

sin is the servant of sin. And a servant does not remain forever in the house, but the Son remains forever. If therefore the Son should free you, truly you will be free men” (Yochanan 8:20-25).

Josephus the Netzari

“So the Word of Elohim spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of kohanim became obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7

Throughout the Gospels, we are told of prominent members of the Jewish aristocracy, particularly from the Sanhedrin Council, who were “secret followers” of Y’shua Mashiyach (John 12:42, 19:38). Two men who are directly mentioned by name are Joseph of Ramtha and Nicodemus, but there can be little doubt that there were many others. Here we will examine the possibility of another such man, descended by his own account from both priests and kings. His name was Yoseph bar Matthias, better known as the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius.

In the two millennia since his death, the writings of Josephus have become one of the foremost focal points in the Jewish Christian divide and debate. His works are among the only surviving sources for documenting the trials and tribulations of First Century Israel. While some would add Philo of Alexandria to this short list as well (although he visited Israel just once), Josephus was a long-time resident who was an eyewitness to events like the Jewish War and the destruction of the Second Temple, which makes Josephus an even more critical witness than his Alexandrian counterpart and literally puts him in a category all by himself.

Josephus also emerges as a huge enigma when we consider how different groups have portrayed him over the centuries. In Rabbinic circles, he is largely looked upon as a traitor, because by Josephus’ own account, he had surrendered to the Romans after commanding Galilean forces in the Jewish War. He then “switched sides” interpreting for the Romans the Hebrew laments of his brothers while living the last quarter century of his life in Gentile splendor. The fact that Josephus gives approval to Y’shua and his early followers surely did not help curry favor with his brethren. In addition, Josephus the Pharisee provides a fair amount of negative appraisals of the key tenets of that sect, and it is from the Pharisees that we get the Rabbinitics of today.

On the other hand, Josephus’ account of the Second Temple’s destruction and other key aspects of Jewish history have never been successfully refuted by the Rabbinitics either, so like it or not, they admit Josephus is generally reliable. The modern state of Israel in fact uses the story of Masada as a major symbol of their national identity, and this is in spite of the fact that Josephus is the sole source for this event. Generally speaking, the grudgingly difficult but rock solid consensus is that Josephus is overall considered one of the greatest and most accurate historians the world has ever known. So while many Rabbinitics accuse Josephus of abandoning them, they have not altogether abandoned Josephus.

But if the Rabbinic response to Josephus appears to be confusing, the Christian version of this could well be considered downright schizophrenic as Christians have actually attempted to add to his writing for credibility. And, while accepting as a normative fact Josephus’ love of Torah and status as a Pharisaic leader, they have also suggested that his positive portrayals of the early Nazarenes pointed to the historian as an early Bishop of Jerusalem! All these centuries later, we may well look at such an idea as Christian fable, but the fact remains that even many of the most fantastic legends have some basis in real history. But the question is: What are the facts behind this theory? Is it possible that Josephus was an early follower of Y’shua, and that this formed the basis of Christian legend about him? If so, can we demonstrate from the historical record how Josephus’ genuine beliefs may have been morphed for their purposes? At the end of the day, can we say with any certainty that the most famous Jewish historian of them all was really a Nazarene Jew? In order to find out, we will need to answer a series of progressively interesting and difficult questions, starting with the easiest one first:

From Publication to Masorah and Liturgy: Where Do We Go From Here?

It's the text

As you've sojourned through these pages you've noticed suggestions and ideas – some gentle, some not – which dealt with a wide variety of historical and spiritual traditions that surround, or have been in opposition to, this text. You have seen critiques against Rabbinic Judaism, ancient Gnosticism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and “Greeks in Jewish Clothing,” just to name a few. However, let it not be said that one group hath escaped the sharpened quill, we of the Netzari Faith ourselves!

The fact is, there is no place on Earth, not one solitary *kehillath* (assembly) in which all the optimum requirements are being met for worship. Yes, obviously some assemblies are quite close, but all are lacking in elements which are just as critical as the ones they have embraced and adopted.

Picture this if you will: It is Shavuot, and the whole Netzarim congregation is rejoicing in the Ruach haKodesh, in Mashiyach and in the giving of Torah. As the Torah is being carried about and rejoiced over there is dancing, singing and aliyahs, blessings upon the opening and closing of the ark that contains the precious word of YHWH inscribed in the Set Apart Hebrew language. It is certainly a great honor for each of us to be part of such a community of worshippers. And then, to climax all of this, many will read from their source of ultimate halakha, the teachings of YHWH's Son, the Living Torah, from a Greek translation? And without a scroll?

What's worse, many can't even agree on which version to learn from! Is it the Greek from Western, Alexandrian or Byzantine text families? Is Matthew to be read from these or from one of three late medieval copies written in Hebrew? Are the rest of the Gospels coming from the Greek, Peshitta or Old Syriac? Or maybe we should targum by the seat of our pants, becoming “Nazarene Pentecostals” speaking in “strange tongues” and cobble together readings from a particular Semitic Buffet Line?

Can we not see the disconnect here dear brethren? Why are Scriptures treated and handled differently because of what part of the Word they come from?

Are we never to do an *aliyah* reading from the scroll that has the first five books of the Renewed Covenant in Aramaic, as we do from the five books of Torah that were given by the One True Lawgiver?

Why then you may ask, did we not put this diglot into Hebrew rather than English? As mentioned earlier it is vital that we all share in the preservation of the Aramaic language. Now everyone can see the text and analyze it for themselves regardless of their Hebrew or Aramaic language skills.

But for the Netzarim community there must be a wider purpose, even to standardize and reinvigorate the kind of Jewish learning infrastructure that existed in the days of the Shlichim when the Temple stood and in the centuries immediately following with the establishment of the Tiberian style yeshivas. For this, we must read from all Set Apart texts in a unified manner. The rabbis of the period ascertained that standardizing and stabilizing canon lists, liturgy and the readings themselves was critical to keeping their culture alive. Hebrew and Hebrew literature had to have a base which everyone agreed on, at least as a foundational starting point for scholarship and prayer. Should not this same wisdom be applied to the Renewed Covenant writings as well?

The writings of the Renewed Covenant are just as worthy as Tanakh, and should be venerated and preserved in the exact manner as Tanakh, including production by a scribal hand on animal skins and using a counting method of the letter values of each line to ensure one hundred percent accuracy. But we can't make that kind of guarantee if we don't know what the text that we are reproducing actually is!