

Reclaiming the Original Faith

Part 4- The Netzarim & Torah

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Introduction: The entire journey that we have undertaken in this series is to establish the truth of our faith that has always revealed the importance of Torah observance to the faith that was passed down from the Fathers. Rather than time diminishing its importance it was in fact the subtle and frontal attacks upon everything that the Covenants and the Torah suffered that made us observe how vital it was to the lifeblood of Yisrael. It was through this conflict that Yisrael discovered their true purpose of preserving everything that YHWH had imparted through Mosheh to them.

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In our last encounter we looked carefully at the approach that Yahshua had towards Torah and noted how his only opposition was to the added “Takanot” or the rules and regulations that the “Perushim” the Pharisees made which placed great burdens on the people making a life of Torah observance extremely burdensome. Therefore we see Yahshua opposing the Pharisees about healing on the Shabbat, about their regulations concerning washing hands, & plucking grain on the Shabbat remembering they had imposed over 500 commands related to Shabbat let alone any other aspects of the Torah. In this vein we discovered that rather than Yahshua coming to put aside Torah he came to give it its real application or to reveal the spirit of the Torah which was a blessing for any who desired to live by it.

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It is also appropriate to consider that “Halakah” is somewhat like an extension of the “Takanot” or the regulations of the Pharisees and that we can easily become like the Pharisees in applying the complexity of them but when these smother the joy of Torah then they fail to achieve what they were meant for which was to enhance our Torah observance and not hinder it or cause it to become burdensome.

Notwithstanding it is our desire to simply conclude from our previous teaching that Yahshua clearly demonstrated his love for all the Mitzvot (Commandments) of YHWH always referring to the Torah in his defence or in answering questions so as to affirm for us that in no way has he come to destroy the Torah. We know that due to the failure of many to understand Rabbinic terminology his true teaching, has for too long been hidden under the many misunderstood verses resulting in

doctrines contrary to what Yahshua and his Talmidim apparently taught as we saw from our last encounter.

In the Aftermath of Persecution:

To fully appreciate the understanding of the first Century Kehilot or Assemblies we need to take our journey through the writings of the earliest written texts and that of the “Ma’aseh Sh’liychiyim” or the Acts of the Apostles and we will begin with an introduction to establish some vital information that will help to confirm the teachings that were prevalent with the Netzarim as they were called or what was known as “The Way”. For this to happen we will endeavour today to observe the early Kehilot or the Assemblies and refer to verses and proofs of whether anything in their observance changed, followed by an introduction into the Sepher of Ya’acov or what is better known today as the Book of James.

The years Following Yahshua

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What is noticeable as we read through the book of Acts is how the believers responded to the message and how they lived. Firstly we find something quite interesting with regards those who came to the faith who were not just the common people:

Ma’aseh Ha Sh’liychiyim (Acts) 21:20 And they said to Sha’ul (Paul), “you see, brother, how many thousands of Yahudim there are who have believed and all are Zealous for the Torah (Law).

Why this incident is so relevant is that it is quite late in the book of Acts and we find Sha’ul (Paul) coming up to Yerushalayim to meet Ya’acov (James) and the Elders of the “Kehilah” (Assembly). Like many today who think Sha’ul was teaching against Torah these believers had heard stories that he taught against Torah but we now see, that is not the case because he follows the instructions of the Elders according to:

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Ma’aseh Ha Sh’liychiyim (Acts) 21:23-24 “So do what we say to you: We have four men who have taken a Nazarite vow. 24“Take them and purify yourself with them and pay their expenses so that they shave their heads. And all *shall* know that what they have been informed about you is not so, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Torah.

It is extremely clear that by these verses that Shaul (Paul) was totally Torah observant lest he be a deceiver putting on a show for the new believers which we do not ascribe to. Therefore we can rest assured that he was obedient to all as written in the Torah whether regards Shabbat observation which he kept throughout the Brit Chadashah (New Testament) as many as 86 times plus the

feasts and all what was required for the Yahudim (Jews). Sha'ul's entire defence before King Agrippa is based on his faith in Yahshua as he states, and his absolute Torah obedience cannot be denied:

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**Ma'aseh Ha Sh'liychiym (Acts) 26:4-5 Truly, then, all the Yahudim (Jews) know my way of life from my youth, which I led from the beginning among my own nation at Yerushalayim,
5 since they have known me from the first, if they wish to witness, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our observance.**

We also receive a clear message from Kepha (Peter) in Acts that the believers continued to keep Kosher & not eat unclean animals at a time that would have been at least 7 years after the resurrection of Yahshua. In this story he received a rather strange vision which he pondered over and which subsequently has been greatly misunderstood but what is important is what we read about his continuing in Torah observance:

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Ma'aseh Ha Sh'liychiym (Acts) 10:14 But Kepha (Peter) said, "Not at all, Master! Because I have *never eaten whatever is common or unclean.*

This verse confirms that even 7 years after the Resurrection nothing had changed with the Talmidim (Disciples) concerning their observance of Torah with regards foods.

We therefore are now living in a unique time in History since YHWH by the power of his RUACH (Spirit) is awakening many of us to the truth of his word and causing us to question many of the preconceived views on Scripture and challenging Doctrines that have been rendered immovable until now since they have been central to Christianity for 2,000 years but are now beginning to reveal cracks.

Why is it that we should now turn to the Book of Ya'acov (James) for our study on the early Netzarim movement? He was the half-brother of Yahshua but he also had no belief in Yahshua as the Moshiach (Messiah) during Yahshua's life. These are the challenges we will face and try to answer.

1. The Person of Ya'acov Ha Tzadik (James the Just)

If we know our Greek we find there is no "Y" therefore his name became *lakōbos* - but then from the Latin it became 'Jacobus' - but over time it became 'Jacomus' then finally it became 'James' though King Jimmy (James) may have had a great influence on that as well.

We now know that there was not any James in the Scriptures so his true name was Ya'acov (Jacob) known as the Tzadik. Ya'acov was called the Tzadik (the Righteous) because of his ascetic practices which involved taking Nazarite vows.

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A quote from “Hegesippus” by Jerome gives us some insight into the person of Ya’acov Ha Tzadik:

This one was Holy from his Mother’s womb. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, ate no flesh, never shaved nor anointed himself with ointment or bathed. He alone had the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies since he did not use woollen vestments but linen and went alone into the Temple and prayed on behalf of the people in so much that his knees were reputed to have acquired the hardness of camels’ knees.

“Hegesippus” portrays Ya’acov as somewhat of a zealot associated with the Ebionites, who regarded Shaul (Paul) with disfavour and praised Yaakov as the true heir to Yahshua’s teaching.

It is most likely that Ya’acov had students of his own but there is no mention of him during Yahshua’s ministry until the book of Acts. Shaul (Paul) records an event that likely had a profound effect on Ya’acov (James) in:

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1 Corinthians 15:5-7 And that Yahshua was seen by Kepha (Peter), then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the greater part remain til now, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by Ya’acov (James), then by all the emissaries.

Ya’acov’s position as successor to Yahshua appears in numerous accounts of the early Assembly literature before the Council of Nicaea.

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Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History: ‘Ya’acov (James), who was surnamed the Just by the Forefathers on account of his superlative virtue, was the first to have been elected to the Office of Bishop of the Jerusalem Congregation.’

‘Kepha (Peter) Ya’acov (James) and Yochanan (John) after the Ascension of the Saviour, did not contend for the Glory, even though they had previously been honoured by the Saviour, but elected “James the Just” as Bishop of Jerusalem.’ (Hypo-typo-ses)

Clement then adds that the election was by the Principal Three.

In fact the Nazarenes recognized Ya’acov as the “Nasi” the Pillar or Bishop of their Nazarene Sanhedrin.

The Downplaying of Ya’acov:

Often in many circles we find that Ya'acov is downplayed while Shaul (Paul) is raised up because Ya'acov was a Zealot. However we now come to understand that Ya'acov (James) is actually the head of the Yerushalayim Assembly. Therefore according to the 1st Century Saints Ya'acov was superior to both Kepha (Peter) & Shaul (Paul). This is so important because the Catholics have elevated Peter.

Why then was Ya'acov put down and Peter & Paul elevated?

This was because Ya'acov was Zealous for the Torah!

We see both Kepha (Peter) & Yochanan (John) defer to Ya'acov's authority & headship in:

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Acts 15:1-2 And certain men came down from Yahudāh (Judea) and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the *practice* of Mosheh, you are *unable* to be saved.” 2 So when Sha'ul and Barnabāh had no small dissension and *dispute* with them, they arranged for Sha'ul and Barnabāh and certain others of them to go up to Yerushalayim, to the emissaries and elders, about this question.

The Favouring of Paul or Shaul has been huge for 2 Millennium with his heavy theology rather than Ya'acov who is extremely primitive. Martin Luther came along and fanned the flames of the Reformation by assigning Ya'acov (James) to an Appendix in his German translation naming it “A Right Story Epistle” since he did not know what to do with the book of Ya'acov as it did not match his theology.

John Elliot in his commentary says this: The Book of Ya'acov is ranked among the Junk Mail of the New Testament.

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The book was very popular, however with the Eastern Fathers, particularly in Alexandria with the first commentary being written by Didymus the Blind (313-398) in Alexandria.

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The Significance of the Sepher of Ya'acov (Letter of James)

It is now important for us to realize why this letter was written, to whom it was written and when it was written:

Why it was Written:

We know that Ya'acov was in Yerushalayim and in fact this Sepher (letter) was more likely a sermon or "Homily" in Greek" or in Hebrew "D'rashah or Midrash". It is like an Oration because there is rhyme in the text itself.

Ya'acov was communicating to Yahudim believers who had scattered and were facing persecution not only from Rome but from their own Brethren the Yahudim as well. The emphasis of the Letter was not on creed but conduct, not on belief but behaviour, not on doctrine but deeds! Ya'acov was encouraging the faithful to endure persecution without denying Yahshua or turning from Torah obedience by demonstrating true Character under persecution.

To Whom was it Written:

It was written to an audience who lived outside of Yerushalayim in the Diaspora or the dispersion after the Martyrdom of TsephanYah (Stephen) who himself was a Hellenistic Yahudim (Jew):

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Ma'aseh Ha Sh'liychiym (Acts) 11:19 Then, indeed, they who were *scattered* because of the persecution that arose over TsephanYah (Stephen) passed through to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one *except* the Yahudim (Jews) only.

From this we see that the message was only delivered to the Yahudim though surely believers from the other tribes of Yisrael are also included who were also coming to the faith in Yahshua. The significance of this letter is that it has no additional Christian theology and that is why Martin Luther added it as an appendix to his German Bible. Also the use of the Torah (Law) shows the familiarity the audience had with the Torah. This book has 40 allusions from the Tanakh & 4 direct quotes.

Many in the Messianic movement will push for a Hebraic or Aramaic dominance but if Ya'acov's (James) audience is in the Diaspora following the death of TsephanYah (Stephen) and since the language of the international community was Greek and we read in Acts about Stephen and Philip among others ministering to the Hellenistic Widows it could easily be concluded that it was of Greek origin. It does however have a very Semitic feel to it.

The Messianic teacher Matthew Nolan says that we can tell its Greek origin by its structural rhythm and rhyme and Ya'acov's (James's) fondness for alliteration and wordplay. When we become aware of these stylistic devices in the Greek it becomes nearly impossible to imagine this homily or sermon as a translation from Aramaic or Hebrew.

When was it written?

It appears that 1st Yochanan (John) & 1st Kepha (Peter) draws off the information in this Sermon so it must date mid-1st century but we can dig deeper since we know that Ya'acov was Martyred in 62CE but we can even go earlier because it does not include any of the 1st Century developed Doctrines of the Brit Chadashah (the New Testament) like that which developed with Shaul (Paul) found in Christianity so it reveals a totally Raw texture. This is why it focusses on impacting & changing lives which is surely what we all need today and in all other times as well. It is about the heart, stirring up faithfulness to YHWH, love for the fellowship through behaviour & deeds in order to strengthen the faith and hold firm to Torah.

Therefore this most probably could bring us to a date about 40-50 CE making Ya'acov (James) the oldest book of the Brit Chadashah (New Testament). Matthew Nolan even suggests it could have been written sometime after 34CE leaving one year or so for the events from Acts 1 to Acts 9 since nothing in this sermon goes beyond Acts 9.

The Death of Ya'acov Ha Tzadik (James the Just)

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The death of Ya'acov (James) becomes extremely significant since we discover that he had a great reputation even among the Sanhedrin suggesting that he was seen as fully Torah observant and considered righteous and influential among the Yahudim. After his arrest he is presented with an ultimatum. He was to address the 100,000 people in Yerushalayim at the Passover and renounce his faith in Yahshua or he would be killed. Ya'acov (James) agrees to speak to the great gathering and is brought to the Temple Pinnacle only to preach his faith in Yahshua and is then pushed off the Temple and lands on the Temple steps and is then stoned to death. The Jewish Historian Josephus attributes the Destruction of the Temple and Yerushalayim to this Historic day being the Martyrdom of Ya'acov.

What is even more significant and often goes against most history is that Titus laboured earnestly to save the Sanctuary and the city.

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Quote from Josephus:

Josephus & the Destruction of the Temple

Book VI, Chapter II, Section 4 (Entire)

4. Now Titus was deeply affected with this state of things, and reproached John and his party, and said to them, "Have not you, vile wretches that you are, by our permission, put up this partition wall* before your sanctuary? Have not you been allowed to put up the pillars thereto belonging, at due distances, and on it to engrave the Greek, and in your own letters, this prohibition, that no foreigner should go beyond that wall? Have we not given you leave to kill such as go beyond it, though he were a Roman? And what do you do now, you pernicious villains? Why do you trample upon dead bodies in this temple? and

why do you pollute this holy house with the blood both of foreigners and Jews themselves? I appeal to the gods of my own country, and to every god that ever had any regard to this place, (for I do not suppose it to be now regarded by any of them ;) I also appeal to my own army, and to those Jews that are now with me, and even to you yourselves, that I do not force you to defile this your sanctuary; and if you will but change the place whereon you will fight, no Roman shall either come near your sanctuary, or offer any affront to it; nay, I will endeavour to preserve you your holy house, whether you will or not." *

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We will often read that the Romans burnt and destroyed the Temple but through the words of Josephus we gain more historic truth;
.... it was the corrupt Levitical priesthood under Ananus the Cohen Ha Gadol (High Priest) that set fire to the Temple- an inside job rather than let it fall into the hands of followers of the recently martyred Yaakov which were thought to be numbering about 20,000.

The fall of the temple was directly connected to the killing of Yaakov the Tzadik!

Josephus writes, '*the Jews were even burning down their own Temple and then jumping into the flames.*' (War 2.425-9)

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Some have disputed the words of Josephus as simply pandering to the Romans but regardless the result of the action at the Beyth Ha Mikdash (the Temple) was its destruction and the complete ransacking of Yerushalayim with according to Josephus 1.1 Million Yahudim dead though this is disputed but this figure has some credibility since it was according to Historians just before Pesach (Passover) which would swell the City with people.

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The Knowledge Gained from this Introduction:

From this brief introduction into the person of Ya'acov Ha Tzadik (James the Just) we can surmise the tremendous effect that the Message of Yahshua was having in Yerushalayim and from this we can list some often lost truths:

1. Among the Believers Torah observance did not vary at all from what was observed by all the Yahudim as noted by Shaul (Paul) & Kepha (Peter) and the respect awarded Ya'acov (James) by all the Yahudim (Jews).
2. It was Ya'acov (James) who was elected by the top three leaders as the "Nasi" or head of the Netzarim movement and not Kepha (Peter).
3. Ya'acov was zealous for the Torah and so the book of James was not given its correct importance by the Catholic Church or by Martin Luther.

4. It can be concluded that the Sepher of Ya'acov (The Book of James) was the first to be written among the Brit Chadashah (New Testament) since it is "Raw" text without the later heavy Doctrines.
5. This letter has the purpose of strengthening believers among the dispersion of the tribes of Yisrael who were turning to faith in Yahshua. It was in fact meant to develop inner Character reflected in conduct, behaviour and deeds so it is a very a practical work for the believer to enhance Righteous living and Covenant relationship with the Elohim of Yisrael.

Conclusion

In our journey of the faith it has been my desire to establish the permanency of Torah and the establishment of evidence to help us give conclusive proof that Yahshua appearance was in accordance with Torah. It was by his sacrifice to bring Salvation to Yisrael & all who would be grafted into the Covenant and the evidence of scripture is that faithfulness to YHWH is revealed by faith in Yahshua as well as obedience to his Mitzvot (Commands) as confirmed by the Book Hitgalut (Revelations):

Hitgalut (Revelations) 14:12 Here is the steadfast endurance of the set-apart saints; here *are* they that guard and keep the commandments of Elohim and the faith of Yahshua.