



# Minutes With Messiah

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## My Yoke

He was a stranger in town. As happens so often when one is alone in a small town like Nazareth, he killed some time by wandering around looking at things. If Nazareth had been a walled town, he probably would have spent most of his time sitting in the court that would have been held in the gate. As it was, he started at the market at the edge of town.

As he approached one edge of the market, close by the fields, he saw a particular shop. The sign on the shop, carefully crafted as befit the nature of the establishment, said "Carpentry by Yosef." Underneath, in smaller letters, it proudly proclaimed "My Yokes are Easy."

It just happened as the stranger was passing that he had an example of what the sign meant. Outside the shop stood a pair of oxen. Between

much later, doctoring the sores on the oxen's backs. To save trouble, the farmer would go to a craftsman like Yosef, who would fit the yoke to the team--who would make his yokes "easy."

A few years later the same stranger went to hear a young rabbi who was gaining prominence. He didn't recognize him as the youth who had held the yoke for his father to measure. He had probably forgotten the specific incident. But he did recognize the message. "Come unto me," the rabbi said, "all who are weary and heavy laden." As you plow through life, you get tired because you are being rubbed raw by a cut-rate yoke. "But," said the preacher, "as the sign on my daddy's carpentry shop used to say, 'My Yoke is Easy.'" He added, "My burden is light." (Mt 11:29-30)

The farmers in the audience knew. The stranger knew. A yoke can wear you down. Or it can make life good, if it is "easy."

We often plod through life. We can remain under the old, chafing, "off the rack," cheap yoke of sin and sorrow. Or we can choose to go to an owner who lays on us a yoke that he carefully carved just for us, a yoke that we don't even feel.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)

### Carpentry by Yosef My Yokes are Easy

them stood a lad holding a rough carved yoke over their shoulders. An older man, undoubtedly the carpenter, was checking each end of the yoke where it lay across the oxen. He was drawing lines where he would have to carve and fit the yoke. It didn't take a farmer to realize that this was the most crucial part of making the yoke.

How many people have stood before a mirror while the tailor or dressmaker pinned here and marked there, trying to achieve the perfect fit? No good farmer would expect less for his oxen. He could go to the cut-rate carpenter down the street and buy a yoke "off the rack." But if he saved money that way he would spend twice as

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# ***Pesach: Passover–Four Children***

In the Passover Haggadah, the Telling of the Exodus story, there is a section that talks about four sons, which is, in reality, showing four basic attitudes toward God’s word.

Every child is unique and we must enter into discussion according to his or her level of understanding. We respond in different ways to each of the four types of children: the wise one, the wicked one, the simple one, and the one who is unable to understand. The wise one asks, “What are the precepts, laws, and observances which our God has commanded us?” By saying “us” he wisely recognizes his place in the community. To the wise one we explain the observances of the Passover in complete detail. The wicked one asks, “What is this observance to you? By saying “to you” this child removes him or herself from the community of Israel. Nevertheless, we patiently tell the story that belongs to all Israel. The simple one asks,

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**There are those houses  
where the clock on the  
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“12:00”**

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“What is the meaning of all of this?” To this child we retell the story from the very beginning. One child is unable to understand. Even this child is deserving of hearing the Passover story.

The sages recognized what educators and managers today have been trying to tell us. Everyone learns in his own way. Whether it be Torah (broadly, God’s entire teaching, or specifically the Law contained in the Pentateuch), or mathematics, or auto repair, or how to program a VCR, not everyone learns alike. Using that last example, the VCR, there are those who immediately want someone to show them how it is done. I read the instruction book from cover to cover. Someone else picks up the controls and fiddles around until they figure out how to program it. And then there are those houses I have visited where the clock on the VCR keeps flashing “12:00” because nobody cared to learn to set it up. (Perhaps those are the smartest ones.) Each has his own way.

There are those who try to tell us “everyone has his own road to God.” That is not what I am saying. God has shown his road. It is not “roads”, but “road.” Whether one travels that road on his feet, his knees, walking on his hands, or on camel back, it is the same one road. The difference is how we choose to travel. The four children exemplify the way we travel.

**Contrary to the order given above**, I want to look at the four children starting with the fourth one, the one who is incapable of understanding. This may include those like my eldest son who will never be capable of understanding the Word of God. It also includes, however, a much vaster group--our youngest children. Right now they are incapable of understanding God’s ways. They don’t even understand their parents’ ways. It would be easy to wait until they could understand to teach them. But would it be right? The Lord commanded through Moses, “And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deut 6:7) He didn’t exempt babies from the command. Instead he commanded diligence. That implies earnest obedience even from the beginning. Perhaps each generation we raise wicked children (see below) because we don’t

teach them from day one. We expect teenagers to be observant, but haven't given them the background to make that choice. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6)

**The second type of child**, in my order, is the simple child. This is not to say that he is limited in his capability. On the contrary, he may be quite intelligent. He is simple in the Word because he hasn't been shown the way. He asks, "What is the meaning of all this?" He wants to learn, he can learn, but he just has not yet learned. This is true of the vast numbers of people who have never been taught. There is a hunger in them for something. They don't necessarily understand that something to be God's word. But once they hear the good news, they want to know more. The question they ask is an honest one. They just don't yet know "the meaning of all this." With these people we need to start at the beginning and tell the whole story.

This is the person who goes to learn to program the VCR and an hour later you find him in the middle of the floor with the cover off (and maybe even pieces of it laid neatly about him). This is the child that asks, "Why?" well beyond the Terrible Twos. This is the person who has to stop at each "historical marker" along the highway. This is the person for whom God instituted the observance of Pesach (Passover) (Ex 12:26-27) and had Joshua set up the stones from the Jordan (Josh 4:5-7). This person sees the memorials and wants to understand why they were established.

**The next child is called the wicked child.** He asks, "What is this to you?" It's not just "what does this mean?" It's not quite "what meaning does this have for me?" He sees no personal involvement at all.

Why is he called wicked? Does he beat his parents? Has he coveted his neighbor's wife? Is he a perjurer? Not necessarily. He may be a "good, moral person." If so, why is he called wicked? It is precisely because he says "what is this to you?" Why does this make him wicked? It is because he deliberately cuts himself off from the people of God. He willfully elects to make a distinction between "you," God's people, and "me." His wickedness is not in outward acts, but

in choosing not to be one of God's own. In fact, he may know scripture better than anyone. He may even choose to do good deeds because he recognizes them as good. He just doesn't recognize the good as God. "A wicked man hardens his face: but as for the upright, he directs his way. There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." (Pr 21:29-30)

This child (or adult) we patiently teach all God's ways. We don't belittle him because of his attitude. We don't chide or condemn. We patiently teach. We show him that "you" can become "us"; that wickedness can become wisdom. Perhaps he is listed between the wise and

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## He willfully elects to make a distinction between "you," God's people, and "me."

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the simple because he is so close to wisdom. He is just a word away.

**The wise child asks about the precepts,** laws, and observances which God has given us. He is wise because he says "us." But there is more to his wisdom. He wants to dig deep into God's word. He wants to know the why, the precepts. He wants to know the meaning of the observances. In these things he is like the simple child. But he goes beyond. He wants the details. He delights in the scriptures. "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law he meditates day and night." (Ps 1:1-2) A story is told that the son of a famous Rabbi once came to his father and said, "I have read and learned all of Torah. May I now go and study Greek thought." His father, the Rabbi, quoted the Psalm where it says "in his law he meditates day and night." "Find a time," he told his son, "when it is neither day nor night, and during that time you can learn Greek thought." The wise child makes God's word a natural part of his everyday life.

Lord, make me to be a wise child.

# *A Tangled Web*

“Oh what a tangled web we weave...”

Sir Walter Scott

When Sir Walter Scott spoke of a tangled web, he was talking of the results of deceit. Today’s “tangled Web” starts with the words “World Wide.” And many use it to deceive. The “World Wide Web” is one of the tools we have not started to take advantage of in the church, with few exceptions.

While I was living in Illinois, I regularly received used issues of various computer magazines. In looking through the lists of web sites I was struck by the number of “gay and lesbian” sites listed. In addition, a whole industry has grown up developing software to keep young people from accessing pornographic sites. Even the charismatic and, especially, the premillennial denominations have a strong presence on the web. So, why is there so little of pure, first-century Christian teaching out there? Why are we lagging behind?

Unfortunately, one reason can be found in the history of the churches of Christ in America. We have so long taught, “speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent” that we have taken even that out of context. Long ago I heard someone say, “Just because the Baptists go out through the door doesn’t mean we should go

out through the window.” We have traditionally lagged about ten years behind the denominations in using new methodologies or technologies. This was true of the bus ministry of mid-century. This is true of the internet of the end of the century. New methods and technologies are not new doctrines. We can use them.

A second reason, at least in the case of “the Web” may be that many people are still intimidated by the technology itself. It takes only about as much time to write a web page as it does to write a sermon. It’s just in another language. And these days you don’t even need to know the language.

Many preachers feel they don’t have time to maintain a web page. It does take time. To be effective a site should be updated a couple of times a month. On the other hand, who said the preacher has to do it? If it is not the preacher’s talent, surely it is someone’s in the congregation. Even if it simply means transcribing the weekly sermons onto a web page, that can be effective. The web is just another way for anybody with the talent and time to teach.

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15) Maybe we should also paraphrase it “Go into all the World Wide Web...”

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