

Hebrew Heritage Bible Society

A division of the Gospel Research Foundation

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Hebrew Heritage

Pope John Paul II declared, “Whoever meets Jesus meets Judaism” (April 28, 1980). The Hebrew Heritage Bible Translation of the Gospel of John brings out the Hebrew mind-set and the Jewish cultural expressions deeply embedded in the story of Jesus’ life and teachings. Some translations try to be very literal, like the New America Standard Version. Other translations seek to be more readable with a dynamic equivalency like the New International Version. This is the Gospel of John as you have never read it before, because it is a translation seeking a Hebrew literal dynamic equivalency, going from the Greek text into Hebrew linguistics and culture, and coming back into modern English. Many translations claim to give the reader a modern, easy to understand, up to date, English translation for current and relevant usage. Unlike them, this translation gives the ancient meaning. It seeks the way a Hebrew disciple would have understood and applied the message. Now the twenty-first century disciple can study the life of Yeshua more like a first century disciple. In fact, everyone who really wants to know better how first century Jewish people lived and thought, as well as how the movement connected with a Jew crucified by the Romans in a tiny province of the Mediterranean Sea gained a world-wide following, must read this translation. This is a must read to understand both the faith of Yeshua, as well as the faith in Jesus. Jesus was a Jew. He never changed religions. He was loyal to his people, committed to Torah in faith and practice, loved the land of Israel and all the peoples of the land, spoke Hebrew, but was impacted by the Greco-Roman culture and language, while always remaining true to the vision of the prophets of his own ancient faith tradition.

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Martin Luther taught, “The wisdom of the Greeks, when compared to that of the Jews, is absolutely bestial; for apart from God there can be no wisdom, not any understanding and insight.”

The Gospel of John is in the center of a debate among scholars. Is the Jesus movement more Hellenistic or Hebraic? If Christianity became dominated by Greek thought and ways, how did she depart from her Jewish beginnings? How did Hellenism impact Judaism in the first century? In many ways, the clash of civilizations in today’s cultural conflicts is similar. Abraham Joshua Heschel observed, “The vital issue for the church is to decide whether to look for roots in Judaism and consider itself an extension of Judaism or to look for roots in pagan Hellenism and consider itself as an antithesis to Judaism” (*Insecurity of Freedom*, p. 169-170). The world moves between these two points of influence. The purpose of both is similarly the same: the perfection of the human race and its salvation. The difference, however, between Judaism and pagan Hellenism, is God. The Hebrew understanding of divine compassion and human weakness is different from the exaltation of external beauty and physical strength in Hellenistic thinking. On the one hand, the Greeks prized artistic design and external form, revering the holiness of beauty. On the other hand, the Hebrews valued noble character and inner serenity, emphasizing the beauty of holiness.

The fear of God is the goal of Hebrew learning. Living a life pleasing to God is the eternal perspective leading to ever increasing abundance. The inner spiritual life, lived responsibly within community, always praying to God, while always serving others who are in need, is the path leading to personal fulfillment. For Yochanan, Yeshua is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). Bible scholar Raymond Brown called attention to Juan Maldonado (1533-83) who, “saw behind the Greek a Hebraism wherein the truth is just an adjectival description of the way: ‘I am the true

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way to life” (*John*, vol. 2, p. 621). The prevalent English saying, “Seeing is believing” is reversed in John’s teachings. Believing is seeing, because the true spiritual life can only be discovered by faith. In fact, the one who believes will do the works of Yeshua and even greater works (14:12). As Brown pointed out, “Belief in Jesus will bring to the Christian power from God to perform the same works that Jesus performs, because, by uniting a man with Jesus and the Father, belief gives him a share in the power that they possess” (*ibid*, p. 633). In Hebrew thought, these “greater works” (14:12) must be connected in some way to keeping the commandments, helping others and walking humbly with God. Yeshua proclaims that “salvation is from the Jewish people.” Believe and live. Live by walking out the conviction of faith. The vibrancy of Jewish faith begins with the kindness and mercy of God. Greeks sought to comprehend the mysteries of the universe through the complex world of gods and goddesses in competition with each other. Hebrews sought the fear of God in faithful service to one another. Reverence the one true God and remain faithful to the teachings of Torah.