

MATTHEW, THE MISHNAH AND OTHER SOURCES

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Recent studies have yielded information that the New Testament reflects the cultural milieu of the literature of the end of the Second Temple period, that is, the Mishnah and the Outside Literature and to some extent, Qumran, and not, as it has been assumed for centuries, Greek culture. Our task in this paper is to consider selected passages of Matthew, the messenger, and their tie with the Mishnah and as much as possible, other literature of the period. While this writer has sought to assess the entire message of Matthew in the light of its cultural background, it soon became apparent that for the size of this paper, and with so many passages which reflect the Mishnah, the project had to be curtailed to handling only selected passages. The Mishnah translation used for this project is the more recent one by Jacob Neusner, but at times, consideration was also given to the older work by Herbert Danby.¹

placed a curse on the line of Solomon; no one of his line could ever again sit on the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:28, 30). But, Joseph being of that line could not be biologically related to Yeshua, and yet, when he married Miriam and, in a sense, became the *legal* guardian of her son, he does give the right to the Messiah to sit on David's throne; however, Mary's line connects Yeshua to David through a brother of Solomon, Nathan (Luke 3:31), and so through this extreme care, the taint of the curse is cared for.

A specific example is mentioned: *"I discovered a family register in Jerusalem, in which was written: 'Mr. So-and so is a mamzer, [having been born of an illicit union] of a married woman [and someone other than her husband],'* according to R. Simeon b Azzai (Yebamot 4:13). The illustration becomes quite complicated but the point is that a son of an adulterous relationship is a *momzer*. Could this be a veiled reference to Yeshua? As already mentioned, Yeshua certainly had the stigma of being of suspicious origin because of the mystery involved in Miriam's conception of him. Exactly because Miriam was not officially married to Joseph when Yeshua was conceived, His legal status raised many questions as this Mishnah passage addresses.

In another Mishnah, a man and wife live together and then go overseas for some period of time. But upon their return home with children, they do not have to produce certificates of proof concerning the parentage of the children (Kiddushin 4:10). In the Matthew account, Joseph took Mary for his wife and nowhere does it indicate that he brought a charge of adultery against Miriam. In this case therefore, it is presumed that Miriam did not consort with any other man, and Joseph understood her conception as of divine origin, and the child is therefore legally legitimate and regarded as Joseph's son. In a further sense, because Joseph cared for

Exactly because one of the functions of the scribes was to teach people the Torah, they had no hesitation with their reply.

Gundry states of the Scribes who had become either "lawyers," "scribes," and "teachers" (of the law):

"Application of the law to daily life necessitated their interpretive function... the disciples ("learners") of the scribes followed behind them wherever they went and learned by rote memory minutiae of the Old Testament and of rabbinical laws. The Scribes taught in the temple precincts and synagogues and occasionally debated in the presence of their disciples."³

A number of the interpretations in The Mishnah are noted: The scribes answered questions of what to do about [fruit ... which there is] a doubt [whether or not it is in the status] of *Orlah*. A long discussion follows as to hypothetical situations, whether fruit is homegrown in the land of Israel or if it comes from outside of the land of Israel, that is, Syria.

The scribes greatly expanded the meaning of the fourth commandment,

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work..."
-Ex.20:8-10

This commandment in itself raised the age old question across the centuries, "What is work?" and the religious leaders were more than happy to provide an understanding of what it entails. By the second temple period, the directive for defining work is: "forty less one," or thirty nine major classifications of work forbidden on the Shabbat. Each classification is further subdivided. For example, for one who shears wool, which is a major class of work, he can neither engage in the further subdivision of this work on Shabbat by washing wool, beating, or dying it (Shabbat 7:2). The purpose of the Oral Law was to make the Written law liveable, that

Scribes also kept the records of the high court when it was in session. *The sanhedrin was [arranged] in the shape of a half of a round threshing floor [that is, as an amphitheater], so that [the judges] should see one another* (Sanhedrin 4:3). Each judge had two scribes, one to the right and one the left who served as clerks, writing down the arguments of those who vote to acquit and of those who vote to convict. The great Sanhedrin, or supreme court, had an elaborate system in their deliberations of how to come to an honest judgment of declaring a defendant innocent or guilty. It appears that there were no more than seventy one judges (Sanhedrin 5:5).

The teaching of the scribes with regard to Oral Law appears to carry great weight, at times even more than the written law: *A more strict rule applies to the teaching of scribes than to the teaching of Torah* (Sanhedrin 11:3). An example is provided, *He who rules, 'There is no requirement to wear phylacteries,' in order to transgress the teachings of the Torah, is exempt,"* thereby suggesting it would be better not to wear phylacteries at all (thereby setting aside the Mosaic law) then to try to change the manner of how the phylacteries are constructed, *[but if he said,] 'There are five partitions [in the phylactery instead of four],'* in order to add to what the scribes have taught, *he is liable*. This writer would suggest that the idea here is not that people should think up ways and means to break the Written law but that rather, if every person felt that he should provide his own interpretation of the Written law as he saw fit, then the authorities had a right to fear that anarchy would result.

From what we have already mentioned, it might *seem* that the scribal interpretations were of more importance than the Written law, but this would hardly be the case. In another instance, which demonstrates this point, uncleanness which came as a result of transgressing the

camels, it is permitted. Because John was the son of a priest, Zachariah, and as a priest himself, he would be very careful to follow the guidelines concerning what would be permitted for clothing and food.

In discussing further John's meal of locusts, directives are provided for which locusts are considered clean and which are unfit for human consumption: *and among locusts: any which has (1) four legs, (2) four wings, and (3) jointed legs [Lev. 11:21], and (4) the wings of which cover the greater part of its body* (Hullin 3:7). Locusts are considered *parve*, that is, neither milk nor meat. A further instruction on how to prepare locusts, other than frying them, is that the flesh of fish and locusts can be cooked in milk (Hullin 8:1) and therefore, this might also provide for possibilities of creating a gravy with the meat of the locusts. From this instruction, we can infer that if a man took a vow to not eat meat, he could still eat locusts. Because John the Baptist had been preaching in the wilderness, he probable stayed at one of the camps of the Essenes, living the life of an ascetic, and therefore, on a continual fast from eating meat. Perhaps this is the reason why John ate locusts as a part of his diet.

John also ate honey (Matthew 3:4). Under certain circumstances, bees' honey may come into contact with liquids which could make the honey unclean. However, *the honey of hornets is insusceptible to uncleanness but is permitted for eating* (Makhshirim 6:4). Wild honey could very well have been honey of hornets and that would free John from any danger of contracting ritual uncleanness. We need to highly respect John's position as a spokesman for God and a forerunner for the Messiah. As a priest, he was very careful with his activities, what he ate and wore; no one could bring any charge against him for living contrary to the given Written and much of the Oral law at the time. No wonder Yeshua said of him, "Among those

taking place because so many people had gone to the river for this immersion, they must have been curious as to what was taking place and why. However, based on the authority that came with his ministry, John took with his ministry, he rebuked the Pharisees who looked on, questioning them quite sharply, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7).

The people of Judea were accustomed to seeing immersion, or, *tebillah*, performed in only two situations: 1) when a person was being cleansed from ritual uncleanness; and 2) when a non-Jew wanted to come within the commonwealth of Israel as a proselyte, as a son of Abraham, and be *born again*. The immersion of John became therefore quite significant: a) God wanted to cleanse people from spiritual uncleanness, making them ready for the coming kingdom of God (Ezek. 36:25); and also b) in view of the coming kingdom with Messiah's presence, it was no longer sufficient for unrepentant Judeans to be merely born as a son of Abraham to be a part of the nation. Even Judeans had to convert to be declared righteous by God, as Ezekiel had put it,

"I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh"

-Ezekiel 36:25, 26

With the preaching of John the Immerser, the call was issued to be ready for the Messiah's coming, and particularly, people had to know the LORD in order to be a part of this coming kingdom. This immersion underscored particularly the need for the decision for atonement from one's sins.

The same passage also cites a statement by R. Aquiba:

Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom are you made clean, and who makes you clean? It is your father who is in heaven, as it says, and I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean (Ez. 36:25).

As a way of making clear and plain the meaning of the forgiveness of sins, the same passage also discusses true repentance: *He who says, I shall sin and repent, sin and repent - they give him no chance to do repentance*. John the Immerser made the point regarding that sincerity of heart was extremely important. Of those who came to be immersed, he reminded them that they must "bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

When a person repented from his uncleanness, including even the proselyte, an atoning sacrifice had to be offered, which was a part of the ritual in becoming a full proselyte: *R. Eliezer b. Jacob says, A proselyte is one whose atonement is not complete until the blood will be sprinkled on his behalf* (Keritot 2:1). So, when these ceremonial washings took place, the thought of atoning sacrifice was always near at hand.

The Pharisees and Sadducees

John the Immerser minced no words when speaking to representatives of leaders of the nation, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, some of whom came to be immersed and John warned them to truly repent. He called them: "A brood of vipers," questioning them sharply as to who told them that the wrath of God was soon coming (Matthew 3:7). What is interesting, John was not a singular voice in his harsh talk with these leaders: *R. Eliezer said, (1) Let the respect owing to your fellow be as precious to you as the respect owing to you yourself*, but he also warned his disciples, *(1) Warm yourself by the fire of the sages, but be careful of their coals,*

had been meant for all of them (Abot 5:2). Of the ten trials which Abraham endured in his walk with God, the patriarch *withstood all of them, to show you how great is His love for Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace* (Abot 5:3).

If Abraham is as human as any of us today, there must have been times when he was sorely tempted. The call to Abraham by God to offer up Isaac could be a case in point (Gen. 22:2). The only recorded response by Abraham is that in the next verse, v. 3, he arose early in the morning, made everything ready, took Isaac and the servants, and left for Mount Moriah. But in a real sense, the Holy Spirit pulled down the blinds between verses two and three and does not let us have even the slightest glimpse into what must have been a great struggle in Abraham's heart. How could he give up his beloved in such a manner? Nevertheless, he did so, and afterward, he regarded Isaac as having been raised from the dead. Ever afterward, the only wealth that mattered to Abraham was his son who had been spared by God and the greatest object of his affection in this life was the LORD Himself.

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew Chapters 5 - 7

One of the greatest messages Yeshua ever preached was to a large crowd which had gathered around him on a lovely hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee and ever afterward what he said came to be known as The Sermon on the Mount. When he saw the great multitudes following Him, He went up part way on a hill so as to better face his audience, sat down, and began to teach.

It appears from the traditional materials that earlier in the first century, *the Rabbis*

as a disciple of Abraham, one highly honored, and to be poor is highly regarded because such a person is teachable. The point to be made here is that happiness is not based on how much of this world's goods a person can possess; goods in themselves do not really bring one true happiness. But if one can empty himself of any reliance on material things, he or she will find a humility before God and have the eager anticipation of serving Him. Such people are happy because the kingdom of heaven awaits them.

The phrase, "those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4) seems to draw upon Isaiah's proclamation, "to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning (Isaiah 61:2, 3). Offhand it might sound strange to say that people who suffer all kinds of degradation should be happy but this condition is bearable in the light of their soon being comforted.

One possible major catastrophe could occur when the former rains did not fall at the proper time in the Fall, thereby endangering the wheat crop that would be harvested the following summer. A series of fasts are proclaimed in the Mishnah, and people must pray, fast and even mourn. Should rain not appear in response to the initial prayer, then the normal functions of life become even more and more curtailed, as people are called to increasing prayer and fasting when rains still did not come (Taanit, Chapters 1-3).

In the biblical text, Yeshua is the one who can be the comforter and what is of interest, later rabbinic sources refer to their concept of Messiah as Menahem the comforter⁸.

In the beatitude, "O the happiness of the gentle, or meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5), the possibility exists of interchanging ideas with Matthew 5:3 because of a similarity between the "poor," *ani* and "meek," *anv*. Furthermore, as Lachs points out, the

is really hungering and thirsting after righteousness and such a person is encouraged to do the deeds of kindness.

The hope for these humble and righteous folk is that "they shall be satisfied," suggesting thereby some kind of an eschatological emphasis. The Mishnah describes what happens when loans are made and when collectors come to receive payment on loans: *The charity collectors go around everyday and collect from man whether he knows it or not. And they have grounds for what they do. And the judgment is a true judgment. And everything is ready for the meal* (Avot 2:16), suggesting that once everything is paid up by those who seek to do righteously, they then can enjoy a banquet. In the Beatitudes, however, there seems to be the picture of the objective of living righteously so that one day they will enjoy God's favor at His Messianic banquet.

Up to this point, the subject has been specifically people who are poor and humble, but the next three beatitudes describe some of the noble ideals for those who are seekers for righteousness.

The merciful are the really the happy ones because "they shall receive mercy" (Matt. 5:7). The Jewish understanding of the Hebrew word, righteousness, or, *Zedakah*, (v. 6) has also been translated as charity or showing mercy. This might suggest, however, an act of self-righteousness. There doesn't seem to be any suggestion concerning this passage in the Mishnah but later statements by Jewish writers have similar statement to what Yeshua suggested, "He who shows mercy to his fellow creature obtains mercy from heaven."¹³

The "pure in heart" are also filled with happiness because "they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Yeshua may have had in mind the question David asked, "Who may ascend into the hill

have a specific relationship who reflect who God is and therefore, these folk are *sons of God*.

The last three verses of the Beatitudes serve as a reminder that those truly happy in the Lord will know what it means to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. They will realize that the message God has given them to share will not be readily received. Yeshua explains to his disciples they will be no different than the prophets who had been persecuted by previous generations when they sought to share the truths of God's word. Elijah himself said that both Ahab and Jezebel had killed prophets with a sword (I Kings 19:10) and Jeremiah had been persecuted any number of times for his message (Jer. 26:20-24; 38:6-13). Isaiah, Amos, and Jeremiah were also martyrs because of their insistence upon their message.¹⁸ Yeshua also prepared His disciples that they too could expect similar treatments from both Jewish people, Greeks and Romans and whoever else. But, these disciples of Yeshua must not think that they would be held in high esteem for the Word they preached and lives they lived; they should regard themselves as knowing the Lord's joy and happiness when men "revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me" (Matt. 5:11).

The Mishnah also declares, *And if you have labored in Torah, [God] has a great reward to give you* (Avot 4:10), and the encouragement is that one needs to be faithful to Torah and live righteously. Therefore, as Yeshua mentioned, the righteous should rejoice and be filled with happiness, not just because of a reward, but for the privilege of serving the Lord. As already mentioned in v. 3, those who are persecuted have as their hope of enjoying a great reward in heaven.

With the loss of the second temple in 70 C.E., there must have been a great sense of despondency by many in Judea because no possibility existed anymore for offering sacrifices.

affliction, concerning them Scripture says, But they that love Him shall be as the sun when He goes forth in His might (Judges 5:31).²⁰

Lessons on Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

Salt

The statement, "You are the salt of the earth" is without a doubt some popular saying of the day and Yeshua had a purpose in referring to his disciples as such. With the authority and ministry given to them, they are to be as salt for spiritual and moral well-being. Salt is what gives food that special taste and likewise in a moral and spiritual sense, a distinctive lifestyle of the disciples will not only reflect a special quality of godliness, but it will have a telling effect on everyone nearby. If the followers of Yeshua lose this special dimension to their lives, they will not have a real sense of what it means to be a servant and disciple of Yeshua.

The Mishnah refers to usages of salt, although not to what is mentioned in the passage under consideration. For example, salt was scattered on the altar ramp so that the priests will not slip (Erubin 10:14); in the temple, there was a special section where salt was stored and there were those who worked in the office *in charge of salt* and *there did they put salt on the offering* (Middoth 5:3). More to the point of what was taught by Yeshua, something similar is stated later on in the Talmud, *They asked [R. Joshua]: When salt became unsavory wherewith is it to be salted? He replied, With the afterbirth of a mule! And is there afterbirth of a mule? And can it become unsavory?*²¹ Obviously, the illustration pointed to only a moot question about which no one should ask any further questions how salt can regain its flavor!!!

light would not start any fire within the house.

As lamps were held high so their light shone over everyone nearby, the illustration is an encouragement to the disciples that they should "let" their "light shine before men in such a way that they may see" the good deeds, and thereby glorify their "Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Obviously, these works are not a "tit-for-tat" relationship with God, (e.g., I will do good so You can do good to me) but rather, a godly lifestyle which will commend itself to seekers for spiritual truth.

The reference to your "Father who is in heaven" is a very common one at the end of the second temple period, but this phrase will receive more detailed attention when discussing the Lord's prayer.

While this matter of a lifestyle that gives glory to God has no specifics in the Mishnah, it does appear in other literature: 1) *God will be glorified through you among the Gentiles, ... the one who does not do the good ... God will be dishonored* (Testament of Naphtali 8:4, 6);²⁴ and 2) "R. Simon v. Eleazar said: 'When the Israelites knew God's will, His name is exalted in the world. When they do not do His will, His name is, as it were, profaned in the world, as it says, *and they profaned My holy name* [Ezekiel 36:20].'"²⁵

Sharing with the Needy

Matthew 6:1-4

Yeshua next considers three pious practices: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, which are a part of doing acts of righteousness. We see already a number of emphases in Scripture but the Outside Literature likewise has a number of references: *Do not be not faint-hearted in*

that is, make a big noise, that he is about to give money to the needy. What is interesting is that the Mishnah describes the reading of a portion of the Torah that seems to illustrate somewhat Yeshua had in mind, *The minister of the assembly takes a scroll of the Torah and hands it to the head of the assembly, and the head of the assembly hands it to the prefect, and the prefect hands it to the high priest, and the high priest hands it to the king, and the king stands and receives it, but he reads sitting down* (Sotah 7:8). Everyone was in on the action of the reading of the portion assigned to the king and everyone received his due share of honor. But the idea in the passage before us is Yeshua's suggestion that this natural tendency to give and receive honor, *kavod*, to and from each other as human beings, can blur our focus of service and remove our eyes from the Lord. To want full attention in doing deeds of righteousness is only being hypocritical.

Instead, one should give in secret, where the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing; deeds of righteousness and sharing with the poor should be done secretly. One such statement from the Mishnah is quite pointed when one violates these guidelines: *R. Yohanan b Beroqah says, Whoever secretly treats the Name of Heaven as profane publicly pays the price* (Abot 4:4).

A number of other suggestions are provided by the Mishnah: One already noted above (page 8) is that while our clothing can fool people but if the law of *Sha'atness* is violated (Kilayim 9:1), then what good is it because God sees what is being done. We are reminded that He sees our secrets, either for countermanding what is forbidden or the secrets that we do for good; 2) Again, noting from a passage already cited, Yoma 8:9, page 8 above, *sin and repent, sin and repent* (Yoma 8:9), nothing escapes God's notice because He knows what is being

unless he is not afraid because of the person (Berakhot 2:1). The Sh'ma must be read conscientiously, thereby fulfilling his obligation of reading it, morning and evening; 3) The Sh'ma may be recited anywhere, but one who recites it must be ritually clean as well as also be in a ritually clean place (Berakhot 2:4). If it is impossible to find a proper setting, that is, the person is on a journey and not able to stop, then the heart needs to be directed toward the temple site, that is, to direct one's heart toward the chamber of the Holy of Holies (Berakhot 4:4,5); 4) Another instance is that *one may stand to pray only in a solemn frame of mind* (when reciting the Shemoneh Esreh)(Berakhot 5:1). The prayer cannot be interrupted for any reason, not even to return a king's greeting or *even if a serpent is entwined around his heel, he may not interrupt [his prayer]* (Berakhot 5:1).

But on the other hand, there are times when one goes into his own room, shuts the door, and prays to his Father who is in secret and the Father who sees in secret will repay the unselfish effort (Matthew 6:6). One well known example is that of Daniel when he realized that he had been trapped by spies because of his religious faith, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chambers toward Jerusalem, kneeled to pray, gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously (Dan. 6:11). What is interesting is that there is a statement later on in the Talmud which says that one should pray in a house that has windows, even as Daniel did for an example.³¹ But Yeshua's directive was that one should withdraw and pray in secret, simply because He did not want anyone to become ostentatious in this matter of prayer. Then, the Father who sees in secret will reward such a disciple openly. The Mishnah indicates that after the high priest had offered the initial incense in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he came out, paused briefly in the outer area (the holy place) *and said a short prayer ... He did*

indicate only three: *Because he is our Lord and God, he is our Father for ever* (Tobit 13:4);³⁴ *The Jews ... called upon their Lord ... the merciful God and father ...* (3 Maccabees 5:6, 7); one was to be strong, fast, fleet and brave to *carry out the will of your Father who is in heaven* (Abot 5:20).

As to whether one is to keep repeating the words of this prayer, a number of observations can be made from the Mishnah: 1) *R. Gamaliel says, Each day a man should pray the Eighteen [Benedictions]. R. Joshua says, [Each day one should pray] an abstract of the Eighteen. R. Aqiba says, If one's prayer is fluent he prays the [full] Eighteen [Benedictions]. But if not [he should pray] an abstract of the Eighteen* (Berakot 4:3). The point is that if one is fluent in the actual words, he can use them, but if not, the substance can be used. As a parallel to the Lord's prayer, this would indicate that Yeshua did in fact desire that this prayer be memorized and recited, but only for the purpose for meditating on the ideas rather than fixating on the very form of the words; 2) When the high priest came to read, *the Beadle of the community takes the scroll of the Torah and gives it to the head of the community, and the head of the community gives it to the prefect [of the priest], and the prefect gives it to the high priest. The High Priest rises and receives it and reads After the death (Leviticus 16), and Howbeit on the tenth day (Leviticus 21:23-32). Then he rolls up the Torah and holds it to his heart and says, More than what I have read out before you is written here* (Yoma 7:1). The point is that in addressing one's self to the Father in Heaven, with what the High Priest said, or anyone with the *Shemoneh Esre*, one has the words but is also thinking upon the ideas and considering them carefully as he addresses himself to the Most High God.

The next phrase, "Hallowed be thy name," can be similar to the third blessing of the

His forgiveness of our sins and seek His restoration. Therefore, as Yeshua suggested, the believer should pray that God will forgive as he or she also has forgiven others.

The forgiveness of financial debts within the Israeli society through the Mosaic Covenant can serve as an apt illustration of what is intended in Yeshua's directive: "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the LORD's remission has been proclaimed (Deut. 15:1,2).

Later on in Israeli society, Hillel developed what is called the *prosbul*, which allowed the lender to loan money in the sixth year of a Sabbatical cycle, but permitting him to collect on it, even beyond the seventh year. The *prosbul* overrode the biblical injunction that all debts must be canceled and therefore, the creditor could collect at any time after the seventh year. Perhaps Hillel had mercy on those who desperately needed funds in the sixth year when the creditor would be less likely to provide them, but on the other hand, he cleverly set aside what God had expressly determined that all debts must be canceled during the seventh year. If people desperately needed money in the sixth year of the Sabbatical cycle, the creditor should be more than happy to provide the funds and trust God to make up the difference when debts were canceled. Obviously, in a society where there was a possibility of unbelievers with hard hearts, not many would be moved to loan money in the sixth year of a cycle; but some would take advantage of the *prosbul* and collect money later on, no matter how difficult it would be for the borrower.

What Yeshua asked of believers for a new day is that they are to freely forgive people all manner of moral indiscretions and then call upon God to do the same for the forgiveness of

this same challenge, reminding the people of Judea to call upon the Lord for this change (Jer. 4:4). The prophet Ezekiel also declared the same truth, making it even more plain; people have stony hearts and only God is able to exchange the stony heart for a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). Rav Shaul's (Paul) description of man's problem is essentially what Ezekiel had already proclaimed.

Yeshua's message is essentially a call for believers who have already found an atonement from sin to pray that they not fall prey to evil deeds, but instead, to be delivered from it. If we consider Satan and his kingdom, Rav Shaul (Paul) challenged us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephes. 6:12).

The closing statement, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen," does not appear in many manuscripts. The statement itself could be a reflection of David's prayer in the Hebrew Scriptures, "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; thine is the dominion, O LORD, and thou does exalt thyself as head over all" (I Chron. 29:11). What is interesting, the Mishnah also has a reminder that in the closing benediction in the Temple, one must say, "*min h'olam v'ad ha olam*, from eternity to eternity," or, "forever and ever," (Berakhot 9:5) in order not to give occasion to the heretical Sadducees who claimed that there was only one *olam*, only one world (no world to come). Another benediction also appears in the Mishnah that as the High Priest offered prayer over the goat of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, he uttered the *Expressed Name* [of the LORD], and all the *priests and people standing in the courtyard* would say, *Blessed be the name of the glory of His*

seder.

Our primary source is the tractate Pesahim (chapter 10), and its materials which will be inserted at the appropriate places.

The Cup of Sanctification

The guests assembled in the large upper room, including Yeshua and His apostles, the women who would have set the tables, and all the rest, which could accommodated up to 120 people.

The first step was to partake of the first cup of wine, called the cup of sanctification. Luke refers to it, "After taking the cup, He gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes'" (Luke 22:17-18). Normally, four cups of wine were taken during the course of the Passover, two during the meal, and two afterwards. No one became drunk on these occasions because there are specific details for mixing the wine. The tractate Pesahim insists that even the poor must have no less than four cups of wine to drink, even if it is from the (Pauper's) dish.

As the head of each family held up the first cup, he recited a blessing over it, and no doubt, Yeshua would have done the same as He led the disciples in the Passover order of service: *And the house of Hillel would say, He says a blessing over the wine, and afterward he says a blessing for the day* (Pesahim 10:2).

and sorrows, symbolized by the vinegar. As Jesus taught this lesson, He must have had in mind His own intense suffering that was so soon to follow after this particular Passover meal.

At this point, they brought to Yeshua *unleavened bread, lettuce, and haroset* (made of nuts and fruit pounded together and mixed with vinegar-wine). They also brought and set on the table *the carcass of the Passover offering*. The second cup of wine was now mixed for Yeshua.

Breaking the Bread

The tractate Pesahim mentions no specific plate of three pieces of unleavened bread although plenty of bread was on the table. At some time later on, such a plate was indeed added to the Jewish Passover but we have no actual date when it was added. Possibly, the best date that has been suggested is somewhere between the fifth and tenth centuries.⁴⁰

Asking the Questions

In accordance with what had already been prescribed by Moses, when Israel would finally be in the land, and as Passover was to be observed, someone of a younger generation was to ask the question, "What does this rite mean to you" (Exodus 12:26).

At the end of the second period, the practice would have been for a father to choose one of his sons to ask the question, "*How different is this night from all other nights?*" If the son is an only one and does not have enough understanding to ask the questions, his father is to instruct him, placing the words on his lips. At the table where Yeshua sat, the youngest disciple was John and he would have been the one chosen to ask the questions that was already

the deeper meaning of the Passover and what it could mean for personal redemption as well.

At this point the Hallel, i.e., Psalms 113-118 are recited. There seems to be a difference of opinion as to how much of it is recited, whether from Psalms 113:1-9, ending with "As a happy mother of children" or from Psalms 113:1-114:8, "Who turned... the hard rock into springs of water." Yeshua could very well have chosen whatever suited Him, although we are not sure of how much of these Psalms He did use. The prayer is concluded with the benediction concerning redemption, recounting the way God took His people out of the hands of the Egyptians.

Because of the emphasis upon redemption and no doubt having also discussed the plagues that came upon the Egyptians before they would release their slaves, the second cup has come to be known as the cup of the plagues.

Possibly, as the host explains the Passover, they partook of the elements, although the tractate Pesachim does not indicate so. The host would not doubt have pointed to the roast lamb and explained that it was the blood of the lambs which spared the first born of each of the families of Israel. As everyone also partook of the unleavened bread, they would have been told that the women had no time to bake bread when they left Egypt because they could not wait for the dough to rise because of the yeast in it. The people then ate of unleavened bread and therefore Passover symbolizes the fact. They also ate of the bitter herbs, reminding themselves of the life of bitterness when the people of Israel were slaves but these bitter herbs are tempered by dipping them into the sweetened *haroset*. Since it had a reddish hue because of the nuts, fruit and wine added to it, it then took on the symbol of the mortar out of which the Israeli forefathers had made bricks in Egypt. There is no reason to suggest that Yeshua did not also

he certainly will go out into the blackness and darkness of night (John 3:19-20).

When the meal was completed, nothing else was to be eaten. The meat of the lamb was the last food to be eaten and the tractate Pesahim is very precise, stating, *After the Passover meal they should not disperse to join in revelry*, and the traditional interpretation is, *They may not finish with 'dessert.'* (Pesahim 10:8).

Instituting the Lords's Table

Jesus the Messiah now instituted a practice that is remembered by believers to this day, based on the major lessons of the Passover. He first picked up a piece of unleavened bread, held it up, and said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). What did He mean? The bread became the symbol that, even as the Passover lambs of old were given up to die, so He, God's Passover lamb, would also be given up to become the sacrifice whereby those who believe in Him will not perish.

But what was the response by the disciples? Did they really understand what Yeshua had said? This is not the first time that their Teacher had emphasized that He would be given over to die but that He would also be raised from the dead (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19 and so on). The disciples however did not seem to comprehend what Yeshua said, but later on, after the resurrection, they did indeed remember and what was underscored at the end of the Passover was designed to help them and the people of God to never forget what Yeshua did when He gave Himself up willingly for us.

There is one final lesson we can learn from this piece of unleavened bread. When Yeshua made it the dessert of the Passover meal, we can also readily understand why in our

However, could the disciples comprehend that it would be through the means of this third cup there was to be an unique emphasis upon atonement for sin? Hardly! Only after the death and resurrection of Jesus would they grasp fully what was meant by the cup held in His hand. Salvation, or atonement, was not possible in any other way.

Tractate Pesachim also mentions a fourth cup and between these last two were many psalms sung. But once the fourth cup was taken and grace said, the Passover meal was finally completed. However, at the table where Yeshua sat, Matthew mentioned that after everyone had partaken of the third cup, they sang a hymn (possibly one of the Hallel psalms), and then went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30). The fourth cup was left standing on the table. This cup conveyed an aspect of the coming kingdom, especially with the singing of the second part of the Hallel Psalms, Psalms 115-118. So, when Yeshua left the fourth cup sitting on the table as He and the disciples left to go to the Mount of Olives, He signified that the fullness of this Kingdom of God was yet to come.

The disciples walked down the hill toward the Kidron brook, crossed it, and went on into the garden of Gethsemane. There Yeshua prayed while His disciples were heavy with sleep, but finally He arose, awoke his disciples, even as the temple guards and Roman soldiers were coming to arrest Him. It would be a long night of trials, culminating in His crucifixion.

The Passover of Yeshua's day gave ample opportunity for Him to use it, adapt the meaning of the bread and the cup so as to emphasize the reason why He came into this world, to die for our sins and He resurrected so that believers in Him can have hope that one day they too will be with Him.

16. James Charlesworth, *Op. Cit.* Vol. 1, page 180.

17. *Ibid.*

18. As for example regarding Isaiah, "And they seized Isaiah the son of Amoz and sawed him in half with a wood saw" Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 5:11, in James Charlesworth, *Op. Cit.* Vol. 2.

19. Berakhot 28b in *Zeraim*, *Op. Cit.*, page 175.

20. Shabbat 88b in *Mo'ed I*, *Op. Cit.*, page 419.

21. Bekhorot 8b in *Kodashin III*, *Op. Cit.*, page 53.

22. James Charlesworth, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. 1, page 793.

23. Apocrypha, *Op. Cit.*, page 45.

24. James Charlesworth, *Op. Cit.* Vol. 1, pages 813, 814.

25. Cited by Lachs, *Op. Cit.*, page 85.

26. Apocrypha, *Op. Cit.*, page 117.

27. Danby opens chapter 6 of Avot with *Kinyan Torah*, the acquisition of the law, and explains that this chapter appears to be "a very late gloss to the five chapters of Avot. It was probably added because of the common liturgical use of Avot since the eleventh century as a reading on the six Sabbath afternoons between Passover and Pentecost, when a sixth section was called for," H. Danby, ed., *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pages 458, 459.

28. Lachs, *Op. Cit.*, page 112.

29. Samuel Tobias Lachs, *Op. Cit.*, page 113.

30. Lachs, *Ibid.* pages 113, 114.

31. Berakhot 31a in *Zeraim*, *Op. Cit.*, page 190.

32. Apocrypha, *Op. Cit.* page 117.

33.

34. Apocrypha, *Op. Cit.*, page 63.

35. Berakhot 17a in *Zeraim*, *Op. Cit.*, page 100.

36. Tosefta Berakhot 3:11 in