



The Biblical Heritage Center's

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

Understanding the ancient meanings of the words of our Bibles by viewing them in their original cultural & historical contexts.

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What God Treasures

By Jim Myers

Do not store up treasures for yourselves upon earth, where moths and rust destroys, and where thieves break through and steal. Store up treasures for yourselves **in heaven**, where neither moths nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

The heart is the center of life and where one's heart is reveals what he or she most values. Obviously, protecting one's treasure is of great importance and the place that offers the greatest security is of primary importance. The word "heaven" was a very familiar euphemism used by Jews at the time of Jesus for the name of God. His audience would have understood it to mean "with Heaven," meaning "with God." Wouldn't that be the safest place to put your treasure?

The light of the body is the eye. If therefore you have a good eye, your whole body shall be full of light. But if you have an evil eye, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23)

What is "the light of the body?" What does it have to do with "the eye?" The other question that Jesus' audience would have been thinking about had to be – "What does this have to do with my treasure?" The words "light" and "darkness" were of particular interest to the sect of Jews living at Qumran. The underlines in the quote below have been added for emphasis:

The Qumran community separated the Sons of Light from the main body of the people of Israel, and assigned the title of the Sons of Light to the members of their own community and others with similar or related beliefs and halakha [laws] (1QM I, 2b-3), while excluding their countrymen who had broken the covenant and were therefore counted among the Sons of Darkness (1QM I+). Dualism was adopted at Qumran in order to strengthen the identity of the members of the

community. Dualism was an effective weapon for this purpose. Light, goodness and life were confined to the community and its few allies in Israel, while the violators of the covenant, all outsiders and all other nations were counted among the Sons of Darkness.
(<http://www.nnqs.org/sollamo.html>)

In Jesus' opening words he used terms that were clearly directed at two groups – the wealthy and members of the Qumran community. What characteristic did both of those groups share in common? They separated themselves from the rest of the Jewish people. The importance of each member of the community in Jewish thought is reflected in Rabbi Jill Jacob's book (There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice through Jewish Law & Tradition; p. 14)

A rabbinic story tells about a group of people traveling in a boat. One passenger takes out a drill and begins drilling a hole under his seat. The other passengers, quite understandably, complain that this action may cause the boat to sink. "Why should this bother you?" this man responds, "I am only drilling under my own seat." The others retort, "But the water will rise up and flood the ship for all of us!" (Vayikra Rabbab 4:6).

The moral of this story is clear: one person's destructive action may literally drown the entire community. But we might add that the inverse is also true: a single positive change may transform an entire community. Thus, the alleviation of poverty, even in the smallest detail, may help the community as a whole flourish.

The survival of the Jewish people rests on the shoulders of each Jewish person and if anyone "drills a hole in the boat" by splitting or harming its members, it could sink the whole nation. Plugging up the holes that had already been drilled was what Jesus hoped to accomplish when he used the above terms -- "good eye" and "evil" eye." They were very familiar to his audience, so no explanation was needed, but that would not be the case when his words were translated into Greek, Latin, and many other languages, including English. The terms Jesus used would be unknown because they were idioms.

An idiom is a word or phrase that cannot be understood by literally translating its words into the equivalent words of another language. The best way to define idiom is by looking at familiar idioms in our language. As you read the idioms below, think about what the words would mean to a person from another culture if he or she tried to use an English dictionary to simply look up the meanings of each word.

(1) If that happens, I will **eat my hat**.

- (2) I got it straight from **the horse's mouth**.
- (3) I'll do it **when the cows come home**.
- (4) You really **put your foot in your mouth** this time.
- (5) It's raining **cats and dogs** outside.

Idioms create some very interesting mental images, when you consider their literal meaning, but there would be no way to grasp their actual meanings without additional help. How can we unlock the meanings of the idioms Jesus used? A good place to start is by looking for them in his Bible.

He that has a good eye shall be blessed;
for he gives his bread to the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)

A very popular writing style used in the Jewish Bible is called a "parallelism." A parallelism contains words or phrases that are written in parallel, which means the words of one section are directly related to the words in the other. Learning to recognize parallelisms will elevate your Bible studies to a new level. Parallelisms make it very easy to find the meaning of an idiom found in one part by finding the parallel words in the second. A good way to do this is by turning the first part into a question and then using the second to answer it.

Question: Who is the one that has a "good eye?"

Answer: He is the one that "gives his bread to the poor."

We are very fortunate in this case to have an idiom that is still in common use today in Israel. An Israeli friend of mine pointed out that when beggars come up to people on the street they say, "Good eye, good eye?" What they are asking is "Are you a generous person? Are you an almsgiver?" Now let's use this information to replace the idiom Jesus' used above.

"The light of the body is the eye. If therefore you are a generous person (an almsgiver), your whole body will be full of light."

The Jews from Qumran would have paid a great deal of attention to what Jesus said because he linked light to almsgiving. Unlike the "Sons of Light" at Qumran, according to Jesus the true "Sons of Light" would be involved with the entire community through almsgiving, not people separated from it.

Since the sect from Qumran called the Jews who were not members of their group the "Sons of Darkness," they would also have been interested in the link Jesus made to darkness by the other idiom – evil eye. It is found in the Jewish Bible in Deuteronomy 15:9:

"Beware that there be not a thought in your wicked heart, saying, `The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and you have an evil eye against your poor brother, and you give him nothing; and he cry unto YAHWEH against you, and it be sin unto you."

The parallelism in this verse is "you have an evil eye against your poor brother, and you give him nothing." So, let's turn the first part into a question and then let the second answer it.

Question: Who is the one with the evil eye?

Answer: The one who gives his poor brother nothing.

A person with an evil eye is a "greedy stingy person" who wouldn't help his poor brother. Now let's replace both idioms with their actual meanings and take another look at what Jesus said:

The light of the body is the eye. If therefore you are a generous almsgiving person, your whole body shall be full of light. But if you are a greedy stingy person, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

We will now learn more about the terms "light" and "darkness."

"Better to extinguish the light on Sabbath than to extinguish life, which is God's light" (Shab. 30b).

"Light" and "life" are used interchangeably in the Jewish culture. The obligation to save life in Judaism is one of the highest priorities and is called "*pikuach nefesh*."

In Judaism, human life is essential and so *pikuach nefesh*, the obligation to save a life in jeopardy, is considered a major value to uphold. This obligation applies to both an immediate threat and a less grave danger that has the potential of becoming serious. *Pikuach nefesh* is derived from the biblical verse, "Neither shall you stand by the blood of your neighbor" (Lev. 19:16).

According to *pikuach nefesh* a person must do everything in their power to save the life of another. . . It is also permissible to travel on Shabbat to save a person's life. Maimonides declared that a Jew should take the individual, even if a gentile is present, in order to encourage "compassion, loving-kindness and peace in the world" (Mishneh Torah, 2:3).

The preservation of life [*pikuach nefesh*] is considered to be of paramount importance, surpassing virtually all of the other commandments of the Torah. One may and must violate Yom Kippur or the Sabbath, eat non-kosher food, etc. if there is the slightest chance that human life may be preserved or prolonged.

Judaism rejects the notion of unlimited personal autonomy. Our bodies and our lives are not our own to do with as we will. They are temporary bailments given to us by G-d for a specific purpose and duration which only G-d can terminate and just as we don't have the moral right to kill or harm others, we don't have the moral right to kill, maim, or injure ourselves or to authorize other persons to do those things to us.

(http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pikuach_nefesh.html)

If "light" equates with "life," then "darkness" means "death." Now let's revise the words of Jesus by adding the above information about *pikuach nefesh*:

"The **life** of the body is the eye. If therefore **you are a generous almsgiving person** who gives to the poor, your whole body will be full of **life**. But if **you are a greedy stingy person** who doesn't help his poor brother, your whole body shall be full of **death**. If therefore the **life** that is in you is **death**, how great is that **death!**"

Helping a poor person is called "charity" in our culture, but for Jesus it was called **TZEDAKAH**, which is usually translated as "righteousness." There is a very big difference TZEDAKAH and our concept of charity. The Encyclopedia Judaica defines TZEDAKAH as follows (underlines added for emphasis):

"**The fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations.** TZEDAKAH is not an abstract notion but rather **consists in doing what is just and right in all relationships**. Acts of TZEDAKAH results in social stability and ultimately in SHALOM. In the (Hebrew) Bible TZEDAKAH bears a distinctly legal character; the TZADIK (righteous man) is **the innocent party**, while **the wicked man is the guilty one**. TZEDAKAH is not an inherent human characteristic, but rather a trait resulting from sustained performance of obligations.

In rabbinic literature the term **TZEDAKAH was used to specifically mean "almsgiving."** Almsgiving is regarded as **an offering brought to God**. "They that give alms to the poor, give it to Me," says God, for it is said, "My offering, My bread" (Num. 28:2). Surely God needs no bread, nevertheless He says: "I count your gifts as though you were My children supporting their father." "He hath dispersed, he hath given to

the poor; **his TZEDAKAH endures forever**" (Ps. 112:9).

Almsgiving is not a favor to the poor, but something to which they have a right to receive, and the donor, has an obligation to give. In that way they teach "The poor man does more for the householder (in accepting alms) than the householder does for the poor man (by giving him alms)" (Lev. R. 34:8) for he gives the householder the opportunity to perform a mitzvah.

Giving alms is the way in which man can "walk after the Lord God" (Deut. 13:5) and **saves from death** (Prov. 1:2). Together with the Torah and service (i.e., prayer), the practice of almsgiving is one of the pillars on which the world rests (Avot 1:2). Giving alms does not impoverish and **not giving is tantamount to idolatry** (Ket. 68a). **Everyone is obligated to give alms**; even one who himself is dependent on alms should give to those less fortunate than himself (Git. 7a).

Almsgiving and loving-kindness are a powerful defense on the Day of Judgment (Tosefta Peach, 1)

The link between God and the person in need is an important principle that is firmly established in Jewish thought.

When a beggar stands at your door, **the Holy One**, Blessed be He, **stands at his right hand** (Wayyikra Rabbah 34:9).

He that feeds the hungry **feeds God also** (Agadat Shir ha-Shirim)

The scroll of Isaiah was a very important text during the Second Temple Period. The Jewish audience listening to Jesus would have quickly recognized the link between what he was teaching and the words of Isaiah.

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a horn, and declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways; as **a nation that did TZEDAKAH**, and forsook not the ordinance of their ELOHIYM, they ask of Me righteous ordinances, they delight to draw near unto ELOHIYM.

Wherefore have we fasted, and You do not see? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and You do not acknowledge?

Behold, in the day of your fast you pursue your business, and exact all your labors. Behold, you fast for strife and contention, and to smite with

the fist of wickedness; you fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the fast that I have chosen? The day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to YAHWEH?

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

Is it not **to deal your bread to the hungry**, and that **you bring the poor that are cast out to your house?** **When you see the naked, that you cover him**, and that **you hide not yourself from your own flesh?**

Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily; and **your TZEDAKAH shall go before you, the glory of YAHWEH shall be your reward.**

Then shall you call, and YAHWEH will answer; you shall cry, and He will say: "Here I am." If you take away from your midst the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedness; and **if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul.**

Then shall your light rise in darkness, and your gloom be as the noon-day. YAHWEH will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make strong your bones; and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (Isaiah 58:1-11)

Think about the implication of Isaiah's words, when they are viewed in the context of the teachings of Jesus, especially these words – "Then shall your light rise in darkness." The meaning of "light" is "life," and "darkness" is "death." Those listening to Jesus would have clearly understood the promised reward for the almsgivers:

"Then shall your **life** rise in **death!**"

Now let's put everything together that we have learned to this point about the lesson Jesus was teaching so we can understand what his audience heard:

“Do not store up treasures for yourselves upon earth, where moths and rust destroys, and where thieves break through and steal. Store up treasures for yourselves with Heaven, where neither moths nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The life of the body is the eye. If therefore you are a generous almsgiving person who gives to the poor, your whole body will be full of life. But if you are a greedy stingy person who doesn't help his poor brother, your whole body shall be full of death. If therefore the life that is in you is death, how great is that death!

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and Mammon.**”

Mammon is a term that was used to describe greed, avarice, and unjust worldly gain in Biblical literature. It was personified as a false god in the New Testament. The term is often used to refer to excessive materialism or greed as a negative influence. It is an Aramaic loan word in Hebrew meaning “wealth.” (Wikipedia)

The scene Jesus was painting in the minds of his audience was one that is found many times in the Jewish Bible. The original version was that of the Adam, Eve and the serpent (a snake, not Satan) in a garden in Eden. If we put the words of Jesus' lesson in the garden picture, the serpent would have said something like this:

“Don't give your wealth to your fellow human beings who are in need. Who will take care of you? Keep your wealth locked up in a safe place where only you have access to it. It is what will take care of you. Trust in it! You can't believe what God said!”

Jesus offered his audience the same choice that Adam had in the garden in Eden.

Would they trust God and store their wealth with Him by being an almsgiver or would they trust their wealth more than they trusted God and withhold it from Him by keeping it just for themselves?

The consequences of which choice one made were much more than just whether to help someone by giving a charitable gift. Jesus and his Jewish audience knew exactly what was at stake from writings that had been in circulation for over a century before Jesus every taught. Those texts made it clear that the cost of ignoring the cries of those in need would be much more than the loss of money. One of the earliest extant midrashim is preserved in the Book of Tobit:

Give alms of your substance; and when you give alms, let not your eye be envious, neither turn your face from any poor, and **the face of God shall not be turned away from you**. If you have abundance give alms accordingly: if you have but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little: For you **lay up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity**. Because that **alms delivers from death**, and suffers not to come into darkness. For alms is a good gift unto all that give it in the sight of the most High. (Tobit 4:7-11)

It is good to keep close the secret of a king, but it is honorable to reveal the works of God. Do that which is good, and no evil shall touch you. Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. **It is better to give alms than to lay up gold: For alms delivers from death, and shall purge away all sin. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life**: But they that sin are enemies to their own life. (Tobit 12:7-10)

The phrase "treasures gained by wickedness" is understood as monies that were withheld from the poor. A similar midrash is found in Ben Sira 29:8-12:

To a poor man, however, be generous; keep him not waiting for your alms; because of the precept, help the needy, and in their want, do not send them away empty-handed. Spend your money for your brother and friend, and hide it not under a stone to perish. Dispose of your treasure as the Most High commands, for that will profit you more than the gold. **Store up almsgiving in your treasure house, and it will save you from every evil**.

We find the same lesson in the Psalm of Solomon and 2 Enoch:

For You are a just judge over all the peoples of the earth. For from Your knowledge none that does unjustly is hidden, and the **TZEDAKAH** (righteous) deeds of Your pious ones (are) before You. O Lord, where, then, can a man hide himself from Your knowledge, O God? Our works are subject to our own choice and power; to do right or wrong in the works of our hands. And in Your **TZEDAKAH** (righteousness) You visited the sons of men. He that does **TZEDAKAH** (righteousness) **lays up life for himself with the Lord**. And he that does wrongly forfeits his life to destruction. (Psalm of Solomon 9:4-9)

I have put everyman's work in writing and none born on earth can remain hidden nor his works remain concealed. I see all things. Now therefore, my children, in patience and meekness spend the number of

your days, that you inherit endless life. Endure for the sake of the Lord every wound, every injury, every evil word and attack. If ill-requitals befall you, return them not either to neighbor or enemy, because the Lord will return them for you and be your avenger on the day of great judgment, that there be no avenging here among men. **Whoever of you spends gold or silver for his brother's sake, he will receive ample treasure in the world to come. Injure not widows nor orphans nor strangers, lest God's wrath come upon you.** (2 Enoch 50:1-7)

The same idea is found in Jewish writings after Jesus.

In years of famine, King Monobaz of Adiabene distributed all his treasures to the poor. His kinsmen admonished him: "Your fathers laid up treasures, but you squander them." He replied: "My fathers laid up treasures for below; a place where force prevails – treasures which bear no fruit; treasures of money, treasures for others to enjoy; treasures of consequence only in this world. **I however, have laid up treasures for Above; a place where no force prevails – treasures bearing fruit; treasures for souls, treasures which I, myself, will enjoy; treasures of value in the World-to-Come.**" (Tosefta Peah, 4:18; Baby Batra, 11a)

The consequences of not being an almsgiver, according to Jesus, and as seen above, according to other Jewish teachers, extends far beyond this life. It will only be **the treasures of TZEDAKAH stored with God** that will count when the Son of Man comes to judge mankind:

Then shall he say also unto those on the left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his messengers. **For I was hungry, and you gave me no food. I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and you did not take me in; naked, and you clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.**" Then shall they also answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto you?" Then shall he answer them, saying, "Amen! I say unto you, **inasmuch as you did not to one of the least of these, you did not to me.**" And **these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.**" (Matthew 25:41-46)

A key to interpreting the teachings of Jesus is understanding that in Hebrew thinking an *action* is regarded as being either *completed* or *incompleted*. Hebrew, therefore, knows of no past, present or future tenses (A Practical Grammar for

Classical Hebrew [Second Edition] by J. Weingreen; Clarendon Press; Oxford; © 1959; p. 56). The religion of the Jewish Jesus was based on obligations and prohibitions, not right and wrong beliefs. **If one point was made very clear in this message from Jesus, it is that what one does or doesn't do will be what determines his or her ultimate destiny. Not only is this what modern forms of Christianity do not teach, the fact of the matter is that they teach exactly the opposite of what Jesus commanded.**

A message that you will hear from pulpits around the world is that a person must have the correct beliefs to make it into heaven and live forever. Questioning that doctrine is considered tantamount to heresy by most Christians. However, shouldn't something that directly contradicts the teachings of the one upon whom the validity of all Christianity depends be questioned? **Don't you agree that any belief or doctrine that contradicts the teachings of Jesus should simply be removed from every Christian creed and statement of faith?**

A major issue that became "the line in the sand" between the Roman Catholic Church and Martin Luther's Protestant movement can be summed up in two words – works or grace. Salvation by grace alone became the dominant doctrine of Protestant theology. As a matter of fact, if you do a Google search on this topic you will find numerous entries that reflect the information below.

Grace and works are distinct and opposite thus salvation cannot possibly be of any combination or mixture of both. It must be wholly one or the other. It is essential for all of God's people to understand that righteousness before God is obtained only through imputation.
(Search results from Google)

This theology has led to the formation of a Religious Belief System that separates what people do from what they believe **by elevating beliefs above acts.** The message I was taught in my childhood church was very clear. When Jesus returns there is going to be a final judgment at which God would judge every person that had ever lived. *Those who believed in Jesus will go to heaven and live in a luxurious mansion forever. But those who didn't believe in Jesus will be sent directly to hell and would burn forever.*

A summary of this belief system found its way into the closing remarks of every service. They were followed by the invitational hymn and sinners would be given the opportunity to walk down front and become a believer. They would be told that all of their sins would be forgiven (past, present & future) when they became believers. It didn't make any difference what they had done or would do to others -- when the trumpet sounded on the last day that person was going to heaven. However, if you can believe what Jesus taught above, when the final trumpet sounds there may be a lot of surprised believers standing in front of God! **BHC**

We Need Your Help!

The Biblical Heritage Center is completely funded by gifts donated by individuals who understand the importance of its work. We are committed to getting as much solid factual information as possible into the hands of as many people as possible – **but we need the funds to be able to do it.**

The past few issues of this newsletter have provided readers with solid factual information about how and when many of our modern religious beliefs were created. Readers were given references to the times and places that different religious authorities created the beliefs that millions were taught came directly from God. The information that you have received lately is just the tip of the iceberg – our MRI Databases have much more information that we urgently need to publish and distribute.

BHC is also hearing from more people who are searching for a way to network with others who are willing to test their belief systems. **Creating a safe place to share information and discuss religious and spiritual subjects is another of our top priorities.** We have no doubt that there are millions of people sitting in the pews every week **who know there are real problems with their religion's official belief systems, but also know that they will not be allowed to openly question them and remain a part of that community.**

We know there are many people who want to be part of a spiritual community that allows for open and frank discussions of popular beliefs in light of historical facts without being attacked. A spiritual environment that empowers members instead of demanding blind submission is desperately needed.

Help us take our work to the next level so we can meet the needs of many others. Please make a generous year end contribution now so we will have the funds required to turn our plans into realities. You may make an **online donation** at the BHC website or **mail your donation** to the addresses below. We must receive your gift no later than December 31, 2010 for it to be claimed on your 2010 tax return (see your account, tax consultant or visit the IRS website for more information).

Don't miss this opportunity to share your life by giving a very generous gift -- \$250, \$500, \$750, \$1,000, \$1,500, \$2,000, \$2500, \$3000, \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000, \$25,000, \$50,000, \$100,000, \$250,000, \$1,000,000 or more. *The more funds we receive the more people we will be able to help – your gift will help tremendously!*

Thank you for helping & May you have a great 2011!