

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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Sinai Speaks

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Sinai Speaks

EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS to clearly understand the biblical/Hebraic roots of our faith is an essential goal of Bridges for Peace. We seek to accomplish this in a variety of ways. Our monthly Teaching Letters and other printed material, presentations by BFP representatives to local church groups or other meetings, and one-on-one conversations are all avenues to increase this understanding. This month we'd like to introduce you to a new tool that has just become available: *Sinai Speaks*, a devotional book written by Dr. Jim Solberg, the BFP US National Director. The potential this book has to deepen our understanding of the Hebraic foundations of our Christian faith is exciting.

www.wikipedia.org/ Berthold Werner

What is your favorite book in the Bible? Chances are it is not Leviticus or Numbers. What images come to mind when you think about books like Genesis or Exodus? Do you think the ancient history as retold in the first five books of the Bible is relevant in your life today? For thousands of years the Jewish people have faithfully read these Scriptures in their entirety every year, fulfilling God's commandment that "*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it*" (Josh. 1:8a NKJV). Are we missing an opportunity to grow in our faith if we avoid Scripture that we may consider dull or uninteresting? So, the challenge is to put aside any preconceived ideas and consider a *Torah* devotional study.

Specific Terms

If you were asked to define the word *Torah*, what would your answer be? You might say the first five books of the Bible or the Law. The Hebrew language provides a more accurate and richer understanding. In Hebrew, the word *torah* (תורה) is translated as "teaching, instruction or direction." The root of the noun *torah* is the verb form *arah* (ארה) which means "to point out" or "show." So when we speak of the *Torah*, we are essentially speaking of God's instruction or teaching of His children. Don't we all need that?

When you embark on the study of *Torah*, you may encounter some other unfamiliar terms. As you might expect, most are Hebrew words.

Midrash: The word comes from a Hebrew root meaning "to study, to seek out, or to investigate." A *midrash* involves stories elaborating on incidents in the Scripture primarily to provide a moral lesson.

Parsha: In Hebrew it means "portion," and here refers to a section of the *Torah*.

Talmud: a rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tanach (also spelled Tanakh): Genesis through Malachi. The name *Tanakh* is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the Bible's three traditional subdivisions: *Torah*, *Nevi'im* ("Prophets") and *Ketuvim* ("Writings").

Writings of the Apostles: For many readers of the Bible, the terms "Old" and "New Testament" have negative connotations, but finding terminology to effectively refer to them has been difficult. In this volume, we have chosen to use language that is becoming common in modern biblical scholarship. We will refer to the "Old Testament" as the *Tanach* (*Tanakh*) and the "New Testament" as the writings of the Apostles.

A Week in the Desert

We'd like invite you to preview this amazing collection of daily devotions. *Sinai Speaks* contains five sections, one for each book of the *Torah*, and then is further divided into 52 weeks. Each section, as well as the weekly portion, has a Hebrew name which is usually taken from the first words of that book's text. For instance, Exodus begins with the words, "*Now these are the names...*" (Exod. 1:1 NKJV); therefore in Hebrew it is called *Shemot*, or "names."

Since the Jewish community reads a specific *parsha* each week, we've chosen to preview the portion named *Ki Tisa*, or "*When you take...*" which is based on the first three words in Exodus 30:12. So let's step back in time, spend a week in the desert with Moses and the Israelites, and discover how relevant their experiences are to those we encounter today.

KI TISA — Exodus 30:11–34:35

Day One: Exodus 30:11–31:17

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.’” (Exod. 31:1-5)

This passage contains two key truths for us today. First, the more obvious: all gifts and talents come from the Lord and are given to us for a purpose. There is no need to feel ashamed if we lack a talent, as God Himself chose which ones to give us. And, there is no need to hide a talent or cover it with false modesty, when the One who deserves the credit is not me, but God. Special skills are given to each person to fulfill the roles which God has designed for us. We are not given gifts to waste, but to use in His service. This principle comes with a built-in “humility-gauge.” The greater the gift or talent we may have, the greater God’s expectation of us to use it for His purposes. In a fallen, sinful world, there is not one of us who always uses every

talent to its fullest potential in God’s service. And, there is no one who lacks a gift or talent, provided by the Lord, to use in His service and for His purpose. The true measure of success is not what we produce, but how faithfully we use what we are given.

The second key truth hidden in this passage is that God often blesses families with gifts to serve Him. Bezalel, the master craftsman, is the grandson of Hur. In Exodus chapters 17 and 24, we read of Hur, alongside Aaron, as one of Moses’ key aides. God raises up Hur’s grandson with special gifts to play a specific role in setting up the true worship of God in the Tabernacle. We don’t know much about Hur, but it may well be that he, too, was a master craftsman who taught his son and grandson. We never know how God will use the time we invest in bringing up the next generations. Of course, the most important thing to teach our children is to know and follow God. In Genesis 18:19 we read: *“For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”*

Prayer:

Lord God of Israel, let us turn our focus away from counting how many or how large our gifts and talents may be; and focus on faithfully using them for Your service and purpose. Amen



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KI TISA—Exodus 30:1–34:35

Day Two: Exodus 31:18–33:11

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' So Aaron said to them, 'Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.'"
(Exod.32:1–2)

Have you ever done something so foolish, so bad, so clearly wrong, that later on you wondered how you could ever have done it? Most of us have. I've always thought this must have been how Aaron felt after the incident of the golden calf. And yet Scripture gives us no such detail on his soul searching. Neither Moses nor God seem to directly punish Aaron for this incident.

Exodus 24:14–15 may give us a clue. We read: *"And he said to the elders, 'Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.' Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain."*

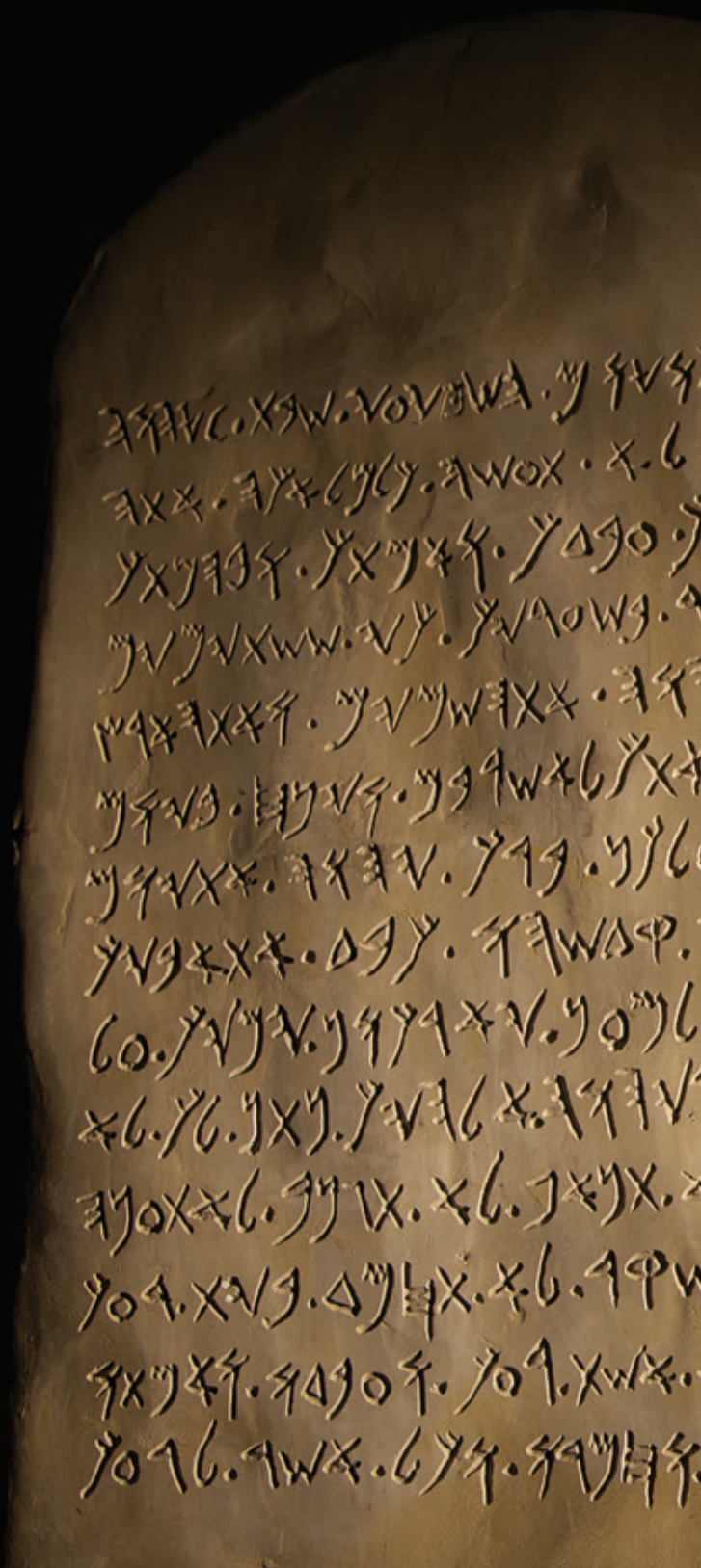
In chapter 24, the Bible provides the details as Moses ascends Mt. Sinai. Chapters 25 through 31 contain God's instruction for the construction of the Tabernacle, and then chapter 32 begins with the episode of the golden calf. What really happened while Moses was meeting with God on the mountain?

After chapter 24, there is no further reference to Hur. Rabbinic tradition tells us that when the children of Israel demanded a golden calf, Hur stood firm against them and was killed for his effort to stop this blasphemy. The rabbis explain that it was only after Hur was killed that Aaron gave in to the people's demands.

We don't know for sure if this tradition is correct, but we do know this: Aaron made a huge mistake, and yet God still used him. Many years of effective faithful service to God lay ahead for Aaron, even after this terrible choice. What a comfort to know that God has a plan and future for each of us, no matter what mistake(s) lie in our past.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your unfailing love and countless opportunities for new beginnings. Help us to stand for You and not to give in to fear of others. Set our hearts to focus on You and to serve You faithfully throughout all the days You give us. Amen





KI TISA — Exodus 30:11–34:35

Day Three: Exodus 33:12–16

“Now therefore, if I have found favor in Your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people. And he said, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.’” (Exod. 33:13–15)

This discussion between Moses and God occurs soon after the episode of the golden calf. When Moses first encounters God at the burning bush, it is God who asks Moses to go and lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land. To persuade Moses, God shows him relatively minor miracles of a burning bush, and a rod that becomes a snake. Moses reluctantly agrees to become God’s emissary, and so begins this great partnership with the Almighty.

Moses has been through quite a bit since the beginning of his mission to bring Israel to the Promised Land. He has seen demonstrations of God’s power in the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, provision of water in the desert, and the giving of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai. Any doubts he ever had about God’s power have been erased.

But, there has been another major change. Moses has come to understand the heart of the people. The Israelites are very much like you and me. Most of them don’t want to do evil, but they consistently have trouble fully obeying God. Like Moses, they have seen God’s power through the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, provision of water in the desert, and His appearance in thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai. But, none of these demonstrations of God’s power were enough to really change their hearts. They still wandered off and forgot their promises to faithfully serve God.

So, Moses has learned two key things. He has learned that God is amazing and can do anything; and he has learned that he, Moses, cannot manage or lead these people by himself. These are two great lessons for every parent, leader, pastor, elder, and teacher. Like Moses, we all lead imperfect people and can only succeed with God’s help: *“If Your Presence does not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”*

Prayer:

Lord, help us learn these two key lessons: that You are able to do everything, and we are able to do nothing without You. Amen

KI TISA—Exodus 30:11–34:35

Day Four: Exodus 33:17–23

"Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.'" (Exod. 33:18–19)

What can we truly know about God? Theologians debate and use words like omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. It is not my intent to disagree with any of these scholarly terms. It is my intent, however, to call special attention to what God directly tells us about Himself, and His choice of words.

Moses asks to see God's glory. At this point, he has already been on top of Mt. Sinai and must be pretty impressed with the awesome display he has seen. He has already seen the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and water coming forth from a rock. Yes, even after all of this, he understands that he has not yet seen God's full glory. The miracles in Egypt and the awesome display on the top of Mt. Sinai are only a glimpse of the full glory of God—so he asks to see it all!

And how does God reply? God offers to show Moses His goodness. In Hebrew, the word is *tov* (טוב) which carries in it a wide sense of beauty, joy, and the best of everything. Rather than offer another display of overwhelming power, God says to Moses that He will show him His goodness.

What is the most important attribute for us to know and trust about God? It is His goodness. This is reflected by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

God's goodness is a key message throughout Scripture, and if we are really going to place our lives in His hands, we must embrace it.

Prayer:

Lord, please help us to know and to trust Your goodness. In whatever situation we find ourselves, let us draw into our hearts both Your power to act and Your goodness to work all things together for good. Amen



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KI TISA — Exodus 30:11–34:35
Day Five: Exodus 34:1–9

“The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,

visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’” (Exod. 34: 5–7)

The creeds of the early Church and the doctrinal statements of our modern fellowships seek to provide some definition as to who the God we worship is and what we know about Him. The verses above may be the earliest and best statement of who God is and what He wants us to know about Him.

The LORD, the LORD: One true God of gods, not some ethereal force or god of your own choosing;

Merciful and gracious: Before anything else, He wants us to know about His grace and mercy;

Slow to anger: He is not an angry God, not in a rush toward judgment;

Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness: Not just possessing love and faithfulness, but overflowing in abundant love and faithfulness;

Keeping steadfast love for thousands: It’s not only about me—we hear an echo of “*God so loved the world...*”

Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: Before we hear of judgment, we first learn of God’s offer of forgiveness;

By no means clearing the guilty: There is justice, and ultimately that requires judgment and punishment of the guilty;

Visiting iniquity to the third and fourth generation: As much as we wish it wasn’t so, our choices have an impact for generations to come.

Prayer:

Lord, please open our eyes to know You. Let us hear You as You reveal Yourself to us in Your Word. Amen

KI TISA — Exodus 30:11–34:35
Weekend: Exodus 34:10–35



“Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.”
 (Exod. 34:34–35)

One of the great artistic masterpieces of all time is Michelangelo’s sculpture of Moses, which is housed in the Church of St. Peter in Chains in Rome. The statue is an amazing and beautiful work of art, showing a seated Moses holding the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments. If you are ever in Rome, it is well worth a visit to this church to see this statue and several other masterpieces.

Should you be able to visit, you will notice one rather odd feature. On Moses’ head are two bumps, actually small horns. This is due to a misreading of the Hebrew word *qaran* (קָרַן) when St. Jerome first translated the Bible into Latin. The word is actually a figure of speech used to indicate something striking in appearance, shining like the rays of the sun. Unfortunately, St. Jerome translated it as literal “horns.”

The point here is not really about the mistake in an early translation, but rather to emphasize that there was something visibly and noticeably different about Moses after he had been with God. This is not just a historical report of what happened when Moses met with God, but also a tremendous illustration and challenge to each of us. When people look at us, can they see that something is different? Do they wonder if we have been with God? We may not have bumps, or shining rays to prove it, but we, too, are challenged to look different, to live differently, because we have been with God.

Prayer:

Lord, may Your presence so impact us and Your Holy Spirit so shine in and through us that people may see we have been with God. Amen

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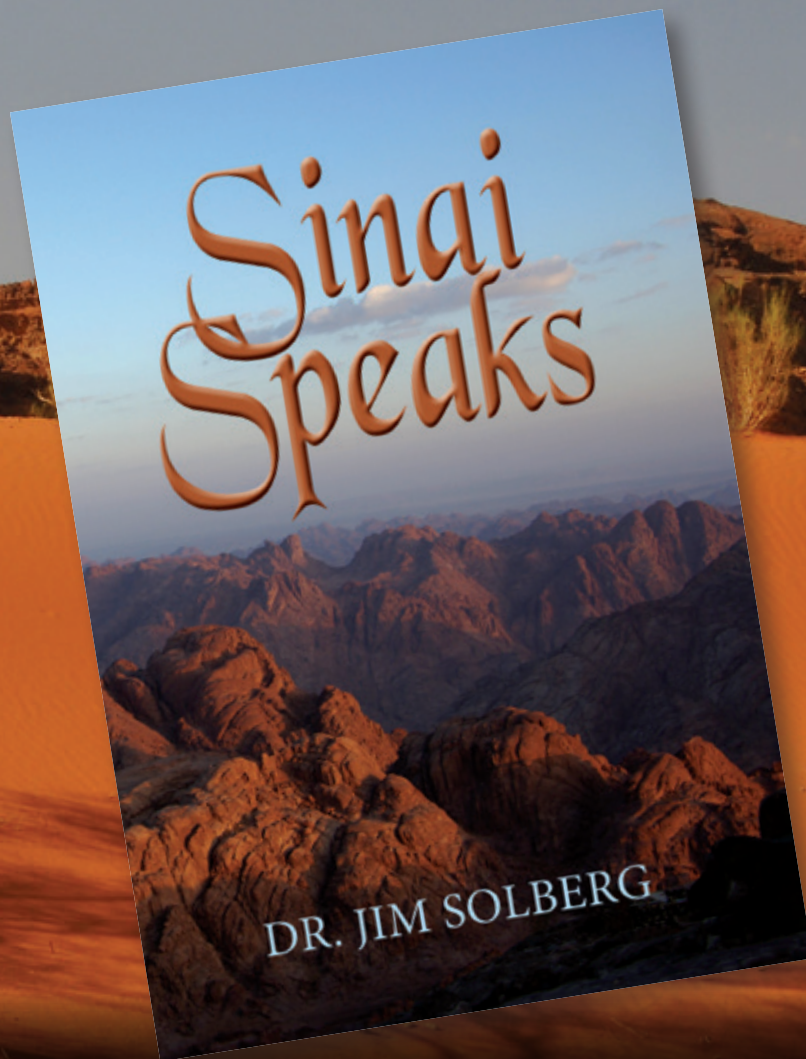
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Re-discovering the Torah

For millennia, the Jewish people have read the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) through every year, allowing their ancestral desert experience to speak to them wherever they were, whatever their need. After centuries of neglect, Christians are re-discovering the *Torah* and its relevant messages for life today.

We've given you a brief glimpse into Dr. Solberg's devotional, *Sinai Speaks*. If you are curious about the study of *Torah*...if you would like the Scriptures to speak to you today...if you are already a *Torah* student but have friends or family that you would like to introduce to this life-changing endeavor...*Sinai Speaks* is for you. Written for the beginning *Torah* student, this amazing devotional will open your eyes to a whole new realm of Bible study as ancient stories with modern applications bring you ever closer to the God of Israel.



PRICE: US \$14 + S&H

The book can be ordered through your national office or on the BFP website at www.bridgesforpeace.com

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