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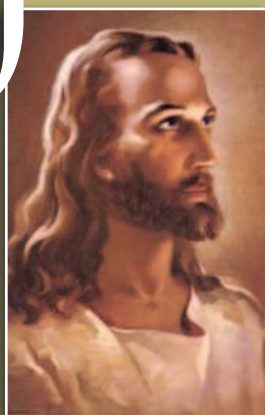
Israel Teaching Letter

Vol. # 770510

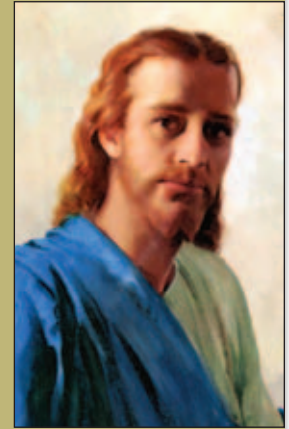
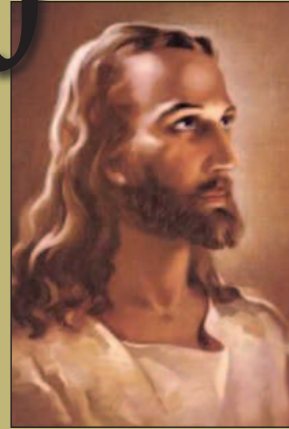
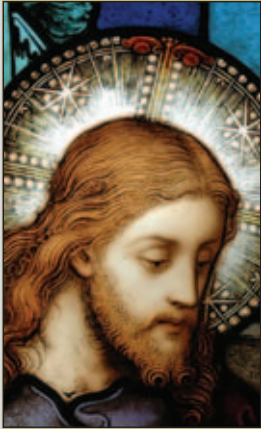
May 2010

ENCOUNTERING the **REAL** JESUS

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ENCOUNTERING the **REAL** JESUS



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To any Jewish readers:

This teaching letter is written to Christians to hopefully bring clarity about Jesus and the context of the Christian Scriptures which took place in the Second Temple Period world. However, I would like to alleviate any concerns you may have about our motivation for helping Israel and the Jewish people. We are not motivated by a belief that all prophecy must be fulfilled before the Messiah can return. Rather, we are motivated by a sincere love for G-d and the Jewish Jesus, whom we believe is the Messiah. We stand in awe as we see that G-d is still active in human affairs. We see the regathering of the Jewish people and the reestablishment of the Jewish state, Israel, as incredible evidence of G-d's hand at work in the world today. As lovers of G-d, we want to participate in what He is doing today.

All over the world, people have heard of Jesus. He has more than a billion followers today. Even if you don't believe in Jesus, you must recognize that Jesus is one of the most well-known personalities in history. I recently picked up a book by Jewish author Michael Shapiro entitled *The Jewish 100, a Ranking of the Most Influential Jews of All Time*. Predictably, Moses claims the number one slot, but to my surprise, the Jewish author chose Jesus of Nazareth for the number two slot. On another occasion, an Israeli mayor had invited a BFP leadership group to his home for dinner, and he brought up the subject of Jesus, saying he was fascinated by a man who had such influence.

As Christians, we look forward to the coming of the Messiah. As a child, I remember singing with great pathos many songs of longing to see Jesus. In current times, it seems that longing for the coming of Jesus and the Messianic era is growing. Not only Christians long for the coming of Messiah. I often hear Jewish friends speak of their desire for the Messiah to come. In fact, the Amidah prayer (or *shemona esrai*), which is prayed three times a day, includes a request for the Messiah to come and establish the throne of David. Maimonides, one of the most influential figures in medieval Jewish philosophy, has a statement about the coming of Messiah in his 13 Principles of Faith. "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming." You may have heard the Hebrew song, "Mashiach, Mashiach, Mashiach." This song is a powerful rendition of the words of Maimonides statement of faith concerning the Messiah. (To hear the song, go to the following YouTube link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MKtQ--ayDM&feature=related>.)

Christians and Jews don't agree on the identity of the Messiah, a subject that has caused much division between the two groups throughout our painful shared history. Regardless, the fact remains that both groups long for the Messiah. The late David Flusser, a Jewish professor, has been credited with the following story, although many eminent Jewish leaders have subsequently used it in conversations with Christians. Flusser recommended that when the Messiah comes, we should form a committee of Christians and Jews and seek an appointment. Because the Messiah will be busy, we should prepare our questions in advance. He recommended that the first question be "Sir, have you ever been here before?"

Although these are very interesting topics, I am not attempting to resolve these issues in this *Israel Teaching Letter*. Rather, I want to talk about aspects of Jesus I've encountered since I've been living in Israel.

The “Christian” Jesus

The disciples and early followers of Jesus had a great advantage. They saw Him face-to-face, ate with Him, walked with Him, and went to His teaching sessions. Today, we have the written account of what He did, but we don't have their advantage. We don't have YouTube videos of His ministry or digital photos. If you are like me, you grew up seeing painted pictures of Jesus, ideas of various artists. Most of them portray Him with a European look, although I have seen velvet paintings of Jesus in Mexico in which He looked distinctly Mexican. One of our Japanese volunteers drew a Japanese-looking baby Jesus a few years ago. Because we don't have the photographs, our view of Jesus's appearance has been dictated by our cultures and imaginations.

We think of Jesus as a good Christian. We forget that He was a Jewish man living in the first century who never stepped foot into a church. (Of course, there were no churches until much later.) He was never called a Christian. Stop and think about it, the word Christian means “like Christ.” “Christ” is the Greek word meaning “anointed one,” which in Hebrew is *mashiach* or Messiah. As the Christ, He wasn't *like* the anointed one—He *was* the anointed one. He had a Jewish name—Yeshua. (Referring to Him as Yeshua reminds us of His Jewishness; therefore, I will refer to Him by His Hebrew name throughout the rest of this teaching letter.)

What clues do we have of His appearance? For one thing, I imagine that He was very strong and muscular. He walked from one end of this Land to the other. He worked with Joseph, His step-father, in the building trade in a time when there were no power tools. Guys, He wasn't a wimp, He was a man's man. I believe He looked like a Semitic man of the time. He didn't stand out as different. Consider the fact that when Judas was going to betray Him, he kissed Him to identify Him to those coming to arrest Him. The Bible doesn't give us a physical description, so anything else is simply conjecture. So, when He comes, we may not recognize Him by His physical appearance, especially if we're not thinking of Him as a Jew. However, there is much in the Newer Testament that tells us about the Jewishness of Yeshua.

He didn't stand out as different.
Consider the fact that when Judas was going to betray Him, he kissed Him **to identify Him** to those coming to arrest Him.



His Family Was Torah Observant

Yeshua and His family carefully kept the laws of Moses found in the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.). Let's look at the story of the days following His birth from the book of Luke for several examples.

Circumcision: When He was eight days old, Yeshua was circumcised. “*And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, His name was called Jesus*” (Luke 2:21). Today, as in biblical times, Jewish boys are circumcised on the eighth day, and it is on that occasion that their name is announced.

they brought the turtledoves instead of a lamb is an indication that the family was not wealthy.

Blessed by a devout man: Luke goes on to tell the story of Simeon, who is described as just and devout. This righteous Jewish man blessed God after holding the babe saying, “*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel*” (2:29–32).

A devout Jewish man is called a *tsadik*. It is difficult to imagine such a respected devout Jewish man who would have prayed such a prayer if the family of Yeshua was not keeping the commandments. The passage confirms the fact that Joseph and

“...they had performed all these things according to the law of the Lord...”



Purification of the Mother: Leviticus 12:1–8 gives the prescribed laws for the purification of a woman after giving birth to a child: “*If a woman has conceived and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days*” (Lev. 12:1–4). Luke tells us, “*Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord*” (2:22).

Sacrifice: Yeshua’s mother brought a sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. This was to fulfill the commandment found in Leviticus 12:8: “*And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons— one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her and she will be clean.*” The fact that

Mary were deliberately fulfilling the Scriptures by their actions. Luke emphasizes this at the end of the passage: “*So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth*” (2:39).

Keeping the Feasts: The Scripture doesn’t tell us much about the early life of Yeshua. One incident is related from the time when He was twelve years old. The story is recorded again by Luke: “*His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast*” (2:41–42).

His family did this as prescribed in the book of Exodus: “*Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year...You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread [Passover], and the Feast of Harvest [Shavuot or Pentecost], the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering*

[Sukkot or Feast of Tabernacles] at the end of the year...Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD" (Exod. 23:14-17, also Deut. 16:16).

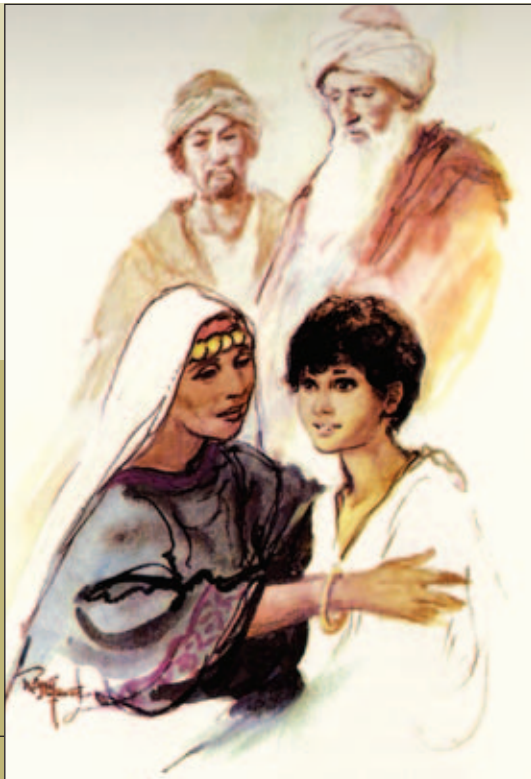
You know the story. Yeshua stayed in Jerusalem while His parents returned to the Galilee. After a day, they missed Him and returned to Jerusalem to find Him after searching for Him for three days. They found Him sitting in the Temple in the midst of the teachers, who were astonished at His understanding and answers. In the days of the Second Temple Period, it is hard to imagine that the Temple sages would have been discussing the *Tanach* (Gen.-Mal.) with one who was not from a religious Jewish family.

His Lineage: Yeshua and His family were from the Tribe of Judah, direct descendants of King David. Both Matthew and Luke trace the ancestry of Yeshua, knowing the importance of genealogies to first-century Jews. Genealogies proved Jewish nationality and tribal identity, which was important to identify which Jews were eligible for certain roles such as the priesthood, Levitical roles, and the Messiah.

mean to bring to an end, Nelson Study Bible]. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19).

When a scribe asked Him what the most important commandment was, "Yeshua answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: "Hear; O Israel; the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment"" (Mark 12:28-30). Yeshua was quoting from the Law, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This passage, called the *shma* (meaning to hear) is still the most recognized of all Jewish prayers.

Yeshua quoted from 24 of the books in the *Tanach*, and an additional 10 books in the *Tanach* were quoted in other parts of the Newer Testament. It is important to remember that whenever we read the word "Scriptures" in the Newer Testament, it is referring



"His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover."

When a scribe asked Yeshua a question, He quoted from the Law.



He Had Respect for the Law and the Prophets

There is much evidence which shows that Yeshua respected and kept the Law. His own words show this: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [which means to fill out, expand or complete. It does not

to the *Tanach* because the Christian Scriptures were not canonized until AD 325. Yeshua often said, "It is written" or "Have you not heard" just before quoting a Scripture. In all, there are over 1,600 *Tanach* Scriptures quoted in the Newer Testament.

Orthodox Rabbi Harvey Falk, author of *Jesus the Pharisee*, said, "Jesus of Nazareth...never wished to see his fellow Jews change one iota of their traditional faith. He himself remained an Orthodox Jew until the day he died." Eugene Fisher, a Roman Catholic scholar, concurred in his book *Faith without Prejudice*, saying that "He [Jesus] considered himself to be a faithful Jew.

He was brought up to observe the Jewish law, the Torah... When he spoke, he spoke to his fellow Jews and presumed their knowledge of and love for the Hebrew Scriptures."

Professor David Flusser, an expert on Second Temple Period history, said, "The Synoptic Gospels, if read through the eyes of their own time, still portray a picture of Jesus as a faithful, law-observant Jew. Few people seem to realize that in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is never shown in conflict with current practice of the law—with the single exception of the plucking of heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands..." It is Flusser's opinion that, even in this instance, Yeshua did not break the law. Rather he suggests that there are translation inaccuracies. According to Flusser, the concept of plucking was not in the original text. Flusser goes on to explain that rubbing the grains was acceptable in Galilean tradition. Rabbi Yehuda, also a Galilean, said that it was permissible to rub the grains of wheat between the hands on the Sabbath.

astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority" (Luke 4:31–32).

"Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue" (Matt. 12:9).

"Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught" (Mark 1:21).

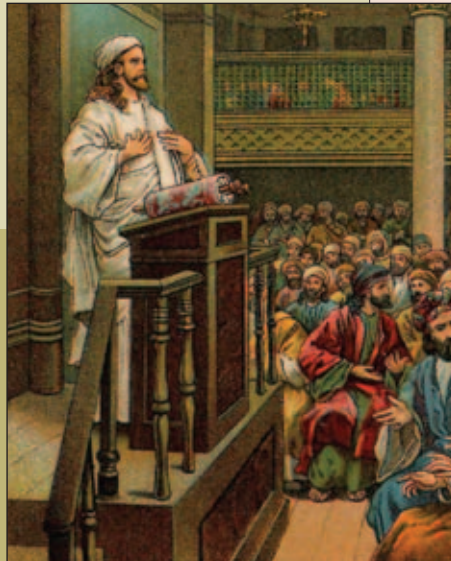
"Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught" (Luke 6:6).

"Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath" (Luke 13:10).

It is obvious that this was the regular practice of Yeshua and His disciples. How distressing it must have been to His followers when He warned them that they would face persecution and be thrown out of the synagogues (John 16:2).



"And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day..."



Synagogue in Capernaum

He Kept the Sabbath

In the first century AD, Jewish observance of the Sabbath was extremely important and, in fact, was considered a prime duty. Although there were several expressions of Judaism at the time of Yeshua, all of them regarded the keeping of the Sabbath as extremely important. Repeatedly, we see from the Scripture that Yeshua was in the synagogue on the Sabbath:

"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read" (Luke 4:16).

"Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were

In his book, *They Loved the Torah*, Dr. David Friedman addressed the question of whether Yeshua kept the Sabbath. He asserts that well-known Jewish scholars are divided on the issue. Klausner, Montefiore, Abrahams, and Cohen say that Yeshua violated the *mitzvot* (good deeds or commandments) of keeping the Sabbath, while Jacobs and Schonfeld assert that He did not break any scriptural *mitzvot* on the Sabbath. Kohler, Flusser, Lapide, and Vermes asserted that he did not violate scriptural *mitzvot*, nor did He have any major differences with accepted Pharisaic Sabbath-keeping. The differences on the Sabbath recorded in the Scripture may all be understood in light of the arguments concerning Sabbath observance given by two different schools of thought in first-century Judaism: the schools of Hillel and Shammai, who were both Pharisaic rabbis.

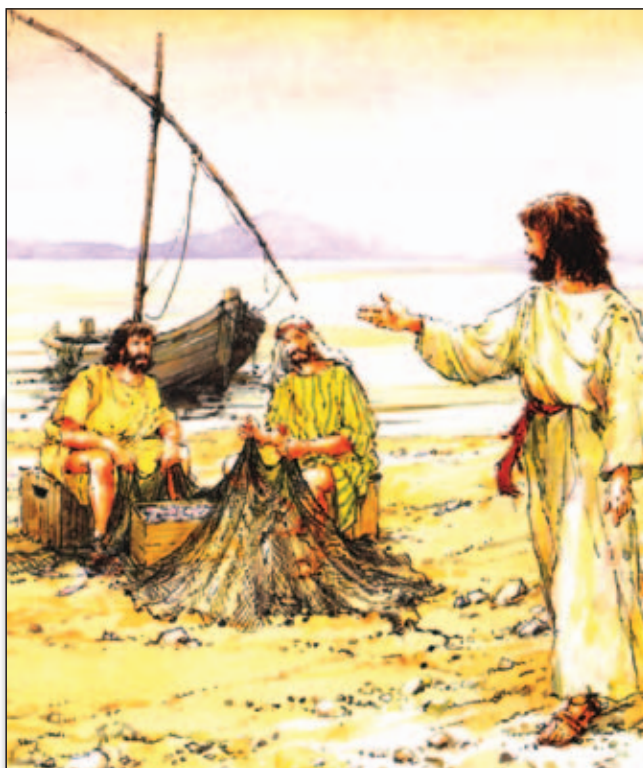
Friedman goes on to say that one of the most influential Second Temple Period scholars, Shmuel Safrai, noted that Yeshua kept the Sabbath fully according to the *halacha* (Jewish law) of his day “It was 100 percent according to the Law.” Safrai also noted that verbal sparring among rabbis was a common accepted practice. This was particularly true between Galilean and Judean religious authorities. The Galilee where Yeshua was educated and raised was actually more devoted as a whole to the study and practice of the *Torah* than many parts of Judah.

Even a casual reading of Christian Scriptures makes it apparent that Yeshua definitely kept the Sabbath, and after much reading on the subject, I have come to understand that He also entered into many discussions on how to observe the Sabbath. Remember that Yeshua was respected by the common people who most likely would not have respected a rabbi who was not keeping the Law of God.

Bible say this about verse 22: “The Feast of Dedication was celebrated for eight days in December. In 167 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, as prophesied in Daniel 11:31. The Maccabeans restored and purified the temple. In commemoration of the restoration, the Feast of Dedication was instituted. Today it is also known as the Feast of Lights or Hanukkah.” The fact that Yeshua celebrated *Hanukkah*, which is not one of the feasts found in the *Tanach*, shows the degree to which He was immersed in the culture of His day.

He Was Israel-centered

Yeshua was Jewish, and in the biblical record, we see a strong sense of identification with His people. He came to the lost sheep



Yeshua was educated and raised in the Galilee.



Yeshua celebrated Hanukkah.



Zacchaeus was one of the lost sheep of Israel with whom Yeshua so strongly identified.

He Celebrated the Feasts

Repeatedly in the Newer Testament, we find reference to various feasts. We have reference to Yeshua keeping the Passover in Mark 14:12–25, *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles) in John 7, and The Feast of Dedication in John 10:22. “Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch.” The notes in my *Nelson Study*

of Israel (Matt. 15:24); He agreed to heal a Gentile only with reluctance (Matt. 15:21–28); He said “*Salvation is from the Jews*” (John 4:22); He marveled at the faith of a non-Israeli “*Not even in Israel have I found such faith*” (Matt. 8:10). His earthly ministry was in the Land of Israel where He was born, died, and was resurrected. He is coming back, and according to the Bible, His feet will land on the Mount of Olives (Zech.14:4), which is also in the Land of Israel.

What Does This Mean to Me?

Tragically, the early Church fathers deliberately separated Christians and Yeshua from His family, culture, and religious practices. Today, hundreds of years later, because of their actions, we embrace non-biblical holidays, ignoring the biblical days that God called “feasts of the Lord,” and that Yeshua celebrated. How sad that true believers were robbed of their biblical foundation and heritage. Studying the Jewish character of the Bible has opened my eyes to see so many rich treasures that I never understood before. New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine says, “If you get the [Jewish] context wrong, you will certainly get Jesus wrong.” I think she is right.

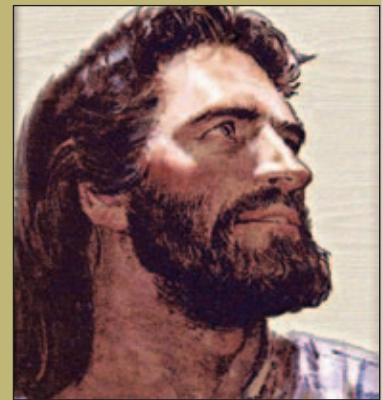
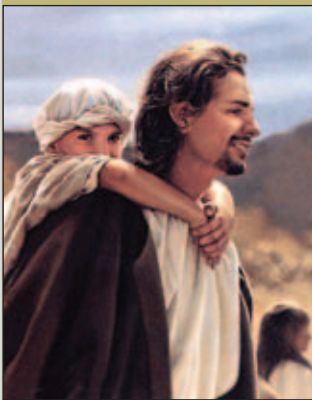
Dr. LaSalle Vaughn in his book, *The Next Great Move of God*, reminds us that “God loves His covenant people, the Jews, and He has not forgotten them. We would be wise to remember that no matter where our forefathers came from, if we’re part of God’s covenant plan through Jesus Christ [*Yeshua HaMashiach*], our spiritual roots are tied in with His covenant people, the Israelites.”

As Christians, we eagerly long for the coming of our precious Messiah, Yeshua. In this teaching letter, we have learned that we are looking for a Jewish Messiah—strong and manly, having respect for the *Torah*, a celebrator of the feasts, a synagogue attendee, to whom Israel has always been central. My question to you is this: Will you recognize Yeshua when He returns? If you are looking for a frail, fair-haired, blue-eyed European, I fear that you will be disappointed. I am looking for my *Jewish* Messiah!

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer
International President and CEO

The **REAL** Jesus:
strong and manly,
respector of *Torah*,
lover of Israel...
Our *Jewish* Messiah!

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.