

OIM UPDATE

September 2014

As August came to a close and now with September commencing, sincere followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are once again reminded of the appointed times and convocations that occur in the Hebrew month of Tishri, as mainly delineated in Leviticus 23. For the Messianic community of faith, the month of Elul, coupled with the Ten Days of Awe” from the first of Tishri to *Yom Kippur*, is just a day short of forty days—a significant period to seek the Father’s face, with repentant hearts, yearning for intimate communion with Him. Quiet times of reflection, soul-searching prayer, and meditation upon the Word of God, are generally rewarded with satisfying growth and maturation in the faith walk of any saint, who devotes the time to diligently pursue righteousness. As Yeshua Himself taught in His Sermon on the Mount, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”** (Matthew 5:6).

This seasonal soul search in the Fall, coupled with Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread in the Spring, and *Chanukah* in the Winter, make three times every year for a concerted time of searching various “deceitful heart [s]” (Jeremiah 17:9), for any darkness hidden in unseen or possibly unknown crevices. For when Believers are totally honest with God and themselves, we must confess that even a redeemed heart continues to need the sanctifying grace of the Holy One to reveal any sin or transgression, and all ungodliness that requires confession and repentance. After all, disciples of the Messiah Yeshua (from babes in the Messiah to seasoned saints) are exhorted to continually seek to know Him. This lifelong sanctification process takes place, in order to pursue the hallowed “perfect” or “complete” status, alluded to by the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians:

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Messiah Yeshua. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Yeshua. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of

the cross of Messiah, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:8-21).

Note that in this passage, Paul states not only the desire to ultimately obtain the goal of becoming “perfect” by the upward call of God in Messiah Yeshua—but that in having already been made “perfect” by faith in the Messiah with citizenship in Heaven, Believers are to follow the example of Paul and walk according to the pattern or lifestyle that he and the genuine disciples established after Yeshua’s resurrection. A part of this pattern would be to take the seasons of reflection, centered around the appointed times of the Lord, seriously, in order to **know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead**” (Philippians 3:10-11). For most assuredly, being conformed to the image of the Messiah (Romans 8:29), who incidentally also commemorated the feasts of the Lord and came to fulfill Moses’ Teaching (Matthew 5:17-19), means to not only comprehend, but embrace the spiritual concept of denying self, or losing one’s life in order to gain eternal life, as described in the following admonition:

“And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels’” (Mark 8:34-38).

Hence, spiritual growth or learning to deny oneself—in order to take up a cross and follow the Messiah—is often a byproduct of deep, heartfelt reflection, leading to personal confession and repentance. This is particularly encouraged throughout the Hebrew/Jewish calendar year from the month of Elul to the tenth of Tishri, when *Yom Kippur* is then commemorated. Providentially this year, I have been asked to share at our local congregational *Yom Kippur* service, and as I have prayed about what to relate, I have been led to the Book of Jonah, which generated this month’s lead article, entitled, “**Regarding Vain Idols.**” My prayer is that in this season of repentance, we will all take a serious look at anything in our lives that is hindering our walk with the Messiah, which would necessarily impede our usefulness to advance His Kingdom on Earth, until the Messianic restoration of all things.

Thank you again for your financial support of our **Free Book Prison Ministry** and the **Theological Defense Trust**. Your faithfulness sustains us to do the work we have been called to do!

Blessings,
Mark Huey

REGARDING VAIN IDOLS

by Mark Huey

The other day I was approached by the leadership at our Messianic Jewish congregation to share on *Yom Kippur* from some selected topics which deal primarily with confession of sin. As I prayed over the list of Scriptures that were suggested for a short teaching, I was reminded of the powerful lessons about repentance and mercy to be learned from considering the Book of Jonah, *instead* of the recommended subjects. Somewhere in my memory bank I recollected that in many traditional Jewish settings, the Book of Jonah was one of several texts read and/or prayers recited, to be contemplated during the day set aside to afflict the soul and culminate this annual season of repentance. I had always thought it was not by coincidence that between the twenty-nine days of Elul and the Ten Days of Awe (from the first to the tenth of Tishri), there was almost forty days to search the heart in preparation for the commemoration services on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). Then, when I was reminded that Jonah's warning message to the Ninevites was "yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4), my attention was piqued by the similar amount of time to get the heart right, before the Lord tells His people to memorialize *Yom Kippur*.

Hence, I asked and received approval to speak on the subject of Jonah, which initiated an earnest return to the Lord to seek His face during this season of repentance. Subsequently, during my meditations and self-examination, I was reminded of an illustration that came from a sermon I had heard nearly twenty-five years ago that focused on Jonah 2:8: **"those who regard vain idols, forsake their faithfulness,"** *chesed* (חֶסֶד) or "mercy" (KJV). I had such a vivid recollection of the word picture that was used in that sermon, that I became convinced that the Lord wanted me to purposefully search my heart to ascertain whether there were any hidden vain idols impeding my walk and relationship with Him. This confessional and repentant personal exploration, has prompted the composition of this article, in preparation for sharing some thoughts on *Yom Kippur*.

Accordingly, I began to reread about the reluctant Prophet Jonah, and also review some of the references made by Yeshua recorded in the Apostolic Scriptures that gave credence to the story about Jonah spending three days and nights in the belly of a fish (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4), before he went to Nineveh to preach repentance to the heathen. Jonah's testimony obviously foreshadowed the three days and nights Yeshua remained in the grave before His resurrection. As the Scriptures state, this was a sign to His, and every wicked and perverse generation since His atonement, that repentance and belief in the blood sacrifice of the Messiah is critical for salvation.

However, from this parallel passage in Luke 11, where Yeshua refers to the sign of Jonah, there is also Yeshua's declaration that something much greater than Solomon or Jonah has come to the Earth, subtly referring to Himself:

"As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, **"This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of**

Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. **The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.** No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. **The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays”** (Luke 11:29-36).

Yeshua is the Light of the world. Unabashedly declaring that truth of the gospel to others, is one way that true Believers know that the “light of truth” within is not tainted with darkness, but full of light. As Yeshua stated to His followers, **“I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness”** (John 12:46).

However, as I considered Yeshua’s statements regarding the light of truth that needs to be placed on a lampstand for others to see, His warning to **“watch out that the light in you is not darkness”** (Luke 11:35) shifted my thoughts to the reluctant prophet’s final prayer, and his heartfelt declaration from the depths of the fish, was that **“Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy”** (Jonah 2:8, NKJV).

Was there some similarity between the warning of Yeshua to His followers to “watch out” or discern that the light in you is *not* darkness, with the declaration of Jonah from what must have seemed to be the end of his corporeal existence in the belly of the fish, that “those who regard vain idols, forsake the faithfulness/mercy/lovingkindness” of the Almighty?

After all, when one takes into account what is revealed in the balance of the Book of Jonah, it is abundantly clear that even after Jonah’s ordeal in the belly of the large fish and proclamation to the people of Nineveh to repent, his account ends with him being angry, for God demonstrating mercy toward the inhabitants of Nineveh, and a wish for death to overcome him:

“But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. **Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life’**...When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, **‘Death is better to me than life.’** Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ **And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death’**” (Jonah 4:1-3, 8-9).

From these statements one can conclude that despite Jonah’s distinctive call to warn the Ninevites, and the positive results of Nineveh being spared the immediate judgment of God, **Jonah continued to regard some unspoken vain idol**

in his heart. He was not to be found rejoicing that God's mercy, toward the dreaded people of Nineveh, had resulted from their collective willingness to repent in sackcloth and ashes:

"Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, 'In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.' **When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it"** (Jonah 3:5-10).

Jonah was angry with God for His mercy toward the Ninevites. So what was Jonah's vain idol that was exposed by his attitude toward the mercy of God extended to the heathen of Nineveh? Is there something modern-day followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can learn, from taking this season of repentance to search for any vain idols that might be lurking in the darkness of our hearts?

Upon turning to the Tanakh to discover what is known about Jonah, other than the Book of Jonah, there is only one other reference where Jonah is mentioned. It is found in 2 Kings 14:25, nestled in between some of the turbulent descriptions of what was transpiring between the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel during his lifetime. Here, one discovers that Jonah (the name *Yonah*, יוֹנָה meaning "dove") was the son of a prophet named Amittai (the name *Ammitai*, אֲמִיטַי likely "short form of אֱמֶת [emet/truth] + x" [HALOT, 1:69]) and from Gath-hepher, a village in the territory given to Zebulun, located about three miles from the town of Nazareth, the future boyhood town of Yeshua:

"In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, *and reigned* forty-one years. He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. **He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.** For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, *which was* very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. The LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash" (2 Kings 14:23-27).

This passage confirms Jonah 1:1 regarding the Prophet's parentage, but from various extra-Biblical sources, there is additional information from the Jewish Sages and Rabbis about Jonah's background. While it would be easy to conclude Jonah being a son of a prophet and a prophet himself, it would stand to reason that he enjoyed a relatively privileged position among the elite and ruling class.

The fact that Amaziah restored the borders of Israel from Hamath (north of Damascus) as far as the Sea of Arabah (Dead Sea), according to the prophecy of Jonah, would have placed him in high regard among the monarchy and his peers.

But to add some additional statements from ancient Jewish sources, “the son of the widow of *Tzorfas* (Zarepheth) (1 Kings 17, the child whom Elijah brought back to life, resuscitated from the dead) was Jonah. He was a complete *tzaddik*” (*Midrash Shocheh Tov* 26:7). Next, “Jonah was equal to Elijah, Elisha anointed him” (*Mishnas Rabbi Eliezer*). Hence, when Elijah departed, Jonah became a disciple of Elisha. Then, when a young prophet was dispatched to anoint Jehu to deal with the wickedness of the house of Ahab, the young prophet chosen was Jonah as described in 2 Kings 9:1-10 (according to *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* 10; *Seder Olam* 19). Prophecies to Jehu were brought by Jonah in 2 Kings 10:30 (see *Rashi* and *Seder Olam*). Finally, in *Maharzu to Bereishit Rabbah* 21:5, all of the prophecies to the house of Jehu came from Jonah. (These sources are noted in the commentary Meir Zlotowitz, *Jonah / Yonah: A New Translation With a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1994]).

Hence, whether one relies solely on the texts found in the Holy Scriptures, or the additional descriptions, it would be prudent to conclude that the information about Jonah was some part of the Jewish worldview, even at the time of Yeshua, because of the multiple references to him found in the Apostolic Writings. Interestingly, the fact that Jonah’s name means “dove” in Hebrew, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. But it could also be indicative of the common man’s offering if one could not afford sheep, goats, or bulls (Leviticus 5:7). Thus, Jonah, the potentially resuscitated prophet from a town very close to Nazareth in the Galilee area, could be symbolically pointing to Yeshua being the sacrificial offering for all humanity, regardless of financial capability.

Nevertheless, since Jonah was the son of a prophet, and a prophet who presumably spent time with the kings of Israel, we can conclude that Jonah would have been familiar with these passages from the Torah, Proverbs, and the Psalms of David that reveal the Creator God’s compassionate nature. Here are just a few passages that confirm that the Holy One of Israel is a merciful and compassionate God, who responds with mercy to those who confess and repent of their sin:

“Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, **“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth”** (Exodus 34:6).

“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, **but he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion**” (Proverbs 28:13).

“A *Psalm* of David. A *Maskil*. **How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!** When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah” (Psalm 32:1-5).

Jonah knew the character traits of the Holy One, and His willingness to forgive those who confess and repent, yet he was reluctant to go and preach judgment to the citizens of Nineveh. After all, the Assyrians living in Nineveh were a persistent regional nemesis of Israel, and Jonah was fearful that they would indeed repent and be spared from God's judgment:

"He prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity'" (Jonah 4:2).

Hence, when the direct command of the Lord to go and preach to the Nineveh came, Jonah set out in the opposite direction:

"The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:1-3).

It must be understood that in Jonah's position as a prophet in the courts of the kings, he was fully aware of the incessant attacks upon Israel and Judah that originated in Nineveh and other cities under Assyrian and Syrian rule. In Jonah's mind, by not going to Nineveh, he was simply protecting Israel from any future ravages and attacks from the Ninevites, who had periodically harassed the Israelites during these chaotic years when the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom were divided, and at times, at war with each other. If one takes the time to study the period of Israel's history from the division of the Israel and Judah to the time when the Assyrians came and decimated the Northern Kingdom, one could perhaps understand from a human perspective why Jonah reacted the way he did when told to go to Nineveh (a city that was incidentally first built by Nimrod and his cohorts as noted in Genesis 10:11-12) and preach repentance.

However, after the ordeal in the belly of the fish and the prayer of praise, confession, and supplication that appears to come forth from Jonah toward the end of his three days and nights inside the fish (Jonah 2:2-9), the fact that Jonah survives his ordeal is followed by a second command of the Lord to simply go to Nineveh, and then God would then tell Jonah what He wanted Jonah to proclaim:

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.' So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown'" (Jonah 3:1-4).

This time, after being spewed forth from the fish, Jonah obeys the command of the Lord and the Ninevites repent, resulting in God relenting to destroy them in the forty days proclaimed. Needless to say, as the testimony concludes in Jonah 4, the reluctant Prophet is not delighted with the mercy shown toward the repentant Ninevites. In fact, as noted earlier, he is angry and ready to welcome

death.

Consequently, Jonah reveals some darkness in his heart as he voiced his anger over the worm destroying his shade tree with no regard for the Ninevites saved. The concluding dialogue and what God did, reveals that *even* a prophet of God, who survived a miraculous journey in the belly of a fish (and only the Lord knows exactly what else in the history of Israel, given all of the extra-Biblical data mentioned above) had *still* not learned the lesson that he should have about God's merciful and compassionate heart toward humanity. For, it is the Father's desire that none should perish, as "the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9):

"Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, 'Death is better to me than life.' Then God said to Jonah, 'Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?' And he said, 'I have good reason to be angry, even to death.' Then the LORD said, 'You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:5-11).

As the prophecy of Jonah comes to a close, one has to conclude that despite the majesty of God's mercy toward the Ninevites, the Lord's Prophet seems to be hanging on to, at the very least, **one vain idol** that was keeping him from praising the wondrous saving works of the Creator God. For whatever reason, after building a *sukkah* to shade him from the desert sun, and then watching a plant grow up over night to shield him from the heat, Jonah was more concerned about the death of the shade tree than the salvation of the Ninevite people and their livestock. Despite coming to the revelation that **"those who regard vain idols, forsake the faithfulness/mercy/lovingkindness"** (Jonah 2:8) while he was approaching death in the belly of the fish, Jonah is totally self-absorbed rather than thankful for the marvelous works of the Lord God to change His mind and not judge Nineveh at that time.

What was Jonah thinking? Did Jonah want the Ninevites to perish? Was Jonah afraid that the Ninevites would recover from potential disaster, and some day rise up and be used as an instrument of judgment against the Israelites? (This actually happened some 50-80 years later, depending on when one dates the prophecy of Jonah.) Did Jonah really trust the Lord? Or was Jonah hanging onto a vain idol like his family background, his position as a prophet of Israel, his other purported exploits as a prophet, his understanding of what would be happening in the future? Or, was there anything else that he trusted in more than the omniscient Lord God of Israel? Or is it possible that Jonah was more focused on the

shade tree, than he was trusting in the Lord for His will to be done with Nineveh and himself for that matter?

At this point, let's return to the Jonah 2:8 that states succinctly, "those who regard vain idols, forsake the faithfulness/mercy/lovingkindness" and consider this vivid sermon illustration alluded to earlier. First remember that it is the Lord God of Creation, who by His proclaimed nature is committed to be constantly pouring out His faithfulness/mercy/lovingkindness upon the Earth without ceasing. He desires that no person should perish, as epitomized in this self description:

"Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, **'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness [*chesed*] and truth'**" (Exodus 34:6).

Now imagine that the Holy One's eternal attributes noted above, are very much like a downpour of rain, incessantly sprinkling the created order, day in and day out, while covering the Earth. God's *chesed* is freely available to all of humanity without any charge. His love and compassion are free for the taking, but they have to be received by simply opening the arms and taking it in by faith. But there is a problem, in God's mind, when people prefer to cling to anything that would impede receiving His free gifts of faithfulness/mercy/lovingkindness (*chesed*). And this is where the revelation given to Jonah while in the belly of the fish comes into focus, noting that anyone **who regards vain idols forsakes the faithfulness** freely offered by the Almighty One to all. The vain idol, no matter what it is, becomes like an open umbrella (or shade tree) that is clung on to and held over one's head. While God's mercy and love are being poured freely all around, the vain idol represented by the umbrella prevents God's *chesed* from falling upon the person, who is clinging to the idol, no matter what the idol happens to be.

While Jonah might have been reflecting on all of the idols that were cast overboard by the crew, in order to lighten the load and prevent a shipwreck, what about the idol in Jonah's heart that was not revealed until much later, when he was hoping for Nineveh to be judged? In Jonah's case, he was more concerned about the demise of a shade tree than the potential judgment upon many thousands of people. His self absorption was evidence that there was some darkness in his heart, although he surely knew the light of compassion that existed in the Eternal One. Even though he finally did what was required by God to preach judgment to Nineveh, Jonah was angry. He would have preferred to have sat under the shade tree and watched Nineveh be judged for its heathen ways.

Now how does the story of Jonah apply to followers of Yeshua the Messiah millennia later, as this season of repentance proceeds? What can one learn from studying the life of Jonah, in light of what Yeshua has cautioned about making sure that the light in you is not darkness?

Consider the turmoil that is currently taking place in the Middle East, including modern day Mosul, which just happens to be Ancient Nineveh. How would you react if God told you to go and share the gospel with the current inhabitants of Mosul, who from media reports, are probably as wicked—if not more so—than the Ancient Ninevites? Would you go? Or would you respond like Jonah?

But, God's request for you to share the light of Yeshua might be much less dangerous. He might ask you to share with a relative, or neighbor, or co-worker, or customer, or even someone you do not like. Can you discard any vain idol and respond in faith to His request, to preach repentance to the lost sinner? Or, is it possible that the light within is really darkness as suggested by Yeshua:

“Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness” (Luke 11:35).

On another hand, perhaps this would be a good time to simply ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any vain idols or darkness that might exist in your heart, impeding your walk with the Messiah of Israel. Like Jonah, far too many rely upon their gifts, talents, contacts, education, wealth, resources, and/or other attributes that may have become idols that are forsaking God's faithfulness toward them. Check your heart for any potential darkness that may have crept in, which is preventing the Light of Yeshua from shining forth in all His glory!

Finally, throw away *any* umbrella-like idol, and take in the outpouring of His love, while basking in and sharing the fullness of His Light to all you encounter. There is no better time than *now*, as the day of Yeshua's return approaches!

After all, the Apostle John adds some clarity to the words of Jonah, with these concluding remarks from his first epistle, which warns *all Believers* to guard the heart from any insidious and unknown idols:

“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Yeshua the Messiah. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, **guard yourselves from idols**” (1 John 5:19-21).

TNN ONLINE EDITOR'S UPDATE

September 2014

Dear Friends:

September and the Fall often begin a new season of excitement for Messianic people, with the new



vitality brought with the High Holidays, new Torah cycle, and often even a new school year. I sincerely hope that you all have been following our almost daily Facebook updates, which are posted to the main pages of both the OIM and TNN websites (if you are not on Facebook). These do comment and make observations on some of the current trends and ideas circulating in Messianic social media.

I begin the month of September with an exciting announcement: it has taken me about one full year to complete the coordination of the *Messianic Kosher Helper*. **This resource has been a long time coming.** While two-thirds of this publication addresses Bible passages on the topics of eating and kosher—and its size (674 pages!) seems a little daunting—we have just gone ahead and produced it with the idea that it will be an important reference work which Messianic people can access, when a wide variety of questions and comments regarding eating and diet present themselves. This resource should be available for purchase in paperback and eBook sometime next month.

Any of you who have followed Outreach Israel and TNN Online, for any length of time, know that the tasks of researching and writing on important issues, **do not end.** A publication like the *Messianic Kosher Helper* sets a *higher common denominator*, than what has been seen in previous Messianic analysis on *kashrut*. Much of the format seen here, will be reproduced in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper*, which we now know will take much of 2015 to put together.

One of my personal “struggles,” has been in classifying and categorizing which issues get priority to be addressed now, and which issues need to still wait. I confess that I do get disappointed, when I think of all the work that could have been done in the 1990s and 2000s by others, with some things handled not so well, and the personal burden they have placed onto me. So to psychologically handle some of the annoyance, I compartmentalize things—and I view things from the perspective that we might have to wait on addressing a number of topics, because others have apparently needed to have their say (or not). Kosher is a prime example of this, as we had to wait a while to see it thoroughly addressed. With so many things that I want to see achieved, I am doing my best to pace myself, and work on a project-by-project basis. I am even going to be a little “predestinarian” on the timing of when certain things get produced...

Over the next several months, my own routine will change slightly, as I have four chapters yet to complete on *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*. The Romans Bible study is also in its final stages, with a commentary release due sometime at the end of 2014.

Until next month...

J.K. McKee