

WHAT ARE WE MISSING?

Yeshua Messiah King - Introduction

We didn't have a swimming pool growing up so we kids loved any chance we got to go swimming, usually on vacations. My Dad would get in the water with us and play around, but never our mother. I couldn't understand that as a kid; I thought everybody loved to swim. Years later Mom shared that when she was a little girl, she went swimming at the community pool. A couple older boys held her underwater and she's been terrified of swimming ever since.

Hearing her story, getting more of the facts, enabled me to understand what didn't make sense.

There are a lot of things said and done in the Bible that don't make sense to us. There are many reasons for this. The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years beginning in about 1500BC. Its final book was finished about 100AD. We're separated from the Bible by 2000 years of history.

The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Bible was written predominantly by Jews within Jewish culture to primarily a Jewish audience. The worldview of a first century, Mediterranean Jew living in Roman occupied Israel is very different than the worldview of a 21st century southern Californian living in freedom in the United States of America! If we want to accurately understand Jesus, we must do everything to bridge this huge gap. We must not read 21st century ideas back into a 1st century document such as the New Testament.

Our church fathers of the third and fourth centuries did us no favors bridging this gap. By the third century AD Gentiles were in the majority in the Church. In order to make Christianity more attractive to Greeks and Romans, the early church fathers downplayed Christianity's Jewish roots. Antisemitism and replacement theology developed and the Jewish context of the Bible was suppressed. As a result, phrases and sayings clearly understood by the original Jewish audiences to whom Jesus spoke were misinterpreted by Gentile readers ignorant of Jewish culture. For instance, the phrase "born of water" meant "to be born physically" to a first century Jew such as Nicodemus (John 3). But ignorant of Jewish culture, Gentiles in the fourth century misinterpreted "born of water" to refer to water baptism. As a result, the error of baptismal regeneration was introduced into the church.

We have lost much by suppressing the Jewish culture in which Jesus ministered.

For instance, the Gospel of John opens with these majestic words:

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

I was taught by one of the premier seminaries in the world that the "Word", the "Logos" of John 1:1 came from Greek philosophy. According to Greek philosophy the Logos encompasses two concepts, the concept of reason and the concept of speech. So, ignorant of its Jewish context, gentile commentators teach that the very Jewish John was teaching that Jesus fulfilled the Greek ideal of the Logos: by reason Jesus was the very idea of God and by speech He was the very expression of God.

But the Apostle John would not have been writing about Jesus from a Greek philosophical perspective. The Apostle John was a Jewish fisherman. He was writing about Jesus from a Jewish worldview. He was not attempting to show that Jesus fulfilled the Greek concept of the "Logos". Rather, John was showing his Jewish readers that Jesus fulfilled the characteristics of an entity their rabbis had taught about in their synagogues! Jesus is the "Memra" taught by the rabbis. "Memra" is "word" in Aramaic. The Hebrew word is "davar"; the Greek word is "logos". Based on their studies of the Hebrew Scriptures, the rabbis identified that in addition to God, there is another entity they named the Memra – the Word! The Memra was a mystery to the rabbis, but they believed in its existence. According to the rabbis, the Memra has six characteristics:

1. The Memra was distinct from God, but the same as God.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. The Memra was the agent of creation.

³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

3. The Memra was the agent of salvation.

¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God,

4. The Memra is the means by which God takes on visible form.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

5. The Memra is the means by which God signs His covenants.

6. The Memra is the agent of revelation.

¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Do you see how our lack of knowledge about the Jewish context of the first century affects our understanding? John is declaring that Jesus is the Memra about Whom the Jewish rabbis had been teaching for years in their synagogues!

Here is another example. In first century Judaism there were six ways a man could be "born again":

1. He was "born again" when he was bar-mitzvahed.
2. He was "born again" when he married.
3. He was "born again" if/when he became a rabbi.
4. He was "born again" if/when he became the head of a rabbinical school.
5. He was "born again" when he was crowned king of Israel.
6. He was "born again" if, as a gentile, he converted to Judaism.

By the time Nicodemus met with Jesus, Nicodemus had been "born again" in the four ways available to him. Nicodemus therefore was very familiar with the concept of being "born again" when Jesus told him:

John 3:3 (ESV)

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus' concern was that Jesus was introducing yet another way of being "born again" that Nicodemus, at his advanced age, would not be able to accomplish. But Jesus explained that His way of being "born again" is a spiritual rebirth available to all who believe in Him (John 3:16).

I hope you're beginning to sense how much we've lost by not knowing the Jewish culture in which Jesus ministered and to which He presented Himself as their Messiah-King. We hope to remedy this situation through the series I am introducing today: *Yeshua Messiah King*.

This series is based on Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's four volume series titled, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. This series is also based on the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The main theme is Jesus, the Messiah-King. In this series we will see twelve major stages in the life and ministry of Jesus:

Part 1. The Coming of the King: This section concerns the birth narratives, Jesus' infancy, baptism and temptation. It marks God's official presentation of Yeshua as the Messianic King.

Part 2. The Authentication of the King: Yeshua begins to present Himself to Israel as the promised Messiah and authenticates Himself with miracles, signs, and wonders. This is the time when He goes from city to city and synagogue to synagogue, offering the messianic kingdom to Israel. To receive the

messianic kingdom Israel must accept Him as the Messianic King. During this period of time, He receives opposition from the Pharisees.

Part 3. The Controversy over the King: In this stage, the leadership of Israel officially rejects Jesus, largely due to His repudiation of Pharisaic Judaism. In response to this rejection, there is a radical change in the nature of His ministry.

Part 4. The Training of the Twelve by the King: Following His rejection, Jesus works primarily with His disciples, training them for their mission – a mission they will perform later, in the book of Acts.

Part 5. The Opposition to the King: Whereas earlier the opposition came only from the leaders, now it also comes from the common people. In this stage, the people begin to follow the leaders, rejecting His Messiahship and the authenticating miracles, signs and wonders.

Part 6. The Preparation of the Disciples by the King: This section covers the final period of His public ministry, and there is a special focus on preparing the disciples for their future work, which will be done in the book of Acts.

Part 7. The Official Presentation of the King: This stage actually closes His public ministry. It begins with His triumphant ride into Jerusalem and final conflict with the Pharisees and closes with His lengthy denunciation of the spiritual leaders of Israel for leading the nation to reject Him. He also lays down the precondition for His return and the setting up of the messianic kingdom.

Part 8. The Preparation for the Death of the King: This stage begins with the Olivet Discourse, which contains prophecies of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and His second coming. This is followed by His last Passover and the Upper Room Discourse and concludes with the agony of Gethsemane.

Part 9. The Trial of the King: Here, the rejection of the Messiah is carried out.

Part 10. The Death of the King: The events surrounding the death of the Messiah will be studied in chronological sequence.

Part 11. The Resurrection and the Ascension of the King: This marks the period of the final training of the apostles and the ascension of the Messiah to heaven. It concludes with a promise of His return.

Part 12. The Sequels: The remainder of the New Testament records events in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the surrounding Gentile world in the immediate decades after Yeshua's ascension. This stage looks at issues and events that are extensions of issues and events begun in the Gospels.¹

As mentioned, this series will be based on the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If you've read the Gospels, you know they are different from one another yet contain some of the same material. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit each author had a specific target audience and a specific theme.

Matthew

Matthew was formerly a tax collector for the Roman government. He was considered a collaborator and a thief by his fellow Jews. As an outcast, Matthew would have been able to socialize only with disreputable members of Jewish society.

Matthew's target audience was Jewish believers scattered by persecution throughout the Mediterranean. They needed an authoritative record of Messiah's life and teachings which Matthew supplied.

Matthew's theme is that Jesus is the Messiah-King of the Jews.

Mark

Mark was the Apostle Peter's right-hand man. He was a first-hand witness of Peter's teachings.

¹ Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective, 2nd Edition*, (San Antonio, Ariel Ministries, 2017), pp. 6-7.

Mark's primary audience were the Romans.

Mark portrayed Jesus as the ideal Roman: a man who accomplished His commission. Romans were more concerned about a man's abilities than his lineage. Mark focused on Jesus' actions and used phrases like "straight away, forthwith and immediately" 42 times to convey the urgency with which Jesus accomplished His commission.

Luke

Luke was a physician. he was the first trained medical missionary, accompanying the Apostle Paul on some of his journeys.

Luke's primary audience were the Greeks. Luke felt the need to lay out the life and teachings of Jesus in an orderly manner. This appealed to the historically minded Greeks.

John

John was one of Jesus' closest associates and His cousin.

John's target audience was the Church.

John emphasized the Deity of Jesus. John focused more on the teachings of Jesus than His works.

This series is a harmonization of the four Gospels. It is based on Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's four volume series titled: *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. If you'd like to go deeper in this study I encourage you to purchase the abridged version of Dr. Fruchtenbaum's study (\$39.00):

Our hope is that this series will bring a clearer, deeper understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus and that as a result we will love Him more deeply, trust Him more completely and serve Him more passionately.

