

WHAT A CRAZY YEAR! We could easily call this the Year of FEAR. The last twelve months have been like nothing we've ever seen. A new virus, government mandates and lockdowns, an out-of-control propagandist media, big tech takeover of free speech, loss of jobs and businesses...and on and on. From the beginning of 2020, it seemed to many of us that we were living in an Orwellian, apocalyptic sci-fi.

The good news is that YHVH our Elohim is not wringing His hands in fear! He promises to protect His Bride, and it is critical that in these days, more than ever, we need to reject the Spirit of fear, and be true light to the world by living out YHVH's ways. In fact, during these days, there is more opportunity than ever to show the truth of God's word! Hallaluyah!

In October 2020, I began teaching through the Gospel of Matthew from a Hebraic perspective. After presenting the following message on Shabbat night, January 8, 2021, I realized how timely this message was. May you be encouraged as you read.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

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We pick up where we left off in Matthew, just after Yeshua strongly defeated the temptations of the evil one.

Matthew 4:12

Now when Yeshua heard that John had been handed over, He withdrew to the Galilee.

The John mentioned here is John (Yochanan) the immerser. What does it mean **that John had been handed over**? You may remember that John's message was a slap in the face of the religious leaders of the day, who had corrupted the worship of YHVH by adding thousands of rules to the simple instructions of Torah. Not only that, but the civil leadership (politicians) had been corrupted by the Romans who were

using the corrupt Herodians to rule Israel. The world of John was in a huge mess. Does that sound familiar?

Remember the core of John's message: **"Turn away from your sins, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" (Matthew 3:2).** Many English versions say, "Repent!" In Hebrew, repent is the word *"shuv"* which means "return to the path that leads home." That path, for God's people, was and is His teachings and instructions - Torah! So, John's message was: *"Turn back to YHVH's Torah, for the reign of God is offered."* Just as we often declare, "I am a citizen of heaven," our ultimate allegiance must be to the Kingdom of God and His ways.

Later in Matthew, we learn details about *why* John was "handed over:"

Matthew 14:3-5

For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because John had been telling him, "It is not permitted for you to have her." Although Herod wanted to kill John, he feared the crowd because they considered John a prophet.

There were several generations of "Herods." Herod the Great had at least ten wives, and executed his own sons, Alexander and Aristobulus. Aristobulus had a daughter named Herodias, who then married Philip, another son of Herod the Great, meaning she married her uncle. But Herodias then "fell in love" with Herod Antipas, who was Philip's half-brother, then left Philip and became a mistress of Antipas. Later, she divorced Philip and married Antipas, who is the Herod that had John arrested, as we read, **because John had been telling him, "It is not permitted for you to have her."**

Apparently, the "priests" of Israel had not confronted Herod. Of course, they were not the real priests of Israel anyway, but were political appointees of Herod. There is great evidence that John the Baptist was the actual High Priest of the Aaronic line of Israel. As such, he had every right to confront the corruption of Herod and Israel's priests. But let's get back to Yeshua.

Matthew 4:13

Leaving Natzeret, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Capernaum was located on the northwest shore of Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), named from the Hebrew word *kinnor*, which means “harp,” because of its’ shape.

Matthew’s mention of the ancient tribal territories of **Zebulun and Naphtali** show once again that Matthew was writing to Jews, because the old tribal names would have had no meaning outside of the Jewish population. Matthew also connects Yeshua’s move to another Tanakh prophecy from Isaiah:

Matthew 4:14-16

This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying,

**"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the nations—
the people sitting in darkness have seen a great light,
and those sitting in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned."**

The words that Matthew quotes are from Isaiah 8 and 9. It’s important to know that there were no chapter or verse numbers in the Bible. Numbers were added as locaters much later in biblical history. So, how did people know where to go in the Bible?

Rabbis and studious Jews would memorize large portions of Scripture and simply knew where a passage was located from the actual words. These *word locaters* were used to lead readers to the larger passage where the words were found.

As an example of the word locater method, if I wanted you to go to John chapter 3, I would simply say, “*For God so loved the world...*” By saying that, I would want you to read all of the passage about Yeshua and Nicodemus and being “born from above.”

One of the most famous examples of this practice is in Yeshua's own words from the cross:

Matthew 27:46

About the ninth hour Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?"

From these words, many Christian theologies have been built saying that God abandoned Yeshua on the cross. But this man-made theology has huge problems. First of all, if God abandoned Yeshua, and we are to be like Yeshua, then will He abandon us as well? Secondly, the idea that God abandoned Yeshua goes directly against Scripture.

Psalms 37:28

**For ADONAI loves justice
and does not abandon His godly ones.**

On the cross, Yeshua was using the common word locator method of announcing a biblical passage. Yeshua was actually quoting from Psalm 22, perhaps the most Messianic of all the Psalms. Every Jew hearing Yeshua's words would know that Yeshua was saying: "Go read Psalm 22!"

When Matthew includes the quote from Isaiah, he is pointing his Jewish readers to an entire passage in Isaiah. So, let's look closer at this highly Messianic passage from Isaiah.

Isaiah 8 was a warning to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel, who had lived for many years in outright idolatry and rebellion against YHVH. Isaiah warns that the Assyrians will come and conquer the kingdom of Israel. The onslaught by the Assyrians was gradual, and eventually the ten tribes of Israel were captured and scattered all over Asia and Northern Africa and beyond.

What Isaiah describes next is that as the Israelites felt pressure from the Assyrians, they frantically tried to find answers. They tried to get their prophets to contact the dead for answers. They tried sacrificing to other

gods. They did everything but look to God's Word for direction. In the midst of this, Isaiah writes about what YHVH told him:

Isaiah 8:11-12

For thus ADONAI spoke to me, with a strong hand, warning me that I should not walk in the way of these people, saying: "Do not say: 'It's a conspiracy!' about everything that these people call a conspiracy. You must not fear or tremble at what they fear.

Tom Bradford writes:

...the Prophet says that God told him that even though these are Isaiah's own people, he is not to join them in this nonsense. Don't listen to the conspiracy theories and don't buy in. Don't dread what the people dread, don't fear what the leaders fear. In other words, don't listen to all the noise of a disjointed society and become as anxiety driven as they are. (Bradford, Torah Class, Matthew, Lesson 10)

I wonder how appropriate Isaiah's words are for us in our day. As we see our own world in turmoil and anguish and anxiety, to whom will we turn for answers?

The good news is that in the midst of the warning about what is imminent for Israel, Isaiah gives hope, saying there will be a day of salvation for Israel. These are the words from Isaiah which Matthew quotes:

Isaiah 8:23-9:1

**But there is no gloom to her
who was in anguish, as in time past.
He treated lightly the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali,
but in the future He will bring glory—
by the way of the sea,
beyond the Jordan—
Galilee of the Gentiles.
The people walking in darkness
will see a great light.
Upon those dwelling in the land of the shadow of death,**

light will shine.

The word **darkness** is *choshek* in Hebrew. It does not simply mean darkness as in a dark room or nighttime. *Choshek* means obscurity, oppression, chaos, and deception. The word *choshek* is first used in Genesis 1:

Genesis 1:2

Now the earth was chaos and waste, darkness (*choshek*) was on the surface of the deep, and the Ruach Elohim was hovering upon the surface of the water.

Likewise, **light** is the Hebrew word *or*. *Or* is not simply the light of a light bulb or the sun. *Or* means enlightenment, truth, and revelation. This word is also used in Genesis 1, and it is used before the creation of the sun:

Genesis 1:3-4

Then God said, "Let there be light (*or*) !" and there was light (*or*). God saw that the light (*or*) was good. So God distinguished the light (*or*) from the darkness (*choshek*).

Isaiah is saying that **The people walking in the darkness** of obscurity, oppression, chaos, and deception, which would include Israel and the pagan gentiles in the land...**will see a great light**...of enlightenment, truth, and revelation.

Furthermore, **Upon those dwelling in the land of the shadow of death, light will shine.** Obscurity, oppression, chaos, and deception bring death! Only God's ways of enlightenment, truth, and revelation bring LIFE!

Then Isaiah says:

Isaiah 9:5

**For to us a child is born,
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be upon His shoulder.
His Name will be called**

**Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God
My Father of Eternity,
Prince of Peace.**

Who is this child? He is none other than Yeshua, the true King and Priest of Israel. **His Name** means His character, which is **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, My Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.**

Isaiah goes on:

Isaiah 9:6

**Of the increase of His government
and shalom there will be no end—
on the throne of David and over His kingdom—
to establish it and uphold it
through justice
and righteousness
from now until forevermore.
The zeal of ADONAI-Tzva'ot
will accomplish this.**

Notice that the child who is born, the **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace**, has a government that is ever increasing and ever bringing shalom (wholeness). But it is His government. This heavenly government expansion will take place through **justice** and righteousness.

Justice is the Hebrew *mishpat*, meaning “right ruling according to YHVH’s Torah.” **Righteousness** is the Hebrew *tsedekah*, meaning “walk by the right path of YHVH’s Torah.”

To the Jewish rabbis, this passage from Isaiah was understood from ancient times to be a reference to the Messianic King. A first-century Targum (Aramaic translation) translates this passage: “*From ancient times his name was given as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, He who lives forever, the Messiah in whose days peace shall increase.*”

No wonder we read next in Matthew:

Matthew 4:17

From then on, Yeshua began to proclaim, "Turn away from your sins, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

This is the exact same message John preached. There is another reign, another government. It is the reign of heaven, which may be entered by turning away from the darkness of man's ways and returning to the ways of YHVH. This is the kingdom of heaven, and this is what Yeshua offers to anyone who will hear his voice and follow!