



Surviving Jericho

*Learning to
Love the God
Who Saves Us*

JENNIFER BENNETT

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Surviving Jericho: Learning to Love the God Who Saves Us

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Special Thanks

Rahab, for your legacy which God has used, even all these generations later, to speak to someone like me. I can't wait to meet you in heaven!

Abba, there are no words, only overwhelming gratitude. You are so much more than I could have ever thought of, asked for, or imagined. Thank You for saving me from the destruction for which I was destined.

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Forward

Even though there is arguably less written about her than any other “main character” in the Bible, I believe we can learn more about how to love God from Rahab than many of the others we read about in scripture. Hers was an uninhibited, all-or-nothing, no-turning-back kind of love. And that’s the kind of love I want to have for God, too.

That’s a hard kind of love for me to fathom, however. I don’t believe, for most of my life, I even knew that kind of love existed much less how to muster it up. What does that kind of love look like? Where does it come from? How does it feel?

What does it mean to *really love God*?

I think I’ve always believed that God existed. Even at a young age I remember being very aware of the spiritual realm. But, it wasn’t until my early twenties that I opened myself up to a relationship with the God I’d claimed to follow most of my life.

That’s because that is when God rescued me. I had come to a very dark, difficult crossroads in my life, and if I continued down the path I was living, I, like

Rahab, was destined for destruction. I needed help. I needed God. And He saved my life.

From that point on, I couldn't get enough of church. I just wanted to be where God was. I bought myself my very first Bible, sought out women's groups and bible studies, and basically searched high and low for anyone or anything that could teach me more about the One who'd saved me from myself.

I'm pretty sure people thought I was a little crazy. My newfound zeal was a lot to take in. What can I say? I was excited! I'd finally tasted and seen the goodness of the LORD, and I just wanted more.

Bible studies, women's groups, seminars, you name it. This introvert was stretching out of her comfort zone! Anything that promised a deeper understanding, a closer relationship with God... I wanted it. But after years of all that stuff, my searching started to fall flat. Not that it wasn't good and I wasn't learning and growing in my relationship with God, but it felt like something was missing. It always seemed like once the book was finished or the study had reached its conclusion, there was no significant or lasting change. The day-to-day of life for me and the others on this journey with me looked very much the same as it did before it started – pursuing the cares of this world with a little Jesus thrown in the mix.

I'm not exactly sure what I was expecting to happen. I guess I just wasn't expecting life to return to its previous status quo. I wondered, weren't we supposed to look different? Changed? From one degree of glory to another? Set apart for God's holy purpose?

Not that there weren't profound moments along the way. Moments that changed the way I saw the world, the way I saw God, and the way I saw myself. I just couldn't shake that feeling, though, that something was missing. Something that would help better distinguish the bride of Christ from the rest of the world, not give her permission to keep looking like it. Something that made the "Jesus freaks" of this world look a little less radical and a lot more normal.

I wasn't sure who to talk to about what I was feeling. No one else seemed to be having the same struggle I was, and I thought it might just be me. I decided not to say anything, but I also didn't want to just read another book or do another study, because they didn't seem to address my questions either. Somewhere along the way, though, I'd heard that God wants to speak to each of us if only we'll listen. I guess I figured I'd find out if that was true. That's when I started to read the Bible not as directed by someone else, but for myself. I just wanted to listen. I wanted to put down

what everyone else was saying about God and hear what He had to say to me Himself.

As I read, I began to see phrases like “statute forever,” and “throughout your generations.” Things I didn’t remember anyone really talking about before. It was also during this time that God drew my heart to Rahab. Little did I know how much He was going to use her to speak to me in the years to come.

Eventually, I started to ask questions from others in the church, those who had been doing this church thing a lot longer than I had. They were questions like: Why don’t we honor the Sabbath as holy? Why aren’t we celebrating the LORD’s Feasts anymore? Where does it say we can now eat whatever we want?

I talked with Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, you name it. Although I did find some helpful guidance, much of what I found were a lot of doctrinal answers (which varied from denomination to denomination) with very little scripture to back them up. Traditions, interpretations, and opinions of man that weren’t necessarily rooted in the Word of God. My desire for understanding wasn’t being satisfied with the traditional “Christianese” answers, which all seemed to end with a passive “we just don’t do that anymore.” I needed to know why I believed what I believed, and not just because someone told me to.

That's when I began to search outside the traditional church. Not outside of God's Word, mind you. Just outside some of the long-held traditions that didn't seem to be matching up with what I was reading in the Bible.

I started studying the history, culture, and original language of the Bible. I began, to the best of my ability, to do the things I was reading – like observing Passover and not eating pork. The more I studied and tried to obey, the more I began to realize something that D. Thomas Lancaster coined as “The Macaroni Principle.”¹

This principle is based around an old children's song called *Yankee Doodle*, which contains a verse in it that goes like this:

*Yankee Doodle went to town
Riding on a pony
Stuck a feather in his hat
And called it macaroni*

I remember clearly, as I'm sure you may too, singing that song as a child and thinking how weird it was for some Yankee guy to do that. What in the world did a feather have to do with pasta and why did he stick it in his hat?

Thomas remarks that had this verse been some religious text, pastors all over the world would be preaching sermons theorizing the spiritual significance of this statement, surmising that Yankee Doodle must have been a devout man who happened to be poor. Instead of dwelling on his evident lack, Mr. Doodle decided to show his faith in God's coming provision by declaring a feather to be symbolic for macaroni (food) and sticking it in his hat as an outward display of that faith. That might have made for a wonderful and encouraging sermon... except for that fact that it would have been entirely wrong. We misunderstand the meaning of that song because we, over the 250+ years since it was written, have lost the context in which those words were penned.

As the story goes, Yankee Doodle was actually a term for the American soldiers during the Revolutionary War. During this time the word 'macaroni' was a term that had nothing to do with food. According to the Collins English Dictionary, it meant "an English dandy in the 18th century who affected foreign mannerisms and fashions."² So in context, this feather in Yankee Doodle's hat had nothing to do with pasta. It was a term describing how Mr. Doodle was dressed.

The story continues that as the American soldiers rode north to meet the British army for battle, they stopped at a farm in Connecticut. There they were, farmers themselves dressed in shabby farmer clothes, about to face the British soldiers who were adorned in fancy uniforms. The Connecticut farmer's daughter hurried and plucked the feathers from one of their chickens, stuck a feather in each of the soldier's hats, and declared them to be dandies as well. Now that makes a lot more sense!

If in only 250 years we have lost the meaning of this song, how can we possibly think, with 2000-3000+ years between us, that we can properly interpret the scriptures without some knowledge of the context, culture, and language in which the Bible was originally written? This is where Rahab comes in.

I want us to become like Rahab, who chose to believe God even though she didn't understand everything about Him. But because of her belief, her faith, she was saved from the wrath of God and grafted into the commonwealth of Israel. She went from "dedicated to destruction," to "heir according to the promise." And when we place our faith in God, that's what happens to us too! (See Joshua 6:17, Ephesians 2:12, and Galatians 3:26-29)

Rahab didn't immediately understand what it meant to follow God. She didn't know how to live a life that was pleasing to Him. But, once she became a part of God's chosen people, she began to learn from them. Her fear of God led to a faith in God, which led to a love for God, which then led to a life of obedience that honored God. The transition we see in her ought to be the same transition that marks the life of all who claim to follow God, too. It's what Paul described as the continuing process of sanctification. (Rom. 6:17-19; 2 Cor. 3:18)

I invite you to not be in a rush to finish this book. Take your time, because transition takes time. We're not trying to master the long jump, but to train for a marathon. (Heb. 12:1-2) As we begin to study the context, culture, and original language of the Bible, some things may be new to you, and I want you to do your due diligence in searching the scriptures to see if what I say lines up with God's Word.

Take time to read the scripture references I include, they're there for a reason. Pray through each chapter and do the suggested study provided at the end of each one. I have purposely left the margins in the book large enough for you to write down notes and questions that may come up, and I hope you will be

stirred enough to seek out the answers as you go. We're here to learn, so let's purpose to do just that.

In the last days, just before the time of the tribulation comes, The LORD says that people will again return to a knowledge of Him. They will seek out what it means to worship Him in spirit and in truth, and they will do this by going to the one's to whom the scriptures were given. Zechariah 8:23 prophesies about these days, saying, *“This is what the LORD of Hosts says: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue will tightly grasp the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”* (BSB)

The word “robe” in this verse is the Hebrew word ‘Kanaph,’ meaning corner or edge, which refers to the prayer shawl that Jewish men wear. It is called a tallit, from the corners of which hang the *tzitzit*, or tassels representing the commandments of God, which in Hebrew is called ‘Torah’. During these last days, we are going to see Gentiles returning to Torah, clinging to the robes of the Jewish believers because we realize that we have missed out on the greatest expression of love for God that we could ever make – obedience to His Torah.

It is not just us Gentiles that have some learning to do, either. Jews need something we have as well. It is

their knowledge of God's instructions that we need to make our faith complete; and it is our knowledge of Messiah, the One of whom the Law and the Prophets testify, that they need from us. What a beautiful picture, one painted all throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation, of the union of the prophets and apostles, bringing together all flesh, reconciled to God through Messiah. (Eph. 2:11-22)

So like Rahab, we're going to learn from Israel. With The Macaroni Principle in mind, we're going to look at the context and culture, the idioms and figures of speech, the history and the people to whom and through whom the scriptures – both old and new testaments – were given. We're going to see where we, in our much removed world view, may have gotten some things wrong along the way, and find out what it means to really love God.

Introduction

It wouldn't serve us very well to dive into a book about Rahab if we don't know who she is. Before we begin, I'd like to make sure we're all well acquainted with her, which will be easy as there isn't much the Bible has to say – at least not at face value. So, I present to you Rahab, the one through whom God has spoken volumes to me.

Joshua 2:1-21 ESV

And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there.

And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.”

Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they

have come to search out all the land.”

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.

And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.”

But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.

So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof

and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did

to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign

that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”

And the men said to her, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.”

Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall.

And she said to them, “Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide

there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.”

The men said to her, “We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear.

Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household.

Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head.

But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.”

And she said, “According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

Joshua 6:16-25 ESV

And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.

And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.

But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it.

But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”

So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city,

every man straight before him, and they captured the city.

Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, “Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.”

So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel.

And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the

messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Matthew 1:1-17 ESV

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram,

and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon,

and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,

and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,

and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,

and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and

Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and
Joram the father of Uzziah,
and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the
father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of
Hezekiah,
and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and
Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos
the father of Josiah,
and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his
brothers, at the time of the deportation to
Babylon.
And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah
was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel
the father of Zerubbabel,
and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud
the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the
father of Azor,
and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the
father of Achim, and Achim the father of
Eliud,
and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the
father of Matthan, and Matthan the
father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of
Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is
called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Hebrews 11:30-31 ESV

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

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

James 2:24-26 ESV

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

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The Fear of the LORD

Before we start to dig in, I feel the need to premise the rest of the book with this: Please don't take what I have to say as the absolute truth. I know that sounds strange as this book is all about what I have found on my journey of discovering what it truly means to follow God, but there's a good reason I'm telling you this at the onset of chapter one. One of the problems within the Christian church today is that we lack the desire to find things out for ourselves.

Too often, we go to church, listen to a sermon, and assume that because the pastor is a pastor, he must know what he's talking about. His message sounded good. He seems like he knows what he's talking about. He can quote scripture. He's been to seminary. At face value, these all seem like good reasons to believe what someone has to say. But, they do not guarantee that the message is in line with God's truth, and they excuse us from having to study the Bible for ourselves.

As Christians, we uphold the beliefs of the Baptists or Catholics or Methodists or Church of

Christ... We align ourselves with the ideas of Calvinism or Lutheranism or Arminianism... We get so busy trying to decide which manmade doctrine aligns with our personal beliefs that we forget that what we're supposed to do is follow in the footsteps of Messiah, not man. Some of us are so concerned with what "feels right" that we forget to find out if a teaching or doctrine is Biblically sound. As the apostle Paul might have said, let it not be so! (See 1 Cor. 1:10-17 and 3:1-5)

Paul likens this kind of passive faith to that of an infant which still needs to be bottle fed. Of course that's where we all begin, but it's not where we are meant to stay. It is in stark contrast to the faith he urges us to pursue. In fact, in his letter to the Hebrews, he rebuked those who should have already become mature believers with these words:

"For although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the very first principles of God's Word all over again! You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who has to drink milk is still a baby, without experience in applying the Word about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by continuous exercise to distinguish good from evil." - Hebrews 5:12-13 CJB

Instead of remaining bottle fed babies who constantly need someone else to explain to us what God's Word says, we need to become mature in our faith and be more like the Bereans whom Paul praised for their pursuit of truth, not simply believing what they were being told by the apostles, but verifying what they were hearing by searching the scriptures for themselves (the Torah and Haftarah scrolls at the synagogue) to see if it was true. (Acts 17:11) If what the apostles were teaching hadn't lined up with what the scriptures prophesied, they wouldn't have believed it at all. In fact, that is how they knew the apostles were preaching the truth, because the Old Testament scriptures backed it up. (Amos 3:7)

About fifteen years ago, a mother-daughter team of religious evangelists showed up at my door. When I found out what religion they followed, I was very upfront with them and said I didn't agree with their beliefs. I didn't really know why, except that I had been taught that what they believed was wrong. I wound up letting them come in, and for almost a year, they continued to come back two or three times a month.

I sort of took this as a challenge. Every time they left, I took the material they left behind and began to search the scriptures. I wanted to see if what they said lined up with what God said or not. I think God used

this time to teach me how to pursue Him. He strengthened my faith and my resolve to know why I believed what I believed and how to test the doctrines that claimed to be from Him.

The day came when they tried to gift me with a Bible translation written by their church. When I refused to accept it because I now knew with firm conviction and a solid foundation that I did not believe what they believed, they left and never came back.

Not that I think we need to let every person from another religion into our home, in fact we need to take care to protect our homes and our hearts from false doctrines and their influence on our families. The best way to spot a counterfeit is not by studying it, but by intimately knowing the original. But, I don't think having our faith challenged once in a while is bad – as long as we take that challenge to our Heavenly Father and ask Him to lead us through it.

This is what I hope you will do here. Don't just read this book and believe what I say; read the scripture references I cite, do the homework at the end of each chapter, and ask God for clarity. And please don't get offended if I step on some toes along the way. Take any challenge to your faith that might arise as an opportunity to find out why you believe what you believe. Take the things we're going to discuss and do your own prayerful

searching of the scriptures and begin to build a more firm foundation for your faith.

I will give you some ideas at the end of each chapter that will help you in your pursuit of truth. They are ideas and avenues that will help you dig deeper into God's Word and learn how to discern His truth apart from my teaching; how to hold up what I say against what He says to see if it fits.

I encourage you to do this with any teaching you hear, whether from a book, a podcast, or a podium. Let it not be said of any of us that we were satisfied with teachers who tickled our ears, but were hungry enough for God's Word that we pursued His truth with passion and persistence, seeking His wisdom above all else.

Gaining Wisdom from Solomon

His wisdom. That's where this all begins. Well, actually, it begins with a fear of the LORD. As Proverbs 9:10 says, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*" (ESV See also Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Isaiah 33:6) I believe a good place to start learning a little bit about this fear and wisdom is from a king named Solomon.

Solomon was the third king of Israel, the son of David, and his rule was one marked by peace and prosperity. When Solomon became king, God told him to ask for whatever he wanted. (1 Kings 3:5) Solomon asked for wisdom. He could have asked for money, health, a long life, power, but instead he asked for the ability to rule God's people well.

Scripture is clear that Solomon loved the LORD. (1 Kings 3:3) God had chosen him to lead the nation of Israel, and he obviously understood the weight of that task. After all, his father and mentor was the one known as "*a man after God's own heart.*" (1 Sam. 13:14 ESV, see also Acts 13:22)

Before he died, David encouraged his son Solomon, telling him to, "*keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.*" (1 Kings 2:3 ESV) This sounds like a promising start for a life well lived, however we only have to skip ahead a few chapters to find that Solomon's story didn't end as hopeful as it began.

Although all of 1 Kings 11 is a vivid picture of Solomon's downfall and the LORD's judgement against him, let's look together starting at verse nine:

“And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.’” - 1 Kings 11:9-13 ESV

This sure sounds like quite the depths to have fallen from having been a king unmatched in wisdom, riches, and honor. (1 Kings 3:13)

The LORD had blessed Solomon with every

blessing imaginable. Money, power, peace within his kingdom, honor and respect even from the kings of other nations. He lacked nothing. However, all this blessing came with a condition – he had to be faithful to walk in the statutes and commandments of the LORD just as his father David had done. But he didn't. Instead he turned to foreign women, foreign gods, and pagan worship practices.

What caused Solomon to fall so far? Why did he stray so far away from the love we were told about in 1 Kings 3:3? Was it a single event that turned his heart? Or was it a slow fade that he didn't even realize was happening? Ironically, I believe we find the answer in the very same verse which noted his love.

“And Solomon loved the LORD and walked in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.” - 1 Kings 3:3 BSB

Except. That one little word tells us all we need to know. Solomon's love for God was not the sold-out, all-or-nothing, undivided kind of love. That one area of disobedience served as a stepping stone for more and greater sin that pulled his heart further and further from the God he claimed to serve. He may have loved the LORD, but he did not fear Him.

You can love someone because you enjoy the benefits of a relationship with them, but that doesn't necessarily equate to a fear or reverence for them. It seems Solomon did not give much thought to the warnings of the One who not only held his physical life in His hands, but also his eternity. Maybe he assumed that he would stay in the good graces of God for the sake of his father David. Maybe his own perceived greatness overshadowed the majesty of the One True God. Whatever the reason, it seems his pursuit of happiness meant more to him than a pursuit of holiness.

The Foundation of Faith

The fear of the LORD is the foundation upon which a life of righteousness is built. It is fear which helps us flee sin and walk in obedience. It is what teaches us not only how to love God, but also helps us understand just how much God loves each one of us.

When we look at the story of Rahab, we are immediately confronted with a fear of the LORD. While Rahab was hiding the Israelite spies on her roof, she went to them and said:

“I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and

that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” - Joshua 2:9-13 ESV

To say the people of Jericho were afraid would be an understatement. They were terrified to the point of despair. It is probably safe to say they'd lost all hope. Everyone except Rahab, that is.

There must have been something in Rahab's knowledge of the God of Israel that, rather than terror, brought awe. Her courage didn't fail like the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho, it rose up and gave her strength and boldness to hide the spies. It gave her hope that

maybe, just maybe, if she helped them they might spare her life in return.

That is the kind of fear that draws us to God and keeps us in a fierce pursuit of His heart. It is what stirs in us a desire for obedience like David instead of rebellion like Solomon. It is what sparks hope like Rahab rather than despair like the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho.

A right fear and reverence for the LORD is one that believes God is who His Word says He is, that He means what He says, that He holds the keys to life and death in His hands, and that His majesty is worthy of our devotion.

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.”

- Deuteronomy 7:9-10 ESV

Rahab revered the LORD and was not only grafted into the commonwealth of Israel, but into the bloodline of Messiah. The inhabitants of Jericho dreaded the LORD and were destroyed. David pursued

the heart of God and was forgiven. Solomon disregarded the heart of God and the kingdom was ripped from his hands.

A right fear of the LORD is one that stirs obedience. It prompts reverence and a right understanding of the glory of God. This fear is a reverential one that draws us to His heart in complete love and devotion for the One who saves us. (John 14:15)

A wrong fear of the LORD is one that is terror-filled. It is that of the demons to whom James refers, who believe that God is, and they shudder! (James 2:19) It incites dread and rebellion. It festers in the depths of sin and lawlessness.

Then there is the space in between, where no fear of God exists at all. This is the place of complacency, compromise, and indifference. It is, I believe, the lukewarmness to which Jesus refers in Revelation 3:16 when speaking to the church in Laodicea – the one He said He would spit right out of His mouth. And this is, I also believe, the problem that lead to the downfall of Solomon.

For those of us who choose to trust and follow God, this fear is not a terror-filled one, rather an awe-filled one. It is a belief that His Word stands above all

else. He is the *only* truth and the *only* way. It is not what man says that matters, but what God says, especially when the two differ. And this is true whether it's said on the street or in a church. We have to decide that what God says is right, even if it means what we may have believed for a long time is wrong.

Do we believe in God enough to believe God?

Word Study:

(Digging Deeper into the Word of God)

- Read this article online to find out more about the name HaShem.
 - <https://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-teachings/the-name-of-god/>

Scripture Search

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Psalm 25:4-5, 12-14
- Ecclesiastes 12:13
- Isaiah 51:4-7
- Acts 4:12
- Galatians 1:6-10

Scripture Study

(Taking time each day to meditate on God's Word)

- Matthew 6:9-13 (CJB)

*You, therefore, pray like this:
Our Father in heaven!*

*May your Name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us the food we need today.
Forgive us what we have done wrong,
as we too have forgiven those who have
wronged us.
And do not lead us into hard testing,
but keep us safe from the Evil One.*

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The Synergy of Law and Grace

My family and I love to watch old black and white TV shows. From *The Rifleman* to *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, it's not uncommon to find us, especially on a Saturday night, sitting on the living room couch watching a remnant of life long ago.

I remember a time when my daughter was little, maybe five or six, when she and I were watching *The Andy Griffith Show* together. At one point she turned to me and said, "I'm sure glad we didn't live back before there was color."

I couldn't help but let out a laugh. It was one of those perfectly childlike moments that just makes one giggle. Not understanding that it was simply the product of almost ancient filming capabilities, my sweet girl actually believed there was a time when the whole world was cloaked in black and white.

Recently, I was reminiscing about lots of things while driving alone in my car, when that memory came to mind. I smiled to myself, remembering the deep sincerity of my daughter's words, when it occurred to

me that it was the perfect analogy for our spiritual condition today. Many of us are living oblivious to the fact that our lives, spiritually speaking, are without color. The familiarity of our achromatic existence leaves us entirely unaware of the brilliant saturation of colors waiting just beyond our view.

This is the only way I can think to describe it. When I began to study and understand Torah, it was like my life had been injected with Technicolor. The grayscale hues of my spiritual life began to burst with vibrant color. Everything that had not made sense before, all the questions for which I could not seem to find answers, started to come together and make sense. Instead of law or grace, a doctrine that insists the two cannot exist together, there came a synergistic union of the two. And that revelation was like a paintbrush in the hands of the Master, splashing pigmented beauty across the canvas of my faith.

However, when I shared with friends what God was revealing to me and how my faith was growing, I was told that following the Law was legalism. And legalism was bad. But, as I continued reading through the Bible on my own, verses continued to jump out to me like John 14:15 where Jesus says, *“If you love me, you will obey my commands.”* (ESV) And Romans 3:31 where Paul tells us, *“Do we then overthrow the Law by*

this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law.” (ESV) And 1 John 5:3 that tells us, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (ESV)

There are many more like these; too many to include them all here. I have listed some of them at the end of this chapter so you may do your own searching of the scriptures when you have some time to spend just you and God. But, these verses continued to raise questions in my mind. Questions about doctrines within the church that didn't seem consistent with what I was reading in God's Word. Was it Law? Or was it grace? Or was there actually a balanced harmony between the two?

All these questions left me a little confused and uncertain as to whether or not what I'd been taught and believed for so long was really true. How could something that, in the words of David, was the source of life and blessing and abundant treasures, now be considered irrelevant and burdensome? (Psalm 19:7-11) I wasn't questioning God, I just began to question what I thought I knew about Him.

Lessons from the Past

Here is a good place for us to consider what it may have been like for Rahab. She was most certainly a recipient of God's unmerited grace and went on to live among the Jews where God's Law was, well, the law, and just as she learned from Israel what it means to live as one of God's children, we might be able to learn from her. After all, we too were once alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, having no hope and without God. But now, because of our trust in Him – just like Rahab – we have been brought near, grafted in as fellow citizens and members of the household of God. (See Eph. 2:11-13, 19)

I can only imagine it was a little confusing, and maybe a little scary for Rahab as she began this new way of life. Throwing away all your previous ideas and beliefs and ways of doing things for something completely new wouldn't be on most people's Top 10 List of exciting things to do. It certainly isn't on mine. I like my routine and my customs and my comfortable little box. Sure, it's fun to try new things. But throwing away everything you know for those new things? Probably not.

I'm sure for Rahab it was a process of learning, just as it has been for me. It's a process of studying, praying, a little bit of trial and error, and lots of grace as

you learn to do things differently until they slowly become more normal. It is certainly a place where law and grace collide.

Israel was the nation chosen by God to receive the blueprints for how to live a life that is holy, set apart, and pleasing to Him. And they were the ones who were supposed to model that way of life for the rest of the nations around them. They weren't Israel's laws or customs or ways of doing things. They were God's. And His instructions were not just for the Jews, but for anyone who loved Him and wanted to become part of His family. (See Exo. 12:49; Num. 15:16; Romans 3:29-31)

So what do you suppose was the first thing Rahab noticed about this nation of Israel and their God? I think Deuteronomy 6 sums it up pretty well. We could camp out for days on this chapter, but for now we'll focus in on verses 4 -7 and 17:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down,

and when you rise...

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you.” (ESV)

Rahab came from a nation that embraced many gods and followed sinful ways. Most of their service to those gods was done out of fear, not love. Any loyalty they had didn't stem from relationship, but appeasement - a stark contrast to the God of Israel. His ordinances were not meant to conform, but to draw near. His commands were not made as a means to oppress, but to purify. Just as a loving father directs his children, so our Heavenly Father directs His sons and daughters.

But, that's Old Testament teaching. The Law was done away with when Jesus died on the cross, right? That's often the rebuttal of those who believe the Law was replaced by grace. However that was not the thread I found woven throughout scripture. Rather than trying to “prove” my point with Old Testament scriptures, I want us to dive right into the New Testament, specifically what Jesus, Himself, had to say.

The Pharisees were constantly trying to trip Jesus up. To get Him to break a commandment or teach a false doctrine or somehow misrepresent scripture. They wanted to discredit the One who was causing them

much distress by pointing out just how far they had strayed from the Word of God and wandered into their own ways of doing things. Basically, Jesus was making fools of them and they wanted Him gone.

On one occasion, they tried to trick Jesus by asking Him this question: *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”* (Matt. 22:36 ESV)

Jesus replied to them by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”* (Matt 22:37-38 ESV) He then added *“And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* (v. 39-40 ESV)

Did you catch that last part? Let’s look at it in another translation to see if it makes it more clear:

“All the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets are based on these two commandments.”- Matthew 22:40 CEV

All of God’s Law and everything told us by the Prophets teaches us how to do two things: 1) How to love God, 2) How to love our neighbor. Our obedience is in fact the way we know whether or not our love for God and others is sincere. (1 John 2:3-4)

This is why John reminded us that “*by this we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*” (1 John 5:2-3 ESV) Paul also affirmed this when he wrote to the church in Rome saying, “*For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*” (Romans 13:9-10 ESV)

The idea that God’s instructions are not burdensome, as John said, was a foreign one to me. I had been told that His commandments were a great burden from which we had been released when Jesus died on the cross. And the most common support of this theology that I have heard is found in Acts 15 when Peter rebuked the church leaders for putting a heavy burden on the Gentile believers who wanted learn how to follow God. But, it wasn’t the commandments of God that were in question here. Let’s take a closer look at this chapter to see what it was that he was actually rebuking.

There were men who’d come down from Judea

to Galatia, who were teaching that in order to be saved, the Gentiles must undergo circumcision according to the custom of Moses. (Acts 15:1) Note that it was a custom they were requiring, not a commandment; customs were man-made not God-instructed. Paul and Barnabas were extremely unhappy about this and confronted the men who were teaching these things. (v. 2) They were upset because what these men were saying, that salvation must be earned, was simply not true. There is nothing one must do to be saved. Salvation is a free gift for all who believe. (Rom. 6:23) Always has been, always will be.

Once Paul and Barnabas reached Jerusalem, they gathered with the apostles and elders of the church to discuss this matter. Peter boldly reminded them that God showed him that salvation is for the Gentiles as much as it is for the Jews. (See Acts 10) There was no need for the Gentiles to convert to Judaism in order to be saved. (vv. 7-11)

As this meeting went forward, the council agreed that there were certain things that must be required of the Gentiles who were *turning to God*. (v. 19) These were people who were not yet full-fledged followers of Messiah, but they had expressed a desire to learn more.

This list that the council compiled was not a means of salvation, but a way of showing that their desire to change was true – they needed to “*abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.*” (v. 20 ESV) These things are the very things that epitomized pagan worship. If one was not willing to refrain from them, they obviously didn't have a sincere desire to seek the LORD and did not have a place in the synagogue among those worshiping Him.

When I began to search out the scriptures, over and over I found affirmations that obedience, when done out of a right placed fear and love for the LORD, were a joy, they brought life, and they were valued beyond any treasure this world has to offer.

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant

warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” - Psalm 19:7-11 ESV

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.”- Jeremiah 15:16 ESV

“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being.” - Romans 7:22 ESV

Any idea that the Law has been abolished is quashed with Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:17-18 when He said:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”(ESV)

Here’s a perfect example of how contextual application is necessary for a proper understanding. The

words “abolish” and “fulfill” are Hebrew idioms with specific meanings that would have been clear and obvious to His audience at that time, but aren’t so clear and obvious to us. Without this context, we’re going to get stuck in some serious macaroni.

Abolish meant to loosen, demolish, or halt, and fulfill meant to make replete, satisfy, or verify. Rabbinically speaking, abolishing was the equivalent of misrepresenting the Word of God, and to fulfill meant to teach rightly. So, Jesus didn’t come to misrepresent the Law or alter it the way the Pharisee’s had done. According to Matthew 15, they had forsaken the commands of God for the doctrines of men, and were teaching others to do the same. (v. 1-9) Instead, Jesus came to not only teach God’s Law rightly, but to model for us how to live it out - dependent upon the Holy Spirit, not our flesh.

Wow! Until just now, as I wrote the last words of that sentence, I had never seen it quite so vividly before. I knew it in my head, but I just saw it with my heart!

Jesus came in the flesh to show us how to live in these fleshly bodies, and yet not live according to their desires. He *showed* us, not just taught us that it is possible to live in obedience to God’s Law, His Torah,

when we depend upon and draw strength from the Holy Spirit, our Helper. (John 14:15-16) He was tempted in the flesh in every way, but was without sin. (Heb. 4:15) He *showed* us how to flee sin and pursue righteousness. (1 Tim. 6:11) He *showed* us what it looks like to live a life that both pleases and glorifies our heavenly Father! (See! God continues to add beautiful pops of color to the canvas of my faith. Thank you for experiencing this with me!)

I had always been taught, and maybe you were too, that we are sinful creatures. We sin all the time, every day. But, because Jesus paid the price for our sin, and as long as we believe in Him and our sin doesn't get too out of hand, it's ok. However, that's not the picture the Bible paints of how our lives should look once we are saved. Just look at what John wrote in his letter:

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil

has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” - 1 John 3:4-8 ESV

And if this isn't yet proof enough, let's look at what Paul said in Acts 24:14-16:

“But this I do admit to you: I worship the God of our fathers in accordance with the Way (which they call a sect). I continue to believe everything that accords with the Torah and everything written in the Prophets. And I continue to have a hope in God — which they too accept — that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Indeed, it is because of this that I make a point of always having a clear conscience in the sight of both God and man.” (CJB)

The early church, which began with the Jewish followers of Jesus, called themselves the Way. This was in accordance with Jesus' claim to be the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6) This group was considered to be a sect, or specific group of Judaism, just like the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Along with others belonging to this Way, Paul continued to adhere to and affirm all that was written in the Law and the Prophets, just as many of the other sects did. Obedience to the

LORD's instructions was how they were able to maintain a clear conscience before God and man. This is because the Law and Prophets teach us how to walk uprightly, loving God and loving our neighbor, so that even when they try to accuse us of doing wrong, they themselves are put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:16)

Paul clung to the knowledge that there is going to be a resurrection. Both the righteous and the unrighteous will be raised again and will stand before God. Only those of us who have been covered by the blood of Christ on our behalf will be able to remain in His presence. The rest will be cast away from Him forever. How will He know who truly loved Him and who did not?

Simply saying we believe in God is not going to be enough. Even the demons recognized Jesus when they saw Him, confessing that He was the Son of God. (Matt. 8:28-32) What differentiates the confession of faith from the confession of knowledge is this:

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” - 1 John 2:3-6 ESV

Jesus was both fully God and fully man, tempted in the flesh in every way possible, just as we are, yet He was without sin because of His dependence upon the Holy Spirit in Him. He was the perfect example of, as Paul put it, walking by the Spirit so that we will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Jesus’ constant call to those who would follow Him was to repent (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3), and to “*go and sin no more.*” (John 5:14, 8:14 ESV)

A very wise friend once said that to be healed from our sin, we have to come face to face with it, and that’s the beauty of God’s Law. It shows us what sin is so that we may turn from it and be healed. This, right here, is the very reason that Paul tells us that the Law is good. (Rom. 7:12-25) God doesn’t want to oppress us, He wants to heal us, to free us from our bondage to the things that will harm, defile, and eventually destroy us.

This is not to say that we will never make a mistake or slip up once in a while. This flesh/spirit battle is real and fierce, and sometimes it gets the best of us. But, those of us who love God do not make a practice of

sinning. There is a difference between accidentally sinning and embracing sin as a lifestyle. Grace is there for those times when we don't get it right. But, let us not abuse the grace we have been given by consciously continuing in our sin. (Romans 6:1-2)

For centuries, the priests and Pharisees in Israel had created and enforced their own doctrines and traditions and imposed them upon the people above the commandments of God. Jesus came to break the heavy yoke they had placed on the people, and show us what it really means to obey the LORD with a right heart and understanding. Why then, if His objective was to teach us rightly how to love God and how to love our neighbor, how to avoid sin and pursue righteousness, how to walk in the Spirit and not in our flesh, would He do away with the very thing that shows us how to do that?

Daniel 7:25 tells us that when the antichrist comes, he will try to put a stop to the times and the Law. The term "times" refers to the LORD's appointed times, of which we will go into more detail in other chapters. The word "Law" refers to God's Torah. According to scripture (2 Thes. 2:7; 1 John 2:18), the spirit of the antichrist is already at work among us, leading us away from a sincere love and devotion to the One True God. Just as in the garden, he says to us, "Did God really say

that?” (Genesis 3:1) Does God really want us to obey those things? Did He really mean it when He said forever? Is it really fulfilling and not a burden to obey all those silly commands?

Historically, this took place when Antiochus IV invaded Israel in 167 BC, desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, and forced the priests of the LORD to offer pagan sacrifices on pagan altars. It happened again during the fourth century when Constantine outlawed the observance of Biblical holy days under penalty of death, and replaced them with pagan celebrations. And this will ultimately take place when the antichrist, himself, comes during the tribulation period.

Rather than getting too bogged down with all the historical accounts here, I will put some links in the resources section at the end of the book. I encourage you to do some research and learn more about the Councils of Nicaea and Laodicea, the Reformation and Inquisition, and where the doctrine that the Law has been abolished actually came from. Suffice it to say, scripturally and historically speaking, it was not the will of our Messiah, but of the one who opposes Him.

God chose Israel to be a light to the nations through whom He would show both His love and design for creation. (Rom. 3:1-2) His love and design are

displayed in the whole of the Law and the prophets for all to see. When Israel failed to draw the nations into a relationship with the LORD and ultimately rejected their Messiah, God used the faithful remnant of the Jews to take the Gospel out to the nations.

Our salvation is, thankfully, not dependent upon our works of the Law. Our salvation is simply a gift for all who choose to accept it. A beautiful, merciful gift that stems from God's immeasurable love for us. But our works, our obedience to the LORD's commands, are the proof of our love for Him in return - just as Rahab first had faith, then learned what it meant to obey.

Present Applications

I once listened to a Sunday school teacher try to explain the place God's Law should have in our lives today. He started by saying that only some of God's commands from the Old Testament still applied. He then began to break down the Law into sections: a) Moral, b) Ceremonial, and c) Dietary. According to him, only some were still in effect, some were abolished all together, and some we could still follow if we really wanted to, but it wasn't mandatory. This only raised more questions for me, because once again I couldn't find any scriptural foundation for his claims.

However, about a year or so later, something a different teacher said made much more sense to me. It was another one of those color splash moments, and it came with enough scriptural support that I was confident it aligned with God's Word.

He said that everything from the Law, even those things that seemed to only have use in the past, still have a spiritual application in the present. For example, it would seem logical that, because the Temple was destroyed and sacrifices are no longer necessary, the laws that applied to the priests and their duties were done away with. But, that isn't necessarily the case.

Although we may not be Levitical priests at a physical temple sacrificing animals on an altar, we are, as His holy people, being "*built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood,*" so that we might "*present (our) bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.*" (1 Peter 2:5, Romans 12:1 ESV) This is the command and purpose for which God set Israel apart, and it is the same command and purpose into which we have been grafted (see Exodus 19:5-6).

We may not be performing the duties as they were, but the principles the LORD laid down are still the same. The holiness and reverence and purpose with which the Levitical priests entered the Holy of Holies,

is the same way we ought to approach our spiritual worship.

For example, the priests were commanded to wash themselves before entering the Temple to offer sacrifices. (Exodus 30:21) God is holy, and they were to approach Him in holiness, being cleansed from all their unrighteousness. Was the washing of their hands and feet in a special bowl of water really what washed away all their sin? Nope. It was symbolic of the spiritual cleansing that occurred through their obedience, because of their faith in the promise of the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (Hebrews 11:13).

We, too, are to cleanse ourselves from “*every defilement of body and spirit, because of our fear and reverence of God.*” (2 Cor. 7:1) To be “*holy as He is holy.*” (1 Peter 1:15) And to “*offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.*” (1 Peter 2:5) We are washed by the Word of God and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit, because of our faith in the One who came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Even seemingly silly things are really important and show just how much God’s ways are for our good. For example, Leviticus 19:19 tells us not to mix linen and wool in the clothes we wear. This isn’t telling us not

to mix any fabrics, just specifically linen and wool. These two materials contain oils that, when combined, cause a chemical reaction that can burn our skin. Studies have also shown that wearing these two fabrics together can weaken our immune system.³ It is for our good that we not mix these materials in the clothes we wear. It just goes to show that God really does love us and His ways really are for our good, even when we don't understand.

If you're anything like me, your mind may be swirling with questions right now. If this is all true, if we really are supposed to be following the whole of God's instruction, what does that look like? What are we doing that we shouldn't? And what are we not doing that we should? What exactly do these laws look like in today's world, and how do we keep them out of love and not legalism? How, exactly, do Law and grace coincide?

These are some really great questions over which I have poured and prayed for years. I won't claim to have memorized all 613 commandments or to be practicing the ones I do know perfectly, and I'm not suggesting that by the end of this book you will either. But, we have to start somewhere, right?

Just as you wouldn't try to teach trigonometry to a kindergartener, neither does our Heavenly Father expect us to know it all at day one. It's a learning

process. Everything we learn today is meant to strengthen the foundation of our faith so that we can continue to build upon it with what we learn tomorrow. The goal is to put into practice those things as we learn them, one step at a time.

Remember, it's not about pointing out all the things we are doing wrong, but teaching us how to do things right. And I hope that the things we are going to study are just the beginning for you.

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Deuteronomy 12:32
- Psalm 1:1
- Psalm 19:7-14
- Proverbs 28:7-9
- Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
- Matthew 19:17
- John 15:9-11
- Romans 3:29-31; 7:22-25; 8:5-8
- 1 Corinthians 7:19
- James 1:22-25, 2:14-26
- 1 Peter 1:24-25
- 1 John 2:3-6

Scripture Study:

(Taking time each day to meditate on God's Word)

- Psalm 119:9-20 ESV

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes!

With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.

I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me!

My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times...

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Chapter Three

The Seventh Day

One of the most beautiful gifts the LORD has given His children is the Sabbath. It is also one of the most misunderstood. The richness of this day is found both in how we observe the day, and the day upon which we observe it. It's not just a time to sit back and relax, it is so much more!

The first mention of the Sabbath is found in Genesis 2:1-2, which says:

“And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” (ESV)

This day of rest, or Sabbath, was the day that God completed His work of creation. There was nothing left to do but sit back and enjoy a relationship with that which He had created. Time was set from beginning to

end. Everything that was needed, even the redemption necessary for our inevitable sin, had been set in motion. All of His love and mercy and righteousness and majesty had been woven into those first six days, and now it was time to rest.

This was also the very first thing God consecrated, setting it apart for Himself. Not the sun and moon and stars. Not the land or the animals on it. Not even man and woman. It was this particular day that He chose first to bless and call holy. That right there ought to be our cue to take note, to find out why this day is so important to God and make it a point to make the Sabbath important to us, too.

Understanding “Why”

The Sabbath is likened to a wedding ring, an outward symbol of our relationship with our Creator, a gift from our Heavenly Bridegroom to His bride. This is a day that belongs to the LORD. He has invited us into a covenant relationship with Him, with the Sabbath as its sign. It is, quite literally, the thing that distinguishes His children from the rest of the world.

I think that first understanding the “why” behind the Sabbath is important, because it will help us

embrace the “what” that comes with it. Many times, knowing why we are doing something can make the difference in whether or not we do it at all. Although there are hundreds of mentions of the Sabbath in scripture, two stand out to me as the epitome of its purpose. So that’s where we’ll start.

“You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.’” - Exodus 31:13 ESV

“Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”- Ezekiel 20:12 ESV

God gave us the Sabbath as a picture of our salvation; a reminder that it is not our works that save us, but our faith in the One who sanctifies us through His Word. When we break the Sabbath, when we do not keep the Sabbath according to the LORD’s instruction, we break that picture. When we do not honor the Sabbath as holy, we dishonor the One who created it.

God worked for six days in preparation for His desired communion with mankind. Everything He did

was to make ready a place where His creation could live in perfect unity with their Creator. But on the seventh day, once His work had been completed, He focused solely on spending time with His creation. It was no longer the formation of the world with which He was engaged, it was now time to cultivate His relationship with Adam and Eve.

The LORD Himself modeled for us the idea that our lives here on earth and the works that we do are in preparation for the life that is to come. His works were done out of a love for His creation and a desire to provide for us a place of perfect peace and unity with Him. Likewise, our works, although they do not save us, prepare us for a future destination. We now have a choice to either sow works of righteousness which lead to eternity in the presence of our Heavenly Father, or sow works of lawlessness and become separated from Him forever.

In Hebrews chapters three and four, Paul talks bluntly about this picture with those to whom he was writing. In speaking of those from Israel who, after being rescued out of Egypt, did not enter the Promised Land, he said that it was due to their lack of faith. (Heb. 3:17-19) God sent a double portion of manna on the sixth day so they would not have to work to gather food on the Sabbath. This speaks directly to how important

the Sabbath is to Him. However, some still went out to gather on the Sabbath, distrustful of God's provision, and they found none. (Exo. 16) They did not believe, they did not obey, and therefore they did not enter into God's rest.

The reality is that if you'd asked any one of them if they believed in God, they would have said, "Of course I do!" But saying you believe in God is not what counts. Sitting in church, doing Bible studies, listening to Christian music, although they are good things, are not proof of our salvation.

Paul's words in chapter four were not only an encouragement to the Hebrews to whom he was writing, but also to us today:

"There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the same pattern of disobedience."
Hebrews 4:9-11 ESV

The Sabbath is a picture of what God intended our relationship with Him to be. It is what He set forth in the beginning and what He will restore during the

Messianic Kingdom. It is a time of relationship, worship, and intimacy with the Lord, looking forward to when all else will fade from view in light of His glorious presence. It is a time when the cares of this world are intentionally set aside for communion with our Heavenly Father. It is remembering what He planned from the beginning while looking forward to what is to come when our Bridegroom returns for His bride.

The LORD gave us this weekly observance because He knew we needed the reminder. Life gets hard. The cares of this world grow heavy. Our hearts can become weary of doing good. It helps to intentionally rest from our burdens and remember why we press on. To remind ourselves that God is still good, no matter what is going on in the world, and anything we endure in this life is but a blink in light of eternity. (Romans 5:1-5) Sometimes that may be the only thing that gets us through. This truth has certainly been a light in some of my darkest places.

Understanding “What”

Now that we’ve got the “why,” it’s time to look at the “what.” What does it mean to honor the Sabbath

as holy? How do we set this day apart from all the others? It can sound a little daunting, restrictive even, when we begin to imagine how to do this. But, if we have truly come to embrace why this day is special, honoring it becomes a joy. (See Isaiah 58)

It can be hard for all of us, as it has been at times for me, to discern between some of the manmade traditions apart from God's commands. There are a lot of things mixed into the observance of the Sabbath that God didn't put there. Manmade customs and traditions have intermingled with and even overtaken the LORD's instruction regarding Sabbath observance for thousands of years.

One of the ways the Pharisees tried to denounce Jesus was by catching Him profaning, or breaking the Sabbath. However, they were holding Him to the standards which they had built, and instead of convicting Jesus, they showed just how far they themselves had strayed from God's original design. One example is when they accused Jesus' disciples of working on the Sabbath by picking and eating the grain from a field they happened to be passing. (Matt. 12:1-2)

Centuries before, when God gave us His written Law, He included instruction that had to do with caring for the poor and needy among them. When anyone

harvested their field, they were not to harvest all the way to the edge. They were to leave some, along with anything they dropped, for the poor and foreigners among them. That's God's heart, after all. He wants everyone who comes to Him (or to His people) to be able to taste and see that the LORD is good. One way of doing that is by meeting the tangible needs of those around us.

Jesus and His disciples were not rich. They did not own farms or homes or have employment. Their provision was, in a sense, like manna from heaven, each day's need met by the hand of God. They depended on what the LORD provided, whether through a divine miracle or a just regular person. In this instance, it was the grain on the side of the field. They weren't harvesting. They weren't plowing. They weren't even putting any in a bag to save for later. They were simply picking up bites of food and putting it in their mouths. Not much different than taking a bite of food with a fork from your plate.

The Pharisees, by contrast, were not poor by any standard. Any one of them could have invited the disciples to his home and shared from his abundance. They could have offered food from their table so Jesus and His disciples didn't have to pick grain from the field. But, as Jesus pointed out, they chose to condemn

rather than extend grace. (Matt. 12:7)

There are also many accounts of Jesus healing on the Sabbath, one in particular is recorded in Luke 13. Jesus was at the synagogue teaching, as was His custom. There was a woman there who had suffered from a disability for eighteen years. Jesus called to her and said, *“Woman, you are freed from your disability.”* (v. 12 ESV)

The ruler of the synagogue was angered by this. He told everyone that if they wanted to be healed, to come back when it was not the Sabbath. But Jesus, well, He had a difference of opinion. In fact, He responded to the ruler by pointing out his hypocrisy:

“Then the Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?’” – Luke 13:15-16 ESV

That right there - healing and restoring and extending grace - was the purpose of the Sabbath! This day is the very thing that points us to the restoration we will receive when we enter the LORD’s final and complete Sabbath rest in eternity. And this man had

missed it.

The Do's and Do Not's of the Sabbath

The Sabbath is a day to rest from our works. It is a day to separate ourselves from the things of this world and put our focus on our relationship with God. Not flipping a light switch, or using the microwave, or even not being able to leave our houses are all manmade traditions. Those are called fences, extra commands put around the Laws of God to make sure that we aren't doing something wrong. As we discussed in the last chapter, they are a heavy burden we weren't meant to carry. All those extras only distract us from what God has instructed us to do.

There are traditions that are fun and meaningful when you have the time to do them, but still aren't a command. Things like making challah bread and lighting candles, both of which I personally really enjoy. These things are reminders of God's faithfulness and goodness, but if they don't get done, they just don't get done.

However, there are absolutes that the LORD made clear by which we must abide. One of those things is resting from our works. Exodus 20:10 says that on the

Sabbath, “*you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.*” (ESV) This includes not only our jobs, but personal hobbies, yard work, even washing the car. Those things, although not inherently bad, take our focus off of the One to whom the Sabbath points.

Notice that this command includes not only refraining from work ourselves, but also from causing others to work on our behalf. Yes, that means no restaurants or movies or shopping or anything else that might cause someone to break the Sabbath. Even if they are working regardless of our patronage, it is our duty to refrain from taking part in or benefitting from their sin. Remember, we are to look different from the world, and this is the number one way we can do it.

When the Sabbath was commanded at Mt. Sinai, no other nation had such a day. No one else honored their gods with a day of rest and communion. It truly was something that set Israel apart from the rest of the world.

We are also to refrain from making a fire on the Sabbath. (Exo. 35:3) I can’t tell you how many times I’ve wanted to have a bonfire on a Friday night, but forgot to get the wood in the fire pit and light a candle

before the sun went down. (Side note: the day, according to scripture, begins and ends at sundown. That means that the Sabbath officially begins at sundown on Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday. Some observe from 6:00pm one day to 6:00pm the next, because the sunset can vary depending on the time of year.)

Some people have taken this to mean that God does not want us to have a fire at all during the Sabbath. If that were so, God would be cruel and archaic, especially in light of the fact that at the time the Ten Commandments were given, all of Israel was dependent upon fires for heat, as a means of cooking food, light when it was dark out, and for many other tasks. It isn't that we cannot have a fire, but making one (especially back then) takes some work to do, and it is from the work of preparing the fire that we are to abstain. This is one of those commands that points to our need to be diligent and intentional with our works as we prepare for Messiah's return, so we will be ready when He comes.

When I make sure to prepare the wood beforehand and light a candle which I can use to light the fire, I have all I need to make a bonfire without breaking God's commands. I can enjoy my Sabbath with Him, resting from my works. It is in this same way

that we need to be diligent with our lives, working out our salvation according to His ways so that we are ready for our Bridegroom when He comes for His bride. (The parable of the ten maidens in Matthew 25:1-13 is the perfect analogy for this! When you have time, I encourage you to read it.) We are to be working for His kingdom purpose, getting ourselves ready for Messiah's return, so that when He comes, we can rest from our works and simply enjoy Him.

These are a few of the "do not's," but what about some of the "do's"? This is where the joy of the Sabbath really starts to take shape.

What we get to do is put everything else aside and enjoy God. You can attend a Sabbath service or listen to one online, read scripture with your family, and spend time out in nature. Some families (one's that are much more organized than mine) keep a special box full of games and books and things that are just for use on the Sabbath. If you're musical, spend some time singing praise songs or playing them on your instrument of choice. Set aside some time to pray. Have a special meal with your family or invite friends to come eat with you. It should be food you have prepared beforehand, but it's a great excuse to use paper plates so you don't have to wash any dishes!

The point is that you center your activities around fellowship with the LORD and with others. It is a day that He, the God of all creation, specifically set aside to meet with us in a special way for a special purpose. Why wouldn't we want to meet Him there?

Why do we Celebrate Sunday?

All this information begs the question of why the church observes Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Sabbath instead of Saturday, the seventh day, as the LORD commanded. And that is a very good and very important question for us to ask. The Bible clearly states that the seventh day is the Sabbath. God, Himself, gave the command, Jesus observed it as God commanded and taught His disciples to do the same, and nowhere in the Bible does it say that it ever changed. So why do we now say it's on Sunday?

To answer this question, we need to look first at some of the scriptures people have adopted in their argument for Sunday, then we need to look at the historical documentation surrounding the change. Following tradition for tradition's sake won't cut it when we have such a clear discrepancy between God's Word and man's ways.

We cannot settle for the “that’s just the way we do it” excuse if we truly want to know God’s heart. We have to seek Him out. As He said, if we seek Him, we will find Him, when we seek Him with all of our heart. (Jer. 29:13) So let’s get to seeking!

Searching the Scriptures

The first scripture we are going to look at is Acts 20:7, which says:

“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.”(ESV)

The phrase, “on the first day of the week,” is a phrase we need to camp out on for a moment. One that requires us to look back at the Greek language from which our English Bibles were translated, to get the full and intended meaning. It is important, because none of those words are actually in the original Greek text. The Greek here says ‘*mia ton Sabbaton,*’ which literally means “one of the Sabbaths.”

Just as in English, both Greek and Hebrew have

two types of numbers – ordinal and cardinal. Ordinal numbers signify order, such as first, second, or third. Cardinal numbers denote quantity, such as one, two, or three. It is basically the difference between me saying, “Please hand me *the first* book on the shelf,” and “please hand me *a* book on the shelf.” ‘The first book’ clarifies which book I want you to get. ‘A book’ simply means any book upon the shelf. ‘*Mia*’ is a cardinal number. It lends no clarification as to a specific object or order, only that it was one of the objects in a group.

The word ‘Sabbaton’ is the Greek word for Sabbath. The phrase here does not denote a change in the day of the week, it simply states that on one of the Sabbaths, the people met together to break bread (eat together) and learn from Paul as he taught them.

In Hebrew, only one of the days of the week had a name, and that was the Sabbath. Every other day was just the first day, the second day, and so on. When the LORD said to keep the seventh day holy, (Exo. 20.8), He was referring to a specific day, not just any day of our choosing.

Correspondingly, if Paul had meant the first day of the week, he would have simply said the first day of the week. But he did not. He specifically referred to a Sabbath day, which to him was the seventh day.

The phrase, “one of the Sabbaths,” will make more sense when we look at it in context of the verses before it. Paul was in Macedonia, waiting until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread to sail to Troas to meet up with his traveling companions.

We’ll go into much more detail about this Feast in a later chapter, but for now, understand that it was one of the Spring Feasts celebrated by God’s people. Between this Feast and Shavuot (also called Pentecost in Greek, or Weeks in English), God instructed His people to count seven Sabbaths. This was known as ‘counting the omer.’ When Luke, who authored the book of Acts, wrote “one of the Sabbaths,” he was referencing one of the Sabbaths counted within this group of weeks. It was a common phrase that made sense both to him and to others at that time. We have missed its meaning because we have lost the context of the time and culture in which it was written.

This verse was first translated as “the first day of the week” in the King James Version of the Bible. This was during the time of the Inquisition, when the Roman Catholic Church sought to eradicate heresy by inflicting severe forms of torture, and even execution, upon anyone who disagreed with their doctrinal beliefs even if the accusations against them were false and only confessed to under extreme duress. This included Jews,

Muslims, scientists, witches, and anyone else who was not Catholic.

Rome had decreed back in the fourth century that the Sabbath was Sunday, the first day of the week. Anything contrary to this would have been considered heresy. You can make your own speculation as to why the monks decided to translate the Bible in such a way instead of holding fast to the truth of scripture, but my guess is that it may have had something to do with not wanting to be burned at the stake.

But, fear of execution isn't the only reason that was in play back then, and it certainly doesn't explain the fact that we still hold to this teaching today. The King James Bible is not the only translation with some doctrinal bias. Take the NIV, for example. It was not translated from the original texts, but from the Westcott-Hort Greek text which relies heavily on the Code Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. The editors then used church doctrine rather than original texts to determine if the translators were accurate in their rendering. The Jehovah's Witnesses also created their own version of the Bible called the New World Translation in which they altered passages to align with their doctrinal beliefs.

Most Bible schools and seminaries today teach

doctrine first then give you scriptures that seem to back it up. This type of interpretation is called eisegesis, which is basically an “interpretation, especially of Scripture, that expresses the interpreter's own ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the meaning of the text.”⁴ However that is the exact opposite approach of what we should be taking when we read scripture.

We ought to look at God’s Word with an exegetical approach, which is allowing scripture to shape what we believe rather than the other way around. Filtering our doctrines through the Bible to see if they fit instead of trying to make the Bible fit into our doctrines. Allowing scripture to explain itself rather than trying to explain what God means using our own fallible wisdom.

Although God’s Word is indeed infallible, man’s interpretation of it is not. This is one of the many reasons it is important for us to understand the language, culture, and context in which the Bible was originally written. Not that we all have to become fluent in Hebrew and Greek or scholars of their ancient cultures, but a basic understanding is helpful when accompanied by a heart that longs to dig deeper into the words spoken to us by the God who created the universe. We should also seek to surround ourselves with others who are earnestly seeking Him too, so that we have encouragement and

accountability along the way.

Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water and start burning all our Bibles. God still speaks through His Word. He can use even man's feeble attempts at encompassing and interpreting all that He is to lead us into His truth. So keep reading and keep seeking and I assure you, you will keep finding Him on every page.

Learning from History

I know for some people, this kind of study can seem cumbersome and unnecessary, but please stick with me a little longer. It really is essential to knowing why we believe what we believe. For sorting out what God says and what man says. For separating church tradition from God's instruction. And for learning appropriate, God-honoring ways we can live out our faith.

Although we cannot find within the pages of our Bibles any evidence for the change from Saturday to Sunday, we can find it historically, specifically during the fourth century. Constantine was emperor of Rome from 306 to 337 CE. It was during this time that the Roman Catholic Church also rose to great power. Rome was beginning to become divided between Catholic

Christianity and paganism, not to mention those pesky Christ-followers who didn't fall into either of those categories, and Constantine wasn't about to see his kingdom fall.

Rather than vie for power between himself and the pope, Constantine formed an alliance. So-called Jewish traditions were outlawed, Christian holidays were exchanged for pagan ones, and the Sabbath was combined with the weekly pagan worship of the Unconquered Sun.

This tradition has continued for nearly 1800 years, unthwarted even by the so-called Protestant Reformation, which for the sake of not rocking the boat too terribly much, maintained many of the Roman Catholic traditions even without scriptural support to uphold them, simply because they were so deeply ingrained in Christian thought.

Peter R. Kraemer, for the Catholic Extension Society in 1975, had this to say:

"Regarding the change from the observance of the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday, I wish to draw your attention to the facts: 1) That Protestants, who accept the Bible as the only rule of faith and religion,

should by all means go back to the observance of the Sabbath. The fact that they do not, but on the contrary observe the Sunday, stultifies them in the eyes of every thinking man. 2) We Catholics do not accept the Bible as the only rule of faith. Besides the Bible we have the living Church, the authority of the Church, as a rule to guide us. We say, this Church, instituted by Christ to teach and guide man through life, has the right to change the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament and hence, we accept her change of the Sabbath to Sunday. We frankly say, yes, the Church made this change, made this law, as she made many other laws, for instance, the Friday abstinence, the unmarried priesthood, the laws concerning mixed marriages, the regulation of Catholic marriages and a thousand other laws. It is always somewhat laughable, to see the Protestant churches, in pulpit and legislation, demand the observance of Sunday, of which there is nothing in their Bible."⁵

Others within the protestant church say the change was made to honor the day Messiah rose from the grave. However scripture clearly tells us that He rose the day *after* the Sabbath. (Matt. 28:1) The day Messiah rose was indeed significant, but not so that it would become the new Sabbath day, rather because it was the

fulfillment of the prophetic promise of Firstfruits, of which we will learn more when we take a look at the Spring Feasts. But for now, know that it was one of the appointed times the LORD made with mankind in keeping with His plan for redemption.

Whenever we think that man has the right to change the Laws of God, we are making the gravest of mistakes. It is the same sin for which the Pharisees were guilty and which Messiah condemned. It is the same pit into which Adam and Eve fell when the serpent asked, “Did God really say that?”

Jesus came to teach the Law rightly, apart from the customs and traditions and laws put in place by the religious leaders. Once again, I’m afraid, we are in need of Him to come and do the same.

I truly believe that the LORD is drawing His people back to Himself, to a pure worship according to His instruction. It’s like the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well, when she confronted the belief that only the Jews knew how to worship God. He responded to her in this way:

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the

Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” – John 4:21-24 ESV

This was the point of His first coming, to restore a right relationship with and subsequent worship of the One True God. I believe, as the day draws near for His return, He is stirring up the same longing in our hearts. It was to the Jews that the path of salvation was given, and through the Jews that our Messiah came. And, like Rahab, it is in union with the Jew that we can learn how to love the God who saves us.

My prayer is that I, that we all, will have hearts not like the Pharisees which were hardened against Him, but like those of the disciples who followed unashamedly after Him. And I believe that one of the first steps we can take is in honoring the LORD’s Sabbath as holy, the way He commanded, as He invites us into His presence.

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Genesis 2:1-3
- Exodus 20:8-11
- Nehemiah 13:15-22
- Isaiah 56:1-7
- Mark 1:21-28
- Acts 18:1-6
- Hebrews 4:1-11

Applying the Word:

(Being doers of the Word, not hearers only)

- Do something special to mark the Sabbath this week. It doesn't have to be anything big (unless you feel lead to do so), sometimes this process takes baby steps. It can be something simple like lighting a candle before sundown, making challah bread, or spending time reading scriptures about the Sabbath. Ask God to show you His heart for this day, and be ready to act upon what He tells you. If you're ready to jump right in, check the resources section in the back of the book for a link to help you find a Messianic congregation in your area or one you can listen to one online.

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The Feast of Unleavened Bread

I was originally going to try to cover all the Biblical Feasts in one chapter. My plan was to simply give an overview in hopes of stirring your heart to learn more on your own. But, the more I thought about it and the more I wrote about it, I realized I would be doing both you and the Feasts a great disservice if I didn't give them the attention they deserve.

There is another change I want to make at this point, as well. For the remainder of this book I will be referring to Jesus by His given name, Yeshua (YEH-shoo-ah). If you are not familiar with the name Yeshua, it might be a bit confusing or even offensive when you first hear somebody use it. I want to explain a little about why I choose to use His Hebrew name so that we might avoid any confusion or offense.

I do not believe that calling Him Jesus is wrong. There are certain times and circumstances when I continue to use that name. Jesus is simply the English transliteration of the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew

name Yeshua, which means ‘salvation.’

When I call Yeshua by His given name, I feel a greater sense of nearness to my Savior. It’s sort of like when you first meet someone who is introduced to you by his nickname. The nickname isn’t an ugly or derogatory name, in fact to many it is a very endearing one. It just isn’t his real name.

As you get to know him better and learn more about him, you find out that his given name actually holds great significance as it speaks directly to his character, to the very essence of who he is. In learning this, it begins to have a greater significance to you as well. The friendly titles go away and are exchanged for the intimacy of a first name basis.

That’s how I feel when I call Yeshua by His given name, and I want to invite you into that kind of intimacy with me, whatever you choose to call Him. The Feasts are the perfect time for this transition from informality to intimacy, because they are all about the LORD who saves us! If you choose to continue to call Him Jesus, that’s ok. I just wanted you to understand why I’m making this transition so you wouldn’t be confused when this name change occurred.

Introduction to the Feasts

There are seven appointed times contained within three Feasts which the LORD instructs His people to observe; three times each year that Israel is commanded to appear at the temple in Jerusalem to present sacrifices and offerings to the LORD. They are outlined in Leviticus 23 along with the Sabbath, and are expanded upon throughout Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These are the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles, and they are divided into the spring and fall Feasts. Two of them contain more than one celebration, but are considered to be a single Feast period.

There are two other celebrations not included within these Feasts, but they do not require pilgrimage to Jerusalem nor do they include sacrifices at the temple; these are Purim and Hanukkah. Another distinction between the Feasts and Purim and Hanukkah is that the Feasts (and the Sabbath) all have Messianic significance. They all picture a specific event that will occur between Messiah and mankind. Purim and Hanukkah, on the other hand, are pictures of the antichrist and his plans and purposes for this world.

Leviticus 23:2 says, *“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts*

of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.”(ESV) Note first that the LORD calls them *His* feasts. They are not the Feasts of Israel, nor are they intended only for the Jews. Other translations call them “appointed times,” “set feasts,” or “appointed seasons,” but they all are from the Hebrew word ‘mo’edim,’ (mō-ed-eem) which means appointment or signal.⁶ They are God’s appointed times set apart for His purpose.

The first mention of these appointed times is in Genesis 1:14 which says, “*And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.’*” (ESV)

The word “seasons” here is the same word we just saw in Leviticus 23:2 – ‘mo’edim.’ The lights in the heavens weren’t markers for seasons like summer or winter, but as signals for the appointments the LORD was going to make with us.

He put these markers in the sky like an alarm clock, as reminders of when He was going to do something special. He didn’t want us to be caught off-guard or unprepared when the time came. He, quite literally, did everything He could to make sure we didn’t miss these times.

It amazes me that even from the foundation of the world, our Heavenly Father was planning our redemption and putting in place all we needed to find it. Not one thing in all of creation was made without an eternal purpose. Everything in creation sings of the glory of our great God and the fact that He wants to have a relationship with us! The ball is now in our court, so to speak, as to whether or not we want to come into that relationship with Him.

When I first started studying the Feasts, I had to look up another word from Leviticus 23:2 because I admittedly had no idea what it meant. That word was convocation. It means something that is called out, whether a certain person or a specific place, for a holy purpose. It also carries with it the idea of a rehearsal for something to come.⁷ Through these Feasts, we are being called out for His holy purpose, celebrating His faithfulness through all generations, as He prepares us for the things to come.

If He found it important enough to weave His appointed times into the fabric of creation, shouldn't we, too, find it important enough to learn about these times so we can meet Him there?

My First Passover

I remember the first time my family and I celebrated Passover. I had no idea what I was doing, and I'm pretty sure my family was just along for the ride. To them it was one of those "mom's being weird again so just go with it" kind of things.

I remember, though, as I stood in the kitchen preparing the food, I looked out into the living room and everyone seemed so peaceful. My normally very active son was sitting quietly on the floor playing while my husband strummed on his guitar. My daughter was sitting on the couch just listening. Everyone was happy. Content. And if you knew what the last year had looked like for our family, you'd understand just how precious this moment was for me.

While I cooked, while we ate, while I fumbled through the rituals of the Seder meal, I sensed something in our home that I hadn't before, at least not in this profound of a way. It was the presence of God. It was almost tangible. I had never felt His presence so strongly, so peacefully, and so fully in all my life.

The LORD had been stirring my heart for some time concerning His Feasts, but this was the first time I had attempted to celebrate one. It's probably because

this was the one with which I was most familiar. Little did I know just how much more there was to learn. And it set my heart in motion (thought it took a few more years) to really seek to discover the beauty in all the other Feasts as well.

The First Passover

The very first Passover, called Pesach in Hebrew, was commanded by God in Exodus, when He delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. I want you to take a minute now and read Exodus 12:1-13. This way you'll have a reference for the things we're about to discuss. Don't worry, I'll be right here waiting when you get finished.

Ok, now we're going to do a little verse-by-verse study of what you just read. There are several things we need to understand more fully so we can see both the immediate and prophetic significance of what was happening. The first thing is what God said in verse two, that this was to be the "beginning of months" for Israel.

The beginning of the yearly calendar was, and still is Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, which occurs in the fall around September or October. But this new beginning of the

year was in the Hebrew month of Nisan, which is in the spring. A great question here is why God would tell them to change the month in which the year began. I don't know about you, but to me and my logical mind that just sounds a bit unnecessary.

The answer, however, is pretty simple, yet really profound. This new year, which was to begin at the month containing Passover, was to be the beginning of their spiritual calendar.

The LORD's Feasts are His appointed times, dates when He has promised to interact with humanity in very specific ways. They all have to do with His plan of redemption for mankind through Messiah. God told us to keep these times, these appointments every year in remembrance of and preparation for the fulfillment of His promises. This new beginning of the spiritual year marked the first of His appointments that He, through Messiah, would keep.

In Exodus 12:3 we see that the Israelites were to take a lamb for each family and keep it in their homes for four days. They were to take special care to make sure this lamb was without spot or blemish. It was during these days, from the 10th to the 14th, that they carefully inspected their lambs and insured there were no defects. Then, together with the whole house of

Israel, they were to take their lambs at “twilight” and slaughter them.

Twilight is probably not the best translation for the original Hebrew word in Exodus 12:6, as it gets confused with our western idea of the term. It was actually mid-afternoon, at precisely three o’clock. Once the lamb was slaughtered, they were to drain the blood completely, then roast and eat the meat before morning. Anything left over was to be burned. These little details may seem insignificant, but they really are important as we will see when we look at their fulfillment in Yeshua.

You’ll also notice that the blood of these Passover lambs was to be painted upon the doorways of every house of the people of Israel. That might sound a little weird outside of its prophetic significance, but it was a sign that they belonged to the LORD. Whoever had this covering on their homes would escape the tenth and final plague – the death of every firstborn in Egypt.

God didn’t need this sign, He knew which homes belonged to His people. However, their obedience to this command was a sign of their faith in that promise. It was a distinct and visual marker that everyone could see which set them apart from the rest of Egypt. Another notable point is that the blood upon the doorpost and lintel would make the Hebrew letter

chet – π – which stands for life.

Their deliverance out of Egypt was not the only one promised through the Passover lamb. This continual yearly observance - a day of memorial and statute forever – was for Israel a reminder of not only what God had done for them in Egypt, but also of the promise of their final and eternal deliverance that would come through Messiah, the Lamb of God.

And it was not just Passover the LORD commanded at that time for them (and us) to keep. That was just the prologue to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a seven day Feast in which no yeast or leaven could be eaten. It was a reminder of how the Israelites in Egypt had to eat their Passover meal in haste, without time to leaven their bread before baking it. Again, a seemingly insignificant detail with profound significance.

This Feast also includes two days of rest, or Sabbaths, one on the first day and one on the last. You'll see as we go on, that every Feast includes at least one Sabbath. These are additional, or High Sabbaths, over and above the weekly Sabbath. Each Sabbath, whether the weekly one or one of the additional Sabbaths of the Feasts, was a reminder that our works are not what save us, rather they are preparing us for a time to come, when nothing will be left to do but rest in our relationship with

our Creator.

Also found in the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the celebration of Firstfruits, This was a day during the Feast of Unleavened bread when the priests would wave the first fruits (a bundle of grain from the barley harvest) before the altar. (Lev. 23:9-14) This was to be done on the day after the weekly Sabbath that took place during the festival.

This day can change its place within the festival, because it is tied to a day in the week, not to a day of the month. The 14th day of the month, which is the first day of Unleavened Bread and the day of Passover, falls on a different day of the week from year to year. So, if the 14th falls on a Tuesday, Firstfruits would be six days later, on the first day after the weekly Sabbath. But if the 14th falls on a Thursday, it would only be four days later. This is important to know as we look into the prophetic meaning of this celebration.

Keeping His Promise

Now that we've looked at the immediate implications for the Israelites in Egypt, let's look at the prophetic. Like I said earlier, all of the Feasts point to Messiah and His redemption plan for mankind.

Yeshua is our Passover Lamb. (1Cor. 5:7) John the Baptizer said of Him, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*” (John 1:29 ESV) The lambs the Israelites slaughtered in Egypt were a picture of the Lamb of God. Just as the blood of the lambs saved them from the angel of death in Egypt, the blood of Messiah saves us from an eternal death.

Yeshua was hanged on an execution stake, on Passover, at nine in the morning, the very same time the priests in Jerusalem slaughtered the first Passover lamb on the altar. And He died at 3pm (Mark 15:33-37), the same time the LORD commanded Israel to slaughter the lambs in Egypt, and the same time the priests completed the final Passover sacrifice each year.

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not only are we instructed not to eat leavened foods, but to clean it completely out of our homes. Leavening, Biblically speaking, signifies sin. It is during this Feast, as we refrain from eating anything containing leaven, that we emphasize the need to cleanse the sin from our lives. The outward act of removing the leaven from our homes, cleaning in the nooks and crannies and inside cabinets and sweeping out anywhere leaven might have fallen, is an active reminder for us to search our own hearts, ask God to reveal to us anywhere that sin might be lurking, and diligently work to remove it. Just as we

separate ourselves from leavened bread, we are to separate ourselves from the sinfulness of this world.

Yeshua was in the grave on Unleavened Bread, carrying with Him the sins of the world. He died for our sins so that through faith in Him we might live. (John 2:32-35, Heb. 9:26)

As we celebrate Passover and Unleavened Bread today, we look back at a promise fulfilled. Messiah went to Jerusalem just before Passover and, just as the lambs were carefully inspected for even the smallest defect, He was questioned by the priests and Pharisees for four days, during which time they could find no cause for which to accuse Him. He truly was the Lamb without spot or blemish. (1 Pet. 1:19)

Do you remember how I said that Firstfruits can fall on a different day in the festival depending on the year? Here's where that fact becomes important. On this particular year, Passover was on a Thursday, which means Firstfruits came three nights and three days later, which was the first day of the week, the day after the weekly Sabbath. Yeshua was crucified and died on Thursday, was buried and in the grave Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night. He then rose on Sunday fulfilling the prophecy that he would be in the grave three nights and three days. (Matt. 16:1-4)

I know, I know, this isn't what you were taught in church. For centuries we have celebrated Messiah's death on Friday and His resurrection on Sunday. However, there simply is no way to get three days and three nights from Friday to Sunday. No amount of fuzzy math will get you there. If that were true, had he really died on Friday and not Thursday, He would not have fulfilled the prophecy of Jonah which would have made Him a false prophet rather than our Messiah. (Matt. 12:40)

There is a great online teaching on the Passover Week timeline for which I will include the link at the end of this chapter. I encourage you to take the time to listen, because this teaching goes into great detail, both Biblically and historically, more so than I can do in this book.

Suffice it to day, God knew 1500 years before it happened, the exact year, day, and even hour that Messiah would die on the cross. He knew how many days He would remain in the grave, and on what day of the week He would rise again, securing victory over the curse of sin and death forever for all who believe in Him.

Yeshua died on Passover, not only on the same day the Passover lamb was killed, but at the very hour.

He was in the grave on Unleavened Bread, carrying with Him the sins of this world. He rose on Firstfruits, being the first fruits of the resurrection, (1Cor. 15:20) and the guarantee that we too, those of us whose hope is in Him, will be resurrected on the last day. (Rom 8:11)

Can you imagine how Rahab must have felt as the city of Jericho fell all around her, yet she was spared? Or what went through her head as she and her family were lead through the ash and rubble and brought safely into the community of Israel? That's the very same destruction from which we are saved as we walk from death to life among the children of God.

The scarlet cord in her window was a symbol of the blood of the Lamb, the covering of our Messiah, the same as was the blood on their door posts in Egypt. Because of her faith, she became an heir to the promise that had been given through Abraham to the people of Israel – a promise that is extended to everyone who trusts Messiah as Lord and Savior. And you can bet that every Passover, she celebrated with them with a heart full of awe and wonder of the God who saved her. So should we.

Word Study:

(Digging Deeper into the Word of God)

- Read this online article to find out more about the name *Yeshua*
www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/jesus-vs-yeshua
- Passover Week Timeline by Wayne Davis
<http://john1415.org/Festivals/2021-Passover-Week.MP3>

The Feast of Weeks

Remember in chapter three when I mentioned counting the omer? Well, now we're going to learn more about what that means. It isn't a much celebrated event, for most people it kind of goes by on its own without much notice. However, what it leads up to is a big deal, and now that I've got little ones in the house again, I've decided to have a little more fun with it. By keeping a special calendar on which we count down the days, and fun stickers to mark each day off, it helps build some excitement as we approach the Feast of Weeks.

The omer are the seven weeks between Passover and the Feast of Weeks – called Shavuot (shah-voo-ot) in Hebrew or Pentecost in Greek. Here are the LORD's instructions from Leviticus 23:15-16:

“You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath.

Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD.” (ESV)

Israel was to count fifty days, starting from the day of Firstfruits, which occurred the first day after the first Sabbath after Passover, and ended on the seventh Sabbath. (It sounds a little more complicated than it really is.) Then they were to hold another sacred assembly, or holy convocation to the LORD. This was the second of the three Feasts where Israel was commanded to go up to the temple in Jerusalem, and the fourth of the celebrations they were to observe. (Remember, the Feast of Unleavened Bread contained three observances during that one Feast period.)

These seven weeks of counting are important, because they mark two things: 1) the seven weeks Israel traveled after they left Egypt until they reached Mt. Sinai, 2) the time between the death and resurrection of Yeshua, and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

At the Foot of Mt. Sinai

When Israel reached Mt. Sinai after leaving Egypt, they were a pretty weary bunch. They were a people, but not yet a nation, having no country to call their home. They had been in Egypt for over four-

hundred years, ruled by foreign kings and surrounded by pagan gods.

I imagine they might have resembled Rahab in some ways. They knew about God, but during their captivity, His presence had been missing. Not that He wasn't there or that He had forsaken them, but Israel's assimilation and subsequent oppression created a distance between themselves and God. The wonders of the LORD became stories they'd heard, not things they'd experienced. The most profound expression of any deity for the last 400 years had been merely the lifeless statues of the Egyptians gods. They, like Rahab, were about to be faced with a choice: were they going to return to the statues of Egypt or follow the One True God?

After all the plagues in Egypt, after their deliverance through the Red Sea, after manna had rained down from heaven and water flowed out of a rock, they found themselves standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai, where the presence of God Himself was about to come down. All those stories they'd heard about God must have paled in comparison to what they had just experienced, but that, too, was about to pale in comparison to what they were getting ready to see.

“On the third day, when morning came, there was thunder and lightning. A thick cloud was upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the ram’s horn went out, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke, because the LORD had descended on it in fire. And the smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. And as the sound of the ram’s horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in the thunder.” - Exodus 19:16-19 ESV

Thunder, lightning, billows of smoke and fire, earthquakes, and the very presence of the LORD Almighty. I try to imagine what that must have been like, but I’m not sure I can. It’s one of those “you had to be there” kind of things. But, I can imagine it must have been quite overwhelming, and I can’t help but see a parallel between Moses and the people of Israel, and Rahab and the people of Jericho.

Moses wasn’t afraid to be in God’s presence. He didn’t shirk back in fear, he believed what God said and obeyed. The people of Israel were terrified, and they

begged Moses to be a mediator between them and God, because His presence was too much for them to bear. Moses's fear was a reverential one, the rest of Israel was simply afraid.

The most important part of this event is what God said to the people from the mountain. He spoke to them the terms of His covenant. He spoke so that everyone could hear and understand.

Remember, it wasn't just the Israelites who came out of Egypt. There was a mixed multitude who came out with them. Egypt was a melting pot of the nations. They had brought in slaves from nearly every surrounding nation, and it was a central point of commerce and trade. It was, at this point, the wealthiest kingdom in the world.

When the Israelites were brought out of captivity, there were foreigners who came out with them. Although they were not Israelites themselves, they had chosen to join the community of Israel. God spoke so that everyone could hear and understand the terms He was setting forth for anyone who wanted to follow Him.

Here's what God told Moses to say to the people just before He began to speak:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” - Exodus 19:4-6 ESV

These weren't Israel's laws. It wasn't Israel's covenant. They weren't Israel's terms and conditions. These were God's instructions for those who wanted to be God's people. Keep this verse fresh in your mind, because we're going to come back to it in a minute.

What we need to understand right now is that up to this point Israel was not a nation. They were simply the descendants of Jacob who came to sojourn with the Egyptians when there was a famine in their land. What started out as seventy people had turned into hundreds of thousands of people over the course of over two hundred years. And these people, who started out as sojourners, had become slaves to Pharaoh in whose land they dwelled.

Here, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the LORD was offering to make them into a kingdom with Himself as their King. This is what the Feast of Weeks is about;

God turning Israel into a nation, bringing them into a covenant relationship with Himself, separating them as a holy people for His good purpose. Anyone, not just the Israelites, were allowed to be a part of this nation. God was offering Himself to them as a bridegroom betroths himself to his bride.

After God spoke, and the people shirked back in fear, Moses returned to the top of the mountain to talk with God. While he was there, the people down below got tired of waiting for him to come back down. In their impatience, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Take note here, because it's a good lesson for us when we think God is slacking in His duties or not working according to our timeline.

While Moses was on the mountain with the LORD, the people of Israel made a golden calf and called it their gods. Israel reverted to the ways of Egypt. They returned to the comfortable familiarity of the slavery from which they had been delivered. They broke the terms of the covenant into which they'd just entered all because they got tired of waiting. They simply lacked faith.

God told Moses He was ready to kill them all and start over with him. (Exo. 32:9) Obviously, they had rejected Him as their King and they deserved to die, just

as the Egyptians had. But from the mountain, Moses interceded for them, for they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of whom God had promised to multiply as numerous as the stars, and form into a nation for His glory. (Exo. 32:11-14) But when Moses came down from the mountain and saw just how great their sin was, he, too, was so enraged that he threw down the tablets of stone and commanded the people in this way:

“Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me.’ And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. And he said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.”’ And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell.” - Exodus 32:26-28 ESV

God takes seriously our obedience to His commands, because it shows where our heart is. Those who loved the LORD and believed what He said took it to heart and stayed away from sinning. Those who did not, well, it didn't take long for them to fall away.

New Testament Fulfillment

As I said before, all the Feasts have their fulfillment in Yeshua. They all point to an interaction between Messiah and humanity, according to His redemptive plan. Most commonly known among the church as Pentecost, we find the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks in Acts 2. Go ahead and read that now. As before, I'll be here when you get finished.

Here we see that the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem with Jews and proselytes from every nation there among them. They were there because this was the second of the three pilgrimage Feasts commanded by God in Leviticus 23. Obviously, Yeshua had taught His disciples to observe the Feasts and festivals after His resurrection or they would not have continued to do so. That's a pretty good sign that we ought to do the same.

As they were praying, the sound of a mighty rushing wind came down from heaven and filled the place where they were gathered. (v. 2) Biblically speaking, a mighty wind is symbolic of the Spirit of God, as are tongues of fire. (See Psalm 29:3-9; Jer. 51:16; Rev. 14:2) Just as the LORD spoke from Mt. Sinai, He was again speaking to the people of Israel. But, instead of the voice of God, Himself, echoing out

among them, He was speaking through the disciples. And just as everyone from the nations that had come out of Egypt understood when God spoke at Sinai, all who were there understood in their own language what the disciples were saying – both Jews and foreigners who had joined themselves to the nation of Israel. (v. 11)

This was no coincidence. Because this took place at the temple during the celebration of Shavuot, they would have just been reading about the miracle at Mt Sinai when the disciples began to speak in other tongues. There would have been no doubt in the minds of the faithful that this miracle was also from the LORD.

It didn't take long before the people questioned both the sobriety and mental state of the disciples. However, Peter stood up and began to quote from the scriptures all that the prophets had prophesied about this day and how it had been fulfilled in the person of Yeshua, whom they'd crucified. However this time, rather than plead for the disciples to stop speaking God's words as the people had done at Mt. Sinai, they now were asking for more. They wanted to know what they must do in light of their great sin. Peter replied, "Repent." (v. 38)

At Mt. Sinai, about 3000 people died as a result of their sin. This day, about 3000 people were added to

the number of those who believed. From the mountain, the commands of God were written on tablets of stone. At this Feast of Weeks, they were written on the hearts of those who believed. In the desert, they rejected the Holy Spirit's voice. Now, they had the Holy Spirit dwelling inside them, as a sign of their covenant relationship with God.

This is the power of Messiah to all who call upon the Name of the LORD.

A Holy Purpose

Remember that verse I told you to keep in mind a few pages back? Here's where it comes into play for us today. In case you're like me and you have forgotten, let's refresh our memories.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” - Exodus 19:4-6 ESV

God's purpose for making Israel a nation was so they would be a kingdom of priests, His treasured possession, set apart for God as His holy people. Those who were in agreement with His covenant, walking according to His ways, were to Him a beloved, cherished, highly valued treasure. And this wasn't just a place for Israel to hold. Listen to what Peter said in his letter to the church:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” - 1 Peter 2:9 (See also Rev. 1:6 and 5:10)

This is what the Messianic fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks is about; God turning not only Israel into a nation, but all who put their faith in Him, bringing us into a covenant relationship with Him, separating us as a holy people for His good purpose.

The call given to Israel at Mt. Sinai is the same call given to you and me and all who want to follow God. At the Feast of Weeks, we celebrate the fact that we have been given a place among God's people, Jew and Gentile alike. That not only has He revealed to us the terms of His covenant that we might enjoy a

relationship with Him, but He has also given us His Holy Spirit which enables us to live according to that covenant. We don't have to muster up the will power or the conviction to do it on our own, we simply have to depend upon Him. What a wonderful gift that is!

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Deuteronomy 16:16-17
- Ezekiel 36:22-27, 47:21-23
- John 14:25-26, 16:7-15
- Acts 20:16
- Romans 15:4-13
- 1 Corinthians 16:5-11
- Ephesians 2:18-19

Scripture Study:

(Taking time each day to meditate on God's Word)

- Acts 2:36-41 CJB

“Therefore, let the whole house of Isra’el know beyond doubt that God has made him both Lord and Messiah — this Yeshua, whom you executed on a stake!”

On hearing this, they were stung in their hearts; and they said to (Peter) and the other emissaries, “Brothers, what should we do?” (Peter) answered them, “Turn from

sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the (Holy Spirit)! For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away — as many as ADONAI our God may call!”

He pressed his case with many other arguments and kept pleading with them, “Save yourselves from this perverse generation!”

So those who accepted what he said were immersed, and there were added to the group that day about three thousand people.

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Teshuvah

The fall Feast period is a time that can take us on quite the emotional rollercoaster if we let it. First we are lifted to the joy and excitement of anticipating our Bridegroom's return, then lowered to the humbling reality that there will be a day of judgement for each of us, some of us finding mercy through the blood of Messiah, and others condemned to an eternal death. Finally, we're right back up on the mountain top as we look forward to eternity in the New Jerusalem with our LORD and Savior. Just as the spring Feasts pointed to Messiah's first coming, the appointed times of the fall point us to His return. If we want to understand end times prophecy, this is where we need to begin.

The preparation for this time actually begins with something known as the season of Teshuvah, (teh-shoo-vah), which begins thirty days before Yom Teruah, on the first day of the Hebrew month of Elul, and ends on Yom Kippur (yōm ki-pūr). (We'll go into more detail about those days in the next chapter.) Teshuvah means "repentance." It is a time of reflection as we examine our lives, the good and the bad, and take

an honest account of where we have departed from God and His ways. This is a time of repentance, as we seek forgiveness for our sins and return to an all-or-nothing pursuit of the God who saves us.

The Bride of Messiah

Recently, I learned that in Judaism, Elul, the month in which Teshuvah takes place, is an acronym for “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” (Song of Sol. 2:16 and 6:3) This is very fitting, because this theme of repentance and renewal is likened to that of a bride preparing for her bridegroom to come. Per Jewish custom, as the groom is away preparing the bridal chamber, the bride, while she waits, is diligently working to make herself ready for him. She is purifying herself with baths and oils, staying away from anything that might defile her or make her unclean, and preparing her lamp so she will be ready to go out and meet her beloved when he comes.

These concepts – purifying, abstaining, and preparing – are important for us to know as the bride of Messiah. They are what will help us be ready for our Heavenly Bridegroom when He returns. So let’s take a look at them one at a time so we can capture the fullness of their purpose for us.

Purification

As we think about purification, there are three verses I want us to consider. The first is Hebrews 9:22 which says, *“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (ESV)*

The only payment that can cancel the debt of our sin is the blood of a sinless sacrifice. This blood is what clears us of any defilement or wrongdoing. Without blood, without a sufficient sacrifice, there is no forgiveness for our sin.

Think about this for a moment. Our Messiah Yeshua became that perfect sacrifice on our behalf. It is through His blood that we become purified. Without Him, we would have no means of reconciliation with God.

The next scripture we’re going to look at is Ephesians 5:25-27. Here’s what it says:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that

she might be holy and without blemish.” (ESV)

Just as the bride of Yeshua’s day would have been purifying her body with oils and salves and ritual baths as she awaited her bridegroom’s return, we have been given the Word of God to wash our hearts and minds for the coming of our King. Messiah, our heavenly Bridegroom, washes us with His word. There is no water in the world that has the cleansing properties of the Word of God. It is what teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains us in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16)

During Old Testament times – which still applies to us today because we know that God’s Word never changes – when someone was considered to be unclean, for example by committing unintentional sin, touching an unclean thing, or having a disease or sickness, they were not allowed to take part in religious rituals or ceremonies. In some cases, they were commanded to remain outside the camp, quarantined if you will, until they were pronounced by the priests to be clean again. So if a bride, who was waiting for her bridegroom, was found to be in an unclean state when her bridegroom came, she would not be allowed to go out to meet him or take part in the marriage ceremony. Just think of the diligence she would have kept to make sure she would be ready when he came.

We now have a High Priest in heaven, who through the sacrifice of His own blood, declares us clean. (Heb. 9:11-14) Yeshua doesn't do any of this because we deserve it. He does it because He loves us. Because He is good. Because He will do whatever it takes for us to be with Him. Which brings us to the third verse for us to consider. Yeshua saved us, *“not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”* (Titus 3:5 ESV)

Not only does Messiah purify us, He equips us to continue to live in this new found cleanness by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Abstinence

Unlike purification, for which we do not have the power to carry out ourselves, abstinence is our responsibility. This is where it needs to get very real for us. As I stated earlier, if we are in an unclean state when Yeshua returns for His bride, we will not be able to go out to meet Him. Therefore, once we have been made clean, we must each be diligent to *“keep (ourselves) unstained from the world.”* (Jam. 1:27 ESV) Basically, we need to take care not to indulge our flesh which is in

direct opposition to the things of God, but rather live according to the Spirit which leads us into righteousness.

I always thought it was crazy how Esau was willing to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. (Gen. 25:29-34) What kind of person does that? Why would you give up your inheritance just because you were hungry? The thing is, we do that every single time we indulge our flesh. Let me say that again. We despise our birthright as children of God, called to be holy as He is holy, every time we indulge our sinful nature with the things of this world. (Heb. 12:14-17) I wish there were a way to convey the pangs of conviction I feel even as I write these words. If you are feeling them too, know you are not alone.

Our birthright, our inheritance, is the New Jerusalem. The requirement for us to receive that birthright is holiness. (Heb. 12:14) Why, then, would we take any pleasure in the things of this world, the things in direct opposition to the Word of God, when it means that it could cost us our inheritance? (Believe me, I pose that question to myself as much as I do anyone else.)

This does not mean that we will have no pleasure in this world. The beauty of God's creation is all around us and is one of the most tangible expressions of His

glory that we can see this side of heaven. (Rom. 1:20) He wants us to find joy in the life He has given us here. What I am talking about are the things of this world that are contrary to the things of God. Sexual immorality in every shape and form. Idolatry. The love of money and power and praise. Pridefulness. Lawlessness. Lust of the eyes and lust of the flesh. Unbelief, disobedience, and strife. (See Gal 5:16-26)

These are things that characterize the desires of the flesh. They are not in line with the fruit produced by those who have been set apart for God's holy purpose. If these things are characteristic of our lives, we need to take a serious account of whether or not our faith is genuine.

I won't tell you there isn't going to be a struggle. We are going to be tempted by the things of this world because we are still living in bodies corrupted by sin and predisposed to desire them. This is where walking by the Spirit so we will not gratify the desires of the flesh comes in. (Gal. 5:16) And we can trust that although we will be tempted, God will always give us the strength to resist it.

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with

the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” - 1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV

This is one reason, and probably the most important, for why we need a good, godly support network of people to walk this life with us. This helps provide accountability, encouragement, and a safe place to find help when we need it. We were not made to be solitary creatures. We were made to be a community – for fellowship with God and with others. If we surround ourselves with people who do not agree with what God’s Word says about sexual morality, social standards, and godly obedience, we are setting ourselves up to fail. Their influence will inevitably affect our mindset and our values and our choices.

So, too, will the things we put into our minds through music, movies, and social media. What we watch and listen to absolutely affects the way we think. It shapes our world view and our perception of right and wrong. So if we continue to watch inappropriate movies or TV shows, or listen to vulgar or suggestive music, our minds will become conditioned to affirm those things as acceptable and good.

However, if we fill our minds with good things, honorable things, and worthy things, it will strengthen

our resolve and our desire for the things of God. Just as feeding your body with good food makes your body stronger, so does feeding your heart and mind with the things that please God. As Paul reminded the church in Philippi, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* (Phil. 4:8 ESV)

Likewise, if we surround ourselves with people who love God, love each other, and love us, we will find there truly is strength in numbers. Maybe that’s partly the reason Rahab asked not only for her life, but also for her father’s entire household. (Josh. 2:12-13) Of course she wanted to save them from the imminent destruction that awaited the inhabitants of Jericho, but I’m sure that having the support of her family, who were all experiencing this new life together, was a great source of comfort to them all.

There is a pitfall here that we need to be aware of. Sometimes we can get so bogged down with avoiding sin that we lose sight of the joy that comes from following the LORD. Yes, there are things we aren’t supposed to do. They are things that will hurt us, defile us, and ultimately hinder and even sever our relationship with our Heavenly Father. We are told unequivocally to flee

from sin. (1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11) The things done in darkness should not even be spoken of by those of us who follow Messiah. (Eph. 5:12)

So, absolutely, there are things on our “do not do” list that we need to avoid. But, that doesn't have to be our main focus all the time. If we keep our eyes on righteousness, doing those good things that we are supposed to do, we will by default avoid those “don't do” things while still remaining in the joy of the LORD.

We get to spend time with God, and by default avoid the things of this world. We get to fill our minds with His word and His ways, and by default guard our hearts from the darkness around us. We get to be generous to those in need, and by default avoid the greed and lust of this life. We get to celebrate God through His appointed times, and by default avoid taking part in the works of darkness. When God is our joy, righteousness is our pursuit.

Preparation

Scripture uses the imagery of lamps to paint many pictures with spiritual significance. God's Word is a lamp to our feet. (Psa. 119:105) The eyes are the lamp of the body. (Matt. 6:22) The lamp in the temple represented the presence of God. (Exo. 27:20) And the

light of a lamp is used to represent the life within us, whether righteous or wicked. (Prov. 13:9)

Lately, there is one specific lamp that has been on my heart, and that is the lamp of the ten maidens in Matthew 25. I'm sure it has something to do with the approach of Yom Teruah – the day of the awakening trumpet blast, when our heavenly Bridegroom will call for His bride. And as I watch prophecy unfold around us, I know that the day of His return isn't far away.

So, let's take a look at Matthew 25 together, then we can talk more about what it means to keep our lamps lit and how it speaks to our need to be prepared for the day when Yeshua will come for those who are ready and waiting for Him.

“The Kingdom of Heaven at that time will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible. The foolish ones took lamps with them but no oil, whereas the others took flasks of oil with their lamps. Now the bridegroom was late, so they all went to sleep. It was the middle of the night when the cry rang out, ‘The bridegroom is here! Go out to meet him!’ The girls all woke up and prepared their lamps for lighting. The foolish ones said to the sensible ones, ‘Give us some of your oil, because

our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both you and us. Go to the oil dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ But as they were going off to buy, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Later, the other bridesmaids came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they cried, ‘Let us in!’ But he answered, ‘Indeed! I tell you, I don’t know you!’ So stay alert, because you know neither the day nor the hour.” (vv. 1-13 CJB)

A group of ten, Biblically speaking, signifies a representative group of people. Here, the group represented by the ten maidens are those who believe they are part of the bride of Messiah, those who have professed a faith and love for Him. However, their level of preparedness is what will show us whether or not their faith is genuine. What we’re going to see is that not everyone who thinks they are saved is truly saved.

Five of the maidens were wise and five were foolish, yet they both thought they were going to have a place at the wedding ceremony. It’s probably important for us to understand the scriptural difference between the two so we will know how to live our lives as ones who are wise, not foolish.

In chapter one, we went pretty deep into godly wisdom, so let's do a quick recap of what we learned. Proverbs 1:7 tells us that true and godly wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD. This isn't a terror-filled fear, but an awe-filled one. It is a reverential love that draws us to Him. Proverbs 24:14 tells us that those who have wisdom have a future and hope. According to Ecclesiastes 7:12, wisdom is a shelter, preserving those who have it, and Psalm 119:100 says that those who have wisdom follow the LORD's commands. According to Deuteronomy 4:5-8, it is through our obedience to His commands that we display godly wisdom like a light to those around us. Here's what it says:

“See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and

rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?” (ESV)

This reminds me of the parable Yeshua told in Matthew 5:14-16:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (ESV)

Our good works (obedience to Torah) are the light that glorifies God and leads others to Him. Yeshua said that He did not come to abolish this Law (Torah), but to teach it rightly. He taught us how to live out the Law as God intended, without all the man-made traditions the Pharisees had tacked on. And when we love Him, we will follow His example. By imitating Him, as Paul says, we will show others how to do the same. (1 Cor. 11:1)

The five wise maidens, by having their lamps and oil ready, were shining the light of both spiritual prudence and genuine love toward the one for whom they were waiting.

By contrast, foolishness, according to Matthew 7:24-27, is seen in disobedience to the LORD's commands, which in this context is likened to building one's house upon the sand. It has the appearance of being a sound home, but it lacks the foundation necessary to withstand the storm.

Foolishness is not taking seriously God's commands and His call to holiness, thinking that we've either got time to get it together so what's the rush, or that our intentions will, in the words of Alfred P. Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*, be enough to "get me to the church on time." But, we all know the saying about roads paved with good intentions, right? After all, we only live out those things which we truly believe.

This sounds a lot like the foolish maidens who did not heed the signs of their bridegroom's return. Although they knew he was coming, they did not make themselves ready because their hearts were not truly set on the one for whom they waited.

Oil, Biblically speaking, also holds a lot of significance. It is used in the anointing of priests and kings, is a sign of sanctification or consecration, and is symbolic of God's blessing. Oil was mixed with the grain of the offerings at the temple. We also see it used in several instances for healing. Oil is also a metaphor

for the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is the significance we see here in Matthew 25.

Pop quiz: what happens to a lamp with no oil? It burns out very quickly because it is just a wick with no oil to sustain the flame. It has an appearance of being a lamp, but it is missing a key ingredient required to fulfill its purpose. Five of the maidens brought their lamps along with an extra flask of oil. The other five, the foolish ones, brought lamps with no oil at all. Like empty lamps, they represent those who have an appearance of being saved, but lack the ingredient necessary for their salvation.

Yeshua said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, that it cannot be outward in appearance only. True and genuine love comes from our hearts, not from our works. It is an internal posture displayed externally through our actions. Without the oil of the Holy Spirit, any works that we do are just works done out of a belief that we can save ourselves. It is only by faith that we are saved. And that faith is the necessary ingredient from which the works, the shining light of our lamps, and the excitement of getting ready for our Bridegroom to return, all become as natural as a flame shining forth from a lamp full of oil.

Like the foolish maidens, those with no oil in their lamps have no substance to their faith, no Holy

Spirit guaranteeing their salvation. When they asked the wise maidens to share their oil, they refused. This is because salvation is a personal, individual experience. As much as I would like my faith to be enough for everyone else, we each have to come to Messiah on our own, repent of our own sins, and find forgiveness. It is a gift we all must make the choice to either accept or reject.

Just as the foolish maidens were not allowed into the wedding feast, Yeshua told us clearly that not everyone who claims to know Him will enter the kingdom of heaven.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ - Matthew 7:21-23 ESV

Those who do not enter the kingdom of heaven, although they did all kinds of things in His name, did not do the one thing that truly expresses our sincere love for Messiah – obedience to His commands out of love

and not legalism. They had an appearance of faith, but no substance.

I have to say, though, I think I'm one of the only people I know who gets a little excited when I see all the crazy things going on in the world today. It's not because I am glad these things are happening, but because I know it means our Bridegroom is right around the corner, and I can't wait to see Him!! And this is where the significance of these lamps become personally significant to each of us.

We, all of us who claim to be bridesmaids waiting for our Bridegroom, have God's unfailing Word in our hands. We have witnessed the fulfillment of His promises concerning Messiah's first coming, and we have not only the future promise of His return, but also a very clear picture of the events preceding it. We also have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whose job and purpose is to lead us into all wisdom and truth. (John 14:15-17, 16:13) Yet, even with all of this to help us, so many of us have still forgotten our oil. We are simply unprepared.

And that's what Teshuva is all about. It is a time of reflection. It is a time of repentance and preparation. It is a time for us to make sure that we have our lamps trimmed and our oil ready. This season – not limited to these forty days, but a mindset we should carry with us

all year long - is how we find out if our faith is more than just good intentions. Is our love for God enough to compel us to action? Or is it just lip service?

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Matthew 3:1-17
- Acts 26:19-20
- Romans 13:11-14
- Revelation 2:1-7

Scripture Study:

(Taking time each day to meditate on God's Word)

- Psalm 51:7-12 ESV

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that
you have broken rejoice.*

*Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all
my iniquities.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew
a right spirit within me.*

*Cast me not away from your presence, and take
not your Holy Spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and
uphold me with a willing spirit.*

Chapter Seven

The Covenants

I feel the need to step away from the Feasts for a moment, before we dig into the fall holy days. That's because only those who have entered into a covenant relationship with the LORD will be able to experience the blessing that the Feasts usher in.

If you're someone with little or no knowledge of the Biblical covenants, you are probably at an advantage here. You're not going to have as much to unlearn. I personally never really understood the covenants very well before I began to study them myself. I remember some vague teaching about how the covenant of the Old Testament had been replaced with something new. But, when I started to read the Bible on my own, I saw something different. What I saw were a lot of verses that said "everlasting covenant," and "My covenant I will not break." What really caught my attention were the verses that said they weren't only for the Jews, but also for the strangers and foreigners among them.

So, for those who have little or no knowledge of the covenants of the Bible, don't worry. We're going to

look at them together in enough depth for you to hopefully feel more confident in your understanding of them by the end of this chapter. If you are familiar with the covenants, then this may be more like a review for you – with a twist. Instead of relying on doctrine to explain them to us, we’re going to pick up the scriptural thread and see where it leads.

The First Covenant

A good starting place might be to understand what a covenant is. Simply speaking, it is a contract or agreement between two parties which is legal and binding. The terms of the covenant are clearly laid out – the expectations, responsibilities, goals, etc. – and these terms cannot be changed or altered except to strengthen or reaffirm them. In essence, covenants were forever, unbreakable and irrevocable.

The first covenant was made by God with Adam and Eve in the garden. Basically, it was very simple: Obey God and live, disobey and die. There weren’t a lot of rules, just one. Don’t eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:16-17) This wasn’t because God was being stingy, He was protecting them from the consequences that would come if they ate of that tree.

Paul explains that “*sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.*” (Rom. 5:13 ESV) So without a knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were just good. However, eating the fruit of that tree opened their eyes to sin, bringing with it all its consequences, including and ultimately their death.

Before eating from that tree, Adam and Eve knew no sin. Their minds and hearts were pure. They had no knowledge of sin or evil or lawlessness. But, when they gave in to the temptation, that disobedience gave birth to sin and brought forth death. (Jam. 1:15) This was the moment the knowledge of the Law came to be. The LORD then, according to the righteous requirement of the Law, sacrificed an animal and used its skin to cover over the nakedness (sin) of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:21)

This righteous requirement says that we must die for our sin. However, in God’s great mercy, He allowed for the substitution of the blood of an acceptable sacrifice to take our place. Only a spotless, sinless substitution could do that. But, this animal substitution could only cover over sin, not remove it. (Heb. 10:4) At some point, we would have to take account for ourselves unless something else came along that would not only cover over our sin, but take it away. (Are you sensing

something prophetic here? Good, because there is. And we'll get there soon!)

Although this is the first of the covenants, there are actually five that are considered the “Foundational Covenants” of the Bible; these are the Noahic (made with Noah), Abrahamic (made with Abraham), Mosaic (made with Moses), Davidic (you guessed it, made with David), and the New Covenant made through Yeshua.

Noahic Covenant

After the fall of Adam and Eve, the world began to spiral into complete evil and darkness, increasing with each generation and spreading throughout the earth until a man named Noah came along. Noah was said to be a righteous man, blameless before the LORD. (Gen 6:9) We already established in earlier chapters that righteousness before the LORD is only achieved through faith which is evidenced through obedience to His commands. Because we know that the knowledge of the Law came to be when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, we know that Noah knew the difference between sin and righteousness.

It was no accident that he was found to be blameless before the LORD. He had made a choice to

follow God and His ways instead of the evil that surrounded him. This is why, when God decided to send a flood to cleanse the world of the sin that enveloped it, He chose to shelter Noah and his family, along with some of the animals in the ark.

God has never condemned anyone without just cause. He has always given us a choice as to whether or not we want to follow Him or our sinful desires. So when God sent the flood to wipe out all of humanity except for Noah, his sons, and their wives, it was not without justification. Everyone who was doing evil knew he was doing evil and chose to do it anyway.

Once the flood subsided and Noah and His family were safe on dry ground, Noah promptly built an altar and made sacrifices to the LORD. (Gen. 8:20) These sacrifices, done according to the LORD's instruction, were a pleasing aroma to Him. They were a sign of Noah's faith in the LORD and His promise of salvation. God then made a covenant with Noah and set a rainbow in the sky as His sign. (Gen. 9:11-17) Although the LORD knew man would fail to keep up his end of the deal, God promised to never flood the earth again. (Gen. 9:11; Psa. 104:9)

Abrahamic Covenant

Next we have the Abrahamic covenant. Once again evil had taken a hold on humanity. This is when God called a man named Abram. He promised to make Abram (Abraham) the father of nations through whom the whole world would be blessed. (Gen. 26:4) The problem, however, was that Abram and his wife didn't have any children. In fact, Sarai (Sarah) was barren. However, Abram chose to believe God would do what He said He would do.

The sign of this covenant was the circumcision of every male in his household – family, slave, or free. It might sound weird, and maybe even a little archaic, to impose something so personal on a man. But, this act was actually in direct accord with it. God took an heirless man with a barren wife, way past their child-bearing years, and turned him into the father of nations. The very body part used to create children became the sign of this extraordinary promise. And as a circumcised people, it was a constant reminder of the covenant to which they belonged. (Gen 17:1-14; Rom. 4:11-12)

Again, we see that faith came first. Abram believed, then he obeyed. And not only did he obey, but he taught his family to do the same. (Gen. 18:19)

Mosaic Covenant

And now we come to Moses. Here's where we're going to see a significant change in the covenant. The terms are going to be the same, however there's going to be a shift in the delivery.

Up to this point, the Torah was handed down verbally from one generation to the next. Fathers taught it to their children, and on to their children's children. Animal sacrifices as a means of covering over sin, the rainbow, and circumcision were all signs of the promise made by God to those who believed in and followed Him. However being in captivity in a foreign country, surrounded by foreign gods, and forbidden to worship the God of their fathers caused a great distance between the LORD and His people. And it would seem, from their lack of knowledge concerning His ways, the fathers had ceased to teach their children the things of God. They needed someone to come and teach them again.

Previously, God had spoken to Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and even Moses face to face. But here at the foot of Mt. Sinai, when God began to speak to the people of Israel, they cowered in fear. So rather than continue to impose Himself where He was not wanted, He communed with Moses on the mountain top alone,

wrote His commands on tablets of stone, and Moses became the mediator between God and man. God gave them the blueprints for the Tabernacle, the earthly place where His presence would dwell, as a sign of the promise that He would be their God, and they would be His people.

Here in this moment, God was fulfilling a promise He'd made long ago. This was now the nation that was promised to Abraham. God was proving Himself faithful to His covenant and strengthening, or renewing His covenant with His people. He is, after all, *“the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”* (Deut. 7:9 ESV)

No longer were they dependent upon men to verbally carry the terms of the agreement, they were now written down by the hand of God. Israel was to be the LORD's *“treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,”* provided they obey the LORD and keep His commands. (Exo. 19:5-6 ESV)

But... they didn't. Israel failed to keep covenant with the LORD and once again everyone reverted to doing what was right in their own eyes. (Jud. 17:6)

Davidic Covenant

Regardless of how unfaithful we are, the LORD remains true to His Word. And although He had already established Israel as a kingdom, He was now about to give them a king. The thing is, Israel already had a King. God, Himself, was Israel's King. But, after years being governed by judges – people appointed by God to administer justice for Israel both domestically and in the face of their enemies – they wanted to be like everyone else. And everyone else had a human king sitting on a human throne ruling over them.

Goodness, this being set apart thing has been a hard one since the beginning of time. It's not easy to stand out and look different. There is a responsibility, a higher standard to which we must live, and it's more obvious when we mess up, mostly because people are just watching and waiting for us to make a mistake. Being a leader, especially when you're leading against the grain, is a difficult task. But, that was exactly what Israel – and all the children of God, including us – was supposed to do. They were supposed to lead people from all nations to the One True God. But, the only way to do that is to look like Him, not like the world.

We all know the saying 'be careful what you ask for.' It seems Israel should have thought about this

before they asked for a king. But they asked, and God answered. He gave them a king just like them – a man named Saul.

Saul was handsome, charismatic, and appealed greatly to the people. (1 Sam. 9:2) It didn't take long to see that he was more like them than they probably bargained for. Although he made a profession of faith and fidelity to the God of Israel, he quickly reverted to doing what was right in his own eyes, just like the rest of Israel continued to do.

Eventually, Saul reached the pinnacle of his disobedience when he *“spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them,”* which was in direct disobedience to what God had instructed him to do. (1 Sam. 15:9 ESV) That moment was the beginning of the end for King Saul. Now, God was going to pick someone who wasn't necessarily what the people would have picked. Instead of charm and appearance, His prerequisite was someone who was going to be a man after His own heart. (1 Sam. 13:14)

Here enters David. David is one who truly loved the LORD. He cherished the commandments of God even more than his own life. To him they *were* life. (Psa.

119:93) And although he made many mistakes along the way, his heart was one of repentance. He truly wanted to be a leader who led Israel in the way of Torah... and he was. And it was with David that God renewed His covenant, strengthening it once again with another promise: That his kingdom would last forever, and through the line of David, Messiah would come. (2 Sam. 7:16; Jer. 23:5-6)

God promised that His love would never depart from Israel, no matter how often or how far they strayed. He promised that He would not break His covenant nor alter the word that has come from His lips. (Psa. 89:34) And as we have seen, He's a pretty good promise keeper. Every promise He made concerning the past has come to pass. We can be sure that every one He made about the future will too. And this is why we need more than ever to understand this covenant into which we have been grafted.

The New Covenant

Here's where the unlearning started for me. I had always been taught that the Old Covenant, all the ones from the Old Testament given prior to the birth of Yeshua, had been made obsolete when He died on the

cross and rose again. And I can understand someone coming to that conclusion when we look at verses like Luke 22:20 when Yeshua said, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”* Or this one from Hebrews 8:13 which says, *“In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”* (ESV)

If we simply look at these verses and the few others like them, I would say yes, we are partakers of a new covenant and the old one is no more. New covenant, new set of rules, new way of salvation. Sounds right, right? But, what have we learned about context and how to interpret scripture? You can't take a few scriptures and use them to create doctrine. You have to look at the whole of the context then find a scriptural thread to support it. So let's go find that thread and see where it takes us. We're going to start in the Psalms:

“My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens. If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity

*with stripes, but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.” - Psalm 89:28-34
ESV*

*“He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.” - Psalm 105:8-10
ESV*

*“He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!” - Psalm 111:5-9
ESV*

This sure sounds like the covenant God made in the Old Testament was forever, unbreakable, and everlasting. Not something that was going to be done

away with some 500 years later. So where's the disconnect? It's in that pesky word "new." The original Greek word, *kainos*, does not carry with it the idea of replacing one thing with another. It carries the idea of renewal and of refreshing, not new in respect to time but in form.⁸

We saw with each of the covenants God made during the time of the Old Testament that He was taking the previous one and building upon it, either with a new and specific people or with a new and specific promise. They also had a new and unique sign associated with it.

Adam and Eve's was the skin of a sacrificed animal that covered over their sin. For the Noahic covenant, God added a rainbow in the sky and a promise that He would never flood the earth with rain again. In the Abrahamic covenant it was circumcision, pointing to the promise of an Heir through whom all the world would be blessed. In the Mosaic covenant we received the tablets of stone and the Tabernacle (which later became the Temple in Jerusalem), signifying that Israel was the chosen nation belonging to the LORD and everyone who was grafted into this community would also become heirs according to the promise. Next we had the Davidic covenant and with it the throne as a sign that the King of kings and Lord of lords would come from the line of David.

All these were parts of the same promise, the same terms regarding Torah, but with a renewed and strengthened guarantee. (Take a mental note of that last sentence here. It's going to come back to us as we dig deeper into the New Covenant.)

I think this is sufficient evidence for now to see that the covenants of the Old Testament were established forever. Now let's see if we can find a scriptural thread that supports the idea that the new covenant was a renewal rather than a replacement of the old. I think I have a great place for us to start.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the

least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” - Jeremiah 31:31-34 ESV

Here we find a very important distinction regarding the new covenant. We see that the delivery of the Law was going to be different. First it was oral, passed down verbally from one generation to the next. Then it was written, contained on the tablets of stone and on parchments read by the priests who then instructed the people. Now, the Law would be placed not in an ark, but inside the believers, written by God not on stone tablets but on our hearts. This is a really important point, because we only truly treasure those things that are in our hearts. (Matt. 6:21)

This is why the LORD said in Deuteronomy 6:5-7 that we are to “*love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*” (ESV) And why Yeshua said that if we love Him, we will obey His commands. (John 14:15) If we love Him, His law, His instruction, and His covenant will be written on our hearts. It is was drives

us, inspires us, and compels us to live out our love in obedience to Him.

Paul affirmed this understanding of the new covenant when he wrote to the Hebrews and said:

“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,’ then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin....

... Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” - Hebrews 10:15-18, 28-29 ESV

The terms of the covenant have not changed, but have reached their fullness in the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua. We are still called, as partakers of this covenant, to live a life of obedience to God. But now, we have God’s Word written on our

hearts, and we have His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. (John 16:13) We have His Spirit to help us discern what is true and what is not. (Rom. 12:2) To give us wisdom when we aren't sure. (Jam. 1:5) And as the guarantee, or sign, of His covenant promise. (Eph. 1:13-14)

We, just like Rahab, have become partakers and beneficiaries of the promise that God made and has confirmed with all mankind for all time. Israel, now, isn't just the Jews. It is the entire community of people from every nation who have chosen to follow the LORD. Here's how Paul explained it to the church in Ephesus:

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of

commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”
- Ephesians 2:11-18 ESV

Wait a minute. Did he just say that this union between Jew and Gentile into the same community and same promise of God was made by abolishing the commandments? Wouldn't that mean we don't have to do them anymore? This sure does sound like a contradiction to me. And to that I say yes... and no. There are no contradictions in scripture, only misinterpretations. With a proper contextual study we can always clear it up. Here, we need to understand what this "*law of commandments expressed in ordinances*" is, and to do that we're going to take a quick look at something we'll build upon more in a later chapter, which is Peter's vision in Acts 10.

To recap, Peter had a vision where all sorts of animals, including both unclean and common, were lowered down to him on some sort of sheet. (Acts 10:9-16) 'Unclean' was a term for what God said was off

limits. ‘Common’ was a term used for things man said was off limits. And God told Peter to stop calling common what He had called clean, to stop adding to His list of regulations trying to make oneself look more holy.

These were the commandments expressed in ordinances to which Paul was referring. Man-made laws and regulations which stated that the Gentiles were unclean causing a dividing wall of hostility between them and the Jews. Because Jews were taught that Gentiles were off limits, they vehemently shunned them so that they would not become unclean by association.

God was never hostile toward Gentiles. He was hostile toward sin and the people who embraced it, but never to anyone who wanted to come to Him in faith and love. That is evident in the life of Rahab, in the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with Israel, and with the fact that you and I are now grafted into that same community.

The law of man-made commandments expressed in ordinances that caused hostility between Jews and Gentiles are the commandments that were abolished, not the righteous commandments of God that teach us how to live in a way that pleases Him and blesses others. Paul further explains the effectual

application of the new covenant in this way:

“In past generations it was not made known to mankind, as the Spirit is now revealing it to his emissaries and prophets, that in union with the Messiah and through the Good News the Gentiles were to be joint heirs, a joint body and joint sharers with the Jews in what God has promised.” - Ephesians 3:5-6 CJB

Every covenant the LORD made was sealed in blood. In the Old Testament, although they were a picture of the fulfillment in Messiah, this was done through the sacrifice of animals. This new covenant, sealed with the blood of Messiah as the eternal and binding sacrifice for all people and for all time, is what it all pointed to. He is the only perfect, sinless, acceptable sacrifice which not only covers over sin as the animal sacrifices did, but effectively and fully removes it from our lives.

“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” - Hebrews 9:15 ESV

Our Guarantee

Here's where we need to take out that mental note and focus in on it. Just as we had the rainbow, and circumcision, and the tabernacle or temple, and the throne of David, we now have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as our sign. God gave us His Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our salvation, as the sign of our entering into agreement with His covenant. (Eph. 1:13-14)

The previous signs were tangible. They were things we could see. Things for which we had some sort of visible and verifiable proof of God's promise. But, the Holy Spirit isn't something we can see. What, then, is the evidence that we indeed have the Holy Spirit within us? Where is our proof of this guarantee of our salvation? How can we be sure that we are living in agreement with God's covenant and not just giving lip service to it? It sure would be nice if God gave us a way to know for sure. Well guess what, He did!

The proof of whether or not we have the Holy Spirit living in us is through something scripture calls "fruit." This fruit is seen in the works we do that are in line with God's word and His ways. Do you remember in the last chapter when we talked about not gratifying the flesh? This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. Here's how Paul explained it in Galatians 5:16-25:

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”
(ESV)

The job of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into all truth. (John 16:13) And what is truth? According to scripture, God’s Torah is truth. So if we indeed are being led by the Spirit, keeping in covenant with the

LORD, we have as our proof works that are in line with God's Law.

“Your righteousness is eternal righteousness, and your Torah is truth.” - Psalm 119:142 CJB

*“The main thing about your word is that it's true; and all your just rulings last forever.”
- Psalm 119:160 CJB*

“Set them apart for holiness by means of the truth — your word is truth.” - John 17:17 CJB

“If you really listened to him and were instructed about him, then you learned that since what is in Yeshua is truth, then, so far as your former way of life is concerned, you must strip off your old nature, because your old nature is thoroughly rotted by its deceptive desires; and you must let your spirits and minds keep being renewed, and clothe yourselves with the new nature created to be godly, which expresses itself in the righteousness and holiness that flow from the truth.” - Ephesians 4:21-24 CJB

Here's where the difference between holiness and legalism becomes glaringly evident. We can do things that look good. We can be very active in our churches and attend Sunday school and Bible studies. We can even be someone that others look at and say,

“He/she’s a really good person.” But even Yeshua said, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*” (Mark 10:18 ESV) The only truly good works are the ones done in line with God’s righteousness.

Yeshua went on in Mark 10 to illustrate that works of the Law alone will not get us into heaven. That’s legalism. Only the works that flow from a genuine gratitude for the salvation we have been given, ones done out of a love that compels us to act out our love in obedience knowing that nothing on this earth satisfies like being in the presence of our Heavenly Father.

What a wonderful promise, what an immeasurable gift we have been given, that God would not only give us a way to be restored to Him, but would also give us His Holy Spirit to guide, strengthen, and equip us to do it.

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Leviticus 19:33-34
- Matthew 26:26-29
- Hebrews 9:11-28, 11:1-12:2
- 1 John 2:1-14
- Psalm 119

Scripture Study:

(Taking time each day to meditate on God's Word)

- Hebrews 13:20-21 ESV

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Chapter Eight

The Fall Holy Days

Now we get to dive into the fall holy days, hopefully with as much excitement as a bride who is watching for her long awaited groom. We begin with Yom Teruah (yōm teh-roo-uh), the day of the awakening trumpet blast. You may be more familiar with the name Rosh Hashanah. It is the Jewish New Year, the beginning of the Hebrew civil calendar, and a time that looks forward to when Messiah will come for His bride. This season contains both a lot of history and a lot of prophecy, and it might turn out to be a really long chapter if I try to cover it all!

This is also the chapter with which I struggled the most to write. I didn't really know why at first. I love this season and everything about it. I felt like I had a pretty good grasp of the history behind it and the promises associated with it, although I know there's always more to learn. But, every time I sat down to write, I sensed a block... until now.

This happens sometimes when God wants me to wait. It's because there's something more I need to see,

a connection I have not yet found, or a different approach I need to take in trying to share what I've learned with others.

I think my writing block for this chapter came because I planned to go into the deep theological meaning of these fall holy days. But, there are other, better equipped teachers out there who have done a superior job, much more so than I could. I will include links to them in the resource section at the back of the book.

I think the path we need to take here is in the more personal nature of these days. Not that the theological meaning isn't personal, it is in fact deeply and profoundly so, and we will dig in to some of that here too. But, I don't want us to get bogged down with history and dates. I want us to get this as personally as we would a marriage proposal from our beloved.

Now I feel confident I know where God wants us to start. It's in a part of scripture that has both a personal connection for me and my walk with the LORD, and a connection to Yom Teruah. This scripture is Psalm 27, and we're going to start with its significance to me, specifically in verses 4-6:

*“Just one thing have I asked of ADONAI;
only this will I seek:*

*to live in the house of ADONAI
all the days of my life,
to see the beauty of ADONAI
and visit in his temple.
For he will conceal me in his shelter
on the day of trouble,
he will hide me in the folds of his tent,
he will set me high on a rock.
Then my head will be lifted up
above my surrounding foes,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, sing praises to ADONAI.” (CJB)*

Just For Me

In my early twenties, when I was just starting my walk with the LORD, I found this Psalm. I was fresh in my “saved from destruction” new life. I had spent years claiming to know the LORD, yet living completely contrary to His word and His will. That time of my life had been dark, lonely, and scary. I wanted better, but I didn’t know where to find it. Even if I had, I probably wouldn’t have believed I was worthy of it. That all changed when I decided to throw myself on the mercy

of God and hope that He might show me grace. And did He ever! Maybe this is why I relate so much to Rahab.

One day, as I was reading these verses in Psalm 27, they leapt off the page and right into my lap. Somehow, these words really, truly captured my heart. To seek after the face of God. To live in His house, with Him, all the days of my life. To see His beauty and sing praises to His name. Nothing on earth sounded better to me than that. All the fears that had plagued me for so long were being replaced with a fear of the LORD, and all the darkness that had surrounded me was fading away as my heart was invaded by His glorious light.

This may sound a little dramatic, but it's true. After years of running away from God, now my only desire was to chase after Him with everything I had. This was the new found zeal I talked about in the beginning of the book. The one that made some people think I was a little bit crazy.

I fumbled through my faith quite a bit, however, because I still had a huge need to be accepted and approved of by people. I had a deep need for the affirmation of others. So, instead of chasing God, I wound up chasing them – Bible teachers, church groups, pastors, even my new Christian friends. I thought that in pursuing them, I would find Him.

Yes, people can be avenues through whom we find the LORD, and godly relationships and mentors are so necessary to our walk. The fact that I'm writing this book attests to the fact that books and bible studies can be very helpful in our walk with the LORD. But they are not substitutes for a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father and the reading of His Word. This is exactly what these verses from Psalm 27 are pointing us to – a personal relationship that causes us to shun any substitute that comes our way. And this is where I am thankful that, in spite of myself, I believe I have wound up.

An Invitation for All

Yom Teruah, the Day of Trumpets, is the day when the LORD commanded His people to blow their shofar (trumpet) as a call for all to join the same pursuit about which King David penned in Psalm 27, and to which I felt so drawn twenty-something years ago. (Lev. 23:23) The sound of the shofar is meant to stir in us a desire to seek the LORD and to live in His presence all the days of our life. This is the first appointment our Messiah will keep when He returns, which I believe could be sooner than any of us realize.

With this chapter being a bit more personal in nature for me, a space I don't share casually, I hope that it will have a much more personal nature for you, too. We all need relationship, we need connection, and we need relatability. Sometimes that's what we need more than we need scripture memorization or contextual understanding or anything else. You can't get much more relational than a bride and her groom, and since we as believers are the bride of Yeshua, this is something we don't want to miss! (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:7)

The Last Trump and the Bridal Procession

There are three trumpets mentioned in the Bible which have names – the First Trump, the Last Trump, and the Great Trump. The First Trump was blown at the Feast of Shavuot, which we talked about in chapter five, when God betrothed the children of Israel (native born and adopted in) to Himself at Mt. Sinai, and was reconfirmed with the apostles and early church in Acts 2. The Last Trump is blown on Yom Teruah as a rehearsal for when Messiah will return for His bride and take her to the bridal chamber for seven years. The Great Trump is associated with Yom Kippur, and is prophetic of when Yeshua physically returns to take His place on

His throne in Jerusalem. We'll talk about this one more in a minute.

All throughout scripture, God likens His relationship with His people to that of a husband and wife. (Isa. 54:5; Hos. 2:19; John 3:29 and so many more!) Yeshua often used the Galilean wedding ceremony as a parable for this relationship as well. This covenant relationship always began with a proposal.

The groom-to-be would go to the home of the bride-to-be to propose. He would bring with him a '*Ketubah*,' (kuh-too-buh), which contained the written terms of the marriage covenant, and would present it to his intended and her father. If they both accepted the terms of the covenant, arrangements would be made for the betrothal ceremony. I want to make a note here that at the time of Yeshua, most marriages were pre-arranged. However, the bride had to be a willing participant. If she was not willing, the marriage would not take place. Marriage was not forced or coerced, but was a relationship into which both parties were invited.

At the betrothal ceremony, the bride and groom would drink from a cup of wine as a symbol of this new covenant and their agreement to willingly enter into it together. This was a sealing and confirming act and from this point, they were considered to be joined

together as one. This betrothal was as binding as the wedding ceremony itself.

Once the betrothal process was over, the preparation time began. This is when the bridegroom would leave his bride to go and prepare a place for her. This process usually took about a year, but in some cases even up to two. Neither the bride nor her groom knew when he would return for her. It was up to the bridegroom's father to decide when it was time.

When it was time, the bridegroom would go, usually at night, and stand outside the city and call to his bride with the sound of a shofar. The bride, who'd spent the last year or two waiting and making herself ready, would get up, along with her bridal party, and she would be carried by a great procession out of the city to meet her groom.

Once at the place of the wedding ceremony, the couple would stand beneath a '*chuppah*,' a sort of canopy or tent. Often these are made from a beautiful and ornate tapestry, other times a simple tallit was used. Among other things, this chuppah represented the home the groom had built for himself and his bride where they would abide together as husband and wife. Standing beneath this chuppah was symbolic of the bride placing herself under the care of her beloved. From there they

would enter the bridal chamber, and for seven days they would remain tucked away from the world. After the seven days were complete, the bridegroom would emerge from the chamber and present himself along with his bride to all the wedding guests. And thus they would begin their “together forever.”

Yeshua Our Bridegroom

I have a love/hate relationship with those princess fairytales we’ve all grown up reading and watching in movies. I love them because they so accurately depict the desire of every person for a love that defies the odds and always wins. One that is “meant to be” and will last forever. One that rescues, redeems, and endures. I hate them because they create in us a belief that a mere human can fulfill that role.

I spent years looking for love in all the wrong places. It was probably the source of every bad decision I’d made for the first twenty or so years of my life. Even after God saved me from myself and gave me the amazing man that is my husband, I have to remember that even he is not the end-all-be-all fulfillment of what my heart needs (although he comes pretty close!). There is only one love that can last forever, that will never let

us down, and will indeed conquer all. And that is the love of our heavenly Bridegroom.

Our Lord and Savior, Messiah Yeshua Himself, lived out and fulfilled the spiritual betrothal customs portrayed in the Galilean wedding ceremony. He has presented us with His Ketubah, the Torah, a marriage contract we have the choice to accept or reject. He has invited us into this covenant relationship, not with force or coercion, but with love.

At the last supper, Yeshua told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them, and that He would return again and take them to Himself. (John 14:2-3) This is a promise for you and me, too, when we enter into a covenant relationship with Him. Just as the bridegroom would leave to go and prepare a home for his beloved, Yeshua is even now preparing a place for us.

This is what Yom Teruah is all about. Our heavenly Bridegroom is going to come and blow the shofar, calling His bride out of this world and into eternity with Him.

I have an auto immune disorder that causes lots of problems like food allergies, inflammation, migraine headaches, and it mimics the symptoms of things like

lupus, chronic fatigue, and RA. Some days are great, some are good, and some not so much. The better I take care of myself, the better I feel, but even that takes a lot of effort on my part, and I'm not always good at doing so.

On the hard days, it can be especially difficult to keep a good attitude and stay positive about life in general. But on those days, God is so good to remind me of this truth: He is coming for me, and everything I experience in this life, good and bad, will be nothing in comparison to the glory of being in His presence. And remembering that truth, even if my physical pain or discomfort doesn't immediately go away, makes it more bearable.

This is the hope to which I cling, and at times clings to me when I'm too tired to hold onto it myself. It is the source of my strength and of my joy. It brings me peace when nothing else in this world seems to offer that to me. The fact that God even wants someone like me, that alone makes me love Him even more.

"It will take but a moment, the blink of an eye, at the final shofar. For the shofar will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever, and we too will be changed." - 1 Corinthians 15:52
CJB

Yom Kippur

Now we come to the most sacred and solemn of all the Feasts – Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is the one day of the year when the high priest could enter the holy of holies, the inner room of the temple, to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. It was on this day that people believed their names, should the sacrifice be accepted and their sins be forgiven, would be written in the Book of Life for the coming year.

Other sacrifices were made throughout the year for individual sins, for peace offerings, at the initiation or fulfillment of a vow, and for other reasons as well. We're not going to discuss them all in this book, but it's a great area for individual study should you want to learn more (and I highly suggest you do). But this sacrifice, this specific sacrifice that only occurred on this one day each year, was for the sins of the entire community of God's children. Either this sacrifice was accepted and you were covered for the coming year, or you weren't.

It is on this day that the Great Trumpet is blown. It points to when the Great and Final Trumpet will sound on the day of judgement at the end of the seven year tribulation period, when all people will be judged

by the LORD. It is on this final day that we will find ourselves covered by the blood of Messiah and will live in His presence forever, or we won't.

And this is the agony of the day for me: the knowledge that there are people who may choose not to enter the marriage covenant with our heavenly Bridegroom. This is also where it gets so very personal for me. I have family members who have rejected the knowledge of God, refusing to believe that He even exists. I have others who claim to know Him, yet their lifestyles say something completely different. Friends, we must be diligent to pray for people and to share the lavish love and mercy awaiting those who follow God. This is not a place where we can be complacent in our faith. As long as there is breath in one's lungs, there is hope; and because of that hope, we pray.

Here's where the beauty lies: the knowledge that we have been given a way to be restored to right standing with a Holy God. This is the whole purpose of Messiah, who before the foundation of the world, purposed to be the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice for all mankind. To be the way for humanity to be reconciled to God. We deserve death, and yet, through Him, we live.

Even in the garden, the skin of the animal

sacrificed for Adam and Eve only covered their nakedness. The blood of every animal shed on the altar since then only covered over the sins of the people. But, we have been given in Yeshua the Messiah, the only sufficient sacrifice that no longer covers over sin, but takes it away. He doesn't just hide our sin from His sight, He removes any sign of sin from our lives. We will truly be, through the blood of His sacrifice, presented to God as "*holy and blameless and above reproach before him.*" (Col. 1:22 ESV)

The beauty is that even a prostitute like Rahab and a heathen like me and a sinner like you can come boldly before the throne of grace and find mercy. (Heb. 4:16) We can find forgiveness and redemption in the arms of our loving Father.

Sukkot

Also called the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot is all about remembering how the LORD dwelt with Israel in the wilderness, and looking forward to when He will dwell with us again in the Messianic Kingdom. This Feast takes place five days after Yom Kippur and is probably most notable for the *Sukkah* which pops up at most Jewish homes during this time.

Sukkah is the singular form of *Sukkot* (pronounced soo-kúh and soo-kóte respectively), and is a sort of tent, or temporary dwelling, symbolic not only of the temporary dwellings that housed Israel for the forty years they wandered through the desert, but also of the fact that this world is not our home. We are temporary residents in a foreign land on our way to our eternal dwelling place.

This season moves us from the somber tone of repentance that marks the other fall holy days and brings us to what is known as “The Season of Our Joy.” This joy stems from knowing that our sins have been forgiven and we have been presented with another year to know and follow the God who saves us. Of this Feast, the LORD commands us saying:

*“You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.” - Deuteronomy 16:14-15
ESV*

Take joy, He says! Everyone! Jew, Gentile, slave, free, man, woman, rich, poor, rejoice in the blessings of God. And although this is the overarching theme during the time of Sukkot, it's an attitude we should keep with us always. As Paul said, "*Always be joyful. Pray regularly. In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.*" (1 Thes. 5:16-18 CJB)

God With Us

In some form, God has dwelt among His people since the creation of the world. He was there with Adam and Eve, walking and talking and communing with them in the garden. His presence was there in the wilderness as the LORD "*went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*" (Exo. 13:21 ESV)

Once the tabernacle was completed, "*the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*" (Exo. 40:34 ESV) When the temple was built in Jerusalem, that became the place

where God's presence rested.

When the Angel of the LORD visited Joseph as he contemplated what to do about Mary, his betrothed who just became pregnant with a child that wasn't his, the angel told Joseph not to forsake Mary because this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, "*and they will call him 'Immanu El.'* (The name means, "God is with us.")" (Matt. 1:23 CJB) It was in Yeshua that "*the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*" (Col. 1:19)

Although not specifically stated, a scriptural timeline can be drawn showing that, if not indeed on Sukkot itself, this was the time of year that Yeshua was born. It makes sense that the LORD would fulfill His prophecy to dwell among His people in this way.

Now we are told that we, the believers in Yeshua the Messiah, are the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells. (See 1 Cor. 6:9, 2 Cor. 6:16, and Eph. 2:22) When the LORD returns, we will dwell with Him once again in the fullness of His presence. Revelation 21:3 says, "*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*" (ESV)

Sukkot is also known as the Feast of the Nations. In his book, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*, Eddie

Chumney writes,

“The universal concern of G-d’s plan for the Jewish people reaches back to the covenant with Abraham (*Avraham*). In that agreement, G-d promised in Genesis (*Bereishit*) 12:3, as it is written, ‘...all families of the earth [shall] be blessed [through his seed].’ From Abraham (*Avraham*), G-d would raise up a people, Israel, to be a blessing to the nations. That promise was fulfilled through Yeshua, the Messiah, as stated in Galatians 3:8, 14, 16, 29. In fact, the greatest evangelism in the history of the world will be by the 144,000 anointed members from the tribes of Israel proclaiming the gospel (*basar*) of the Kingdom of Heaven through Yeshua HaMashiach (Rev. 14:1-7).”⁹

The gathering of Rahab and her father’s household unto the people of Israel was but a glimmer of the ingathering of the nations unto our LORD in the Messianic Kingdom. What a glorious day when the fulfillment of God’s promise is celebrated by believers from every tribe and language and people and nation all worshiping together around His throne. (Rev. 5:9)

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Leviticus 23:23-44
- Malachi 4:4-6
- John 7:1-10
- Ephesians 1:3-14
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-58
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Hebrews 9:1-12
- 2 Peter 3:8-13
- Revelation 21:1-27

Applying the Word:

(Being doers of the Word, not hearers only)

Take some time this week to meditate on the reality that Yeshua is going to return for His bride. Are you ready to meet Him when the shofar sounds? Ask the LORD to give you the desire and wisdom to live as one who is looking forward to and preparing for His return.

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Purim and Hanukkah

Purim and Hanukkah are two of my favorite seasons to celebrate. Part of it, I'm sure, is because of the many traditions and festivities associated with these seasons that make them so much fun. Things like baking hamentaschen (Yummy! I'll put a recipe for these in the resources section at the end of the book) and getting crazy with the noisemakers as we read the story of Esther for Purim. Or lighting candles in the hanukkiah as we say blessings each night of Hanukkah while eating fried foods like latkes and doughnuts. But even better than this, these two stories tell of God's miraculous deliverance from imminent destruction, something with which Rahab would have been very familiar.

All of the LORD's appointed times tell about the salvation of His people through Messiah. They are the times, or appointments, through which Messiah brings about His redemption plan. Purim and Hanukkah, however, reveal the plans of Satan, our adversary. They also show us, though, that no matter how hard our

enemy tries or how bad the outcome looks, God wins! And that is certainly something worth celebrating.

Purim

We find the story of Purim in the Book of Esther. If you're not familiar with this story, that's ok, we'll do a quick recap here. Esther was a Jewish girl living in Persia during the reign of King Ahasuerus. The Jews had been carted off to captivity because of their disobedience to the LORD, and were now living in enemy territory being ruled by a foreign king.

One night, at the end of a week-long extravagant party, Ahasuerus summoned his wife, Queen Vashti, to come show herself to his guests wearing only her royal crown. He'd just spent the last six months showing off the splendor of his kingdom, why not top it off with showing off his good-looking wife? When she refused, he had her banished from the kingdom and sent out a decree that all wives everywhere were to obey their husbands or suffer the same consequences. (Est. 1:1-21)

When the pomp and circumstance of the king's grand celebration wound down, and the wine wore off and his friends all went home, Ahasuerus' wifeless palace must have felt a bit empty. What does a lonely king do to comfort himself? He summons all the eligible

maidens of his kingdom, subjects them to twelve months of beauty treatments, then has them presented to him so he can pick a new queen. (Est. 2:1-4)

Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah, was one of these women. Esther was an orphan being raised by her uncle, Mordechai, a Jew living in the city of Susa. The Bible describes Esther as shapely and good-looking. (vv. 5-7) She quickly gained the favor of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of all the women, and she was given special treatment and position among the others. When it was her turn to go in to the king, you can probably guess that she gained favor is his sight, too. In fact, it was pretty much love at first sight for King Ahasuerus as he placed the crown on her head and declared her the queen. (vv. 12-19)

For time's sake, I'm going to skip a lot of the details here, but you can read the full story later if you want to. To make a long story short, the king had an advisor named Haman, who hated the Jews. He was the descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king who was supposed to be exterminated, along with all his people, by King Saul. However, Saul decided not to obey the LORD thereby not only allowing the lineage that brought forth Haman to continue, but also losing his place as king of Israel.

See what happens when we disobey God? There are consequences that are not only personal and immediate, but can be far reaching and long lasting. It just goes to show that God's ways are the best ways, even when we don't understand.

Anyhow, Haman hated the Jews, and as the king second in command, this hatred was only heightened when Mordechai refused to bow before him. Haman devised a plot to kill all the Jews in Persia and King Ahasuerus fell for it hook, line, and sinker. (Est. 3:1-15) It's important to note that up to this point, no one in the palace knew that Esther was a Jew.

When Mordechai learned of this plot, he tore his clothes, put on sack cloth and ashes, and began to pray. This was not just a regular kind of prayer, but a weeping, crying out, throwing himself on the mercy of God kind of prayer. Then he went to Esther. Mordechai knew that Esther, a Jew herself, must have been placed in the palace for "*such a time as this.*" (Est. 4:1-17)

Because no one in the palace knew that Esther was a Jew, when Haman devised his plan he was entirely unaware that it included the annihilation of the very object of King Ahasuerus' affection. And this put Esther in a very unique position.

No one was allowed to enter the king's presence unless summoned by him, but because of her faith in God and her love for her people, Esther came up with a plan of her own. She put on her royal robes and stood just outside the throne room where the king could see her. This could have gone one of two ways, either she would be found in defiance of the king and hanged, or given favor and invited in. Thankfully, once again Esther found favor.

Through a series of banquets Esther gave for the king and Haman, Esther revealed Haman's plot to kill not only the Jews, but Ahasuerus' very own queen. This enraged the king, who ordered that Haman be hanged on the very same gallows he had made to hang Mordechai. What a turn of events!

Although the king could not reverse the decree that proclaimed the annihilation of the Jews, he did make a new one stating that *"the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods."* (Est. 8:11 ESV)

Needless to say, the Jews were victorious. Not only were they not slaughtered by their enemies, but many of their enemies became Jews because they were

so afraid of them! (v. 17) A feast was declared and is now celebrated every year in remembrance of the LORD's deliverance over His people.

The History of Hanukkah

Hanukkah (also spelled Chanukah) was the second Biblical celebration to which the LORD drew my heart. It was December of 2016, I believe, and up to this point I knew some about Hanukkah, the tradition of the oil that burned for eight days, and something about the destruction of the temple, but I didn't know much of the details beyond that. That year, the first night of Hanukkah just happened to be on Christmas Eve. This really intrigued me, because I knew that in God's realm, there were no coincidences, and this inquiring mind just had to know more. I'll come back around to this in a bit, but for now I'll just say that God used this non-coincidence to speak deeply to me.

Hanukkah is only mentioned twice in the Bible, and it's easily missed if you don't know what to look for. First I want us to explore the events surrounding Hanukkah and then we'll look at where we find it in scripture.

In 174 B.C.E., a man named Antiochus IV began to rule in Syria. He was a vicious ruler with a serious

god complex. He called himself *Epiphanes*, which means “the gods’ beloved,” but behind his back he was called *Epimanes*, which means “madman,” a title much more fitting his nature.

During his reign, Antiochus was constantly at war back and forth with Egypt. On one such occasion, when he took his armies down to Egypt to fight, Rome stepped in to the aid of Egypt, and Antiochus was left retreating with his tail between his legs. For such a blood thirsty and narcissistic man, this was a hard loss. And what do you think he did? He decided to beat up on poor little Israel on his way back home.

Antiochus sought to unify his kingdom – which at this time included Israel – by means of a common religion and culture. First it was just by replacing the Jewish priests with ones willing to spread their Hellenistic ways. But now, being both angry and humiliated by his recent loss, Antiochus took his cruel tactics to another level. This meant either assimilation or annihilation for the Jews. They could either bow in submission to the gods of the Greeks or die.

Laws were enacted that forbade worship of the God of Israel, the temple scrolls were confiscated and burned, and the Sabbath, Feasts, and dietary laws were outlawed. Idols were set up in the temple, pigs were

sacrificed upon the altar, and any priest who refused to take part in the pagan rituals was put to death.

Some of the Jews, including priests and rabbis, succumbed to the pressure and valued their earthly lives over their love for God. But, many others did not. Countless lives were lost during this terrible campaign.

City by city, town by town, the Assyrian soldiers went, forcing the priests to commit pagan sacrifices or die. Eventually they made their way to the city of Modiin, where an old priest named Mattityahu lived. When ordered to sacrifice a pig on their pagan altar, Mattityahu refused, proclaiming his loyalty to God.

Another priest, seeking to appease the enemy, went to make the sacrifice instead. Mattityahu grabbed a sword, killed the priest, and then he and many of the other men there turned on the soldiers, killing many of them and causing the rest to turn and flee. Thus began what is now called the *Maccabean Revolt*.

Even after the death of Mattityahu, his son, Judah, rose up and led the people in their revolt against Syria, earning himself the title *Judah the Maccabee*, a name composed of the first letters of the Hebrew words *Mi Kamocha Ba'eilim Hashem*, meaning "Who is like You, O G-d." For the next three and a half years,

the faithful Jews fought back against the army of Antiochus IV.

God's people were victorious. Because of their unwavering faith and commitment to the God to whom they belonged, they were able to defeat one of the most powerful armies in the world. Once Jerusalem was liberated, the Jews returned to the temple and cleared it of the pagan idols and build a new altar, which they dedicated on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev, in the Hebrew year 3622 (139 B.C.E.).

Although the temple menorah had been stolen, they built a new one and were able to find a single bottle of pure olive oil bearing the name of the high priest Yochanon. However, it was only enough to light the menorah for one day. This was a problem, because the temple menorah is commanded by God to remain lit continually. It is never to go out as it is the symbol of His eternal presence.

The oil used for the menorah wasn't something that could be produced quickly. It took time and special care to be made and must be approved of by the high priest before it was allowed in temple service. It would take much longer than the one day's worth of oil that they had. However, that one bottle of oil, sufficient for only one day, lasted eight days, just long enough for more oil to be made.

Now every year, a special eight day celebration is held in remembrance of Israel's divine victory over their enemies and the rededication of the temple. A special menorah, called a hanukkiah, is lit each night beginning on the 25th of Kislev, as we remember the faithful Jew's who refused to bow in the face of tyranny, and the faithful God who saved them.

Hanukkah in the Bible

Unlike the other Feasts and festivals, the specific history and events surrounding Hanukkah are not found in the Bible. They are recorded in the books of 1st and 2nd Maccabees, and are considered part of the Jewish historical texts. However, we do find the prophecy and the observance of Hanukkah in both the old and new testaments.

The observance is found in John 10:22-23 when Yeshua was found in the temple during the "Feast of Dedication." Hanukkah means "dedication" in Hebrew, and is the observance or celebration of the victory given by God to the Jews over the Assyrian army and the rededication of the temple after it had been desecrated with the blood of pigs and their pagan idols.

What's so important about this, and what we so often miss, is that this festival not only pointed to a

victory past, but also to a victory yet to come. This festival pointed Israel to the Messiah who would come and bring lasting victory to God's people for eternity.

During the time Yeshua walked upon this earth, Israel was under oppression by the Roman Empire. They were actively looking for someone like Judah Maccabee to come and lead them in another revolt against their enemies. And with this being the Feast of Dedication, it was especially fresh in their minds.

What they missed is that this was exactly what Yeshua had come to do, but this victory wasn't going to look the same. Rather than lead a military conquest against their oppressors and establish His kingdom through worldly weapons and might, He was going to bring forth His kingdom in the hearts and minds of His people. Rather than defeat His opponents with warfare, He was going to win them with love. When they asked Yeshua point blank if He was indeed the coming Messiah, they didn't believe Him because He didn't look like the warrior they wanted Him to be. (John 10:24-42)

The prophecy of Hanukkah is found in Daniel 11, starting in verse 29:

“At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it

was before. For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.” (vv. 29-32 ESV)

Does any of this sound like what you just learned about Antiochus IV and the Maccabean Revolt? He went to battle Egypt (the south), was stopped by Rome (the ships of Kittim = a Roman war ship), took action against the holy covenant (banned observance of Torah), profaned the temple (sacrificed pigs on the altar and set up pagan idols), but the faithful stood firm and opposed him (refused to dishonor God). It all happened just as Daniel prophesied. This prophecy, however, was only one attempt of the enemy to fulfill his plan. (See also Daniel 8)

The Agenda of the Antichrist

The agenda of the Antichrist is to “*speak words against the Most High, and (to) wear out the saints of the Most High, and (to) think to change the times and the law;*” (Dan 7:25 ESV) In the cases of Purim and Hanukkah his plan was quite blatant. But even today, we can see him at work in much more subtle ways. At least they seem subtle because we have become so accustomed to them.

Not only did Satan (the Antichrist) try to abolish God’s Law and appointed times at Purim and Hanukkah, but he did it again through Constantine and the Roman Catholic Church at the councils of Nicaea and Laodicea. It was at those councils that the observance of the Sabbath, the “Jewish” holy days, and the Biblical dietary laws were outlawed, and pagan celebrations were put in their place.

The authority of scripture was put into question and was replaced with the authority of the pope to interpret scripture and enact new laws as he saw fit. But this time, instead of God’s people uniting and revolting in the face of such persecution, a dividing wall of hostility between Christians and Jews was formed, the same wall to which Paul refers in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” - Ephesians 2:14-16 ESV

Messiah came to tear down the manmade rules and doctrines that divided God’s people (Israel) from the rest of the world. He came to bring all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike, into the same family, heirs according to the same promise. Ironically, some of the Gentile ways that the church now embraces are the very things that once separated us from the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise, and left us without any hope in this world. (Eph. 2:11-12) We have traded the covenant of God into which we have been grafted for the traditions of man. (Mark 7:7-8)

If the enemy of our souls can get us to forget the God whom we claim to serve, and instead tie pretty red bows on the evil of this world so as to call it good, then he has successfully accomplished the battle he launched against God’s people all those years ago.

I'm not going to go into the origins of Christmas and Easter here, because I know from personal experience we need the tender correction of our Heavenly Father to nudge our hearts about something so dear to so many. I will ask you though, to please pray, take time to read the resources I'll include in the back of the book, and consider what these days really mean. God was very clear that we are not to worship Him as the pagans/gentiles worship their gods, and that is exactly what these holidays do. (Deut. 12:4; Ephesians 4:17)

For me, Easter was pretty easy to let go of, but I had a lot of joy and tradition tied up in Christmas. However, the more I sought God's heart, and the more I learned what these celebrations were really about, the less joy the memories I had of them brought me. And the more joy I found in embracing the appointed times of the LORD.

However, I will clearly and unequivocally say that we who claim to honor God have no business celebrating Halloween, something so very blatantly and horrifically evil. Halloween is the satanic high holy day for which animals and children (yes, children) are bred and groomed to be used for blood sacrifices. Woman and children are brutally sexually assaulted and mutilated on this night. The worship of the devil and all

that is evil is at its all-time high during Halloween.

This is happening in every country in the world, including the United States, all while we dress up in costumes and hand out candy, turning a blind eye to the truth. How dare we take any part of this day and call it harmless, innocent fun. Don't believe me? Please do some research. You'll be shocked and horrified at what you find.

God does not tell us to stay away from these things because of some selfish, egotistical need to not share His glory. He tells us to stay away from evil because He knows that it will destroy us. Every time we call evil good, every time we justify our involvement in darkness as "not that bad," we are giving Satan ground in our lives. We are giving him permission to influence us, afflict us, and torment us. God wants us to be safe and set apart for His good purpose, which means staying away from these pagan practices.

Now more than ever, we are experiencing a time when the world is calling evil good and demanding that we embrace it. I fear that soon it won't be that much different than it was when Antiochus IV invaded Israel, and we too may be faced with the choice to assimilate or suffer the consequences.

The LORD said this was going to happen as the last days drew near. We don't need to be afraid, we need to be ready. When we choose to hold fast to an unwavering devotion to God rather than bend to the ways of this world, the same strength and courage that rose up in Esther and Mattityahu, and in Paul and the disciples of the early church, and even in Rahab, will rise up in us. After all, we know that our Messiah is coming, and in Him we have eternal victory over all our enemies.

There are so many seasons and times when we can celebrate God in a way that glorifies Him without incorporating pagan practices. With such beautiful, meaningful, and God-honoring celebrations such as these and all the Feasts of the LORD, why would we want to settle for the counterfeits of this world?

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Deuteronomy 12:1-9
- Philippians 3:12-21
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- 2 Peter 3:14-18
- 1 John 2:18-29

Applying the Word:

(Being doers of the Word, not hearers only)

- Consider praying this week and asking God to reveal His heart to you concerning appropriate worship. Open your heart to the possibility that you may have to let go of some things you once held dear so that you can more fully embrace the God you love. Remember Rahab if you need some encouragement in this. If you need a starting point for your prayer, Psalm 139:23-24 might be a good place:

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts! And see
if there be any grievous way in me, and
lead me in the way everlasting!” (ESV)*

You Are What You Eat

This may be the most confrontational chapter of the entire book. I say confrontational because I am always amazed at the fervor with which people reject something as simple as feeding their bodies the way God said, insisting that because of our “Christian Liberty,” we can eat whatever we want. So, we’re going to be taking a very pointed look at the doctrine of clean and unclean foods using the scriptures as our lens. This way, maybe we’ll see just how important it is to take care of our bodies through what we eat, and how obedience to God in this way is not only beneficial physically, but how this can lead to spiritual blessings as well.

The Oxymoron of Unclean Food

The best place to start is where God outlined for Israel all the animals He considered to be acceptable for food and which aren’t. In Leviticus chapter 11, God distinguishes between the animals that are clean and

those that are not. He lays out pretty clear parameters on how to know the difference, and concludes this list by saying:

“This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.” - Leviticus 11:46-47 ESV

Here, God explains what may be eaten among every living creature, and what may not. Only the animals that were clean were acceptable for food. Unclean animals weren't. So to say something is an 'unclean food' would be an oxymoron, because if it is unclean, it isn't food at all.

When God created the animals, He made each of them with a very specific purpose in mind, and He designed their bodies to work in such a way as to accomplish that purpose. Most of the unclean animals are what we consider to be the janitors of the animal kingdom. They are the animals that eat decaying matter, or break it down, so that it doesn't just sit there and rot. They eat things like the dead bodies of other animals,

the waste products of living animals, and the bacteria and algae that accumulate in the soil, rivers, and oceans.

It's like that phrase, "you are what you eat." Their bodies are full of the junk they consume. But that's ok, because God designed their bodies specifically for that purpose. (See Genesis 7)

Eating those animals is almost like eating food from the trash can outside a busy restaurant after it's been sitting there for several days. Our bodies were not designed to eat that way. We need nutrients, not decaying matter. When God told us what was to be food for our bodies, it was because He knows what our bodies need to thrive and be healthy. And He should know, because He did create us after all.

But Yeshua Said...

In defense of our supposed Christian Liberty as related to what we can eat, many people turn to Mark 7:19, which says, "*(Thus he declared all foods clean).*" (ESV) Notice first that this was a parenthetical statement. They were not actually the words of Yeshua, but were a commentator's interjection. However, had He said this, it would have been true, just not the way most think. It is true because God did indeed declare that

all things that are good for food are considered clean.

Second, we need to consider the context of the statement, not just this one verse. Without contextual reference, we can take any number of verses and make them mean whatever we want. But as we talked about earlier, we cannot get a correct view of scripture if we try to infer our thoughts and opinions into it. We must use scripture to interpret itself.

If we go to the beginning of chapter seven, we see that the problem Yeshua was addressing was the criticism of the Pharisees against His disciples for not washing their hands according to the traditions of the elders. (v. 1-4) These traditions were not God's instructions, but manmade rules requiring a ceremonial washing of the hands before eating. Not one of them, especially the Pharisees, had any question as to which foods were clean and which were not, it was simply the manner in which they said food should be eaten.

Yeshua then criticized the scribes and Pharisees for departing from the commands of God and holding to the traditions of man. He pointed out that they had no concern for God's ways, only their own version of holiness –

“Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

‘These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.

They worship Me in vain;

they teach as doctrine the precepts of men.’

You have disregarded the commandment of God to keep the tradition of men.” - Mark 7:6-8 BSB

God calling the foods clean wasn't enough for the Pharisees. They tacked on extra measures to make them, if it were even possible, cleaner than God had. The Pharisees believed that by eating without washing their hands as the Pharisees commanded, the disciples were in effect making the food unclean. Yeshua scolded them for this, called out the wickedness of their hearts, and said that it was not the Pharisees rules, but God's declaration that made food clean.

We have neither the right nor the ability to set up our own moral standards. When we begin to do this even in such a seemingly insignificant area, we slide quickly into the same state of society as in the time of the judges, when everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes. (Jud. 21:25) Sadly, we see this happening in many ways today. The only way to defend against such a departure from the LORD is to maintain a faithfulness to His commands even in the “little things.”

Peter's Dream

In Acts chapter ten, Peter had a vision. In this vision, something like a large sheet came down from heaven, and upon it were creatures of all kinds, both clean and unclean. A voice said to him, “*Rise Peter, kill and eat.*” (Acts 10:9-13 ESV)

Peter responded by saying, “*By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.*” (v. 14) (Take special note of what Peter said here. If Yeshua had indeed called all things clean in Mark 7, why then would Peter, who was one of the twelve closest to Him, still be refusing to eat unclean things?) This happened three times before the sheet was taken back into heaven and the vision was gone. Peter was perplexed by the dream, and pondered it for some time.

The church widely teaches that this vision given to Peter meant that all animals had been declared acceptable for food. There was no longer clean and unclean, but all things were now good to eat. But again, that assumption removes any contextual relevance. For indeed, Peter did not rise, kill, and eat. He instead rose and took the Gospel to the Gentiles! Let's look more closely at how these events surrounding Peter's dream unfolded.

Just before Peter's vision, another man was visited in a vision by an angel of God. This man was a Roman centurion named Cornelius. He is described as a *"devout man, a 'God-fearer,' as was his whole household; he gave generously to help the Jewish poor and prayed regularly to God."* (Acts 10:2 CJB)

Cornelius lived much like the Jews did. He observed Torah, feared the LORD, gave alms to the needy within the Jewish community, and prayed according to Jewish tradition. Basically, if you didn't know He wasn't a Jew, you would have thought he was. However, being a member of the Roman army, converting to the Hebrew faith would have meant death for him and his family. Never-the-less, he showed a great love for the Jews and their God.

God saw his love and devotion. His prayers and acts of charity had gone up as a pleasing aroma before the LORD. (v. 4) And because of this, God told him to go find a man named Peter.

Here's where we need to get knee deep in some word study. There are two words we need to understand that were used in Peter's vision. Those words are 'common' and 'unclean.' (v. 14) Rabbinically speaking, these two words referred to things that were off limits, one according to God, and the other according to man.

Unclean was a term for things that God commanded us to stay away from. *Common* was a term for all the extra things that man thought needed to be added to the list.

According to tradition, the Jews considered the Gentiles to be unclean. They were part of that “common things” list they’d compiled over the centuries. This is one reason they failed to draw the nations to the LORD. Unless one was willing to undergo all the rituals they required to become Jewish, Gentiles had no place among God’s children, or so their traditions went. The Jews wouldn’t talk to them, eat with them, and certainly not worship with them. This is where the Biblical interpretation of Peter’s dream becomes really important.

The LORD told Peter not to call common the things He’d called clean. Don’t take the things He’d said were ok and declare them off limits. Never ever did God say that the Gentiles were unclean. He said not to worship the way they worshiped, not to partake in their sin, but also to never refuse them the opportunity to worship the LORD. In fact, as we discussed in chapter two, that was the whole purpose of the nation of Israel, to draw others to God and show them how to live holy lives set apart for Him.

As Peter sat and pondered the vision,

Cornelius's men knocked on his door. After an assurance by the Holy Spirit that he was to go with them (v. 20), they left together the next day and traveled to Cornelius's house. When Peter arrived, he found the house full of people waiting for him, and he said:

*“You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. **But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean**; so when I was summoned, I came without raising any questions.” (v. 28-29 CJB, emphasis added)*

Cornelius immediately told Peter about his vision and how the LORD had instructed him to send for Peter. This was a pivotal point, as I'm sure Peter's own vision had been swirling in his head the whole time, too. For a second time, Peter reveals the meaning of his vision:

“Then (Peter) addressed them: ‘I now understand that God does not play favorites, but that whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what people he belongs to.’” (v. 34-35 CJB)

Had Peter not received his vision before Cornelius's men showed up, he never would have gone with them to Caesarea. More importantly, he never would have taken the Gospel to the Gentiles. Peter later, when debate arose among the church elders as to what a Gentile must do to be saved, used this event to remind them of how God had opened the door to the Gentiles without condition. (Acts 15:6-11)

God did not declare unclean things clean, He confronted the doctrines set by manmade traditions that called clean things unclean.

As I was studying for another chapter, something jumped out to me that is relevant to us here. Acts 2:42 says, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" (ESV)

The time between Acts 2 and Peter's vision in Acts 10 was seven years. For seven years, as the early church gathered together for fellowship and instruction, the apostles were teaching them to follow God's instruction concerning clean and unclean animals, just as they had been taught by Messiah. Now, all of a sudden, we are told that God changed His mind?

That's not how God works. He is the same

yesterday, today and forever. (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8) He does not change His mind. (Num. 23:19). And His covenant, including what is appropriate for food and what is not, is everlasting. (Deut. 11:1) By calling unclean things clean, we have essentially done the very same thing the LORD was telling Peter not to do, and that is changing, by adding to or taking away from, God's Word. (Deut. 4:2, 12:32)

Do Not Grieve Your Brother

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times – context is everything. Removing the context of scripture is the number one cause of false doctrines. So many times, our misunderstanding of the original language and culture, and our inability to connect a single verse to the others surrounding it, has led to many misinterpretations of the words printed on the pages of our Bibles. This is exactly the case in terms of Romans 14:20 and what we think it says about food. Here's what it says:

“Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.” - Romans 14:20 ESV

If we read this verse alone, with no context in which to understand it, it sure sounds like Paul has now said we can eat anything we want. So let's go back and start at verse one to get some of that context I keep talking about.

“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.” - Romans 1:1-6 ESV

It seems that some sort of debate had arisen within the church, about which Paul is urging the

believers not to quarrel. There are some things that matter and are worth arguing over, and some that aren't. Some things are non-negotiable and some things we need to leave up to God to give us wisdom. To Paul, whatever it was that they were quarreling over was not one of those "necessary to our salvation" kind of debates. In fact, Paul says that this kind of quarreling can cause our weaker brothers to stumble in their faith.

So what was this debate all about? This is where having an understanding of the culture and doctrines of that day comes in handy. It helps us decipher some of the seemingly vague references within this chapter, like why one would only eat veggies and another will eat anything, or why one esteems a certain day over another while others esteem them all the same.

It was common practice among the Jewish religious leaders to fast two days each week, Monday and Thursday. This was a practice that began after the destruction of the first temple and was not a complete fast, but only vegetables and water were permitted. We see reference to this tradition in Luke 18:9-14 when Yeshua contrasted the false righteousness of the Pharisee and the true repentance of the tax collector.

These two fasting days were esteemed as better than other days only by those who were adhering to this

manmade doctrine. It was not a command from God. The only fast day commanded by Him was the Day of Atonement. Not that fasting isn't permitted apart from this day, it is simply not required. Those who didn't follow the traditions of the Pharisees but only the commands of God, would have seen these days as the same as all the rest, apart from the Sabbath, and would have had no reason to abstain from any type of food.

The brother to whom Paul refers in verse one is the brother whose faith is not yet as strong as the ones to whom he's writing. He's likely new in his walk with Yeshua and is still learning. He's still growing. And he's probably trying to figure out how to distinguish between the manmade doctrines he'd been taught his whole life, and the actual commands of God.

Does that sound familiar? It sure does to me. It should also serve as a reminder for us to be gentle with each other as we learn and grow in our faith. To be sensitive to where each of us is in our walk, so that we may be an encouragement and support for each other rather than a stumbling block.

With this context in mind, we can more clearly understand what Paul says in verses 14-15:

"I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus

that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.” (ESV)

*NOTE: The Greek word here is not accurately translated as unclean, but common.

Nothing is unclean in itself. A pig isn't unclean because it's a pig. It's unclean because God said it's unclean. Just like the common things from Peter's vision, it's not up to us to say whether or not something is off limits. So if someone is observing a fast day because they want to honor God and someone told them this is the way to do it, as long as it's not breaking one of His commandments, we don't need to make a big issue out of it. God will show them what honors Him if they truly want to know.

If our not fasting in the same way causes our brother to stumble in his faith, would it not be to his benefit to walk with him in gentleness and compassion as he learns? Not that we have to observe the fast as he does, but when we are around him, it would certainly be a gracious gesture to walk with him in this way. And I don't think it would hurt any of us to eat a salad instead of a steak once in a while.

Now, with this new understanding, let's read verses 19-21:

“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.” (ESV)

We're not talking about breaking God's commandments and eating things that aren't permitted as food, it's about loving our brothers and sisters in the faith enough to not cause unnecessary strife. Instead, pray for them that they, too, will find the same freedom we have found in true obedience. And who knows, maybe this fasting is having a spiritual work in them that you can't see.

Big Things and Little Things

Some rules are much easier to follow than others. Don't murder someone, don't rob a bank, don't commit adultery, these are things no one argues about whether or not they are wrong. They're pretty big offenses that can carry with them pretty big

consequences. Other things, like eating shellfish or pork, don't seem like that big of a deal. It's easier for us to justify or excuse or even simply ignore those rules because, well, who are they really hurting?

Although the earthly consequences for those things are not the same, the spiritual and eternal consequences are. Eating shrimp scampi for dinner may not send us to hell, although it might, (See Isaiah 66:17 and 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 and 1 John 2:3-4), because it could be exposing not just an ignorance concerning the LORD's instruction, but the truth of our hearts and our lack of desire to live according to His ways.

All sin, every single one, causes distance between us and our Creator. Our obedience even to these "lesser sins," and maybe even especially, speaks directly to the condition of our heart. In our walk with God, even the little things matter.

Do we love God and want to please Him? Do we long for the holiness that only comes from following His ways? Do we truly and earnestly want to pursue righteousness, even if it means crucifying our flesh and consecrating ourselves in such seemingly insignificant ways? Do we trust God's instruction even when we don't understand or agree?

Don't think for one moment that all these things are going to be easy, especially when we first begin to walk according to God's Torah. Some things might seem effortless while others come with great struggle. Paul meant what he said when he told us there was a battle raging between our flesh and our spirit, and the only way to win is to crucify our flesh every single day. (Gal. 5:17)

The better we get at crucifying our flesh, the better we get at giving life to the Spirit within us, which enables us to live not for sin but for righteousness. (Gal. 5:16) The more in tune we are with the will of God, and the more we choose to walk in His ways, the easier and more natural it becomes. It really does become an act of love and not a burden.

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Leviticus 11:46-47
- Deuteronomy 14:3-21
- Luke 18:9-14
- 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Applying the Word:

(Being doers of the Word, not hearers only)

- Is there a food you enjoy that is on the “do not eat” list? Consider committing to not eat that food for the next 30 days. You may find that you don't miss it that much after all.

Love God, Love Your Neighbor

There is an account recorded in Matthew 22:34-40, when the Pharisees conspired together once again to try to trip Yeshua up. They really wanted to catch Him somehow speaking or teaching against God and His Torah. So one of them, thinking he was being pretty clever, asked Him this question:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” (v. 36 ESV)

The Pharisees already knew that all of God’s commandments held the same weight. Obedience to them all carried the same blessing, and disobedience to any carried the same punishment. No matter which law Yeshua chose, it would have become ammunition for them to accuse Him of some sort of heresy. Once again, He proved that their human conniving could never outwit His divine wisdom. Here was His response:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall

love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (vv. 37-40 ESV)

Yeshua didn't just pick one law and say it was the greatest, He summed up the whole of Torah in these two statements. He clearly and concisely stated that there is not one thing in God's instruction that isn't important. This is why John tells us that if we love God we will obey His commandments, and if we love others, you guessed it, we will obey His commandments. (1 John 2:3, 5:2) That's because everything in the law and spoken of by the prophets teaches us how to do these two things.

God is love. He doesn't just act it out, He embodies it. That is why His Torah is all about teaching us how to love Him and how to love others. We've looked at many ways in which we can show our love for the LORD, acts of obedience that are directed specifically toward honoring Him. But, we can't have a book about learning to love God without learning to love others, too.

This chapter was actually inspired by my husband. He's got an amazing servant's heart and I've seen him go out of his way to help others. It's one of the many reasons I love him so much. But, this inspiration came when we were having one of our "spiritual"

discussions. He and I are not always on the same page about things, and we sometimes have to agree to disagree while we take a step back and let God work on our hearts and bring us onto the same page. This was one of those times.

We had been talking about the obedience in which we are called to walk, but most of the discussion had centered around the things we do for God. Ways we are called to walk, worship, celebrate, abstain. All of a sudden he asked, “What about helping others? I mean, isn’t that important too?” He was making the point that it shouldn’t end there, stuck in our own little congregations as we perform all these rituals with the world shut outside in the cold. And he was right.

Loving Others

When the Bible describes God, we see that He is mighty, compassionate, righteous, kind, merciful, holy, and so much more. These are all attributes of His divine character. But when it comes to the essence of His being, scripture tells us that *God is love*. (1 John 4:16) Everything he does, everything else about Him stems from that love.

Our lives are to be reflections of His love as it speaks of both His character and His essence to the

world. After all, love is what first drew our hearts to God and it is what will draw others to Him as well. We do this by tangibly expressing that love through our actions first to those who are our brothers and sisters within the church, and also to those on the outside looking in. (Gal. 6:10)

The best big-picture Biblical example I have found that shows us what this love for others looks like is in Acts 2:42-47. The believers had just received the Holy Spirit at Shavuot, and through their testimony many others were being added to their community of faith and fellowship every day. Here is how it describes them:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the

Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” - Acts 2:42-47 ESV

We really need this to sink in. Sometimes hearing things more than once or in a different way can help us better internalize it, so let’s read that again in another translation.

“They continued faithfully in the teaching of the emissaries, in fellowship, in breaking bread and in the prayers. Everyone was filled with awe, and many miracles and signs took place through the emissaries. All those trusting in Yeshua stayed together and had everything in common; in fact, they sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to all who were in need. Continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose to meet in the Temple courts daily, and breaking bread in their several homes, they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart, praising God and having the respect of all the people. And day after day the Lord kept adding to them those who were being saved.” (CJB)

This is so different from what much of our society and communities look like today. We’ve got our cliques and our “tribes” and, if you’re like me, you don’t

venture out of that group very often. Many of us belong to large congregations where you can attend for years without ever knowing more than ten people, because you become just another face in the crowd. Sunday morning services often end with people rushing out the door to beat the lunch crowd or get home in time to watch whatever game is on TV that day.

But the early church, they weren't just a group of people who happened to believe in the same God. They were family. Their fellowship was a priority, and their lifestyle of love and community attested to that.

As a western society, generally speaking, we store up and tuck away and collect more stuff and build our castles, and if there's a little left over, we might help some worthy cause. But the early church, filled with the Spirit of God, was a true community. They counted nothing as their own, but considered each other's needs first. They sold and gave away just so the needs within their community could be met. Some had more to give, some had less, but none the less they all treated their possessions as opportunities to bless others.

Not that stuff is bad. Stuff can be good and fun and one of the ways God blesses us and enables us to bless others. But, when our love of stuff overshadows our love for others, it's a problem.

The early church was a community that loved God and loved others, not in word alone, but also in deed. They ate together, prayed together, and pursued the heart of God together. It wasn't just a once a week on Sunday kind of thing, it was each and every day. The early church lived in a community that truly honored the heart of God.

Beyond the Acceptable Standard

There are so many examples of how God's Law teaches us how to love our neighbor. Don't lie, don't steal, don't murder, don't hate, don't commit adultery. I think most everyone would agree those things are wrong. Even atheists would probably be on board with this list. However, God's Word, although it includes these things, goes even beyond them. His heart for us is not just to avoid hurting someone, but to be an active part in helping, healing, and uplifting them.

One great and really simple example of how God has instructed us to meet the needs of others is seen in Leviticus 19:9-10. Here, God instructs His people not to harvest all the way to the edges of their fields. God told Israel to leave what was at the edges and anything dropped while harvesting for the poor and foreigners

among them. This is a reminder for us to always set aside something for those who are less fortunate than us. To be prepared beforehand so when we see a need, we are able to fill it.

One way my family and I keep this reminder before us is by keeping a *tzedakah* box. “*Tzedakah*” (tseh-dah-kuh) is a Hebrew word often translated as “charity,” although it is probably better rendered as “righteousness.” Every Sabbath, I place our box on the dinner table next to the candles and everyone is given a dollar to put inside. It’s kind of like a piggy bank, but instead of saving for ourselves, we keep the money until we are presented with a need from someone around us.

A few dollars a week may not sound like much, but it accumulates over time. I can’t tell you how many times that money has come at just the right time for just the right person. But, even more than that, it’s a weekly reminder for our family to keep our eyes open to the needs around us and to look for opportunities to help others – whether with our money, our time, or our talents.

God knows our needs even before we do. And the beautiful thing about God is He doesn’t have to save up or set aside or be reminded to fill those needs when they arise. He is already ready to help us in our time of

need. This is why we can come with confidence before the throne of grace to find the mercy we need to help us through whatever circumstance we face. (Heb. 4:16) This is God's heart toward us, and this is the love He calls us to show others as well.

Yeshua summed it up pretty well in Matthew 7:

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, **for this is the Law and the Prophets.**” (vv. 7-12 ESV, emphasis added)*

Pop quiz: What does God's Torah teach us? How to love God and how to love others. The more I learn about Torah, the more I understand just how much we are loved by God and just how good He is to have shown us how to love Him back. And loving others is

one way we show our love for Him. (1 John 5:2)

A Legacy of Love

I think this is a great place to take a moment and look back at our friend Rahab. Part of how we can learn what someone was like is by the legacy they leave behind. We've already seen that hers was one of faith, but it was also one of love.

Rahab, once settled nicely into the community of Israel, married a man named Salmon. Even less is said about Salmon than about Rahab, although there is a lot of speculation out there. Some say he may have been one of the two spies who hid in Rahab's house, or that he was one of Joshua's generals.

Whoever he was, it is not out of reason to believe that he was a prosperous man with a good reputation (we'll see more why I believe that in a minute.). And it appears that he had a kind and merciful heart, because he overlooked Rahab's pagan roots and sexually immoral past and saw the new person she had become as a child of God, and chose to marry her because of that. This is a testimony to all of us with a less than stellar past. Who we used to be has nothing to do with who we now are as children of God.

We can see some of Rahab and Salmon's legacy in what we know about their son, Boaz. His life and character are rooted in that of his parents through their example of faith and love. In Ruth 2:1 of the ESV Bible, Boaz is described as a worthy man. Other translations call him wealthy, mighty, rich or important. And as the son of a pagan woman who'd been grafted into the community of Israel, he likely had a special place in his heart for foreigners.

Boaz met one such foreigner named Ruth, when she was gleaning in his field; from the edges he'd left for the poor and the foreigner according to God's instruction. It is likely that Rahab was a recipient of this same act of grace when she first entered the community of Israel. She and Salmon likely put this into practice in their own fields, and Boaz, no doubt, lived this out because of the godly example of his parents.

Because he chose to show love for others through obedience to this specific instruction, Ruth was able to provide food for herself and Naomi, her mother-in-law. Had he not been obedient to this command, Ruth would have gone somewhere else, and history would have looked very different. Their love story would have ceased to unfold and the legacy of Rahab may have ended with him.

Without question, Rahab's all-or-nothing love for the God who'd saved her allowed Boaz to see past Ruth's pagan roots to her modesty, her work ethic, and her kindness toward her mother-in-law. All of these things are what made him fall in love with her.

This legacy of love continued throughout the generations as Salmon and Rahab birthed Boaz, Boaz and Ruth birthed Obed, Obed became the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David, a man after God's own heart. (Matt. 1:5-6) This is also the line from which Yeshua our Messiah came, God in the flesh, who showed us what it really means to love God and love others.

Faith In Action

If you've ever been in a relationship that ended badly, you've probably said something like this: "If he really loved me, he would have been more attentive to my needs," or "If she really loved me, she would have treated me better," or "If he really loved me, he would have cared more about what's important to me."

The way we can tell if someone loves us is by how they treat us. Do they treat us well? Do they care about our needs? Are they kind and helpful and

encouraging? These things are an external litmus test for whether or not one's love and affection are genuine. And in a healthy, loving relationship, these are actions that ought to be reciprocal. Likewise, in our relationship with the LORD, our actions produced out of love are the litmus test of whether or not our faith is genuine.

James highlighted this point when he said:

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such ‘faith’ able to save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, and someone says to him, ‘Shalom! Keep warm and eat hearty!’ without giving him what he needs, what good does it do? Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions!” - James 2:14-18 CJB

Often times love comes with warm and fuzzy feelings that compel us to act out our love in tangible ways. But, sometimes it is a choice we make despite our feelings. This is because love is not a feeling, it's a choice. Our feelings neither validate nor negate God's command to love others.

Sometimes that love is self-sacrificing, sometimes it's hard and exhausting, sometimes it might even seem mean or unloving to the person to whom we are showing love. When someone I loved was making very poor life choices and I had to stop cleaning up the messes she was making, she was angry and hurt. But, I knew the only way for her to start making better choices was to let her feel the consequences of her actions. Neither she nor I had any warm and fuzzies. That kind of love wasn't easy, but it was love none the less.

Pangs of Conviction

As I've studied for and written this chapter, I have come face to face with areas in my life where love has been lacking. But, that's just God's form of tough love for me, I guess. You see, when we read His Word and feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, it compels us to do better once we've learned better. I felt that kind of conviction when I read what John wrote in 1 John 3:

“From the beginning you were told that we must love each other. Don't be like Cain, who belonged to the devil and murdered his own brother. Why did he murder him? He did it

because his brother was good, and he was evil. My friends, don't be surprised if the people of this world hate you. Our love for each other proves that we have gone from death to life. But if you don't love each other, you are still under the power of death. If you hate each other, you are murderers, and we know that murderers do not have eternal life. We know what love is because Jesus gave his life for us. That's why we must give our lives for each other. If we have all we need and see one of our own people in need, we must have pity on that person, or else we cannot say we love God. Children, you show love for others by truly helping them, and not merely by talking about it. When we love others, we know that we belong to the truth, and we feel at ease in the presence of God." - 1 John 3:11-19 CEV

This was the conviction: When have I seen a brother or sister (those of the household of God) who had a need I could have filled... and I didn't? When did I see a need that, by filling that need, would have shown the love of God tangibly to someone who needs to see it... and I didn't?

I admittedly wrestle with God a bit on this topic. Where is the line between love and self? For example,

is it selfish to buy an expensive new car instead of a less expensive or even used one when the money I would have saved could have been given to the local women's shelter or children's home? Or helped a friend who was short on rent? Or bought groceries for a neighbor who was out of work? Or....

This may sound silly to you, but when we begin to walk and learn and grow in our faith, and when our heart's desire truly becomes that of pleasing the LORD, these questions will inevitably arise. This is where our flesh will rise up and start to battle against our spirit as we sift and sort and wrestle between the heart of God and the ways of this world. My best advice is to pray. Ask God how to be a good steward of your money, your time, and your resources. And go where you feel His peace. After all, when we ask Him for wisdom, He will give it abundantly, provided we ask with confidence and don't spend time second guessing the answer when it comes. (Jam. 1:5-6)

We can't give in to the feelings of guilt inflicted by our enemy any more than we should give in to the feelings of selfishness that arise from our flesh. It's ok to take a vacation with your family. It's ok to get your nails done. It's ok to live in a nice home or drive a nice car or have a pantry full of healthy, organic food. What's

not ok is neglecting to acknowledge the needs of those around us or being indifferent to the suffering of others.

For my son's math credit this year, he is taking a personal finance course. In this course, it teaches the importance of putting money in a retirement savings account. It also encourages one to begin this type of saving as soon as possible, even as a teenager or in your early twenties. The sooner you start saving, the more you will have once you retire.

The thought behind this is to anticipate a future need and prepare for it today. This is, I believe, the heart behind God's command to love others. We need to remain aware that needs are going to arise, personal needs and the needs of others, and we are to steward our time, money, and resources in such a way that when those needs come, we, as a community, are able to meet them. After all, should we be the one with a need that arises which we are unable to handle ourselves, what a blessing it would be if others were ready, willing, and able to help us.

This is what community looks like, what fellowship looks like. Love for God and love for others are inseparable aspects of the same virtue. As the Apostle Paul said:

“Look out for each other’s interests and not just for your own. Let your attitude toward one another be governed by your being in union with the Messiah Yeshua.” - Philippians 2:4-5 CJB

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Leviticus 19:9-18
- Isaiah 58:6-14
- Luke 10:25-37
- Galatians 6:8-10
- Philippians 2:1-11
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

Applying the Word:

(Being doers of the Word, not hearers only)

Pray and ask God to show you a need that you can fill. Then fill it.

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The Hope of Our Salvation

“Salvation exists in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” - Acts 4:12 BSB

I know we’ve touched on the topic of salvation, to some extent, in every chapter of this book so far. But, simply touching on it isn’t enough. Our salvation is in fact the pivotal moment when we move from life to death, from lawlessness to righteousness, and from “destined for destruction” to “saved according to His promise.” It is the point upon which genuine faith rests.

Obedience to God’s ~~Word~~ commandments is not a means of salvation. We cannot earn it. Salvation is a gift given to us by grace through our faith in Yeshua as our Messiah. (Eph. 2:8) Everything else in this book is like leaves sprouting forth from a tree firmly planted by the LORD beside streams of Living Water. So, this is where we’re going to camp out together for the next chapter, establishing an understanding of what salvation is according to scripture, so that we may have full

confidence in faith of the promised hope of our salvation. (Heb. 10:22-23)

By Definition

According to the Strong's Bible Concordance, the word 'salvation' in both Hebrew and Greek, carries the concept of deliverance, rescue, help or aid, and victory.¹⁰ It impresses the idea that there is something from which one needs to be saved, and from which one cannot save himself.

Think about it this way: You're walking alone near a river bank when all of a sudden you step into quicksand. You realize that your feet are stuck, and the harder you work to free yourself, the more you begin to sink. The branches of the trees around you are just out of your reach and you have no way to pull yourself out. You have no idea what to do and unless someone else comes along and offers their assistance, there is no means of escape.

Our salvation is much the same. Each one of us is stuck in the quicksand of our sinful nature. No matter how hard we try to do good works, we will never measure up to the holy standard to which we have been

called. All of us have sinned, and all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

In the very beginning, Adam and Eve were created spotless, sinless, and good. They were created in the image of God in the fullness of His righteousness. But Adam and Eve, when they were tempted by Satan, gave in to the desires of their flesh and defied the one command God had given them – “*you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*” (Gen.2:17 BSB) They ate, their eyes were then opened to the knowledge of good and evil, and this single act of disobedience brought sin into the world and into the hearts of every person born ever since. (Gen. 3:1-7, Rom. 6:12)

I really want to blame Adam and Eve sometimes, for all the things wrong with the world today. If they had just obeyed... But, then I am reminded that had it been Bob and Julie, or Hassan and Rochelle, or Mick and Lynn, or Nigel and Mei, (you and I could easily insert our names into this sentence), the outcome would have been the same. We do not have the ability in our own flesh to defeat the temptations of the devil any more than any of us could save ourselves from a giant pit of quicksand. This is why our salvation is and can only be a gift.

What Are We Saved From?

Without the redemption that comes through salvation in Yeshua the Messiah, we are slaves to our flesh and its sinful desires. (Rom. 6:6) Paul calls this the law of sin and death. (Rom. 7:23) According to the law of sin and death, on that day when we stand before God and must give an account for our lives, we will be judged according to how well we upheld the righteous requirement of the Law. (1 Pet. 4:5) And being found sinners, we will die.

Death is separation. We experience this separation whenever loved ones die and we are separated from them in this life. But, this life is not all there is. Spiritual life goes beyond the finite, temporal one we live here on earth. There is an eternal life we enter into the moment we leave this world. Eternity is divided into two places – one is completely surrounded by the presence of God, the other is completely separated from it.

In the presence of God we have light, we have life, we have peace. In His presence we find all that is good and pure. There is no pain, only joy. There is no sickness, only healing. There is no want, only complete satisfaction stemming from the One who supplies all our needs. (Rev. 21:3-4)

By contrast, in the absence of God's presence there is no joy, only anguish. There will be no comfort, only pain. There will be no light, only suffocating darkness enveloping everything it touches. For how can there be any good when the presence of the One through whom everything good exists cannot be found? (Luke 13:28)

Here on earth, we have the presence of light and darkness, of good and evil. (Deut. 30:15) We can feel the presence of God and at the same time know the temptations of the enemy. Even the worst of circumstances here on earth cannot compare to the complete absence of God's presence in the world to come, because even here we still have hope. And though at times we may feel like we are in hell, we are not, although that is exactly what our sinful nature deserves.

On the flip side, no matter how good and comfortable and exciting our life here on earth might be, we are far from the perfection of God's eternal presence. The mantras permeating our society today like *You only live once* and *Live your best life now* are only illusions. No earthly fame or fortune can compare with the riches of heaven. The reality of our sin defiles the perfection in which we were created and, without the salvation found only through Messiah, excludes us from a life with our Creator.

But God... two of the most profound and humbling words ever spoken. Paul tells us that Messiah came to set us free from the law of sin and death – both the penalty of our sin and the act of sin itself. (Rom. 8:2) This, he says, is grace. (Rom. 6:14)

Grace says that we, who through faith, have believed in Messiah as our Lord and Savior, are no longer slaves to sin, but to righteousness. We are no longer bound to the desires of our flesh, instead we are able to live according to the Spirit within us, whose job is to teach and lead us into obedience to God. (John 14:26) And on that day, when we stand before God and must give an account for our lives, we will be judged according to how well Messiah upheld the righteous requirement of the Law – and because He was without sin, we will live! (1 John 3:5) Oh what grace that is! (2 Cor. 5:21)

Let us not mistake this grace, however, as a free pass to sin. As Paul said to the church in Rome:

“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to

*righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” – Romans 6:15-18
ESV*

Hell Is Real

Too many of us today live as if hell were not a reality. We have been so saturated with a message that God is love that we have forgotten that He is also just. We wonder how a good God could ever send anyone to hell, when a better question might be how can a righteous God do anything else? We blame God for our freedom to choose instead of thanking Him for a solution to our sinful ways.

God wants to be with us. The fact that He created us in the first place attests to that. He knows the things that will hurt us, defile us, burden us, and even destroy us, and like any good father, the LORD gave us loving instruction to keep us away from harm.

But we say, if He really loved us, He would let us do what we want so we can be happy. If it makes us

happy, it must not be bad. Would I let my child run across the street if I saw a semi-truck speeding toward her? But she only wanted to chase that butterfly! It would have made her so happy! No, it would have made her dead.

We don't always see or understand the consequences of sin or the far reaching effects it can have. Sometimes, often times, we see sinful choices through rose colored glasses. It looks like love, it feels like joy, it sounds like peace. However, Satan is very good at tying pretty red bows on evil and making us believe it's good. He is the great counterfeiter, parading around as an angel of light and blinding the minds of unbelievers. (2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Cor. 4:4)

Although we may not always understand, God does. And in the end, He knows our sin will wind us up in hell. This is why God tells us to flee from sin; not just acknowledge it or point it out, but run far from it. Sin, like fire, has a way of burning us when we dance too close to the flame.

What Are We Saved For

What we have been saved *from* is only half of the hope of our salvation. There is also that which we

have been saved *for*. Salvation is not simply a single act. Yes, salvation begins at the moment we repent of our sins and believe in Yeshua as our LORD and Savior. (Acts 3:19) However, our salvation continues to be worked out as long as we are here on earth. (Phil. 2:12) This is the process of sanctification, the faith + works that James talks about in his letter. He explains that true, genuine faith is proven by the works that it produces. (Jam. 2:17-26)

Anyone can say they believe in God, but that does not mean that our confession is true. James tells us that even the demons believe in God, yet they shudder in fear! (James 2:19) So, if simply claiming to believe isn't enough, what is?

I had a boyfriend when I was in my teens and early twenties. We dated for over two years. He said he loved me, and I wanted so badly to believe him. I made all sorts of excuses for him in my mind, but the truth was that he lied to me, cheated on me, and stole from me. Very rarely did he do anything that resembled love for me.

It's amazing how I spent so long trying to justify his behavior as love. Most of my friends wondered why I chose to remain in a relationship with him at all. I over

looked his behavior and chose to hope that his words would someday prove to be true.

I think that we often do that in our relationship with the LORD. Not that we try to justify His love for us, but our love for Him. Isn't it enough that we say we love Him? Isn't it enough that we go to church? So what if I still watch inappropriate movies, or dishonor the Sabbath, or ignore the orphan and widow, or use crude and vulgar language, or do what is right in my own eyes? When we treat the LORD this way, we are showing love for Him about as well as my ex-boyfriend did for me.

When we truly love someone, it becomes something that radiates from us. Finding ways to show them becomes the most exciting part of our day. Others can see our love just by the way we look at him or her. If there is something that makes them happy, we go out of our way to do it. If there is something that bothers them or makes them sad, we avoid it as best we can. We don't just tell the person we love them, we show them every chance we get.

Thankfully, now I am married to a man who does a much better job at expressing his love for me. Even after two decades it can still be hard sometimes to get this right, but I know his heart for me and he knows

my heart for him. We trust our love for each other because we have a track record of works, not just words, which show our love for each other is genuine. And we are committed to this love even on the days when we aren't felling those warm and fuzzies.

When we love God, we want to show Him. Our obedience to His instruction is not an effort to earn His love for us, we are simply trying to display our love for Him. This is what it means to believe in God in a way that brings salvation. Not just, a belief that God exists, such as that of the demons. But, a belief that He loves us, sent His Son to die in our place, raised Him from the grave in victory over sin and death, and now gives us life through faith in Him.

Our salvation is immediate in the forgiveness we receive when we first believe. It is ongoing in the fruit it produces in our lives here on earth. And it will come in its fullness when we see God face to face in eternity.

This idea that love leads us to obedience is a thread that winds its way all throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation in verses like Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 5:10, Daniel 9:4, 1 John 2:3-4 and 5:2-3, and Revelation 14:12. As Yeshua said, if we love God, we will keep His commandments. (John 14:15)

The grace we receive is not a pass to keep on sinning. Anyone who loves God does not make a practice of sin, but pursues righteousness. (Rom. 6:1-2) God's grace washes away the sins of our past and grants us forgiveness for when we mess up in the future.

I couldn't explain this any better than King David, so I won't try. Let's read what he had to say:

*"I have gained perfect freedom by following your teachings, and I trust them so much that I tell them to kings. I love your commands! They bring me happiness. I love and respect them and will keep them in mind. Don't forget your promise to me, your servant. I depend on it. When I am hurting, I find comfort in your promise that leads to life."- Psalm 119:45-50
CEV*

We have been saved with a promise that leads to life. That is the hope of our salvation. That is what we have been saved for. We have been granted a salvation that ends all our stories with a happily ever after. But this salvation, this hope, is not just in the life to come. We are called to a freedom right here and right now, which is gained by following the righteous teachings of God – *Torah*.

This is the same freedom of which Paul spoke when he spoke of submitting ourselves to the law of grace. We are no longer slaves to sin, but servants of the Most High God. We are no longer bound by the chains of death, but redeemed by the Giver of life. It is not a burden for those of us who have been given this gift of salvation to walk according to the Law, but a blessing and a joy. We have been saved so we may know the goodness of God, and make Him known to those around us. We have been saved from the chains of our sinful flesh so we may become holy as He is holy. (1 Pet. 1:15-16)

Both Sides of the Promise

As I began to study and prepare to write this chapter, I looked up every verse in the Bible that contains the word “salvation.” I found it interesting that the first use of this word is not until the second to last chapter of Genesis. Although the concept of the LORD’s deliverance is everywhere in those first forty-eight chapters, it was surprising to me that it took so long for this word to appear.

What’s more interesting is the fact that it is nestled within the blessings and prophecies Jacob spoke over his sons, just after the words he spoke to Dan.

“I wait for your salvation, O LORD.” – Genesis 49:18 ESV

There are a few tidbits about Dan that are helpful for us to know because they help illuminate the profoundness of this inconspicuous verse. First is the fact that Dan is not included in the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel who are sealed during the time of the tribulation. (Rev. 7:4-8) The purpose of those who are sealed will be to proclaim the way of the LORD’s salvation to all who are here during that time. Although I have yet to find an obvious explanation as to why Dan will not be numbered among them, I believe that looking at Jacob’s prophetic vision for his future will help us draw some conclusions.

“Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that his rider falls backward.” – Genesis 49:16-17 ESV

In scripture, a serpent represents Satan, the adversary of the LORD’s anointed. He is portrayed as the accuser of God’s people. (Rev. 12:10) A likely conclusion is that Dan will be the tribe from whom the antichrist comes, or at the very least, his strongest ally within Israel. Just as Judas, one of the twelve disciples,

betrayed Yeshua, so too may Dan, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, betray the children of God.

Jacob, through the gift of divine wisdom, saw this. And the response of his heart was to wait upon the salvation of the LORD. Do you remember in chapter four, when I began to use the name Yeshua instead of His nickname, Jesus? Yeshua is the Hebrew word for salvation. Jacob was waiting for the Yeshua of the LORD, the Messiah who was to come. Even then he looked forward to the hope of his Deliverer.

This same sentiment is echoed from David and all through the prophets in verses such as Psalm 25:5, *“Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.”* Lamentations 3:26, *“It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”* And Micah 7:7, *“But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.”* (all quotes from the ESV)

All of God’s faithful servants of the Old Testament waited for and looked forward to the coming salvation of the LORD. They all waited with hope-filled expectation for the fulfillment of the promise of God. Hebrews 11 is full of examples who trusted God’s

promise to save those who love Him, and lived out that faith in obedience to Him.

Faith, according to Hebrews 11, is the assurance of things hoped for and confidence in things not yet seen. (v.1) We are also told that without faith, it is impossible to please God. (v. 6) All of these witnesses showed us what sincere faith looks like – obedience. It is because of faith that we are able to live in obedience to God, and it is our obedience that brings Him pleasure. It is our obedience that speaks love. And it is our obedience that leads us to the salvation that is waiting for us in Messiah.

This great cloud of witnesses from Hebrews 11 had the hope of a promise to come. We have the proof of a promise fulfilled. (vv. 39-40) Abraham, Moses, David, Rahab, the prophets, they all had faith that God would do what He said He would do. We get the privilege of seeing that fulfillment come to pass. We also now join them in their hope of the ultimate fulfillment of that promise when Messiah returns for His bride and defeats sin and death forever.

The Sinners Prayer

If you've been in church for any amount of time, you've probably heard of something called *the sinner's*

prayer. It is a prayer we are told to pray when we decide we want to give our lives to Jesus. The call is often given on Sunday morning after the sermon, when the pastor invites people to step out of their seats and come down the isles to the front of the church where someone – usually a deacon, elder, or pastor – will lead you to pray something like this:

“Lord, I ask you to come into my heart and forgive me of my sins. Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross for me so that I can be a part of your family. Help me to live according to your word. Amen”

I'm not going to say this is wrong, in fact it may be a very good start. However, too often, people walk back to their seats after praying this prayer and remain entirely unchanged. They continue to sit in the pews of the church and listen to the Sunday sermon each week, yet their lives on the other six days look just like they did before. If this is the case, we have to ask ourselves what is missing. Why are we not seeing a transformation in every person who prays that prayer?

Maybe it is because nowhere in scripture does it tell us to say a prayer inviting Jesus/Yeshua into our hearts. Instead we find a call to repentance. Rather than extending an invitation for God to meet us on our terms, we are given an invitation to accept salvation according

to His terms, which are found in His Torah.

Scripture is clear that everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21), but what exactly does that mean? We've already established that just believing that God exists doesn't cut it. Even Satan and his demons believe that. So how do we know that our declaration of faith is one that saves?

Peter's bold words in Acts 2 give us some insight. Here we find the disciples gathered together at the temple for Shavuot (Pentecost) forty days after Yeshua's ascension into heaven. As they were praying, tongues of fire (the Holy Spirit) fell upon them and they all began speaking in other tongues so that every devout man, even those who had come from other nations to celebrate Shavuot at the temple in Jerusalem, could hear them speak in his native tongue.

Were they drunk? Were they possessed? No, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, who gave them utterance as He willed so that no man there had excuse to say they didn't hear the Word of God which was being proclaimed to them.

Peter stood among them and began a conclusive account of how scripture had prophesied of a coming

Messiah, who was manifest in the person of Yeshua, whom they crucified. He was raised from the dead in victory over sin and death and was now seated at the right hand of God. Yeshua was indeed Lord and Messiah. (v. 14-36)

The people who heard this were cut to the heart and asked what they were to do. (Acts 2:37) They realized their folly and wanted to know how they could find forgiveness. This is the same reaction we see over and over throughout scripture when someone with a receptive heart is confronted with their sin. Here are just a few examples:

“Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read it before the king. When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, ‘Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that

*is written concerning us.’” – 2 Kings 22:10-13
ESV*

“But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.’” – 2 Samuel, 24:10 ESV

“The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.” – 2 Chronicles 33:10-13 ESV

“And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen

the King, the LORD of hosts!’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’” – Isaiah 6:5-7 ESV

“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, ‘O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.’” – Daniel 9:3-5 ESV

There are so many more examples, but these are sufficient to affirm the pattern of a truly repentant heart. Repentant is the key word here. The reality of our sin should break us. It should bring us to our knees before a holy God as we seek His forgiveness and grace. If we confess our sin, God will faithfully and fully forgive us and take the stain of our sin away. (1 John 1:9)

Not everyone who feels sorrow for their sin

turns from it. 2 Corinthians 7:10 tells us that “*godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*” (ESV) No matter how sorry we are for our sin, if our sorrow does not cause us to turn from our sin to God, it is meaningless.

Repentance

True repentance brings change. It is a turning away from our sin and disobedience to a sincere devotion to God and His Word. The grace we find in the forgiveness of our sins is not a pass to keep on sinning or to keep living life the same way we did before we came to a knowledge of Messiah. Paul makes this point in his letter to the Romans over and over again in verses like Romans 6:1-2, when he says, “*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?*” (ESV, see also Rom. 3:31 and 6:15)

These aren’t just the words of Paul. This is indeed what he and the apostles were taught by Yeshua Himself. John affirmed this when he said,

*“And this is the message **which we have heard from him** and proclaim to you: God is light, and*

there is no darkness in him — none! If we claim to have fellowship with him while we are walking in the darkness, we are lying and not living out the truth. But if we are walking in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of his Son Yeshua purifies us from all sin. If we claim not to have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, then, since he is trustworthy and just, he will forgive them and purify us from all wrongdoing.” – 1 John 1:5-9 CJB (Emphasis added)

I have always said that Yeshua loves me just the way I am, but He also loves me too much to leave me this way. And this is salvation, that we are not left as sinners condemned to death, but made saints redeemed for righteousness which leads to life. Our salvation here on this earth is a process of sanctification from one degree of glory to another, as we are being transformed back into His image, the same image in which we were first created. (2 Cor. 3:18; Gen. 1:26-27)

And because of this salvation, when we reach eternity we will truly be like Him, clothed in righteousness and holiness, without spot or blemish, enjoying His presence forever. (1 John 3:2; Isa. 61:10;

Rev. 7:9; Eph. 5:27; Psa. 41:12)

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”
Hebrews 10:22-23 ESV

Scripture Search:

(Following the thread woven throughout God's Word)

- Psalm 24:1-6
- Psalm 25:4-14
- Psalm 85:4-9
- Proverbs 28:13-14
- Matthew 3:8-11
- Acts 26:19-20
- Romans 4:22-25
- 2 Timothy 2:19-26, 3:16-17
- 1 Peter 1:13-21
- 2 Peter 3:9-14

Scripture Study:

(Taking time each day to meditate on God's Word)

- *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are*

zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” Titus 2:11-15 ESV

Chapter Thirteen

What Now?

Although writing a book about Rahab had been a prayer of mine for some time, it has wound up looking very different than I initially thought it would. Originally, I planned to compare and contrast the lives of Rahab and Joshua. Two very different people with very different lives, yet both found favor with God and were saved from the destruction that befell Jericho. I was focused on what it was that brought this pagan prostitute the very same victory that had been given to the faithful servant of the LORD.

My idea of what this book would look like changed after a conversation with my sister. She posed the question of how do we know that what we believe is true and how do we know we really are saved. I think this is a reasonable question with which many of us struggle in light of all the numerous doctrines, denominations, and religions out there. How do we know what we believe is right?

God used this question to both shape and fuel the purpose behind the writing of this book. I then knew I

needed to aim our attention not so much on what saves us, because that is the same no matter who we are or where we come from, but more so on what our lives, what our faith, should look like once we have been saved. It was not so much about what Rahab did before the fall of Jericho, but what she became once she chose to follow God.

Although I've tried to be as thorough as I could, this book falls woefully short of all there is to know about the God who saves us. My only consolation is that even John, who walked and talked and learned from Messiah Himself, said there weren't enough books in the world to contain all there was to know about Him. (John 21:25) Certainly too much to squeeze into these few hundred pages. But, I guess that wasn't the point of this book either.

My hope was to give a firm scriptural foundation for why I believe what I believe and why I feel secure in the salvation I have been given through Yeshua, and to stir you onto a journey to finding that same assurance. We may never be able to answer every question that arises, I'm convinced that the more I study, the less I know, because everything I learn leads me to another revelation. However, assurance in our salvation is something we all ought to have.

God clearly tells us to study to show ourselves approved and to be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks us for the reason for our faith. (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15) The only way I have been able to do that, to answer the questions that I had personally and to answer those who have questioned the assurance I now have in my faith, is by studying the Word of God, not the doctrines of man. Not that all the doctrines of the church are wrong, but we need to be able to spot a counterfeit when we see one, no matter how long or by whom it has been upheld.

So maybe that's the purpose of this book, to stir in your heart a desire to pursue God for yourself and not simply be satisfied with what others have to say about Him. Not to simply tell you what I found in my pursuit, but to give you some tools to continue to seek God's heart even after you close this book.

Two Kinds of Hearers

When the truth of God's Word is revealed to people, when we see it face to face, there is generally one of two reactions. One, we become like King Jeroboam, who rejected the Word of God and refused to turn from his sin. (1 Kings 13:33) Or like the

unbelieving Jews who crucified Messiah. Although they at some point may have considered themselves to be followers of the LORD, the true nature of their hearts was exposed when their faith was challenged.

Two, we become like King Josiah, who was doing what he thought was right in the eyes of the LORD, but when a Torah scroll was found and read to him and he realized just how far he was off the path of true obedience, he tore his clothes (a sign of repentance), and instructed the priest to, *“Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”* (2 Kings 22:13 ESV) He readily and humbly accepted God’s correction and not only followed wholeheartedly after Him, but led the nation of Israel to do the same.

This is the same heart within the disciples of Yeshua. They had been taught the ways of the Pharisees all their lives. It was what they knew. It was what they believed was the right way to serve and honor God. But when Yeshua came, He taught them rightly and they obeyed. There was certainly a learning curve along the way (Peter was a great example of that!), but they really

wanted to learn because their love and devotion was sincere.

Sometimes this revelation comes with a sudden change of heart one way or the other, but often it's a slower more gradual process of choosing as we wrestle with the knowledge of God and His holiness. Is it *Law or grace*, or *Law and grace*? Do we desire the joy of the LORD or the pleasures of this world? Do we truly fear the LORD or do we fear the opinions of man? It may seem like an easy decision to some, but the battle between the flesh and the spirit can be strong, and we must all choose whom we shall serve. (Josh. 24:14-15)

We see a beautiful collision of Law and grace in the Apostle Paul. Paul was a fervent believer in obedience to the commandments of God. However, he rejected Yeshua as the promised Messiah and actively sought to kill those who followed Him. But, once he encountered Messiah for himself, he didn't then turn from Torah, but rather now, with the merging of the two, his faith was made complete. He then took this faith in the fullness of *Law and grace*, of love *and* obedience, to anyone who wanted to listen – Jew and Gentile alike.

All of this knowledge now begs the question, “if so, then what?” What do we do now? What comes next? The short, and slightly mysterious answer is now we get

the joy and privilege of walking with God in a nearness we may have never experienced before. The whole point of our obedience, if not for our salvation, is for our sanctification – the process of increased holiness that makes it possible for us to have a relationship with God.

Without Holiness

Like a lot of parents, one of the means of discipline that I use with my kids is sending them to their rooms for some designated amount of time – i.e. they get a time-out. Regardless of how long their “sentence” is, they know they are not allowed to come out of their room until I come and get them.

One morning, I had to send one of my boys to his room for taking his sister’s toy. I had asked him twice to give it back, but he wouldn’t. She continued to scream for her toy, and he continued to smirk at her obvious distress. Anyone with siblings can relate to this scenario, I’m sure.

Although he knew the rule that he had to stay in his room until I came to get him, my sweet boy just couldn’t stand the solitude. He kept coming out because he just had to tell me something, show me something, or ask me something.

After the third or fourth time of sending him back to his room, I sat on the floor with him so I could explain that our choices come with consequences. When he disobeys, he gets sent to his room, can't play with friends, or has other privileges taken away. When he makes good choices, like being nice to his sister and obeying when I ask him to do something, he gets to be out with us and play and get snuggles. He agreed that making good choices sounded way more fun!

I don't think the timing of this incident was an accident, either. It all unfolded as I was studying what the Bible says about holiness. And it hit me as I was sitting on the floor with my boy that what I was saying to him is exactly what our Heavenly Father is saying to us.

Holiness is setting ourselves apart for a relationship with God. It is pursuing righteousness according to His standard, and *choosing* obedience to the LORD's instruction.

The opposite of holiness is lawlessness. It is throwing God's Word out the window and living according to our own standard of right and wrong.

The same way that AJ's disobedience got him sent to his room, separated from the rest of the family,

our disobedience separates us from the presence of our Heavenly Father. And if we die in that disobedience, He won't send us to our room for a little while, we will be separated from Him forever.

Hell is a reality, and so is the fact that people are going to find themselves there for eternity. And it's not because God wants to send anyone there. His heart's desire is that all would come to a place of repentance and spend eternity with Him. (1 Pet. 3:9) He even provided the way for us to do so by securing the necessary payment for our sin should we choose to repent and embrace Him as our LORD and Savior. But, just as my kids have a choice to follow the rules or break them, so do we. And it is our choice that determines our eternity.

Although the reality of hell ought to be enough to scare any of us into obedience, it's not. But, that's because it isn't terror that draws us to the heart of God, it's love. Nothing will stir our hearts to obedience except love. If we love Him, we will obey His commands. (John 14:15)

Peter reminds us that, *“as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be*

holy, for I am holy.;” (1 Pet. 1:14-16 ESV) So, the remainder of our time together in this book is going to be spent tracing the thread throughout scripture that teaches us what it means to be holy.

Holiness – consecration, purification, sanctification. Set apart for God.¹¹

“For I am ADONAI your God; therefore, consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy; and do not defile yourselves with any kind of swarming creature that moves along the ground. For I am ADONAI, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore you are to be holy, because I am holy.” - Leviticus 11:44-45 CJB

*“It is to be a (tassel) for you to look at and thereby remember all of ADONAI’s (commands) and obey them, so that you won’t go around wherever your own heart and eyes lead you to prostitute yourselves; but it will help you remember and obey all my (commands) and be holy for your God.”
- Numbers 15:39-40 CJB*

“For ADONAI your God moves about in your

camp to rescue you and to hand over your enemies to you. Therefore your camp must be a holy place. [ADONAI] should not see anything indecent among you, or he will turn away from you.” - Deuteronomy 23:14 CJB

“ADONAI will establish you as a people separated out for himself, as he has sworn to you — if you will observe the (commands) of ADONAI your God and follow his ways.” Deuteronomy 28:9 CJB

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;” - 1 Chronicles 16:29 ESV

“That we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” - Luke 1:74-75 ESV

“For just as you used to offer your various parts as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led to more lawlessness; so now offer your various parts as slaves to righteousness, which leads to being made holy, set apart for God. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in

relationship to righteousness; but what benefit did you derive from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end result of those things was death. However, now, freed from sin and enslaved to God, you do get the benefit — it consists in being made holy, set apart for God, and its end result is eternal life.” - Romans 6:19-22 CJB

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” - Romans 7:12 ESV

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” - Romans 12:1-2 ESV

*“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,
‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,*

*and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.'*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” - 1 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 ESV

“Therefore I say this — indeed, in union with the Lord I insist on it: do not live any longer as the pagans live, with their sterile ways of thinking. Their intelligence has been shrouded in darkness, and they are estranged from the life of God, because of the ignorance in them, which in turn comes from resisting God’s will. They have lost all feeling, so they have abandoned themselves to sensuality, practicing any kind of impurity and always greedy for more. But this is not the lesson you learned from the Messiah! If you really listened to him and were instructed about him, then you learned that since what is in Yeshua is truth, then, so far as your former way

of life is concerned, you must strip off your old nature, because your old nature is thoroughly rotted by its deceptive desires; and you must let your spirits and minds keep being renewed, and clothe yourselves with the new nature created to be godly, which expresses itself in the righteousness and holiness that flow from the truth.” - Ephesians 4:17-24 CJB

“The new self allows no room for discriminating between Gentile and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigner, savage, slave, free man; on the contrary, in all, the Messiah is everything. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with feelings of compassion and with kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” - Colossians 3:11-12 CJB

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.” - 1 Thessalonians 4:7 ESV

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace

himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23 ESV

“But we have to keep thanking God for you always, brothers whom the Lord loves, because God chose you as firstfruits for deliverance by giving you the holiness that has its origin in the Spirit and the faithfulness that has its origin in the truth.” - 2 Thessalonians 2:13 CJB

“Therefore, get your minds ready for work, keep yourselves under control, and fix your hopes fully on the gift you will receive when Yeshua the Messiah is revealed. As people who obey God, do not let yourselves be shaped by the evil desires you used to have when you were still ignorant. On the contrary, following the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in your entire way of life; since the Tanakh says, ‘You are to be holy because I am holy.’” - 1 Peter 1:13-16 CJB

“However, the Day of the Lord will come ‘like a thief.’ On that Day the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt and disintegrate, and the earth and everything in it

will be burned up. Since everything is going to be destroyed like this, what kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives, as you wait for the Day of God and work to hasten its coming. That Day will bring on the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt from the heat; but we, following along with his promise, wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will be at home.” - 2 Peter 3:10-13 CJB

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” - Hebrews 12:14 ESV

In Conclusion

All of this means nothing without love. If the LORD did not love us, He would not have made a way of salvation, a way of redemption for you and me from the foundation of the world. He would have just wiped us out and started over again. If the LORD did not love us, He would not have sent His Son to die in our place. And if the LORD did not love us, He would not have provided such caring instruction showing us how to live a life that is good and righteous and holy, to live in a

way that honors Him and blesses others, and is truly and ultimately for our best.

It breaks my heart to think of all the years I wasted following my own futile ways. I didn't just walk apart from God, I ran from Him. All the while claiming to know Him. But, just as I call my kids from their rooms, He called me out of my darkness into His glorious light. (1 Pet. 2:9) He gave me another chance to choose Him. God will continue to extend His invitation to each of us until the day we die. To me, that is the most amazing and most baffling part of all of this. But, that's just how much He loves each of us. So if you or your loved ones don't get it right away, I know there is still hope. And for that hope, I pray.

He is giving you and me that chance right now, in this very moment. This book may not contain everything there is to know about God, for that we will have to wait until heaven, but we do have all we need to make an informed decision as to whether we want to pursue the heart of God or not. Or, as Messiah said, to count the cost of following Him. (Luke 14:28)

Rahab counted the cost. She had just witnessed the complete destruction of Jericho and now stood at the edge of the Promised Land along with the children of Israel as she listened to the words Joshua spoke to them

all:

“I call on heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have presented you with life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life, so that you will live, you and your descendants, loving ADONAI your God, paying attention to what he says and clinging to him — for that is the purpose of your life!”

- Deuteronomy 30:19-20 CJB

And having counted the cost, Rahab decided there was nothing, neither in gain nor in loss, that compared to the richness of following God. I agree with Rahab.

There are only two roads we can walk, the wide and the narrow, each having a very different end. I won't presume to judge the path each of us is on. We are all at different places in our faith, with different obstacles to overcome and lessons we need to learn. Our relationship with God is beautiful and unique to each of us. Some of us need to wrestle with God while others seem to dive right in. We all, though, need to be sure we are on the right path.

If you're not yet fully convinced, I hope that you will, at the very least, continue seeking answers to the

questions you are asking. God promises that we will find Him if we seek Him with all of our heart. (Jer. 29:13) Our walk with God is one of continual learning and growing. We aren't going to get it all at once or do everything right from the start. But, that's not the point. The point is to fall in love with God in such a way that we want to please Him, and to do so to the best of our ability with the knowledge and understanding that we have. And as we learn better, we do better. So as you go, wherever it is you go from here, this is my prayer for you:

I pray that from His glorious riches, the LORD would strengthen you in your inner most being through His Holy Spirit, and that Messiah may dwell in your heart through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have all the strength necessary to grasp with all God's people, the width, length, height, and depth of Messiah's love, to know it even though it is beyond our understanding, so that you will be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine, to Him be glory among the community of believers and in Yeshua our Messiah throughout all generations and forever. Amen

(Based on Ephesians 3:16-21)

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Resources

For Further Study Chapter by Chapter

Chapter One – The Fear of the LORD

- The *Macaroni Principle*, by D. Thomas Lancaster.
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1406752001483>
- Lessons on how to study the Bible.
<https://bethtikkun.com/how-to-study-the-bible/>
- Evidence for Hebrew being the original language of the Bible.
 - <https://biblethingsinbibleways.wordpress.com/2013/11/14/was-the-new-testament-written-in-greek-or-in-hebrew/>
 - https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Articles/Jesus_Hebrew/jesus_hebrew.html

Chapter Two – The Synergy of Law and Grace

- The letter from Constantine to the churches concluding and confirming the council of Nicaea.
www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-26/
- An online teaching taking an in-depth look at the relevance and continuity of God’s Law for all time.
www.john1415.org/2Kings/17-17-2Kings.MP3

Chapter Three – The Seventh Day

- What does the Bible say about the Sabbath?
<https://followingmessiah.org/2020/03/24/gods-sabbaths-are-his-wedding-ring-are-you-wearing-it/>
- Principles for keeping the Sabbath Holy.
<https://lifehopeandtruth.com/bible/10-commandments/sabbath/how-to-keep-the-sabbath>
- A brief history of the Inquisition
<https://www.history.com/topics/religion/inquisition>
- Constantine’s rule and religious beliefs.
<https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-famous-people/was-emperor-constantine-true-christian-or-was-he-secret-pagan-005603>
- A printable pdf containing both Catholic and Protestant confessions about the Sabbath.
<http://john1415.org/Rev2019/confessions.pdf>
- Messianic Congregation finder.
<https://www.119ministries.com/resources/fellowship-finder/>

Chapter Four – The Feast of Unleavened Bread

- How to celebrate the Passover for Believers in Yeshua.

<https://www.bethimmanuel.org/articles/hosting-seder>

- A study on the Passover Week timeline
<http://john1415.org/Festivals/2021-Passover-Week.MP3>

Chapter Five – The Feast of Weeks

- An online teaching on the Feast of Weeks.
<http://john1415.org/Festivals/2022-Shavuot.MP3>
- An article on the history of Shavuot.
https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Spring_Holidays/Shavuot/shavuot.html

Chapter Six – Teshuva

- An article on Teshuvah – Turning back to God.
<https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Meditations/Teshuvah/teshuvah.html>
- A Jewish perspective on Teshuvah.
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/repentance/>

Chapter Seven – The Covenants

- An article on the concept of covering over verses removing sin.

<https://answersingenesis.org/sin/did-animal-sacrifices-remove-sin/>

- An article on the new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31
<https://www.oneforisrael.org/jewish-evangelism/jeremiah-31-new-covenant-prophecy/>
- An article explaining the Biblical concept of the covenant.
<https://firmisrael.org/learn/what-is-a-covenant-in-the-bible/>

Chapter Eight – The Fall Holy Days

- *Before The Wrath*, a documentary movie about the rapture and the last days.
<https://beforethewrath.com>
- An article about God’s wedding invitation to all people.
<https://allpropastors.org/did-god-only-marry-israel-at-mt-sinai/>
- A three part series on Yom Kippur
 - <https://galileeofthenations.com/blogs/knowledge-center/16709164-yom-kippur-a-solemn-look-at-the-severity-of-sin-part-1>
 - <https://galileeofthenations.com/blogs/knowledge-center/16709188-yom-kippur-in-tradition-a-search-for-a-solution-part-2>

- <https://galileoofthenations.com/blogs/knowledge-center/16709248-yom-kippur-the-triumph-of-yeshua-part3>

Chapter Nine – Purim and Hanukkah

- An article on the history of Easter
<https://rcg.org/books/ttooe.html>
- An article on the History of Christmas
<https://rcg.org/realtruth/articles/169-ttooc.html>
- An article on the history of Hanukkah
https://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/article_cdo/aid/102978/jewish/The-Story-of-Chanukah.htm
- An article on the origins of Halloween and its practices.
<https://clothedwithdignityco.com/7-important-reasons-christians-shouldnt-celebrate-halloween>
- Recipes for hamentaschen
<https://jamiiegeller.com/holidays/top-ten-hamantaschen-recipes/>

Chapter Ten – Clean and Unclean Foods

- An article outlining the benefits of Biblical foods.

<https://www.ucg.ca/booklets/what-does-bible-teach-about-clean-and-unclean-meats/a-matter-health>

- *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living* by Rex Russell M.D. – available in stores and online.
- *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living Cookbook* by Hope Egan and Amy Cataldo – available in stores and online.

Chapter Eleven – Love God, Love Others

- Here are several ministries with which you can partner. I also suggest researching local ministries in your area who could use your support.
 - Compassion International
<https://www.compassion.com>
 - Open Doors
<https://www.opendoors.org>
 - Exodus Cry
<https://exoduscry.com>
 - Directory of Ministries in Israel
<https://app.kehila.org/ministries>

Chapter Twelve – The Hope of Our Salvation

- A teaching by Grant Luton looking at the scarlet cord of Rahab.

<https://youtu.be/IMLphl46vD4>

- An article contrasting genuine salvation and “easy-believism.”

<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A114/an-introduction-to-lordship-salvation>

Chapter Thirteen – Holiness

- An online teaching tracing the Biblical thread of holiness.

<http://john1415.org/Misc/Holiness.MP3>

Additional Resources

- Creekside Messianic Fellowship – Wayne Davis
www.john1415.com
- Torah Today – Grant Luton
www.youtube.com/@grantluton/videos
- *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* by Eddie Chumney

Read for free online here:

- <https://hebroots.com/sevenfestivals.htm>

Purchase a hard copy online here (available other places as well)

- <https://www.amazon.com/Seven-Festivals-Messiah-Edward-Chumney/dp/1560437677>

- *Messiah in the Feasts of Israel* by Sam Nadler – available in stores and online.
- A timeline of the Bible.
<https://biblehub.com/timeline>
- Messianic Worship Artists
 - Joshua Aaron –
www.youtube.com/@JoshuaAaron
 - Heartcry of David Collective –
www.youtube.com/@HeartcryofDavidCollective

Notes

1. The Macaroni Principle by D. Thomas Lancaster, Part 1-
<https://www.facebook.com/104185905005/videos/1406731360967>; Part 2 -
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1406752001483>
2. Collins Dictionary online,
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/macaroni>
3. Study done by Dr. Heidi Yellen on the frequencies of fabric
www.lifegivinglinen.com/linen-study.html
4. Eisegesis definition according to Dictionary.com
<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/eisegesis>
5. Peter R. Kraemer, Catholic Church Extension Society (1975), Chicago, Illinois
6. Strong's Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible; H4150, mo'edim.
7. Strong's Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible; H4744, convocation.
8. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W.E. Vine, p. 109, 'New – Kainos'
9. The Seven Festivals of the Messiah, by Eddie Chumney, Chpt. 9: Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles: The Feast of the Nations
10. Strong's Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible, 'Salvation', Hebrew 3444, 3468, 8668; and Greek 4991, 4992
11. Strong's Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible; 'Holiness', Greek 38

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About the Author

Jennifer Bennett is a wife, mother, and writer, living in southeastern Alabama with her husband, children, and two grandchildren.

Jennifer has been involved with women's and children's ministry for over two decades, through teaching, partnering with local ministries, and speaking engagements. She has published two books and a women's bible study, as well as writing a blog and other non-published materials.

When she is not spending time with her family or writing, Jennifer enjoys making pottery, baking, and leading women's Bible studies in her home.

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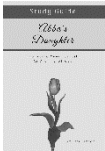
And Resources by Jennifer Bennett

Abba's Daughter: Embracing Your Identity as a Child of God



The Bible gives Christians many promises on which to stand: we are chosen, loved, forgiven, and so much more. Yet often followers of Jesus approach life as if they've been passed over, are unloved, and still carry the weight and shame of sin. In *Abba's Daughter: Embracing Your Identity as a Child of God*, author Jennifer Bennett shares scriptural insights and personal reflections designed to help every believing woman better understand and live in light of her glorious, divine inheritance.

Abba's Daughter Study Guide



This is a study guide to be used along with Jennifer's book, *Abba's Daughter: Embracing Your Identity as a Child of God*. This eight week study takes you into a deeper, more personal walk with the truths explored in each chapter of the book while helping the reader to apply them to their own lives.

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