

FIRSTBORN FACTOR

IN THE

PLAN OF REDEMPTION

BY

EPHRAIM & RIMONA FRANK

Firstborn Factor In The Plan of Redemption

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Disclaimer: This book assumes the Scriptures' absolute veracity, taking their content at face value without employing the so-called higher criticism methods or evaluations. In fact, we have not resorted to any extra biblical material. Rather, we have attempted to align scriptures and thus let "scripture interpret scripture" from both the Hebrew, as well as and the English translations (NKJV/BibleWorks unless otherwise specified).

Following are the Hebrew terms used in place of their English translations:

Elohim - God

El Shaddai - God Almighty

YHVH – the LORD

Yeshua - Jesus

Messiah - Christ

Tanach - Old Testament

Torah - Law

BCE (Before Common Era) – BC (Before Christ)

*“Thus says the LORD [YHWH]:
‘Israel is My son, My firstborn.’”*

(Exodus 4:22)

*“Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever
opens the womb among the children of Israel... it
is Mine.”*

(Exodus 13:2)

*“As it is written in the law/Torah of the LORD
[YHWH], ‘Every male who opens the womb shall
be called holy to the LORD [YHWH].’”*

(Luke 2:23)

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PREFACE

If the content and essence of the Word of God/Elohim were to be condensed or distilled into just one term, “redemption” would be a likely choice. Upon examining and probing this profound concept, one discovers that it is powered by the *first fruit-firstborn factor*. However, redemption is not just an idea or a theory; it is manifested through human beings - individuals, families, and nations, in their lives and histories. The book which you are about to read tracks the familiar but seminal and defining Biblical stories, shedding light on details which work together to progressively form eternal redemptive and judicial patterns that are as valid now as they ever were.

The Sovereign of the universe, the Creator of the world, the Maker of heaven and earth, calls Himself “*the God/Elohim of Abraham, God/Elohim of Isaac, and God/Elohim of Jacob*” (Exodus 3:6). How is it that a universal God, the Source and Originator of all, seems to condense Himself by limiting His attachment to the identity of these three men and their progeny, which in today’s terms is an insignificant and a seemingly tiny people group, and to a land equally minute and relatively unimportant from a worldly perspective? The fact that the All Powerful One is thusly affiliated demands a thorough investigation of His Word.

The Almighty has also determined that redemption cannot be realized until the appearing of those who are called, “*the sons of God/Elohim*” for whom the “*whole creation groans*” (Romans 8:19, 22) and, “*the saviors [who] will go up to Mount Zion*” (Obadiah 1:21 literal translation). Who are they, and why has He chosen them?

These are the main topics examined in this book.

FOREWORD

God's plan of redemption is a very broad subject, spanning many aspects from the earthly to the heavenly. This book is not, by any means, an attempt to exhaust this vast theme. Rather, we will be focusing on one of redemption's main components - the *first fruit-firstborn factor*. We will follow this crimson thread as it winds its way through the Scriptures, delineating the story line of God's redemptive plan with its statutes, laws, ordinances, promises, and covenants that He made with His chosen people, those who are His possession - the "firstborn." Their role in His plan, in establishing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, is of paramount importance. Indeed, it is written that Abraham and his chosen progeny will inherit the world (ref. Romans 4:13).

"God/Elohim so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16), is an all-time favorite Bible verse. Scriptures also inform us that this world has been under the spiritual dominion of another kingdom and ruled over by its prince - Satan. However, according to the above quote, the Almighty Creator loves this earthly domain so much that He sent His Son to redeem it, albeit not without involving a people that He has already chosen and whom He identifies as "firstborn" or "first fruit."

Yet in order to take up the destined role of firstborn, there are qualifications that must be met. We will take a look at these prerequisites, as well as the God-given duties assigned to the firstborn. From the very beginning when the world's population was made up of only two individuals, humanity was designated two main positions - that of kingship and priesthood. Even though the "fall" of man brought with it separation from the Creator, His kingdom principles are still valid and operative and have never been done away with. These principles, together with their accompanying Torah statutes, laws, and ordinances (commonly called the "law"), characterize the Word of YHVH/the LORD, and have left their mark on "His-story."

We will trace the *firstborn factor*, along with the redemptive patterns and the bitter conflicts that have arisen over the birthright and the inheritance, from the days of Cain and Abel all the way to our own era. A great part of the book is devoted to the lives of the forefathers, as they form a microcosm of what is today's macrocosm. It is in the course of their lives that these redemptive patterns are seen developing and manifesting, later to be applied to the nation of Israel as a whole. The kingly and priestly functions that together make up the office of the firstborn were very soon separated from each other, as the birthright was divided. This event bore its effect on the history of the nation, the formation of the royal house, the split into two kingdoms, and finally, the exiles of the people of Israel.

The story of redemption climaxes with the coming of the Firstborn Kinsman Redeemer, who epitomized and fulfilled perfectly all of YHVH's kingdom principles. Thus He was given the authority to impart His resurrection life into the hearts of those foreknown, called, and chosen by His Father - YHVH, enabling the restoration of the *spiritual* aspect of the kingdom. Redemption's acceleratory process ultimately leads to the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdom of God/Elohim and His Messiah (ref. Revelation 11:15; Obadiah 1:21).

Terms such as the kingdom of Elohim, redemption, covenants, firstborn, first fruit, kingship, and priesthood may appear to the modern mind ancient, outdated, and esoteric. Yet for those of us who are looking for *His appearing* and for the full restoration of YHVH's kingdom, all of these ideas should be coming more and more into view... Because, whether one believes or not, they have always been in existence and are now closer than ever to being realized, as our Father is restoring all things about which He had spoken through the mouths "*of all His holy prophets since the world began*" (Acts 3:21).

Chapter 1

Back to the Sheep Fold

As a post-war baby growing up in the United States in the late 1940's and 50's, I (Ephraim) was immersed in a culture of professed freedom and religious tolerance that was sometimes called, 'the American Dream.' My family members were die-hard Lutherans and as a consequence I became acquainted with a Lord and Savior Whose first name I knew was 'Jesus' and Whose last name was 'Christ.' My parents prayed before every meal that Jesus would come and be our guest. Not seeing an extra plate on the table, I assumed that because he never showed up, they had stopped setting a place for him. Every Sunday before going to church, I donned the expected starched white shirt and bow tie. The winter months produced even more suffering as I was made to wear prickly and itchy woolen underwear. I construed that all this discomfort had to be undergone 'for Christ's sake.'

After graduating from high school, I attended a Lutheran college where Bible courses were rendered low on my priority list. Then in 1966, with a B.A. degree in Biology behind me, I enlisted in the U.S. Army. Thankfully, my tour of duty did not include Vietnam and by what I felt was a stroke of luck, I was stationed in California. It was there that I began to take an interest in popular Eastern philosophies such as Transcendental Meditation (TM), Yoga, and the Great White Brotherhood ('White' indicating spiritual purity and not racial supremacy). I was hungry for righteousness and virtue, values which I had not seen in church. Yet my life during that period was confusing, at least partly due to the over-consumption of alcoholic beverages that I indulged in during my free time.

Even in this darkened state, however, a flicker of light began to filter into my muddled mind. For some indefinable reason, I was being 'tinkered with' by the God of the Bible. Before long I became a Spirit-filled believer, referred to at the time as a 'charismatic.' Scriptures came alive and as I read my Bible, they were milk to a thirsty soul - "*As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*"

(1 Peter 2:2).

A song we sang and I strummed on my guitar at almost every meeting was, “*Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33 KJV). Although meaningful at the time, its real significance was as far away from me as university studies are from kindergarten games. It would take years before the Spirit of the Living God would begin to open my mind, through revelatory understanding, as to what those early apostles taught from the Torah (Law) of Moses, the Writings, and the Prophets (ref. Acts 28:23) concerning the kingdom of heaven.

In 1976, my new life in Messiah was further transformed when I went on a tour of Israel. A most compelling feeling of *coming home* greeted me when I looked down at the shoreline of this land from the window of the 747 aircraft. The fuller meaning of this episode would have to wait, however, at the portal of my future life experiences.

Another of those ‘enlightening’ events met me in late 1982. While living with my new Israeli bride on a kibbutz in the Upper Galilee and studying Hebrew, I was hit by a major eye-opening realization. The three-month Hebrew course was almost over and we were studying the weekly Torah portion (*Parasha*) one Friday morning. The section that I had been assigned to read happened to be Genesis 48:8-20. As I came to the part about Israel/Jacob pronouncing a blessing on the head of Ephraim, declaring that his seed would become *m’lo ha-goyim* – “*fullness of the nations*” (or ‘Gentiles’), I was suddenly stopped in my tracks as revelation electrified me. After class I went back to my room and grabbed my Green’s Interlinear Hebrew-Greek Bible. I flung it open to the same text and read it again, this time in English. The question that popped into my mind about the “fullness of the Gentiles” was, “Is this the same *fullness of Gentiles* that Paul mentions in Romans 11:25?”

The answer came bursting into my innermost being like a bomb, “Yes, of course! Where do you think he got it from?” I gasped for a breath of air and then broke into tears as the reality of the *faithfulness* of a covenant-keeping Elohim touched my soul. I now had the

answer to the question of why I, being from a Gentile family, felt so at home in Israel and had such a close kinship with the Jewish people. The apostle Paul wrote: *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob...’”* (Romans 11:25-26). With that, a string of questions began to array themselves in my mind. Why Jacob? What does “all Israel” have to do with the “fullness of the Gentiles coming in”? Coming into what?

During the following months of re-reading the Tanach (Old Testament) and especially the Torah, I began to realize that there were continuous references to two different people groups in Israel, frequently called ‘houses.’ Isaiah 8:14 states, *“He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both [literally, two] the houses of Israel.”* The most obvious reference to the two houses or ‘two sticks’ is found in Ezekiel 37:16: *“As for you, son of man, take a stick/tree for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.’ Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.’”*

As I began to discover many more scriptures that spoke about Judah and Joseph/Ephraim, my heart was set ablaze. I became convinced that much of the Word of God addressed ‘two families,’ ‘two sticks/trees,’ and ‘two houses’ - the house of Judah and the house of Israel. Furthermore, there was a distinct destiny for each one of them. True believers needed to hear this message! However, did I have a surprise coming...

In the summer of 1983 my wife and I left the kibbutz. We felt that we were to spread this amazing news of their identity and destiny to the lost Israelites who were now to be ‘found’ in the form of the new covenant believers. These are the ones spoken of who have the same faith as their father, Abraham (see Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:29).

Little did I know how few would be willing at that time to hear about such a novel idea, or to take an interest in it. In any case, I went ahead and pursued what was burning in my bones, assembling as many scriptures as I could find that spoke of this concept. From September of 1983 until March of 1984, while living in the new settlement of Ma'ale Adumim east of Jerusalem, I worked on this undertaking.¹ It was at that time that the Father brought into our lives Angus and Batya Wootten, who shared the same interpretation of Scripture and had been teaching it for several years. Meeting them was an answer to prayer, as it appeared until then that we were quite alone with this insight.

After several years of sharing what we understood to be the 'two house' teaching, that is, the house of Israel/Ephraim and the house of Judah, I turned one day to the Father in prayer. I did not want to focus on this revelation alone, but rather desired to seek further understanding of YHVH's plan of redemption and the role that Israel, all Israel, was to play in it.

¹ Posted on <http://thussayseloheyisrael.blogspot.com/>. The book, *Firstborn Factor*, is based on the texts collated in this manuscript.

Chapter 2

Seeking First YHVH's Kingdom

In an early morning time of reading scriptures in the year 1994, I became intrigued like never before by Acts 28. Paul was under house arrest in Rome *“for the hope of Israel”* (verse 20). He called together the Jewish leaders to explain to them why he had come there. These leaders had heard about this sect of Judaism that was *“spoken against everywhere”* (Acts 28:22). Consequently, after listening to Paul they set a date for him to clarify and explain his stance to many regarding this issue. When the day arrived, Paul *“solemnly testified of the kingdom of God [Elohim], persuading them concerning Jesus [Yeshua] from both the Law [Torah] of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening”* (Acts 28:23).

Upon reading verse 23, something leaped inside of me with a big, *“WHAT, Paul was teaching the kingdom of Elohim from the Torah and the Prophets?”* I had never heard, in all my years, the Gospel of the kingdom presented from the Torah and the Prophets! *“Where in the Torah is Elohim’s kingdom?”* I prayed. I turned to my Heavenly Father and asked Him to show me. I left for work that morning in a state of absolute bewilderment. How was it possible that after twenty years of being a believer and singing that song, *“Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God,”* I could still be so ignorant of something so important? I had read many times the parables of Jesus/Yeshua concerning the kingdom of Elohim, but did not realize that Yeshua and His apostles were actually teaching about the kingdom from the Torah and the Prophets! Truly, I fit the shoes of those who have ears but do not hear, and eyes but do not see!

In the following weeks, I started studying Scripture and noted anything that spoke of or referred to Elohim’s kingdom. One morning I awoke with a ‘Holy Spirit prompting’ to read the first chapter of Acts again. The setting for this was forty days after Yeshua’s resurrection and He was on the Mount of Olives with His disciples. He had just spent all those days speaking to them about the kingdom of Elohim. Then, just before He left this earth, the disciples asked Him a very candid question, *“Will You at this time restore the*

kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). In their hearts, they assumed that this was what He was going to do all along, but they became terribly disappointed and discouraged when the Romans crucified Him. All of their hopes died with Him. However, to their amazement He arose from the dead three days after He was put in the grave, and rekindled their faith. That was the reason for the question, “*Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*”

What struck me about the disciples’ query was the usage of the term “*restore.*” The very employment of that verb meant that the kingdom had been in Israel sometime in the past, but where and when? How was it perceived? What did it look like? Why Israel?

The question about the “restoration” really stirred me, as in the past I had always assumed that the kingdom would only be set up when Yeshua returned. The more I studied Yeshua’s answer to His disciples, the more my original thoughts on the matter changed. “*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:7-8). What appeared to loom large about Yeshua’s answer was His statement regarding witnesses. “Witnesses to what?” I insisted. Was it to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel? If that were the case, then I had a lot more questions to ask and needed to take more seriously Yeshua’s exhortation to “*seek first the kingdom of Elohim and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33). It was also vital that I gain an understanding about the correlation of YHVH’s kingdom to the present restoration of the nation of Israel.

Generally, most people are prone to seek first food, drink, clothes, and shelter, which equates to the quest for provisions. However, Yeshua declares that this is something we are not to worry about, as our Heavenly Father already knows that we have these needs. Yeshua adds that we are not even to “*worry about tomorrow*” (Matthew 6:34). In fact, He placed so much importance on seeking *first* the kingdom of His Father, that He wanted His disciples’ attention to be wholly focused on it. After all, it was the restoration

of the kingdom to Israel that was one of the main reasons for His coming, as foretold in the message delivered by an angel to Miriam, His mother: *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Yeshua. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and YHVH Elohim will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His **kingdom** there will be no end”* (Luke 1:31-33 emphasis added).

In answering His followers’ question on the Mount of Olives (ref. Acts 1:6), Yeshua also stressed that they will *“receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...”* (Acts 1:8). Where will that power come from and for what purpose? The power would come with the Holy Spirit. So what is Yeshua really implying here about the kingdom? In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul the apostle, clarified the Messiah’s statement, *“For the kingdom of Elohim is not eating and drinking (repeating Yeshua’s words); but righteousness and peace and joy **in** the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17 emphasis added). Thus, it appears that the kingdom of Elohim comes with the Holy Spirit. Yeshua’s wounds and His blood, shed for the forgiveness of sin, opened the way for the Spirit of Elohim to regain access to the heart of man.

Chapter 3

The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel

How does a person who is full of the Spirit of YHVH become a witness to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel? By the time of Yeshua's statement on the Mount of Olives, had not most of the Israelites from the northern kingdom been scattered throughout the world for many centuries? Had they not lost their identity and become what the prophet Hosea calls, "*not My people*"? (Hosea 1:9).

The only known Israelites in Yeshua's days were the Judeans, made up primarily of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin, plus a small remnant from the other tribes. Their land, now called 'Palestina,' was part of the Roman Empire. Could it be that when Yeshua had commissioned His disciples to go to "all the nations" and introduce them to the Holy Spirit, via the new covenant, that He was sending them to seek for the "*lost sheep of the house of Israel*"? In fact, according to Yeshua, He Himself "*was not sent except to [those] lost sheep*" (Matthew 15:24). Were not these "*outcasts of Israel*" (Isaiah 11:12) destined, through the new covenant, to receive the Spirit and thus testify to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel? (ref. Isaiah 44:3; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 37:27).

According to Isaiah 49:6, the task of YHVH's Servant is to "*raise up the tribes of Jacob*" and to "*restore the preserved ones of Israel,*" which is a prerequisite to His Light going out "*to the nations,*" and His sweeping salvation reaching "*to the ends of the earth.*" Obviously, Yeshua did not accomplish this while He was on earth. However, after the Father raised Him to glory, He was in a position to pour out the Holy Spirit upon a redeemed remnant and through them to begin to carry out His commission as YHVH's Servant. Could this be a hint of the "*greater works*" that Yeshua spoke about to His disciples? (ref. John 14:12). Could these "*greater works*" constitute the raising up of the whole house of Israel from their graves in the 'valley of dry bones'? (ref. Ezekiel 37:1-14).

Regarding the beginning of this redemptive process, the prophet Micah, who foresaw the origins and birthplace of the Messiah (ref. Micah 5:2), adds the following, “*Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel*” (Micah 5:3). The verb *give up* relates to those whom YHVH had called “not My people,” but who are also the brothers of His Servant. These ones have been given up until a significant birth takes place. After that birth (of Yeshua), these brethren would begin to return to their family, *to the children of Israel*. Hence, when the apostles went out into the world they searched for the “*lost sheep of the house of Israel,*” “*the remnant of the brethren.*” They were also fishing for those about whom it was said, “*...and let them grow into a multitude of fish [literal translation] in the midst of the earth,*” and, “*...they will be the fullness of the Gentiles/nations*” (Genesis 48:16, 19 literal translation). This subject will be elaborated on in a later chapter.

When the chief priests and Pharisees gathered the Sanhedrin in order to decide what to do with Yeshua, Caiaphas, the High Priest, made the following declaration: “*You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation [Judah and their companions] should perish*” (John 11:49b-50). The Gospel writer adds to these words the following: “*Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Yeshua would die for the nation, **and not for that nation only**, but also that He would gather together in one the children of Elohim who were scattered abroad*” (John 11:51-52 emphasis added). Who are these *scattered children of Elohim*? And whom did the prophet Hosea refer to as the “*sons of the Living Elohim*”? (ref. Hosea 1:10).

John concludes his account with a very symbolic and prophetic comment: “***Therefore Yeshua no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples***” (John 11:54 emphases added). Yeshua Himself says about this other part of the nation: “*Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear*

My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16; see also Ezekiel 37:22, 24; Micah 2:12-13).

Why was Yeshua so emphatic about coming only to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*? In Numbers 18:15 it says clearly that all firstborn must be redeemed. Hence, before He can apply redemption to humanity as a whole, He has to redeem the designated firstborn nation of mankind, namely Israel. This law of redemption is essential as YHVH’s redeemed firstborn sons (Israel), for whom the groaning and travailing creation “eagerly waits” (ref. Romans 8:19-22), have to be *revealed* first. What this process has entailed in the past and will involve in the future, is the central theme of this book.

Chapter 4

An Everlasting Kingdom

“YHVH is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O YHVH, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations” (Psalm 145:9-13).

After reading these verses one day, the following questions flooded my mind: “What, or who, are these works that YHVH has mercy over?” and, “Who are these saints that will bless YHVH and speak of the glory of His kingdom and power, making known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the majesty of His kingdom?” Some of the answers to these questions began to surface as I read Isaiah 29: *“Therefore thus says YHVH, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: ‘Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now grow pale; but when he sees his children, **the work of My hands**, in his midst, they will hallow My name, and hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the Elohim of Israel. These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine’”* (verses 22-24, emphasis added).

Upon reading the Isaiah 29 text, I construed that the redeemed of Abraham and the children of Jacob are the work of YHVH’s hands. These are the ones who will bear His name and bring a testimony of it, along with the glory of His kingdom, to the sons of men. I asked further, “But who are those who erred in spirit and need to come to an understanding?” This too would be answered in due time, but the verse that stood out and gripped my attention was the one in the middle of Psalm 145: *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout **all** generations”* (verse 13, emphasis added). If that were the case, then why did the disciples ask about *restoring* YHVH’s kingdom to Israel? Was He deposed at any time from His throne? Did His people ever doubt His sovereignty? I continued to query.

After many years of “every one doing what was right in his own eyes” in Israel (ref. Judges 17:6), YHVH raised up the prophet Samuel. But before long, the latter brought his grievance to the Almighty, namely, that the people had not been heeding him; instead, they had rejected his authority. YHVH pointed out to Samuel that it was not him whom they were rejecting, but rather, Himself that they had been attempting to overthrow as king. “*And YHVH said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being **king** over them’*” (1 Samuel 8:7 NAS emphasis added).

That little four-letter word - *king* - flashed at me like a neon light at midnight. YHVH’s rule over the house of Jacob was the evidence of the kingdom’s existence on earth. However, when the people chose a man to reign (like Saul, David, and Solomon), they were in fact rejecting YHVH as their king. Yet much to my amazement, I discovered that David and Solomon actually sat on the throne (position of authority) of YHVH: “*Then Solomon sat on the throne of YHVH as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him*” (1 Chronicles 29:23). Elohim was still overseeing His plans and purposes for His people, although they had rejected Him as their sovereign. His kingdom principles were in operation in spite of the fact that it was men who manned His throne.

Equipped with this new understanding, my thoughts now turned back to the statement that I had read earlier about YHVH’s kingdom and dominion being in every generation. “Well, if His kingdom and dominion have been in every generation, then they must have been in the first one,” I concluded. I then proceeded to turn the pages of the Bible back to the first chapter of the first book, asking the Holy One of Israel to teach me. That was the beginning of a path that I am still on today, even as I write these lines.

Thus, it is with fear and trembling that we are to respond to Yeshua’s exhortation to “*Seek first the kingdom of YHVH and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). Let us pray along with Paul the apostle, “*That the Elohim of our King and Messiah Yeshua, the Father of glory, may give to us the spirit of*

wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, and that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the holy ones, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Messiah when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:17-20 my alterations). Amen.

Chapter 5

Dominion - Rule

As I turned to the first chapter of Genesis, I began to read it prayerfully verse by verse. But it was primarily one word that illumined the path to further understanding: “*Then Elohim said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; **let them have dominion - vayirdu** - over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’*” (Genesis 1:26 emphasis added).

With this discovery, my thoughts burst out joyfully: “Of course, **dominion**; YHVH’s kingdom rule and sovereignty were already present in the beginning, with Adam and Eve!” Both the man and his wife had received the delegated authority to rule and serve all the other living creatures that YHVH had created in the fifth and sixth days. Two verses later, the very same word caught my attention again: “*And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and **subdue** it; have **dominion - u’rdu** - over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’*” (Genesis 1:28 emphases added).

The Creator did not relinquish His own sovereignty but instead entrusted a dual role to man (both male and female): “*And YHVH Elohim took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden [delight] to tend [work/serve] and keep [watch over] it*” (Genesis 2:15). Man was to be an *eved* (servant), and a *shomer* (watchman). As servants and watchmen man and woman would ‘walk with’ the Creator; in other words, they would have an intimate relationship with Him and thus receive from Him *Life* and *Light*. They were to transmit this Life and Light to the creation. However, man was not to rule or have dominion over other human beings. That position was reserved to Elohim alone, Who was King of kings (or Sovereign) and above all. Because the Creator blew *His* Life into man, if the latter were to rule over his own species, it would constitute a form of dominion over Elohim. The authority that was granted to man/woman in YHVH’s

kingdom on earth was, therefore, that of a servant-king and watchman-priest, ruling and serving all other living creatures.

This kingly-priestly arrangement of YHVH's kingdom order, within which humanity was to function, may be defined after the name or title of an individual who will show up later - Melchizedek - *priest of the Most High Elohim* (ref. Genesis 14:18). Described as king and priest (Hebrews 7), he epitomizes the ideal state in which the two offices may be unified, under the condition of sinlessness. Thus, before his fall Adam (male-female) truly fit the "Melchizedek" role.

As long as Adam and Eve maintained their oneness with Elohim through obedience, this state of harmony would prevail. But if man failed to live up to the Creator's instructions, he would experience the consequences of a broken relationship with Him. Elohim, fully aware of the weakness inherent in natural man and what this limitation would cause, had prepared a way even before the foundation of the world for restoring humanity's union with Himself. YHVH's plan for dealing with man's rebellion, and his subordination to Satan's kingdom authority is alluded to in His address to the latter: *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"* (Genesis 3:15). ("Heel" is *akev* in Hebrew, which is the root word for Yaacov/Jacob.)

From the very beginning, the Creator determined that humanity would be cognizant of the fact that He is true to perform that which He has declared. This is a fundamental principle demonstrated in the very act of creation: *"And Elohim said... And it was so..."* YHVH declared in no uncertain terms that He is *"watching over His word to perform it"* (ref. Jeremiah 1:12 NAS), and that He will accomplish and fulfill all that He has spoken by the mouths of all His holy prophets since the world began (ref. Acts 3:21). There is, therefore, an assurance and a guarantee that His redemptive plan, backed up by His faithfulness, will find its total fulfillment in the fullness of the times and seasons.

Chapter 6

In the Beginning

(Genesis Chapter 1)

Let us now reflect on the Creation account in order to reinforce our understanding of Elohim's loyalty to His Word. His Word, as well as His kingdom, is a manifestation of Himself. What YHVH says is what will be, for He calls Himself, "*I will be what/whom I will be*" (literal Hebrew translation of Exodus 3:14; *E'he'ye Asher E'heye*). His Spirit is the power that carries out what He decrees by His Word. Viewing His characteristic of consistency will help us to better comprehend His plan of redemption, as revealed in the Creation process. This understanding will also have significant implications for our own faith in the covenants, promises, and prophecies that YHVH makes later.

The opening lines of Scripture, "*In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1), comprise a statement of intent. In the first verse of the second chapter it is written, "*Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished*" (Genesis 2:1). What took place between those two verses was the process and order of creation until its completion at the end of the sixth day, for "*on the seventh day Elohim ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done*" (Genesis 2:2).

According to Genesis 1:2, "*The earth was without form, and void...*" The location where the creation process was to take place was called "earth" (*eret*), although at that point it (the earth) had not yet taken its present form. This transformation would occur only on the third day of the manifestation of Elohim's Word.

"*And darkness was on the face of the deep...*" What kind of darkness was over the face of the deep, and how did this condition of *darkness* come about? We understand that at one point in eternity past there was an angel, a created spiritual entity called Lucifer (*Hey'lel Ben Shachar*), whose name means *son of the dawn*, hence *light bearer*. This entity coveted the position of the Most High and so is addressed by the following, "*How*

you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). This rebellion constituted *sin*. Thus, when he was expelled from heaven and cast down into an abyss called *sheol* (ref. Isaiah 14:15; Luke 10:18), his light was removed from him, as was the light of all the other angelic beings who had rebelled at the same time (see 2 Peter 2:4). This realm (that included *sheol*) of deep spiritual darkness was now described by the term *tohoo va’vohoo* - without form and void (ref. Genesis 1:2).

Elohim had a specific purpose in mind for this spiritual sphere called *darkness* (see Isaiah 45:7). The contrast between *light* and *darkness* was an essential part of His plan, as the *darkness* was destined to become the medium through which He was about to manifest His Word and reveal Himself. The principle of “light out of darkness” and by the same token “life out of death,” is at the very core of redemption. Therefore, the Spirit of Elohim hovered, or brewed, over the face of these “spiritual waters,” which was now the domain of Lucifer, indicating that YHVH had not lost His sovereignty.

“Then Elohim said, ‘Let there be light’” (Genesis 1:3). Keeping in mind that everything that was brought forth by Elohim’s Word revealed aspects of His nature, the *Light* was also a type of manifestation of Himself. This *Light* was not natural light, as the luminaries had not yet been created, but the very essence of the Creator’s nature! It is the highest form of Life and the quintessence of His *being*. This *Light* also contains all the laws, statutes, and ordinances that govern His kingdom and its administration, as revealed in the light of Torah.² Because Elohim is *Light*, by necessity He had to separate the *Light* from the *darkness*. Had He not separated one from the other, there would have been no darkness, as the *Light* would have swallowed it up. However, this separation would only occur on the second day.

Following the account of the above activities, Genesis 1:5 says, *“and there was evening, and there was morning, one day”* (literal translation, emphasis added). Because there were yet no heavenly bodies, this day could not be a unit of time. Hence, in this context,

² A well known Hebrew idiom is *Torah-Ora* (or “Torah Or” ref. Proverbs 6:23 literal translation), that is - “Torah-Light.” Application and reference to Torah laws are made throughout this writing, even to events that occur before the ‘official giving’ of the (written) Torah at Sinai.

'Day' signifies spiritual Light (*"Elohim called the light Day,"* verse 5). The fact that it is "one" (*echad*) and not "first" (day) refers to the essence of the Creator Himself (YHVH *Echad* - YHVH is One), Who is the wholeness and completeness of Life. YHVH, being that "One Day" is, therefore, the very foundation from which everything else will emanate.

Chapter 7

The Second and Third Days

(Genesis Chapter 1)

It was in the second day that Elohim said, “*Let there be a firmament (ra’kee’ah) in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters...*” “*And Elohim called the firmament heaven (sha’mayim)*” (Genesis 1:6, 8). Note that He divided “waters from waters” and not “waters from earth.” YHVH separated the waters that were faced by His Light and Spirit from the waters that were faced by the darkness.

Elohim did not call the firmament “good,” as it would only be there to keep the two areas separated until His redemptive plan would come to completion. Then, as described by Isaiah the prophet and John the apostle: “*All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree*” (Isaiah 34:4); “*Then the sky [firmament] receded as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island was moved out of its place*” (Revelation 6:14).

At this juncture in the creation process there are three separate and distinct spaces, or heavens: 1) an outer upper level or third heaven (ref. 2 Corinthians 12:2), which is the dwelling place of the Most High and is the realm of Light; 2) an intermediate area called the firmament or second heaven; and 3) the lower level or the deep that is steeped in spiritual darkness. After the third day, this lower level will be called “earth” with its atmosphere and its natural bodies of water called “seas.” If we could only step back and see how infinitesimally small this area of darkness actually is, compared to the massive universe of the second and third heavens, it would give us a more accurate perspective on YHVH’s supremacy over the earth.

On the third day of creation a very important aspect of YHVH’s manifested Word comes into view: “*And Elohim said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so.’ And Elohim called the dry*

*land earth; and the gathering together of the waters He called seas, and Elohim saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:9-10). The Creator took the waters that were under the firmament, the waters that were in a state of darkness, and gathered and compressed them together to cause the formation of the dry land or earth, and its seas. Interestingly, in Hebrew the verb used for the “gathering” of the waters (yikavu) shares its root with the word for hope (tikvah), intimating that “hope” was embedded in what was otherwise devoid of spiritual Life and Light, and Elohim called it “good.” Paul alludes to this scripture in his letter to Titus, where he mentions the “**hope of eternal life which Elohim, who cannot lie, promised before time began**” (1:2, emphases added).*

The Maker chose this realm of *spiritual darkness*, and all that He intended to create within that sphere, as a stage upon which He would ultimately reveal Himself and His nature. Light cannot be seen in light, as an opposite medium (darkness) is needed in order to see it. If all natural light were to be extinguished, nothing would be seen. Nevertheless, when light appears, it is reflected off all the objects and items that are around. Thus, that which is visible is actually the different hues, or colors, of the invisible rays of light. In other words, what we see is actually the unseen.

Here is how the Bible describes the above principle: “*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of Elohim, so that things which are seen were not made of things which are visible*” (Hebrews 11:3). “*While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:18). “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power...*” (Romans 1:20).

Before the third day was over, Elohim created grass, herbs, and fruit trees, each with its own distinct seed. What was the state of the life of these plants, since there was no natural sunlight in the third day, without which vegetation cannot exist? This question unmistakably leads to the conclusion that Elohim created the seed first.

Like any good farmer, YHVH knows what the mature plant will look like, in that the seed contains within it the very likeness of the respective grass, herb, or tree into which it will grow. Although the seed is completely different from that which sprouts out of it, after falling to the ground and being watered, it will grow to look like its progenitor. The description in Genesis 2:5 gives an indication of this order, or process: *“before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For YHVH Elohim had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground”* (literal translation). Each plant or herb that springs up out of the ground starts its existence as a seed. We will take a closer look at the “seed principle” in *Chapter 9*.

Chapter 8

The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Days

(Genesis Chapter 1)

When Elohim created the firmament on the second day, as we saw in the previous chapter, it was not declared “good.” However, the sun, moon, and stars that were placed within the firmament on the fourth day *were* declared “good.” YHVH intended for the greater light to rule the natural day, and the lesser light with all the stars to rule the natural night. These He created in order to illustrate a divine order, as well as for signs and seasons (ref. Genesis 1:14-18).

Let us take, for example, the promise to the forefathers that their seed would be like the stars of heaven. Could this be more than a mere reference to numbers, suggesting that they were also to become a light and governing influence in this realm of spiritual darkness? Moreover would they, like the stars, be used for signs and for seasons in YHVH’s redemption timetable? Another illustration regarding the heavenly bodies and their connectedness to the progeny of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is seen in the life of one Israelite, Joseph, in whose dreams his family appeared as the sun, moon, and stars (ref. Genesis 37:9). Yeshua was also referred to as the “Bright and Morning Star” (ref. Revelation 22:16), revealing the fact that He holds a very unique position among the “stars of Jacob” (ref. Numbers 24:17).

YHVH’s spiritual reality is demonstrated daily. During the day we cannot see the stars or the moon, for their light is absorbed in the brightness of the presence of the *greater light*, just as it is in the life of the redeemed: “*Your life is hidden with Messiah in Elohim*” (Colossians 3:3). This sets an example for what will take place at the end of the *night order*, when the Father’s day of redemption will dawn fully through His Son: “*The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but YHVH Elohim will be to you an everlasting light, and your Elohim your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for YHVH Elohim will be your everlasting light*” (Isaiah 60:19-20; refer also to Revelation 21:23).

In the course of the creation process, the Creator brought forth by His Word a progression of life forms. Though the creative Word emanated out of the realm of Light, it materialized in living things that came forth either from the waters or from the dry ground, both of which were immersed in spiritual darkness. Like the plants, so now the reptiles and the birds each carried the uniqueness of its particular species, bearing witness to some aspect of the Creator's Life and nature that was embedded within them.

Elohim's intent was that each kind would multiply and fill the earth. The environment was perfect for this growing process, but every species was in need of Elohim's ongoing rule, management, and administration. The Creator ended the fifth day with another evening and another morning, pronouncing it "good."

On the sixth day Elohim created a still higher form of *nephesh chaya* (living soul). These types were permeated with instincts and learning capabilities that could respond to discipline, or training, by yet another species, man, who was the last on the list of creation. Unlike those who reproduce by oviposition (egg-depositing), these sixth day creatures, which have to carry their young in their own bodies for a term, would be reproducing in smaller numbers. They would also depend for their survival upon a more sophisticated eco-system.

The groundwork had now been laid by Elohim for the crown of His creation, the one genus that would become the expression and heart of His own nature, and would be given the responsibility to name, administer, rule, and serve the rest of the living creatures that had been brought forth previously.

*"Then Elohim said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; **let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the ground'" (Genesis 1:26 emphasis added). "And YHVH Elohim formed man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living (literally) soul" (Genesis 2:7).*

As we see from the above quote, YHVH Elohim created Adam from the dust of the earth. The earth and its dust were brought forth from “the lower spiritual waters,” a realm that was governed by the spirit world of darkness. Natural man was going to be YHVH Elohim’s expression or conduit to subdue, rule over, and put into order this domain of potential chaos, disorder, and rebellion. In other words, male and female would have the delegated authority to establish YHVH’s kingdom here on earth, as it exists in heaven. But because Adam and Eve were created from this very earthy and natural substance, they had an inherent weakness which would ultimately show up and express itself. Paul describes this condition: “... *sown in corruption ... sown in dishonor ... sown in weakness ... sown a natural body ...*” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Yet YHVH planted within natural man a mystery. A closer look at the words He pronounced when He created Adam will allow us to get a glimpse of this ambiguity: “*Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness*” (Genesis 1:26). How is it that both male and female could look like Elohim and yet be earthy? How can something created from a substance of darkness be an expression of the Light? This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Just as we have seen in the preceding days of creation, Elohim was watching over His Word to do, accomplish, perform, fulfill, and bring to completion what He had designated for it. What He spoke came to pass, and even now, in our generation, this should be our reality. His Word is an *anointing* (a moving and determining force) in and upon the life of those to whom it was spoken, and their progeny, until all that has been promised is fulfilled.

“Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides”
(Psalm 119:90).

Chapter 9

The Seed Principle

(Genesis Chapters 1:26 to 2:7)

The Creator, Who is Spirit, Word, Life, and Light (glory), made Himself known in the things which He created. He also made man in *His image* and *likeness*. But, in what way does man express the *image* and *likeness* of the Creator?

In order to understand how YHVH Elohim could view natural and earthy man in His own image and likeness, we must rely on one of the apostles' commentaries. "*And so it is written, 'the first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven*" (1 Corinthians 15:45-47).

Elohim formed man from the dust of the earth and blew into his nostrils the *breath of life* - *neshama* - and thus he became a *living soul* (*nephesh chaya*). Man was the only fashioned creature into whom the Creator exhaled His own breath/Spirit. Nevertheless, Adam's spirit-life (*neshama*) would remain in its embryonic form until the appropriate season would come for Adam (the "seed") to be "sown" in the earth, and eventually to break forth into the new creation life (ref. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15).

Paul describes natural man as an entity that is sown: "*But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?'* Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain [seed] -- perhaps wheat or some other grain. But Elohim gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body" (1 Corinthians 15:35-38).

These verses portray what I call the *seed principle*. YHVH Elohim gives the seed its outer appearance as He has determined. He sows it, it falls to the ground and dies, and when watered it comes back to life in a whole new form, while the outer shell fades

away. After this takes place, the new figure or shape will look just like the parent plant, and will bear the same “image and likeness.” Thus, the fleshly part of man will also vanish, while the inner life, after being redeemed from the Fall’s consequences, when YHVH’s Spirit waters it, will come forth from the *dust*, and look just like its progenitor, and in man’s case like his Heavenly Father.

YHVH’s command to man to multiply and fill the earth was not solely for the purpose of propagating the ‘outer seed’ (the natural part of man). The intention was also for the inner life, which is the ‘embryo life’ of the Creator, to be perpetuated. From the beginning, Elohim had planned to reveal Himself through the medium of spiritual darkness - a vehicle totally opposite to His own nature. As in the case when a seed is sown and is interred or buried in the soil, it is hidden in ‘darkness,’ just as was mentioned regarding the flora on the third day of creation. The darkness is required in the initial stages, for the seed’s normal growth and development (including the human embryo). Therefore, YHVH allowed the spiritual as well as the natural darkness for His purposes. Here is what He Himself says: “*I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, YHVH do all these things*” (Isaiah 45:7).

Paul uses another analogy to describe this phenomenon of ‘camouflaged life’: “*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of YHVH, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of YHVH*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “Transformed” is translated from the Greek word *metamorphoo*. As we know, this is what happens to a caterpillar while inside its cocoon. How many of us, when looking at that caterpillar (natural man), can see the butterfly (new creation man)?

The spirit that was blown into the core of man imbued him with the *tzelem* (image) and *d’moot* (likeness) of the Creator. Let us examine the meaning of these two words.

In *tzelem* (image) is hidden the word *tzel* (shadow), a form that does not have its own existence apart from the object that blocks the light and casts its shape upon a given area. Thus, the relationship of the Creator to the man whom He had created is comparable to

the relationship of a three-dimensional object to its shadow. Interestingly, *tzelem* is also the term that Scripture employs at times to describe the false gods, that is, images and idols (for example, Daniel 3:1-18). Natural man, being without inherent honor/glory, takes on the image and likeness (*tzelem*) of that which he worships (ref. Romans 1:23-25; Revelation 14:9), whether it be an idol or YHVH.

The second Hebrew word, *d'moot*, comes from the root *dam*, that is, "blood." Thus, the *neshama* and its nature was resident in the "blood" of Adam, "*for life... is in the blood*" (ref. Leviticus 17:11). As long as the spirit of man had an intimate relationship with the Spirit of Elohim, he would remain under the "shadow of the Almighty" and reflect His nature. However, because of Adam's disobedience in partaking of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, YHVH's presence within him departed, leaving his spirit vulnerable to the spiritual nature of Satan's kingdom. Male and female did not have to learn how to become fearful or to lie; this disposition manifested immediately when they fell under the "shadow of death" (*tzalmavet*). Adam's life (the *neshama* that was in the blood) was now contaminated with the nature of spiritual darkness called "Sin." Paul writes about this Torah-truth in his letter to the believers in Rome: "*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men...*" (Romans 5:12).

And so, man's disobedience and sin brought about the tragic breakup of his relationship with the Creator. But since man was formed from the dust of the earth, and hence was inherently weak and corruptible even before he sinned, this was to be expected. Nevertheless, Elohim took into account this inevitability. Thus, redemption was not an after-thought, it was already in the plan even before creation (ref. 1 Peter 1:18-20).

Chapter 10

Each One in His Own Order

(Genesis Chapter 3 and 1 Corinthians Chapter 15)

In his horticultural analogy, Paul refers to an order in redemption: *“For as in Adam [the seed] all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah’s at his coming [appearing]”* (1 Corinthians 15:22-23).

As explained in the previous chapter, when ‘natural’ man partook of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he began to express its nature, which matured into a death-producing fruit. His ability to serve the creation in the capacity of a servant-king and watchman-priest quickly turned into self-serving, and to the exploitation of the creation for his own ends. Thereafter, man administered death rather than life. As he became a slave to the kingdom of sin and death, that which he ruled over started travailing and groaning, and so did he. Why would YHVH assign man to such a high position of responsibility, knowing his weakness and potential for disobedience? To the natural mind, this appears to be foolishness.

However, the “foolishness” of the Creator outwitted the god of this world of darkness (ref. 1 Corinthians 1:25). By hiding His ‘breath’ within earthen ‘shells’ that were merged with the nature of darkness, YHVH camouflaged this spark of life so that in the season of sowing, the grain would fall to the ground, as stated above, and be broken open. At this point the light within will be released, and man’s true state of being will be revealed. This is *“the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them Elohim willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles/nations, which is Messiah [His Spirit] in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:26-27). *“... the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting Elohim, for obedience to the faith...”* (Romans 16:25-26).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Paul explains that there is a divine order in this process: *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah shall all be made alive, but each one in his own order...”* (1 Corinthians 15:22-23 emphasis added). Writing to the twelve tribes of Israel, James calls them the “first fruits” of this hidden spiritual reality in humanity: *“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”* (James 1:18). Why did James point to the twelve tribes, calling them the first fruits of this new order? Why were the sons of Jacob chosen and predestined for this purpose? Why does YHVH Elohim call Israel His firstborn and the first of His produce? (ref. Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 2:3). Why does He also call Ephraim a firstborn? (ref. Jeremiah 31:9). What is behind this first fruit administration order of YHVH’s redemption and kingdom on earth? In order to understand this arrangement, we will have to continue to examine what is written in the Torah, especially in Genesis. For what we find there forms a model of what is becoming a full-blown reality today, and is governed judicially by the Word.

Chapter 11

First Fruit

(Genesis Chapter 4)

As we follow the history of YHVH's kingdom and its restoration to all Israel, the recurring theme of the "*first fruit-firstborn factor*" will accompany us all the way through. The importance of the *first fruit-firstborn factor* principle within the family of Adam and Eve becomes evident right away as recorded in Genesis 4. When their sons Cain and Abel became of age, each of them brought an offering to YHVH Elohim. Because he was a tiller of the ground and grew crops, Cain made an offering of "*the fruit of the ground*" (verse 3). Abel, on the other hand, who tended flocks of sheep and goats, took of "*the firstborn of his flock*" (verse 4) and offered them to the Creator. YHVH did not accept Cain's contribution, but He did look favorably upon Abel's. This had an adverse effect upon Cain who became very angry. Unable to overcome sin's temptation, he eventually murdered his brother. Several questions beg to be answered. Why did YHVH not regard Cain's offering, but accepted Abel's? What caused Cain to harbor evil desires against his brother? Why did YHVH ask Cain where his brother was when He already knew? Why did Cain retort so defensively, saying, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (verse 9).

Pondering these questions and studying further the Torah laws, statutes, and ordinances, I discovered some interesting scriptures that shed more light on the reason for YHVH's rejection of Cain's offering and His acceptance of Abel's. "*Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine*" (Exodus 13:2). Further, "*The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of YHVH your Elohim*" (Exodus 23:19). The statute that *all* firstborns and *all* first fruits belong to YHVH is a critical component in the principle of the *firstborn factor*.

Some contend that because Cain was a tiller of the ground, which was cursed, YHVH could not accept his offering. However, if that were the case, was Cain at fault for being

a farmer? Furthermore, if the ground was cursed, why did YHVH put the above ordinance in the Torah? “*Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to YHVH*” (Genesis 4:3). Examining this scripture more closely reveals why Elohim did not accept his offering, as Cain held back for himself the first fruit of the ground. This unrighteous behavior had a very devastating consequence, and was the reason why sin was already stalking him. Since Cain was a firstborn and did not belong to himself, he had birthrights that awaited him if he qualified by being obedient to YHVH’s righteous instructions.

Unlike his brother, Abel demonstrated righteousness. Note that he even offered up the fat when he brought *the firstborn of his flock* (Genesis 4:4). Thus, his offering was accepted. Abel did not hold back that which belonged to his Creator. What caused Cain’s anger to flare up over this matter, and why did he vent this rage on his brother? The answers to these questions are crucial in gaining insight into a problem that keeps recurring in families throughout the Scriptures, and even up to this generation.

Cain and Abel were out in the field together when Cain struck the deathblow to his brother. YHVH had warned Cain that sin was crouching and ready to pounce on him if he did not turn away from his jealousy and hatred. However, the rejection of his offering by YHVH was not the only motive behind Cain’s behavior. Because of his disobedience, Cain lost favor with YHVH and consequently his leadership role as well, resulting in anger and hostility toward his younger brother who would have inherited this firstborn position.

A final confirming test of Cain’s loss of the birthright was YHVH’s challenging question to him regarding the whereabouts of Abel. In Cain’s sarcastic response, he deliberately expressed defiance toward Elohim and disregard for his redeemer status and the corresponding responsibility for his brother. If he had been a faithful firstborn, he would have been aware of and concerned about his younger sibling.

By withholding his first fruits, Cain had fallen prey to pride, selfishness, and greed, although he could have repented as Elohim had issued him a warning. Cain, however, chose to ignore it. Consequently, he opened up a door for “sin” to take charge of his life. Spirits of rejection, jealousy, retaliation, rage, and ultimately murder invaded his being. This example of a firstborn losing his birthright to a younger brother also illustrates the principle of the “first Adam” losing his rights to the “second One.” *“The first man was of the earth, made of dust (earthy); the second Man is the Lord from heaven (spiritual)”* (1 Corinthians 15:47).

Now that Cain had lost the position of the firstborn and Abel was dead, there was no one in the family who could carry on the responsibility of a future father and redeemer, and so Eve gave birth to another son, Seth. With Seth begins the genealogy of the firstborn, and the commencement of the story of YHVH’s kingdom order in the family of Adam.

Chapter 12

Genealogy of the Firstborn

(Genesis Chapters 5 to 9)

The fifth chapter of Genesis is essentially an inventory that lists the firstborn patriarchs from Adam all the way to Noah. Why was it necessary for Elohim to list these men in His records? As mentioned before, they belonged to Him and thus His name had been *inscribed* upon them for His redemptive purposes (ref. Numbers 6:27; Deuteronomy 28:10; 2 Chronicles 7:14). These forefathers form ‘the genealogy of the firstborn,’ and even the meanings of their names outline a prophetic picture.

Adam - man, Seth - appointed, Enosh - mortal, Cainan - sorrow, Mahalalel - one who praises Elohim, Jared - will come down, Enoch - dedicated, Methuselah - his death shall send, Lamech - hidden king (the letters for the word “king” - *melech* - are jumbled up and hence hidden in ‘Lamech’), and Noah - rest. Thus, from the very beginning YHVH hints at His redemptive plan for mankind. The message that these names form is: *To man is appointed mortal sorrow, (but) one who praises Elohim will come down and dedicate (himself), his death bringing the king (although hidden for a time), and rest.*

These patriarchs of humanity were all firstborns, or had filled that position because of the unfaithfulness of an older brother. Each of them was like a prince in YHVH’s kingdom order, and therefore did not belong to himself. They carried the anointing as elders or redeemers of the family and potential possessors of the birthright after the death of the father. However, because of the sin nature in them coming through the natural lineage of Adam, they could never qualify to inherit the spiritual kingdom of YHVH and enjoy the *full* benefits of their place as YHVH’s servant-princes. They themselves were in need of a redeemer. In fact, according to Joshua these “[fore]fathers served on the other side of the River...” gods/idols (Joshua 24:14). Nevertheless, they still held the positional rights of the firstborn. Noah and his son Shem were the last of the firstborn patriarchs who lived before YHVH’s judgment in the form of the flood, which made an end of that world and its inhabitants.

Noah trusted YHVH and was obedient to Him. Had Noah not been more righteous than his contemporaries (ref. Genesis 6:9), he would not have qualified for the position of the firstborn. “*Noah found grace in the eyes of YHVH*” (Genesis 6:8), and thus YHVH preserved him and his family. Note that in order to safeguard humanity, YHVH chose to continue the lineage of the firstborn. At that time, Noah was the only rightful heir to the promises and blessings that the Creator gave to Adam - to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and have dominion, or rule, over all living things (ref. Genesis 9:1-2).

After the flood waters receded, YHVH established a covenant with His family, the rainbow in the clouds. The rainbow is a very significant sign, as man is likened to a mist or a cloud (ref. Psalms 39:5; James 4:14), but when the unseen rays of the sun hit those little particles, they refract all the hues of the light. How much more will the beauty of YHVH’s glory be when it shines through us, His ‘dew drops’ of righteousness, revealing the essence of His nature!

Scripture records that Noah was 500 years old when his three sons were born. Interestingly, because of the wording in Genesis 5:32, some speculate that they had to be triplets. Whether or not that was the case, they would have emerged out of the womb one at a time. Because Shem’s name is first on the list of the siblings, we are safe in drawing the conclusion that he belonged to the firstborn order. This fact is also borne out in Noah’s pronouncement over his sons (ref. Genesis 9:25-27).

The following account in Genesis 9 took place some years after the family came out of the ark, in the wake of a strange and puzzling episode. Noah, who had planted a vineyard, enjoyed its fruit (wine) to the point of becoming so inebriated that he uncovered himself. His son Ham, the father of Canaan, *saw the nakedness of his father*, while his brothers took meticulous care not to do so and what is more, they covered their father’s shame (ref. verses 20-23).

Ham's disrespectful action resulted in a curse over his fourth son, Canaan, who therefore was destined to be a servant of servants: "*A servant of servants he shall be to his brethren*" (verse 25). It was the latter's territory that YHVH was going to give to Abram and his firstborn progeny, Isaac. This will be covered in more detail later.

Shem's right as a firstborn is made even clearer, judging by these words of Noah: "*Blessed be YHVH the Elohim of Shem and may Canaan be his servant. May Elohim enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem*" (verses 26-27). Several significant Torah facts are presented in this short blessing. It is important to stress these matters at the outset, because this order in Noah's family is an embryonic form of what is approaching maturity in our day and age.

As we have already seen, "*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations*" (Psalm 145:13). Therefore, YHVH was arranging the order of His kingdom in the family of Noah and his firstborn son, Shem. Notice that Canaan was to be a "servant of servants." Who are the servants that he was to serve? Since Shem and Japheth were also to be servants, the answer seems clear - Canaan was to serve Shem and Japheth "in the tents of Shem." This statement establishes Shem as the responsible head of his father's house or tent. But who was Shem to serve? Being the firstborn, he was to serve his father's family and the One to Whom Noah belonged, that is, YHVH Elohim. Shem was the prince of the family and responsible for the well-being of all his relatives; he was to be his brothers' keeper and redeemer. YHVH inscribed His name upon Shem, because this firstborn belonged to Him. Noah, therefore, blessed and praised YHVH, the Elohim of Shem. At this point in time YHVH was governing humanity through Noah. But then a problem arose...

Chapter 13

Another Kingdom

(Genesis Chapters 10 and 11)

Like Noah, his sons were born in the image and likeness of Adam via Seth (ref. Genesis 5:3) and were of the same nature. Shem, being the older and the firstborn, had the right to inherit the patriarchal position of his father. If other members of the family were to lose their property, inheritance, or in the event of not having posterity, he would be responsible to redeem that which was lost or had not come to fruition. It says about Shem that he was “*the father of all the children of Eber*” (Genesis 10:21). Thus, we see that at times ‘fatherhood’ has a far wider scope than strict biological parenting. Because of the principles of redemption, Biblical fatherhood involves definite legislated parameters and ramifications, which will become evident later on.

In the third generation of Noah’s family we encounter a deviation from the firstborn redeemer order. The instigator of this subversion was Ham’s firstborn grandson (from his firstborn son Cush) - a man by the name of Nimrod.

The fact that Nimrod was given this name, which means “we will rebel” or “let us rebel,” definitely points to his father’s intentions and heart condition. The name speaks of both father and son. What or whom were they rebelling against? Nimrod “*was a mighty hunter before YHVH... like Nimrod the mighty hunter before YHVH*” (Genesis 10:9). This means that he was very adept at leading, planning, organizing, and carrying out a hunt. Since in pagan religions the gods were to be appeased by food provisions (cf. Leviticus 21:6, 8, 17, 21-22), Nimrod ‘the hunter’ in all likelihood had positioned *himself* to be that provider “*before YHVH*” (cf. Exodus 28:35; 29:11; 34:23, 34). Interestingly, YHVH’s chosen firstborn was often a shepherd, while the hunter exemplifies an antithesis of a true firstborn. Nimrod is depicted as a cunning individual who had all the natural attributes that would have predisposed him to rebel against YHVH’s kingdom order. And this is exactly what took place. “*The beginning of his [Nimrod’s] kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar*” (Genesis 10:10).

Furthermore, of his subjects it is written: *“And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’”* (Genesis 11:4). Here we see the inception of another kingdom, a kingdom which had its roots in the world’s first city (other than the one built by Cain) - Babel, in the Land of Shinar.

What was the reason for gathering the people together and building a city with a high tower? What motivated Nimrod to establish another kingdom, and what caused the people with him to try to *“make a name for themselves”*? Nimrod, true to his spiritual heritage (as a descendant of Ham), was no doubt prompted by the firstborn jealousy over the patriarchal positions of his uncle and his cousin, Shem and Eber. He was not interested in humbly serving YHVH. The nature of a satanic spiritual entity found a new firstborn (Cain-type) to prey upon. Man was supposed to be YHVH’s channel for the manifestation of His nature and kingdom here on planet earth. By the same token, Satan can also make use of humans for his kingdom purposes. So just like Cain, Nimrod and his cohorts expressed and reinforced the nature of the kingdom of the *“knowledge of good and evil”* through the *“lust of the eyes”* (the tower), the *“lust of the flesh”* (a city), and the *“pride of life”* (making a name for themselves) (ref. 1 John 2:16).

Building something bigger, higher, and stronger was intended to confirm, justify, and express the existence of the other kingdom. YHVH’s word to the Noachic family was to *“be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth”* (Genesis 9:1). Nimrod did the very opposite. Rather than filling the earth as commanded, he gathered the people to himself.

Like YHVH’s kingdom, Nimrod’s was also governed by a kingly-priestly order. However, these offices did not exist for facilitating service to YHVH and to mankind; rather, they were hierarchical, political, and religious positions which became institutionalized and paid tribute to humanity instead of the Creator. As mentioned, YHVH had not given man jurisdiction to rule over his own kind, only to serve one another. Nimrod’s offices of king and priest, on the other hand, were designed to exalt the names of those who bore these positional titles.

YHVH dealt with the rebellious kingdom by confusing the language so that their objectives could not be accomplished: *“Therefore its name is called Babel, because there YHVH confused the language... and from there YHVH scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth”* (Genesis 11:9). Nevertheless, it was from this rebellion that the various nations/*goyim* emerged, patterned after Nimrod’s kingdom, together with their governments and religious expressions. YHVH’s kingdom order, however, was still intact through the mandate of the firstborn.

It was during the days of Peleg (whose name means ‘to divide up’ or ‘split’ and who lived only one generation after Eber - Nimrod’s cousin and contemporary), that YHVH judged Nimrod’s kingdom and scattered the people by confusing their language. Interestingly, before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were born, YHVH’s dispersion of these people was related to *the number of the children of Israel*: *“When the Most High **divided** their inheritance to the nations, when He **separated** the sons of Adam, **He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel”*** (Deuteronomy 32:8 emphases added).

From the above verse it is clear that Israel was to become the governing head over the rest of the nations. Israel’s role would be to serve mankind and be their brothers’ keepers. What would qualify the twelve tribes to be in such a position as to oversee other nations? Would not history prove their conduct to be no different or better than the rest of the nations? In order to answer these questions we must turn to the twelfth chapter of Genesis, which describes a very crucial development in YHVH’s plan to establish His kingdom, rule, and authority upon earth. It begins with the word of YHVH to a man called Abram.

Chapter 14

Abram

(Genesis Chapter 12)

“Now YHVH had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation [goy]; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing’” (Genesis 12:1-2).

After twenty generations of firstborns, YHVH visits one man, Abram, and promises him that he will become the father of a nation (*goy*). Why would YHVH Elohim single out the firstborn of this particular generation and make such a promise to him?

As we have seen from the days of Nimrod, Eber, and Peleg, the Noahic family had been scattered, resulting in the formation of nations (*goyim*): *“These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood”* (Genesis 10:32). These nations continued to pursue the hierarchical counterfeit and the kingly/priestly (oligarchic) rule that was established by Nimrod. At the time of Abram’s birth there were ten firstborns still alive in YHVH’s kingdom order, with Noah as the patriarchal head. However, these elders were all aged and destined to pass away within the next generation. Because of the proliferation of the earth’s inhabitants, it was obvious that one man or one firstborn could not represent and implement YHVH’s kingdom for all these people groups.

The order of YHVH’s kingdom on earth, therefore, had to take a new turn. From the twentieth generation of firstborn the Almighty selected a man - Abram, and declared that a nation would issue out of his loins. What kind of nation would this be? It was to be a firstborn nation which would belong to YHVH Elohim for His name’s sake. It was to be a peculiar nation, a nation of righteous servant-kings, a chosen and set-apart nation, and a royal priesthood (ref. Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). This people would show forth the glory of the Creator and be a blessing to the rest of mankind (ref. Genesis 12:2-3; Zechariah

8:13). They would become a witness-nation of YHVH's faithfulness to His covenant and to the promises that He would be making to and with the patriarchs.

YHVH had planned and predestined this people group to carry all the birth-rights inherent in the family of Adam and Noah, and as such to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. They would ultimately have dominion, as servants of the Most High, over all that was bequeathed to Adam. However, having the nature of their progenitor, Adam, they would not qualify to function as redeemers until a future Kinsman would fulfill all righteousness for them, atone for their sin, and restore their relationship with their Covenant Maker Who would re-establish His kingdom rule in and through them.

Let us return to the promises that YHVH gave to Abram and to his seed: "*Then YHVH appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants/seed I will give this land'*" (Genesis 12:7). Abram had to leave his father and household in Haran in order for this promise to be realized. However, the children of Canaan, the cursed son of Ham, already occupied the land that YHVH chose to give to the progeny of Abram. How was it that Abram had the right to wrest this property away from the Canaanites?

Being a slave of slaves, or a servant of servants, Canaan did not have a judicial right to own land as a slave was the property of his owner. Thus, the area that he occupied was available, as it were, while his progeny was destined to be servants in the tent, or land, of another. Abram, on the other hand, and his firstborn descendants had the right to redeem that territory and to dwell in it. Yet being servants - of the Most High - they too could not possess it: "*The earth is YHVH's and all its fullness*" (Psalm 24:1), and, "*The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me*" says YHVH (Leviticus 25:23). He always holds the title deed to the land and can choose to give it to whomever He pleases, according to the conditions that He laid down (ref. Leviticus 18:25-28, especially verse 27).

As pointed out earlier, after the days of Peleg the nations were divided according to the (future) number of the tribes of Israel. In essence, the governmental administration and

oversight of YHVH's kingdom on earth was to be given to the promised seed of Abram's firstborn. But who would this one be, since Abram and his wife, Sarai, were childless?

Chapter 15

Testing a Redeemer

(Genesis Chapters 12 to 14)

Before the appearance of the promised son, Abram had to go through a series of tests in order to qualify, that is, to be found loyal to his position as a firstborn redeemer. After leaving Ur with his father, Terah, to go to the land of Canaan, the family settled down in Haran, north of the ultimate land of destination. Terah was 145 years old when YHVH summoned his son Abram to take leave of him and the family and go to another land. YHVH spoke to this seventy-five-year-old firstborn saying: *“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation [goy]; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Genesis 12:1-3). Before leaving Haran, Abram had a firstborn’s responsibility to execute - he took his nephew Lot and his deceased brother’s property under his wing. It was only then that he departed his father’s house for the promised land.

From then on YHVH subjected Abram to one test after another, examining His servant’s faithfulness in the role of a servant-prince and firstborn-redeemer. True to his given task, Abram proved to be his *“brother’s keeper,”* demonstrating that he was not unaware of Whose servant he was.

When Abram and his then-small family and entourage arrived to the environs of the heartland city of Shechem, YHVH spoke to him once again, saying, *“To your descendants/seed I will give this land”* (Genesis 12:7). Fulfilling his priestly office as a redeemer, he built his first altar to YHVH in the land that was now declared a possession of his future family. Notice that at first YHVH did not give the inheritance to Abram, but to his seed which was destined to become a nation. Yet, in spite of all the promises, Abram’s wife Sarai remained barren and hopes were diminishing of her ever having a child.

After a short stay in Shechem the family moved on to Bethel (House of God), where Abram built a second altar. Here again, we see the firstborn functioning in the office of a priest, possibly even offering to YHVH first fruits and the firstborn of his flocks. It was not long after YHVH had pointed out the land which He was giving to Abram's seed that a famine swept across the territory. This called-one of Elohim must have been quite surprised, if not confused, about the kind of inheritance that was bequeathed to him. Here he was, trusting his Heavenly Master to give him a land that would sustain him and his dependents throughout the generations, but instead he found himself going down to Egypt!

Alas, even now Abram's troubles and tests were not over. In fact, it seems that they were only just beginning... His fear that Pharaoh might look upon his beautiful wife and kill him in order to take her for himself was of real concern to the patriarch. He, therefore, convinced Sarai to tell a half-truth and say to the ruler of Egypt that he was her brother (ref. Genesis 20:12). This time Abram's righteousness failed the test. If there was a hero in this story, it was Sarai, who submitted to her husband's decision and, in truth, was willing to give up her life to save his. YHVH, however, not only protected Sarai's innocence and loyalty but also delivered her out of Pharaoh's hand. To top it off, He caused the latter to bless Abram and give him sheep, cattle, and other riches. Amazingly, Pharaoh did not hold Sarai's husband accountable for YHVH's wrath which fell on Egypt because of this deception!

In time Abram returned to Bethel, to the same place where he had pitched his tent and built an altar shortly after his initial arrival to the land (ref. Genesis 13:3-4). Is there a prophetic pattern here, foreshadowing what would happen to his offspring? Indeed later on, the promises to the seed (Israel) will appear to have been discarded for a time, resulting in a descent (precipitated by famine) to Egypt, an eventual emergence from there with great riches, and a return to the "house of Elohim" (that is, to the promised land).

Acting as a faithful redeemer, Abram handed back to Lot the latter's rightful inheritance, which he had administered for him until then. He also gave his nephew the first choice of land. Lot chose what appeared to be the best that the world could offer. The fact that Lot is referred to as Abram's "brother" (ref. Genesis 14:14, 16) illustrates another aspect of the seed principle, that the life of the father is in his progeny.

After Abram performed this righteous act, YHVH spoke to him again, reiterating the promise and adding to it: "*Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are -- northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you*" (Genesis 13:14-17). Abram may have given his nephew first choice in picking territory, but YHVH had offered the former much more, promising him property in all directions including that which Lot had chosen. Unlike the first promise to the patriarch's seed, this time YHVH bestowed land specifically to Abram himself.

The above promise that the descendants would be "*as the dust of the earth*" is not limited to numbers and profuseness of posterity; it also refers to the nature of the seed, which would be 'earthy' and 'natural.' Nevertheless, although up to this point YHVH has given promises to Abram, He has not yet made *a covenant* with him, as a covenant could only be ratified with blood, following testing in the fires of life's experiences.

Upon Lot's departure, Abram moved his tent to the area of the great oaks of Mamre in Hebron, where he built a third altar to YHVH. During his time there, a war broke out. Five of the city kings of the area, who were vassals of the king of Elam, rebelled against him. The latter formed a coalition with three other kings and came down to defeat the rebels. One of the five dissenting Canaanite city-states was Sodom, where Lot had made his home. When the four kings defeated the five insubordinate ones, they took captives and spoils, including Lot's family and possessions. Abram, no doubt, was very much aware of the political situation but did not join his neighbors to do battle against the

foreign forces. However, upon hearing that Lot had been taken captive, Abram, again true to his position of firstborn and redeemer, acted according to his obligation to restore his relative and retrieve the seized assets. He not only brought back that which belonged to Lot, but also recovered the possessions of the five local kings. Does this event not evoke YHVH's plan to send a Kinsman Redeemer for the lost tribes of Israel, to restore them, along with all their property, bring them back to their land, and while doing so to also save the rest of lost humanity? (ref. Matthew 13:44).

As soon as the spoils were returned, the king of Sodom wanted to strike a deal with his savior. However, Abram knew the ways of Torah righteousness and justice and therefore refused. According to Genesis 14, during that encounter or perhaps even beforehand, Melchizedek (whose name means King of Righteousness), whom we referred to in *Chapter 5 Dominion - Rule*, arrived on the scene.

In his willingness to be his "brother's keeper" and give up his own life in order to deliver him from the hand of the enemy, Abram once again fulfilled his mandate as a firstborn redeemer and deliverer. YHVH therefore sent the king of *Shalem* (Salem), who was also a priest of the Most High, to bless Abram with bread and wine. "*And he blessed him, and said, 'Blessed be Abram of the Most High Elohim, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the Most High Elohim, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.'*" *And he [Abram] gave him a tithe of all*" (Genesis 14:19-20). Unlike Cain, Abram faithfully gave to Elohim that which belonged to Him, thus continuing to qualify for the covenant.

Chapter 16

The Covenant

(Genesis Chapter 15)

After Abram was blessed by the king-priest of the Most High, YHVH came to him in a vision saying: *“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, and your exceedingly great reward”* (Genesis 15:1). Elohim was now establishing for His firstborn a principal foundation stone: *“Trust Me,” “Fear not!”* In other words, *“Do not be governed by fear, but faith, for I am your protection and your provision, the fulfillment of everything that I have spoken to you.”* Because of His steadfastness, YHVH Elohim will watch over all of His words of promise, and will be faithful to perform them. It is not going to be about religion or politics, but about a relationship with the word of the great, *“I AM that I AM.”*

“But Abram said, ‘YHVH Elohim, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’” (Genesis 15:2). After all the tests, trials, and now the blessing that was conferred upon him by Melchizedek, Abram, rather than being hopeful, was still concerned about not having an heir. It seemed to him that the only option for a successor was Eliezer of Damascus, who must have been a faithful servant in his household. YHVH, however, was very quick to respond to this proposal with the non-equivocal words: *“‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be’”* (Genesis 15:4-5).

This seed would come out of Abram’s own loins. But unlike the last time when YHVH described his descendants *“as the dust of the earth,”* now the imagery of stars is added. Again, this was in order to point out not only numerousness, but also to establish the fact that the promised seed would be like the stars - for signs, seasons, and for light - and would play a governing role in the realm of spiritual darkness.

However, Abram had come to the end of any hope that his wife Sarai would ever bear a child. He now had only one recourse, and that was to believe that YHVH would be true to keep His word of promise. Here was a demonstration of faith working in the life of a man whom YHVH had called from the womb as a firstborn, and now chose to use to father a new genus in humanity - a people who would be the carriers of *the faith of their father Abraham*.

Two millennia later, an apostle of the Messiah understood this covenant mystery, namely, that YHVH had multiplied and hidden the promised seed in many nations: “*Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to **all** the seed, not only to those who are of the Law [Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, **who is the father of us all***” (Romans 4:16 emphases added). Note that no mention is made here of a ‘spiritual father.’ It simply states that Abraham is the natural father of those who have “*the faith*” to be able to believe Elohim’s Gospel. Thus, the “seed of Abraham” is a witness to the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping Elohim.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul repeats this idea: “*And if you are Messiah’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (Galatians 3:29). We are in Messiah and belong to Him because of *the faith* that we have received from our forefather, Abraham. This faith is the birthmark that identifies us as inheritors of the promises that YHVH made to this forefather and his progeny (sperm/life). As was noted above, He responded to Abram’s question about his heir by taking him outside and having him count the stars. At this point, Abram believed YHVH, and He acknowledged his faith and accounted it to him for righteousness.

Let us take a closer look at what YHVH said to Abram about the land, while also reminding him Who had brought him out of the land of Ur. The record states that Abram’s father, Terah, took his family and left Ur to go to Canaan. Nevertheless, the Sovereign One wanted Abram to realize that *He* was the One Who was directing his circumstances: “*Then He said to him, ‘I am YHVH, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’ And he said, ‘YHVH Elohim, how shall I*

know that I will inherit it?’” (Genesis 15:7-8). Abram’s question here, in response to YHVH’s words, elicits a very interesting counter-response from the Almighty. Keep in mind that YHVH’s answer will be prophetic and will seal the promises: “So He said to him, ‘Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon’” (Genesis 15:9).

After a very tiring day of accomplishing what YHVH had asked of him and chasing the vultures off the sacrifices, evening descended upon this special firstborn and he fell into a deep sleep. It was not a pleasant sleep, as this old prophet was going to experience the frightening revelation that his life, carried on within a multitude of posterity, would be in slavery and bondage to another nation. *“Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him” (Genesis 15:12). YHVH’s prophetic words were then imparted to him: “Know certainly that your descendants/seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions” (Genesis 15:13-14).*

Suddenly there appeared between the sacrifices a pillar of fire and a cloud. It is not clear whether Abram was awake or asleep during this event, but the Mighty Redeemer and Covenant Maker Himself passed amid the cut-up pieces as a sign that He was ratifying the covenant. At the same time, He also revealed to Abram the destiny of the promised seed’s deliverance from 400 years of bondage in Egypt. *“And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces” (Genesis 15:17). Similarly, we read about the exodus out of Egypt, “And YHVH went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night” (Exodus 13:21).*

YHVH went on to reiterate the previous promise and gave Abram a detailed description of the land that was to come into his descendants’ possession: *“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates -- the*

Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Genesis 15:18-21). Notice that YHVH was saying that He has *already* given the land to Abram’s progeny. How could He make such a statement? Having given it to a father is as good as having given it to his descendants.

“Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age” (Genesis 15:15). Even though Abram was quite old at this time, YHVH assured him that he would have more years ahead of him. However, Abram still had a problem - he now had a land promised to his descendants, but did not yet have an offspring who could inherit it.

Chapter 17

Wife and Concubine

(Genesis Chapter 16)

Abram and Sarai's situation was becoming more and more paradoxical. Some of YHVH's promises were materializing very rapidly, while others, namely the obvious and most essential - that of posterity - seemed to be getting further and further away. Sarai had not only been barren all their married years, but now, to make matters worse, she was way beyond childbearing age. Thus, a very distraught spouse, following the custom of that day that allowed a wife to give her handmaid to her husband and have children vicariously through her, was about to do just that. Abram, being a righteous man, did not consider this option until Sarai brought it up. It is hard to know what his thoughts were on the matter. Did he truly believe that this was going to be the child that YHVH had promised him? Apparently, he did.

So it was that Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian maid, bore Abram his first son. As mentioned, firstborn have princely rights in the family and hence the situation was potentially very volatile. Indeed, it was not long before troubles started manifesting. After she conceived, Hagar became proud and despised her mistress. Sarai blamed her husband for the situation, while he, without retorting, gave his wife the authority to deal with this state of affairs (ref. Genesis 16:5-6).

Sarai's solution was to treat Hagar so harshly that the latter ran away. Although the child that was in Hagar's womb was not the promised seed, YHVH did have a plan for him. The Almighty sent an angel who found Hagar in the desert and conveyed a message to her: *"Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand"* (Genesis 16:9). YHVH commanded Hagar to promptly submit herself to Sarai's authority. Was this episode establishing divine order in the Abrahamic family? If so, then any challenges that would arise in the future in the form of jealousy, envy, and contention, would be met with the authority of YHVH's sealed promise.

Hagar's child received from the Creator a portion of his father's blessings of multiplicity, and his seed was destined to also become part of that "*dust of the earth.*" YHVH said of Hagar's son Ishmael and his posterity: "*I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude...*" "*He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation*" (Genesis 16:10; 17:20). This child was to have a unique disposition and nature (one that would be contrary to that of a kinsman-redeemer): "*He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren*" (Genesis 16:12).

Typically, YHVH's pronouncements to an individual have long-lasting effects which continue to be magnified when played out in history. This is certainly true of Ishmael and his progeny, including in our own days. Thus, what YHVH established by His word here in Genesis entered the very life force of the seed, along with the particular nature that would manifest wherever this seed/progeny would be dispersed.

Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. Both mother and child lived in his tents, and for a number of years things seemed to settle down. Then one day YHVH came to Abram again...

Chapter 18

The Seal of the Covenant

(Genesis Chapter 17)

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, YHVH appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty Elohim; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’ Then Abram fell on his face, and Elohim talked with him, saying: ‘As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations’... ‘I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant’” (Genesis 17:1-4, 6-7).

Thirteen years had passed since Ishmael’s birth, and by this time Abram felt that this son would be the inheritor of all his property and promises. However, YHVH was still grooming and preparing His firstborn, Abram, by continuing to put him to the test. YHVH was also about to make an addition to the covenant. As you recall, the first time He met with Abram, YHVH imparted to him the promise that he will be a “goy” (nation). Now He tells His friend that he will be the father of “goyim” - nations (plural). Elohim was not only going to make the seed as “*the dust of the earth and the stars of heaven,*” His plan also included its proliferation into nations.

Abram was so overwhelmed by YHVH’s words that he fell on his face before Him. Because of Abram’s proven devotion, YHVH’s covenant with him was now about to be sealed by the patriarch’s own blood. “*This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations... My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant*” (Genesis 17:10-13).

The fact that this covenant was going to be stamped upon the very flesh of Abram and his descendents serves to indicate that this is a ‘down to earth’ covenant, made evident in ‘flesh and blood’ reality, yet governed from the heavens by the mighty right arm of the Creator. This covenantal seal was also accompanied by a name change: *“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations”* (Genesis 17:5). The Almighty Husbandman was going to take the seed/life of Abraham and sow it into all nations, tribes, and kindred of tongues and peoples. Moreover, this seed would be marked by the faith that characterized its progenitor. The prophet Hosea foretold of this great day of YHVH’s sowing: *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered... And they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel [Yah will sow]!”* (Hosea 1:10-11).

No sooner did Abraham look up from being face down and hearing this tremendous promised blessing, when the Almighty’s tone suddenly changed into what sounded to the old patriarch like an amusing impossibility: *“As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.’ Then Abraham fell on his face [again] and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to Elohim, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then Elohim said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants/seed after him’”* (Genesis 17:15-19).

YHVH is committed to continuing the line and the blessings that He bestows upon those who belong to Him. Because up to this point the twenty patriarchs of YHVH’s firstborn genealogy all had normal births, Abraham naturally assumed that Ishmael, his firstborn, would inherit the princely position. Notice what Abraham says about him, *“Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”* But the only one who can “live before YHVH” is the one who is called and chosen for that purpose. Eliezer of Damascus did not qualify, and

neither does Ishmael. Many years later, the nation of Israel/Ephraim will say: *"He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him"* (Hosea 6:2 NAS).

This covenant that YHVH was making with Abraham through Sarah was no small matter; He was staking *His* name on it. A sign of this fact was the name change: Abram to Abra-h-am and Sarai to Sara-h. The Hebrew letter "hey" that was added to their names often signifies Y-H-V-H, where it appears twice. Thus, keeping this covenant was not going to depend on man, but on the faithfulness of the Creator, Yah, Who initiated it, declared it, and would therefore accomplish it. In fact, this covenant was going to govern all of human history.

In establishing the line of the firstborn-redeemer and inheritor of the covenant promises, YHVH's involvement was required so that a seed could emerge from a dead womb. In the future it will also take His committed oversight to see the implementation of the covenant promises through to their completion or fulfillment. And so, the beginning of the life of the son of promise was going to be marked by divine intervention like that of no other child born to the human race (except Yeshua). Sarah's son was destined to be a miracle child and a testimony of *"life from the dead,"* which signifies redemption.

After Abraham laughed at YHVH's puzzling words, the Creator told him to name his son Isaac (*"Yitzchak"* in Hebrew, meaning "he will laugh"), because through him and his seed He, YHVH, would have the last laugh... (see Psalm 2).

Chapter 19

The Son of Promise

(Genesis Chapters 18 to 20)

“But it is not that the word of Elohim has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of Elohim; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: ‘At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son’” (Romans 9:6-9 emphases added).

In order to continue to follow the line of the firstborn and the transition from an individual to a nation, it is paramount that we not confuse YHVH’s plan for the salvation of mankind with that of the establishing of His kingdom order, although these two are intricately connected. Thus, the “son of promise” is not to be confused with Yeshua, as is often the case. Paul is very clear, “...and **Sarah** shall have a son.”

When YHVH in the form of a man visited Abraham, accompanied by two other persons, the promise of the son was reiterated. The fact that YHVH deigned to appear to him must have built up Abraham’s faith. But as if that were not enough, the Creator also specified a date and pointed out that the conception of the son was tantamount to *His* very presence. Here is what He said to Abraham: “**I will certainly return** to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son” (Genesis 18:10 emphases added). Indeed this was a miracle in the making! YHVH was going to intervene in a dead womb and bring forth life. Although both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the prospect, the conception of Isaac was totally dependent upon the Spirit of the Creator and Sustainer of Life, and upon His response to the faith of one man - that of our father Abraham. Paul refers in his writings to this mystery child who was born according to the Spirit: “*But he [Ishmael] who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he [Isaac] of the freewoman through promise...But, as he [Ishmael] who was born*

according to the flesh then persecuted him [Isaac] who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now” (Galatians 4:23, 29).

YHVH told Abraham that in one year’s time Sarah would have the child of promise. And what a year it was! It began by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. At the time, Abraham was living so close to the fire and to the sulfur-filled air that he was forced to move to Gerar in the Negev (situated between Kadesh and Shur). There is no indication that Abraham (the family redeemer) had any information as to the eventual fate of his nephew Lot and family, although his plea-bargaining with YHVH may have been somewhat of an assurance that Elohim would spare his brother’s son (ref. Genesis 18:23-32), which He did. That deliverance resulted in the birth of two other firstborns in the family of Terah - Moab and Ammon (Genesis 19:31-38). Later, after becoming nations, these two would join other firstborns (according to the flesh) and try to destroy Israel, YHVH’s firstborn nation (ref. Psalm 83).

While in Gerar, the father of the faith again handed his wife over to another man, the local ruler Abimelech. It was for no other reason than the one that had compelled him to hand her over to Pharaoh, that is, to protect his own life. At the same time, YHVH was about to teach yet another king the lesson which He had taught the Egyptian monarch. YHVH came to Abimelech in a dream, warning him that his death was imminent along with that of his entire household, should he not give back Abraham’s wife. YHVH also informed Abimelech that Abraham was one of His prophets (ref. Genesis 20:7). This is the point at which we find out that Sarah was indeed Abraham’s sister, albeit a half-sister from a different mother (ref. Genesis 20:12). The whole affair was concluded with Abimelech’s blessing of Abraham materially, just as Pharaoh had done.

The stage was now set for the “son of the promise” to come on the scene. His father was the recipient of great wealth and of a covenant of peace with the local ruler. At last the family could settle down and await the birth of the miracle child whose progeny was destined to influence humanity in multiple ways.

At a later point in the history of the seed, the apostle Paul makes the following observation: *“As it is written, ‘I have made you [Abraham] a father of many nations’ in the presence of Him whom he believed -- Elohim, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did [Isaac]; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he [Abraham] became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be’”* (Romans 4:17-18). This statement highlights the covenant of multiplicity that YHVH was already in the process of bringing into being from the dead and barren womb of Sarah, truly *calling those things that do not exist as though they did*.

Chapter 20

Positioning the Firstborn

(Genesis Chapter 21)

After the promised child Isaac was born, Abraham, in obedience to the sign of the covenant, circumcised him on the eighth day. To have been the first to be circumcised on the eighth day was of great significance. This was not only a sign of YHVH's guarantee of the covenant, but the number eight ('new beginnings') also marked the inauguration of the next phase in His plan of redemption.

As already mentioned, in his very conception this child had YHVH's spiritual imprint. Moreover, Elohim declared that Isaac was Abraham's "only son" (ref. Genesis 22:2), and as such would be the sole legal heir to the covenant promise. YHVH's word is of extreme significance, as we note from one of Paul's letters: "*For the promise that he would be **the heir of the world** [cosmos] was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but [to Abraham and to his seed] through the righteousness of faith*" (Romans 4:13 emphasis added). We will expand on this in another chapter.

When Isaac was weaned, Abraham threw a great feast in his honor. It was then that Sarah happened to see Hagar's son mocking the boy, and was reminded of his mother's attitude toward her in the past. Sarah's reaction was swift, as she knew that if this child were to remain in the family, his jealousy would cause him to murder her son in order to acquire for himself the rights of the firstborn. For her part, Hagar was still contemplating that Ishmael would inherit the vast wealth and patriarchal position of his father. Fearing an imminent disaster, Sarah approached her husband and demanded that he would send away the concubine and her son (ref. Genesis 21:9-10).

While the troubled Abraham was pondering this, YHVH Himself addressed him: "*Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is also your*

seed” (Genesis 21:12-13). Thus, even though Ishmael would become a nation, the promised people of the covenant would be fathered by the one called from the womb of Sarah. At the same time, because Ishmael was also from Abraham’s loins, YHVH made sure that the cast-away Hagar would not let her son die in the wilderness, as He had given His promise that Ishmael would become “*a great nation*” (Genesis 21:18).

After the departure of Hagar and son, Abraham settled down in the land of the Philistines. There he became well known, powerful, and influential. The local king Abimelech and his army commander Phicol recognized Abraham’s position, status, and Elohim’s favor toward him. Hence, the king saw fit to take precautionary measures regarding his relationship with the patriarch and called for a unilateral agreement with him (ref. Genesis 21: 22-24).

Dwelling securely and enjoying his family and prosperity, Abraham’s days of testing appeared to be over. He could now watch and enjoy his son’s growing years, and quite likely took great pleasure in telling him over and over the history of the firstborn, and how the Almighty had called him to leave his father’s house and go to a land of promise. Abraham no doubt recounted to Isaac in detail the stories of his journeying, and the times in which Elohim met him face-to-face and in dreams. He also did not neglect to teach his son what it meant to belong to YHVH and to live before Him (ref. Genesis 18:19). So it may not have come as a great surprise to the aged patriarch when YHVH approached him and asked for what was rightfully His.

Before moving on to the next chapter, let us recap and reiterate that Isaac is the undisputed son of promise. Isaac was to inherit all that was guaranteed by the covenant. He would also be the father of a chosen nation, a nation whose members would have “the faith” of their father Abraham. As mentioned earlier, the apostle Paul refers to them as the “faith people,” explaining that YHVH had sown and hidden His treasured possession among the nations (ref. Romans 4:16-18; Genesis 17:5-6; see also Yeshua’s Parable of the Hidden Treasure, Matthew 13:44).

There is no mistake - Scripture makes it clear that Isaac, the miracle child, is the one who was “called” out of death into life in fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham and Sarah. Thus, all those who are of *the faith* are from the same father - Abraham, and mother - Sarah. *“Listen, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek YHVH: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him”* (Isaiah 51:1-2).

Chapter 21

The Ultimate Test of Obedience

(Genesis Chapter 22)

Abraham, the servant of the Most High, was so well-practiced in hearing the voice of His Heavenly Father, that when He called his name he immediately responded. This time Elohim's still small voice rang in him as loud as thunder: "*‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’*" (Genesis 22:1-2). An astonishing request! Yet Abraham, although a loving father, knew in his heart that obedience was always required of a firstborn in order to inherit the greater promises of the sovereign Elohim. Abraham also realized that as a firstborn, Isaac in fact did not belong to him, and hence he did not question the command for a minute. YHVH's statement referring to the "*only begotten son*" makes it clear that He recognized Isaac alone as the promised seed. From experience Abraham had already learned that the Creator of the universe, the Almighty Redeemer, could raise the dead, as He did in the womb of his aged and barren wife.

The record describes Abraham rising early, saddling his donkey, and going to the place that Elohim had designated. Three days later when Abraham sees the place from afar, he and Isaac take leave of the servants. Charging them to wait until he *and his son* would return, Abraham displayed complete trust in his Elohim. The patriarch "*took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire, in his hand, and a knife and the two of them went together*" (Genesis 22:6). As father and son walked side by side, Abraham's heart was bursting inside of him. Suddenly Isaac's voice broke the heavy silence that enveloped the two travelers: "*‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’*" (verse 7). The voice that would now answer Abraham's beloved was that of a tested prophet: "*My son, Elohim will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering*" (verse 8 KJV).

What did it all mean - a donkey, the wood on the back of an only begotten son, and a sacrifice to be offered on a very specific mountain? Was this a rehearsal, a prophetic prefiguring of a future event when YHVH would supply His only begotten Son, the Lamb riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Who would later carry a beam of wood for the ultimate sacrifice, in order to give up His life on a designated mountain?

Isaac was fully prepared for this occasion as he had been taught from earliest childhood that he belonged to his Elohim. Thus he willingly submitted himself to his father's will, as well as to the command of the Almighty (see Genesis 18:19; 26:5, where we are told that Abraham kept YHVH's commandments, statutes, and laws and charged his household likewise). When father and son arrived at the place that YHVH had appointed, Abraham built an altar, bound his son, and laid him upon the wood. Next, he took the knife and raised it. Abraham's heart was now fully engaged in carrying out the will of his Master when a voice from heaven called out his name, "*Abraham, Abraham!*"... "*Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear Elohim, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me*" (Genesis 22:11b-12). The sound of the voice brought Abraham back, as if he were returning from a temple in the heavens. He quickly removed his son from the altar and embraced him like never before. The fear in Isaac's soul fled under the power of his father's love. For Abraham, that moment in the comforting embrace of *his* Heavenly Father, felt like being in paradise.

The sounds of something thrashing behind them brought the attention of the two to a ram, whose horns were entangled in a bush. Ecstatic, they seized the large animal and sacrificed it in place of the "ram of Abraham," who was destined to become the father of the chosen flock of the Almighty Shepherd.

Chapter 22

Finding a Bride

(Genesis Chapter 24)

It was a sad day for Abraham and Isaac as they buried their beloved wife and mother, Sarah, in the Cave of Machpelah near Kiriath Arba (Hebron). The people of the land, the Hittites, who respected Abraham and called him “*lord, prince of Elohim*” (ref. Genesis 23:6 literal translation), were willing to sell him the field with its cave. Following Sarah’s burial, however, it did not take the elderly father very long before he helped his son to fill the empty tent. He sent the most senior and trusted of his servants to find a wife for Isaac from among his closest of kin, the family of his brother Nahor in the land of Aram (Mesopotamia).

Abraham knew that if Isaac was to father YHVH’s promised firstborn nation, his wife would have to be of the same family as themselves. He assured his messenger that YHVH would send an angel out before him, to find the woman of His choice. Abraham’s servant placed his hand under his master’s thigh (the most powerful muscle in the human body), as a sign that he would faithfully carry out the charge with which he was entrusted (by ‘power-of-attorney’). Arriving at his destination in the proximity of a local well, the man placed a ‘fleece’ out before the Almighty. He asked that the intended bride would have a servant’s heart, so that she would not only offer him a drink from the well, but would also draw water for all his camels. This ‘envoy on a mission’ did not realize that YHVH had already prepared the bride, Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel, son of Abraham’s brother Nahor - a beautiful virgin, who was chosen for Isaac.

Yet, even with her dazzling beauty and holy character, the future would reveal that the intended bride was not without a problem, the same one that had plagued Isaac’s mother. Rebecca, whose name includes the adjective *rav* (“great, many”) was barren. Interestingly and almost ironically, upon her being sent away to meet the future husband, the bride’s family did so with the following blessing: “*Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of [revava] ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the*

gates of those who hate them” (Genesis 24:60). What a wonderful and powerful blessing with which to leave her family and home! These words must have echoed in her mind as she went off to a strange land to meet an unknown bridegroom.

Before moving on, we should take note of the messenger’s words to Rebecca’s family: *“YHVH has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. And Sarah, my master’s wife, bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has”* (Genesis 24:35-36 emphasis added). Here again it is apparent that the inheritance was to be given solely to Isaac. There was no dividing of the birthright of the firstborn; Isaac received the fullness of the patriarchal position as a servant-prince in YHVH’s kingdom order. The calling upon this firstborn’s life meant that he was to father the firstborn nation, which was promised in the covenant with Abraham.

Nervous excitement must have charged the souls of Rebecca, coming in on a camel, and of Isaac, who was taking a stroll in the field, when they lifted their eyes and saw each other for the first time! Evening was quickly setting in and there did not even seem to be time to meet the father-in-law. And thus, after hearing the servant’s providential story of finding his bride, *“Isaac brought her into his mother’s tent; and he took Rebecca and she became his wife, and he loved her, so Isaac was comforted by her after his mother’s death”* (Genesis 24:67). When Isaac was weaned his father threw a big party, but upon his wedding, no mention is made of a celebration. The family may still have been mourning Sarah’s death.

Abraham, for his part, did not waste any time and remarried. The new wife, Keturah, bore him six more sons. But again, just as with Ishmael, Scripture makes it very clear who was to be the rightful inheritor in the family: *“Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east”* (Genesis 25:5-6).

Chapter 23

The Twins

(Genesis Chapters 25:19-34 and 27)

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca, yet twenty years later he was still fatherless. The ‘miracle son,’ like his father before him, had to face the fact that his wife was barren. And so Isaac began to intercede and pray to YHVH on her behalf. Indeed, it did not take long for the Redeemer to intervene and bring forth life in another infertile womb! Rebecca conceived and soon found that she was carrying twins. The mother-to-be sensed that a struggle was taking place inside her, somewhat like a wrestling match. When she inquired of YHVH about this situation, the prophetic ‘ultra sound’ of His voice spoke thus: *“Two nations [goyim] are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger”* (Genesis 25:23). What confusion and mix-up in what was supposed to be divine order! *What was this all about; the older, the firstborn, shall serve the younger?* If this indeed were to be the case, then Isaac was about to have a problem on his hands!

In today’s world there is not too much appreciation for the expression of a baby’s sensibilities in utero. Yet Rebecca’s little ones seemed to know all about the birth order, that it entailed leadership position and a princely portion within the family. And so, the brothers were already at odds, fighting one another in their mother’s womb as to who would be the first one out. Eventually the stronger one prevailed and came out hairy and red (*adom* - related to *adama*, earth), while his brother was still pulling on his heel. However, being the first one out was not necessarily in his favor, as the decree of Elohim was going to govern his future.

The Almighty’s answer to Rebecca’s inquiry (ref. Genesis 25:22) was that the struggling sons within her would become two nations, two peoples with two separate destinies. Esau, who was the first one out, was therefore granted ‘automatic’ birthright leadership in the family, without having to merit it. He had merely proven himself the stronger of the two. Having fought successfully for his position, he was now its recipient. Jacob, on the

other hand, had held on to his brother's heel and thus received the name "*Ya'akov*," which means "heel" and "follow."

In accordance with the Almighty's prophetic utterance to Rebecca, even before their birth the two brothers were already representatives of entire nations (*goyim*). This becomes very important in order to understand His covenant with their grandfather Abraham, a covenant that was now continuing to be fulfilled through their parents. Paul explains it this way: "*And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of Elohim according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'*" (Romans 9:10-13; Malachi 1:3). This may seem entirely unfair to our natural way of thinking and judging matters, but YHVH Himself would be governing the lives and affairs of the two brothers, and thus the entire process was going to be subject to His mercy and justice (see Romans 9:14-18).

Moreover, being the 'automatic' recipient of the firstborn position upon birth, Esau could not be the *chosen* firstborn nation. However, in order for Jacob to become the *chosen* one, YHVH had to cause Esau to give up the princely portion of the birthright to his younger brother. Thus Jacob would receive it from the Almighty and not by the natural birth order. These divine developments in the family of Isaac were not altogether extraordinary. What seemed impossible for man was not impossible for a sovereign Elohim, and so the story goes as follows...

Early one morning the hunter in the family, Esau, went out for some game. Much to his dismay, he had a bad day and felt as though he was at death's door by the time he reached home. As YHVH's destiny would have it, Jacob just happened to be stirring some lentil soup outside his mother's tent and did not hesitate for a minute to strike a bargain with his brother. Esau reasoned that his princely standing in the family would not do him any good if he were dead, so he agreed to give Jacob his birthright position for a bowl of soup. However, should he not die, he was sure that eventually his aging father would lay

his right hand on his head, as was the custom, and would bestow upon him the double portion that belonged to the birthright status.³ He also knew that his father favored and loved him more than he did Jacob, and so Esau had no doubt in his mind that he would still get the right hand blessing. But what he did not think through, was that if Jacob had the princely portion and he the double portion, neither would qualify to be the prince/redeemer, a fact that could spell disaster for this family. It would be doubly problematic for a family/nation which belonged to the Creator for the very purpose of the redemption and restoration of the creation. Like Cain, who withheld the first fruit and lost his birthright, Esau too gave it up without regarding the consequences (ref. Hebrews 12:16-17).

By the time that Isaac was about to confer the double portion blessing upon Esau, Rebecca understood that it was imperative that Jacob be its recipient. She remembered the prophecy given to her while she was pregnant, and thus would have had a definite interest in Jacob receiving the birthright. At the same time, she could not afford to have it divided; hence, Rebecca must have known about the deal struck between her sons. The matriarch did not waste any time and called Jacob to her side. Mother and son were about to embark on a hazardous attempt to receive the blessing, an endeavor that might have turned into a curse. Rebecca needed a redeemer in the family, and thus took the risk of carrying out a plan that could easily have failed had it not been accompanied by YHVH's sovereign intervention, in spite of its moral shortcomings. The following is the scriptural narrative, starting with Rebecca's words to Jacob:

“Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.” And Jacob said to Rebecca his mother, ‘Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall

³ Double portion: a right hand blessing conferred before the death of the father upon a chosen faithful son. It is an extra measure of wealth that would enable the recipient to redeem a captured or impoverished family member or lost property.

bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.’ But his mother said to him, ‘Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.’ And he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. Then Rebecca took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck” (Genesis 27:8-16).

While Jacob was in the presence of his father, lying about his identity, his mother was holding her breath and praying that this masquerade would succeed. After emerging from his father’s presence victoriously, Jacob and his mother danced for joy. Their jubilation, however, would be short-lived as Esau arrived home with his game. What was about to take place would influence the entire history of the family, even up to this very day. These two brothers/nations were going to face the same difficulty which centuries earlier had plagued Cain and his brother Abel.

Chapter 24

Isaac Bestows Blessings

(Genesis Chapters 27 to 28:9)

Jacob's ears were still resonating with the prophetic blessing of the double portion that he had just been given: *"Therefore may Elohim give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!"* (Genesis 27:28-29). Before he was able to absorb what had transpired, his brother, the heir-presumptive, arrived on the scene with savory food. Esau was full of anticipation at the thought of receiving the blessing of the firstborn and its great riches (material and otherwise). This expectant young man was unmindful of the fact that some time earlier he had despised this (very) birthright. What a shock to both father and son when they discovered that the right hand blessing had been given to Jacob (*Ya'acov*, the "supplanter," according to Esau)! Isaac, who obviously was not aware of the bargain made between the sons, was greatly distressed (ref. Genesis 27:33) as he assumed that he had just split the birthright.

Esau, however, was quick to clarify this detail, although only partially and imprecisely, when he cried out: *"Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!"* (Genesis 27:36). With tears of woe Esau pleaded for an equal blessing, but his father, who understood the protocol extremely well, knew that only one member of the family could be the recipient of this judicial right. We must remember that Esau despised the birthright, which was holy in the eyes of YHVH.

In a commentary presented in one of the books of the New Covenant, the writer to the chosen Hebrew people mentions this episode in the life of the forefathers. He subsequently warns the people of the Abrahamic faith not to take lightly the holiness and righteousness of their calling, and not to be profane as Esau, who for a morsel of food

sold his birthright. After it was given to another, it was too late and there was no room left for repentance, although Esau sought it with tears (ref. Hebrews 12:16-17).

Hearing the pleas of his distraught son, Isaac was moved with compassion and under the guiding hand of the Spirit prophesied: *“Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck”* (Genesis 27:39-40). The next statement about Esau (following this prophecy), is destined to mark the history and character of the nation that he would father: *“So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart... ‘I will kill my brother Jacob’”* (Genesis 27:41). Thus, the relationship between the two brothers was now set in an atmosphere of jealousy, hatred, and murder.

Rebecca realized that Esau posed a threat to Jacob’s life, and therefore urged her beloved son to obey her once again and flee to her brother Laban in Haran. The matriarch was hoping that Esau’s anger and hatred would subside quickly, but YHVH had another plan for His chosen one. Jacob, now equipped with the full rights of a firstborn in the genealogy of the firstborn of YHVH’s kingdom order, was about to leave and return to the place where his family’s history had begun when YHVH first called his grandfather to leave *his* family and go to another land. Let us bear in mind that the double portion blessing, which Jacob received by the laying on of the right hand (ref. Genesis 27:28-29), was more than a blessing conferred upon an individual; it would apply to the entire nation that was to come forth out of his loins. His very life would carry the anointing of the princely position (that which he obtained from Esau), as well as the double portion blessing. But the fulfillment of all that was promised and prophesied was going to take the sovereign oversight and watchfulness of the Almighty One of Abraham and Isaac.

In the aftermath of all that happened, Rebecca must have recounted to her husband everything that had taken place, including the word that YHVH had spoken to her while the children were still in her womb. Isaac believed his wife, and being full of faith and

the anointing of a patriarch, he blessed Jacob once again before the latter left home: *“May Elohim Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which Elohim gave to Abraham”* (Genesis 28:3-4). At the same time, Isaac also instructed his son not to take a wife from among the Canaanites, but from his own relatives.

Meanwhile, Esau was broiling with the venom of revenge but was not able to carry out any of his schemes toward his brother, as their father was still alive. After hearing Isaac’s instructions to Jacob not to take a foreign wife, he tried to make amends by marrying an Ishmaelite, as his two Hittite wives were very displeasing to his parents (ref. Genesis 28:8-9).

With tears in their eyes, Rebecca and Isaac embraced Jacob and bid him farewell. As the next phase of this forefather’s story is about to unfold, each detail will continue to point to YHVH’s kingdom order and to His jurisdiction, faithfulness, and ability to watch over His word to perform it.

Chapter 25

Love at First Sight

(Genesis Chapter 28:10-22)

Jacob's journey had barely begun when he arrived by a mountain and lay down to rest for the night, using a stone for a pillow. During the night he had a dream: "*Behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of Elohim were ascending and descending on it. And behold, YHVH stood above it and said: 'I am YHVH the Elohim of Abraham your father and the Elohim of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you'*" (Genesis 28:12-15).

Waking up from this dream awed and astounded, Jacob declared the place to be "*the gate of heaven,*" naming it *Bethel* (the House of God) (verses 17, 19). What a remarkable prophetic word of promise and hope for himself and for his posterity! The Sovereign One of his fathers was going to watch over him and would bring him back to this place and this land. Seeing the heavenly servants of Elohim coming to him from His presence and then returning, only to keep coming again, signaled to Jacob that they were guarding, ministering, and carrying out the divine will for his life and his future, which made for quite an inauguration to his journey!

Jacob set up the stone that he had used for a headrest and anointed it with oil. He then made a 'deal' with the Elohim of heaven. Daring to address the Creator in his typical manner, Jacob said: "*If You, Elohim, will be with me and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then YHVH, You shall be my Elohim,*" to which he added the following words: "*And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be Elohim's house, and of all*

that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You” (Genesis 28:20-22, partially paraphrased).

YHVH’s elected one, when making a deal with his father’s Elohim, promised to give back a tenth of everything that *He* would grant him. The above arrangement proves that Jacob was really looking out after himself and his own interests, and had not yet learned what it was to be the custodian of the birth-rights of a redeemer.

YHVH wasted no time in introducing Jacob to his future wife. When the wayfarer arrived at a covered well in the land of his ancestors, a young maiden appeared with her flock of sheep and was pointed out as the daughter of his mother’s brother, Laban. It was love at first sight. Jacob proceeded to remove the stone lid. His mother, years before, perhaps even at the same well, drew water to give to the servant of his grandfather and his camels. Now he repaid the favor and watered the flock of this “ewe” - Rachel (meaning *ewe* in Hebrew).

Chapter 26

Wheeling and Dealing

(Genesis Chapters 29 to 31:13)

As the drama of the chosen firstborn continues to unfold, we see Jacob meeting his uncle and future father-in-law, Laban. After a month of a ‘working vacation,’ Laban approached Jacob concerning remuneration while the latter, for his part, proposed to make an arrangement with his uncle for the hand of his daughter Rachel. But while Jacob was content to serve Laban seven years for his younger daughter, there were a few cultural lessons that he was about to learn. When the seven years were up, a wedding feast was prepared and the veiled bride was presented to the excited bridegroom. The festivities went on late into the evening and then it was time for the bride and bridegroom to retire to their tent. The next morning, however, upon waking up Jacob had one big surprise - Laban had given him Rachel’s older sister, Leah! Yet as shocked as the new groom was, he himself was no stranger to cover-up and impersonation.

Jacob no doubt rushed off immediately to pay a visit to his new father-in-law, only to learn that the custom of their land was to marry off the eldest first (at least according to Laban). Shrewd businessman that he was, Laban proposed that Jacob serve him another seven years for the hand of Rachel. Jacob loved the young maiden so much that he agreed. But happily for Jacob, in spite of the long-term work commitment, Laban gave Rachel to him a week after the first nuptial with her sister, although it countered a Torah ruling: *“Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive”* (Leviticus 18:18).

It was not long before Leah felt that her husband’s heart was not turned toward her, and so YHVH opened her womb, enabling her to give birth to Jacob’s firstborn, Reuben. Subsequently she had three more children (Simeon, Levi, and Judah), while Rachel remained barren. In her distress, Rachel started to envy her sister and threatened Jacob that if he did not give her children she would die, thus pronouncing a curse upon herself.

Jacob's angry response was that he was not Elohim, and therefore was not responsible for opening her womb. Rachel then, like Sarah, gave to her husband her maid Bilha who birthed a son, Dan. This handmaid brought forth yet another son, Naphtali. Rachel began to feel victorious over her sister who was still competing for love and recognition. Because of this, Leah gave her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob. The handmaid conceived and gave birth to two more children, whom Leah named Gad and Asher. But still not satisfied in this race, Leah allowed her sister to purchase from her the mandrakes that her son Reuben had found in the field, in exchange for sleeping with Jacob. She was hoping that she could still buy her husband's love by providing him with even more offspring. Indeed, YHVH saw fit to give Leah three more children - Issachar, Zebulon, and a daughter, Dinah.

At last YHVH heard Rachel's plea and opened her womb, but only after Jacob's second seven years of work commitment to Laban was completed. During those fourteen years, Laban laid claim to all of Jacob's possessions, including his wives and children. But now that the time was up, the hired-laborer was free of all obligations. And so Joseph, Rachel's first child, was born to a 'free' family/father. Jacob was extremely elated over this birth and proceeded to make arrangements to go back to his native land. However, Laban refused to release his son-in-law and his daughters, grandchildren, and their stock. In his greediness he began to negotiate again with Jacob over his wages. This time the latter was able to outwit his deceptive master, as YHVH showed him in a dream what to do in order to increase his own flocks (ref. Genesis 31:7-12) - so much so that over time he practically wrested all of his father-in-law's wealth from him. Laban's sons became resentful of their wealthy cousin and brother-in-law, who they felt was getting rich at their expense.

In the same dream that YHVH used to instruct Jacob about increasing his flocks, He also reminded him that He, YHVH, was the Elohim of Bethel (the place where Jacob struck a 'deal' with Him), and that it was time to start preparing to go back there. Jacob was therefore compelled to devise a strategy that would enable him not only to get away, but also to take all of his riches with him to the promised land. His situation was not simple,

as he now had enemies behind him, *and* quite likely also ahead of him. He had no idea how his brother Esau would greet him after all these years.

Having left his home single, Jacob was now about to make his way back to the land with a large family, and thus we see that YHVH was already fulfilling the covenant promise of multiplicity.

Chapter 27

Jacob Returns Home

(Genesis Chapters 31:22 to 32:12)

Jacob imagined that he could head for home by sneaking out the back door, and so proceeded to do just that. However, when Laban got word that his son-in-law had departed with all his family and flocks, he wasted no time and set out to look for them. Moreover, when he realized that the household idols were also gone, he became doubly angry!

In spite of having been warned by YHVH in a dream not to “*speak to Jacob neither good nor bad*” (Genesis 31:24), at the juncture where pursuer and pursued met, Laban was still contemplating retrieving what he thought was rightfully his. He also demanded to check the camp of the runaways in order to find his lost idols. Little did he know that his daughter, Rachel, had hidden them beneath the camel saddle upon which she sat, and now refused to get up under the pretext that she was in “*the manner of women*” (referring to the monthly cycle). Jacob, who was oblivious of his wife’s trickery, was once again feeling unjustly treated by his father-in-law as the latter was now scrupulously examining his possessions. Indeed, had it not been for the Elohim of his fathers, Laban, who was making his point, would have left Jacob empty-handed: “*These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?*” (Genesis 31:43).

Laban had absolutely no compunctions about cheating his nephew and lying to him. According to Jacob’s admittance, during the twenty years that he had served Laban the latter “*changed my wages ten times*” (ref. Genesis 31:7, 41). But as we have seen, YHVH was watching consistently over His servant, who at times had actually prospered even at the expense of his boss. And so, in order for His firstborn to be completely severed from any further obligations to his father-in-law, YHVH had to set up this encounter between Jacob and Laban. It also afforded Laban an opportunity to send off

his family with a final blessing of separation and releasing to Jacob all that the latter had acquired from him, including his daughters (ref. Genesis 31:55).

Elohim's warning to Laban also served to alert him to the fact that Jacob was destined to become powerful and influential. It was this that had prompted him to make a pact with Jacob, which was to guarantee that each would respect the other's life and property. In order to commemorate their agreement, the two proceeded to pile up a heap of rocks, which Jacob named *Gal-Ed* ("a testimonial rock pile"), saying: "*This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm*" (Genesis 31:52). Jacob, as the bearer of the priestly role of the firstborn, sealed this covenant by offering up a sacrifice to the Elohim of his fathers, after which he and Laban shared a banquet. The following morning Laban gave his final consent to the separation when he kissed and blessed his daughters and each of the grandchildren.

With a deep sigh of relief now that the issues with his father-in-law were concluded satisfactorily, Jacob continued on his journey with his family, but before long he had a surprise encounter. Quite unexpectedly, YHVH's angels 'ran into' the weary traveler (Genesis 32:1 literal translation paraphrased). Could they be the ones whom he had seen climbing up and down the ladder some twenty years earlier? (ref. Genesis 28:12). Jacob declared this band of angels to be, literally, "Elohim's camp" and named the site of their appearance *Mahanaim* ("two camps" or a "double camp"), possibly referring to the two camps - the angels' and his. Soon it will become evident that the idea of a "dual camp" must have inspired him, because before meeting his brother Esau he will divide his own household into two camps or companies. Additionally, the question as to whether this was also a hint regarding the future destiny of Jacob's family at a much later stage, when it would be split into two separate "camps/houses," begs to be raised.

Recalling his brother's anger and hatred toward him years earlier, Jacob was now dispatching some of his servants with gifts to inform Esau that he was returning home. The servants came back with a frightening report - Esau was advancing with 400 men.

With very little time on his hands, Jacob arranged his family according to his preference and provided the greatest protection for his beloved wife and her child, Joseph. In a manner so typical of him, Jacob reasoned that if he were to divide his household into two camps and Esau attacked the one, the other would still have a chance to escape.

Nevertheless, since over the years he had become a little better acquainted with the Elohim of his fathers, a somewhat more humble Jacob was now beseeching YHVH: “*O Elohim of my father Abraham and Elohim of my father Isaac, YHVH who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you;’ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies [literally “camps”]. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children*” (Genesis 32:9-11). At this point, Jacob also reminded YHVH about His promise to multiply his seed like “*the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered*” (Genesis 32:12).

Esau’s brother was beginning to demonstrate here the true heart of a firstborn. He obviously was no longer ignorant of the fact that he was but a servant. Although he carried the full birthright he did not exhibit pride or arrogance; in fact, he even addressed himself as *Esau’s servant* (ref. Genesis 32:4). Recognizing the importance of the office that had been entrusted to him and what it meant in YHVH’s plan of redemption, in the above quote we hear Jacob crying out, “*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant...*”

At the same time, being subject to typical human weaknesses, fear seized Jacob and caused him to try his best to appease his brother. YHVH, for *His* part, had already taken care of Jacob’s concerns by prospering Esau during his (Jacob’s) sojourn in Haran. Esau, who added to his harem one of his Uncle Ishmael’s daughters, had gone to live on the other side of the Jordan. This move most likely was encouraged by his father Isaac to avoid a possible conflict with the rightful heir when the time would come for the latter to claim his inheritance.

Chapter 28

The Wrestling Match

(Genesis Chapter 32:24-32)

The night before the unpredictable reunion between the brothers, when Jacob “*was left alone*” (Genesis 32:24), he sought the Elohim of his fathers. By the ford of the Jabbok (*Yabbok*), the returning firstborn found himself in a very desperate situation indeed. After all, Esau, whom he was attempting to appease, was on his way to meet him with an army of 400 men, which made the future appear quite dismal (ref. Genesis 32:14-22).

Suddenly, the silhouette of a *Man* appeared out of the darkness. Before he knew it, the bewildered Jacob found himself in a wrestling match. He was no stranger to struggles however, for even in the womb he had contended with his twin. Jacob therefore recovered rapidly from his surprise, fought fiercely, and would not let go of his opponent. It would seem that his rival had no other recourse than to take control, and so “*touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him*” (verse 25). But touching Jacob in the socket of his hip was an intentional and premeditated move. The natural strength of Isaac’s son had to be “poured out”⁴ during the “night season” so that in the morning, at the breaking of the day, he would no longer trust in his own strength but in the One Who ended up both overpowering and blessing him. We of the redeemed remnant of Jacob’s progeny also need to bear in mind that YHVH’s “*strength is made perfect in [our] weakness*” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

At daybreak, the maimed competitor was still holding on to the *Man*, while the latter was asking him to let go, “*for the day breaks.*” Jacob, who was quick to assess the situation, responded: “*I will not let You go unless You bless me!*” (verse 26). The *Man* was reluctant to bestow the blessing right then and there, as the original ‘deal’ was that Jacob had to return *all the way* to Bethel in order to receive it (ref. Genesis 28:15). Notwithstanding, Jacob persisted and insisted and would not let Him go. “*So He said to*

⁴ In Hebrew, the root of *Yabbok* is connected to *poured out*, and also to *dust* and *struggle*.

him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with Elohim and with men, and prevailed'" (Genesis 32:27-28). The *Man* was now conferring upon YHVH's servant the blessings of his *true* identity, which was more than just a name - it was a title and a declaration of the position that had also been held by his forefathers. Jacob was no longer to be the "follower," but **Israel**, the *prince who rules having prevailed with Elohim and men* (ref. verse 28). Nevertheless, still not entirely satisfied, he responded, "Tell me **Your** name, I pray." And He said, 'Why is it that you ask about My name?'" (verse 29 emphasis added).

Who was this *Man*, Whom Jacob would later call "El," naming the site of his encounter with Him "*Peniel*" and saying, "*I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life has been preserved*"? (Genesis 32:30). The one other occasion when Jacob named a place was when he saw YHVH standing above a ladder upon which angels were ascending and descending. Witnessing that sight, he called the place *Bethel* - House of Elohim (ref. Genesis 28:19). Is there a connection between these two episodes and places? And is this a key to the identity of the *Man* Whom Jacob had asked to bless him? Some twenty years earlier at that Bethel encounter, YHVH had revealed Himself to him in a dream and told him His name (Genesis 28:13). Thus, Jacob's present question as to the *Man's* identity did not require an answer. Regarding his request to be blessed, what did Jacob have in mind? Was it the blessings of the covenant, which the "*Elohim of Bethel*" had promised to give him in that first meeting? Having now received only the new *name*, the final ratification of the Bethel pledge will have to wait until his return to that place.

In the meantime, assured that all was well, Jacob/Israel was able to meet his brother in the spirit of humility. YHVH had already taken care, at least temporarily, of Esau's anger. What a wonderful scene of reconciliation is depicted when the two brothers embrace, crying on each other's shoulders! (ref. Genesis 33:4). Esau then invited Jacob to join him, possibly seeing this as an opportunity for his brother to live under *his* jurisdiction; but that was not to be the case. Jacob remembered well YHVH's words:

“Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you” (Genesis 31:3).

Chapter 29

From Shechem to Bethel

(Genesis Chapters 33 to 35:15)

After Jacob's encounter with the *Man* and the peaceable reunion with Esau, he crossed the Jordan and entered the land through the Tirzah Valley, which was the main eastern gateway into his inheritance. This valley leads to the area of Shechem, which sits between two mountains named Gerizim and Ebal (destined to be called the Mount of Blessing and the Mount of Cursing following the exodus). It was through this gate and valley that Abram and Sarai walked when they arrived in the land many years earlier, and it was here that Jacob acquired his first parcel of land from Hamor, the father of Shechem the Hivite. Let us examine the encounter between these two families - Jacob and Shechem's - an encounter which illustrates how YHVH was going about establishing His governmental order in the land.

Jacob/Israel, whose new name indicates his position as a prince who rules with Elohim, came in direct contact with another prince. The Canaanites did not recognize Israel's position nor did he flaunt it in any way. He had been humbled before the Almighty during his twenty years of learning to be a servant, and also by his recent experience with the *Man*, as is the case with anyone who sees Elohim face-to-face.

Hamor's son Shechem is described as "*the prince of the country*" (Genesis 34:2). His interest in Dinah, Leah's daughter, was not necessarily love at first sight. Shechem defiled Jacob's daughter and laid with her by force, therefore in accordance with Torah, retribution had to be carried out (ref. Deuteronomy 22:20-30), especially so since Shechem had actually kidnapped the girl (ref. Genesis 34:26). Yet more was going on here than meets the eye... This episode epitomizes the struggle for the spiritual and physical dominion over the land of Canaan.

YHVH needed to establish His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob, but as long as there was a Canaanite/Hivite prince ruling that part of the land, conflict

between these two firstborns was inevitable. Thus, YHVH used the ensuing circumstances in order to deal with Prince Shechem. When Dinah's brothers heard how their sister had been disgraced, their anger was kindled. Reuben, being the firstborn and avenger of the family, had the responsibility of dealing with this matter but failed to live up to his duty and to take charge. Simeon and Levi, the next in line, therefore took matters into their own hands, executing the justice due to the offenders. However, in so doing they were usurping their father and older brother's positions, as they did not acquire their permission. Their angry reaction and out-of-order approach ultimately cost each of them the right to the princely portion of the birthright, following Reuben's loss of this status years later.

Jacob was distraught over what Simeon and Levi had done in deceiving, slaughtering, and plundering the inhabitants of Shechem's city. He was also afraid that his small band would be subject to the reaction of the other clans of the land. However, YHVH put great terror upon the Canaanites and so they refrained from pursuing the one who belonged to Him (ref. Genesis 35:5). Thus gradually, YHVH was setting up Jacob's jurisdiction over the territory.

With the Shechem episode behind him, Jacob was charged by YHVH to go back to Bethel and to build an altar there. This firstborn knew that before he could comply with YHVH's directive, he and his family would have to purify themselves, change their garments, and most certainly put away all foreign gods (ref. Genesis 35:2). It was time for Jacob to keep the vow which he had made in his first encounter with YHVH (ref. Genesis 28:20-21). Hence, he and his family prepared to meet the One Who had promised to bring him back to his father's house. And so, another aspect of Jacob's relationship with his Elohim was about to unfold.

Following the arrival of Jacob at Bethel and the completion of building the altar there, Rebecca's wet nurse Deborah died and was buried under an oak tree just below Bethel (ref. Genesis 35:8). Why was this event recorded, while neither Rebecca nor Leah's

deaths are even mentioned? In order to understand the significance of Deborah's presence in the life of Rebecca and her son Jacob, let us do some backtracking.

Just before Rebecca, along with her wet nurse and her other maidens (ref. Genesis 24:59), was to leave her family and be joined to her future husband, she was conferred with the following blessing: "*Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands [revava]; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them*" (Genesis 24:60).

Deborah, the wet nurse who had heard the blessing and later witnessed the beginning of its fulfillment, was now greatly mourned - so much so that when she was laid to rest under an oak tree, the place was named the Oak of Weeping (*Allon-Bacuth*). Thus Deborah, who may well have nursed Esau and Jacob and had assisted the family as it began to multiply, was actively involved in nurturing the progeny, helping to bring about the very realization of the promises. Her passing away, therefore, signified a change; her role was now going to be replaced by another.

When YHVH made himself known to Jacob some twenty years earlier, He said to him: "*I am YHVH, the Elohim of your father Abraham and the Elohim of Isaac*" (Genesis 28:13). However, immediately after Deborah's burial YHVH introduced himself to Jacob as (in Hebrew) "*El Shaddai*" (literally, the Breasted One, Genesis 35:11). Herein is a key to the transition that Jacob the man was about to undergo - a transition from an individual into "*Israel the nation and a company of nations.*" By revealing Himself as El Shaddai, YHVH was saying that *He* would be their source of strength and substance ("wet nurse"), causing His chosen "firstborn nation Israel" to *be fruitful and multiply*, and to become "*a nation and a company of nations...*" and also, "*...kings shall come from [their] body*" (Genesis 35:11).

The imperative "multiply" is "*rveh*," hence the similarity to the above blessing upon Rebecca (*revava*). YHVH is consistently referring to the covenant of land, positional authority, and multiplicity that He made with Abraham and reiterated to Isaac. Now He

repeats the same words to Jacob/Israel, as well as to the matriarchs. The promises made to the forefathers were the means that YHVH used for revealing and establishing His kingdom, and He is still using them in the same way today.

Following this blessing, which sealed the earlier promises that he was given, Jacob set up a pillar, poured out a drink offering upon it, and anointed it with oil. Perhaps it was this same pillar/stone that he had anointed and left behind the first time he spent the night at Bethel (ref. Genesis 28:18). Completing these priestly duties, Jacob departed from this holy place and traveled south towards his father's tent in Kiriath-Arba (Hebron).

Chapter 30

Benjamin - Son of the Right Hand

(Genesis Chapter 35:16-21)

In the above Bethel episode we see YHVH's kingdom order firmly intact, with Jacob functioning as a prince and a priest before His Elohim. Again we must bring to mind the fact that Jacob was more than just an individual firstborn. He did not represent merely himself before the Almighty; rather, he was a personification, as it were, of YHVH's royal priesthood and the nation chosen and destined to serve and live before Him.

On the journey, near Ephrath (Bethlehem), Rachel began to go into labor while the travelers were still some distance from their destination. Consequently, it was on that road that she gave birth to Jacob's only son to be born in the land of his inheritance. This birth, however, was at great cost as Rachel died in the process, but not before naming her son *Ben-Oni* ("son of my strength"). Soon after, Jacob renamed him *Benjamin* ("son of the right hand"); this was the only son to actually be named by Jacob himself. Rachel's untimely death brings to mind the fact that her marriage to Jacob contradicted the Torah law that forbids sisters to be married to the same man at the same time (ref. Leviticus 18:18), as well as Rachel's self-inflicted curse while she was still barren (ref. Genesis 30:1). There is also the matter of her stealing her father's household idols and then lying to him about them (ref. 31:34-35).

When he named his son after the right hand, Jacob had in mind something quite specific. His intent was to give the blessing of the right hand ("double portion") to one of Rachel's children. Thus, if something were to happen to Joseph, there would be a 'back up' son of Rachel.

As a tribe, the Benjaminites committed an atrocious act known as the 'Concubine at Gibeah' (ref. Judges Chapters 19-21). Their resultant brokenness and near annihilation seems to have brought forth an anointing for restoration and reconciliation in this tribe more than others, as indicated in the following:

- Benjamin's territory lay between the areas apportioned to the two firstborn - Judah and Ephraim. There were times when members of his tribe mediated between situations involving the two 'chieftains.'
- Even before the tribe came into being, it was Benjamin's presence that motivated Joseph to reveal himself to his brothers (ref. Genesis 43:16, 29-30; 45:1-3, 14).
- Saul the Benjaminite united, albeit temporarily, the fragmented nation (ref. 1 Samuel 11:7).
- Another Benjaminite, Shimei, along with a thousand of his brothers, crossed over the Jordan in order to bring King David back to rule over both houses after the war with his son Absalom (ref. 2 Samuel 19:16-18).
- Mordechai, a *Jew* from the tribe of Benjamin, together with his cousin/niece, saved the day when the existence of world Jewry was in jeopardy in the Persian Empire. It was by their actions that the Agagite/Amalekite Prince Haman and his progeny were annihilated (thus partially fulfilling the mandate that was given to King Saul who failed to comply, ref. 1 Samuel 15:2-3, 9). Consequently, many non-Jews at that time joined the house of Israel ("*became Jews*" ref. Esther 8:17), while Mordechai is said to have been well-received by his brethren, whose good and peace he was seeking (ref. Esther 10:3). His exploits, as well as his treatment of his orphaned relative whom he took under his wing, also classify Mordechai as a firstborn redeemer.
- It was Rabbi Saul (Paul), from the tribe of Benjamin, who took the Gospel of the kingdom of Elohim and His Messiah to the nations, where YHVH had dispersed the descendants of the tribes of Israel, in order to bring them back to the covenant (ref. Romans 11:1, 25-26).

After Jacob buried his beloved wife Rachel in Bethlehem, he arrived at the home of his youth, to be greeted by a very elderly father. Jacob had longed to introduce his family to Isaac, especially his pride and joy Rachel with her two sons, but alas, that was not to be the case. The old patriarch was naturally elated to have his chosen firstborn home again, with the progeny that would fulfill the promises that YHVH had made to him so many years before.

At the age of 180 years, Isaac breathed his last and his two sons buried him alongside his father Abraham at Kiriath-Arba (Hebron). With the death of Isaac, Jacob was now the only living elder in the firstborn genealogy with all the birth-rights, being the twenty-second from Adam. He had the legal rights of YHVH's kingly-priestly governance in the family of Noah and was the sole head of the tent of Shem, although as we have seen, at this point Jacob actually represented the chosen nation. Interestingly, peace between the two brothers was still unbroken, as Esau did not contest his sibling's right to the inheritance.

Chapter 31

Family Squabbles

(Genesis Chapter 37)

Sometime after Jacob settled down in the land, troubles began to brew in his family. He had given his son Joseph a very special garment. This aroused in his other sons a suspicion that their father was favoring Rachel's firstborn and was grooming him for a particular role in the family. Being awarded such a royal garment (see 2 Samuel 13:18) usually signified that the recipient would inherit the birthright. The brothers regarded only Reuben, who was the first of the firstborn, as having the jurisdiction of the princely leader. Leah, no doubt, also had her opinion on these issues. What made matters worse was the fact that as he was helping the sons of the concubines pasture the flocks, Joseph would occasionally come home and give his father a bad report about them (ref. Genesis 37:2). Before long, all the brothers were caught up in jealousy, envy, and dislike toward their sibling, leading to more animosity, resentment, and hostility.

But as if these issues were not enough to tarnish the relationships within Jacob's family, Joseph also had some dreams regarding his kin; being young and immature, he could not resist the temptation to share them. In these dreams, he saw his father, step-mother, and brothers bowing down to him. His siblings' envy was now primed to hatred and murder. They could not wait for an opportune moment to dispense with him. The same conflict that had arisen between Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob, had now resurfaced anew in YHVH's people. These confrontations were always at the forefront of the selection of the one who was to inherit the birthright. Thankfully, YHVH was in control of this family's destiny. Having sworn by Himself that He would keep His covenant with Abraham, YHVH purposed that a chosen firstborn nation would emerge from the son of promise - Isaac.

At seventeen years of age, Joseph was dispatched by his father to look after the welfare of his brothers and the flocks. Once again, it is apparent that Jacob was aiming to ultimately make him the leader of the family. When Joseph finally caught up with his

brothers in the Dothan Valley, they had already determined to do away with him. Because Reuben as firstborn was responsible for the well-being of the family, he was able to convince the others to throw Joseph into an empty cistern instead. Unknown to his siblings, he reasoned to himself that later he would rescue Joseph and return him to their father. Contrary to Reuben's expectations, however, during his absence the sovereign Elohim occasioned a camel train of Ishmaelites to come by on their way to Egypt. Upon seeing them, Judah had a brainstorm. He decided that his brother's life could be spared by selling him as a slave, while at the same time they could make a little profit. A deal was struck for twenty shekels of silver. Later upon arriving in Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers.

When Reuben returned to the pit and found that Joseph was no longer there, he tore his garment as fear gripped him. He knew that his position as a kinsman-redeemer was at risk. Should Jacob hear about his lack of trustworthiness and inability to protect his brother, he most certainly would terminate his princely role as a firstborn and give it to another. This is why he cried out: "*Where shall I go?*" (Genesis 37:30). Reuben had another 'strike' against him as he had already defiled his father's bed when he lay with Jacob's concubine Bilhah after Rachel's death (ref. Genesis 35:22). This firstborn failed to live up to the standards that were required of him. If he were to be the heir of this office in the family, he would have to prove himself true to the will of his father in all matters pertaining to the life of the family, and to godliness.

The brothers were now faced with a real dilemma. What would they tell their father? They came up with the idea of taking Joseph's princely garment and sprinkling it with goat's blood, and then producing it as evidence to Jacob that his son had been killed by an animal. In spite of the insidiousness of this action, as it turned out this very episode foreshadowed the sprinkling of a lamb's blood that was to take place many years later over the nation of Israel along with the rest of mankind.

Jacob refused to be consoled after receiving the grievous tidings. So much so that he considered the death of his beloved son to be his own undoing. Judah, for his part, was

weighed down by guilt as he carried the burden of responsibility for his father's condition. In fact, he could no longer bear to live at home and therefore took leave for the land of Adullam (ref. Genesis 38:1).

Chapter 32

Judah's Lesson

(Genesis Chapter 38)

YHVH, having already determined the future of Leah's fourth son, whose three older brothers proved unworthy of the firstborn position, set him on an educational course as befitting a candidate for the role of a "prince." As we shall see, Judah had to discover the importance of abiding by the laws of righteousness which govern the life of a family leader.

Judah married a Canaanite woman and had three sons by her. Such a marriage was actually forbidden by YHVH; it constituted the same disobedience that was committed by Esau. When Judah's firstborn, Er, was old enough, Judah found him a wife. However, Er was an evil man and so YHVH took his life before he had an heir. Following the rule of redemption (ref. Deuteronomy 25:5-10), Judah bade his second son, Onan, to marry his sister-in-law Tamar, Er's widow, and have through her an offspring for his dead brother. Onan, who was now legally in the role of a redeemer and potential heir of the double portion in Judah's family, was greedy for this position and was not willing to part with it. He knew that if his union with Tamar were to produce a boy, the child would not belong to him but would replace his older brother Er as the firstborn, and he (Onan) would be divested of the birthright. He therefore spilled his semen on the ground. Because of this disobedience, greed, and open violation of YHVH's righteous law, the Sovereign One took his life too.

Judah had a third son, Shelah, but the latter was too young to marry and so Judah told Tamar to wait in her father's house until he would come of age. However, Judah did not intend to give his youngest in marriage to Tamar, fearing that Shelah would end up like his siblings (ref. Genesis 38:11). For all intents and purposes, Judah gave up having an heir through this redemptive process. Perhaps he reasoned that his third son would some day simply inherit the position of redeemer-firstborn, from him. But as long as Er's wife

was still alive, YHVH's levirate Torah law⁵ could not be done away with and Judah had to learn a most valuable lesson.

In obedience to Judah's bidding, Tamar remained for many years in her father's house. But then one day after the death of Judah's wife, she was told that her father-in-law was going up to Timnah to shear sheep. She promptly removed her widow's attire, wrapped herself in a shawl, and with her face veiled, sat by the gate of the city. Interestingly and perhaps ironically, the name of the gate that witnessed the scene that was about to ensue was *Eina'im* ("eyes"). As YHVH was watching Judah eyeing the 'harlot,' she was peering at her 'client' through the veil that covered her face.

YHVH was going to have His way with Judah, the future leader of Israel. Thus, for Judah to have a legal firstborn was absolutely vital for the continuance of the birthright in the chosen family. Tamar, having an understanding of these matters, essentially put her life on the line for the kingdom of Elohim. She was like Sarah and Rebecca before her, both of whom were willing to lay down *their* lives for the sake of their husbands, which may have been another qualification allowing them to bear the royal firstborn redeemers. Tamar knew very well the consequences of her actions, but took legal precautions by keeping Judah's signet ring, cord, and staff after the fact.

Only three months went by and word came back to Judah that his daughter-in-law was pregnant. Supposing her pregnancy to be the result of harlotry, Judah's response was swift and conclusive: "*Bring her out and let her be burned*" (Genesis 38:24). However, when Tamar presented her evidence, Judah could only bow to her righteousness and declared to all, "*She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son*" (Genesis 38:26). Judah, humbled by the Almighty, learned this lesson well, a fact that will become evident when the opportunities present themselves for him to take the reins of leadership in accordance with YHVH's kingdom order in the family. Judah

⁵ According to levirate marriage, the brother of a deceased man who left no heir is obligated to marry his brother's widow, and she is obligated to marry him. In the case where there is no brother, it is up to the closest relative/redeemer to do so, as is illustrated by the story of Ruth and Boaz (ref. Ruth 3:12-4:17).

never had relations with his daughter-in-law again, as that would have knowingly violated a Torah ordinance (ref. Leviticus 18:15).

Although there is no record of Tamar's ancestry, one would have to assume that Judah took her for his son from a Hebrew family and not from the Canaanites, as the following point would seem to indicate. When Judah ascertained that Tamar was a harlot, he did not simply want her put away or stoned; instead, he was going to have her burned at the stake. A law recorded hundreds of years later that governed the priestly family decreed that if a daughter of that lineage was found committing harlotry, she was to be executed by fire (ref. Leviticus 21:9). All the mothers of the other firstborns were from the firstborn lineage, thus making it likely that Tamar was also from that family line. Judah himself had violated this principle by marrying a Canaanite woman; as a result, his sons had also become rebels.

Tamar settled into her role as a soon-to-be mother in the tent of Judah, and when she did give birth it was not to one child, but to twins. YHVH was consoling Judah and compensating him, as it were, for the sons he had lost. The twins' birth was accompanied by a very unusual event: the arm of one of them suddenly protruded from the birth canal and the midwife tied a scarlet thread on it. However, the child withdrew his arm and instead, it was his brother who actually burst out first from the womb. This firstborn out of the womb was named Perez and his brother, Zerah. There is a recurrence here of the familiar pattern of the first being overcome by the second, fulfilling once again Yeshua's words that "*the last will be first, and the first last*" (Matthew 20:16). The would-be but *deposed* firstborn Zerah (*Zerach*), like Esau the 'red man,' was denoted by the color red (or scarlet). His brother Perez (*Peretz*) was so named because he was born by *bursting* or *breaking out*. Similarly, the One about Whom prophecy declares that He would *go up before the* (proverbial) *flock* would be Perez's descendant, and is described as a *breaker* (*poretz*) (ref. Micah 2:13).

Again we see life coming forth from the dead, as Perez takes the place of Er, Judah's firstborn. Thus, this fundamental principle in YHVH's kingdom order continues to be active in perpetuating His redemptive plan.

Chapter 33

Joseph's Preparation

(Genesis Chapters 39 and 40)

While Judah was learning from his daughter-in-law about divinely ordered responsibility, Joseph was also going through YHVH's "redeemers' prep school." Joseph's first lesson culminated in having to deal with his brothers' cruel betrayal, rejection, and lies, and finally being sold as a slave to the Ishmaelite merchants. As we have already noted, after arriving in Egypt he was sold again, this time to a high official in the government of Pharaoh.

Contrary to the apparent facts, the text surprisingly states that "*YHVH was with Joseph.*" This did not go unnoticed by Potiphar, Joseph's new master, and he too "*saw that YHVH was with him and that YHVH made all he did to prosper in his hand*" (Genesis 39:2-3). How is it that in spite of the harsh circumstances he was subjected to, it could still be said of Joseph that YHVH was with him? Did it signify that the Almighty had a destiny for this young lad, who as one of Jacob's two firstborns belonged to Him for His redemptive purposes? Joseph was aware of his position, even though an ordinance of the kingdom would actually prevent him from receiving the birthright directly (this will be explained in *Chapter 38*). He was also mindful of the qualifications needed in order to receive the birthright, one of which was to be loyal to one's father and in his case, to one's master. Walking as a servant of righteousness, Joseph was blessed by YHVH and as a result, the household in which he served enjoyed the benefits of these blessings.

Another test that Joseph succeeded in passing was one that would present a challenge to most single young men. Potiphar's wife took a liking to this handsome and successful slave, and continually tried to tempt and coerce him into an illicit relationship. But Joseph remained faithful to his Elohim and the instructions of his fathers (the "oral Torah" of his day) and did not compromise his obedience. Potiphar's wife, infuriated by this young man's uprightness, framed and charged him with seduction. With Joseph's garment in hand and the backing of false witnesses, she summoned other members of the

household and beguiled them with her lies. After laying this groundwork, she proceeded to take the matter to her husband. Potiphar immediately had Joseph thrown into the king's prison.

Yet YHVH continued to be with Joseph, directing him on a course of righteousness through these tests of obedience to Torah principles. His pathway, as well as his conduct in many ways, prefigured Messiah's earthly journey and His person. Joseph's circumstances also represent the prophetic destiny of the house of Israel, in that they too would be taken to foreign lands and there they would lose their identity and become as the Gentiles. Like Joseph, many of them in their respective lands of exile would gain positions of power, although unlike their progenitor, they would be lost in iniquity and sin.

This period of being held as a prisoner was one of the lowest ebbs in Joseph's life. It certainly did not appear that he would ever be the mighty ruler and redeemer to whom his family would bow down. Nevertheless, YHVH continued to bless the Hebrew slave in spite of the circumstances, and thus the head of the prison, chief of the king's jail, extended kindness to him. He also delegated to Joseph full responsibility over all the prisoners. In this fashion YHVH had His redeemer hidden for a time in the bondage and prison of Pharaoh's kingdom. During Joseph's incarceration the king's cupbearer and the baker were also imprisoned. Both of them had dreams, foretelling what YHVH had in store for each one. Joseph, knowing Who to turn to for interpretation, proclaimed: "*Do not interpretations belong to Elohim?!*" (Genesis 40:8). He then proceeded to unravel their dreams.

After YHVH brought to pass the foretold destiny of each of the king's servants, the baker's execution and the cupbearer's reinstatement, Joseph asked the latter to remember him to Pharaoh. But since it was YHVH Who was in charge of Joseph's destiny, the cupbearer forgot the prisoner as it was not yet time for him to be lifted up out of his predicament. Only after Pharaoh himself had experienced two very disturbing dreams which none of his priests, soothsayers, or wise men could interpret, did YHVH find it

appropriate to bring to the cupbearer's remembrance the ability of the Hebrew lad to interpret dreams. And so it was then that his name was mentioned to the very troubled Egyptian ruler.

Pharaoh did not waste any time and summoned the dream interpreter. The young man was quickly shaved, washed, dressed, and fetched to the palace. But even though Pharaoh immediately acknowledged Joseph's ability, the recently freed prisoner's reply to Egypt's sovereign was full of humility: "*It is not in me; Elohim will give Pharaoh an answer of peace*" (Genesis 41:16).

Being one of YHVH's firstborn and a redeemer in the family of Noah, Joseph was now going to be positioned in the 'tent' of Ham's second son Mizraim/Egypt, in order to secure salvation for his brethren. Bitterness or pride never lifted their ugly heads in the heart of YHVH's servant, and thus the gifts of wisdom, discernment, and administration were going to be fully operative in the one who was about to become the most powerful person in Egypt next to Pharaoh himself.

It cannot be stressed enough that we are looking at the sovereignty of Elohim in the ongoing *life* of the forefathers and elders in the family of Noah. The microcosm of their individual lives provides a prophetic window into what will become a macrocosm of their seed/progeny's life and destiny.

Chapter 34

A Dream Come True

(Genesis Chapters 41 and 42)

While the dreams of the cupbearer, the baker, and now Pharaoh were all coming to pass, as was predetermined by YHVH, Joseph's own dreams were still waiting to be realized. Yet, it was during this time that Egypt was being prepared to become the staging ground for their eventual fulfillment. Joseph was to be used mightily by YHVH in His great plan to multiply the seed/life of the forefathers and bring forth a nation.

In the role of an overseer of Egypt and a prospective kinsman-redeemer, Joseph was in position to express the will of the Heavenly Master for His family, as well as for the people of Egypt. Shortly after Joseph's instatement, Pharaoh arranged the marriage of his highly-esteemed administrator to the daughter of a (pagan) priest. How fitting this was regarding the future of the house of Joseph (as we shall see later)!

Joseph's wife bore him two sons. Not only were they a blessing to their parents, but their very names embody YHVH's prophetic destiny for the family of the Hebrews. The first son was named Manasseh, as his father proclaimed, "*Elohim has made me forget all my toils and all my father's house*" (Genesis 41:51). Manasseh (*Menashe*) stems from the root, *n.sh.h* which means "forgetfulness." When the second son came along, he was given the name Ephraim, because "*Elohim has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction*" (verse 52). The root of Ephraim is *p.r.h*, meaning "fruit," but in the plural form (Ephraim) it is rendered "doubly fruitful." Again, both names become very important in understanding YHVH's plan for the house of Joseph in future generations - especially that of Ephraim. This name will become symbolic of YHVH's demonstration of faithfulness to the covenant of multiplicity and fruitfulness that He made with Joseph's ancestors.

As mentioned earlier, YHVH's redeemers were not only princes but also priests, thus for Joseph's seed to come forth from a daughter of a priest was prophetically significant. As to

the pagan aspect, all the kings of the future northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel will lead their subjects into such practices, exhibiting a propensity for idol worship. Consequently, YHVH will reject that kingdom and remove its inhabitants away from their inheritance, scattering them in foreign lands. Ultimately, they will live up to the name Manasseh and forget their identity for an extended period. They are destined to be like the *prodigal son* who despised his inheritance, and as a result also ended up far from his father's home (ref. Luke 15:11-16).

While in their state of oblivion and forgetfulness, YHVH will multiply these people (Ephraim/Israel) profusely throughout the earth. Although backslidden, they will still have the 'anointing' to lead and guide other people groups into a condition similar to their own, as evidenced by their latter-day call to repentance: "*Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says YHVH; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says YHVH; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only **acknowledge** your iniquity, that you have transgressed against YHVH your Elohim, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says YHVH*" (Jeremiah 3:12-13 emphasis added. KJV modernized). Again, like the prodigal, these disobedient ones will wake up at one point in time and will go back to Father's house, there to also meet their older brother (ref. Luke 15:18-20).

In the meantime back in Jacob's household, the conditions were ripe for the next phase of YHVH's plan. The seven years of plenty that Pharaoh's dreams foretold were up, and the seven years of famine were about to have their effect on the whole region including Canaan, the promised land. It is interesting to note Jacob's words to his sons before he dispatched them to fetch the supplies from Egypt: "*Why do you look at one another? And he said, 'Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, **that we may live and not die**'*" (Genesis 42:1-2 emphasis added). To secure "life and not death" is within the realm of responsibility belonging to the redeemer of the family. Therefore, YHVH made sure that an Abrahamic firstborn was placed in a position to preserve life. YHVH has never turned His back on His plan, nor has He

chosen another to accomplish it for Him. He set His word in place in the book of Genesis and no matter at what juncture we are in the history of the family of Noah, Shem, Abraham, and Israel, YHVH's decrees and promises do not change. He is still watching over them, and at the same time keeping His eye on His firstborn.

At Jacob's directive, ten of his sons set out for Egypt to buy grain. Led by Reuben, they arrived at their destination and met Joseph who was attired in official Egyptian garments and was in charge of all sales. The brothers did not recognize him but he, on the other hand, identified them immediately. The surprise encounter evoked in Joseph his dreams of long ago and the memory of how his brothers had treated him. In the first dream that he had back then, the brothers appeared as sheaves of wheat bowing to his upright sheaf. Now, many years later, Joseph's siblings were in that posture before their disguised brother and looking to buy... wheat.

Under these unique circumstances and being endowed by YHVH with wisdom, Joseph was in a position to judge his brothers' past unrighteous behavior and to bring them to repentance. In this manner he was fulfilling another aspect of the redeemer's responsibility. When he sent them on their way, it was upon the condition that should they want to buy more grain, they would have to return with their youngest brother. Simeon was kept in prison as a hostage to ensure their compliance with this requirement. Why was it Simeon and not Reuben or one of the others whom Joseph chose to keep? Here is another lesson about YHVH's order of responsibility in the family. When the brothers had sold Joseph, Reuben was away and thus Simeon should have stepped into his older brother's place, in order to preserve the life of the younger sibling. Since Simeon had failed to act according to redemption principles, Joseph had no other recourse but to now pronounce judgment upon him. This predicament also served to bring to the minds and consciences of the brothers their sin and guilt of long ago regarding Joseph: *"Then they said to one another, 'We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us'"* (Genesis 42:21). Unknown to them,

Joseph was privy to that exchange but was not about to let this process of repentance and of acknowledging that YHVH's heavy hand was upon them come to a halt.

Just before the brothers were getting ready to leave, Joseph maneuvered them into another distressing situation. Fear gripped their souls when they saw that their money was in the “mouths of their sacks” (literal translation). They all trembled at the possible outcome but not without recognizing again that this was from the hand of Elohim. “*What is this that Elohim has done to us?!*” (Genesis 42:28), they exclaimed. With their mouths they claimed to be “*honest men*” (ref. Genesis 42:11), but the “mouths” of their own sacks testified against these very words, which they now had to ‘eat.’

Chapter 35

A Change of Leadership

(Genesis Chapters 42:24 to 43:15)

Upon returning home, Reuben had a lot of explaining to do about the current situation. Jacob was rather upset with his sons for informing Egypt's stern ruler that they had another brother at home, without whose presence he would not supply them with more provisions nor release Simeon. At the same time, the grief they were now causing their father reminded them that they were to blame for Joseph's disappearance, and for Simeon's present predicament. How could the elderly patriarch entrust his beloved Benjamin into his sons' hands, especially Reuben's?

Reuben tried to strike a deal with his father that he might be allowed to take full responsibility for the life of Jacob's precious son. Israel, however, was already weary with this firstborn of Leah, who had repeatedly proven himself unworthy of the family leadership. Not only was he not able to rule his brothers, but he also failed to take revenge for his sister's disgrace. And then, to top it all off, he defiled Jacob's bed by lying with the latter's concubine (see Leviticus 18:8). Reuben's last attempt to salvage his position in the eyes of his father was to try to negotiate the present situation with him. Nevertheless, his proposal was the straw that broke the camel's back - as he offered the life of *his* two sons to (literally) be *put to death* if he were to fail to bring Benjamin back safely. In the eyes of Jacob this terminated Reuben's role as a would-be redeemer, and thus he was totally opposed to having his beloved go down to Egypt with him: "*My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave*" (Genesis 42:38). Let us remember that a redeemer is an agent and preserver of life to the family - not death.

The famine in the land did not let up and before long the grain was consumed, leaving Jacob with an immense dilemma. It was time to send his sons back to Egypt, but who would lead the family and who could take responsibility for Benjamin? When the

moment came Judah, who had returned to his family from his self-imposed exile in Adullam (as his descendants are also destined to do in the future, according to Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 33:7), reminded his father that the Egyptian overseer would not let them see his face unless they brought their brother with them. Jacob had still not gotten over the fact that they had acted foolishly and disclosed to Egypt's powerful governor details about their family. He waited until the very last minute, as he simply could not release his son into Reuben's hands. But then Judah stepped forward and asked his father to allow him to take Benjamin under his wing. Compare Reuben's proposal with the one which Judah now offered his father: *"Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever"* (Genesis 43:8-9). Jacob was finally willing to release his youngest son, as he knew he could trust Judah to take care of him. He recognized in Judah a potential kinsman-redeemer who was willing to lay down his own life for his brother: *"If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever..."* The up and coming leader had been well prepared for this moment through Elohim's instruction during his sojourn in the South. There he learned what it meant to be faithful and true to the statutes and ordinances of the Torah. Tamar, his daughter-in-law, awakened in him a repentant, righteous, and teachable spirit by being willing to give up *her* life for the sake of YHVH's kingdom order.

Before they left on their journey, Jacob pronounced a blessing upon Judah and his brothers, saying: *"And may El Shaddai give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"* (Genesis 43:14).

Chapter 36

Momentous Encounter

(Genesis Chapters 43:15-34 and 44)

Jacob's sons did not have an easy time of it on their way down to Egypt. Constant fear and trembling accompanied their thoughts and conversations. What if the Egyptian master would not be satisfied with the refunded money, the extra cash that they were dispatching, and the gifts that they carried with them? Most of all, what was to become of Jacob's only surviving son of his beloved Rachel?

Upon their arrival, the brothers stood before Joseph awaiting his verdict. When the 'Egyptian' governor saw Benjamin, who was now a young man, he asked his steward to prepare an animal so that he could dine with his visitors at noon. Bewildered by the invitation to the ruler's house, the guests were extremely troubled: *"It is because of the money, which was returned to our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and fall upon us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys"* (Genesis 43:18).

As they were standing there at the doorway to Joseph's house, the brothers made an attempt to build a defensive case before Joseph's servant: *"O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks"* (Genesis 43:20-22). The steward must have been quite amused by these frightened Hebrews, whose occupation of sheep herding would already have made them appear inferior in his eyes. His master, he thought, was quite likely equally entertained by this little brood of shepherds. He tried to calm this 'trembling bunch' by suggesting that it was their 'god' who had seen fit to grant the money gift to them, adding that it had been handed to him with instructions to put it in their sacks. Before entering Joseph's home, the travelers' feet were washed and their donkeys fed, and then Simeon their brother was

brought to them. Once inside the ruler's residence, they bowed down and handed him their tribute. This was the second time that the brothers had prostrated themselves before their sibling, just as he had seen in his dreams so many years before.

The scene that Joseph was now witnessing moved him deeply, especially the presence of his mother's son, who was most likely kneeling next to Judah. He could no longer contain himself and hurried to leave the room in order to release his emotions and tears. After washing his face and regaining his composure, he returned and ordered the meal to be served. To the brothers' amazement and consternation, the Egyptian ruler placed them around the table according to their ages. Moreover, when the food was brought, Benjamin was given five times as much as the rest of them.

After the meal Joseph sent his servant to fill the brothers' sacks with grain, and to once again return their money. But this time he also added his silver cup, which he ordered the steward to put in the bag of the youngest. Early the next morning the brothers were sent on their way but as soon as they left the city, the same steward caught up with them and accused them of repaying evil for good by having stolen their host's silver cup. The stunned men immediately proceeded to defend themselves. Judah, being totally confident of his siblings' innocence, declared that if the cup were to be found in the sack of any one of them, the same would have to forfeit his life while the rest would become slaves to his lord. The servant agreed. When the sacks were searched, the money was indeed found there, while the silver cup was discovered in Benjamin's bag. Judah must have gone into shock, with his face drained of every drop of blood. What could he say? The evidence spoke for itself and he had been the one to declare the verdict... just as he had done so long ago, when Joseph was sold.

Arriving back at the house of the lord of the land, they all expected that this would be the end of their freedom; or conversely, was this going to be the beginning of their release from guilt and fear? They bowed down again before their judge and were asked to justify their actions. Judah, the defense attorney, stood up before the one who would decide their fate and proceeded with a lengthy defense speech, but not before making a

statement that meant much more to his listener than what he could possibly have imagined: “*What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? Elohim has found out the iniquity of your servants...*” (Genesis 44:16 emphasis added). Judah then launched into his detailed account of the events.

“But you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.’ So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, ‘Go back and buy us a little food.’ But we said, ‘We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, surely he is torn to pieces; and I have not seen him since. But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.’ Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad’s life, it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.’ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?” (Genesis 44:23-34).

Judah displays yet again the nature of a true redeemer, asking to pay with his own life for that of his brother’s. For millennia, volumes of books and articles have been written about these Genesis stories; however, the details highlighted here are for the purpose of following YHWH’s kingdom order in the making of a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Chapter 37

Joseph Reveals His Identity

(Genesis Chapters 45 and 46)

Joseph could no longer contain the emotion that was welling up inside of him. The love that he had for his father and family was overwhelming. He suddenly charged all the servants to leave the room and as his brothers stood in shock and dismay, he cried loudly: *“I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?”* The men remained standing in speechless awe and disbelief, so Joseph asked them to come closer. At this point he may have revealed to them his circumcision. If indeed that was the case, could such a scene prefigure a time when the house of Joseph, which has remained unrecognized for millennia, will be revealed through the new covenant’s circumcision of the heart?

Joseph then went on to console his dismayed siblings: *“But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for Elohim sent me before you to preserve life... and Elohim sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance”* (Genesis 45:5, 7). Here again we hear the voice of a true kinsman-redeemer.

The famine was to last for five more years, so Joseph instructed his brothers to go and get their father and all their households and bring them down to Egypt. After giving these directions, he embraced Benjamin and the two wept on each other’s shoulders. He then did the same with the others, and all wept together that day, for great was the joy of seeing their redeemer alive.

Upon hearing the news (and the noise!) coming from Joseph’s house, Pharaoh summoned his deputy and offered to provide wagons and supplies in order to bring his family to the best land in Egypt. Joseph also gave a change of garments to all of his brothers, but again awarded Benjamin with five times as much, along with 300 pieces of silver.

Together with the provisions that they received from Pharaoh, the Hebrew men started their journey back home. They were given a very firm order from Joseph to hurry back to Jacob and deliver a message from his lost and beloved firstborn son: *“Elohim has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine”* (Genesis 45:9-11).

When Jacob’s eleven arrived home, they told their grief-stricken father that Joseph was still alive, and furthermore, that he had become one of the most powerful persons on earth. At first Jacob was so stunned by the report that he did not believe his sons, but when they told him the rest of the story and he saw the wagon train, the ten donkeys loaded with grain, and another ten loaded with bread and other essentials for the trip, he finally trusted their word. *“The spirit of Jacob their father revived. Then Israel said, ‘It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die’”* (Genesis 45:27b-28).

One would think that Joseph would have packed up the fastest chariot in town and hurried straight to his father. Notwithstanding, he recognized that as a servant of the Most High, as well as Pharaoh’s, his obligation to his calling as a redeemer and savior took priority over an emotional issue, however near and dear to his heart. At the same time he did make all the necessary preparations for his father, brothers, and their households to return in safety.

Many years had passed since YHVH had last spoken to Jacob. But now it was again necessary to quiet Israel’s fears, so in a vision of the night Elohim appeared to His chosen firstborn: *“‘Jacob, Jacob!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ So He said, ‘I am Elohim, the Elohim of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes’”* (Genesis 46:2-4).

For Jacob, the ride down to Egypt to his beloved whom he had been bereaving for such a long time must have felt like eternity. Finally, the day came when the heart of a father was reunited with his son, and a son's with his father. Joseph and Israel embraced and wept for a long time upon each other's shoulders. This is very much like the experience that many are having nowadays, as the Spirit of YHVH is turning the hearts of the children to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (ref. Malachi 4:6).

Joseph went back to Pharaoh and told him that his family had arrived; he also brought with him his father and five of his brothers, but not before cautioning them not to tell the mighty ruler that they were shepherds, as such an occupation was an abomination to the Egyptians. However, when asked, they did not lie to Pharaoh but told him that they and their fathers before them had all been shepherds. This disclosure actually worked in their favor. Since the Egyptians did not mix with flock tenders, the sons of Israel would not be exposed to the pagan practices of their hosts. Just before leaving the presence of Pharaoh, Joseph presented his father to his master and Jacob blessed the king of Egypt.

With Pharaoh's permission, the Hebrews settled in one of Egypt's richest areas, Goshen. YHVH was again planting the seed of Jacob/Israel in a fertile foreign land, so that they would multiply and become a nation according to His promise in the patriarchal covenant. This pattern of the blessing of multiplicity always seems to occur outside the land of Israel. Perhaps this is how YHVH intends to make Abraham a blessing to all the families of the earth, and heir of the world (see Genesis 12:3; Romans 4:13).

Chapter 38

Jacob the Lawyer

(Genesis Chapter 48:1-14)

Jacob, finding himself together with and under the care of his beloved firstborn, settled down with the rest of the family in the land of Goshen. For another seventeen years he enjoyed the blessings of the Creator and Heavenly Master. But finally the day came when his 147 year-old body broke down. Knowing that the time had come, he now had to perform his last obligation as YHVH's firstborn, and that was to lay the right hand on the son of his choice in order to confer upon him the redeemer's blessing of the double portion.

However, bound by Elohim's laws, Jacob found himself in a perplexing situation. He could not bequeath the inheritance to Joseph as it countered YHVH's word: *"If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his"* (Deuteronomy 21:15-17).

Hence, Jacob was aware that only Leah's side of the family could receive this blessing. Reuben should have been the legal heir, but he lost favor and as we have already learned (in *Chapter 35*), Judah stepped in and received his father's permission to lead the family. Judah, therefore, was now the potential heir of this final blessing as Joseph was his mother's firstborn but not his father's. The old patriarch, however, was no novice 'lawyer,' and so he carried out one of the most astonishing transactions in biblical history. Before performing the task he had in mind, Jacob shared with his beloved Joseph what his faithful Elohim had bestowed upon him as part of his own birthright: *"El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me,*

‘Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude [literally a congregation of people], and give this land to your descendants/seed after you as an everlasting possession’” (Genesis 48:3-4). Jacob then declared to his son that the two young men who were standing next to him, that is, Israel’s two grandchildren by Joseph, were to become his own. And so the patriarch went ahead and adopted the two boys.

Let us follow Jacob’s course of action. *“And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine”* (Genesis 48:5 emphasis added). Interestingly, Jacob mentioned Joseph’s second son Ephraim first and thus the younger took Reuben’s position in the family. Although Reuben was Leah’s firstborn, because he lost his *leadership* of the birthright to Judah, and the *right hand double portion blessing* was yet to be given, Ephraim, through adoption, was now entitled to receive it. Jacob also placed Manasseh into Simeon’s second-born position, perhaps as a back-up in case something would happen to Ephraim. Joseph, for his part, did not totally understand what his father was doing, as we shall see later.

Please note that up to this point, when referring to the person of the patriarch, the name “Jacob” has mostly been used. However, during the process of conferring the double portion blessing upon Joseph and his sons, the patriarch is called Israel. In fact, “Israel” is mentioned seven times in the chapter at hand (Genesis 48). Thus, Israel asked Joseph regarding the identity of the two who were standing next to him, even though he had already known them for seventeen years. However, because of his failing eyesight and the all-too-significant blessing that he was about to give, he had to make sure that this legal procedure would be carried out according to the statutes and laws governing YHVH’s kingdom. At that moment the memory of his own father, who had tried to verify unsuccessfully the identity of the one who stood before him, must have flashed across Israel’s mind. Joseph assured Jacob that these children were the ones that Elohim had given him in Egypt.

Understanding the importance of the position of the firstborn, Joseph took Manasseh to his left so that Israel might reach out his right hand and lay it on his firstborn's head. But Joseph clearly did not realize the order of adoption; that is, that his father was going to give the blessing of this portion of the birthright to Ephraim, whom he had just transferred to Leah's side of the family.

Next, Israel crossed his hands and laid the right one on Ephraim's head. The puzzled Joseph protested this action but his father continued, being quite sure of what he had in mind, and thus we read: *"Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn"* (Genesis 48:14). Much later on in history, YHVH validates Israel's blessing upon Ephraim: *"For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn"* (Jeremiah 31:9). We are not told what motivated Israel to prefer Ephraim above his older brother. Perhaps he recognized that having a prophetic name indicating multiplicity, Ephraim's progeny would be fulfilling the blessing that YHVH had given to him and his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. In choosing the younger son for the birthright's right hand blessing, Israel followed the pattern that we have seen repeatedly. By blessing Joseph, via his *two* sons, he was also granting the beloved of Rachel an extra measure of "double portion." Thus, from then on, Joseph was the only son who was represented by *two* tribes (ref. Genesis 48:22).

Jacob/Israel's act regarding the sons of Joseph is definitively described in I Chronicles 5:1-2, which also accords Judah *his* position in the birthright: *"Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel -- he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph's."*

Chapter 39

Jacob Imparts the Birthright Blessings

(Genesis Chapters 48:15 to 49:28)

After laying his hands upon his newly-adopted sons, Israel continued: *“The Elohim, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the Elohim who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name [Israel] be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth”* (Genesis 48:15-16).

“Let my name be upon them.” Since in this narrative Jacob is called “Israel,” as was pointed out in the last chapter, and since it was in this name that he blessed Joseph and his sons, he thereby imparted it to them. In the future, when YHVH addresses the two nations, or the two houses of Judah and Ephraim, He will many times call the house of Joseph/Ephraim (and the other tribes that will be associated with it), Israel. Occasionally the house of Judah is also referred to as Israel (see Isaiah 8:14), especially in the writings of the New Covenant by which time Joseph’s progeny and the other northern tribes had already interspersed and assimilated among the nations.

Israel was now prepared to impart the double portion blessing to Ephraim, but in so doing he was about to divide the birthright. He had already recognized Judah as the leader, conferring upon him the princely position in the family. But by laying his right hand on Joseph’s son, Israel ensured that neither one of the recipients would qualify to be the *redeemer* of the family. This mysterious act of Jacob can only be understood in light of the prophetic destiny that YHVH had ordained for “Jacob the chosen nation.”

With the allocation of the leadership and the birthright to only two heirs/tribes, how is it that the entire nation is destined to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation? The answer lies in the future division of the people of Israel into the two houses. When that takes place, the tribes of the north will become part and parcel of Ephraim, while Benjamin, Simeon, and Levi (mostly) will join Judah. Thus, each grouping will participate in the

respective office, as well as the prophetic destiny of the leading tribe. Because of sin, the division was of necessity - Elohim could not permit one entity to be the sole possessor of the entirety of the birth-rights (for an example see 2 Chronicles 26:16-18).

Let us return briefly to the moment of the blessing. As we recall, the above quote ended with the words: “...and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” This declaration is summed up by one word or verb in the Hebrew original, “*va’yid’goo*”- this being the only place in Scripture where it is found. In fact, in normative Hebrew this verb does not exist at all. It is as if YHVH had specifically “invented” the verb for this prophetic blessing. The only comparable term in English would be the equally non-existent “and they will fishize,” meaning, “they will become or turn into fish.” Thus, millennia later when the Messiah called his disciples to become fishers of men (ref. Matthew 4:19), which fish did He have in mind?

After some disagreement between father and son, Israel prophesied over the two grandchildren. To Manasseh he said that he would be an “*am*,” that is, a single people group - “*Am Yisrael*” (the People of Israel). To Ephraim he declared that he would become literally the “*fullness of the nations*” (*goyim*) (ref. Genesis 48:17-19).

Examining carefully the prophetic significance of the names Manasseh and Ephraim, we conclude that as “*Am Yisrael*/the People of Israel” (specifically the descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel), they would “forget” (*nashah* - root of Manasseh) and lose their identity. At the same time, these descendants of Jacob and Joseph would become “fruitful” (*parah* - root of Ephraim), and multiply into many nations (*goyim*). Ultimately at some future date, through a “new covenant,” YHVH would reveal His compassion, loving-kindness, and faithfulness toward them (ref. Jeremiah 31:2-3, 10b, 12-13), and cause the hearts of their children to turn to their forefathers (ref. Malachi 4:6). Thus, the “*am*” that is destined to forget their identity as the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, would begin to remember the Torah, which is the document describing their heritage and calling, their roots, and their chosen destiny, as well as their identity as those who belong to YHVH.

Paul, the apostle to the nations, addressed his audience by quoting from this very blessing: *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery [mystery of the blindness of Israel], lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the **fullness of the Gentiles/nations** has come in. And so all Israel will be saved”* (Romans 11:25-26 emphasis added). What does the *“fullness of the nations”* have to do with *“all Israel,”* unless the mystery is directly connected to Ephraim’s blessing?

Is the Almighty telling us that He is a covenant-keeping Elohim, and is therefore consistently faithful to the fathers whom He had infused (or anointed) with His word? *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it”* (Isaiah 55:11). *“For I am YHVH, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob”* (Malachi 3:6). Is it within the context of the new covenant that the multitudes of Ephraim, those who have received this covenant as stated by the prophet Jeremiah, will be revealed? Paul affirms this idea by making the following statement: *“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to **all the seed** [sperma of Abraham], not only to those who are of the law [house of Judah], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, **who is the father of us all”*** (Romans 4:16 emphases added). Notice, Paul does not refer to Abraham as an adopting or spiritual father. Regarding *the faith*, the apostle clarifies elsewhere that, *“not all have **the faith”*** (2 Thessalonians 3:2, literal translation, emphasis added) - referring to the faith of Abraham (as we have just observed in Romans 4:16). This “faith” is not to be confused with the gift of faith that comes only with the Holy Spirit (ref. 1 Corinthians 12:9).

Jacob’s next move was to summon all his sons and bless each one individually. As we have already observed, Judah received the leadership or the princely portion of the birthright because his older siblings were disqualified by their disobedience to Torah statutes, while he had proved to be worthy. Judah’s brothers were destined to bow down

before him and to be obedient to his authority, as he would carry the scepter of the responsibility to execute the Torah (ref. Genesis 49:8, 10).

Jacob's blessing to Joseph reveals the latter's role as the fruitful entity "Ephraim," a fruitfulness that will fulfill or accomplish the ancestors' covenant of "multiplicity." Joseph is destined to be doubly blessed with the wealth of the nations, and the power to rule outside the land of Israel (ref. Genesis 49: 22, 25-26).

In this blessing, the elder also uttered the following, regarding Joseph: "*The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors... They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate [nazeer - "Nazarite"] from his brothers*" (Genesis 49:26). When pronouncing his son a *nazir*, was Jacob proverbially preordaining his posterity for *separation* and *dedication* unto YHVH? Jacob felt that having a son with such a calling made his blessings, as Joseph's father, greater than those bestowed upon *his* fathers (Abraham and Isaac).

In Hosea chapter 4 there is a hint as to the eventual position of Israel/Ephraim (as distinct from Judah - see verse 15a), in which YHVH says to them, "*Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me...*" (verse 6a; for the same idea see also 5:1-5 where, again, the context points to the house of Israel and not Judah). Thus, conversely, a repentant and reformed Israel/Ephraim will be able to assume their priestly role in the Melchizedek order sometime in the future.

Chapter 40

Patriarch's Burial

(Genesis Chapters 49:29 to 50:26)

After Jacob finished blessing all his sons, he charged them to bury him with his fathers in the cave of Machpelah in the land of Canaan. What a wonderful departure for a father to be able to bless all his sons as one-by-one they came to bid him farewell, but most of all, to be looking into the face of his lost-and-found beloved, who would now be the last one whom he would see! After Jacob took his final breath, Joseph kissed him and then, weeping, laid his hand upon the old patriarch's face and closed his eyes, just as YHVH had predicted (ref. Genesis 46:4).

Joseph had his father embalmed according to the custom of the Egyptians. After the seventy days of this procedure were over, one of the largest burial entourages of that time left Egypt for Canaan. At one point beyond the Jordan, to the east and before entering the land, they stopped and mourned the death of Jacob for seven days. The Canaanites who were living in the area saw all these Egyptians mourning and named the place Abel-Mizraim ("Egypt's mourning"). But were they all Egyptians? Remember, Joseph had given his family "changes of garments" (ref. Genesis 45:22). Therefore, one could not tell the difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. So too today there are many like the Canaanites, who do not recognize the Israelites for who they are and hence regard them as Gentiles.

Jacob's sons returned to Goshen, after fulfilling their father's request. Within a short time they began to fret about this powerful prince of Egypt, and came begging his forgiveness for what they had done to him. Once again, Joseph proved himself equal to the role of a redeemer and servant of YHVH as he wept, forgave his repentant brothers, and said to them, "*Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of Elohim? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but Elohim meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you*

and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (Genesis 50:19-21).

Joseph lived to see the third generation of the children of Ephraim, but when it came to Manasseh’s firstborn, Machir, he did something quite strange. Scripture tells us that Machir’s children were born on the knees of Joseph (ref. Genesis 50:23). As we noted above Joseph’s firstborn Manasseh was adopted by Jacob in place of Leah’s second son. Israel had told Joseph, after taking his two sons that he (Joseph) would get to keep the rest of his children. According to Joseph’s reasoning, however, he had in effect lost his firstborn, and whether or not more children were born after the adoption, Manasseh was still the first. Thus, Joseph did not have a legal firstborn for his own family. So when the wife of his grandson Machir gave birth, she sat on Joseph’s knees as a sign that the children came out of his own loins, and in that way they became their great grandfather’s offspring and belonged to him. Many years earlier, Joseph’s mother Rachel enacted this very same proxy-procedure. *“So she said, ‘Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her’” (Genesis 30:3).*

Before Joseph died, at 110, he made his brothers swear that whenever they would go back to the land, so would his bones. The body of this sage was embalmed and put into a coffin, and when the time came, his “dry bones” returned to the land of his inheritance.

It is possible that all the other brothers received the same treatment upon death, and that their mummified bodies were placed in temporary dwellings or “*succot*” (plural for *succah*). Interestingly, some 300 years later on their way out of Egypt, the people of Israel stopped at a place named Succoth and there picked up the remains of Joseph (ref. Exodus 13:19-20). It is not unlikely that aside from him, other ancestors were entombed there and their bones were also taken and carried to the land.⁶

⁶ In Israel today, in the region of Benjamin west of Jericho, there is a site whose Arabic name of “*Kuvur Beney Yisra’eel*” is but a slight distortion of the Hebrew - “the graves of the sons of Israel,” which could be where the bones were buried by the Israelites at some point after entering the land.

With the addition of Jacob's two firstborns, Judah and Joseph, as the last patriarchs, we now have the twenty-four elders (YHVH's firstborn-redeemers) that are seen sitting around the throne of YHVH (ref. Revelation 4:4). Here are the generations of these firstborns: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Arpaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and Joseph - all-in-all twenty-four elders. Please note that none of them qualified to take the scroll that was in the right hand of the Almighty and to open its seals (ref. Revelation 5:3-4). Psalm 49:7-8 declares that no one "*can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to Elohim a ransom for him: for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever.*" Elohim was therefore obligated to provide a redeemer who would be entitled, amongst other things, to take the scroll from His hand.

From now on we will no longer be looking at the individual patriarchs but at their descendants, the tribes of Israel, who will make up the firstborn nation that was promised to their ancestors in the covenant. YHVH brought His Hebrew flock down into Egypt, gave them the most fertile land in that country, and blessed and multiplied them.

Chapter 41

A Deliverer after the Order of Levi

(Exodus Chapters 2 to 4)

The nation of Jacob enjoyed many years of prosperity and fruitfulness in the region of Goshen. As was the pattern in the life of Jacob, who prospered and had children outside the land of promise (except for one), so it was now with his descendants, who multiplied greatly in the territory of Ham. However, at one point the indigenous population began to get concerned about these prolific Hebrew people, whose great numbers seemed to pose a threat to them.

When YHVH made a covenant with Abraham, he told him that his life would be perpetuated in a people as numerous as the stars, and that a day would come when they would be in a condition of extreme darkness and slavery (ref. Genesis 15:12-13). This darkness not only pertains to the natural conditions (of bondage) in Egypt, but also to spiritual darkness and slavery to *sin, death, and the world* (see Romans 5:12). (Reference to Israel's spiritual condition in Egypt is found in Joshua 24:14.)

Toward the end of their stay in Egypt, the Hebrews' oppressive situation became unbearable. The attempt to kill or destroy that which belonged to the Almighty, along with the resultant suffering of His people, assured a response from heaven. After 400 years of Israel's exile, YHVH was now ready to redeem, save, and deliver His inheritance from Pharaoh's world of slavery and prove to the cosmos that He was Who He claimed to be - *the Elohim of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*.

In order to put into effect this master plan, Israel's King was going to groom a leader who would bring the nascent nation out of bondage and back to their homeland. Thus in the "fullness of time," He raised up Moses whose life, right from the start, was marked for that purpose. That which was said of Jeremiah the prophet is also applicable to the up-and-coming liberator: "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet...*" (Jeremiah 1:5). Moses, however, was

to become much more than a prophet (to the nation of Israel). He was going to be a deliverer and leader whom YHVH would use to turn a mass of slaves into a nation during a forty-year wilderness journey. Above all, Moses would be in the presence of YHVH for two different forty-day periods, in the course of which the Torah and the instructions for the tabernacle would be given to him. YHVH's servant was also destined to act as a redeemer 'par excellence' on behalf of the children of Israel, as when addressing YHVH after the golden calf episode, he begged Him to "*forgive their sin -- but if not, I pray, blot me out [in their place] of Your book which You have written*" (Exodus 32:32).

Moses was born to a Levite family, subjected to a threat of death, put in a basket, placed in the reeds of the Nile, rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, nursed by his own mother, and raised in the king's house. Years later, Moses took it upon himself to mete out justice by killing an Egyptian taskmaster and ended up fleeing for his life to the wilderness of Midian. There he married the daughter of the local priest and became a shepherd and a father. Such a series of events was sufficient for one person's lifetime, and Moses was most certainly ready to settle down.

Nevertheless, one day in the time scheme of YHVH's plans, the Hebrew fugitive encountered the Creator Who spoke to him out of the fires of a bush that was not consumed by the flames. The voice commanded this Levite to go back to Egypt, tell Pharaoh to let His people go, and then to lead them out of their "house of bondage." In light of the jurisdiction and position of the firstborn redeemer, which we have been examining all along, the choice of a son of Levi for this role, rather than someone from either Judah or Ephraim, seems quite odd.

Let us 'accompany' Levi from the time that Jacob pronounced his prophetic words upon the individual, on to the wilderness journey and the tribe carrying his name. Levi's (and Simeon's) anger and violent actions in the 'Shechem and Dina' episode, when he and Simeon usurped Reuben's firstborn responsibility, caused Jacob to pronounce the following about them, "*I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel*" (Genesis 49:7). Interestingly, the eventual ministerial tasks that were given to the tribe of Levi

necessitated being “divided and scattered in Israel,” and thus that which was originally intended as a form of chastisement was transformed into a blessing (for Levi and for the rest of Israel).

Likewise the quick temper of Levi, a trait that greatly displeased his father, was what eventually enabled his sons to respond to Moses’ call after the Israelites had sinned with the golden calf: “*‘Whoever is on YHVH’s side -- come to me.’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him*” (Exodus 32:26) and executed YHVH’s judgment by the sword upon the people. As a result, “*Moses said, ‘Consecrate yourselves today to YHVH, that He may bestow on you [the Levites] a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother’*” (Exodus 32:29).

Later on YHVH addressed Moses concerning the Levites, saying: “*Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.*” “*...I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel*” (Numbers 3:6, 12-13). We observe here an interesting connection between the Levites and the firstborn of Israel. The latter have always been YHVH’s possession, and all the more so after they were spared by Him when He redeemed (bought) them during that fateful night in the course of which all of Egypt’s firstborn died (ref. Exodus 12:12). But now YHVH declares that the sons of Levi are to be His possession (on the national level) in place of the firstborn. In fact, as the people were standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, mention was made of “priests” well before Aaron and his sons took up their office (ref. Exodus 19:22). These “priests” were no doubt the elders and firstborn of the clans and the tribes.

The root of the name “Levi” (*l.v.h*) means “to accompany” and also “to borrow.” YHVH called the tribe of Levi to assist (accompany) their older brother Aaron in the duties of the tabernacle. Before they could serve legally in that capacity, they had to “borrow” a portion of the rights of the firstborn of Israel. Also, because the firstborn had many

responsibilities in and to their families, clans, and tribes, it would not have been practical to enlist them into full-time work in the sanctuary. Thus, a twelfth portion of the nation was “borrowed” to perform some of the duties of the firstborn. The Levites did not acquire all the birth-rights, but their own firstborn, Aaron, and his descendants were assigned the role of the priesthood while the rest served the priests. The office of the Levites as firstborn also foreshadows the atoning work of the future High Priest, the Messiah, and so we read: “*And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons... in the tabernacle of meeting, and to **make atonement** for the children of Israel...*” (Numbers 8:19 emphasis added).

The Levites’ status was to last until YHVH would deal with the issues of “sin and iniquity” through a “new covenant” (ref. Jeremiah 31:31-35) that would eventually usher in the Melchizedek royal priesthood (ref. Hebrews 7:11-27). The latter will manifest as an entire firstborn nation of priests and kings, headed by the High Priest of the priesthood and King of the kings, Yeshua their Messiah (ref. Revelation 17:14). The fact that YHVH commanded the Israelites to redeem their firstborn proves that the Levites were not to wholly replace them (ref. Numbers 18:15-16).

Aside from redeeming every firstborn male, there is an interesting reference to the *firstborn donkey*, which was to be redeemed by a lamb or else its neck was to be broken (ref. Exodus 34:20). The Hebrew word for “donkey” (*chamor*) shares its root with the word for “clay” or “soil” (*chomer*), and is parallel to the connection between Adam (“man”) - *adama* (“earth”). Thus, the “donkey” portrays man in his earthy condition. Messiah, the Lamb riding on a donkey, illustrates the need for the firstborn (nation) of mankind to be redeemed (and to be followed, of course, by the rest of humanity).

In spite of the Levites and priests’ positions being temporary, it should be noted that like the covenant made with the house of David, their covenant with Elohim is also linked to the continued existence of the laws and elements of creation (ref. Jeremiah 33:20-22; more on their latter day role see Ezekiel 44). Hence, prior to the Melchizedek priestly-kingly rule of the nation as a whole, the Priests and Levites are “borrowed” for a time.

However, in the future kingdom era their function will be that of “accompaniment,” but not before a purification process takes place such as described in Malachi 3:3: *“He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to YHVH an offering in righteousness.”*

Chapter 42

Preparations for War

(Exodus Chapter 40 and Numbers Chapters 9 to 11)

After YHVH moved by His mighty right arm and brought His people out of Egypt, He immediately established kingdom rule over His nation. The Almighty-El Shaddai was going to be to them everything that they would need to make the journey. *“I will be what I will be”* (Exodus 3:14, literal translation), said the blazing bush to Moses. Elohim then revealed Himself through the power of Moses’ rod, and in the “cloud by day” and the “fire by night” that led them through the entire journey. He was the wind that divided the Sea of Reeds, drying up the ground. He was the manna, the water from the rock as well as the rock, the fire on Mount Sinai, the voice that spoke like thunder, the finger that wrote the Ten Words (Commandments) on stone. He gave His people a flawless judicial system that contained statutes, laws, and ordinances for the community life of the nation: for the tribes, for the families, and for the individuals. He also granted them their identity, along with their birthright as a firstborn nation. But even more importantly, because of their propensity for iniquity as ‘fallen man,’ He became the Tabernacle in which they could experience His love, mercy, compassion, and power to forgive. Notwithstanding, without His actual presence in that temporal shrine it was of no value whatsoever. The tabernacle that was constructed in the desert according to the directions which YHVH gave Moses, was also an outward manifestation of a heavenly reality that He would reveal in the future through His Son and our Messiah (see Hebrews chapter 9).

YHVH’s people remained for about a year at Mount Horeb, where the craftsmen meticulously made every part of the tabernacle. Then came the day when Moses put the last piece into its place. *“And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up. So Moses raised up the tabernacle, fastened its sockets, set up its boards, put in its bars, and raised up its pillars. And he spread out the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, as YHVH had commanded Moses.” “And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate...”* (Exodus 40:17-19,

33). *“Now it came to pass, when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle that he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings, and the altar and all its utensils; so he anointed them and consecrated them”* (Numbers 7:1). *“So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of YHVH filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of YHVH filled the tabernacle”* (Exodus 40:33b-35).

Now, *“The leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers’ houses, who were the leaders of the tribes and over those who were numbered, made an offering. And they brought their offering before YHVH”* (Numbers 7:2-3a). What a day it must have been for Moses, Aaron, and the nation! The first sacrifices were to be brought by the heads (firstborn) of each of the tribes. Please note the order in which they were to come to offer their sacrifices and gifts - a tribe a day (see Numbers 7:11). On the first day (most likely the second day of the first month of the second year), the head of the tribe of Judah came to the Levites to present an offering. On the next day Issachar came, Zebulun on the third day, Reuben on the fourth, then Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, and lastly, Naphtali who brought the twelfth offering on the thirteenth day of the first month. YHVH then spoke to Moses, reminding him of the importance of the following day: *“On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it [Passover] at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it.’ So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the Wilderness of Sinai; according to all that YHVH commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did”* (Numbers 9:3-5).

However, not all the men could partake of the Passover as they had been handling things that brought about defilement. Upon inquiring of YHVH, Moses received a ruling for those who could not participate in the Passover at its appointed time: *“If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep YHVH’s Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of*

it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it” (Numbers 9:10-12).

“But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of YHVH at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. And if a stranger dwells among you, and would keep YHVH’s Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land” (Numbers 9:13-14). YHVH was stressing the seriousness of this appointed day. This was **YHVH’s** Passover. There was not to be any marching forward, especially into battle and into the promised land of their inheritance, without all of them observing that day.

After the Passover was celebrated according to all its regulations, YHVH made His intentions known to the entire nation on the first day of the second month in the second year of the exodus. He asked Moses to take a census of all the men from twenty years and up who were able to go to battle (ref. Numbers 1:1-2). Then the tribes were assembled in martial array around the tabernacle, according to the order in which their leaders presented the tribal offerings to the Levites.

YHVH continued to give instructions, this time for the making of two silver trumpets and for their usage. These instruments had a variety of purposes: gathering the people before YHVH, gathering the tribal leaders, moving the camp, for feasts and the first day of the month, and before going to war (ref. Numbers 10:1-10). Less than one year previously, the nation was not ready for battle. Hence, YHVH deliberately did not take them through the land of the Philistines. At that juncture, however, with their journey having just begun, they were being accosted by Amalek. Joshua with a few chosen men *did* have to fight defensively (ref. Exodus 17:8-10). Now the situation was different. YHVH was marching on the offensive to take the land of promise by force.

What an awesome sight it must have been when on the twentieth day of the second month, after the second Passover, the cloud lifted from the tabernacle for the first time and this mighty army of YHVH, with its banners flying and with the priests carrying the ark in front of the leading tribe of Judah, set out toward its destination! No doubt Moses' voice carried to the ends of the camp as he proclaimed, "*Rise up, O YHVH! And let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You*" (Numbers 10:35). Expectations were running high when they set out on the three-day journey. However, hidden beneath the surface of their excitement, there lurked in some a fear of the unknown enemy that occupied the land they were to enter and possess...

Chapter 43

Doubt, Unbelief, Rebellion

(Numbers Chapters 11, 12, 14 and Deuteronomy Chapter 1)

YHVH gave Moses explicit instructions about the order in which the army of Israel was to set out (ref. Numbers 10:13-28). Judah's camp was to lead the way, followed by Issachar and then Zebulun (186,400 soldiers). Next were two of the sons of Levi, Gershon and Merari, who were to carry the tabernacle. Following the latter came Reuben, Simeon, and Gad (in that order, numbering 151,450 soldiers), to be followed by another contingency of Levi, the Kohathites, who were given charge of all the holy articles - "*the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary... the screen*" (Numbers 3:31). Behind the Kohathites were Ephraim and Manasseh and then Benjamin (108,100 soldiers). Dan, Asher, and finally Naphtali (157,600 soldiers), were to be the rearguard. Thus, when everyone and everything was put in place, 603,550 soldiers in their martial array were marching through the wilderness, being led by a cloud by day and a fire by night. An impressive sight indeed!

Inside the camp, however, trouble was brewing. Moses, who was not altogether confident that such an army could be led solely by YHVH, pleaded with his father-in-law to stay with them and act as their *eyes* in order to lead Israel to their various camp sites (ref. Numbers 10:31). But because the Midianite priest chose not to go with them, Moses broke YHVH's orders and placed the ark in front of the company of Judah, "*to search out a resting place for them*" (Numbers 10:33). Thus, instead of the ark being in its designated spot with the family of the Kohathites and with the rest of the holy articles, it was moved up front to lead the way. This was but the first phase in a chain of escalating rebellions.

Grumbling arose in the midst of the people. It was only Moses' intercession that put an end to the fire of YHVH's anger which sparked at the edge of Israel's camp (ref. Numbers 11:1-2). Next, the "mixed multitude's" desire for meat immediately swayed the Israelites as well. Murmuring and complaining had been prevalent all along. Now,

however, the desires of the flesh were so strong that they wanted more than just the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, and onions that they had supposedly eaten in their exile - now only meat (flesh) could satisfy their appetite. For over a year YHVH had been providing them with manna (like coriander seed), which they gathered and baked into bread, but that was no longer palatable. Again the people wept in their dwellings, and wished that they had never left Egypt. Moses, knowing that this behavior was evil in the sight of Elohim, took it personally and lodged his own complaint, even to the point of asking Him to take his life as he had had enough of “bearing” this people.

It was his own unbelief that brought this distress upon Moses. Hence, he was to experience reproof: *“And YHVH said to Moses, ‘Has YHVH’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not’”* (Numbers 11:23). Moses was charged to bring seventy elders to the Tent of Meeting, where YHVH bestowed upon them the same prophetic anointing that was upon His servant. Now, just like Moses they all prophesied, quite likely about the coming thirty-day meat supply (ref. Numbers 11:17-19, 25). Two other men were also granted the spirit of prophecy; they stayed in the camp and did not show up at the Tent of Meeting. Even so YHVH did not withhold from them the spirit of prophecy (ref. Numbers 11:26-27). When Joshua came to warn Moses of these two prophets, Moses had already been sufficiently humbled by the Elohim of Israel, Who demonstrated to him that prophecy originates from the anointing of the Spirit and is not attached to any human gifting or status. Thus Moses’ question to the young man Joshua, *“Are you zealous for my sake?”* was tainted with sarcasm. Changing his tone Moses added, *“Oh, that all YHVH’s people were prophets and that YHVH would put His Spirit upon them!”* (verse 29). Paul echoes these words, saying, *“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy... he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men”* (1 Corinthians 14:1, 3). The prophet Amos declared: *“Elohim does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets”* (Amos 3:7).

In fulfillment of the prediction regarding the provision of meat, the Mighty One of Israel sent a wind/spirit which flung on the ground masses of “dead meat” (quail) in heaps up to

three feet high and a one day's journey all around the camp. In other words, YHVH gave them a month's supply of meat all at one time. Imagine the stench this produced after a day or two in the hot desert sun! By the time the Israelites picked up the birds, these fowl had gone foul as they died by themselves, rendering them non-kosher. Thus, the people were violating a prohibition concerning eating dead animals or even touching them (see Leviticus 22:8). Consequently, a very severe plague fell on the camp of Israel. This was not the first time that YHVH had given them quail to eat - in the second month of their journey out of Egypt, He supplied them with enough bird meat for a single evening (ref. Exodus 16:13).

The spirit of rebellion continued to beset the people. It struck another time when Aaron and Miriam became jealous over Moses' anointing to prophesy: "*Has [YHVH] not spoken through us also?*" (Numbers 12:2). In addition, Miriam also criticized Moses for marrying a dark-skinned woman. Both Aaron and Miriam were scolded in no uncertain terms by YHVH Who pointed out that Moses was not just a prophet, but a person to whom He spoke "*face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings*" (Numbers 12:8). Again judgment was meted out, as Miriam was plagued with leprosy for seven days.

When they arrived at what would have been an entry point to the land at Kadesh-Barnea, Moses' command went out to "*go up and possess [the land], as YHVH the Elohim of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged*" (Deuteronomy 1:21). Yet the army of Israel would go no further, and the people demanded that Moses send out a reconnaissance mission. With YHVH's permission, Moses selected twelve tribal leaders and dispatched them on a forty-day tour of the land. When they returned, ten of them confirmed the apprehensions of the people about the land and its inhabitants: "*The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven*" (Deuteronomy 1:28).

Fear of the Amorites caused the Israelites to reconsider the imminent military campaign. What made things worse, however, were their complaints against the Elohim of Israel: "*Because YHVH hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into*

the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us” (Deuteronomy 1:27), and, “Why has YHVH brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims?” (Numbers 14:3). When Joshua and Caleb tried to encourage them to press on into the beautiful land under the protection of the Almighty One of their forefathers, they were ready to stone them (ref. Numbers 14:6-10). In fact, they even expressed their wish for a leader who would take them back to Egypt.

This was the straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back. Their constant rebellion and waywardness led YHVH to eventually pass over that generation, including Moses, and sentence them to forty years in the wilderness. Moreover, they themselves pronounced their own verdict after listening to the spies’ evil report: *“If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!”* (ref. Numbers 14:2). Only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who saw the goodness of the land and were assured of the Almighty’s guidance and leadership, were to eventually go in to possess it, along with the children under military age (see Deuteronomy 1:35-39). Thus YHVH handed down the judgment: *“But as for you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red [literally Reed] Sea” (Deuteronomy 1:40). “And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness” (Numbers 14:33).*

Upon hearing this grievous command the people attempted to repent, taking it upon themselves to go into the land anyway, without Moses or the ark and above all, devoid of YHVH’s presence. They were immediately defeated by the enemy. Their so-called repentance was nothing less than another form of rebellion. *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for **our** admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11 emphasis added).*

It is very sobering to realize that this entire army of 603,550 men, less Joshua and Caleb, all perished in the wilderness without possessing their land or even getting a glimpse of it...

However, instead of this verdict stimulating some hard-core heart searching, leading to humility and repentance, more scum of discontent surfaced in the Israelite camp. Once again, renowned leaders and “princes” voiced their dissatisfaction and jealousy of Moses and Aaron’s positions. Korach, a relative of the Levitical leaders, infected three Reubenites who most likely could not forget their ancestor’s removal from firstborn status, and 250 “princes” whose birth-rights, at least partially, have been transferred to the Levites. This rebellion had devastating effects with not only the dramatic deaths of Dathan, Abiram, Korah and clan, but also that of the other 250 who perished by fire (ref. Numbers 16:1-35). But this was apparently not enough in order to shake the people into a solemn fear of YHVH. Already “*on the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of YHVH’*” (Numbers 16:41). This last insolence resulted in a plague which consumed 14,700 individuals. Only by Aaron making atonement with a censer of fire and incense from the altar was the pestilence brought to a halt (ref. verses 46-49).

Chapter 44

Enemies of the Nation

After these occurrences of discontentment and distrust, which led to a series of rebellions, YHVH turned the people away from their inheritance. Because of their mutiny, unbelief, and doubt in Him, their journey would take a new turn. He was obliged to send Israel back to the desert in order to humble them, as well as test whether they would keep His commandments or not (ref. Deuteronomy 8:2). He did, however, know full well that they would not be able to live up to His standards of obedience because of their ingrained Adamic nature and the power of another spiritual kingdom that held sway over them. Hence, He made the following prediction: *“When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant”* (Deuteronomy 31:20).

Because of these predispositions, the most dangerous of all enemies resided within them. The power of and the capacity for sin were as natural as breathing. YHVH gave them the tabernacle as a visual *type* of heavenly realities. He also provided the Aaronic priesthood that would carry out His judicial requirements for atonement. Thus, in spite of their condition, YHVH was bound to His covenant and His word. He was still the ruling King, and they were His people. He did not change His mind or intentions to give them the land of their forefathers, and to have them become His witnesses - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Outwardly they also had enemies. From the moment they left Egypt, the Amalekites came out against them. This enemy bore the spirits of enmity, hatred, and murder inherited from their ancestor Esau. The Elohim-given privileges of dominion and territory are the two main components that hover over the entire history of Israel's relationship with their firstborn cousins from the surrounding nations. Regarding Amalek, YHVH told Moses that He would utterly blot out their memory from under

heaven and that He would wage war against them throughout all generations (ref. Exodus 17:14, 16).

Without recounting each of the recorded hostilities that faced the Israelites in the desert, it is sufficient to say that what those forefathers experienced was a microcosmic form of what was to become in later generations a full-blown series of on-going conflicts. Psalm 83 encapsulates this perpetual state which had its beginnings (on the national level) in the wilderness, and is still continuing. The psalm lists the antagonistic people groups and their motive for fighting YHVH's nation. *"For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.' For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot"* (Psalm 83:2-8 emphasis added). Notice the close relatives and how many are actually firstborns. The birthright was always at the hub of the wheel of animosity, jealousy, and enmity. But YHVH had His chosen firstborn nation Jacob/Israel and nothing was going to change this, not even their ill conduct and unruly ways.

After forty years of Moses' leadership, YHVH was about to restore jurisdiction to the tribes that held the birth-rights within the family. Joshua from the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb from the tribe of Judah were YHVH's choice for bringing the nation into the land of promise. These two men were the only spies who had faith and confidence that the Elohim of the Armies of Israel would do what He said He would, namely, go into the land and take it while driving out its occupiers. Here again is a picture, though in small scale, of Ephraim and Judah coming together in their combined firstborn authority, with YHVH moving before them to execute and accomplish His purposes (see Isaiah 11:11-14; Zechariah 9:13).

Chapter 45

YHVH's Solution to Disobedience

(Deuteronomy Chapters 9, 10, 30, 31)

As we watch the children of Israel failing time and again to comply with the conditions that have been placed upon them, with the resultant consequences of those failures, a new theme which will keep recurring is starting to weave its way through the old familiar fiber of 'crime and punishment.' Little by little, YHVH will be unveiling *His* solution to their endless propensity for sin and rebellion.

The many acts of disobedience that occurred during the preparation years before their entering the promised land, made it clear that there was only one operation that would guarantee the Israelites' obedience - a heart circumcision. This concept is first introduced in Deuteronomy 10:16: "*Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*" Further descriptions of that heart of obedience are found in the next chapter: "*Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine **in** your heart and **in** your soul...*" (11:18a emphases added). YHVH was starting to point out that He held the solution to their problem in His hand. In Deuteronomy chapter 30 where He foretells what is to come, He furthermore elucidates, even to the point of predicting the *scattering* and the *banishing* (verses 3 and 4), as eventually Judah would be "scattered" (from the Hebrew root *n.f.tz*), and Ephraim "driven" (literally "rejected" - from the root *d.ch.h*) ultimately to be reunited (ref. Isaiah 11:12).

In that distant future, not only will YHVH restore the lost to Himself and to the land, He will also bring to pass the directive to "*circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love YHVH your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live*" (Deuteronomy 30:6; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34). In this way the requirements of holiness, which are to characterize YHVH's people and His kingdom, will be fulfilled as was presented earlier on in the narrative: "*Today you have proclaimed YHVH to be your Elohim, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also*

today YHVH has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to YHVH your Elohim, just as He has spoken” (Deuteronomy 26:17-19). Moreover, even though at this point the above description was a far cry from the Israelites’ reality, YHVH Who sees the end from the beginning could make such a declaration and be absolutely sure that it would be fulfilled in His timing.

After establishing a firm foundation of YHVH’s total control over Israel’s destiny, a human voice was heard speaking in the camp. It was Moses. This time he did not speak for YHVH. Moses was speaking for himself with an awareness of the change that was approaching, acknowledging that he was not going to lead the people any longer nor was he going to enter the land. Yet very profoundly, he reassured YHVH’s people of Elohim’s implicit loyalty, ending with a hearty: *“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them [the enemies]; for YHVH your Elohim, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).*

Thus these words, declared so categorically, and outlining YHVH’s plans and *His* part in the covenant relationship, validated the promise that had been uttered earlier: *“Therefore understand today that YHVH your Elohim is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them [the enemies] and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as YHVH has said to you” (Deuteronomy 9:3).*

However, lest there be any misunderstanding as to YHVH’s motives in doing all that He was about to do, He did not leave any room for doubt as He presented His perspective: *“It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that YHVH your Elohim drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which YHVH swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 9:5).*

Chapter 46

Israel Rejects YHVH as King

Just as Jacob blessed his sons before his death, so Moses, the man of Elohim, conferred blessings upon each of the tribes of Israel before his departure. The Song of Moses and the short introduction together form a significant preamble to the prophetic words that Moses pronounced upon each tribe (ref. Deuteronomy 32:1-43; 33:1-5).

The “Song” was primarily to testify against Israel in their predicted unfaithfulness: *“For I know their inclination [‘yetzer’ - their very form and disposition] of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them”* (Deuteronomy 31:21b). In fact, Moses even called upon the elements of nature (ref. Deuteronomy 31:28b; 32:1) to witness the story - past, present, and future - of Israel’s relationship with their Elohim, as well as the designs and dealings that He has predetermined for His people in spite of their ‘inclinations.’ Moses continued to declare a principle for all time: *“And there was a king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, the tribes of Israel together”* (chapter 33:5 literal translation). As seen here, the supreme rule of the King of Israel will manifest to its fullest when Jacob the “crooked” becomes Jeshurun, the “straight and upright” or “straightened-out one,” and when all Israel is united under the leadership of its Shepherd and King (ref. Ezekiel 37:24-25).

After the death of Moses, YHVH charged Joshua to cross the Jordan into the land that He was giving to His people. Once again, spies were dispatched. This time only two were sent, as in the previous episode it took only two witnesses to speak the truth. Indeed, the scouts returned with a positive report regarding the condition of the local population, who were very apprehensive of the impending invasion by the Israelite tribes. The pathway was now open for Israel to come in and conquer the land. With YHVH of Hosts leading them and with the Jordan’s waters retreating all the way to a place called *Adam*, the people marched in following the ark of the covenant.

However, this triumphant entry did not signal what was to transpire, even after the miraculous fall of the walls of Jericho. Sadly, the land was never fully conquered in spite of YHVH doing His part, as is clearly declared: *“So YHVH gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. YHVH gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; YHVH delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which YHVH had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass”* (Joshua 21:43-45). YHVH gave and “made possible” all the above for His children. They, however, failed to fully *take* what had been made available to them. *“... The word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it”* (Hebrews 4:2).

By the end of Joshua’s life we hear the sorrowful report, *“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know YHVH nor the work which He had done for Israel”* (Judges 2:10). The military campaigns continued, therefore, even after Joshua’s death. The book of Judges commences with YHVH’s command for Judah, typically, to head the battle with the Canaanites (ref. Judges 1:1-2). However, all of the tribes’ encounters with the enemy ended with the refrain *“and [so and so]... did not drive out...”*

It was no wonder that in this state the nation constantly failed to please Elohim and as if that were not enough, they continued to indulge in idol worship. Hence, YHVH gave Israel into the hands of the nations round about them. This inevitably caused them to cry out to Him, to which He responded repeatedly by saving them (usually through raising up a judge/leader). This on-going cycle continued numerous times. However, in spite of YHVH’s chastening as well as His ‘rescue operations,’ that era was characterized in the book of Judges by what appears there as a recurring theme: *“In those days there was no king in Israel; every one did what was right in his own eyes.”* Thus, YHVH’s kingship over Israel was challenged, even though He had continually proven Himself well able to rule His people by His sovereignty as well as by delegating power to the tribal elders, judges, and to the Aaronic priesthood. Every time this order was rejected, chaos reigned.

In order to allow His people to experience His governmental principles through a trustworthy servant, YHVH chose the person of Samuel from the tribe of Levi (ref. 1 Chronicles 6:33-38). Samuel, who had been called from birth, had a unique position among the people of Israel - aside from being a priest, he also functioned as a judge. This man of Elohim embarked on his ministry only after the death of Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who proved unfaithful to their calling and contributed to a severe military defeat for Israel, in the course of which even the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines.

Samuel had a very interesting family background. His father had two wives - one loved and the other unloved. The loved wife was barren and the unloved was fertile. It was the barren wife, Hanna, who received the “double portion” from her husband (ref. 1 Samuel 1:5) and eventually gave birth to Samuel. This situation created a great deal of strife and rivalry between the two women, making it quite similar to the story of Jacob and *his* two wives. Indeed, Jacob and Rachel (and their relationship) are somewhat of a prototype of Samuel’s parents.

Samuel judged Israel as he traveled the route from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah. During his days Israel repented and cast down all their foreign gods including the Ashtaroath, and directed their hearts toward YHVH. Hence, they were successful in defeating the Philistines (ref. 1 Samuel 7:10). However, Samuel’s sons did not follow YHVH, which led to one of the most devastating decisions during his entire time of ministry. As we saw already in *Chapter 4, An Everlasting Kingdom*, the people demanded a king like all the other nations, deeming it the only solution for establishing order and peace. This grieved the elderly seer who felt personally cast aside. Elohim, however, informed His servant that the nation was not rejecting him, but Himself as king over them. “*And YHVH said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have **rejected Me**, that I should not reign over them’*” (1 Samuel 8:7 emphasis added). Nevertheless, before choosing their earthly king, Samuel warned the people of the consequences of such an act (ref. 1 Samuel 8:11-18).

Surprisingly, Israel's first kings are said to be sitting on YHVH's throne, as for example in the following: "*Then Solomon sat **on the throne of YHVH** as king instead of David his father*" (1 Chronicles 29:23 emphasis added).

The people's insistence upon *seeking* or *asking* for a human king is highlighted by several references (for example, 1 Samuel 8:10; 12:13, 17, 19) employing the verb *sh.a.l* which shares the same root that forms the name "Shaul" - Saul, the tall and handsome Benjaminite whom YHVH chose to 'replace' Himself on the throne. However, Shaul also means "he who is borrowed." Is this an ironic twist, indicative of the fact that when human will is appeased it is, of necessity, short-lived?

Interestingly, the tribe of Benjamin, whose territory was located between Judah and Ephraim, yielded the first monarch who before his coronation was prophetically handed two loaves of bread (ref. 1 Samuel 10:4). However, Judah still held the scepter, the kingly portion, with Ephraim having the double portion. Thus, this attempt to set up Benjamin for the position of unifying all Israel was doomed from the beginning.

Chapter 47

Two Camps in Conflict

(1 Samuel Chapter 16; 2 Samuel Chapters 3 to 8, 11 to 13, 15 to 20)

With the failure of Saul to lead the nation in righteousness, YHVH turned to the kingly lineage of Judah, picking the man of His choice to sit on His throne. Some of the details of Judah's lineage are listed in the book of Ruth, starting with Boaz (who was a descendent of Perez, Judah's firstborn through Tamar), followed by Obed the father of Jesse, who sired the chosen monarch. Samuel, the judge/seer/prophet, was sent in his priestly capacity to Bethlehem to the family of Jesse, to find the one who would qualify for the position (ref. 1 Samuel 16:1). After having seven of Jesse's sons pass before him without receiving any indication of YHVH's choice, Samuel inquired of the father if there were any more boys. Almost reluctantly, Jesse mentioned the last of his sons who was out tending the sheep. As the young shepherd came and stood in front of the aged prophet, heaven and earth bore witness to YHVH's divine involvement once again. David's heart was turned toward the Elohim of Israel from his youth. Therefore, YHVH selected him to sit on His throne.

As we have seen again and again, it was not necessarily the one to come first out of the womb who would qualify to receive the birthright. The father's life is in all of his sons, thus he (or YHVH) can bequeath the firstborn rights to the most faithful one. In the case of David, YHVH chose him even though he was the eighth in line. By selecting one of Judah's sons for the kingly position, YHVH was honoring Judah's role as the nation's prince and leader.

The house of Israel was greatly displeased by this change, so they kept their allegiance to Saul's son Ishbosheth. David, on the other hand, ruled Judah for these seven years, during which time conflicts continued between the two parts of the nation (ref. 2 Samuel 3:1a). However, "*David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker*" (verse 1b). It was only after the army commander of the house of Saul,

Abner, defected to David's side that the elders of Israel invited Judah's king to rule over them as well (ref. 2 Samuel 3:17-21).

Shortly following this reunification, David conquered Jerusalem and built it up, making it the capital of the united kingdom. He then continued to lead the nation in several other successful military campaigns, extending the borders of the promised land. David, who was also spiritually inclined, prepared a site in Jerusalem for the ark of the covenant in order to "make room" for the presence of the Almighty. In turn, YHVH responded by initiating a covenant with His chosen (ref. 2 Samuel 7:4ff).

Yet David's victorious military ventures may also have whetted his carnal appetites, causing him to feel invincible and thus leading to the Bathsheba affair. YHVH's rebuke and pronouncement of curses upon David's house were not late in coming: the sword would not depart from his family, his wives would be given to other men in broad daylight, and he would suffer the death of Bathsheba's firstborn (ref. 2 Samuel 12:10-14). With the spirit of lust now having inroads into David's family, incest and fornication started to manifest, along with rebellion and murder. After his son Amnon raped his sister Tamar, another son, Absalom, took revenge by killing his brother. A rift then ensued between David and Absalom, resulting in an insurrection and an attempt by Absalom to usurp the throne of his father. This mutiny divided the nation once again, with most of the house of Israel following Absalom.

As we know, David fled from his son and stayed beyond the Jordan in the city of Mahanaim (which means "double encampment"). There he waited, refusing to go out with his army against his son. Surprisingly, even after the latter's death when it was clear that the rebellion had been restrained, David still did not go up to reclaim his throne. Why?

Absalom's army was made up mostly of Israelites from the north who, after the death of their leader and their defeat, fled each one to his own tent. At that point internal conflicts arose among the northern tribesmen. They had anointed Absalom as king, in an attempt

to replace his father. But now that Absalom was dead, what were they to do? (ref. 2 Samuel 19:9-10). The Israelites had committed mutiny ‘big time.’ How then could they face David whose reinstatement they were contemplating?

David, who became aware of this situation, stayed where he was. His reasons for doing so may reveal why the Messiah, King of Israel, Son of David, also tarrys at the gate of the “encampment” in the wilderness beyond the Jordan, so to speak, and will not come back to reign in Jerusalem. His expectations could be similar to David’s, who sent his two priests, Zadok and Abiathar, to call upon his kin of the tribe of Judah saying: “*Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house?... You are my brethren, you are my bone and my flesh*” (2 Samuel 19:11-12). Remarkably, these words turned the hearts of all the men of Judah (ref. verse 14). May this be true of the house of Judah in our generation; may they likewise acknowledge the greater Son of David and invite Him back to Jerusalem!

At this juncture the elders dispatched word for the king to return, but he only came as far as the Jordan. David waited for his tribesmen to come down to Gilgal, which they eventually did *as one man*, in order to meet him there. Gilgal was the place of circumcision after the children of Israel had entered the promised land, and it was there where “the reproach of Egypt rolled away” from them (ref. Joshua 5:2, 9). Is the Messiah waiting for the house of Judah to not only realize that they are “*my bone and my flesh*” (see Isaiah 11:1; Luke 1:31-32; Romans 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:8), but also that they (like the rest of Israel) are in need of the heart circumcision which will remove the proverbial reproach of Egypt (infestation by the world)?

Judah’s kingly position, scepter, and leadership in the family also had to be respected and honored by the northern tribes. David realized that if only one house recognized his Elohim-given appointment, the kingdom divided would not stand. Could it be that until the Messiah has a united kingdom - when Judah and Israel/Ephraim are willing to walk together in humility, repentance, and reconciliation under His Kingship, rule, and divine order - He will have to stay put, just as it says about Him: “*whom heaven **must receive***

until the times of restoration of all things, which Elohim has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began”? (Acts 3:21 emphasis added). A significant prophecy, out of the many (as of yet) unfulfilled ones regarding this restoration, is found in Ezekiel 37:15ff.

Just before the contingency from Judah managed to reach the king, another group joined them. A repentant Shimei, son of Gera from the house of Saul, a man who had cursed and stoned David when the latter was at his lowest point (ref. 2 Samuel 16:5ff), came now with one thousand men from Benjamin and crossed the Jordan before the king (ref. 2 Samuel 19:16-20). Shimei took it upon himself to speak not only for his tribe, but also for the “house of Joseph.” David granted forgiveness to Shimei and was also reconciled to Saul’s crippled son Mephibosheth. Meanwhile, more and more of the Israelites were coming down to watch the procession crossing the Jordan. They had stopped quarreling among themselves, but now they were incensed with Judah. When the latter came down to meet their king, the jealousy of Israel finally boiled to the surface: *“Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, ‘Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David’s men with him across the Jordan?’”* (2 Samuel 19:41). The Israelites in their self-righteousness were forgetting their own recent rebellion, and did not want to be left out or pushed out or even ‘bullied’ out by their older brother. Therefore, they lodged a complaint: “That’s not fair! It was our idea in the first place to bring the king back!” In other circumstances this might be a reasonable grievance. Unfortunately, Israel’s sense of inferiority demanded a touch of favoritism and a measure of recognition. Having failed in their attempt to get their way, they flared up in anger.

What was Judah’s reply to this emotional assault? *“The king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king’s expense? Or has he given us any gift?”* (2 Samuel 19:42). Did this response have anything to do with Israel’s complaint? Poor Israel, always outwitted by their Jewish brethren! Indeed, there did not seem to be any favoritism on the king’s part toward Judah, yet Israel’s hurt feelings of pride, jealousy, and anger surfaced - although not totally without reason.

Still confused over Judah's remarks, the sons of Israel made their next mistake by an attempt to take a business-like approach: "*And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, 'We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us?'*" (2 Samuel 19:43). (Note that at some point, perhaps during David's seven-year reign over Judah, the ratio of "ten to one" was established.)

"*We have ten shares in the king,*" they boasted. "Big deal!" So what's that to Judah? He can take his one share and make it into a hundred before his brother even begins to realize what he's doing. "*Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel*" (2 Samuel 19:43b). The argument must have been quite intense, but the lion's roar won the conflict and left Israel even more frustrated, intimidated, and devastated.

Now when Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, a rebel from the tribe of Benjamin blew a trumpet and announced: "*We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!*" (2 Samuel 20:1). Consequently, Israel departed to their tents and once again, fighting ensued. An all-out war was just barely averted with the intervention of an unnamed "wise woman" from Abel Beth-Maacah (ref. 2 Samuel 20:16ff).

Even though David was eventually able to bring all the tribes under his rule, the ten tribes of the north still maintained their jealousy, and Judah retained their enmity. The relationship between the two camps would be further strained during the reign of Solomon. However, there is very little mention of "two houses" in the Solomonic era narrative; the nation is mostly referred to as "all Israel." Albeit, there still remained evidence of the separation of the two parts of the nation as can be seen by the following statement: "*And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon*" (1 Kings 4:25). What made the distinction between the two parts of Israel in the days of Solomon was that the house of

Joseph felt quite suppressed. It was Jeroboam the Ephraimite, put in charge of the forced labor of that house by the king, who eventually raised the banner of discontent and rebellion (ref. 1 Kings 11:28, 26).

YHVH responded to Solomon's idolatrous ways by charging one of His prophets, Ahijah, to divide the kingdom and officially transfer ten of Israel's tribes over to Jeroboam (ref. 1 Kings 11:31-32). Upon getting word of this event, Solomon sought to kill this trouble maker who fled to Egypt and remained there until the king died. When Jeroboam returned, what YHVH had promised him came to pass, but not without some negotiations with Solomon's son Rehoboam. It is here that we get a glimpse into what life was like during the days of Solomon. At Shechem, Jeroboam and some others from the tribes of Israel appealed to the newly crowned king of Judah, asking him to lighten the heavy yoke that his father had placed upon them. Rehoboam, however, refused with these words: *"And now, whereas my father **put a heavy yoke on you**, I will add to your yoke; my father **chastised you with whips**, but I will chastise you with scourges!"* (1 Kings 12:11 emphases added). *"Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: 'What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!' So Israel departed to their tents"* (1 Kings 12:16 - see almost identical words in 2 Samuel 20:1). They then made Jeroboam king of the house of Israel. Only the house of Judah, the tribe of Benjamin, all of the Levites, and some Israelites living in Judah followed the house of David (ref. 1 Kings 12:20; 2 Chronicles 10:17; 11:13-14, 16).

Rehoboam was not about to concede defeat, and with the help of the tribe of Benjamin, planned to attack the other tribes of Israel. YHVH, however, sent a message through Shemaiah, a man of Elohim, saying: *"You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for **this thing is from Me**"* (1 Kings 12:24 emphasis added). Here is the officially-sanctioned, YHVH-ordained, commencement to the division of the progeny of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into the two separate and distinct kingdoms, nations, and people - Israel and Judah.

Chapter 48

The Sin of Jeroboam

(1 Kings Chapters 11, 12 and 14)

With the house of Jacob (Israel and Judah) now divided into two nations and kingdoms, Elohim's will and word will continue to guide their destinies, in spite of their iniquities. As we follow their biblical history we must pay close attention to the prophets, since YHVH uses them to speak very specifically and explicitly to each house and sometimes to both at the same time.

The initial influence that the first king, Jeroboam, had over the northern kingdom is very significant, as he set the pattern and created a 'model' of rebellion, idolatry, and adultery. Not only did he cause Israel to sin by setting up idols, which he declared to be Israel's "gods," but he also broke off all relations with Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Abolishing the Torah of Moses, he established his own priesthood, along with feast days other than those decreed by YHVH (ref. 1 Kings 12:25-33).

Jeroboam's reign lasted only twenty-two years. However, he left his legacy imprinted on the very core of his kingdom. YHVH refers over and over to the "sin of Jeroboam" as the main reason for the judgments and curses that fell on the people and the land. The "sin of Jeroboam" may be summed up in one phrase - "*replacement theology.*"

YHVH called upon the very aged and blind prophet Ahijah to bring a message of doom and gloom to Jeroboam and to the nation. It was this very prophet who earlier had symbolically given Jeroboam the kingship over the ten tribes by the gesture of tearing his garment into twelve pieces, ten of which he handed to the soon-to-be king (ref. 1 Kings 11:30). But now he delivered a very different prophecy: "*But you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back -- therefore behold! I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; I will take away the remnant of the house of*

Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone.” “For YHVH will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking YHVH to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin” (1 Kings 14:9-10, 15-16).

This was not the first time that YHVH had instructed a prophet to speak out in this manner. Moses, before the people had ever entered the land, foretold of these days and the reasons for what was to befall the house of Israel: *“Because they have forsaken the covenant of YHVH the Elohim of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods that they did not know and that he had not given them; then the anger of YHVH was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book; and YHVH uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 29:25-28).*

One of the main characteristics of the two kingdoms’ relationship was that of their frequent conflicts. During the reign of Jeroboam (whose name means “dispute in the nation” and also “national multiplicity”) and beyond, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah warred against each other. The tribe of Ephraim, bitterly envious of Judah, was the latter’s chief rival. Years later Isaiah would prophesy that one of the signs of the end-time restoration of the two houses would be that this jealousy and envy would depart, and as a result the enemies of Judah would be cut off (ref. Isaiah 11:13).

In spite of this horrible disposition toward lawlessness in the house of Israel/Ephraim, YHVH’s intent was to fulfill the covenant promises of multiplicity that He had made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. His word is attached to the life of the forefathers’ seed/offspring, in spite of the fact that *“although they knew Elohim, they [the offspring] did not glorify Him as Elohim... and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21).* As we have already seen in some of the first chapters, YHVH hid his purposes in the realm of darkness until it was time to bring these plans into the light. Likewise in this

case, YHVH camouflaged His intentions for the house of Joseph under the covering of iniquity. He hid His people/treasure in this realm of spiritual darkness until He would remove the authority behind the “power of sin” and bring Israel *out of [this] darkness into His marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9).

All the kings of the northern kingdom were evil and followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam. Perhaps the most famous was the team of Ahab and Jezebel and the latter’s prophets of Baal. YHVH sent to them and to their kingdom his two most renowned servants, Elijah and Elisha. Interestingly, just before the coming of Yeshua, John the Immerser appeared on the scene in the *spirit* of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (ref. Luke 1:17). Prior to “*the great and terrible day of YHVH,*” He will send this same spiritual anointing on the prophet Elijah to also turn the hearts of the children (of Israel) to the fathers - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (ref. Malachi 4:5-6), and to exhort them to “*remember the Torah of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel*” (verse 4).

Chapter 49

Judgment and Prophecy

*“For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,” says YHVH, ‘that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; **but they would not hear** [listen]’” (Jeremiah 13:11 emphasis added).*

While Israel was following the ways (sins) of Jeroboam, Judah too was not free from iniquity, as it is written: *“Now Judah did evil in the sight of YHVH, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree”* (1 Kings 14:22-23). The prophet Ezekiel compares the two nations of Israel as represented by their respective capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, to two sisters. The prophet contrasts Samaria with Sodom and then goes on to conclude that Jerusalem’s sins are far worse than Samaria’s: *“Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sister’s by all the abominations which you have done”* (Ezekiel 16:51).

If Judah’s sins were worse than Israel’s, how is it that Judah was not judged equally? The answer lies in the separate destinies of the two nations. Since Judah’s destiny was going to be different from Israel’s, her lessons and the consequences of *her* sins could not be identical to those of her compatriot from the house of Israel. Thus, in meting out justice in different ways, YHVH was making a clear distinction between the two parts of the nation. His purpose in dividing the house of Jacob was not only for judicial reasons as mentioned in earlier chapters (splitting the positional firstborn rights because of inherent sin), but also because ultimately His *two onyx stones, two loaves, two houses, two sisters, two nations, two countries, two sticks/trees, two kingdoms, two olive branches, two anointed ones, and two lamp stands* were to become the *two witnesses* of

His faithfulness, mercy, and love (ref. Exodus 28:9; Leviticus 23:17; Isaiah 8:14; Jeremiah 3:6-10; Ezekiel 35:10; 37:19, 22; Zechariah 4:3,11-12, 14; Isaiah 43:10, 12; 44:8; Revelation 11:3-4).

Let us take a look at how the consequences of Israel/Ephraim's sins are being described, as these descriptions point to the prophetic destiny of this house. YHVH sends the prophet Hosea to His wayward children whom he compares to a harlot by the name of Gomer. Interestingly, Gomer was also the name of Japheth's firstborn (ref. Genesis 10:2). The prophet Ezekiel mentions Gomer as one of the nations that will come down from the far north in the battle of Gog and Magog, which will occur in the latter days (after Judah and Ephraim are united and living securely in their land, ref. Ezekiel 38:1-8, 11). However, many millennia before that end-time scenario takes place, the house of Ephraim will end up in the land of Gomer when taken there by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. That is where they will mix with the local inhabitants and lose their identity, as prophesied by Hosea (ref. 8:8-9). Nevertheless, in and from that place they will also begin to multiply as befits Ephraim, the "doubly fruitful" one.

Hosea is told by YHVH to have children by this harlot, whose names were already predetermined because of their prophetic significance. The firstborn son was to be named *Jezeel* which means "Yah will sow." YHVH was reiterating what He had said to the forefathers when He made the covenant with them, that He would multiply their seed/life plentifully. Nevertheless, here the "sowing" also implies scattering and hence the demolishing of the kingdom and the deportation of its subjects. Another immediate reason for the destruction of the kingdom was in direct response to the actions of Jehu (ref. Hosea 1:4), who before taking the reigns of power in the northern kingdom had shed the blood of Ahaziah king of Judah (ref. 2 Kings 9:27), David's offspring and YHVH's anointed, in the Valley of Jezreel.

The next child of Hosea with Gomer, a daughter, was to be named *Lo-Ruhama*, "*for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away*" (Hosea 1:6). Here again is a prophetic tag on the temporary destiny of this house, which

sets the stage for them to become ultimately “YHVH’s mercy vessels” through a new, or renewed, covenant (ref. Romans 11:31). Much later on, the apostles Paul and Peter quote these prophecies of Hosea when addressing their audiences, a fact that points to the identity of their addressees (ref. Romans 9: 25-26; 1 Peter 2:10).

Making a plain differentiation between the destinies of Israel’s two kingdoms, Hosea says to the house of Judah: “*Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by YHVH their Elohim, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen*” (Hosea 1:7). Thus Judah and her companions from the other tribes were destined to remain an identifiable entity (to be known as the Jews and Israel).

Gomer conceived and gave birth to another boy who was to be named *Lo-Ami*, meaning “not My people,” to which YHVH added, “*and I will not be your Elohim*” (ref. Hosea 1:9; 1 Peter 2:10a). With these words YHVH cut off the branches of Jacob’s proverbial olive tree (see Jeremiah 11:16-17). The outcasts would no longer have roots or links to the people of Israel, nor to the forefathers. They were to become the cut-off and scattered “*wild olive tree*” (Romans 11:17), “*being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without Elohim in the world*” (Ephesians 2:12). YHVH not only severed them, but He also burned them in the fires of His jealousy. They have become ashes, *epher*, which just happens to be the first three consonants of the name Ephraim. YHVH then sent a desert wind that blew the ashes primarily, but not exclusively, northward and westward (see Jeremiah 3:12; 31:8; Hosea 11:10) until Ephraim became well mixed in all nations (ref. Hosea 7:8). However, the divine spark which has been placed into those ashes is YHVH’s word, and thus when His Spirit will blow on these dim embers, they will become a mighty flame, “*The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame*” (Obadiah 1:18a). This flame promises to be beautiful, as YHVH assures Israel that He will “*give them beauty for ashes*” (ref. Isaiah 61:3).

In spite of these future promises, at present the judgments that were to be inflicted upon Ephraim were so severe that it looked like nothing would be left of them: “*Ephraim is*

stricken, their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. Yes, were they to bear children, I would kill the darlings of their womb” (Hosea 9:16). What a contrast to their declared destiny of multiplicity! We have noted before that darkness and sin at times form a veil over YHVH’s positive purposes. Here too we find that He concealed His intents in what appears to be a contradictory state of affairs.

Hosea’s prophecy of doom, however, does not end with an equally tragic forecast. Like all the other prophets, he too points to the “hope of Israel” and to the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping Elohim: *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living Elohim.’ Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!” (Hosea 1:10-11). Hundreds of years later, the prophet Zechariah reinforced these words: “I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; They shall live, together with their children, and they shall return” (10:9).*

How will we recognize the greatness of the *day of Jezreel* other than in the harvest produced by this seed (Israel) that YHVH sowed? John the Immerser makes reference to Yeshua standing with a winnowing fork and clearing out the threshing floor, in preparation for the ingathering of the harvest of the seed that His Father had sown (ref. Matthew 3:12); but not before getting rid of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30).

Chapter 50

The Heart of the Matter

The previous two chapters (dealing with the nation's sins and their consequences) may be viewed against a backdrop that had already been put in place by Moses. Prior to the Israelites' entrance into the land, the dedicated leader delivered to his flock a very disturbing message in which he revealed to them that YHVH had "*not given [them] a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear*" (Deuteronomy 29:4). Moses went on to predict that once settled in their YHVH-given land, they would break covenant with Him. Consequently they would not live there long, as YHVH would cast out and scatter them amongst the nations (as cited in the previous chapter). In spite of this harsh proclamation, the people of Israel were not left without hope. Moses promised them that in the latter days they would return to their Elohim whole-heartedly, and listen to His voice (ref. Deuteronomy 4:29-30).

The prophet Jeremiah uttered a similar prophecy: "*Thus says YHVH: 'Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places; The city shall be built upon its own mound, and the palace shall remain according to its own plan. Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry; I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small... So you shall be my people, and I will be your Elohim...' The fierce anger of YHVH will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the **intents of His heart**. In the latter days you will consider it*" (Jeremiah 30:18-19, 22, 24 emphasis added). Here we get a glimpse into Elohim's heart of love and compassion for Jacob. YHVH will fulfill His intents and purposes toward our forefathers and us, their progeny. And so, although He was judicially bound because of their iniquities to cast Israel away and disperse them, He was going to make use of these circumstances for His ultimate goals.

YHVH had determined that His chosen (particularly through Ephraim), would become a multitude of nations and myriads of people, and that their multiplication would take place

while assimilating in the midst of the heathens. But, the dispersion would not be solely for the purpose of their proliferation. *“I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you”* (Ezekiel 22:15 emphasis added). YHVH also purposed the scattering to be effective in the “removal of their filthiness,” so that the relationship with His disobedient children could be fully restored.

Repeatedly, Israel was reprimanded, punished, and “put on notice” but to no avail. Hence, what will make this present restoration effort different? Through Moses, YHVH hints at what *He* will have to do (in the latter days) in order for His people to be bonded to Him on the heart level. Thus, this transformation, which He will put into effect, will also enable Israel to return to the land. *“And YHVH your Elohim will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love YHVH your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live”* (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Admittedly, “the heart of the matter” is that there is an inherent problem with the heart of man, and Israel is no exception. Even as early as the pre-Noahic days, YHVH pointed out that the heart of man is evil even from youth (ref. Genesis 6:5; 8:21). There were times during which the Israelites themselves cried out to YHVH regarding their heart condition: *“Why have You made us stray from Your ways, and hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants’ sake, the tribes of Your inheritance”* (Isaiah 63:17). Nevertheless, YHVH is very clear and unequivocal concerning the future of His people: *“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your Elohim”* (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

In one breath YHVH completely reverses what looked like the demise of His nation. But *how* will He transform the heart of His people so that it will meet the requirements of His Torah?

Chapter 51

Preparation for Another Covenant

In order to answer the question that we just posed, we must continue to follow YHVH's strategic plan as expressed through the prophets. It is a plan which points to His continuous and unconditional love and acceptance (grace - *chen*), the latter forming the foundation of all of His covenant promises to Abraham and his chosen descendants.

Between the dispersion of Israel, circa 722 BCE and the deportation of Judah in 586 BCE, YHVH raised up the two major prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, through whom He explained in full to both houses (although the northern kingdom was already dispersed) the reasons for their predicament. At the same time, these prophets also described and elaborated on Israel's future restoration and redemption.

In speaking to the elders of Israel who were now beyond the Great River, Ezekiel reminded them of their history of disobedience and rebellion and of how Elohim had responded to their insurrection each and every time. YHVH had *“acted for [His] name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles/nations among whom [Israel lived], in whose sight [He] had made [Himself] known to them...”* (Ezekiel 20:9). Before the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, YHVH declared that He was not taking them there for their sake nor because of their righteousness, but for His name's sake, as they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people (ref. Deuteronomy 9:5-7). However, He still intended for them to be His witnesses to the nations, just as King David pointed out: *“Nevertheless [YHVH] saved [us] for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known... not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth. Why should the Gentiles/nations say, ‘So where is their Elohim?’”* (Psalms 106:8; 115:1-2).

Even though YHVH cast off both houses of Israel, He was continuing to watch over them for He had not given up His covenants and promises to their ancestors. Furthermore, although His people had proven to be unable to uphold the Torah, YHVH was obviously

not going to do away with the statutes, laws, and ordinances which govern His kingdom, His relationship with His people, and their destiny. Because He is bound to His perfect nature and word, nothing would stand in the way of His progressive plan, not even Israel's utterly fallen disposition and propensity for sin.

As we have seen all along, Israel was called and chosen as YHVH's firstborn nation. YHVH even sealed His relationship with them with a very radical pronouncement: *"Thus says YHVH, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (YHVH of hosts is His name): 'If those ordinances depart from before Me,' says YHVH, 'then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.' Thus says YHVH: 'If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done,' says YHVH"* (Jeremiah 31:35-37). Having said all this, YHVH had to embark on an undertaking that would transform the errant hearts of His chosen, which thus far have been in consistent opposition to His kingdom, His authority, and His plans and purposes.

Here is where a new covenant comes into history. This covenant was going to be different from the one made at Mount Sinai, which was contingent upon certain conditions and therefore depended on Israel's ability to choose YHVH's righteousness via a law written on tablets of stone. This newly declared agreement was founded totally on YHVH's mercy and ability to remove the rebellious nature of sin from human hearts, and to grant forgiveness once and for all. The prophet Jeremiah records the terms of this new arrangement: *"Behold, the days are coming,' says YHVH, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,' says YHVH. 'But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' says YHVH: 'I will put My Torah in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their Elohim, and they shall be My people... For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more'"* (Jeremiah 31:31-34). What a far-reaching

promise! Thus the Torah, its laws and statutes, will no longer present an insurmountable challenge. It is the Torah which is at the very core of the new covenant, as the recipients' new hearts will be Torah-compatible by nature.

Yet most remarkably, this new covenant declaration came at a time when Israel was already in exile and Judah too was facing deportation. The peculiar and deliberate timing of announcing this covenant attested to its veracity and guaranteed that YHVH *Himself* would carry it out. He promised through Moses that He would raise up another such prophet (ref. Deuteronomy 18:15, 18). As we have seen, Moses was YHVH's servant-deliverer from the slavery in Egypt. But now He needed a deliverer, a savior, to bring them out of their bondage to sin and to their naturally evil inclinations. YHVH had to introduce a firstborn, a kinsman-redeemer who would qualify for this office. This one would have to be both a prince and priest after the order of Melchizedek (King/Priest of Righteousness), and be totally free of the nature of sin.

Chapter 52

A Kinsman Redeemer

In order to maintain the laws governing man's redemption and the kingdom principles as they apply specifically to the family of Noah, the kinsman-redeemer that YHVH was going to bring forth had to be from the firstborn family, the family that held the leadership rights. Abraham was the twentieth firstborn prince of that line, followed by Isaac and by YHVH's "chosen nation" - Jacob. As we have already seen, Judah was granted the princely portion of the birthright. David, a descendant of Judah, acted not only in the capacity of king but also wore the ritual ephod and ministered to YHVH in a priest-like role (ref. 1 Chronicles 15:27). The Psalms demonstrate the special relationship between YHVH and David, who prefigured the future Redeemer/Messiah.

Many years later, during the split into two kingdoms and beyond (that is, after the expulsion of the northern house and even after Judah went into exile), YHVH's prophets foretold His plan for the future redemption of His inheritance, the house of Jacob. Through the mouths of these prophets YHVH declared that He would raise up a righteous Branch for David - a king Who would reign, prosper, and execute judgment and justice in the earth. In this monarch's days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in safety. This king will be called, "*YHVH our righteousness*" (ref. Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Since there was no possible way for unregenerate man to have the righteousness of YHVH (ref. Psalm 14:1-3), the figure so described from the lineage of David would have to be endowed with the divine nature. How could there be such dichotomy? The one who was to come could not be of the natural Adamic life. He would have to be conceived by a life not related to that disposition, but in his role as a kinsman-redeemer (much before his reign as king) still be connected to the family of Israel, Judah, and David. Thus, only a family member of the house of Jacob whose life/blood was not tainted with sin could qualify to atone, to remove from the human spirit and soul the nature of sin, and to reconcile man to Elohim.

In the wilderness, even prior to establishing the national life of Israel, YHVH had already announced what it would take to atone for and forgive sin: *“For the life [literally “soul” (nefesh) which is the life-giving force and expression] of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul”* (Leviticus 17:11). But as we know, the blood of sacrificed animals was only temporarily effective, since animals are a lower life-form than humans and are not compatible in the exchange called for by atonement and propitiation (ref. Hebrews 9:12-28). However, neither can man *“by any means redeem his brother, nor give to Elohim a ransom for him; for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever”* (Psalm 49:7-8). How then will lasting and effective atonement be possible?

For YHVH to have a kinsman-redeemer with the qualifying nature of His own righteousness, He would have to produce an offspring of Himself. For this offspring to be *His* but also a descendant of the human race and more particularly of the firstborn family of Jacob, YHVH would have to cause this one to be born through a human agent. It would require the “seed of a woman” (ref. Genesis 3:15) from the Adamic race, and specifically from the Israelite firstborn lineage. That indeed is what took place when YHVH brought forth His only begotten Son through a maiden by the name of Miriam. Hence we see that our Heavenly Father, by His Spirit, intervened in a womb just as He did with Sarah and Rebecca. An angel with the following message visited the chosen young maiden: *“‘And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Yeshua. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and YHVH Elohim will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.’ Then Mary/Miriam said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of Elohim’”* (Luke 1:31-35).

Joseph, Miriam's betrothed who later became her spouse, was from the family of David (ref. Matthew 1:1-16). He in essence adopted the Son of the Most High when he took Miriam to be his wife. Thus, the child was legally joined to the house and lineage of David, and was in a position to qualify as their Kinsman Redeemer.

Chapter 53

The Priesthood Restored to the Firstborn

Everything YHVH Elohim has done up to this point was in accordance with His judicial requirements for the full restoration of all things that had been spoken by the holy prophets since the world began (ref. Acts 3:19-21). Yeshua's life and ministry, as recorded in the four Gospels of the New Covenant writings, reiterate this fact. Yeshua Himself declared that He did not come to do away with the Torah but to fulfill it (ref. Matthew 5:17-18).

As foretold by the prophet Micah, Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea (ref. Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1; John 7:42). After His circumcision on the eighth day, at the age of one month when his mother's days of purification were over, He was taken to the Temple to be redeemed as a firstborn (ref. Numbers 18:15-16, Luke 2:22-23). There He and His parents were met by two prophets, Simeon and Anna, who both recognized the child as the One sent as Savior and Redeemer (ref. Luke 2:25-38). Later, when Yeshua became of age (twelve years old), He was seen in the Temple discussing the Torah with men of learning (ref. Luke 2:46-47). When His parents found Him there, He answered their concerns in a most revealing way: *"Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"* (Luke 2:49). Yeshua already recognized Who He was and why He came. He also knew that He did not belong to Himself.

Yet, even though Yeshua entered this world as a firstborn prince (ref. Acts 3:15) and future king, His role as a priest would have to wait until He was thirty years of age (ref. Numbers 4:3). The union of the two offices, of king and priest, was foretold by Zechariah the prophet: *"Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of YHVH. Yes, He shall build the temple of YHVH. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both [the kingly and priestly offices]"* (Zechariah 6:12-13).

John the Immerser, a firstborn of the priesthood of the Levitical order, whose mother like Sarah was old and barren when YHVH intervened and caused her to conceive (ref. Luke 1:7, 13), was still in the womb when Yeshua ‘came for a visit’ in the womb of *His* mother. Like the in-utero episode of Esau and Jacob, here too we see another one of those mysterious incidents, when John leaped inside his mother at Yeshua’s ‘presence’ (ref. Luke 1:41). Sometime before John’s mother became pregnant, YHVH sent an angel to Zacharias, the future father, while he was officiating in the Temple. Among the other predictions regarding the child that was to be born, the angel announced that the latter would be filled with “*the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] back to the children...*” (Luke 1:17; Malachi 4:6). This is in response to words spoken by Isaiah in Chapter 63, where Abraham and Israel are said to, literally, “not know, or recognize” their progeny (verse 16). Notice it is not said that John would “*turn the hearts of the children to the fathers,*” which is the second part of the Malachi prophecy; that will have to wait for a future time, when the *spirit and power of Elijah* (“my Elohim is Yah”) will be poured out for *this* objective.

John, like Yeshua (ref. Luke 3:23), would have started his priestly role of immersing at about the age of thirty, six months before his cousin came to him at the Jordan River. Upon His arrival, John immediately recognized Yeshua and announced, “*Behold the Lamb of Elohim*” (John 1:29). Why did Yeshua come to John, who showed some reluctance to immerse Him? And regarding this immersion, what did Yeshua mean by the words, “*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matthew 3:15)? Note that both of them were to fulfill “*all righteousness*” in this one act. What Torah ordinance requires washing, especially when Yeshua was not defiled by sin? Which washing would fulfill a “righteous” requirement of the Torah? We get a glimpse of this in YHVH’s commandment to Moses regarding the washing and anointing of Aaron and his sons before they entered the priesthood and its assignments (ref. Leviticus 8:6). Therefore, for Yeshua to be initiated into this office He needed to be washed/bathed and anointed like Aaron and his sons.⁷

⁷ In the Second Temple period, the priests immersed themselves in *mikvas* (special ritual pools) or in natural bodies of water; they did not merely wash themselves as was done in the wilderness.

Only after this act did Yeshua qualify to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit, setting Him apart to carry out His role as High Priest in the house of Jacob (ref. Matthew 3:16). YHVH affirmed this judicial act by declaring, *“This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (verse 17). In this way, Yeshua was now in the likeness of Melchizedek. Paul explains this important role in his letter to the Hebrews: *“So also Messiah did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’ As He also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’”* (Hebrews 5:5-6).

Yeshua was not only the sacrificial lamb, He also had to be the priest Who officiated in His own sacrifice. Paul continues, elaborating: *“But Messiah came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to Elohim, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living Elohim? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance”* (Hebrews 9:11-15). (For further understanding of this change that took place in the priesthood, read Hebrews chapter 7.)

In spite of the fact that the firstborn belonged to YHVH from the beginning of human history, this issue becomes more pronounced when in place of Egypt’s firstborn, YHVH took what rightfully belonged to Him out from their midst, that is, Israel’s firstborn. This event did not occur, however, until the blood of a lamb distinguished the lot of the Egyptians from that of the firstborn of Israel, whom YHVH delivered (ref. Exodus 12:12-13). The blood of Yeshua, the Lamb of Elohim, had a parallel role to that of the lamb in

Egypt. He too was first given for the deliverance and salvation of the firstborn nation who belong to YHVH - the people of Israel.

Chapter 54

Yeshua and Kingdom Authority

Shortly after Yeshua came up from the waters of the Jordan, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to face the prince of the spirit realm of darkness (ref. Luke 4:1-13). This confrontation was only the beginning of many throughout Yeshua's physical presence on earth. These first three attempts of Satan to trap Him were none other than the tactics with which he had beguiled Eve (and Adam). Satan tried to tempt the Redeemer with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride (ref. Luke 4:3, 5-7, 9). Yeshua's obedience to His Father's will was of the utmost importance. He knew that one act of cooperating with the nature of sin would disqualify Him from being the unblemished lamb for the sacrifice. He also understood that He would forfeit the double portion of the inheritance unless He was perfectly obedient.

It was a victorious Yeshua Who returned to His home in Nazareth. On the Sabbath He went to the synagogue where He read publicly from the prophet Isaiah: *"The Spirit of YHVH Elohim is upon Me, because YHVH has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of YHVH"* (Isaiah 61:1-2a; Luke 4:18-19). He then said something very astonishing: *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:21).

In fulfillment of these words, Yeshua went out in the power of the kingdom of Elohim. He cast out demons, healed the sick, lame, and blind, raised the dead, and with a word, stilled the raging of a storm. At one point the religious leaders, questioning who permitted a certain man to carry a pallet on the Sabbath, were told by that healed paralytic that it was Yeshua. When asked about this, Yeshua gave an answer that bears a great significance for us as present day believers: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner"* (John 5:19). Yeshua always recognized that the Life and

Spirit of His Father were active in Him, to initiate and to do *all* according to *His* will (ref. John 14:10).

However, the main purpose for which the Father sent His only begotten Son to the family of Jacob was to restore His kingdom on earth. Before this plan could be implemented, atonement had to be made through a blood sacrifice. Satan still had legal right of dominion over mankind, through whom he manifested his so called “good” *and* “evil” nature, resulting in death. On the other hand, Yeshua as a Kinsman Redeemer came to give life by submitting His will to that of His Father, so that the just requirements of the Torah laws pertaining to atonement and redemption might be satisfied.

Satan, like the disciples, was of the mind that Yeshua was going to set up His kingdom while here on earth. Thus, since he did not succeed in tempting Him to sin, Satan made every effort to put Yeshua to death by mobilizing the political and religious systems of his kingdom. Unwittingly, all of them played right into YHVH’s plan, working together to accomplish the Almighty’s aim in establishing His kingdom, power, and authority. Paul makes note of this in his letter to the Corinthians: *“But we speak the wisdom of Elohim in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which Elohim ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would **not** have crucified the Lord of glory”* (1 Corinthians 2:7-8 emphasis added).

When Yeshua was on the execution stake, all the principalities and powers were there in the unseen realm. It was as though YHVH had invited them into His courtroom, where He judged Satan and his kingdom. Thus, the devil and all these authorities and demons walked out empty-handed: *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it* [the execution stake; that is, the death of Yeshua]” (Colossians 2:15). By this one judicial act YHVH reconciled humanity back to Himself through forgiveness and propitiation for sin (ref. 2 Corinthians 5:14-19; Hebrews 2:17). In this way He made it possible for the Holy Spirit - His kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy (ref. Romans 14:17) - to reside in man’s

spirit/heart. Nevertheless the divine order, which is determined by the *firstborn factor*, must be taken into account.

Chapter 55

YHVH's Foreknown, Called, and Chosen

We have seen that the first fruit or firstborn who belong to Elohim are the chosen from whom loyalty is expected. These are the ones that YHVH *knows*, as it is they whom He has separated unto Himself, and thus He is intimately acquainted with them. Speaking to Israel YHVH says, "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth*" (Amos 3:2a).

The authors of the New or Renewed Covenant books whose writings are revelations, elaborations, and commentaries on the Tanach (the Old Testament), referred to YHVH's people as the "foreknown, predestined, called-out, and chosen." "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son... whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified*" (Romans 8:29-30). To the believers in Ephesus Paul writes, "*Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.*" "*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will*" (Ephesians 1:5, 11).

The New Covenant writers refer to and quote the following Tanach excerpt a number of times: "*And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them [Israel], 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living Elohim'*" (Hosea 1:10b emphasis added; see also Hosea 2:23; Romans 9:25-26; 1 Peter 2:10). Against this prophetic backdrop, Paul says, "*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of Elohim*" (Romans 8:19 emphasis added).

The terms describing YHVH's people cited above in the books ('commentaries') of the New Covenant are rooted in the covenants and promises that YHVH made with and to the people of Israel and their ancestors. In order to guarantee these, YHVH swore *by Himself* and because He cannot lie, He has to fulfill them all: "*Elohim is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do?*"

*Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). “Thus Elohim, determining to show more abundantly to the **heirs of promise** the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for Elohim to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:17-18 emphasis added). Who are these “heirs of the promise”? Obviously, they are the ones whom the apostle is addressing - the Hebrews, that is, the whole house of Israel.*

The Tanach and the New Covenant writings address YHVH’s people occasionally as “saints” or “holy ones.” Although in some contexts these terms are connected to purity (“*be holy to Me as I am holy*” - ref. Leviticus 20:26a), at other times they denote the first fruit or firstborn, meaning those who have been set apart. After YHVH brings Israel out of Egypt, for example, Moses says: “*He [YHVH] loves the people,*” and then adds, “*all His saints*” - His set-apart ones (Deuteronomy 33:3). Hence, I would venture to say that in many of the cases where “saints” or “called-out ones” is used, it is alluding to YHVH’s chosen people Israel. This would be as true in the writings of the apostles as it is in the writings of the Tanach. In the former these set-apart ones or firstborn also represent the first fruits of the new creation order in Messiah, having experienced the fulfillment of the promise which is the anointing of the Spirit of YHVH through faith in the blood of the new covenant (see for example, Ephesians 1:7, 13-14).

Therefore, in each generation all those of the seed of Abraham, that is “the faith” people (ref. Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:29), who by YHVH’s grace have had their ears opened to hear and “the faith” to believe the “Good News,” comprise the first fruit of the *new creation* in Messiah. James confirms this when writing to the *twelve tribes*: “*Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*” (James 1:1, 18). Paul also writes: “*Therefore if anyone is in Messiah (through the same faith as their father Abraham), he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

YHVH's will was laid out in the Torah and in the books of the prophets. Since the apostles' writings follow the establishment of the "new creation order" by Yeshua, their interpretation of the Tanach texts is augmented by that fundamental fact. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul teaches about the divine order in the resurrection process: "*For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah's in His coming [parousia - hidden presence]*" (1 Corinthians 15:21-23 emphasis added).⁸ We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but now we have been made alive in Messiah's hidden presence through the indwelling of His Spirit: "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to Elohim in Messiah Yeshua our Lord.*" "*And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to Elohim as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to Elohim*" (Romans 6:11, 13).

YHVH's promise to Israel was that He would dwell among them: "*I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their Elohim*" (Exodus 29:45). "*And He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name...'*" (Ezekiel 43:7). Paul understood that the fulfillment of these prophecies to Israel would take place through a new covenant ratified by a Kinsman Redeemer's blood: "*For you are the temple of the living Elohim. As Elohim has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their Elohim, and they shall be My people'*" (2 Corinthians 6:16). According to Zechariah 6:12-13, the 'building' of the *temple of the living Elohim* (the restored house of Jacob) was a designated task of the *Branch* – Messiah (see also Luke 1:31-33). Thus, the restoration of a nation, which was

⁸ In the Aramaic version of this text (Peshitta Aramaic Text) "**firstfruits**" is *resheeta* (or *resheet* in Hebrew) – that is, "**first**" or "beginning" (stemming from *rosh* – head). This word is identical to the one employed in Leviticus 23:10 in reference to the "**first**" (*resheet*) of the Omer – the first barley sheaves. This is saying that Yeshua is the first of the Omer, which is waved for our "acceptance." "Coming" is *parousia* in Greek and means "hidden presence." Thus, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit at Shavuot (Pentecost), on the 50th day of the counting, Yeshua's presence came into them ('hid' in them), making *them* the first fruit or *bikkurim* of Shavuot (which is baked with leaven). *Bikkurim* is the Hebrew word used in Leviticus 23:17 for the first fruit of Shavuot – Feast of Weeks.

in the grave for millennia (ref. Ezekiel 37:1-14), represents the concept of “life out of death” that is central to YHVH’s redemptive plan.

This foundational truth is also of prime importance in the life of the redeemed individual. Paul testified in his very being to this trait which characterizes the “new creation” person, brought forth in the image and likeness of his Redeemer, when he was willing to be cut off or accursed from Messiah “*for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh*” (Romans 9:3). In essence, when Yeshua’s life through the Holy Spirit invaded Paul, it came with the Redeemer’s willingness to give up his life so that others may be its recipients. Paul made this principle an essential part of his teaching: “*...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Yeshua, that the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Yeshua’s sake, that the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you*” (2 Corinthians 4:10-12).

Chapter 56

Yeshua Glorified

(Revelation Chapter 5)

By giving up His life for the sake of His brethren, Yeshua, our Kinsman Redeemer, fulfilled the last requirement which demonstrated His faithfulness to the will of His Heavenly Father. Therefore, three days after his burial, the Spirit of the Almighty raised Him in newness of life. Miriam of Magdala saw Him in the garden outside the tomb, early on the first day after the Sabbath. Her attempt to touch Him elicited from Yeshua a very unusual response: *“Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and My Elohim and your Elohim”* (John 20:17 AENT). Why was Miriam not allowed to touch Him at that point when later on in the same day He was seen and touched by others, and why this particular message to the disciples? What was going on in the garden?

For the answer let us turn to a Torah ordinance: *“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits [literally beginning or first] of your harvest to the priest. ‘He shall wave the sheaf **before YHVH, to be accepted on your behalf**; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it”* (Leviticus 23:10-11 emphasis added). Yeshua could not be touched prior to presenting Himself before the Father as that beginning/first wave offering (that is, Omer; see footnote in the previous chapter) of the new creation order. This would have been the point in both time and eternity that the Father, in accordance with His judicial requirements, could accept us back to Himself. But there was more to come. Yeshua’s tenure here in the earthly realm was not quite finished. He returned and visited numerous people after His resurrection; He also met with His disciples on many occasions during a forty-day period and spoke to them about the kingdom of Elohim (see Acts 1:3).

The details of what Yeshua said to His followers during those forty days is not recorded, but it drew out of them their final question: “*Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6). They were asking Him regarding the same kingdom that He had already spoken to them about earlier. Yeshua’s answer to their question becomes extremely important for us as well: “*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...*” (Acts 1:7-8). It appears that Yeshua was telling the disciples that they would become the first witnesses of the restoration of YHVH’s kingdom to Israel.

Additionally, Yeshua instructed His inquirers to wait in Jerusalem until they would receive what the Father had promised, echoing what He had said to them in the past about that topic (ref. Acts 1:4-5; John 14:16, 26; 15:26). However, before they could ask the next question, Yeshua disappeared in a cloud. Where did He go? As mentioned, He told His followers to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. It was still some days before the Feast of *Shavuot-Bikkurim* (Weeks-First Fruits), which was the designated “*fullness of time*” for receiving the promised Holy Spirit. However, the Spirit could not come until Yeshua was glorified: “*...for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because **Yeshua was not yet glorified***” (John 7:39b emphasis added). Where are we to look in order to find out when Yeshua was glorified? Perhaps the answer lies in the vision of John which is described in the book of Revelation. Was the Spirit disclosing to him what took place in the heavens after Yeshua departed in the cloud?

It is said that John was “*in the Spirit*” (Revelation 1:10), which means that what he saw was not subject to the dimension of time. In his vision, the apostle observed the Almighty sitting on the throne of power and authority over heaven and earth, with a scroll in His right hand that no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth was qualified to open by loosening its seven seals (ref. Revelation 4-5:3). This scroll was so important that when it was said that no one was eligible to open its seals, including the twenty-four elders sitting around that place of heavenly glory, John fell on his face and wept bitterly (ref. Revelation 5:4). Then one of the elders told him to stop weeping as the Lion of the

tribe of Judah, the Root of David, had overcome and hence was entitled to take the scroll out of the right hand of the Father and open its seals (ref. verse 5). Yet when John looked, he did not see a lion, but rather a lamb as if slain (ref. verse 6).⁹

Yeshua, the Lamb of Elohim, was making His way to the right hand of His Father to take the scroll, which He had rightfully earned. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him and sang a new song. Then myriads joined in and declared: “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and **glory** and blessing*” (Revelation 5:12 emphasis added). Was this the occasion in which the Father was exalting His Son to His right hand and giving to Him all power and authority? If so, then Yeshua was now in a position to send the Holy Spirit into the lives of all those who believed in Him, just as He told His disciples at the last Seder (Passover meal): “*Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged*” (John 16:7-11). Thus, the glorified Yeshua was going

⁹ By its description, this book or scroll resembles a typical title deed (*book of purchase*), consisting of two sections – the first section was rolled and firmly sealed (*the sealed book*), and the second section, which contained a summary description of the sealed contents, was left open and accessible to read (*the open book*).

In the first section were recorded all the details of a contract, agreement, or property transaction, including the signatures of all the parties and witnesses involved, such as is cited in Jeremiah 32:6-16. This section of the book, by being rolled and firmly sealed, was inaccessible to unauthorized persons, and was therefore termed “*the sealed book*.”

The rest of the scroll, termed the “*open book*,” recorded an abbreviated version of the terms of contract, agreement, or purchase. The case described in Jeremiah involved the purchase or “redeeming” of his (Jeremiah’s) family property.

This also provides a clue as to the contents of the “*scroll of the book*,” the seals of which only Yeshua was able to open. Thus it was quite likely that “*the scroll of redemption*,” with the ‘property’ listed therein being the ‘property’ of Yeshua’s Father, was that which Yeshua as the Kinsman of the family was in position to purchase back or redeem (for His Father).

Additionally, the first tablets that Moses brought down from the Mount were also “*written on both sides*” (Exodus 32:15) while being penned “*with the finger of Elohim*” (Exodus 31:18). Hence, this similarity could be indicative of the fact that the *scroll of the book* at hand was also written thus.

to restore the house of Jacob and set up His everlasting kingdom, through the Holy Spirit, in accordance with what had been prophesied about Him before His birth (ref. Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33).

Of no less importance is the fact that now Yeshua could grant to the believers eternal life, in fulfillment of what He had pronounced in His high-priestly prayer: *“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him”* (John 17:1-2).

Chapter 57

Restoring the Kingdom Within

Yeshua, having taken His seat at the Father's right side and holding the scroll in His hand, was now ready to continue carrying out His role as the Kinsman Redeemer and Shepherd of Israel. As we have just seen, Yeshua told the disciples that He had to go but that He would return to them (ref. also John 14:28a). At the same time, He also promised to send them the Holy Spirit, the *Helper* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). In the Aramaic version of the same texts, the "helper" is referred to as "he who removes the curse," and thus is recognized as a *redeemer*.¹⁰ Interestingly, in Daniel 4:27 (verse 24 in the Aramaic/Hebrew) the same Aramaic term was translated (into Hebrew) as *propitiation*. Yeshua also said of Himself that He was *the Truth* (John 14:6) while calling the coming Spirit, the *Spirit of Truth* (verse 17). Thus, Yeshua's references to the Spirit's characteristics being identical to His own are indicative of the fact that He was *indeed* returning to His followers, albeit in the Spirit. Paul challenged the believers in Corinth by asking them to: "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that **Yeshua the Messiah is in you?***" (2 Corinthians 13:5 emphasis added).

On the day of Shavuot (Pentecost) when the disciples received the impartation of the Spirit, they were able to recognize Yeshua's promised *coming* or *return* (this is not the same as His future coming in the clouds). This return was not limited like the post-resurrection forty days, but was permanent just as He had said, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). On "*that day*" (Shavuot), tongues of fire appeared over the heads of the disciples as they swayed under the mighty winds of the Spirit. Indeed, Yeshua was now doing what John the Immerser said He would do, and that was to "*immerse... with the Holy Spirit and fire*" (Matthew 3:11). Moreover, the coming of the Spirit at that time was in fulfillment of Yeshua's words: "*At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you*" (John 14:20).

¹⁰ The Aramaic English New Testament (compiled, edited and translated by Andrew Gabriel Roth, Netzari Press), p. 280.

In His coming thus with the power of the Spirit, Yeshua in fact responded to the disciples' earlier question on the Mount of Olives: "*Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6). When defining the kingdom He said: "*The kingdom of Elohim does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of Elohim is within you*" (Luke 17:20-21). Paul declared that the kingdom was "*not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy **in the Holy Spirit***" (Romans 14:17 emphasis added). The kingdom, being the epitome of the nature of the Father's life through His Son, would now dwell and rule in the hearts of those who were foreknown, called, chosen, and predestined to become a kingdom of priests and who would eventually rule on earth as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (ref. 1 Peter 2:9). In this way YHVH's kingdom was beginning to be restored to Israel with Yeshua reigning over the house of Jacob as King of kings (ref. Revelation 17:14), and High Priest of Israel's priesthood (ref. Hebrews 8:1), offices which He occupies to this very day.

When Yeshua was about to take the scroll from the hand of the Majesty on High, the twenty-four elders and the living creatures sang a song which confirmed His position over the nation of Israel: "*You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to Elohim by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us **kings and priests** to our Elohim; and we shall reign on the earth*" (Revelation 5:9-10 emphasis added). By that time most of Israel and Judah had been scattered into many nations, tribes, and tongues (ref. Ezekiel 34:6; 36:19), but even so they still had the promise of becoming a royal priesthood, which is alluded to in this song.

John's greeting to the seven congregations in Asia also echoes the same understanding: "*From Him [the Father] who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Yeshua the Messiah, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us **kings and priests** to His*

Elohim and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:4-6, emphasis added).

It was always YHVH's intent to restore His rule to His firstborn nation Israel, and to do so in the land that He had promised. In our day this process of restoration is taking place both naturally and spiritually, with the establishment of the State of Israel on the one hand, and the setting up of YHVH's kingdom in the hearts of many Israelites on the other. Yeshua told His disciples to “*seek the kingdom of Elohim... for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:31-32). Remember, YHVH identified Israel as a firstborn nation, as evidenced in His message to Pharaoh: “*Israel is My son, My firstborn*” (Exodus 4:22). Later He addressed the entire nation, saying: “*And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:6a). But first of all, Israel had to be extricated from the other spiritual kingdom, which the atoning work of YHVH in and through the blood of Yeshua, their Kinsman Redeemer, made possible: “*He [the Father] has delivered us from **the power of darkness** and conveyed us to the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins*” (Colossians 1:13-14 emphasis added).

As mentioned in the beginning chapters on the creation (6-9), this earth with all its components was created in the "spiritual waters" of darkness. This was the sphere called *sheol* – the place Satan and all his demonic followers were cast down to from heaven. YHVH allowed Lucifer to have his dominion and authority there as “*the prince and power of the air*” (Ephesians 2:2) for a limited time period. The nature of this kingdom was totally opposite to Elohim's kingdom. Throughout this book we have been following YHVH's plan to redeem the world back to Himself through a Kinsman Redeemer and His called, chosen, and foreknown firstborn nation - Israel.

As the era that the Almighty has designated for the restoration process comes to an end, the battle will intensify on every level. Satan will not be defeated, and neither will his authority collapse until Yeshua reigns in righteousness, peace, and joy within the unified nation of Israel. Familiarity with and understanding of the realities of this spirit world are

essential, therefore, because *“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12).

The nature of this darkness manifests itself through humanity, especially on the national level. Hence those who are aware of their identity in all of its totality must understand that it is in the very lives of individuals, families, communities, and eventually the entire nation that the battle must be won. Thus, although bruised in the process like the Messiah, their foot, or heel, will crush the serpent’s head, in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, where YHVH declares: *“I will put enmity between [Satan] and the woman, and between [Satan’s] seed and her seed; He shall bruise [Satan’s] head, and [Satan] shall bruise His heel”* (emphasis added). We have already noted that the name Jacob - in Hebrew Ya’acov - originates from the word *akev*, which is “heel.”

The fulfillment of YHVH’s enigmatic pronouncement regarding Satan had to wait until the time that a new covenant was made with the house of Jacob (ref. Jeremiah 31:31; Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). The new covenant had been designed into Elohim’s plan, to be fulfilled through Yeshua, the Firstborn Son, born of the seed of a woman (ref. Genesis 3:15; Matthew 1:23) in the House of Jacob, Who would ratify it by His blood and *bruises*. When the intended recipients of this new covenant finally enter their promised restoration, it will lead to their union with their Elohim and each other, thus becoming the *one* house of Jacob (or *Heel Company*). As such, they will magnify their Redeemer’s victory over the enemy, fulfilling the words penned by the apostle Paul: *“And the Elohim of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”* (Romans 16:20).

Paul put the ‘finishing touches’ on the reality of YHVH’s presence and kingdom in His people in the following words: *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of Elohim and not of us”* (2 Corinthians 4:7). The indwelling Spirit functions just like Yeshua Himself when He walked on earth according to YHVH’s holy Torah, putting into effect the promise of the new covenant with the

house of Israel by which the “...*Torah* [is written] *in their minds, and... on their hearts*” (Jeremiah 31:33). This is further confirmed by: “*I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them*” (Ezekiel 36:27).

Chapter 58

The Future at a Glance

Obviously, it is not our intent to cover the vast subject of the “future” as depicted in Scripture, with its innumerable possibilities and variety of interpretations. In the following, we will only highlight briefly several major crossroads pertaining to the topic of redemption and the restoration of YHVH’s kingdom to Israel.

Zechariah chapter 10 presents a synopsis of Israel and Judah’s reinstatement and related events, some of which are happening before our very eyes, while others are already established facts or remain as future developments. According to this scenario, Judah’s nation/stick (ref. Ezekiel 37:16) is the first to be visited by YHVH and thus becomes a mighty and powerful *warhorse*. They are also to provide the *corner stone*, the *tent peg*, and the *bow of battle*. Clearly the *corner stone*, Messiah, came from Judah. In repatriating and restoring the land, Judah also laid that *corner stone* while stretching the proverbial *tent pegs* (“borders” ref. Isaiah 54:2), albeit not to their fullest extent yet.

Hence the *bow of battle* (ref. Zechariah 9:13) has been one of the characteristics of the Jewish State of Israel. Judah’s military prowess truly confirms this text. As far as Joseph/Israel is concerned, he is to be *saved* and will then be brought back with mercy as though never forsaken (ref. Zechariah 10:6). Indeed, the many that are now discovering their Israelite identity and Hebraic roots (the *ten* who are taking hold of the garment of the Jew, ref. Zechariah 8:23), would describe themselves as “saved.” Continuing in chapter 10, we find that Joseph/Israel will be gathered in great numbers and, like Judah, will become *mighty men* (verse 7). Following the distinct sound of their Shepherd’s *whistle*, they will return from the numerous countries where they have been scattered. This, however, will not occur before they smite their thigh in repentance for the rebellion of their youth (ref. Jeremiah 31:18-19 NAS), and are fully reconciled to their brother Judah (ref. Isaiah 11:13).

The international role that Israel's two peoples will play is further seen in Isaiah chapter 11, where they are described as a *banner* or an *ensign* that will be *before the nations*, once they are gathered as the *outcasts of Israel* and the *dispersed of Judah*. They will take over parts of the land of Israel that are still to be liberated. During this time, they will *pass through the sea of affliction*, but will also be *strengthened* by YHVH (ref. Zechariah 10:11-12). Together they will do battle in the lands round about, such as the *shoulder of the Philistines on the west*. They will also fight the peoples of the east in Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and will engage militarily in the *tongue of the Sea of Egypt* (ref. Isaiah 11:14-15). As we saw above, Judah provides the *bow of battle* but it is Ephraim who is the *arrow* (ref. Zechariah 9:13). Joel corroborates this scenario of Israel's *mighty men* (ref. Joel 3:9) in their war with the *surrounding nations* (verses 11-12 literal translation) whom YHVH judges for having *divided up* His land (verse 2), a fact that has been a growing reality for decades.

Jerusalem plays a very central role in these last-day conflicts and wars and will be *a cup of trembling* and a *very heavy stone for all peoples* (ref. Joel 3:1; Zechariah 12:2-3), something that is in the making even while these lines are being written. There is a concerted international effort to take over the hills, the mountains, the ravines and the valleys, which are under the control of the Jewish state, and turn them over to the enemy who has been crying out arrogantly, "*Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession*" (Ezekiel 36:2), and, "*Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more*" (Psalm 83:4). Nevertheless, the future's inevitable war will culminate in victory due to YHVH's intervention on behalf of His people (ref. Joel 3:16; Zechariah 10:12; 12:3-9). At about the same time, "*On the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem [He will pour] the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn*" (Zechariah 12:10).

The Scriptures are replete with glowing accounts of the return to the land and of the ingathering of the flocks, together with their dedicated shepherds. These shepherds will

feed the flocks with *knowledge* and *understanding*, and will thus please YHVH (ref. Jeremiah 3:15). The Israelites' homecoming will be of such magnitude that the ark of the covenant will not be remembered any more, nor the exodus out of Egypt (ref. Jeremiah 3:16; 23:7-8). As *clean water* is poured over these returnees, their new-creation, new-covenant Torah heart will be revealed (ref. Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Their sins will be forgiven and forgotten (ref. Jeremiah 31:34; 50:20). In this way they can become *one stick in YHVH's hand* (ref. Ezekiel 37:17, 19) upon the land of Israel, in the face of the enemy's mockery and audacity (ref. Ezekiel 35:1-36:5).

The land too will be prepared to receive the unified nation under the leadership of the One Shepherd (ref. Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Hosea 1:11), Who will return "*in like manner as [He had gone] into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). Yeshua left the earth in a cloud and will come back in a cloud of glory, and so we read in Isaiah: "*Then YHVH will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering*" (Isaiah 4:5). If this is the "*cloud of witnesses*" (ref. Hebrews 12:1), filled with the fires of the Spirit, could it be that its 'composition' is none other than the redeemed of Jacob? "*But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; but the house of Esau shall be stubble; they shall kindle them and devour them, and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau, for YHVH has spoken*" (Obadiah 1:17-18).

Now YHVH's sanctuary will be established among His people, who upon vanquishing their enemies and repossessing their inheritance, will assume their role as *redeemers* and *saviors* after the image and likeness of their Kinsman Redeemer and Savior. Their ascent to Mount Zion (to judge the Mount of Esau) will result in the kingdom becoming YHVH's! (See Obadiah verse 21). Thus, firstborn Israel will take the place designated for them as a *royal priesthood* (ref. 1 Peter 2:9) and the *sons of Elohim* (ref. Hosea 1:10), for whose revealing all of creation eagerly waits (ref. Romans 8:19, 21).

Being restored to right standing with Elohim, these sons of Israel, much in the same way that the first humans did prior to committing sin, impart life to the creation that has so longed for their appearing. Hence we read: “*‘It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer,’ says YHVH; ‘I will answer [literally, respond to] the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel’*” (Hosea 2:21-22). “*‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says YHVH, ‘When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it’*” (Amos 9:13). “*Israel shall blossom and bud, and **fill the face of the world with fruit***” (Isaiah 27:6b emphasis added).

IN CONCLUSION

As remote to the modern mind as the ideas and concepts discussed in this book may be, a closer examination by those who have been following history, especially that of the past century, reveals that these seemingly archaic principles form, in fact, the grid into which fit most of the significant events. In other words, YHVH's unseen but ever-progressive plans are the prime cause which sets in motion all that has been occurring for the sake of His elect and in support of His ultimate purposes for humanity as a whole. That which was sown in the beginning has never been uprooted. It is now coming to fruition. Life's realities continually reveal the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of the *One who was, who is, and who is to come*. Thus, those who are called by His name, Y H V H (*Yah-Hoveh*, the Eternal and Living One, Who Is the Present Presence), must live their lives before Him in a way that is congruent with the nature of the One Who is so named.

None of us is exempt from His evolving plan. We do have the choice, however, whether to participate willingly and intelligently, or to remain passive and oblivious... Howbeit, this train is unstoppable; it is on the way to its predetermined destination.

“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:9-11).

Abba, open our eyes that we might see

Your beloved united olive tree!

WARNING!

YHVH knows the end from the beginning, and is the Aleph and Tav. He therefore exhorts us to, *“Remember the Torah of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments; for behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of YHVH; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”* (Malachi 4:4-6). Thus, the failure to remember the Torah of Moses and to turn one’s heart to the fathers (the Patriarchs) will result in a “curse” - *cherem* in the Hebrew text.

In the first chapter of Habakkuk, the above term, *cherem* - curse, or literally a hunters’ net, is repeated three times in the course of the portrayal of a certain people and their exploits: *“For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and fiercer than even wolves... They all come for violence... They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, and princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, for they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, ascribing this power to his god... Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with a hook, they catch them in their net [cherem], and gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice to their net [cherem], and burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plentiful. Shall they therefore empty their net [cherem], and continue to slay nations without pity?”* (Habakkuk 1:6–11, 14-17; see also Micah 7:2 where “net” is again a translation of *cherem*).

Similarly, in Jeremiah 16:16 we read, *“Behold, I will send for many fishermen,’ says YHVH, ‘and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.’”*

The reason Elohim is sending these hunters is that His people are not turning to the Torah of Moses, as charged by Malachi and the other prophets. Staying in religious systems and institutions, their true identity as YHVH's redeemed nation is being withheld from them. At the same time, the Spirit that was in Elijah and John the Immerser is today moving throughout the world in order to turn the hearts of the sons back to their forefathers and the Torah, so that the curse of the "net" may be averted.

Thus, there is one response which Elohim is requiring, and that is to embrace what He is holding before our eyes: "*He [YHVH] will [literally] lift up a banner/signal pole before the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*" "*And the sticks/trees [Judah and Joseph/Ephraim] on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes*" (Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 37:15-20 emphases added). But without the road map of Torah, both the identity and the work of restoration will remain obscured, thus making the believer susceptible to the dangers of the net's curse.

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