

THE FOCUS OF OUR FAITH

**(A *Midrash* Bible Study to Encourage the Faith of those Interested in
Messianic Judaism)**

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**(October 1998, revised January 2007 – Based on a talk given by the author
at a certain Messianic Jewish Fellowship in July 1996)**

Ephesians 4:4-5, (paraphrased) “*There is one ... faith.*”

Thought Starter

*“The big issue today, is not whether we believe in something, but rather is what
and who we believe in.”*

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N.B: all Biblical quotations are based on the King James Version and are updated by the writer for reasons of clarity. Some amplification and paraphrasing may be present in order to bring out salient points. Any amplification is shown by non-italicised square brackets [], whilst any paraphrasing is denoted by three *italicised* consecutive dots (...). In the event of doubt the reader is recommended to consult the passage in question, using a reputable translation like the Amplified, NEB, NIV or RSV

Exodium: Rhetorical Introduction to the Main Theme

- 1) *Before there can be any belief in the Lord Jesus,
It is first of all necessary to affirm that: -
There exists one personal, infinite God,
Who by His very nature cannot be seen with mortal eyes?
But who, in gracious mercy will
Reward all those who earnestly seek Him
And His will for specific situations.*

- 2) *These affirmations are abundantly confirmed
Both in Scripture and throughout
The Apostles, Nicene, and Leeds Creeds;
In terms of logical order these affirmations place belief in
'God the Father' before belief in 'God the Son'
Though all acknowledge that
Both Persons co-exist in perfect unity.*

- 3) *Let us never forget that our faith should
Always be directed towards
The One true God of Israel and
His only Begotten Holy Son, Jesus
We should always be ready to affirm that Jesus died horribly
In order to offer a perfectly complete
Blood Sacrifice for sin before breaking the bonds of death
By physically rising from the dead three days later*

- 4) *He did this in order to show that
He had indeed triumphed over death whilst
Pacifying His Father's holy wrath against sin*

- 5) *Should our faith in the above truths be lacking?
We need to go humbly to the Father of mercies and
Ask Him to implant that faith in our hearts by His Holy Spirit*

- 6) *As this is done we should also realise
That even now, in His office as Great High Priest,
Jesus sits beside His Father in Heavenly splendour,
Knowing well our infirmities
Interceding on our behalf and
Let us focus our faith in the One
Who both created and redeemed us
From the exhausting slavery of **sin**
Our lives will indeed
Stand firmly upon an unshakeable foundation.*

Section 1: Belief in the existence of the One Personal-Infinite God who by nature cannot be seen

Now let us begin by examining some New Testament Scriptures. These clearly reveal the *one* personal infinite God who, by nature cannot be seen by mortal eyes. In Him alone must we place our entire belief; for as the Holy Spirit writes: -

- 1) *"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him,"* (John 1:18)
- 2) However, on a more specific note *"Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed,"* (John 20:29b)

The above words tell us that divine invisibility is necessary for faith; for if God was visible to all how could there be any faith? And without faith how could there be any salvation? So out of love, the good Lord has restrained the visibility of His glory until such time when He will come to cleanse the World from sin.

Here again the Spirit states: -

- 3) *"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the things that He made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so they [that refuse to believe] are without excuse,"* (Romans 1:20)
- 4) While Jesus Himself is *"the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature,"* (Colossians 1:15)

So the Almighty has manifested His Glory; firstly, through Creation and then through His Son, providing unbelievers with tangible evidence of His existence. He did this to leave unbelievers without any excuse. There is evidence aplenty if only they would look. Sin separates them from God's holy and Heavenly glory but enough evidence has been left to challenge them.

Again through Paul, the Holy Spirit emphasises the fact that: -

- 5) As believers *"We walk by faith not by sight."* (2 Corinthians 5:7) Whilst in his First Letter to Timothy, Paul praises the Heavenly King for being: -
- 6) The *"eternal, immortal, invisible the only wise God ... who has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach, to whom no man has seen nor can see,"* (1 Timothy 1:17a & 6:16a)
- 7) Not surprisingly, Paul ends His letter by praising God; claiming that to Him should be attributed *"honour and power everlasting,"* (1 Timothy 6:16b).

Hence, in Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches that the one personal infinite God in whom we believe is to be worshipped with an intelligent but hearty enthusiasm. For if there was no worship where would faith be? And if our faith were questionable where would be our eternal destiny? Such points are brought together in Hebrews 11:1 which teaches that *"faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* Present here is a Biblical definition of faith. It is this definition, which is used in this study.

Section 2: Belief That God Will Graciously Reward Those Who Earnestly Both Seek both Him and His Will for Specific Situations

Let us patiently press on to examine those New Testament passages which highlight the fact that, in His compassionate mercy, God will most definitely reward, without exception, all those who seek to know Him and His will for specific situations. He does this not because there is anything intrinsically worthwhile in our own seeking – weak and self-centred though it often is; but because Jesus prays for us. As our *"Great High Priest"* He is moved by *"our infirmities"* because He *"was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."* (Hebrews 4:14 & 15b) In His role as priestly mediator, He persuades His willing Father not to take our shortcomings into account; but instead to apply the benefit of His Calvary blood into our situation. This means that, *"The blood of Christ ... cleanses us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7) Our seeking is therefore only honoured because of what the Messiah has accomplished in terms of pacifying the fury of divine wrath. This means that we can have no confidence at all in the merit-worthiness of our own seeking. Instead, the basis of our confidence lies solely in the sacrifice Jesus made for us upon the cross. Because of Christ's death on our behalf it is possible to trust firmly in the following unconditional promises made by the Holy Spirit: -

- 1) *"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in Heaven,"* (Matthew 5:12a)
- 2) *"Your Father who sees [your almsgiving] in secret, Himself shall reward you openly,"* (Matthew 6:4b)
- 3) *"But when you pray, enter into the closet, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you open,"* (Matthew 6:6)
- 4) *"That you do not appear to fast to men but to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly,"* (Matthew 6:18)
- 5) *"But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,"* (Matthew 6:33)
- 6) *"He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. Whilst he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward,"* (Matthew 10:41)
- 7) *"For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Angels, then He shall reward every man according to his works,"* (Matthew 16:27)
- 8) *"Well done you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you rule over many things, enter into the joy of your Lord,"* (Matthew 25:21)
- 9) *"Verily, I say to you, in as much as you have done it for one of the least of these my brethren you have done it for me,"* (Matthew 25:40b)
- 10) *"But love your enemies and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great. You shall be the children of the Highest for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil,"* (Luke 6:35)
- 11) *"And I say to you; ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, and he that seeks finds. To him that knocks it shall be opened,"* (Luke 11:9-10)
- 12) *"You shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just,"* (Luke 14:14b)
- 13) *"The righteous judgement of God who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality,"* (Romans 2:5b-7)
- 14) *"Now he that plants and he that waters are one, and every man shall receive his own reward according to his labour,"* (1 Corinthians 3:8)
- 15) *"If any man's work abide which he has built upon he shall receive a reward,"* (1 Corinthians 3:14)
- 16) *"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad,"* (2 Corinthians 5:10)
- 17) *"Whatsoever good thing any man does the same shall he receive of the Lord whether he be bound or free,"* (Ephesians 6:8)
- 18) *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only but to all them also that love His appearing,"* (2 Timothy 4:8)
- 19) *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he rewards them that diligently seek him,"* (Hebrews 11:6)
- 20) *"The Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work,"* (1 Peter 1:17b)

- 21) *“Look to yourselves that we love not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”* (2 John 8)
- 22) *“Know that I am He who searches the [mind] and the heart. I will give to everyone according to [his] works,”* (Revelation 2:23b)
- 23) *“To him who overcomes will I grant [the privilege] to sit with me on my throne even as I overcame and am sat down with the Father on His Throne,”* (Revelation 3:31)
- 24) *“You should give reward to your servants and to them that fear your name (small and great) and should destroy them who destroy the earth,”* (Revelation 11:18b)
- 25) *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... that they may rest from their labours and their [good] works do follow them [into God’s eternal kingdom],”* (Revelation 14:13b)
- 26) *“And behold I come quickly; and my reward is with every man to give according to [what] his [good] work shall be.”* (Revelation 22:12)

Lack of time prevents any detailed comment concerning these passages. However, even a cursory glance will confirm that we can boldly have the rock-solid confidence to believe that God will graciously reward all those who seek to know Him and His will for their individual situations. The precise reason why this happens is because *“God is love.”* (1 John 4:8b) and it is a love that can find full expression because of Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross. Amazing though it may seem, this love is directed toward you and me! So take comfort my friends, seek to know the Lord; but if you already do know Him, then seek to know more about Him and seek to know Him in a more deeply personal way. Furthermore, with the aid of Scripture, seek to discern His will in a particular situation that may be troubling you. However, once God’s will has been discerned, begin actively to obey it on the strength that has been given you. If this is done diligently, then in God’s own time, you will receive a reward. Let the belief that God is gracious stir you to ever-greater faithfulness. Truly, what we have in Christ is so good – so marvellously excellent that there exists every motive to be faithful to His will.

Section 3: Belief That God So Loved the World That He Sent His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ, In Order That He Should Die For Sinners and Bring Them Back To the Father

Let us now proceed with this study by referring to those Scripture passages, which show that *“Christ Jesus came into the World to save sinners,”* (1 Timothy 1:15). Hence, those who put their trust in Him will be unquestionably saved from sin and that Hellish fire which rages forever. Never, forget for one tiny fraction of a second that *the only key to our redemption is the cross of Calvary* where with sighs and groans *Jesus offered a final, non-repeatable propitiatory sacrifice for our sin.* By propitiating (that is pacifying) God’s justified fury against our sin Jesus saved us from all manner of evil. Forever broken was the cruel tyranny that Satan had exercised over our lives through all manner of deceptions. No longer need Satan’s Spiritual and human emissaries terrify us; nor need we resort to those accursed, useless magical expedients that do nothing but place people into further bondage. Christ died to save us from superstitious dread – never forget that! Such a point is confirmed by Holy Scripture, which repeatedly witnesses to the deliverance the Messiah has brought to all who believe in Him.

Christ is the Saviour of all kinds of people, accomplishing many wonderful things on the cross whilst dying a most terrible death on our behalf. As it is written *“Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World”* (John 1:29b); John the Baptist (a true prophet of God) made this statement; he stressed with great fervour the widespread effect of our Lord’s death. Furthermore, Jesus Himself declared, *“I lay down my life for the sheep,”* (John 10:15) – for those elect saints already predestined for salvation *“before the foundation of the World,”* (Ephesians 1:4). Reconciliation between these two passages is found in John’s First Letter, written by the then elderly Apostle in about 85 AD. He stated, *“Jesus Christ is the righteous propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole World.”* (1 John 2:2) This means that Jesus not only pacified His Father’s righteous anger against our sins only, but also the sins of the whole World. Indeed, if this was not the case how could our sinful World still exist? Would it not have been blotted out aeons ago by the white-hot indignation of the Lord? So my friends, place your entire trust in Jesus. Believe in Him as your only Saviour from the wrath of God and from the

cruelty of satanic bondage. Accept that He alone can deliver you from the snare of sin. Cling to Him in humble dependence; hold onto Him as if you were a half-drowned man clinging to a life raft in a stormy sea. Through faith, allow His sacrificial death to become effective in quenching the molten rage of God's wrath against the sin in your life.

He could blot out sin because of the marvellous work accomplished on the cross. Scripture itself witnesses to this point when it reveals that the redeemer will be called *Jesus*, "for he will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21b). So it is possible to see that even His name highlights his capacity as Saviour. Yet more than that, He died painfully as "the King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26 & Luke 23:38b) who has delivered us from the powers of darkness (Colossians 1:13) by "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." (Colossians 2:14a) In natural bewilderment we may ask 'how was it possible for Christ to do all of these things whilst pinned to the cross as a convicted wrongdoer?' Before answering that question first let us take comfort from the Messiah's own words "It is finished." (John 19:30) By uttering these just before His death He confirmed that He had fully accomplished the task given to Him in all of its aspects. Nothing was left incomplete; nothing was left undone; no aspect of His sacrificial work needed to be repeated – in either bloody or non-bloody form. Any future propitiatory sacrifices were rendered totally unnecessary. In relation to the forgiveness of sin and the appeasement of God's wrath against it, *everything was accomplished to the complete degree.* Moreover, through this work of propitiation, He delivered us from the beggarly Spirits who control this World and *gave us open access to His Heavenly Father.* Thanks to Christ's thorough propitiatory work a perfect atonement was made for our sins; they were covered over and blotted out in His Father's sight. Consequently, all believers can know God as Father in a deeply personal way. The evil one no longer has any claim over us. Jesus could do all this because He was simultaneously a sinless man offering a perfect unblemished sacrifice, and also Almighty God – possessing the power needed to absorb the sins of this World. There is nothing the Deity cannot do as long as it is in full accord with His Holy nature.

By now we can see how "God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Please note the condition "whosoever believes in Him." Should we fail to believe then the death of Jesus will not benefit us. Instead "we shall die in [our] sins." (John 10:24) This is because the burning "wrath of God abides on [the unbelieving sinner]." (John 3:36c) The supreme expression of this wrath is Hell. This is a place containing a lake of fire where unredeemed sinners "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:10b) Such will be the degree of misery that, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30b) Undeniably, Hell is a place to be actively avoided. From these warnings we can deduce that when Scripture talks about Jesus being the Saviour of the World it does not mean that He will save everyone indiscriminately. Instead, it means that He has kept the World in being so that He could draw out an elect remnant from all classes and nations of people. In essence 'the elect' is that true Messianic Remnant comprising of both Jews and Gentiles united in one body of believers. Paul himself testifies, "For He [Jesus] is our peace who has made both [Jews and Gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us." (Ephesians 2:14) Thanks to His Son's death, God could keep a sin-polluted World in existence in order to benefit those who would faithfully follow Him. From this study, it is possible to conclude that, without exception, *all believers can possess a legitimate joy in the tremendous wrought on their behalf.* Gone forever is any need for fear or timidity concerning our eternal prospects! With reverent boldness we may prayerfully approach the Heavenly Sanctuary and receive those glorious blessings the Father wishes to bestow upon us. Above all else, we are never to lose sight of the fact that "Christ Jesus came into the World to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15) – sinners like you and me.

Section 4: Belief in Jesus as the Ascended High Priest Ministering to those Awaiting His Return

In order to enter into the faith, we are called upon to believe that the Messiah died for our sins. However, in order to grow in that faith (which is based upon the Scriptures) we are likewise to believe that, even now He is tirelessly working on our behalf as our Great High Priest. From His Heavenly Throne, He protectively watches over every believer; through the mysterious workings of His providence He orders all things to our good – even difficult circumstances, (Romans 8:28). Incredibly, even the most trying of situations can be used to forge those character traits that are pleasing to Him. Furthermore, He sends His Holy Spirit to place His life in us and to stir us to those good deeds that are in compliance with His will. Yet most marvellous of all, He takes our sin-tainted devotions, and by His crucified merits He makes them acceptable to His Father who receives them as if they came directly from His son. In the meantime, we should humbly acknowledge that even our most noble prayers are tainted by sin. Without Christ's work as Priestly Mediator they would possess the unwholesome stench of a sewer. However, when taken up by our sympathetic High Priest they assume a sweet and pleasing fragrance, which allows our Father to answer them as if they had no sin in them at all. Jesus is the prism through which the dull light of our intercessions is transformed into a beautiful rainbow that is the delight of Heaven. Our prayers and the deeds, which arise from them, have value only because Jesus is our Priest who continually presents every aspect of our lives to the One who created us from dust. There is nothing He does not present to His Father. Through His Priesthood we are all made Holy. Should all this sound too good to be true than let us bring to mind some wonderful words of Scripture; these read, *“For Christ is not entered into the Holy Place made of hands which are figures of the true, but into Heaven itself. Now He appears in the presence of God for us. Nor yet that He should offer Himself as the High Priest enters into the Holy Place every year with the blood of others; for then He must have suffered since the foundation of the World. But now once has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. As it is appointed for men to die but after this the judgement, so Christ once offered to bear the sins of men, and to them that look for Him shall He appear a second time without sin for salvation,* (Hebrews 9:24f). At the end of this passage one can only exclaim that we have been given a glorious hope thanks to the mercy of God.

Work hard my friends to gain a clear comprehension of the Messiah's ongoing work as Priest. Recall too that our faith involves not only believing that the Lord did a great work in the past, but also that He is doing a great work now at this very moment in time, and also that He will a great work in the future when He will appear a second time. (Hebrews 9:28f) In near-Creedal form it is possible to sum up this teaching by saying: -

*In the past He was our Crucified Saviour,
Offering up a final sacrifice for sin*

*In the present He is our interceding High Priest,
Sitting at the right hand of God the Father, (Mark 16:19c)*

*In the future He will return as our warrior Judge,
Crushing all opposition, before ruling the Nations as King*

Never, in all eternity has our Lord been inactive. He has been and always will be about His Father's business, (Luke 2:49b). Scripture itself proclaims that, in His divine character *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,”* (Hebrews 13:8).

All this means that the Messiah has always been the same in showing unlimited devotion to His Father and He is always the same in showing unlimited devotion to us who follow Him. Now He appears in the presence of God on our behalf but not offering *Himself often as the High Priest enters into the Holy Place every year with the blood of others.*” (Hebrews 9:25) Beyond doubt, every form of bloody and non-bloody propitiatory sacrifice has, since Calvary forever been abolished. Consequently, any attempt to reinstate such a sacrifice is nonsense. Even worse it is a sign of unbelief in the ability of the cross to make a full propitiation for sin. There is also an implicit denial of the effectiveness of Christ's High Priesthood. Here it is wise to remember, *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin,”* (Romans 14:19). Admittedly, such unbelief may arise from genuine ignorance, in which case it is forgivable. However, if it stems from deliberate denial of the statement that *“Christ was once offered to bear the sins of man”* then that could be *“the sin of death”* which the Apostle John mentioned. (1 John 5:16b) It leads to death because there has

been a wilful rejection of the one true sacrifice that can give eternal life. Forgiveness itself has been spurned.

So, fellow believers in Christ do not resist the Holy Spirit's testimony, (Acts 7:51). Do not mimic the wicked example of those who "*stopped their ears*" when they heard the first martyr Stephen preaching, (Acts 7:57). Keep in mind that Christ died to abolish all future types of propitiatory sacrifice. God's blazing wrath has been totally appeased "*once for all*," (Hebrews 10:10c). There is no need for any repetition of Calvary in either bloody or non-bloody form. In light of this clear teaching from Scripture, any attempted repetition is not only unnecessary but is blasphemous in the sense that it makes God out to be a liar. He is portrayed as saying that He offered a perfect sacrifice when He did not offer one. However, given the fact that Christ's sacrifice is complete, let us enjoy the access to God that is now ours. Such access arises from the Holy Priesthood of Jesus "*who even now at the right hand of God makes intercessions for us*," (Romans 8:34b). Yes my friends, let us pray to Jesus, confidently trusting that He alone is the "*one mediator between God and men*," (1 Timothy 2:5b). Also realise that He continually prays for us, offering intercessions (just as He did for His disciple Peter shortly before his denial of Christ, Luke 22:32). Exercised in the unlimited power of the Holy Spirit, such heartfelt intercessions must be a source of great delight to the Father. However, being seated at God the Father's right hand (Colossians 3:1) means that, for all His interceding, Christ is at rest. He does not find His prayers a burdensome chore. Moreover, He is in a position of wonderful privilege where He can do mighty things on our behalf. As the Holy Spirit Himself has emphasised, "*But this man Jesus, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin forever, sat down at the right hand of God ... until His enemies be made His footstool*," (Hebrews 10:12-13). With Christ seated at the right hand of God, it is hard to see how His body could be physically offered up during any Eucharist ritual. This is simply because, by its very nature, a body is limited to one position in time and space. In other words, if Christ's body is seated beside the Father in Heaven, then it cannot simultaneously be here on earth in either visible or invisible form. On an equally challenging note these words from Hebrews infer that Christ is patiently waiting for His enemies to be crushed in "*the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*," (Revelation 19:15c). Thankfully, this wine press of wrath is not for us. All of our sins have been completely atoned for at the cross of Calvary. What will prove to be a day of doom for those who hate God will be a day of joy for those who love Him! As it is promised, "*unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin [but] for salvation*," (Hebrews 9:28)! Note that it is for salvation, not for damnation. Not for us the endless torment of the reprobate. In light of this fact we can rest in our Father's presence, enjoying to a small degree that peace which Jesus already has to an unlimited degree. On a more selfless note, let us be diligent in praying for others and for their salvation. Where possible try to amend circumstances in their favour. Also let us rejoice in the privilege of knowing God as Father and be like Jesus in waiting for our enemies to be judged (if they do not come to repentance). Remember also the example of our Ascended High Priest who shows compassion for the weak. We should discard those things that hinder our progress in following His will. Finally, whilst we may appreciate that the Jewish identity of our Messiah is a very precious thing, we must never overlook the fact that *the Jewish Jesus is now also the risen ascended Jesus who graciously receives the petitions of people from every Nation*. Remember! There is no good role that He cannot fulfil to an absolutely perfect degree. In His Father's time (Acts 1:7) Jesus will return in kingly glory to destroy His enemies and to save from cataclysmic destruction a loyal Messianic Remnant consisting of Jewish as well as Gentile believers.

With such teaching in mind let us grow into the maturity that God wants from us. Bear in mind that the Messiah we follow is both awesome in His greatness and tender in His gentleness. He will not cast away those who put even a feeble trust in Him. Look to our Great High Priest and receive salvation. If you have already received salvation, then still go to the Great High priest – but this time to receive the favours needed to live a Godly life in a World that is bitterly opposed to the One True God. Finally, be confident in only one propitiatory sacrifice; namely the sacrifice at Calvary. Apply these exhortations and you too will hear the wonderful words, "*Be of good cheer your sins are forgiven you*," (Matthew 9:9:2b).

Section 5: Belief that God will guide His faithful 'remnant' by wisely ordering of circumstances and also through the work of His Holy Spirit

Consider how, in former times of apostasy, God guided His faithful remnant to follow various courses of action, appropriate to the situations they faced. Even, in the case of specific individuals like Joseph; He ordered even apparently unfavourable circumstances to work for that persons blessing. (Genesis 37-47) Appreciate also the way in which the Holy Spirit has led many saints down the ages. Through His wise government of affairs, God has both honoured His people and brought glory to His name. In relation to God's guidance care must be taken to distinguish between the 'desert' and the 'city' call. At times some of God's remnant was led into remote places from whence they could minister in the Messiah's name. Whereas, on other occasions the 'remnant' were led near to the centre of affairs – despite the presence of fierce, unremitting opposition. God would also alternate His guidance between a 'desert' and a 'city' call. Sometimes driving His people into the wilderness where they could pray (Mark 1:12), and then pressing them on to participate more fully in public affairs.

In this part the intention is to minister to those people whose call is either a 'desert' or a 'city' call. This is not to deny that those who are in the remote places will not at times minister also in the city, whilst those in the city may, for limited interludes, find themselves driven by persecution into the remote places. The argument here is that those with a 'desert' call and those with a 'city' call both need one another because they are different parts of the same body. They therefore should avoid the proudly destructive attitude, which boasts, "My calling is better (or more Spiritual) than yours." To adopt such a stance is tantamount to holding fellow believers in contempt. Overlooked is the fact that a true call from God should engender humility not pride. Indeed, if any ministry leads to persistent pride then it is questionable whether such a ministry has its origins in the Holy Spirit. It is more than likely that the person concerned is merely on an, 'ego boosting' social climbing exercise; proud human desires (or Satan) rather than God lie at heart of such ministries.

Let us commence with the example of Abraham who obeyed God's call to get "out of your country and from your kindred and from your Father's house to the land that I will give you." (Genesis 12:1) He was to flee from the idolatrous city of Ur and wander in remote areas until such time as God would minister to him. When, out of expedience he went to a city in Egypt, the Lord through Pharaoh expelled him in ignominy. This humiliation confirmed that Abraham's calling did not lie at the centre of human affairs – his was the desert call.

However, Abraham's call could well be contrasted with Joseph who, through the mysterious workings of providence, was called down to Egypt. Following severe trials he was raised to the position of Pharaoh's advisor. As Joseph himself confessed to his brothers, "God meant it for good, to bring it to pass as it has this day to save much people alive," (Genesis 50:20b). In contrast to his Great Grandfather Abraham, his calling was to be at the centre of human affairs – his was a city call.

When turning to Moses, we find that he was forty years in the wilderness before God used him to liberate His people from Egyptian slavery. Even after their liberation he had then to spend a further forty years wandering in the wilderness. He never entered the Promised Land. Apart from the interlude when he confronted Pharaoh his was primarily a 'desert' call. However, when we look at His successor Joshua, who stormed near-impregnable cities, waged much victorious warfare and destroyed whole pagan coalitions, we can see that God can shift an emphasis between generations. Primarily, Joshua's was a 'city' call. It involved bringing people out of the wilderness and into a land where they could dwell in cities.

Again, in the time of the Judges, God worked through a succession of charismatic leaders whose 'city' call placed them at the heart of contemporary affairs. Yet during this period He also quietly worked through Ruth, who, being a woman living in a barbaric time, enjoyed no influence outside of her immediate family. Nevertheless, in her 'desert' call she was the forebear of King David and of Jesus who was far greater than David. The case of Ruth confirmed that God could do a powerful work among the socially excluded.

Throughout the period of the Kings could be found two types of people. There was Elijah who was very much a man of the desert and Obadiah – the Governor of Ahab's house who, despite his position near a godless king, "feared the Lord greatly." (1 Kings 18:3b) Now did Elijah call Obadiah

to flee into the wilderness? Or did Obadiah urge Elijah to live in Ahab's ivory palace as a court prophet? Of course not! Both men respected each other's calling and both worked together to preserve the truth and to overthrow the wretched idolatry of Baal worship. If two such different characters could work together under the old dispensation how much more must those with diverse callings, work in the new dispensation where far greater grace can be found.

Moving onto the Major Prophets, we find that some like Isaiah enjoyed a vast influence in the city of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah consulted him during a time of national crisis when Jerusalem a merciless enemy besieged Jerusalem, (Isaiah 37). However, others like Jeremiah were persecuted, even being thrown into a well when another invader had surrounded Jerusalem, (Jeremiah 38:1-6). Even when King Zedekiah consulted this suffering prophet, his advice was ignored and so this foolish King went to his doom as a blind captive to Babylon, (Jeremiah 38:14-39:7). Yet the fact remains that God was powerfully at work through both the influential Isaiah and the isolated Jeremiah. As the case of Jeremiah indicates, a person does not have to flee a city in order to be in a social desert. To quote an old saying, *'it is possible to be lonely in a crowd.'*

That same difference between a *'desert'* and a *'city'* call also emerged with Ezekiel and Daniel. Ezekiel ministered among disgraced exiles who, despaired over the failure of a religious-political system to which they had once been loyal. Even worse, as Ezekiel ministered, Jerusalem fell and all seemed lost. However, with great fervour he gave the despairing remnant a fresh vision of God and showed them that not everything had been lost. The exiles in Babylon's Gulag were simply moving from one phase of their history into another. In contrast, Daniel ministered as a senior official in King Nebuchadnezzar's court (whose venomous intrigues rival anything in the modern politics). Although Daniel had daily interaction with those who were the slaves of Babylon, he never once compromised his integrity. Instead he preferred to brave the wrath of a tyrant than to cease worshipping the One True God, (Daniel 3). Through his witness Daniel humbled a King, which led him to praise and glorify the name of the God.

Time alone prevents any description of the respective *'desert'* and *'city'* calls of other heroes in Israel's history. However, what can be briefly touched upon is the example of John the Baptist who, as the last prophet of the old dispensation was a voice crying in the wilderness. As a man he ate *"locusts and wild honey,"* (Matthew 3:4). Our Lord who was *"the friend of sinners"* took a very different stance (Matthew 9:10-13) and was accused of being a *"gluttonous man"* and a *"wine bibber,"* (Luke 7:34). Among the Apostles we find that Paul was God's *"chosen vessel,"* used to bring His name before *"Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."* (Acts 9:15) Lastly, John had his divine revelation whilst exiled on the isle of Patmos *"for the testimony of Jesus Christ,"* (Revelation 1:9).

Progressing from the New Testament we discover that during the fourth century Athanasius (a bishop of Alexandria who lived C.297-373AD) was himself at the epicentre of Theological controversy. Five times he was exiled for his defence of Trinitarian doctrine. However, when the Arian heresy was at its height he received crucial support from Anthony the desert Father, whose followers provided hiding places for the fugitive Bishop. Thanks to the work God did in Athanasius' life, a Bible-based belief about the deity of Christ was preserved for future generations to treasure. We are beneficiaries from the stand taken by this man.

During the Reformation the same pattern of mutual support between those with a *'desert'* and a *'city'* call could be found. Although very much at the centre of public affairs, both Luther (1483-1546) and Calvin (1509-1564) were men who boldly ministered to those scattered saints who were driven here, there and everywhere by persecution. Also contributing to this necessary reformation of faith were people like William Tyndale (c1494-1536) and Menno Simons (1496-1561) who spent their adult lives as hunted fugitives far removed from any positions of Worldly influence.

Even in the last century those like the Brethren who withdrew into a wilderness situation conducted God's work. However, other Christians like the Earl of Shaftsbury (1801-1885), were actively involved in British Politics at a time when Britain was the most powerful nation in the World. Much help was given to the poor through his efforts.

Now we come to our own time when the Western Churches face their most serious doctrinal-Spiritual crisis since the Reformation. As in Athanasius' own day heresy appears to have swept all before it – rampaging like an angry bull in Christ's vineyard. Even worse (at least in the UK), many Churches are unworthy to proclaim the name of Christ. Afflicted with a retributive Spiritual blindness as a punishment for their faithlessness, many leaders have trodden the way of Balaam

whose greed for sordid gain destroyed him (2 Peter 2:15-16). Absent is any willingness to make any kind of moral stance. The Spirit of anti-Christ has seduced them – so that now their behaviour heaps derision on the name of Jesus. Even formerly sound teachers have entered into unholy alliances that could bring shipwreck to their ministries. What we see today is another fulfilment of Isaiah 52:5 which reads, *“My name is continually blasphemed... among the Gentiles because of you.”* (Romans 2:24) This condemnation, true of the Jewish religious establishment of Isaiah’s (and also Paul’s time), is also true of the various ecclesiastical establishments of our own day.

In response to this dire situation it is important that those who belong to God’s true Messianic Remnant accept each other’s different callings. There were some *“of whom the World was not worthy; [who] wandered in desert and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”* (Hebrews 11:38) However, there were other saints equally loyal to the Lord *“who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises [and] stopped the mouths of lions.”* (Hebrews 11:33) In all periods of crisis for God’s people, there have been the Anthony’s who prayed in the desert and the Athanasius’ who contended for the faith in the full glare of publicity. (Jude 3) Thanks to their faithfulness we today can enjoy a heritage of sound doctrine. Let both the *‘Anthony’s’* and *‘Athanasius’* of today work together in order to ensure that a legacy of truth is passed onto future generations. In fellowship let there be respect for one another’s different ministries. One person’s call may not be another’s call, but in love we can accept that God is doing a real work in each of our lives.

If your vocation is to flee into the wilderness, then make sure that God wants you there. If your vocation is to stand in the public arena and confront those errors, which ensnare God’s people then also make sure that God wants you there. Lastly, if your calling lies midway between these two extremes; then ensure that your Heavenly Father is leading you. No matter what the pathway down which you are being guided; test carefully the Spirit behind that guidance. As the Apostle John exhorted, *“Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits to see whether they are of God,”* (1 John 4:1a). Indeed, with great fervour I beg you to test and test again until you are absolutely sure that the leading is from the right source. However, once you are as sure as it is possible to be, boldly follow it without any hesitation. Also, do not look back – remember Lot’s wife.

Lastly, be wise, try to keep a sense of balance between the *‘desert’* and *‘city’* call. Reflect on the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His perfect manhood he alternated from periods of solitary prayer and quietness (Luke 5:16), to periods of active ministry where he would be the centre of a crowd’s attention, (Luke 5:17-21). The truth is that we need elements of both the *‘desert’* and *‘city’* in our own lives. What varies from person to person and from situation to situation is the proportion of each element. Sometimes the *‘desert’* may come to the fore whilst at others the *‘city’* may play a more active part. Even those who major on the desert should retain some elements of the city and vice-versa. To sum up matters in this hour of growing peril, God’s true people who are being called together to form the Messianic Remnant must take great care to: -

- 1) Establish whether their calling is primarily to the desert – far away from the centres of influence, or primarily to the city near the centres of influence (or alternating between the two).
- 2) Recognise and have fellowship with those who have a different calling
- 3) Avoid the petty-minded attitude, which proudly assumes that *‘My calling is the only truly Spiritual one.’*

Above all, remember the Creator who made all things, *“according to their different kinds,”* (Genesis 1:26). Inevitably, *God will have different ministerial roles for those belonging to the Remnant.* Again, your calling will not be my calling and my calling will not be your calling but together we can glorify God and support one another in the difficult days ahead. Should we persevere in doing this then we too will be numbered among the heroes of faith who bring honour to the name of Jesus. From Him we will also receive the personal commendation *“Well done you good and faithful servant,”* (Matthew 25:21a).

Section 6: A Final Exhortation to Faithfully Keep Previously Stated Beliefs

With all such thoughts in mind I strongly urge you to keep faithful to the One who made and saved you. Do not take the Lord's blessings for granted, but be neither timid in seeking them out. In addition, remember that the focus of our faith is not upon an, 'object' at all, nor even on a set of doctrines, but in the one true personal-Infinite unseen God who honours those who seek Him. Remember too, that God the Father sent His Son Jesus to die for sinners and to bring them into a love relationship with Himself. Think of it this way; our faith is in an objective deity who has been revealed as a person who can be fully trusted in every situation – no matter how unpleasant it may seem. *The God we follow is worthy to be trusted.* There can be no secret reservations or doubtful wavering, (James 1:6-7). *God is worthy to be trusted because He is God. God by nature is entirely trustworthy.* There is no trace of unreliability in His character. Hence the words 'God' and 'trustworthiness' can readily go together.

Before closing, allow Scripture to have the final word. In obedience to Deuteronomy 19:15, three (Scriptural) witnesses will be brought forward to support the case that, *"He that believes upon the Son has everlasting life,"* (John 3:36a)

- 1) *"Repent you and believe in the Gospel,"* (Jesus in Mark 1:15)
- 2) *"And by Him all that believe are justified from all things which could not be justified by the Law of Moses,"* (Paul in Acts 13:39)
- 3) *"And this is the commandment; that we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus,"* (John in 1 John 3:23a)

From this trio of witnesses it is possible to see that any lack of faith is a form of blasphemy because it slanders the character of God. The Lord whom we follow is great – not little. All Powerful – not ineffective; Paul concurs with the witnesses quoted in previous passages by promising in Romans 10:9, *"If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved."*

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