

**Behold, he winnoweth barley tonight
in the threshing floor.**

Looking at all the annual Feasts of the Lord, one could put them into two general categories: those that deal specifically with Israel's sin and deliverance (Passover, Day of Atonement/Yom Kippur) and those that are connected with harvest and rejoicing (Shavuot/Pentecost and Tabernacles). Passover and Yom Kippur seem to pertain to God's direct dealings with the nation of Israel, while Pentecost and Tabernacles seem to 'widen out' to include Gentiles (though sin is always addressed in each festival).

Shavuot is of immense significance. It was during that festival the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the early believers, both Jewish and Gentile (Acts 2:1-10). It was at that very season that the heart-warming story of Ruth – the 'wild olive' Moabitess who was grafted into the Olive Tree by faith – takes place. Her redemption occurred during winnowing, on a threshing floor at Shavuot (Barley harvest; Ruth 3).

The relationship between Israel and Moab was not always benign. In fact, sometimes it was downright turbulent. Many prophetic Bible passages refer to Moab's pride (Is 16:6, Zeph 2:9, 10) and their contempt for God's people Israel (Jer 48:29). In fact, Isaiah 15 & 16 and all of Jeremiah 48 reveal God's burden of judgement upon Moab for their attitude and treatment of Israel.

Yet, as with faithful Rahab, there is a scarlet thread of redemption that runs through the history of this Gentile people, which has a message for us today.

Moab's inception was the result of the desire of Lot's elder daughter to preserve Lot's seed when she and her sister thought that they were the only ones left on the earth, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:31-37).

Prior to that, Abraham had been visited by the three 'men' who informed him of the cry and sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and their intended investigation and potential judgement (Gen 18: 1-21). In his intercession before the Lord, Abraham presented the possibility that righteous people could be undeserving of, but caught up in, God's judgement (Gen 18:24, 25).

The Lord replies, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes (v. 26)'. Abraham gradually decreases the hypothetical number of righteous, to which the Lord answers in like increments. Here is a condensed exchange: 'If I find there forty and five...I will not do it, if I find thirty there...Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake...Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.'



What is significant in this dialogue is the concept expressed in the words 'found' and 'find'. As in English, this Hebrew word means the discovery of something that exists, but which might be hidden, lost or obscured, including character. Such exposure is often produced by changing circumstances which reveal latent temperaments and attitudes. This kind of 'winnowing' takes place in the next chapter:

'And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed *as one that mocked unto his sons in law* [emph. mine]. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are **FOUND** (Lit. Hebrew) here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hands of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city' (Gen 19: 12-17).

So, while there may not have been as many as 10 righteous present in order to stay the Lord's destruction, we can deduce that the Lord 'found' some righteous people and endeavoured to spare them (even though Lot's wife was further 'found out' in the process). While we would recoil at the thought of a man offering his two daughters up to the intents and abuses of wicked men (19:8), Lot is declared 'just' and 'righteous' in 2 Peter 2:7, 8.

As mentioned above, Lot's daughters' response to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was their concern to preserve their father's seed (Gen 19:32), resulting in the nations of Ammon and Moab. This type of action probably causes us to wince, but later in Scripture we see that Tamar also used 'unconventional' methods in her initiative to 'raise up seed' for Judah's firstborn (Gen 38:6), for which Judah declared that she was 'more righteous' than he was (v. 26)!

Boaz's declaration at his redemption of Ruth was as follows: 'Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.' In reply, the elders pronounced the blessing: 'And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.' (Ruth 4:10,12)

In Ps 89:20, The Hebrew phrase, 'I found David' is understood by scholars to connect David *directly* to the daughters of Lot and - by extension - to Ruth the Moabite, who raised up the royal, Messianic seed by her faith. This is underlined by David when he declares, 'I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid' (Ps 116:16), and prays, 'save the son of thine handmaid' (Ps 86:16), both times alluding to his heritage in Ruth ('I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.' Ruth 3:9).

The devastating events of 'October 7th', and the subsequent developments, have resulted in a huge increase in anti-Semitic feelings and actions, worldwide. While, as believers, we should not be surprised at this, what does

concern us is the real surge of anti-Semitism manifesting within the church.

Besides the visible, vocal presence of those who claim to be Christians participating in various protests and marches, Churches have also been coming together to produce statements and resolutions, calling on the UK government to act against Israel and stipulating various courses of action to take. At a more senior level, the Archbishop of York has also issued an appeal to the British government to ensure Israel's restraint, while not requiring the same of Hamas. Christian Aid has been promoting the screening by local churches of a film called 'Tinderbox', an independently-produced film which claims to present 'the untold story' and history of the 'Israel/Palestine' conflict.

Recently a church, which had previously hosted 2 HEBRON outreach concerts, refused a request for the use of its premises from a group which prays for Israel, whose numbers had increased after Oct. 7th. When asked the reason for the rejection, the leadership stated that they 'didn't want to cause division'. The prayer group leader replied that Jerusalem is the only city that the Bible commands us to pray for by name (Ps 122:6) and that the church would be blessed for doing so. However, the decision was not reversed.

2000 years ago a Gentile, Roman centurion exhibited faith of a profound calibre. Instead of personally approaching Jesus to heal his servant, *he sent the elders of the Jewish people to Him!* Their testimony in appealing to Jesus was, 'For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.' (Luke 7:5) Later, the true, sterling nature of his faith was further revealed when Jesus proclaimed, 'I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel'. (v.9)

Personal, national and global destinies were decided on threshing floors in Scripture (Jud 6:37; 2 Sam 6:6; Ruth 3: 3ff.), not forgetting that the Temple itself was built upon a threshing floor (1 Chron 21: 18 – 22:2)! When rebuking the religious hypocrites, John the Baptist declared: '*He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*: Whose [winnowing] fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge (lit. winnow) **His** [threshing] floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:7-12, emph. mine). These strong words allude to Ruth and Pentecost in a no-nonsense and very sobering way, which it behoves the church to understand as it celebrates this feast.

Deut 33:29 reads, 'Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD...thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.'

'When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:1-8). Of what sort will it prove to be? May we be persevering in our prayers and intercessions on behalf of the salvation of Jewish people. May we seek their welfare and may our witness 'send' them to Yeshua.

Yours in Yeshua's shalom, Chrissy Rodgers