

Why is Salvation a central theme in Messianic Judaism?

If one were to study the prevailing Judaisms of our day it would not be wrong to conclude that salvation as a theological theme does not feature highly in them. However, it becomes very quickly obvious that, if one then looks at Messianic Judaism, the opposite is true. Indeed, salvation is one of the clear distinctive themes that set Messianic Judaism apart from its non-Messianic counterparts. Why should this be? This study will attempt to answer that question.

Two aspects will be considered in this study. One will look at the message of Salvation as outlined in the Torah itself, and the second will look at two case studies where Yeshua uses the Torah to teach salvation. Both of these are of interest to us because they will show how the Torah is to be used to illustrate the path of God's salvation. To illustrate the Jewish aspects of this Messianic Jewish faith, I have included some terms and names in a transliterated form from the Hebrew. They are italicised on their first appearance and are listed in a glossary at the end.

It is often taught¹ that salvation only began with Yeshua's death and resurrection 2000 years ago, as if before that time it was impossible to receive this. To avoid the obvious theological and teleological absurdity of this, a theology has been developed over time to universalise Yeshua's salvation work in time, while not playing down the historical and chronological aspects of it. This leads to a position whereby the people who were potential recipients of His salvation prior to Yeshua's death and resurrection were to be 'stored up' somewhere, waiting to hear the message of God's salvation work, only actually responding to the message much later. Such latent and probably unintended anti-Semitic statements² undermine the fact that God has always included the message of salvation in His Torah from the very beginning. That this should be the case should not surprise us. God's mercy that reaches out to a fallen and lost humanity is a part of who He is. His desire has always been to walk with His created beings made in His image. This desire is so strong that it would inevitably lead Him to

¹ The desire to place the uniqueness of Yeshua's work centrally to the plan of salvation is correct, but to extrapolate from this that something entirely *new* began at that time is not supported by Scripture. Furthermore it could lead one to conclude (erroneously) that this enormously important act in soteriological history was actually the foundation of a new faith.

² Anti-Semitic due to the often cited (but simplistic) view that Christianity contains the path to salvation and Judaism does not. So, by definition, Christianity must be better. This leads to a Supersessionist theology: The Church triumphant.

an act of reconciliation. Indeed this is exactly what the Torah and the Prophets teach us. From our present historical perspective we can understand the fullness of God's salvation through Yeshua, Messiah of Israel, but we must not be led to think that the message could only be understood retrospectively. Yeshua's teaching on salvation was completely drawn from the Torah and the Prophets/Writings, and would have been understood in that context. It was not novel³ from the perspective of the Scriptures. Interesting enough for this study is the agreement between the *Messianic Writings* and the *Talmud* on the pre-existence of Messiah. The Talmud lists seven pre-existing things, one of which is the Messiah (Pesachim 54a). In another reference (Pesikta Rab.152b), the Talmud talks about the Messiah being born even before Creation itself, as He has always been in God's mind. There is a direct thematic parallel to this in Rev.13:8 where it states that the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. By implication therefore God's salvation has been available from that time too. This concept is very 'Jewish' and entirely consistent with Torah. It now remains to show that the complete message of salvation is contained in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.

Two *Talmidim* of Yeshua were walking towards a village called Emmaus and were thoughtfully discussing everything which had transpired recently. Luke⁴ tells us what then happened. Yeshua drew close and

'Beginning with the Torah...expounded all things concerning Himself.'

Later in the same chapter we read that He repeated this⁵ using all three sections of the Torah. Yeshua is God's salvation, and therefore if Yeshua is in all these sections, then so is His salvation. Notice also that in Heb.4:2 it is stated quite clearly that the Israelites in the Wilderness had the message of salvation preached to them. The vehicle God used for this in the Wilderness was the Torah⁶. The enigmatic comment relating to Moses and Messiah in Heb 11:24-26 also backs this up.

In presenting the message of salvation an obvious place to start would be with the issue of Original Sin. However, the key issue is not how innate or 'Original' our sin is, but our inability to keep

³ Novel aspects however do include His application of Torah to Himself, something many were confused by in Yeshua's day.

⁴ Lk 24:13-27

⁵ verse 44

⁶ God also manifested Himself to them through Theophanies, but the bulk of the Israelites growing understanding of God and the way of salvation came through Torah as instructed by Moses after he received it on Sinai.

God's teachings. The fact that we (even subconsciously) do attempt to keep Torah to achieve salvation (a form of legalism) rather than holiness becomes a secondary issue. The Hebrew word Torah means teaching/ instruction, not Law⁷. God has always given Mankind His teaching, even in *Gan Eden*. God's command was to not eat of a certain tree; the teaching was first misinterpreted then misquoted and then disobeyed.

We will not need to read far in the Prophets to confirm our inability to keep Torah: Is.65:2-3 talks about God pleading with a rebellious people:

I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts;
A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; who sacrifice in gardens, and burn incense on altars of brick;

They 'walk according to their own thoughts'. Isaiah⁸ reminds us that

'No one calls upon your Name..we are consumed because of our iniquities'.

Torah itself stands against us and we stand judged and condemned. Our failure to meet God's exacting standards of holiness stare us bleakly in the face. What had been given to us as a wonderful gift now becomes our accuser. As Isaiah⁹ says

'We look for light but there is darkness... for salvation but it is far from us'.

Who has ever kept the Torah in its entirety, who can stand before its searching and penetrating light and say 'I have kept it all'? Isaiah¹⁰ continues on this theme of our ongoing sin:

'We need to be saved',

Even our attempt at keeping Torah, which in itself **is** a level of righteousness, can only be compared to 'filthy rags'. As if this is not bad enough Ezekiel¹¹ informs us that

⁷ One of the biggest theological problems of perception in the last 2000 years has been the (mis)translation of the Hebrew word Torah into *Nomos* in Greek and then into Law in English.

⁸ 64:7

⁹ 59:9-15

¹⁰ 64:5-6

¹¹ 18:4

'The soul who sins shall die'.

This echoes the promise in *Gan Eden*, Adam and *Chava* only being allowed to continue to live by God's mercy. This is a truth we urgently need to reflect on for ourselves. We are deserving of this death, yet we live!

God's mercy truly does extend for a long time, yet the penalty of death cannot be avoided. According to Scripture it must be carried out. The situation, if evaluated honestly, is bleak, as the writer of 1 Kings¹² accepts:

'There is no one who does not sin'.

And again in Ecclesiastes¹³

'There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin'.

Against this grim reality, however, a stark promise stands as a light in the darkness. Isaiah¹⁴ promises us that

'Even though our sins be as scarlet, they shall become as white as snow'.

To be told that as a prisoner you are going to be released produces tangible relief and excitement. This promise has the same effect; it tells us that it is possible to have this stain removed of our failure to keep God's commandments. This should fill us with great joy and expectancy that God Himself has made a way for our redemption. In case we should even now be tempted to argue that we are sinless and acceptable before The Ancient of Days, *Moshe* reminds us in Numbers¹⁵ that

'You have sinned against the Lord and your sin will find you out'.

The Lord sees the hearts of all people and we cannot presume our innocence. An example of this can be drawn from the Temple rites. Once a year on Yom Kippur a sacrifice was required for the people's sin. This offering was **commanded** and was not optional. There was an assumption built into Torah that sin had been

¹² 8:46

¹³ 7:20

¹⁴ 1:18-19

¹⁵ 32:23

committed¹⁶. Only one person, the *Cohen HaGadol*, could go into the Holy of Holies to offer this sin sacrifice for the people, and then only after offering a sacrifice for himself. Even then he had a rope tied to his foot in case God should kill him once inside with fire from heaven¹⁷. For anyone else to enter the Holy of Holies would have meant certain death, due to sin. The Torah assumes no innocence when it comes to our involvement with sin.

So what should our response to this problem of sin be? Try even harder to keep Torah? Go down into the *Mikveh* more often to try to wash our sin away? No. Job¹⁸ himself, when looking from a human perspective and confronted with this dilemma, knew the position was hopeless. He says

'Who can bring a clean thing from an unclean one? No one!'

Only God Himself can do that! Only He is able to remove our sin and clean us that deep. We cannot do it to ourselves. Our sacrifices can only cover our sin but not remove it. A *Mikveh* may wash the outside but not the inside. Isaiah¹⁹ again tells us how God brings salvation to us with the remarkable statement that

'God is my salvation'

or, rephrasing it slightly, 'God is my Yeshua', and

'He has become my salvation'.

As amazing as it sounds, we could never earn God's salvation by our sacrifices (as good and proper as they were), nor by a meticulous observance of Torah (as good and right as that may be), but by seeing that God Himself is our salvation. Only by His intervention can we survive. God Himself makes this clear through Isaiah²⁰ again

'I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no Saviour'

and

'I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own Name's sake, and will not remember your sins'.

¹⁶ See 1 John 1:8

¹⁷ The rope was attached so he could be pulled out if he died while offering the sacrifice.

¹⁸ 14:4

¹⁹ 12:2-3

²⁰ 43:11,25

He is our redeemer²¹, and again in Isaiah²²

'You O Lord are... our Redeemer from everlasting'.

So God Himself redeems us, but how? Isaiah understood something which had been revealed from as early as Genesis itself, namely that One would come to crush the serpent's head, but at the same time have His heel bruised. He says²³

'The Lord Himself will give you a sign... bear a son.. call His Name Immanuel',

meaning 'God is with us'. A Son would be born who would be 'God with us'. This concept of a son was not new; the writer of the Proverbs²⁴ knew that God had a son:

'... What is His Son's Name if you know?'

The issue now before us is this: God Himself redeems us. He has promised to send One who would deal a blow against the serpent, yet be His Son too. How does it all fit together? Sin is so serious a problem that sacrifices were always demanded for atonement/ covering: the sacrificial animals die on our behalf to achieve this. This substitution, however, is fundamentally unequal when talking about the life of a human in comparison with the life of an animal. As such it is clear that from a creational perspective that God would need a greater sacrifice than those animal sacrifices laid down in the Torah to ultimately atone for our sins. Leviticus²⁵ teaches that only the shedding of blood can atone because the life is in the blood. This substitutionary act was acceptable to God because of the actual death of the animal, despite the inequality²⁶. It was of course this fundamental problem of sacrificial inequality which meant that the High Priest had to go into the Holy of Holies every year to offer afresh the sacrifices for sin. This scenario was designed to make us yearn for a final and ultimate sacrifice equal to our own deaths which would be offered once and for all time. Isaiah²⁷ highlights this in one of the great 'Messiah *ben Yosef*' passages, acknowledged by many Rabbis down the ages to be a depiction of a Suffering Servant Messiah patterned after our

21 Is 54:5

22 63:16

23 Is 7:14

24 30:4

25 17:11

26 We must not forget that substitution does not logically imply equality, or finality, merely acceptance.

27 53:10

Patriarch Yosef in Egypt. Only from the time of *Rashi* onward²⁸ do we see the interpretation of this important passage changed, although this was not accepted by all Rabbis of his time, or since²⁹. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine Rashi's view here, but suffice it to say the earlier and original view was that this was a suffering Servant Messiah presented here by Isaiah. In verse 10 of chapter 53 we read that God would make Messiah's

'Soul an offering for sin'

and in verse 11 Messiah would

'Justify many' and 'bear their iniquities'.

It is truly wonderful that God should provide an equal sacrifice, like for like, one that would indeed atone for our sins. God would send His Son '*Immanuel*' who would suffer and die for the sins of His people. Perfect atonement, like for like, fundamental equality and total identification with our sin. What should our response be in the face of all this? We should say with the Psalmist³⁰

'I acknowledged my sin to you.. Blessed is he whose sin is forgiven'.

Repentance unto God then begins to turn our hearts back to Him and His ways. *T'shuvah*, turning around or returning to God, is a necessary part of this restoration, while at the same time holding onto the sacrifice of Messiah, and counting it as a substitute for our own deserved death. If this was all God had done for us, we should be satisfied, and yet He has done more. Torah was not merely given to convict us of our lack of ability to keep it, but it was His gift to enable us to reveal a holy and almighty God to the world.

Having dealt with the problem of sin by the sacrifice of His Son Yeshua, God also needed to make it possible for us to keep His ways, to live out His Torah faithfully and truly, full of trusting faith. The Rabbis often talk about the failure of historical Israel to internalise the Torah, and yet this internalisation was God's will all the time. *Moshe* understood this from the Lord and taught it as Torah. In Leviticus³¹ the Lord says

'If they confess their iniquity.... and that they have

²⁸ Rashi lived 1040-1105.

²⁹ Rabbi Moshe Alshekh from Safed in Israel wrote in the sixteenth century confirming the ancient view of Messiah in Isaiah 53.

³⁰ 32:1-5

³¹ 26:40-42

walked contrary to me.... if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and accept their guilt... then I will remember the covenant..'

God directly links their guilt/sin as regards keeping Torah with the fact of their uncircumcised hearts. Jeremiah³² recognises this too as the reason for Israel's punishment. Does God command us then to have circumcised hearts as well as the external mark of circumcision? Indeed He does! In Deuteronomy 10:16 God gives a direct command

'Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer'.

This section in Deuteronomy³³ is summarising the Torah expectancy for us all. We are however left with a problem: A *mohel* can circumcise a boy using a sharp blade, but how can we circumcise our hearts? The Torah provides us with the answer³⁴:

'The Lord your God will circumcise your heart... to love the Lord your God with all your heart... that you may live'.

As we have seen before, God will undertake to do this for us too! Only He is able to reach into the human heart and make such a radical change to it. The results of such surgery are in the quoted passage too: 'we shall live'. We can now live out Torah as God intended us to: a fully internalised Torah, our actions, lifestyle, thoughts, behaviour and instincts becoming more in line with His every day. Jeremiah³⁵ expressed it this way: God will

'Put Torah in their minds and write it on their hearts'.

This is what it means to have a circumcised heart. Ezekiel³⁶ talks of this act in this way:

'Cast away your transgressions... and get yourself a new heart'.

Ezekiel expresses the results of this in an even more dramatic way: God will

³² 9:26

³³ 10:12-22

³⁴ Deut 30:6-10,11-14

³⁵ Jer 31:31-34

³⁶ 36:26-27

'give you a new heart... I will put my *Ruach* in you and **cause you to walk in my ways**. (Bold mine)

Again not only does God want us to live out His Torah, but He even makes it possible for us!

As we know when a covenant is made/cut, there has to be the shedding of blood. Jeremiah³⁷ talks about this enabling to live out Torah as a covenant, and as such we would expect to see blood shed, but Jeremiah is strangely silent on this issue. It is only with the death of Messiah, a death and shedding of blood that He Himself equated with the blood needed to bring about this Renewed Covenant³⁸, that we see all parts of this covenant finally revealed. As the Rabbis have always said: 'There is no before and after in Scripture', a principle that would absolutely hold true in this case.

So what is the outcome of all this? Torah has been given to us for Life. With Torah on our hearts, and His enabling *Ruach* in us, we can indeed have Torah for life. As the Prophet Habakkuk³⁹ tells us:

'The just shall live by faith'.

Faith in what God has done for us. We in no way can boast of our own works. God has brought salvation to us, through His Son Yeshua. This is no different to what Avraham⁴⁰ experienced

'Avraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'.

We can therefore rightly claim our salvation through the atoning work of Yeshua, and be enabled through the action of the Renewed Covenant to keep the Torah in faith. Yeshua's sacrificial act made it possible to live both now and forever.

There is however one more thought. Is this salvation only to come to the Jewish people? Again Jeremiah⁴¹ knew the answer:

'At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the Lord, and all nations shall be gathered to it.... they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart'

37 31:31
38 Matt 26:28
39 2:4
40 Gen 15:6
41 3:17

Solomon, too, had revealed to him that the future would involve the nations believing in the God of Israel and then following Torah, as the Jewish people fulfilled their historic role as a priestly nation to the world. He says⁴²:

'Moreover, concerning a foreigner who is not of your people,... when he comes and prays towards this Temple, hear.. and do all according to which he calls to you, that all peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you'.

Torah will go out from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem, unto all nations, so that⁴³

'Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved'.

The answer therefore to our initial question of why salvation is so central to Messianic Judaism is that the Torah itself declares it to be central, uniting all aspects of a historically developing progressive revelation. This is why Yeshua spoke so often about the path of salvation, directly or indirectly, in His own teachings. It is to this evidence that we now turn. How did Yeshua put these *Tanach* themes of salvation to use? Let us not forget that the *Messianic Writings* as we know it had not been written at that time, and yet many thousands believed in Yeshua and His atoning work and received salvation on the basis of the message He taught from the Torah. We shall look at two occasions where Yeshua used the Torah and its wealth of ancient Jewish interpretation to teach salvation. The two passages in question are found in John 3:1-17 and Matthew 19:16-26. Both of these passages should be of interest to any Jewish person seriously examining the claims and teachings of Yeshua.

Starting with the passage in John 3 we see Yeshua and Nicodemus, a member of the *Sanhedrin*, discussing Torah in regard to receiving salvation from the Lord. This is no superficial debate between the two, and on the face of it it seems a strange encounter in what both say. Why does Yeshua not simply explain the way of salvation to Nicodemus and secure a place for him in the world to come? Instead He introduces what on the face of it seem strange references to water and spirit⁴⁴, ascending and descending⁴⁵, and Moses and the bronze serpent⁴⁶. These are not the themes that we

⁴² 1 Kings 8:41-43

⁴³ Joel 2:32

⁴⁴ verse 5

⁴⁵ verse 13

⁴⁶ verse 14

would probably choose when explaining the way of salvation! Yet a close examination of Yeshua's midrashic and typological use of these passages reveals very clearly that he knew both what he was saying and to whom He was saying it. Nicodemus like all Torah teachers of his day knew the Torah extremely well, if not most of it by heart. Beyond this the Oral Torah was also very well known, as well as other writings of their day. Yet despite this certain knowledge, Nicodemus had not made the links that Yeshua was about to make for him. In verse 10 of John chapter 3 Yeshua chides Nicodemus for not knowing (understanding) these things, despite the fact that these teachings belong to the realm of 'niggaloth'⁴⁷. The way of salvation, as far as Yeshua is concerned, belongs to the realm of 'revealed things' in Torah; it only remained for Yeshua to remove the veil⁴⁸ for Nicodemus to see it.

Yeshua refers⁴⁹ to the incident where Moses holds up the bronze serpent, and then adds that looking to the Son of Man who would likewise be lifted up would bring Life, just as the bronze serpent did if one looked up to it. We need to understand the background to this comment to fully grasp the implications of what Yeshua is teaching. For Nicodemus it would have triggered a mass of collective learning, but as yet unlinked to the One he saw in front of him that night. The passage Yeshua refers to is found in Numbers 21:4-9

'Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.

And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

⁴⁷ These were teachings in the Torah that were 'plain' to see, revealed things or 'earthly things' as in verse 12. There is a direct reference to Deut 29:29 here. See the background information on this in Santala, Risto *The Messiah in the New Testament*, Jerusalem 1992. Page 131

⁴⁸ 2 Cor 3:14-16.

⁴⁹ Verse 14

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."

So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.'

The people complain against Moses and the Lord for bringing them out of Egypt, so the Lord consequently sends a plague of snakes which bite them. Upon repenting the Lord instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole, with the result that whoever looked up to the serpent on high would be healed of the bite. This passage is full of the way of salvation, and the Sages of old knew and acknowledged this. It has long been established that the Gematria⁵⁰ of the Hebrew words Messiah and serpent (as used in Genesis) are the same, leading many leading rabbis to conclude that Messiah would be the one to crush the serpents head, as promised so long ago. There is much rabbinic material on the subject, but three references will suffice here.

Before we look at the rabbinic sources however, the following points need to be made. Much use of anachronistic rabbinic teaching has been made recently in the desire to study Yeshua and His teaching, as well as to bring alive the authentic '*Sitz im Leben*'. This is undoubtedly a step forward in the academic research of Judaism in the Second Temple Period and its contribution to New Testament studies. The sources are, however, also open to abuse. Many of the source texts marshalled to support these 'new' views were written much later than the first century and so from a historical evidential viewpoint have to be assessed critically. It is certainly true to assert that much of the later codified data⁵¹ belong to strata of oral teaching which was current in Yeshua's time. The critical problem for all scholars is to assess which parts can correctly be transposed at least into the first century, if not earlier. We must be cautious here: an overuse of early rabbinic sources used as proof texts may actually undermine the argument. Merely because Talmud (or any other text from the ancient sources) mentions a subject may not mean it was current and normal teaching from the earliest times. Interpreting backwards is not a tool that always offers the best results!

⁵⁰ Gematria is the ancient study of numerology in the Scriptures. While this can result in erroneous interpretations when taken to extremes, the Scriptures do contain some examples of this. The number of the beast in Revelations would be one example. However, Jewish mysticism uses numerology extensively and it needs to be used with great caution when using it for Torah interpretation.

⁵¹ As recorded in Talmud for example.

That being said, there are remarkable parallels in the later rabbinic materials with much of what Yeshua taught. The first reference comes from the intertestamental Wisdom of Solomon⁵². In it the writer compares the bronze serpent to a

'Sign of Salvation'

since

'All who looked at it remained alive, not due to looking at it, but due to the Lord's mercy'.

In other words, the Lord made a way for His deliverance to come about, not, we notice, that the problem was removed! Sin remains in the world around us, yet the Lord has made a way for us to live in the world but not of the world. However, we could be led to believe that all Israel needed to do was to look at the serpent and be healed. Many maybe did look, but was the act of looking enough?

In the second reference, from *Targum Jonathan*⁵³, we read the Aramaic paraphrase

'He who lifts his heart to the Lord will live'

and

'If the offspring of woman live out and observe Torah, they too will crush the serpents head'.

Putting these quotes together we understand that an act of faith and trust was needed together with the looking, and that as we continue then to live out Torah in that same spirit of trusting faithfulness, we too can and do 'crush the serpents head'. This answers the previous question.

Our third reference is from the Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 29a⁵⁴. It links in with another well-known passage from Torah, which unless you were well versed in rabbinic hermeneutics, it would be easy to miss. In this section the Talmud links Numbers 21 with Exodus 17:10-16 on the basis of a word string.

⁵² chapter 16:7-8

⁵³ Some scholars date this to around the time of BCE 275

⁵⁴ Quoted in a similar manner also in Rosh Hashanah 3:8.

'So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner⁵⁵, for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

In Exodus 17 Moses has to hold up his hands to the Lord to ensure a great victory for the Israelites. The outcome of the battle apparently depended on Moses' ability to hold up his arms. In the physical realm there clearly is no link between the two events, so there was a supernatural element of Divine intervention involved. This mighty deliverance is used by Talmud to teach something about salvation. In both passages the Hebrew root word '*nes*' is used, which means banner or pole. For the rabbis this means the texts have complimentary and supportive meanings, and can be used together to elicit a greater understanding of the content of both. Talmud says that for 'arms' we should read 'heart', and that

'if Israel should look up and give over her heart to The Lord, then she prevails in battle, but if not she will lose, and with the serpent too, if she looks up and gives over her heart to the Lord she will be healed, if not she will die', (Paraphrase mine).

We could further develop these themes in a Messianic way by bringing in two passages from Isaiah,

'And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the nations

shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.⁵⁶

and

Go through, Go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; Build up, Build up the highway! Take out the stones, Lift up a banner for the peoples! Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.'"⁵⁷

In chapter 10 Isaiah talks about the Root of Jesse who will stand as a banner (*nes*) for the nations, and in the second passage Isaiah talks about lifting a banner (*nes*) to the peoples..surely your salvation is coming. Both continue the theme of salvation in the same context as the Torah passages and their ancient interpretations.

When we consider how Yeshua presupposes the knowledge of these hints in His comments about being raised up, we can see that He is not so much focusing on the act of being raised up and the sacrifice entailed in this in itself, although this is important too, but for Nicodemus, all the ideas of looking up for salvation and deliverance from the results of sin would have crystallised and then been focused on Yeshua. He would have been reminded of the need to show faith and trust in the Lord's merciful provision, and the need to continue in that path through Torah. Yeshua's next comment that

'Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life'⁵⁸

would have made very clear sense to him in the linking of trust and Torah to bring Life. All of these ideas are inherent in the texts quoted by Yeshua. If that was all Yeshua hinted at we might be lead to believe that we could see in that the full message, but Yeshua goes on to use another Tanach text to make a clear point in the Way of Salvation.

In line with genuine Jewish hermeneutic Yeshua hints at another key text in verses 5-7 of John 3. We read somewhat cryptic comments regarding being born of water and the Spirit as well as

⁵⁶ Isaiah 11:10

⁵⁷ Isaiah 62:10-11

⁵⁸ John 3:15

like giving birth to like, flesh to flesh and the Spirit to spirit. If all we had to go on was this comment in John, all kinds of strange doctrines could be made up (and frequently have been⁵⁹), but as always we know that Yeshua was drawing upon the Torah to teach from and therefore alluded to passages which were full of Messianic and Salvic meaning. Two things according to Yeshua are needed to enter the Kingdom: Water and Spirit. For Nicodemus this hint would have connected with Ezekiel 36.

The context in the second half of Ezekiel chapter 36 is the restoration of Israel, not for Israel's sake, but for the Lord's name sake. If God breaks His covenant with Israel, then He is shown to be a liar and a covenant breaker, something which He would never allow. Israel is out of the land in *gallut*, a sure sign that Torah was not being kept⁶⁰. In this dire situation the Lord steps in to make a way of restitution possible. Not only will He take them back to the land, but He will also make it possible to keep His Torah too, thereby removing the possibility that they will ever again be uprooted from the land. What is of interest here is the way in which the Lord will achieve this:

'I will sprinkle clean water on you...cleanse you from filthiness... give you a new heart and new spirit within you... put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my Statutes and keep my Judgements. Then shall you dwell in the land.'⁶¹ (Underline mine)

This of course ties back into the main salvation theme of Torah outlined earlier in this study. If we were to link this text with others that are thematically linked we would see that Yeshua is also teaching about the circumcision of the heart, mentioned by Moses⁶² as being necessary to keep Torah in the way that the Lord had intended. Linked with Ezekiel 11:19-20 and Jeremiah 31:31-34, it is clear that Yeshua hints here at the Renewed covenant, the covenant of salvation. In this covenant Torah is written on your heart and you can live it out by the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh*, the Lord's own Spirit, while trusting in His mercy. This mercy was shown by the sacrificial death of His Son Yeshua, the sacrifice that brought in the Renewed covenant. Only God Himself can change your heart, your inward being, and only He can truly wash you in a way that you become truly 'clean'. The *T'vilah* demanded as a sign of the ritual cleaning when one enters the Renewed covenant for both Jew and

⁵⁹ 'Yeshua tells him that a Jew cannot (be born again)... unless he first strip himself of his Judaism' This interpretation of the water and Spirit is quoted from: Lightfoot, John *Commentary on the NT from Talmud and Hebraica* OUP 1859 Vol 2 p266.

⁶⁰ See the 'Stipulations' or 'Blessings and Cursings' in Deut 28.

⁶¹ Ezekiel 36:24-27

⁶² Deut 30:6-10

convert is symbolic of this washing by the Lord Himself. Titus 3:5 says

'According to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit',

expressing again these two ideas as one in the process of entering the Kingdom of God. Cleansing and enabling are the two key themes in this aspect of the way of salvation.

To summarise Yeshua's Midrash to this point, we can see the following themes:

- Looking up to the Lord in trust and faith;
- Relying on His mercy towards us;
- Offering up our hearts to Him while acknowledging the dangerous situation we are in (snake bites/ sin);
- The need for the Lord to wash us and circumcise our hearts to enable us to live out Torah, a holy life.

We have the 'whole' message of the way of salvation given to Nicodemus in two short comments. Yeshua's further comment on 'like giving birth to like'⁶³ links us to the Genesis portion where each kind gives birth to its own. This idea was further interpreted by *Shaul* in Romans 8:1-11 and 2 Cor.5:17, where he taught that being a new creation means living according to one's new order in life, not being a slave to sin any more but to righteousness. This also makes sense of an enigmatic comment in 1 John 3:9

'...whoever has been born of God does not sin...he cannot sin.'

The Renewed covenant transforms us from people who try to live up to the Lord's righteous standards and fail, to people who through the Lord's indwelling Spirit can meet His standards and therefore go on to eternal life, the *olam haba*.

The final passage where Yeshua illustrated the salvation message from Torah is found in Matthew 19:16-22. On the face of it, it again seems to be a strange encounter. A rich young man approached Yeshua and asked the normal question one would ask of one's rabbi,

'What good thing (*Mitzvah*) must I do to enter into eternal life?'

⁶³

John 3:6

Put another way, he is asking Yeshua's view on what is necessary to inherit eternal life. Yeshua answers him with thus:

'If you want to enter life, keep the commandments (Torah).'

This seems to be a strange response indeed at first glance. Why, we ask, did Yeshua not preach the way of salvation to him clearly and without any seeming ambiguity? Our initial reaction is to think that this opens the door to a legalistic use of Torah; can we therefore earn our salvation? Our reaction is predicated on 2000 years of theological misunderstanding. A Christian might question Yeshua's use of the Torah at all in this dialogue. After all, was Yeshua not about to abrogate it? From a Jewish perspective it may seem more reasonable, yet again it would be easy to miss the import of HOW Yeshua uses the Torah in this exchange. The answer to this question of course lies in both Yeshua's very subtle use of the Torah text He quotes, and His link with the word 'Life' in both the enquirer's question and Yeshua's answer. His answer is entirely in line with what we read in the Torah itself. Deuteronomy 4:1 states

'Listen to the Statutes ...I teach you to observe, that you may live'.

Again in Leviticus 18:5 it says

'You shall therefore keep my statutes.. which if a man does he shall live by them'.

In Proverbs 19:16 we read that

'He who keeps the commandments keeps his soul, but he who despises them will die'.

We would not, in fact, expect any other response from Yeshua here, culturally, theologically or historically. This takes on an even greater dimension when we consider Yeshua calling Himself 'Life'⁶⁴, and His own mission statement

'I have come that they may have life'.⁶⁵

This is the eternal life promised to those who in trusting faithfulness offer up their hearts to the Lord and live out the Torah life (Holiness) continuing in this trust. Yeshua came to make this possible. However, we need to take note of which parts of Torah

⁶⁴ John 14:6

⁶⁵ John 10:10

Yeshua quotes. He leaves out the first five commandments from the ten⁶⁶ given at Sinai, only quoting those to do with one's behaviour towards one's neighbour rather than the one's towards God. In other words, Yeshua was making a point: Your actions towards God were not at fault, but towards your neighbour there is something wrong. The man still does not understand, so Yeshua makes it clearer for him,

'If you want to be perfect (*Tzaddik gamur*), then sell what you have and give to the poor.'

Judaism teaches that one should not willingly destitute oneself, and clearly Yeshua was not giving a teaching that was contrary to this. Rather He was using the passage in question to bring the conviction of Torah to bear upon this young man because 'he had great possessions.' As Shaul would later make clear, if you break one commandment it is as if you had broken them all. So this man came under the conviction of God through His Torah. It is precisely this 'inner' power of Torah to bring conviction of our own shortfall in our attempts to be observant that should point us to our need for salvation⁶⁷. Had he responded to Torah's conviction and repented, then salvation may well have come into his life. To reiterate, possessing wealth in itself is not wrong, but for this young man it was preventing him from keeping the commandments, and hence illustrated his sin and need for salvation. Yeshua was aware of this and went straight to the key issue for him, and allowed the Torah, applied by the Spirit of God, to bring conviction. Any casual glance at a passage like this can bring an error of teaching, but the teaching from Torah can be stated thus: **Torah is Life to you, not a way of achieving Life.**

Putting these two examples together we can see a rich heritage of Yeshua's use of the Torah's themes of salvation. We might even say (with theological hindsight) that Yeshua used the Torah 'Torahfully'⁶⁸ to bring salvation, directed at both the individual's need and position at that moment. It presupposes a knowledge of Torah, Tanach and the traditions to bring the full message of salvation, and these are often only hinted at in the comments and texts alluded to. We should be able to do the same. God's salvation is written large in the Torah, we must be able to teach it and apply it to people we meet in their situations. Allowing Torah to convict as well as allowing it to become our way of holiness is to give Torah

⁶⁶ These 10 'commandments' are called 'words' or sayings in the Hebrew. We might call them the first 10 commandments, and as such they encapsulate all the other commands or teachings within them.

⁶⁷ Shaul teaches on this in Romans chapters 6-8. See also Heb 4:12 and Shaul's argument in Rom 10 that Yeshua is the teleological aim of Torah.

⁶⁸ See comment at 1 Tim 1:8. Use the Torah as God envisaged.

the function and intent the Lord has given it. Through His Ruach we can receive salvation, and we trust in His mercy as we continue to now lead those holy lives He requires.

Glossary

<i>Shaul</i>	Paul (Saul)
<i>Messianic Writings</i>	New Testament
<i>Talmidim</i>	Disciples
<i>Talmud</i>	Collection of Oral teachings codified in Yavneh after dispersion began
<i>Gan Eden</i>	Garden of Eden
<i>Chava</i>	Eve
<i>Moshe</i>	Moses
<i>Cohen haGadol</i>	High Priest
<i>Mikveh</i>	Immersion pool
<i>Ben Yosef</i>	Son of Joseph (Messianic title used of Yeshua)
<i>Rashi</i>	One of the great Jewish sages. He began to teach that Isaiah 53 referred to Israel not to the Messiah.
<i>Immanuel</i>	Lit: God with us
<i>T'shuvah</i>	Repentance, the act of turning back to God
<i>Mohel</i>	The officer who carries out the circumcision on baby boys
<i>Ruach HaKodesh</i>	Holy Spirit
<i>Tanach</i>	Acronym for the Hebrew Bible
<i>Sanhedrin</i>	The court that passed rulings and judgements for the Jewish people.
<i>Sitz im Leben</i>	German phrase meaning the context of the passage of Scripture.
<i>Targum</i>	Aramaic translation/dynamic interpretation of the Torah.
<i>Gallut</i>	Diaspora/dispersion of the Jewish people.
<i>T'vilah</i>	Immersion
<i>Olam haba</i>	The world to come
<i>Tzaddik gamur</i>	A truly righteous person