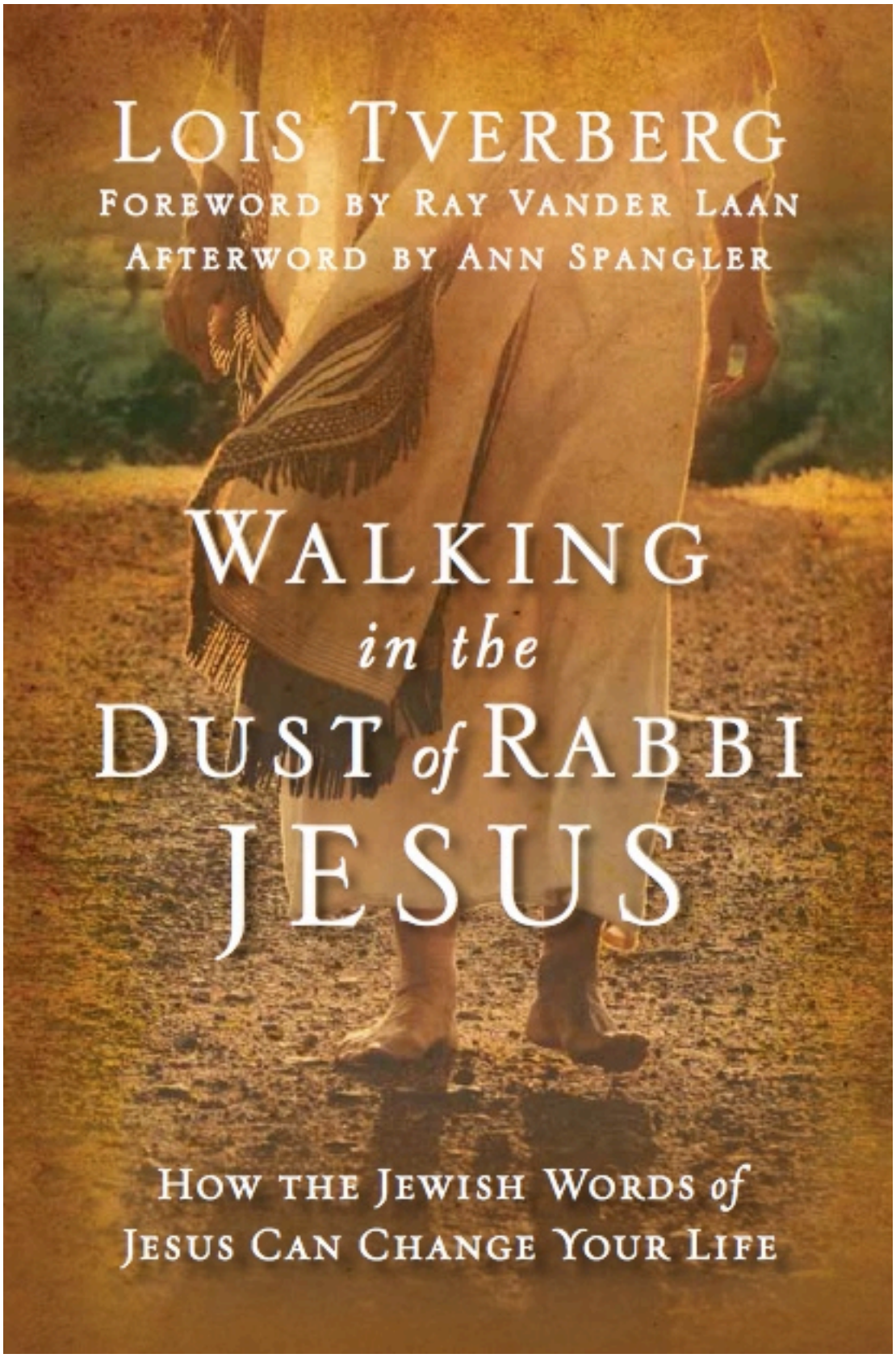
LOIS TVERBERG
FOREWORD BY RAY VANDER LAAN
AFTERWORD BY ANN SPANGLER
WALKING
in the
DUST of RABBI
JESUS
HOW THE JEWISH WORDS of
JESUS CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

ZONDERVAN

Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, *Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tverberg, Lois.
Walking in the dust of Rabbi Jesus : how the Jewish words of Jesus can change your life/ Lois Tverberg.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index [if applicable].
ISBN 978-0-310-28420-8 (hardcover)
1. Jesus Christ—Jewishness. 2. Jesus Christ—Words. I. Title.
BT590.J8T84 2011
232.9'06—dc23 2011035954

Published in association with the literary agency of Ann Spangler and Company, 1420 Pontiac Road SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

Cover photography: iStockphoto®
Interior illustration: iStockphoto®
Interior design: Beth Shagene

Printed in the United States of America

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11 12 13 14 15 16 17 /DCI/ 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Foreword

As an author, Bible teacher, and study tour leader, I have had the privilege of walking the lands of the Bible with thousands of Jesus' followers who came to see where Abraham, Ruth, David, and Jesus lived. I enjoyed watching group after group slowly come to realize that the Bible's stories are set in real times and real places. As they learned more about the land, the people, and the culture of the Bible, these believers saw that the context God chose for his redemptive plan could help them apply the Word to their own lives. At the end of their travels, I often heard people say, "I will never read the Bible the same way again."

Many returned home from Israel or Turkey or Greece with their faith in Jesus deepened but hungry for more — much more. The pilgrim excitement of "walking where Jesus walked" became a growing thirst for a deeper understanding of God's story — a thirst as palpable as their need for bottled water in the hot, dry climate of Israel.

I know their experience well — that was my journey too. I began to explore the Jewish world of Jesus with a desire to deepen my faith *in* Jesus. I was familiar with the accounts of his life and believed them to be true. I accepted his claims to be the Messiah and believed in his redemptive death. But as I entered the world of Jewish thought, I began to wonder about the faith *of* Jesus. I struggled to understand what I should learn from the accounts of how he *lived*. Was it simply to explain why he must die? Or was his life a pattern to be understood and emulated? And what did it mean to imitate him in my walk with God?

As I explored the lands and cultures of the Bible, I realized that I did indeed need to have not only faith *in* Jesus, but also to develop the faith *of* Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus I needed to know why and how he lived out his faith, so that I could follow him more closely.

This insight seems so obvious now that I cannot imagine that I

had not considered it before. I grew up in a Christian community, lived in a Christian home where the Bible was often read, attended Christian schools through college, and received an advanced degree at an outstanding seminary. I believed the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and from my childhood was committed to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Yet I had not even considered the implications of the fact that Jesus lived among us as a Jewish man in a first-century Jewish culture. Jesus was Jewish! What a radical thought!

From the beginning, God chose to speak and act within the context of human culture, so it is no surprise that his Son would do the same. Jesus lived like a Jew, talked like a Jew, and worshiped like a Jew. His words, actions, and teaching methods were in keeping with the customs, traditions, and practices of the Semitic culture into which he was born. He wasn't born in northwestern Iowa among nineteenth-century Dutch immigrants. He was born in Judea, a land that was a hotbed of political and religious turmoil, a country that had been the crossroads of the ancient world for centuries. He grew up among the Jews, a people chosen by God to bear his name to the world. And he ministered under the mighty empire of Rome. While God's message was and is timeless, it was first revealed to a real people in a real place and at a real time. Understanding this ancient world is critical to interpreting and applying the biblical story to our own lives.

In a sense, as we study the Bible, we must temporarily leave our twenty-first-century culture and our Western attitudes and go back to another time and place … to the land of Israel, the birthplace and home of Jesus. We must enter an Eastern culture that was passionately religious and that longed for God's great redemption. The Jews of Jesus' time knew their story and fiercely debated how God wanted them to live it out. The Hebrew Bible was their daily bread, and discussion of it dominated their lives, as it would Jesus' life. Paradoxically, stepping back into that setting makes the Bible even more relevant to our own culture and time.

That was my journey from faith *in* Jesus to learning to live out the faith *of* Jesus. What I had been taught from the Bible was not wrong. Few, if any, doctrines changed for me as I studied the Bible's

ancient Jewish context. And after thirty-six years of intensive cultural study, I still believe God is our Creator, Jesus is our Savior, and the Bible is his inspired Word. But there are more riches in the Word than I had ever imagined. To view Scripture through the perspective of an ancient Near Eastern culture is to gain additional insights, as certainly as reading the Bible in the original languages deepens one's grasp of the text.

Somewhere on the journey of studying the context and culture of the Bible, I met Lois Tverberg. Just like so many others I had known, her first experience of the ancient world of the Bible produced an ever-growing thirst for greater understanding of its story in context. She was as intense and intentional in her search as any student I had ever met, bringing her training and skill as a scientist to her pursuit of deeper understanding of the biblical text. Her tenacity in learning the ancient languages, in studying the land of Israel, in exploring Jewish thought, and in investigating archaeological discoveries provide her with a unique set of tools to explore the text in context. Soon I was learning from her, as her insights gave me a new understanding of the Bible and particularly the life of Jesus—the One we both knew as Savior and Lord, for we share a faith *in* Jesus. Through her insights Lois has deepened my understanding of the faith *of* Jesus and encouraged me to "walk … as [Jesus] walked" (1 John 2:6 NASB).

Lois's earlier work (with Ann Spangler), *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*, was an entry step into Jesus' world. The Jewish context into which Jesus came and the implications of that setting for understanding him better are powerfully presented and have guided many believers as they seek a greater understanding of the Teacher from Nazareth. I believe the present work will have even greater impact on those who desire to be disciples of Jesus. Readers will be deeply challenged as they discover the implications of Jesus' teaching for their daily walk.

While each chapter is supported with careful analysis of contemporary scholarship, ancient sources, and recent archaeological discovery, as you read you will feel as if you are on a journey back to the world of Jesus. You will see the beauty of the silvery green olive trees on the Galilean hills, feel the rocky path under your feet, and smell

the dust as you follow the Rabbi. You will hear the sages discussing the Torah as their disciples listen and will discover the greatest interpreter of all … Jesus the Messiah. For he is not only God incarnate, but also the Word incarnate. His life is in a real sense the Word—the Bible—in living flesh. And you will be challenged to become ever more passionate about being his disciple—having the faith *of* Jesus. So come along with us and follow in the dust of Jesus—the Jewish Rabbi—of Scripture.

Ray Vander Laan

PART I

Hearing Our Rabbi's Words *with* New Ears

What would it be like to listen to Jesus' earth-shattering words through the ears of a first-century disciple? The first thing you'd notice is how Jewish they are. His greatest commandments begin with the *Shema*, the core statement of Jewish faith. For over two millennia, each morning and evening, Jews have committed themselves to loving their one and only God with all of their heart, soul, and strength. Learning more about Jesus' language, his Scriptures, and his people will deepen our understanding of his most important words.

CHAPTER 1

Brushing Away the Dust of the Ages

Just as rain water comes down in drops and forms rivers,
so with the Scriptures: one studies a bit today
and some more tomorrow, until in time the understanding
becomes like a flowing stream.

— Song of Songs Midrash Rabbah 2:8

In 1977, Pinin Barcilon won the assignment of a lifetime when she was asked to lead the restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, one of the most well-known images of all time. But the renowned Italian art conservator could hardly imagine how nerve-wracking the next twenty-three years would be.

The centuries hadn't been kind to the mural that da Vinci completed on a monastery wall in Milan, Italy, in 1498. Always the experimenter, Leonardo had reformulated his paints in a way that proved to be unstable, so that the paint began flaking off even before his death. And even though his mural was immediately hailed as a masterpiece, it was left unprotected from pollution and humidity. When Barcilon began her restoration, five hundred years of dust, mold, and candle soot had darkened the iconic work almost to the point of invisibility.

The real challenge for her team, however, was to undo the disastrous attempts at restoration that had begun back in the 1700s. Heavy coats of varnish, glue, and wax had been brushed on, each of them hastening the darkening process. Worst of all, hack amateurs had painted over da Vinci's work time and again, rendering its images distorted, brushing out details they didn't understand, and filling in gaps with their own interpretations.

After months of photographing every square centimeter of the

painting's surface and analyzing it using state-of-the-art technology, Barcilon's team members finally began their work. Then, for over twenty years they hunched over microscopes, painstakingly scraping away five hundred years of grime and overpainting. On a good day, one postage stamp's worth of the image would emerge. In 1999, when da Vinci's brushstrokes were finally revealed, her team's meticulous, mind-numbing labor found its reward. Barcilon called it a "slow, severe conquest, which, flake after flake, day after day, millimeter after millimeter, fragment after fragment, gave back a reading of the dimensions, of the expressive and chromatic intensity that we thought was lost forever."[1]

Gloomy shadows banished; a well-lit banquet hall emerged. Peter's beard and nose were free of the clumsy weight that later retouchings had given them. Matthew sported blond hair, not black. Thomas gained a left hand. Andrew's expression was transformed—he was no longer sullen, but astonished. And Jesus' face glowed with new light after the dingy repaintings had been removed.

The essence of the scene remained unchanged. Da Vinci had depicted the fateful scene at the moment Jesus revealed one of his disciples would soon betray him. But after centuries of murky obscurity, restoration had brought to light the original beauty of the artist's masterful portrayal of the facial expressions and body language of Christ and his disciples.[2]

Unearthing Jesus' World

Just as modern technology enabled Barcilon to reveal da Vinci's original strokes, in recent decades scholars have gained new tools to restore the picture of Jesus that the gospel writers first gave us. In just the past fifty years, we have seen more advances in biblical archaeology and in the discovery of ancient texts than in all the centuries since the time of Jesus. As dingy accretions of history are cleared away, vivid details of Jesus' life and culture are emerging.

The same year that the *Last Supper* was newly unveiled, I took my first study trip to Israel. One of the scarier highlights of our tour was exploring the water tunnel that King Hezekiah built under Jerusalem

in 701 BC. Half terrified, our group peered into the dark, stone-hewn shaft before us and stepped down into the icy, rushing waters of the Gihon spring. After groping our way through the cramped blackness by flashlight for a third of a mile, waist-high water sweeping us along, we heaved a sigh of relief when we finally glimpsed the exit.

Adding to the thrill, we were emerging at the site of the famous Pool of Siloam, where a blind man miraculously recovered his vision after Jesus sent him there to wash (John 9:7). The puddle-deep pool was, admittedly, unimpressive—only a few feet wide and a few more yards long. But this was the famous site, according to Christian tradition that went back to the fourth century AD.

Or so we thought.

In 2004, five years after our visit, a sewage pipe broke underneath a nearby Jerusalem street. Massive earth-moving equipment rumbled in to make the repair. Pushing into the soil, a bulldozer blade collided with a submerged object and came to a grinding halt. An ancient plastered step emerged as the dirt was brushed away. Within minutes prominent archaeologists had rushed over, the word "bulldozer" hurrying them to the scene. Excavation revealed several more steps down one side of an enormous rectangular pool. Within weeks this monumental reservoir (about 160 feet wide by 200 feet long) was identified as the *real* Pool of Siloam, the main source of fresh water within Jerusalem's walls. Coins embedded in the plaster confirmed that it was in use during Jesus' time.[3]

As they excavated the Pool of Siloam archaeologists also discovered a wide, stepped first-century street that leads from the pool up to the Temple. This was one of the main Jerusalem thoroughfares in the first century, and it would have been the final steps of ascent for pilgrims after days or weeks of journeying to celebrate the feasts. The Pool of Siloam was one of the places where they could have stopped to purify themselves before entering the Temple.

And reading John's gospel again, we discover that the Pool of Siloam played a part in another scene in Jesus' ministry. Each night of the joyous weeklong Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), the high priest would parade down this street amid great fanfare and fill a golden pitcher with *living water* from the Pool of Siloam for the water libation

on the Temple's altar. On the last day of the feast, the high priest would process around the altar seven times as the crowds chanted fervent prayers for *living water*, rain for the next year's crops. The roar grew ever more thunderous until the priest finally approached the altar. A hush would descend as he filled a silver bowl and then ceremoniously poured the *living water* onto the sacrificial pyre. It was then when Jesus stood up and shouted, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of *living water* will flow from within them" (John 7:37–38, italics added).

Details That Connect the Dots

My first exposure to this field of study was about fifteen years ago when I signed up for a class at my church called "The Land, the Culture, and the Book." Having grown up in a devout Lutheran family, I figured that learning some historical background would be good for my Bible study. My grandparents had been missionaries in Madagascar, and several uncles and cousins were pastors. My own world was the sciences, so I was more used to facts and lectures. My graduate degree was in biology, and I was teaching human physiology and molecular biology at a nearby college.

I admit that I cringed a little before starting the class, bracing myself for what I thought would be a weekly dose of dusty, dry archaeological information. I didn't know much about the presenter except that he had taught high school for twenty-five years and had been leading study trips to Israel for twenty-five years—mentally I calculated his age at about eighty-seven. How appropriate to learn about the Old Testament from an octogenarian, I thought.[4] (Not catching that the presenter, Ray Vander Laan, had being doing these things *concurrently*, I was off by about forty years.)

But from the first session the class was like drinking from a fire hose. Everywhere the Bible started greening up, sprouting with new life. It was there that I first heard of the biblical idea of *living water* and learned about its association with the Feast of Tabernacles and

with the outpouring of the Spirit during the messianic age (Ezekiel 47; Joel 2:23–29; Zechariah 14:8–18).

As I started to see how important history, geography, language, and culture were for unlocking the biblical text, my curiosity led me to study in the land of Israel, to learn from scholars there about first-century Jewish culture, and to study Hebrew and Greek.[5] A few years later I left the world of teaching biology to write and teach about this subject full-time.

You might think that you need to master whole textbooks before this kind of study starts to enrich your Bible reading, but I've been amazed at how the smallest details can help connect the dots. It's like when you're stumped doing a crossword puzzle but then finally decipher one word. Suddenly an adjoining word falls into place, which yields clues to unlock yet more words, and then the rest of the grid starts to fill in.

The simplest cultural details can unravel knotty mysteries, sometimes with powerful theological implications. For instance, how much would the firewood weigh for an average burnt offering? You might think that minutiae like this isn't worth studying, but this obscure detail casts light on one of the Bible's most difficult chapters.

After reading the account in Genesis 22 about God's asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, many people ask, "How old was Isaac?" Was he a toddler, a teen, or an adult? Most paintings picture Isaac as a child toting a bundle of sticks under his arm as he walks beside his elderly father. This is because Genesis 22:6 says that Abraham carried the knife while Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice.

But a sacrifice was offered by roasting an animal as a whole burnt offering, which took several hours over a full fire.[6] The large logs needed for fuel would require the strength of a full-grown man to carry them. There was no way the elderly Abraham could lift them (remember, he was one hundred already when Isaac was born), so he carried the knife while Isaac carried the wood. In fact, for most of the journey, two donkeys bore the massive burden (verse 3).

Once you envision an adult Isaac bearing the heavy wood, the story takes on an entirely different tone. Now we see that the story is not just about Abraham's unshakeable faith in God; it's about Isaac's

willing, heroic obedience to submit to his father's will. And suddenly the scene of Christ carrying his cross comes starkly into view.

Hearing Jesus through a Disciple's Ears

What does it mean that Jesus lived as a Jewish rabbi who called and trained disciples? And how does learning about his teachings in their original context enable us to better live out our calling? Jesus' first followers responded to his words with actions that astound us. They left home, family, and comfort behind to follow him, risking their lives to change the world. As life-changing as his teachings were in their original context, modern readers often struggle to see what provoked such a radical response. More than twenty centuries separate us. Could it be that the debris of time and cultural change have taken the edge off Jesus' earth-shattering words?

What if we could scrub off the dust and dirt of the ages to see the original Jesus in the Gospels? What if we allowed the scenery around him to come to life, so that we could visualize him once again in his native context? Jesus' words would not change, but they would burst with new meaning when understood in their original setting. We would see Jesus with new clarity as we bring into focus the fuzzy backdrop around him that is so foreign to our modern world—a place of rabbis and synagogues, nomads, farmers, kings, and shepherds.

The world stands on three things: on Torah, worship, and loving deeds of kindness.
—Mishnah, *Avot* 1:2

It's hard not to wonder if the early Jerusalem church might have had a few advantages in understanding Jesus that can help us as disciples today. In the first chapters in Acts we read of their amazing passion—their Spirit-filled prayers, their joyful gatherings, their loving generosity, and their dynamic witness to their neighbors.

Until a few years ago, it never occurred to me that the first believers of the infant Jerusalem church in Acts were all observant Jews, men and women who continued to study the Torah and worship in the Temple, even after they came to faith in Christ. In fact, for the first half of Acts, the rapidly expanding church was almost entirely

Jewish. It was only after God pushed Peter out of his comfort zone to witness to the Gentile centurion Cornelius that the church considered the possibility that the gospel was for Gentiles too (Acts 10).

We Christians often neglect this as we retell the stories of the early believers' joyful fellowship. We assume that the remarkable success of the Jerusalem church came from the fact that believers were freshly filled with the Holy Spirit. But Paul's Gentile church at Corinth had experienced the same outpouring, yet it struggled with immaturity, division, and sexual immorality. Why the difference? As wonderful as it was that the Corinthians found Christ, most had come out of a pagan reality, and their lives had not been saturated by the Scriptures that Jesus read, our Old Testament. They lacked the Torah's training in moral laws that Christ built upon. They had a lot of catching up to do.

Moreover, while the Gentiles worshiped Jesus as their Savior and God, the Jewish believers also knew him as their *rabbi*. As Jesus' disciples, they knew their obligation was to memorize his words and live according his *halakhah*, his interpretation of how God's Word teaches us to live.

Why Haven't We Known?

Nowadays, it seems only natural to wonder about Jesus' Jewish cultural setting. Why haven't we asked those questions in the past? A stroll through the aisles of my local grocery store suggests one answer: Sushi. Gyros. Kimchi. Tahini. Fifty years ago my mother had never even heard of these ethnic specialties; it wasn't until the late sixties that she even tried making a new-fangled dish called "pizza." Until only a few decades ago, a startlingly short list of bland foods comprised my family's entire culinary world. Creamed beef on toast. Macaroni and Spam. Ground beef over rice. In my white-bread world, I simply never thought to ask.

On my kitchen table is a little clay sculpture of Jesus healing a blind man, with a sticker on the bottom that says it was handcrafted in Peru. But you hardly need the label to guess where it came from when you see the dark braids, the ponchos, the Peruvian faces. Of

course its creator imagined Jesus within his or her own reality, just as white Americans have cast Jesus as a blue-eyed Caucasian. As the gospel has gone out around the world, people have, by default, pictured Jesus through their own cultural lenses.

You might be surprised that Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* does the same thing. This masterpiece has influenced the Christian imagination of Jesus' fateful last evening more than any other, yet it is culturally wrong in every detail. In the background are windows looking out on a sunny mid-afternoon scene, whereas the Passover meal always took place at night. And of course the faces of Jesus and the disciples are pale-faced Europeans, not Semitic. Most telling is what is on the table. Lacking are the essential elements of the Passover celebration, including the lamb and unleavened bread. In their place is a puffy loaf of bread, when leavening is strictly forbidden during the week of Passover, and a shockingly unkosher plate of grilled eels garnished with orange slices![8]

Of course da Vinci's goal was to portray the disciples' reactions at that critical moment, and he does so with brilliant technique and emotive depth. But by not including the elements of Passover, a feast that celebrated God's redemption and brimmed over with messianic expectations, we miss the fact that Jesus was powerfully proclaiming himself as the fulfillment of God's ancient promises. Jesus uses the symbols of Passover to point toward his coming atonement to redeem those who believed in him and to inaugurate a "new covenant" for the forgiveness of sin.[9]

Certainly much of the reason that we Christians have missed these details is simply out of ignorance. But it also comes out of how we've read our Bibles. As I was growing up, what I usually heard about Jesus' Jewish context was how much he opposed it and was bringing it to an end. Unfortunately, that attitude is not just a relic of the past. Just a few months ago I happened to tune my car radio to hear a popular pastor put it this way:

> When Jesus came, everything changed, everything changed. . . . He didn't just want to clean up the people's attitudes as they gave their sacrifices, He obliterated the sacrificial system

> because He brought an end to Judaism with all its ceremonies, all its rituals, all its sacrifices, all of its external trappings, the Temple, the Holy of Holies, all of it.[10]

If this were what Jesus taught, his first passionate followers in Acts certainly didn't catch his drift. Peter and the other early Christians continued to participate daily in Temple worship (Acts 3:1; 21:23–26). Jesus did, of course, speak against corruption within the priesthood and prophesy the Temple's destruction forty years later. Other Jewish groups, like the Essenes, also denounced its corruption and sought to purify their worship. But while the Essenes abandoned the Temple,[11] Jesus' disciples never did, implying that Jesus did not preach against the Temple's ceremonies. And even though the Jerusalem church ruled that Gentiles did not need to observe Jewish law, Jewish believers in Jesus continued to carefully observe the Torah and were even known for their avid observance (see Acts 21:20, 25).[12]

When I used to read the passages in the New Testament about "the Jews" as those who opposed the church and rejected Jesus, I didn't realize that the people writing those words were *also* Jews. Often they used the phrase "the Jews" to refer to the Jewish leadership who opposed them. Acts tells us that thousands of Jews actually *did* believe in Christ (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:7; 21:20). So the issue to Paul in Romans 9–11 was not that *none* of the Jews had believed in Christ, but that not *all* of them did. (Have all of us Gentiles, for that matter, embraced him?)

Scholar Luke Timothy Johnson notes that many first-century documents show a cultural habit of referring to one's opponents with harsh epithets such as "hypocrites," "blind," or "demon-possessed." By our standards, every debate sounds overcharged and full of slander. When you hear John the Baptist calling his listeners a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7), and Paul wishing that his opponents would emasculate themselves (Galatians 5:12), their comments should be heard in this light. Within its wider cultural setting, the New Testament's rebukes don't sound quite so harsh.[13]

The Jews were strongly divided over Jesus in the New Testament, and this within-the-family debate became heated. But it wasn't until

centuries later when the church became overwhelmingly Gentile that the New Testament was understood as being hostile toward Jews as a whole. This has strongly contributed to anti-Semitism over the ages, and for many Christians has led to a disinterest in the Jewish setting of the Bible and our faith.

I was hardly aware of this attitude myself until a stunning encounter I had before my first study trip in Israel. I was chatting with a neighbor down the block and mentioned my upcoming travels. Since he was active in his church, I thought he might be interested. But he grimaced and blurted out, "Why on earth would you want to go there? Those Jews never did nothing good, except give us Jesus."[14]

Wouldn't that be enough?

New Tools to Know

Never before have we been more profoundly aware of the diverse mosaic of peoples that blanket our planet. With such heightened sensitivity, it seems only natural to ask about Jesus' Jewish setting. But ironically, as our world has become more sensitive to embracing ethnic differences, some have done exactly the opposite with Jesus. In 1999 the *National Catholic Reporter* magazine sponsored a "Jesus 2000" competition, searching for a new "image" of Jesus for the next millennium. The prize-winning painting, called "The Jesus of the People," portrayed Jesus as dark-skinned, thick-lipped, and feminine.[15] It's understandable that this Jesus is not white. But what about the fact that he's also not in any way *Jewish*?

This was the approach that the *Last Supper* caretakers took in former centuries. Each time da Vinci's scene grew dingy, the faces were "brightened" by repainting right over the top of them, touching them up in whatever way the current painter saw fit. In a similar way, the Christ we often encounter has been "repainted" to blend into everyone else's culture rather than his own. Each artist adds another layer to suit their tastes.

It's hard not to wonder if this is why each new book of the "Jesus reimagined" genre wildly disagrees with the previous one. In one Jesus is a wandering guru, in the next a subversive rebel, in the next a busi-

ness CEO, in the next a dreamy mystic.[16] Instead of photoshopping Jesus into yet another improbable reality, a helpful corrective would be to restore Jesus to his original setting. And now we are gaining more and more tools to do so, with the discovery of ancient texts and archaeological remains of his day.

What would it look like to peel back the layers of time and to see the real Jesus? Obviously, it would be a mistake to project on him Jewish realities of later centuries. If we picture him with a bagel in one hand and a dreidel in the other, we'd be guilty of distorting his reality too, because both things are from later centuries and practices. But Jesus did eat *matzah* (unleavened bread) and celebrate Hanukkah, traditions that go back to before his time.[17]

How much can we know about the world of Jesus anyhow? A wealth of literature actually exists that preserves Jewish thought from the centuries before and after Christ. Best known are the Mishnah and the Talmud, two compendiums of discussion on the laws of the Torah, which contain teachings preserved orally from about 200 BC until AD 200 (Mishnah) or AD 400–500 (Talmud, in two editions).[18] Orthodox Jews still study these writings today. Of course Christians don't read these texts as authoritative, but they reveal an ancient river of thought that flowed through Jesus' world, which can fill in gaps in our understanding. Other first-century documents like the writings of Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls shed light on Jesus' world too.

You might be surprised to learn that some of Judaism's most influential thinkers, including Hillel and Shammai (30 BC to AD 10), lived in the decades right around Jesus' time. Hillel's grandson, Gamaliel, was Paul's teacher, who came to the defense of the early church in Acts 5:33–39. The words of these and other early rabbis allow us to reconstruct the conversations going on around Jesus. They used the same kind of logic to answer questions, interpret Scriptures, and weave parables, which yields fascinating clues to Jesus' words.

Of course, scholars disagree about the exact details of Jesus' reality, and Judaism is known for its wide diversity of opinion. My thoughts will hardly provide the last and best word. But as a Christian, I grew up without knowing the most basic details of Jesus' Jewish world,

aspects of his reality that have persisted in Judaism from the first century until today. What I've chosen to share in this book are a few core concepts that Christians have hardly known about, yet shed light on Jesus' teachings. Often this Hebraic perspective unlocks biblical wisdom that our culture has forgotten over time.

Ken Bailey has spent decades traveling in the Middle East to study Arab peoples, showing how traditional societies there preserve the Bible's cultural perspective in ways that Western societies have not. He comments, "For us as Westerners the cultural distance 'over' to the Middle East is greater than the distance 'back' to the first century. The cultural gulf between the West and the East is deeper and wider than the gulf between the first century (in the Middle East) and the contemporary conservative Middle Eastern village."[19]

Christians may also be surprised at how Jewish traditions have preserved biblical attitudes. To catch the emotional power of Jesus' claim to be the source of "living water" in John 7, you can go to the parched Middle East and ask an Arab about how precious rain is to him. Or, go to the synagogue in your own hometown, where you'll hear passionate prayers for "living water" each day during the week-long feast of Sukkot. (In one Jewish prayer book, these go on for over fifty pages.) Some liturgies preserve cultural memories that go back thousands of years.[20]

Why is God allowing us to discover these insights now? Perhaps it's because we need them now more than ever. Indeed, for much of the world, the culture of the Bible makes more sense than it does to us. Eugene Nida, a pioneer in Bible translation, has commented:

> In a sense, the Bible is the most translatable religious book that has ever been written. . . . If one were to make a comparison of the culture traits of the Bible with those of all the existing cultures of today, one would find that in certain respects the Bible is surprisingly closer to many of them than to the technological culture of the Western world. It is this "Western" culture that is the aberrant one in the world. And it is precisely in the Western world . . . that the Scriptures have seemingly the least acceptance.[21]

Throughout history people have lived in extended families, practiced subsistence farming, and lived under the shadow of slavery and war. And around the world, many traditional cultures focus their children's training on sacred stories and order their lives around religious practices. With our individualism, secularism, materialism, and biblical illiteracy, we in the Western world are the ones who have moved farthest away from Jesus' world. Could it be that we're the ones who have the most to learn?

Not *Just* a Rabbi

One thing I don't want you to misunderstand. You might think that by calling Jesus "rabbi" I'm implying that he was just an innovative teacher trying to promote a new idea, like Edison with a light bulb or Bill Gates with a new operating system. We're so used to thinking this way that we assume that Jesus' goal was to compete in the realm of thought. We mistakenly hear Jesus' message about the "kingdom of God" as if he's trying to sell an exciting new plan for establishing world peace. But to Jesus' Jewish audience, to proclaim the kingdom of God was to make a shocking announcement that God's promised Messiah had arrived, because the task of the Messiah was to establish God's kingdom on earth. Jesus was making an earth-shattering claim that he was the Christ, and that God's redemption of the world would come through him.[22]

The reason I point this out is because it allows us to release Jesus from the age-old competitive game of "Jesus vs. Judaism," where his ideas can only be right if everyone else's are wrong, and vice versa. If, as a Christian, you start out by assuming that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, he simply doesn't need to compete. He speaks with divine authority whether he disagrees with the Jewish thought of his day or affirms it. We can grow as his disciples when we hear his words in their Jewish context and learn how to better live them out.

Bearing this in mind, it is still appropriate to speak of Jesus as "rabbi," because part of his mission was to teach his redeemed people how God wanted them to live.[23] He did so by using the methods that other early Jewish sages used for teaching and raising disciples.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus was called "teacher" and "rabbi" by those around him, and members of the early church universally called themselves "disciples." They were *mathetai* (Greek for "students"), followers of the "Way" that Jesus had taught them for living.

Walking in His Dust

The way Jesus taught his first disciples was not unique but part of a wider tradition in Judaism that began a few centuries before his time. Jesus didn't hand his disciples a textbook or give them a course syllabus. He asked each one of them to follow him—literally, to "walk after" him. He invited them to trek the byways at his side, living life beside him to learn from him as they journeyed. His disciples would engage in life's activities along with him, observing his responses and imitating how he lived by God's Word.

Out of this unusual teaching method arose a well-known saying: you should learn from a rabbi by "covering yourself in his dust." You should follow so closely behind him as he traveled from town to town teaching that billows of sandy granules would cling to your clothes.[24] As you walked after your rabbi, your heart would change. This will be our task in this book, to stroll through Jesus' ancient world at his side, listening to his words with the ears of a disciple.

I did not go to the rabbi to learn interpretations of the Torah from him but to note his way of tying his shoelaces and taking off his shoes. . . . In his actions, in his speech, in his bearing, and his faithfulness to the Lord, man must make the Torah manifest.
—Aryeh Leib Sarahs

But in Hebrew, the word for *halakh*, "walk," encompasses so much more. Your "walk" in life refers to your overall lifestyle, how you conduct yourself morally. A rabbi's interpretation of the Torah was called *halakhah*, how to "walk" by God's Word. When Jesus called his disciples to "walk after" him, he meant the word in both ways. First they would follow in his literal footsteps; later they would follow in his teachings, taking his message out to the world.

Closely related was the word *derekh*, meaning "road," "path," or

"way." The imagery was not of four-laned freeways that are paved for permanence, but the track left behind by people's footprints. Some paths led to good places, and some to dangerous, evil places. Your "way" was a spiritual metaphor for how you lived. This is still true today, as Jesus lovingly walks before us in the way we ought to live. And then he bids us to put our feet in his own footprints to follow after him, to become part of his "Way," as his early followers once did.

In *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*, my coauthor Ann Spangler and I began by looking at another first-century idiom, that to "sit at the feet" of a rabbi meant to study with him. We pondered what Jesus' words might have sounded like if we had gathered in Martha's house and sat alongside Mary at Jesus' feet, enjoying an after-dinner discussion with his disciples. Ann and I examined basic aspects of Jesus' Jewish reality like the yearly feasts, the daily prayers, and the way rabbis trained disciples. Through them we discovered many new insights on Jesus' life and mission.

In this book, I will be looking more closely at Jesus' words and teachings in their Jewish context. We'll push beyond externals to explore the world of Jewish thought. We'll contemplate some of the cultural ideas and biblical images that gave meaning and depth to Jesus' words. And, we'll discover some of the wisdom that Jewish culture has preserved over the ages that reveals ways we can become more like Rabbi Jesus.

We'll look at some key Hebrew words that Jesus knew from his Scriptures and discover how their deeper meanings cast light on our faith. We will listen with new ears to Jesus' interpretation of how to live out the *Shema*—the daily pledge to love God with all your heart that formed the very center of Jewish commitment from ancient times until today. As we do, we'll hear our Savior's calling in ways that will transform our lives today.

Wisdom for the Walk

1. Reflect on your own cultural and spiritual heritage. How may it have distorted your view of Jesus and his teachings? In what ways do you feel it portrays Jesus accurately?
2. Why have we lost an understanding of the Hebrew culture and context of Jesus? How might those things still affect our thinking today?
3. Read John 7, keeping in mind that Jesus' followers as well as his opponents were all Jews, and often the words "the Jews" refers to Jewish leaders who opposed him. How does that cast light on your reading?
4. The chapter points out the contrast between the maturity of the Jewish believers in Acts and the Gentile believers of Corinth, who were plagued with sins and scandals. Consider your own life and the life of your church. Do you exhibit signs of maturity, or do you have a long way to go, like the Corinthians? How can you and your church pursue spiritual maturity?
5. How does understanding Jesus' culture help us to better interpret and live out his words?

CHAPTER 2

Shema: Living Out What You Hear

The word *Shema* itself means "listen,"
and the recital of the Shema is a supreme act of faith-as-listening:
to the voice that brought the universe into being,
created us in love and guides us through our lives.
— Rabbi Jonathan Sacks[1]

In 1945, Rabbi Eliezer Silver headed up the search for thousands of displaced Jewish children across Europe. They had been hidden from the clutches of the Nazis on farms and in convents and monasteries, and now he sought to return them to their families if at all possible.

The rabbi had a promising lead with a report that a monastery in southern France had taken in Jewish children. But the priest in charge was of little help, declaring that to his knowledge, all of their children were Christians. And Rabbi Silver could produce no records.

Schwartz … Kaufmann … Schneider. These family names were obviously German, but they could be either Jewish or Gentile. He scanned their small faces — many had lived there since they were toddlers. How could he know if any of them were from Jewish families?

He asked if he could visit the wards. In front of the children he began singing in Hebrew, "*Shema Israel, Adonai elohenu, Adonai echad*." ("Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.") A handful of faces lit up, and tiny voices from around the room joined in. They recognized these ancient words from their bedtime prayers and from their earliest memories of their mothers and fathers reciting them each morning and evening during their own prayers.[2]

These six words begin the *Shema* (pronounced "shmah"), three sec-

tions of Scripture repeated twice daily to remind each Jewish person of his or her commitment to God (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41; see pages 195–96 for the text). For thousands of years, observant Jewish parents have taught their children the words of the *Shema* as soon as they could speak. Jesus likely learned it on Joseph's knee when he was a youngster too. These same lines have been central to Jewish prayer life since centuries before Jesus was born.[3]

Before I started learning about Jesus' Jewish context, I, like most Christians, had never even heard of the *Shema*. But it was so central to Jesus' own faith that when a lawyer asked him what he believed was the greatest commandment, his answer began by quoting from the *Shema*:

> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"
>
> "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28–31)

Like many Christians, if you asked me to summarize this famous story, I'd rattle off Jesus' words about loving God and neighbor. But I'd skip over this mysterious preamble about God being "one," the very words that those Jewish children knew by heart. The line I had never heard of was the cornerstone of their faith.

Why did Jesus quote this line about the Lord being one? Because it is the opening line of the *Shema*. Immediately following it is the great command: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Every morning and evening for thousands of years, the Jewish people have promised to love God wholeheartedly when they've said the *Shema*.

Believe it or not, Jesus' next command, "love your neighbor as yourself," comes straight from Leviticus 19:18. I used to think that the

scribe's question was a legalistic quiz and that Jesus' talk of love rather than law would have shocked and scandalized his audience. Imagine my surprise to discover that every word of Jesus' answer came straight out of the *Torah*—from Leviticus and Deuteronomy—the Old Testament two books I had read the least.

The lawyer's query was not foolish either. Rather, it was an invitation to participate in a fascinating debate among the rabbinic teachers of his day. Most likely his words were: *Mah klal gadol ba'torah?* What is the great essence of God's Law? What overriding principle encapsulates all of God's instruction? (*Torah*, which we translate "law," actually means "teaching." Technically, the term "Torah" only refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the Pentateuch. But often the word is used to refer to the Scriptures as a whole.) The goal of answering this classic question was not to summarize the Bible in one's own words, but to choose one key verse that distilled all the rest, focusing its light down to a single brilliant point. Jesus was being asked to give his opinion on an intriguing discussion that sought to get at the very heart of God's will.[4]

When we hear the lawyer's question in light of its Jewish context, we can see how profound it was. And Jesus' answer is all the more penetrating when we meditate on it in its original setting too. Let's begin to uncover some of the richness of God's greatest command by examining this first line of the *Shema*, which has been so central in Jewish thought for many centuries. In later chapters, we'll examine the rest of Jesus' words.

Shema—Hear and Obey

The Hebrew words that Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy overflow with great wisdom. Looking more closely, this is how the first line of the *Shema* is translated:

Shema (Hear)
Israel,
Adonai (the Lord)
elohenu (our God)

Adonai (the Lord)
echad! (one/alone)

The first word, *shema*, we usually translate "hear." But the word *shema* has a much wider, deeper meaning than "to perceive sound." It encompasses a whole spectrum of ideas that includes listening, taking heed, and responding with action to what one has heard.

I discovered the wideness of the word *shema* in my first Hebrew class. One classmate had a smattering of Hebrew knowledge gleaned from other places, and he let us all know it. He'd come late, leave early, and goof around during class. The teacher would pose a question to someone else, and he'd blurt out the answer before they could respond. Annoyed, one classmate pointedly inquired, "How do you tell someone to *obey*?"

"*Shema*," responded my instructor.

Later that afternoon, curiosity prodded me to search for verses that contained "obey" in my computer Bible program. In almost every case, the Hebrew behind "obey" was *shema*!

For instance, in English we read Deuteronomy 11:13 as, "So if you faithfully *obey* the commands I am giving you today. . . ." Literally, though, this verse reads, "And it will be if *hearing*, you will *hear*. . . ." And after Moses recited the covenant to the people of Israel, they responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey" (Exodus 24:7). But the Hebrew here actually reads, "All that God had said we will *do* and we will *hear*." The two verbs here are really synonymous—to hear *is* to do, to be obedient.

This became even clearer one sticky summer evening when I was visiting an old college friend. As we chatted together in her front yard, we could hear squealing and laughter coming from behind her house. Her kids were drenching each other in a water fight, a duel between the garden hose and a big squirt gun. As the sun sank below the horizon, it was getting past their bedtimes, so we paused our conversation so that she could call them inside. "It's getting late—time to go in," she announced. But the giggling and chasing didn't even slow down. She repeated her command, louder and louder. No effect.

"My kids seem to have a hearing problem, Lois," she sighed, wearily.

Since I knew that she had studied some Hebrew, I commented, "You know, actually, what I think your kids have is a *shema*-ing problem." Her words were vibrating their eardrums, but not actually moving their bodies toward the door to her house. She could have been talking in Klingon for all their response. She knew as well as I did that the natural outcome of listening *should* be response.

Grasping the wider meaning of *shema* yields insights to other biblical mysteries. In the psalms, David pleads, "O Lord, please *hear* my prayer." But he wasn't accusing God of being deaf or disinterested. Rather, he was calling on God to take action, not just listen to his words. When the angel appeared to Zechariah to announce that his wife Elizabeth was pregnant with John, he declared that their prayer had been *heard*—that God was answering the barren couple's prayerful longings to have a child (Luke 1:13).

How does this help us unlock the words of the *Shema*? In this line, it is saying in effect, "Hearken, take heed, Israel—the LORD is your God." Often God uses *shema* to call the Israelites to obey him, to trust him, and to follow in his ways. You can hear God saying this very thing in Psalm 81. Listen to it in light of the wider meaning of the word *shema:*

> *Hear* me, my people, and I will warn you—
> if you would only *listen* to me, Israel! . . .
> But my people would not *listen* to me;
> Israel would not submit to me.
> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
> to follow their own devices.
> If my people would only *listen* to me,
> if Israel would only follow my ways,
> how quickly would I subdue their enemies
> and turn my hand against their foes! . . .
> You would be fed with the finest of wheat;
> with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.
> (Psalm 81:8, 11–14, 16, italics added)

Having Ears to Hear

Understanding the word *shema* also helps us see why Jesus often concluded his teaching with the words, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (e.g., Mark 4:9). What he really meant was, "You have heard my teaching, now take it to heart and obey it!" He wants us to be doers of his words, not hearers only (James 1:22).

You see this especially in Jesus' parable of the sower, which concludes with his saying about having "ears to hear." He tells about a farmer who sows seed all over his land. But much of the ground is poor, so the seed bounces off the hardened pathway, withers in the rocks, and is choked by weeds (Mark 4:3–20). Only what lands in the good soil really grows.

In Jesus' parable, our hearts are the soil, and we "hear" by receiving his words with faith and obedience. His words are a call to examine ourselves as to which type of listener we are. Are our hearts hard to God's Word? Or are we shallow, distracted by wealth or daily living?[5] It's easy to insult Jesus' original audience by assuming that they were especially unwilling to respond. But are we so different than them? Who of us isn't choked by weeds in our lives? How many of us truly follow wherever Christ leads?

As tough as this parable is to hear, it makes a potent promise. God is like a farmer who sows a field, knowing that much of the land is poor. But the seed he is sowing is supercharged. When Christ's kingdom takes hold of the few who will *shema*,[6] hear and obey, what an amazing impact it will have—a huge, hundredfold yield, the very limits of ancient productivity. Through an obedient disciple God can do truly miraculous things to expand his kingdom, far beyond human imagination.

Wise Hebrew Words

The reason that *shema* has such a breadth of meaning is because Hebrew is a "word-poor" language. Biblical Hebrew includes only about 8,000 words, far fewer than the 400,000 or more we have in English.[7] Paradoxically, the richness of Hebrew comes from its pov-

erty. Because this ancient language has so few words, each one is like an overstuffed suitcase, bulging with extra meanings that it must carry in order for the language to fully describe reality. Unpacking each word is a delightful exercise in seeing how the ancient authors organized ideas, sometimes grouping concepts together in very different ways than we do.

Many verbs in Hebrew that we think of as only mental activities often encompass their expected physical result. For instance, to "remember" can mean "to act on someone's behalf." In Genesis 8:1 it says that "God remembered Noah … and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded." But God didn't just wake up one morning and suddenly recall that an ark was out bobbing around somewhere. He "remembered" Noah by coming to his rescue. And to "know" another person is to have a relationship with them, to care about them, even to be intimate with them. When Adam "knew" Eve, she conceived Cain (Genesis 4:1).

The Hebrew tongue, above other languages, is very plain, but withal it is majestic and glorious: it contains much in few and simple words, and therein surpasses all other languages.
— Martin Luther

Hebrew verbs stress action and effect rather than just mental activity. This isn't unique to Hebrew. Lorrie Anderson, a New Testament translator in Peru, searched for months to find a word for "believe" in the Candoshi language. No direct equivalent existed for that all-important term in Bible translation. What she finally discovered was that "hear" in that language also can mean "believe" and also "obey." Anderson writes:

> The question, "Don't you hear His Word?" in Candoshi means "Don't you believe-obey His Word?" In their way of thinking, if you "hear" you believe what you hear, and if you believe, you obey. These are not separate ideas as in English.

She and other Bible translators share the same observation. They often struggle to find words for mental activities we see as all-important, but simply don't exist in indigenous languages where thought is tied to its expected outcome.[8]

Part of why this seems strange to us is because of our Western perspective. Many of our Greek cultural ancestors, including Plato, considered the mental world all-important and physical reality worthless. As a result, our culture tends to exalt our intellect as critical and discount our actions. Some of us Christians even see actions as "dead works" that are irrelevant, even opposed to faith.

You often see this unhappy disconnect online, when Christians respond to what they consider theological error with rude, ugly insults, feeling innocent of wrongdoing as long as they are outing a "heretic." *Knowing* the right thing is paramount; *obeying* Christ's command to "love your neighbor" is irrelevant. But Jesus said that we'll be held accountable on judgment day for every careless word we speak (Matthew 12:36). Just imagine what he'll read off from his heavenly computer monitor as he scrolls through our online comments.

The logic of Hebrew (and other languages) realizes that an action should result from what is in our minds. If you "remember" someone, you will act on their behalf. If you "hear" someone, you will obey their words. If you "know" someone, you will have a close relationship with them. Hebrew realizes that the longest twelve inches that your faith has to move is from your head to your heart. And once your faith makes that move, it naturally comes out through your hands and feet.

Echad — The One and Only

The other key word in the first line of the *Shema* is *echad* (ech-HAHD). Its most common meaning is simply "one," but it can also encompass related ideas, like being single, alone, unique, or unified. The multiple shades of meaning of *echad* and the difficult wording of the rest of the line have made the *Shema* a topic of debate for millennia.

Part of the problem is that Deuteronomy 6:4 doesn't even have verbs. It literally reads: "YHWH … our God … YHWH … one."[9] The verse can be read either as saying "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone," or "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Of these two readings, the more common reading is the second, that "the Lord is

one" in the sense that God is unique. There is only one God, the God of Israel. So this line is usually understood as a statement of belief in monotheism.

The word *echad* has been a sticking point between Jews and Christians. Often Jews point to the fact that it means "one" as a reason that they cannot believe in the Trinity or in the deity of Christ. And Christians respond that *echad* can refer to a compound unity, as when God created morning and evening, and together they made *yom echad* ("one day") (cf. Genesis 1:5). Or when Adam and Eve, through marriage, became *basar echad* ("one flesh") (Genesis 2:24).

This whole debate hinges on interpreting the *Shema* as a creed; that is, "the LORD is one" is a statement about what kind of being God is. But, interestingly, one of the most widely-read Jewish Bible translations now renders Deuteronomy 6:4 as "The LORD is our God, the LORD *alone*" rather than "The LORD our God, the LORD is *one*."[10] It does so because in recent decades, scholars have come to believe that the original, ancient sense of *echad* in this verse was more likely to be "alone" than "one." In Zechariah 14:9, for instance, *echad* has this sense: "The LORD will be king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be *echad* and his name *echad*" (pers. trans.). This is a vision of the messianic age, when all of humanity will cease to worship idols and revere *only* God and call on his name *alone*.

Jewish scholar Jeffrey Tigay asserts that even though the Scriptures clearly preach monotheism, the *Shema* itself is not a statement of belief. It's an oath of loyalty. He calls the first line of the *Shema* "a description of the proper relationship between YHVH and Israel: He alone is Israel's God. This is not a declaration of monotheism, meaning that there is only one God. . . . Though other peoples worship various beings and things they consider divine, Israel is to recognize YHVH alone."[11]

Why is this important? Because it changes the sense of what the *Shema* communicates. Rather than merely being a command to a particular belief about God, it is actually a call for a person's absolute allegiance to God. God *alone* is the one we should worship; him only shall we serve. As often as the *Shema* is called a creed or a prayer, it

is better understood as an oath of allegiance, a twice-daily recommitment to the covenant with the God of Israel.

As Western Christians we are used to reciting creeds and statements of belief in order to define our faith. We expect to find one here too. So we easily could misunderstand that Jesus was saying that it is extremely critical that we believe in God's "oneness." But when properly understood, this line shows that the greatest commandment is actually a call to commit ourselves to the one true God.

Reading the line this way solves another mystery about what Jesus was saying. If he was asked what the greatest commandment was, why does he begin by quoting a line about God being "one"? Because if you read this line as about committing oneself to God as one's Lord, it flows directly into the next line in the *Shema*, explaining *why* we should love God with every fiber of our being. If the Lord *alone* is our God, and we worship no other gods, we can love him with all of our heart and soul and strength. The two sentences together become one commandment, the greatest in fact—to love the Lord your God.[12]

Once again, in the light of their Hebrew context, we find that Jesus' words call us beyond what is going on in our brains. We are not just to "hear" but to take heed, to respond, to obey. And we are not just called to believe in the oneness of God, but to place him at the center of our lives.

To do that, we are to love God with all of our heart and soul and strength and mind. Each of these words, in their Hebrew context, can expand our understanding of our calling and the very essence of the Scriptures, as Jesus understood it. We'll consider that next.

Wisdom for the Walk

1. Read the three passages of the *Shema* on pages 195–96 at the end of this book. Why do you think these passages were chosen for repetition every morning and evening? What questions do they raise in your mind?
2. Read 2 Chronicles 6:19–27, which is Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the first temple. How does knowing the wider Hebraic meaning of "hear," *shema*, enrich your understanding?
3. In what ways may you have heard (intellectually understood something) but not obeyed (acted on your knowledge)? Why does this happen? What can you do about it?
4. The *Shema* is often interpreted as a statement of monotheism, that God is one. But it can also be translated as "the LORD alone is our God." How does this translation change or deepen your understanding of God and how to relate to him?
5. Paul also quotes the *Shema* in 1 Corinthians 8:4. How does he use it in his teaching?