

TorahScope

V O L U M E II

Life Examined and Understood
Through the Grid of the Torah

William Mark Huey



TorahScope

Volume II

© 2006

by William Mark Huey

edited by J.K. McKee

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Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

Special terms unique to this publication have also been provided in this chart:

Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament

ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)

b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)

BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)

BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*

CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*

CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)

ESV: English Standard Version (2001)

Grk: Greek

HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)

HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2001)

Heb: Hebrew

KJV: King James Version

LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)

LXX: Septuagint

LS: *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Lidell & Scott)

m. Mishnah

NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)

NEB: New English Bible (1970)

NIV: New International Version (1984)

NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)

RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

Tanakh: the Old Testament

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

Introduction

TorahScope Volume II is a second compilation of written commentaries that compliments the teachings compiled in *TorahScope Volume I*, first published in 2004. Once again, these teachings were written during the traditional, annual Jewish Torah reading schedule that has divided the first five books of the Bible into fifty-four separate *parashot* or *sidrot*, coupled with corresponding readings from the Prophets and Writings. For the past four years in full time ministry (since 2002), our ministry has sent weekly Torah reflections to e-mail subscription lists. This volume is a selection of those messages that were largely written and transmitted within the past two years (2005-2006).

Since becoming Messianic, we have discovered that studying the Torah is a dynamic and active part of our pursuit of the Holy One of Israel. In 1995 as our family began attending a Messianic Jewish congregation, I first became acquainted with the Jewish tradition of studying through the Torah on an annual basis. Needless to say, it only took a few months before I realized the profundity of studying and analyzing what makes up the foundational stories and accounts of our faith. After all, if one does not have a solid, foundational knowledge of these ancient texts, what kind of spiritual house is one building?

For nearly two decades as a Believer in Yeshua the Messiah (1978-1995), I found that the history of the world and Israel communicated in the Biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy was interesting reading. For years I had been taught and read the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses with remote spiritual connections made to my personal walk with Yeshua. It was not until I entered into the Messianic community, and understood that we had become a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:10-22; Romans 11:13-21), that the heritage of the Torah was a dynamic part of my spiritual heritage as well.

Understanding that as Believers in Messiah Yeshua we were a part of Israel, the consistent study of the Torah became a part of our family's weekly routine. As relative newcomers to this practice, we concluded that following the pattern established by the Jewish community made the most practical sense. After all, since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the Jews were allowed to return to the Land of Israel after their Babylonian exile, the example of studying the Torah had been refined for nearly 2,500 years:

“And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose...Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground...They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading**” (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8).**

Here, we see a description of the eager exiles, having returned, wanting to hear the Instruction of God and obey Him. They did not want to go into exile any more or be punished for any kind of disobedience.

How does this relate to us now? Do we want to go into any kind of spiritual exile? If you have entered into the Messianic movement, do you not feel as though you had been separated from certain parts of the Bible, most notably the Torah? The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 understood that the new, non-Jewish

Believers coming to faith had to be instructed in the truths of God's Word weekly from the Torah (Acts 15:13-21). Our family's early testimony of being Messianic is that we became acquainted with what God wanted us to do every week from a careful reading of the Torah portions.

TorahScope Volume II is written to encourage the study of the Torah from the perspective of a modern-day Believer in the Messiah Yeshua. The call that our Heavenly Father has put upon His people is that we be a light to the world. We are to demonstrate proper behavior to others, and have the testimony that committing oneself to a life of Torah obedience makes one more and more like our Lord and Savior. Our job is to demonstrate His character to others so that the message of salvation may reach to all we meet:

“And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength), He says, **‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth’**” (Isaiah 49:5-6).

It is my prayer that as you read and meditate upon these commentaries that you will be empowered to be about God's work in the sinful world in which we live. May our Heavenly Father use *TorahScope Volume II* to encourage your testimony of faith in Yeshua the Messiah, and make you more knowledgeable about the Scriptures, so you can be most effective for Him!

Until the restoration of all things...

William Mark Huey
Director, Outreach Israel Ministries

COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

***Bereisheet* בְּרֵאשִׁית** **In the Beginning** **"Return to Foundation"**

Genesis 1:1-6:8

Isaiah 42:5–43:10

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

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

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

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

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

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

control choices and decisions, has resulted in an annual review of what our spiritual forefathers did during their respective sojourns. The wisdom in repetitive study is self-explanatory.

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

"Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, 'I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you'" (Isaiah 42:5-9).

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

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

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

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

naturally inculcate the principles that are profoundly articulated in the pages of the whole counsel of God. One has to conclude that the “fathers” have already overcome the evil inclination and are now in a position to teach the young children and young men by their examples of a faithful walk with the Creator.

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

“Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the LORD.*’ Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it’” (Genesis 4:1-7).

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

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

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

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

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

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

only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God" (Psalm 62:1-7).

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

Since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, is it sensible that we should internalize this admonition? In our human condition, we all have the potential to be as wicked as Cain or anyone else who has ever lived. However, our Heavenly Father gives us a solution to the problem innate in our flesh nature: **we must master sin.** It is our responsibility to overcome the sin that may indwell us.

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

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

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

The author of Hebrews describes why we should enter into the rest that the Father has accomplished that was required for our salvation. But he also points out the importance of studying the Word of God. As we let His active Word penetrate into our hearts, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit will help divide between what comes from Him and what is generated by our soul. As we study the Torah and other

teachings that come from the heart of our Father, we can move from being “little children” in the faith and become “young men” who overcome evil. In time, perhaps through a consistent study, we can attain the status of being called a “father” in the walk. At that point, I believe we will not only know the Father from the beginning, but we will be walking in His rest and not seek to be lifted up—following the example of our Messiah, who was humble in His walk before others in the world.

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

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

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

Noach נֹחַ
Noah
"Walking by Faith"

Genesis 6:9-11:32

Isaiah 54:1-55:5

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are *the records* of the generations of Noah. **Noah was a righteous man,** blameless in his time; **Noah walked with God”** (Genesis 6:8-9).

Each year when we reconsider this Torah portion, which deals with the account of Noah, we are faced with another five chapters of Scripture that cover a great deal of human history. As you can imagine, there is much that can be and has been said, as people down through the ages have hypothesized about what transpired from the time of Noah to the appearance of Abraham. While most of this speculation is interesting reading, many of the assumptions have a tendency to muddy the waters of what God is trying to communicate to us who are trying to take this material and apply it in our lives today. Oftentimes, hungry Torah students spend considerable time munching on so-called “nuggets”—mostly pure conjecture—and can overlook the serious questions that arise concerning God’s judgment upon the world via the Flood.

We live in a world that incessantly belittles the Creation account of Adam and Eve and the Noadic Flood. Seeds of doubt can be planted by modern science or “the enlightened” that can germinate into unbelief or full blown apostasy from belief in God. Questioning the veracity of these opening accounts in Genesis, or attempting to fill in the gaps with imaginary scenarios, can be damaging to the point of generating cracks in a person’s faith. This not only extends to attacks on the Bible by skeptics, but even liberal theologians who question the validity of these events. These fissures can lead to the instability that is characterized by the double-minded person who is considered unstable in all of his ways:

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways”* (James 1:6-8).

While pondering *Noach* in conjunction with last week's Torah portion, *Bereisheet*, the lack of details regarding this period of human history is thought provoking. Certainly, no one studying the Torah wants to be unstable in his or her ways, but instead should want to have unwavering faith in what God has stated.

In the Creation account, almost like an annual spiritual examination, we have the yearly reminder that God created the Heavens and the Earth out of what is termed in Hebrew *tohu v'bohu* (תוהו ובוהו), "welter and waste" (Genesis 1:2, Alter), basically meaning "confusion and emptiness." We have to consider that when God said, "let there be light," that out of the darkness came illumination. We have to believe that in just six days—not knowing exactly what constituted an actual "day" at this time—that the Almighty spoke into existence the elements of the universe. Additionally, without the analysis of scientific explanation, we have to believe that God created all the plants and animals that inhabit Planet Earth. Next, we have to consider that God formed man and woman out of the ground and that He breathed life into them. Furthermore, we have to believe that a serpent communicated to Eve in order to deceive her into eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Moreover, we see that Adam, upon learning of his wife's indiscretion, voluntarily chooses to disobey the command of God—fully aware of the repercussions. From here, we read about the curses placed upon the serpent, Eve and Adam, and the fallout from there continues. There are a great deal of events that are subject to various interpretations.

Now in *Noach*, by the time we come to the fuller account of Noah, we are told that a worldwide flood destroyed all of humanity except Noah and his family. Quite frankly, without faith in God and the veracity of His Word, especially coupled with the confirmations found in the words of Yeshua of the Messiah that treat it as an actual event (Matthew 24:37-39), it would be difficult for some to believe that the Flood took place as described. Skepticism combined with human logic has definitely persuaded the unbelieving world to discount these stories as allegories at best, fables and myths at worst.

As you consider some of the episodes recorded in the opening chapters of the Bible, you might see that a pattern is being established. This pattern has to do with faith and trust in what has been preserved down through the ages for our personal edification and encouragement. It is likely that in these opening eleven chapters of Genesis, God is describing some of the basic themes that establish and affirm the system of faith and righteousness that makes communion with Him possible.

Just what is God trying to communicate to us in these opening chapters of the Bible? Is it possible that He is giving the student of the Torah an overview of what to expect throughout the course of human history? Certainly from a personal perspective, one can perhaps identify with various aspects of the figures such as Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth, Enoch, or Noah and his sons, as representatives of the human race. Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of the Creator God and became the representatives of all of humanity that would follow them. They were given a free will to choose to obey the will of the Creator. However, they eventually chose to disobey God's first prohibition about eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which resulted in the punishment of physical death:

"Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; **but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die**'" (Genesis 2:15-17).

Their willful disobedience to God results in unrighteousness. Along with the serpent, Adam and Eve were cursed and thrown out of the Garden of Eden. However, as this was taking place the first Messianic prophecy was uttered about the Redeemer to come from the seed of the woman:

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

This prophecy not only forecasts the crushing of the serpent's head that would occur via the crucifixion and sacrifice of the Redeemer. For its more immediate audience, it also demonstrates the need for a blood

sacrifice, as God mercifully sheds the blood of an animal and fashions a “skin covering” for Adam and Eve so their nakedness can be covered. The pattern of blood sacrifice for the transgression of sin is being established:

“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:21-24).

Additionally, we see that God deliberately removes Adam and Eve from the Garden, where they might have eaten from the Tree of Life, and possibly lived forever in the fallen or unrighteous state. By expelling the lawbreakers from the Garden into a world overrun with thorns and thistles, with the knowledge that they would eventually return to the dust they were made from, Adam and Eve now had to start making some choices about how they were going to conduct their lives. There is an indication in the Epistle to the Hebrews that Adam and Eve understood the principle of shedding blood as atonement for sin. Apparently, their son Abel learned this righteous act from his parents, and in so doing offered up sacrifices that were pleasing to God:

“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4).

Even the Messiah Yeshua recognizes the righteousness of Abel, as He shares about the blood of “righteous” Abel and blood of Zechariah continuing to bring guilt upon the perpetrators of their deaths:

“So that upon you may fall *the guilt* of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matthew 23:35).

In so many Genesis vignettes, the faithful student of the Torah is beginning to see some patterns emerge. Consequences for the transgressions of Adam and Eve, and the curses uttered against Cain for the murder of his brother, are contrasted with the blood sacrifices of the animals for the loin coverings, or simply as a pleasing aroma to the Holy One by righteous Abel.

By the time we get to *Noach*, it is safe to say that Noah was following the patterns established by his forefathers. There is a distinct indication that Noah was aware of the importance of animal sacrifices, and that he even knew the difference between what were considered clean and unclean animals. God commanded Noah to take seven pairs of clean animals into the Ark:

“Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you *alone* I have seen *to be* righteous before Me in this time. **You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens**, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth” (Genesis 7:1-3).

Upon completing the Ark’s sojourn and settling on dry ground, one of the first acts of faith performed by Noah was the construction of an altar and the sacrifice of the proper clean animals:

“Then God spoke to Noah saying, ‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.’ So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark. **Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.** The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to

Himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:15-22).

Clearly, the Lord was communicating about the need for blood sacrifices as either an atonement for sin, or perhaps simply as praise offerings that recognize His mercy toward humanity. Whatever Noah was doing, God considered him righteous and blameless as he walked with Him. Of his entire generation, there was only one person who God considered for the responsibility of building the Ark to preserve elements of His Creation. As stated earlier, God is establishing a pattern where one man’s work actually serves to save humanity from extinction. Of course, that prefigures the ultimate need for a Messiah who would save the world. By coupling the need for a blood sacrifice with an individual who will save the world, we see typology that all points to the crucifixion of Yeshua the Messiah.

The critical axiom we find in *Noach* is that faith in the work of the Holy One ultimately generates the righteousness He requires for fellowship with humanity. Let us never lose sight of the fact that absolute faith in the Creator and His righteous provision for our restoration to Him are the critical components expressed throughout the balance of the Scriptures. Perhaps no better verse summarizes the necessity for faith than the realization that without faith it is impossible to please God or be rewarded for seeking Him. The author of Hebrews expresses this reality when he couples the necessity of faith with the faith exhibited by Noah:

“And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:6-7).

Did you notice that Hebrews 11:7 describes Noah as an heir of righteousness according to faith? Interestingly it is in *Noach*, this week’s Torah portion, that we are first introduced to the concept of a person being righteous and blameless before the Lord:

“These are *the records* of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9).

This is the first time that the Hebrew words *tzaddiq* (צַדִּיק), meaning “righteous one,” and *tamim* (תָּמִים), “complete, sound” (*BDB*),² are used to describe a human being. While the brief statements about Enoch describe him as one who “walked with God,” there is no direct mention of Enoch’s righteousness or blamelessness in the Genesis account:

“Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. **Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him**” (Genesis 5:22-24).

The Greek Septuagint actually says that “Enoch was well-pleasing to God” (LXE), obviously an extension of what it means to write from Him. This view is validated by the author of Hebrews, who indicates that Enoch pleased God in his walk, just before he describes the faith of Noah and states the impossibility of pleasing God without faith:

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; **for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.** And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:5-6).

² Ibid., 1071.

Whether Enoch was considered righteous and blameless before God is not stated directly, but apparently a righteous and holy God was pleased by Enoch's walk to the point of translating Enoch from Earth without the necessity of physical death. It would not be a stretch of our thoughts to believe that Enoch was considered righteous and blameless before Him. But even more than obtaining perfect personal righteousness and blamelessness, which is impossible to achieve, is the absolute principle that God truly desires a people of faith.

The concept of faith in our Creator is no doubt one of the absolute principles in the Scriptures. In short order, as our Torah study continues next week, we will be introduced to Abraham. He is often considered to be the father of faith. The Apostle Paul emphasizes the need for faith as exhibited by Abraham in his letter to the Romans:

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.’ Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, ‘FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. For this reason *it is* by faith. in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Romans 4:1-16).

Here in this passage, Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6 two times in order to get his point across that it is by our faith, not our works, that we are considered righteous:

“Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Additionally, the Prophet Habakkuk reiterates this principle of faith resulting in righteousness:

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

In coming weeks, we will look more intently at this principle. So let me conclude with a few thoughts.

As you read this week's text and the selected Haftarah portion, is there something that the Holy One is trying to communicate about our walk of faith? If you look briefly at the Haftarah selection from Isaiah 54, you will note that God promises to show compassion on Israel and ultimately gather them after a period of estrangement:

“For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth. For the LORD has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of *one's* youth when she is rejected,’ says your God. **‘For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,’** says the LORD your

Redeemer. ‘For this is like the days of Noah to Me, when I swore that the waters of Noah would not flood the earth again; so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you nor will I rebuke you. **For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,**’ says the LORD who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:5-10).

We need to have faith in not only the Redeemer’s work, but also in the fact that God has promised to restore us to a covenant of peace. This is a great truth to meditate upon as we look forward to learning more and more about the faith of our predecessors. It is my prayer that by once again looking at the Torah, we will each be further impressed with not only their levels of faith, but most importantly, growth in our own individual walks of faith. Without a doubt, it is only by faith in the work of the Messiah that anyone receives the righteousness that the Father requires for fellowship with Him. May we each grow in our faith daily!

Lech Lecha לך-לך
Get Yourself Out
"Trials, Faith, and Blessings"

Genesis 12:1-17:27

Isaiah 40:27–41:16

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Genesis 12:1-3).

After two Torah readings have covered multiple millennia of world history, the Torah portion this week begins to focus on Abraham, considered the father of faith (Romans 4:12-16). In this reading, we are told that God has chosen one man and his descendants to be either a blessing or a curse to all humanity. We read that Abram, our imperfect forefather, experienced trials, exercised faith, and received the blessings of faithful obedience. His life, in many ways, exemplified for his descendants a standard of how each of us should approach our loving Creator. Certainly, as we ultimately discover, **“in him, all of the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

As you will recall, we were briefly introduced to Abram as *Noach* was concluding. Interestingly, as you read about Abram’s immediate family, you might conclude that it was actually his father Terah, who was called out of Ur:

“And Terah took [laqach] Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there” (Genesis 11:31).

Abram, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot were supposed to go to Canaan. But as the text indicates, they went as far as Haran. This was the crossroads in the upper Euphrates east of Assyria, and part of the trade route that connected Egypt with the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. There they settled until the death of Terah.

In a cursory reading of last week's statement above, it appears that Terah "took" (Heb. *laqach*, לקח)³ Abram and his other relatives. However, when we read further we see that the call to come out from among the people and circumstances of Ur was definitely made to Abraham.

First, we read Nehemiah's testimony that states that he understood exactly what the Torah said in its description of the life of Abraham:

"You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give *him* the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite—to give *it* to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, for You are righteous" (Nehemiah 9:7-8).

Stephen's testimony in the Book of Acts gives us more specific information regarding Abraham's departure from Ur:

"And he said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers! **The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia**, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, "Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you." **Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living.** And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him'" (Acts 7:2-5).

Here we are told that Abraham himself had the "God of glory" appear to him when he was in Mesopotamia, "before" he lived in Haran. The command that he was to "**depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you**" (Acts 7:3), is spoken to Abraham when he was living in Ur.

Finally, the author of Hebrews completes our Scriptural understanding of this great "father of our faith" as it relates to the Creator of Heaven and Earth:

"**By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.** By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; **for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God**" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

With all of this confirming Scriptural evidence, we discover that the Lord was most concerned about His choice of Abraham to be the recipient of His blessings. God knew, from before time, that Abraham would exhibit the heart of faith and the obedience to His commands that would be pleasing to Him. As the Prophet Isaiah points out in this week's complimentary Haftarah portion, "He has called for the generations from the beginning" (Isaiah 41:4):

As you read the narrative for this week, it begins with Abram hearing a command from the Most High that appears to be a repeat of the first appearance that occurred while the family lived in Ur. This time, Abram heard the voice of El Shaddai, and obeyed, after the death of Terah. After reading Stephen's statement above (Acts 7:4), it appears that Abram did not continue on his journey into Canaan until after his father's death:

"Now the LORD said to Abram, '**Go forth from your country, and from your relatives And from your father's house**, to the land which I will show you'" (Genesis 12:1).

Abram hears the command to "get yourself out" or "go forth" (Heb. *lech lecha*, לך-לך), not only from his country, but his countrymen and even his very own relatives. Here in this portion, our trusting Patriarch

³ In the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), used in Genesis 11:31, *laqach* means "take, lay hold of, seize" (William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988], 178).

begins his walk of faith. As we will learn, Abram soon realizes that representing the Almighty among men is peppered with life's trials. But because he listened, believed, and obeyed, the blessings of obeying God are ultimately received in his lifetime. Of course in time, we will discover that those who have followed in his faithful footsteps have also partaken of those same blessings.

Faith Trials

While pondering the opening chapters regarding the life of the great Patriarch of our faith, I was struck by the fact that Abraham, just like the rest of his "faith-filled" descendants, was not spared the "trials of life" that we all must endure. Perhaps, I thought, there is a direct connection between faith and trials. With further thought, it dawned on me that perhaps there is a direct correlation between faith, trials, and the blessings of responding to life's trials by faithful obedience to Him. After all, the walk of faith we are traversing is certainly beset with personal and corporate trials. **Is it possible that the Lord gives us trials so that we can exercise our faith in order to receive more of His blessings?**

I thought about how profound, yet elementary, this is to our faith. After all, are not tests, trials, and even tribulations designed by God to see if we are living and walking by faith and obedience to Him? **And does not the Holy One respond by blessing us when we react to trials by faithfully following His instruction manual known as the Holy Scriptures?**

Certainly, when one considers the inevitability of trials, many Scriptures come to mind. One of the most quoted brought a smile to my face:

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, **when you encounter various trials**, knowing that the **testing of your faith produces endurance**. **And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**" (James 1:2-4).

In this passage, James the Just is encouraging First Century Believers that they should be expecting various trials that have been designed to test their faith. James states that responding by faith will produce endurance, which will have its perfect result in that the saints will be perfect, complete and lacking in nothing. **Talk about a blessing! Can you imagine the blessing of lacking in nothing?** This is not a bad reward for considering joyfully the trials of life—recognizing their source—and that they have been specifically designed by God for each person as he is being perfected in his walk of faith!

The Apostle Peter had a very similar approach to handling trials with rejoicing and joy inexpressible:

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, **you have been distressed by various trials**, that the **proof of your faith**, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, **and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls**" (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Peter, also writing to First Century Believers, understood that the trials that would be encountered should be handled joyfully by the faith that resides in the revelation that Yeshua HaMashiach is Savior. The ultimate blessing is that this belief will result in the salvation of one's soul.

You can readily see that there is a direct correlation between the trials you encounter, how you respond by faith, and the blessings associated with proper faith based responses.

As I considered this spiritual axiom, I thought about the magnitude, severity, and frequency of trials. **Is it possible that the greater the trials and the more faithful the response, the greater the blessings?**

Certainly, the trials endured by Abraham as described in the Torah, and his faithful responses, were definitely rewarded with a huge blessing. Is it possible to detect some parallels in the balance of Scripture that might confirm this observation?

Of course, the entire Bible is replete with testimonies about how people when challenged with various trials responded by faith. You can go to Hebrews 11 and read about some of the champions of faith who were blessed in a variety of ways as a result of their faith filled responses to trials, tests, and tribulation. But even the author of Hebrews reminds us that there are a “cloud of witnesses” that make up too many testimonies to try to consider:

“And what more shall I say? **For time will fail me** if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (**men of whom the world was not worthy**), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. **And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect**” (Hebrews 11:32-40).

Suffice it to say, the concept of experiencing trials, responding in faith, and receiving the blessings of the Almighty are basic concepts of Judeo-Christian theology.

As I reflected on this truth, I was also reminded of the trials and persecutions that the Apostle Paul endured during his walk of faith. In 2 Corinthians, he encouraged the Corinthians to tolerate some trials and, listing some of the afflictions that he had endured in his own ministry for the gospel:

“Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly. For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face. To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am just as bold myself. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Messiah? (I speak as if insane) I more so; **in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.** Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the assemblies. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Messiah Yeshua, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands” (2 Corinthians 11:18-33).

As I thought about all of these trials, and Paul’s faithful response to his accusers and those who personally abused him, I was again reminded of the blessings that he received. As author of almost two-thirds of the Apostolic Scriptures, he will be receiving his rewards for eternity for how his writings have been used by the Ruach HaKodesh to bring untold millions to a saving knowledge of the Messiah of Israel. Once again, the correlation between trials, faith, and blessings seem to form some degree of symbiosis.

Personal Application

While thinking through these verses, another viable form of trial kept coming to mind. This was the inevitability of the persecution that comes with the walk of faith that has been exercised by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and God's people throughout the ages. We certainly all know that Israel has been persecuted throughout the ages.

But now that the revelation of God's Son and His completed work at Golgotha has been accomplished, belief and proclamation of that gospel are guaranteed to bring persecution and trials beyond being a part of a single ethnicity. After all, if you are going to walk by faith in the knowledge of Yeshua as the Messiah, you will be persecuted according to the very words of Yeshua, Himself:

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, **they will also persecute you**; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me" (John 15:20-21).

It is interesting that Yeshua also encourages one to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad," for one's reward or blessings in Heaven will be great. But remember brethren, the persecutions will definitely come if you keep His Word. I would ask you,

- Have you been enduring any trials lately?
- Do you consider them to be great trials of the magnitude experienced by Paul, Peter, James, or any of the other Apostles?
- How about trials that rival the persecution experienced by the Prophets?
- Have you been stoned, flirted with a sword, or sawed in two lately?

For the most part, all you have probably had to endure has been an occasional mocking or put-down, but life-threatening events are few and far between. And yet, we all do experience some tests and trials during our Earthly sojourn.

Is it possible that trials are specifically designed by our Creator to give each of us an opportunity to exercise our faith? Then, when the trials or tests come, do we exercise our faith, by turning to the Torah and the rest of the Scriptures to find the prescriptions for the trials? Do we follow His Word as opposed to the inclinations of our flesh? If we do, then according to the trustful patterns established by Abraham, we will receive the blessings of faithful obedience. Perhaps we ought to look at these tests and trials as an opportunity to exercise our faith. Perhaps we should examine just how well we responded to what we might perceive as great tests or trials.

Did we follow the admonitions that are described in Bible when we faced the tests of life? If the answer is yes, then the blessings will flow. And do you know what else? The rejoicing will follow in due course. When you realize that you have been chosen (like Abraham or Moses, David, or Paul) to endure certain trials and tests—and that by your faith, you choose to follow His Word—you truly have something to rejoice about!

After all, we should all be rejoicing that our faith is resulting in the salvation of our souls. That is the ultimate blessing that following the walk of faith established by father Abraham determines. May we all be found thankful for the trials and rejoicing with the blessings of the faithful!