

Jerusalem Perspective

A Monthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus

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First-century Discipleship

The call to be a rabbi's disciple in first-century Israel often meant leaving relatives and friends and traveling the country under austere conditions. It also meant total commitment. A prospective disciple first had to be sure his priorities were in order.

Consider the words of the man who said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family" (Luke 9:61). Jesus' reply shows that only those who were prepared to totally commit themselves to him would be welcome: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

This is emphasized in Jesus' response to another man who offered to follow him, but only after "burying his father." "Let the dead bury their dead," Jesus told him (Luke 9:60, Matthew 8:22).

Apparently Jesus' replies were directed towards persons whom he had invited to leave home and serve a full-time apprenticeship with him. This form of discipleship was a unique feature of ancient Jewish society.

Sacrifice

According to Peah 1:1, there are certain things such as honoring

one's father and mother of which a person "benefits from the interest" in this world, while "the principal" remains for him in the world to

come. "But," the passage goes on, "the study of Torah is equal to them all." Jesus said something similar: As important as it is to honor one's parents, leaving home to study Torah with him was even more important.

To the rich man mentioned in Luke 18, the call to follow rabbi Jesus meant giving up all his wealth.

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תְּמַלִּיךְ מַלְכוּתְךָ

Thy Kingdom Come — Part 2

by Bradford Young

Like Jesus, the rabbis made frequent reference to "the Kingdom of Heaven." A familiarity with the way "Kingdom of Heaven" is used in rabbinic literature is essential for understanding its use in the Gospels.

A Hebrew benediction which appears quite frequently in rabbinic literature can help us grasp Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom. In his confession on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest spoke the sacred name of God. When he pronounced that name, the people fell on their faces and cried, "His honorable name is blessed and his Kingdom is for ever and ever" (Yoma 6:2). God reigns when his people recognize his kingship.

A passage from the Mishnah links the Kingdom of Heaven to ancient Israel's affirmation, "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). This prayer is known as the *Shema*

("Hear"), and occupies a central place in the liturgy of the synagogue.

Rabbi Joshua ben Korha taught that anyone who prays the *Shema* has accepted the Kingdom of Heaven (Berachot 2:2). By reciting the *Shema*, a person acknowledges the one and true God, and this, in ben Korha's opinion, is the first step in accepting God's authority and entering his reign.

The word מַלְכוּת (*mal-KUT*, kingdom) is a verbal noun which is based on the Hebrew verb מָלַךְ (*ma-LAK*, rule, reign). The Hebrew word for "king," מֶלֶךְ (*ME-lek*), is derived from the same root. "Heaven" in the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" refers to God himself. "Heaven" was used in place of the word "God" because of the special sanctity reserved for God's name. This substitution was already practiced when the book of Daniel was

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The price was too high for him and he did not become one of Jesus' disciples. Peter reminded Jesus that he and the others who had accepted Jesus' call were different: "We have left everything to follow you."

"Amen!" said Jesus — in other words, Yes you have done that and it is commendable. Jesus went on to promise that anyone who had made the sacrifice of total commitment for the sake of the Kingdom of God would receive something of much greater value than what he had given up, and eternal life in the world to come (Luke 18:28-30).

Commitment

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

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

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

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife,

children, brothers, sisters, and himself as well, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)

In this context the word "hate" does not carry the meaning it normally has in English usage, but seems to be used in a Hebraic sense. In Hebrew "hate" also can mean "love less" or "put in second place." For example, Genesis 29:31 states that Leah was "hated," but the context indicates that Leah was not unloved but rather loved less than Jacob's other wife Rachel. Note that the preceding verse specifically says that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

A second illustration of this particular Hebraic shade of meaning of the word "hate" is found in Deuteronomy 21:15: "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other hated...." Here too, the context shows that the "hated" wife is only second in affection and not really hated in the English sense of the word. Likewise in Jesus' statement, he was saying that whoever did not love him more than his own family or even his own self could not be his disciple.

Jesus also alluded to the rigors of the peripatetic life of a rabbi when he said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:57-58). The burden Jesus' disciples had to bear was a heavy one, but it was similar to what other first-century rabbis demanded of their disciples and would not have been considered extreme by the standards of first-century Jewish society.

Another hardship a disciple could face was being away from his wife. Disciples commonly were single, but since marriage took place at a relatively early age (usually by eighteen according to Avot 5:21) many disciples had a wife and children. For example, the mother-in-law of one of Jesus' disciples is mentioned in Luke 4:38. If married,

a man needed the permission of his wife to leave home for longer than thirty days to study with a rabbi (Ketubot 5:6).

Like a Father

Despite the many hardships, there was nothing to compare with the exhilaration of following and learning from a great rabbi and being in the circle of his disciples. A special relationship developed between rabbi and disciple in which the rabbi became like a father. In fact he was more than a father and was to be honored above the disciple's own father, as this passage from the Mishnah indicates:

When one is searching for the lost property both of his father and of his teacher, his teacher's loss takes precedence over that of his father since his father brought him only into the life of this world, whereas his teacher, who taught him wisdom [i.e., Torah], has brought him into the life of the World to Come. But if his father is no less a scholar than his teacher, then his father's loss takes precedence....

If his father and his teacher are in captivity, he must first ransom his teacher, and only afterwards his father—unless his father is himself a scholar and then he must first ransom his father. (Bava Metsi'a 2:11)

If it seems shocking that anyone could ransom his teacher before his own father, it is only because we do not understand the tremendous love and respect which disciples, and the community at large, had for their rabbis.

Similarly, it may seem cruel that Jesus would not allow a prospective disciple to say goodbye to his family before setting out to follow him. However, it would have seemed quite reasonable and normal to Jesus' first-century contemporaries. It would have been perfectly clear to them what Jesus meant when he said, "No one can be my disciple who does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters." JP

Jerusalem Perspective

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The menorah is a special symbol for the Jewish people. It symbolizes something of the ancient glory of the Jewish nation which was embodied in the Temple and its worship.

When the Second Temple was destroyed by the Roman legions in 70 A.D. and the gold menorah and other fixtures carried away to Rome, the menorah became a symbol of national independence and eventually the prominent feature of the emblem of the nascent State of Israel.

Artistic Depictions

The menorah was one of the prominent fixtures both of the Tabernacle and Temple. Perhaps because its seven branches made it easily identifiable, it best symbolized the Temple and thus was depicted more frequently than other Temple vessels.

There are few surviving representations of the menorah which can be dated to the period when the Temple was still standing. The menorah on the Arch of Titus in Rome, for instance, was created following Titus' death in 81 A.D., years after the destruction of the Second Temple.

The most detailed pre-70 A.D. representation of the Temple menorah was discovered during archaeological excavations conducted in 1969-1971 in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. This 20 centimeter high graffito was scratched on the inside wall of a building from the Herodian period.

nun

The second letter in the word **מְנוּרָה** (*me-no-RAH*) is **נ** (*nun*). It is the fourteenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and stands for the "n" sound. Just as in the English alphabet **n** follows **m**, so in the Hebrew alphabet **נ** follows **מ**. In the system of transliteration used in **JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE**, the *nun* is represented by "n."

Hebrew Nuggets

נ derives from the ancient Semitic pictograph **נ**. The word for this pictograph, *nun*, meant "snake," and when alphabetical writing was invented this image was chosen to indicate the "n" sound.

6:12). Remember that **ב** (*bet*) is pronounced as a "v" when there is no dot in its middle, that **כ** (*ʿA-lef*) is a silent letter, and that **ח** (*heʿ*) is silent at the end of a word.

• **נָמֶל** (*na-MEL*), "harbor; port." This word is not found in the Bible, but is in rabbinic literature. Actually, **נָמֶל** is a popular corruption of **לִמְנָה** (*li-MEN*), the earlier rabbinic word for the same thing. The latter is a transliteration of **λιμήν** (*li-MEN*), the Greek word for harbor. Notice how in popular usage the first and last letters of **לִמְנָה** were reversed to form **נָמֶל**.

Lesson Thirteen nun & ho-LAM

In our previous lesson, we encountered mem, the first letter of the Hebrew word me-no-RAH. We also reviewed some of the background to the menorah in Jewish history. In this lesson we will encounter two new Hebrew sounds found in this word.

ho-LAM

The fourth sound one hears in the word *me-no-RAH* is the "o" sound, as in the word "note." The symbol used to represent this sound, **וְ**, is called

ho-LAM. It is written as a straight line with a dot above it. Rather than being printed below the letter as is usual, this vowel sign is placed to the left of the letter with which it is pronounced. In our system of transliteration, this vowel is represented by the letter "o."

Remember that when this same straight line appears with a dot to its left (**וּ**), it is the *shu-RUK*, the "u" sound as in the word "flu."

By changing the pronunciation of **וְ** (*lu*, "if," see the final paragraph of Lesson Ten) to **וּ** (*lo*), we have a different word which means "him, to him." When reading Hebrew newspapers and modern books, which are written without the help of vowel symbols, how does one know how to read **לוּ**? Is it **לוּ**, or is it **לוּ**? Very simply, one understands the meaning of the word from the context. If we were accustomed to reading English without vowels, we could easily understand from the context that "th mn n th mn" meant "the man in the moon" and not "the moon in the man."

*We will continue our study of **וְ** and present the rest of its sounds in the next installment of Hebrew Nuggets.*

In Other Words

The addition of the letter **נ** allows us to read the following Hebrew words:

• **נָוֵל** (*na-VAL*), "boor," in modern Hebrew also "scoundrel."

There is an ill-natured man mentioned in I Samuel 25:25, Naval the Carmelite, the husband of Abigail, whose name was a fitting description of his personality.

• **נִמְלָה** (*ne-ma-LAH*), "ant," found in Proverbs 6:6; 30:25. The *she-VAʿ*, the two vertical dots under the nun, is here pronounced like the "e" in happening.

• **נְבוּאָה** (*ne-vu-ʿAH*), "prophecy." Nehemiah could tell a false prophet when he saw one. He knew that Shemayah son of Delayah son of Mehetavel had been hired by Toviyah and Sanvalat to intimidate him, and he refused to be scared into going into hiding by Shemayah's prophesy. "Then I knew," Nehemiah writes, "that God hadn't sent him, but that he had been hired by Toviyah and Sanvalat to utter this *ne-vu-ʿAH* about me" (Nehemiah

"Who Was Jesus?"

was the question presented by TIME magazine's

August 15, 1988 cover story. It surveyed the views of Gospel scholars, including those of the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels, concerning the identity of Jesus.

The article presented a sad picture of the current state of scholarly knowledge. After 200 years of "scientific" investigation into New Testament records of the life of Jesus, scholars are more divided than ever as to who Jesus was and who he thought he was. Even sadder, the herculean efforts of generations of scholars have brought Jesus no nearer to the ordinary believer.

TIME's next update may be able to report less pessimism on the part of New Testament scholars about the possibility of discovering the Jesus of history. The Jerusalem School's research is revealing a flesh-and-blood, historical Jesus who fits into the Jewish society of first-century Israel in every aspect. Its findings show that the first written account of Jesus' life was not a late story written by a Greek author, but a Hebrew text written close to the death of Jesus, probably by Matthew

"Who Was Jesus?"

or another of the inner circle of disciples.

The Greek texts of the

synoptic Gospels are so Hebraic that many passages make no sense in their Greek form. By translating the Gospels to Hebrew, the Greek layer is peeled away, often revealing passages of perfect Hebrew word order and idiom. It is almost as if a copy of an ancient Hebrew scroll had been unearthed in an archaeological excavation.

Simply translating the Gospels from Greek to Hebrew is not enough. This material must be related to the background of first-century rabbinic teaching methods and the ways other rabbis of Jesus' day interpreted Scripture. Despite the notion that Jesus' sayings are easy to understand, many of them are so firmly rooted in first-century Jewish culture that the modern western Christian finds them unintelligible.

Rediscovering the Jesus of history and understanding his words in the context in which they were spoken is the task of the Jerusalem School. The recovery of an earlier text of Jesus' biography will provide a better understanding of his sayings and make him more accessible to the person in the pew. JP

Thy Kingdom Come

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written (cf. Daniel 4:26) and was common in Jesus' day.

Receiving Torah

In Jewish literature, the Kingdom of Heaven often is related to the giving of the Torah or the redemption of Israel from Egypt. At the foot of Mt. Sinai, the Israelites received the Kingdom with joy.

The Mekilta, an early midrash that provides a running commentary on most of the book of Exodus, preserves a parable that elucidates Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom. This parable appears at the beginning of the Mekilta's treatment of the Ten Commandments, and follows the verse "I am the LORD thy God..." which, according to Jewish tradition, is the beginning of the Decalogue.

They told a parable: To what may the matter be compared? To one who came to a province. He said to the people, "May I reign over you?" They said to him, "You have done nothing good for us that we should accept your reign." What did he do? He built them a wall. He brought them water. He fought battles for them. Then he said to them, "May I reign over you?" They responded, "Yes! Yes!"

Thus it was with the Omni-

present. He redeemed Israel from Egypt. He parted the sea for them. He brought them manna. He provided them with a well. He sent them the quail. He fought the battle of Amalek for them. Then he said to them, "May I reign over you?" They replied, "Yes! Yes!"

Rabbi [Yehudah ha-Nasi] said, "This shows the merit of Israel. When they stood before Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, they all determined in their hearts to accept the Kingdom of Heaven with joy." (Mekilta Bahodesh 5; to Exodus 20:2)

This parable describes the liberation of God's people from Egypt and their acceptance of his authority by receiving the Torah joyfully. The theme of the parable is the Kingdom of Heaven. God demonstrates he is king by his mighty redemptive acts of liberation. His people demonstrate their acceptance of his rule by joyful obedience to his Torah.

Realizing the Kingdom

Jesus' challenging call to repentance was an essential aspect of his proclamation of the Kingdom. But his dynamic ministry of redemptive acts and captivating teaching was the realization of the Kingdom.

Of course, the Kingdom also must be connected with the activi-

ties of Jesus' followers. All of his disciples were active members of the Kingdom of God. This is the meaning of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Poor in spirit" refers to Jesus' followers. The phrase "...for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" is a poor translation, because it implies ownership. How can one own the Kingdom? It is impossible. The Greek words *αὐτῶν ἐστίν* (*au-TON es-TIN*) should be understood to mean "is comprised of such as these," and not "theirs is."

In Hebrew the verse would have been אֲשֶׁר יִגְוֹ רֵיחַ כִּי פָדַם מִלְטָה שְׂמָחִים (*ash-RE 'a-ni-YE RU-ah ki me-HEM mal-KUT sha-MA-yim*). Therefore it would be better translated, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they make up the Kingdom of Heaven." They are citizens in the Kingdom. They have accepted the King's rule. The "poor in spirit" are Jesus' disciples who have accepted God's authority in their lives and become active in Jesus' Kingdom movement.

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