

The Dangers of Dualism: Fearing the World Instead of Trusting in God

do we trust God
Dualism
or fear the world?

Dualism is a metaphysical belief that looks at life in terms of extremes – physical vs spiritual, good vs evil, us vs them, etc. Sounds reasonable at first glance, and yet this kind of thinking has led to a terrible kind of bondage, not

only in the world but also within the Body of Messiah – bondage that we see in politics, congregations, and all over social media. It is an extreme point of view that has led to paranoia, persecution and unnecessary division throughout the ages.

Dualism is about separation, and most often comes up in terms of “we are good, they are bad,” or “physical = bad, spiritual = good.” It’s the mindset behind the idea that this world can be written off, that it exists simply to be escaped from – where we become “more heavenly focused than earthly good.” Because of this, there has grown up a mistrust in and fear of the physical world as well as a fear of and contempt for anyone who is not in lockstep with ourselves – there are no shades of grey in dualistic religious or political thinking. For example, Catholicism (Judaism, Liberalism, Conservatism, whatever) can’t just be partially wrong, in the mind of a true dualist, it has to be entirely evil. It has to be discredited, destroyed, at any cost, through whatever worldly and even sinful means at our disposal. When we are scared, we are more than willing to allow our morals to slip “for a good cause.” Everything done under that banner has to be suspect, and no one can give them credit for any good works for fear of being labeled as a papist, or at least very dangerous. People from other countries can’t just be “backward,” they have to be subhuman – they have to be, because we, ourselves, are

supposedly good. Or at least I am, in this train of thought. (Hence the American form of slavery as identified and justified by color). This is also the line of thinking responsible for political rancor, racism, and class warfare – people like me are good and anyone else is suspect and most probably inferior (at the very least)

The Bible even seems to support this kind of thinking, because it was written in a dyadic society – hence they had no problem with celebrating the “dashing of enemy babies against the rocks.” They were too extreme for the tastes of people growing up in a post-Cross world which has been largely transformed by the fruit of the Spirit. We take for granted that no decent person would want such a thing to happen, but again, Yeshua/Jesus died in order to bring God’s heart values (and not just outward observances, which are also vitally important) into the world in a massive and unprecedented way.

But, with the advent of social media, we have once again become very much like the paranoid and conspiratorial people who lived before the Cross. Nowhere is it better seen than in politics and the fake news stories spreading all over the internet – reporting conspiracies as though they were fact, citing non-existent news stories and fabricating quotes, data and statistics. Of course, these sites have a LOT of advertisements, and they get money when you visit, a lot of money. Because of this unBiblical dualism, which paints everything in terms of black and white, these stories feed the notion that, for example, government is entirely evil, and anyone who questions it is immediately granted an aura of integrity. That’s dangerous. We can’t attribute virtue to those people who feed our pre-perceived notions and call it something like, “taking the red pill” – instead, it is simply believing, without a thorough investigation, a separate storyline. Believe me, if you take too many red pills, you will overdose.

If you are obsessed with finding all the hidden evil in the world, then your focus is desperately off.

I have seen it used in politics, racism, anti-semitism, intercountry squabbling, religion, you name it. It is rooted

in an absolute paranoia of the different. We want “us” to be good and right, and so we need “them” to be evil and wrong. It’s completely about us, and because it is about us, our moral compass goes off-kilter. We will believe everything good about us and everything evil, no matter how absurd, about them. It goes so far that we read a story and don’t even do a basic fact check – we don’t bother to find out if this celebrity actually even made the interview being quoted, or if CNN is actually the source behind a story, or if there truly is a speech on file that says what the story claims, in context. We are driven by fear and surface-appearances by people who, frankly, would appear to be training us to react and divide without even thinking about why we are doing it, and without asking questions. Who exactly is yanking our strings so effectively, while warning us that others are yanking our strings? Seems to be the perfect disguise for a deceiver, eh?

Think, for a moment, about the paranoia that has to exist within us, in order to believe and propagate anything bad we see reported about our “enemy” when the Ten Commandments specifically tell us not to bear false witness against our neighbors. Think about how compromised we have to be, to forward every bad thing we see about the suspected folks of our choice. That isn’t a godly virtue, or truth-seeking, being informed, smarter, a remnant, or a watchman. In the real ancient world – a watchman who reported false information regularly would die. He was not at liberty to blow the shofar every time he saw a tumbleweed on the horizon. What we are dealing with is a lack of self-control – fear gone wild, manifesting itself in sin through false witness. It’s a blindness brought on by a need to be good and right – but we aren’t entirely good and right – are we?

No. We aren’t. And it is our pride and self-deception that drives this madness of external dualism. But let’s look at a healthier dualism-ish sort of situation.

Within each individual (let’s not bring extremes like psychopaths into the mix), there is a battle of good vs evil. I am certainly no exception – I am trying to be more good all

the time and less evil – but the Bible clearly lays out this struggle in every human being, beginning with Adam and Eve. All of the patriarchs, the kings, everyone fought this battle within themselves. We are not entirely good – only one Man could ever boast of that on His resume. The rest of us are various degrees of what I call a hot mess. It is an unending battle that we have to fight every day, for the rest of our lives. As we begin to see how suspect we are, as we stop seeing ourselves and those who side with us as inherently good, we will begin to see the world and the people in it as more multi-faceted. Honestly, that is the kind of mindset that can take the gospel to the ends of the earth – as opposed to Peter's belief that he couldn't even enter the home of a Gentile, even a decade after the Cross. We can't effectively serve God when our judgment and perception is clouded by extreme dualism.

You know what? The best way to start is to take a break and stop questioning everyone else all the time – the government, religions, races, ethnicities, etc.; we need to question ourselves and what the things we need to/choose to believe – specifically, we need to understand what they tell us about ourselves and our need to believe that we (and those who agree with us) are truly on the unquestionably trustworthy end of our dualistic paranoia.

“Wow, look at that headline, it's outrageous, and it is about X so it must be true.”

Whether it was happening in Nazi Germany or today, it's the same dualistic pride and fear behind the sin – and it is behind our inability to do anything but sit in paralyzed fear of the world around us. One thing is for certain – we can't make any kind of headway in the Kingdom if our constant focus is the world and all the terrible things they must be constantly doing behind the scenes – especially if a lot, or even just a little, of it is just the product of our imagination spurred on by those who are out to make a quick buck, create outrage, and further their own agendas – which we actually should be questioning. After all, if we are so

suspicious of X that we will believe anything that Y says, it doesn't make us particularly well-informed, it just makes us useful to God only knows who, hidden safely and anonymously behind the scenes and hidden behind some computer screen. People we don't know, but whom we place our blind trust in – simply because they appear to be the enemy of those whom we believe are our enemies.

We are the Body of Messiah: worshippers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Who exactly have we been trusting blindly?

Praising Yeshua: Why We Need the Heir to the Kingdom

King
Kingdom
Citizen

His Reign and Our Identity
From the Ancient Near Eastern
And First Century Perspective

Tyler Dawn Rosenquist

There is a disturbing tendency that has come out of some facets of Messianic Judaism and the Hebrew Roots Movement to label any praise of Yeshua/Jesus as a sin – and yet few people know that has its source, not in the Bible, which clearly presents two divine figures in Daniel 7 to sit on the two thrones mentioned in verse 9 (the great Rabbi Akiva, post Yeshua, even mentioned it). But this devastating doctrine is a trap laid by the Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages, not to convert gentiles, but to prevent Jews from believing in Yeshua as Messiah – as though Judaism had always agreed uniformly on these principles. In the 12th century, Maimonides (RAMBAM) wrote the famous 13 articles of faith that *modern Judaism* is founded on, and it is easy to see that they were written as a response to a Christianity that was increasingly hostile

towards Judaism, shamefully so. The way these were written up makes charges of idolatry inevitable (yet without merit) when we praise and even worship Yeshua – but, the idea that we are bound by the writings of RAMBAM, regardless of his brilliance (I greatly value his insights into the Mishnah), is misguided. RAMBAM was reacting to a clear and present danger, and we cannot blame him for it – what was being done to Jews in the Name of their Messiah was clearly not of the character of God and it is no wonder they could not see their King. In this chapter from my book [King, Kingdom, Citizen: His Reign and Our Identity](#), I tackle the faulty doctrine of not being permitted to praise Yeshua head on, of it being enough to simply acknowledge the Father. For a while, I followed that doctrine, and the anti-missionaries (people who used to believe in Yeshua and who have denied him or Jews who actively try and keep other Jews from coming to their Messiah) almost nabbed me four years ago by approaching me through the underhanded schemes of someone who presented himself as a friend. Refusing to acknowledge Messiah as my Lord and Master was an unwittingly treacherous step towards denying Him altogether – quite ungracious when I consider His sacrifice on our behalf.

Bottom line: Yeshua is the absolute image of God on earth. When we look at Him we see the Father, and I for one am not capable of looking at the image of the Father and not falling to my knees in devotion. If a human saved my life, I would certainly praise him (I just wouldn't worship him), but when the divine son of God saves the lives of all the world who look to Him – I have to do more than praise Him. Literally no amount of praise is enough. Yeshua only did whatever He saw the Father doing, and so I have to respond to that with worship – because in so doing, I also heap even more worship and honor on His Father. Make no mistake, how we treat someone's son is how we are treating them, and we cannot fool ourselves into thinking we can all but ignore Messiah, withhold the honors due to Him, and be pleasing to God.

Why Do We Need the Heir?

The Father is Spirit, unseen, [\[1\]](#) and does not directly interact with humanity in human form. He is the great Suzerain in the Heavens and He has always interacted with His people through the Word. Through Scripture, we see the Word made manifest as the Angel of the LORD or YHVH who spoke with Moses face to face; but most recently and profoundly, we see the Word made flesh as Yeshua ben Joseph. We need Him. The Kingdom of Heaven *needs* a flesh and blood monarch, an heir to the Kingdom of God; we have already proven that in the absence of physical, godly leadership we are easily corrupted.

That's fine, you may say – but why do we need to acknowledge Him now? Isn't it enough to just worship God the Father? Why is it important to understand the concepts of King and Kingdom and to recognize the legitimate Heir? In summary of the first three sections and giving a short introduction for the fourth:

Messiah was born into a pre-existing Kingdom; He did not have to die and resurrect to create a new one. This Kingdom was not the Kingdom of the Jews but the Kingdom of God and it had been closed off – made exclusive. Contrary to Torah law, the House of Shammai Pharisees made it virtually impossible not only for the lost tribes of Israel to return from exile and divorce, but also for the Gentile Nations to enter in.

Matthew 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees (of the House of Shammai), hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”

That's why it was so important for the Heir to the Kingdom to show up and “lay down the law,” so to speak. Preaching on behalf of the Father, and using only His Father's words, Yeshua deflated the importance of the traditions of the elders (now found recorded in the Talmud) and elevated the original laws of the Kingdom. He promoted His Father as the great King

who alone had the right to determine the rules and regulations, the legal Constitutional requirements placed upon the citizens of His own Kingdom. By upholding His Father's ways, by showing Himself to be righteous and just towards the poor, sick, widows, orphans and oppressed, through signs and wonders, and through a renewal of the original Kingdom Covenant by His own blood ratification, He proved that He was indeed the Son of the Father. Yeshua, through His words and actions, showed us the character of His Father, the Great King. When we look at His character and say, "I do not recognize YHVH in the works of Yeshua," we are refusing to acknowledge the most excellent character of our King.

Yeshua was more than a prophet, He was a living, breathing, dare – "Tell me that you know My Father and do not see Him in my every righteous action! If you don't recognize Him when you see Me, then you do not know Him – we are One."

*John 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

Why can't we have the Father without the Son?

*John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.**"*

Why can't we be in good standing in the Kingdom of God without recognizing the Son? When we refuse to acknowledge the Son, not only are we failing to recognize the righteousness and justice of our King, but we are refusing to recognize His Heir to the kingdoms of the world. If I were a righteous Queen, and I sent my son out among my own people to represent me – and if he was a good and righteous man, if no fault could be found with him, if there was no sin (violation of my kingdom laws) to be found in him, if he not only upheld my every law but also taught others to follow them, if he restored the original intentions of my laws, if he railed against those who set up

their own laws and illegitimate kingdoms within my kingdom, if he showed my character by having mercy upon the “least of these” ... and if you turned around and said that you “didn’t see the resemblance” then it would not matter what you did – there would be no intimacy between us. You would be insulting me. If you claimed to know me, and to represent me, but you didn’t know me well enough to see me in my own son – then although you might live without going to jail because you kept my laws and were otherwise a good citizen, you would have no part in his coming reign.

Yeshua’s coming reign is a big deal; His reign is about eternal life here on earth.

When someone rejects Messiah, even if they keep the laws and live a blessed life because of it (because obedience to the laws of a kingdom will always result in blessing, it’s just simple logic), they will have no part in the Kingdom when it passes into His hands.

Rev 11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Messiah, coming in the mercy of the Father, reopened the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven to all those from around the world who would recognize the heir and desire to live as good citizens in His Kingdom. This was the original intent at Sinai, “one law for all, the native and the foreigner.”

Ex 12:49 There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.” (see also Lev 24:22 You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the LORD your God.)

The world was meant to see the righteousness and justice of God, His mercy and kindness, through those laws that were so different from the laws of men – the world was meant to desire

to live under those laws, to recognize the wisdom of the citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Deut 4:6-8 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

The pagan nations were supposed to look at their own laws and see how burdensome they were, how unrighteous and unjust – and by extension how lacking their own gods were. Israel was meant to be a light – attracting the world to the King of kings. But they hid that light under a bushel basket, and they greedily kept it for themselves. Messiah came to change that. He is the light; He is the perfect representation of the perfection of the Father and of His goodness and justice and righteousness.

Matt 5:15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

We were created to desire that righteousness, but we were trained by the world to resent it. We were meant to desire His rule, but we were taught to fear it. We have been conditioned to want a King who has no ability to rule us – but a King without laws is a King without dominion, authority, or power. From the beginning, God has been looking for good citizens for His Kingdom so that it can shine like a gleaming city on a hill. We owe it to Him to draw people to His righteousness by exemplifying who He is, by following the example of the Son.

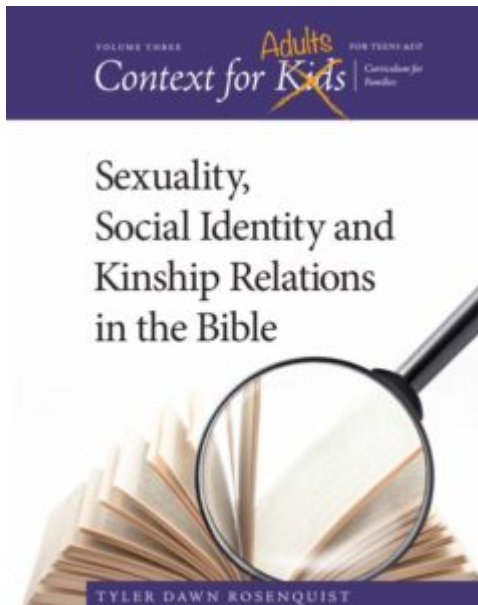
We owe it to Him to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven – not in the future, but now – establishing His dominion across the face of the earth. This was the original plan in the

Garden, renewed again at Mt Sinai with the blood of animals, and then finalized with the righteous blood of Yeshua.

We all owe Him everything, but in the first century, something very serious was happening that kept some from giving Him anything at all. We see glimpses of this problem in the gospels, and we see Paul fighting it tooth and nail in the epistles. Between the return of the Jews from exile and the ministry of Yeshua, something had gone terribly wrong. That something was preventing people from entering into the Kingdom of Heaven, and if we don't understand what that was, we will never fully understand what Yeshua came to fulfill or what Paul was writing to the assemblies about.

[\[1\]](#) John 1:18; Col 1:15; I John 4:12, etc.

**Now Available! Context for
Adults: Sexuality, Social
Identity and Kinship
Relations in the Bible**



Although it still falls under the umbrella of the “Context for Kids” curriculum series, this book ain’t for kids. I recommend it for older teens and up, but only with parental guidance. The first ten and last five chapters are G-rated and very valuable for any age group, and probably the most important material that I teach – on the ancient group social identity that, in and of itself, unravels many mysteries in the behavior of Bible

people. The chapters on the inside, however, are a real mixed bag – not much different than the Bible itself. Like all my books, this is for families to go through together, as appropriate, and never to be simply handed to kids.

What is this book about? Well, this is the book I wish I had available for me – the book that explains, from the ancient Near Eastern perspective, the sections of Scripture that make the Bible so hard to defend and support – not only to our kids, but also to our unbelieving friends and relatives. Marrying a rapist? Marrying female POW’s? Why are terrible subjects like bestiality, and incest even mentioned? Why did Peter refer to Lot as righteous?

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Although these subjects seem strange to us, they were not strange in the ancient world that served as the context of the everyday lives of the Exodus generation. Some questions, like the marrying of a “rapist”, boil down to bad translations – but others are related to the ancient notion of what righteousness means, what behaviors were the norm in the outside world, and what it meant to be part of a group, instead of an individualistic, social dynamic. God was creating a new paradigm in a world driven mad with sin. Living in the aftermath of the Resurrection, we really have no

appreciation for how bad things truly were before Messiah changed everything.

I am going to take you into the world of group-centered dynamics where you will learn a form of kinship relations that is foreign to the western world. I will introduce you to the horrifying realities of the laws of the ancient Near East. Life for the Patriarchs was akin to walking through a minefield of depravity and injustice, the likes of which we can barely imagine – but in order to understand and defend God's laws, and answer the tough questions, the really good questions, we really need to know what the Biblical authors knew. It isn't enough to shrug and say, "Well, I just know that God is good" when our lack of context makes Him look bad to the very people we were commanded to reach with His love. Remember – without a concrete salvation experience, we cannot simply expect people to ignore the stuff about the Bible that sometimes seems insanely disturbing. Compassion should compel us to seek out better answers – for unbelievers, our kids, and ourselves.

So, if you are tired of shrugging and saying, "Well, I just know that God is good," I hope you will allow me to illuminate many of the Bible's most uncomfortable subjects.

From the back cover:

Are you tired of being asked tough questions, both by kids and skeptics, about some of the terrible things in the Bible? Are you tired of not having real answers? Don't you wish you understood why Bible people sometimes did terrible things?

No one is satisfied with pat answers like, "Well, I know God is good," or "Jesus came to change all that." If we truly believe that God is good and that Jesus is the exact image of the Father, then those answers won't satisfy us – much less anyone else.

What if I told you that we can learn the answers to the hard

questions by studying ancient Near Eastern law codes and sociology?

What if I told you that Western Christianity fundamentally misunderstands the meaning of words like righteous and has misconstrued concepts like kinship? What would you say if I told you that the ancients' concept of family, loyalty, honor, shame, and community was completely different than ours is today?

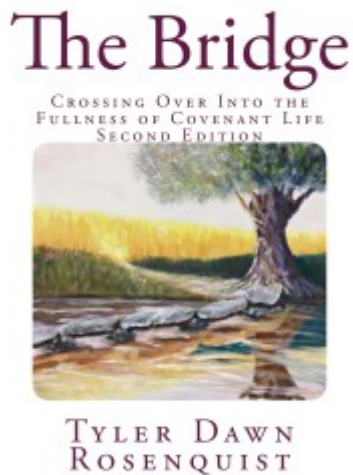
What if, by understanding these ancient beliefs, you could provide concrete answers instead of platitudes to people's questions? And what if by doing so you could offer hope and the reassurance that God is loving and good?

When people ask what kind of God would allow slavery, require women to marry their "rapists," or tell parents to stone their children, wouldn't you like to clear up their misconceptions instead of sidestepping the issues? Good questions deserve real answers, and that's why I am here.

As I have explored [Honor and Shame culture](#) and [ancient covenants](#) in previous volumes, this curriculum will be dedicated to the subjects of ancient law, social identity, and kinship relations. This information is going to change forever the way you read your Bible. What you learn here will equip you to answer those "skeptics" whose only real crime is that they are honest about some of the situations in the Bible that are, or seem to be, very disturbing.

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The Bridge – ****FREE CHRISTIAN BOOK**** for the next 5 days 7/25-29, 2017



All of the instructions (I have over 5000 successful downloads of the first edition based on them and I lost count on the new) and all the links work. Everything you need is here – I even added a picture into the instructions. Please read them as I will not be available for questions.

No Kindle required – all you need is any online device – PC, Mac or android!! Read all the instructions, the links are in blue. PLEASE read all the directions as I will not be able to help you beyond that. Absolutely everything you need is here.

If the country you live in has an amazon platform, this will still be free for you, but my links will only work in America. Just do a search for my name – Tyler Dawn Rosenquist – and you will hopefully see the book listed.

So what is The Bridge? The Bridge is a book that spans the gap between 1st and 21st century Christianity, sending the reader back in time to the faith once delivered to our fathers, so that we can understand what they understood, and see the Kingdom as more of a family instead of a religion. If you ever wanted to explain to anyone, in very simple and non-threatening terms, why you believe what you believe – this will help you. Why does God describe Himself as Father, King, Master, Husband? Why does He call us to become a child,

ambassador, bondservant, and bride? What do those relationships teach us about His promises and expectations?

The Bridge: Crossing Over Into the Fullness of Covenant Life is a book designed to explore those relationships and restore you to the path that leads to the intimacy that we were always meant to have with our Father. I have revamped much of the book, especially the last half, adding in 20,000 words that reflect better research into the ancient Near Eastern and First Century context of many issues – and, my original reason for the rewrite, I removed some popular urban legends that I took for truth – I simply had not verified because so many people were teaching them and besides that, I had an agenda and really wanted to believe them.

If you want the book for free:

1. If you don't already have it, and you already have a kindle or the free app, just get it free [here](#) or do a search if you are from another country on your respective amazon platform.

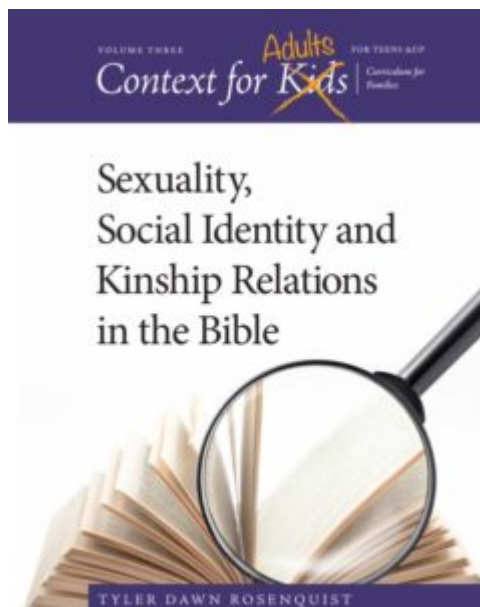


Hit the “Buy it now with 1-click” before Saturday 7/29 at midnight PST.

2. If you don't have a kindle, download this app first on [PC](#), [Mac](#), or [android](#). When that is done, download the [book](#), but make sure you do it before midnight PST on July 29, 2017.

You can also buy it in paperback [here](#) if you are like me and hate reading things on Kindle.

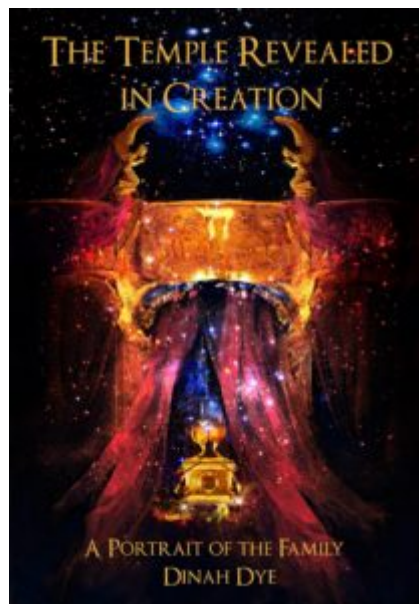
You can help me by getting the word out about the free offer, and once you have read it, I would appreciate reviews. If you like The Bridge, then check out the sequel, written from the Ancient Near Eastern and First Century Perspective – [**King, Kingdom, Citizen: His Reign and Our Identity**](#), which proves our rights to Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven through Messiah. You can also check out my family curriculum series [**Context for Kids, Vol I: Honor and Shame in the Bible**](#) and [**Volume II: Ten Commandments and the Covenants of Promise**](#) – I believe in teaching children the same things I teach adults, within reason, I don't dumb it down, I just teach it more slowly. I've had kids from 7 to 62 go through Volume I with no problems, and a University professor as well (Volume II is



better suited for 10 and up). If you haven't caught my weekly youtube teachings for kids, check out my **Context for Kids youtube channel** linked on the sidebar – last year took the kids on an archaeological journey through the ancient Near Eastern context of Scripture from Genesis through Deuteronomy and started teaching New Testament Backgrounds during the winter. **Coming soon** will be **Context for Adults: Sexuality and**

Social Identity in the Bible – covering a lot of those really uncomfortable Bible questions that both seekers and children will probably ask you about at one point or another, but you really wish they wouldn't.

Excerpt from The Temple Revealed in Creation: A Portrait of the Family



When I talk to people about Dr. Dinah Dye's first book, they invariably heap praise upon the Midrashic sections. Midrashic literature is a classically Jewish form of writing, creating "what if" stories that fill in the blanks within the Scripture narrative. It is easy to forget that Bible characters were not characters but instead historical figures, aka real flesh and blood people. Midrash brings life to these people, long dead, through creative storytelling that

is not meant to replace the Bible, or stand on equal par with it, but to bring color to it. Most people are familiar with the "Book of Jasher" aka Sefer haYasher, written in 1552 in France – that is a classic example of Midrashic fiction (not to be confused with the actual lost book mentioned in the Bible, one of many texts referred to that we no longer have). Dinah is about halfway through writing Volume 2 – The Temple Revealed in the Garden. I am telling you, you are really going to want it. The detail she is going into about the Tabernacle/Temple is just phenomenal – not in a dry, scientific way but by placing you in that environment. Believe me, Dinah has a gift for making you see, feel, hear, smell and taste everything. Like I always tell her, she's an artist!

Dinah's website is www.foundationsintorah.com if you would like to formally study with her and take advantage of over 30 years of serious research. If you want to order her book, here is the [link](#)

PROLOGUE

In the fifteenth day of the seventh month you are to have a holy convocation...you are to observe a feast to Adonai seven days...in addition to the regular burnt offerings with its grain and drink offerings (Num. 29.12,16).

Darkness crept over the city of Jerusalem. The moon appeared above the horizon casting its silvery glow on the stone walls of the Temple buildings. It glimmered across the cold pavement of the Court of the Women where a large crowd had gathered. It was the last night of *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles), and the excitement was palpable.

As the light from the moon intensified, four young priests-in-training, called "the flowers of Priesthood," climbed up four ladders which were propped against four large lamp stands that stood in the Women's Court. The young priests steadily scaled the ladders so as not to spill a drop of the pressed olive oil they carried in open pitchers. The olive oil was the fuel source for the great lamps. Once the young priests reached the large vats that were mounted on the lamp stands, they quickly poured the oil to light both the outer and inner lamps. Wicks for the outer lamps were made from the old trousers of the priests; wicks for the inner lamps were made from the trousers of the high priest himself. Once the wicks were lit, the night was ablaze; every corner and courtyard of Jerusalem was illuminated as though it were noonday.

The mood of the crowd was electric. The atmosphere in the Court of the Women had been supernaturally transformed. The

men held burning torches and danced with reverent jubilation while Levitical priests played musical instruments with great exuberance and passion. The great scholars and sages of Israel were among those who had gathered in the courtyard. These men were well-known not only for their scholarship but also for their piety and character. Yet they participated joyfully in the celebration with hand clapping, foot stomping, and enthusiastic singing. An audible gasp rose from the crowd as *Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel* juggled eight torches at the same time without dropping even one. The men danced like King David danced before the Ark of the Covenant—leaping and spinning and whirling before the Lord.

Meanwhile, women and children who came to Jerusalem for the feast sat in the specially constructed raised balconies that lined the edge of the courtyard. As the women chatted together in barely audible tones, the children fidgeted impatiently in their seats and tried to suppress giggles as they watched their fathers dance and sing. Without warning, the crowd below erupted with shouts of, "Halleluyah! Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the heights. Praise Him sun and moon; praise Him all bright stars. Praise Him the most exalted of the heavens and the waters that are above the heavens!" The chant from the crowd was followed by the sweet, melodious sounds of harps and lyres which echoed far and wide throughout the deep canyons surrounding Jerusalem. Every now and then, a quick blast from a ram's horn pierced the night. Tambourines and flutes, along with the occasional loud clash of cymbals, added to the drama.

In front of the bronze doors of the Nicanor Gate, and above the semi-circular stone stairway, the Levitical choir took their places on the platform. It was not unusual for them to sing from this elevated place; the choir sang from this spot

when they accompanied the regular morning and evening offerings. But tonight was special. Tonight, they sang the fifteen Songs of Ascent with intensified emotion in anticipation of the *Simcha Beit HaShoevah* (Rejoicing in the House of the Water Drawing). "I raise my eyes to the hills; where does my help come from? My help is from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth," reverberated throughout the Temple complex.

After a long night of celebration, the first rays of the morning sun appeared in the eastern sky over the hills of Hebron. Though some had fallen asleep, many of the celebrants, now near exhaustion, continued dancing and singing. They were eager for the water drawing portion of the ceremony. A clear, high-pitched call from the Temple crier rang throughout the Temple precincts signaling the men of Israel, the Priests, and the Levites to prepare for the day's services.

Meanwhile, at the entrance to the Nicanor Gate, two young priests blew silver trumpets. Anticipation grew. The two priests moved slowly and deliberately down the semi-circular steps. When they reached the tenth step, they stopped and blew the trumpets again. Once they reached the stone floor of the women's courtyard, they paused and blew the trumpets before crossing the pavement to the eastern gate. With the last blast, the crowd made their way onto the Temple Mount. Before making their descent to the Pool of *Shiloach* (Siloam), the worshippers pressed forward slightly then stopped abruptly. They turned back in unison to face the Holy Sanctuary. By this act, the crowd declared their worship of G-d in His throne room, the Holy of Holies, which was towards the west. Their forefathers had faced east, towards the sun, to worship.

They continued down from the Temple Mount, passing through the Huldah Gates to the underground twin passageway of the Double Gate with its unique Herodian features. Some in the crowd glanced up momentarily to appreciate the fine, decorative dome ceiling that had been meticulously carved in stone. Meanwhile, the high priest quickly passed through the Water Gate, so named for this ceremony, in order to join the crowd as they descended to the Pool of *Shiloach*. The night had indeed been a joyous one, but now their joy would increase as the worshippers witnessed the double ritual of the drawing of water from the pool and the pouring out of water on the great altar. Today's ceremony at the pool was particularly significant as the high priest himself would be the one to draw the water.

As the high priest made his way down the broad steps of the plaza into the cool waters of the pool of *Shiloach*, the worshippers closed ranks behind him. Between the enormous Herodian columns, the crowd squeezed in tightly—each one eager for a better view. The Pool of *Shiloach* was uniquely situated in the shadow of the Holy Temple, and it received its water from the Gihon Spring: the water supply for the city of Jerusalem. A channel constructed along the eastern slope of the City of David had originally been built to irrigate King Solomon's garden. Later, however, King Hezekiah constructed a channel through solid rock—diverting the water inside the city walls in order to protect the vulnerable supply from foreign invaders. Now the pool, which had formed from the water in the channel, was the site of one of Israel's most important rituals: the water drawing.

The golden flask carried by the high priest shimmered in the

early morning sunlight. As he scooped up the half-liter of pure water from the pool, the crowd nodded its collective approval and cheered loudly with delight. The multitudes then turned and followed the high priest back up the well-worn path to the Temple Mount; it was now time for the second part of the ritual that coincided with the daily morning offerings.

All the while they sang the fifteen Songs of Ascent, "...I was glad when they said to me, The House of Adonai! Let's go! Our feet were already standing at your gates, Jerusalem."

As the boisterous crowd re-entered the Temple precincts, passing again through the Water Gate, the priests standing on the steps began blowing the silver trumpets. The worshippers responded enthusiastically: "Therefore with joy shall you draw waters from the wells of salvation!" They followed closely behind the high priest as he entered the inner courtyard and ascended the large stone ramp of the great altar. He made his way to the altar where two attached silver bowls served as receptacles for the water libation as well as for wine from the morning offering.—

Before pouring out the water, the high priest held up the golden flask for the entire crowd to see. It seemed a Sadducean priest who opposed the entire ceremony had recently poured the ceremonial water onto his feet instead of into the silver bowl for which it was meant. The crowd reacted strongly to this act of contempt, and they pelted the offending priest with their *etrogim* (large lemon-like fruit).

On this day, however, the high priest poured out the portion of water in an attitude of thanksgiving—with gratitude to G-d for sending His Spirit to bring salvation and for providing rain to the crops and blessings to the nation.

One veteran priest who served as assistant to the high priest had also made his way up the ramp to the location of the bowls. He carried with him a silver vessel containing the wine for the daily libation. In perfect unison, the high priest and his assistant poured their libations into the two silver bowls. The bowl positioned eastward was for the wine while the bowl positioned westward was for the water. Since wine is somewhat thicker than water, the hole in the bottom of the east-facing bowl was marginally larger allowing water and wine to flow together.

From the bowl, the wine ran down into a special vat underneath the altar. Every seventy years, young priests would descend to this vat to collect the congealed wine which by then resembled dried rounds of pressed figs. The water, on the other hand, flowed through perpendicular shafts called "*shitin*" to an underground channel that joined the brook *Kidron*. From there, the water flowed into the *Gihon* River and down the valley to complete the cycle. According to the sages, the portion drawn from the *Shiloach* was returning to the waters of the *Gihon* Spring, called the fountain of living waters, and so back to the waters of creation. Legend told that in order to bring each country its power and assortment of fruit these shafts routed the water through a subterranean network of canals that issued from underneath the Temple Mount.

Once the water and the wine disappeared from view, the crowd let out a prolonged shout of *Hoshanna* (save us). With that, the official ceremony was over. Now they waited for the rains to come and water the crops—blessing the whole House of Israel with a bountiful final harvest.

Judgment in the Third Heaven: My Testimony



This is a story I rarely share but my friend Dinah encouraged me to a while back, and in the interest of keeping the leaven out of our homes this week I am going to go ahead and share it here. This is not a complimentary story about me –

it doesn't make me special; I think it happened was because I was such a desperate case and such a dangerous person – and yet, God still had a plan for my life.

(FYI: It took me forever to come up with a title to this and I am still not happy with it – it sounds pretentious but if you keep reading you will understand why I have no reason to be proud of what happened)

I was living in a small town in New Mexico in 2008 – my kids were in first grade, and it was Fall – I remember because I was in the backyard raking leaves. I had, a few months earlier, prayed the kind of prayer that only insane people pray, “Lord Jesus, judge me in this life while I still have time to change.”

I meant that prayer with all my heart. I was an angry, wounded, hot mess of a person. I distrusted God, loved Jesus, and saw no way around that inherent conflict – but although I distrusted God, I desperately wanted Him to love me. I won't go into the reasons why I felt that way about Him. There are too many, and that isn't the point.

I was a racist, and my specific brand of racism was on full alert living in a town that was largely illegal aliens and their children and grandchildren. It was also helped along by

the fact that, in that town, it was a definite two-way street with all too many people.

But I also didn't know anything about how to be a loving person – I knew how to be a critical, unpleasable person. I knew how to justify my harshness as the “truth spoken in love.” In short, I was an expert at coming up with reasons why everything I did and thought was really okay, and those justifications went up quickly, and without a thought every time the Holy Spirit approached me about what I was actually doing.

I was the most dangerous kind of believer – I was incredibly intelligent, well-read, zealous beyond belief, confident in what I was doing and in my “anointing” – but on the inside, I was as much of a murderer as Paul ever was. I would tear a person who disagreed with me down without so much as a look backward. The problem was this – I was also having dreams about being surrounded by children, and during those moments when my guard was down, the Spirit was urgently impressing upon me that I was in no way prepared to be the kind of person whom children would need.

That's the easy part of the story to tell – the part no one has any trouble believing. That actually isn't embarrassing anymore to talk about – what God had to do to me to get me to begin to change is why I am crying right now.

Like I said – I was raking leaves. Then all of a sudden I wasn't in my backyard anymore. I guess maybe I was in what Paul called the “third heaven” – I don't know. To be honest, I didn't look around, I was aware of the Shekinah enthroned in front of me, and a man standing to my left, wearing white. I never saw His face; I never looked up. No one ever spoke at all. When you are being judged, you don't notice much of anything else. You just can't. Or at least I couldn't.

There is a verse about being judged by every careless word and another which explains that the Word judges the thoughts and intentions of our heart.

I want you to imagine every terrible thing you have ever thought and said – not the things you knew were wrong and repented of, but the things you quickly made excuses for and lied to yourself about – the things you did to hurt people because you wanted to be hurtful, you wanted them to know you were a better believer, or superior; think about the real intentions and hidden motivations in your words and actions that you lied to yourself about, and lied about so often that you actually began to believe your own lies. Those lies that worked to protect you from the truth about how cruel you really were and even intended to be – truths that hurt so bad that you dare not face one at a time, let alone all of them at once.

No one, and especially not me, ever said a word. I was in agony that I cannot describe. We are used to our own egos coming to our rescue when we behave in evil ways – those defense mechanisms pop up before we know it and they are so deft at deceiving us that we rarely even get a twinge to our conscience after a while. We want the lies, not the truth. It is easy to say otherwise before you stand before God to face them all at once.

I realize now that I was taken there, not because I deserved a glimpse of the throne room of God, but because that was the only place where my ego would stand down. In the presence of pure light and truth, not only was my physical mouth shut – but so was my internal voice. I had no defense attorney in that room – I was exposed completely with no ability to justify anything. What I became aware of was the truth about everything I had ever said or thought or did – and the truth about why I said and thought and did those things. You just can't imagine seeing yourself for who you really are.

Funny – to be in the room with Father and Son and not to hear their voices, or condemnation. No instruction, no revelation of doctrine, no corrections to what I already believed. No calendars, no Names, no challenges about what I was eating or doing on my Saturdays. Everything was about my character, which was very, very bad. That was the reason I was there – evidently, that was my most important issue – the biggest

problem.

I am still shocked that I was able to stand, but sometimes I wonder if I was just frozen in place. I don't know; all I was aware of was the agony of seeing myself as I was, with no respite and nowhere to hide. I don't know how long it took – eternity is just different. What I became increasingly aware of as it went on was that Father and Son were not there to condemn me but to expose and support me. I started to realize that if they were not there, I probably would have died from the strain. I cannot even begin to relate how horrible it is to see yourself without the self-deceptive and protective filter of ego.

When it was over, I was back in my backyard – rake in hand as if nothing had ever happened. I was ashamed – in some ways I felt very empty, and in other ways, I felt very full. As I recall, it was actually a week or two before my ego tried to kick back in and start lying to me again – but it has never been nearly as successful as it used to be. Ego gets stronger when I am angry, hurt or have been betrayed – but my success at deceiving myself has been hampered – when I am acting like a jerk, I am generally keenly aware of it and have to force myself to believe otherwise – self-deception is no longer effortless. I am constantly faced with my shortcomings.

No, I can't tell you what color Messiah is, I saw hands, but it wasn't like that – color like we think of it. White but certainly not white, and yet, white. I never lifted my eyes past the hands. No, I didn't see nail holes either – just hands from the side view where they wouldn't be visible anyway. I was aware of much but saw little; the experience was too overwhelming and terrible. It was also the best thing that ever happened to me. Drastically bad character requires drastic measures from God. I had a calling to work with children – that's why I prayed that prayer in the first place – I knew I wasn't ready. Ministering to adults is bad enough, but with kids, there is no room to be in the flesh all the time.

I hate sharing this because someone might think I am bragging

– but believe me, this was not like any of the throne room trips of the prophets. I wasn't hearing the secret counsel of God or seeing the glorious things there. I didn't eat a covenant meal or hear His voice or listen to the Angels singing. I didn't deserve any of that. In very human terms, I was taken to the principal's office and stripped of my unearned false pride, deprived of every excuse and any pretense of – it's still hard to explain. When I returned, it was without a shred of faith in myself. I have never trusted myself since that day, and that's why I am constantly questioning myself – especially when I feel like I am in the right. Most people have no clue the depths of self-deception they are capable of – but that knowledge was God's gift to me. It is an undeniable truth. The awareness goes deeper with each passing year – what I faced in the throne room was just the correction, it wasn't the end. It spurs me on to be more like Him because remaining the way I am is just too painful to contemplate.

Guest Blog: You're In God's Army Now!



So, my second official Guest Blog, I hope you are as excited about it as I am. About a month or so ago, I got this awesome idea of comparing the concept of being the image-bearers of God to the real life context of how soldiers represent their country. I just had a small problem – I have never been in

the military and would be forced to fake an article, which I was not willing to do. Fortunately, I have this amazing

colleague who actually is military, and who studies with the Wisdom in Torah Talmidim teachers – so when I told him that I wanted and asked politely (begged might be more accurate), he said yes! So, without further ado – here is Matt Nappier of Beit Shalom congregation in Monroe, La.

I often like to take inventory of my personal space and the interactions around my small slice of this world to see God wherever it is I happen to find myself. Over time and as I've grown, like all of us, I've found Him within many different experiences. When my wife and I decided to start a farm, our sole focus in the beginning, and hopefully still, was to learn to see God in a deeper way through His creation, digging our hands into the most basic aspect of it. Before that, we became parents, and our prayer was that God would not only show to us how to be great parents but also reveal to us a deeper understanding of Him as Father. Going even further back, as we were married, our prayer was that God not only would teach us to be fruitful spouses to each other but also that he would guide us in showing the world that relationship He desires to have with all of creation.

One other identity I hold is that of an Army soldier over the last 15 years. Having just graduated from another leadership course, I find myself also looking for God in those experiences. As the Army has trained me over the years to be a leader within its ranks, I have prayed God that God will continue to show me how to use those tools to be a leader within the ranks of His Kingdom on earth. While I was away, one emerging area of contemplation for me has been that of the ancient concept of humans as the image-bearers of God; as a result, a physical picture of what that means has presented itself, as so many other times, in the experiences around me.

I'd like to offer somewhat of an analogy, a physical comparison of something we may relate to today to help

illustrate what it means to be the image-bearers of God on earth. I'd like to paint this picture through the palette of my career in the US Army. Let me be clear that I'm not suggesting that the Army of the United States is a good or equal comparison to God's Kingdom and reiterate that this is simply an analogy in the physical world around us.

Although my focus for this comparison is our current worldview and responsibilities as image-bearers in the Kingdom of God here on earth, carrying the identity we have through Yeshua (Jesus) our Messiah, it wouldn't be correct if I failed to mention the original image-bearers of God – Adam and Eve.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

-Genesis 1:26-27

At the very inception of our existence as human beings, the intention was that we should be the image-bearers of God. Often, we overlook the middle section of those verses that states our image-bearing is in relation to the dominion of the world, bringing God to all creation. Anglican bishop, professor, and theologian N.T. Wright explains that image as being like a mirror one looks into at an angle – seeing a reflection, not of themselves but another that is standing a few feet away. When creation looked to Adam and Eve, they should have been able to see God, but Adam and Eve corrupted that image. Since then, God has been working through His creation to restore the Creation Covenant made with us, humans, to restore us as His proper image-bearers on earth.

Fast forward to the first century, and we are given Yeshua, the incorruptible image of the invisible God, the One Who came to establish order and restore the image-bearers back to the

intended image. Through His restorative act of the resurrection, we are no longer captives to sin, nor are we slaves to bearing the burden and image of Egyptian captors, but are instead set free to walk out into the world bearing the true image of our God, King, and Creator. That freedom, however, comes with a heavy responsibility.

When a person joins the military, their very first action as a soldier, sailor, marine, or airman is to raise their right hand and swear to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies. We even call on God to help us do this, and this moment is always a very solemn one. I don't know many brothers or sisters in arms that don't remember that moment of raising their right hand. It's serious. There's a real task at hand, one that can very well include an enemy threat. As I assume anyone reading this would agree, the seriousness of the task we undertook by coming into Covenant and swearing allegiance to the Body of Messiah has often been diminished. Can you imagine the seriousness of God's oath to Abraham when it was promised that his offspring would be a blessing to all nations? Can you imagine the seriousness of the oath taken at the base of Mt. Sinai, which carried the expectation of being true image-bearers to the nations?

Once the oath is sworn, new recruits are then sent to Basic Training, the discipleship camp that transforms those who have never served into the image of a United States soldier. Through long hours of training and intense study of material, those who once only dreamed of what it looked like to be an Army soldier now embody the role. They've been given a uniform, taught how to stand and walk, and trained rigorously to be fit to fight. The great transformation occurs over a short nine weeks, and it's a remarkable change. Parents and loved ones often have trouble recognizing the new soldiers after they've completed those weeks. They've been transformed into the image that the Army desires.

These exterior changes, however, are not the important ones

nor are they the most significant. These changes are merely the simplest and easiest. We throw some clothes on them, give them a haircut, and workout with them for nine weeks; this only accomplishes the external, or physical, changes. The harder task is changing what can't be seen: what's inside the soldier. The greatest change is only evident when we can see that a person has fully embodied the intent of their Army training – to be instilled with the Army Core Values that motivates us not only to be soldiers who can not only win any war but also have the integrity to win that war honorably.

For those who haven't heard of the Army Core Values, they consist of Leadership, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These are the weightier matters of our service. That's quite a hefty list of characteristics, and so it is readily understandable that Basic Training can only be the beginning of this molding process. For many, it takes years to truly internalize these values, and for some, it never happens. Yet, this is the intent of the Army – to train soldiers that will fight and fight honorably.

The United States Army has been the leading army in the world for quite some time now, and when we think back on why, it's because we fight the honorable fight. Sure, we may have hiccups along the way, but overall, we have fought to restore justice and righteousness in the world. Being the strongest army isn't all that matters – being the strongest and most honorable is. Think of WWII when we saw the Nazis as enemies, a force that fought hard yet failed to overcome the prowess of the United States. Yet, their strength never matters to anyone today because the world looks back with almost universal disgust at the shameful acts committed. They may have had strength, but no honor.

The Body of Messiah should work in similar fashion. We should be taking new believers through Basic Training, explaining to them in a quick, efficient manner those things which we are

not to do at all. Our example is Acts 15 where we see new converts instructed to stop their overtly pagan practices, which was then supplemented with weekly training on how to walk out the task of becoming the image of God on earth. These quick changes, doing away with idolatry and the overt acts of worldliness, are akin to the uniform and haircut given within the first week at Basic Training. Yes, it changed our image a bit, but it wasn't a full transformation. Some may still look as weak and skinny as I did when I left for Basic Training. Others may still need to trim a little fat. Most importantly, they all need to continue to learn the values of how to take on the desired image honorably.

Every Sabbath, at our weekly training session, we should be learning more and more about what our new image in Messiah looks like and, following our Acts 15 example, that learning can and should come through the writings of Moses – the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. This is, functionally, the mission statement of our congregation, Beit Shalom Messianic Congregation. In our beginnings, we made a decision that, no matter what else was taught, the instructions of Moses would be read in our community every Sabbath. Therefore, every service opens with a reading of the entire weekly Torah portion. This corresponds to the training, the putting on of the uniform, and the resultant trimming down or bulking up.

In the Messianic or Hebrew Roots movement, we've taken this new uniform or realized that maybe we weren't given the full uniform when we became believers in Messiah. Those that led us in giving us a haircut and a brown t-shirt sometimes innocently left us sitting in the barracks. We weren't given the full picture of what it meant to walk in the image of God. Yet, in our current understanding, we've found the uniform and performed those nine weeks of training – only to forget that the original intent was to instill those unseen values within us that would allow us to become members of

God's Army fighting the enemies of His Constitution, the Torah, honorably.

We've taken these externals that are definitely part of the image of God, the uniform that anyone who sees us should know us by, and we've made that the end-all focus of our training as image-bearers. We've taken the easier things to change, tying on tzitziyot, taking some days off of work, and changing our diet; we implemented those while forgetting to tackle the tough, internal sins that serve to separate our character from God's character – as displayed in His love, righteousness, mercy, justice, and kindness.

In the Army, we judge those within our ranks to a harder degree, and this is done in the name of maintaining the proper image of an honorable institution. When soldiers get caught doing that which is dishonorable, things that go against the Army Core Values, they aren't allowed to remain in the ranks, and when we release them from the ranks, it's usually done in a manner that publicly shows what we expect in terms of honor.

However, if soldiers simply fail in maintaining the outward appearances, those physical changes that are easy to adjust, we help our brother or sister in arms make the necessary corrections. If we see a deficiency in a uniform, we make a simple on-the-spot correction, and we do so respectfully. We don't rip their uniform off and show everyone in the unit how they had missed a string on their pocket or had their boot laces out. If someone gains a little weight and can't pass the physical requirements, we put them on a program towards success and get them back in right standing, again, doing so respectfully.

I can see our flaws as a movement through these experiences – and how we can improve. We put on these uniforms, get a haircut, lost a little weight, and then we go around kicking in the doors of innocent people – poking our chests out as though wearing medals, yet having earned none. We've put on

the easy physical changes, but haven't embraced the deeper changes that come through painful refinement. I see our Core Values plainly laid out in the Scriptures, but are we working diligently to make sure those are our priorities in training?

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

-Genesis 18:19

We all know that Abraham was blessed for keeping the instructions of God, but Abraham's leadership, his installation as the progenitor (commander) of the Israelite people, is ascribed to his walking in righteousness and justice. He not only kept the instructions of God but kept them honorably. He took the full image of God, inside and out, and went train those others coming after him, the children and his household to do the same.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say

all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

-Matthew 5:3-12

Are we walking in the deeper image that was shown to us through the perfect image of God made manifest in the flesh? Are we seeking mercy, peace, and righteousness? Are we turning the other cheek when others mock us through the new 1st Century world of shame: Facebook and YouTube? Are we putting on the uniform and cutting our hair but forgetting to comfort those around us, humble ourselves, and serve as Yeshua taught us to serve?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

-Galatians 5:22-23

This list, given to us in Galatians, represents our Core Values. When people look at us, the covenant members of Israel and God's Army, do they see love, joy, and peace, or do they see a bunch of strife, bitterness, and hatred wrapped in the physical changes of tzitziyot, Sabbath, and Feast Days? I can't tell you how many times in the past I've been involved in arguments full of sarcasm and negative speech towards others on the Sabbath, and I see it going on every week around the world. Are people seeing us and seeing the image of a longsuffering God, or are they seeing short-sightedness that cuts people down if they don't immediately mold to the image of ourselves? Do people see kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness in our walks, or are they seeing harshness and rudeness towards those that don't agree with us? And finally, do they see the image of our God in self-control, or do they see people who can't control their tongues?

Have we become First Century Judaism, a sea of people trying to build others into the image of ourselves rather than the

image of God, not hesitating to cut down our brothers and sisters when they don't conform? Have we lost sight of the fact that we are supposed to be the image of a God who is abounding in mercy, goodness, graciousness, and longsuffering?

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

-Exodus 34:6-7

I want to share one more Core Value verse with you, one that has been a focus for me over the past year, one that God keeps bringing back to me.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord

-Hebrews 12:14

How do we present the image of the one true God to the world, being right and honorable image-bearers for His name's sake? – We pursue peace with all people, as well as holiness. We don't forsake those things that we realized we weren't taught, the holiness in our walk of Sabbath, Kosher, Feasts, Tassels, and more. We most definitely need those physical acts of holiness to point the world around us to the invisible God that desires an intimate relationship with all – but when we pursue holiness without peace, without walking out that holiness honorably, the world cannot and will not see the true image of God.

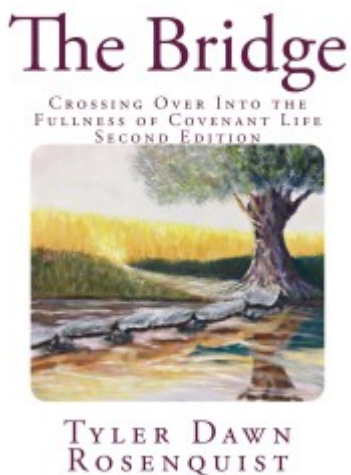
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So what is The Bridge? The Bridge is a book that spans the gap between 1st and 21st century Christianity, sending the reader back in time to the faith once delivered to our

fathers, so that we can understand what they understood, and see the Kingdom as more of a family instead of a religion. If you ever wanted to explain to anyone, in very simple and non-threatening terms, why you believe what you believe – this will help you. Why does God describe Himself as Father, King, Master, Husband? Why does He call us to become child, ambassador, bondservant, and bride? What do those relationships teach us about His promises and expectations? The Bridge: Crossing Over Into the Fullness of Covenant Life is a book designed to explore those relationships and restore you to the path that leads to the intimacy that we were always meant to have with our Father. I have revamped much of the book, especially the last half, adding in 20,000 words that reflect better research into the Ancient Near Eastern and First Century context of many issues – and, my original reason for the rewrite, I removed some popular urban legends that I took for truth – I simply had not verified because so many people were teaching them and besides that, I had an agenda and really wanted to believe them.

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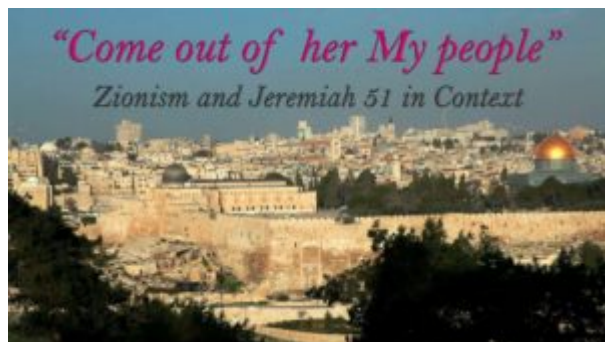
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You can help me by getting the word out about the free offer, and once you have read it, I would appreciate reviews. If you like The Bridge, then check out the sequel, written from the Ancient Near Eastern and First Century Perspective – [King, Kingdom, Citizen: His Reign and Our Identity](#), which proves our rights to Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven through Messiah. You can also check out my family curriculum series [Context for Kids, Vol I: Honor and Shame in the Bible](#) and [Volume II: Ten Commandments and the Covenants of Promise](#) – I believe in teaching children the same things I teach adults, within reason, I don't dumb it down, I just teach it more slowly. I've had kids from 7 to 62 go through Volume I with no problems, and a University professor as well (Volume II is better suited for 10 and up). If you haven't caught my weekly youtube teachings for kids, check out my [Context for Kids youtube channel](#) linked on the sidebar – last year took the kids on an archaeological journey through the Ancient Near Eastern context of Scripture from Genesis through Deuteronomy and started teaching New Testament Backgrounds last month. [Coming soon](#) will be [Context for Adults: Sexuality and Social Identity in the Bible](#) – covering a lot of those really uncomfortable Bible questions that both seekers and children will probably ask you about at one point or another, but you really wish they wouldn't.

“Come Out of Her My People” – Zionism and Jeremiah 51 in Context



Zionism: The national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty to the Land of Israel.

You know, we see from Scriptures that Babylon is not entirely bad. Before entering exile, the Jews were not monotheistic – they were henotheistic – worshiping many gods but acknowledging Adonai as the head of the pantheon, the top god. King David even had a teraphim in his bedroom that Michal placed in their bed to distract the soldiers (I Sam 19). It began after the death of Joshua and wasn't because they wanted to insult God – it's just an indication that we all read the Scriptures through our unique cultural context and assumptions. The entire world was non-exclusively polytheistic (meaning the multiple gods they served were not jealous) – henotheism was a step up from that, not having any gods BEFORE Adonai, just beneath Him. They saw Him as jealous, but not *that* jealous. We see that this was unacceptable to Adonai and the prophets repeatedly warned the people, and yet we see Adonai's patience. They really were trying to do what was right, but they weren't quite understanding. Every other pantheon had greater and lesser gods who controlled different cosmic functions – polytheism was just an indication that no one thought one god could do it all alone. Sometimes they had more gods and sometimes very few, who were worshiped alongside Adonai – until the exile.

Exile changed Judaism forever; it was a major correction. The Jews were engulfed into a truly polytheistic society and, because of this, they were allowed great religious freedom to worship Adonai. Horrified by what life was truly like in a society bereft of the One True God, they chose to worship Him exclusively, becoming enormously concerned with what the Scriptures said about acceptable worship, and that worship has remained exclusive to this day.

The original idea behind a vaccine is this: being infected with a controllable measure of a virus at a certain stage in its life cycle, and being able to suffer through it and overcome it naturally, builds the immune system to give immunity. The body learns what the disease looks like and learns how to deal with it. The early vaccines did that incredibly well. (Not an invitation to talk about vaccines, only the Bible). That was Babylon – God’s vaccine against idolatry. The Jews got a snootful of the real thing and the true lack of freedom that people have within it to be led by and obey God’s laws. As a result, the Judaism that emerged from Babylon was hyper anti-idolatrous. This hypersensitivity was a direct lead up to the Maccabean revolt – the Jews were wanting to die before going the path of betraying God ever again. A great many did die – they allowed themselves to be slaughtered instead of fighting on the Sabbath, they endured torture rather than eat idol meat, the mothers illegally circumcised their male babies only to die with them hung around their own necks.

Why was the command given, “Come out of her my people?” (Jer 51:41). Well, they had been sent to Babylon against their will – Nebuchadnezzar, a brutal and idolatrous man, was used as God’s own tool – His servant (Jer 27:6). But Nebuchadnezzar had gone too far; he had been too brutal, he enjoyed his job. God often uses the unrighteous to discipline His people, but woe to the man who enjoys doing it, who inflicts too much punishment and shows not enough mercy and refuses to give God His due respect afterward. When the discipline is done, what happens to the people who went too far? Who relished slaughtering the apple of God’s eye? They have to be judged

themselves! And they were – by Cyrus the Great, who destroyed Nebuchadnezzar's line. The Jews were warned to flee out of the way of the coming destruction – not from idolatry. Babylon was an incredibly comfortable place, the commercial center of the world – and they had religious freedom. There were some bumps along the way where kings were manipulated into actions that put the Jews in jeopardy, but all in all, the Jews were safe and cozy there, they were prosperous and influential – it was hard to contemplate leaving and in fact, at that point, they had nowhere to go, really, but this was a call to get ready to go. They were subjects of the Babylonian empire with no homeland of their own to legally return to yet – but that would change.

Cyrus II, the “Great” would change that, and they would be able to leave in the last half of the sixth century BCE, able to go back to a very hazardous Israel to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Those who did, faced hardship and death, a total loss of comfort and the status they had in the Empire. It was somewhat like the prospect of those who leave America and make Aliyah today. Israel is good, it is the Land of my King and always will be, but those who go are leaving a very safe and very easy way of life here in order to go to a place where living is expensive, jobs are hard to get unless you speak Hebrew as well as a native born, and the threat of being murdered by terrorists is very real.

Still, the call to “Come out of her” is spiritually always before us, not just the Jews. Are we willing to leave our ease and comfort to go where God is leading us, away from what we have always known? Following God is always difficult – it rarely takes us over well-tread paths, it is not comfortable, it comes at great cost to ourselves, and sometimes it is not safe. And yet, where is God? Is God calling us to live well-fed in our city, suburban or country homes, pleased with ourselves and our safe religious lives, or does he call us to turn our eyes away from all that ease when the time comes?

The Jews who did not “Come out of her,” who refused to go rebuild Jerusalem in 530 BCE, ended up being faced with slaughter at the hands of Haman around fifty years later

during the rule of Cyrus' grandson Xerxes I. It was only after this genocidal attempt that many more Jews made Aliyah under Artaxerxes – the king mentioned in the chronicles of Ezra and Nehemiah .

Sadly, it became popular within Christianity, during the Protestant/Catholic wars, to mischaracterize this call to "Come out of her" as a clarion call against "Babylonian" idolatry, but this isn't the context – in fact, Babylon's idolatry barely gets a mention in the entire chapter; when it does, it is in relation to their being shamed as part of God's overall vengeance. Furthermore, when the danger of idolatry is mentioned in the Bible, it is in connection with Egypt, Canaan, and Jeroboam. Babylon, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly referenced in respect to commerce, military might, and the luxury provided by the two. God didn't send Israel into exile to introduce them to idolatry, but to cure them of it and make them sick of it before they could rebuild the Temple as commanded in Haggai 1.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar the authority to subdue the people as well as the nations of the Earth, but he misused his power and was unspeakably cruel, as were his descendants. He amassed tremendous wealth – Babylon was probably the greatest commercial giant of the ancient world. Hence the head of the statue in his dream was made of solid gold. The wealth of the world was centered in Babylon, it was the merchant's equivalent of Mecca – and the whole world was drunk off of the luxury and profits – not the religion. After all, Babylon was simply one of a great many heathen nations – not unique in the ancient world. They were all entirely idolatrous, every single nation, and so Babylon was not unique in that way. Babylon's uniqueness lay in her military prowess and especially in her commercial dominance.

Babylon was sent to punish God's people and went overboard. Babylon destroyed the filth that had overtaken God's Temple and His city Jerusalem and went overboard. Once the seventy

years of wrath were completed, God had achieved His vengeance, as Jeremiah 51 clearly shows. Babylon dishonored God in every way, instead of honoring Him as they should – and when Nabonidus took the sacred Temple vessels and placed them into the hands of heathens to drink to the honor of the gods of silver and gold, that was the final straw. Jer 51:24 gives the final sentence against Babylon:

“I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done ****in Zion,**** declares the Lord.”

God’s honor was tied up in Zion – it still is. That’s why all the nations still fight over Jerusalem, why every nation seeks out a place for their god there. Islam, for example, sets up mosques over the holy ground of any other religious site they destroy – to shame defeated gods and, by extension, the people who worship them. Since the end of World War II and even long before, Zionists have been crying out “Come out of her my people” because they see now what too many Jews of Babylon did not understand: If the Jews had all returned to Israel in the time of the initial decree of Cyrus, then no one would have been able to harm them or subjugate them. There were enough Jews in the world at that point that their sheer numbers would have overwhelmed the Samaritans, they could have rebuilt the walls and Temple quickly, and they could have avoided much of the bloodshed under the later Seleucids.

“Come out of her my people.” It is a statement of reality – you can generally only be persecuted when you live in small pockets around the world – like the 1% of the pre-WWII German population whose passports were taken easily and whose voting rights and jobs were taken just as effortlessly. Of course, superior weaponry can change that – as we saw in Apartheid South-Africa where the minority terrorized the majority. In general, however, it holds true. As Gandhi taught the Indian people, there is strength in numbers, enough strength to drive out the oppressors.

“Come out of her my people.” Before WWII, in 1933, there were approximately 15.3 million Jews in the world, after WWII there

were roughly 9 million Jews in the world, with just over half living in the Americas. In 2014, there were 13.9 million Jews worldwide – 6.1 million of those living in Israel and 5.7 million living in America.

That's right – there are fewer Jews now than there were in 1933, and anti-Semitism is rising again. I don't blame them for not wanting to leave America, but I am increasingly wondering if they are supposed to go. We are the new commercial giant giving them religious freedom, we have made it comfortable to stay when they belong to the Land and the Land belongs to them. They need each other, the Land and the Jews. The Land of my King is good, so good, but too much of it lies undefended because God's people have been spread out too thin in other nations. Too many Jews live undefended as well because they are spread out too thin among the nations. I am torn, I want them here because I love them and they bring blessings, but a growing part of me wants them to go home, because increasingly I feel a tug at my heart that they should be home in Israel – even though this is also their home. I fear for the days when this will not be their home anymore, may it never happen – when we will have to hide them and feed them and care for them at the cost of our own lives and the lives of our children. Already I see them being increasingly slandered among some cultish fringe leaders – but how long before the cultish fringe becomes the mainstream? Hitler was fringe once, and so was Stalin – fringe but charismatic. Hates burns brighter and brighter until the fuel runs out and it fizzles – our modern Google society has too much fictitious kindling out there right now to ignite the hatred of people who are quick to believe whatever fuels their contempt – as though people with webpages are automatically credible as long as what they say either outrages or appeals to us. People who don't want to believe they can be deceived are easily distracted and fooled when told that someone else has already lied to them. In their offense they become easy pickings for con men and women.

What fuels the hatred most of all is jealousy, which is short-sighted and unnecessary. From Sinai, relationship with God has never been genetically exclusive – a person is a Jew who swears allegiance and lives according to the Covenant.

Although that had been obscured by the eighteen edicts of Shammai in the first century BCE, making contact between Jew and Gentile incredibly difficult, when the Holy Spirit fell onto the God-fearing (commandment keeping) family of Cornelius in Acts 10, that middle wall of separation was struck down. No one has to be jealous of the Jews – they have the advantage, certainly, and have carried out the responsibility of preserving the oracles of God with great diligence. Observant Jews have kept the commandments alive for millennia, and they do have an inherently special connection with God. That was and is God's choice! Dare we be jealous of God's choice when he has graciously opened the door wide to all who desire to be grafted in? Gratitude, and not jealousy, should be our response. Yes, some Jews, even Messianic Jews, want us to be second-class citizens. Oh well. That has nothing to do with us, and a whole lot of non-Jews want Jews to be second-class citizens – allow God to work in the hearts of people who want supremacy, as He has to work on ours as well. What does God desire? That all men be saved and worship Him. This is about Him; it's never been about us.

“Come out of her My people” – the first and ongoing call to Zionism.

What's New for 2017 – New Testament Background for Kids, a book on Sex and

Social Life in the Bible, and Bites of Fruit on Youtube!

I have been switching things up a bit this year. I have been busy for the last month with our move to Idaho Falls, Idaho and we are finally getting settled in. As most of you know, I have already transitioned my Ancient Near Eastern and First Century Context teachings over to contextforkids.com, and this year we are doing Backgrounds of the New Testament in the video series – had a great time going through the Maccabean Revolt, from the origins through the first Hannukah. Right now I am writing Context for Adults: Sexuality and Social Life in the Bible – I am tackling a lot of the questions that people struggle with, and that keep unbelievers at arm-length from God – questions that everyone dreads getting asked about the Bible. It can be used as curriculum, but with extreme parental discretion. I am currently working on the last five lessons. After that, I am planning on writing Context for Kids: Backgrounds of the New Testament. My long game, which I have spent the last two years diligently studying for, will be to write Context for Kids volumes on the Temple and the Priesthood, as well as the Feast Days, which I am planning on calling “Jesus’ Days of Joy.”

On the grownup front, I have mostly switched over to videos on my youtube channel. I am focusing on our social media character and how it reflects on our King – I have been asked to produce 28-minute teachings that can later be used in mp3 format for a radio program and decided to kill two birds with one stone. This year we are especially focusing on spiritual growth and self-control. Check them out on youtube! Here is the first of the four videos, but the entire playlist is [here](#):