

THE TIMES OF YESHUA:

In the last 30 odd years there has been a great deal of knowledge of the early first century CE, thanks to the Qumran Scrolls and to Jewish scholars such as the brilliant Prof. David Flusser taking an interest in the Jewish Rabbi Yeshua (Jesus).

There are at least 8 major sources of information about these times:

They are:

1. The TaNaK (OT) – by inference – historical foundations/reasons
2. Jewish apocalyptic literature from 200 BCE – 100 CE – books such as 1 Enoch, Testaments of the 12 patriarchs, and the Psalms of Solomon
3. The Dead Sea Scrolls – The Manual of Discipline, The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness and the Temple Scroll having particular significance,
4. The Apocrypha – 1 & 2 Maccabees (esp. regarding Hanukah), & Sirach,
5. The Targums – aramaic paraphrases of books or passages of the TaNaK (300 BCE – 300 CE),
6. Works of Josephus,
7. Talmud – Mishnah (Oral Law) – 200 CE and Gemara – commentary on Mishnah from around 500 CE plus midrash (commentary) on TaNaK passed orally until recorded around 100-300 CE.
8. And of course the Messianic Writings, the New Testament!

I have begun to seriously study some commentaries taken from this range of sources such as:

1. Our Father Abraham by Marvin Wilson;
2. Yeshua – A guide to the Real Yeshua and the Original Church by Dr Ron Moseley,
3. A HISTORY of THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE TIME OF YESHUA CHRIST By Prof. EMIL SCHÜRER,
4. Christianity and Judaism – Two Covenants by YEHEZKEL KAUFMANN,
5. JUDAISM AND THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY by DAVID FLUSSER,
6. JEWS, JUDAISM AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD by Gedalyahu Alon,
7. Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud Translated from the Hebrew by ISRAEL ABRAHAMAS,
8. JESUS OF NAZARETH HIS LIFE, TIMES, AND TEACHING by JOSEPH KLAUSNER,
9. The Sages—Their Concepts and Beliefs by Prof. Ephraim E. Urbach,
10. NAZARENE JEWISH CHRISTIANITY From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century by Ray A. Pritz,
11. JEWS, PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS IN CONFLICT by DAVID ROKEAH
- 12. Jesus by Flusser**

To quote Flusser:

“In the fullness of time the Christian religion sprang out of Judaism; as a fact, indeed, of divine revelation, but also inseparably joined by innumerable threads with the previous thousand years of Israel’s history. No incident in the gospel story, no word in the preaching of Jesus Christ, is intelligible apart from its setting in Jewish history, and without a clear understanding of that world of thought—distinction of the Jewish people.

Thus it becomes the bounden duty of Christian theologians to examine into and describe that realm of thought and history in which the universal religion of Christ grew up. Nor is it enough to know simply that older literature which has been collected together in the canon of the Old Testament.

On the contrary, the gospel of Jesus Christ is much more closely connected with its immediately contemporary surroundings, and the tendencies of thought prevailing in that particular age.”

Given the significance I place on the work and writings of the late Prof. David Flusser, I think it worth a quick overview of why I see his contribution as so superior to the vast majority of scholars.

Firstly, some information excerpted from Wikipedia:

“Flusser was a devout Orthodox Jew who applied his skills in Torah and Talmud to the study of ancient Greek, Roman and Arabic texts, as well as the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Flusser scrutinized the ancient Jewish and Christian texts for evidence of the Jewish roots of Christianity. ... Flusser published over 1,000 articles in Hebrew, German, English, and other languages. ... Flusser was trained as a philologist and thus the study of

Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic manuscripts was central to his research interests.”¹

Flusser was born in Poland in a Christian area that was quite friendly to the Jewish people in their midst. As a result Flusser developed an interest at an early age to study the Jew, Jesus (Yeshua). He moved to Israel before at the age of 22 in 1939 and spent most of his professional life studying Judaism of the Second Temple Period as well as Yeshua, in particular through the Synoptic Gospels. I know of no other orthodox Jew and theologian whose has devoted so much time and energy to studying who and what Yeshua was, along with having the religious and linguistic background to be able to fully interrogate the extant manuscripts of this age.

Here is an excerpt from some comments on Flusser by the renowned Christian theologian Ben Witherington (Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary):

“If we ask the question, What did David Flusser bring to the study of the historical Jesus that many others could and did not? the answer is several fold.

Firstly his breadth and depth of knowledge of early Judaism and its sources was vast. He was that rare scholar who had a profound grasp of the requisite languages, culture, physical setting, archaeology, as well as the literary sources.

Secondly, he had a keen interest in Jesus, and in the intellectual pursuit of the understanding of him as a crucial historical figure.

Thirdly, and most importantly as Notley so aptly puts it “Flusser felt no need to deny Jesus his high self-awareness. In his understanding, the historical Jesus was both identified with his people and the cornerstone of the faith of the early Christian community.” (p. xi).

Flusser had that rare gift of allowing a person their distinctiveness, not attempting to explain it by explaining it away, while still being able to show how what had come before him had in various ways prepared for and influenced a figure like Jesus.

For example, Flusser highlights and stresses the love ethic of Jesus, in particular its command to love one’s enemies, without suggesting that Jesus had any desire to start a new world religion. For Flusser it was axiomatic that Jesus not only was a Jew but wanted to remain within the Jewish faith. At the same time he was insistent on saying “I personally identify myself with Jesus’s Jewish worldview, both moral and political, and I believe that the content of his teachings and the approach he embraced have always had the potential to change our world and prevent the greatest part of evil and suffering.” (p. xviii). ... he believed that Jesus’ life and teaching should influence how we conduct our lives today.”²

So, given the very rare and perhaps unique traits and talents that Flusser brought to the study of Yeshua/Jesus I believe he should be taken most seriously. This is not to say his word is Gospel, as he himself admitted that he was always learning, even into his eighties. However, I believe a careful examination of his works is of enormous benefit in appreciating the Hebraic context within which we must try to place Yeshua if we are to correctly understand and appreciate him.

Also, we need to learn and appreciate the Hebraic mindset and learn to recognize our natural tendency as Gentiles, as those brought up in a Greek/Platonic mindset, to read our Bible with Greek or Hellenistic eyes and so lose so much of the treasure within and even arrive at very seriously flawed doctrinal positions as a result.

What would be one of the most important findings from the Qumran Scrolls and archaeological of recent times that overturns conventional wisdom?

- It would be that **Hebrew was the primary spoken and written medium of the majority of the Jews in Israel during the time of Yeshua (Jesus) and that Yeshua therefore did most if not all of his teaching in Hebrew (not Greek or Aramaic).**

Evidence:

- Archaeologists unearthed part of a first-century limestone sarcophagus cover with the Hebrew inscription “son of the High Priest” (ben haCohen haGadol).
- Jewish teachers of first-century from both Galilee and Judea ordinarily passed on their teachings in Hebrew. For example, parables were preserved in Hebrew.
- Shmuel Safrai writes, “The parable was one of the most common tools of rabbinic instruction from the second

¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Flusser

² <http://blog.beliefnet.com/bibleandculture/page/198/>

century B.C.E. until the close of the amoraic period at the end of the fifth century C.E. Thousands of parables have been preserved in complete or fragmentary form, and are found in all types of literary compositions of the rabbinic period, both halachic and aggadic, early and late. All of the parables are in Hebrew. Amoraic literature often contains stories in Aramaic, and a parable may be woven into the story; however the parable itself is always in Hebrew, There are instances of popular sayings in Aramaic, but every single parable is in Hebrew.

- Hebrew also was typically chosen for written accounts of Jewish religious significance, as evidenced by post-biblical writings such as Ben Sira, 1 Maccabees (according to consensus), by the Qumran texts and teaching texts.
- 1 *Maccabees*, which was originally written in Hebrew, was not preserved by the Jews. 'Jews, Judaism & Classical World' by Gedalyahu Alon
- The Jewish historian Josephus describes an incident that took place during the siege of Jerusalem (War 5:269-272). Josephus relates that watchmen were posted on the towers of the city walls to warn residents of incoming stones fired from Roman ballistae. Whenever a stone was on its way, the spotters would shout "in their native tongue, 'The son is coming!'" (War 5:272). The meaning the watchmen communicated to the people was: Ha-even ba'ah (the stone is coming). However, because of the urgency of the situation, these words were clipped, being abbreviated to ben ba (son comes). (This well-known Hebrew wordplay is attested in the New Testament: "God is able from these avanim [stones] to raise up banim [sons] to Abraham" (Luke 3:8) The wordplay (and pun) that Josephus preserves is unambiguously Hebrew. This wordplay does not work in Aramaic.

Flusser argues that:

- the original accounts of Yeshua's life were composed in Hebrew (as one might conclude anyway from early church history) – have mentioned this in previous talks;
- **the Greek gospels which have come down to us represent a third or fourth stage in the *written* transmission of accounts of the life of Yeshua;**
- Luke was the first gospel written, not Mark;

Therefore, the key to understanding many of the difficult or even apparently unintelligible passages in the gospels is to be found not primarily in a better understanding of Greek, but in retroversion to and translation of the Hebrew behind the Greek (made possible by the often transparently literalistic translation methods of the Greek translators).

To begin with at least 78% of the biblical text as we have it is in Hebrew (most of the OT – some of Daniel and Ezra was in Aramaic).

An increasing number of researchers and scholars such as Bivin and Blizzard (also of The Jerusalem School'), assert that there were Hebrew originals for the gospels (very good evidence in the case of Matthew especially).

Adding to the OT the highly Hebraic portions of the NT (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts 1:1-15:35, which together constitute 40% of the NT), the percentage of the biblical material with a Hebrew background rises to 87% (subtracting the 1% that is in Aramaic in Daniel and Ezra). When one further adds the 176 quotations from the OT in John and from Acts 15:36 to the end of the NT, this percentage rises to over 90%.

It is also quite probable that the entire book of Hebrews, which early Christian writers who speak on the subject agree was written by Paul in Hebrew and translated into Greek either by Luke or Clement of Rome.

This would bring the percentage of NT books with a Hebrew background even closer to 100%.

Fact: Much of the day-to-day Second Temple literature discovered at Qumran and Massada is in Hebrew.

Flusser: "Whenever we can be sure that there is a Hebrew phrase behind the Greek text of the Gospels, we translate that, and not the literal Greek."

The followers of Yeshua were initially totally Jewish – 90%+ Hebrew in first 10-15 years i.e. to 45 AD.

As can be seen in Matt 10:16-18 they originally attended the synagogue.

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles."

They were not evicted from the synagogue until after Council of Yavneh around 90 CE. Prior to 70 CE Israel had many (maybe 24) 'denominations' of Judaism with the main ones being Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots.

The followers of Yeshua attended the synagogue and afterwards also meet in someone's home for HavDalah and to celebrate the resurrection.

The first Gentile converts joined some 10 yrs after ascension (Acts 10 – Cornelius was a God fearer, that is he and his household obeyed the Noahide Laws). As God fearers most if not all of the early Gentile converts were attending Synagogues and hearing from the Torah in Hebrew.

The followers of Yeshua, even after the ascension and events of Pentecost, etc., were still during this time observing the Holy Days (see for example the many references to Paul's travels focused around their timing, and his use of the analogy of the Passover when referring to our Passover Lamb).

The receiving of the power of Holy Spirit by Gentiles however, forced the disciples to re-assess the scope of the new move of God through Yeshua and to accept Gentiles into the fellowship.

It appears that this led to the need to formulate some plan (Jerusalem Council – these were only minimal standards – according to Flusser in "Judaism and the Origins of Christianity") so that these Gentiles could be included in the fellowship without needing to become Jewish proselytes.

For the gentile converts to try to take on the Jewish lifestyle without the godly and disciplined background (upbringing), would have placed a burden that was neither necessary nor desirable.

It would also appear that there were 2 opposing extremes (and nuances of these of course) that the Apostles opposed – the Judaizers and the Greek Pagans/Hellenists.

Judaizer: Gentile converts to Judaism – submitted to the entire Oral and Written Torah (including circumcision) (Wilson, 'Our Fathers..' p25)

There is also now clear evidence as to what a Pharisee or a man with a Pharisaic mindset, like Yeshua meant when he made the Matt 5:17 statement.

D Flusser (this Prof who died in 2000 at age of 83 is one impressive scholar) in "Jesus" (2001) p36 *"In the Pharisees, Jesus saw the contemporary heirs of Moses, and said that men should model their lives upon their teaching. This makes sense, for although Jesus was apparently indirectly influenced by Essenism, he was basically rooted in universal non-sectarian Judaism. The philosophy and practice of this Judaism was that of the Pharisees. It would not be wrong to describe Jesus as a Pharisee in the broad sense."*

The Pharisees had 2 main schools – Hillel and Shammai – Yeshua supported Hillel – their own condemnations of each other were similar to Yeshua's.

A crucial and central example of his Pharisaic approach:

When Yeshua said he came to 'fulfill the Torah' he meant to correctly interpret and enact it. To 'destroy the Torah' was to interpret in incorrectly.

Matt 5:20, *"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven,"* is illuminated by the insight that the halacha (the way); of the Pharisees had been reduced to almsgiving, and Yeshua was calling for a greater halacha; God's halacha (the way of righteousness).

Matt 5:17-18, *"Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say to you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled,"* is explained by showing the typical Hebrew rabbinic phrases employed in this statement evidently aimed at other rabbis.

The Hebrew idiom "I have come" obviously means "it is my purpose to," and the terms "destroy" and "fulfill" were commonly employed in Yeshua's day as technical terms in rabbinic argumentation.

When a rabbi felt that his colleague had misinterpreted a passage of Scripture, he would say, 'You are destroying the Law.'

Needless to say, in most cases his colleague strongly disagreed. What was 'destroying the Law' for one rabbi, was 'fulfilling the Law' (correctly interpreting Scripture) for another.

Thus, it is Yeshua's method of interpretation that is under consideration here.

Hence, to paraphrase, he is saying "**never imagine for a moment that I intend to abrogate the Law by misinterpreting it. My intent is not to weaken or negate the Law, but by properly interpreting God's Written Word I aim to establish it, that is, make it even more lasting. I would never invalidate the Law by effectively removing something from it through interpretation. Heaven and earth would sooner disappear than something from the Law. Not the smallest letter in the alphabet, the yod nor even its decorative spur, will ever disappear from the Law**"

Consider Yeshua's famous sentence in Mt 5:17: "Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." The words "or the prophets" are evidently a later addition; in the following passages Yeshua treats only verses from the Pentateuch ('The Law' often referred to the 5 books of Moses). Mt 5:17 is the introductory sentence of the preamble (Mt 5:17-20) to Yeshua's exegesis of verses from the Torah (Law), the Pentateuch (Mt 5:21-48).

Thus, it appears that the word "law" in Mt 5:17 does not mean the Mosaic law as an institution but as a book: indeed, in the following sentence (5:18) Yeshua speaks about an iota and a dot in the Law. If so, what was the meaning of the two Hebrew terms, which are translated in our Greek text by "to abolish" and "to fulfill"? These were originally two terms used in Jewish biblical exegesis.

According to the rabbinic terminology the two terms are used in connection with a right or false interpretation of a biblical verse: if it is interpreted wrongly, you "abolish" (or 'destroy'), that is, you make void the word of the Law; if you succeed to find and articulate the original and proper meaning of the verse, you "fulfill" or establish it.

Paul uses the same terminology in Rom. 3:31:5 "Do we then make void the law through the faith? By no means! On the contrary, we establish (or fulfill) the law (Torah)."

If in debate, a Pharisee thought another Pharisee was misinterpreting the Torah, he would argue that to misinterpret any part of it was to bring the whole of the Torah into question and so it was to 'abolish' or 'destroy' or undermine the whole Torah. To, on the other hand, correctly understand and explain it was to make it more complete, more secure and therefore to fulfil or more completely establish it.

Thus Yeshua began his sermon by saying (Mt. 5:17): "Think not that I have come to undermine (by my following interpretation the meaning of) the Torah; I do not come to undermine (abolish) it, but to place (fulfill) it on a firmer footing."

To examples that I think illustrate this well are Gal 6:2 and Romans 13:10.

Try reading these passages and replacing 'fulfill' with 'correctly interpret and enact' and hopefully you will see what I mean:

Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

This context is of course perfectly in harmony with God's pronouncement to Moses that he would send a Prophet who would perfectly declare the Torah (that is, who would 'fulfill' it).

Hellenism began to influence the life and mindset of the Jewish people from the time of Alexander the Great (324 BCE). The works and beliefs of Plato were seen as attractive. The reclaiming of the Temple in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes saw something of a rejection of Hellenism though and of course Hanukah³ celebrates a remembrance of the overthrow of this Greek tyrant.

Yeshua also celebrated Hanukah – John 10:22 – after-all he was the true light of the world!

Let us jump forward for a moment to the time of Marcion (130-140 CE), who was called the 'firstborn of Satan' (a Pharisaic term) by Polycarp who we know was a disciple of the Apostle John.

Marcion's doctrines led to a church which was sharply dualistic; visibility anti-semitic; strictly ascetic and celibate & wielded a strong and destructive influence throughout Christendom – read Catholic? – Augustine championed his ideas.

Almost every aspect of Marcion's doctrines were anti-semitic and anti-biblical; from asceticism, to celibacy to dualism. What did this lead to? To the Trinity, to Sunday worship and rejection of the Sabbath.

³ Explain Hanukah oil miracle – burned for 8 days yet supply only for 1 – recommend reading of Maccabees

Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity are both off-shoots of an ancient proto-Judaism.

The resurrection of Lazarus:

Let us first read John 11:17-27. Yeshua left him stay in the tomb for four days. It was a Pharisaic belief that a person's spirit hovered over the body for 3 days during which resuscitation was possible – this may be why Yeshua waited until four days had passed.

This left no question as to his Messiahship. Note the clear declaration and also the clear reply by Martha confirms this.

While many Pharisees may not have had a problem with this the Sadducees who ruled the temple did and from this time sought to remove him.

The Son of Man – both a term for Judgment (eg Ezekiel 6⁴) and a term for mankind

Originally the Son of Man was the man-like eschatological judge. Yeshua spoke of him.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . ' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matt. 25:31-36).

In all of the sources, the one resembling a man is portrayed in a consistent manner. The Son of Man has a superhuman, heavenly sublimity (Of high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth.. He is the cosmic judge at the end of time. Sitting upon the throne of God, judging the entire human race with the aid of the heavenly hosts, he will consign the just to blessedness and the wicked to the pit of hell. Whatever sentence he metes out, he will execute. Frequently he is identified¹ with the Messiah, but he can also be identified with Enoch, who was taken up into heaven.

According to 'The Testament of Abraham' the Son of Man is literally the son of Adam — ben Adam — Abel, who was killed by the wicked Cain. God appointed Abel to be the eschatological judge, because he desired that every man would be judged by his peer. At the second judgment the twelve tribes of Israel will judge the whole of creation. Not until the third judgment will God Himself judge.

This apocalyptic tradition explains why Yeshua said to the twelve. "You, who have persevered with me in my tribulations, when the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne will also sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30).

In one of the Essene fragments Melchizedek, the Tanakh priest-king of Jerusalem in the time of Abraham, figures as the eschatological heavenly priest at the end of times. In company with the angels, from on high he will judge men and the wicked spirits of Belial. It is of him the psalmist speaks, "God has taken His place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods He holds judgment" (Ps. 82:1). Elsewhere, too, in the Bible, Jewish tradition understands the word "god" as simply "judge," but the Essene identification gives us a remarkable glimpse of what majesty could be attributed to the "manlike" judge at the end of time.

The view that the executor of the last judgment would be the biblical Melchizedek was based upon Psalm 110. "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at My right hand . . . You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek....'" The Hebrew phrase "after the order of" could be understood to mean "I (God) have said to you (Melchizedek)." In this sense God is addressing Melchizedek himself in the psalm.

It appears that this is how it was understood by the Essene author. According to the usual interpretation, he who will sit at God's right hand is not Melchizedek himself, but merely one who is the same kind of person as Melchizedek. That is how Yeshua understood this psalm. On one occasion, reported in Luke 20:41-43, he quoted the beginning of Psalm 110 with reference to the Messiah.

On another occasion, before being handed over to the Romans, he alluded to the words of this psalm when the high priest asked him if he were the Messiah. He said, "But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power

⁴ And the word of Adonai came to me, saying, 2"Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them. 3"And you shall say, 'O mountains of Israel hear the word of the Master Adonai!' Thus said the Master Adonai to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines, and to the valleys, "Look, I Myself am bringing a sword against you, and I shall destroy your high places."

of God" (Luke 22:69). Those present correctly understood this as Yeshua' indirect admission of his messianic dignity.

Ps 110:1 – the most alluded to Psalm, but as a number of scholars have indicated, when part of a verse or chapter is quoted, the whole verse or chapter or Psalm is often brought to mind. This is understandable when we consider that many in Yeshua's day and Hebrew society learned a great deal of scripture off by heart. Let us look at the whole Psalm and we see the Son of Man & the High Priest who is now our Messiah Yeshua!

The mission of Yeshua:

In about 175 BCE a Jewish scribe bearing the Greek name Antigonos of Socho said, *"Be not like slaves who serve their master for the sake of reward, but like slaves who serve their master with no eye on any reward; and may the fear of heaven be among you."*

This saying is characteristic of the change in the intellectual and moral atmosphere that had taken place in Judaism since the time of the Tanakh (Old Testament).

At the same time, it exemplifies the expression of a new and deeper sensitivity within Judaism, which was an important precondition for the preaching of Yeshua.

So Yeshua came to give:

- a the radical interpretation of the commandment of mutual love,
- a call for a new morality, and
- promote the idea of the kingdom of heaven.

Yeshua is not unique in dealing with the root of the problem in the human heart, but his emphasis on internalized sin, or the sins of the heart again pushes the scope of sin and scope of the imperatives to new heights.

The Three Pillars of Yeshua

A rabbi who lived in the decades before Yeshua described the foundations of Jewish faith by saying, "On three pillars the world stands—on the Torah, on the Temple service, and on acts of loving-kindness."

The spiritual pillars of Yeshua were righteousness, prayer and repentance. They served as a framework for his approach to our life with God and with each other.

The best summary of the new Jewish ethics is found in its oldest manifesto, Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach (27:30-28:7) – written around 165 BCE:

*Wrath and anger are loathsome things which the sinful person has for his own.
The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance,
for He remembers their sins in detail.
Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then,
when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.
Should a person nourish anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord?
Should a person refuse mercy to a man like himself,
yet seek pardon for his own sins?
If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins?
Remember your last day, set enmity aside;
remember death and decay, and cease from sin!
Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor;
of the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.*

And what did Yeshua say: *"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back"* (Luke 6:37-38).

The Golden Rule - accepted as a moral imperative by many nations.

Yeshua quoted this maxim when he said, "Whatever you wish that men should do to you, do so to them, for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Among the Jews, even before the time of Yeshua, it was regarded as the summation of the entire law. Hillel had said, "What is distasteful to yourself, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole law, the rest is but deduction."

Both Yeshua and Hillel before him saw the Golden Rule as a summary of the law of Moses. This becomes intelligible when we consider that the biblical saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Lev. 19:18) was esteemed by Yeshua and by the Jews in general as a chief commandment of the law.

Flusser:

"From ancient Jewish writings we could easily construct a whole Gospel without using a single word that originated with Jesus. There was a saying, "Flee from what is evil and from what resembles evil."

If we apply this concept to the commandments, we discover that the lesser commandments are as serious as the greater. This implies a tightening up of the law, not regarding ritual, but in respect to the relationships between people. This attitude was also present in Judaism at that time, as the following saying exemplifies: "Everyone who publicly shames his neighbor sheds his blood."

According to Yeshua, possessions are an obstacle to virtue. *"Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God"* (Mark 10:24-25).

For both the Essenes and Yeshua, poverty, humility, purity, and unsophisticated simplicity of heart were the essential religious virtues.

The Kingdom of God:

For Yeshua and the rabbis, the kingdom of God is both present and future, but their perspectives are different. When Yeshua was asked when the kingdom was to come, he said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). Elsewhere he said, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

There are therefore it seems, according to Yeshua, individuals who are already in the kingdom of heaven. This is not exactly the same sense in which the rabbis understood the kingdom. For them the kingdom had been always an unchanging reality, but for Yeshua there was a specific point in time when the kingdom began breaking out upon earth. *"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is breaking through, and those who break through, seize it"* (Matt. 11:12). According to Luke 16:16, *"every one forces his way in."* Yeshua's words are based upon Micah 2:13.

Micah 2: 12-13 *"I shall certainly gather all of you, O Jacob, I shall bring together the remnant of Israel, put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture, they being noisy because of men. "The breach-maker shall go up before them. They shall break out, and pass through the gate, and go out by it, and their sovereign pass before them, with YHWH at their head!"*

This, then, is the "realized eschatology" of Yeshua. **He is the only Jew of ancient times known to us who preached not only that people were on the threshold of the end of time, but that the new age of salvation had already begun...**for Yeshua, the kingdom of heaven is not only the eschatological rule of God that has dawned already, but a divinely willed movement that spreads among people throughout the earth.

The kingdom of heaven is not simply a matter of God's kingship, but also the domain of his rule, an expanding realm embracing ever more and more people, a realm into which one may enter and find one's inheritance, a realm where there are both great and small.

That is why Yeshua called the twelve to be fishers of men [Matt. 4:19] and to heal and preach everywhere. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:5-16).

For this reason he demanded of some that they should leave everything behind and follow him. It appears that Yeshua wanted to start a movement, not found a church or even a single community.

That which Yeshua recognized and desired is fulfilled in the message of the kingdom. There God's unconditional love for all becomes visible, and the barriers between sinner and righteous are shattered. Human dignity becomes null and void, the last become first, and the first become last.

The poor, the hungry, the meek, the mourners, and the persecuted inherit the kingdom of heaven. *"Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"* (Matt. 21:31-32). Yeshua found resonance among the social outcasts and the despised, just as John the Baptist had done before him.

Even the non-eschatological ethical teaching of Yeshua can presumably be oriented towards his message of the kingdom. Because Satan and his powers will be overthrown and the present world-order shattered, it is to be regarded almost with indifference, and ought not to be strengthened by opposition.

Therefore, one should not resist evildoers; one should love one's enemy and not provoke the Roman empire to attack. For when the kingdom of God is fully realized, all this will vanish.

Commitment:

Yeshua did not want his prospective disciples to have any false expectations, and he frequently stressed the need to count the cost before making a commitment to him:

Which of you, if he wanted to build a tower, would not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he had enough money to complete it? ...likewise, any of you who is not ready to leave all his possessions cannot be my disciple. (Lk. 14:28-33)

Yeshua was very clear about the degree of commitment that was required of a disciple:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and himself as well, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (Lk. 14:26-27)

In this context the word "hate" does not carry the meaning it normally has in English usage, but seems to be used in a Hebraic sense. In Hebrew "hate" can also mean "love less" or "put in second place."

For example, Genesis 29:31 states that Leah was "hated," but the context indicates that Leah was not unloved but rather loved less than Jacob's other wife Rachel. Note that the preceding verse specifically says that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

A second illustration of this particular Hebraic shade of meaning of the word "hate" is found in Deuteronomy 21:15: "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other hated..."

Here too, the context shows that the "hated" wife is only second in affection and not really hated in the English sense of the word. Likewise in Yeshua's statement, he was saying that whoever did not love him more than his own family or even his own self could not be his disciple.

Binding & Loosing:

Matt 16:19, "Whatsoever you shall bind (or loose) on earth shall be bound (or loosed) in heaven,"

The Hebrew background of the saying would lead to the translation "allow" and "disallow" for this very common rabbinic phrase.

This authority was applied at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, at which James both "loosed," i.e., allowed the believers not to be circumcised and not to keep the whole law, and "bound," i.e., disallowed idolatry, cult prostitutes, and eating meat from which the blood had not been removed (Lev 7:26).

"Jews living in the Second Temple Period thought the Torah was a grace-filled gift for instruction and life." - Solomon Schechter, "The Joy of the Law," in Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998 [1909]), 148-169.

"The first adherents to the new faith among the Gentiles were recruited from among non-Jews who were already close to Judaism. These were the "God-fearers", who accepted certain basic Jewish obligations, at least the so-called Noachide precepts; I hope to show elsewhere that the western text of Acts 15:29, giving the decree of the Apostles, is the original one.

According to this, idolatry, shedding of blood, and grave sexual sins were forbidden to Gentile believers.

These were originally the Noachide precepts accepted also by the Synagogue on which the Gentiles were obliged. It is logical that the Apostolic Church of Jerusalem should accept the view of the Synagogue on the conditions which Gentiles needed to fulfill in order to be saved.

It can easily be shown that, according to Jewish opinion, the fulfilment of other commandments of Judaism was not prohibited to Gentiles. On the contrary, the Noachide precepts were only seen as the minimal condition for Gentiles to be recognized as God-fearers. They were so understood by the God-fearers themselves, who were attracted to the Jewish way of life and accepted many Jewish commandments without becoming full proselytes. This was also the attitude of Christian God-fearers, as may be seen from the Epistle to the Galatians; many of them wished to observe as many Jewish precepts as

they could.

It is evident that, while the leadership of the Mother Church decided to lay no burden upon the Gentile believers beyond the Noachide precepts (Acts 10:28-29; see Gal. 2:6), it did not object to their voluntarily observing more. Among the figures of the primitive Church who instructed Gentile Christians to observe more precepts than these essential ones was Peter, as we know from Paul's criticism of him for demanding that Gentiles live like Jews (Gal. 2:14).

Some argue that, rather than interpreting the apostolic decree as a minimum, Paul saw in the Noachide precepts the maximal obligations of Gentile Christians, even if he always strongly recommended a sympathetic understanding of individual Christians who observed personal restrictions. But at the same time, speaking about the incident with Peter at Antioch, he says (Gal. 2:15-21), among other things, that "no man is ever justified by doing what the law demands, but only through faith in Christ Jesus: so we too have put our faith in Jesus Christ, in order that we might be justified through this faith, and not through deeds dictated by law; for by such deeds, Scripture says, no mortal man shall be justified... If righteousness comes by law, than Christ died for nothing."

If this was what Paul thought about the Jewish way of life and of worship, we can easily understand why he did not accept the view that Gentile Christians should or could accept Jewish ritual obligations."

- from 'Judaism and the origins of Christianity' by Prof. David Flusser

Each of the first three Evangelists recorded the story about a rich man who asked Yeshua what was necessary to be a candidate for inheriting eternal life (Matthew 19:16-22, Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23).

According to Matthew, the man asked, "What good thing must I do to have eternal life?"

What verse of Scripture motivated that question? In Micah 6:8, the prophet said, "He has told you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you..." Pastor Robert Lindsey suggested that the young man (who most likely posed his question in Hebrew) asked Yeshua something close to "What good shall I do in order to inherit eternal life?"^[25] The link to Micah 6:8 becomes more apparent once the question has been put into Hebrew. The key phrase is "*mah tov*" literally, "what good." The rich young ruler had asked a sincere question. He sought to know what God required of him to inherit eternal life.

According to Luke, Yeshua answered:

You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.

To this the young man replied, "All these I have observed from my youth." This young man apparently felt that there was still something more. He was obeying the commandments—you shall not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, etc. Now Jesus began to apply the pressure:

One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.

We are told that the young man departed saddened because he had much wealth.

About what did the young man originally come to ask Yeshua? Eternal life. With what did Yeshua end the discussion? He ended with an invitation to follow him or to become a member of his redemptive movement.

The ancient rabbinic literature indicates that eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven (or Kingdom of God) are two different concepts. Eternal life is basically what we understand it to be; an ultimate new reality after death. The Kingdom of God, however, remains in full force now for those people who have made Yeshua, their circumcision, their 'doorway' and master—not tomorrow, not when the Son of Man comes back to judge, but today. People who have truly with their very lives, said "yes" to Yeshua belong to his redemptive movement, which he called the Kingdom of God.

In this story, the rich young man came to Yeshua with a question about inheriting eternal life. Yeshua basically answered, "You know the commandments—keep them." Although the young man lived in accordance with the commandments, he wanted to experience a deeper level of spirituality and communion with God. Yet, when faced with the cost of discipleship, which included freeing himself from the snare of materialism by laying up treasures in heaven, he hesitated to make Yeshua his Master or Lord.

This does not mean he could no longer look forward to the Coming Age, but that he would lose the great benefit of experiencing a lot of it in the here and now.

In Yeshua's day it appears God inspired many moves towards Him. He inspired an incredible vitality in Judaism that produced the Pharisees' wisdom and charity, the Sadducees' liturgical enthusiasm, the Zealots' deep commitment to social

action and the Essenes' mystical purity.

And of course, this age brought the end-times Messiah, the Son of God, who lived the ultimate life of devotion; a life without sin; a life in which he declared and demonstrated the greatest love, in that he lay down his life for his friends, his brothers and sisters. He paid the ultimate price and was lifted to the ultimate place!

But this charismatic renewal was treated most harshly of all, for the Roman overlords at the time of Yeshua persecuted Judaism with vehemence, putting to death anyone who challenged the state's control over Jewish expression. It will only be at the return of the Messiah that this persecution will fully end and real and sustained renewal will occur.

As we gain a greater appreciation for the life and times of Yeshua, how should we respond?

I believe we need to start to:

- Stand up for Israel against the lies of the enemy;
- Seek Righteousness, Repentance and Prayer;
- Act with humility, live with purity, and seek to love God and our neighbour with the unsophisticated simplicity of the heart;
- Seek and Promote the Kingdom of God, both by living in it now and by setting our heart and focus on the glory of its inauguration and reign.

Paul Herring
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