

THE APPLE OF HIS EYE

ימצאנו בארץ מדבר ובתהו ילל ישמן יסבבנהו יבוננהו יצרנהו כאישון עינו:
He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about,
he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.



«For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins». (Ro.11:25-27)

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THEN SANG MOSES AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL THIS SONG UNTO THE LORD, AND SPAKE, SAYING, I WILL SING UNTO THE LORD, FOR HE HATH TRIUMPHED GLORIOUSLY: THE HORSE AND HIS RIDER HATH HE THROWN INTO THE SEA. THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND SONG, AND HE IS BECOME MY SALVATION: HE IS MY GOD, AND I WILL PREPARE HIM AN HABITATION; MY FATHER'S GOD, AND I WILL EXALT HIM. THE LORD IS A MAN OF WAR: THE LORD IS HIS NAME. PHARAOH'S CHARIOTS AND HIS HOST HATH HE CAST INTO THE SEA: HIS CHOSEN CAPTAINS ALSO ARE DROWNED IN THE RED SEA. THE DEPTHS HAVE COVERED THEM: THEY SANK INTO THE BOTTOM AS A STONE. THY RIGHT HAND, O LORD, IS BECOME GLORIOUS IN POWER: THY RIGHT HAND, O LORD, HATH DASHED IN PIECES THE ENEMY. AND IN THE GREATNESS OF THINE EXCELLENCY THOU HAST OVERTHROWN THEM THAT ROSE UP AGAINST THEE: THOU SENTEST FORTH THY WRATH, WHICH CONSUMED THEM AS STUBBLE. AND WITH THE BLAST OF THY NOSTRILS THE WATERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER, THE FLOODS STOOD UPRIGHT AS AN HEAP, AND THE DEPTHS WERE CONGEALED IN THE HEART OF THE SEA. THE ENEMY SAID, I WILL PURSUE, I WILL OVERTAKE, I WILL DIVIDE THE SPOIL; MY LUST SHALL BE SATISFIED UPON THEM; I WILL DRAW MY SWORD, MY HAND SHALL DESTROY THEM. THOU DIDST BLOW WITH THY WIND, THE SEA COVERED THEM: THEY SANK AS LEAD IN THE MIGHTY WATERS. WHO IS LIKE UNTO THEE, O LORD, AMONG THE GODS? WHO IS LIKE THEE, GLORIOUS IN HOLINESS, FEARFUL IN PRAISES, DOING WONDERS? THOU STRETCHEDST OUT THY RIGHT HAND, THE EARTH SWALLOWED THEM. THOU IN THY MERCY HAST LED FORTH THE PEOPLE WHICH THOU HAST REDEEMED: THOU HAST GUIDED THEM IN THY STRENGTH UNTO THY HOLY HABITATION. THE PEOPLE SHALL HEAR, AND BE AFRAID: SORROW SHALL TAKE HOLD ON THE INHABITANTS OF PALESTINA. THEN THE DUKES OF EDOM SHALL BE AMAZED; THE MIGHTY MEN OF MOAB, TREMBLING SHALL TAKE HOLD UPON THEM; ALL THE INHABITANTS OF CANAAN SHALL MELT AWAY. FEAR AND DREAD SHALL FALL UPON THEM; BY THE GREATNESS OF THINE ARM THEY SHALL BE AS STILL AS A STONE; TILL THY PEOPLE PASS OVER, O LORD, TILL THE PEOPLE PASS OVER, WHICH THOU HAST PURCHASED. THOU SHALT BRING THEM IN, AND PLANT THEM IN THE MOUNTAIN OF THINE INHERITANCE, IN THE PLACE, O LORD, WHICH THOU HAST MADE FOR THEE TO DWELL IN, IN THE SANCTUARY, O LORD, WHICH THY HANDS HAVE ESTABLISHED. THE LORD SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER.





Truths of Christian Faith.

Special Revelation of God. «God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds».

4

God's People.

Israel. Unfortunately not many Jews today know what makes their nation different from all other nations in the world. What is so special about Jewish people and what kind of historical mission do they have? To be able to answer this question we need to look at the role of the Jewish nation as it is given by the Almighty in the Holy Scriptures, His plan for humanity in general..

6

The history of Israel's messianic movement.

Prophets. «Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us»».

8

Mashiah/Messiah.

Who is the Messiah?. «The principal statement of the Christian faith is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ/the Messiah. But who is the Messiah? How did this concept appear? What is the biblical view of the Messiah?».

10

New Testament reading

Gospel of Mathew. According to Papius, Apostle John's disciple, Mathew wrote down the teaching and the life of Jesus in Hebrew, or actually the Aramaic language.

13

The Apple of His Eye - Russia.

Rev. Alexey Shepelev. Shalom Dear Friends!

15



Revelation

**«Canst thou by searching find out God?
canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?
It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do?
deeper than hell; what canst thou know?»**

Job 11:7-8

In the search for God mankind has traveled many roads. Throughout the centuries numbers of wise men, philosophers, mystics, and scientists have attempted to give an answer to the greatest riddle of life.

But if we look back at the paths they have crossed and see the results of their searches, we will be extremely disappointed. The reason for this is the striking variance and contradictions of the presented answers and solutions.

The ancient Greek philosophers, the wise men and mystics of India and China, the thinkers of the Middle Ages and Modern Times, each of them has given his answer, drawn his picture, often completely contradicting that which other, no less outstanding minds, have made.

An outstanding theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth described the results of these centuries of searching thus: "When we examine the history of mankind's aspirations and the history of man's notion about that being ("god"), our initial, and at the same time, deepest impression comes from the thoroughness and remarkable diversity of man's inventive ability, and also the ability of man for arbitrariness, for a self-willful approach to this concept, to this idea of a god. Thus from created man an endless, diverse picture in this sphere arises – a picture, at the same time, of something very unsteady, full of glaring contradictions."

Anyone who might try to come to the knowledge of God through studying these attempts of man to investigate and know God will inevitably find himself in a whirlpool of the most conflicting and contradictory assertions, propositions, and guesses, which have accumulated through all the many centuries of the history of man's thinking.

How do we decide in the end who is right, whose picture or idea of "god" is correct? On what foundation do we make our choice between the various, at times conflicting, ideas of "god"? Who is right: Plato or Spinoza, Aristotle or Hegel, or perhaps they are all wrong, perhaps, for example, the Indian and Buddhist mystics are right, and teach the truth? Or perhaps they are also wrong? Per-

haps after all the materialists are right, who assert that there is no god of any kind at all, there is only the "idea of god" – a product of the mythological creativity of man's mind? But if there is a god after all, then what is this god like and how do we get to know what he is like?

A great multitude of such questions will arise if we go to God by the path of human intellectual and spiritual endeavors. The saddest thing is that we will never receive any instructive answer to these questions.



The most and best that man can come to by following such paths is bending a knee before the altar of the "unknown God" (Acts 17:22-23). At the worst, if he persists in his investigations, he will become entangled in a particular image, a caricatured representation, or he will find himself in the complete confusion and emptiness of disappointed indifference, and possibly, despair. Does this mean that mankind, even in the person of its best representatives, proceeding

from its own strength, is not in the condition to know the true God, and is condemned, if again taking only man's strength and abilities, to wander about in the darkness of its own vacillating guesses and suppositions creating by the endeavors of its mind a "god", or more precisely, a multitude of gods, though they are "One" "god" in their image and likeness?

From a Christian point of view the answer to this question is affirmative. *Yes, proceeding from his own strength and abilities, man is not in a condition to know the true God.*

There are two reasons for this. One of them is sin. But we will talk about its fatal and ruinous influence on our abilities to know God at another time, right now let's look at the other reason because of which man with the strength of his mind alone proves to be incapable of knowing the true God.

This reason is the vast and inexpressible distance between God and man, between the Creator and the world created by Him. We must realize with perfect clarity that the true God is completely and radically different from all that we humans, putting every-



thing together and combining all our experience, refer to as “reality”. God is not a part of the world’s realities, subject to our knowledge and investigation. God is the “Perfect Other”, and as the “Perfect Other” He is absolutely incomprehensible for man’s intellect, which is capable of investigating and comprehending by its own strength only the realities surrounding itself, and even then only to a certain extent and imperfectly. Therefore no endeavors of our intellect and spirit are able to bring us to true knowledge of God. *God is fundamentally incomprehensible.*

It is because of this fundamental incomprehensibility of God, and accordingly, our inability to know Him by our own endeavors, that we are in need of His indulgence towards us, we need Him to show Himself to us. And God stoops to our weakness; God Himself reveals Himself. Christian teaching calls this self-disclosure of God **Revelation**.

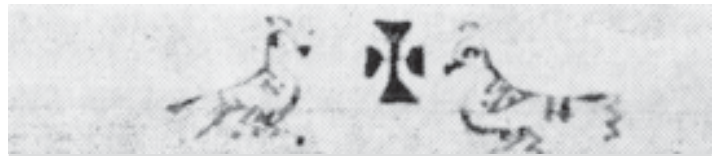
In this way the very possibility for man to know God is founded not on his, man’s, strength and abilities, but solely on the merciful and supreme decision of God to reveal Himself to man, that is, on His grace, which is absolutely independent of us and in no way deserved by us.

The Bible speaks of the “divers” manners by which God reveals Himself, but they can all be divided into two main types: the general, natural revelation and special revelation. The general, natural revelation is the self-disclosure of God through nature, i.e. through His created universe and through the inner life of man’s person. But since sin has virtually killed our ability to know God through natural revelation, there is the need for special revelation.

And so begins the history of salvation, the history of Israel, in which God revealed Himself and His will to specific people in His own time and His own places, giving these people the undeserved mercy to enter into a saving, redeeming relationship with Him.

The culmination of God’s special revelation was the Mystery of Divine Incarnation in the Person of the Messiah. This Incomprehensible Divine Mystery – offensive to rational intellect and common sense – is the main thing that makes the Christian understanding of revelation different from any other, is what makes it unique. The Most High displayed the fullness of the revelation of Himself not in a book, not in a philosophical or religious system, not in lists of laws and regulations, but in a living Human Being, in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, in the Person of the Messiah – the Savior of Israel, the Savior of the world.

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).



that which was from the Beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life; for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the father, and was manifested unto us; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the father, and with his son Jesus Christ. and these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. this then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:1-5



Every people has its own history. Those who believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Son of God are also a people, God's people, that made up of the descendants of Abraham and "gentiles", united by a trust in God's merciful promises that were revealed to Israel and the whole world in the New and Eternal Covenant which is held together by the blood of the Messiah that was shed by Him on the cross of Golgotha. Those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah – the Savior of the world, both Jews and non-Jews make up what in the New Testament is called the Church of God. And as God's people, the Church has its own history which is in essence the history of the great and saving acts of God. The origins of the Church's history, God's

by the Jewish people. Describing, in the first eleven chapters, the creation of the world, the Fall, and the early history of mankind in a language of imagery easily understood by the ancient people, the Torah recounts with amazing depth and accuracy the original conditions, which, passing from one generation to the next, underlay human existence. However, the real history of the Revelation begins on that day when a certain Aramaic-Semite from the vicinity of the heathenish Ur of the Chaldees heard a call and followed in faith the command from on High. Whose call? The call of the One True God who chose Abraham to be a herald of His Word and commanded that both he and his family break forever with the error and abomination of the polytheism

around them. Since that moment people have stood before the face of TRUTH.

2. The Patriarchal Epoch. mid-19th - 18th cent. B.C. (Genesis 12-50)

The beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. was a time of intensive migration for the peoples in the Near and Middle East. At that time several waves of migrations occurred among the Semitic peoples. In approximately the 19th century B.C., a small clan of Arameans left the city of Ur, located in South trans-Euphrates, under the leadership of Abram (subsequently he received the new name Abraham from God). At first Abraham settled in the city of Haran in north Mesopotamia, but later, obeying the call of the Most High, resettled in Palestine.

people, the people of the New Testament made up from people of all races and nationalities, goes back to the history of one people – **Israel**. In this way, the history of the Jewish people, as it is described in the Old Testament, and the history of the Church from Pentecost to the present day – represents one history – the history of God's people. The One True Creator of this history is God, who, despite all human unworthiness and faithlessness, gave His people a great and unshakeable promise: "...and [I] will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

1. The Beginning

The Holy Scriptures narrate the history of salvation. The Torah, Prophets, and Scriptures (*Tenakh* – or the Old Testament) includes the first part of this Holy History of mankind. The Bible begins with a narration of the creation of the world and mankind which corresponds to traditions existing since time immemorial and preserved

The Birth of Israel

«And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ».
1 Cor. 10:3-4



God made a Covenant with Abraham, promising to give the land of Palestine as an inheritance to his descendants and promising to be their God. Also, the Covenant contained God's promise that in the posterity of Abraham all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. As a seal of this Covenant, God established the rite of circumcision (to learn more about Abraham see our issue #1 "Apple of His Eye"). After the passage of some time famine forced Jacob (Israel), Abraham's grandson and heir of the blessings of the Covenant, to resettle in Egypt together with his sons. The descendants of Jacob received the name "sons of Israel", constituting in later times God's chosen people; this people, in turn, were divided into twelve tribes, each of which traced its origin to one of the sons of Jacob and took their name from him. In this way, the people who were descendants of the patriarch from Ur were chosen by God to be witnesses, heralds, and preservers of

His Word. The Covenant was a kind of contract; from the very beginning of their existence the people who took the name of Israel profited through God's grace by the special patronage of the Most High, they were the "Chosen People" and were given from God the charge to be faithful to God, to follow the Lord's will, and most importantly, not to swerve in any way from faith in the One God. This Covenant, repeatedly confirmed, is the focus of the whole Old Testament, the focus through which everything else assumed its true meaning. Later generations of Jacob's descendants continued to live in Egypt in the land of Goshen on the north-east Nile Delta.

3. The Exodus and the Conquering of Canaan. Mid-13th cent. B.C. - approx. 1200 B.C. (Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua)

After a succession of a line of Egyptian Pharaoh dynasties the Hebrews became slaves of the Egyptians. However, the Most High remained faithful to his Covenant and did not leave the people who had been chosen by Him in His mercy. He called Moses – a Hebrew raised in Pharaoh's court, who, by the will of God, was to bring the Hebrew people out of Egyptian slavery and lead them to the Promised Land, that is, to Palestine (Canaan).

At God's call the Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, completed the Exodus out of Egypt. The Hebrew Exodus was accompanied by many mighty signs from God ("the Ten Plagues"), which gave witness that it was indeed the Most High who was liberating His chosen people from the Egyptian slavery. During the tenth plague, when all the first-born boys in the Egyptian families were killed, God established the Passover (Pesach) as an eternal reminder of the events of the Exodus. The Israelites were to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood on the posts and crossbeams of their house doors. The Most High instructed His angel when he saw the blood to pass over those houses and spare the first-born. In all the homes that did not have blood on the doors, the firstborn perished. Only the blood of the lamb could save the child from death. **This was a living symbol of the coming Messiah, the**



Lamb whose blood truly saves from sin and death – "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Since that time the Jewish people observed the Passover (Pesach) every year, remembering God's deliverance of His people from Egyptian slavery. This yearly celebration of Passover was also a portent of the future sacrifice of the Messiah on the cross.

When God's people came out of Egypt Pharaoh made a last attempt to bring them back. But God, faithful to His people, saved them. While the nation of Israel miraculously crossed over the bottom of the Red Sea, the Egyptian army pursuing the Israelites perished in the waters of the same sea. A memorial of that mighty event became the well-known "Song of Moses", which modern researchers consider one of the oldest texts in the Bible.

At Mt. Sinai God gave His people the Law – the basic code of religious and moral injunctions which had Divine authority and established the standards of faith and life for the Hebrew people as God's people. The focal point of the Law is the Ten Commandments. From that time on, the keeping of the injunctions of the Law in life was the measurement of faithfulness for the Hebrew nation to

the Sinai Covenant made with the Most High. There is no need to think, however, that the Law and the keeping of it were a means of justifying and reconciling man with God. Such a thought is completely foreign to the Holy Scriptures and represents a great error. The basis of fellowship between God and His chosen people was the undeserved grace of God, expressed in the mercy of the Covenant and its promises, which, just like the promises of the New Testament, were received solely by faith. The keeping of the injunctions of the Law was to be a witness of the genuineness of the faith and faithfulness of God's people to the Covenant with God made on Mt. Sinai.

Beside giving of the Law, the Most High assured the sons of Israel of His continual presence among them. The symbol of the actual presence of God was the "Ark of the Covenant" kept in the tabernacle – a special tent for conducting worship services. The Levites (representatives of the tribe of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob) became the hereditary ministers of the tabernacle. God's presence among the people was enhanced by the principle of Theocracy: God is the one Sovereign and King of His people. He revealed His will to the people through His chosen prophets (initially this type of leadership was realized through



Moses). The people, in turn, approached God through priests, who perform sacrifices to Him. The priestly ministry was inherited from Aaron the Levite, Moses' brother, by his descendants.

For many years after the Exodus the Hebrew people continued to wander in the wildernesses of the Sinai Peninsula. The Torah's narration of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness is anything but the story of a grateful people, rejoicing at their liberation from slavery and impatiently looking into the future, fully trusting their fate to their Creator. At times the Hebrew people just turned into an aggressive mob, dissatisfied with everything and everybody. During the time of wandering in the wilderness hardly once were they satisfied, hardly once were they grateful to God who had freed them from slavery, but indeed, they were always ready to rebel. However, the Torah shows the ultimate faithfulness of the Most High. When His love was rejected by His chosen people it would have been completely fair for Him to have sub-

jected His people to eternal punishment, blotting the name of Israel from history. But He did not cease to be their God, remaining faithful to His Covenant with Abraham.

By God's will Moses did not bring the Israelites into the Promised Land until a generation grew up that had not known slavery. He died right before the sons of Israel entered Canaan.

Caption at end of article: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength.

By the will of God, Moses does not lead the Israelites into the Promised Land until

a generation grows up that knew no slavery. He dies just before the sons of Israel enter Canaan.

A disciple of Moses, Joshua ben Nun, becomes Moses' successor and the leader of the Hebrew people. He conquers Palestine which was inhabited by Canaanites and some other nations. The Israelites gradually settle Palestine where each of the tribes of Israel receives its territory (inheritance).

Thus, by around 1200 BC, in Asia Anterior, by the will of the Most High and in accordance with His eternal

plan, appears a new state, Israel, which was a unique phenomenon for the ancient world. Its people confessed a religion of strict monotheism. And it was from this nation that the Most High foreordained the advent of the One who made manifest God's salvation both to Israel and the whole world. Jesus, God's Messiah.



Caption at end of article:
Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength.

שמע ישראל יהוה
אלהינו יהוה אחד:
ואהבת את יהוה
אלהיך בכל-לבבך
ובכל-נפשך
ובכל-מאדך:

Father

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal. 3:6-9)

of Believers

Abraham is the eldest of the Israelite patriarchs, the forefather of the Jewish nation. The account of his history is found in the first book of Moses, Genesis/Bereshit 12-25. Called by God, Abraham migrated from Ur in Mesopotamia to Palestine where he stopped in Mamre by Hebron. There the Most High made an eternal covenant (alliance) with him and promised the land of Canaan to him and his descendants as a possession, and also that in his posterity all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. In this covenant God changed the patriarch's name: Abram (heb.: “extolled father”) to Abraham (heb.: “father of many”).

Abram was born in Ur, which was in Chaldea in the land that is present-day Iraq (Genesis/Bereshit 11:31), at the beginning of the second century B.C. He was the son of Terah, a descendant of Noah's son Shem, therefore a Semite (Genesis/Bereshit 11:10 and so on). The two younger brothers of Abraham were Nahor and Haran, who died young (Genesis/Bereshit 11:27). In Ur Abram took as his wife Sarai, who, however, proved to be barren (Genesis/Bereshit 11:29-30). The exact date of Abram's birth in Ur of the Chaldees is unknown, but can be approximately figured by archeological data found at Bar-ed-Dra, near Sodom. Sodom was destroyed about 1900 BC. No artifacts were left by the patriarch, however finds at Mari, Nuzi and other places show that his life belonged to the Middle Bronze Age in Mesopotamia (about 2000-1500 BC). Archaeologists' discoveries show that Abram grew up in the midst of a highly developed culture and was far from a uneducated shepherd as some biblical desk-critics of the nineteenth century supposed. Nevertheless, in spite of its high level of civilization Ur was a heathen city. Abram and his family professed as well polytheism as the Bible testifies: “Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods” (Joshua/Jehoshua 24:2). So it was until Abram heard the voice of the One True God calling him.

Terah, Abraham and his wife Sarah, as well as Lot, Haran's son, left Ur to migrate to Palestine. This move is described as if Terah, as the head of the family, was the initiator of the migration, however further on God makes it clear that it was He who brought Abram out of Ur: “I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it” (Genesis/Bereshit 1:7). After reaching the northern Mesopotamian city of Haran they stopped; here Terah died (Genesis/Bereshit 11:31-32). After Terah's death God again spoke to Abram and commanded him to continue his wandering (Genesis/Bereshit 12:1-3). Now, he must leave his father's house and head for an unfamiliar country shown to him by the Most High. Abram headed to the land of Canaan. For those times this was a more than risky step. Abram left behind his religion, ancestors, familiar surroundings, security, and safety and set out to wander foreign countries as an out-



his future Abram moved on his way by faith in the Word of the Almighty. He fully committed himself and his whole life to God Most High, who had called him from the darkness of heathenism into His light. “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis/Bereshit 12:2-3). Trusting neither his own intellect, nor his own common sense, nor his own wisdom, but only God's merciful promise, Abram and his family began the long journey.



His wandering became a major starting-point for the history of the Jewish people, and in the history of the salvation of the world. Before Genesis/Bereshit 11:26 the history of all mankind is described in the Bible. Then, with the calling of one man and his family, God begins a new phase of history. God chose one nation to lead and direct. Abram became the patriarch of this chosen people of God – the Israelite nation.

With his wife Sarai and nephew Lot Abram migrated to Canaan and came to an oak tree at Sichem, where God again appeared to him and promised to give as a possession to him and his descendants this land, as yet inhabited by the Canaanites (Genesis/Bereshit 12:6-7). From Sichem Abram went further south and built an altar at Bethel, and then went towards Negeb (Genesis/Bereshit 12:8-9).

When the land of Canaan, promised by God to Abraham, was struck by famine, he was forced to set out for Egypt. Fearing that the Egyptians would kill him for his beautiful wife Abram passed her off as his sister and even let her be taken to Pharaoh's palace. To a certain extent this was actually true, because Sarai was his step-sister, but Abram's action is nevertheless not without reproach. When after this, plagues from God befell Pharaoh and his household, Pharaoh realized the real relationship between Abram and Sarai, returned Sarai, and gave command for them to be expelled from the country (Genesis/Bereshit 12:10-20). A similar story is told of Abram's stay with the Philistine king Abimelech in Gerar (Genesis/Bereshit 20:1-18). This episode shows that God did not choose Abram because he was better or more moral than other people. Abram showed by his behavior that he was no "better than the rest". Lack of trust in God and actions ensuing from this lack of trust were just as characteristic of him as for all people. But God, unlike Abram, was faithful. God in His unconditional love and mercy did not leave His chosen ones. When Abram left Egypt he was richer than when he had arrived.

After his return from Egypt, Abram, who was "very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold", and his nephew Lot settled again in Canaan. But since the land was too small for the herds and people of both men to migrate together, Abram and Lot separated. After their shepherds had had a fight Lot chose for himself the well-watered Jordan valley (Genesis/Bereshit 13:1-11). After God had again promised Abram that he would give him and his descendants the land of Canaan, Abram settled at the oak of Mamre at Hebron and built an altar there to the Most High (Genesis/Bereshit 13:14-18). After an attack on Sodom by four kings led by Chedorlaomer, Lot was captured. Abram came to help him, defeated the armies of Chedorlaomer, and freed Lot. Again God had showed Abram His faithfulness. Abram would be safe even in a foreign country; God would protect Abram if he would totally rely only on Him. On the way back to Mamre Abram was met and blessed by the king of Salem, Melchizedek, a priest of the True God Most High (Genesis/Bereshit 14:1-20).

For many years Abram lived as a stranger in Canaan. He was already almost a hundred years old, and his wife Sarai was nearly 90. Nevertheless, they still had no children. Therefore it is not surprising that Abram began to doubt God's promise of many descendants, thinking that his servant, the steward of his house, Eliezer of Damascus would become his heir. But God did not allow this to happen. As a sign of His promise God made a **Covenant (Alliance)** with Abraham. Doing this he changed the patriarch's original name Abram to Abraham ("father of many"), and the name

of Sarai to Sarah ("mother of kings of nations"). The promises, given earlier in general terms, were defined more precisely in the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis/Bereshit 15:8-18; 17:1-14). The covenant stated: God would make Abraham's descendants numerous, He would give him all of Canaan as a perpetual possession, and in his posterity all the tribes of the earth would be blessed; as a sign of this covenant all the male babies were to be circumcised on the eighth day. "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis/Bereshit 15:6). In the Bible "righteousness" means "holiness before God". The Bible teaches that Abraham received a right to this righteousness not because of his own works, but because of faith.

So, faith in God is more than faith in the "existence of God". To believe in God meant to believe His promises, believe His words, and fully rely on His mercy. God accounts such faith to a man as righteousness. It is interesting to note that the Apostle Paul quotes Genesis/Bereshit 15:6 in the two New Testament epistles where he most fully expounds the teaching about the justification of a sinner before God (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). God receives and accepts sinners, not turning them into holy people, but declaring them holy. He accounts to them their faith – faith in His merciful promises – as righteousness. The sign of circumcision Abraham received later as a seal of righteousness by faith. Circumcision was the sign of being a party to God's covenant with Abraham, a sign which God directed Abraham's descendants to bear. The performance of this procedure formally marked entry into the ranks of Israelite society.

Abraham and Sarah's marriage remained unfruitful for a long time, and Sarah gave Abraham her slave, the Egyptian Hagar, as a wife, who bore him a son, Ishmael. Yet the heir of the promises of the covenant was to be the son of Abraham by Sarah – Isaac. Soon after the conclusion of the covenant, three mysterious strangers came to Abraham and foretold the birth of Isaac. A year later, as God had promised, Sarah gave birth to Isaac (Genesis/Bereshit 18:1-15; 21:1-8). In this way the Most High confirmed His promise to Abraham, showing that there is nothing impossible for Him. Among these events in the narrative of Genesis/Bereshit there is a story of God's destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the salvation of Lot through the request of Abraham. Abraham's conversation with the Lord on the subject of Sodom and Gomorrah's fate demonstrates a genuine, living faith in God – it is founded on unconditional trust, and is therefore an absolutely sincere dialog between man and the Creator (Genesis/Bereshit 18:23-19:29).

Right after the miraculous birth of Isaac Abraham's faith was again put to the test. God said that He would raise Abraham's descendants entirely from Isaac, and therefore Abraham had to send into the wilderness his other son Ishmael together with his mother Hagar. How difficult it must have been for Abraham to fulfill this command of God can be imagined. But, nevertheless, he did it, firmly believing that the Most High could fulfill His promise and give him numerous descendants through Isaac alone. Beside this, God gave Abraham a promise about Ishmael, too. From Ishmael's descendants would arise the Arab nation. However, the enmity between Ishmael and Isaac would continue between their descendants as well. The Arab-Israel conflict is a clear witness of this.

The permanent, unconditional faith of Abraham is best illustrated by the episode which is the culmination of the patriarch's history. Abraham received from God a dreadful and outrageous command, incomprehensible to the intellect and morals: to bring as a burnt offering his only heir of the promise of the covenant, his only son, Isaac. It is nearly impossible to imagine what went on in Abraham's soul. But he took his son and set off. He had three days in which to think over God's command. Three days of mental and spiritual agony. Three days of struggle with God. At last father and son came to the land of Moriah, to that dreadful mountain indicated by God for the completion of the sacrifice. In spite of all that rose up in him against his faith Abraham kept his faithfulness to God and his faith in His omnipotence. Abraham had reached the point of full and unconditional trust in the Most High. But Abraham himself was not capable of this; it was God by His mercy and strength who preserved him in faith. He even helped him raise the knife over his son. However, nothing more was demanded... A voice of God's angel was heard:

"Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis/Bereshit 22:12).

When Abraham passed through this test something amazing happened. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time and said that God was confirming His vow to fulfill His promises. All the peoples of the earth would be blessed in Abraham, because he obeyed God's voice in unconditional faith. The event on Mt. Moriah reveals to the world the power and mystery of faith. The faith by which Abraham lived and by which his spiritual descendants lived and live. The New Testament depicts this with brilliant meticulousness and conciseness: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there

even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. By

faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:19).

Who was it Abraham believed? The One who called him from Ur of the Chaldees. The One who made his descendants more numerous than the stars of the heaven and the sand on the seaside. The One who brought his descendants from Egyptian slavery and gave them the promised land of Canaan. The One who, two thousand years later, came to this earth to fulfill the promise given to Abraham about blessing all the peoples of the earth. The One who said: "**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am**" (John 8:56, 58).



In the New Testament Jesus is called the Lamb of God, that takes on Himself the sin of the world. This epithet is tied to key biblical concepts of salvation and redemption. However, in practice, the rabbinic Judaism of the day attached the religion of Biblical Revelation concerning God's Salvation to the keeping of moral and ceremonial rules, even though any unbiased reader of the Bible can easily see that for the authors of the Bible this was far from the most important idea. At the heart of their sermons, reflections, and hopes does not stand man, behaving in this or that way, but The Most High God; God is the Savior of His people in the prophets' view of the world. The main message of the Holy Scriptures is the

relationship of love with the Most High.

In the Old Testament the word "redemption" and similar phrases such as "redeeming sacrifice" and "peace offering" come from the Hebrew root word *kaphar* – "redeem", "to cover". In this way the concept of redemption gains the meaning "to cover sin, to hide sin, to expiate guilt". The noun *kopher* ("ransom") is interesting in that it indicates a price paid for a life which was destined to be sacrificed. (Exodus 21:30; 30:11-16).

The frequency with which the concept of "redemption" is used in the Old Testament is striking. Redemption is provided even for inanimate objects such as leprosy-infected houses, the altar in the Temple, the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies (in the tabernacle and later in the Temple), and the tabernacle of

the congregation itself or the Temple. But, naturally, for the most part, all mentions of the concept of "redemption" have to do with the redemption of people, whether it was the Israelite society as whole or its individual members. Redemption was designated first of all for God's chosen people, Israel, and the foremost means of redemption was **sacrifices**. The means of redemption through sacrifice were various. Sheep, goats, and birds were listed in the Torah as acceptable animals for sacrifice, but offerings in the form of bread, oil, and wine were also provided for. However, the shedding of sacrificial blood indisputably stands out as the most frequently mentioned means of redemption in the Old Testament. This theme dominates the Torah books of Leviticus and Numbers. Redemption is

Lamb of God

The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him, and said, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)

message of God's Salvation and permanently tied to it is the concept of **REDEMPTION**. So what is the meaning of this concept of redemption, without the comprehension of which it is impossible to adequately comprehend the biblical message and messianic hope?

The concept of redemption has root in the social, legal, and religious customs of the ancient world. The essence of this concept lies in the idea of liberation from dependence, liberation from captivity or slavery by means of a ransom. Moreover, at the root of this concept lies always the idea of a "payment" that makes the redemption possible. The authors of the Bible used the metaphor of redemption to express the idea of a Way that God had already laid out for Israel and mankind so that they could return to a trusting



required for all sins – from blasphemous crimes like idolatry (Numbers 16:47) to unintentional mistakes, when the only guilt is ignorance or oversight and not premeditated arrogance (Numbers 15:22-29).

The heart of the Old Testament teaching about redemption is undoubtedly the 16th chapter of the book of Leviticus, which contains guidelines for the Day of Atonement ("Yom Kippur"). The Day of Atonement, because of its special connection to the redemption of the sins of the people, was the most solemn holy day for Israel. Its observance was held on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri 10). On that day the high priest washed himself with water, and then put on a white undergarment and a white coat. On that day he did not wear the symbols of his priestly dignity. The high priest sacrificed a young bull for his and his house-

hold's sin, then he took a censor full of burning coals and put it in the Holy of Holies and also sprinkled the blood of the young bull on the Ark of the Covenant. The high priest cast lots for two goats; one was to be sacrificed and the other became the "scapegoat". One goat he sacrificed to the Lord for the sins of the people and sprinkled its blood on the Ark of the Covenant. Then the high priest came out of the tabernacle and cleansed the altar with the blood of the young bull and the goat. Following this, he laid his hands on the head of the "scapegoat" and confessed over him all the sins of the Israelites, after which a suitable man led the scapegoat into the wilderness and released him; this person had to wash his clothes and body before returning to camp. The high priest left his white clothes in the tabernacle of the congregation, washed himself again with water, and put on his usual vestments. The young bull and sacrificed goat were to be burnt to ashes.

The symbolism of this ceremony is fairly transparent. By cleansing himself before entering the tabernacle of the congregation the high priest avoided the chance of somehow defiling it. By putting on linen clothes instead of the usual high priestly vestments he confessed himself a repentant sinner with no right to the symbols of distinction or honor. The sacrifice of the young bull for his and his family's sins served as the clearest communication of the high priest's personal sinfulness.

However, the true focus of the ceremony was the sacrifice of the one goat and the releasing of the other. The meaning of the ritual with the "scapegoat" is made clear only in context of the Israelites' understanding of redemption. In the Old Testament any elaboration on the idea of redemption will always contain the idea of appeasement. The beginning of chapter 16 in the book of Leviticus directs us to the episode in Leviticus 10:1-2, when Nadab and Abihu offered before the Lord "a strange fire" and were destroyed by fire "before the face of the Lord". The lesson implied in this episode lies in the fact that God is Holy and therefore those who approach Him must do it with reverential fear and trembling. Throughout the Scriptures the Holiness

of God is a subject for such trembling. When the ancient Israelites experienced terror in the presence of God (Isaiah 6:5), this was no exaggeration of any kind. The feeling of terror arose from a universal conviction that no one is able to stand before the Holy One of Israel unless God's anger at the sins of a nation or a man is not first turned aside through appeasement.

For the modern man it is very hard to imagine what it meant in ancient times to offer an animal as a sacrifice. For us, at best, it would be a difficult and bloody business. However, we can still imagine how the ancient Israelites, having watched the death of the animal presented as a sacrifice to the Most High for their sins, went home with the realization of the fatalness of sin and the necessity for a softening and appeasement of the Lord's anger towards sin.

To this we can add that the words formed from the Hebrew root *kaphar* ("to redeem") and used to mean "a ransom" imply the appeasement of someone. The essence of these ideas is this: that God in His anger will take vengeance for evil until His anger is abated. Moreover, one of the basic guidelines for the day of atonement is that the high priest may not enter the Holy of Holies at just any time, otherwise he will die (Leviticus 16:2). The ceremony allowed the high priest to appease God so that he might enter God's presence and not be destroyed.

In light of the above two essential aspects of redemption, reflected in the rituals of the Day of Atonement ("Yom Kippur"), become clear. The first is appeasement, expressed in sacrificing one of the goats chosen by lots for sin. The symbolism of this sacrifice is distinctly and concretely communicated, and there are three different, necessary actions that make clear all its meaning; they are specifically stipulated by God in order that the people might understand His attitude toward sin. The death of the first goat at the altar in a straightforward way shows that sin demands punishment by death (Ezekiel 18:4). The killing of this goat and the sprinkling of its blood on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant symbolically satisfied the Lord's anger. The second aspect was the blotting out of sin, its

removal, so that it was forgotten and the nation of Israel was no more subject to condemnation. The releasing of the second goat into the wilderness with the sins laid on its head emphasized that sin would be taken as far away from each man and from the whole nation "as the east is from west" (Psalm 103:12). The burnt offering (complete burning) of the sacrifice spoke of God's power over sin: He completely destroys sin so that it no longer prevails over man through guilt and condemnation. These two goats symbolized appeasement and blotting out and together served as an illustration of what redemption means. And in the end, redemption covers all the sins – intentional, unintentional, commonplace, and sacrilegious – of those it affects.

The next important aspect of the biblical concept of redemption is the redeeming acts of God in history. For all the authors of the Scriptures the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery stands as the example and pattern of God's redeeming acts: "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). The idea of being ransomed from Egypt includes the thought that the nation of Israel and everything that belonged to it was the property of God. In this way, the Most High steps forward as the "Redeemer": "...O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Deuteronomy 9:26). The picture of "ransom" from Egyptian slavery, often used in the Torah, is picked up by the prophets and applied to other historical circumstances: the return from Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 31:11; Zechariah 10:8), the situation after captivity, etc. And the main prerequisite of God's redeeming work is the forgiveness by God of the people's sins: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return



unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isaiah 44:22). For God, Who is the "Holy One of Israel", redeeming work is dictated exclusively by His love (Isaiah 54:8), and when redemption is accomplished, then the heavens rejoice and the depths of the earth sing (Isaiah 44:23). The Most High, however, redeemed the Israelites not only in their totality as a nation, but also each one individually. So, for David, for example, God is the Lord who redeemed his soul out of all adversity or distress (2 Samuel 4:9; 1 Kings 1:29).

In all the Scriptures redemption most obviously an exclusive act of God, not man. For this very reason, God, after He had redeemed His people, is called the "Redeemer" of Israel. This epithet is most common in the book of Isaiah, in which redemption is the key metaphor (Isaiah 41:14; 43:1; 44:6; 47:4), and in the 63rd chapter God is granted the name "Our Redeemer". The prophets of Israel also foresaw the time when the Most High would accomplish the full and final redemption of Israel and the whole world from the power of sin by sending the One who would reconcile the world with God and give final salvation to all creation. So, the idea of a final and eternal redemption proves to be unavoidably tied to the Person of the Redeemer – the MESSIAH.

By the first century A.D. the concept of redemption had gained the following aspect: the liberation of Israel from Egypt was but a historical anticipation of the great act of redemption through by history is to be brought to a close. According to the rabbinical ideas of the time, the Messiah was to become the Redeemer of Israel, and the Great Day of Lord was the day of final redemption.

The most basic teaching of the New Testament is the proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the messianic expectations of Israel and that He brought the long-awaited redemption. The deliverance of mankind from its condition of estrangement from God was accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the New Testament re-

demption also demands the payment of a "ransom", but the condition from which mankind must be redeemed is due to spiritual causes – mankind is in slavery to sin, that hinders a love relationship with God. Only the redeeming death of God's Messiah can free people from this condition. The central theme of the New Testament is that God in His grace acts from compassion for those who are too helpless to be saved by themselves. The New Testament indicates that the final divine redemption entails the God's identification (in the Person of the Messiah)



with mankind in its needy condition and the faithful promise of the liberation of Israel, as well as all mankind from the power of evil, sin, and death through the obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, God's Son.

Jesus understood His mission to be the ministry of the Son of Man, who is come to give His life to accomplish God's redeeming plan. He applied to Himself the words spoken in the Old Testament about the Lord's Servant (Isaiah 53) touching His rejection, degradation, death, and resurrection (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In a similar fashion, the New Testament writers relate to Him the texts and terminology connected with this Ser-

vant (Mat. 8:17; 12:18; Acts 4:27,30; 8:32-33; 1 Pet. 2:22-25; Rom. 15:21). The most important text in the matter of Jesus' understanding of His redeeming mission is Mk. 10:45 where Jesus declares that He came not only for self-denying service, but also to give His life "a ransom for many". In this way, Jesus' death is understood as a ransom for the deliverance of those who are in captivity and slavery to sin and death. As the means of redemption Jesus' death brought deliverance, which entails not only the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), but also the renewal of life through the restoration of relationships with God which had been ruined by sin. Although, the redeeming acts of Jesus as the Messiah are perfect (Heb. 9:25-28), the redemption of believers and the world will be fully accomplished at the return of Jesus as King (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30).

The supreme, sovereign power and love of the Most High is plainly expressed in the redemption of the world. It is not our love for God, but His love for us, and it is this love which provoked the redeeming sacrifice of the Messiah, necessary for the restoration of relationships with God. In Jesus God undertook actions that can be justly called substitutionary – He put His Son in our place. The biblical teaching of redemption can be summed up in the following words: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

The concept of "redemption" implies our guilt before God. In the first book of Samuel (2:25) the question is asked: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?" The redeeming act of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ answers this question: "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them". Jesus is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" "for God so loved the world...!"



In the epistle to the Hebrews we do not find the usual introductory greetings which would make it clear who and to whom it was written; however, in all the ancient manuscripts and translation the heading is unchanged: to the Hebrews. Inasmuch as there are no concrete indications in the Epistle as to its author, his name is wrapped in deep mystery. And although the name of the person who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews remains unknown, one thing is doubtless: the Epistle, like the Holy Scriptures before it, was written as "spoke the Holy Spirit". For this very reason the Epistle to the He-

brews was very early on acknowledged as a God-inspired expression of Christian faith, and in the fourth century A.D. it was definitely accepted into the canon of Holy Scriptures of the New Testament.

The author of the Epistle addresses himself to his fellow countrymen who have believed that Jesus was the Messiah and been baptized, but are being enticed to fall away – first of all, it is clear, to the Jews of Jerusalem and Israel. This was a more than difficult time for the Jewish Christian communities. The ignited hatred among the Jewish people against a foreign domination excited a malice towards Jewish Christians as apostates of their na-

out in 67 A.D. and end in national catastrophe – the dispersion of the people, the destruction of the Holy City and of the Temple itself, which was the heart of Israel and the bulwark of its national consciousness. In this atmosphere the universal perspective found in Christianity was a summons to reject zealously cherished, but Utopian, dreams that would inevitably leading to national tragedy.

Filled with a stunning foresight into the nearing events (Heb. 10:37) when that which is shaken would fall in order

make way for that which cannot be shaken (12:27), the Epistle expounds on the New Testament succession and fulfillment of the Old Testament proto-

type rites in the Person and ministry of Jesus Messiah. Succession implies an ending of that of which place it comes to take: now,

with the coming of the Messiah, the Levitical priesthood after the order of Aaron has ended;

since the redeeming sacrifice of the Messiah the former sacrifices have become unnecessary;

the hand-made tabernacle has fulfilled its purpose. Now, a tabernacle not made by hands has been opened for Israel,

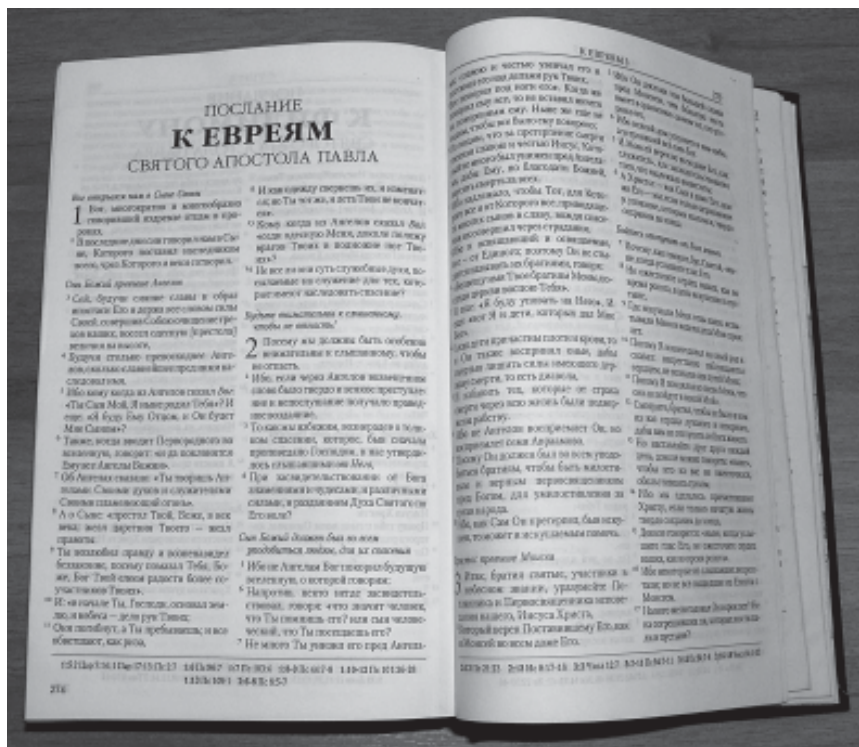
and a High Priest has been given forever in the individual of the very Son of God, Jesus Christ/Messiah. Whom

the Father has appointed heir to all things.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a solemn address to a dear and beloved people on the eve of a tragic loss – the loss of the Temple and the priesthood rooted in the tabernacle. The contents of the Epistle is suffused with dazzling spiritual insights and a passionate love for Israel, which, though full of bitterness and grief, is unchanged and firmly convinced of her final glorious destiny.

The theological issue of the Epistle to the Hebrews can be formulated thus: the teaching about the Person of the Messiah/Christ and His redeeming work. No other biblical text, except for the four Gospels, concentrates with such breadth and strength on the Person of the Messiah/Christ and the redemption accomplished by Him.

EPISTLE



TO THE HEBREWS

But the Jewish people at that time were completely mastered by political passions and a zeal for the restoration of a former powerful national kingdom. A national pride wounded by invaders and a specter of the former glory of Solomon's empire stirred their minds to a frenzy and fed a mutinous spirit of irreconcilable, desperate resistance to the world dominion of Rome. The fateful Judean War was brewing; it would break

the Father has appointed heir to all things.

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An opening like the powerful chord of a symphony introduces us to the main theme of the Epistle, portraying Jesus Messiah, God's Son in the brightness of His cosmic glory and greatness: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high..." (Heb. 1:1-3). Here is a multitude of indirect references to the divine nature of Jesus, which state that He in His ministry fulfilled the three Messianic ministries outlined by God in the Old Testament – Prophet, King, and High Priest. The prophetic ministry of Jesus is made clear in Heb 1:1-2, where it declares that Jesus is the Son in whom God speaks His final redeeming Word of the last days. Further, in the last part of Heb. 1:3, Jesus' accession to the throne of the universe is described: "[He] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high". This high position is a direct result of His high priestly ministry: "when he had by himself purged our sins". It is this high priestly aspect of the Person and ministry of Jesus as Messiah/Christ that later proves to be the focal point of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Epistle is divided into two large parts. The main theme of the first one (Heb. 1:1-10:18) is the superiority of the Messiah/Christ's ministry as the eternal High Priest over the highly respected institutions of ancient Judaism. The Messiah/Christ is the original in respect to God's Word spoken through the prophets, inasmuch as He is Himself God's redeeming Word of the last days. The Messiah surpasses all the angelic hosts, inasmuch as not one angel can boast that he is God's Son and one with God (Heb. 1:4-14) and at the same time a man just like us. Thanks to the joining of God and man in the Person of the Messiah/Christ, He is the only faithful and eternal redeemer of the sins of His people. In view of the oneness of His Person the Messiah/Christ surpasses the great Israelite prophet and lawgiver, Moses (Heb. 3:1-6), as the Creator surpasses His creation. The spiritual rest from dead works, offered by Jesus, surpasses the temporal rest that Moses and Joshua presented to the Israelite people after they had taken possession of the Promised Land (Heb. 4:1-11). The call to enter the rest does not relate to heaven, but to the spiritual rest of those, who, walking the path of faith, has gained peace with God by wholly entrusting himself and his life to God's mercy displayed to us in Jesus Christ/Messiah.

From the beginning of the fifth chapter the nerve of the whole Epistle may be said to be traced – the eternal spiritual high priesthood, adopted by Jesus when he presented Himself as an eternal sacrifice for the sins of many. This eternal, heavenly high priesthood absolutely surpasses the temporal, earthly ministry of Aaron and his successors (Heb. 4:14-5:11; 7:1-10:18). Like Aaron and his successors, He received the priestly ministry from God (Heb. 5:4-5), but unlike them, His ordination originates on the foundation of a completely different covenant (Heb. 7:11-14), in which He is declared a priest FOREVER (Heb. 7:15-22). Here the superiority of His ministry is seen – He lives forever to intercede for His people

(Heb. 7:25). This superiority is realized owing to the ministry of Jesus, as the Messiah/Christ, for the reconciliation of sinful mankind to God.

Here the teaching about the Person of the Messiah/Christ and His redeeming work reaches its culmination. Jesus is the High Priest forever, He enters the Holy of Holies of the universe and, willingly submitting himself to God, offers His Flesh and Blood as a sacrifice for sin, once and for all, for all people. Jesus is simultaneously Priest and Sacrifice. The ministry of Jesus in the capacity of eternal High Priest includes His role as mediator, because of which the better covenant is possible, confirmed on better promises (Heb. 7:22).

This new covenant entails a direct, first-hand, intimate relationship of love between God and His people. The unsurpassed Sacrifice, offered by Jesus Himself, the eternal High Priest, and not by the blood of sacrificial animals, stands as the pledge of this new covenant (Heb. 9:11-15; 10:1-4). The sacrifice of Jesus, instead of a temporal covering of sin, shall "purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14), giving each believer an inner impulse of the heart to such service, which is based on a complete confidence in the unconditional character of God's redeeming love.

In the second part of the Epistle the emphasis shifts to practical application of the truths disclosed in the first part. The foremost theme now becomes an urgent appeal for the reader to trust unwaveringly in the One whose eternal high priesthood is fully adequate to provide us a direct access to God (Heb. 10:19-39), and for him to be inspired by the perfect example of faith and patience displayed by Jesus during the days of His earthly ministry (Heb. 12:1-4). Jesus, God's Messiah, is the last and greatest in a long line of those heroes of faith, listed in famous eleventh chapter of the Epistle, who were called to be witnesses. The author appeals for the reader to concentrate his attention on Him and Him only – if he wants to successfully run life's race. As earlier in the Epistle, so here the appeal is for a focus on the adequacy of Jesus as our eternal High Priest before God (Heb. 13:8-15). True spiritual satisfaction is achieved solely by hope in God's promises. Having the confidence of faith that He is eternal, will never leave us, and will not turn away from us, we conquer human fear.

This spiritual condition can be obtained only by having a heart by God's grace affected by forgiveness and acceptance, and not by the outer performance of a moral and ceremonial code. The main theme throughout the whole Epistle is God's never-limited, unconditional acceptance of us because of the priestly performance of Jesus Christ. The author calls the reader to receive in all fullness his highest privilege and responsibility – to persevere to the end as God's children awaiting the Kingdom.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."





The Willowbank Declaration

The Lutheran Conference on Jewish Evangelism Statement:

Lutherans from around the world gathered in Israel from July 2 to 6, 2001 for an International Conference on Jewish Evangelism. This gathering of Lutherans interested and involved in Jewish evangelism sprang from a group meeting at the sixth International Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism held in New York in 1999.

We, as Lutherans, reaffirm our commitment to the Great Commission to reach all people. Therefore, in the light of the Biblical call to present the Gospel to the Jew first (Romans 1:16), we deny the Two Covenant Theory which excludes Jewish people from the Great Commission. We call on our respective churches to adopt in principal The 1989 Willowbank Declaration on The Christian Gospel and the Jewish People and to act accordingly.



PREAMBLE

Every Christian must acknowledge an immense debt of gratitude to the Jewish people. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus is the Christ, the long-promised Jewish Messiah, who by his life, death and resurrection saves from sin and all its consequences. Those who worship Jesus as their Divine Lord and Saviour have thus received God's most precious gift through the Jewish people. Therefore they have compelling reason to show love to that people in every possible way. Concerned about humanity everywhere, we are resolved to uphold the right of Jewish people to a just and peaceful existence everywhere, both in the land of Israel and in their communities throughout the world. We repudiate past persecutions of Jews by those identified as Christians, and we pledge ourselves to resist every form of anti-Semitism. As the supreme way of demonstrating love, we seek to encourage the Jewish people, along with all other peoples, to receive God's gift of life through Jesus the Messiah, and accordingly the growing number of Jewish Christians brings us great joy.

In making this Declaration we stand in a long and revered Christian tradition, which in 1980 was highlighted by a landmark statement, "Christian Witness to the Jewish People," issued by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Now, at this Willowbank Consultation on the Gospel and the Jewish People, sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship and supported by the Lausanne Committee, we reaffirm our commitment to the Jewish people and our desire to share the Gospel with them. This Declaration is made in response to growing doubts and widespread confusion among Christians about the need for, and the propriety of, endeavors to share faith in Jesus Christ with Jewish people. Several factors unite to produce the uncertain state of mind that the Declaration seeks to resolve.

The holocaust, perpetrated as it was by leaders and citizens of a supposedly Christian nation, has led to a sense in some quarters that Christian credibility among Jews has been totally destroyed. Accordingly, some have shrunk back from addressing the Jewish people with the Gospel. Some who see the creation of the state of Israel as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy have concluded that the Christian task at this time is to "comfort Israel" by supporting this new political entity, rather than to challenge Jews by direct evangelism. Some church leaders have retreated from embracing the task of evangelizing Jews as a responsibility of Christian mission. Rather, a new theology is being embraced which holds that God's covenant with Israel through Abraham establishes all Jews in God's favor for all times, and so makes faith in Jesus Christ for salvation needless so far as they are concerned.

On this basis, it is argued that dialogue with Jews in order to understand each other better, and cooperation in the quest for socio-economic shalom, is all that Christian mission requires in relation to the Jewish people. Continued attempts to do what the Church has done from the first, in seeking to win Jews to Jesus as Messiah, are widely opposed and decried, by Christian as well as Jewish leaders. Attempts to bring Jews to faith in Jesus are frequently denounced as proselytizing. This term is often used to imply dishonest and coercive modes of inducement, appeal to unworthy motives, and disregard of the question of truth even though it is truth that is being disseminated.

In recent years, "messianic" Jewish believers in Jesus, who as Christians celebrate and maximize their Jewish identity, have emerged as active evangelists to the Jewish community. Jewish leaders often accused them of deception on the grounds that one cannot be both a Jew and a Christian. While these criticisms





may reflect Judaism's current effort to define itself as a distinct religion in opposition to Christianity, they have led to much bewilderment and some misunderstanding and mistrust.

The declaration responds to this complex situation and seeks to set directions for the future according to the Scriptures.

I. THE DEMAND OF THE GOSPEL

ARTICLE I.1.

WE AFFIRM THAT the redeeming love of God has been fully and finally revealed in Jesus Christ.

WE DENY THAT those without faith in Christ know the full reality of God's love and of the gift that he gives.

ARTICLE I.2.

WE AFFIRM THAT the God-given types, prophecies and visions of salvation and shalom in the Hebrew Scriptures find their present and future fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who by incarnation became a Jew and was shown to be the Son of God and Messiah by his resurrection.

WE DENY THAT it is right to look for a Messiah who has not yet appeared in world history.

ARTICLE I.3.

WE AFFIRM THAT Jesus Christ is the second person of the one God, who became a man, lived a perfect life, shed his blood on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for human sins, rose bodily from the dead, now reigns as Lord, and will return visibly to this earth, all to fulfill the purpose of bringing sinners to share eternally in his fellowship and glory.

WE DENY THAT those who think of Jesus Christ in lesser terms than these have faith in him in any adequate sense.

ARTICLE I.4.

WE AFFIRM THAT all human beings are sinful by nature and practice, and stand condemned, helpless and hopeless, before God, until the grace of Christ touches their lives and brings them to God's pardon and peace.

WE DENY THAT any Jew or Gentile finds true peace with God through performing works of law.

ARTICLE I.5

WE AFFIRM THAT God's forgiveness of the penitent rests on the satisfaction rendered to his justice by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

WE DENY THAT any person can enjoy God's favor apart from the mediation of Jesus Christ, the sin-bearer.

ARTICLE I.6.

WE AFFIRM THAT those who turn to Jesus Christ find him to be a sufficient Saviour and Deliverer from all the evil of sin: from its guilt, shame, power, and perversity; from blind defiance of God, debasement of moral character, and the dehumanizing and destructive self-assertion that sin breeds. WE DENY THAT the sal-

vation found in Christ may be supplemented in any way. ARTICLE I.7

WE AFFIRM THAT faith in Jesus Christ is humanity's only way to come to know the Creator as Father, according to Christ's own Word: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

WE DENY THAT any non-Christian faith, as such, will mediate eternal life with God.

II. THE CHURCH OF JEWS AND GENTILES

ARTICLE II.8.

WE AFFIRM THAT through the mediation of Jesus Christ, God has made a new covenant with Jewish and Gentile believers, pardoning their sins, writing his law on their hearts by his Spirit, so that they obey him, giving the Holy Spirit to indwell them, and bringing each one to know him by faith in a relationship of trustful gratitude for salvation.

WE DENY THAT the blessings of the New Covenant belong to any except believers in Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE II.9.

WE AFFIRM THAT the profession of continuing Jewish identity, for which Hebrew Christians have in the past suffered at the hands of both their fellow Jews and Gentile church leaders, was consistent with the Christian Scriptures and with the nature of the church as one body in Jesus Christ in which Jews and non-Jews are united.

WE DENY THAT it is necessary for Jewish Christians to repudiate their Jewish heritage.

ARTICLE II.10.

WE AFFIRM THAT Gentile believers, who at present constitute the great bulk of the Christian church, are included in the historically continuous community of believing people on earth which Paul pictures as God's olive tree (Romans 11:13-24).

WE DENY THAT Christian faith is necessarily non-Jewish, and that Gentiles who believe in Christ may ignore their solidarity with believing Jews, or formulate their new identity in Christ without reference to Jewishness, or decline to receive the Hebrew Scriptures as part of their own instruction from God, or refuse to see themselves as having their roots in Jewish history.

ARTICLE II.11.

WE AFFIRM THAT Jewish people who come to faith in Messiah have liberty before God to observe or not observe traditional Jewish customs and ceremonies that are consistent with the Christian Scriptures and do not hinder fellowship with the rest of the Body of Christ.

WE DENY THAT any inconsistency or deception is involved by Jewish Christians representing themselves as "Messianic" or "completed" or "fulfilled" Jews.

Please check the continuation of The Willowbank Declaration in number 3 of our magazine





Shalom Dear Friends!

Apple of His Eye-Russia exists to share Gospel with Russian speaking Jewish people. A big part of our work is writing and distributing printed materials.

We just finished translating a few of the articles from the issues of our Apple of His Eye-Russia Magazine. We hope you enjoy this sample and we look forward to hearing your comments.

We hope that our ministry equips and encourages you to share the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. If you or someone you know has a friend who speaks Russian, please let us know. We want to help you share the Gospel with your friend.

In this Digest you also can find a list of all of our Russian language materials. Please feel to contact with us if you would like to receive one of these items, or the annual Digest of Apple of His Eye-Russia Magazine.

We are a faith ministry. The only way we can continue to serve is through the prayers and generous donations of ministry partners like you! It would be a great encouragement to us if you would let us know you are praying for us. You can send your tax-deductible donations to:

The Apple of His Eye Mission Society (designate to Russian ministry)

P.O. Box 6977

St. Louis MO 63123

(636) 326-4040

+ 7 (901) 5130024 Russian phone

web: <http://www.aohe.ru>

E-mail: applerus@yandex.ru

Rev. Alexey Shepelev





Apple “Core” Values

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Direct Jewish Evangelism:

It is vital that we focus energy on a clear presentation of the Good News of life and salvation in Y?hua to unsaved Jewish people world-wide. (Romans 1:16)

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Lutheran Biblical Doctrine:

We value sound Biblical grace-oriented teaching as we equip people to be witnesses to the life we find in the Messiah, Y?hua.

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Planting Messianic Congregations:

The planting of worshipping congregations with a messianic Jewish heritage is an important outcome of our ministry.

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Nurturing Mishpochah (Family)

We value a caring and committed community which will rejoice with one another in victory and mourn with those who mourn. We recognize that for some, faith in Y?hua may lead to loss of family and Jewish community support, and we willingly stand in the gap to provide support and community for those Jewish believers.

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Awareness and Training for the Church in Jewish Evangelism

We value raising the awareness level of Lutheran congregations for their Jewish community neighbors and we work to lift their zeal and skills in sharing their faith with them.

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Leadership Development

We prize the discovery and usage of the Spiritual Gifts and talents of Jewish and gentile believers, and we invest time and energy in training and deploying them to carry out God? mission in the community and the world.

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We Value God? Promises Concerning the Jewish People

We believe that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. The promises that He has made concerning the Jewish people will be consummated in His time (Jer. 31:35-37; Romans 11:24-26) We stand against anti-Semitism in all of its forms, and view withholding the Gospel from the Jewish people to be the worst form of anti-Semitism.



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