

Mashiach with Certainty

Rambam, the famous rabbinical commentator of the 12th century, authored 13 Principles of Judaism. One of them deals with the concept of Messiah.

"I believe with a perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. And even though he tarries, with all of this I will wait for him every day that he should come."

Principle 12

In regard to the Messiah, what is the proper faith? Over the next few months there will be several articles that deal with this issue. Two questions will be posed.

1. What is the identity (characteristics) of the Messiah?
2. What is the work of Messiah?

The Identity of Messiah

Section 1: The Messiah and the House of David

It is a well-known fact that there is a connection between Messiah and the House of David. What is the significance of this relationship? In order to answer this question, one needs to understand the background of the lineage of David. The book of Ruth reveals the foundation of the Davidic kingdom. The book of Ruth opens with the verse,

"...a man from Bethlehem of Judea went to live in the fields of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons."

Ruth 1:1

There are two important elements in this verse. One is that Judea is mentioned. The patriarch Jacob reveals that the Messiah is from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). The second is that there is a mention of the concept "exile". When the role of Messiah is discussed, more will be said on the subject of exile and Messiah.

The name of this man that departed from Bethlehem was Elimelech. His two sons married two Moabite women (Orpah and Ruth). Elimelech and his two sons died and his wife, Naomi, and only one her daughters-in-law (Ruth) returned to Judah.

Naomi said,

"I went out full, but empty I returned."

Ruth 1:21

When Naomi and Ruth returned to Judea, their financial situation was dire. Therefore, Ruth gleaned in the fields after those who were harvesting (Ruth 2:3). Ruth took this action because the Torah instructs the poor,

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely reap the corners of your field, nor shall you glean the gleanings of your harvest. And (in) your vineyards you shall not pick the undeveloped (grapes) nor shall you take the gleanings, but you shall leave them for the poor and the proselyte, I AM the L-rd your God."

Lev. 19:9-10

Ruth the Moabite utilized the commandments in order to find the blessings of the L-rd. It was because she did the Torah commandments that she found favor in the eyes of Boaz. Boaz was an extremely wealthy man and a relative of Naomi's family. Upon noticing this young Moabite woman keeping the Torah, he asked,

"Who is this young lady?"

Ruth 2:5

Boaz also said to Ruth,

"...listen to me well, my daughter, do not go and glean in any other field, and also do not leave from this place. Thus you shall cling to my young ladies, your eyes shall be on the field which they are harvesting. Walk after them, for I have commanded the young men that they should not touch you..."

Ruth 2:8

Boaz continued and blessed Ruth saying,

"May the L-rd pay you for your actions and may your reward be full with the L-rd, the G-d of Israel, Whom you have come to seek refuge under His wings."

Ruth 2:12

These verses are most significant. The expression, "under His wings", is a Hebrew idiom, which means to obey the Torah commandments. In order to understand this expression, one must remember the commandment of tzitzit (the fringed garment),

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them, "Make for themselves tassels upon the corners (wings) of their garments throughout their generations. And they shall place upon the fringed garment (tzitzit) a blue thread. And it shall be fore you a fringed garment and you shall look at it and you shall remember all the commandments of the L-rd and you shall do them and you shall not stray after your heart or after your eyes, which you prostitute(yourselves) after

them. On account of this, you shall remember and you shall do all My commandments and you shall be holy to the L-rd your G-d."'''

Number 15:37-40

Another example that demonstrates Ruth's utilization of the Torah in order to find the blessings of G-d is found in chapter three. According to the Torah, there is an obligation upon a widow to raise up an heir for her departed husband. This commandment requires the widow to bear a son by means of one of her brothers-in-law or a close relative.

"For when brothers dwell together and one dies among them, and he does not have a son, the wife of the deceased shall not marry outside to a strange man (non-relative). Her brother-in-law shall come upon her and take her to himself for a wife and do levirate marriage (yibmah). And it shall be that the firstborn which she bears will establish the name of his dead brother and his name will not be wiped out from among Israel."

Duet. 25:5-6

In this account from the book of Ruth, Boaz performed the duty of the levirate marriage and raised up an heir for the deceased. It is important to note that scripture calls the one (Boaz) who raises up an heir a redeemer. All commentators agree that the word "redeemer" hints to the Messiah. This view is based on the fact that Israel, due to sin, was spiritually dead and it is Messiah Who has the responsibility to raise Israel up so they might inherit the kingdom of G-d.

The book of Ruth ends with the genealogy that ties the tribe of Judah to Boaz. It is very significant that this genealogy begins with Perez, the child that was born to Judah and Tamar also through a levirate marriage. The genealogy ends by informing us that the name of the child that Boaz raised up with Ruth was named Obed, the father of Jesse, who begot David.

What is one to conclude? It was the Torah observance of Ruth and Boaz that caused the messianic lineage not to be wiped out. Through their faithfulness, the House of David was established.

In regard to recognizing the Messiah, one must conclude that the Messiah will be One Whose character is reflected through Torah observance.

In the next article we will continue our discussion of identifying the Messiah when we connect Bethlehem, the city where the book of Ruth took place, and the birthplace of Messiah.