



Rivers of Living Water

the Message of Hoshanna Rabbah

by Tim Kelley

One of the most perplexing questions within the Christian world has been whether or not the heathen can be saved. On his web page, Howard Culbertson of the Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, OK asks¹ –

“Are the heathen really lost? What happens to those who haven't heard the gospel when they die? Do the un-evangelized go to hell? Can God be considered loving and just if He fails to provide large numbers of people with an opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ? If the un-evangelized have an opportunity for salvation, how is it made available to them?”

Yet, for some there is no question. For instance Dr. Jack Arnold has a ministry called Third Millinium Ministries. In his on-line magazine he has an article entitled “Are the Heathen Lost? A Study of Romans 1:18-23”² in which he writes -

“Are the heathen lost? The answer to this question has never been a problem to Bible-believing Christians, for the Bible, church history, and missions all give evidence that the heathen are lost, that they are under the wrath of God and are headed for eternal punishment without Christ.”

I guess to get the proper context of what he's saying, a person would have to know what he means by the word “heathen”, and Dr. Arnold gives us the definition later in his article. He writes:

“Scripturally speaking, the heathen are all Gentiles, whether they have heard the gospel or not.”

Then he quotes a couple of scriptures to sort of *nail down* his definition –

“But when it pleased God, . . . to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen” (Gal. 1:15,16).

“They (*James, Peter, and John*) gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision” (Gal. 2:9b).

So, since Paul was sent to the *heathen* and James, Peter, and John were sent to the circumcision, then that must mean that the Jews in the first century were not heathen. I don't suspect that's really what he meant, so to clear up all speculation, he continued with this point -

“Today “heathen” has come to mean those who have never heard the gospel”

Since Dr. Arnold's article is supposedly based on Romans 1:18-23, it's interesting to point out that Paul never uses the word *heathen* in the entire book of Romans. Instead, Paul uses the term *Gentiles*, which we understand to mean “the nations”. Of course, in the first century, being a part of one of the various sects of Judaism, and thus - a believer in the God of Israel - was the only way to not be considered a heathen.

It appears that Dr. Arnold has the answer that satisfies fits his theology . . . and it doesn't look to good for the heathen.

¹ <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/heathen.htm>

² <http://cleartheology.com/expo/45Romans/NT.Arnold.Rom.09.html> quoting [IIIM Magazine Online](#), Volume 1, Number 9, April 26 to May 2, 1999

Dr. Arnold's sentiments are echoed by another theologian, Dr. Ralph Arnold, this time from Tampa, Florida. In his article entitled "The Heathen?"³ he submits the question:

"But what about those (*heathen*) who have never heard? What about them?"

He goes on to answer the question by saying -

"God says that they will have no excuse because God has revealed His existence to every person born into this world. They may not have heard of Jesus Christ but they do know that God exists, so they become accountable and are without excuse."

In his article, Dr. Arnold goes on to say that "there is no such thing as a born atheist" . . . that all human beings are born with a basic understanding of God. He states that since all humans have basic understanding of God, it is therefore their responsibility to search out the truth about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Pretty firm answer, and I'm sure that a number of fence sitters have taken a second look at their spiritual life after reading his article. But what about those for whom this information – a Bible – is simply not available? Most of these theologians don't have an answer. What about the natives in the Amazon jungle, some who have never come in contact with what we call civilization? Maybe a missionary was on his way to teach them about The Messiah, but had a flat tire on the way. He never made it to the village, thus a whole tribe of people miss out on salvation because of a flat tire.

"That's life", you might say, or in this case – that's death. But let's get a little bit closer to home. What about the child who dies at a year old? I've got a couple of year-old grand-daughters; and neither of them are asking questions about their salvation. If they were to die in a car accident this afternoon on their way home from church, are they lost? Will they burn forever in hell fire because some drunk crossed the centerline and plowed into their car?

What kind of God is that?

So let's go back to the first question –

"Are the heathen really lost? What happens to those who haven't heard the gospel when they die? Do the un-evangelized go to hell? Can God be considered loving and just if He fails to provide large numbers of people with an opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ? **If the un-evangelized have an opportunity for salvation, how is it made available to them?**"

Thankfully, the Bible does have an answer, and the answer can be found by practicing God's *blueprint for salvation* – the festivals of God. The overall theme of God's festivals is how He will bring salvation to mankind. He sent His son Yeshua within the framework of the festivals in order to bring about that salvation. And what's more, Yeshua came at a time in history where He could use Jewish tradition to support and illustrate His role in the salvation of all mankind.

Today, we are going to discuss the festival of Sukkot with a focus on the last day of the festival, which in Judaism is called *Hoshanna Rabbah*. This Jewish tradition is filled with meaning and hope, and as we study it, we'll gain a bigger understanding of God's plan for mankind.

Christianity has, for the most part, misunderstood God's plan of salvation because they have failed to observe the *moedim*, the festivals that are spelled out in Leviticus 23.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:1** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.

3

<http://www.biblelineministries.org/articles/basearch.php3?action=full&mainkey=THE+HEATHEN%3F&typed=heathen>

In this passage, the word for *feasts* is *moedim*, a word that basically means an *appointment*. It's an appointment God has made with His people where He reveals to them the things that are near and dear to His heart. One of those things is His plan of salvation.

The apostle Paul understood the purpose of the festivals, thus he said –

NKJ Colossians 2:16-17 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Paul understood that the festivals portray a plan by which all mankind would have the opportunity to come in contact with the knowledge of the God of Israel, and Israel's redeemer – Messiah Yeshua. Being that Paul was raised in a Pharisee home, and was himself a Pharisee, it would stand to reason that he understood Jewish tradition pertaining to the resurrection of the dead, for of all the Jewish sects, the Pharisees were the staunchest believers in the resurrection. So let's look at that tradition.

As we've seen this week, the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Messianic kingdom, the time when Messiah will reign on the throne of David. It's mentioned in a number of Old Testament prophecies. In many cases, it carries the theme of restoration. For instance, Solomon's Temple was completed and dedicated during the Feast of Tabernacles, a representation of the unity Israel and Judah had not shared since crossing the Jordan nearly 400 years earlier. Five hundred years later, Ezra restored the temple worship to Israel during the feast of Tabernacles.

When Messiah Yeshua returns, He will once again reign over a united Israel, and true worship will be restored, but that's not to say the nations, the gentiles, will all the sudden jump on the bandwagon and submit to Israel's King. It's going to take years . . . maybe hundreds of years to clean up the cultural mess here on earth, but eventually there will come a time when all the families on earth will be raising Torah observant children in Torah observant homes; when children will be able to play in the streets without fear; and all mankind will look to YHVH and praise Him for giving us His Son. I believe this time will happen towards the end of the 1000 year messianic kingdom.

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles is a seven-day festival. After this festival ends, there is another one-day festival called Shemini Atzoreth, which simply means the *Eighth Day Assembly*.⁴ Shimini Atzoreth is not the Last Day of the Feast of Tabernacles, it's a different festival. The Last Day of the Feast of Tabernacles is today. On the Jewish calander, it's Tishri 21. The Jewish people have attached a name to this day – *Hoshanna Rabbah*, which means the *Great Salvation*. To understand the significance of this day, let's recall what we did last night during what we call the Water Pouring Rehearsal.

As we were shown, the first century Jewish people had a tradition of drawing "living water" from the Pool of Shiloam each morning of the feast of Tabernacles. They would take that water, and along with a pitcher of wine, pour it on the Alter. At the same time, other priests would bring long willow branches through the eastern gate of the Temple, waving them back and forth as they marched one time around the altar - just as Israel marched one time around Jericho after entering the Promised Land. The purpose of this was to simulate the Holy Spirit which they felt would be prevalent during the Messianic Kingdom.⁵ This tradition was called the *Beit haShoeva*, or *House of the Water Drawing*.

They would continue this custom for the first six days of the festival, but the seventh day was special. On this seventh, or last day of the festival, they would march around the altar seven times, again as Israel had marched around Jericho seven times on the seventh day. At the conclusion of the seventh circuit, the priests would blow the silver trumpets and the people would begin to shout. Fourteen hundred years earlier at Jericho, that shout resulted in the walls of Jericho falling down. For the Jews in the first century, it signified a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Because this great outpouring of the Spirit happened toward the end of the festival of Sukkot, the message is that there would be a great

⁴ See Lev. 23:36

⁵ The Hebrew word for *wind* is the same as for *spirit* – "ruach"

outpouring of the Spirit accompanied by a great salvation (Hoshanna Rabbah) at or towards the end of the Messianic Kingdom.

There is a reference to this in John chapter 7 where we find Yeshua keeping Sukkot at the Temple in Jerusalem –

NKJ John 7:37-39 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Though I can't say for sure, I can picture Yeshua standing in the Court of the Women, on a pedestal of some sorts, waiting for the trumpets to blow. When they do, He shouts out the message of the living waters. In effect, Yeshua was substantiating their tradition of Hoshanna Rabbah, the great salvation.

But where did the Jews come up with this concept of a Great Salvation towards the end of the Millennium? Did they just pull it out of thin air, or is there a basis for their belief. We know that the Jewish sages searched diligently within the scriptures for clues to what YHVH was doing. They would often link a thought in one verse with that in another in order to develop a theory. Sometimes they were right, other times they were wrong. In the case of the Beit haShouava – the House of the Water Drawing, it appears they were correct since Yeshua used that occasion as a backdrop for one of his greatest teachings.

We'll take these next few passages and link them together to see if we too can find a basis for this exciting Jewish tradition. I'm not saying this is how the Jewish sages did it, but I can see a basis in these scriptures.

This first passage we want to look at clearly pertains to the Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles –

NKJ Deuteronomy 31:10-13 And Moses commanded them, saying: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, ¹¹ "when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. ¹² "Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, ¹³ "and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess."

Notice what Moses is saying. At the end of a seven year cycle, at the Feast of Tabernacles, teach the people, including women and children, the Torah. Then it goes on to say to teach it to those children who have not known it. Now think about it. Moses was giving these instructions to a people who were to soon enter the Promised Land – a forerunner of the Kingdom of God. They were to get on a seven year cycle - the Land Sabbath cycle – and on the seventh year of the cycle they were to read and explain the Torah during Sukkot.

But did you notice that there are two different types of children spoken of here? In the first group there are men, women, children, and the stranger in your gates. These are all people of a household who, you would suppose, would have been taught the ways of YHVH during their previous 6 years in land. But Moses goes on to mention "their children, who have not known it". Who would have not known the Torah? Is Moses speaking of the families already in the land? I don't think so. I would assume that these are proselytes, people who were not raised in Israel but came in later. What's significant is that these "children" were to be introduced to the Torah during the Feast of Tabernacles. So, in the Promised Land (the Messianic Kingdom?) there were (are going to be?) people who had been practicing the Torah walk and would be reminded of it every seven years, and there were (are going to be?) people who are introduced to Torah every seven years, or could we say, during year seven hundred of the Messianic Kingdom.

When you compare the cycle of seven years and the thought of introducing Torah during Sukkot - this could very clearly be a hint that YHVH had something big in store for the seventh day, or near the end of the Messianic Kingdom, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles. And it appears Yeshua concurred.

This next passage helps us to understand one of the major roles of the Messiah, and what the Jewish sages would have been looking for in a messiah. Very early in Isaiah's ministry he was told to make this quite puzzling proclamation to Israel and Judah. He was told –

ESV Isaiah 6:9-10 "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.'"

What God is saying is that there would be a time when Israel and Judah would be blinded to the deep ways of YHVH. They would read the words, but would not understand what they're reading. They would see Messiah, but would not understand Him. This is precisely what happened, and Yeshua referred to it during His ministry –

ESV Luke 8:9-10 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant,¹⁰ he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

Yeshua very clearly stated that He spoke in parables so that the majority of the people would not understand. All four of the gospels make mention of this, in fact John makes the statement that in spite of the prophecy, Yeshua's signs were so overwhelming that many could see through the blindness and recognize that He was the Messiah.

ESV John 12:37-42 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it . . .

Up to this point, we see that Moses may have been predicting a time during the Feast of Tabernacles when Torah will be preached to those who had not previously heard it. And why had some not heard it? Because they had been blinded. It was all a part of God's plan. Continuing on, we find that Isaiah predicts a time when YHVH's spirit would be poured out like a river. Isaiah speaks quite often of the Spirit of God and of spiritual blindness.

ESV Isaiah 44:1 "But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!² Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen.³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams (*rivers, floods*) on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

In this passage of Hebrew parallelism, God likens Israel to a dry and thirsty land. He says that he will pour water (*mayim* in Hebrew) on a thirsty people, and the water would be like a flood (*nazal* – Strong's 5140). He then likens this flood of water to His spirit.

Thus, a time will come when YHVH will pour out His spirit as a flood. If we read on, this outpouring of the spirit will cause that person to identify himself with the God of Israel, implying a turning back to the Torah. This desire will cause the blindness of their eyes to depart.

ESV Isaiah 29:18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

Now all we have to do is tie in a little chronology. We've already seen back in Deuteronomy that in the seventh year, or could we say, the seven-hundredth year after coming into the Promised Land, the Torah was to be read and explained to a people who did not know the Torah. Could this event coincide with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the Messianic Kingdom? Let's see.

The entire second chapter of Joel speaks of end time events. Each event is attached to the various fall festivals. We can build a chronology based on the festivals. The first festival is Yom Teruah –

NKJ Joel 2:1-14 Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! . . .

Which is followed by Yom Kippor -

NKJ Joel 2:15-17 ¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly . . .

The next festival is Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles -

NKJ Joel 2:18-27 ¹⁸ Then the LORD will be zealous for His land . . . ²¹ Fear not, O land; Be glad and rejoice, For the LORD has done marvelous things! . . . ²⁶ You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied . . .

Joel ends his discussion of Sukkot by showing the state of the people that are alive at that time in the Messianic kingdom. He says –

NKJ Joel 2:27 ²⁷ Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the LORD your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.

It seems that by the time we get to the end of verse 27, all mankind will be worshipping the God of Israel. They will be walking in Torah, and the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is fully implemented. But immediately after this Sukkot passage, the prophecy continues -

NKJ Joel 2:28-32 ²⁸ " And it shall come to pass **afterward** That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh . . . ²⁹ And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Sometime after Sukkot is well underway, when all mankind who are alive during the millennium have found the value in submitting to the God of Israel, He again pours out His spirit. Why would there need to be another outpouring of God's spirit if all mankind is already following God? Will there be some event that will take place sometime during the millennium by which people will come on the scene and need His spirit to see things they previously could not see? I believe there is, and I believe the Jewish sages saw it in the scriptures, and they called it Hoshanna Rabbah.

In a letter of encouragement to his friend Timothy, Paul tells Timothy to pray and make intercession for the civil leaders in the places he goes to evangelize. In all likelihood these leaders would be considered *heathen*, yet it is within this context that Paul says that it's God's desire for all men to be saved.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The word *desire* in this passage is somewhat misleading. YHVH does more than just desire, He intends for it to happen – both believers and non-believers to be saved. The Greek word for desire is *thelo* (Strong's 2309) and means *to will or to be determined*. God is determined to make this happen. But if knowledge and faith in Messiah Yeshua is a prerequisite, then God's not doing a very good job, and if God and HaSatan are in a race for souls, HaSatan is winning, that is unless there's a part of God's plan that allows for those who are blind to the ways of God to have an opportunity for the blindness to be lifted.

Hoshanna Rabbah, the Great Salvation, is that way. The Jewish people in the first century knew it, they just didn't understand that Messiah Yeshua was the vehicle by which the Great Salvation would come about.

NKJ John 7:37-39 "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of His heart will flow rivers of living water."

Yeshua stood up and made this proclamation on Hoshanna Rabbah, the Last Great Day of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the appropriate thing to do and on the appropriate day within the framework of God's holy days.

Most of the Bible believing world has missed it because there are scales on their eyes that keep them from understanding His festivals. But YHVH has revealed it to us, and He's beginning to reveal it to many others. Those who are blinded will someday see. They will come up to the feast of Tabernacles and will learn of His ways.

So are the heathen lost? Are those who missed their opportunity to hear about Messiah Yeshua lost because of a missionary's flat tire? Because a drunk lost control of his car and killed a little one year old girl, will she burn forever in hell fire? If the un-evangelized have an opportunity for salvation, how is it made available to them?" The answer is found in the festivals of YHVH and in the Jewish tradition of Hoshanna Rabbah – the Great Salvation.

Shalom Aleichem