

Salvation, Hebrew Style

lesson on Parashah 14; Va'era
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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed.”

- Yochanan/John 3:16

This is probably the most well known verse Believers in Messiah know. It can be said that the basis for all Christian theology can be summed up in this verse. Some even treat this verse as the pass to get into heaven. How well do people really understand this verse though? This is the Optimus Prime of Bible verses, and as such, there is much more than meets the eye.

What God?

“God spoke to Moshe; he said to him, “I am Adonai (YHVH). I appeared to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov (Abraham, Issac, and Jacob) as El Shaddai, although I did not make myself known to them by my name, Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [Adonai].”

- Sh'mot/Exodus 6:2-3

This passage from this week's parashah, together with Sh'mot/Exo. 3:13-15, is where anyone studying Scripture ought to begin. Here is where we find out exactly what God we are talking about. It is not some Greek, Roman, Babylonian, or Egyptian god, not the god of Buddhism, not one of the three million gods of Hinduism, not even Allah (which though “allah” is the Arabic word for god, he was originally a moon god and not the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov). God is preparing Moshe (Moses) for one of the most important events of the Bible, the exodus of God's people, Yisra'el from their slavery in Egypt. It was important for Moshe, Aharon, and the rest of Yisra'el to know exactly what God they were following, and who it was that was saving them. In the same way, it is important to know exactly what God we serve, who we worship, and who we pray to. This will help us to serve Him properly, and distinguish between the true God and the many counterfeits HaSatan (The Enemy) has come up with and will come up with in the end of days.

What world?

When we read that God so loved the world, it is generally thought that this means all the people of the earth. The Greek word is “kosmos”. This literally means, “orderly arrangement or decoration”. This word comes from the word “kolumbos”, which means, “to tend, take care of, to provide for, to carry off as if from harm”.

“Therefore, say to the people of Yisra'el: 'I am ADONAI (YHVH). I will free you from the forced labor of the Egyptians, rescue you from their oppression, and redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements.’ - **Sh'mot/Exo. 6:6**

“From a distance ADONAI (YHVH) appeared to me, saying, “I love you with an everlasting love; this is why in my grace I draw you to me. Once again, I will build you; you will be rebuilt, virgin of Yisra'el. Once again, equipped with your tambourines, you will go out and dance with the merrymakers.” - **Yirmeyahu/Jeremiah 31:2-3**

“He (Yeshua) said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Yisra'el”
- **Mattityahu/Matthew 15:24**

With these verses in mind, and comparing them to the meaning of “kosmos” and “kolumbos”, and knowing that in Yochanan (John) 3:16 Yeshua is a Jew talking to Jewish people, I think the “world” Yeshua is speaking of is primarily the sheep of His pasture, Yisra'el. This does not mean that God doesn't love non Jews, but His covenants are with Yisra'el, and thus the focus of His love and the sacrifice of His Son is for the household of Yisra'el.

What Son?

“Sh'ma, Yisra'el! Adonai (YHVH) Eloheinu, Adonai (YHVH) echad [Hear, Isra'el! The Lord (YHVH) our God, The Lord (YHVH) is one]” - **D'varim/Deuteronomy 6:4**

Now we go from the most well known verse in Christendom to probably the most often recited verse in Judaism. It may seem that the two verses contradict one another. How can God be one and have a son? Was this idea a Christian invention?

“Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has cupped the wind in the palms of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know!”

- **Mishlei/Proverbs 30:4**

Obviously the beginning of this verse is referring to God. Then the writer asks who God's son's name is, and asks it as if it ought to be common knowledge to the reader. The original readers would have been Jewish. If Torah so vehemently opposed the idea that God could have a son, then how was it that Yeshua is able to declare Himself to be the Son of God in Yochanan 10? Also, how is it that Yeshua's talmidim (disciples), and Sha'ul (Paul), a Jew of Jews, allow themselves to recognize the sonship of Yeshua (Jesus)?

“God promised this Good News in advance through his prophets in the TaNaKh. It concerns his Son – he is descended from David physically; he was powerfully

demonstrated to be Son of God spiritually, set apart by his having been resurrected from the dead; he is Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord.” - **Romans 1:2-4**

What trust?

In the scriptures there are a few Hebrew words for “trust”. Other than “emun” or “emunah”, which can mean “faith” or “trustworthy”, we most often see two Hebrew words; “khasah” and “batakh”. Both of these words are similar and can be translated, “to hide for refuge” or “to flee for protection”. Of course this implies protection from something. What would that be?

“The nations have drowned in the pit they dug, caught their own feet in the net they hid. Adonai (YHVH) made himself known and executed judgment; the wicked are ensnared in the work of their own hands. The wicked will return to Sh'ol, all the nations that forget God.”

- **Tehellim/Psalms 9:16-18**

“My soul, wait in silence for God alone, because my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and salvation, my stronghold; I won't be moved. My safety and honor rest on God. My strong rock and refuge are in God. Trust in him, people, at all times;”

- **Tehellim/Psalms 62:7**

“Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Yisra'el, whom the Egyptians are keeping in slavery; and I have remembered my covenant.” - **Sh'mot/Exo. 6:5**

For Yisra'el, they trusted in God to rescue them from slavery in Egypt and from Par'oh (Pharaoh). Today, we run to God to rescue us from the same kind of bondage, the bondage of sin and from this wicked world. There are only two kingdoms, one of light and one of darkness. The one of darkness leads to Sh'eol, also translated as hell. (Yes hell is in the Bible) The kingdom of light leads to life.

What life?

“I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am Adonai (YHVH) your God, who freed you from the forced labor of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov – I will give it to you as your inheritance. I am Adonai (YHVH).” - **Sh'mot/Exo. 6:7-8**

“Therefore you are to be careful to do as Adonai (YHVH) your God has ordered you; you are not to deviate either to the right or the left. You are to follow the entire way which Adonai (YHVH) your God has ordered you; so that you will live, things will go well with you, and you will live long in the land you are about to possess.”

- **D'varim/Deut. 5:29-30**

Whenever we talk about eternity, we are talking about God, who is eternal. The first

concepts of eternity in the TaNaKh relate to God's covenants with Yisra'el. It is because of these covenants that God brings His people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. To stay in Egypt meant death. The Promised Land meant life. It was not a life of their own choosing, however. They were to be the people of God. In order to accomplish this, they had to observe Torah. Life without Torah is not life at all.

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such 'faith' able to save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, and someone says to him, 'Shalom! Keep warm and eat hearty!' without giving him what he needs, what good does it do? Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions!”

- Ya'akov/James 2:14-18

Messiah Yeshua was given to rescue His people from their lack of obedience to Torah, so they could live a life of Torah observance. Those who are not Jewish are able to also be saved from the death that comes from a lack of Torah observance. What do they get saved to if not a life of Torah observance, which leads to life? Though Yeshua came for the lost sheep of Yisra'el, this would include those who are brought into the fold through their trust in Him. The result is life, abundant life, and everlasting life.

As we read Yochanan (John) 3:16, it is important to understand it in its Hebraic context. It is not a Christian verse. It was given by the Messiah of Yisra'el to the people of Yisra'el. After understanding Yochanan in its proper context, we can understand the beginning of this week's parashah in a new way as well. For the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov so loved His people Yisra'el, that He gave them His servant Moshe, so that all, including the Egyptians, who would follow him would not perish in Egypt, but be led to the Promised Land and live according to the Torah of God.