



# A Different Kind of *Aliyah*

THE MODERN-DAY CALL  
TO SPIRITUAL ALIYAH

THE TANAKH'S TRUTH  
UNTANGLES POPULAR ERRORS

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PART OF  
THE FAITHFUL KEDOSHIM

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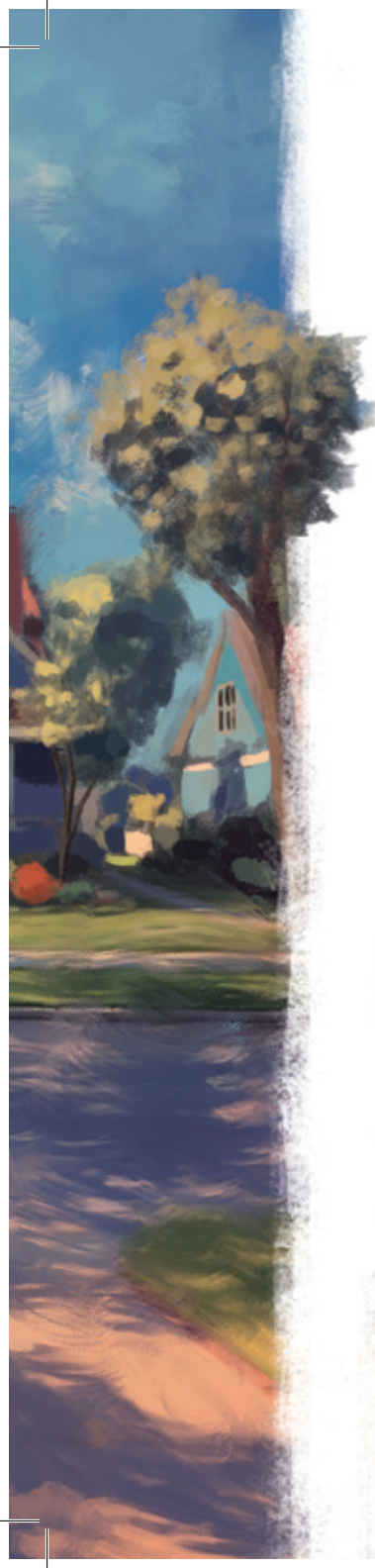


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A painting depicting a man with a beard and a woman in a suburban setting. The man is in the foreground, looking back over his shoulder. The woman is standing on a porch in the background. The scene is set in a sunny, suburban neighborhood with houses and trees.

# Choosing Captivity Over Freedom



# 01

**F**our gray walls. A hard cot. A routine as changeless as death itself.

This is prison.

Your beloved son lives here, his life rotting away behind bars. Year after year, he is absent from seder meals and shabbat gatherings. He misses family milestones—bar mitzvahs, graduations, weddings. When your first grandchild is born, you cry—not only because of the joy of the moment but because you miss your son. He will never know the blessing of parenthood, for behind those bars there is no laughter, no children, no future—only the bleak drudgery of prison existence.

Finally, the time approaches when your beloved son will be released. Excitement fills your heart. You yearn to welcome him with open arms. He

has served his sentence. Justice has been executed. Now he can come home! Your heart is thrilled at the thought of having the whole family together again—finally!

The day arrives, and you stand outside the prison doors with a sense of anticipation. Your son, aged and stooped, appears at last. He reflects your smile. Tears flow freely as you embrace each other. You urge your son, “Come, let’s go! I can’t wait to show you all that you’ve missed!”

But then something strange happens. He stops on the threshold of the door—one foot still in the prison. “I don’t know if I can do this,” he says as a frown crosses his face.

“But of course you can! You’re free!” you respond. “What are you waiting for?”

“It feels so strange,” he murmurs. “After all these years . . . I just don’t feel ready to leave.”

“Why would you want to stay when you can be completely free?” you question.

“I just don’t think I can leave! This is where I feel comfortable,” your son replies. You are dumbfounded.

You may think that this story is strange and unlikely. Would a freed prisoner really want to remain in prison? Perhaps not. But a parallel experience has taken place in history. In fact, nearly a whole nation chose to remain in the land of their captivity—Babylon—when they

had the opportunity to live freely in their own land.

Today, many make the same decision to stay in captivity, but not in the literal city of Babylon. Instead, they have lingered in the captivity of spiritual Babylon.

### **The Call to Leave Historical Babylon**

After a deadly siege in 605 BCE, Babylon overcame Jerusalem and took its inhabitants as captives to Babylon. The exile had begun.

The Babylonians were a pagan nation and followed practices that were contrary to the Tanakh. In time, some of the Jews became so comfortable in the land of exile that they began to adopt these practices.

Nonetheless, others remained true to God, waiting for the promise God had given them through the prophet Jeremiah/Yirmeyahu that He would end their captivity and bring them back to their land after 70 years. Within that time, the Babylonian Empire fell to Persia. Under the reign of Persia’s King Cyrus, the longing of the Jews was fulfilled. Cyrus decreed that they could return to their land! About 50,000 Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, traveled back to Jerusalem to reconstruct the temple (Ezra 1–2).

Sadly, hundreds of thousands of Jews chose to stay in their land of

exile. They had become comfortable. They dreaded the challenges of returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding it.

God was merciful and gave His people another opportunity. About 20 years later, King Darius issued another decree that allowed the Jewish people to return to their land. The urgency to get out of Babylon was increasing. During this time, Zechariah the prophet warned the people:

“ ‘Oy, oy! Flee from the land of the north’—it is a declaration of *ADONAI*—because I scattered you like the four winds of heaven’—it is a declaration of *ADONAI*. ‘Oy, Zion! Escape, you who are living with the daughter of Babylon’ ” (Zechariah 2:10, 11).

Despite the prophet’s pleas, the people did not realize the danger of staying in Babylon. Those who remained would soon find themselves out of favor with the ruling powers there, as we will see in the next story.

### **The Death Decree**

Fear filled the heart of Mordecai, a Jewish official who served in the Medo-Persian court, as he scanned the chilling words of the decree that had been displayed in Shushan—and all throughout the Medo-Persian Empire. It was sealed with the king’s ring, a symbol of its


unchanging nature. He knew of the anger of his enemy Haman, a subject in the king’s court. After all, Mordecai had refused to comply with Haman’s request for worship. Mordecai had been faithful to God and would not put any person or earthly power in the place of the God of heaven. But he hadn’t thought that Haman would go this far in his vengeance. Now, the lives of all the Jewish people were at stake.

The book of Esther records the story:

“Dispatches were sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, stating to destroy, slay, and annihilate all the Jews—from the youth to the elderly, both little children and women—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions” (Esther 3:13).

If only the Jews had obeyed God’s call to leave the northern lands of their captivity! Then, they wouldn’t be facing death. But in their distress, Queen Esther, her cousin Mordecai, and all the Jews throughout Medo-Persia sought God with prayer and fasting. Following their earnest pleas to God, the courageous queen approached the king and spoke on behalf of her people, which resulted in a counter decree that allowed the Jewish people to defend themselves.





## ***When we choose to obey God and honor Him above our own desires, He blesses that decision.***

God worked a mighty deliverance for His people. In saving their lives, He also provided them with a third opportunity to leave Babylon—this time through the decree given by Artaxerxes in 457 BCE.

### **Staying in Babylon**

Despite all the warnings and opportunities God gave the Jews, many of them never left Babylon. By the beginning of the first century CE, some of the largest populations of Jews were scattered abroad in cities like Babylon, Rome, and Alexandria. Even today, the most widely accepted Talmud is the Babylonian Talmud, which was written between the second and fifth centuries CE by Jewish scholars in Babylon. This reminds us that some of Judaism's brightest

minds were dispersed abroad, still exiled in Babylon and elsewhere.

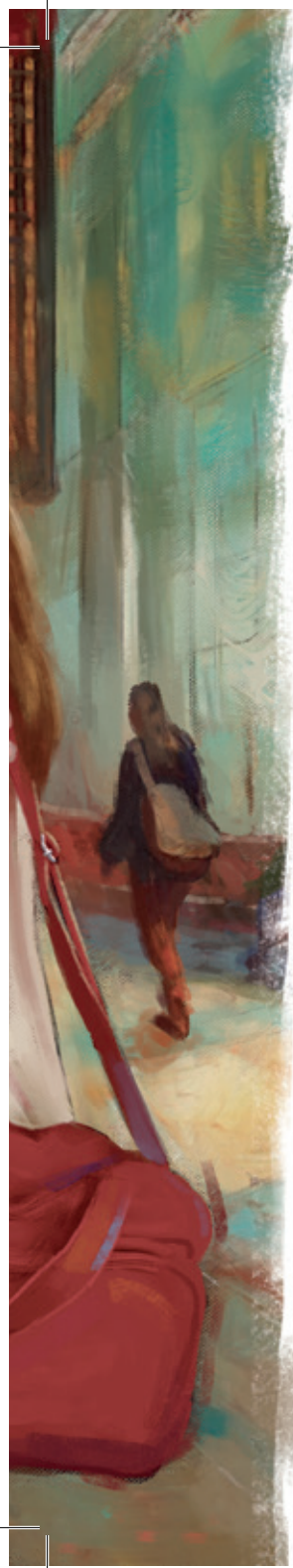
After centuries of captivity, the Jews of the 20<sup>th</sup> century longed to return to their home in Israel. On May 14, 1948, they rejoiced as the State of Israel was recognized as a nation. At that time, 650,000 Jews lived in Israel. But the number grew quickly as the historical hope of the people revived and many decided to make *aliyah*—the Hebrew term used to describe the immigration of Jews back to Israel. By now, over 6 million Jews have made *aliyah* with the desire to revive their nation and culture.<sup>1</sup> But would this be enough? Would a physical *aliyah* accomplish God's spiritual purposes for His people, or is there more to the story?

#### **Reference**

1. Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, "Number of Jews in Israel and Worldwide on the Rise," *The Jerusalem Post*, jpost.com, September 27, 2019.



# The Need for a Spiritual *Aliyah*



## 02

“America may be the land of opportunities, Europe may be the land of art and culture, but Israel is more than that: Israel is home.”

These were the words of a Jewish young man who, together with his wife, decided to make *aliyah* to Israel. They were excited to return to their national roots! Despite having to learn a new language and assimilate into a new country, they were willing to bear those challenges to be back in the land of their ancestors.<sup>1</sup>

Another young man, Yoni, decided to take his chances with *aliyah*, even though many of his friends and family discouraged him and told him he was crazy. He recognized that there would be many challenges in going to Israel but decided that immigrating would be worth it.

Having lived in Israel for ten years now, many of his friends have come to Israel and then left. Living in Israel wasn't the easy life they had expected. Yoni says,

“It's important to understand your motivations in making the tough choice to leave America for Israel. There's no question it's easier to stay in your comfort zone, and America is nothing if not the world's biggest comfort zone.”

The Jews after the Babylonian exile had faced a similar decision. Staying in the land they'd become comfortable with was easier. Going back to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple would be a very difficult undertaking. But those who chose to follow God's instructions experienced the blessings of leaving Babylon.

Yoni identifies his own motivation for *aliyah*: “When you believe Israel is your destiny—and you really believe it—there's almost no hardship you can't overcome.”<sup>2</sup>

Could it be that God has an even greater destiny for His people? According to an ancient prophetic message, God is still calling His people to make a spiritual *aliyah!* This immigration isn't a call out of a physical exile in Babylon; instead, it is a call to leave a spiritual Babylon and return to the truths of the Tanakh. And when we believe in this destiny that God has for us,

there is no hardship that we can't overcome to reach it!

### **The Ancient Prophetic Book of Revelation**

We find this prophetic message in an ancient book called Revelation. It was written by a Jewish man who was a prophet in the first century CE.

All throughout the history of the Jewish people, God sent prophets to His people, but only a few of them are mentioned in the Tanakh. Some of these prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, were persecuted or rejected during their time, but their writings were later accepted by the Jewish community. Yochanan ben Zebedee, the writer of Revelation, also suffered persecution during his lifetime. And today, we can evaluate his writings. Is his message consistent with the Tanakh? And if so, what does his compelling message mean for us?

First, we should note that about 65 percent of the book of Revelation alludes to the Tanakh. Yochanan was well educated in the Jewish teachings and customs. The structure of his book centers around the Jewish sanctuary and the yearly feasts. The first chapter opens with a scene of the holy place of the sanctuary, which focused on the seven golden candlesticks. The following chapters continue describing the sanctuary,

picturing the throne in heaven (Revelation 4), the altar of incense (Revelation 5:8, and 8:4, 5), and the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place (Revelation 11:19). Only a Jew with a deep knowledge of the Tanakh and its festivals could have written this book.

But then Yochanan makes a startling call for God's people to come out of Babylon, for imminent destruction is upon her. Yet, he isn't speaking to the ancient Jews who lingered in literal Babylon. His prophetic word rings down the annals of time and speaks to a much more modern and urgent reality. This warning is for you and me, and it can only be understood by readers who can trace the mysterious symbolism hidden within the Jewish festivals.

### Three Jewish Festivals and Three Messages

Loud voices rang through the air like trumpets. Something significant was about to take place! Yochanan watched in awe as the scene unfolded before him in prophetic vision. Three angels swooped from heaven to the Earth, carrying words of both hope and warning to all the world.

Yochanan must have leaned forward with anticipation. What would the angels say? He didn't want to miss a word! He recorded this vision in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of

Revelation, which depicts the angels coming to proclaim three very important messages to "those who dwell on the earth—to every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (vs. 6). Here are their messages:

"[The first angel] said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the One who made heaven and earth and sea and springs of water.'

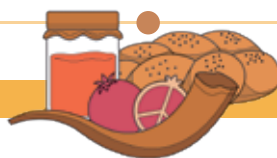
"Another angel, a second one, followed, saying,

" 'Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great—she who made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her immorality.'

"And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying in a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he shall also drink the wine of God's fury, poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. Those who worship the beast and its image and those who receive the mark of his name have no rest day or night' " (Revelation 14:7–11).

## The Three Jewish Feasts

### ROSH HASHANAH



## The Three Angels' Messages

**"Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come" (Revelation 14:7)**

The symbolism of these messages is interwoven with three important Jewish festivals: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and *Sukkot*.

As Yochanan heard the first angel proclaim his message "in a loud voice," he must have thought of the shofar that would sound at the beginning of Rosh Hashanah to prepare God's people for Yom Kippur. Those acquainted with the mysteries of the Jewish festivals would recognize the call of Rosh Hashanah in the first angel's message: "Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come" (Revelation 14:7). Yochanan remembered earnestly praying and fasting during those days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—the ten days of repentance, or *Aseret Y'mei T'shuvah*.<sup>3</sup> They are "Days of Awe, for all humanity stands in judgment before God."<sup>4</sup>

The angel had more to say: "Worship the One who made heaven and earth and sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:7). Yochanan must have remembered the celebration

of Adam and Eve's creation during Rosh Hashanah. The festival has a twofold purpose: worshiping the Creator and preparing for the coming judgment.

For Yochanan, the Shabbat was one of the greatest memorials of Creation, and the message he hears from this first angel is a near-direct quote from the commandment to keep Shabbat:

"Remember *Yom Shabbat*, to keep it holy. . . . For in six days *ADONAI* made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Thus *ADONAI* blessed *Yom Shabbat*, and made it holy" (Exodus/Shemot 20:8, 11).

Both Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah remind us of God's creative power. The first angel emphasizes this commemoration as a way to prepare for the judgment.

But the vision Yochanan was seeing began to shift from an atmosphere of celebration to that of doom. A second angel flies by with

## YOM KIPPUR



**“Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great—she who made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her immorality” (Revelation 14:8)**

## SUKKOT



**“Here is the perseverance of the kedoshim—those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Yeshua” (Revelation 14:12).**

the urgency of a warning: “Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great—she who made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her immorality” (Revelation 14:8). The words “fallen, fallen” echo with the finality of the sentence of judgment. Yom Kippur has taken place.

The third angel’s message is even more severe. We shudder at its pronouncement: Those who disobey God and accept a false form of worship will be punished and have no rest (Revelation 14:9–11).

But God must have known that Yochanan needed a message of hope—both for himself and for us. In the midst of judgment and punishment, Yochanan sees something else in vision:

“Here is the perseverance of the *kedoshim*—those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of *Yeshua*” (Revelation 14:12).

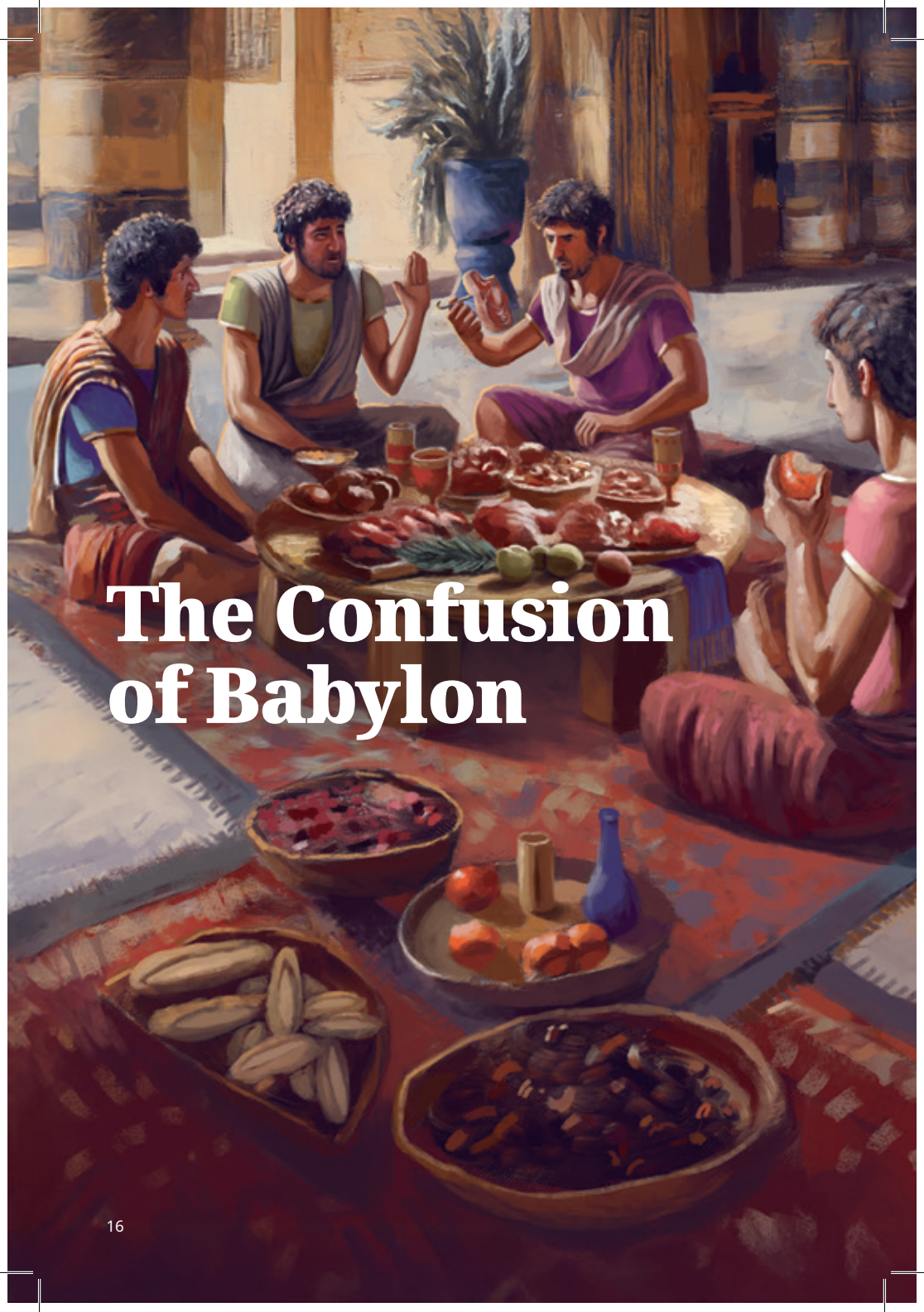
Yochanan sees the *kedoshim*, who “keep the commandments of God” and have deep faith like the faith of Yeshua. These people have heeded God’s commandment to “come out of Babylon” (Revelation 18:4) and have found rest through faith and obedience. While all the world is suffering under the judgments of God, these faithful few have persevered, and they remain unmoved.

Yochanan must have remembered the celebration of *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles, which begins just five days after Yom Kippur. It was a time of joy and peace because the judgment had passed, and God’s people had been sealed!

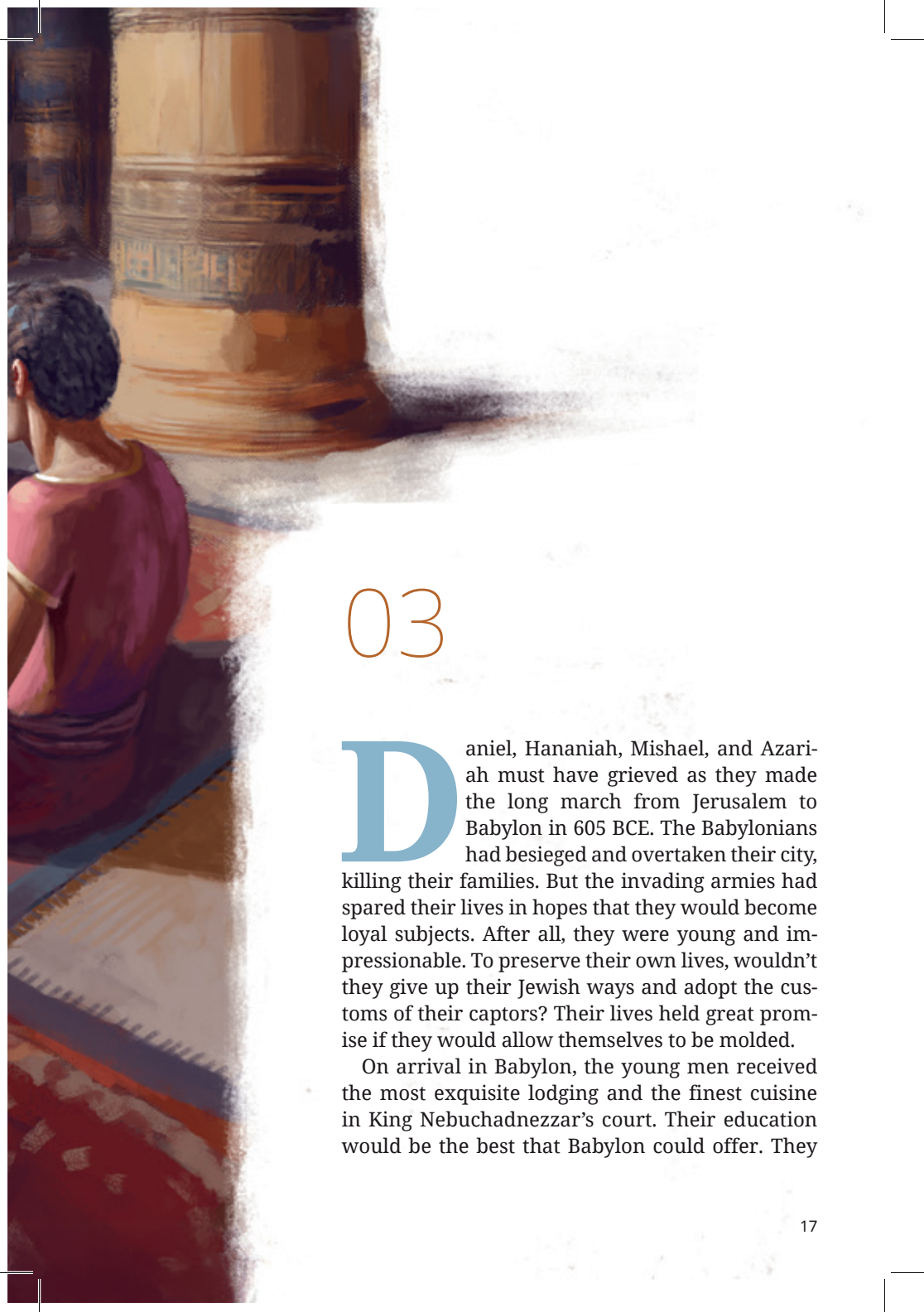
You, too, can be one of the *kedoshim* who departs from spiritual Babylon and avoids its coming destruction. Thankfully, the Tanakh will help us decipher the mysterious symbolism of Yochanan’s messages so that we may persevere to the end!

### References

1. “Putting Down Roots in Israel,” *The Jewish Agency for Israel*, [jewishagency.org](http://jewishagency.org).
2. Yoni Leviatan, “The Secret to Successful Aliyah (A True Story),” *The Times of Israel*, [blog.timesofisrael.com](http://blog.timesofisrael.com), May 26, 2019.
3. Rabbi Abraham B. Witty and Rachel J. Witty, *Exploring Jewish Tradition* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), pp. 205, 206, 217.
4. Witty, p. 204.



# The Confusion of Babylon



## 03

**D**aniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah must have grieved as they made the long march from Jerusalem to Babylon in 605 BCE. The Babylonians had besieged and overtaken their city, killing their families. But the invading armies had spared their lives in hopes that they would become loyal subjects. After all, they were young and impressionable. To preserve their own lives, wouldn't they give up their Jewish ways and adopt the customs of their captors? Their lives held great promise if they would allow themselves to be molded.

On arrival in Babylon, the young men received the most exquisite lodging and the finest cuisine in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. Their education would be the best that Babylon could offer. They

were destined to become officials in the royal palace.

Daniel 1:7 records that “the chief officer gave them new names: to Daniel, Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-nego.” What was the significance of these new names? They were the names of Babylonian idols and would help to establish the new identities of these young men. The meanings of these idolatrous names are listed in the following chart.

Though King Nebuchadnezzar and his officials did not force the Hebrew young men to leave their religion, they hoped that, by changing their names, they would slowly begin to identify with Babylonian ways and forsake their Jewish beliefs. In this way, the Babylonians sought to create confusion between Babylonian and Jewish tradition. If the two traditions were mixed together, the Jews would eventually accept false doctrines.

**Hebrew Name**

Mishael = who is like YHWH

**Babylonian Name**

Meshach = who is what Aku is

**Hebrew Name**

Azariah = YHWH helps

**Babylonian Name**

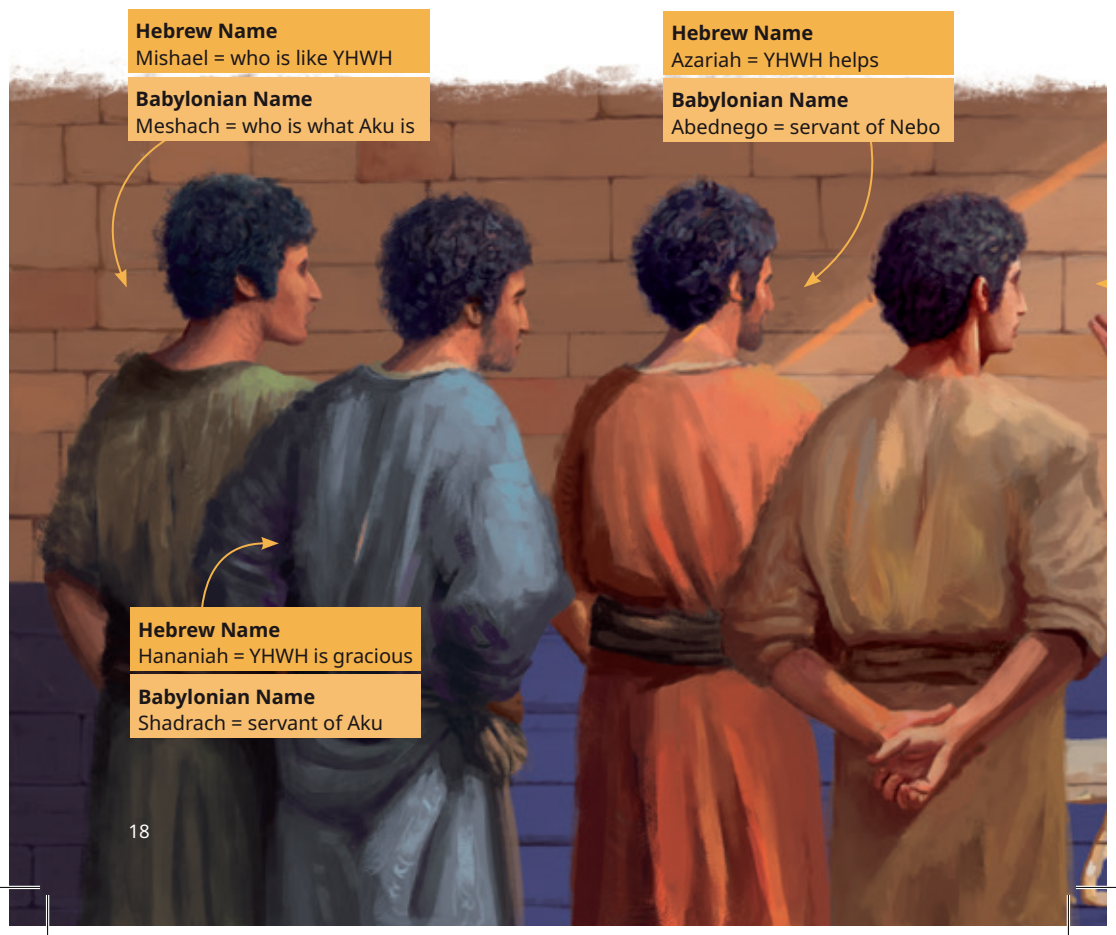
Abednego = servant of Nebo

**Hebrew Name**

Hananiah = YHWH is gracious

**Babylonian Name**

Shadrach = servant of Aku



These four young men chose to remain faithful to the one true God amid the confusion, but the Bible does not record whether the other Hebrews did. This trend of confusion has continued down to our day, as the false teachings of Babylon have continued to infiltrate the ranks of those who wish to follow the Tanakh.

### Spiritual Babylon Today

How does the confusion of Babylon still affect us? To answer the question, let's review the second angel's message in Revelation 14:8:

“ ‘Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great—she who made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her immorality.’ ”

The book of Revelation contains many symbols; and often, the book itself provides the meaning of these symbols. For this reason, we recognize that Babylon, its fall, and its wine are not literal but symbolic.

**Babylon.** *Babylon* and its root *Babel* are Hebrew words that mean “confusion (by mixing).” The words originated at the tower of Babel,

#### Hebrew Name

Daniel = YHWH is my judge

#### Babylonian Name

Belteshazzar = Bel protects his life



when the people after the time of Noah sought to build a city that would reach to heaven. God recognized that if they were allowed to continue unrestrained, these people had the potential to commit great evil, just as the people before the worldwide flood had. In His mercy, God confused the languages of the people, so that they would be forced to scatter throughout the earth. Genesis/*Bereishit* 11:9 records, “This is why it is named Babel, because *ADONAI* confused the languages of the entire world there, and from there *ADONAI* scattered them over the face of the entire world.” Babylon, then, must symbolize a system of confusion.

Revelation 17:5 adds more detail. It speaks of a woman who is named “Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and the detestable things of the earth.” Throughout the Tanakh and the apostolic writings of Revelation, a pure woman is used as a representation of God’s people (Jeremiah 6:2). A prostitute, on the other hand, symbolizes God’s people who have chosen to be unfaithful to Him (see Hosea 1:1, 2).

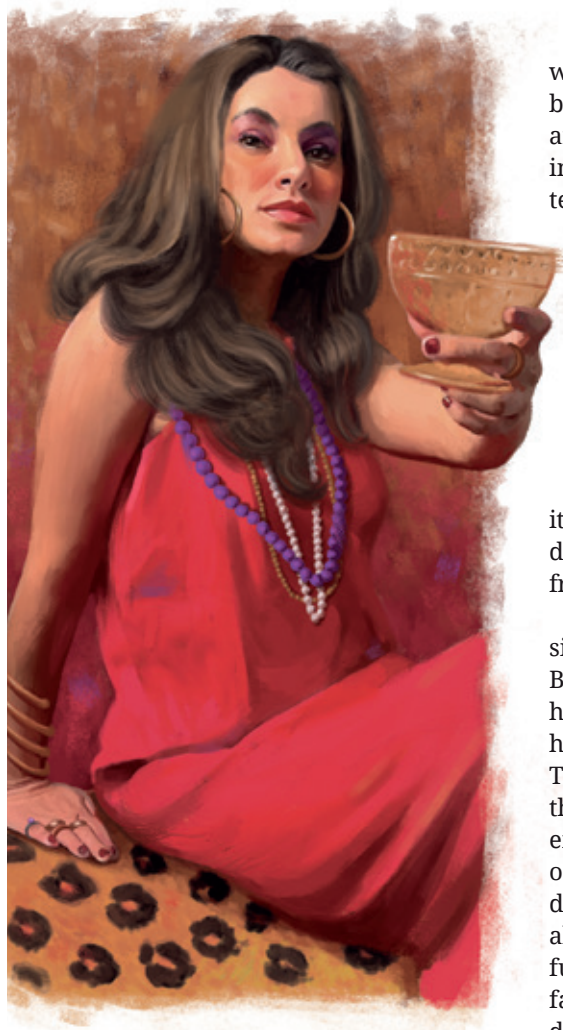
Babylon is a system that has chosen to be unfaithful to God and has held to a confused form of religion.

**Fallen.** The second angel gives the message that Babylon has fallen. *Fallen* means to “fall under judgment” or “come under condemnation.” It also can refer to a fall away from faithfulness to God and the truth (Psalm/Tehillim 37:24; Proverbs 24:16). Those in Babylon who once followed God have turned away from Him and become corrupt because Babylon has “made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her immorality” (Revelation 14:8).

**Wine.** Wine in the Bible also carries symbolism. In Isaiah/Yeshe-yahu 55:1–3, God invites His people to partake of wine:

“ ‘Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the water, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread? Your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me,

***Babylon is a system that has chosen to be unfaithful to God and has held to a confused form of religion.***



and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, so that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the trustworthy loyalty to David.’ ”

In this passage, God freely offers wine. He then parallels the symbol of wine to listening to Him and hearing His teachings. We can infer that wine represents the true teachings of God.

A pattern throughout the Tanakh is that there is a counterfeit to God’s ways. Fresh wine represents the true teachings of God, but intoxicating wine has a different effect, causing people to stray from good judgment (Isaiah 28:7). “The wine of the fury of [Babylon’s] immorality” is this kind of false teaching that does not come from God; it comes from fallen forms of religion.

The prophet Jeremiah used a similar symbol as he described Babylon during his time: “Babylon has been a golden cup in *ADONAI*’s hand, intoxicating the whole earth. The nations drunk her wine—so the nations are going crazy” (Jeremiah 51:7). As the Babylonians offered the Hebrew men wine to drink from the king’s table, they also offered them the wine of confusion and false doctrine. These false doctrines have been passed down to our time. It is these false doctrines that confuse God’s people, leading us to stay in Babylon when God is calling us out to freedom and safety.

### **The Call to Come Out of Babylon**

How should we respond to the confusion that has come in among



us? We will find the answer in a parallel passage in the book of Revelation. This passage further describes Babylon:

“After these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his glory. He cried out with a mighty voice, saying: ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a den for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit and for every unclean bird and for every unclean and detestable beast. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the fury of her immorality’ ” (Revelation 18:1–3).

The angel describes the terrible condition of Babylon. This confusion of worship and religion is a “den of demons.” The people who once followed God and were filled with His Spirit have now been filled with “every unclean spirit.”

The worship and teachings of Babylon are often a blend of the true and the false. Just as in the case of the four Hebrew young men in the Babylonian court, these changes have taken place slowly and deceptively. But now, with the cry of the fourth angel, Babylon is seen in its true light.

The angel in Revelation 18 provides one course of action for those who have found themselves confused by Babylon’s teachings:

“ ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you participate in her sins and receive her plagues! For her sins have piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes . . . Her plagues will arrive in a single day—death and grief and famine—and she shall be burned down with fire. For mighty is *ADONAI Elohim* who judges her!’ ” (Revelation 18:4, 5, 8).

As the time of the judgment approaches, God’s people who are still in spiritual Babylon—false systems of worship with their teachings of confusion—are urged to come out. They have the opportunity to leave Babylon and not participate in its sins, just like the Jews had the opportunity to leave Babylon after their exile had ended. God invites His people today to make a spiritual *aliyah* to the truths of the Tanakh and leave behind the teachings of Babylon. No matter how difficult it may be, we can turn from the confusion because we know that God’s ways are better than our ways.

A man with a dark beard and long hair, wearing a purple tunic and a gold bracelet, sits on a bed. He has a thoughtful or distressed expression, with his right hand resting on his forehead. The room has a tiled wall and a window with red and purple curtains. A blue blanket is draped over the bed.

# Untangling Babylon's Confusion



## 04

**K**ing Nebuchadnezzar awoke troubled one morning. He had had a disturbing dream, which he could not remember. In the ancient world, dreams often had spiritual significance and were considered to be messages from the gods. Nebuchadnezzar had an urgent desire to know his dream and its interpretation.

In his distress, he summoned his “magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans” (Daniel 2:2)—the highest religious leaders in Babylon. The magicians practiced magic and other forms of the occult to understand the will of the gods; the astrologers studied the stars and practiced enchantments; the sorcerers used witchcraft and claimed to communicate with the dead; and the Chaldeans were men of higher learning. If anyone could

provide the king with answers, they could.

Yet, their religion proved completely inadequate.

As the men rushed in before the king, perhaps awakened from sleep themselves, they awaited his command. Nebuchadnezzar said, "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream" (Daniel 2:3).

This was probably not the first occasion in which the king had desired to understand the meaning of a dream. The wise men of the kingdom responded, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will declare the interpretation" (Daniel 2:4).

But the king didn't remember his dream, and he expected these men, who claimed to have such wisdom from the gods, to tell it to him: "I firmly decree: If you do not make the dream and its meaning known to me, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses reduced to rubble. But if you tell the dream and its meaning, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and its meaning!" (Daniel 2:5, 6).

Now the wise men grew fearful. What the king was asking was impossible!

They tried to find a way to get the king to change his mind: "Let the king tell his servants the dream and we will declare the interpretation" (Daniel 2:7).

The king accused the men: "I know for sure that you are buying time since you see that I have firmly decreed that if you do not reveal the dream to me, there is only one verdict for you. You have conspired to say something false and fraudulent, until such a time as things might change. So then, tell me the dream and I will know that you can tell me its meaning" (Daniel 2:8, 9).

The wise men recognized that their occultic practices would not suffice: "There is no man on earth who can meet the king's demand. For no great king, however great or mighty, has ever asked such a thing from any magician, astrologer or Chaldean. What the king asks is too difficult. There is no one who could declare it to the king, except the gods whose dwelling is not with mortals!" (Daniel 2:10, 11).

Similarly today, the teachings of spiritual Babylon include falsehoods related to communication with the dead and other occultic practices. Many of these teachings have been combined with teachings of the Tanakh. They are Babylon's ways of confusion, which will not succeed.

### **Babylon's Confusion Today**

Coming out of Babylon means using the Tanakh to evaluate everything that we believe. Unfortunately, traditional interpretations of the Tanakh have led to

## Coming out of Babylon means using the Tanakh to evaluate everything that we believe.

much confusion among sincere followers of God. The Mishnah and Talmud are oral traditions that the rabbis have passed down through history. The Talmud is a commentary on the Mishnah, which then offers comments on the Tanakh itself. Could it be that these traditions have brought the confusion of Babylon into our midst? The Talmud itself claims that “everything begins as a mystery, and ends as a mystery.”

One example of the confusion comes from a disputation recorded in the Talmud. The followers of Hillel and the followers of Shammai were arguing over whether one had to lie down when saying the evening prayer.

“Shammai said, ‘Yes, Deuteronomy says, “When you lie down and when you rise up.”’

Hillel, on the other hand, said, ‘No, it’s not required. It’s just customary.’”

In the course of the dispute, one rabbi shared that, while traveling, he had dutifully laid down to say his evening prayers. As a result,

he was attacked by robbers and nearly lost his life. The rabbis of the school of Hillel told him that his near-death experience was a consequence of not following what Hillel said!<sup>1</sup>

Disputations of an even more serious nature can be found in the Talmud. They offer opinions but fail to establish what is right. Rabbi Louis Jacobs stated in the *Talmudic Argument* that in the Talmud, “theories are advanced and then contradicted. They are examined from many points of view and qualified where necessary. One argument leads to another when logic demands it. The claims of conflicting theories are investigated with great thoroughness and much subtlety.”<sup>2</sup>

Many Orthodox Jews study the Talmud far more than the Tanakh and consider it an authoritative source.<sup>3</sup> But are the teachings of the Talmud always consistent with the Tanakh? This is the question we must answer to be sure that we do not remain in the confusion of Babylon.

The religion of historical Babylon contained errors related to



occultic practices and sorcery. In the following sections, we will consider some teachings about these practices and evaluate them with the Tanakh.

### The Soul after Death

Many people believe in the separation of the body and the soul after death, during which time the soul goes to “the-world-to-come.” Talmudic rabbis taught that the soul existed in “the-world-to-come” in a “fully conscious state.”<sup>4</sup> A story in the Talmud tells of Raba, a Babylonian sage, who asked his dying friend Nahman to come back to him after he died and tell him what death was like. According to

the story, Nahman indeed returned to him in a dream with the following description of death: “Like the removal of hair from milk, which is a most gentle process. But nevertheless, were the Holy One, Blessed be He, to say to me: Go back to that world, the physical world, as you were, I would not want to go, for the fear of the Angel of Death is great. And I would not want to go through such a terrifying experience a second time.”<sup>5</sup> This story would indicate that those who die remain in a conscious state.

Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah, also teaches reincarnation, or *gilgul*. The book of Jewish mysticism known as the *Zohar* illustrates the

concept of reincarnation by telling the story of a vineyard owner who plants grapes year after year and continues to get sour grapes. The question is asked: “How many times must he go through the process? He said, ‘Up to a thousand generations.’ ” Similarly, Jewish mystics believe that reincarnation takes place generation after generation and depends on the merit of the individual in each life.<sup>6</sup>

The Zohar also teaches that people have three parts to their souls. The first is *Nefesh*, which stays in the body for a few days after an individual dies and then reincarnates into another body. The second part, *Ruah*, goes to a place of torment in *Gehinom*, which has seven levels. If the individual lived a fairly good life, *Ruah* can ascend up the levels until it reaches the lower level of the Garden of Eden. Then, it can eventually reach the higher level of the Garden of Eden. The third part, *Neshamah*,

is divine and good. It immediately goes to the higher Garden of Eden after death.<sup>7</sup>

These teachings seem confusing! Let’s look at what the Tanakh teaches about the soul after death.

The Tanakh describes the creation of man in Genesis 2:7: “Then *ADONAI Elohim* formed the man out of the dust from the ground and He breathed into his nostrils a breath of life—so the man became a living being.” The word “being” in this verse (“*nefesh*” in Hebrew) is sometimes translated as “soul.” The living being, or soul, is formed of two important parts: the body, which is made from dust, and the breath of life, which comes from God. When one part or the other is taken away, the soul (*nefesh*) no longer exists. When we die, our physical bodies perish, and God retains our “spirit.”

For this reason, King Solomon wrote that:

***“The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, even the memory of them is forgotten.”***

**ECCLESIASTES 9:5**



“The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hatred, and their zeal have already perished; never again will they have a share in anything that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes/Kohelet 9:5, 6).

This passage does not indicate that this death only takes place for the wicked. The righteous also will be unconscious in death. Psalm 6:6 adds that there is “no memory” of God after death. Thus, neither reincarnation nor the existence of the soul in a conscious state after death coincide with the teachings of the Tanakh.

### Speaking to the Dead

If you have experienced the death of a loved one, you may have prayed the *El Maleh Rachamim* for the souls of those who died:

“O G-d, full of compassion, Who dwells on high, grant true rest upon the wings of the Shechinah in the exalted spheres of the holy and pure, who shine as the resplendence of the firmament, to the soul of [the individual’s Hebrew name and the name of his father] who has gone to his [supernal] world, for charity has been donated in remembrance of his soul; may his place of rest be in Gan Eden. Therefore, may the All-Merciful One shelter him with the cover of His wings forever, and bind his soul in the bond of life. The Lord is his heritage; may he rest in his resting-place in peace; and let us say: Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

Many also ask the dead to pray for them in heaven.<sup>9</sup> Great rabbis throughout history have gone to the tombs of the patriarchs, such as David, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, and

## What the Tanakh Teaches About Death

**1**  
We have no intellectual capacity (Psalm 146:4).

**2**  
We know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

**3**  
We experience no emotion (Ecclesiastes 9:6).

asked the dead to grant them favors, or speak to God on their behalf.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the Tanakh, God spoke directly to His people or through living prophets, but He forbade invoking the dead. He commanded in Deuteronomy/Devarim 18:9–12:

“When you enter the land *ADONAI* your God is giving you, you are not to learn to do the abominations of those nations. There must not be found among you anyone who makes his son or daughter pass through the fire, or a fortune-teller, soothsayer, omen reader, or sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or a medium, a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is an abomination to *ADONAI*, and because of these abominations *ADONAI* your God is driving them out from before you.”

In Isaiah 8:19, 20, God warned His people against seeking guidance from the dead:

“When they say to you: ‘Consult the mediums and necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ shouldn’t a people seek their God? Should a people consult the dead on behalf of the living? To *Torah* and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light.”

Despite this warning from God, the Talmud and rabbis have said that speaking with the spirits of the dead is acceptable. Yet, if the soul indeed dies and the dead do not go directly to “the-world-to-come,” then such practices are futile. They are an example of the confusion found in Babylon.

Coming out of Babylon means a return to the truths of the Tanakh. While many aspects of death remain veiled in mystery, there are a few points that we know very clearly. See the infographic below for these points.



4

We cannot interact with life on Earth (Ecclesiastes 9:6).



5

The grave is a place of rest (Job 17:13–16).



6

We return to dust (Psalm 104:29).

And yet, the Tanakh also speaks about a coming resurrection. Scripture tells us clearly that there will be a resuscitation of our dead bodies:

“Yet I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and in the end, He will stand on earth.  
Even after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I will see God;  
I myself will see Him with my own eyes,  
I and not a stranger” (Job 19:25–27).

Job believed that, even after his body was destroyed, he would somehow return to his flesh and see God with his own eyes. In fact, nearly all the prophets spoke about the coming resurrection:

- › David said those who go down to the dust will kneel before God (Psalm 22:28–30).
- › Hosea spoke of God ransoming us from the hand of Sheol (Hosea 13:14).
- › Isaiah said God will swallow up death forever and wipe away tears from every face (Isaiah 25:8); he also wrote that dead corpses will live again, and those who dwell in the dust will awake and shout for joy (Isaiah 26:19).
- › Daniel said many of those who sleep in the dust will awake—some to everlasting life, and others to everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

- › Ezekiel foreshadowed an army of dead bones that would be reanimated to life by God’s Spirit (Ezekiel 37:1–14).

This is the antithesis of the spiritualistic, Babylonish attempts to speak to the dead or secure a higher reincarnation.

The truths of Scripture teach us that we need not fear death, because God will raise us up and wipe every tear from our faces! Isn’t that a beautiful promise? Why should we stay in Babylon with Babylonian teachings when we may instead return to the land of promise?

### **Superstition and Magic**

One final kind of false teaching is also something the wise men of Babylon practiced: superstition and magic. Deuteronomy 18 also forbade these occultic practices.

## **To Torah and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light.**

**ISAIAH 8:19, 20,**

For some today, superstition can look like using horoscopes to understand the future. For others, it may involve wearing charms, such as the *hamsa* or the red Kabbalah bracelet for protection from the evil eye, which is believed to be a “curse that is transmitted . . . when someone looks at you or your possessions (or especially your children) with envy.”<sup>11</sup>

As the wise men admitted, superstition and magic were inadequate. And in the end, the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream came not from the

magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, or Chaldeans but from the God of heaven through Daniel. Daniel told the king,

“The mystery about which the king inquired is such that neither wise men, astrologers, magicians, or sorcerers can disclose it to the king. But, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar the things that will happen in the latter days’ ” (Daniel 2:27, 28).

Later, the words of the prophecy were recorded in the Tanakh so that they would be available to God’s people throughout the ages. The words of the Tanakh are words of certainty. They reveal truth to us, so that we won’t fall into the confusion of Babylon. But are we studying the Tanakh with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Or are we content to remain in Babylon, hanging our life and eternal safety on human traditions?

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An artistic illustration of a study desk. On the desk, there are several rolled-up scrolls, one of which is partially unrolled, showing text. To the right of the scrolls is a multi-armed candelabra with lit candles. The background features a window with light blue curtains. The overall style is painterly and warm.

# Returning to the Tanakh's Truths



# 05

**I**n the 1970s, Jewish people in Ethiopia began to experience oppression under a new head of state. Between 1980 and 1985, many Jewish people fled by foot to Sudan, where they received assistance to complete their *aliyah* to Jerusalem. The journey involved taking a dangerous route of over 1,000 kilometers through the desert and resulted in the deaths of 4,000 Jews.

Five-year-old Benny and his family were among those who made the journey to escape their country. “We started to run out of water,” he explains. Because of the poor conditions, many older people did not survive. Women who were pregnant died in childbirth, and their babies often died also. People who contracted an illness called desert fever were usually left behind to die because they were too weak to continue. Both of Benny’s



parents contracted the illness, but their family refused to leave them; a relative provided horses for them to ride on.

“After a while without water, I couldn’t stand up, so they put me on a donkey,” says Benny. Not long after, the donkeys and horses sensed that water was nearby and took off in a stampede toward it. Benny fell off into a thorny Sudanese acacia tree, causing him to bleed profusely and lose consciousness. Thinking he was dead, his family prepared to bury him. But just before the burial, they decided to wash him. Much to their surprise, the water running over his body revived him. He was alive! He would survive the journey to Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1980, over 90,000 Jews have made *aliyah* from Ethiopia, enduring the hardships and sacrifices that come with it to find freedom in Israel.

### **The Tanakh and the Confusion of Babylon**

Doing the right thing is not easy, and those going on *aliyah* understand this better than many others. They are willing to deny their desires and comforts to be faithful to their beliefs and hopes. Spiritual *aliyah* is the same way. It involves a faith that would rather live in the freedom of the Tanakh’s teachings than the confusion of Babylon, even if doing so is uncomfortable. Yeshua, a Jewish man whom we have written about in some of the

other magazines in this series, lived with this kind of faith.

At the beginning of his public ministry, Yeshua went to Yochanan ben Zechariah and was baptized in the Jordan River. When he came up out of the water, a voice was heard from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased!" (Matthew 3:17). But Yeshua's union with God would soon be challenged. Would he believe God's word, the Tanakh, when provoked to rely on other sources?

Yeshua went immediately into the desert to fast and pray. A great and important job lay ahead of him, and He needed to be spiritually strong. He needed to be one with his Heavenly Father. He prayed earnestly and ate no food for 40 days. Instead, he spent his time communing with God and meditating on the Tanakh.

At the end of 40 days, Yeshua was weak and hungry. Suddenly, he saw a bright, glorious being. It appeared to be an angel of light, but soon he realized the deceptive nature of this apparent "angel." He approached Yeshua and tempted him, saying, "If you are *Ben-Elohim*, tell these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Had Yeshua not heard, only 40 days before, the voice from heaven declaring him to be the Son of God? Now he was asked to prove this special relationship, to pull from other sources beyond the plain word of the Lord.

In faith, Yeshua refused. He quoted from the Tanakh, Deuteronomy 8:3:

" 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" ' " (Matthew 4:4).

Yeshua knew that even when his senses seemed to be telling him that something was right, the Tanakh had to be the final determiner of truth. The enemy was not finished, however. He took Yeshua into Jerusalem and brought him to the highest point of the temple. Again, the enemy tried to insinuate doubt about his calling. This time, the devil also quoted Scripture, but falsely so.

"Then the devil took Him into the holy city and placed Him on the highest point of the Temple. 'If You are *Ben-Elohim*,' he said, 'throw Yourself down. For it is written,

" 'He shall command His angels concerning you,' and 'upon their hands they shall lift you up, so that you may not strike your foot against a stone.'

"*Yeshua* said to him, 'Again it is written, "You shall not put *ADONAI* your God to the test" ' " (Matthew 4:5-7).

The enemy made one more attempt to overcome Yeshua. He took him up on a high mountain,



showing him all the beauties of the land—not the dry desert where the man had been fasting, but the lush fields and vineyards of the valley. The sunlight glistened off the marble of the cities. It was a refreshing sight.

The devil presented his final and most enticing offer: “All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.”

But even the prospect of all the world could not move the man who had chosen to be faithful to God. Showing that he now recognized the true character of the enemy, he boldly responded, “Go away, satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship *ADONAI* your God, and Him only shall you serve’ ” (Matthew 4:8–10; see Deuteronomy 10:20).

The Torah was again his life-line. The enemy could do nothing but leave. Through the Tanakh, Yeshua had been victorious over Satan’s attacks. In fact, Yeshua’s entire ministry was characterized by deep devotion to the Tanakh. He taught unyielding obedience to its commands, and he spoke

against the emptiness of human traditions. He even rebuked some of the religious leaders who had chosen to turn away from the commandments of God to hold onto their traditions:

“ You set aside the commands of God, in order that you may validate your own tradition’ ” (Mark 7:9).

For Yeshua, the Torah held the final authority. He believed the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“To *Torah* and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light” (Isaiah 8:20).

Yeshua showed His love for *HASHEM* by obeying His teachings above every human idea. Unlike Adam and Eve, the first humans, who chose to follow the words of the serpent rather than the words of God (Genesis 3), he always lived by faith in the Word of God and taught everyone to do so.

***Yeshua’s entire ministry was characterized by deep devotion to the Tanakh.***

# ***The kedoshim will be the people who remain when all others have succumbed to false worship and teaching.***

## **Characteristics of the *Kedoshim***

Yochanan's visionary messages in Revelation 14 encourage us to prepare for the judgment by coming out of Babylon and its system of confusion. The third angel identifies those who do so as the *kedoshim*, "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Yeshua."

The *kedoshim* will be the people who remain when all others have succumbed to false worship and teaching. Despite the most difficult circumstances, they will keep the commandments of God that are found in the Torah.

And they will also have the faith of Yeshua. Just as Yeshua relied completely on the Word of God in a most trying temptation, the *kedoshim* will find strength through the Tanakh. They will respond to the call to come out of Babylon by rejecting its false teachings. We have discussed a few of them in this magazine:

- › The consciousness of the soul after death.

- › The ability to speak or pray to the dead.
- › The use of spiritualism and magic in any of its forms.

The *kedoshim* will evaluate every one of their beliefs with the truths of the Tanakh, while rejecting the teachings of other writers that contradict the truth. They will refuse to allow confusion in their lives. And if it becomes necessary to leave behind some cherished view that they realize is not according to the Tanakh, they will make this spiritual *aliyah* even if it means going against the customs, displeasing loved ones, or experiencing personal difficulty.

## **Coming Out of Spiritual Babylon Today**

When Omer, a devout Jew, read the prophetic messages of Revelation, he encountered the call to come out of spiritual Babylon. How did he respond? Omer realized that if he loved God and the truth, he had to be willing to place them above everything else in his life, even religious customs.

“You’re crazy!” his friends laughed. “Will you turn from the teachings of the Talmud, which our ancestors have revered for hundreds of years?”

“Yes,” Omer said. “I must believe what the Tanakh says above any other book or writing. The Tanakh tells me that the dead don’t know anything and that they are sleeping in the grave.”

When Omer’s father died, he did not participate in reciting the *El Maleh Rachamim*. His decision caused some tension among his relatives. But how could he pray for his father’s soul when he knew that his father was resting peacefully in the grave? Omer took comfort in the fact that his father was not experiencing torment in one of the levels of Gehinom or being



## ***Choose today to be among those who keep the commandments of God and have a faith founded on the Tanakh.***



reincarnated in an endless cycle. By leaving the confusing teachings of spiritual Babylon, Omer had found a peace he was unwilling to give up.

You can experience that peace, too. What will be your response to the call to come out of Babylon? Will you leave confusing teachings and make spiritual *aliyah* back to the Tanakh? Will you let go of any occultic practices or beliefs in your life? It is sometimes an uncomfortable path, but it is worthwhile.

Just like Rosh Hashanah preceded Yom Kippur, we live in the time of repentance right before the sentence of the judgment will be pronounced. It is our opportunity to leave false teachings and embrace the Tanakh as the authority in our lives. Choose today to be among those who keep the commandments of God and have a faith founded on the Tanakh.

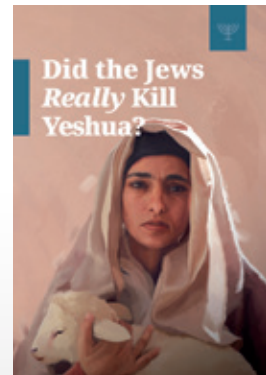
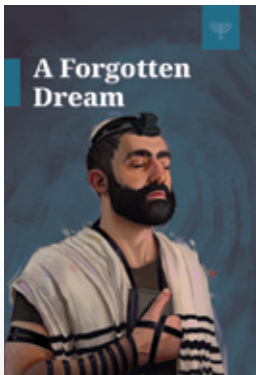
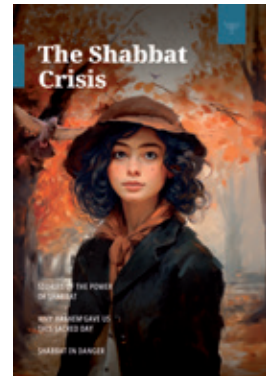
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