



Teshuva & the Role of the Remnant

by Tim Kelley

The festivals of Leviticus 23 spell out God's plan of Salvation. I had heard that most of my life, and like most, I believed that if the preacher said it, it was probably true, but for the past 15 or so years, I've begun to see that – even though it's true – *God's plan of salvation is found in the festivals* – the plan that I had been taught doesn't seem to line up with scripture, at least not as I've seen it lately?

What made me begin to see the “plan” differently? What made me begin to rethink this plan that seemed to make so much sense just 15 years ago? Quite simply – the Hebrew Wedding customs. Now, what's so important about the wedding customs of the ancient Hebrews¹? A lot! The Bible is a book about the marriage covenant between God and Israel. It would be quite unfair to stage the entire book in the context of a wedding, then not provide us a glimpse of the structure of the wedding. It would be like writing a story about a baseball game, but not letting us know what baseball is all about!

Thus if God's plan begins with a betrothal², and ends with a marriage supper, or more correctly – a new life together with the bride after the wedding supper - we should see a parallel between those events and the wedding/marriage pattern established in the Hebrew people . . . and we do!

In this study, I want to focus on a specific part of the Hebrew wedding, the part that correlates with where we currently are in the festival cycle as well as we are in the Biblical wedding. In order to do that, we'll need to not only define the festival cycle, but the Hebrew wedding as well. So let's start with the wedding.

In the ancient Hebrew culture, marriages were often arranged. It was not uncommon for the fathers of adolescents and young teens to enter into agreements that at a specific age, their children would marry, that is, if the daughter would consent to the marriage. Thus, when the children came of age, they the young man would begin to court his bride, and at some point – he would propose to her. If she accepted, they would sign a wedding covenant called a “ketuba”, a document listing in general terms what was expected of both parties, and what would happen if either party did not follow through with their promises. At this point, they are legally married, and the husband is fully responsible for his wife. Yet the couple has not yet consummated the marriage, instead – he leaves the wife for a period of time and builds a wedding chamber at his father's home in which for seven days, he and his wife will consummate the marriage. This chamber is called the “chuppah”, and it's only complete when the father says it's complete; but when he does, the husband quickly leaves his father's house and goes to fetch his bride. After their seven days in the chuppah, there's a week long wedding feast, then the husband and wife go build a new home, oftentimes on land that was given to them by the husband's father.

With that context, let's see how the Biblical festivals fit in, especially the time we're currently in – the month of Elul and the period of time called Teshuva. We'll begin by recapping the festivals that come before – the spring festivals³.

The first festival of the Holy Day cycle is Passover which technically begins on the 10th day of Abib (the first month). This is the day the lamb is chosen that will just 4 days later provide redemption for the Israelite People. It is sacrificed on the 14th of Abib and eaten that night on the 15th, which is the same night Abraham struck a deal with YHVH to give Him his descendants⁴. The next week there's another festival – the last day of unleavened bread – on which the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and were, according to the scripture, saved.

Roughly 45 days later is the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. It's the Day the Israelites signed the “ketuba” - the wedding covenant - and thus became officially betrothed to YHVH. The *ketuba* was the Ten Commandments. And like was mentioned earlier, after the ketuba is signed, the groom leaves the bride and goes to his father's house to prepare a “chuppah” to which he will bring his bride and stay with her for

¹ These customs, though not practiced as much today, are still understood by modern day orthodox Judaism.

² Begins in Genesis 15 when God enters into covenant with Abraham, and ends (or begins again) with the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21

³ See the series “Salvation Cycles” on the Ami Yisrael web site – www.amiyisrael.org

⁴ The Hebrew custom often contains arranged marriages

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seven days⁵. As he's away preparing the *chuppah*, she's back home preparing herself to be his bride, and she awaits his return at which time she'll be *swept off her feet* and taken to the *chuppah*. That's where we are now. We're a betrothed woman awaiting our groom to return. And that brings us to the period we're now in – the time when the bride makes herself ready⁶.

At the beginning of His ministry, after fasting for 40 days and subsequently being tempted by haSatan, Yeshua began to travel throughout Galilee saying:

^{NKJ} **Matthew 4:17** . . . "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Note what He said. The kingdom of God is right around the corner, therefore REPENT.

John the Baptist made a similar statement to the throngs of Jews who had come to the Jordan River to be baptized by him. He said –

^{ESV} **Matthew 3:2** "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In both of the above cases, the Greek word for “at hand” is the word *eggizo* (Strong's 1448) which means “to bring near or to join together”.

We know that the immanent restoration of the Kingdom of God was the focus of Yeshua and John the Baptist. Even Yeshua's remark that John actually did fulfill the role of Elijah⁷ - a reference to the Malachi 4 prophecy that Elijah would precede the *birth pains of the Messiah*, better known in the Christian world as “the Tribulation”, would have strengthened their resolve that the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom was right around the corner.

But what did both John and Yeshua indicate would be needed for the restoration to begin? The people would have to repent. But unfortunately, history shows that the Jewish nation in that day did not repent, so what does that mean? Were John and Yeshua wrong in their prophecy that the “kingdom” was near? Not at all! They knew what they were doing. They knew that the masses would not repent and turn wholly to God. Instead, they were beginning to call out those people who would be the “firstfruits” of the kingdom – the ones who are regarded in prophecy as the “remnant”.

It was the remnant that Yeshua was calling to repentance. They were the people who would be instrumental in heralding to the nations the Gospel of the Kingdom of God – the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. So for the remainder of my time, I want to talk about this concept of Teshuva as it pertains to the remnant of Israel, the people of God

So what is “Teshuva”? Teshuva (תשובה Strong's 8666) is a Hebrew word for *return*. It comes from the root word *shuwb* (שׁוּב Strong's 7725) which again means to *return* or *turn back*. This is the word that's most commonly used in the Tnakh (the Old Testament) when it comes to a person repenting of sins. It's also commonly used in reference to restoration, as in restoring the relationship between God and man. It's first used in the context of Samual returning to his home which was where he judged Israel and worshipped YHVH.

^{NKJ} **1 Samuel 7:17** But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

A good example of the use of the word *shuwb* is found in the prophecy of Ezekiel –

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 18:21** "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Another example is in this messianic prophecy regarding the role of the Messiah –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 49:6** Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

⁵ Genesis 29:28-29

⁶ Rev. 19:7

⁷ Matt. 17:10-12

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Because Hebrew is an action-oriented language (every word is rooted in a verb), the Hebrew concept of repentance is more than just feeling sorry for what you've done. To the Hebrews, repentance means restoring what you had taken or destroyed then setting your heart to follow the correct path the next time. Everything a person does is considered part of his *walk*, and the Hebrew walk is to follow a narrow and strait path that was defined by YHVH's Torah (law or instructions). Thus, when a person got off the path, it was sin.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 4:14** Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.

In order to *repent of the sin* the person would simply get back on the path. This understanding is illustrated in many of David's psalms; here's an example –

^{ESV} **Psalms 119:35** Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

So, to *shuwb* – repent – simply means to *reverse course and get back on the path*. But this doesn't usually happen overnight. Teshuva is a process. It takes effort. We sometimes find ourselves well down the path to destruction before we realize how far we've strayed.

According to the rabbis, Teshuva consists of four steps –

1. Regret. Realize that you have indeed sinned, then coming to the understanding that your actions have brought harm to another's life, and being ashamed and embarrassed that you had done so.
2. Cessation of the sin. One cannot be sincere about turning his life if he remains in the sin.
3. Confession before God – an oral confession of the sin and its impact on one's own life and the life of others. Confession must first be before God. If your sin is against your fellow man, confession is followed by restitution, which opens the path for forgiveness.
4. Acceptance for the Future – Accepting the just consequences for the sin and making a heartfelt commitment to not sin again.

As we are taking these steps, we find ourselves getting closer to the correct path – the way of God.

Why is there a period called Teshuva? Because of tradition. The scriptures show that after the *sin of the golden calf* Moses again ascended Mount Sinai. His purpose for doing so was to seek God's forgiveness for Israel's sin. According to tradition, he ascended the mountain on the first day of the sixth month – the month of Elul – and stayed there 40 days and 40 nights. That would have brought him to the Day of Atonement, the day Israel's *corporate sins* are forgiven according to Leviticus 16.

In Jewish eschatology, the Day of Atonement is also the day a person's eternal fate is determined. On that date, a person's name would be found written in one of two heavenly books – the Book of Life or the Book of Death. Which book your name is found in would be determined in some degree by your acts of Teshuva in the previous 40 days. Thus, the month of Elul, and the days from Yom Teruah to Yom Kippor are called Teshuva and are quite important in regards to repentance.

The Bible mentions that John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance. Though it cannot be clearly established, it's quite possible that it was the custom during the period of Teshuva to be immersed.

^{ESV} **Mark 1:4-5** John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Luke's account of the same event mentions John's remarks to the crowd that came to him –

ESV Luke 3:7 "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

The *wrath to come* may have been a reference to the Jeremiah 30 prophecy of the *birthpains of The Messiah* - what is referred to as the *tribulation* in the Christian world. The Birthpains were understood to start on Yom Teruah and end on Yom Kippor, and those whose names were found written in the Book of Life on Yom Teruah would escape the most severe portions of the Birthpains of the Messiah. If they remained faithful to God during that time, then on Yom Kippur, their names would be sealed in the Book of Life.

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In the example of John the Baptist, the Jewish people would have been immersing in the Jordan as a sign of being born again – a commitment to a new life, after which they would spend the next 40 days re-orienting their lives to be pleasing YHVH in preparation for Yom Kippur – the day the corporate sins of Israel were forgiven (as per Leviticus 16).

So, to the Jewish people, Teshuva is a “national” thing. It’s a national period of repentance. Synagogue attendance increases during Teshuva, and the synagogues are packed on Yom Kippur. For many secular Jews, Yom Kippur is the only day of the year they set foot in a synagogue.

But is this what God intends for His people. Is repentance something that’s only done for part of the year. Is fear of the “birthpains” what should motivate the people of God? Would we want OUR children to only obey us because of fear?

The answer to the above questions is obviously “NO”. So how can restoration come if repentance focuses on Yom Kippur; if it’s only a seasonal process? The answer is with the Remnant, the people of God whose lives reflect a spirit of continual teshuva, a people who need not fear the “birthpains”.

Let’s look to see what scripture has to say about the remnant.

In the book of Romans⁸, Paul is working through the problems that have developed as the non-Jewish believers begin to attend and be a part of the synagogue in Rome. It seems that the Jewish believers are not too receptive to the idea that non-Jewish Israelites can become a part of the synagogue system and be considered a part of the *people of God*. To help everyone understand what God was doing at that time, Paul quoted a number of prophecies from Hosea and Isaiah. One particular verse was Isaiah 1:9 which he quoted out of the LXX (Septuagint) –

^{LXE} **Isaiah 1:9** And if the Lord of Sabaoth had not left us a seed, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been made like Gomorrha.

That same verse out of the NKJ reads like this –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 1:9** Unless the LORD of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah.

You’ll remember that both Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by hailstones and fire, and that no one was saved except for Lot and his two daughters. Paul used this verse to show the Jewish believers in Rome that Israel would face that same fate if it were not for a remnant of Israel. That’s not to say that they’d be saved because of the remnant, but that the remnant would make salvation possible.

Like the rest of the apostles, Paul thought he was living in the last days and that the believing Jews, along with their non-Jewish counterparts, were the ones who would make up the remnant. He referenced this end-time prophecy of Isaiah’s to solidify his point⁹ -

^{ESV} **Isaiah 10:20-22** In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.
²¹ A remnant will return (*shuwb*), the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. ²² For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return (*shuwb*). Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.

The scripture shows that the remnant will rise above the idolatry of the majority of Israel and Judah. Instead of being a barren¹⁰ woman, they will be fruitful and multiply

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 23:3-4** Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

⁸ Romans 9:6-33

⁹ “in that day” is a Hebrew idiom meaning “the day of the Lord”

¹⁰ Isaiah 54:1

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Contrary to the majority of Israel, the remnant will produce godly offspring who will in turn teach their children, thus spreading the ways of YHVH to an ever-growing community of believers. Armed with the truth of God, they will have nothing to fear.

Zephaniah, in his end-time prophecy brings this point out as well –

^{NKJ} **Zephaniah 3:13** The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed *their* flocks and lie down, And no one shall make *them* afraid."

What is it about the remnant that sets them apart in the eyes of God? It appears that their defining trait is that they have turned away from the ways of the peoples around them and have returned to the ways of the fathers, they have returned to the ancient paths¹¹. Isaiah says they will be called the –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 58:12** . . . the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

The remnant will restore – to *shuwb* – the ancient paths, the ways that YHVH gave to the children of Israel, and as they prosper in the way, as their families and communities grow, they will begin to make an impact on the nation as a whole, just as prophesied by Micah and reiterated in

^{NKJ} **Micah 2:12** " I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, Like a flock in the midst of their pasture; They shall make a loud noise because of *so many* people.¹²

The remnant will be the ones who will restore – will *shuwb* - a true understanding of Messiah Yeshau. Where mainstream Christianity has made Him out to be someone who did away with His Father's laws, the remnant will show that Yeshua is Messiah because of God's laws.

The remnant will return – will *shuwb* - the love for the covenant that God made with Israel to the people. For the most part, people outside of Judaism have little knowledge of, and even less regard for, the promises God gave our fathers. This is hinted at in Malachi 4, which based on Luke 1:17, could go like this –

^{TK Interpretation} And Elijah will return the heart of The Fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the children of Israel, And the heart of the children of Israel, will turn to The Fathers . . .

The remnant will see and understand that they have a part to play in the restoration – the *shuwb* - of Israel and the fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As you can see, the remnant of God has a huge part to play in God's plan of salvation as defined by the Festivals. We have the honor of living in the most exciting times in the history of mankind, and we might even be making Biblical history. It's an honor to live in these days and to be a part of the remnant of God, but we must be careful to hold fast to what we've been given, and repent – *shuwb* – when we stray off the path because repentance opens the way for forgiveness -

^{ESV} **Isaiah 55:6-7** "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return (*shuwb*) to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Peter fully understood that the return of the Messiah and the restoration of all things was dependant on teshuva taking place within the community of believing Israel. On Shavuot, just days after Yeshua was resurrected, he admonished the myriads of Jewish and non-Jewish believers to -

^{ESV} **Acts 3:19-21** Repent therefore, and turn again (*epistrepho* – “*turn again, return*”), that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

¹¹ Jeremiah 18:5; Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 6:16

¹² See Matthew 11:12

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So let's tie this back into the Hebrew wedding picture. Remember how I showed that there is no correlation between the wedding and the festivals in regards to Yom Kippur, the day of forgiveness for the national sins of Israel? In the past, I've reconciled that by saying that all analogies break down. But I believe now that the wedding of the Messiah to Israel reflects an Israel that is truly Israel – an Israel that has truly “crossed over”, one that truly honors their covenant relationship with YHVH by following Him and entering into true *teshuvah* when they fall short.

Not all Israel will have that kind of relationship on Yom Teruah when it appears Yeshua will come to fetch His bride. As Paul says –

^{ESV} **Romans 9:6** . . . not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel . . .

and those who are not may have to endure at least part of the Birthpains as shown throughout the prophets. These same Israelites, if they repent during the Birthpains, will have their sins forgiven on Yom Kippur.

But for those who are part of the bride, their sins have already been forgiven and they now enjoy a relationship with Messiah Yeshua that allows them to spend that period of time in the Chuppah. They don't have to depend on Yom Kippur – the day of covering, because they are already covered by the blood of their husband. For them, Yom Kippur has no impact, they go directly from the Chuppah to the wedding feast.

In the Hebrew Wedding picture, the bride is comprised of those who have rejected their former ways and have returned to the God of Israel. Each year we go through these festival cycles. They help us understand God's plan for the salvation of the world. I hope we will all make Teshuva a part of that cycle so that we can all be a part of the greatest of all wedding suppers, the one that takes place during the fall festival of Sukkot – the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

^{NKJ} **Revelation 19:7-9** "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready"

Shalom Alecheim