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# BRIDGES FOR PEACE

## *Israel Teaching Letter*

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# Cleaving to God

"That you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Deuteronomy 30:20



# Cleaving to God

**O**n a first reading of Leviticus 21, it seems that all it's about is a list of restrictions placed on the priests by God in order for them to serve Him in the tabernacle. The High Priest had the most restrictions. From this, we learn that the closer to that most intimate place with God, the Holy of Holies, the more holy one had to be. As believers in Yeshua (Jesus), we yearn to be in an intimate place with God...and we are. Yeshua is our righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), and we can enter boldly into the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). God's love is eternal, we are forgiven, and nothing can snatch us out of His hand (John 10:28). However, what about our love for Him? Unfortunately, our love has the ability to grow cold (Matt. 24:12), and we find that often we are not as close to Him as we should be or would like to be.

What separates us? It's not baldness, a blemish, marrying a widow, or touching the dead as it was in Bible times for a priest, but it may be business, other loves in our life, books, television, or sin. That separateness has nothing to do with God's love for us, which is constant and always drawing us to Him. In fact, if you read Leviticus 21 with this in mind, you can almost hear God saying, "I want all of you. I don't want anything separating us." In marriage, intimacy is one of the things that suffers the most over the years. Usually, a couple has let business, work, other friends, maybe even the children, and often other lovers rob them of their time together. Intimacy is critical to a marriage...and even more so with God.

A Hebrew word that describes intimacy is *debak*, which means "to cleave to" or literally "to stick like glue." **What does God want us to cling to like glue?** I found that *debak* can refer to cleaving to a mate, a person other than a mate (such as a king or specifically Ruth to Naomi), the Land of Israel, God's Word, and God Himself. Most of the time, it is used positively, but there are also things that Scripture tells us *not* to cleave to. Often, the first use of a word gives us the best understanding of it, so we'll start in Genesis.

## Cleaving to a Mate

The first time the word is used is in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (KJV). This verse contains God's recipe for a successful marriage. Notice that there are three parts: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. I believe the order is intentional. If one part is left out or done out of order, there can be trouble.

*Leaving:* A couple has to leave their parents' home to establish their own. Though they still love and respect them, they have to physically separate themselves from their parents. As they have learned to submit



to their parents' authority, now they learn to submit one to the other. If they haven't learned the lessons about honor, respect, obedience, and submission to authority while in their parents' home, they will no doubt find submitting to one another difficult. They leave independence to learn dependence. They leave solitude for togetherness. Rabbi Zlotowitz, in his commentary on Genesis, says, "As long as man was alone, his condition was not 'good' [2:18], and once the division between man and woman had been made, it was no longer possible for man to find fulfillment alone." The two leave me for us, mine for ours. It's not that the individual disappears; it's that another is now a part.

*Cleaving:* Other Bible versions translate *debak* as they shall be joined to, united to, hold fast to, or cling to. Zlotowitz points out that whereas animals were created simultaneously and can therefore function independently of one another, "woman was created from man to show that only in partnership do the two form a complete human being." They cleave because the cleaving makes them whole. Any division makes them feel incomplete. The cleaving is the part that speaks of permanence, a wholehearted commitment. If they are not able to leave behind all previous relationships, if part of their heart still lingers behind, they cannot cleave to the mate wholly. So our leaving comes first, and the cleaving is dependent upon how well we've done the leaving. If a man is a mama's boy, he cannot cleave wholly to his wife. A Jewish saying goes, "When a son gets married, he divorces his mother."

There are marriages or "arrangements" where two people live together. They have left and they have become one flesh, but there's nothing that causes them to stick together. Cleaving cannot happen without commitment, and one cannot commit to a lifetime without love. So, cleaving denotes the kind of love that is essential if the couple is to say "till death do we part." It's a selfless, unconditional love. It has to be unconditional, because every "condition" can become a reason to separate. Of course, there are numerous ingredients to this "glue," which cause a marriage to stick: forgiveness, submission, thinking of the other more than one's self, honesty, transparency, etc.

*Becoming one flesh:* Only when a couple has done the leaving and the cleaving, can they truly become one flesh that lasts for a lifetime. Because God took part of Adam to form Eve, it can be said that they were truly one flesh from the beginning. Therefore, when a man and a woman unite physically, they are bringing back together that which was one originally. Though both sexes, of course, can live apart as single people, man and woman are no doubt most complete when they are one flesh, as they were in the very beginning.

Do you have a marriage that sticks like glue or is it coming unglued? Perhaps a look at leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh will help determine where the weak link is. Are you considering marriage? Use God's recipe and include all three parts—in the right order.

## A Gentile Cleaves to a Jew

When Naomi, Ruth's Jewish mother-in-law, decides to return home to Israel from Moab, she tells her two Gentile daughters-in-law to stay with their families. But Ruth "cleaves" to Naomi and pleads with her, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16). This verse is often used as part of a marriage vow. However, the context in which it was originally spoken should not be overlooked, especially for New Testament believers.



"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."

RUTH 1:16



One reason the book of Ruth is studied at *Shavuot* (Pentecost), when the giving of the *Torah* (Gen.-Deut.) at Mount Sinai is celebrated, is because Ruth is an example of a Gentile accepting the *Torah*. Ruth knew that to go with Naomi, it meant more than just living with her mother-in-law. It meant becoming a Jew, and to become a Jew, she knew she had to leave her Moabite gods and accept the Jewish God. Naomi had probably talked many times with Ruth about her faith and religion. Though the word “cleave” is used in this story to describe how Ruth clung to Naomi physically as she was about to leave, Ruth’s behavior proves that there was a cleaving that went far beyond the physical.

In Francine Rivers’ little book, *Unshaken: Ruth*, she imagines that the trip to Israel from Moab was a long, arduous, and dangerous trip for two women unaccompanied by men, but we know Ruth made the trip without turning back. She was loyal to Naomi by offering to work hard day after day in the hot sun, so they would not go hungry or have to beg. She never questioned the Jewish customs that must have seemed very strange to her. It was Jewish Mosaic law that commanded that farmers leave the gleanings of the field for the poor (Lev. 19:9). It was Jewish law that required a relative to marry a man’s widow, so that he did not lack an heir (Deut. 25:5-7). The same law stipulated exactly how the transaction took place, the strange custom of removing a sandal (Deut. 25:8-10). And what about going to Boaz at night, uncovering his feet, and lying down at his feet? Scripture does not tell us if Ruth questioned the wisdom of this or asked for an

explanation, but we do know she completely trusted Naomi. Ruth’s behavior in all these ways displays a love and loyalty characteristic of the principle of cleaving.

But we must not miss perhaps the greatest application for us as Christians. Ruth’s relationship with Naomi and, beyond that, with her adopted country Israel, foreshadowed the relationship that God planned the nations of the world to have with Israel. We, like Ruth, cleave to the God of the Israelites and should come close to Naomi’s family, the Jewish people. The Apostle Paul describes our relationship as that of wild branches grafted in (Rom. 11). Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and David are ancestors of our Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). As Christians, we see Yeshua, like Boaz, as our kinsman redeemer. We who were once afar off have been brought near. The promises and covenants of Israel are ours too (Eph. 2:11-22). Not that we take them away from the Jewish people, but enjoy them alongside them. Whereas many Jewish people rightfully fear us because of our reprehensible history of anti-Semitism, one day, they will recognize us as joint heirs and their brethren.

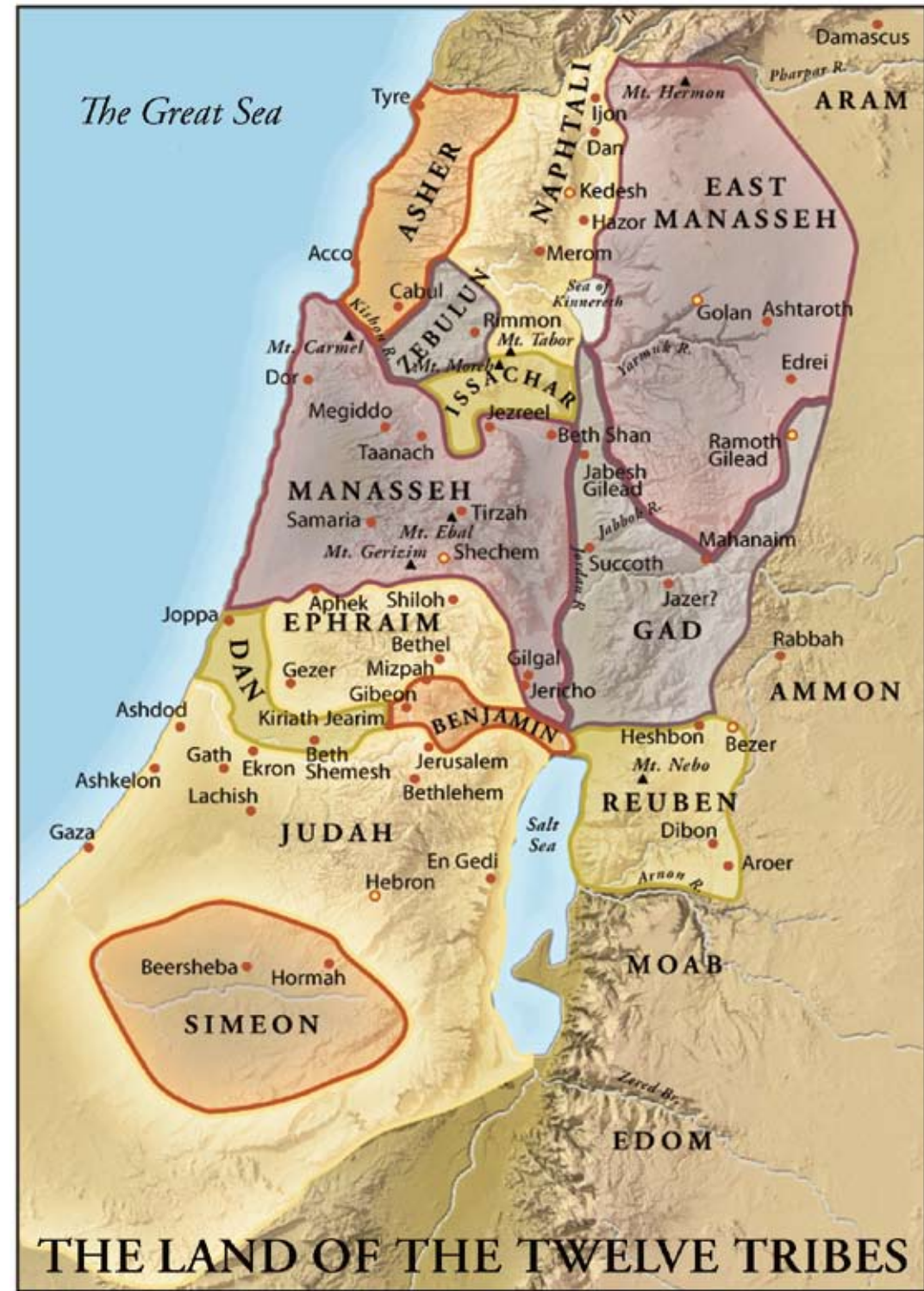
Zechariah was one of many prophets who foresaw this: “*Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’*” (8:23). Though we have not yet seen the fullness of this prophecy, we are witnessing the beginning of it as Christians rediscover their Jewish roots. I so love being taught the Word by a Jewish rabbi or professor. Not knowing Hebrew, I love hearing the Word translated by a native Hebrew speaker who understands all its nuances and can explain the word plays lost in English. What a difference it makes! I heard a Jewish rabbi in America asked, “How much of the original understanding of the Scriptures is lost in translation?” He said, “It’s like getting a kiss by telephone.” You lose a lot! We can learn so much from our Jewish friends!

### Cleaving to the Land

Just before the children of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land, the daughters of Zelophehad asked Moses about their situation. Their father had died and there were no brothers, so who was to acquire their father’s inheritance of the land? The Lord instructed Moses to give the land to the daughters with the stipulation that they were to marry within



Ancient sandals discovered at Qumran similar to the ones that would have been used by Boaz to secure the redemption of Ruth as his wife.



their tribe, so the land would not be transferred to another tribe. “*Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance*” (Num. 36:9). Literally, it says that every tribe shall “cleave to” its own inheritance. Israel was not to be like Esau who despised his inheritance and gave it away so easily. They were to stick to the Land like glue, not “disengage” from it.

Hundreds of years later, the prophet Isaiah describes this cleaving to the Land in terms of a marriage: “*It will no longer be said to you, ‘Forsaken,’ nor to your land will it any longer be said, ‘Desolate’ but you will be called, ‘My delight is in her,’ and your land, ‘married’ for*

Every tribe was to “cleave to” its own inheritance. Israel was not to be like Esau who despised his inheritance and gave it away so easily.



the LORD delights in you, **and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you...**" (Isa. 62:4-5a, NASB). This is great proof to Israel that God is never pleased when Israel gives up any part of the Land.

"I cling  
[cleave] to Your  
testimonies;  
O LORD, do  
not put me  
to shame!"  
PSALM 119:31



## Cleaving to God and His Word

"You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast [cleave] to Him" (Deut. 13:4). The book of Deuteronomy speaks of cleaving to God more than any other book in the Bible. This is interesting, because it is the book in which Moses reviews the Hebrews' 40-year history in the wilderness and gives his last words of advice. It could be that this verse is a good definition of what it means to cleave to God: to walk after (follow) Him, to fear (revere) Him, to keep (guard, watch carefully) His commandments, to obey (*shema*, hear to do) and to serve (work for). Each word has a little different meaning, but when you put all those acts together, you are cleaving to God. When we do all these things, there's no room for separation.

And why do we do this? "That you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling [cleave] to Him, **for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them**" (Deut. 30:20). Note that when we cling to God, He connects us with His Land. God wants what is close to His heart to be close to ours also.

Something else happens when we stay so close to God. "For as the sash clings [cleaves] to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling [cleave] to Me," says the LORD, **that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory...**" (Jer. 13:11). The more we cleave to God, the more we will become like Him and be a natural witness of who He is for the world to see. For Christians, it is a reminder of what Yeshua said: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14, 16).

To cleave to God is to cleave to His Word. "I cling [cleave] to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame!" (Ps. 119:31). When I read this, I hear the same desperateness in the psalmist's voice as was in Ruth's when she clung to Naomi and begged to go with her. I think of the woman with the issue of blood in the Christian Scriptures who reached out to touch the hem of Yeshua's garment (Matt. 9:20). I remember Psalm 42:1-2a: "As the deer



pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God..." Using other words found in Psalm 119, if we wait for, delight in, never forget, run the way of, seek, meditate on, love, sing of, and rejoice in His Word, then His word



"As the deer  
pants for the  
water brooks, so  
pants my soul  
for You, O God.  
My soul thirsts  
for God, for the  
living God..."  
PSALM 42:1-2a

will stick like glue to us and give us life. But if we do not cleave to God and His Word, then troubles await us, just as they do in any marriage when we start cleaving to someone or something other than our partner.



## Do Not Cleave to...

God says there are also things we should not cleave to.

**Other gods:** "You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast [cleave] to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day" (Josh. 23:7b-8). God is a jealous God and cannot stand anyone or anything taking His place in our hearts.

**An unbelieving partner:** 1 Kings 11 tells us that King Solomon held fast or clung to his 700 foreign wives. God has said, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods" (v. 2). The apostle Paul gave the same kind of advice to Christians: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). It is God's plan that Christians marry someone who shares their faith in Yeshua. Regardless of your situation, however, Paul makes it clear that your loving acts will be a witness to the faith which lies within you.

**Any evil thing:** "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling [cleave] to me" (Ps. 101:3). The Christian Scripture names those works: "...adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like" (Gal. 5:19-21). We may not participate in all of these ourselves, but how many do we set before our eyes through television as our entertainment? I know I'm guilty. May the Lord help us to walk in holiness and purity.



## Leaving to Cleave

We've looked at cleaving, but what about the leaving? Leaving always comes first. What might God be asking us to leave or let go of? An addiction, an unhealthy relationship, an idol, or a bad habit? It might even be something good, but not the best for us or not God's will for the hour. We have many biblical examples to follow of people who knew how to leave in order to cleave.

Abraham left his home and country. Lot left Sodom. Rebekah left her mother and father. Jacob left Laban. The Hebrews left Egypt. Ruth left Moab. Elisha left home to train under Elijah. Yeshua's disciples left their jobs and families. Zacchaeus left behind dishonesty. Though all these were hard "leavings," what came after was better in the end. So, be encouraged, whatever we let go of only leaves our hands free to grab on to the One who will never let us go—because He sticks like glue! *"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8:38–39).



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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

**M**any pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. *"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 2:3).

