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~ Sin and Leprosy ~

And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle,
Suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow.
Then Aaron turned toward Miriam,
And there she was, a leper.
Numbers 12:10

The following is a Midrash, a story written to teach a truth.

* * *

Suppose that you are a member of an ancient Hebrew society. You are betrothed to a beautiful virgin girl, who lives in a faraway town, and have gone back to your father's house to prepare the *Chuppah* חופה (Hoo'-pah = wedding chamber) for her. Much time has already passed but your father has given you no indication that he is anywhere near ready to send you back to get your bride. Legally you and your bride are fully married, but according to custom you are not allowed to consummate the marriage until your father tells you; "Go and fetch your bride, it is time to bring her to the *Chuppah*."

You puzzle over the fact that it has been such a long period of time since the betrothal took place. What could be the problem? The *Chuppah* is all prepared and stocked with provisions for the seven day wedding consummation. It has been quite some time since your father has made any suggestions about further changes that should be made to it. In addition, you have been studying *Torah*, praying three times a day, working diligently at a job, saving your money, and not running around with the boys. In addition, your father has given you no indication that you need to make changes in your personal habits. What could possibly be the problem? You are longing so much to bring your beautiful bride home to the *Chuppah* and to dwell with her in the fullness of marriage.

Finally, out of desperation, you go to your father and ask; "Why haven't you sent me to fetch my bride? Is there something else that I need to do in preparation for marriage? Please tell me, what is the problem?"

Your father looks at you and with very sad eyes says; "Your bride has contracted a serious, even life threatening illness. She has leprosy. You cannot go for her until she is healed of this terrible disease."

What a shattering blow to learn about the one with whom you hope to spend the rest of your life. What utter devastation. Even more devastating to you is the realization that leprosy is understood to be a punishment for a serious sin of which the leper has not repented. This means your beloved bride is harboring some sin which she either refuses to recognize or refuses to give up. You wonder what awful sin it is that she has not only committed, but of which she is either unwilling or unable to repent.

* * *

The element of truth in this Midrash is that some members of the Bride of Messiah have a terrible disease, one that affects the whole body, and that disease is spiritual leprosy. However, this is a condition from which the Bride can be healed and cleansed; so the situation, while very serious, is not hopeless. The Bride is afflicted with this disease for a number of reasons. This chapter will touch on some possible causes.

~ Biblical Leprosy ~

Most scholars and medical people agree that the modern disease called leprosy (Hansen's disease) is not the same one that carries that name in the English translations of our Bibles. In Hebrew the word for leprosy is *tzara'at* צָרַעַת (tzah-rah-ah't'). In Greek the word is *lepra* (lep'-rah) and it means; "scaliness or leprosy." It is interesting to note that James Hastings, in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, says that *tzara'at* comes from the word *tza-rah'* צָרַע (tzah-rah'), and both words are general terms "for any prostrating experience or disabling disease." (p. 575). In other words, the leprosy of the Bible was a disease that caused you to prostrate yourself. This could be interpreted to mean that it would confine a person to bed. However, the scriptures do not substantiate that view, as lepers were often seen in public. In actual fact, the disease of leprosy did cause people to prostrate themselves in order to be cured. However, it was a prostration born of repentance, not from the physical symptoms of the illness itself.

Biblical leprosy could affect more than an individual's body. It could also afflict one's clothing, vessels or house. Leprosy of this nature appeared as greenish or reddish spots, which some feel were a type of mildew or mold. On a person's body it manifested itself as flaky or scaly skin, or ulcerous eruptions. The Jewish Encyclopedia summarizes the characteristic features of leprosy, found in Leviticus 13, as follows: "(1) bright white spots or patches on the skin, the hair on which also was white; (2) the depression of the patches below the level of the surrounding skin; (3) the existence of 'quick raw flesh;' (4) the spreading of the scab or scall." (Vol. VIII, p. 9).

What is described in the Scriptures as 'leprosy' is definitely not the modern disease of the same name. More likely it covered a variety of skin diseases. What is significant about Biblical leprosy is that all of the lepers mentioned in the *Tanakh* (Tah-nahk' = Old Testament) received their affliction as a result of a serious sin, either their own, or that of a relative.

The best known of the Old Testament lepers was *Miriam* מִרְיָם (Meer-yahm'), the sister of *Moshe* מֹשֶׁה (Moh-shay' = Moses). She was stricken with the disease as a result of speaking against the marriage of her brother *Moshe* to the:

"Ethiopian woman whom he had married..."

(Num. 12:1)

According to Jewish tradition, both *Miriam* and *Aharon* אַהֲרֹן (Ah hah-rone' = Aaron) were immediately plagued with leprosy, but *Aharon's* leprosy was quickly removed because he had not actually spoken against *Moshe*, but had committed a lesser sin by listening to *Miriam's* complaint and not rebuking

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What was the reason for all of this ritual? To teach the people the difference between being clean and being unclean:

"This is the law for any leprous sore and scall, for the leprosy of a garment and of a house, for a swelling and a scab and a bright spot, to teach when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the law of leprosy."

(Lev. 14:54-57)

Let it be understood that when the Scriptures speak of people becoming "unclean," they are speaking of ritual uncleanness, not a dirty physical body. When a person became ritually unclean, he or she was prohibited from worshipping at the Temple. Also, a ritually unclean person could transmit their uncleanness to another person through physical contact. Therefore, it was especially important for the priests and Levites to refrain from situations that would cause them to come into physical contact with other people. To do so would put them in jeopardy of becoming unclean themselves. If they were to become unclean they could not perform their duties at the Temple. Since service at the Temple was considered not only a great honor, but an absolute obligation before God, the priests and Levites took great pains to make sure that they would not come in contact with anyone or anything that might make them ritually unclean.

~ The Causes of Uncleanness ~

There were a number of things, in addition to leprosy, that could cause ritual uncleanness. One of the most obvious was contact with a dead body:

"He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean."

"Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD [YHVH]. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him."

"This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean."

"Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days." (Num. 19:11-16)

Not only was contact with a dead body a cause of uncleanness, even going into the tent of a dead person rendered one unclean. Also, graves were a source of ritual uncleanness, as was the touching of a dead man's bone. In fact, not only did contact with a grave render a person ritually unclean, if one's shadow were to cross a grave that person was also considered to be ritually unclean.

Uncleanness also came by other means. Each month a woman goes through an unclean period during her menstrual cycle. During this time a married woman would have to refrain from having intimacy with her husband, plus, she could not go

to the Temple to worship. Anyone touching her also became unclean. For this reason she was required to wear clothing that identified her as being unclean so that others could avoid physical contact with her. In fact, another person was not even allowed to sit upon the bed on which she lay during her unclean time. (See Leviticus 15:19-30.) She was required to go through a purification ritual at the end of each monthly period.

Likewise, a man who had a discharge from his body became unclean and also had to go through a purification ritual in order to be declared clean. Whatever object the unclean person sat upon also became unclean, and anyone that sat upon that item of furniture also became unclean. (See Leviticus 15:1-18).

It is difficult for us today to understand why it was so terrible for religious Israelites to be in a state of ritual uncleanness. In modern society it is common for women to use sanitary items that allow them to maintain a regular lifestyle and no one is the wiser. It would be unthinkable, in Western society, for a woman to actually dress in a manner that told the entire world that she was having a menstrual period. But in God's society, things are very different. All of these laws were given as instruction about very important concepts. From the laws of ritual cleanliness we learn that one did not dare to approach the God of the Universe, the Creator of all things, in a state of ritual uncleanness, for no unclean person can come before God and live:

"Thus you shall separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness when they defile My tabernacle that is among them."

"This is the law for one who has a discharge, and for him who emits semen and is unclean thereby, and for her who is indisposed because of her customary impurity, and for one who has a discharge, either man or woman, and for him who lies with her who is unclean." (Lev. 15:31-33)

~ Cleansing the Unclean ~

While it was very easy to become ritually unclean, the methods of ridding one's self of that uncleanness varied from the simple and inexpensive to the expensive and complex. We have already seen what was required for the cleansing of leprosy. Other forms of uncleanness did not demand quite as much ritual or expense.

Cleansing from contact with a dead body required seven days and two sprinklings with "the waters of purification." These were the waters which contained the ashes of the Red Heifer.

The man with a discharge and the woman coming out of her menses had to wash their clothes and immerse in water. Then on the eighth day they had to bring to the priest two turtledoves or two young pigeons as an offering.

In all cases of uncleanness, part of the ritual purification process included "immersing in water." The Jewish people understand this terminology to be immersion in a *mikvah* or immersion pool. In addition, a prerequisite is to be physically clean before entering the *mikvah*. A witness, beside the pool, would testify that the person immersing themselves went completely under water. It was this immersion in the *mikveh* of "living water" that completed the cleansing ritual and signified

~ Separation or Divorce? ~

If someone says, "I love God,"

And hates his brother,

He is a liar;

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen,

How can he love God whom he has not seen?

1 John 4:20



Do we correctly understand Y'shua's teaching on Separation and Divorce? Y'shua said:

"It hath been said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:"³² But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (Matt. 5:31-32 KJV)

As we examine the above passage, we see that Y'shua has used the phraseology **"It has been said"** to refer to a Rabbinical teaching (*Oral Torah*) on the Torah Command (*Written Torah*) pertaining to divorce:

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.² And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.³ And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife;⁴ Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD [YHVH]: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD [YHVH] thy God giveth thee for an inheritance." (Deut. 24:1-4 KJV)

Understanding that Y'shua came to correctly interpret the law (*Torah*), and seeing that He has addressed the problem of adultery, which was not addressed in the *Torah* command on divorce, we can interpret His response to be directed at the extant Rabbinical teaching on divorce. Furthermore, from this translation of Matt. 5:31-32, it appears that Y'shua has taught that a divorced person who remarries commits adultery. However, we do not find this teaching in the *Torah*. For this reason, we need to search further to understand what Y'shua really taught.

We will have to use the Strong's Concordance to find the original word used for the text in question. For this reason, the same passage is listed below with the corresponding Strong's codes:

Matthew 5:31-32 ³¹ It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away <630> his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement <647>:³² But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away <630> his wife saving for the cause of

fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced <630> committeth adultery."

The parallel passages of Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:2-12, and Luke 16:18 were also examined and the Strong's Number (S.N.) 630 was found to be translated as "put away" each and every time it was used in those passages. However, in the Matthew 5:31-32 passage, we find two different translations used for the same word, S.N. 630 (apoluo = ap-ol-oo'-o):

- 1.) Put away, and
- 2.) divorced.

It is important to understand the correct definition of this word (S.N. 630) and its implications.

In the first century, if a man gave his wife a writing of divorcement (S.N. 647), she was sent out of his house and allowed to legally remarry. But, if a man merely put away his wife, she was sent out of his house and was not allowed to legally remarry. However, from the beginning it was not so, for:

"...Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." (Mark 10:4 NIV)

"And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife." (Deut 24:2)

In those days the primary means of support for a woman was through marriage. That is why Y'shua said: "whoever puts away his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery." Logically, if she were already guilty of committing adultery, the act of putting her away would not be the cause of her adultery.

A woman who was only separated from her husband would not be free to remarry. Although she could have been supported by family members (as long as that was an option), if she were to remarry without having received a writing of divorcement (S.N. 647), she would thereby be guilty of both committing adultery and causing the man she married to commit adultery. This is why Y'shua said: **"Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement."**

To **"write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house"** was a *Torah* command which allowed for the divorced person to remarry.

Now, with this understanding, let us look at the passage again with the words translated correctly:

"Furthermore it has been said, "Whoever puts away his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."³² But I say to you that whoever puts away his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is put away commits adultery." (Matt. 5:31-32 KJV)

For those interested, the Strong's codes referenced above are listed on the following page.

~ Conclusion ~

The word (S.N. 630) which was translated as 'divorced' in Matthew 5:32, should have been translated as "put away."

May you be blessed as you bless others with the correct teaching of this passage.

of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" [empty headed] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "You fool!" shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matt. 5:21-22)

God can, and does, forgive all sins including the sin of murder, but only if the one who has committed the sin asks for forgiveness and fully repents (I John 1:9). The story of Joab, King David's general, is very interesting, for Joab committed a murder during a time of war. He was not given the death penalty, nor was he personally afflicted with leprosy. Instead, King David placed a curse upon this man's family, which included *tzara'at* (leprosy).

After King Saul's death, David דָּוִד (Dah-veed') found himself at war with Saul's descendants. Saul's son, Ishbosheth אִישׁ־בִּשְׁתַּח (Ieesh Boh-shet'), was officially recognized as king by all the tribes except Judah. Ishbosheth's general, Abner, went to David and made a pact. But David's general, Joab יוֹאָב (Yoh-ahv'), became angry when he heard that Abner אֲבִנֵר (Ahv-nayr') had met with David. Joab hated Abner because he had been responsible for the death of Joab's brother in a recent battle, and so he had Abner killed. David was furious, and showed the nation that he had nothing to do with the murder by marching in Abner's funeral procession. David then placed a curse upon Joab and his descendants:

"And afterward, when David heard it, he said, 'My kingdom and I are guiltless before the LORD [YHVH] forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.'" (II Sam. 3:28-29)

Are there any members of the Bride of Messiah today who stand guilty of hatred without a cause, or murder? If so, their complete repentance and change of heart is urgently needed.

~ Sin #4: Desecrating the Name of God ~

"You shall not take the name of the LORD [YHVH] your God in vain, for the LORD [YHVH] will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." (Ex. 20:7)

It is perhaps our greatest purpose in life to glorify the name of God. We can do this in both word and deed:

"Praise the LORD [YHVH]!

Praise the name of the LORD [YHVH];

Praise Him, O you servants of the LORD [YHVH]!

You who stand in the house of the LORD [YHVH],

In the courts of the house of our God,

Praise the LORD [YHVH], for the LORD [YHVH]

is good;

Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant."

(Psalm 135:1-3)

However, there are grave consequences for blaspheming the name of God:

"Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.)

"Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD [YHVH] might be shown to them.

"And the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: "Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD [YHVH] shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death.'"

(Lev. 24:10-16)

The reason the Jewish people refuse to speak the name of God (*YHVH*) is because they do not wish to risk taking God's name in vain. Instead, they substitute the Hebrew words *Adonai* אֲדֹנָי (Ah-doh-nai' = Lord) or *HaShem* הַשֵּׁם (Hah Shehm' = the Name) whenever they speak or encounter, in reading or writing, the name of God. When writing these substitute words for the Name, some will eliminate the vowels. This is done as a sign of respect for the ineffable name of God. Thus, God becomes G-d, and Lord becomes L-rd.

In the Jewish world the actual name of God (*YHVH*) can only be spoken in synagogue on *Yom Kippur*. When the name is spoken all of the worshippers fall to the floor on their faces. It is apparent from these practices that the Jewish people hold the Name of God in great awe and reverence.

Several people have written to *Hebrew Roots*® urging us to use the "Scared Names" exclusively in our publication. We appreciate their stand on this issue. However, we are convinced that very few people currently know the correct pronunciation for God's Name (*YHVH*). While we use *Y'shua* as the given Hebrew name of our Saviour, we also recognize that it was by the name of Jesus Christ that many were/are brought to repentance and baptized into His body of believers. Therefore, we also continue to use the anglicized form of the Hebrew name and title, *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah), which is "Jesus Christ."

What then constitutes taking the LORD's name in vain? The Jewish people say it is the indiscriminate use of the tetragrammaton (*YHVH*). The Believers who use the Sacred Names say they feel use of substitutes -- such as *Adonai*, LORD, God, and the name Jesus, desecrate the name of God.

However, consider this: one does not need to address our Father in heaven by His actual name. I never called my physical father Emory; it was always Dad, or Daddy or Pa. Neither do I call my spiritual Father by His name, but rather by the closer and more familiar terms 'Father,' or the Hebrew form 'Abba.' In our opinion, a more virulent form of taking the

have also been taught that the Festivals of *YHVH* are not to be kept, and in their place they have been taught to keep holidays which stem from paganism but have now been Christianized. And they have been taught that God now approves of their eating any kind of meat they want, despite what Leviticus 11 says. In other words, they have been taught that it is permissible to disobey God's commands.

As a result of these false *antinomian* (against the law) teachings, some have become so disillusioned that they decide to throw out the baby with the bath water and reject the Church's teaching about "Jesus" (*Y'shua*) as well. What they do not realize is that down through the centuries there has always been a remnant of Believers who have accepted the Scriptures in their entirety. These same people have also rejected the false teachings of the Churches. Many of these people were persecuted by the Roman Church along with the Jews. The Church leaders called such Messianic Believers in *Y'shua* "Judaizers," because they followed the "Jewish" ways.

~ Needing to Belong ~

Another draw to Judaism, for the Messianic Believer, is the need to belong. Having found themselves out of the mainstream Christian community, some are desperately looking for a Spiritual home and believe they have found it in Judaism.

Not only is there a deep sense of tradition within Judaism, these traditions are rich with meaning and they cover every aspect of life. In addition, the Synagogue service is both beautiful and sublime, with a great number of the prayers taken straight out of the Hebrew Scriptures.

When one becomes a Messianic Believer (i.e. comes to accept the Jewishness of *Y'shua*), they often have a difficult time finding fellowship. Those who keep the Sabbath and the Festivals, and wish to explore the Hebrew roots of the Faith, are often few and far between in any given area. Many have to meet in Home Fellowships because there are not enough people to form a congregation.

Home Fellowships can provide a wonderful opportunity to fully explore the Scriptures, and this can be a very positive step in the spiritual growth for Believers. However, if not run well, Home Fellowships can also become the 'soapbox' for someone who wants to be a preacher.

There are some very successful Messianic congregations which have been formed as a result of good leadership and dedicated members. However, others have been torn apart when an outsider has come in and attempted to take over; often bringing in false doctrines that drive the original people away.

In addition, a new Messianic Believer can experience estrangement from family and friends who feel condemned because Messianic Believers will no longer share in their Christianized pagan holidays.

These are just a few of the problems which face all of us who wish to hold onto our faith in *Y'shua* while pursuing a *Torah* lifestyle. Unfortunately, some Believers find it difficult to survive spiritually under these conditions. They are the people who, at times, become candidates for conversion to Judaism.

Equally troubling are the people who are more than ready to assist the Believer in *Y'shua* to give up his faith and become

a Rejecter of *Y'shua*. Those who lead Believers in this direction are often people who have already made the switch themselves. Of course, there are also plenty of Christians who are more than happy to lead Jews into faith in a paganized Jesus coupled with an anti-Torah (*antinomian*) belief. We believe both such camps (Judaism and *antinomian*) are in danger of hearing the words **"I never knew you."** (Matt. 7:23).

More insidious are those who claim they are neutral in their approach to both Jews and Christians, but who regularly assist Christians in becoming Jewish. However, these same people tend to scream bloody murder about anyone who might want to help someone switch from Rabbinic Judaism to a Messianic Jewish faith in *Y'shua*, even though such people are able to retain their Jewish understandings, traditions, and culture. This last phenomena is probably based upon the mistaken belief that all those who accept *Y'shua* as the Messiah are stepping into the pagan customs of traditional Christianity.

Perhaps it would be well to recall what *Kepha* said about the Believing community:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (I Pet. 2:9-10)

The King James Version, in this passage, calls us a "peculiar people," and indeed we are, for the leadership of mainstream Christianity does not like us because we preach *Torah* observance and the Jews are suspicious of us because we accept *Y'shua* as the Messiah. It is important to remember some more of *Kepha's* words:

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's [Messiah's] sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ [Messiah], blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian [Believer in Y'shua], let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. ¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ Now

'If the righteous one is scarcely saved,

Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'

[Prov. 11:31]

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." (I Pet. 4:12-19)

The apostle Paul made it very clear that the Bride of Messiah is a body, fitly framed together by God Himself.

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ [Messiah]. ...

"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ...

"Now you are the body of Christ [Messiah], and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."

(I Cor. 12:12, 15-18, 27-31)

That more 'excellent way' is not positions of power and prestige within the Church, but a humble attitude of love and respect for all the members of the Bride of Messiah.

Are there any members of the Bride of Messiah today who stand guilty of coveting by acting in a capacity not permitted to them? If so, their complete repentance and change of attitude is required.

~ Sin #7: Conceit ~

"You shall have no other gods before Me." (Ex. 20:3)

In effect, all of the sins that caused the biblical form of leprosy came from an attitude of conceit. Anytime a person puts himself above others, he is setting himself up for a fall into sin. Conceit is the exact opposite of humbleness. Like leaven (a type of sin), it puffs one up. But the Bride of Messiah must learn to walk in:

"...the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (I Cor. 5:8)

"For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

Conceit is never far from the heart of any human being. It was in the hearts of the disciples when they came to *Y'shua* and asked:

"...Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

"And Jesus [Y'shua] called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.'" (Matt. 18:1-5)

It is the natural instinct of the carnal mind to want to put one's self above other people, for this is the attitude from where the world's form of self esteem comes. But it is a false form of self respect, and one into which the members of the Bride must not fall.

Are there any members of the Bride of Messiah today who stand guilty of conceit? If so, their complete repentance and humbleness of heart is required.

~ Sin #8: Lashon Hara ~

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Ex. 20:16)

The most extreme forms of *tzara'at* (leprosy) were said to have come forth upon those individuals who committed the sin of *lashon hara*. It is said that one who speaks *lashon hara* denies the basic concepts of the *Torah*. If this is true, then the Bride of Messiah is in deep, deep trouble, for the evil tongue; the slanderous tongue; the tongue that has little good to say about anyone (be they Believer or non-believer), is rampant within the Believing community. It is important to note that *lashon hara* is more than just speaking lies about other people. Telling the truth about someone can also fall into the category of *lashon hara* if the results of one's statement inflicts injury upon another individual. The injuries one might suffer from the sin of *lashon hara* can be one or more of the following: physical, monetary, mental, spiritual, or emotional.

Let us again examine the case of *Miriam*, the sister of *Moshe*, in this regard:

"Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman." (Num. 12:1)

There are a couple of different ways of looking at this verse. The most frequent understanding is that *Miriam* and *Aharon* criticized *Moshe* because he had married outside of his racial group. Ethiopians were understood to be descendants of Noah's son Ham. They were not of Semitic (descendants of Shem) origin.

Another way of looking at this, is that they may have been critical of the troubles that *Moshe* and *Zipporah* זִפּוֹרָה (*Tzee-poh'-rah*) had during their trek from Midian to Egypt, and the fact that *Zipporah* seems to have spoken disrespectfully to *Moshe* over the issue of circumcision:

"And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD [YHVH] met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, 'Surely you are a husband of blood to me!'

"So He let him go. Then she said, 'You are a husband of blood!' -- because of the circumcision." (Ex. 4:24-26)

After the Exodus we find that *Moshe* and *Zipporah* were separated, for it is written that *Zipporah's* father, *Jethro* יִתְרוֹ (*Yeet'-roh*), brought her back to *Moshe*:

"So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, with her two sons,

"... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

(Eph. 4:16)

In other words, it is the entire body working together which brings about proper edification. Do not be deceived. Your understanding of a Scripture passage is just as important as any one else's. It may not be correct, but it is important, for by expressing your view, you (and those you are with) may gain valuable input from others. Of course, the desired end result of all such discussion should be that the real truth may be brought forth (and agreed upon) from the various views expressed.

Shimon Kepha (She-moan' Key'-phah = Simon Peter) spoke about the men of his day who tried to exploit the brethren through false doctrine:

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, ... ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." (II Peter 2:1-2)

As we look out upon the Believing community, we are saddened (but not surprised) to see the same things happening today that happened in *Kepha's* (Peter's) day.

~ Prove All Things ~

We all need to become like the Bereans of old, who did not just believe something because someone came into their Synagogue and taught it. Instead, they searched the Scriptures to see if what was being taught was in accordance with what was written:

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Acts 17:10-11)

Brethren, do not believe something just because you read it in *Hebrew Roots*, or in any other journal or book, or hear it preached by someone who sounds authoritative. Search it out for yourself. We try very hard to present the truth as we understand it. However, our faith, just like yours, is in the process of maturing. Perhaps we do not see things in quite the same light as you do because one (or both) of us has an incomplete understanding at this particular time. Such differences in understanding should not present a problem between brethren as long as all involved are willing to admit that they may still have things to learn.

Shaul clearly stated that it is through differences of opinion that the truth will be made known:

"For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. ¹⁹ For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

(I Cor. 11:18-19 KJV)

Shaul says there must be heresies (differences of opinion) so that the truth can be discovered. However, the Churches of this world have used this word to condemn anyone who disagrees with their official doctrines.

Now there are heresies which are damnable, and *Shimon Kepha* spoke about those:

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." (II Pet. 2:1 KJV)

The "damnable heresy" mentioned above is specifically the one which denies that *Y'shua* is the Messiah, the Son of God in the flesh; thus denying that He is our Lord and Savior.

Thankfully, Messiah *Y'shua* will return one day and give all of us a true and complete understanding. Then we will agree completely on all points of doctrine.

~ Two Ditches ~

The road of religion is just like any other road, it has two ditches on either side plus potholes in the middle. One ditch is the *antinomian* (against the *Torah* or anti-Law) ditch. This ditch beckons people because it allows them to do whatever they wish to do and still claim they are in a right relationship with God. This is apparently where most Americans are today, for a recent poll shows that two-thirds of all Americans believe they will go to heaven when they die, while only 0.5% think they will go to hell. Apparently the other one-third either have no opinion or they believe they will die and be resurrected or reincarnated.

A prime example of *antinomianism* is the homosexual Priest who was ordained a Bishop in the Episcopal Church despite the clear teaching of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) that such a lifestyle is sinful. Thankfully, there appears to be many in that Church who still believe the Scriptures teach against such behavior.

It is this *antinomian* (anti-law) ditch, out of which many (if not most) of our readers have come. It is the very ditch which *Hebrew Roots*® has been addressing through many articles concerning the acceptance of *Torah* as the Believer's Standard of Behavior.

Another ditch is one that has caused us much sadness. Some, who have given up their old *antinomian* ways, become pursuant of the *Torah*, and accepted the Hebrew roots of the Faith, have now gone all the way over into the other ditch and converted to Judaism. In the process, most (if not all) of these folks have also given up their long held faith in Messiah *Y'shua* as the Son of God. *Shimon Kepha* addressed this phenomenon in the previously quoted passage:

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed."

(II Peter 2:1-2)

be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." (Matt. 5:33-37)

There is a classic example in Scripture where a man took a "vain oath" (one he knew was not true) and was plagued with leprosy as a result. It is the story of *Gehazi*, גֵּהַזִּי (Geh-kah'-zee) the servant of the prophet of God, Elisha אֵלִישָׁה (Eh-lee-shah').

Naaman נַעֲמָן (Nah ah-mahn') was the commander of the army of the nation of Syria and he was afflicted with leprosy. A captured servant girl (from Israel) suggested to Naaman's wife that he contact a prophet of God in Samaria for possible healing of his affliction.

So the king of Syria composed a letter to the king of Israel asking him to heal Naaman of his leprosy. The king of Israel was extremely upset because he had no power to heal leprosy or any other disease. The king of Israel was afraid that when the king of Syria learned that he was powerless to perform the required healing that war would ensue.

However, Elisha the prophet heard about the problem and asked that Naaman be sent to him. Naaman came to Elisha, but Elisha did not even go out to see him. He merely told Gehazi, his servant, to tell Naaman to immerse himself seven times in the Jordan river and his leprosy would disappear.

Naaman was angry that Elisha did not come out to see him, but was finally persuaded by his attendants to try out the cure anyway. Sure enough, the leprosy disappeared immediately and completely. Naaman returned to Elisha to thank him and to offer him valuable gifts. But Elisha declined the gifts:

"But he said, 'As the LORD [YHVH] lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.' And he urged him to take it but he refused." (II Kings 5:16)

Naaman left with his entourage to return to Syria. However, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, had overheard the conversation and became greedy. He followed after Naaman and intercepted him on the road:

"So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, 'Is all well?'"

"And he said, 'All is well. My master has sent me, saying, "Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments."'"

"So Naaman said, 'Please, take two talents.' And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed.

"Now he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, 'Where did you go Gehazi?' and he said, 'Your servant did not go anywhere.'

"Then he said to him, 'Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive

groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.'

"And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow." (II Kings 5:21-27)

Are there any members of the Bride of Messiah today who have taken a 'vain oath?' If so, complete repentance and a determination never to do so again is required.

~ The Leprosy of the Bride ~

What do all these stories about the punishment of sin through leprosy have to do with the twenty-first century Bride of Messiah? After all, the biblical form of leprosy no longer exists, and sin is no longer punished in this manner.

Well, there is a reason for all of this instruction, for a great deal of Scripture is taken up teaching us about how leprosy was used as an immediate punishment for very grave sin. It was all recorded so that those upon whom the end of the age has come might read, understand and come to a righteous fear of our Creator God. For:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Tim. 3:16-17)

But, you may be wondering, how does all of this apply to us today?

A simple explanation is that sin still exists in the Body of Messiah, the Bride of Christ). Why? Because the Church (the *ecclesia*) still lives in the house of her evil earthly father, *HaSatan*; the adversary. Like a leprous cancer, sin in all of its forms has invaded the Body of the Bride of Messiah. It appears in various forms of spiritual sickness that we see taking hold of the Believing community. Yes, false doctrines are a part of it, but the real leprosy is one of the spirit -- not of the mind. It includes the inability to truly love one another, the willingness of so many to believe the worst about other Believers, the lack of concern for those who are in need or suffering from physical ailments, and the list goes on and on:

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men shall be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (II Tim. 3:1-5)

~ What Must We Do? ~

Today, the Orthodox Jewish people believe that the entirety of the world is in a state of ritual uncleanness. Since there are no ashes of the Red Heifer, a person may not, at this time, be ritually cleansed physically. Certainly, in relationship

- ◆ The blood of bulls and goats covers sins, but only until the next time one sins.
- ◆ Committing even one sin, for which repentance has not been made and/or is not covered by sacrifice, requires the death penalty.

As you can see, there is no permanent redemption possible in this order of things, only temporary relief from sin. However, Messiah *Y'shua* has taken care of the problem by shedding His blood and dying in our place:

"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28)

Therefore:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

The Bride of Messiah (the Church of the Living God, the Body of Christ) is right now betrothed to this same *Y'shua HaMashiach* who shed His blood so that our sins could be taken away. The Bride is His legal wife in every sense of the word. However, we (the Bride) do not yet dwell where *Y'shua* dwells, for we have not yet come to the fullness of the wedding process. The culmination or consummation lies yet before us.

While we wait for *Y'shua* to return for us, we need to be preparing our wedding gown of righteousness so that we can be properly clothed for the great wedding that is to take place in heaven. We make those preparations by learning righteousness and (even more importantly) living righteous lives. The wedding dress will never be completed through the arguing of doctrine or striving over scripture, but only through righteous acts of loving concern for our Brethren and our neighbors:

"Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a Worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness, and their message will spread like cancer." (II Tim. 2:14-17a)

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

We desperately need to be fervently working on our wedding dress, adding righteous stitches to it each and every day, as long as we still have the breath of life within us. Let us resolve, through the power of the Holy Spirit of God which indwells us, to do our very best to follow His Spirit into all righteousness so that each of us can add beautiful stitches to our beautiful gown of righteousness:

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus [Y'shua] from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach], to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb. 13:20-21)

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~ Hold Fast ~

Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, For He who promised is faithful. *Hebrews 10:23*

**I**t is always a joy when subscribers write telling how they are growing in grace and knowledge in the Faith. Because they take the time to write, we like to believe that at least some of their understanding has come to them as a result of reading *Hebrew Roots*:

**"For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."** (III John 1:3-4)

Realistically, however, we know that our part is but a minor one, for the understanding which subscribers are gaining is not from us, but is a result of the Father teaching them through the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh* רִיחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ (Rue-ahkh' Hah Koh-dehsh' = the Holy Spirit):

**"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."** (John 14:26)

The primary role of *Hebrew Roots*® is to supply information to the Believing reader. However, it is not just the information itself that is important, rather it is what the Believer allows the *Ruach* to do in their lives with that information.

~ Study as Worship ~

There is a Jewish understanding that one of the highest forms of worship is to study the Scriptures in order to gain true understanding. *Shaul* שָׂאוּל (Shah-ool' = Saul or Paul) confirmed this when he wrote Timothy:

**"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."** (II Tim. 2:15 KJV)

Each one of us needs to learn for ourselves what the Scriptures teach. Our beliefs must not be based solely upon what someone else believes or teaches, even if they are teaching correct doctrine. Teachers can be a great help in learning the true Faith, but the bottom line is that Scripture is the bedrock upon which our beliefs and doctrines are to be based. Therefore, we must learn what the Scriptures are really saying so that we can be confident that we know the truth:

**"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for**

## ~ Our Dress of Fine Linen ~

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
My soul shall be joyful in my God;  
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,  
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
Isaiah 61:10

The modern wedding is usually quite an event. It requires large amounts of planning, time, energy and money. A date is set, a church or hall is rented, a person is contracted to officiate, invitations are printed, reception plans made, a guest list is prepared, flowers and decorations are selected, tuxedos and dresses are ordered for the attendants, and a wedding gown is chosen. It can be an extremely busy, and sometimes frustrating, experience to say the least. Then there are the various roles played by the parents of the couple. The chief duties fall to the mother of the Bride. She is responsible for assisting the Bride in all of the many plans and preparations. The father of the Bride is also quite involved for he gives the Bride away at the ceremony. Also, he is usually the one who provides the funds needed for the wedding celebration. Meanwhile, the mother of the Bridegroom may assist to some degree with the wedding plans, while the father of the Bridegroom is expected to provide funds for a rehearsal dinner, show up for the wedding, and not cause any trouble.

### ~ The Ancient Wedding ~

Ancient Hebrew weddings were quite different. First the couple was matched. The parents of both the Bridegroom and Bride were intimately involved in this process, which could take place long before the couple were of marriageable age. Then, when the prospective couple came of age, the Bridegroom would go to the father of the prospective Bride to make the necessary arrangements. However, these were not the kinds of arrangements common to a modern wedding. Rather, they worked out a marriage contract, or covenant, called a *Ketuvah* כְּתוּבָה (Keh-two'-vah). Once the details were agreed upon, the father of the prospective Bride called his daughter into the room. A cup of wine was poured and the Bridegroom offered it to her. If she accepted the cup, and drank from it, they were officially betrothed. In the eyes of Hebrew law they were then considered married and only a legal divorce could separate them.

However, they could not yet live together as husband and wife. Instead, the Bridegroom went back to his father's house to prepare a wedding chamber for his Bride. This chamber was called a *Chuppah* חופּה (Whoo'-pah). It was located on the property of the father of the Bridegroom, usually within the father's house. It was the responsibility of the Bridegroom to prepare the *Chuppah* in a way that would be pleasing to his

Bride, and it was the responsibility of his father to examine it at regular intervals and make suggestions on how it could be improved. Also, it had to be well stocked with provisions, for once the couple entered the *Chuppah* they remained in it for seven days.

The wedding was not announced ahead of time. In fact, only the father of the Bridegroom knew the day or the hour in which the wedding would take place, because it was his responsibility to determine when the *Chuppah*, his son, and the bride were ready. When the father felt all was in order, he would say to his son; "The hour has come, go and get your Bride."

The time span between the Betrothal and the final wedding ceremony was usually about one year. It could be longer if circumstances demanded, but it was usually not shorter unless the Bride was a widow. During the betrothal time, the couple (although officially married) normally did not see one another. One can only imagine the anticipation that must have existed in the hearts of both the Bride and her Husband, as they awaited the final approval of his father. When that day and hour finally came, the couple would enter the *Chuppah* to consummate their marriage. Then they would truly be able to say:

"I am my beloved's,  
And my beloved is mine." (Song of Songs 6:3)

### ~ The Bride's Preparation ~

During the time while the Bridegroom was preparing the *Chuppah*, the Bride also had some important things to accomplish. She needed to begin collecting those items she would need to run the household once they were fully married and living together. This would be the trousseau which she would bring to their permanent home once the seven days in the *Chuppah* had been accomplished. The Bride also had to prepare her wedding dress and other appropriate articles of clothing. In addition it was an ancient custom for the Bride to learn how to make herself physically beautiful for her husband through the application of cosmetics and perfumes. So, it was during this year of preparation that she learned these arts as well. This practice is mentioned in the book of Esther, the beautiful young Jewess who became the Queen of Persia:

"Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name." (Est. 2:12-14)

It must be remembered that each of these women, who came to King Ahasuerus' chamber, became his legal wife. They were called concubines and were considered to be of lower

*Shaul's* epistle to Titus expressly instructs the Believers to live good, honorable, and righteous lives. In other words, to live according to the instruction book of God:

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age ..." (Titus 2:11-12)

The Bride must be clothed in:  
"... the righteous acts of the saints." (Rev. 19:8b)

### ~ What Happens When We Sin? ~

But what happens when the Bride (or a member of the Bride) sins? According to Scripture, a lifetime of righteousness can be wiped out in a single act of unrighteousness.

A rather extensive passage in the book of Ezekiel clearly lays out the grave problem which each human being faces when he or she acts in an unrighteous manner. This passage follows, quoted in its entirety:

"Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, 'If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live.'"

"Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"

"Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people: 'The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of his righteousness in the day that he sins.'"

"When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die."

"Again, when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live."

"Yet the children of your people say, 'The way of the LORD [YHVH] is not fair.' But it is their way which is not fair! When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it."

"Yet you say, 'The way of the LORD [YHVH] is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways.'" (Ezek. 33:10-20)

According to this passage one act of sin, one act of rebelliousness, one wrong motive, can blow an entire lifetime

of righteousness. On the other hand, a lifetime of sinfulness and wretchedness can be obliterated by true, heartfelt repentance and by turning from that life of sin to a life of living according to the instruction book of God; in other words, turning to a life of righteousness. Obviously, those who are already practicing righteousness do not need to repent for their righteous acts:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'" (Matt. 9:12b-13)

This does not mean that *Y'shua* does not call, into the Bride, people who are already practicing righteousness. What it does mean is that He also has a way in which sinners can become righteous.

### ~ A Crucial Question ~

Is it really possible that a lifetime of sin can be wiped away and forgotten completely by God?

Certainly if it were left to the "righteousness" of men (the "filthy rags"), it could never be so. For rarely do men forgive, and certainly most do not forget. If it were left to men, the sinner (by their definition) would be made to pay every last penny he ever earned and then still have to give up his life in additional payment. Even after all of this had been done, people might still remember his sins, and some might even relish talking of them after he was gone.

But the ways of God are far greater than the ways of man, and we can rejoice in that God has a plan that He has revealed to His disciples. In fact, He has called, and is yet calling, a body of people to be a righteous Bride for His Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach*. At the right time, God will reunite and restore the divided Kingdom of Israel (Ezek. 37).

### ~ God's Plan for Righteousness ~

What a marvelous plan! God the Father sent His only begotten Son to earth to negotiate a *Ketuvah* (wedding covenant or contract) for His Bride. The Bride price that was named in the *Ketuvah of Messiah* was that He would take upon Himself all the unrighteousness (sins) of the Bride and die because of them, thereby removing those sins from her, thus making her righteous before God (the Father) and a fitting mate for Himself. All of those sins, which had previously cut the Bride off from being worthy to be *Y'shua's* wife, are removed:

"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:  
'The Deliverer will come out of Zion,  
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;  
' For this is My covenant with them,  
When I take away their sins.'" (Rom. 11:26-27)

Now there is really only one thing that the Bride has to do in order to be brought into the betrothal state with *Y'shua*. That is to display the most important character trait exhibited by her great forefather *Avraham אַבְרָהָם* (Ahv'-rah-hahm = Abraham), the joint traits of FAITH and WORKS!

"Just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,' Therefore know that only those

It is clear from this passage that, in order to be righteous, it is necessary for one to be "... careful to observe all these commandments ..." that have been given in the *Torah*. This concept is confirmed by the Psalmist in the following verse:

**"My lips shall utter praise,  
For you teach me your statutes.  
My tongue shall speak of Your word,  
For all Your commandments are righteousness."**  
(Psalm 119:171-172)

All of God's commandments are considered to be righteousness. Not just the big Ten. Not just those which have to do with how we should relate to each other, but also those which teach us how we should relate to God in all facets of our life. All of God's commandments are righteousness.

The Hebrew word translated as commandment is *mitzvah* מִצְוָה (meets'-vah, Strong's #4687). It is; "a command whether human or divine." The word can also mean a "good deed." In other words, to help someone in need is not only a command, it is also a good deed and to perform any of God's *mitzvaot* (meets'-vah-oat' = plural form) is also to perform good deeds.

The Hebrew word for statutes is *chok* חֹק (hohk, Strong's #2706). It means; "an enactment; hence an appointment (of time, space, quantity, labor or usage)." Thus, it can also be a reference to the 'appointed times' or festivals set forth in Leviticus 23.

The two previously mentioned verses (Psalm 119:171,172) are a prime example of what is known as 'Hebrew parallelism.' The first line of each verse refers to the willingness of the Psalmist to speak about the glory of God:

**"My lips shall utter praise,"  
"My tongue shall speak of Your word,"**

These two introductory lines are then followed by phrases in which the Psalmist tells us why he is so willing to praise God and teach His word:

**"For You teach me Your statutes."  
"For all Your commandments are righteousness."**

Hebrew parallelism is used to add emphasis to a thought or concept. In this case the thought being emphasized is the greatness and righteousness of God's statutes and commandments, in other words, the greatness of His instructions (*Torah*) on how to live a righteous life. The Psalmist proclaims his desire to praise God publicly because God's commandments and statutes are so completely righteous.

Not only are God's commandments and statutes righteous, His judgments are as well. As the Psalmist says:

**"I will praise You with uprightness of heart,  
When I learn Your righteous judgments."**  
(Psalm 119:7)

**"I have sworn and confirmed  
That I will keep Your righteous judgments."**  
(Psalm 119:106)

The apostle *Shaul* שָׂאוּל (Shaw-ool' = Paul) taught us that the *Torah* is righteous when he said:

**"Therefore the law [*Torah*] is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."** (Rom. 7:12)

That which the Psalmist called righteous in Psalm 119 (God's commandments) is now called "holy and just and good" by *Shaul*. In fact, *Shaul* went so far as to equate obedience with righteousness when he said:

**"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?"** (Rom. 6:15-16)

According to *Shaul*, not only must we, as Believers, be obedient to God's commandments, we must become actual slaves to righteousness:

**"And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."** (Rom. 6:18)

In other words, we must continually practice righteousness, for a slave must always do what his master bids.

What then is righteousness? Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 119 tell us that the commandments, statutes and judgments are all righteous. Therefore, when we perform them in the manner in which they were intended, we become righteous because we are living righteously through them.

Now, in order to learn what the commandments, statutes and judgments are, we must turn to the *Torah*. Therein are contained the 613 *mitzvaot* (commandments), the *chokim* (statutes), and the many judgments. The Writings, \* and the Prophets \*\* also instruct us in the ways and desires of our righteous God, as they contain many applications and amplifications on the instructions of God given to *Moshe*.

But let us not forget the *Brit Chadasha* (Renewed Covenant or New Testament) which is said to contain over one thousand commandments, most of them reiterations or amplifications of those found in the *Torah*. Combined together (codified), we have a complete body of instruction (the Bible) which teaches us the righteousness of God.

~ Who Is Righteous? ~

**"As it is written:  
'There is none righteous, no, not one;  
There is none who understands;  
There is none who seeks after God.  
They have all turned aside;  
They have together become unprofitable;  
There is none who does good, no, not one."**  
(Rom. 3:10-12)

\* The Writings include: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and I & II Chronicles.

\*\*The Prophets include: Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets.

Taken together, the *Torah*, the Writings and the Prophets make up the 'Old Testament,' which the Jews call the *Tanakh*.

We must understand that what mankind considers righteousness does not hold a whole lot of weight with God:

**"But we are all like an unclean thing,  
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;  
We all fade as a leaf,  
And our iniquities, like the wind,  
Have taken us away.  
And there is no one who calls on Your name,  
Who stirs himself up to take hold of You;  
For you have hidden your face from us,  
And have consumed us because of our iniquities."**  
(Isa. 64:6-7)

The expression "filthy rags" literally means "menstrual cloths." (See Strong's #5708). The righteousness of men, apart from God, and as contrasted to God's righteousness, is like the difference between the menstrual cloth and the wedding gown.

While man is inherently unrighteous, God, on the other hand, is completely righteous. The scriptures abound with verses which speak about the righteousness of *YHVH*. For example:

**"The LORD [*YHVH*] is righteous in all His ways,  
Gracious in all His works."** (Psalm 145:17)

**"For the LORD [*YHVH*] is righteous,  
He loves righteousness;  
His countenance beholds the upright."** (Psalm 11:7)

The Scriptures also teach about the righteousness of the Messiah:

**"Behold, the days are coming,' says  
the LORD [*YHVH*],  
'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;  
A King shall reign and prosper,  
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.  
In His days Judah will be saved,  
And Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this is His name by which He will be called:  
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS'"**  
(Jer. 23:5-6)

**"And I heard the angel of the waters saying:  
'You are righteous, O Lord,  
The One who is and who was and who is to be,  
Because You have judged these things.'" (Rev. 16:5)**

~ Unequally Yoked ~

This presents us with a dilemma. If God the Father is righteous, and His Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah) is righteous, but the Bride is unrighteous (because she is made up of sinful people); how can *Y'shua* ever even begin to think that He can marry her? Can righteousness be yoked to unrighteousness?

This was the very same problem that occurred when God married the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. The Bridegroom was perfect and righteous, while the Bride was imperfect and unrighteous. She proved that very quickly while they were still in the *Chuppah* at Mt. Sinai, when she went whoring after the

golden calf. The results were disastrous. Centuries later, after the bride (Israel) divided into two warring parts (the house of Israel, and the house of Judah), God divorced the house of Israel because of her unrighteousness, and consequent unfaithfulness, through her acts of spiritual adultery which is idolatry. The only reason He remained married to the house of Judah was so that the prophesied Messiah could be born of that lineage and into their culture; which was primarily derived from God through *Torah*, Temple *Avodah* עֲבֹדָה (ah voh-dah' = service), and the Synagogue system established by Ezra.

Idolatry was not a major problem during the period of the second Temple. Neither was the breaking of the Sabbath, for the vast majority of the foundational values of Jewish culture were based on Scriptural values, although the Pharisees tended to teach traditions with an over zealous strictness. The primary sins of the house of Judah, during the second Temple period, had to do with uncharitable attitudes toward the poor and downtrodden of their society. Thus, the rules of tradition became more important, to many of the religious leaders, than did expressions of love and charity for those in need.

*Y'shua* addressed this problem when He said:

**"... they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."** (Matt. 23:4)

~ Can Men Become Righteous? ~

We have already shown, from the scriptures, how man's righteousness is nothing more to God than 'filthy rags.' Yet the scriptures also abound with passages that extol the virtues of the 'righteous' man, such as:

**"Rejoice in the LORD [*YHVH*], O you righteous!  
For praise from the upright is beautiful."** (Psalm 33:1)

**"The eyes of the LORD [*YHVH*] are on the righteous,  
And His ears are open to their cry."** (Psalm 34:15)

**"The wicked borrows and does not repay,  
But the righteous shows mercy and gives."**  
(Psalm 37:21)

**"... The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."** (James 5:16b)

It is obvious from these verses that man can be considered righteous if he performs righteous acts. However, this can only be accomplished by correctly understanding and practicing the righteous commandments, statutes and judgments of God as found in the Scriptures. Man's righteousness, on the other hand, can never make a man righteous in the sight of God.

~ Man's Righteousness vs. God's Righteousness ~

Man's righteousness is a mixture of good and evil. It can be found in the laws and traditions of all races, nationalities and cultures. Sometimes it is more good, sometimes it is more evil. It is the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that our first parents partook of in the Garden of Eden, and which