

A man in a brown robe, possibly a prophet or a figure of faith, is depicted holding a long staff or scepter. He is standing with his right arm raised, holding the staff, and his left arm extended outwards. The text "By Way of Sukkot" is written in a stylized, golden-brown font, with "By Way" at the top, "of" in the middle, and "Sukkot" at the bottom. The man's figure is partially obscured by the text, particularly the word "of".

# By Way of Sukkot

A Guide for Evangelicals in the Roots of Our Faith

# By Way of Sukkot

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Sh'ma! Chazak!

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the  
New King James Version  
Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982



## Prologue

Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Sukkot, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.

And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.

Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them *by way* of the land of the Philistines, although that *was* near; for God said, “Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around *by way* of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.” So they took their journey from Sukkot and camped in Etam at the edge of the wilderness.

Exodus 12:37, 51; 13:17-20

If the Bible is a storybook at all, it is a storybook of our own experiences. Exodus 13:8 says, “And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘*This is done* because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’” It is helpful to see the accounts of the Bible as memorials of our own experiences and our own spiritual journey.

## My Journey

I came out of Egypt, the land of my bondage. I came out by God’s right hand and His outstretched arm. I came out by miraculous signs and wonders. I came out by God’s grace. I came out of a life of sin, and from being a slave to a harsh master. I was delivered from the kingdom of darkness. I was transformed into a subject of the King of the Universe.

Once set free, my Redeemer did not lead me to the Promised Land by the shortest distance – He led me by way of the wilderness. First though, I should have gone by way of the city of Sukkot as did the children of Israel. For most of my life I avoided Sukkot, until I discovered that it was through Sukkot that the journey to the Promised Land must rightly pass.

Not only is the wilderness not the shortest distance between the Egyptian city of Ramsees and the Land of Promise, Sukkot is also a detour in human reasoning. But God has a specific reason for taking us by way of the storehouse<sup>1</sup> city of Sukkot as He had done with the descendants of Jacob. But I digress... the Exodus account is supposed to be my account in this *midrash*<sup>2</sup> that I have now begun to tell.

## Making the Story Personal

Ramsees was the city that *we* built for the Pharaoh of Egypt. It was named Ramsees [“child of the sun”] in honor of the Pharaoh who was like a god to *us* for *we* were his subjects, and *we* worshipped him as *our* god-king (are *you* with *me* on this now?). Moses came and reminded us that we were called by Another – the God of our forefathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We watched in awe as the might of this God was revealed to us in signs and wonders. The first three of those ten signs we experienced along with our Egyptian masters; and then the last seven we simply watched as God’s power was unleashed against Egypt and our god-king, the Pharaoh.

We had not always been slaves, or worshippers of foreign gods. We were the children of Abraham. Our father Abraham had known the Holy One, the One true God. To Abraham He was revealed as the God of protection, promise, and sustenance. He was known as *El Shaddai*. Our father Abraham had obeyed God’s call and left a land of idolatry and gone to a land promised to him. There, God had made a covenant with him and promised him the land, many descendants, and a Redeemer. God had promised to be his shield.

Our father Abraham had not worshipped the gods of Egypt, nor had he been a slave to anyone; but God revealed to him that his descendants would sojourn in Egypt for four hundred years.

Our father Isaac was born miraculously to Abraham and Sarah. God had shown Abraham that through Isaac the blessing and the promises would pass. Our father Jacob, the second born of Isaac, was God’s choice for passing the blessing and promises on to his twelve sons.

It was because of one of those twelve sons of our father Jacob that we began our journey by passing through Sukkot. Joseph was the eldest son of Jacob’s second wife Rachel. He is a

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<sup>1</sup> Some archeologists believe that the store city of Pithom was also called Sukkot. At the very least, it was in the immediate vicinity of the storehouse city of Pithom that Exodus 1:11 says was built by the enslaved Israelites.

<sup>2</sup> *Midrash* is a Hebrew word which means “to search out”. It is a common exhaustive approach to making application of Scriptural passages. It is to begin with the surface and search even deeper.

father to some of us, but a brother to us all. He preceded us all here in Egypt. The account of how he arrived in Egypt portends much about our own redemption.

## Joseph, a Foreshadowing

Joseph was sent by his father to his brothers. Joseph found his brothers at the place of two wells, Dotan. Because they were jealous of their father's love for Joseph, they conspired to kill Joseph. They threw him into a pit. After a while, they sold him as a slave to a traveling caravan. They took his cloak and soaked it in goat's blood and showed it to our father Jacob so he would believe Joseph was dead.

Joseph, was sold into slavery in Egypt. But because of God's promises to Abraham, God preserved him there. He went from a lowly slave to being the second most powerful man in Egypt. It was not until many years later that his brothers saw him again. But they did not recognize him. He no longer looked like a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He spoke a foreign language. He dressed as an Egyptian. His name had been changed. He was a viceroy of Egypt. He had built great storehouse cities in Egypt which sustained Egypt during the great seven years of famine. Sukkot may have been one of those cities.

It was only after observing his brothers for a while that Joseph revealed himself to them. Then he forgave them. He shared with them the bounty of Egypt. He provided for them and protected them. All of the sons of Jacob continued to live in Egypt since Joseph was a ruler there.

Before Joseph died, he reminded his brothers that God had promised our father Abraham that he would give their descendants the Land of Promise, and that when they left Egypt, they should take Joseph's bones with them and bury them in the Promised Land.

Our forefathers flourished and multiplied in Egypt, but after Joseph died, another Pharaoh arose that did not know Joseph. Our forefathers were then enslaved and forced to be subjects to Pharaoh, and to worship the gods of the Egyptians.

Then God raised up Moses our Teacher; and now He leads us out of Egypt by way of Sukkot. We have a promise to keep. A promise to our brother Joseph to take his bones with us – to take the memorial of him back to the place of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is why we are here in Sukkot. It is where the bones of an Egyptian viceroy named 'Zaphenath-Paneah' are kept. It is our duty to not allow our brother Joseph to be remembered as 'Zaphenath-Paneah' – we are to take him with us, back to the Land of Promise.

## Sukkot: a Starting Place for Our Redeemed Identity

Some might be certain that going to Sukkot is a detour, but it is of vital importance that our brother Joseph never to be remembered as an Egyptian – as a foreigner. In reality, it is

vital for us as well; to help us remember our identity. Egypt is not our home. Egypt's gods are not our God. Egypt's ways are not our ways.

This is what God always intended: His people, redeemed and looking back to their brother Joseph and their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and forward to the wilderness and the Land of Promise. This was a fulfillment of prophecy. It is a picture of my spiritual journey – and maybe of yours.



## Introduction

**“Do you think you are Jewish?”**

**“I am just concerned for you and your family. Don't you know this is how cults start?”**

**“You are going back under the Law.”**

**“We cannot continue to be with you as long as you are doing this ‘Jewish thing’. We don't want to go there.”**

**“I am concerned for you, because the Law has become more important to you than Jesus.”**

Well-meaning people have said these things to me. Maybe they have said similar things to you, or maybe you have said such things to someone. This is the way some people talk when people of Evangelical Christianity begin to explore the Hebrew roots of their faith. Depending upon how far one goes on that exploration, the concerns may even be accusations of heresy.

### What is Heresy – What is Orthodox?

‘Heresy’ is a strong word. It is a word reserved for a radical departure from orthodox beliefs. What constitutes orthodoxy is the subject of what I am writing here. You see, by the very nature of the exploration into the Hebrew roots of Christianity one is challenging the accepted history in an attempt to try to discover the true history of the Bible and God's people.

To have orthodox beliefs means that one's beliefs and customs can be traced back to the original. Right or wrong, the people voicing the above concerns would say that to have orthodox beliefs would be to have the beliefs of Jesus and His First Century Apostles. So what did *they* believe? How did *they* act? Simply put, were Jesus and His First Century followers into "Hebrew roots" or would they too express their cautions to the growing number of those who are on that journey of discovery? Some think they *did* reject all things 'Jewish', and we will look into that question.

## Responding Correctly

For the record, here are some valid responses to the questions and statements of concern (you may have already thought of your own):

*Question: "Do you think you are Jewish?"*

**"No, I am not Jewish, nor do I think of myself as Jewish. But my Master is Jewish."**

*Statement: "You are going back under the Law."*

**"Which 'law' am I not to 'be under' – the one that says to love the LORD my God with all my heart, soul, and strength, or the one that says to remember and keep the Sabbath holy? Or some other 'law'? Who decides – God or a denominational seminary? But for the record, I am not seeing 'under' in any of it as if it were a burden – but rather, I see and experience *delight*."**

*Statement: "I am concerned for you, because the Law has become more important to you than Jesus."*

**"Not at all. I am studying *all* of Scripture, because it *all* speaks of Jesus. It is like saying that pouring over a love letter shows that the letter is more important to someone than the loved one – isn't it a mark of love to enjoy each word?"**

*Statement: "We cannot continue to be with you as long as you are doing this 'Jewish thing'. We don't want to go there."*

**"This is sad, but let's be clear: I am not withdrawing from you; and the things I am discovering are not 'Jewish' – they are 'Bible things'. With that aside, what would be wrong with 'Jewish things' anyway – what exactly are you saying?"**

*Question/Statement: "I am just concerned for you and your family. Don't you know this is how cults start?"*

**"Was the 'religion' of Peter and John a cult? Even the Sanhedrin did not go that far. Is this a Sanhedrin?"**

## Joseph: A Picture of Jesus

Like Joseph, Jesus was sent by His Father to His brothers. Many of Israel did recognize Him as the One sent, but collectively they did not. He was killed. Within a generation of His resurrection many Gentiles saw Him as *their* Redeemer and King. Like Joseph, over the centuries Jesus had an 'appearance' represented by the church that less and less looked like His Jewish brothers. Within one hundred years of His ascension, many Gentiles claimed Him as one of their own – just like the Egyptians claimed Joseph as theirs when they saw his wisdom.

Just like Joseph, Jesus has become unrecognizable to His Jewish brethren – because it seems as if His identity has changed. When taken from prison, Joseph was no longer a Hebrew shepherd – he was viceroy of Egypt. So Jesus seems no longer to be a Jewish teacher and Messiah, but instead the founder of a new religion, and His teachings appear to have much more in common with Greek philosophy, than they do with the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they were then able to see that it was still the same Joseph. He was still the son of Jacob and he still spoke their language. By grace, God likely saved much of the known world from famine through Joseph.

When Joseph prepared to die, he reminded his brothers that Egypt was not their home – that God had promised their father Abraham a Land. He wanted his bones to be buried in that Land. He did not want to be remembered as an Egyptian ruler – but as a son of Abraham. Of all the things Scripture could remind us of Joseph, Hebrews 11:22 makes this the mark of Joseph's faith.

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

Unlike Joseph, our Redeemer yet lives – but like Joseph, He is to be remembered and related to as the Jew that He is. After all, the prophecies of His first coming demand He be a Son of Abraham, a Son of Judah, and a Son of David. That makes Him Jewish by any definition. He has a Jewish heritage; His teachings and His life are the mirror of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the antithesis of Greek philosophy.

## Correct Identity – His and Ours

Well-meaning Christians of varying Gentile heritages may well point out Paul's admonition of the new man being "neither Greek nor Jew" (Colossians 3:11) . We will deal with this in context, but for now let's simply agree then that in any case the identity of our Master is not to be as it predominantly is now; namely Gentile.

The time has come to remember that Jesus, our Master, is not a Gentile. It is time to remember and honor Him as the Jew that He is. He is the Jewish King of all the World. Like the Israelites leaving Egypt, it is time for all of God's people, Jew and Gentile together, to strip away the false Gentile identity of the Master – and 'carry Him back to the Land'. We do that by the manner in which we follow Him. It is important for our identity to correctly understand our Master's identity.

So, let's step back and begin our journey by way of Sukkot, shall we?



## Leaving Ramsees

Our journey begins in the northern Egyptian city of Ramsees. This was the last home of our bondage. Even though this account is not really about our bondage and how we were set free, it is an important reminder of who we are now, so it is worthy of some discussion.

We are free now. In an instant, our whole world has changed. It is as if we are 'born again' – but this time as free men and women. It was the last sign that did it. It was the last of the ten plagues that God poured out upon our Egyptian masters, and their gods. Moses called it the 'Passover' because in it, the plague passed over us. It was a sign and a plague against the firstborn. God sent an Angel of death and killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. In doing so, God assaulted the very fabric of Egyptian idolatry – the highest of Egypt's gods – the Pharaoh Himself. His heir, the future Pharaoh, was slain.

God had given us instructions to prepare a lamb. To slay the lamb and place its blood over our doors. We were instructed to be ready to leave in haste. We obeyed. Some of our neighbors from other nations also obeyed. We were all spared the plague *because of the blood of the lamb*.

Once freed from Pharaoh's grip, we left.

People who are truly freed always leave.

## Our Passover Lamb

We know that the blood of those Passover lambs so many years ago pointed to the ultimate Passover Lamb whose blood was shed on Passover nearly 2,000 years ago. Messiah is our Passover Lamb and we have been set free by His blood. As Paul says,

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>1 Cor 5:7

The fact that Jesus was crucified on the very day of Passover and resurrected on the very day of First Fruits was not lost on the early disciples of the Master. They understood that God establishes patterns, and the patterns of redemption are repeated throughout Scripture. The Exodus was a pattern of God's redemption first for the physical descendants of Jacob that had been enslaved in Egypt. Next, that it was the pattern of the redemption of all mankind by Messiah's atoning blood.

As those in Egypt, we who know the Master have been set free. We have been set free not by our own efforts, but on *account of the blood of the Lamb* – Jesus Himself. Anticipating our freedom, we have laid aside our 'leaven', our sin and are ready for travel. We don't want to stay in the place of our bondage – in sin. Like those in Egypt, as true believers who have been saved by grace through faith, we set out on our journey. We know the destination: to meet and fellowship with God.<sup>4</sup> Our bags were packed and we set out quickly. Freedom was compelling, but the call of our new Master was even more compelling. We were anxious to get to know Him better.

## The Identity of Those Freed

One problem that many evangelical Christians have after being set free, is the problem of finding their true identity as freedmen. Much is made of the entanglements of sin and how we often do not act as if we have been set free from the vicious master of our past life as a slave to sin, but little is done to reveal our biblical identity as freedmen. This identity is important. But in the same way that it was not by our own efforts that we have been set free, establishing our own 'free' identity won't be of our own making either. Or rather, it shouldn't be.

Many are just happy to be in 'the crowd' of others who are former slaves. They don't know where they are going, or if they are going at all, just as long as they are in the crowd. It feels good there. Those are the ones, just like the ones in the book of Exodus, who will perish in the wilderness – because they never were really set free. They never really had exchanged their slave master for the Master of the Universe.

## Already Redeemed, the Journey is Not About Redemption

Where we are going next really is important. It is the place that most evangelical Christians skip. We often simply set out for the 'Promised Land' by the shortest distance. It really is quite a short way from Ramsees to the Land, which is what makes the journey south, *away from the Promised Land*, to Sukkot, seem so odd to most of us. That journey will help

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<sup>4</sup> The Promised land was 'a destination' and a promised inheritance, but the real thing they received in redemption in Exodus 6:1-8 was God Himself. The destination is not 'the Promised Land' or 'Heaven' – it is wherever God is.

us not only establish our identity as freedmen, it will set the stage for everything we encounter on the way to 'the Promised Land'.

I'm speaking metaphorically. To be sure, the events of the Exodus happened, but they also provide redemptive patterns that we would do well to remember. Using the redemptive language of the Exodus helps us see the truth in a beautiful way.

Part of the reason why the 'Reed Sea'<sup>5</sup> crossing is so misunderstood is because 'Ramsees' is misunderstood. Part of the reason why 'Mount Sinai' is misunderstood is because 'Sukkot' is virtually unknown to most.

So, let us make it more clear: the Reed Sea 'baptism' was given to a people already redeemed. They did not pass through the Reed Sea in order to be set free – that had already occurred *because of the blood of the lamb*. Using that picture, immersion, does not enact salvation – it is a sign of the change in status – from slaves of sin, to worshippers of the One True God. 'Baptism' as a ritual act does not save us. It simply declares, "we are free, and no longer slaves to sin."

Likewise, the Covenant at Mount Sinai was given to a people already set free. God did not make their freedom from slavery conditional upon the Covenant. Rather, the Covenant of Mount Sinai was given to describe how God's people were *to live as free people*. Applying that picture, the instructions given at Sinai do not save anyone – they simply describe what holy living *looks like*. Obedience to God's standard, no matter how much effort is put into it, will never save us.

But all of this would be clearer, if we evangelicals would start our journey as freedmen by going through Sukkot. We need to get the identity right before establishing some elaborate theologies.

So, let's start with our redemption. We are saved by grace through faith – period. Nothing we can do can add to the work of the Perfect Passover Lamb. His resurrection proved that nothing could be added to His atoning work, and it forever silenced the lips of legalists.

The journey by way of Sukkot is not about redemption – it is about identification. No longer Egyptian slaves, we are descendants of Abraham. To better live out that truth we need to make that all important journey through Sukkot.

Joseph, the redeemer of Genesis, had preserved his people in the midst of famine. Having faith in God's faithfulness to the promises to Abraham required that the fleeing former slaves retrieve the bones of Joseph to bury them in the Promised Land.

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<sup>5</sup> The English translation often renders it 'Red Sea'. The Hebrew word is '*suf*' which means 'reed' – not 'red'. This does not in any way minimize the miracle of the parting of the Sea. Even the Greek references in Acts and Hebrews do not use the color 'red' when referring to the 'Red Sea'. Quite simply, and most correctly it is the 'Reed Sea'.

We too have a necessary stop – although our Redeemer has no bones to be reburied. He arose and sits now at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Instead, we need to embrace His true identity and take it for our own. Like Joseph's true identity was not that of an Egyptian viceroy; so too, the identity of our Master is not that of a Gentile, the starter of a 'new religion'. His name is *Y'shua*, and we go by way of Sukkot in order to get to know Him better. We go by way of Sukkot to learn how to identify with Him and Who He is – and to learn to live like Him. We go because we have been set free.



## What's In a Name?

To some, it might have been enough for the descendants of Jacob to remember that 'Zaphenath-Paneah' was merely the Egyptian name for Joseph, and to make sure that everyone simply pronounced his name in the Hebrew way: *Yosef*.

In issues of identity it is important to get one's name correct, but that was not enough for the redeemed former slaves of Pharaoh. They did more than simply pronounce Joseph's name correctly. Knowing Jesus' Hebrew name is a nice gesture, but that alone is not the issue in understanding and following Messiah as He is revealed in Scripture.

### Etymology of the English Name 'Jesus'

The Hebrew and Aramaic word for 'Jesus' is *Y'shua* [pronounced "yuh-shoo-a"]. It quite simply means, *salvation*. He is the very embodiment of what God has done for us – redeeming us from the bondage and slavery of sin – He *is* salvation. He is Y'shua.

So where did the name 'Jesus' come from? After all, the closest Hebrew name to Y'shua is 'Yehoshua', which is rendered 'Joshua' in English. Why doesn't our English 'New Testament' transliterate the name 'Yeshua' as 'Jeshua' in keeping with the way other Semitic names are transliterated?<sup>6</sup>

The language of the first Gentile believers was Greek. The original language of most, if not all of the 'New Testament' was Greek. The name 'Y'shua' was transliterated into Greek by the Jewish writers of the Apostolic period. The final letter of His Name was changed to a 's' instead of an 'a' because 's' denotes a *masculine* subject declination in Greek. So 'Y'shua' became 'Jesus', pronounced 'yay-soos' (there is not "sh" sound in Greek so the Hebrew letter *shin* was replaced with a Greek *sigma*).

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<sup>6</sup> 'Jeshua' is a common name in the 'Old Testament' – it is used 29 times. The Hebrew is identical to the Master's Name: 'Y'shua'.

From the Greek, the name 'Jesus' was transliterated into the Latin, where it was pronounced in the same manner as the Greek.

Old English, like German had a soft 'j' for the 'y' sound. When the Bible was first translated into English, the Greek name 'Jesus' became "Jesus" which at that time was pronounced 'Ye-sus'. So now in modern times, we have a name that is not spelled like, nor sounds like the Master's actual Hebrew name.

## Hebrew Names

A similar mangling of names can be found throughout the Bible. Most of the name problems stem from the fact that Hebrew names were usually transliterated into Greek, and then into English following Old English pronunciation rules. 'Ya'akov' became 'Jacob'; 'Yeshayahu' became 'Isaiah'; and 'Yirimayahu' became "Jeremiah".

Some Bible names reveal marked bias when they are rendered in English. For example, we read that Moses' sister was named 'Miriam'. This is an English transliteration of the Hebrew name 'Miryam'. Knowing that we have the English equivalent why did the translators not give us the same English equivalent for 'Mary' the mother of Y'shua? For consistency, all English renderings of the Master's mother should be 'Miriam'. There is no such name as 'Mary' in Scripture.

'James' is another name that changes between the 'Old Testament' and the 'New Testament'. The disciple by that name went by the Hebrew name 'Ya'akov'. That name is transliterated as 'Jacob'. So why do we not have an Epistle of 'Jacob' in the 'New Testament'?

## 'Paul' a Convert Name?

No name reveals more of the bias in our thinking than the name 'Paul'. The popular view is that a Pharisee named 'Saul' was persecuting the early church. While traveling to Damascus, 'Saul' was accosted by 'Jesus' and converted to the new religion of 'Christianity' and then the Master changed Saul's name to 'Paul'. The name 'Paul' reflects his new identity as a believer in Jesus, or his 'Christian name'. This is usually cast in something akin to Abram's name being changed to 'Abraham' after God establishes a covenant with him. But is that what happened to Paul? Not exactly.

There was a Pharisee named 'Sha'ul' [pronounced "*shah-ool*"] who was persecuting the Jewish believers in Y'shua. While traveling to Damascus, Sha'ul' saw a bright light and heard a Voice. The Voice, speaking in Hebrew said, "Sha'ul, Sha'ul, why are you persecuting Me?" When asked Who was speaking, the Voice answered, "I am Y'shua, Whom you are persecuting."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 26:14

So when did 'Sha'ul' become 'Paul'? Throughout the account of Paul's Damascus Road experience, Y'shua continues to refer to him as 'Sha'ul'. Throughout the book of Acts, Paul is still referred to as 'Sha'ul' when the characters are Hebrew speakers. In fact Luke, the scribe of the book of Acts uses the names interchangeably. An example is found in Acts 13:9: "Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him."

Paul's name was never changed from 'Sha'ul' to 'Paul'. 'Paul' was simply his Greek name [i.e. *Paulos*]. One possible reason that he used the name 'Paul' may be because when the Hebrew name 'Sha'ul' is transliterated into Greek it is 'Saulos', which is a word meaning 'haughty' or 'conceited'. 'Paulos' [little one] is a far better name for a humble man of God working with Greek speakers.<sup>8</sup>

## 'Church' is not a Bible Word

How about that important 'New Testament' word 'church'. By the English rendering, it appears to be a new entity found first mentioned in the 'New Testament'? That's right, isn't it? Actually, no.

The first English Bible to use the English word 'church' was the King James Version (the Authorized Version). Previous English Bibles had translated the Greek word *ekklesia* as 'assembly' or 'congregation'. The reason why is quite evident when one reads the Septuagint, the Greek version of the 'Old Testament' – where the word *ekklesia* is used over 80 times in the Greek 'Old Testament'. As a comparison, it is used just 33 times in the Greek version of the 'New Testament'. In the English 'Old Testament' the word 'church' is never used – to do so would be absurd in some people's minds. But doesn't it seem odd that a word that describes the assembling of God's people that is used in the 'Old Testament' is not used in the 'New Testament' in most English Bibles today?

Because of these inconsistencies, there is little wonder that the vast majority of Christians today believe that the 'church' came into being in Acts chapter two. A simple search in the original languages would show that to be far from the case. Many Christians today would be shocked to read that the Greek word for *synagogue* was used to refer to a gathering of believers. It is right there in their Bibles, but because of the 'name game' translators covered it up. You know the thinking don't you: 'church' is for 'Christians' and 'synagogue' is for 'Jews'. Oh, really?<sup>9</sup>

Names and identities you see, are important to our theology. They define us, but more importantly they help us understand the identity of our Master.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer* (FFOZ, 2002), 28-35.

<sup>9</sup> *sunagoge* is used repeatedly in Acts and rendered 'synagogue' usually in a favorable light, but the translators regard it only as a 'Jewish' thing. Read James 2:2 where they usually render it 'assembly' or 'congregation' in English. Ever wonder why?

## Rip that Dividing Page From Your Bible!

What about the very portions of our Bibles labeled 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament'. Since those are man-made divisions, they certainly speak volumes about where a 'Christian' should spend their time reading don't they? The fact of the matter is that they are not a biblical division at all. In fact, the writers of the 'New Testament' would be shocked at how modern believers have left the first two thirds of their Bibles as largely unread. After all, every time the word 'Scripture' is used in the 'New Testament' it is actually referring *specifically* to the 'Old Testament'.

A better name for the first two thirds of our Bible then would be what Y'shua Himself called it: 'the Torah and the Prophets'. This is shorthand for what it has been called for millennia: **TaNaKh** (pronounced: *tahn-akh*, with a guttural 'kh'). This is an acronym for **T**orah, **N**evi'im, **K**etuvim. Which is Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

As well, the 'New Testament' was never meant to replace the Hebrew Scriptures, so it is probably best rendered 'Apostolic Scriptures'.

## Just Semantics?

Some in Messianic circles find that using the 'right names' for biblical characters is the most important thing in a historically authentic faith. It is a start, and it does help – but simply changing names does not equate to correct identification, and that is not the point being made here. Just like it was not enough for the Redeemed from Egypt to simply make sure that 'Yosef' was used instead of 'Zaphenath-Paneah' for their beloved Joseph. Part of their transformation from Egyptian slaves to a redeemed people included that they carry his bones faithfully out of the land of bondage to the Land of Promise. Joseph was a part of their identity. He was not an Egyptian, and as freed slaves neither were they. There is more to a historically authentic faith than saying the 'right names'.

As we will see, going through Sukkot, and deciding to take the bones of Joseph back to the Promised Land was more than an intellectual exercise. The journey laid out ahead of them was going to be quite a long one. As freedmen, it was important to start off *on the right foot*. And so will we.