant this way also indicates that you are inviting Yahweh to slaughter you the way the animals were slaughtered if you break your promise.⁷⁷

Today, we do not enter into covenants so most of us are unfamiliar with the concept. Instead, we enter into contracts, and covenants and contracts are very different.

If you and your friend enter into a contractual relationship and you fail to live up to your end of the bargain, then the contract's provisions are no longer binding on your friend. As I said, in a covenant the terms

⁷⁷ Read Jeremiah 34: 8-22 to understand how important it is for us to live up to the terms of a covenant. Yahweh expects us to live up to our word, and He also expects us to obey His Word. Failure on our part to honor our word or to obey Yahweh's Word is inviting disaster. Covenants are binding agreements no matter what happens.

of the agreement never cease to apply.⁷⁸ This distinction is key.

Furthermore, the covenant that Yahweh ratified with Abraham was not a typical covenant. Look at Genesis 15: 12 and Genesis 15: 17-18 and see what I mean:

“Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him (Genesis 15: 12)...It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram...” (Genesis 15: 17-18)

The “smoking oven” and the “flaming torch” were two manifestations of Yahweh. He caused Abraham to fall asleep when He ratified the Covenant. Therefore, the Covenant that we refer to as the Covenant that Yahweh made with Abraham is actually a Covenant between Yahweh and Yahweh. Abraham and his descendants are the beneficiaries of Yahweh’s work on our behalf.

Since Abraham was asleep when Yahweh ratified the Covenant, Yahweh assumed sole responsibility for fulfilling the Covenant’s terms. Stated another way, Yahweh’s Covenant with us is not dependent on our doing anything for Him.

⁷⁸ McVey, Steve. *Grace Land*, Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon, 2001, p. 81.

Please do not undervalue the significance of that point. The Children of Israel misunderstood it. They lacked faith in Yahweh and had to spend 40 years in the wilderness instead of going directly to the Promised Land.⁷⁹

Steve McVey has written several books dealing with the importance of grace in the lives of Yahweh's people.⁸⁰ In his book *Grace Land*, McVey explains the Covenant's ratification this way:

"When the time came for the covenant to be ratified, God [Elohim] caused Abraham to fall asleep....There was no way that Abraham could live up to the promises he would have been making....It was as if God [Elohim] were saying, 'Abraham, I know you have good intentions, but there is nothing you could ever do for Me. You would only break any promises you make. So for that reason, I want you to lie down and rest while I ratify the covenant. I'll do the work. You simply trust Me as the recipient of all I do.'"⁸¹

Yahweh's Covenant is "a unilateral pact [between Yahweh and Abraham and his descendants], a

⁷⁹ Psalm 78: 22, Psalm 78: 32, and Psalm 78: 59-62.

⁸⁰ The three books on grace written by Steve McVey are *Grace Walk*, *Grace Rules*, and *Grace Land*, and Harvest House published all of them.

⁸¹ McVey, Steve. *Grace Land*, Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon, 2001, p. 82.

divine initiative, a solemn promise sealed with an imprecatory oath.”⁸²

Yahweh called down curses on Himself if He fails to deliver on every one of His promises. Yahweh knew that Abraham could not live up to the terms of the Covenant no matter how hard he tried, and neither can we.

The Law requires the death of anyone who violates even one of the Covenant’s provisions. Thus, every one of us deserves to die because all of us have violated the Covenant. However, by ratifying it single-handedly Yahweh agreed to take upon Himself the penalty for our sins and to die⁸³ in our place. That fact is alluded to in Genesis chapter 22.

When they nailed the Messiah to a tree, He paid the price for our sins, redeemed us, fulfilled the Old Covenant, and sealed the Renewed Covenant with His own blood. That is true love.

The Messiah is Yahweh’s Human Form

⁸² *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday, New York, 1985, p. 35.

⁸³ Yahweh cannot die, because then the universe would stop running. The human form of Yahweh did die when He was hung on a tree, but His divine nature inside the Messiah did not and cannot die (see Isaiah 11:1-12, Isaiah chapter 53, Isaiah 63:1-14, and Psalm 51:1-11). In a nutshell, the Messiah, who is Yahweh the Son, laid down his life voluntarily in submission to Yahweh the Father (see John chapter 10) to atone for our sins. Thanks to Andrew Roth for suggesting this clarification.

Yahweh appeared in Person to make His promises. Most of the time He appeared in human form. Therefore, we know that Yahweh has a human form. The Messiah is Yahweh's human manifestation.

Let's take another look at Yahweh's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel since He appeared in Person to make them.

Yahweh Appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel in Human Form

Yahweh has appeared to men and women in human form many times since the creation to declare His Word and to make certain that all His promises are fulfilled. The first time we know that Yahweh appeared in human form was when He walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam.⁸⁴

The Bible refers to Yahweh's human form as the Angel of Yahweh. It refers to Him in other ways, too, but the fact that He has appeared in human form is evident from what He did and said and from people's reactions to Him. Since He never changes, Yahweh always has had a human form.

Many people throughout history have met with and spoken to Yahweh in Person. Abraham, Moses, and many others even shared meals with Him.

⁸⁴ Genesis 3: 8.

Since Yahweh appeared in human form to make His promises, there will be some overlap between the next few sections and previous sections.

Yahweh Appears to Abraham

Abraham was born in Ur in the land of the Chaldees. Abraham's father took him, Abraham's wife Sarah, and Abraham's nephew Lot, and they went to Haran, a city that is in Iraq. While he was in Haran, Yahweh told Abraham to take Sarah, Lot, and all his possessions and go to a land He would show him.⁸⁵

Abraham obeyed Yahweh. When he arrived in the land of Canaan in a city called Shechem, Yahweh appeared to him in human form and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."⁸⁶

Yahweh was talking about the land we know today as Israel. That is why we call Israel the Promised Land. Yahweh promised to give the Land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob/Israel as a permanent possession.

Although Abraham did not obey Yahweh perfectly, his heart was right before Him, and Yahweh used Abraham to bless all the nations of the world.

Yahweh Appears to Abraham Again

⁸⁵ Genesis 11: 27-32.

⁸⁶ Genesis 12: 7.

When Abraham was 99 years old, Yahweh appeared to him⁸⁷ and said,

“I am El Shaddai; walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.” (Genesis 17: 1-2)

When Abraham saw Yahweh, he knew immediately that he was in the presence of Elohim. Abraham fell on his face before Him.⁸⁸

Yahweh told Abraham that circumcision would be the sign of the covenant between them and that his wife Sarah would have a son through whom the covenant would pass to future generations. Abraham fell on his face and laughed⁸⁹ when Yahweh told him that Sarah would have a son because Sarah was about 90 years old at the time—well past childbearing years.

Ishmael, Abraham’s son by Hagar (Sarah’s maid and Abraham’s concubine) was 13 years old at the time. Abraham asked Yahweh to fulfill His promise through Ishmael instead, but Yahweh said,

“No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him....” (Genesis 17: 19)

⁸⁷ Genesis 17: 1.

⁸⁸ Genesis 17: 3.

⁸⁹ Genesis 17: 17.

Yahweh made clear that His covenant would not pass through Ishmael. He was the product of Sarah's desire to have a son, Abraham's willingness to oblige Sarah, and Hagar's consent to become the mother of Abraham's child. They simply took it upon themselves to solve Sarah's problem.

It's possible, even probable, that Abraham thought he needed to take matters into his own hands to fulfill Yahweh's promise to give the Promised Land to his descendants. If he did, he was wrong. Yahweh does not need anyone's help to fulfill His promises. He graciously gives us the opportunity to assist Him if we have faith.

Isaac's birth was a miracle—a gift from Yahweh. He spoke to Abraham face-to-face to emphasize that everything pertaining to the Covenant was, and is, based on His promises and His desires. All that Yahweh required from Abraham was faith in Him and obedience to His word and the leading of His Spirit.

Although Yahweh made clear that Isaac was the child of the Covenant, He made several promises to Abraham about Ishmael:

"As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac....When He finished talking with him,

Elohim went up from Abraham.” (Genesis 17: 20-22)

There can be no doubt that Yahweh appeared in Person to make those points.

Yahweh Tells Abraham about Isaac’s Birth

Later, Yahweh and two angels appeared⁹⁰ to Abraham near Hebron, a city in Israel. Abraham invited Yahweh to stay and share a meal with him, and He agreed. While they were eating,⁹¹ Yahweh told Abraham that He would return in a year and by that time Sarah would have a child.

Sarah was inside the tent listening, and she overheard the conversation. When she heard Yahweh say that she would have a child, she laughed to herself saying,

“After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (Genesis 18: 12)

Yahweh knew Sarah’s thoughts, and He said,

“Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’ Is anything too difficult for Yahweh? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18: 13-14)

⁹⁰ Genesis 18: 1.

⁹¹ Genesis 18: 8.

Once again, Yahweh confirmed that He would fulfill His promises through Isaac—a child who had not been born yet. He concluded His conversation with Abraham by asking a question that is actually a statement: “Is anything too difficult for Yahweh?”

The answer is no.

Yahweh Appears to Isaac Twice

Yahweh told Abraham that He would extend His promises through Isaac and Jacob/Israel, so they had to demonstrate the faith of Abraham, too. Yahweh appeared to them in Person to confirm what He told Abraham.

There was a famine in the land of Canaan, and Isaac was tempted to go down to Egypt where food was plentiful. But Yahweh appeared to him in Person to confirm His promise. He said,

“Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept

My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My Laws.” (Genesis 26: 2-5)

Yahweh made clear that He was doing through Isaac what He had promised Abraham He would do because of Abraham’s faith.

Later, Isaac experienced problems with his neighbors who were concerned that his wealth was a threat to their security. They made life difficult enough for him to make him move on.

Isaac kept moving until he found a place where he and his family could live in peace. That place is called Rehoboth. It means “plenty of room”.⁹²

From there Isaac went to Beersheba, and Yahweh appeared to him in human form and said,

“I am the Elohim of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, for the sake of my servant Abraham.” (Genesis 26: 24)

Yahweh told Isaac, “Do not fear.” That statement suggests Isaac was afraid and that he needed reassurance. Thus, Yahweh appeared to him in Person and repeated the message He has been giving His children since the beginning:

⁹² Ryrie, Charles. *Ryrie Study Bible Expanded Edition*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 45.

“I am Yahweh, and I will watch over my word to perform it. You can have faith in Me, and I will bless you if you obey Me.”

Yahweh Appears to Jacob in a Dream

Isaac’s first-born son, Esau, was willing to trade his birthright for a meal.⁹³ Since his birthright included the promise of the coming Messiah, in effect Esau traded the honor and privilege of being in the Messiah’s lineage for a single meal because for a fleeting moment he was hungry.

Esau traded away his part in the greatest gift ever bestowed on mankind, and Yahweh hated him for it before he was born.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Yahweh would not allow Esau to obtain the birthright of the first-born even though he wept bitterly when the time came for Isaac to bless his sons.⁹⁵

It’s obvious that Esau still wanted the blessing of the first-born, but he had treated it so lightly when he was younger that Yahweh would not allow him to have it.

Isaac loved Esau and intended to bestow the blessing of the first-born on him contrary to Yahweh’s desire.⁹⁶ Rebekah, his wife, and Jacob, his second son, intervened to secure Isaac’s blessing for Jacob.

⁹³ Genesis 25: 34.

⁹⁴ Malachi 1: 2-3.

⁹⁵ Genesis 27: 38.

⁹⁶ Genesis 25: 28.

Many people have said that Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac and stole Esau's birthright. Maybe they did, but they did it with Yahweh's blessing, and they kept Isaac from making a tragic mistake.

Before her sons were born, Yahweh told Rebekah that Jacob was the child of the promise,⁹⁷ not Esau. Thus, Rebekah helped Jacob obtain the blessing of the first-born over Isaac's objections.

When Esau learned what had happened, he was furious and threatened to kill his brother. Thus, Rebekah and Isaac urged Jacob to flee to Haran, to her relatives, and to take a wife from among her relatives. He obeyed his parents, and along the way he stopped to sleep at a place called Bethel.

This Bethel is very likely Mount Moriah in Jerusalem,⁹⁸ not the town of Bethel in Israel today. Bethel in Israel today is a town about 12 miles north of Jerusalem. The literal meaning of Bethel is "House of Elohim".

While he was sleeping, Yahweh appeared to Jacob in a dream and said,

⁹⁷ Genesis 25: 23.

⁹⁸ For a complete explanation of this interpretation, see Peter Michas' book *The Rod of an Almond Tree in God's Master Plan*, Winepress Publishing, Enumclaw, WA, 2001, p. 113.

“I am Yahweh, the Elohim of your father Abraham and the Elohim of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you.” (Genesis 28: 13-15)

Yahweh Appears to Reassure Jacob

Years later when Jacob returned to Canaan with his wives, his children, and all of his belongings, he was afraid that Esau would still hold a grudge against him and kill his entire family. His faith in Yahweh at that moment was not strong. He did everything that was humanly possible to protect his family from Esau, but he was still afraid that it would not be enough.

The night before he met Esau, Jacob separated himself from his family, and “a Man wrestled with him until daybreak”.⁹⁹ The Bible tells us that the Man was Yahweh and that He used this occasion to change Jacob’s name to Israel.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Genesis 32: 24.

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 32: 28.

Jacob knew that he had had a personal encounter with Yahweh, and he said, "I have seen Elohim face to face, yet my life has been preserved."¹⁰¹

Yahweh allowed Jacob to win the wrestling match that night and said,

"...you have striven with Elohim and with men and have prevailed." (Genesis 32: 28)

At that moment, Jacob (whose name was now Israel) knew that Yahweh was on his side. If Yahweh had wanted to win the wrestling match, He could have with no difficulty, but He was making a point. He was showing Jacob that he had nothing to fear because Yahweh was with him. If Yahweh is involved, we can, and should, be fearless.

The Messiah Son of Joseph

The Messiah's identity remains the source of much confusion and controversy. That problem must be solved, because faith in Him determines our eternal well-being.

Somewhere between 1010 BC and 970 BC, King David prophesied that the Messiah would be crucified. In Psalm 22: 16 he wrote,

¹⁰¹ Genesis 32: 30.

“For dogs have surrounded Me; a band of evildoers has encompassed Me; they pierced My hands and My feet.” (Psalm 22: 16)

Crucifixion is a form of capital punishment invented by the Romans in the 1st century BC. In David’s day, stoning was the accepted method for capital punishment, so his prophecy that the Messiah would be crucified at least 800 years before crucifixion was invented is remarkable. David could not have foretold the Messiah’s crucifixion unless Yahweh explained it to him.

Many Jewish people today believe Christians have misinterpreted the Hebrew word in Psalm 22: 16 that is translated as “pierced.” The Hebrew word is *ariy* (ar-ee’). Its literal meaning suggests violence, and it seems to involve a lion or a young lion.

Based on that fact Samuel Levine, author of *You Take Jesus, I’ll Take God*, has said,

“That verse of ‘they pierced my hands and feet,’ which seems to point to Jesus, is a mistranslation, according to all the classical Jewish scholars, who knew Hebrew perfectly. In fact, the Christians have invented a new word in the process, which is still not in the Hebrew dictionary.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² Levine, Samuel. *You Take Jesus, I’ll Take God*, Hamoroh Press, 1980, p. 34.

Even though the contemporary meaning of *ariy* seems to indicate something other than “piercing,” Mr. Levine is mistaken. Here’s why.

The Jewish authorized Greek Septuagint Tanach¹⁰³ that was translated by 70 rabbis in 285 BC—i.e., 285 years before Y’shua was born—and Targums¹⁰⁴ written at that time interpret *ariy* as “pierced” exactly the way Christians have translated the word.¹⁰⁵

No one alive today has a better understanding of the Hebrew used in the Tanach than that group of rabbis. I defer to them and rely on their translation of *ariy* to support my conclusion.

Furthermore, Zechariah 12: 10 refers to the “piercing” of the Messiah. The Hebrew word translated as “pierced” in that verse is *daqar* (daw-kar’). It means to stab or to thrust through.

This is what the Babylonian Talmud says about Zechariah 12: 10:

“What is the cause of the mourning? It is well according to him who explains that the cause is the slaying of Messiah, the son of Joseph, since

¹⁰³ Brenton, Sir Lancelot C. L. *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English, 9th Printing*, originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, 1851. This version published by Hendrickson Publishers, 2001.

¹⁰⁴ A Targum is a Jewish commentary on the Old Testament. It means translation.

¹⁰⁵ Eastman, Mark and Chuck Missler, *The Search for Messiah*, Fountain Valley: Joy Publishing, 1996, pp. 31-33.

that well agrees with the Scriptural verse, 'And they shall look upon me because they have thrust Him through, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son.'¹⁰⁶

Many sages and rabbis over the millennia since Psalm 22 and Zechariah were written have had difficulty accepting the fact that the Messiah Son of David had to suffer for His people. They understood that the Tanach describes a suffering Messiah, but they could not believe that He was the Messiah referred to as the Son of David. Therefore, they called Him by another name—the Messiah son of Joseph.

According to Raphael Patai, a Jewish Bible scholar,

“When the death of the Messiah became an established tenet in Talmudic times,¹⁰⁷ this was felt to be irreconcilable with the belief in the Messiah as the Redeemer who would usher in the blissful millennium of the Messianic age. The dilemma was solved by splitting the person of the Messiah in two: one of them, called Messiah ben Joseph...would fall victim....The other, Messiah ben David, will come after him...and will lead

¹⁰⁶ *Babylonian Talmud*, Sukkah 52a.

¹⁰⁷ Talmudic times” refers to an era between the Babylonian captivity that began in 586 BC and about 400 AD. During Talmudic times, Jewish Sages wrote about virtually every area of life, religion, custom, folklore, and law. Their writings in Hebrew and Aramaic contain approximately 2,500,000 words that are published as books called the Talmud, and they are studied today. The Babylonian Talmud is the best known and most authoritative of all the Talmud writings.

Israel to ultimate victory, the triumph, and the Messianic era of bliss.”¹⁰⁸

As you can see, it is perfectly clear that *all* classical Jewish scholars do not agree with Mr. Levine. Obviously, the 70 rabbis who translated the Greek Septuagint Tanach in 285 BC do not agree with him. It would be foolish to accept his interpretation over theirs.

The weight of evidence confirms that there is (and can be) only one Messiah. He is the Messiah Son of David; He is the suffering Messiah described in Isaiah 53; and He is the victorious King Messiah described throughout the Tanach. Faith in Him is essential.

The Saddest Verse in the New Testament

At the time of the Messiah’s birth, many Jewish religious leaders expected His arrival. Some of them were full of anticipation but others were threatened. Virtually all of them had been indoctrinated. They expected the King Messiah, but He came to them in the form of the Suffering Messiah.

Their misunderstanding of the Messiah’s identity led them to reject Him when it became obvious that He would be executed. In their minds, that could not have happened to the Messiah, but Yahweh told us all along that it would happen.

¹⁰⁸ Patai, Raphael. *The Messiah Texts*, Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1979, pp. 166-167.

I think the Messiah's lament over Jerusalem is the saddest part of the New Testament. As the time for His crucifixion was drawing near, He looked out over Yahweh's holy city and said,

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of Yahweh!'" (Matthew 23: 37-39)

The Messiah came to save/deliver them, but they turned their backs on Him and had Him killed. The pain He felt as He looked out over the city must have been excruciating. He knew that He had to die, but He also knew that His children would suffer greatly because they rejected Him.

Luke provides a bit of detail about that occasion that I think is the saddest verse in the New Testament. According to Luke, the Messiah said:

"They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of Elohim's coming to you." (Luke 19:44)

The penalty for rejecting Yahweh is more horrific than anyone can imagine. He is the Savior and Redeemer, but He is also the Judge. He will reject those who stubbornly refuse to accept Him. This is how King David explained it to his son Solomon:

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the Elohim of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for Yahweh searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." (1 Chronicles 28: 9)

Yahweh will Deny Anyone Who Denies Him

Faith in Yahweh is essential. Meer words are not enough. Intellectual acceptance of Yahweh's existence is not enough, either.

The faith of Abraham is required. It's a faith that is willing to go where Yahweh leads and to do what Yahweh says. Lacking the faith of Abraham is the same as rejecting Yahweh.

This is how the Messiah explained it:

"But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 10: 33)

Obviously, this is a serious matter. Yahweh couldn't have made it any clearer. He will reject those who reject Him. It couldn't be more serious.

Closing Comment

In this book, I presented Yahweh's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. All those promises apply equally to Israel's 12 children, not to Judah alone.

Today in the State of Israel, Judah has control, and they want it to be a Jewish state. On the surface, that sounds good, but it is contrary to Yahweh's promises. That should be clear. Again, Judah is only one of Jacob's 12 sons.

I think I will have more to say about this later. Yahweh knows for sure.