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Caspari Center NEWS

“Equipping His people
for works of service,
so that the body of
Messiah may be built up”
Ephesians 4:12



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Corinthians in Today's Israel

Corinth is not only a Greek polis mentioned in the New Testament, but also a modern city not far from its ancient predecessor's location. But the people I am writing about are connected to the biblical Corinth much more than to the modern. I never thought of calling them so until I began my preparations for a series of lectures at the Haifa Theological Institute—a 15-hour course on Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.

In fact, I should not use the word “them,” because it's us—Israeli believers in Jesus. They will be in my class, coming from Haifa, the smaller towns adjacent to it, and even from as “far away” as Upper Nazareth. (The quote marks betray the irony of an ex-Russian; sorry about that, in this tiny country of ours 40 kilometers is a considerable distance, you know . . .) If you're familiar with the famous rhetorical question posed by the second-century theologian Tertullian—“What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”—you might paraphrase it: “What indeed has ancient Corinth to do with modern Haifa?”

Let me ask you in turn: Do you know Christians who admire the early church and see it as a perfect model for us? I meet them all the time, and I share their admiration and respect. I, too, believe we have much to learn from those early believers in many ways. However, if there is a book that takes the lid off an early believing community, it is 1 Corinthians. In the words of James D. G. Dunn, it gives “a fascinating picture, one very far removed from the ideal of the pure New Testament church which still influences many people's thinking about New Testament Christianity.” Reading this epistle today in the midst of the Israeli believing community, one can't help but see the parallels.

One of the main Corinthian problems addressed by Paul was factionalism: the congregation had several parties that quarreled with each other. Party affiliation was defined by idolizing a particular preacher: believers were saying “I belong to Paul” or “to Apollos” or “to Cephas” (Peter). How did this situation come about?

Both Paul and Apollos ministered in Corinth and brought people to the faith, but at different times. Both were powerful speakers, but had different styles: while Paul's was studied simplicity, Apollos was more eloquent. Just these

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“Where is
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two factors could easily create natural human attachments to particular ministers. In addition, some believers were Jewish, while others came from a pagan background; the city itself was very multicultural and highly dynamic.

Talk about parallels with modern Israeli believers! We are natives and immigrants. The natives are Jews and Arabs. The immigrants come from places like England and Ethiopia that are worlds apart culturally. Some believed and were first discipled here in Israel; others met the Lord abroad and were formed spiritually there. Some appreciate Jewish tradition, others don't. Add the charismatic–evangelical tension, the political right and left, and a few other tensions: is this not enough to see the relevance of this epistle to our life? What a diversity!

So what did God have to say to the Corinthian congregation about their divisions? Two things seem to me especially important in our context.

First is Paul's diagnosis. He attributes the factionalism to only one problem, namely, immaturity: "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?" (3:1–3).

Second is his solution. He neither rebuked them nor merely challenged them to outgrow this childishness, but instead showed them how to rethink their identity: "So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (3:21–23).

Where is my ultimate identity: in my Russian background, Jewishness, speaking in tongues, or in Yeshua? Do I keep camping around my particular expression of faith or open up to interaction with others? Do I close my heart in insecurity and fear of the "other" or ask God to enlarge it and enable me to embrace them?

Finally, am I willing to answer these questions honestly?

Alec Goldberg

Bar Enosh

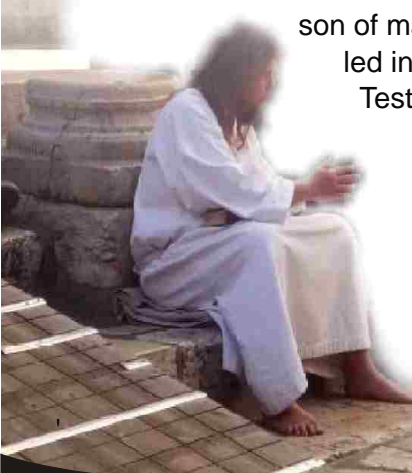
Have you ever asked why Jesus so often called himself "Son of Man" (Bar Enosh)? It couldn't be incidental; like everything he said, these words were a message to his contemporaries and to us. So what's the message?

Most of the church fathers interpreted this phrase as referring to his human nature, and "Son of God" as referring to his divine nature. However, Jesus' humanity was never a matter of debate among the eyewitnesses: his many miracles could not overshadow the fact that he ate and drank, worked and slept, got tired and thirsty, happy and angry—just like any normal man. Why would anyone in their right mind want to emphasize something as obvious as the fact of being fully human?

Another possibility is that "Son of Man" evoked certain associations in the minds of Jesus' audience—but which? The answer is in Daniel 7:13: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence." Coming with or on the clouds of heaven is the standard Old Testament way of describing God. In other words, Daniel sees God in human form ("one like a son of man") approaching God ("the Ancient of Days")!

Could Jesus' usage of this phrase be an allusion to this verse? The strongest evidence for that is a brief exchange between him and the high priest during his trial before the Sanhedrin: "And the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

The high priest tore his clothes. 'Why do we need any more witnesses?' he asked. 'You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' They all condemned him as worthy of death" (Mark 14:61–64).



It is this charge of blasphemy that strongly suggests an allusion to Daniel. The first part of Jesus' reply is just a "yes" to the question of his messianic identity. It could be judged as true or false, but not as blasphemous, for it shows no irreverence toward the name of God. Therefore, logically, it was the second part that triggered the charge and the following death sentence. And the only reason for Jesus' self-identification as the Son of Man to be deemed blasphemous was if "Son of Man" was a known title for deity.

There is only one Old Testament verse which speaks of a divine son of man—Daniel 7:13—and members of the Jewish Sanhedrin were surely familiar with it. They didn't believe Jesus to be divine, so to them Jesus' self-identification as the Son of Man sounded blasphemous. But why did Jesus use it so often?

The divine-human figure of Daniel's apocalyptic vision appears at the end of days with a specific purpose: to replace pagan world powers and establish God's eternal righteous rule on the whole earth (see Daniel 7:14). Although the earthly ruler "like a son of man" is part of this grand global picture, Jesus' contemporaries, who lived under the heavy burden of Roman occupation, seem to be primarily concerned with Israel's national redemption, matters of universal importance holding little to zero of their attention (cf. Acts 1:6–8). So perhaps Jesus' message is that even in difficult times—when being self-centered is quite natural—we should not lose sight of the "big picture" but keep living generously and thinking big.

I am typing these words at a time when this message is most relevant for us in Israel. Today it's not the Roman occupation but Hamas that's making our life difficult. But there is also ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the war between Ukraine and Russia, and untold suffering in other places around the world. So let's heed the message, and do what we should: live generously and think big.

Alec Goldberg

media review

Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up on our website at www.caspari.com.

Ma'ariv, August 3, 2014

This article is the story of Rev. Juha Ketola and his connection with the International Christian Embassy, which was founded in 1980 after most of the embassies left Jerusalem under the threat of oil embargo. Ketola began as the Finnish representative to the Embassy in 1996, and continued his involvement from that point. He visited Israel for the first time in 1979, and realized at the time that an agreement is impossible "if the only thing one side wants is to kill the other." He continued, "People in Europe do not believe that people can draw their opinions from the Koran and are even willing to be violent. Muslims take advantage of European democracy to further their own interests." Ketola closed the interview by saying, "You are special. I don't know of another country that would have acted responsibly like you are doing in Gaza, and it is because of the high sense of responsibility you have. You show mercy."

BeKitzur, June 26, 2014

The district court in Jerusalem has ruled that an event hall is a public place, that as such it is subject to the law forbidding discrimination, and that the right of freedom of expression "may not pass the borderline drawn by the law forbidding discrimination." This ruling came as a conclusion of the appeal submitted to the court by the event hall at Yad HaShmona—which, as a Christian and Messianic Jewish community, wished to uphold their right of freedom of expression, freedom of business, and freedom of religion and conscience—after the Jerusalem magistrates' court ruled in favor of a lesbian couple who had sued the moshav when their wedding reservation was canceled.

A Rosh Hashanah Prayer

Rosh Hashanah, which means “Head Of The Year,” begins at sundown on Wednesday, September 24 this year. God prescribes its observance in Leviticus 23:24–25: “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the Lord.’”

Jewish tradition links this first day of the Hebrew civic calendar with the commemoration of God’s creation of the world. The solemn assembly and trumpet blasts associated with this day point to this ten-day period of self-reflection, repentance, and renewal that begins in earnest on Rosh Hashanah and culminates on the holiest day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Leviticus 16 describes the one day during the year in which the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the entire nation.

The traditional greeting at Rosh Hashanah is “*L’shanah tovah tikatev v’tihatem*” (“May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year”), or simply, “*L’shanah tovah.*” This blessing points to the belief that each person must use these Days of Awe to repent and do everything possible to make things right with God and others so their name will be sealed in God’s Book of Life on Yom Kippur. We who know Jesus as Messiah are grateful that he has been both high priest and perfect sacrifice for us (Hebrews 4:14–5:9), and we come to these Days of Awe with deep gratitude for all he has done for us.

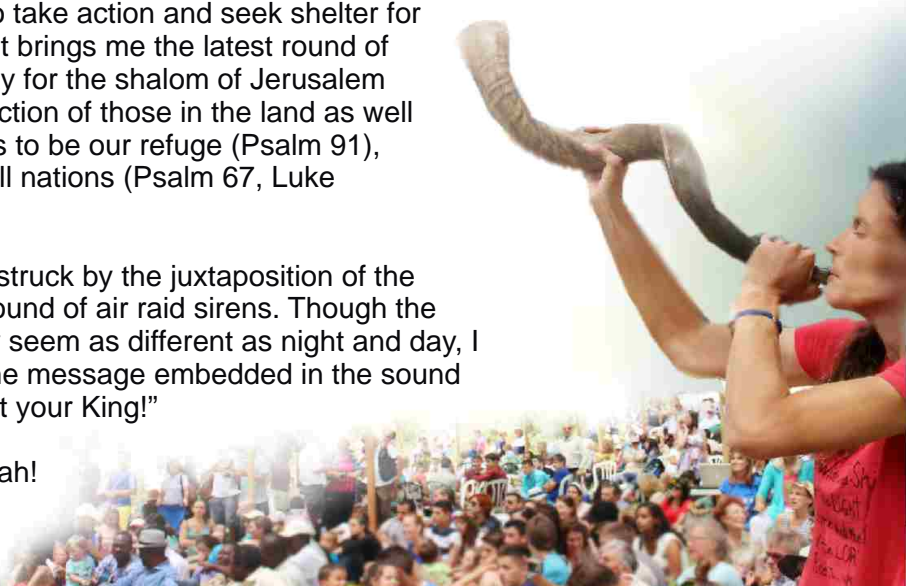
The trumpet blasts of Rosh Hashanah, in the form of a ram’s horn or *shofar* blown during the Rosh Hashanah worship service, launch us into these ten days focused on repentance, and are meant for all of us to be a spiritual wake-up call: Your Creator is coming! Prepare to meet your King!

As Israel is under siege this year, a different sort of alarm has been sounded throughout the land. Sometimes the sirens sound many times a day as they warn people to take shelter from another round of missiles launched from Gaza. Ignoring the siren’s blast is unwise. Its shrill warning is meant to preserve life. I live in the United States, half a world away from the sound of those air raid sirens. Thanks to the Internet and modern communications tools, I can be informed about when those sirens pierce the air in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv or Ashdod, but the knowledge is not a call to take action and seek shelter for me. It is, however, a call to prayer. As the Internet brings me the latest round of news from the Middle East, I am reminded to pray for the shalom of Jerusalem and all of Israel (Psalm 122:6), for physical protection of those in the land as well as the security of knowing the One who promises to be our refuge (Psalm 91), and for the salvation through Messiah Jesus of all nations (Psalm 67, Luke 24:46–47).

As we approach Rosh Hashanah this year, I am struck by the juxtaposition of the shofar’s ancient call sounding along with latest round of air raid sirens. Though the purposes of shofar blasts and air raid sirens may seem as different as night and day, I am praying that many will hear and respond to the message embedded in the sound of both: “Your Creator is coming! Prepare to meet your King!”

I hope you’ll join me in that prayer. L’Shanah Tovah!

Michelle Van Loon



If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to caspari@caspari.com or visit our website, www.caspari.com.

You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.

Prayer Requests

Please pray for



- the Christians in Gaza, Iraq, and Syria
- the teaching in Haifa Theological Institute
- the unity of Israeli believers
- the preparations for the two Shabbat school seminars this fall