

More than 25 prominent rabbis from Israel and abroad recently issued a statement calling for a renewed look at Jesus, Christians and the New Testament faith. Quoting from their own sages, these outstanding Orthodox rabbis are not ashamed to exalt the name of Jesus, welcoming the carpenter from Nazareth back into the Jewish fold.

## Orthodox Rabbis Bring Jesus Home

by David Lazarus  
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"Jesus brought a double goodness to the world," declare the group of well-known rabbis. "On the one hand he strengthened the Torah of Moses majestically... and not one of our Sages spoke out more emphatically concerning the immutability of the Torah," and on the other hand "he removed idols from the nations."

Saying that Jesus, even more than any other Jewish Sage, honored, strengthened and protected the "immutability of the Torah," is an extraordinary acknowledgement. These leading rabbis are turning the tides of history by removing one of the main stumbling blocks in the path of a major Jewish reclamation of Jesus!

You will recall, that religious Jews rejected Jesus from the beginning, with the accusation that he did not obey the Torah, therefore he could not be the awaited Messiah. In the New Testament, we find the Pharisees arguing with Jesus over Sabbath rules, dietary laws, ritual cleanliness, marriage regulations and more. They insisted that Jesus cannot be the Messiah because "he is teaching everywhere not to obey Moses." (Acts 6:14)

What we are now witnessing is the undoing of 2,000 years of Jewish rejection and animosity towards Jesus, a miracle by any estimation. For the out-and-out refusal by Jews to accept Jesus is slowly, but surely, coming to an end, as growing numbers of prestigious Orthodox rabbis welcome Jesus back.

And there is more. "After nearly two millennia of mutual hostility and alienation, we Orthodox Rabbis who lead communities, institutions and seminaries in Israel, the United States and Europe... seek to do the will of our Father in Heaven by accepting the hand offered to us by our Christian brothers and sisters," the statement reads.

Almost two thousand years of Christian anti-Semitism, Crusades, Inquisitions and the Holo-

ocaust can not keep the Star of Bethlehem from rising again in Israel. This call by these distinguished rabbis to embrace Christians as "brothers and sisters" is no less a miracle. For Jews to accept Christians with such endearment, after so much misunderstanding and anti-Semitic ugliness, can only be understood as a divine work of heavenly grace, the likes of which I find unfathomable.

For as this group of Orthodox rabbis points out, it is their "Father in Heaven" who is calling the Jewish people to lay down the past, put aside the enmity, and willingly embrace Christians and their faith in Jesus. That, my friends, is the deeper work of the Holy Spirit as spoken about throughout Scripture.

As Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn, Academic Director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding & Cooperation points out, "This proclamation's breakthrough is that influential Orthodox rabbis across all centers of Jewish life have finally acknowledged that... Christianity and Judaism have much in common spiritually and practically. Given our toxic history, this is unprecedented in Orthodoxy."

In their statement, the rabbis want to find a way to acknowledge the differences between Christian and Jewish beliefs, without taking, or giving, offense. "As did Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi, we acknowledge that Christianity is neither an accident nor an error, but the willful divine outcome and gift to the nations. In separating Judaism and Christianity, G-d willed a separation between partners with significant theological differences, not a separation between enemies," the statement concludes.

These so-called "significant theological differences" between Christianity and Judaism are really about Jesus. He is the stumbling block. Jesus (Yeshua) may be Messiah, Son of the Living God for the Gentiles, but my Jewish people are still not quite sure just who he is for them. So while these rabbis are making major and unprecedented strides in bringing my people closer to Jesus, they are still far from the truth. For if Jesus is the Messiah for the Gentiles, how much more must he be for the Jews?

Perhaps (Yeshua) will not quite be at home this year in Israel, or Jewish homes around the world, but he is certainly knocking on the door.



HaShem had promised Abraham that his progeny would be like the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore, nearly impossible to count. However, he became an old man, and his only progeny was his son according to the promise - Isaac.<sup>1</sup> He was blessed in very many ways, but still had no grandchildren, and he was almost 140 years old! What to do!

Abraham called for his servant, who isn't named. However, he is described as the oldest of the household, who is also in charge of all that Abraham owned, so it is safe to assume that it is Eliezer. He makes an unusual request of Eliezer: "Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by Adonai, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. But you shall go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac." Genesis 24:2-4.

My first reaction would be "Yuck!" I wouldn't want to put my hand under the thigh of another man. The word for thigh is ירך (Yareich). If you go to Strong's Concordance H3409, you will find that the word ירך can mean thigh or generative parts. This same word is used in Genesis 46:26 and Exodus 1:5, "coming out of the (father's) thigh."

The thigh is also a euphemism for the male genitals. Therefore, the request that Abraham made of Eliezer was even more distasteful to what most of us fellows would be willing to do. However, it was God's will.

"Rashi<sup>2</sup> explains why Abraham chose it (the male genitals) for use in certifying the oath. One who takes an oath must place his hand on some sacred object, such as a Torah scroll or tefillin (phylacteries). Because circumcision was the first precept given to Abraham, and because he fulfilled it through so much pain, it was particularly precious to him, so Abraham

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<sup>1</sup> Ishmael was also a son of Abraham, but was not the son of Sarah. The son of promise was Isaac, the son of Sarah.

<sup>2</sup> Rashi was born in Champagne, France in 1040 CE and died in 1105. He was the first man to write comprehensive commentaries on both Torah and Talmud. He also founded the Yeshiva in Worms, Germany, and also earned a living as a wine maker.

asked Eliezer to take his oath upon it. Targum<sup>3</sup> Yonasan renders it similarly. Tanchuma Yashan explains that the reason the Patriarchs cherished the mitzvah of circumcision is that they knew that through it their descendants would be

## A Bride for Isaac

Rav Richard 'Aharon' Chaimberlin

saved from Gehinnom.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore appropriate to invoke that mitzvah (commandment) before the quest for the woman who together with Isaac would forge the next link in Jewish identity.<sup>5</sup> Circumcision transformed a profane part of the anatomy into a most sacred part. Curiously, this concept transfers over into the English language. Our word for testimony has its origins in the word testis, the word for the male testicles. Try to remember this if a judge asks you to give a testimony in court!

I don't see Eliezer protesting about Abraham's method of swearing an oath. (It was later repeated with Joseph requesting a similar oath in Genesis 47:29.) Instead, we see Eliezer showing some doubt about the outcome of him going to Abraham's home country. Eliezer said, "Suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land? Shall I take your son back to the land from where you came?"<sup>6</sup>

Abraham was also asking Eliezer to do something that was contrary to any personal interest that Eliezer might have. Without a physical heir, Genesis 15:1-2 tells us that Eliezer would then be the heir to Abraham's fortune. By finding a wife for Isaac, Eliezer would no longer be Abraham's heir.

Also, please note that Abraham asks Eliezer to bring back a bride for Isaac from among Abraham's own relatives. Isaac ends up marrying his cousin Rebecca (24:4). Although Torah does not forbid cousins to marry, it may not be wise to do this for many generations. The preferred marriage among Muslims is to marry your first cousin, which has resulted in many mental problems with Muslim cousins marrying each other for the past 1400 years.

Abraham forbade taking Isaac to Abraham's home country, recalling the promise, "To your seed I will give this land."<sup>7</sup> He didn't want

<sup>3</sup> A Targum is a translation of a religious text. In this case, it is an Aramaic translation of the Tanakh (O.T.).

<sup>4</sup> "Hell"

<sup>5</sup> This entire paragraph is a direct quote from the Interlinear Chumash, p. 120, Schottenstein Edition, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn (c) 2010. Genesis 24:5.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 24:7