



TAKE MY BLESSING, I HAVE ENOUGH



Stolen Birthright and Bitter Loss

Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons began their rivalry in the womb even before birth. Esau was born first, with Jacob's hand grasping his heel (Genesis 25:26). Into young adulthood their differences mounted. Esau was Isaac's favorite; Jacob was Rebekah's. Their competition spilled over when Esau returned from a hunting expedition, famished. Jacob's stew smelled amazing. Offered a meal in exchange for his birthright, Esau jumped at the chance, failing to weigh the consequences.

In the ancient Near East, a birthright was a serious thing. The firstborn received double the inheritance of all other claimants and the unique blessing of the father. No wonder Jacob wanted it!

When blind Papa Isaac approached death's door, he wanted to bless his firstborn, Esau. Instead, through deceit, Jacob stole the blessing. Upon realizing what his brother had done, Esau wept bitterly, screaming "Bless me - me also, O my father" (Genesis 27:34). He vowed to kill his brother in revenge. This reaction encapsulates the desperate feeling of being put down and pushed aside that we all experience at some point in our lives. Like Jacob, we want the blessing of the firstborn, not second place. Jealousy and resentment paralyze us, and our lives can become a losing battle as we strive to prove our worth and capture the status we crave.

Jacob, fearful of death at Esau's bitter hands, had to escape. And Esau was left to live with loss, deprivation and hatred. Both Jacob and Esau were enslaved because they were not rooted in the solid ground of their worth before God. Jealousy consumed them both - first Jacob, then Esau.

A Transforming Encounter

Fast forward. Jacob leaves, finds a wife, is deceived into marrying two sisters, sires twelve sons, and gathers a huge retinue of people and possessions. In caravan, the patriarch hears that his brother is approaching with four hundred warriors and fears total destruction. That night, alone and insecure,

The bar mitzvah boy beamed with the pride of accomplishment and basked in the joy of approving family and friends. It was a Sabbath morning worship service a few weeks ago at Tents of Mercy.

Netanel, at age 13, was fully secure. What gave him that security within? He was surrounded by loving parents, doting older siblings, and tender-hearted grandparents.

Loved, blessed, and accepted, the lad had no fear of being replaced or of losing his position in the family. This security and well-being is exactly what each of us craves. It is the foundation for all of our relationships and interpersonal encounters. Sadly, many of us - and most of the human race - are not equipped with such a foundation.

Essential Questions

Where can we find the solid ground upon which to base our lives? How can we truly love others, without manipulation, disappointment, and offense? What can I do when someone offends me or usurps my place, especially within my own family? How can I deal with the aggressive and critical society around me?

Feelings of rejection, jealousy, and finally revenge have caused wars and untold human suffering (James 4:1, 2). In recent months, Israel and the USA have experienced serious social conflict that validates this formula. The tensions in Jerusalem and Ferguson, Missouri - while radically different in historic background and issues of justice - bear similarity. In both cases a minority perceives themselves to be under privileged and overly targeted. African Americans and Palestinians view their place in society as oppressed and delegitimized. We are not talking here about right or wrong, justified or incited, but about human emotion and "the street." Anger fuels the smoldering fires of insult and discrimination, setting hearts aflame with indignation.



Reconciliation of Jacob & Esau by Rubens

Jacob is visited by a man and wrestles with him all night. Again, the issue is blessing. Jacob demands a blessing before releasing the Lord (evidently a pre-incarnation appearance of Yeshua). Here is the right source of blessing. It is available to each of us and not dependent on birth order, education, family background or national origin. Jacob receives the blessing of a new name - a new identity. He had been Yaakov, the one who "cuts corners to get what he wants." But now he will be called Yisra-el, Israel, the one who has prevailed with God and receives a princely inheritance. In the bargain, Jacob's hip is touched, put out of joint so that he will have to limp, in a weakened, more dependent, less cocky state.

Secure, I can Extend Grace

Before Esau reached him, Jacob bowed seven times until they met (Genesis 33:3). This demonstration of humility, repentance,

and reconciliation won Esau's heart. They embraced and kissed, with tears. Having received the true blessing of a new identity from God, Jacob was secure enough to extend grace and favor to his brother - from whom he had previously snatched the blessing. Now he says "Here, take my blessing... because God has dealt graciously with me and I have enough" (Genesis 33:11). What a striking change. Jacob really became Israel, through meeting God (Yeshua) face to face (Genesis 32:30).

The Lord recently dealt with me regarding my attitude toward certain Palestinian believers in Yeshua. It had bothered me that they didn't affirm the Biblical promises of the land of Israel to the sons of Jacob - especially since I am one of those sons. It happened in a Jerusalem conference attended by both Jewish and Arab/Palestinian disciples. During worship I found myself remembering Jacob bowing before Esau. I saw that Jacob's encounter with Yeshua changed his heart toward his brother. It no longer mattered what the original claim was, he decided to honor Esau. Moved to realize the relevance of his example, I did what Jacob did, before my Arab/Palestinian brothers.

Being secure in my own identity in Messiah and knowing God's promises, I affirmed my brothers without demanding that they grant me the birthright I cherish.

On my knees, I asked forgiveness for our Jewish pride, for intentionally or unintentionally insulting them by projecting a superiority of ownership. I affirmed their value as absolutely equal to that of Jewish believers, and them as joint heirs of sonship before God. Their response was unforgettable. Several began weeping. Two leaders got up and repented of their own

pride and competition. One acknowledged the Messianic Jews as his "fathers." I was stunned. It was a small taste of Jacob and Esau's joyful reunion.

Answer to Essential Questions

The solution to Jacob and Esau's angry offense toward each other was the embrace of God-given sonship. Like them, we all need to rediscover and abide in the bedrock truth that we are God's chosen sons and daughters, with a place in His heart that no one can take from us. When I know WHO I am and WHO God has made me by His amazing, transforming grace, I am able to withstand the storms of rejection that assail me. I am even empowered to reach out to others, to impart blessing to them - the very blessing I have received. My place as His son frees me from the debilitating sense of dissatisfaction and defensiveness so that I am not looking to others to validate me, but am able to "validate" them.

"Behold what manner of love Father has bestowed, that we should be called children of God" (1John 3:1). "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Messiah..." (Romans 8:16-17).

We can all be as the bar mitzvah boy, unashamed before the entire congregation - filled with love and approval. So it can be for each of us, as sons and daughters of the same Father, who gives the coveted birthright to all. ✡



By EITAN SHISHKOFF

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The national Israeli Messianic teen magazine recently featured an article about Katzir (“Harvest”) youth conferences. Here are translated excerpts of the interview with Eitan Shishkoff and Vanessa (the Katzir administrator), along with counselors and campers:

SOWING INTO THE HARVEST

What is the vision that stands before your eyes in the Katzir activities?

EITAN: To equip the youth to be the workers and leaders in the last harvest before Yeshua’s return.

VANESSA: To equip them spiritually - in our connection with God, and practically - in our daily life.

How do the conferences work?

EITAN: We have been focusing for many years now, on training the younger generation of leadership: the camp counselors...

VANESSA: We also take the teens’ feedback very seriously. They fill out questionnaires at the end of each conference.

Do you see an influence on the teens as a result of the conferences?

EITAN: Teens are exposed to peer pressure and temptations... Part of our job is to help strengthen the relationship of the teens with Yeshua and to equip them with the help of the Scriptures, to persevere in faith and holiness, in the midst of the world. The conferences give them both knowledge and alternative, positive friendships with others their age.

VANESSA: We don’t always see the changes right away... There are moments I think to myself maybe they are not listening or receiving... Then I hear them happy at the end of the conference telling how much the conference helped them, or I see changes on facebook and in their day to day life.



Katzir Hanukkah hike in the Golan

How have you experienced God’s involvement in the conferences?

EITAN: Wonderful question! We can see God’s involvement clearly changing the hearts of teens. At the end of every conference we devote time to testimonies, and then we hear them telling how God touched their hearts in different ways – in the lesson times, nature hikes, talking with counselors, praise and worship, etc.

WE ALSO ASKED THE COUNSELORS QUESTIONS:

As a counselor what do you most like in the conferences and what makes you come back?

YOSEF: I most like being able to serve the teens, because when I see them – I see myself...I also wrestled with the same problems and



Prayer circles at the recent Hanukkah conference

temptations, and now I can help them and share with them things I learned. I also love to just hang out and have fun with them.

HANOCH: First of all, I feel God is calling me to serve. Second, I remember myself as a “camper” and how much these conferences influenced my life for the good. Now I am happy to give others the same thing I received.

What message would you like to impart to the teens?

ALON: Don’t let people define God. Let God define Himself.

ALICIA: It is worth it to get to know Messiah! A connection with Him is the best thing that could ever happen to me or you! Make this faith your own, and not just something you have been told about.

ELONA: Don’t be afraid to change and to ask God for help. He is always listening and ready to help. Choose to follow in His ways.

AND WHAT DID THE TEENS SAY ?

What do you love most about the conferences?

NATALIE: I like the atmosphere, worship and messages.

RUTH: The fellowship, the worship, and the fact that everyone is concentrating on God and not on what is happening around them.

Did this conference add anything to your spiritual life or your daily life?

MASHA: Every conference God makes sure I get blessed and encouraged through one of the counselors. God works in many different ways: sometimes through the worship and sometimes the messages.

Would you like to serve as a counselor in the future?

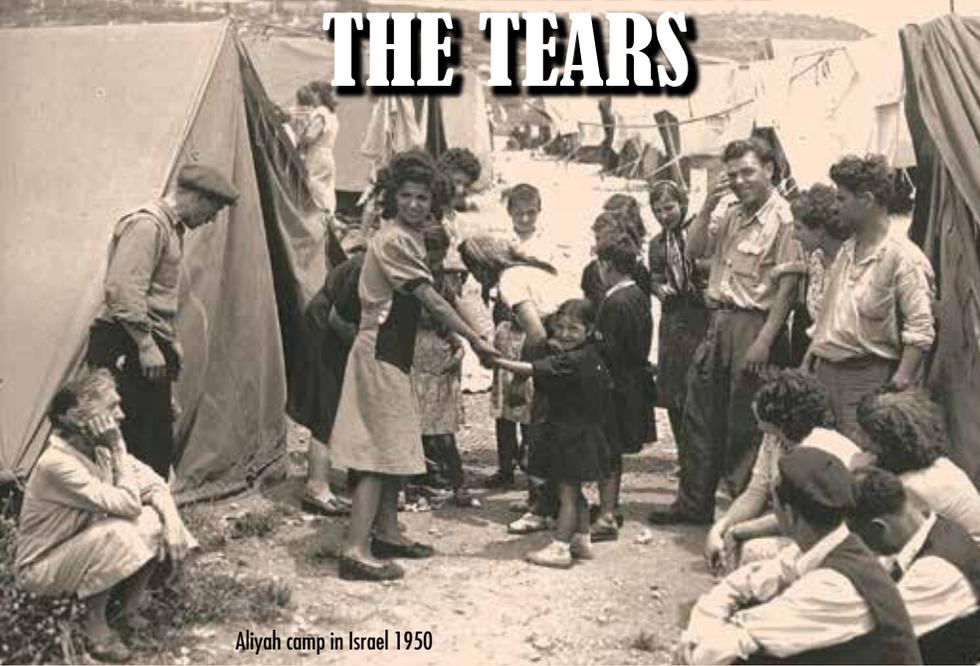
DEBBIE: Yes, obviously! I want to give of myself and serve the youth like others are serving me now. When I was younger I had doubts about the Lord and the faith, and I really want to help the “gang” who are dealing with doubts in their heart.

“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38) ☆



By EITAN SHISHKOFF

THE DREAM AND THE TEARS



Aliyah camp in Israel 1950

“When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion we were like those who dream...those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” (Psalm 126:1,5)

An iconic Israeli song, “Oy, Dear God” illustrates the tension of the rapturous, romantic dream of returning to the land of the fathers, juxtaposed with the very coarse, down-to-earth reality of interaction with “fellow sinner” Israelis already living here. Poor treatment and discrimination toward new immigrants is common in all countries, but here it comes from fellow Jews - and in the very land of promise where we would hope to live in godly harmony.

OY DEAR GOD (ACH YA RAB) - SALLAH'S SONG

Words by Haim Hefer; Main translator: G. Jakubovits

*What am I doing here - I have no idea.
What is this here anyway, I ask.
From all sides I hear...
“This is the Land of Israel, Sallah”
Here was where King David lived,
Here you'll live too, may it be God's will,
In the land of Zion, as God promised.
Oy dear God, dear God, Oy Vey, Oy Vey
Where, oh where, oh where is the Land of Israel?
How could we have left our home there
and put everything into a suitcase? ...
We came just like the Exodus from Egypt:
the kids, the luggage, my wife...
How we saw the **footsteps of the Messiah**,
How we heard the call of the Shofar...
How we said, “God is watching over us.
We won't want for anything here...”
And now there's no one to help us.
There's no Messiah, just Sallah Shabbati,
Who uses his back for loads, like a donkey.
Oy dear God...*

It is very exciting to return from the exile to Israel - the fulfillment of our ancestors' dream. At the end of every Passover they proclaimed, “Next year in rebuilt Jerusalem!” However, every wave of returnees has met with difficulties, including learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. My grandparents on my father's side came from Morocco, and on my mother's side, from Yemen. Making aliyah from Morocco was especially challenging. The Jewish community there was very well established economically and culturally. Yet when they came to Israel, they were looked down upon by the Jews already living in the land, causing tension and disappointment.

The iconic song, “Oy Dear God,” debuted in the most famous Israeli movie of all times, *Sallah Shabbati*,

about a returnee from Morocco. The trials of his absorption into Israel were much the same as today, 50 years later.

While the people of Israel were still in the desert, the LORD made a covenant with them, including promises conditional on them keeping His instructions. Leviticus 26 lays out the promises and the conditions rather starkly, including the punishment of being exiled from the land of Israel for disobedience.

“Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies...I will remember the covenant of their ancestors.” (Leviticus 26:44-45)

Then, **“I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land...”** (Ezekiel 36:24)

The land of Israel was promised to the people of Israel. However, the land vomits out those who will not walk in His ways (Leviticus 18).

The first exile of Israel lasted seven decades in Babylon. The returning immigrants included Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah and Haggai. Later, in 70 A.D., Rome destroyed the Temple in which Yeshua had



Returning by boat

taught, and exiled the Jews again.

The second exile of Israel lasted two millennia, with the Jewish people scattered among the nations, persecuted and accused. But God preserved them by His Torah, and indeed the return to Zion began in 1881, and continues to this day.

Sallah's Song describes the heart being drawn to Israel, the immigrant's trials and the desire to integrate into society. Yet hidden in the lyrics, more important than everything else, is the reference to the approaching footsteps of the Messiah. I do not belittle the many difficulties that both new and old immigrants deal with. They are often devastatingly real. However, in the midst of testing, we remind ourselves that Yeshua is the reason we have been drawn back to the land. And here we will stand, in spite of the challenges, until He returns to redeem our people. ✨



By GUY COHEN