



THE RISEN MESSIAH
JOHN 21:1-14

By R. Baruch, PhD

The Risen Messiah, John 21:1-14

Yeshua promised His disciples that He would meet with them in the Galilee after His death, which occurred at Passover. This means that He was informing them that He would rise from the dead. Although after His resurrection He appeared previously to them in Jerusalem, this did not mean that the promise of Him meeting them in the Galilee would not take place.

The Galilee area is prophesied by Isaiah as a place of revelation. According to Isaiah, the Galilee is where Israel's Messiah would begin to reveal Himself. How did Yeshua reveal that He was the Messiah? He did so by the numerous miracles which He performed there.

Yeshua said to His disciples,

"But after I have risen, I will go before you into the Galilee." Mark 14:28

What was the purpose of Yeshua appearing to His disciples in the Galilee? This is the question that this article will examine.

The disciples returned to the Galilee after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At this time, Peter announced to some of the other disciples who were with him by the Sea of Tiberias that he was going to fish. Normally we call this body of water the Sea of Galilee. So why does the Scripture refer to it in this passage as the Sea of Tiberias, a Roman designation? Peter, as well as the other disciples, had hoped that Yeshua would bring a significant change to Israel. Namely, to remove the oppression of the Roman Empire from the Land of Israel. With the return of the disciples to the Galilee, things were back to normal; the Roman Empire was still in power.

With Peter's announcement that he was going to fish, other disciples joined with him. The text states that they went to fish at night. Although fishermen working throughout the night is normal, there is an additional purpose to this statement. Throughout the Scripture, the concept of night often implies darkness, from a knowledge standpoint. In other words, when something takes place at night, it conveys that something is not understood, comprehended or simply one is not aware of this.

It is very significant that when Yeshua comes before the disciples it is early in the morning, i.e. there is light. The text is foreshadowing the fact that Yeshua is going to reveal something to His disciples. When Yeshua comes to them, the reader is told that they did not know that it was Him. It is immediately after this is stated that Yeshua addressed them as little children. The Biblical word which is used by Yeshua implies a lack of maturity. Yeshua then asked them if they had something to eat. Although many English translations use the word "fish", the actual word means food in a general sense. The disciples responded that they had no food. This answer reveals that their effort, i.e. fishing, was not producing the desired results. In other words, G-d was not blessing their actions. Why were their efforts not being blessed? They lacked a proper understanding of what it means to be a disciple.

Yeshua then instructs them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and that they would most certainly catch fish. Immediately upon obeying Him, they caught a great catch of fish. This event is very similar to Luke 5:1-11. It was in this passage from Luke that Yeshua called these fishermen to become fishers of men. The fact that Peter announced he was going

back to fishing for fish (and some of the other disciples joined him) shows that they had lost sight of the calling that Yeshua had given to them.

Departing from the calling of G-d is something that can happen to any believer. In fact, it is a most common happening. Why does this happen so frequently? The answer is that one departs from the proper understanding of who Yeshua is. Once this happens to a person, he will return to the manner in which he previously lived. Yeshua had promised to meet His disciples in the Galilee in order to reveal once again to them His identity and how they needed to respond to Him, i.e., be a disciple.

The disciple whom Yeshua loved, upon seeing this great catch, was the first to proclaim that the One Who called them to cast their net into the sea was Yeshua. The fact that none of the disciples recognized Yeshua upon seeing Him, teaches the reader an important truth. It was not the outward appearance of Yeshua that was in any way memorable. His body and how He looked was not in any way connected to His identity as the Son of G-d. It is very informing that the disciples recognized Yeshua by this deed. This is related to His teaching that true disciples will be known by their fruit, i.e. good deeds.

After the disciple who Yeshua loved cried out, "It is the L-rd", Peter's response is most revealing. The reader is told that he was naked. Nakedness in the Bible is associated with shame and a lack of good deeds. Peter's desire to return to fishing, as though the three years he had spent with Yeshua left no lasting change upon his life, was shameful. The first thing that Peter did upon hearing that Yeshua was standing before them on the shore was to gird himself and then cast himself into the water. Girding oneself is associated with service. This act represented Peter renewing his commitment to serve Yeshua. The fact that he was girded with a garment, demonstrated his desire not to live in a faithless (shameful) manner. The fact that he cast himself into the water was a hint to baptism, which also relates to service and a renewal in Peter's faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua.

While Peter swam to shore, the other disciples came in their small boat, dragging the net with the multitude of fish. The text states they were 200 cubits from the shore. The number 200 should be understood as 2 x 100; with 2 representing two divergent opinions and the number 100 representing completeness or entirety. In other words, the other disciples were still wavering between their personal ambitions and their call to be disciples. They, like Peter, came to Yeshua that morning, but not with the same commitment, for they were still focused on the great catch of fish.

As the disciples approached the L-rd, the reader is told that they saw fire with fish laid upon it and bread. The combination of fish and bread is not new in the Gospels, as Yeshua fed 5,000 and 4,000. These feedings represented Yeshua's miraculous power and a call to bring freedom and holiness to the world by means of Israel. It is important to remember that Yeshua chose twelve disciples and obviously the number twelve should be associated with Israel, i.e. the Jewish people. Yeshua came before the disciples that morning to renew their call to carry on with the calling that G-d had given Israel. It is most significant that on that particular morning there were seven disciples present (see verse 2). In this context, the number seven relates to a re-commissioning, as the number seven conveys sanctification, i.e. being set apart for a specific purpose. In returning to the issue of the bread and fish, it is stated that the fish were upon the fire. Fire often relates to the Holy Spirit.

In this passage, there is a clear distinction between the fish and bread that Yeshua had prepared, and the great catch of fish. Yeshua commanded the disciples to bring this great catch and set it before them. Fish, according to Jewish tradition, represent blessing; however, in this context, the fish represent Yeshua's call to make them fishers of men, while the bread relates to sustenance. The message is that Yeshua will sustain them as they follow His call upon their lives. The purpose of having the great catch of fish brought along side of the meal that Yeshua prepared for the disciples is to present them with a choice. Each one of them must choose either to accept the life which Yeshua had prepared for them, which is anointed with the Holy Spirit, or return to be fishermen of fish. It is clear that such a catch was not at all typical.

The great catch of fish is a very significant part of this account. As stated previously, there is a similar account in Luke chapter 5, which served as a key event in calling the fishermen to be Yeshua's disciples. There is no doubt that the great catch in John chapter 21 would cause the disciples to remember what transpired in Luke chapter 5 and this call. What is different about the passage from John is the fact that the number of fish is mentioned.

Verse 11 reveals that it was in fact Peter who had brought the net full of large fish before Yeshua and the rest of the disciples. One would think that there would be fish of all different sizes which were caught in the net; however, this was not the case. Only large fish were caught. There were exactly 153 fish in the net. What is the significance of this number? The text relates this number as $100 + 50 + 3$. We have learned that the number 100 conveys completeness or something in its entirety. The number 50, as in the Jubilee, conveys freedom or liberty and finally the number 3 has the purpose of revealing something. Hence the number 153 speaks about the total freedom and liberty that Yeshua came to reveal. As disciples we are called to proclaim this message to the world.

There is another way of understanding the significance of this great catch. It was stated that the meal that Yeshua prepared along side of this great catch presented the disciples with a choice: either accept the meal Yeshua prepared which focused on their call and His provision anointed with the Holy Spirit, or ignore the message of the 153 fish and simply focus upon the sheer amount of money that the great catch of large fish represented. Many people's "faith" and "commitment" to Yeshua are not based in His call to serve His purposes, but in an incorrect belief that G-d only wants to prosper them financially.

Perhaps a story will help illustrate this point. A famous rabbi by the name of Shimon bar Yochai was with his disciples when a former student returned from abroad with great riches. All of his disciples were envious and wanted to leave their studies and follow a non-religious lifestyle and become wealthy. Rabbi Shimon took his disciples outside and showed them the large valley that was before them. He prayed and miraculously the valley was filled with gold. Rabbi Shimon told his disciples that they could go and take from the valley all the gold they wanted, but in doing so it would reduce their rewards in the Kingdom of G-d.

The large catch of fish represented the same temptation that the gold presented Rabbi Shimon's disciples. Receiving what Yeshua has prepared for us, which is anointed with the Holy Spirit, is far better than all the gold or fish in the world.

This passage informs the reader that this was the third time that Yeshua had appeared to the disciples after His resurrection. Not only does the number three relate to revealing something, but it can also have a meaning of confirmation. Scripture teaches that something is

confirmed by two or three witnesses. Hence, another important message of this passage is to confirm that Yeshua truly had resurrected from the dead. How will you respond to Yeshua's call on your life?