



Biblical Heritage Center's

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

*Viewing the words of the Bible through the eyes of their ancient authors
to hear their messages and learn from their experiences.*

APRIL • 2018

You Saw “Me”!

By Jim Myers

It's a Shabbat morning in 27 CE and you are at the synagogue in Nazareth in the Galilee. You are attending the regular morning service when the leader of the synagogue picks up the Isaiah scroll and calls a young man from the audience to come up and read from it. You are familiar with the words because it is one of the scheduled readings. The man unrolls the scroll to find the section and says:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the downtrodden and those overwhelmed with troubles; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”¹

He then rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the leader, turns to the audience and says “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” This was definitely something you were not expecting!

This reader had lived in Nazareth all of his life and his father was a carpenter. Everyone knew him. Stories had been circulating about him since his trip to Judea where he was baptized by a man called John the Baptist. Crowds of strangers had followed him back to Nazareth and they were excited about his announcement, but the people that knew him best were shocked “some wanted to stone him!”

For Americans living almost 2,000 years later, trying to accurately understand that man's life and teachings is a very difficult challenge. Almost everything we know about him comes from English translations of the Christian Bible, which is not like other books we read. It is like a mini-library with multiple books between its covers. Many were originally written on separate scrolls at different times and places by different people who spoke other languages.

Understanding the life, teachings and movement of Jesus begins with understanding what happened in the synagogue in Nazareth when he read from the Isaiah scroll. There were no Americans, English speakers, scientific thinkers, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants or atheists in the audience. So we must begin by finding out what Isaiah's words meant to Jesus and his first century Jewish audience long before Christianity or the New Testament existed.

The *Spirit of the Lord* -- aka *Spirit of God/Holy Spirit* -- should best be understood as “the presence of God” manifesting Himself through “His life-giving life-creating energy.”² It was not a separate entity from God, nor a member of the Trinity (a belief that would not be created until over 400 years later). Being “anointed” by the Spirit of the Lord meant that Jesus had been called to fulfill a specific role and mission by God -- “bring the good news to the poor.” In English translations the Hebrew words we translated “good news” are also translated “the gospel.” Jesus was anointed to deliver this message:

(1) *the captives will be set free*

(2) *the blind will see*

(3) *deliverance is at hand for the downtrodden and overwhelmed with troubles*

(4) *the year of the Lord's favor has begun*

It is important to understand that Jesus was not a poor uneducated peasant. His words reveal that he was a well-educated teacher and interpreter of the Jewish Scriptures. This is confirmed by his ability to quickly find a specific passage in the scroll of Isaiah. The scroll was over 20ølong and there were no chapter and verse numbers in it. As you will soon see, many of his teachings are linked to passages from Isaiah, so he was very familiar with that scroll. There is no doubt that he had spent many years studying and probably teaching Isaiah's words. There is one portion that you familiarize yourself with if you want to accurately understand the teachings and movement of Jesus. In our Bibles it is found in Isaiah 58 and embedded in it are the keys for unlocking the meanings of his words.



*Cry aloud!
Do not spare!
Raise up your voice like a ram's horn!
Show My people their rebellion,
and the house of Jacob their sins.*

*Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My
ways – like a nation that has done righteousness
not forsaken the justice of their God.*

*They ask of Me the justice of righteousness.
They take delight in approaching God.
“Why have we fasted,” they say,
“and You have not seen?”
“Why have we afflicted our souls,
and You take no notice?”*

*Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exert demanding pressure on all your laborers.
Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness.
Do not fast like you do on this day to make your voice heard on high.*

*Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes?
Would you call this a fast and a day of favor of the Lord?*

Notice that this portion and the words Jesus read (61:1-2) in the synagogue both end with the phrase *a day of favor of the Lord*. The text Jesus read was about liberating oppressed and downtrodden people, while the portion above focuses on the oppressors. What kind of people were they?

The first thing we learn about them is that they were very religious. They sought the Lord daily and delighted to know His ways. They acted just like people *that did righteousness and had not forsaken*

the justice of their God. A glaring problem that is highlighted throughout the Jewish Scriptures is that people can have religious fervor, while at the same time oppressing and even murdering people.

The next thing we discover about them is that they found pleasure in fasting. For them this religious ritual was also a time to stir up strife and engage in debate. Fasting serves a number of purposes in the Jewish culture -- *its most widely attested function, for the community as well as the individual, is to avert or terminate a calamity by eliciting God's compassion.* Fasting is also a means of receiving forgiveness from God, which makes it an act of penance -- *a ritual expression of remorse, submission, and supplication.*³ It was never viewed as a time of pleasure.

The last thing we learned about the oppressors is that they struck people with the *ōfist of wickedness* and *ōplaced heavy demands and tremendous pressure on all their laborers* while they were seeking God and participating in religious rituals. Now let's continue with the text from Isaiah 58:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen -- to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

Is it not to break your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

If the people had been fasting the way God wanted them to fast, they would have repented from the sins they were committing against their laborers. The religious rituals God wanted them to engage in were *ōdoing acts of righteousness* and *ōdispensing justice.* If they had been *ōdoing acts of righteousness* they would have been *breaking their bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless to their homes, cover the naked with their garments and checking on the welfare of their kinfolks.*

This wasn't a charity program. God did not want them to do those things simply to help people in need. God wanted them to *ōdo acts of righteousness* to fulfill the purpose that they had been created to fulfill so they could experience something:

Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of Yahweh shall gather you.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer. You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am."

Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.

Take another look at the mystery that is revealed about the power of *ōdoing acts of righteousness*:

- (1) *Their light will break forth like the morning.*
- (2) *Their healing shall spring forth speedily.*
- (3) *Their acts of righteousness shall go before them.*
- (4) *The glory of Yahweh will gather them.*

(5) *Their light shall dawn in the darkness.*

(6) *Their darkness shall be like the noonday.*

Now let's examine the words in Isaiah 61 that followed the verses Jesus read in the synagogue. They reveal another mystery, one that Jesus clearly understood and no doubt taught to his disciples.

*(The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me) to comfort all who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a mantle of praise instead of the spirit of infirmity; so they may be called **Oaks of Righteousness**, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.⁴*

How will comforting those who mourn in Zion make them Oaks of Righteousness? The answer is the driving force behind the actions of Jesus. Isaiah provides the answer in the words below.

For as the earth gives birth to her buds, as a garden that causes its seeds to grow, so shall the Lord Yahweh make righteousness and praise grow in the presence of all the nations.⁵

What came to mind when you read -- *the planting of the Lord*? It was probably the garden in Eden. What came to mind when you read -- *as the earth gives birth to her buds*? It is a reference to the first creation account recorded in *Genesis*:

The Creator said, "Let the Earth cause to sprout green vegetation, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the Earth"; and it was so. And the Earth caused to sprout green vegetation, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind.⁶

The Creator established a law of nature -- *the earth will cause seeds that are in her to sprout*. When the seeds of righteousness and praise are sown within people who are creatures made from the soil of the earth they too will sprout, grow and produce Oaks of Righteousness. Those trees will then bear fruit, produce seeds and reproduce their own kind. *Jesus saw his mission in those words. It was to spread the good news and do acts of righteousness. By doing those things he was planting the seeds that would produce the people that became the Kingdom of Heaven!*

Now let's examine a few of Jesus' teachings and see if we can identify links to the words of Isaiah above. The first is the opening words of his best known teaching session -- the *Sermon on the Mount*:

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.⁷

When his disciples heard the words *you are the light of the world* they knew he was referring to what Isaiah prophesied in chapter 58 -- *Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily and your righteousness shall go before you*. Jesus clearly linked *light* and *doing acts of righteousness* when he said -- *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*. What did Jesus mean by *good works*? He meant *breaking their bread with the*

hungry, bringing the homeless into their homes, covering the naked with their garments, delivering the downtrodden and those overwhelmed with troubles (specifically their kinfolks).

Now let's examine another teaching of Jesus in which *ōlightō* appears.

*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!*⁸

At first glance, it appears that nothing is said about *ōdoing acts of righteousness.ō* However, when we dig deeper into the meaning of those whose *ōbodies full of lightō* we discover that they are people that have a *ōgood eye.ō*

You already have an advantage over most modern Bible readers because you already understand the connection of *ōlightō* in Jesus's teaching to the words of Isaiah 58. But the people listening to Jesus teach this lesson have the advantage of being familiar with the Jewish culture and the Hebrew language. They all knew the meanings of *ōgood eyeō* and *ōevil eyeō* and they knew they were *idioms*. This means their meanings cannot be found by taking the individual words literally.

Let's reverse the process. What would the members of Jesus's audience think if they heard American idioms like these -- *pull yourself together, no-brainer, face the music*. They couldn't simply look up each word in an English dictionary and understand what they mean to us. The best way for us to discover what idioms in the Bible mean is to search for other verses in which they appear.

*He that has a good eye shall be blessed;
for he gives his bread to the poor.*⁹

This verse is written in a popular writing style called a *ōparallelism.ō* It places words and phrases in parallel to one another. In this verse *ōgood eyeō* is in parallel to *ōgives his bread to the poor.ō* The two underlined phrases mean the same thing. A person with a *ōgood eye* is *ōa person that gives his bread to the poor.ō* *ōBreadō* simply means *ōfood.ō* When Jesus said *ōgood eyeō* everyone in his Jewish audience knew it meant *ōa generous person that does acts of righteousness.ō*

ōEvil eyeō is also an idiom that is found in Jewish Scriptures.

"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.'"¹⁰

ōEvil eyeō is in parallel with the phrase *ōgave his poor brother nothing.ō* A person with an *ōevil eyeō* is *ōa person that gives nothing to the poor.ō* For members of Jesus's audience it meant *ōa stingy person that does not do acts of righteousness.ō* Now let's update what Jesus taught by using this information:

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.

*The light of the body is the eye. Therefore if you are a generous person that does acts of righteousness, your whole body shall be full of light. But if you are a stingy person that does not do acts of righteousness, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*¹¹

Now focus on the last sentence ó *the punch line*. It is based on these words from Isaiah 58 -- *Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday*. In order to pull back the curtain and understand the mystery revealed here we need to know this. In the Hebrew language ðlightö and ðlifeö are often used interchangeably as synonyms. Take a look at what happens when we incorporate this information in order to understand the words of Jesus and Isaiah.

If therefore the life that is in you is death -- how great is that death!

Then your life shall rise in death, and your death shall be like life.

We find the same idea in the teachings of other early rabbis ó *a righteous man is alive even after death, while a stingy man is dead even before he dies*.

Now let's examine another teaching of Jesus emphasizing the importance of ðdoing acts of righteousnessö above doing the religious ritual of ðstudying the Scriptures.ö Jesus was specifically addressing the Pharisees. The first you need to know is that the Pharisees were not his enemies. Jesus agreed with them on many things and viewed them as ðexperts in the teaching and interpretation of the Written Jewish Scriptures and the Oral Law.ö Jesus even told his disciples to do what they taught, but do not do what they do. He also told his disciples this:

*Unless your (acts of) righteousness exceeds those of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*¹²

His point was ðBible study is good if it results in acts of righteousness being done,ö but without doing those acts, not even the greatest experts in the Scriptures will enter the *Kingdom of Heaven*. This was basically the same message Isaiah delivered to those that were oppressing people centuries before Jesus was born. By the way, Isaiah delivered the same message that the author of Genesis wrote in chapter 4 -- *the story of Cain and Abel*. The point that people can be very religious, while at the same time doing evil and unjust things, is a very old theme in the biblical text.

Now let's turn to what is arguably the most important lesson Jesus ever taught. It elevates the importance of ðdoing acts of righteousnessö to a new level.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then 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.

The appearance of the **Son of Man** in this teaching signals the arrival of the **Great Day of Judgment**. Notice that ðall nationsö are gathered before him and he places each nation into either the group on his right or the group on his left. He first addresses the nations in the group on his right.

Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.

I find the response of the nations in that group very interesting. Do they think he made a mistake?

Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?

The King answered and said to them: *Amen! When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me!*

At the end, when the King announced the ultimate destinies of all of the nations of the earth -- *those in the group on the right (the ones that did "acts of righteousness") entered into "eternal life" – the other nations entered eternal punishment.*¹³ For Jesus, that's how important it was to teach everyone about *doing acts of righteousness.* When the Son of Man looked at the nations standing before him, it was easy to see which nations belonged in the group on the right *ó he saw the light!* They were the ones that God promised to *gather to Himself.*

Members of the group on the right did not see God when their paths crossed the people they helped, but the Son of Man saw God's image in the people in need of help. Every act of righteousness mentioned by Jesus required his disciples to engage in face-to-face experiences with other people. When they fed the hungry, they didn't deliver food to the hungry or take out to eat. They brought them into their homes, prepared the meals and said a blessing that was probably something like this:

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melekh ha-olam ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz. (Amen)
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe who brings forth bread from the earth. (Amen)

When Jesus said a blessing at a meal, he blessed God not the food. When one fed the hungry, both acknowledged that the ultimate source of the food was God. By the way, if you say a blessing before meals, try using the one above, too.

Chances are that while the needy person was visiting the home, they would have been included other prayers, rituals and traditions *ó depending on the time of day.* They would have also experienced the hospitality of the host and his family. *óDoing acts of righteousnessö is about much more than simply meeting basic physical needs of people ó it about meeting emotional and spiritual needs of all of those involved. God saw Himself in the poor and the hosts. For the poor it was amazing that someone "saw them." Wouldn't it be great if we learned to "see God in ourselves and each otherö?"* **BHC**

End Notes

¹ Isaiah 61:1-2a (Luke 4:17-21)

² [Scripture and Translation](#), translated by Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox; "People Today and the Jewish Bible: From A Lecture Series" by Martin Buber (November 1926); © 1994 Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, Indiana; pp. 4-21.

³ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/fasting-and-fast-days#2>

⁴ Isaiah 61:3

⁵ Isaiah 61:11

⁶ Genesis 1:11-12

⁷ Matthew 5:14-16

⁸ Matthew 6:22-23

⁹ Proverbs 22:9

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 15:9

¹¹ Matthew 6:19-23

¹² Matthew 5:20

¹³ Matthew 25:31-46

April Memorials

In Loving Memory

**JERRY MAC
KELSOE**

b. June 17, 1937
d. April 10, 2017

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

In Loving Memory

**JANET K.
LEWIS**

b. 1936
d. 2016

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

In Loving Memory

**WILLIAM LESTER
STEWART**

d. April 26, 2005

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

In Loving Memory

**CHARLES L. "CHUCK"
GREGORY**

b. January 25, 1925
d. April 11, 2011

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

In Loving Memory

**KAREN SUE
HARRISON**

b. February 8, 1953
d. April 17, 2017

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

*May their memories
continue to bless those
whose lives they touched.*

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.*

*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)