

The Pain of Restoration

by Frank Selch

As one involved for many years in restoring old and broken things, I know therefore, that there can be great pleasure, but also much pain in the process of giving a new lease of life to something that has outlived its usefulness. The pain is mostly in the hard and painstaking work of discovering the original condition of a piece deemed worthy of the arduous attempt to reproduce the former glory of a work of art – whatever that may be. My specialty was woodwork – in a limited sense – and I felt a terrific thrill every time I discovered a particular nice timber beneath several layers of lacquer, or paint - to look upon the work of a skilled craftsman of long ago who had shaped that piece. One such object, in particular, sticks in my mind! When my in-laws died and my wife's siblings divided their possessions among themselves, there remained an ugly looking chest of drawers in the corner of their parents' garage. The piece was covered in some kind of paint, but mostly in grease and dirt. My brother in law wanted to discard it, when an instinct told me to claim it. Several years later, I took a stab at restoring it, which initially seemed to be a pointless undertaking. Nevertheless, I persisted and what eventually emerged was a most beautiful piece of furniture, made from a lovely 'golden silky oak'.

The Christian world is a little (or much) like that chest of drawers. It is battered by 2000 years of religious wars, political storms, corruption, scandals and whatever one cares to think of! Although there are some good outcomes overall, in real terms, in terms of this moment of the 21st century, we cannot claim to really have learnt much. After learning to fly to the moon, the outer planets of our solar system and walking in space; after learning to look inside the atom and making a myriad of other scientific discoveries, we have not mastered the art of living with one another. Most of our churches (be they physical structures or flesh and blood congregations) are broken and leaky cisterns that often look great from the outside, but generally fail to deliver the advertised goods.

The coming of Jesus (Y^eshua) 2000 years ago signified a major change for the world: he spoke about the Redemption (he came as a ransom for many; Mk. 10:45; Matt.20:28; c/f. Mk.1:14-15) of his people and of the human race. What Y^eshua envisaged in his messages was a changed lifestyle of a) his own people and b) anyone else who might want to embrace and worship the God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac & Jacob through a process, in Hebrew called t^eshuva, or '*an about turn*' – the Greek *metanoia* implies the same - based on the ancient teachings of his people. There is nothing in the letters of Paul (Sha'ul) or any of the other writers of the NT that would indicate that they had anything different in mind. If there IS a deviation from the teachings of the T^enach (OT) it is usually an error in translation or INTERPRETATION of the text. In fact, the sum-total of the Bible is a message entrusted to the Jewish people – beginning with Abraham, but especially since Sinai. Although the Gentile world was included in God's work of Redemption through Y^eshua, they were NEVER given the privilege to change the message or its origin.

However, the church did change the message and the net-outcome of 2000 years of '*Christendom*' is a global religion now powerless to affect any lasting change for the better! Jesus said "*I am the way, the truth and the life*". Alas, what do we see among (incl. 'born again') Christians? Every conceivable compromise with a God denying world!

What needs to happen among us is an acquisition of sufficient courage to begin a process of stripping away all layers of religion and refocus on the maker's manual – albeit without theological filters and traditional perspectives. Once the pain (*of discovering how we have been cheated*)

subsides we may well discover a gem of such rare beauty and radiance that nothing else matters anymore! (c/f. Kingdom parables)

Such a move is not easy, and without taking up the Master's tools revealed to us (the whole Bible through Hebrew eyes) we may as well not embark on such a work. Great care and wisdom is needed, for people's lives without number are at stake! There has been too much pain and hurt suffered by disenfranchised people seeking to make it better by starting a fresh denomination or new forms of 'doing church' – only to discover they are merely repeating a pattern traceable back to the earliest centuries.

Much hangs in the balance because we are not only attempting to stand for truth and righteousness, but we are also facing the very real threat of an advancing Islam that will not desist until the world has been conquered for its Allah. And Islam will conquer, unless the people of the TRUE GOD will arise and claim this earth for our Creator! But such a claim needs to be more than just wishful thinking – our actions need to demonstrate what we believe! Some 2500 years ago, the prophet Daniel foreshadowed the option available to us: Dan. 7:25). **Therefore, truth and righteousness must become and remain our constant advisers and travel companions – TRUTH** in terms of re-investigating what the Scriptures really teach, and **RIGHTEOUSNESS** in terms of the lives we live. Neither of these words/terms must be, nor become, buzz-words for us rather pillars to lean against in the storms, which are about to break over the earth. These two, however, are in direct conflict with the rampant pragmatism that has been motivating God's people for many years – and still is!

I see the legacy left to us by the Son of God as something so incredibly precious that we should not spare any pain or effort to return to (as much as is possible for us at this time in history) to the core of what Y^eshua and his first disciples embraced and were martyred for.

The question then needs to be asked, *'Is it indeed still possible for our world to turn at this time in history?'*

I do not know - God alone knows!

However, whether a wholesale turn-about face is possible or not is immaterial. We do not know when our Master will return! **What matters** is that those of us, who have heard the call of God's Spirit, respond with our whole heart to this call (Deut. 6:4-9). It needs to be an about-face in humility before the Almighty, acknowledging that *'we missed the turn at Albuquerque'* (a saying of Bugs Bunny) and need His guidance and direction as promised by the prophet Isaiah (30:21). Then we need to begin stripping away as gently as possible all **Constantinian Christian** trappings – including the elevation of one denomination over another - and aligning ourselves with the teaching of the scriptures as they apply to the Gentiles in line with Hebrew thought. We need to come to terms with the fact that the Jewish people are still God's chosen people, and we Gentiles are but the **Graft – not the tree**. However, just as Gentiles ended up following a monstrous deception, there is much in Jewish/Rabbinic thought and practice also that has come adrift from the T^enach over the ages and needs to be realigned with the Scriptures. Nevertheless, this realignment will not happen until us Gentiles cease from our pontifical, arrogant attitude that we have all the truth and the *'the Jews need to get the Holy Spirit'* so that they will be able to hear what God is telling them.

But then, one may say, what proof is there that God is even listening to the Jewish people, since Y^eshua declared himself the only way to God? Since the Jewish people (as a nation) rejected him, surely they have to be converted (!!) to be saved?

Think again!

If we agree that the restoration of Israel in 1948 and of Jerusalem in 1967 was a fulfilment of ancient prophecies as recorded by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, et al, we are looking at a work of God. Indeed we are looking at a work of the Almighty that seems to be outside the NT (or rather orthodox Christian) sphere of thought. If I am right, then much of our theological framework is askew and needs to be revisited! Therefore, if the Eternal One is working again with His ancient people, **then the Holy Spirit** (also the Spirit of the Holy God, the Ruach Elohim or 'God Spirit' [Gen.1:2]) **is also with them**, even though they may NOT SPEAK IN TONGUES - because who may separate the Almighty from His Spirit!

An additional hurdle we are facing is the translation issue. There are very serious theological issues involved in terms of (at least) our English translations from the Greek and the Hebrew. The problem goes all the way back to the LXX and the Vulgate and covers many translations into the vernacular since.

It is only since I have been living in Israel that I have realised the true significance of the Hebrew Masoretic text and its associated Hebrew thought form, which is as different as chalk and cheese, when compared with our '*Greek*' way of thinking.

The key issue, far above all things, however, is the question of the deity of Y^eshua/Jesus and his origin! As Gentiles we also have to bring ourselves to admit that he was/is a Judean (i.e. Jewish). This means that the Good News Paul and the other disciples took to the Gentile world was a Jewish message and initially for Jewish minds, but eventually became tailored for Gentile consumption – albeit in Hebrew framework. In addition, Paul wrote that Gentiles were grafted into the ancient Olive Tree represented by Abraham and the Patriarchs and therefore became members of the Commonwealth of Israel. In other words, Gentile followers of Y^eshua took upon themselves the nationality of the Kingdom of God, of which the Jewish people are the key component.

How strange, therefore, that the Christian world today worships a god called Jesus Christ!

The person described by Christianity as Jesus Christ is an entirely Gentile entity! He is utterly disconnected from his ancestral people! The person who died on the Roman torture stake was Y^eshua of Nazareth, an orthodox Jewish man who wore tzitzit, and a tallit as part of his garment. Also, he never had a surname as insisted on by more than 1 billion Christians throughout the world. Furthermore, Y^eshua never set out to overthrow the faith of his ancestors, nor change the times or seasons (Matt.5:17) – rather to reaffirm and intensify the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings (c/f. Lk. 24:44-45).

The distortions began when men like Origen et al, who sought to interpret the teachings of and concerning Y^eshua via the medium of the Greek Philosophers, called the new religion Christianity. The title 'Christ' is a Latin form of the Greek word *Christos* and set in concrete by Constantine. Although the Greek form *Christos* appears in the LXX at least 41 times, where it is applied to various figures of Jewish history, it is NEVER translated as such in the OT, but disguised or hidden in other terms. Therefore, the average Bible reader/student remains ignorant of the fudge! Additionally, the translators of the NT make it appear as if this is a new thing and even ascribe deity to the term Christ!!!

I watch daily with deep concern and fear in my heart how this Gentile religion (even among those who profess a love for the Jewish people and Israel) seeks to dominate the Jewish people. Not in order to make them jealous through a greater separation unto God or devotion to our Heavenly Father, but by means of doctrines firmly rooted in Constantinian religion. How? In expressions like, '*Jesus Christ the Messiah of Israel*'. If Christ already means Messiah, then why use it in the first place, or why add *Messiah*, unless the term Christ is understood to have superior meaning!

The major issue Christendom is facing today is the question, what was the message of *Good News* preached to the Jewish world and what was *the* original message preached to the Gentile world by Paul? Whatever we read about Jesus/ Y^eshua in the NT is essentially a message to his own people; in Paul's words, '*...to the Jews first and then also to the Greeks!*' (Ro.1:16-17). To understand the message of Y^eshua, it must be seen entirely in the context of his time and his people; i.e. the Judean world during the Roman occupation. The mistake many have made and still make is to read the words of Jesus directly into a Gentile context. Paul's letters are SITUATIONAL LETTERS and many of them should not be broadly applied to the 21st C. without reference to a correct contextual setting.

Gentiles are the graft - NOT THE TREE! Whatever afflictions and imperfections the tree might have, it remains the tree! Judaism may have lost its way to some degree, but so has the church – and even more so! As a matter of fact, the branches have, to a LARGE extent, become detached from the trunk and thus also from the roots and are now floundering with seemingly nowhere to go!

It is here where I believe that we have to muster the courage to ask, 'how do we get back to our roots?' I believe also, that a major clue is given to us by Paul in the following verses: **Ro. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16; Phil 3:9.** These have been persistently mistranslated by MOST Bibles as needing to have '*Faith IN Christ*' to be saved, whereas the Greek text clearly states that it is the '*Faith of Messiah*', thus = **the faith of Abraham**, which bears salvific power. What Paul clearly understood as a Hebrew, as a Pharisee and student of one of the most important teachers of his day, Gamaliel, and since, that the faith which took Y^eshua to his death on a Roman torture stake, was nothing less than the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, where his seed (Messiah) opened the door of Redemption to the Gentiles. The astounding OT parallel is found in Gen 22 where Abraham proceeds to Mt Moriah to sacrifice his son as requested by God. Isaac must have had an inkling that something unusual was afoot since his Father only had fire and he was lugging the firewood. It would seem that Isaac became suspicious, because he inquires about a sacrificial victim (v. 6), but Abraham assured him that God would provide it.

Y^eshua **too**, intuitively knew that he would be a sacrificial victim, but as the story of Gethsemane reveals, **he STILL hoped** until the last minute that his Father would deliver him from such horrific death, which he anticipated he may have to die. However, this time God did not stay the hand of the executioner!

And it is therein that lies the key! It was Y^eshua's uncompromising obedience unto death, which demonstrates his faith and gives him rights with God above all men and the entitlement to be called **King of kings** (in human terms)! Theology focuses heavily on this death, but overlooks the most important factor of the entire message, which is also the message of the entire Bible: OBEDIENCE! (c/f. Ro. 6:16; Heb. 5:8). The verses highlighted above are the keys, because they call upon the believer to take on the Faith of Messiah and walk the same walk that he walked, to live the life that he lived – NOT just look for a free ride on the basis of what he did.

The grace of God, which grants us salvation, is the undeserved action by God that includes us in the C'wealth of Israel through an expression of repentance and trust that Y^eshua was indeed the agent of the Most High to bring that about. Grace is not the misunderstood reward of a righteousness without obligations, but a reflection of God's righteousness by including us Gentiles in His plan of redemption as He promised to Abraham (Gen 22:18).

In conclusion I want to say, that I never did, I do not now, nor will I in the future propose for Gentiles to become Jewish, but to live lives obedient to the Scriptures, which demonstrate the transforming power of the Spirit of God in conjunction with His written Word revealed to the Ancients and reaffirmed through Messiah.

Let us be mindful of the massive onslaught by Latin & Greek *Churchfathers* on anything Jewish among the early followers of Y^eshua and the Jewish people as a whole. Considering also the defensive efforts of Jewish thinkers, I am convinced that much has been lost of the original message of Y^eshua, as well as that of the early disciples. By the Grace of God there is enough material available to guide us gentiles, although what we have today are only fragmentary reports of those eventful days. However, when we take the Covenantal agreements HaShem made with the physical descendants of Abraham we find more than enough conflict between the T^enakh and the NT to exercise caution on how we deal with the Jewish people today.

As I alluded to above, there is certainly sufficient evidence before us to indicate that God is involved with modern Israel; we ought to think more than twice therefore before we declare them lost without **OUR** gospel!

As true (gentile) followers of the Messiah let us strive to live lives that are a challenge to all around us – be they Jewish or Gentile. Let us turn away from all compromise with ungodly practices despising the cost - for a Kingdom awaits us. It will be only then, when we demonstrate to the Jewish world that we truthfully seek to understand what separates us, and without trying to convert them to a religion that is so far removed from them, that they will accept that many of us indeed worship the same deity. The reality is that although Y^eshua broke down the middle wall of partition, Christendom re-erected and re-inforced it. We do not necessarily endear ourselves to them by dressing like them, singing Hebrew songs or use Hebrew words in our Christianese! In fact, I would counsel strongly against taking on Jewish customs without an in-depth understanding of what is involved in the various symbolisms embodied in those customs, etc. The Jewish world will only become amiable to healthy dialogue with us when they begin to hear, consistently, similar words as spoken by Y^eshua, i.e.: *“[We do not intend] to destroy the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, but to fulfil them!”* Unless we put legs onto the message of Y^eshua by our living witness, by uniting faith and works – there is no message for anyone, be they Jewish or Gentile.

If we are truly filled with the Spirit of God, then this is our task for today. Interpreting prophecy is important, but it pales into insignificance when compared with what needs to be done TODAY (Ps. 95 – esp. v.7-8; c/f.Rev.2:29) *“If today you hear his voice...!”*

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The term T^enakh is an Hebrew acronym for Torah, Prophets, Writings; Torah – N^eviim - Khetuvim