



Exploring Our Biblical Heritages

From ancient cuneiform tablets to "the cloud."

Guidelines & Standards for Exploring the Past, Making Decisions Today & Planning the Future



***New Options for Navigating
the Uncharted Waters of
Individual Lives***

Guidelines for Exploring and Working Together

The Standard of the Creator of the Heaven & Earth: The TOV Standard

The Standard of the Jewish Jesus: The TZEDAQAH Standard

***A collaborative venture of the
Biblical Heritage Center, Inc. and TOV Center, Inc.***

(Preview Copy: Version 03)

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Guidelines for Exploring and Working Together

When **Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor** and I (**Jim Myers**) first became friends and began working together, our primary focus was studying the Hebrew text of the Torah, beginning with the opening accounts of the *Book of Genesis*. We agreed to use the following guidelines in our studies and discussion.

Guideline #1

*My belief system will be large enough to include all of the facts,
open enough to be examined and questioned,
and flexible enough to change if errors or new facts are discovered.*

- I have a Christian Biblical Heritage and I was raised in a home with a Protestant Religious Belief System. My belief system was mutually exclusive and monotheistic.
- Jeffrey has Jewish Biblical Heritage and he was raised in a home with a Jewish Religious Belief System. Jeffrey's belief system was mutually exclusive and monotheistic, too.
- Mutually exclusive meant people with other belief systems could not belong to our religions. In other words, I could not belong to Jeffrey's religion without leaving Christianity and converting to Judaism and Jeffrey could not belong to my religion unless he left Judaism and converted to Christianity.
- Monotheistic meant we both believe there is only one God, but we disagreed about the identity of that God.
- By agreeing to follow the guideline above we agreed to do the following: (1) elevate facts above institutional truths (beliefs), opinions and feelings; (2) grant permission to the each other to examine and question belief systems; and (3) make changes in our belief systems if errors or new facts are discovered.
- We studied the Hebrew Masoretic Text, along with popular English translations made by Christian and Jewish translators, the Septuagint (Greek translation of Hebrew text) and other Hebrew manuscripts.
- We approach the ancient text with an "explorer's mentality" – *allow the text take us wherever it goes* -- instead of a "defender's mentality" – *defend institutional truths above all*.

Guideline #2

*Identify the people Involved in the Communication Experience.
The Source is the person writing or speaking.
The Receptor is the person the Source is communicating with.*

1. The Source was a group of scribes and priests led by Ezra, who was also a scribe, priest and authorized representative of the King of Persia.
2. Ezra lived in Babylon under Persia rule. He was a descendant of exiles who were brought to Babylon after the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in 586 BCE.
3. Ezra and his group collected information and writings from their fellow exiles and probably Babylonian temples, redacted it and produced the Torah scroll from which copies of future scrolls would be made. Ezra was assigned to Jerusalem in 458 BCE.
4. The original Receptors were fellow exiles living in Babylon, followed by Israelites who had remained in Judea after the exiles left.

Guideline #3

A word or phrase is a group of symbols or sounds with an attached bundle of associations, which consists of the Source's culture, historical time period, geographical location and personal experiences.

1. The symbols used by Ezra were Hebrew of that time period.
2. Ezra was born and raised in the culture of an Israelite community living in Babylon. He was also immersed in the Babylonian culture after the Persians defeated them.
3. He lived in the 5th century BCE and took the Torah scroll to Jerusalem around 458. He also took a scroll of Persian law with him.
4. He lived in Babylon until he was assigned to Jerusalem as the authorized agent of the Persian king.
5. Ezra received funding from the Persian king and other Persian groups.
6. Ezra and his fellow priest taught the Torah in various locations throughout Judea in public meetings.
7. Ezra ruled according the Laws of the Torah and the Laws of the Persian Empire.

The Standard of the Creator of the Heaven & Earth: The TOV Standard

The first account in Genesis begins at 1:1 and ends at 2:4a. Chapters and verses were added almost 2,000 years after Ezra by Christian scholars. Their decisions as to where to place them destroyed original contexts in a number of important cases. As you may have noticed above, the end of the first account is in the middle of verse 4!

Anything that appears seven times in an immediate context in Hebrew Scriptures means it very important. The Hebrew word **TOV** appears seven times (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and 31). In every case, **TOV** is the standard the Creator used to measure things he had just created or made. The idea of the Creator of the Heaven and Earth stands out from the other creation accounts, especially the Babylonian account that Ezra and the exiles were very familiar with. In that account creation was chaotic process carried out with acts of violence, bloodshed and murder.

The Creator in Genesis had a plan and followed it in a very orderly way, measuring each act to make sure it measured up to his standard of **TOV**. **TOV** is a Hebrew word that is usually translated into English as “*good*,” but it means much more than that in the context of the first account of *Genesis*. Using **Guideline #3** above, we watched the “*contextual meaning*” of **TOV** emerge from the ancient in the seven appearances it makes. In order for something to measure TOV it must do one or more of the following:

- *protect lives*
- *preserve lives*
- *make lives more functional*
- *increase the quality of life*

After determining the meaning of **TOV** in the first account, we were able to determine the meaning of **RAH** in the second account. **RAH** is usually translated “*evil*.” However, the ancient meaning of **RAH** is very different from what “*evil*” means to most English readers. In order for something to be **RAH** it must do one or more of the following:

- *destroy lives*
- *threaten lives*
- *make lives less functional*
- *decrease the quality of lives*

Every time you hear the words “*good*” or “*evil*” keep the means of “**TOV**” or “**RAH**” in mind – *and identify whose lives have been or will be affected.*

The Creation of Humans

Below is the story of how humans were created in the first account.

1. The Creator and the Earth were both involved.
2. The Creator told the earth to “*bring forth a soul*” for humans, just like she did for the animals when the Creator created them. A “*soul*” is “*the seat of appetites, desires and longings.*” Animals and humans have *appetites, desires and longings related to the earth -- the environment they share together.*
3. The Creator created humans “*with his spirit,*” meaning “*with its presence.*” All humans are created “*with his spirit.*” His spirit gives humans “*the capacity to create and make things by changing things that exist.*” However, they must be taught how to use the TOV Standard.
4. The Creator created *one male* and *one female.*

Now let's do a quick review:

- All humans are created by one god.
- All humans are created with “*an earth-soul*” and “*the spirit of that god.*”
- All humans have earth-soul like the animals.
- Only humans have “*the spirit of god*” (*the presence of god*) with them.
- No individual human can be the equivalent of this god.

The Blessing of the Humans

(The blessing empowers them to do the things they were created to do.)

- Humans (male and female) are equals in standing and the exercise of power.
- Human are created to function as either male or female in the sexual reproduction.
- Humans must be taught how to fulfill the roles of parents. Children must nurtured, guarded, protected and taught over many years before they are able to survive on their own.
- Humans must be taught how to exercise impulse control over the appetites, desires and longings of their earth-soul.

- Humans are to act together as the Creator's co-shepherds over all living creatures – *flying creatures, water creatures, animals and other humans.*
- Humans are to eat a specific diet of fruit.
- Humans have the capacity to do acts like the Creator empowered them to do and they have the capacity to do acts like wild predatory animals.

The next two accounts in Genesis will teach us by allowing us to compare the information above to the decisions made by *Adam and Eve*. The question in the mind of ancient audiences was this – *Will Adam and Eve act together and be the Creator's co-shepherds or will they act like individual and do acts like wild predatory animals?*

How Ancient Audiences Viewed the Words in Genesis

The Torah contains two types of information – *laws* and *instructions*. Most of the accounts in *Genesis* were written to provide instructions, not laws. *Leviticus*, on the other hand, is a book of laws. Below is how ancient audiences viewed the words of the first account.

- *as repositories of wisdom for living lives*
- *as wisdom that is to be applied in their daily lives*
- *as instructions that must be practiced*

One final thought that must be clearly understood:

*Humans are imperfect creatures.
Perfection is beyond human capacity.
Life is a process of improving.*

The Standard of the Jewish Jesus: The TZEDAQAH Standard

Jesus announced how he viewed himself on a Shabbat at his hometown synagogue in Nazareth to the people who knew him best. **Luke 4:16-21** contains that account. What he said literally blew them away!

In synagogues, sections of Scriptures were read every Shabbat by members selected by a synagogue official. Jesus had been selected to read from the scroll of Isaiah that day. When it was his turn to read he walked up to the front of synagogue where he was handed the scroll of *Isaiah the Prophet*, scrolled to the section he would read and said:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me:
He has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor;
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to release the oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and said:

Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears.

What those words meant to his Jewish neighbors was this:

*"I am the person the Spirit of the Lord is on,
the one God has anointed and sent to proclaim the good news
to the poor captives that they have been released!"*

Who were the *poor captives* and their *oppressive captors*? The answer was also provided by Isaiah immediately before the section he read (Isaiah 58):

"Tell My people their transgression . . . they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, like a nation that did tzedaqah (tzay-DOC-ah) . . . They take delight in approaching God. They say, "Why have we fasted and You have not seen? . . . God said, "In the day of your fast you find pleasure, and oppress all of your laborers . . . Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?"

Is this not the fast I will choose -- to open bands of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed ones go free, and every yoke you shall pull off? Is it not to break your bread with the hungry, bring to your house the poor who are cast out, when you see a naked one cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Who are the **oppressive captors?**

- *They are God's people.*
- *They seek God daily.*
- *They delight to know God's ways.*
- *They take delight in approaching God.*
- *They fast for God.*

The ***oppressive captors*** are *God's people* that are *doing religious things* and they *delight in doing religious rituals*. They are not foreigners.

So, who are the *poor captives*? They are *people who work for God's people*. Remember what we learned from God's Blessing for Humans in the first account in Genesis?

Humans are *to act together as the Creator's co-shepherds* over all living creatures – *flying creatures, water creatures, animals and other humans*.

What kind of shepherds had God's people been for their workers – people who were also created "*with the spirit of that God*" – *the same God they were worshipping*.

- *Their workers were hungry.*
- *Their workers were homeless.*
- *Their workers were poor.*
- *Their workers were exposed and in need of clothes.*
- *Their workers were being ignored by their own flesh.*

Now God tells "*His people*" what is more important to Him than all of those religious things they had been doing. These are the sacred things thing they can do that gets His attention:

- *Break your bread with the hungry.*
- *Bring the poor who are homeless to your house.*
- *Give your clothes to the naked you see and cover him.*
- *Seek out those of your own flesh and help them.*

The word Isaiah uses to describe the acts above is ***tzedaqah*** (tzay-DOC-ah). Acts of *tzedaqah* are part of a process which Isaiah described earlier in Isaiah. As you will see,

learning about that process is essential to accurately understanding the teachings of Jesus. The words below are from Isaiah 32:17-18

*The work of tzedakah shall be shalom
and the effect of tzedakah shall be safety that continues forever.*

*My people will dwell in a pasture of shalom,
in dwelling places of safety and secure resting places.*

Shalom is usually translated into English as “peace,” but in Hebrew shalom describes “the state of living in totality, health, wholesomeness, harmony, and success; the completeness and richness of living in an integrated social milieu.”

- *The work of tzedakah shall be the state of living in totality, health, wholesomeness, harmony, and success.*
- *My people will dwell in a pasture where they shall live in totality, health, wholesomeness, harmony, and success.*
- *Acts of tzedakah create safety and security.*

Isaiah’s words -- *My people will dwell in a pasture of shalom* – clearly reflect a link to one of the most well-known psalms in the Jewish Scriptures. See if you recognize it. Below are its opening words:

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of tzedakah
For His name’s sake.*

(Psalm 23)

Are you beginning to see the relationship of *tzedakah* to *shalom*?

- *Breaking bread with a person that is hungry makes his life more shalom.*
- *Bringing a poor homeless person to your house makes his life more shalom.*
- *Giving clothes to the naked makes his life more shalom.*
- *Seek out those of your own flesh makes his life more shalom.*

Now let’s return to Isaiah 58:8.

*Then your light shall break forth as the dawn,
and your healing shall quickly spring up;
and your tzedakah shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall gather you.*

This is another parallelism, so let's match-up the parallel terms:

- *then (after you do tzedakah) your light will break forth*
- *then your tzedakah shall go before you*
- *then the glory of the Lord shall gather you*

Now God specifically addresses their complaints in the opening verses of this chapter.

*Then you shall call and the Lord shall answer,
you shall cry, and He shall say, "Here I am."*

*If you turn away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger and speaking of wickedness.*

If you let out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul,

then your light shall rise in the darkness and your darkness shall be like noon.

When God's people do *tzedakah* and make people's lives more shalom He will answer them. When they do *tzedakah* their light rises in the darkness.

Tzedakah & Shalom in the Teachings of Jesus

The Great Day of Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46): *When the Son of Man comes . . . he will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left . . . those the group on the left will go away into everlasting punishment . . . those in the group on the right will go away into eternal life.*

- **Why were some nations punished forever?** (Matthew 25:42-45): *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 did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Those in this group did not do tzedakah. They were not shepherds and co-creators of shalom.*
- **Why were other nations rewarded with eternal life?** (Matthew 25:34-41). They did tzedakah and were shepherds and co-creators of shalom.

Matthew 5:6: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for tzedakah, for they shall be filled.*

Matthew 5:9: *Blessed are the shalom makers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

Matthew 5:10: *Blessed are those who pursue tzedakah, for they are the Kingdom of God.*

Matthew 5:14-16: *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Matthew 5:20: *For I say to you, that unless your tzedakah exceeds the tzedakah of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of God.*

Matthew 6:22-23: *The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore you do tzedakah, your whole body will be full of light. But if you do not do tzedakah, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness.*

The Nameless Rich Man and Lazarus a Poor Hungry Man (Luke 16:19-31): The rich man was clothed in expensive purple and fine linen clothes, had a banquet every day and treated it like a holiday. Some people laid Lazarus, a crippled and sick poor man by the rich man's gate. Lazarus simply hoped someone would pick him up and give him a place with the rich man's dogs under the table so he might eat crumbs that fell from the table. The rich man ignored Lazarus and gave him nothing. They both died the poor man was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom (Heaven). The rich man was buried and taken to Hades (Hell). Why? He did not do *tzedakah*.

You Cannot Serve God and Riches (Matthew 6:24): *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

John 5:28-29: *Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (Evil is the opposite of tzedakah and TOV.)*

We are the first generation with the knowledge and technologies required to uncover the teaching of the Jewish Jesus – *the one that actually lived and taught in first century Galilee and Judea*. So, what will we do with it? Consider this question:

What would life be like in our nation if just the people who identify with Jesus understood the importance of doing tzedakah, of being co-creators of shalom and of acting together as God's co-shepherds?

Thank you for reading this and may we live in pastures of Shalom together!