

The Biblical Heritage Center's

## ***DISCOVERING THE BIBLE***

*Searching for what the words of our Bibles meant to their ancient authors & following their journeys through the centuries to us.*

**2010 • NUMBER 2**

***Rediscovering the meanings of the teachings of the historical Jesus.***

### **TESHUVAH (Repentance)**

By Jim Myers

Is it important for Christians to accurately understand what Jesus taught? I think most would agree that it is very important, but there is a 2,000 year gap that separates us from the historical Jesus and his original followers. During this period there have been many interpretations of what his words meant and what his followers should do. This is the first in a series of studies designed to help you rediscover the original meanings of his words. The first step towards accomplishing this goal is to view his words through the eyes of his culture.

We must distinguish the historical Jesus from the theological Jesus models created by Gentiles. He lived in Galilee in the early part of the first century CE and was a Jew. His followers lived in Galilee, Samaria and Judea. They would have been very familiar with the Hebrew language through their visits to the Temple and synagogues. They would also have been very familiar with Aramaic, the language of business. Some also probably were acquainted with Greek and Latin. Regardless, the historical Jesus and his followers shared a common culture.

Two events played important roles in separating the Jewish Jesus from his original message and transformed his Jewish movement into a Gentile religion. The first was the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Roman army. The Temple played an important role in Jesus' life and it was also an essential part of the Jewish culture. It touched almost every area of their lives. It took centuries for the Jewish people to adjust to its loss. The second event was the Bar Kokhba Revolt, which ended in 132 CE when the Roman army defeated the Jews again. This event further separated members of the Jesus Movement from other Jews, pushed it toward the Gentiles, and caused it to move more quickly away from its Jewish roots. It would only take a few centuries for it to become the Roman Catholic Church and a multitude of sects, which were called "heretical."

How did the words of the historical Jesus make it from his world to ours? Jesus didn't write down his messages. They were passed around orally and embedded in the memories of his followers. One of the earliest references to this journey was written by Papias, an Early Church Father of the early second century. He stated

that Matthew collected the teachings of Jesus and recorded them in the Hebrew language (Eusebius; *Ecclesiastical History III,39,1*). This is supported by statements from **Irenaeus** and **Jerome**. The most ancient manuscripts known today are written in Greek. Therefore, a gap exists between the time his words were recorded in Hebrew originally and when they were translated into Greek.

The impact of changing from one language to another requires more than a new dictionary to understand what they meant to the author. As one of my professors of linguistics once informed me, "Myers, you might write your thoughts down in Greek, Hebrew or Russian letters, but you were thinking in American, not Greek, Hebrew or Russian!" He made his point very clear – *it is the thinking behind the words that determines their true meaning*. In order to understand my words, a person must understand my culture, which the professor said was "Texan."

The trap we must avoid when reading the words of Jesus, especially in the Synoptic Gospels, is to unconsciously substitute our cultural meanings for his. Because we are reading Jesus' message in our language, it is only natural to "think American," instead of asking what the words would have meant in the Late Second Temple Period to a Jew. Think of the years of schooling we have received that trained us to "think American." We have been immersed in a sea of "American thinking" people all of our lives. In addition, our churches specifically taught us what the words of our Bibles were supposed to mean. But none of my preachers ever pointed out that Jesus was a Jew and not an American.

The starting place for rediscovering the meaning of the teachings of the historical Jesus is to view them through his culture. Many scholars have been involved in extensive research of the ancient manuscripts that were translated to create our English Bibles. Some scholars were influenced by Dr. Robert Lindsey, who discovered numerous Hebrew linguistic structures (syntax, idioms, word order, etc.) embedded in the Greek text. His work revealed the connection between the teachings of Jesus and the culture of first century Israel. It is becoming very clear that the message of the historical Jesus may have been copied in Greek, but the thought behind them was Hebrew.

A word that was very important to Jesus, and has also played a very significant role in Christian theology, is "repentance." You have probably heard it all of your life, if you attended any church. It is one of the first steps one must take in the salvation process; therefore an accurate understanding for this word is imperative. Let's begin our study of this word by finding out what "repentance" means in our culture and language. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as follows:

(1) Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French *repentir*, from Medieval Latin *repenitēre*, from Latin *re-* + Late Latin *poenitēre* to feel regret, alteration of Latin *paenitēre* — more at penitent.

(2) *to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life.*

(3) *to feel or cause to feel sorrow, regret or contrition.*

(4) *to change one's mind.*

As pointed out above, the English words of our New Testaments are translations of Greek words, which are translations of Hebrew words, and then recorded in ancient manuscripts. Our next step in tracing their journey is to find out what the Greek words were and what they meant. There are two Greek words which were translated as "repentance": **METANOIA** and **METAMELOMAI**. The first word was translated as "repentance" fifty-eight times and the latter only six times.

In Classical Greek **METANOIA** meant "changing one's mind or heart about someone or something." This was the common meaning until the end of the first century CE. This meaning began to work its way into Jesus' message as it spread beyond the borders of Israel. The message of Jesus was now one step removed from its original Hebrew culture. Next, the newer Greek meanings began to change as they came under the influence of the leaders from the Roman culture with its Latin language. By the fifth century the Bible of the Roman Church would become the Latin Vulgate, and in it **METANOIA** was translated ***paenitentia***, which came to mean "penance" or "acts of penance." Accordingly, the Roman Church, prescribed acts of penance were required for one to obtain grace.

This transition is seen in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, from Justin Martyr (c. 150 CE), to Augustine (410 CE). By the time of Augustine, "repentance was not the work of man, but a gift like grace from God." The earlier Church Fathers *sought some sort of contrition for sin from a convert, which would then be announced during the convert's water baptism ritual.* However, by the time of Augustine, infant baptism had become the norm. Obviously an infant couldn't show any signs of contrition for sin. How many sins could an infant have committed in its short life? This shifted repentance from something that was required before baptism to something that took place afterwards.

New beliefs, such as justification, regeneration and sanctification, replaced the earlier meanings in the Roman church. These new understandings became almost synonymous with the penance rituals of the Roman Church. This was what became the norm for Christianity in the mid-fourth century and would continue to be the understanding of Christians for the next thousand years. It is no surprise that the newer meaning became the "truth" for generations; but they would have been very surprised if they had learned that it was not what the historical Jesus taught.

The next change came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Martin Luther and the leaders of the Protestant Reformation. Luther taught that repentance began at the point of faith and involved genuine sorrow for sins committed, along with the renunciation of all sinfulness. He wrote, "Repentance is not penitence alone but also faith, which apprehends the promise of forgiveness, lest the penitent sinners perish." He connected repentance with faith and taught that this was a lifelong process for

Christians. In many ways Luther's understanding was much closer to that of the Early Church Fathers than that of the later Roman Catholic Church.

As a result of Luther's conflict with the pope, he was excommunicated. This created a real problem because he was no longer saved according to the Church. Luther was in need of a new way to prove that he was saved. Until then, a person had to be "a member in good standing of the Church" in order to be saved. The pope was willing to bring Luther back into the Church, if he would renounce his previous acts. Luther was not the only one affected by this situation. His followers also urgently needed a solution for this pressing problem.

An important part for being in good standing with the Church was the requirement of being actively involved with its rituals, especially the Eucharist and Confession. The Eucharist (Lord's Supper) and Confession could only be administered by the ordained priests of the Church. Luther created a new theology which effectively removed these institutional road blocks. He introduced the doctrine of the "priesthood of the believer." No longer would priests stand between believers and God. He separated penance from Churches ritual and modified the meaning of repentance once again. Luther rejected the notion that post-baptismal sins could be atoned for by contrition, confession and acts of penance. According to Luther, all sins (past, present and future) were covered by the blood of Christ when the sinner was baptized; therefore penance was not necessary. John Calvin later added that repentance continued through the life of the Christian; it was the fruit of faith.

The theologians of the Reformation taught that the meaning of "repentance" could be understood by breaking down the Greek word into its basic parts: (1) *meta* (after) + *noeo* (to think). When these are combined, they taught that it meant "after the fact." Thus, repentance came to mean "to change the mind" in Protestant groups. Specifically it meant "to change one's mind about Christ."

The bottom line is that "repentance," for members of all of the Christian churches, became "a mental activity," to which many churches linked specific rituals. Many other words of Jesus followed the same path as they traveled from his culture to the Western cultures of later Christian religions. By this point I am sure there is one question on your mind.

### **What did "repentance" mean to the Jewish Jesus?**

Let's review what we have covered up to this point: (1) Jesus was not a Greek, Roman or American; he was a Jew. (2) The Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church and many different Protestant Churches did not come into existence until centuries after Jesus was executed by the Romans. (3) The Jesus Movement was a sect of Second Temple Judaism. (4) The culture of Jesus was that of Second Temple Period Israel. (5) The cultures of the Christian Churches were very different from that of the historical Jesus.

Jesus did not establish the First Christian Church of Jerusalem, the New Testament wasn't his Bible and he didn't go on mission trips to convert Gentiles. STOP! Read the previous sentence again, and take a moment to really think about what it means and their corresponding implications. If discovered that your church was not established by Jesus, the New Testament was not its Scriptures, and Gentiles were not to be converted – what would your church be like? Of course, if you are not Jewish, you wouldn't have been able to join it in the first place!

If your church was following the teachings of the historical Jesus, one of the primary things it would be doing is teaching about **TESHUVAH**. This is the Hebrew word translated into Greek as **METANOIA**, retranslated into Latin as **poenitēre**, and finally into English as "**repentance**." Once we know what TESHUVAH meant in Jesus' Jewish culture, we will be able to compare it to the later meanings from Greek, Latin and English and see how accurate they are.

Literally TESHUVAH means to "turn" or "turn around." Below is what it meant in the Late Second Temple Period when Jesus taught:

TESHUVAH is prerequisite for divine forgiveness: God will not pardon man unconditionally but waits for him to repent. In repentance man must experience genuine remorse for the wrong he has committed and then convert his penitential energy into concrete acts. Two substages are discernible in the latter process: first, the negative one of ceasing to do evil, and second, the positive step of doing good. . . The motion of turning implies that sin is not an ineradicable stain but a straying from the right path, and that by the effort of turning, a power God has given to all men, the sinner can redirect his destiny. (Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 14, col. 73)

The teaching that a human being possesses the power to redirect his destiny has played an important role throughout Jewish history. It is easily seen in the writings of one of the latter prophets, Ezekiel:

"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself. But if the wicked man turns from (TESHUVAH) all his sins which he has committed and observes all my statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the master YAHWEH, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? But when a righteous man turns away from (TESHUVAH) his righteousness, commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that a wicked

man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is my way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right? When a righteous man turns away from (TESHUVAH) his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die. Again, when a wicked man turns away from (TESHUVAH) his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. Because he considered and turned away from (TESHUVAH) all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

"But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the master is not right.' Are my ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares YAHWEH ELOHIYM. "Repent and turn away (TESHUVAH) from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares YAHWEH ELOHIYM. "Therefore, repent (TESHUVAH) and live." (Ezekiel 18:20-32)

There is another cultural concept that is linked to TESHUVAH -- *forgiveness*. Today, I know that many people believe if they commit a sin that harmed someone else, all they need to do is pray and ask God to forgive them. This is something that is done by the person alone. The person that was harmed plays no role in the process and is completely left out of the equation. This was not what Jesus taught; and he makes it very clear. Before I elaborate, I must first explain more about what **forgiveness** meant in Jesus' culture:

God's forgiveness, however extensive, only encompasses those sins which man commits directly against Him . . . those in which an injury is caused to one's fellow man are not forgiven until the injured party has himself forgiven the perpetrator. (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 6, col. 1436)

This concept is very apparent in the teaching of Jesus.

Therefore if you bring your sacrifice to the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you; leave your sacrifice there, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your sacrifice. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the road with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison.

Amen! I say unto you, "You shall by no means come out from there, until you have paid the uttermost farthing. (Matthew 5:23-26)

Notice that the religious ritual was halted until the sinner could get things right with the person he harmed. God wouldn't forgive the person until he received that person's forgiveness. This was what Jesus taught and expected his followers to understand. It is a message that has transformational power of combining TESHUVAH with forgiveness. Let's review the steps of TESHUVAH:

Step 1: **Stop** – Cease from doing the sin; stop doing the harmful act.

Step 2: **Regret** - Feel regret for your actions and the harm they caused.

Step 3: **Confess** - Express your regret out loud. This doesn't have to be done at synagogue or church or to professional clergy. It can be accomplished by a prayer or just by saying the words out loud.

Step 4: **Do good works**. If you sinned against a person, do the good works that are restorative actions and provide restitution. Go to the person(s) sinned against and make amends – (1) ask for forgiveness; (2) do what is necessary to restore things back to the state they were before the sin. Only after these steps are completed can one ask God for forgiveness. **Continue to do good works and incorporate them into your life plan.**

A key to understand the principles underlying the teachings of the historical Jesus can be seen in his response to a question asked by a religious leader:

Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, "You shall **love the Lord your God** with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all of your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, "You shall **love your neighbor as yourself.**" On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)

If you are familiar with the 12-Step program, I think you will see some interesting links of its message to TESHUVAH. I wonder what would happen if Jesus' teachings of TESHUVAH linked to forgiveness became your churches core message. **BHC**

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# February Memorials

*In Loving Memory*

**PHYLLIS  
WYRE**

d. February 8, 1998

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**ALBERTA  
HARLESS  
MYERS**

b. August 18, 1887  
d. February 5, 1979

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**GLORY  
HODGES  
ROSS**

b. January 25, 1975  
d. February 29, 2008

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

## In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to  
seek those qualities of mind and  
heart which they shared when we  
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to  
fulfillment their highest ideals and  
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our  
loyalty to those things which we  
valued and shared --  
faith, love, peace and devotion  
and our biblical heritage.*

*As long as we live, they too will  
live; for they are now a part of us,  
as we remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor  
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The  
Prayer Book Press)

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the Internet and stop back by often. If  
you would like to add your loved one to  
this section, send the information to us.

There is no charge, but donations are  
accepted.

*In Loving Memory*

**MARIA  
ESTELLA  
RUIZ**

February 22, 1996

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**JAMES  
HENRY  
MYERS**

b. September 6, 1881  
d. February 13, 1953

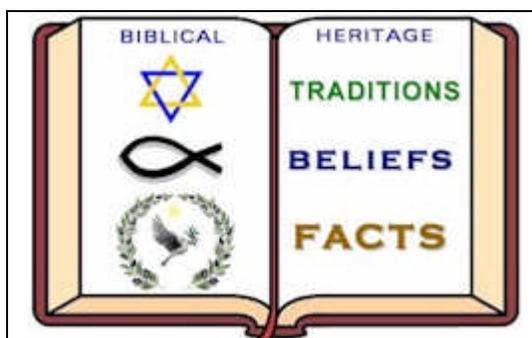
*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*



**SHALOM**

*Totality, Wholeness &  
Peace.*

*Remember those who have meant so much to you with a BHC Memorial.*



### **BHC's Primary Mission**

*Enhance the quality of life and protect life by raising the awareness of the origins and historical transmissions of the beliefs created by the many heritages which base their reason for existence upon a Bible.*

## **Thank you for reading this newsletter.**

Matters of belief & faith play important roles in the quality of lives we lead; especially because of their effects on the political and social environments in which we are immersed. One of our primary missions is to provide you with solid factual information about our Bibles and the many heritages associated with them.

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