

# LEVITT LETTER

\* "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Romans 10:1)

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## Some of their best friends are Jewish!

The ground has been broken for a \$200,000 temple for Beth Ahaba, the Jewish congregation of Muskogee, Oklahoma. It is to be built for them by the members of Muskogee's First Baptist Church.

The story began at a time when the First Baptist members owned the entire block on which their church is now located. In March, 1905, the congregation was using only a small portion of the property and sold one corner to an Edward E. Estus. In January of 1916 Samuel and Alex Sondheimer bought that small corner and deeded it to the trustees of Beth Ahaba (House of Love). The Jewish temple was completed that year.

For all those years the Jewish congregation has shared their block with their Baptist neighbors. But now the Baptist Church requires more space and they have agreed to build a new temple for their Jewish friends.

The original pews and blue stained-glass window will be transferred to the new temple by the Baptists, who well understand such reverence. The church

architect has also planned places of honor in the new temple for the cornerstone of the original structure and for marble tablets on which the Ten Commandments are carved in Hebrew, certainly a treasured feature of the Jewish congregation. The new building will also have a free-standing Ark of the Covenant with the customary "eternal light" burning above it.

During the construction the Baptists have offered space for the Jewish services in their own building until the new temple is completed.

Dr. Bob Woods, Pastor of First Baptist, said that he and other members of his congregation plan to join in the procession of bringing the Torah (the five Books of Moses) into the new temple. "When this joint venture is concluded," he said, "one of the most significant examples of cooperation, good will and mutual respect in the history of Muskogee will have been written." He adds, "Our congregation looks forward to a future relationship marked by the same warmth, neighborliness and friendship that has marked our relationship in the past."

We at Zola Levitt Ministries can only give thanks for such a marvelous witness and such downright Christian kindness. It will be a great pleasure to enjoy the Kingdom along with the First Baptist Church of Muskogee.

"As ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).



In the Sooka -- Zola and crew gather in our handmade tabernacle (Lev. 23:43), for our Feast of Tabernacles program in the new "Seven Feasts of Israel" series.

# "To the Jew First"

This fall the public television network (PBS) will telecast a nine-part series called "Heritage: Civilization and the Jews". I very much look forward to these programs personally and I recommend them to all Bible students. The Bible, Old Testament and New, is in great part the story of this singular Chosen People and a greater understanding of the Jews simply means a greater understanding of the scriptures.

Finally, and most importantly, when we begin to comprehend the Jewish heritage we will certainly all the more deeply appreciate our Jewish Bridegroom.

Abba Eban will be the host of the series and he is more than qualified. He has been Israel's representative to the United Nations and ambassador to the United States, and he has held a number of Israeli cabinet posts through his long and distinguished career. He is presently a member of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament. He is the author of eight complex and widely studied books on Jewish affairs and international diplomacy and he thoroughly understands his people and their heritage.

I came across an article discussing the upcoming series and Mr. Eban had this to say about it:

*"Heritage" is about the interaction between Jews and other civilizations — in order to show how pervasive and varied this influence has been. We start with the fact that there are a mere fourteen million Jews in the world — a mere fraction of the human race. Jews have never been a*

*greater fraction than that. It's a totally insignificant figure in terms of numbers and material strength. And yet the Jewish voice resounds over history and the creation of ideas. You can't understand social, philosophical, moral or religious history without Jews. You can't get very far into history, science or medicine without them.*

I was very gratified by this complimentary and well justified estimation of my people. But I was almost shocked by Mr. Eban's next comment:

*Why? I don't know the answer. All I can do is state the mystery of it.*

When regarding a statesman of Abba Eban's immense importance and knowledge, one is hesitant to criticize in any way. But in the final statement above he demonstrates a kind of spiritual masochism that the Jewish people in general have displayed for centuries. Why should a scholar of the stature of Mr. Eban consider the significance of the Chosen People a "mystery?" Or to put it another way — why would a people that God Almighty has chosen ever be anything **less** than totally influential in all areas of human endeavor?

The Ambassador began with the idea that there are a mere 14,000,000 Jews in the world, and that is a startlingly low figure — somewhere around the population of greater New York City but spread all over the globe. But even more significant is the fact that when God chose these people they were only two in number, Abraham and Sarah. When these peculiar people descended into Egypt there were only 70 of them. When they came out in the Exodus, four centuries later, they numbered about 2 million, and that was their population at the time of the Messiah. How has this relatively small group of people managed to influence so much of humanity and its works? Why does the matter seem to be a mystery to those not initiated in the scriptures?

We say in the same breath that the Bible is God's Word and that it is largely the story of the Jewish people. Why don't we ever put the two together? Why don't we realize that these people were chosen to God's purpose? When God stated His promise to Abraham the terms included the Jews being "a blessing to all nations" (Gen. 12:3). They were also to be a curse to the nations that cursed them. They were to be the world's representation of God at work and they were to represent the world to God. Out of them came all of the prophets, all of the apostles, all of the disciples and of course, the Messiah Himself. The influence of what we think of as the great powers in the world today pales by comparison. Russia and the United States have contributed mainly to the world's produce, science and weaponry. The Jewish people, far less mighty, have consistently reminded the world of its soul. All in all, the decisions of the mighty powers of 1984 spiritually affect the lives of very few of us. But the Jewish contribution to world consciousness of God spiritually affects every human being in all history.

The greater mystery to me is why a competent Jewish scholar thinks of the importance of the Jews as a mystery. What it shows is a lack of Bible comprehension, or more likely, this strange, spiritual contradiction that consistently pervades all generations of Judaism. "If we are chosen then why do we suffer?" or "Choose someone else for a while." Such sentiments ring throughout Jewish literature and they pose a dilemma well known to the Christian church also. As the Jew is questioning in his heart of hearts, "Am I really chosen?", the Christian finds himself asking, "Am I really saved?" The Bible answers both questions very positively, but of course, it does have to be consulted. Some Jewish people don't act as though they were chosen, just as some Christian people don't act as though they were saved.

Abba Eban has not yet dreamed of what God has in store for His people. When the Kingdom comes to Israel, all of the Jews and all of the Christians can relax in the knowledge that all of God's plans will always work out. It will no longer be a mystery of any kind that God chose this people, this land and this Messiah to culminate His fondest wishes and His greatest love for those who would be His children.

There must be a way to make the Jewish people aware — from the profoundest scholars down to the simplest souls among them — of just who they are and why they are consistently in the limelight. I could go on and on with the subject but it is the theme of several of my books and I think I've belabored the point in these letters before. I'll leave the subject with three of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite rabbis:

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).*

*"I say then, hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Romans 11:1).*

*"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1).*

# "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"

*The Christian Church is an organization that often forgets its own birthday. This year, June 10 is Pentecost and everyone saved since that day of the coming of the Holy Spirit, owes their salvation to what happened back then. The following material is reprinted from my book **The Spirit of Pentecost**:*

Pentecost, coming in late May or early June, was likely a very beautiful day. It doesn't rain much in Jerusalem and indeed it's hard to find even a stray cloud in the blue sky. The Festival of Weeks, or Pentecost, celebrated the early harvest of the spring, and the major one of the fall to come. It was a joyous occasion which drew the Jewish people from all over Israel and many foreign lands.

Peter and the rest of the disciples were at the Temple bright and early, and possibly they were actually anticipating the appearance of the Holy Spirit that day. After all, they had seen the Lord take action on each of the past three feast days: He was crucified on Passover, buried on Unleavened Bread and resurrected on First Fruits. It is not clear just how much Bible knowledge the tradesmen-disciples had accumulated, but if they were familiar with the order of the Jewish Feasts, either as it is given in Leviticus 23, or as they had observed it, they might have had a tingling feeling that Pentecost morning.

The day must have been very still, in terms of breezes, since Jerusalem is not usually a windy place, and in the summer it is especially peaceful. The huge crowd at the Temple by 8 or 9 a.m. probably expected nothing unusual.

But "... suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting!"

That must have been a shock!

And then, "... there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire . . . and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance!"

What an incredible moment!

What was happening?

Well, "... the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language." It seems that the disciples, those ordinary fishermen, tax collectors and work-a-day tradesmen, had suddenly become expert linguists. They were speaking eloquently in the languages of the variety of countries from which the large crowd of worshipers came.

"And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?" What they meant by that was simply, *Aren't these fellows from up north in the country? Aren't these men simple folk from the farms and villages of Galilee?* "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

The second chapter of the book of Acts goes on to explain how many different countries were represented at Pentecost, and a selection of some 16 nations are presented. Obviously the collected Jewish worshipers had among them the speakers of many foreign languages. But the Galileans were equal to the occasion.

One theory that went through the crowd was that the men were drunk. "And they were all amazed and were in doubt, saying to one another 'What meaneth this?' Others mocking said, 'These men are full of new wine.'" (Acts 2:12, 13)

At that point Peter stood up and preached one of the most fruitful sermons in the entire Bible.

He began by pointing out that the men were hardly drunk, "seeing it is but the third hour of the day (9 a.m.)," and he taught that what they were seeing had been in fact prophesied by Joel. He quoted Joel for the mesmerized crowd, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . ." He concluded his quotation with Joel's stirring prophecy, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Then he went on to exhort the multitude: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words," and he taught them that Jesus Christ had indeed been the Messiah.

The gathered crowd must have been galvanized by this very controversial statement. After all, it had been just seven weeks before that they had seen Jesus, the Carpenter from Nazareth, crucified, and of course they had wrestled with the alleged story of His resurrection. It must have been a spiritual and political issue of the highest import to the people of Israel, and this Feast of Pentecost marked their first gathering together since those critical days of the spring feasts.

Peter went on to point out that the crowd had certainly failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and in fact "by wicked hands" had Him slain. We can imagine what a stir this must have raised in the holiday gathering.

Peter reached for yet another Old Testament passage to drive home his point. He spoke of David's 16th Psalm in which David praised God, "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." By the term "Holy One" David must have been referring to one who would come and not see death, argued Peter. David could not have been referring to himself for, as Peter went on to say, "David is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre being *with us unto this day.*"

Obviously the Jews, who still visit the tomb of King David in Jerusalem today, well knew that *their* former sovereign lay buried in his capital city. But none of them present that day could have said with any certainty that Jesus Christ was dead. His tomb, also in Jerusalem, lay empty.

We can almost imagine Peter gesturing in the direction of King David's tomb and the crowd nodding and murmuring among themselves, "That's true, that's true . . ."

"This Jesus hath God raised up," continued Peter, "whereof we all are witnesses." That was a very strong statement, but Peter apparently had no fear of contradiction from the crowd. Had the body of Jesus Christ been produced after all? Had anyone testified to seeing the corpse? Wasn't the tomb empty to this very day after all? Could anyone in the crowd offer that Jesus had not been "raised up"?

We can almost see the crowd leaning forward as Peter concluded his explanation of the miracle at Pentecost: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He (Jesus) hath shed forth *this*, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

And Peter reached a stirring conclusion: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

The gathered multitude was stricken. The scripture goes on, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

"What shall we do?" What a marvelous question! What a marvelous reaction to the appeal of an evangelist! How successful a sermon must be preached to have the simple response, "What shall we do?"

Peter seized the moment. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

The harvest was stunning. "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Three thousands souls! Three thousand new Christians to add to the young church of Jerusalem. Three thousand Jewish people brought to the Messiah Jesus Christ. What a harvest!

Perhaps a Jewish scholar or two in the crowd could think back to a similarly great day on which Moses returned from the mount with the law of God in his hand. That day had a tragic ending, unfortunately, because the people waiting below could not wait and had made a golden calf. The scholars of the Old Testament could remember that on that day three thousand were slain.

Indeed, "The letter kills, the Spirit gives life."

Many Bible readers consider that the end of the miracle of Pentecost, and indeed it seems to be a full day's harvest. But the scripture goes on in Acts 2, 3, and 4 to indicate that more souls still came to the Lord and that those who had come on the day of the miracle "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." We see that the harvest went on: "And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."

Shortly thereafter Peter and John went up together into the Temple and encountered a man who had been born lame and who was carried daily to the gate of the Temple where he could beg alms of the worshippers. When the beggar solicited the two apostles, Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none: but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Peter's healing prayer had a profound effect. "And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him."

During the ministry of Jesus crowds had seen the Savior also heal, but the Pharisees seemed ever present to doubt the miracles. In the case of the man born blind in John 9, the Pharisees indicated that the man who was now saying his sight was restored was actually not the same blind beggar they all knew, and they even had a hearing to determine the identity of the supposedly healed man. The blind beggar testified, "whereas I was blind, now I see." But the Pharisees were not very ready to accept that miracle.

But this particular case, happening at the Temple gate, could not be a case of mistaken identity. Obviously *this* beggar was very well known. The people were probably very used to giving him a coin when they entered on the occasions of the feasts, and he was likely a fixture at the holy Temple. There could be no doubt that the remarkable statement of Peter — "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" — had healed this lame beggar.

Peter again capitalized on the moment. He faced the crowd and stated: "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" Peter of course denied responsibility that it was his own hand that had caused the healing of the lame man, but instead taught a profound lesson going back to the covenant made with Abraham and to the prophecy of Moses: "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you." Peter appealed to his brethren as Jews: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers..."; "Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

At that point the sermon was interrupted as the priests and the Sadducees and an officer of the Temple apprehended Peter and John, "being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Peter and John were detained until the next day and the crowd dispersed, but again there was a mighty harvest: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

Imagine Peter, who on the very night of the crucifixion shrunk from identifying himself with Jesus Christ, denying his Lord three times over, reaping such a harvest. What a spiritual giant had this man become. What an evangelist! What a preacher! His scholarship was unerring, his messages devastating. His appeal to faith was irresistible and his zeal for the Lord Jesus Christ inspiring to thousands. We read nowhere else in the New Testament such mighty numbers of salvations, not even in the ministry of the Lord Himself.

But again, as Peter was always the first to say, it was not he but the Lord who healed, who saved, who wrought miracles. Jesus had sent the rushing, mighty wind, taught Peter; Jesus had caused the disciples to speak in the foreign languages sharing their faith in Christ; it was Jesus who obviously sent the tongues of flame; it was Jesus who had been gloriously resurrected and was now calling men to His Church. It was Jesus who sent the Holy Spirit.

And so that was the miracle at Pentecost. It was a Jewish holiday on which remarkable signs and wonders came before the people. Simple Galileans, rural tradesmen, had addressed their brethren of far-off Rome and Libya and Asia, each in their own tongue; Peter, a common fisherman, had taught the Old Testament to the gathered thousands of faithful Jews. Fire from heaven lit the scene, and the Comforter from Heaven whom the Lord had promised had come to the Chosen People.

Although apparently all of those who were saved were Jews, the demonstration of the foreign languages and the salvation of the travelers from many lands represented a remarkable prophecy that the Church of Jesus Christ would sweep over the world. Today we take

for granted that men of all nations become Christians. We do not often stop to realize that the beginning of this remarkable missionary calling which crosses mountain ranges, mighty oceans, "iron curtains," and whole continents was begun at the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The Church was to sweep away the Roman Empire; the Church was to pervade Asia, the Middle East, the European continent; the Church was to come to the New World, the Church was to pervade the whole of mankind.

Today missionaries go forth throughout the world from all nations, and they must learn foreign languages. It is many times a slow and difficult process. The calling out of the Church rests in the hands of men in this age of faith. But we cannot help but be inspired by what mighty works were accomplished in a single day at the miracle of Pentecost.

## Questions, Questions!

We get lots of Bible questions in our daily mail although I have pointed out that it is difficult for us to answer them individually. The whole idea of television is to communicate with a great many people at a time and therefore explain a profound subject as efficiently as possible. So I'm repeating again that we really can't undertake individual service on your questions and we feel that this is the task of the local church.

But since we have certain questions repeating over and over again, I thought I might just take up our "top three" and give you my thoughts.

For some reason our most popular question concerns the day on which the Lord was crucified. People of course have difficulty lining up the idea of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection with the Lord's statement that he would be "three days and three nights" in the earth. On the surface, the two don't work together.

I can't be dogmatic on this issue because I think it has no correct answer, scripturally speaking. The evidence for Friday has to do with the Jewish way of counting days and nights. Since the Jews regard the beginning of a day as sundown on the night before (like our New Year's Eve) two different days can be thought of collectively as one day. Friday night is the Sabbath and Saturday is also the Sabbath, in the manner that a gathering to celebrate the new year begins on one day and ends on the next. If I went into all of the complexities it would merely cloud the issue; suffice it to say that it would not confuse an orthodox Jew if you said that Friday to Sunday was equal to three days and three nights.

On the other hand, some feel that the crucifixion was Thursday because the Passover

celebration, they suppose, was Wednesday evening. One point in favor of this reasoning is the coming of the Lord on the previous Sunday when the people waved the palm branches. The law about the lamb to be sacrificed on the Passover provided that it be selected four days before the event (Exodus 12:3). And so it would have been most fitting for the Lord to sit down to Passover on Wednesday, four days after He had first presented Himself in Jerusalem. And naturally this solves the three days and three nights problem.

Persuasive also is the fact that people remembered Friday as the crucifixion (Good Friday). And for good measure, you will find an arithmetic proof of Daniel's prophecy of the coming Messiah in my book, "Satan in the Sanctuary", which places Passover that year on a Thursday.

There are other less strong bits and pieces of evidence but we are finally left with a dilemma if we want to remember a certain day of the week. All I can suppose is that God did not want to specify a given day, and I can well imagine why not. We worship a risen Lord rather than a day of the week, and that is as it should be.

And that brings me to our second most popular question which has to do with the sabbath. People want to know when it was changed to Sunday. Here I can give a factual and scriptural answer.

The sabbath was never changed; it still is Saturday. However, in the New Covenant we do not keep the sabbath (Colossians 2:16). According to the New Testament, "one day is as another" and we are to "pray without ceasing." There is no special day of worship in the New

While touring in Athens last month, I picked up the English language newspaper and came across the following item:

TEL AVIV, June 7 (Reuter) -- Academics taking a serious look at what makes people laugh gathered at Tel Aviv University today for a joke-filled international conference on Jewish humor.

In addition to swapping gags, the 200 participants will hear lectures on topics such as the physiology of laughter.

Avner Ziv, a psychology professor, told the opening of the two-day conference that his favourite Jewish joke was the one in which religious leaders are told the world will end in a big flood in three days.

"The Pope tells his flock: 'Repent.' The Buddhist monk tells his followers: 'Meditate.' The Rabbi tells his congregation: 'My friends, we have three days to learn to swim.' "

## Questions, Questions!

Testament, not even Sunday. We have kept Sunday in honor of the Resurrection and that is well and good, but in the age of grace, Monday or Tuesday is just as good a day for prayer and good works.

I realize that an answer like this may offend some who consider it an important pillar of their faith to keep a given day, usually Saturday. But I feel on firm scriptural grounds to object to the selecting of a sabbath day in a Covenant where there is no sabbath. It is interesting that nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament but not the one about the sabbath.

And lastly if we are speaking biblically, we cannot correctly refer to Sunday as the sabbath. Sunday is correctly called "the Lord's day".

Our third most popular question is undoubtedly about tithing. In this temporal life money is very important, and people are concerned about how much of it is theirs and how much of it is God's. The answer on this is relatively simple.

It's all God's.

Christian giving is voluntary, above all else. The right hand is not supposed to know what the left hand is doing. We do not compute how much we give. We merely give to the one Who gave everything for us. If a totally innocent man gave us his very life what do we owe for that? Theologically, we owe nothing because salvation is free. Applying common sense we understand that if we are to have a church, we have to pay to operate it.

The term "tithe" refers to 10%, which was the requirement of the Old Covenant. Many churches have stuck to the old law because it is just and fair. Probably everyone, rich and poor, can afford 10% for their spiritual life and none of God's principles are ever outdated. On the other hand should a Christian who is very well off keep 90% for himself while brothers and sisters in the Lord may be going hungry? To stick solidly to the precepts of Jesus Christ, who had one robe and no place to lay His head, the Christian with abundance would give generously to those good workers who need the help. The concept is established on the very birthdate of the church (Acts 2:44). The Christian church is based on sharing and if it is not, it

just isn't the real Christian church.

When a churchman speaks of the tithe, it is probably in desperation to get enough budget to accomplish the works of the church. Truly the apostles cared nothing for their own fortunes but asked only to be economically free to minister. There are religions in the world which demand payment, and there are those which actually sell the seats in their house of worship or otherwise specify to the membership what is necessary to support the organization. This should never be the case among the true believers. Rather we should have greater love than that.

Caesar regards tithing as charity, but it would be a sad state of affairs if the true church were to run on charity. A real church is a unit of an army, and an army unit needs to be outfitted for the battle. It is simply the obligation of those who would presume to be part of the warfare to pay for its conduct.

In brief, Christians can give whatever they like. In more legalistic times, God Himself established a minimum of ten per cent.

Those three questions -- the crucifixion, the sabbath, and the tithe -- are unfortunately the most often repeated. I say "unfortunately" because I'm sure that Christians know in their hearts that there are much more important questions. In the Middle Ages, churchmen discussed how many angels can dance on the head of a pin and the implication was that they had nothing better to discuss.

It would really be so much better if we could give our thoughts to evangelism and the teaching of the Word. It's as if our house is on fire and we're trying to decide which TV program to watch.

And best of all, it would be wonderful if we simply would trust in God rather than trying to pin down some odd fact or participate in some minor league controversy.

"Look up, for your redemption is nigh"



**Zola demonstrates the magnificent costume of the High Priest of the Old Covenant on the Day of Atonement program.**

# THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

If salvation comes by knowing the Messiah, then we all must ask ourselves how well we do know Him. Christians everywhere worship someone they call Jesus Christ, of course. But do we know the Jesus Christ that Leonardo painted in his famous "Last Supper", or the overwhelming Jesus Christ who confronted John on the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:10-18)? These two figures are remarkably different. Likewise, the Lord tends to differ from denomination to denomination and even sometimes from church to church. And it's not just the appearance of our Lord that differs but His character as well. Occasionally we have actually remade Him to serve our own purposes and philosophies.

In my Notebook, which this ministry offers under the title, "The Bible, the Whole Story," I characterized Jesus as we have remanufactured Him and the true Messiah, as He is characterized in the Gospels. The term "remanufactured" comes from auto parts. As we have all seen, over time steel becomes aluminum and aluminum becomes plastic. The remanufactured parts are generally cheaper and suit our purposes. They are more appropriate for our needs. But when we remanufacture the Lord, we are playing with eternity.

I borrowed from J.B. Phillips', "Your God Is Too Small", a number of remanufactured Christs who have been worshipped over the centuries in various churches. I also characterized some odd and sundry Christs I have observed myself. Phillips' first complaint is about Christ as the "resident policeman". He gives us guilt and makes us pretend humility and modesty. The policeman is ever ready to condemn us and the object of life is to behave so modestly that he looks the other way.

In reality, this philosophy demeans the true Messiah who forgave the adulteress, the thief, and even the soldiers who crucified Him. It makes the giver of grace a mere enforcer of law.

Phillips also objected to the Christ who is "gentle, meek and mild". This well-intentioned description is not scriptural but seems designed to make Christians inoffensive. We are to be trusted because we follow so reticent and retiring a saviour. But this certainly does not describe the Messiah who threw over the money-changers' tables in the Temple and was capable of unfathomable depths of sorrow and pity.

The poet Swinburne wrote, "Thou hast conquered, pale Galilean, the world hast grown gray from thy breath." In these lines the King is seen as leading his people not to victory but to stupification. We'll survive by our longsuffering. The followers of this Christ might thrill to the hymn lines, "Oh to be nothing, only to lie at His feet, a broken and empty vessel for the master's use made meet." We can hardly picture the Christian seen as a soldier in the Gospel, engaged in deadly spiritual battle with satan for every soul — "Putting on the full armor of God", and "Warring against principalities and powers."

In modern America the Messiah has been remanufactured as some kind of westerner, a white man, more or less capitalistic in his dealings and teachings. He has lost His pure-bred Israeli characteristics somewhere along the way, and when I take American Christians to Israel they are a bit surprised to find Middle-easterners over there. Our Lord, to judge by appearance of today's Israelis who are very purely bred, was of a non-Caucasian race, undoubtedly not tall, fair or what we Westerners may think of as handsome (Isa. 53:2). In reality Jesus was rather neutral, considering the races of the world, and is accessible to men of every color and nationality equally.

And of course we have remanufactured His name — Yeshua. Yeshua means "savior" and therefore bears a message in itself. If you translate it to English it is "Joshua", the one who took his chosen people to their promised land at the sound of the trumpets and the shouts at Jericho (Josh. 6:5; I Thess. 4:16, 17). "Jesus" is an English transliteration of a Greek name and was, of course, never used until the English language developed a few

hundred years ago. It should be realized that we have founded entire church doctrines on this remanufactured name, such as those that hold that we must "pray in Jesus' name", or "be baptized in Jesus' name". We can see behind these constricting doctrines that resident policeman again, snaring people on technicalities and denying them that free gift of salvation.

And as we elect our elders and deacons, and particularly our pastors, we perhaps try to find a churchman who is a Jesus-like figure in our minds. But really, Jesus was not a churchman and did not favor religious people. The Samaritan woman and the learned Nicodemus wanted to discuss theology with the Lord but were stopped in each case by the brevity and force of the Messiah's own salvation message (John 4:23; John 3:3). Jesus did not use His overwhelming intellect as an intellectual but as a teacher, which is quite different. He did not toil and spin over religious matters but simply articulated the simple truth. He did not seek to found an elite class of people, though in some of our churches we act as if He did.

An increasingly popular remanufactured Christ these days is the "mystical visitor" who brings us magic. He tells certain gifted people secrets and grants them visions to guide their lives. Obviously, He is our Lord and when He is sovereign in our lives we obey His leading. It is scripturally correct to say, "The Lord led me..." but it is presumptuous to say, "Jesus told me...". The difference has to do with maturity. Our Lord was not a mystic who can be consulted on some transcendental level about spiritual secrets. He is our intercessor with God. He hears and answers prayer, the mature petitions of believers having to do with the defined will of God.

The remanufactured Christs go on infinitely. People have made them to suit every human weakness. He has been remade to satisfy tyrannical church doctrines and secular politics. We can understand the true Christ only by consulting one source, our sole Godly source of information about the Messiah, the Bible.

Now the true Messiah is not that difficult to understand if we stick to the Gospels. He obviously had the physical characteristics of the Israelites, as we have observed, and very likely their personality features as well. They are decisive and aggressive. They live under a most stringent and ancient code of ethics and therefore tend to emphasize morality and fairness as a culture. (An Israeli friend gave me a cassette tape in Jerusalem during our Feast of Tabernacles tour. The copyright line reads "duplication of this material is forbidden by Torah and by the copyright laws..." Plagiarists in Israel have to consider the Law of God as well as the laws of the State!)

Our Lord would not have been quiet and unassuming. People in Israel are simply not gentle, meek and mild as a rule. And Galileans are not "pale" in any way. Our Lord would have spoken precisely and directly. He would have walked fast and taken the most direct routes. He would have eaten quickly of simple foods, favoring the fields over the stores. He would have kept the law, all the time.

He was certainly an outdoorsman; a 50 mile walk would be routine to Him. He would have been a good sailor and fisherman, as Galileans tend to be. He would have dressed for the desert, probably including a headdress, on His trips to Jerusalem.

More important than how He looked was what He said. "No man spake like this man" we can see for ourselves in the Gospels. Jesus Christ never wasted a word. He didn't pause for tact and diplomacy. He said, "Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay." He quoted only one book, the Bible, even though many more were available. He never questioned the veracity of a single verse nor found any Old Testament events hard to believe. He tells of Adam and Eve, and Noah and Jonah, and all the rest as historical figures. Those who have trouble believing in the creation account, or the flood, or any other biblical events, are simply differing with the opinion of Jesus Christ.

He remade men, not institutions. A leper by the road proved more important than an interview with King Herod. The thief on the cross was taken to Paradise. Human hearts, one by one comprised His ministry. He did not attempt to remake the Temple or the government, but only to work with the people. Somehow, He became the central figure of history and the ideas He taught to 12 men became the dominant religion of the world. He dealt kindly and gently with women. He stated that His followers were His family.

In characterizing the true Messiah, we must keep in mind that He is alive and effective today. Jesus is not merely a historic figure to be left there in history but is even now our priest in the Holy of Holies and our Advocate with the Father. He is gone for an interim period and will return, probably soon. He is our promised bridegroom and the Israeli bridegrooms always came back. Like a thief in the night He will come to claim His bride. And nothing is clearer in the scriptures than that.

When we say casually that "Jesus saves", we are certainly speaking truth. But we must realize that we refer only to the true Messiah, the Jesus of the Gospels, and not some remade version. We are ever in danger of remanufacturing the Lord to a degree where He simply does not any longer dispense salvation. It's not hard to think of denominations and churches which pronounce His name but know nothing of being born again.

There are three basic steps to knowing the true Messiah, I think. They are (1) read the Gospels, (2) read them again, and (3) read them still again. The reason we remake the Lord is that we somehow put those Gospels away and start listening to people's opinions of who He is and how He acts.

But He is the Word and only through the Word can we know Him.

## **CHANUKKAH--The Feast of Dedication**

Chanukkah means "dedication", as one would dedicate a building. Indeed it can be a "setting aside" of that building or place for a special use. The feast of Chanukkah is eight days long, and commemorates the rededication and sanctification of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Antiochus, leading the armies of Syria and the Roman Empire, had occupied Israel and had begun to systematically destroy the worship of the Lord. The Jewish people could abide the desecration of the Temple no longer, and Judah Maccabee led a band of citizen-soldiers in a campaign that would have striking parallels to our own American Revolution. Battling impossible odds, they put the Syrians to flight and began the holy task of preparing again the Temple for worship. They replaced the menorah (seven-branched Temple candle -- see Exodus 25:31-37) in its honored position, and then began to search for some consecrated oil which might have still been in the Temple. One could not light the eternal light with ordinary lamp oil and the formula for this special oil took seven days to prepare. Finally they found the large and ornate flask which stored the oil for the menorah, but their joy fell to dismay as they discovered it was all but empty. After hours of effort, the flask gave up one day's oil for one lamp.

The men resolved to wait no longer for the new oil to be prepared. They would light the eternal light and rededicate the Temple immediately, as even a week's delay

in re-establishing worship would be too long for Israel, who had longed for a right relationship with their Lord.

On the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, 165 B.C., the oil was placed in the lamp, the wick trimmed, the blessing pronounced, and all hearts leapt for joy as the news was passed through the streets that the Temple was again sanctified. Of course, preparations began immediately for new oil, but there was no short-cut to the formula. But Judah Maccabee and his men didn't worry that the light would go out. They had seen the hand of the Lord give their victory and they knew He would be faithful in this as well. Indeed, that small amount of oil burned on and on, not for two or three days, but eight--giving them time to prepare new oil. The faith and courage of a few religious men and the faithfulness of our Lord gave us the miracle of Chanukkah.

The Jewish people still celebrate this miracle by lighting a nine-branched menorah. One candle stays lit continuously and is used to light an additional candle each night, until on the eighth day the whole menorah shines forth. It is customary that this menorah be placed in the window of the home so that the light of the world can once again shine forth to tell all that He lives and to proclaim again the miracle of courage and faithfulness that is Chanukkah.