aleph
leader's
handbook

"do i have a purpose?"

"is there a God?"

"what am i doing here?"

"why is there evil in the world?"

aleph

"what is the meaning of life?"

"is there more to life than this?"

"is this it?"

aleph

ask questions

learn about God

explore the Scriptures

probe for answers

hunt for truth

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section 1
what is aleph?

what is aleph?

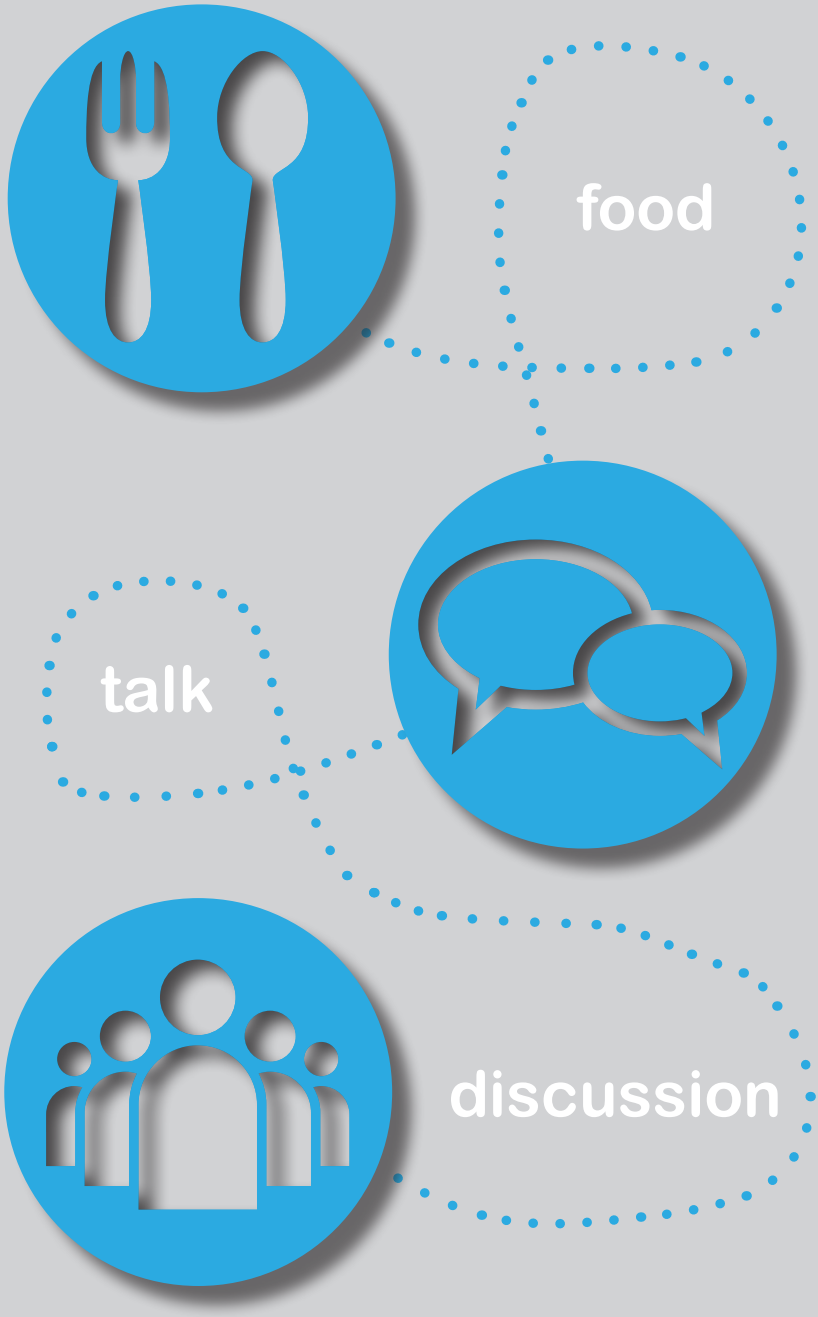
Aleph is a series of interactive sessions that explore Jewish spirituality and the Messianic hope found in the Hebrew Scriptures (Tanakh) where one can …

Ask questions
Learn about God
Explore the Scriptures
Probe for answers
Hunt for Truth.

Aleph is designed for small group (chavurah) leaders, congregational leaders or anyone who desires to see people come to know Yeshua as Lord and Messiah. This leader's guide will equip you in this process. Aleph was developed with the goal of reaching both Jewish and Gentile seekers. What makes Aleph unique from other such programs, i.e., Alpha, is that it has been developed with a Jewish audience in view, which is to say, it presents a Jewish worldview with a primary reliance on the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, Aleph is still highly effective for a Gentile audience in that it will serve to introduce them to the Messiah in his own historical/cultural context. Further, it will serve to ground Gentile believers in the Hebrew Scriptures which will only enhance their understanding of the New Covenant Scriptures.

It is the author's hope that this leader's guide will be effective in helping your chavurah or congregation reach out to the Jewish community where you are. Encouraging Jewish friends or family members to attend Aleph can be challenging but it is well worth the effort. If you spend some time envisioning your chavurah and/or congregation about Aleph, along with prayer for the Jewish community, it will make a big difference!

section 1
aleph goals and structure


food
talk
discussion

aleph goals

Aleph has two major goals:

1. To help participants enter or renew a personal relationship with Messiah Yeshua, experience the love of the Father, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as his disciples advancing the kingdom of God in the world today.
2. To help participants begin to receive the relational support necessary to live for Yeshua within a congregational setting.

aleph structure

Aleph consists of seven sessions/nine talks (including a day retreat – talks 7, 8 & 9). Each regular session includes three key components: food, talk and discussion.

food

Everyone likes food, Food brings people together and helps people get to know one another. Each Aleph therefore begins with a served meal.

talk

The talks are designed to engage people and inspire conversation. Generally about 30 minutes long, talks can be played on video (if pre-recorded) or presented live. Each talk builds on the previous talk with the goal of helping participants discover a more personal relationship with God through Yeshua.

discussion

After each talk, everyone gathers in a small group to share thoughts, ask questions and to listen to what others have to share. No one has to talk but all are encouraged to share their thoughts in a judgement free zone!

section 1
aleph talks

aleph talks

The Leader's Handbook includes **scripts** for each talk to assist the presenter in his presentation of the material. A **Participants Guide** is also available to assist in small group discussions.

Talk 1	What is Judaism: Religion, Race or Relationship?
Talk 2	What is Wrong with the World?
Talk 3	What is Atonement? Is It Still Necessary?
Talk 4	Who is Yeshua: Mensch, Madman, or Messiah?
Talk 5	The Resurrection: Hoax, Joke or Masterstroke?
Talk 6	Who is the Holy Spirit?

aleph retreat

Talk 7	What Does the Holy Spirit Do?
Talk 8	How Can I Be Filled with the Spirit?
Talk 9	How Can I Live a Spirit-Filled Life

section 2
envisioning your chavurah, church, or congregation

envisioning your chavurah, church or congregation

It is important to take time to envision your congregation, chavurah or church to the importance of outreach. Below is a suggested outline for a message to set the context for introducing Aleph.

Title: Bringing the Good News to the Jewish People: The Charge, the Controversy and the Challenge

the charge

- Rm. 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile." (CJB)

the controversy

- For many Jews, it is implausible that one can be Jewish and believe in Yeshua (Jesus). Though it is acceptable to be Jewish and follow Buddhism, Hinduism, eastern mysticism, or outright atheism, it is not acceptable to claim to be Jewish and believe in Yeshua. Why?
  - Unfortunately, church history has not been kind to the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism and Supersessionism, i.e., the church has replaced the Jewish people, produced the horrors of the Crusades, Inquisitions, Pogroms and even the Holocaust, all of which occurred in "Christian Europe." Of course, many "true" Christians did not participate or endorse these aberrations of true Christianity.
  - Nevertheless, for most Jews, the association has been ingrained in our thinking over the centuries and has produced great resistance to the possibility that Yeshua

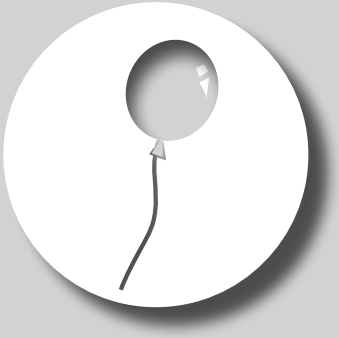
is the Jewish Messiah or that it could be possible to be Jewish and believe in Yeshua.

- Signs of change
  - **Russian Jewry**: many Russians having grown up under Communism do not necessarily associate Yeshua with anti-Semitism. Communism, not Christianity was more the persecutor of the Jewish people.
  - **Israeli sabras** (native Israelis): Likewise, Jews who have been born in Israel do not necessarily associate Yeshua with anti-Semitism in that Islam not Christianity has been anti-Semitism's chief proponent. As a result, both Russian Jews and Israeli Jews are more open to hearing about Yeshua.
  - In the West, there is a growing perception that **Christians** (Gentile believers) now stand with Israel and the Jewish people. There is also a growing awareness, due to modern scholarship, that Yeshua was a faithful Jew who followed Torah. Christians who understand and embrace the Jewish roots of their faith are therefore more apt to find greater openness within the Jewish community to the person of Yeshua.

the challenge

- Being the body of Messiah
  - Embracing Jewish identity and life (if you are Jewish)
  - Embracing Jewish roots and heritage (if you are Gentile)
- Becoming involved in the Jewish community
- Building relationships with Jewish people
- Bringing Jewish guests to an appropriate event
  - Shabbat
  - Concert
  - Special speaker
  - Holiday event
  - **Aleph** (party)

section 2
aleph party



aleph party

- The Aleph party is an introductory event prior to the beginning of Aleph. Because it would be challenging to invite a person to something seven weeks long, it is recommended (though optional) to invite people to an Aleph party with the hope that having had a positive experience, they would be interested in exploring Aleph.
- The goal of the Aleph party is to host a non-threatening and fun event that would be attractive to a Jewish (or non-Jewish) person who is looking for spiritual meaning and purpose in life.
- Therefore, it is recommended that the event be an erev Shabbat evening which puts it in a Jewish framework. The evening would consist of:
  - A meal
  - Lighting of the Shabbat candles
  - A fun activity
  - A short message that introduces Aleph. Alternately, the Aleph introductory video can be shown via YouTube.
  - An invitation to come to the first session

section 2

sample flier

(FOR CONGREGANTS)

sample flier
(FOR CONGREGANTS)

ALEPH is a series of interactive sessions that explore Jewish spirituality and the Messianic hope found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Aleph is for anyone looking for spiritual meaning and purpose in life where one can...

Ask questions
Learn about God
Explore the Scriptures
Probe for answers
Hunt for Truth.

Aleph is a seven week course. Each session includes a meal followed by a presentation, followed by small group discussions where participants can ask questions in a safe and non-threatening environment. A sample of the talks includes:

- What is Judaism: Religion, Race or Relationship?
- What is Wrong with the World?
- What is Atonement? Is It Still Necessary?
- Who is Yeshua: Mensch, Madman, or Messiah?
- The Resurrection: Hoax, Joke or Masterstroke?

the next ALEPH begins:

When:
Where:
Time:

For more information, contact _____

section 3
aleph dynamics

aleph dynamics

This section provides you with the “nuts and bolts” of how to run Aleph in your congregation. A lot of work must go on behind the scenes to produce an excellent course and every task is important. The goal is to get everything right as possible. We want to create a “homelike” atmosphere. We want the participants in the course to feel welcome and to see that every effort was made to make the course a great experience.

dinner

In order to help cooperate with the grace of God, it is essential to provide a welcoming, safe relational environment. To achieve this, we have a dinner at the beginning of each session. The dinner is a time to grow together socially; it is not intended as a time for discussion of the course topics, but rather a time that helps foster relationships, to grow in friendship. This relational dynamic of the course is critical for the participants.

food & donations

Often people have commented that the food kept them coming back, so it is worth keeping the food at a high standard. Some suggestions for meals include simple pasta dishes, sloppy joes, chili, pizza, and casseroles. Serve the main dish with a salad, bread or rolls, and a simple dessert. While there is no registration fee for the course, it is reasonable to accept donations for the meal each evening. After week 2, you can put out a basket with a “Donations” sign. You may suggest $4 - $5.

welcome

Warmly greeting Aleph participants is a huge part of the outreach process. This part of the evening sets the stage for the talks and small groups and makes participants feel at home.

shabbat prayer and lighting shabbat candles

It is recommended to hold Aleph on Friday evenings. It is not only the end of the work week for many people but is also the beginning of Shabbat. Lighting the candles with the traditional Shabbat blessing serves to set the evening apart while highlighting the importance and specialness of Shabbat. Of course Aleph could be at another time during the week depending on what works best for your local setting.

announcements

Make any pertinent announcements, and introduce the talk for the evening. To help everyone relax, it is recommended to do an ice-breaker or joke. Ice-breakers are a great way to help people get to know each other in a relaxed non-threatening way. They are also a great way to help each person feel included since everyone gets a chance to participate (if the group is large, break into smaller groups of 4 or five). Telling a joke is another option. Humor is an important part of the course and jokes are usually appreciated. It is important for the participants to see that believers have a sense of humor and that laughter and faith are not incompatible.

section 3
the talks

the talks

The talks are given live. Detailed scripts above are available to assist you in your preparation. The talks are essentially basic teaching about the good news of what God has done in and through Messiah Yeshua. The talks are "seekerfriendly" and progress over the eight weeks with the aim of inviting people to respond to the lifechanging message of the Good News of Yeshua and the power to live a transformed life. Participant's guides are available to help guests both follow along as well as review at a later time.

small group discussion

Following the talk, everyone meets in small groups. Small groups are intended to be safe places to freely discuss what the participants heard in the teaching. It is essential for the participants to have the freedom to share what they think and feel about what they heard. The small groups are not a time for further teaching, but a time to facilitate discussion. This can be the most powerful part of the experience, allowing participants to process what they are discovering. The goal is to help people encounter and/or enter into a deeper relationship with Messiah Yeshua. As we meet in small groups, the issues become more personal. And the small groups give participants an opportunity to develop friendships. Recommended guidelines:

- "You don't have to talk if you don't want to, but we'd love to hear everyone's thoughts."
- Any question or comment is welcome (just be brief and respectful).
- Respect each other by listening and allowing different opinions.
- Keep things confidential when you leave the group.

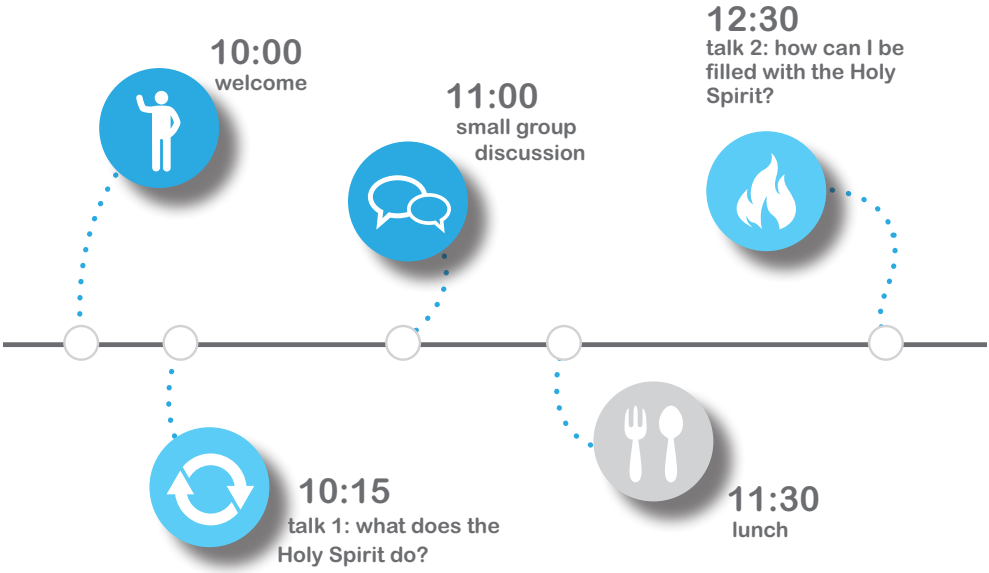
group assignments

For larger courses, the ideal size is a group of 68 guests, 1 facilitator, and 1 helper. As you make up the groups, consider the ages of the participants. Though sometimes there is benefit in mixing ages, a college student may have little in common with a retiree, so it may be helpful to have a young adults group, a young married couples group, etc. Another consideration is trying to comprise groups of an equal number of men and women – as closely as you can make this – trying to have a man and a woman or vice versa as facilitator and helper. Point is - be pastoral when putting together groups. After the first night, evaluate the groups with the small group leaders to see if any changes are needed. Also, consider requests by participants to change groups.

section 4
aleph retreat

aleph retreat

The retreat is the most important component of Aleph. Its purpose is to "create space" in people's lives to respond to the Good News in previous sessions and to turn to Yeshua and ask Him to be the center of their lives and to be renewed or baptized in the Holy Spirit. The day usually takes place on a Sunday. The retreat allows opportunity for teaching on the Holy Spirit along with a meal together, and prayer to be "filled" or "re-filled" with the Holy Spirit. The retreat concludes Aleph with testimonies of what God has done in participants lives with encouragement that this is only the beginning of all that God wants to continue to do.

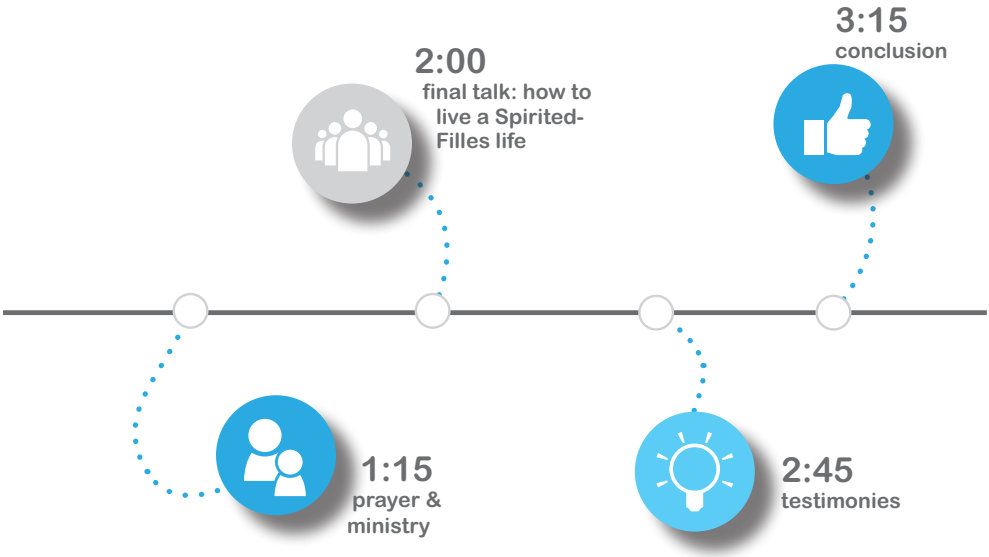


announcing the retreat

Begin to encourage guests early on. It should be mentioned every session, but particular attention should certainly be given by the third session. Tell them it is the high point of Aleph and brings the entire time to a wonderful conclusion that they don't want to miss. At the beginning of the fourth talk, a testimony can be given to help encourage participants to attend the retreat.

schedule of retreat day

10:00 welcome
10:15 **talk 1: what does the holy spirit do?**
11:00 small group discussion
11:30 lunch
12:30 **talk 2: how can i be filled with the holy spirit?**
1:15 prayer ministry
2:00 **final talk: how to live a spirit-filled life**
2:45 testimonies
3:15 conclusion



welcome & announcements

The leader of the retreat begins by welcoming everyone and expressing joy and faith in what the Lord will do during this day. He/she encourages all to set this day apart as a day to press further into discovering Yeshua. The Leader encourages them to be caring towards one another, taking time to share with each other both in small group discussions and lunch. The leader

explains that we will take time for prayer and that it will be little longer than the evening sessions. All that the leader shares should be prayerfully thought through and "preprayered" in order that it truly will help impart faith, expectation and encouragement to those attending.

praise & worship

Before the first talk, have a time of prayer, about 10 minutes. It is a time of singing, praise, and worship. The leader closes this time with a prayer of expectant faith in the Lord's love for each person and His desire to meet him or her during this time.

personal testimony

Prior to the first talk a testimony can be given. Usually this is a team member or a guest from a previous course. The testimony is presented immediately after the prayer time and before the first talk. The testimony should be no longer than 5 minutes. The person should simply tell how Yeshua and the Holy Spirit changed their life. It is not a teaching but a personal example of the life changing love of God!

talk 1: what does the holy spirit do?

The teachings on the retreat focus on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The day is intended as a time to help the guests to understand the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the gifts He gives us to empower us to live for Him.

small group discussion

lunch

prayer

Begin the afternoon session with a brief time of prayer. Sing one or two songs and pray for the session.

talk 2: how can i be filled with the holy spirit?

This talk builds on the first talk and points participants to making a commitment to Yeshua as Lord and asking to receive the Holy Spirit and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

prayer time for participants

After the talk, it is essential to provide an opportunity for the participants to receive prayer from the small group leaders or others who have familiarity with praying with others. The talk will inspire the confidence to ask God for the infilling of the Holy Spirit and the faith to believe that they will receive. All who are part of the prayer teams should have received instruction on the approach to prayer ministry.

prayer ministry guidelines

1. A ministry team consists of 2 or, at most, 3 members. Have men pray with men and women pray with women. Allow married couples to pray as a team.

2. Decide who will lead the prayer. The leader should be responsible for opening and closing the prayer.

3. Begin by asking each person if they have invited Yeshua into their lives as Lord and Messiah.

4. If “yes”, ask if s/he would like to pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit to be released within them or ask if there is anything specific that s/he would like to pray for.

5. If “no”, then ask if s/he would like to pray to receive Yeshua into their lives now. Remember to ask investigative questions in an open ended manner so that the guest does not feel trapped by a yes or no answer. You might say, “Would you like to pray now, or would you rather go away and think about it some more?” Never pressure them.

6. Ask permission to lay hands on the guest as part of the prayer. Be careful not to touch inappropriate areas. Be gentle – do not lean on people.
7. Help the guest be open to what the Lord is doing in and for him/her. Ask them to close their eyes (if they feel comfortable) and open their hands (again if they feel comfortable) as a sign of readiness to receive whatever God will give.
8. Be natural, relaxed, not intense. Avoid extremes. There is no need to shake or shout or use flowery "religious" language.
9. Never push, pull, or apply physical pressure.
10. Pray with your eyes **open** watching the guest and discerning what the Holy Spirit is doing. If you sense that God is working in the heart of the person, ask them to share what is happening or how they are feeling. Listen to and honor what the person is sensing. Even if you do not agree with the guest, be sure to pray the desires of their heart. Look for opportunities to share what the Spirit is saying to you about the person for whom you are praying.

talk 3

This talk is the final Aleph talk. The goal of the talk is to encourage participants of the importance of practicing essential spiritual disciplines in order to have a dynamic and growing relationship with God.

testimonies

The retreat concludes with testimonies. Allow the participants an opportunity to share about the retreat, especially their experience of being prayed with and surrendering to Yeshua as Lord. This can be a time that is very encouraging for all who attend and a great way to bring things to an encouraging conclusion. The emcee/facilitator can ask the following questions...

- What was your relationship with God when the course started?
- How has Aleph impacted your life?
- If there is one thing you would share with a friend about Aleph, what would that be?

section 5
scripts

introduction to aleph talks

Each talk will include a summary and an expanded outline. If you do live talks, It is important to punctuate the talks with stories, illustrations, media, etc. Please review the various components below.

Personal stories: Personal stories and testimony help participants to connect with the speaker and help the talks not only reach the head but the heart.

Quotes: Quotes emphasize a point and enable guests to engage and relate the material. Some of the people quoted may not be well known in your local context, however, please be mindful of the value of what is said in the quoted material. If you choose to replace a quote, it should be replaced with something equally effective to maintain the balance of teaching, story, and references to other information sources.

Key Bible Passages: You may wish to display these visually for your guests (if you are not using a prepared PowerPoint).

Illustrations: Are used to highlight a point. You may choose to substitute an illustration of your own.

Jokes: Jokes **(ice-breakers)** are recommended to give before the talk to help people relax. Jokes can be substituted if you so choose.

Videos: videos are helpful to both highlight a point as well as to add a multi-media effect to enliven the presentation.

Shabbat: if the Aleph sessions are on Shabbat, it is encouraged to light the Shabbat candles along with the Shabbat blessings. Though not necessary to do Aleph on Shabbat, it is in many respects an ideal evening to gather for a meal and a message.

section 5

aleph 1: what is judaism: religion, race or relationship?

aleph 1: what is judaism: religion, race or relationship?

talk summary

There is much debate as to what Judaism actually is: a religion, a race, a culture, an ethnic group, etc. The point of this talk is to emphasize that above all else, Judaism is a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - a relationship that is offered to all.

welcome

Shalom and welcome to Aleph! My name is _____ and I will be your presenter. I would also like to introduce to you our Aleph team. Together we are here to help you in any way we can to make these next seven weeks a great experience for you.

[On Shabbat Only] We begin our evening with the lighting of the Shabbat candles to welcome the peace of Shabbat. Quote: "Relationships take time, and Shabbat is when we give them time – to listen to one another, encourage one other, share a meal and experience the blessedness of one another's company. Adam and Eve, said the rabbis, were spared one day in the Garden of Eden before they were exiled into the world of work. That day was Shabbat. And for those who experience it, Shabbat becomes a way back into Eden, paradise temporarily regained."

Let us welcome the presence of eternity, a moment of majesty, the peace of Shabbat., [light Shabbat candles]

introduction to aleph

What is ALEPH? Aleph is a place to share a meal together; a place to experience Shabbat together; and a place to A.L.E.P.H. (**A**sk questions, **L**earn about God, **E**xplore the Scriptures, **P**robe for answers, **H**unt for truth together. Aleph is for anyone and

everyone. It's for people who want to strengthen their faith; for people who are questioning their faith and for people who are searching for faith.

Lastly, Aleph is also a place where it is kosher to tell Jewish jokes…

jewish mother

A young Jewish man excitedly tells his mother he's fallen in love and going to get married. He says, "Just for fun, Ma, I'm going to bring over 3 women and you try and guess which one I'm going to marry." The mother agrees. The next day, he brings 3 beautiful women into the house and sits them down on the couch and they chat for a while. He then says, "Okay, Ma. Guess which one I'm going to marry." She immediately replies, "The red-head in the middle." "That's amazing, Ma. You're right. How did you know?" "I don't like her."

bee mitzvah

One day, two bees are buzzing around what's left of a daffodil. "How's your summer been?" asks bee number one. "Not too good," says bee two. "Lotta rain, lotta cold. There aren't enough flowers, therefore not enough pollen." The first bee has an idea. "Hey, why don't you go down to the corner and hang a left? There's a bar mitzvah going on. Plenty of flowers and fruit." Bee two buzzes, "Thanks!" and takes off. An hour later, the bees bump into each other again. "How was the bar mitzvah?" asks the first bee. "Great!" replies the second. The first bee, however, notices a small circle on his friend's head, and inquires, "What's that on your head?" "A yarmulke," he answers…I didn't want them to think I was a wasp.

Life is busy. Every day, as we go through life, we have many questions: what am I going to wear? What will I eat for dinner? What goals should I prioritize today? But we also face bigger questions like, Why am I here? What's my purpose in life? Is there more to life than this?

- If we're Jewish, we may even wonder what it means to be a Jew. We know there is a religion called Judaism, a set of ideas about the world and the way we should live our lives. However, many who call themselves Jews don't consider themselves religious. More than half of all Jews in Israel today actually consider themselves secular, and don't believe in G-d or any of the religious beliefs of Judaism. Half of all Jews in the United States don't belong to any synagogue. They may observe some of the customs and celebrate some of the holidays, but they don't necessarily think of these as religious activities. Yet most would agree, they are still Jews regardless of what they believe or don't believe.
- Many Jews think of their Jewishness as a matter of culture or ethnicity. When they think of Jewishness, they think of bagels and lox, colorful Yiddish words such as "Oy vey" or lighting candles on Friday nights. All good things. But as good as all that is, being Jewish must be something more. If so, what?
- This is the purpose of **Aleph** – a place where you can **A**SK questions - **L**EARN about God - **E**XPLORE the Scriptures - **P**ROBE for answers and **H**UNT for truth.

what is judaism?

Personal Story (can be replaced with presenter's story)

- For me, Judaism was more about food than faith. I loved Jewish holidays because my mother was a great cook and she made all the Jewish specialties for the holidays - matzah ball soup, gefilte fish, chopped liver. And on Sundays, we would have a feast of bagels, lox, crème cheese, whitefish and cheese blintzes. Great stuff!
- Going to synagogue or shul was low on the priority list. And my parents felt the same way. As a result, I seldomly went. Though I was Jewish, religion became increasingly irrelevant and other things took its place – particularly friends, fun and of course females.

- Life was going great, my own car at 16, on my own at 18. But in college things began to change. Philosophy and psychology began to shake up my shallow view of life and caused me to start asking questions I never asked before like, "Why am I here, Is there a purpose to life; What is my purpose?" – questions for which I had no real answers. I knew something was missing but I didn't know what.
- As a result, I became something of a student of religion, both western and eastern religions, looking for answers to life's big questions. What I discovered changed the course of my life. In a nutshell it was this – Religion is less about following rules or rituals as it is about a **relationship**. And to my great amazement, I discovered this in what I thought was the least likely place - the Hebrew Scriptures, the Torah.

torah

It became evident in the book of **"beginnings"** or Genesis which is the Greek word for beginnings - where we see people who "**walked**" with God.

- One of the great enjoyments in life is to take a walk with one's wife, friend or even one's dog; it's enjoyable because its relational. And this is what we see in the scriptures... people who walked with God - who had a relationship with God. So let's take a look.

In Genesis chapter 3, we read that **Adam & Eve** - "ish" & "ishshah" – the first man and woman - **walked** with God... "And they heard the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

- In other words, they were talking with God as they walked together in the garden in the early evening - a beautiful picture of the intimacy and closeness we were created to have with God.
- [Personal story] Shortly after my spiritual awakening, I was driving home from Big Sur, California after having all my worldly possessions stolen including my stereo system

and all my music. I was dreading the ride home not being able to imagine all those days and hours without music. But to my great surprise, I had my first experience of walking with God - or more accurately - driving with God. I experienced his presence and closeness so strongly in the car that I didn't for a minute miss not having music. And for me, that was a miracle!

We then read in the fifth chapter of Genesis about "**Enoch** (great, great, great, great, great grandson of Adam) who "**walked** with God for 300 years." Now that's a long time!

- [Personal story] I remember my first-year anniversary walking with God thinking how much my life had changed in just one year and trying to imagine what it would be like in five years. Well here is Enoch who walked with God for 300 years. I can only imagine!

And then in Genesis chapter six, we read that **Noah** also "**walked** with God." [I am always amazed at how much he looked like Russel Crowe]. It also says that he "found favor with God." Which is to say that when we walk with God, we get to experience his favor, the gift of knowing we are loved by God.

We then read about our fathers **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** who also **walked** with God – but here we get additional insight as to how that happens.

In Genesis chapter 12, **Abram,** who is not yet Abraham, [and who has an amazing similarity to Richard Harris] has his first God-encounter. We read...

- Now the Lord **said** to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you; and by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." [I don't know if it was a voice mail or text but somehow he got the message]

- Than a few verses later he has another encounter with God... "Then the LORD **appeared** to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."
- And in chapter 17, God appears to him once again where we read... "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD **appeared** to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty walk before me, and be blameless... No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be **Abraham**; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
- Several things of interest...
  - First, Abraham wasn't Jewish, he was simply one of the Goyim when God came him – and that's good to know because it tells us that God will reveal himself to anyone who is open regardless of their religious or religion-less background.
  - Second, Abraham wasn't yet a mensch – he was just an ordinary man – it wasn't his merits that got God's attention but God's mercy; it wasn't his goodness but God's grace. Likewise for us – it's not about how good we are but about how great God is. He first loved us!
  - Third, Abraham wasn't too old to change. He was 99 years old when God changed his name. Which is to say, we too are never too old to change. For God has the power to change and transform us regardless of our age.

how about isaac?

We read in Genesis chapter 26 that "the Lord appeared to Isaac and said...'I am with you and I will bless you…"

- It's probably not easy following in a famous father's footsteps – maybe that's why we've only had two presidents whose sons became president: John Quincy Adams and George W. Bush.
- But here God is saying to Isaac... "I am with you. Just as I was with your father and blessed him so I am with you and will bless you."

- And here's the thing - God wants to say the same to you – "I am with you. Just as I was with the "fathers," so am I with you to bless you." Even as he said through the prophet Jeremiah, "I know the plans I have for you, plans for good not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

And lastly, we read about **Jacob's** encounter with God – actually encounters.

- In chapter 28 of Genesis**,** we read that Jacob had a falling out with his brother Esau and as he is fleeing from his brother, God **appears** to him in a dream. And when Jacob wakes up, he realizes he had a God-encounter. "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."
  - You know sometimes God comes to us and we don't realize it.
  - [Personal story] I remember my first God- encounter. After a series of unusual events, I went to bed one night and in the middle of the night I woke up and laying there I prayed my first "real" payer... "God if you are real, I really want to know." A few seconds later, a surge of energy went through my body and shook me to my core. What did I do? I jumped up out of bed and since I was majoring in psychology, I said to myself, "This can be psychologically explained." But the next day, I quickly began to realize that something "real" had happened as my life began to radically change.
- Something similar happened to Jacob. A few chapters later, in chapter 32, Jacob has another encounter with God. He found himself between the proverbial "rock and a hard place," and in the middle of the night there he was "wrestling" with God. Well the good news is that God won and like Abraham, not only was his name changed to **Israel,** his life was radically changed as well.

so a few take-a-ways

- First, don't get hung up with how people encounter God. It happens in many different ways. What's important is that in each example each person had an **encounter** with God that brought them into a **relationship** with God.
- Now it could be easy to think, "Well, I'm not Abraham, or Isaac or Jacob. I'm not a religious person." Well, the truth is, neither were they. He comes to us not because we are religious but because he wants a relationship.
- So as you hear these stories, you may wonder if these kinds of things still happen today. Do people still have God encounters – especially Jewish people? Here is Jeff's story [personal testimony of choice.]

conclusion

- God wants to have an encounter with each one of us because he loves us. He wants to walk with us. He wants to be in relationship with us.
- Aleph is a place to go on this journey together – to explore what it means to have a relationship with God where we can Ask, Learn, Explore, Probe & Hunt for the meaning of life. Welcome to Aleph!

section 5
aleph 2: what is wrong with the world?

aleph 2: what is wrong with the world?

talk summary

Last week we looked at God's **PURPOSE** for each of us to have a personal relationship with God. The purpose of this talk is to explore the reason why many people both Jew and Gentile do not experience a personal relationship with God and do not experience the life God created us to have.

welcome

Shalom and welcome back to Aleph!
[ice-breaker of joke]

[Shabbat only] We begin our evening once again with the lighting of the **Shabbat** candles to welcome the peace of Shabbat.

Last week, we asked the question: **What is Judaism** and discovered that Judaism is more than a religion. It's about a **relationship** with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who loves us and desires to **reveal** himself to us. Good News!

- And we ended with the **question**, If this is what God desires for us, why do many people, both Jew and Gentile not experience this? Here's a clue...
    - **Matrix quote**: "There is something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is but it is there like a splinter in your mind driving you mad."

This evening, we are asking the question: **what it is that is wrong with the world**. You could probably come up with a long list...

- Eating meat; war, terrorism, ethnic cleansings, school shootings, poverty, prejudice, homelessness, hunger,

child abuse, drug abuse, sex trafficking, racial violence, crime, corruption and exploitation…

- Clearly something has gone wrong with the world. The big question is - What's at the root of the world's problems? Some say lack of education, or globalization, or global warming; others say capitalism, colonization, racism...the list goes on.
    - **Arundhati Subramani**: The root cause of all problems is desire. If we did not have any desire, then life would be much more easy-going. When we have a desire, we work hard to achieve it in spite of all the obstacles we might face. The problems arise when we aren't able to complete our wishes and fulfill our desires. Therefore the world is full of sorrow and suffering. Only by the elimination of our desires can a peaceful life be led.
- **Pogo:** Perhaps Pogo identified the root of our problems and put it more simply**…** "We have met the enemy and he is **us**."

- But what's wrong with **us –** what has caused us to so malfunction? The Hebrew scriptures give it a name – a 3 letter word – **sin.**

sin

Is one of those words that has that has become virtually irrelevant…

- **Karl Menninger** – [American psychiatrist 1973] "The word "sin" has almost disappeared from our vocabulary, but the sense of **guilt** remains in our hearts and minds" – the splinter in our mind that we try to ignore.
- **Dr. Daniel J. Boorstin,** director of the National Museum of Science and Technology at the Smithsonian Institution - "We have lost our sense of history….lost our traditional respect for the wisdom of ancestors...lost our understanding of the word 'sin.'"

what is sin?

- Sin is like a **sickness**.
  - Like the flu or worse, the coronavirus, it is easy to catch. If you get too close to a person who has it, good chance you will catch it. Up to 7 million people will get the flu each year in the US. 3000 – 49000 will die as a result. Coronavirus as we know has been much worse.
- Sin is a **symptom** of a deeper problem. Genesis 3:1-5
  - A simple summary would be, "Our first parents ate some bad fruit and we've been sick ever since."
  - Real problem wasn't bad fruit but a bad **choice**. What was the bad choice? The choice to "be like God knowing good and evil."
  - Was the choice to be and act like God deciding for oneself what is good and what is evil; what is right and what is wrong.
    - "Life has no meaning a priori… It is up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing but the meaning that you choose."
      – **Jean-Paul Sartre**
    - "Must someone, some unseen thing, declare what is right for it to be right? I believe that my own morality -- which answers only to my heart -- is more sure and true than the morality of those who do right only because the Almighty determines what is right."
      – **Brandon Sanderson**

the tanakh tells us that it is a choice we all have made...(sin's universality)

- **Isaiah 53:6** "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have all turned to our own way."
- **Ecclesiastes 7:20** Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

- **1 Kings 8:46** "For there is no man that sins not."
- **Ps. 14:2-3** "There is none that does good, no not one."

Is a fact that is difficult for most people to accept

- Most people think they are **good**. We tell ourselves that we are a good person because we don't hurt people, kill people or commit capital crimes, i.e., I am not a murderer, child abductor or suicide bomber.

Called **morality by comparison** – we make wrong comparisons because we have the wrong standard: we make other people our **standard** and by **comparison**, we look pretty good. Would be like me saying I am a great **weight lifter** because I can lift more than my grandmother.

- **Al Capone** (infamous Chicago gangster - saw himself as a good person.): "I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man."
- **Hitler**: even Hitler saw himself as a good person… "What we are we have become not against, but with, the will of Providence. And so long as we are true and honorable and of good courage in fight, so long as we believe in our great work and do not capitulate, we shall continue to enjoy in the future the blessing of Providence."
- By contrast, **Ghandi**--a man totally committed to a life of virtue--was not so optimistic. Towards the end of his life he lamented, "It is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from him whom I know governs every breath of my life and whose offspring I am. I know it is because of the evil passions within me that keep me so far from him; yet I can't get away from them." As good as he was, he knew there was a higher **standard** – GOD!

- **Lewis**: "Those who are closest to God think they have fallen the greatest. And those who are farthest from God think they are ok." The person who is most **God-like** is the person who knows he is a "**sinner**" because his standard of goodness is GOD (whose image and likeness we are created)."

what does sin do?

- **Blinds us: Isa. 44:18** "They do not comprehend or understand, for their eyes are **blind** and cannot see; their minds do not discern." (windshield. Don't really see how unclean it is until unfiltered, direct light shines thru it. We think we are cleaner/better than we actually are.)
- **Separates us: Isa.59:2** "But your sins have separated you from God." In eating the fruit, Adam and Eve ceased desiring God and as a result, excluded God from their lives, choosing to live autonomously.
- **Hurts us Ez.18:4:** "the soul that sins (pasha) shall die."
  - When we break God's (moral) laws we break: (broken minds, hearts, lives)
  - Some say they don't believe in moral laws - doesn't matter – operates the same as other laws - if you break them, you break, i.e., the law of gravity, dietary laws.
  - Same with moral or spiritual laws: If you break the law of forgiveness you will either get bitter or better.
  - Opposite is also true: If you obey God's laws you will be blessed.
- **Enslaves us: Proverbs 5:22** "Those who do wrong are enslaved by their own sins; they are ropes that catch and hold him captive."
  - Sin is addictive. Becomes a habit. Like potato chips or pretzels – can't eat just one. Except it is much more serious – "consequences of sin is death" – not God's judgment on man for breaking his laws but death as a

self-imposed condition resulting from our turning away from God who alone is the source of life.

- We need help to break the addiction. Good News: there is help.

conclusion

We all know there are doctors and there are doctors? Most doctors just give you a prescription, but there are those who want to treat the root cause of our condition. The Bible identifies our problem – we have all been infected with sin. And if we are to reach our destiny and become all that we were created to be – godlike or Christlike – we must find the cure.

Good News…there is a cure. But you have to come back next week to find out what it is.

section 5

aleph 3: what is atonement? do we still need it?

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talk summary

In the first talk, we looked at God's **PURPOSE** for us to have a personal relationship with God.

- Last week we looked at what is wrong with the world and discovered that our essential **PROBLEM** is what the Scriptures call sin. Sin separates us from experiencing a personal relationship with God.
- In this talk, we want to look at God's **PLAN** - the cure for our existential condition, what the Bible calls atonement.

shalom and welcome back to aleph!

[ice-breaker] The Jewish Bookie and the Catholic Priest

A Jewish bookie was at the Irish Sweepstakes races playing the ponies and losing his shirt. He noticed a Priest step out onto the track and blessed the forehead of one of the horses lining up for the 4th race. Lo and behold, that horse - a long shot - won the race.

Next race, as the horses lined up, the Priest stepped onto the track. Sure enough, he blessed one of the horses. The bookie made a beeline for a betting window and placed a small bet on the horse. Again, even though it was another long shot, the horse won the race. He collected his winnings, and anxiously waited to see which horse the Priest would bless next. He bet big on it, and it won.

As the races continued the Priest kept blessing horses, and each one ended up winning. The bookie was elated. He made a quick dash to the ATM, withdrew all his savings, and waited for the Priest's blessing that would tell him which horse to bet on.

True to his pattern, the Priest stepped onto the track for the last race and blessed the forehead of an old nag that was 100/1. This time the priest blessed the eyes, ears, and hooves of the old nag.

The bookie knew he had a winner and bet every cent he owned on the old nag. He watched dumbfounded as the old nag pulled up and couldn't even finish the race. In a state of shock, he went to the track area where the Priest was.

Confronting him, he demanded, 'Fadder! Vat happened? All day long you blessed horses and they all won. Then in the last race, the horse you blessed never even had a chance. Now, thanks to you I've lost every cent of my savings!'

The Priest nodded wisely and with sympathy. "You are not Catholic are you my son?" "No, I'm Jewish"

"That's the problem", said the Priest, "you couldn't tell the difference between a blessing and last rites.'

[Shabbat only] We begin our evening once again with the lighting of the Shabbat candles to welcome the peace of Shabbat.

announcement: retreat/date

"Perhaps the most important part of Aleph is the retreat, which is also our final session together. Instead of meeting in the evening, we set apart a morning and afternoon not only for teaching but to experience God working in our lives. So we encourage you to look at your calendars and reserve [date] for our final time together. It really is the highpoint of Aleph!"

summary

- First week, we asked the question, what is Judaism and discovered that Judaism is more than a religion, more than a race. We discovered that Judaism is about a relationship

with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who loves us and created us to live in a love relationship with him - **God's Plan**

- Last week, we asked the question, if this is God's plan for us, what happened? Why do so many people Jew and Gentile not experience this? The Hebrew Scriptures reveal **our Problem**, which can be summed up in one word - **sin** -
  - sin separates us from experiencing a personal relationship with God resulting in pain, suffering, unhappiness, meaninglessness, hopelessness, emptiness
  - Lots of **diseases** - viral, bacterial, psychological - but most destructive of all spiritual. Starting in the garden of Eden, sin like a **disease,** has been passed on from generation to generation infecting the whole human race.
- That's the bad news. However, the same Hebrew Scriptures give us Good News - the cure for our condition –
  - Imagine how exciting it if we were to discover the cure for cancer, Covid- 19; Alzheimer's or even the common cold
  - Amazingly, there is a cure for this deadliest of diseases – **atonement**

Q1: what is atonement? to understand it, we need to go back and look at jewish life as our forefathers lived it.

- Instead of synagogues or a Jewish community center (JCC), we would see a tent-like tabernacle or later, the **Temple** itself.
- Services would be very different than today:
  - In the place of a Torah service, centered in a weekly Torah reading, would be a Temple **sacrifice**.

- There would not be a rabbi presiding but a **priest**, not a Catholic priest but Jewish priest – Kohen - who would was responsible to perform the ritual sacrifices.
- Instead of going up to the bema to give a **sermon**, he would take blood into the Holy of Holies to offer **sacrifice**.

- The focal point of the service was not a **sermon** but a **sacrifice** to make atonement.

Q2: but why was atonement necessary?

- **Lev. 17:11**
  - " For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes **atonement** for one's life."
  - According to God's Law, atonement or forgiveness of sin always required a **sacrifice** - the death of an innocent victim.
- What does the word atonement mean: comes from word kippor or covering.
  - Is the means by which God covers the sins of his people - how - with the **blood** of a sacrificed animal

simon the just

- Was a famous and highly revered High Priest (200 BCE) who helped define the essence of Judaism during the Second Temple period..."The world hangs on three factors: (1) repentance (2) a Temple sacrifice and (3) a holy way of life

in 70 ce, everything changed…

- Jerusalem fell to the Roman armies after a desperate siege. **Josephus** reported that over one million people perished and 97,000 were carried away into captivity. And if that was not tragic enough, what was thought could never happen again, happened – the Temple was completely destroyed. Josephus described it in the **Antiquities of the Jews**…As a result, Judaism underwent a seismic shift…why?
- Judaism was centered around the Temple. The sacrificial system was considered to be the very heart of Jewish worship. Atonement itself was dependent upon the sacrifices. The big question: How can there be atonement without the sacrificial system?
- **Yochanan Ben Zakkai**, disciple of Hillel, convened a council and came up with the answer…
  - The story is told that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai and Rabbi Yoshua were walking by the ruins of the Temple. Rabbi Yoshua said, "Woe to us that the place where the atonement for the sins of Israel was made has been destroyed!" But Rabbi Yochanan replied, "Do you not know that we have a means of making atonement that is as good as this? And what is it? **Gemilut chasadim** - acts of loving-kindness…
  - His decision and the councils were to replace the Temple sacrifice with acts of **loving kindness (mitzvot/ good deeds)**
- This has been the accepted practice for the last 2000 years (rabbinic Judaism). As a result, **sacrifice** is no longer deemed necessary and has been written off as an ancient and primitive practice.

Q3: was this god's solution or man's solution?

- Granted, it was a good idea –but was it God's idea for atonement without a **sacrifice**? Answer is NO. Good deeds are good but not good enough. They were never intended to be the means of atonement. Why - because they by-passed God's primary requirement for atonement – **a sacrificial substitute.** Our good works can never be good enough!

but why the need for a substitute?

- Divine dilemma: God's law demands justice; God's love desires mercy. In his love and mercy, he offers forgiveness; however, His justice demands punishment. Both must be fulfilled. What is the punishment?
- **Ezekiel 18:20**: "the soul that sins shall die"
- **Genesis 2:16-17**: in fact we are warned way back in the beginning... "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall **die."**
- God clearly warned us – the punishment is death.

Q4: why can't god just forgive us?

On May 13, 1981, John Paul II was crossing St. Peter's Square in Vatican City when Mehmet Ali Ağca shot him. In 1983, John Paul visited his would-be assassin and forgave him. Though forgiven, Mehmet was deported to Turkey, where he was imprisoned for the life sentence he had fled decades prior. Why – the need for justice. [became believer and released in 2010]

God's Solution: Though we deserve justice, God in his love and mercy provides a sacrificial substitute to take the punishment that we deserve. An innocent dies in our place.

- **Passover** (Ex. 12:3): the angel of death (God's judgment upon sin) passed over those houses which had the blood of a sacrificial substitute, lamb upon its doorposts. The lamb died in their place.
- **Rosh Hashanah** (Gen.22): Abraham's offering of Isaac: God forbids the sacrifice of his son and provides a ram as a substitute for the child. (Akedah)
- **Yom Kippur** (Lev. 16:29): sin is again atoned for through a sacrificial substitute. The scapegoat symbolically bears the sin of the people transferred through the laying on of hands by the High Priest.

In each event, God demonstrates his love for us by providing an innocent substitute to die in our place as an atonement for our sin, taking upon himself the judgement we deserve, fulfilling both justice and mercy.

Interestingly even today, many of the ultra-orthodox continue to recognize the biblical necessity of atonement and a sacrificial substitute. On the eve of Yom Kippur, they will swing a rooster while saying this prayer…

  - Kaparot prayer: "This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This rooster will go to its death, while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and to peace."
  - Is interesting that in Aramaic, the word for rooster is gever. But in Hebrew, a gever is a man. This "**man**" will go to its death…
  - Could it be that the animal sacrifices (roosters and lambs) were a foreshadowing of a more perfect sacrifice for our sin?
- Many believe the answer is yes – Even though we no longer have a **Temple or sacrifice,** many believe God has provided a more perfect sacrifice to die in our place – as an atonement for sin – not a rooster, not a ram but a Lamb who came as a Man!

conclusion

- If so, the question is "Who is this man?"
  The Bible gives us a clue...
  "Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement (judgement) that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
- **Next week we will find out!**

section 5

aleph 4: yeshua: man, mensch, or messiah?

aleph 4: yeshua: man, mensch, or messiah?

talk summary

In the first talk, we looked at God's **PURPOSE** for us to have a personal relationship with God. We then looked at what is wrong with the world and discovered that our essential **PROBLEM** is what the Scriptures call sin. Sin separates us from experiencing a personal relationship with God. In Last week's talk, we looked at God's **PLAN** - the cure for our existential condition, what the Bible calls atonement. In this talk, we want to look at God's **PROVISION** - a Person.

shalom and welcome back to aleph!

[ice-breaker] Moishe (Moses) and Little Feather…

Moishe, a Yeshiva (Torah/Talmud) boy, graduated high school and is about to go to college. He was born and lived in Brooklyn his entire life but he gets a full scholarship to the Univ. of Montana and it's such a generous deal that his parents, who would prefer to keep him in Brooklyn forever, let him go.

Six months go by and they have not heard from him. They're frantic. They call the dorm and are told that he doesn't live there anymore. They call the Registrar who says that he is no longer enrolled. They are about to fly to Montana when a letter comes from Moishe:

'Dear Moter, Dear Fater, Sorry I have been so negligent but I met the most wonderful girl and we plan to marry. That is why I dropped out of school. Little Feather is a Native American, a princess in her tribe, and her father is the Chief. He has made me a member of the tribe. I had to leave school because of the nonsense they teach about Native Americans - the lack of respect, the distortions of history. But now I understand things better. I have decided to take a Native American name which the

Chief helped me decide. From now on please call me Running Deer. I will NOT answer correspondence any longer addressed to Moishe.

A few days later he gets a reply: 'Dear Running Deer. Your dad and I are pleased that you have finally found a woman to love and that you are happy on the reservation. We regret that she is not Jewish but to celebrate your new love and upcoming marriage we also have decided to take Native American names. I am now SITTING SHIVA and your father is GOING MESHUGANA.

[Shabbat only] We begin our evening once again with the lighting of the Shabbat candles to welcome the peace of Shabbat.

announcements

Retreat Reminder

review

- **Week I God's Purpose:** we looked at God's **purpose** and asked the question, what is Judaism? We discovered that Judaism is more than a religion, more than a race. We discovered that Judaism is about a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who created us to know, love and serve him with all our heart, mind and strength.
- **Week II Our Problem:** we asked the question, if this is God's purpose for us, what the **problem**? What is wrong with the world? Why do so many people both Jew and Gentile not experience this? The Hebrew Scriptures give us the answer, which can be summed up in one word - **sin** – separates us from God and our awareness of his love, plan and purpose for our lives - resulting in a life without peace or purpose.

- **Week III God's Plan**: However, we discovered that Hebrew Scriptures reveal God's **plan** to restore our relationship by means of **atonement – through sacrifice of a sinless substitute –** But without a Temple or sacrifice (2000 years), how do we have atonement today? Has God provided a more perfect atonement? We believe God has provided a more perfect sacrifice to die in our place – as an atonement for sin – not by a rooster, lamb or ram but by a Man!
- Question for tonight – **Who is this Man? And is he the Messiah?**
- **Title of talk: Yeshua: Man, Mensch or Messiah?**

who is yeshua?

- This is the burning question of all time: so important a question, that Yeshua himself asks the question… **Mt. 16:13-15**

  "When Yeshua came into the territory around Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who are people saying the Son of Man is?" They said, "Well, some say John the Immerser, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." But you, he said, **who do you say I am**?"
- Many Jews thought Yeshua was a prophet – which was not insignificant in that there had not been a prophet in Israel for 400 years (since the prophet Malachi)! But how about today? What would Jews today say if asked, Who is Yeshua or Jesus?
  - Man, meshugganah, liar, lunatic...
- But there are other Jewish people who have answered quite differently –
  - **Josephus** 'There was about this time Jesus, a doer of wonderful works.' Antiquities of the Jews, written around 93–94 AD, includes two references to the biblical Jesus

- **Albert Einstein** "As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene."
- **Martin Buber**, Jewish philosopher: "It is a peculiar manifestation of our exile-psychology that we permitted and even aided in the deletion of New Testament Messianism, that meaningful offshoot of our spiritual history. It was in a Jewish land, that this spiritual revolution was kindled; and Jews were those who had spread it all over the land…We must overcome the superstitious fear which we harbor about the Messianic movement of Jesus and place the movement where it belongs, namely, in the spiritual history of Judaism…."
- **Rabbi Boteach** "This book seeks to offer to Jews and Christians the real story of Jesus, a wholly observant, Pharisaic Rabbi...It is time that Christians rediscover the deep Jewishness and religious commitment of Jesus, while Jews reexamine a lost son who was murdered by a brutal Roman state…" Jewish author of Kosher Jesus
- **Sholem Asch**, Jewish novelist and author "I couldn't help writing on Jesus. Since I first met Him He has held my mind and heart. I floundered a bit, at first; I was seeking that something for which so many of us search – that surety, that faith, that spiritual content in my living which would bring me peace and through which I might help bring some peace to others. I found it in the Nazarene…Everything He ever said or did has value for us today, and that is something you can say of no other man, alive or dead…He became the Light of the world. Why shouldn't I a Jew be proud of it?"

jewishness of jesus

What do we know about Jesus? One thing we know for sure: Jesus was Jewish…which for many Jews like myself was a surprise to find out.

- Jewish Name: Though we know him as Jesus, his Hebrew name is Yeshua
- Jewish Birth: Was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Judah in the land of Israel.
- Jewish Circumcision: Was circumcised according to the Torah on the 8th day
- Jewish Dedication: Was dedicated in the Temple according to the Torah.
- Jewish childhood: grew up studying Torah Luke 2:21

not only born and raised a jew, he was an observant jew (torah observant)

- Attended synagogue (observed Shabbat) – Lk.4:16
- Celebrated the Feasts – Mt.26:17
- He even wore tzitzit – Mt.9:20
- David Fleusser (renowned professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem): summarized Jesus' Jewishness well…"Jesus was a faithful Jew faithful to Jewish law from birth to death."

Yeshua was an **observant** Jew**,** but many believe no **ordinary** Jew**…**that he was more than a man (ordinary Jew); more than a mensch (extraordinary) but was in fact the **Messiah**. Why? 3 reasons…

fulfilled messianic prophecy

Belief in the coming of the messiah is a basic and fundamental part of traditional Judaism. It is part of the 13 Principles of Faith, the minimum requirements of Jewish belief. However, many do not realize that Jewish tradition speaks of two messiahs: Messiah ben David and Messiah ben Joseph – a king who conquers and a servant who suffers. Could it be that Messiah's first coming was as messiah ben Joseph?

- There are many messianic prophecies (353) but there is one that is very specific that speaks of an innocent man, a suffering servant, whose death becomes our atonement for sin.
  - Isa. 52:13-15: will be exalted through suffering
  - Isa. 53:1-3: will be despised and rejected by men
  - Isa. 53: 4-6: his death is for us
  - Isa. 53:7-9: dies a criminal's death
  - Isa. 53:10-12: his death is an atonement for sin
- Was written 700 years before Yeshua was born.

spoke & acted with messianic authority

- He claimed to have greater authority than the **Torah**.
  - "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete and fulfill them." Mt. 5:17
- He claimed the authority on earth to forgive **sins** (Mk.2:10) (blasphemy)
- Exercised authority over **disease/disabilities** (leprosy (Mt. 8:2ff), congenital blindness (Jn. 9:1ff), restoration of a severed ear (Lk. 22:50-51), deafness and impediment of speech (Mk. 7:32ff)
- Exercised authority over the forces of **nature** Mt. 8:23
  - Fun things: Water into wine: not wine into water!

- Exercised authority over the **demonic** Mk.12:43-45
- Exercised authority over **death** (the daughter of Jairus (Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:21-43), a widow's son (Lk. 7:11-15), and Lazarus of Bethany (Jn. 11:43-44).

messianic claims

- **I** am bread of life – if you are empty inside and want to be filled, come to me. Jn.6:35
- **I** am the light of the world – if tired of living in darkness… follow me Jn.8:12
- **I** am the good shepherd – if you've lost your way, follow me… Jn.10:11
- **I** am the gate; if you need guidance and protection come to me… John 10:9
- **I** am the true vine; if you feel disconnected from God, I am your connection Jn. 15:1

mega claims

- **I** am the Way, truth and the Life – no one/everyone can come to Father… Jn.14:6
- **I** am the resurrection and the life - Jn.11:25 - Even if you die, you will live – biological/eternal life
- **I** and the Father are one – Jn. 10:30 – Co-equal - if you want to know what God is like, look at me.
- Before Abraham was, I am. Jn. 8:58 – co-eternal

conclusion

- What are we to make of all this? he fulfilled **messianic prophecy**, he spoke and acted with **messianic authority,** and his **messianic claims** challenge us to make a decision about Him, for no man ever said the things he said or did the things he did.
- C. S. Lewis, one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century and, of course, best known as the author of The Chronicles of Narnia, said this:

A **man** who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He'd either be insane or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice: either this man was and is the Messiah, the Son of God, or else insane or something worse. But let's not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher (**mensch**). He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

So we conclude with the all-important question – the question Yeshua asked his disciples…**Who do you say I am?**

- Dr. Oswald Sanders (elder statesman, conference speaker & author of 40 books)

More than nineteen hundred years ago there was a Man born contrary to the laws of life. This Man lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He did not travel extensively. Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived; that was during His exile in childhood.

He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His relatives were inconspicuous, and had neither training nor formal education. In infancy, He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature, walked upon the billows as if pavements, and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed

the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His service.

He never wrote a book, and yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. He never marshaled an army, nor drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun; and yet no leader ever had more volunteers who have, under His orders, made more rebels stack arms and surrender without a shot fired. He never practiced psychiatry, and yet He has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors far and near.

The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone; but the name of this Man abounds more and more. Though time has spread 2000 years between the people of this generation and the scene of His crucifixion, yet He still lives. Herod could not destroy Him and the grave could not hold Him.

section 5

aleph 5: resurrection: hoax, joke or masterstroke?

aleph 5: resurrection: hoax, joke or masterstroke?

talk summary

In the previous weeks, we looked at God's PURPOSE, our PROBLEM, God's PLAN AND his PROVISION. This week, we want to explore God's POWER to raise the Messiah from the dead and why that is such good news.

shalom and welcome back to aleph!

[ice-breaker]

[Shabbat only] We begin our evening once again with the lighting of the Shabbat candles to welcome the peace of Shabbat.

announcements:

Retreat reminder

review

- **Week I God's Purpose:** we looked at God's **purpose** and asked the question, what is Judaism? We discovered that Judaism is more than a religion, more than a race. We discovered that Judaism is about a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who created us to know, love and serve him with all our heart, mind and strength.
- **Week II Our Problem:** we asked the question, if this is God's purpose for us, what's the **problem**? Why do so many people both Jew and Gentile not experience this? The Hebrew Bible gives us the answer, summed up in one word - **sin** – is breaking God's laws & when we break his laws, we break – reason we have broken people, marriages, families, broken world.

- **Week III God's Plan**: We looked at God's **plan** to remedy the sin problem - **atonement – the sacrifice of a sinless substitute** through which God offers **forgiveness of sin, healing & reconciliation –** But without a Temple or sacrifice (2000 years), how do we have atonement, forgiveness and reconciliation today?
- **Week IV God's Provision**: We discovered God's provision – Yeshua - who was more than a man, more than a mensch (great man) but Messiah - God's final and perfect atonement.
- **Week V**: **God's Proof:** But the question remains: Is there any proof that Yeshua is the Messiah? Thus the title: The Resurrection: Hoax, Joke or Masterstroke?

here's the thing: by all the rules of history, yeshua should have faded into oblivion.

- His arrest, condemnation and crucifixion should have ended the movement he began.
- He was not the expected messiah ben David – no one was looking for a messiah ben Joseph (suffering servant whose sacrifice would make atonement for Israel).
- He was abandoned by all who believed in him - his right hand man denied him.
- His death was viewed as proof that he was not the messiah and therefore a false prophet
    - Something happened that caused his followers to believe he was in fact the Messiah. There is only one logical reason – he rose from the dead.

But you may ask, does Judaism even believe in the resurrection – isn't that a Christian concept? [why Jews are more apt to believe in reincarnation – not good news]

jewish bible

- Job 19:25
  - "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God."
- Daniel 12:2
  - "Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace."
- David: Ps.16:10
  - "For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave."
- Isa. 53:10
  - "For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death…After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied."

jewish tradition

- Talmud: Sanhedrin II (rabbinical teaching and commentary)
  - "All Israel have a portion in the world to come, for it is written, 'Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever…but the following have no portion therein - He who maintains that resurrection is not a biblical doctrine."
- Siddur – Amidah
  - "He sustains the living with loving kindness, resurrects the dead with great mercy, supports the falling, heals the sick, releases the bound, and fulfills His trust to those who sleep in the dust."

- Maimonides: rabbi and greatest Jewish scholar: 13 principles of faith: #13
  - THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

jewish scholars - Dr. Pinchas Lapide

  - "Jesus was utterly true to the Torah, as I myself hope to be. I even suspect that Jesus was even more true to the Torah than I an orthodox Jew. I accept the resurrection not as an invention of the community of disciples but as a historical event…" Jewish theologian & Israeli diplomat

jewish messiah: yeshua

Predicted it: Jewish Bible, Jewish writings, Jewish rabbis, Jewish scholars affirm the resurrection. But what did Yeshua believe? He not only affirmed it, he predicted it – his own…

- Mt. 16:21
  - "From that time on, Yeshua began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and ruling priests and Torah scholars, and be killed, and be raised on the third day. But Peter took him and began to correct him saying, 'God forbid, this should ever happen to you."
- Mk. 9:9-10
  - "As they were coming down from the mountain, Yeshua ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They kept this word to themselves, discussing among themselves what it is to rise up from the dead."
- Mt. 17: 22-23
  - "Now while they were gathering in the Galilee, Yeshua said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised." And the disciples became greatly distressed."

Proved it: And not only did he predict it - He proved it

- **lk. 24:1-7 – EMPTY TOMB**
  - "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb…they found the stone rolled away but when they went in they did not find the body."
  - Accused of stealing his body - Try to imagine this conversation between Peter and the other disciples who suggested that they steal the body and fabricate the doctrine of resurrection:
  - "Great idea, guys. We can perpetrate this lie and then devote ourselves to spreading it everywhere. And just think of what's in it for us! Think about what we'll gain by it: hatred, loss of income, beatings, mockery, loss of reputation, imprisonment, and I get to be crucified upside down! Wow! Sounds like a great idea. Let's do it."
  - Stealing the body makes no sense. Cannot account for the radical change in their lives and their willingness to endure horrific persecution for their beliefs.
- **John 20:19-20 – APPEARS TO DISCIPLES**
  - "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish authorities, Yeshua came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side."
- **1 Cor. 15:3-8 - APPEARS TO 500**
  - "Yeshua was buried, he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to Jacob, then to all the disciples. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

- He wasn't just seen by his disciples, but by over 500 including Jacob and Saul and occurred over a period of 40 days

Jewish Disciples: Which is why disciples **proclaimed** it – proof empowered them to proclaim

- Peter: **Acts. 2: 22-24**
  - "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Yeshua of Nazareth by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Yeshua was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and crucified him. But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip."
  - in same place (Jerusalem) to the same people (Jews) who just crucified Yeshua. - Only Yeshua's actual resurrection from the dead explains their boldness (chutzpah)
- Paul: **Acts 17:19-21**
  - In Athens (speaking to Gentiles vs Jews) "Being then God's children, created in his image, we ought not to think that the divine being as an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."
  - **Our assurance is "He Is Risen."** To those who believe he died in our place taking upon himself our judgment, there is no judgment. That's the Good News. But we have a choice – we can believe that He took upon

himself the judgment we deserve, or we choose to take upon ourselves the judgment we deserve. I choose the former!

conclusion

One writer summed it up this way…

More than nineteen hundred years ago there was a Man born contrary to the laws of life. This Man lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He did not travel extensively. Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived; that was during His exile in childhood.

He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His relatives were inconspicuous and had neither training nor formal education. In infancy, He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature, walked upon the billows as if pavements, and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His service.

He never wrote a book, and yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. He never marshaled an army, nor drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun; and yet no leader ever had more volunteers who have, under His orders, made more rebels stack arms and surrender without a shot fired. He never practiced psychiatry, and yet He has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors far and near.

The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone; but the name of this Man abounds more and more. Though time has

spread 2000 years between the people of this generation and the scene of His crucifixion, yet He still lives. Herod could not destroy Him and the grave could not hold Him. **HE IS RISEN!**

section 5

aleph 6: who is the holy spirit?

aleph 6: who is the holy spirit?

talk summary

In the previous weeks, we looked at God's PURPOSE, our PROBLEM, God's PLAN, God's PROVISION and God's POWER. This week, we want to explore God's PROMISE to give us the Ruach (Holy Spirit).

shalom and welcome back to aleph!

[ice-breaker] FINKELSTEIN AND YESHUA

Yeshua was walking around Jerusalem when he decided that he really needed a new robe. After looking around for a while, he saw a sign for **Finkelstein, the Tailor**. So, he went in and made the necessary arrangements to have Finkelstein prepare a new robe for him. A few days later, when the robe was finished, Yeshua tried it on -- and it was a perfect fit! He asked how much he owed.

Finkelstein brushed him off**:** "No, no, no, for the Messiah there's no charge! However, may I ask for a small favor. Whenever you give a sermon, perhaps you could just mention that your nice new robe was made by Finkelstein, the Tailor? "Yeshua readily agreed and as promised, extolled the virtues of his Finkelstein robe whenever he spoke to the masses.

A few months later, while Yeshua was again walking through Jerusalem he happened to walk past Finkelstein's shop and noted a huge line of people waiting for Finkelstein's robes. He pushed his way through the crowd to speak to him and as soon as Finkelstein spotted him he said: **"** Yeshua**,** look what you've done for my business! Would you consider a partnership? "Certainly," replied Yeshua. " Yeshua & Finkelstein" it is. "Oh, no, no," said Finkelstein. "Finkelstein & Yeshua." After all, I am the tailor. The two of them debated this for some time. Their discussion was long and spirited, but ultimately fruitful -- and

they finally came up with a mutually acceptable compromise. A few days later, the new sign went up over Finkelstein's shop: LORD & TAYLOR

[Shabbat only] We begin our evening once again with the lighting of the Shabbat candles to welcome the peace of Shabbat.

announcements

Retreat next week!

summary

God's purpose, our problem, God's plan, provision, proof and God's promise

who is the holy spirit?

- This morning we are asking, "who is the Holy Spirit?"
- Is a good question – growing up Jewish, I would have answered, "never heard of him." Later in life, when I did hear mention of the Holy Spirit, or worse, Holy Ghost, I thought it had something to do with either Halloween or Christianity, certainly not Judaism.
- Fact is – like the resurrection, the Holy Spirit is found throughout the Hebrew scriptures. Hopefully, what you are discovering is that much of what is thought to be Christian in origin, is actually rooted in Judaism.

Journey through the Hebrew Scriptures

- In the very first verse of the first book of the Bible we see the Spirit at work in **creation…**
  - 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the waters.' (Genesis 1:1-3)

- So right from the beginning, we see that the Holy Spirit is not a Christian invention or concept but God himself at work in creation bringing light out of darkness, creation out of chaos, order out of disorder, newness out of nothingness.

We also see the work of the Spirit in people's lives (7)

- **Job 33:4 Elihu** speaks for all faithful Jews when he says, "The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."
  - When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we become aware that God created us and gives us life. We become not only self-conscious but God-conscious. [test tube marked failure]
- In **Numbers 27: 18**, we read that **Joshua** experienced the Holy Spirit… "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua the son of Nun, in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him.'
  - Why did Moses chose Joshua as his successor – because he saw the Spirit at work in his life.
  - When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, people will see something different about us (testimony)
- **In Judges 6:12** we read how the Spirit empowered **Gideon** to do what he thought he was incapable of doing.
  - "And the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and he said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor." Gideon responds, "Who me? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family." - You've got the wrong guy – not a mighty man of valor.
  - **6:16** But the Lord said, "I will be with you…and the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." **(6:34)**
  - When the Spirit comes into our lives he turns our weaknesses into strengths - Testimony: public speaking (mumbles) - his power is made perfect in weakness

- In **Psalm 51:11**, we read of **David's** experience of the Holy Spirit…
  - "Cast me not away from your presence and take not your **holy Spirit** from me."
  - Through the Spirit, David was able to experience God's presence in his life.
  - Likewise, when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we are able to experience the presence of the Lord. [inner knowing that God is with you]
- In **Nehemiah 9:20**, we read where **Ezra** gives thanks to God for being Israel's instructor and teacher…
  - "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them…"
  - When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we begin to understand God's word - it comes alive. [testimony]
- In **Exodus 31:1–5** we read, "The Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have called by name **Bezalel**…and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting and in carving wood, for work in every craft.'"
  - God has given each of us gifts and talents. But when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we begin to want to use our gifts for God and to glorify God vs. ourselves.
  - I believe God wants to say the same to you as he said to Bezalel… "I have filled **you** with the Spirit of God," to empower **you** & use you for my glory – whether you are an artist or an accountant – a homemaker or handyman.
- In **Numbers 11:25**, we read that when Moses gathered the seventy **elders of Israel** at the tabernacle, "The Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took some of the Spirit that was upon him and put it upon the seventy elders; and when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. [But they did so no more.]"

- When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, he not only empowers our natural gifts, he gives us spiritual gifts, one of which is the gift of prophecy – ability to hear God's voice and speak words of wisdom, encouragement and edification. [testimony]
- So we see in the Hebrew Bible some of the ways the Spirit worked in the lives of those who believed in the God of Israel.

At the same time, the same Hebrew Bible indicates that in a **future time**, there will be a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For example…

- In Numbers 11:25 the passage ended, "But they did so no more." In Hebrew Bible, prophecy was normally reserved for a few specifically chosen people (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.)
- That is why **Moses** prayed as he did…"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his **Spirit** upon them" (Num.11:29).

god's promise

- **Joel 2:28** - We read of the promise of that future time when "all shall prophecy…"

  "After this, I will pour out my **Spirit** on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions…in those days I will pour out my Spirit. Gift given to all people (Jew/Gentile; male/female; old/young)
- **Ezekiel 36:26** "I will give you a new heart and put a new **spirit** inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put **My Spirit** within you and cause you to follow My Laws and be careful to do what I tell you."
  - Is a promise to give us a new spirit – Holy Spirit - as well as a new heart – a transformed life that wants to live for God.

- Is what the Spirit does – he changes our hearts – we want to obey his word and do his will; we begin to change from the inside out [testimony]

promised messiah

- **Isa. 61:1** We read of the One to come who will bring this promise to past – Messiah! "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; that the time of the Lord's favor has come." …Lord's favor, promise, blessing has come – the gift of the Spirit.

messiah's promise

- With this in mind, listen to what Yeshua said would be his departing gift to us… speaking on the eve of his death…
  - **John 14:16-17** I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the **Spirit** of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.
  - **Acts 1:4** "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you've heard me speak about. For John baptized with water; in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

promise fulfilled

Ten days later, on Shavuot (Pentecost), the promise was fulfilled…

- **Acts 2:1** "On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what

looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the **Holy Spirit** and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

promise proclaimed

Acts 2:16 "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my **Spirit** upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams'"

- Peter is saying, "this which you see is that which God promised would happen." Is a new Day. This promise is to **you**, to your children, and to those far away — all who have been called by the Lord our God."

So what is the difference between BC and AD (before messiah and after Messiah)? Something like Egypt's Aswan High Dam before and after it was completed.

Construction began in 1953 and was completed in 1970. It was 375 feet high and 11,000 feet across and the 12 turbines with their ten billion kilowatt-hour capacity were unleashed with enough power to light every city in Egypt.

But during the 17 years of construction, the Nile River wasn't completely stopped. Even as the reservoir was filling, part of the river was allowed to flow because the people downstream depended on it. They drank it, they washed in it; it watered their crops and turned their mill-wheels. Their lives depended on it. But on the **day** when the reservoir was released to pour through the turbines, a power was unleashed that changed everything bringing a far greater blessing to many more people.

Pentecost was like the opening of the Aswan High Dam. Before Pentecost the river of God's Spirit blessed the people of Israel

and gave them life. But after Pentecost, ten billion kilowatts was released not only in Israel but in all the earth.

to sum up: who is the holy spirit?

- The One who makes God real in our lives - who teaches you, guides you, equips you and empowers you to fulfill the purpose for which you were created!
- Testimony

next week: the retreat

- What Does the Holy Spirit Do in Our Lives?
- How Can I Be Filled With the Holy Spirit?
- How Do I Live a Spirit-Filled Life?

session 7
aleph retreat

session 7: retreat

welcome

Good morning and welcome! There is a passage in Psalm 118 that says, “This is the Day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” This really is a special day that God has set apart for us and I believe that each of us will be glad that he did! But first what would an Aleph retreat be without a joke...

genesis re-examined

What would an Aleph retreat be without a joke…
On the first day, God created the dog and said:
“Sit all day by the door of your house and bark at anyone who comes in or walks past. For this, I will give you a life span of twenty years.”
The dog said:
“That’s a long time to be barking. How about only ten years and I’ll give you back the other ten?”
So God agreed.

On the second day, God created the monkey and said:
“Entertain people, do tricks, and make them laugh. For this, I’ll give you a twenty-year life span.”
The monkey said:
“Monkey tricks for twenty years? That’s a pretty long time to perform. How about I give you back ten like the Dog did?”
And God agreed.

On the third day, God created the cow and said:
“You must go into the field with the farmer all day long and suffer under the sun, have calves and give milk to support the farmer’s family. For this, I will give you a life span of sixty years.”
The cow said:
“That’s kind of a tough life you want me to live for sixty years. How about twenty and I’ll give back the other forty?”
And God agreed again.

On the fourth day, God created man and said:
"Eat, sleep, play, marry and enjoy your life. For this, I'll give you twenty years."
But man said:
"Only twenty years? Could you possibly give me my twenty, the forty the cow gave back, the ten the monkey gave back, and the ten the dog gave back; that makes eighty, okay?"
"Okay," said God, "You asked for it."

so that is why:

- the first twenty years we eat, sleep, play and enjoy ourselves.
- the next forty years we slave in the sun to support our family
- the next ten years we do monkey tricks to entertain the grandchildren
- and for the last ten years we sit on the front porch and bark at everyone.

review retreat schedule

10:00 Welcome
10:15 **Talk 1: What Does the Holy Spirit Do?**
11:00 Small group discussion
11:30 Lunch
12:30 **Talk 2: How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?**
1:15 Prayer Ministry
2:00 **Final talk: How to Live a Spirit-Filled Life**
2:45 Testimonies
3:15 Conclusion

song(s) & prayer

section 5

aleph 7: what does the holy spirit do?

aleph 7: what does the holy spirit do?

summary panoramic picture

Previous talks: panoramic view of God's purpose, our problem, God's plan, provision, proof and God's promise

Last week: we began to explore the person of the Holy Spirit:

- His Purpose: to anoint/empower/equip **specific** people with God's presence and power: Bezalel, Gideon, Samson, Moses, prophets, (priests, kings)
- His Promise: to anoint/empower/equip **all** people with God's presence and power: Ezekiel, Joel (Hebrew scriptures); John the forerunner, Yeshua (New Covenant scriptures)

Today: What Does Holy Spirit Do: Gives us…

- New life
- New identity
- New nature
- New power

Testimony (video or live) of the difference the Holy Spirit makes in a person's life

new life

- In John 3, read about an encounter Yeshua had with an orthodox Jew name Nicodemus.

  Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could

perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. Truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. "'You cannot mean that a man is to enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born, Nicodemus asked. What is it, then, that you do mean?" Yeshua answered, "Truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." John 3:3–8

- He comes to Yeshua at night, in the cover of darkness, and says to him, **"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him**." He recognizes there is something unique about Yeshua, that maybe he is more than a rabbi but he is confused and looking to Yeshua to help him understand.
  - That may be true for you as well. Perhaps you are beginning to see that Yeshua may be more than a mere man who lived 2000 years ago but are still confused as to who he really is.

- So Yeshua says to Nick (and us included)," you cannot see (understand) the kingdom of God unless you are born again of water and spirit." But what does that mean?
  - Most of us have heard the words "born again." We probably associated it with Christianity and evangelical Christians – something therefore not for us – especially if we are Jewish.
  - So let's clear things up. First, it is Jewish concept. Yeshua is Jewish and he is talking to an orthodox

Jewish leader who is a Pharisee (Jewish sect) and a member of the Sanhedrin (ruling council). And second, it is something God wants for all of us – both Jew and Gentile.

- Yeshua is saying in effect, "I want you to understand and experience the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, but to do so, you must experience a spiritual rebirth. You must be born again not physically but spiritually.

- Yeshua further elaborates by associating the spirit with wind – no accident – Hebrew word for wind and spirit is the same – **ruach**.
  - He is saying the Holy Spirit is a bit like the wind. We can't see the wind but we can see the effect of the wind (trees blowing).
  - Likewise, we may not be able to see the Spirit but we can see effect of the Spirit.
  - Testimony

- Maybe you've begun to see the effect of the Spirit in your own life: things beginning to act differently; change in your thoughts, beliefs or behavior? If so, be encouraged, "the wind is blowing and the Spirit is moving in your life to give you **new life**!

new identity

In Rm.8:15, Rabbi Paul says, 'Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption.'

- Paul is saying that we have been adopted into God's family. He was writing in the context of Roman law. And under Roman law, when someone adopts a child, it was

regarded as the highest status and greatest privilege a child could have, i.e., the privilege and the status of being a son or a daughter.

- This is another effect of being born again – when we are born again, we are adopted into God's family and we receive a new **identity** as a child of God.
  - In other words, we are no longer sinners but sons. Which is to say, we are no longer belong to the Adams family (you may remember the Adams family). GN – we no longer belong to the "Adam's" family because we have been adopted into God's family.
- But perhaps the greatest privilege we now have is that our new identity as God's **children** gives us a new relationship with God as **Father.**
  - In Romans 8:15 Paul continues & finishes his thought, "You have not received a spirit that makes you fearful servants. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."
  - Abba is an Aramaic word. It's untranslatable, that's why it's left in the Aramaic Abba. It's a word that's never used in the Hebrew scriptures (OT) as a way to address God. But it is how Yeshua addressed God. He called God 'Abba'. Is a word that is both personal and intimate yet respectful.
  - And here is the amazing thing – we are invited into the same relationship with God that Yeshua had. We too can call God "Abba Father". We too can have this personal, intimate yet respectful relationship with God – because we have been adopted and given special privileges.
- Paul explains this further in Ephesians 2:18 where he says, "for through him (Yeshua) we both (Jew and Gentile) have access in one Spirit to the Father."
  - In other words, because of our adoption, we have immediate access through the Spirit into his presence. Remember that under the Mosaic Covenant, access into

his presence was denied except for one person (High Priest), only one da (Day of Atonement), and in only in one place (Holy of Holies)

- Now we can come into his presence anytime and anywhere because God is our Abba Father who gives us special and privileged access into his presence.
- Testimony

new nature

- We have seen that the Holy Spirit gives us new life and a new identity but he also gives us a new nature. We read in 2Cor.3:18…
  - We all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'
- It is the Holy Spirit who by his work in us, is transforming into his likeness – the likeness of Yeshua – if I may - making us "Christlike" - transforming our old Adamic nature into a new nature and a new likeness – until we actually look like Yeshua!
  - How does this happen? By "beholding his glory' – spending time in his presence. Have you ever noticed that some husbands and wives who have been married a long time look like each other? Why is that - because they have spent so much time in each other's presence!
  - Likewise, the Spirit changes us to look more like Yeshua as we "with unveiled face behold his glory…growing in relationship with him, spending time in his presence.
- What does it mean to look more like Yeshua? Paul calls it the fruit of the Spirit – that is to say – the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives as we grow in our relationship with God. In **Galatians 5:22–23** we read… "The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." [Fruit not feelings]

- Love: is more than a feeling but the ability to love sacrificially and unconditionally. God so loved the world – more than a good feeling.
- Joy: is more than a feeling but the ability to rejoice even when life is difficult. (Acts 16 Paul & Silas)
- Peace: is more than a feeling but the ability to be at peace in your relationships; in your marriage, family, job, with other believers regardless of their label.
- Likewise with patience (impatience), kindness (criticalness), goodness (badness), faithfulness (unfaithfulness), gentleness (harshness) and self-control (instead of trying to control others) – each is a fruit of a changed life.

new power

- Finally, the Holy Spirit not only gives us a new nature (producing in us the **fruit** of the Spirit) he gives us new power through the **gifts** of the Spirit.
- Now to each one of us the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." 1Cor.12:4-11
- I call it Paul's "epic" vision, i.e., **E**very **P**erson **I**nvolved **C**orporately. God gives spiritual gifts to each of us for the "common good," i.e., for the building up of the community of believers.

- The Holy Spirit gives everybody a gift. There are other gifts as well, gifts of encouragement and teaching and so on. But every single one of you has a gift or more likely gifts that God gives you for the building up of the community/congregation. Everyone is to be involved!
- Why, because God wants an army not an audience.

- Book of Acts (we see not an audience but an army)
  - Not just Peter and Paul who moved in the power of the Spirit
    - Stephen: "And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." Acts 6:8
    - Phillip: "And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did (healing and deliverance). Acts 8:6
    - is why Messianic believers were accused of "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). The had an EPIC vision.
  - This is exactly what Yeshua promised would happen with the coming of the Spirit.
    - Yeshua said, "Truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do and greater works than these will he do because I go to the Father" John 14:12.
    - Greater works: not quality but in quantity as believers all over the world receive the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
  - Is still happening today as believers are filled with the Spirit and walk in the power of the Spirit:

    Testimony:
    - John is a prisoner in a large Israeli jail complex. He became a believer while in prison and God is using him there to bring blessing to many.

Through phone conferences, he brings prayer ministry to other prisoners. "As we prayed, the Lord started to move. One inmate, while trying to avoid arrest, had broken his back. After we prayed for his back injuries, he and four others gave testimony that the Lord had removed all their pain and they were healed. Then God began to heal frozen shoulders. Knees were next. Many inmates who could hardly walk were fully healed and walking. The Lord gave us a word of knowledge that a man had horribly abused his sister when he very young. Then man was able to admit that this was correct and he felt terrible guilt and shame. The Lord spoke through us and said, "I have set you free and healed your heart and your sister's heart; restoration is for today."

(or personal testimony)

- Acts 1:8 This is Yeshua's promise to us. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." - Power to do what Yeshua did!

conclusion

- We are asking the question: What does the Holy Spirit do? He gives us new life, new identity, a new nature and new power. But if I could sum up what the Spirit does in one word – I would say, He makes God **REAL** so that God is not just a concept in our HEAD but a Person in our HEART. And that's what he wants to do today!
- Today, Yeshua says to us…"If anyone (you) thirst, let him come to me and drink. And out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."
- It's an invitation is to all of us, to come and drink that out of our hearts would flow rivers of living water – the river of the Holy Spirit!

section 5

aleph 8: how can i be filled with the spirit?

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summary: who is the holy spirit?

- The Holy Spirit makes God real in our experience.
- The Holy Spirit makes the Bible come alive.
- The Holy Spirit changes our lives (mind, will and emotions)
- The Holy Spirit changes our relationships.
- The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to share our experience with others.

how can i be filled with the spirit: 3 important attitudes…

1 **Open-minded**
Acts 8:4-8 Philip went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there [not open to Jews or Judaism [not unlike many Jews today who are not open to hear about Jesus or Yeshua]. But when the crowds heard Philip and saw what happened (healings/changed lives), they all paid close attention to what he said.

2 **Open to More**
Acts 19:1-2 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

- is possible to believe in Yeshua but not have experienced the power or gifts of the Spirit
- **Acts 19:6** "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in

tongues and prophesied." [this could happen to you even today]

3 **Open to Change**

Acts 2:37-39 Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him, "What should we do?" Peter replied, "Each of you must **repent** of your sins and turn to God and be immersed in the name of Messiah Yeshua for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away — all who have been called by the Lord our God."

- Sometimes people want to experience God in their lives but nothing seems to happen. The problem may be due to the need for repentance.
- Repentance (metanoia – change your mind not how you feel)
  - Is not a feeling or emotion – not feeling guilty or bad about yourself or what you have done in the past
- Repentance (teshuva – change direction - to "turn")
  - Is a decision to "turn around" – to change the direction of your life (living for yourself, for career; for money; for pleasure…)
  - Is a decision to "turn away" from sin and wrongdoing (doesn't mean you won't have temptation any longer)
  - Is a decision to "turn over" control to God

importance of faith – what is faith?

"Those who believed what Peter said were immersed and added to the community that day—about 3,000 in all" (Acts 2:41).

- Faith is believing God to give you what he has promised.

John 7:37-39

- "On the last day of the festival, the great day, Yeshua stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who **believes** in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who **believed** in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Yeshua was not yet glorified."
- Faith is more than intellectual assent – involves thirst/desire – believing that Yeshua can quench your thirst and give you new life.

- Faith is receiving what God has promised
  - **Acts 8:14-17** "When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans welcomed God's message, they sent Peter and John to them. After they went down there, they prayed for them that they might **receive** the Holy Spirit"…"Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they **received** the Holy Spirit."
- Faith is receiving what you ask, seek and knock for
  - **Luke 11:9** "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will **receive** what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, **receives**. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened…How much more will your Father in heaven give the **Holy Spirit** to those who ask."

what to expect

- Expect to receive the Holy Spirit. Different things happen to different people. Don't seek a particular kind of experience.
- Be open to the gift of tongues. It is a gift of the Spirit to help you to pray and hear God's voice.
- Do not expect the Holy Spirit to force you to speak in

tongues. It is something you yield to. Focus on God not on yourself! [personal testimony]

- Above all, expect to receive God's love for you in a new way.

guest testimony

(of how they experience the baptism in the Spirit)

questions

Before breaking into small groups for prayer, take a few minutes for any questions.

instructions

- Pray in small groups
- Pray for those who want prayer one person at a time.
- Before we do, want to take a few minutes to worship and prepare our hearts.

song

prayer of commitment

Lord, thank you for bringing me to this day. Thank you for showing me that you love me and want to have a relationship with me. Thank you for sacrificing yourself for me that I may have a relationship with you. I ask now that you forgive me of my sin and cleanse me of all that separates me from you. I invite you now to be Lord of my life and to fill me with your Spirit that I may love you and live for you all the days of my life.

small group prayer ministry

section 5

aleph 9: how can i live a spirit-filled life?

aleph 9: how can i live a spirit-filled life?

testimonies

(two or three testimonies from the prayer ministry time)

aleph overview

God's Purpose; Our Problem; God's Plan; God's Provision; God's Proof; God's Promise

final talk: our pursuit

In our final talk, we will explore how we can live a Spirit-filled life by learning the principles of spiritual growth.

spiritual growth

Col. 2:7 "Therefore as you received Messiah Yeshua as Lord, so continue to walk in him, rooted and growing in him, established in your faith just as you were taught overflowing with thankfulness."

key word: growing

- Illustration: creating a healthy lawn
  - For years, I have had difficulty growing grass in my yard. Each spring, I would plant seed, water it for a couple of weeks, watch it grow but only to see it die a few months later when the weather got hot.
  - What was the problem? I didn't understand all the factors necessary to create a healthy lawn, such as preparing the soil, weeding, fertilizer, and regular soaking.
  - Likewise, we can be filled with the Spirit, grow for a little while only to dry up a few months later.

- If we want to grow and live a healthy, spirit-filled life, we need a plan.

the plan

A wheel gives us a picture of God's plan for spiritual growth. The wheel was invented in ancient Mesopotamia around 3500 BC and is considered the hallmark of man's innovation revolutionizing our way of life. Likewise, the principle behind the wheel can revolutionize our spiritual life.

4 spokes represent the four most important principles or disciplines of spiritual growth

- Illustration: running track – in order to succeed, one must practice 4 disciplines:
  - Listen to the coach - **The Discipline of Prayer**
  - Learn the necessary skills - **The Discipline of Scripture**
  - Live right (diet/sleep) - **The Discipline of Community**
  - Labor (train) hard - **The Discipline of Service**

the discipline of prayer

- David: "One thing I ask for that shall I seek, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord and to spend time in his presence."
- Rabbi Paul: "All I want to know is Messiah..." (Phil.3:10)
  - Hebrew word for know is yodaah and means to know intimately not simply intellectually, i.e., a relationship
  - For David and Paul, knowing God and being in a relationship with him was the passion of their lives. It was the "one thing" above everything else.
  - Relationships don't grow without two people spending time together. One of the greatest reasons for the failure of many marriages, is that couples fail to spend quality

time together; the business of life takes over resulting in less and less time together. Instead of communion, there is contention.

- But God created us for communion with himself and with one another.

- The question then becomes – How do I pray – which leads to spiritual discipline #2.

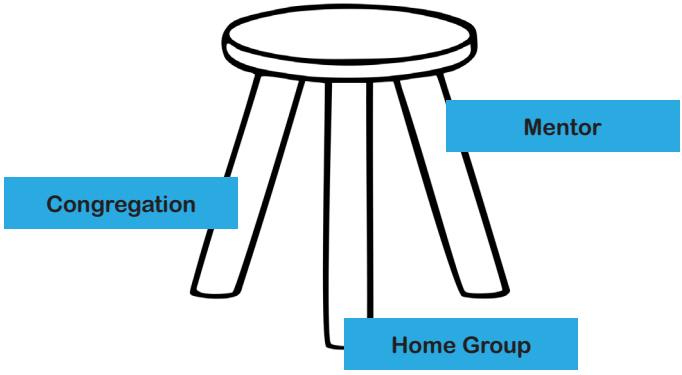
the discipline of scripture

Yeshua said, "If you make my Word your home, you will in truth be my disciples. You will know the truth and the truth will make you free." Jn.8:32

- We cannot know God without knowing his word, the Bible. It would be like trying to know about Abraham Lincoln without ever reading about him or understanding the history of the Civil War.
- The Bible not only reveals who God is and what he has done but also gives us instruction (Torah) for how to make life work [like reading an instruction manual but much better].
- As with prayer, purpose to read the Bible daily, even if it's only one verse a day. And better yet, learn to pray the Bible.
  - READ: choose a book of the Bible you would like to read
  - MEDITATE: read a small portion and reflect on it asking the Spirit to give you understanding and insight.
  - HEAR: Listen to what the Spirit speaks/reveals to you. Write down what the Spirit is showing you.
  - STUDY: when you have more time, do further study of what the Lord is showing you.
  - MEMORIZE: Ps. 119:11 "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

the discipline of community

- Acts 2:44 "They continued faithfully in the teaching of the apostles, in fellowship, in breaking bread and in the prayers...continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose...they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart, praising God and having the respect of all the people. And day after day, the Lord kept adding to their community those who were being saved."
    - They had communal meals, communal teaching and communal prayer.
- Hebrews 10:24 "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to fellowship together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
    - More than simply hanging out and watching football, they fellowshipped together to encourage one another.
    - They knew there was no such thing as a "Lone Ranger" believer. We need each other. Fellowship functions on three levels...
- Three Legged Stool



- We need all three!

the discipline of service

Galatians 6:10 "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

- "Let us do good..." If the discipline of community is "in-reach" (to each other), the discipline of service is our "out-reach" (to others).
  - Dead Sea: is dead because it has an inlet but no outlet.
  - Likewise, our spiritual life will die if we have not outlet or outreach.
- Suggestions
  - First, we want to look for ways to serve the congregation (household of faith) we are part of.
  - Second, we want to look for ways to serve "all people" – family and friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc.
  - Principle: "we are not responsible to "save" people, only to "serve" people. God's job is saving people. Even Yeshua was a servant before he was a Savior.

final question

Is there anything missing (from the wheel diagram)?

- Answer: the Holy Spirit. Yes, there are four spokes or disciplines (prayer, scripture, community & service) but it is the Spirit who ultimately makes the wheel turn.
- **Phil. 2:12-13** "So then, my dear friends, work out your salvation with fear and trembling (paying careful attention to spiritual discipline). For it is God (the Spirit) who is working in you enabling you both to desire and to work out his good purpose."
- There is a saying, "We can work it out because He is working in us." God's plan is that we live in partnership with him. "For we are his workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do." Ep. 2:6

conclusion

- This concludes Aleph. It has been an amazing time together. Thank you for your participation and your faithfulness. Be assured that "God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). And you have!
- As we close, I would like to pray this apostolic prayer for you from Paul's letter to the Ephesians… May the God of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the glorious Father, to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you will have full knowledge of him. I pray that he will give light to the eyes of your hearts, so that you will understand the hope to which he has called you, what rich glories there are in the inheritance he has promised his people, and how surpassingly great is his power working in us who trust him. It works with the same mighty strength he used when he worked in the Messiah to raise him from the dead and seat him at his right hand in heaven, far above every ruler, authority, power, dominion or any other name that can be named either in the age or in the age to come."