

כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ

Ki le'olam chasdo.

"His mercy endures forever."

Warm Holiday Greetings in Yeshua!

The Mercy of God in the Holy Scriptures

One cannot read the Holy Scriptures without being amazed at the mercy of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Throughout the course of history, God has shown that although He chastises His people for their sin and disobedience, He is quick to forgive and show mercy when we cry out to Him in repentance. Mercy in the biblical, Hebrew mind, has two facets: compassion and lovingkindness. The Hebrew word for mercy as compassion is *rachamim*, actually a plural word. This word comes from the Hebrew word for womb-*racham* and expresses a very deep, unconditional love like the love of a mother for her child, as well as the deep compassion elicited by great suffering.

"For the Lord will have mercy (racham) on Jacob, and will still choose Israel..." Isaiah 14:1

"Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob and have mercy (racham) on the whole house of Israel..." Ezekiel 39:25

The other Hebrew word that is translated as "mercy" in the KJV and the NKJV is *chesed* (pronounced HEH-said). This word is also translated as "love" and even sometimes as "grace." In his **Roots** book, Chuck Cohen defines *chesed* as God's faithful, "covenant-love." Hebrew scholar Dr. Danny Ben-Gigi defines *chesed* as "lovingkindness" or "graciousness," with the underlying idea of God's good will toward His people. The word *chesed* in the traditional Hebrew version of the Bible (Tanach) is translated as "kindness" instead of mercy. In some cases, the kindness is a reward that God gives to those who follow Him. This was the case when God fulfilled the promise made to Abraham and in mercy, led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 15:13).

One of the most frequent expressions of the mercy of God includes a form of the word *chesed*, "*chasdo*," and is translated into English as: "*His mercy endures forever.*" In Hebrew this phrase is: "*Ki le'olam chasdo*" (kee lay o-LAHM hoz-DOE). Note what happened when Solomon dedicated the Temple to God, and the worshippers "as one" sang "*For He is good, for His mercy endures forever:*" the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud of God's glory (2 Chronicles 5:13). Also note what Israel sang before going into battle (2 Chronicles 20:21) "*Ki le'olam chasdo.*" Perhaps we should do the same!

A God of Mercy

There are those who say that the God of the Old Covenant is a God of vengeance while the God of the New Covenant is a God of mercy. This can't be true because He is the same God and the God of the Hebrew Scriptures is full of mercy. The first mention of God's mercy is found in Genesis 19:19 where God shows mercy to Lot by saving his life when the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.

In Genesis 24:27, we read about God's mercy in sending Abraham's servant Eliezer to the house of Abraham's relatives in Mesopotamia to find a wife for his son Isaac.

In Genesis 39:21 we read that the Lord was with Joseph in prison and showed him mercy, giving him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

There are countless other examples of the mercy of God in the Torah, but the basis of these examples lies in the revelation of God Himself found in Exodus 34:6-7. God had just told Moses to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones and come up to meet Him on Mt. Sinai. The Lord descended in a cloud and passed before Moses and revealed His character to His most trusted friend:

"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful (rachoom) and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy (chesed) for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."

This is the God we know and love, the God who called us out of the spiritual Egypt of sin, adopted us as His own, and in mercy leads us in the way we should go.

Mercy in the Psalms

King David was intimately acquainted with the mercy of God. So many of the Psalms extol this aspect of God's nature. In each of the following Psalms, the word MERCY is used for the Hebrew *chesed* in most English translations of the Bible:

Psalm 13:5 *"But I have trusted in Your **mercy**; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation (yeshuah)."*

Psalm 23:6 *"Surely goodness and **mercy** shall follow me all the days of my life..."*

Psalm 32:10 *"He who trusts in the Lord, **mercy** shall surround him."*

Psalm 33:18 *"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His **mercy**."*

Psalm 36:5 *"Your **mercy**, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds." (We claim this promise whenever we're in an airplane!)*

Psalm 59:16 *"Yes, I will sing aloud of Your **mercy** in the morning." (A great way to start the day!)*

Psalm 103:11 *"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His **mercy** toward those who fear Him."*

Psalm 130:7 *"O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is **mercy**, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." AMEN!*

If it were not for the mercy of God, we would all be destined to eternal separation from Him. God provided a way to escape His wrath and the consequences of our own sin and disobedience: Yeshua, His Son, our atonement. Jamie often says when sharing Yeshua with lost souls: "I should have been crucified because of my sin and rebellion against God, but in His mercy, He sent the Messiah to take my place. That's why I love Him so much." Such a merciful God deserves what He most desires-US!

Mercy instead of Sacrifice

Did you ever wonder how our Jewish people came to accept *mitzvot* (good deeds, acts of loving kindness) as a substitute for God's prescribed way of atonement through a blood sacrifice (Leviticus 17:11)? The following story, found in the traditional Jewish text, **Avot According to Rabbi Nathan (ARN)**, explains it. "Once as Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was coming forth from Jerusalem, Rabbi Yoshua followed after him and beheld the Temple in ruins. 'Woe unto us!' Rabbi Yoshua cried, 'that this place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!' 'My son,' Rabban Yochanan said to him, 'be not grieved; we have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving kindness, as it is said, For I desire mercy and not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6).

Do you think God was actually saying that He had changed his mind about the blood atonement and the sacrificial system, and that good works could atone for sin? No! The proper interpretation of Hosea 6:6 is that to "merely" sacrifice without a heart of mercy and a right relationship with God is unacceptable. God is speaking to a people in Hosea 6:6 whose sacrifices were an abomination to Him because even though they offered Him sacrifices, their hearts were far from Him.

It was during the Babylonian captivity that *chesed* took the place of *avodah* (worship, Temple service), as the founders of what was to become Rabbinic Judaism had to regroup and come up with a way to continue Judaism without the Temple as the central focus of Judaism. While the early Jewish believers in Yeshua would also have emphasized *chesed*, the issue of a blood sacrifice had already been settled for them in Yeshua's atoning death. And although the Temple had been magnificent, they had come to know someone greater than the Temple. In Matthew 12:6-7 Yeshua says to the Pharisees who took issue with His disciples who plucked heads of grain on the Sabbath: "*But I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the Temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.*" Jews who have met their Messiah still have a temple (their body) and can offer sacrifices of praise continually to God who dwells within them through His *Ruach* (Spirit). Deeds of lovingkindness alone (although praiseworthy) do not bring someone into the presence of God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still desires worship and has a prescribed way to worship Him: in Spirit and in truth, through the Messiah whom He sent.

Mercy and the Fall Feasts

The mercy of God and the three fall Feasts of the Lord are intricately connected. *Yom Teruah* (also called *Rosh HaShana*) begins on the evening of Sept. 15, 2004. The emphasis of the *Rosh HaShana* liturgy is on averting judgment by repenting, and appealing to God's mercy. The shofar is blown as a call to God to have mercy on His people. In the Talmud it says: "*Israel is the people who knows how to win over their Creator with the blasts of the shofar so that He rises from His throne of judgment to His throne of mercy and is filled with compassion for them and turns His quality of judgment into the quality of compassion*" (Leviticus Rabbah 29:4).

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) begins on the evening of Sept. 24, 2004 with a special service known as *Kol Nidre*, and continues with the traditional fast until the evening of Sept. 25, 2004. The focus of the Day of Atonement is the mercy of God. In Temple times, the Mercy Seat (Ark Cover or *kaporet*) was the God-ordained place where the Jewish High Priest made atonement for the sins of all Israel once a year. He entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy seat. It was here that Heaven touched earth as God's presence dwelt in a cloud between the cherubim. Today, with no Temple and no "mercy seat," Jewish people understand *Yom Kippur* as a day to repent and mourn over sin, and afflict one's soul through fasting. (Messianic Jews fast for the salvation of Israel since we already have atonement through the Messiah Yeshua!) Traditionally, long lists of sins are recited in unison in synagogues around the world, with prayers such as the following: "Help me, O God and God of my fathers, to steer clear of sin. And as for my past sins, purge me of them in Thy great mercy, but, I pray, not through severe and painful disease."

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, begins on the evening of September 29, 2004 and continues for eight days. It looks back to the time when Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years before entering the Promised Land. It was the mercy of God that protected and provided for the Israelites in the desert. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob guided His people, gave them food and drink and even preserved their clothing so that it lasted for forty years! This same merciful God is the One to be praised for the bountiful harvest reaped at *Sukkot*.

The Face of Divine Mercy: Yeshua

The heart of mercy (*rachamim*) of Father God was manifested on earth at the coming of Yeshua into this world. As expressed in the Gospel of Luke, "...through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us" (Luke 1:78). Yeshua was the **mercy** of God with skin on!

In Hebrew 2:17 He is called "*our merciful high priest*." Yeshua became like us, suffered what we suffer, was tempted as we are tempted, so that He might have deep compassion (*rachamim*) for those He came to save. As Yeshua walked on this earth He ministered mercy to the poor, the weak, the sick, the sinner, the widow, little children, the masses, the outcast, to everyone, with special mercy for women and strangers. A frequent cry to Yeshua on the part of those with a great need was, "*Thou son of David, have mercy on me*." And He did. And He still does, even today.

Called to love and show mercy

In Micah 6:8 we are told to "do justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." In Matthew 5:7, the Messiah said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*." In Luke 10, we are given the example of the Good Samaritan who shows mercy (*rachamim*) to the wounded man who had been attacked by thieves. In Romans 12:8, the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to show mercy with cheerfulness.

Psalm 102:13 tells us that it is time to arise and have mercy (*racham*) on Zion. The deep compassion of God for His suffering people Israel must be ours as well. As our hearts are touched with what touches God's heart, we are called to action. Our Mercy Mission to Zion begins on Sept. 26. The group returns on Oct. 8. We will remain an extra five days in the land to videotape some segments for a new series of programs. We invite you, our Jewish Jewels family, to come to Israel with us in prayer as you did two years ago. While the situation is somewhat different (there will be lots of tourists in Israel this fall), we still need prayer to cover us

in our mercy missions. We want God to use us to touch lives for Him, to comfort Zion and minister the oil of joy where there is mourning. We want to give out **your love baskets** to the needy, following the leading of the Holy Spirit. If the Lord speaks to your heart, please pray for our group on September 26 through October 8 during the times shown below according to the first letter of your last name:

6 AM–8 AM A, B, C

8 AM–10 AM D, E, F

10 AM–12 NOON G, H, I

12 PM–2 PM J, K, L

2 PM–4 PM M, N, O

4 PM–6 PM P, Q, R

6 PM–8 PM S, T, U

8 PM–10 PM V, W, X, Y, Z

10 PM–6 AM Green beret intercessors. (Israel is 6 hours ahead.)

May the Lord bless each one of you according to His abundant mercies!

Love in Yeshua,

Neil and Jamie

P.S. We're hoping for at least the \$50,000 we took to Israel in 2002. Money can still be sent or called into Jewish Jewels while we're in the Land. *"He who has mercy on the poor, happy is he"* (Proverbs 14:21).