

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS – PART I

*The newly published translation of an inscription found on a stone in the days just before Jesus was born, opens up the question of just what type of Messiah the Jews were expecting and just who Jesus was? So let's get looking.*

RETHINKING THE MESSIAH ?

**“Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”** (Daniel 12:9)

So here's the deal. There's not a low profile debate going on in Israel these days, and it involves on some level, whether or not Jesus, (Yeshua in Hebrew), - might indeed be the promised Messiah. It revolves around the work of an Israeli professor at Hebrew University, - one Israel Knohl, - and an eight year old archaeological discovery and his new translation of the inscription on that ancient artifact. First of all let's establish just what we're talking about. What was found was a tablet or stone with ink inscriptions from the period just before Christ. For years it was very difficult to decipher some of the writing but now Professor Knohl believes he has successfully done so; - and the resulting translation could transform what we know about what Jews of that time believed about the nature of their faith. As Knohl puts it, - (and he's not exactly buying into the Christian interpretation), - “The text changes the way we look at the historical Jesus, and provides a missing link connecting Judaism and Christianity”.<sup>1</sup>

OK, we'll get technical – but just for a moment. Much of the debate between Judaism and Christianity, (originating as a Jewish sect believing that many prophetic Scriptures had been fulfilled by Yeshua), - centers on just what sort of Messiah was to be expected. Modern Judaism claims almost exclusively now, that what the Scripture called for was a triumphant Messiah who would rule an ascendant Israel. Now much of this controversy centers around the interpretation of portions of Isaiah 53. Let's look at Isaiah 53 verses 3 & 5. **“He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”** The now unanimous position of traditional Judaism is that the passage refers to the Jewish nation as a whole. The Christian one is that it is referencing the person of the Messiah come first as the suffering servant, and later to return as King Messiah. To the Christian, Christ's suffering and death as the payment for sin, is clearly visible in the phrase **“But He was wounded for our transgressions”**.

The rabbinic interpretation however was not always the case. Even the Babylonian Talmud written as late as AD 1000, held to the Messianic interpretation of the passage.<sup>2</sup> It was ultimately a famous French Jew named Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, who put a definitive modern spin on the passage in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. From thence forward Jewish authorities have considered the passage to have in mind the entire nation of Israel.<sup>3</sup> The Israeli paper Haaretz summarized it thus: “The premise that the Messiah died and was resurrected is considered the foundation of the Christian faith, one which differentiates it from Judaism”. But getting back to the tablet now, it is characterized as an apocalyptic vision given by the angel Gabriel. According to Professor Knohl, - here's what it says. The beginning of the inscription describes an End Times or eschatological war. Jerusalem is besieged and “residents are

expelled from the city in groups”. Then God sends forth “my servant David”, to in turn send the Messiah Son of Joseph to give a sign heralding “the coming redemption”. That’s when it gets critically interesting.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning in line 80 it reads “L’shloshet yamin hayeh”, which is translated “in three days live”. And its in the imperative case. What the entire line reads then is “In three days live, I Gabriel, command you”. So to who is this being said. The next line answers. To the “Sar hasarin” or “prince of princes”.<sup>5</sup>

Knohl boldly goes on to suggest a link between the resurrection claims of Christians and ‘Gabriel’s Revelation’. He finds the link in the fact that the notion of a Messiah that dies and rises in three days is an established part of Jewish thought by the time that Christ walked the earth. In his mind, it was not just an addition of later Christian thinkers. According to Knohl, Jesus saw “His mission” was to be put to death by the Romans “so his blood will be the sign for redemption to come...This is the conscious view of Jesus himself”.<sup>6</sup> Yehezkel Kaufman, yet another professor from Hebrew University confirms that thought, seeing the “motif” of the resurrection after three days as something “adopted by Jesus and his followers based on an earlier messiah story”.<sup>7 8</sup>

Christian authors like Hal Lindsey have been pointing that out all along. As Lindsey pointed out in a recent broadcast, many early Jewish thinkers were actually expecting 2 MessiahS; - The first, the Son of Joseph, a suffering Messiah, - and later, a Son of David, - or Messiah-King. Luke 4:16-20 records a very enlightening event, when Jesus goes into a synagogue and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. What’s interesting is that Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61 beginning with verse 1, but then stopping in the middle of a sentence, - right where today we find a comma, in the middle of verse 2.. Christ is pointing out the fact that the passage refers to the two phases of His coming. **“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD”** Luke 4:20-21 then records; **“Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’”**. So not only was He claiming to be the very Messiah, but He also did something else unheard of; - He stopped quoting a Scripture in mid-passage. It was a signal as to what was going on. The very next words were clear reference to His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming as Judge of the World. The rest of Isaiah 61:2 reads, **“And the day of vengeance of our God”**.

The upshot of all of this seems to be that there is growing evidence that the Christian view, that the Messiah would come as a ‘suffering servant’ was at least present in some 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish thought. And that at least some Jewish scholars recognized that there had to be a double manifestation of the Messiah to fulfill the Scriptures. So perhaps, this translation of this fairly recent archaeological find may open that discussion. Despite reasoned argument, Scripture itself tells us that the Jews retain a blind spot when it comes to understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the fulfillment of the Law. **“But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”** (2Cor 3:14-16) But there is good news in even this. That blindness will run its course: It will have its end. Paul explains it in Romans 11:25-26, when he writes, **“that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved”**.

## A WARNING FOR IRAN

A mixed message is what Iran is getting from the world community right now. Javier Solana, representing the European Union came hat in hand to Tehran to offer a “package of incentives” to the Iranians in return for stopping work on their nuclear program. And they don’t even have to suspend uranium enrichment while the talks are going on. The government in Tehran indicated over the weekend that they would be willing to start up talks again in 2 weeks.<sup>9 10</sup> It seems that the US may be being left a bit out of the process. However, the signals coming from Washington are significantly stronger and more strident. Speaking for the US and allies, Secretary Rice gave what has been characterized as an ultimatum to the Iranian regime to freeze the enrichment process in two weeks or face ‘punitive measures’ in the form of new UN sanctions.<sup>11 12</sup>

All of that could be dismissed as mere diplomatic fluff if it were not for a report that came out on Israel national radio last weekend and remarks made the next day by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff , Admiral Mike Mullen. In the radio report, a ranking “security-political official” was credited with saying that should negotiations with Iran fail, President Bush was ready to order an attack sometime between the elections and the inauguration of the new president. The Israeli Chief of Staff is scheduled to have a week long meeting with Admiral Mullen.<sup>13</sup> On the day following the broadcast the American Admiral let it be known that he is ‘convinced’ that the Iranians are seeking to produce their own nukes. He went on to assert that despite ongoing conflicts America did indeed have the resources and reserves to carry out an attack against the Iranian nuclear facilities.<sup>14</sup> The military option remains on the table!

## YADA FEST II

*Here’s another succulent helping of one of our tasty feasts of news morsels. Bon Appetit!*

**“[B]ecause, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools”.**

(Rom 1:21-22)

## GOING ISLAMIC

**A Confused Chief Justice** – In a speech given at the East London Mosque, The Lord Chief Justice of Great Britain told his audience that, - in his opinion, - it would be fine if Sharia Law was used rather than English Common Law in settling disputes among Muslims.<sup>15</sup> One has to wonder if he then approves of the “no go zones” found throughout England where non-Muslims are, - in the words of The Rt Rev Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester, face discrimination and even physical attack.<sup>16</sup>

**You Can’t Say That!** – A Jordanian court has issued subpoenas for 12 European citizens to answer charges of criminal blasphemy and inciting hatred for statements that they made outside of that Muslim nation. One was Dutch politician and filmmaker Geert Wilders, whose recent work equated Islam with violence. Front Page Magazine’s Stephen Brown calls this tactic “legal jihad”, - an attempt to intimidate and silence critics of the ‘Religion of Peace’.<sup>17</sup>

**What Freedom Of Speech ?** – The assault on free speech is not confined to the supposed benighted countries of the Islamic world. Canada is staging its own show trial of author Mark Steyn and MacLean’s Magazine. The British

Columbia Human Rights Tribunal is conducting hearings investigating MacLeans publication of excerpts of Steyn's book *America Alone*, where the author contends that Muslims hold traditional values "in contempt", and characterizing believers in true Islam as a "violent people". That contention by the Muslim complainants, Mohammed Elmasry and Naiyer Habib, is that the published statements violated the "reasonable limits" of free speech.<sup>18</sup> The answer is clear. This type of speech has traditionally and clearly been protected in Western nations such as Canada, Great Britain and the US. But the times they are a changing.

**You Must Pray To Allah** – Here's the quote from the UK Telegraph. Two "11 and 12-year-olds, were given detention after refusing to take part in a practical demonstration of how Allah is worshipped". After viewing a short film, the class was reportedly told by the teacher, "We are now going out to pray to Allah". With a lot of angry parents on their hands; - the school is investigating.<sup>19</sup> This in the land of Wesley and Wilberforce!

**The Religion of Tolerance** – Coming soon, - from the Religion that brought you amputations for thievery and jail time for rape victims: Mandatory execution for "apostates". Iranian lawmakers are considering a proposal that "require the death penalty for anyone who leaves Islam for Christianity", or the person who entices them to do so.<sup>20</sup>

### **SIGNS OF CULTURAL DISINTEGRATION**

**Beyond Belief !** - Dr Norman Spack of Boston's Children's Hospital operates a clinic for "transgendered" kids, where prescribes drugs to children as young as seven, - to delay their sexual development, - all in preparation for later sex-change surgery. When they hit their teens, - they then would be given "cross-hormones" in order to develop sexual characteristics of the opposite sex. While the Boston Globe sees this just as another aspect of "modern medical science", others rightly characterize such actions as "cooperating with a mental illness". As Christian apologist Chuck Colson points out, doctors like Spack have accepted the modern view that sexual identity is not biologically determined, - but rather a matter of preference. God said something different.<sup>21</sup> **"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."** (Genesis 1:27)

**And Sorry About That Whole Christian Thing...** - Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams apologized for his faith in a letter to Muslims released last week. The Anglican Primate also called for an alliance between the two faiths, - "for the common good", to take on such issues as poverty and the environment. He characterized the doctrine of the Trinity, as "offensive to Muslims"; - attacking Christianity for its violence, and, in the words of the London Daily mail, "betrayal of peaceful principals".<sup>22</sup> Granted: The Church has not in its history always lived up to the principals of Christ. But what "common good" can there be between any Christ denying religion, - (no matter how peaceful, - which Islam is not), - and True Christianity. Not to proclaim the Truth of the gospel is a sin, in that it denies the only way to God and salvation to a rejecting world; - and in this case to a Christ rejecting religion. Islam expressly denies the Son-ship of Jesus. Yet John 3:18 tells us that those who reject Him are "**condemned already**" and Acts 4:12 informs us "**there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**". Here's the bottom line found in 2Corinthians 6:14: "**For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?**" Answer me that, good Bishop Rowan!

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- <sup>1</sup> Ofri Ilani, Dead Sea tablet suggests Jewish resurrection imagery pre-dates Jesus, Haaretz, July 6, 2008
  - <sup>2</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98
  - <sup>3</sup> Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), Jewish Virtual Library
  - <sup>4</sup> Joel C Rosenberg, Missiles & The Messiah Making News, July 8, 2008
  - <sup>5</sup> Ancient Tablet Ignites Debate on Messiah and Resurrection, New York Times, July 6, 2008
  - <sup>6</sup> Joel C Rosenberg, Missiles & The Messiah Making News, July 8, 2008
  - <sup>7</sup> Ancient Tablet Ignites Debate on Messiah and Resurrection, New York Times, July 6, 2008
  - <sup>8</sup> Background clues taken from the Wikipedia article on Isaiah 53, July 16, 2008
  - <sup>9</sup> Iran, EU to resume nuclear talks in 2 weeks, AP, July 19, 2008
  - <sup>10</sup> 'No clear answer' at Iran talks, Al Jazeera News, July 19, 2008
  - <sup>11</sup> US, Allies Give Iran Ultimatum After Nuclear Talks Stall, FOX, AP, July 19, 2008
  - <sup>12</sup> Rice warns Iran of 'punitive measures' over nuclear drive, Breitbart, AFP, July 21, 2008
  - <sup>13</sup> Senior Israeli official: If nuclear talks fail, Bush will order Iran attack between November and January, DEBKAFfile, July 19, 2008
  - <sup>14</sup> Top US military chief is convinced Iranians seek atom bomb, DEBKAFfile, July 20, 2008
  - <sup>15</sup> Top UK Judge: Sharia Law Should Be Used in Britain, London Daily Mail, July 4, 2008
  - <sup>16</sup> Bishop warns of no-go zones for non-Muslims, UK Telegraph, April 18, 2008
  - <sup>17</sup> Stephen Brown, Jordan's Legal Jihad, Front Page Magazine, July 4, 2008
  - <sup>18</sup> Mark Steyn Human Rights Tribunal "Show Trial" Opens in Vancouver, Life Site News, June 3, 2008
  - <sup>19</sup> Nick Britten, Schoolboys disciplined for 'refusing to pray to Allah', UK Telegraph, July 5, 2008
  - <sup>20</sup> Iranians consider mandatory execution for apostasy, World Net Daily, July 10, 2008
  - <sup>21</sup> It's a Sick, Sick World, Chuck Colson, July 8, 2008
  - <sup>22</sup> Steve Doughty, Archbishop of Canterbury: 'Christian doctrine is offensive to Muslims', London Daily Mail, July 15, 2008