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Discipleship *and the* Hebraic Worldview



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Yeshua walked the Land of Israel as the Master, accompanied constantly by a group of dedicated FOLLOWERS called His disciples.

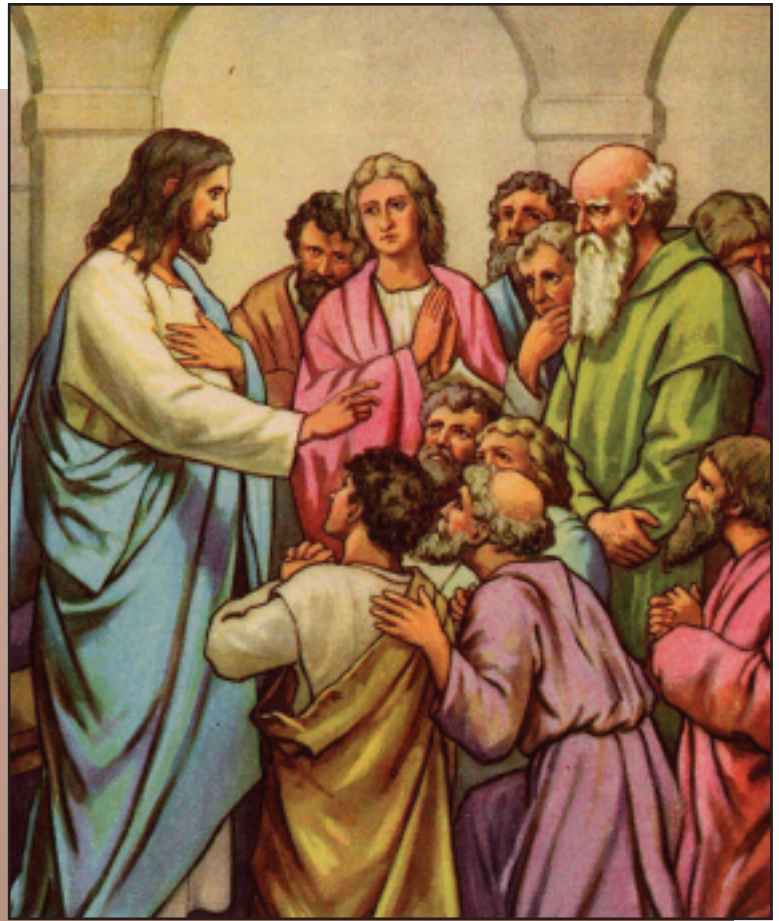
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Discipleship and the Hebraic Worldview

▼ *Webster's Dictionary* defines a disciple as “one who believes the teachings of a master.”

Further, Mr. Webster states, the disciple may help to “disseminate those teachings.” The primary thrust of this definition that is commonly held in most circles today, including the Church, is that discipleship requires little more than intellectual assent. So it seems that to be a disciple of Yeshua (Jesus), all I have to do is believe what He said. However, if we were able to step back into the first-century world, in which Yeshua walked the Land of Israel as the Master, accompanied constantly by a group of dedicated followers called His disciples, we would discover a very different definition. In order to fully understand it, though, we must first come to terms with Yeshua's identity.

Yeshua was Jewish. He was raised in an observant Jewish home by parents, who followed Jewish law and tradition; He lived in a Jewish homeland called Israel and spoke its language, Hebrew. He was a part of a robust and lively community that was identified by its active relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He started life as all Jewish baby boys would—circumcised on the eighth day. His mother probably saved his swaddling cloths, delicately embroidering them over the years, to give Him as a gift at His coming-of-age. During His first eight years of life, Yeshua would have stayed close to Mary's side, watching her as she lived the life of a committed follower of the one true God. Each Friday evening, He sat quietly as she welcomed *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) and laughed with glee as Joseph told and retold the stories of the forefathers. At six, He most likely began attending school at the synagogue, having already learned the *aleph bet* (Hebrew alphabet) from Joseph and committed many Scripture verses to memory. When Yeshua was eight, He began receiving intensive vocational instruction from His father. His life was laced with *Torah* (first five books of the Bible) and the teachings of the sages. He celebrated every biblical holiday and traveled to Jerusalem with His family for the pilgrim



Hebrew alphabet

א-ב

feasts. At thirteen, He may well have graduated from synagogue school to a *Beit Midrash* (school of higher learning), where He would have studied the writings of all the great Jewish teachers and debated with the sages and teachers of the *Torah*. Upon turning 30, He went to the *mikvah* (place of ritual immersion) for ceremonial purification, and then stepped into His adult ministry.

As a typical first-century itinerant teacher of Judaism, Yeshua drew His disciples—all Jewish men with the same history and heritage as Himself—into a vital and committed relationship. Leaving everything else behind, His pupils traveled with Him constantly, observing His every action and reaction. In love and loyalty, they cared for Him by procuring and preparing His food; providing companionship and protection; and guarding Him from danger, as well as from too much attention from thousands of people needing healing and hungry for His teaching. In exchange for this service, called *shimmush* in Hebrew, the disciples received constant instruction and grounding in *Torah*. The most important skill of a successful disciple was that of imitation. The highways and byways of Israel became the classroom in this process of discipleship that involved listening ears, a zealous heart, and keen powers of observation, which imbued the student with the master's persona. The disciple learned not just the oral text of the *Torah* but the emphasis, articulation, and gestures that went with it. He was not just to believe his master and lend mental assent to his teaching, but he was to become his master.



The most
important
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Excuse Me, Mr. Webster...

Our initial definition of the word “disciple,” obviously, did not give a true understanding of the word or the concept as it applied to Yeshua and His early followers. But how could the definition have been so far off? And if the deeper definition applied to those early followers, does it apply to believers today?

Could it be that the Church has failed
to recognize the true gravity of the commitment
to become a disciple of Yeshua?

It's All in How You View the World...

Yeshua and His disciples were obviously men who had like passions and goals, a common history and heritage, as well as shared religious and cultural norms. They reacted to and interacted with the world around them in a manner customary to their place and time. In other words, they shared a common worldview. It was, in fact, a worldview based on hundreds of years of covenant relationship with the one true God and Jewish interpretation of His instructions for life. Called a Hebraic worldview, it was the same one that informed the thinking of the likes of Isaiah, Jeremiah, King David, and the other heroes of biblical faith.

Woven into this worldview was a rich and beautiful heritage—the inner world of biblical thought. Clearly, the New Testament tells us that we have been adopted as sons into the family of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people and our father through adoption (Rom. 4:16). Through our relationship with Yeshua Hamashiach (Jesus Christ), His history becomes our history, His family becomes our family, and His heritage becomes our heritage. From that worldview, we have not only received our adoption as sons, but our concept of salvation; the realization of our personal relationship with God; our Scriptures, scrupulously handed down from generation to generation, written by Jewish men for a Jewish audience; and Yeshua Himself, our Jewish Messiah. How critical it is, then, that this worldview becomes our worldview. If we are to claim spiritual kinship with Abraham and the Jewish people, we must surely think and approach life as they did.



Alexandria, Egypt

If Not Hebrew, Then...

Unfortunately, for us as 21st century Christians, the Hebraic worldview has long since been lost to us. Our cultural mind-set has been shaped and informed by a different system called Hellenism. This is a term generally used by historians to refer to the period from the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) to the death of Cleopatra and the incorporation of Egypt into the Roman Empire in 30 BC. Hellenism is also used to indicate, more generically, the cultural tradition of the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire and/or the influence of Greek civilization on Rome, Carthage, India, and other regions, which were never part of the empire of Alexander.

Hellenism, or more simply put, a Greek worldview, had a profound effect on first century Jews in Israel, but not nearly as profound as that on the Jews of the Diaspora. In Israel, many Jewish people became Hellenists externally by embracing a more liberal

Alexander the Great and his heirs brought about the Hellenization of the Near East by introducing Greek religion and customs.



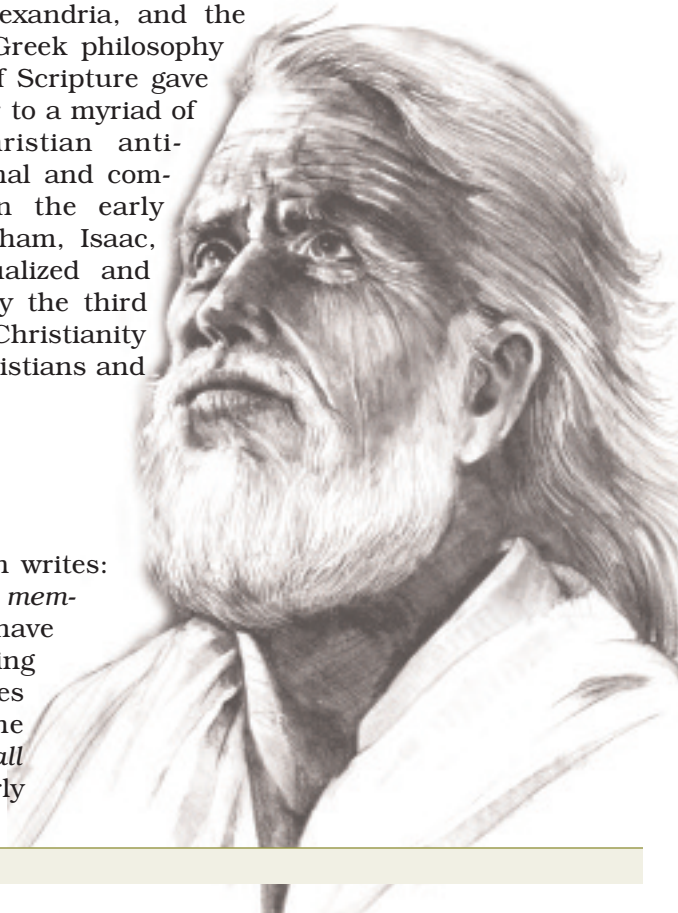
culture, adopting Greek names, etc; but the basics of their Judaism remained intact. However, in the Diaspora, Socratic and Aristotelian thought became more of a force to be reckoned with. In Alexandria, Egypt, Jews and Greeks intermingled freely, sharing thoughts and cross-pollinating ideas. When Christianity arrived on the scene, many of those Hellenistic Jews became converts; but in a short time, Gentile Christians outnumbered Jewish believers in what had started out as a Hebraic sect of Judaism. The first Christian school of theology was established in Alexandria, and the immediate task became the mingling of Greek philosophy

with the Bible. Literal interpretation of Scripture gave way to allegory, opening the door to a myriad of heresies, among them Christian anti-Semitism. The vibrant personal and community relationship between the early church and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became intellectualized and systematized Christian doctrine. By the third

century, this Hellenization of the Church helped to tear Christianity away from its Judaic root and create a chasm between Christians and Jews that would remain for 1,700 years.

Look to Abraham Our Father

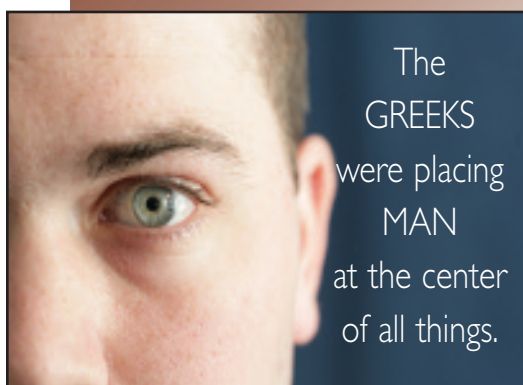
In the book, *Our Father Abraham*, Dr. Marvin Wilson writes: "Paul states that *'the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body'* (Eph 3:6b, NIV). Hence, Gentiles have a new history—Israel's history is now their history. In writing to the predominantly Gentile church of Corinth, Paul states that the ancient Israelites were the forebears of the Corinthians, *'our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea'* (1 Cor. 10:1, NASB). In the early



Church, therefore, Jew and Gentile claimed a common spiritual ancestry with the Hebrews of old. All Jews trace their ancestry to Abraham as father of the Hebrew nation. Accordingly, the Lord proclaimed through his prophet, *'Look to the rock from which you were cut...look to Abraham, your father'* (Isa. 51:1–2, NIV)."

It is no less important for the modern Church to understand and connect to that history, than it was for the Corinthians. It is not too late for us to remove the Hellenistic filters through which we view the world and read the Scriptures, and begin to develop a truly biblical or Hebraic worldview. In order to do that, we must be willing to explore the mind-set reflected by the writers of Scripture, to step into their world and understand their culture. We must look to the rock from which we were cut. Through the following comparisons, we will identify a few of the main areas of conflict between the Hebraic and Greek worldviews in an effort to think more biblically.

We must look
to the ROCK
from which
we were cut.



Theocentrism

To the Hebrew, God was the beginning and the end of all things. Life was a gift from Him, as was every good thing that came with it. Life was to be embraced and enjoyed as a tribute to Him. God was firmly at the center of all things and all else was peripheral. However, the Greeks were anthropocentric, placing man at the center of all things. Individuality was applauded and each man saw himself as the center of the universe. It is not difficult to find that same perspective in the Church today, where many not only see themselves as the center but also view God as a servant on hand to do their bidding.

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Deut. 6:4

Monotheism

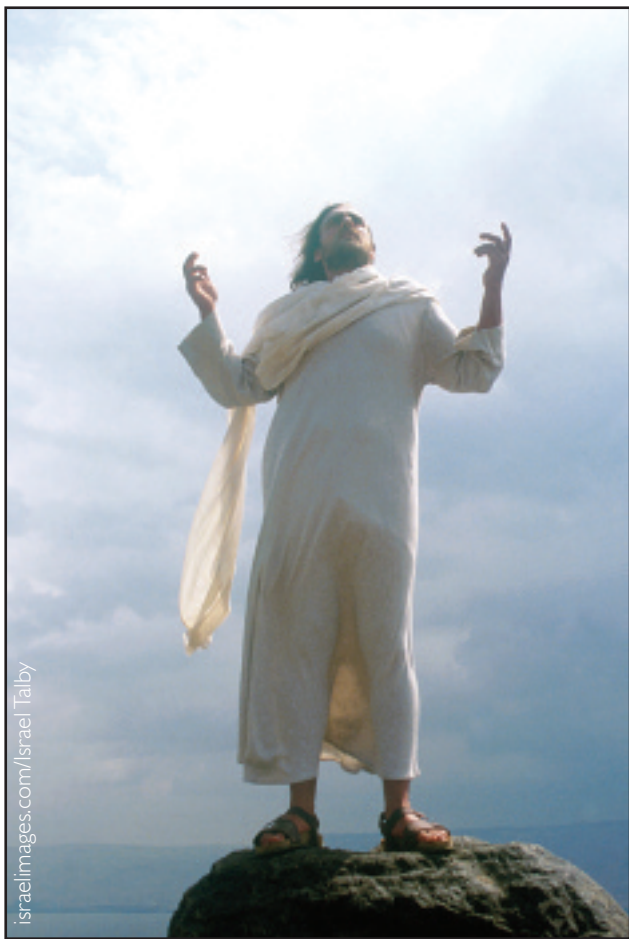
The central tenet of Judaism is found in Deuteronomy 6:4. Known as the *Shema*, this is the identifying statement of the religion. *"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One."* God called Abraham

out of the land of Ur and through him created a new race of people, who God desired to use to reveal Himself to the world. The Jews would be a living example of covenant relationship. They would carry throughout the generations the mantle of monotheism. At the time that God spoke to Abraham in Ur, there were numerous tribal groups in the Middle East, all of whom were polytheistic. Hundreds of gods existed. City-states each had their own temples and sacrificial systems, along with their own priesthood. These religious leaders extracted huge offerings from the people in order to appease angry gods, assure a good harvest, bring favor on a child, bring fertility, etc. Life was one long, difficult attempt to make sure that the gods were happy. In the midst of this polytheistic milieu, God introduced Himself to Abraham. He spoke with Abraham as a man speaks with a friend, and Abraham believed Him. And because of the faithfulness of Abraham and his descendants, the concept of monotheism has been revealed throughout the ages.

Sensuality vs. Spirituality

The Greeks venerated the human body. Physical beauty was to be prized above all else. Nudity was common in art as well as in certain public venues, such as sporting events. The Hebrew, however, placed no more emphasis on the outer man than on the inner man.





Spirituality, which expressed itself in a lively relationship with God and community, was the heart of Jewish worship. The human body was appreciated and cared for as a gift from the Lord. It was treated with respect and modesty as the vehicle through which the worship of God was performed.

Knowledge

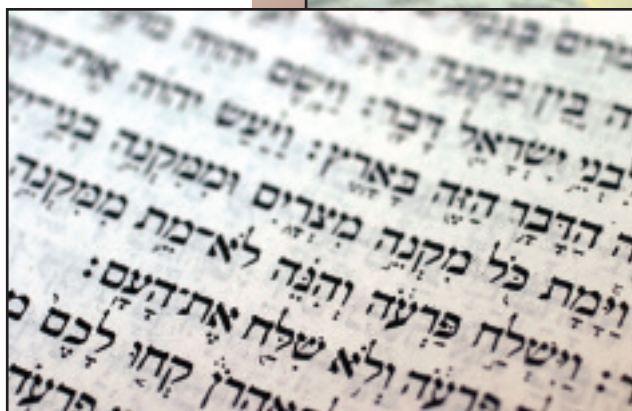
Since biblical times, the Jewish people have considered the quest for knowledge to be one of the supreme goals of life. The ability to pass from one generation to the next the teachings central to their religious heritage was critical to the survival of the Jews throughout history. The following are sayings of the Jewish Talmud (Collections of traditions and commentaries):

“He who teaches a child, it is as if he created him.
The world exists by the breath of school children.
Without Jewish learning, we cannot be Jews.”

The purpose of learning in that Hebraic worldview was to prepare the whole person for a life of service and obedience in the knowledge of God. The *Torah* was given by God as instruction to His people on how to live their lives according to His plan. It was up to the Jewish people to study it, learn it, embrace it, and live it in every

circumstance of their lives. A mere understanding was not enough; learning required response. The fundamental goal of Hebraic education was, in fact, the building of disciples—the passing on of the teachings and instruction of God to His children in order that they might revere and obey Him.

The Greek, on the other hand, sought knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone. His desire was for information and understanding, not instruction leading to obedience. The difference between the Hebraic and Greek worldviews with regard to learning is summed up well by Norman Snaith: “The object and aim of the Hebrew system is *da’ath elohim* (knowledge of God), while the object and aim of the Greek system is *gnothi seauton* (know thyself). Between these two, there is the widest possible difference. There is no compromise between the two on anything like equal terms. They are poles apart in attitude and method. The Hebrew system starts with God; the only true wisdom is knowledge of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The corollary is that man can never know himself, what he is, and what is his relation to the world; unless first he learn of God and be submissive to God’s sovereign will. The Greek system, on the contrary, starts from the knowledge of man and seeks to rise to an understanding of the ways and nature of God through the knowledge of what is called man’s higher nature. According to the Bible, man has no higher nature except he be born of the Spirit.”



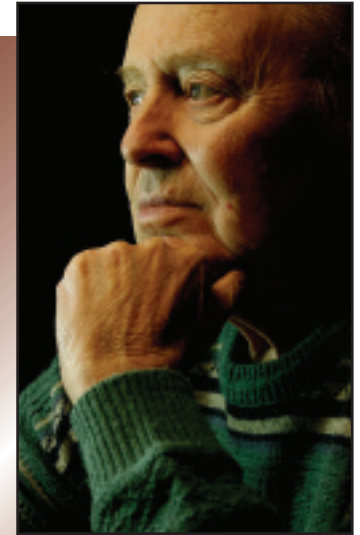
Top:
Greek Bible
Left:
Hebrew Bible

Form vs. Function

As we have discussed throughout this letter, the relationship between God and His people Israel was a vital, dynamic, energetic interaction. God called His children to walk with Him, to talk with Him, and to follow Him. He revealed Himself to them, not through the presentation of abstract ideas, but through visible, tangible acts of deliverance and miraculous intervention. Judaism, therefore, puts a strong emphasis on function, while Hellenism emphasizes structure and appearance. The Hebrew asks: "How do I do my faith? How do I live my covenant relationship? How should I then act?" While Western Christianity with its Greek perspective tends to be



interested in religious theory, Judaism's emphasis is on righteous action. While Christians ask, "What do you think about this Scripture?" Jews ask, "How do you live this Scripture?" Christians tend to think of their relationship with God in terms of faith, which often means an intellectual exercise. Belief, to them, means mental assent. However, the Hebrew does not so much have faith, as he is faithful, steadfast, reliable, constant, and stable. In the Hebraic worldview, belief and action cannot be separated.



Dualism

The Greek philosopher Plato introduced the concept of dualism to humanity. He taught that there are two worlds existing simultaneously. The material world is the world that you can see; it is imperfect, the source of evil, and inferior. The spiritual world, on the other hand, is the invisible world; it is the source of the human soul and the superior place. Humans, therefore, must long to be freed from and strive to subjugate their physical bodies, in order that their souls might find the divine place. Since the soul is imprisoned in the evil body, only at death can it escape to the realm of the spirit. The Hebrew, however, recognized the world as the place wherein God could be encountered. Here was the place God had created to have fellowship with His children and show them His love. There was no duality in the Hebraic worldview but a dynamic body-soul unity. The Hebrew did not *have* a soul, he *was* a soul. Nor would the Hebrew embrace the concept of asceticism—the rejection of the physical in order to mortify the flesh. He believed that God created the world and filled it with experiences for His children; all good gifts are from Him and are to be embraced with joy and gratitude. Anything less would be an insult to the Creator.

Dualism caused the Church to decide that the marriage relationship was evil and fleshly; therefore, a man should only marry if he could not control his unholy passions. Otherwise, celibacy was to be the lifestyle of choice. Conversely, the Hebraic worldview embraced marriage as a vehicle for presenting a true picture of God to the world. A man could not be complete without a wife, Judaism said, and parenting was the highest calling of God. The physical union between a man and wife was a gift and a blessing to be embraced with joy and gratitude.



To Be a Disciple...

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Yeshua said (Matt. 11:28). The love of God, the love of *Torah*, and true discipleship are not meant to be a burden but a joy. The Lord would not have His people be ignorant of anything that would bring them into closer fellowship with Him. We are living in an amazing day—a time when history, archaeology, talmudic study, and biblical study are all coming together—allowing us a peek into our past that other generations have not had. Jewish and Christian scholars are working together to give us a deeper look at life during the time of Yeshua, helping us to shed those Hellenistic filters and begin to see life through Hebrew eyes. As Christians,

Jesus calls us to that same vibrant, exciting, interactive relationship that His original pupils knew. He beckons us to become His disciples...Hebraic disciples...disciples that, according to the Talmud, look like this: "According to the Talmud, the whole world is indebted to the true disciple of the *Torah*. When the world looks at such a one, he who labors in *Torah* for the sake of *Torah* alone, this is what they will see: He is called friend, beloved, lover of the Almighty One, and lover of mankind. He is clothed in meekness and reverence. He is just, pious, upright, and faithful. He is a man of peace. Through him, the world receives counsel, sound knowledge, understanding, and strength. The

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Eddelene Marais

Torah gives him discerning judgment; to him the secrets of the *Torah* are revealed. He is made like a never-failing fountain, like a river that flows on with ever-sustained vigor. He is modest, long-suffering, and forgiving, yet he is magnified and exalted above all things."

By Cheryl Hauer
Deputy National Director
Bridges for Peace, United States

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Scriptures taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and laypeople have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

