

The *Besorah* from a Jewish Perspective

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Tonight begins *Purim*, so I am sure we were expecting that my message today would review *Chag Purim* or relate to it in some way. A few days ago though, God sent the *Ruach Hakodesh* to me to trump my intention, and so what I will say to you in the next several minutes will have only a distant connection to *Purim*. Please come to tomorrow's *Purim* party if you need to know more about the holiday itself.

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During Tikkun's recent American Executive Team meeting, one of the leaders, Glenn Blank, began to explain about his congregation's emphasis on sharing the *Besorah* (that is, the "Gospel" – the "Good News") and I prepared to zone out! I was sure I didn't need to hear another exhortation about sharing the Gospel with the Jewish people; what I needed was a way to get them to sit still long enough to hear it! My memory flitted to the various times when guest speakers at Ohev taught about the foundational importance of preaching the Gospel, and I, for one, didn't need convincing.

But Glenn had the floor and, not wanting to be rude, I listened. He started off in the usual way by reminding us that, despite resistance and rejection, the Gospel is good for people, and it is our responsibility to preach it. But then he said something that caught my attention. He said that he had begun to train his congregants on how to explain the Gospel to others. "Wait a minute," I thought. Don't we all know what the Gospel is and how to explain it? I remember that the last guest speaker on the subject gave us some instruction on how to prepare a short and long version of our individual testimonies – explanations of how we responded to hearing the Gospel when its message impacted us for the first time. We talked about recognizing and seizing upon serendipitous social encounters for sharing, and even some ways to plan events and occasions where sharing might be slipped in. But come to think of it, we did not talk about how to share the Gospel itself – its content – its significance. What words would we use to explain it? We didn't go into that.

I do remember, in my early attendance in Christian churches, that the singular approach seemed to be to memorize John 3:16 as the authorized way to answer any question about the Gospel. Evangelistic conversations went something like this:

Q: "Hi there! Do you know that Jesus loves you?"

A: "Yeh, so what?"

Q: "The Bible says: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Don't you want to be saved?"

A: "Saved? What's that?"

Q: "It means not going to Hell! You don't want to go there, do you?"

A: "HELL NO!"

Q: "Well then, all you have to do is follow along as I read these Four Jewish Laws and pray a simple prayer that's on the last page."

A: "The Four Jewish Laws? I never heard of them. What do they say?"

Q: "Here's a copy that Sid Roth sent me. We can read them together and you can sign the prayer at the end."

A: "You're not explaining this very well. I'm not signing anything until I get some questions answered. Like suppose I pray the prayer; what then?"

Q: "Well, then you're saved."

A: "You mean God doesn't care what I do after that? I'm saved and that's that?"

Q: "Oh, God probably cares, but if you pray the prayer, you have a kind of life-insurance policy. Once you're saved, you're always saved."

A: "But what about God's commandments? Can I go out then and kill someone? Can I commit adultery just because I prayed the prayer?"

Q: Well, now we're getting a little over my head. All I know is that the law was done away with when Jesus died on the cross, and we're saved by grace.

A: That doesn't make any sense to me.

Q: "I don't really know much more than I told you, but my rabbi said if I run into any trouble explaining it, I can refer the person to him. Would you like me to arrange a meeting between you and him?"

A: "Uh, no. Maybe sometime."

Q: "Okay, but remember, you're on your way to Hell until you pray the prayer. And who knows but you might die in an automobile accident in the next few minutes, and then where will you be? Why don't you just pray the prayer and think it over later?"

I may have stated this a bit stereotypically but, for the most part, that was the level of understanding with which we were sent out in those days to knock on neighborhood doors and offer salvation tracts to Metro riders. But the shocking thing that came to me as I heard Glenn Blank speak at the Tikkun meeting was that I could not remember one instance, outside of my formal coursework, when a congregational leader sat down with me and made sure that I knew how to explain the Gospel message in depth.

But my revelation didn't end there. When I began to prepare this message, I suddenly realized that nowadays when I explain the Gospel (and let's start calling it by its Hebrew designation *Besorah*), heaven and hell and eternal life are barely a part of what I talk about, and instead of my beginning with John 3:16, Yeshua doesn't generally make his appearance in my explanation until toward the end. It is very different from how I used to explain it. And then, as if to answer a question I had barely yet formulated, the words of Galatians 3:8 came to me:

“Also the Tanakh, foreseeing that God would consider the Gentiles righteous when they live by trusting and being faithful, told the Good News to Avraham in advance by saying, “In connection with you, all the Goyim will be blessed.” (CJB)

What might God have included while explaining the *Besorah* to Abraham? Well, it certainly wasn't John 3:16, and I doubt that God had an advanced copy of the Four Jewish Laws. He may have not even mentioned Yeshua by name. Logic persuades me that God began with the facts surrounding creation that years later was recorded in the Book of Genesis. He explained the fall and spiritual demise of mankind that resulted from Adam's sin, and how He was planning to redeem mankind from its sentence of death in stages, through several salvation-rich covenants, beginning with the one He was making with Abraham. He would then continue through the lifetime of a man named Moses, during which He would make Israel into a nation of priests, and finally through a New Covenant that He would make with the house of Israel and Judah, through the blood sacrifice of one of Israel's own sons, who would (not by coincidence) also be the only-begotten son of God. That full explanation is what I believe constituted the Gospel – the Good News – the *Besorah* – that was revealed to Abraham.

And why not? In his Gospel, doesn't John also begin at the beginning?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”
(Joh 1:1-5 NKJ)

The *Besorah* is the same for both Jew and Gentile, but the Jewish way of explaining it does not isolate Yeshua and the New Covenant from the rest of salvation history and from its Jewish past. So yes, I do believe we need instruction and practice in explaining the *Besorah* because, as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, we are responsible for knowing how, and showing how, the entire Bible is involved in it. For us it should not be just “John 3:16, or I'll take you to my rabbi.”

So what is the *Besorah* that I do talk about? Well, it's everything about Yeshua, starting with what led up to His coming and why He must return. It's all of the covenants. It's Abraham, Isaac Jacob, Moses, the Temple, and the Law. It's all of the Feasts and their meaning in God's plan for the world. So I should not really have begun this message by isolating *Purim* from its *Besorah* implications, of which there are many. Especially so since *Purim* commemorates a period in history in which God “saved” Israel from annihilation through divine intervention.

I agree with Glenn Blank that we need training in explaining the *Besorah*, but the *Besorah* presented in a Jewish way – not with fear of Hellfire and damnation, but in a way that enhances our relationship with our heavenly Father. Also, in a way that is not overly concerned with life after death (although that is part of biblical teaching), but focusing on our lives with God and with each other here and now.

So, to start us off, I want us to do two things. In the next few months, I want our *chavurah* leaders to set aside some time to teach on how to present the *Besorah* to Jewish people, and

second, I want each *chavurah* to devote at least one session to giving its members some experience in presenting.

Now I see we still have some time and, by my own admission, all the holidays, Purim included, are part of the *Besorah* story. So, with your permission, I will backtrack with some words I composed to the tune of “Bingo is His Name-O:”

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There was a queen, a stubborn little queen, and Vashti was her name-O
V-A-S-H Tee spells Vashti
2X
Vashti was her name-O.

There was a king, an angry Persian king, Ahashverus was his name-O
A-H-A-S-H plus verus
2X
Ahashverus was his name-O.

This Persian king, this angry little king, he didn’t like Queen Vashti-O
Go from my sight he said to Vashti
2X
I’ll get me a pretty replacement-O.

So they rounded up women, and held a contest, to find a replacement queen-I-O
E-S-T-E-R was chosen
2X
To become the land’s new queen-I-O.

Now there was an evil man, in the court of the king, and Hamen was his name-O
H-A-M-E-N spells Hamen
2X
He plotted to kill the Jews-O

Ester had an uncle, a Jewish little uncle, and Mortachai was his name-O
M-O-R-T-Y spells Morty
2X
And Morty learned of the plot-O.

So Morty told Ester, Jewish Queen Ester, of the plot to kill the Jews-O
So Ester prayed, and Ester fasted,
2X
And cooked up a plot of her own-O.

So she held some banquets, like Shirley’s Tea Parties, to butter up the King-O
P-A-R-T-Y spells party

2X

To butter up the King-O.

One of the nights after partying hard, the King couldn't fall asleep-O

So he read from a book of a plot to kill him

2X

And how he was saved by Morty-O.

The king brought Hamen and asked what to do for a man he wanted to honor-O

Thinking he meant him,

Surely he meant him,

So Hamen advised him,

And was made to honor Morty-O.

Hamen made a gallows, to hang Uncle Morty, as he planned to kill all the Jews-O

But Ester revealed that she was a Jew

J-E-W-oo spells Jew

Ester revealed that she was a Jew

And the plot to kill her fam-ly-O.

The king was enraged, and made things right, and hung Hamen high on his gallows-O

G-A-L-L-ows spells gallows

2X

And hung Hamen high on his gallows-O.

So that's how Pur-im first began, and how the Jews there were saved-O

P-U-R-I-M spells Purim

2X

That's how the Jews were saved-O.