

# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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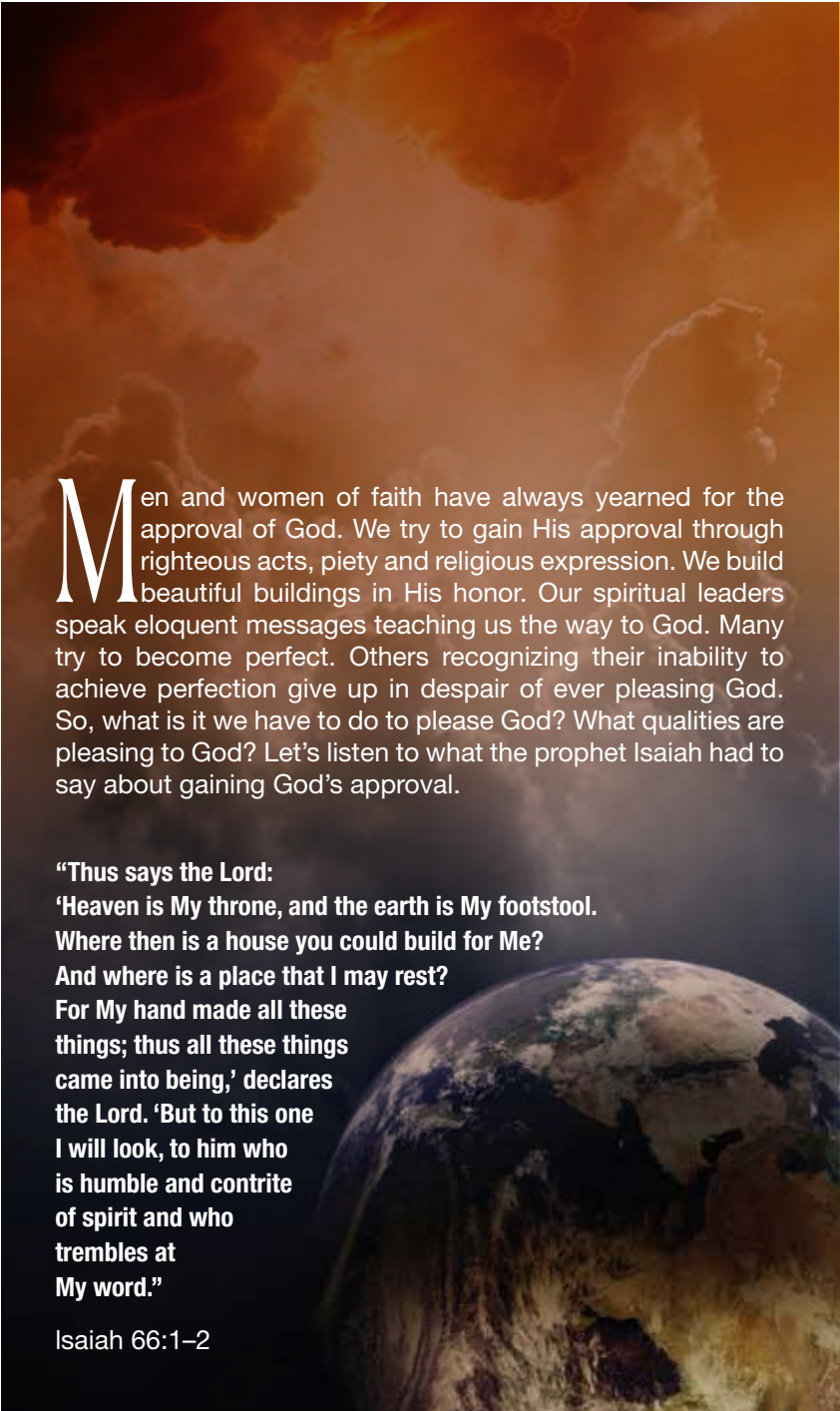


the  
**APPROVAL**  
of God

*One who is humble, contrite  
and trembles at His Word*

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer, *International President and CEO*

Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®



**M**en and women of faith have always yearned for the approval of God. We try to gain His approval through righteous acts, piety and religious expression. We build beautiful buildings in His honor. Our spiritual leaders speak eloquent messages teaching us the way to God. Many try to become perfect. Others recognizing their inability to achieve perfection give up in despair of ever pleasing God. So, what is it we have to do to please God? What qualities are pleasing to God? Let's listen to what the prophet Isaiah had to say about gaining God's approval.

**"Thus says the Lord:**

**'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.**

**Where then is a house you could build for Me?**

**And where is a place that I may rest?**

**For My hand made all these things; thus all these things came into being,' declares**

**the Lord. 'But to this one**

**I will look, to him who is humble and contrite**

**of spirit and who**

**trembles at**

**My word."**

Isaiah 66:1-2

# God Is Awesome

What a picture of God! Can we even begin to imagine the sheer magnitude of God? The earth, the only spatial reality of mankind, with the exception of a few privileged astronauts, is described as a humble footstool of God. How small we must appear in His eyes. Over seven billion people live on His footstool. Human beings must appear microscopic to God.

In this passage, God speaks with irony of the attempts of man to build a house for Him. Mankind, with an unjustified arrogance, has repeatedly tried to contain God, sometimes in temples, other times by believing we can control and manipulate Him to do things our way. Man is constantly trying to redefine Him—to put Him “in a box” of our own ideas, theology and selfish desires. We think we can understand Him, but He says in His word, “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,*’ declares the Lord. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*” (Isa. 55:8–9).

How astonishing that this same God, the awesome Creator of the universe, has a love for mankind and a desire for fellowship with us. In the Isaiah 66 passage, the prophet tells of three characteristics of the person to whom God looks: humility, contrition of spirit and trembling at His Word.

## Humility

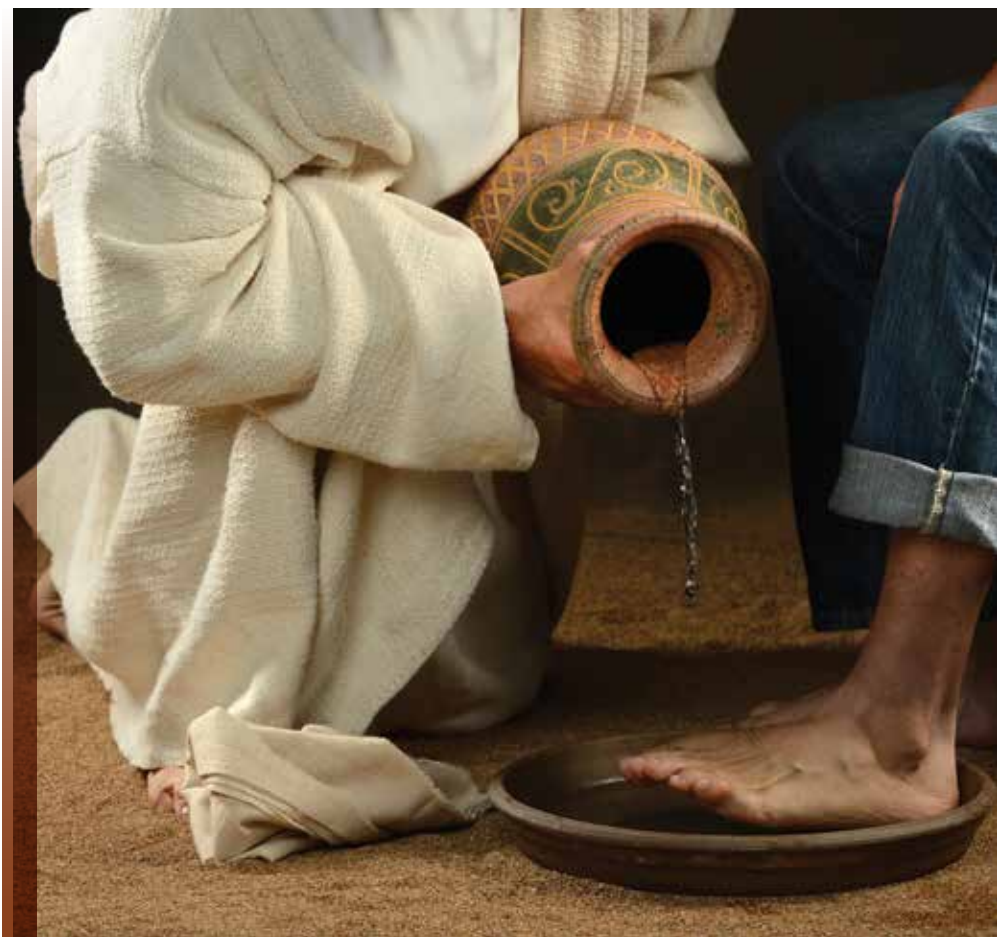
Humility is one of those characteristics for which we don’t like to pray. How often do you find yourself praying, “O Lord, make me humble.” Maybe it is because we are afraid of how God will answer that prayer. We realize that the events which will produce humility in our lives could be difficult or even painful. Maybe it is because we are full of pride, so self-absorbed that we don’t want this godly characteristic in our lives. Yet, God values humility highly. Humility is not an optional trait to God. In order to receive His approval, we must become humble.

So, what is humility? It has been defined as the proper attitude of the human creature toward his Divine Creator. The Bible singles out the humility of Moses as his most laudable trait (Num. 12:3). Many other biblical heroes also exhibited this trait in their lives. When Abraham was boldly interceding with God on behalf of Sodom, he was quick to state in humility, “*Now, behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes*” (Gen. 18:27).

**HUMILITY** is not optional.  
In order to receive God’s approval,  
**we must become humble.**


Jacob, in his prayer for deliverance from his brother Esau, expressed humility. *"I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness You have shown to Your servant"* (Gen. 32:10). David was willing to be viewed in a humble way as he worshiped God hilariously before the ark. His wife was embarrassed by his actions, but David said, *"And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight"* (2 Sam. 6:22 NKJV). The prophet Isaiah cried out, *"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"* (Isa. 6:5).

As Christians, we are amazed to see the way Yeshua (Jesus) exhibited humility in His life: born in humble circumstances, washing the disciples' feet and finally accepting the degrading death of a criminal on the cross. *"Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"* (Phil. 2:6–8).



# Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

James 4:10



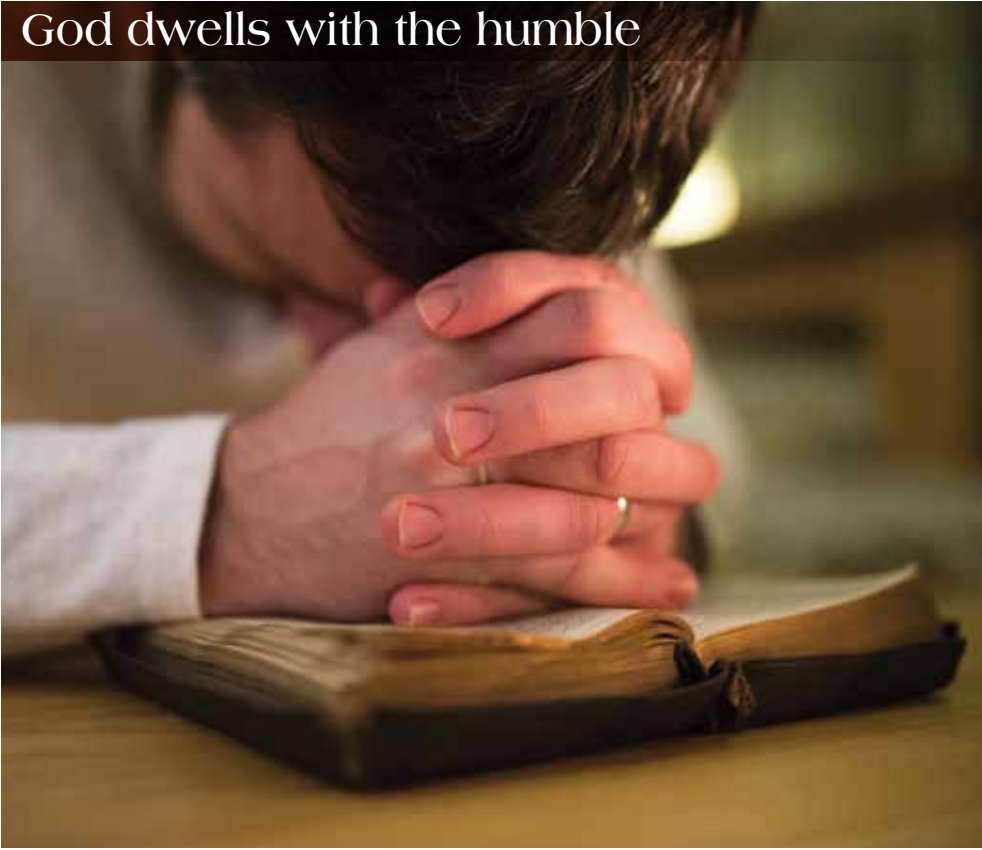
In Judaism, humility is regarded as the crown of man's ethical stature. Many rabbis and Jewish sages spoke about the need for humility. The *Talmud* (rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures) extols the virtue of humility in the most lavish terms. In the second century, Rabbi Meir asserted that the true test of humility is man's conduct in the presence of all kinds of people, including the boorish and the ignorant (Avot 4:12). Rabbi Chanina b. Ida suggested that only the truly humble can attain scholarship. This is logical, as the arrogant person never admits he is wrong, and as a result the truth will always elude him. The *Talmud* points to the great Rabbi Hillel's meekness as the quality most worthy of emulation (Shabbat 31b).

In his *Mishneh Torah*, the Jewish scholar Maimonides spoke in the following terms, "When a person contemplates God's great and wondrous works and obtains a glimpse of God's incomparable and infinite wisdom, he will straightway love and glorify Him... even as David said, 'My whole being longs for God, the living God!' He will realize that man is a small creature, lowly and obscure, with but limited intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge" (Yesode haTorah 2:2).

Rabbi Levitas of Jabneh said, "One should be very humble for there is no real reason for pride, considering that in the end all men will be consumed by worms" (Avot 4:4). "One who is humble," other Jewish scholars declared, "will be raised by God and one who is proud will be put to shame. It is similar to one who seeks greatness and greatness eludes him, but one who avoids it will certainly achieve greatness" (Eruvin 13b).

What happens to a man when he is in the presence of God? In Scripture, every time a man was privileged to be in God's presence and see His glory, the man was brought low or humbled. When God met with Moses at the burning bush, Moses hid his face (Exod. 3:6).

## God dwells with the humble



Isaiah was overwhelmed by the presence of God and cried out, “*Woe is me*” (Isa. 6:5). Ezekiel fell on his face (Ezek. 1:28); Paul fell to the ground (Acts 9:4); John, the Apostle, fell at his feet as though dead (Rev. 1: 17). In the book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse of heaven and see that the living creatures and the twenty-four elders in heaven fall before the throne (Rev. 4:10). When the glory of God filled the Temple, the priests could not continue working (2 Chron. 5:14).

There is a blessing in being humble before God, and the Scriptures declare: God dwells with the humble (Isa. 57:15); the humble will inherit the land (Ps. 37:11); God looks to him (Isa. 66:2); God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6); God exalts the humble (1 Pet. 5:6, Luke 18:14) and God brings good tidings to the humble (Isa. 61:1).

Paradoxically, the reward of the humble is often greatness. Those who seek greatness often find it eludes them, but those who seek to serve God wholeheartedly with a humble spirit will find that God not only looks on them with approval, but God also uses them for great things in His kingdom. Man spends his life striving for greatness, recognition and position. Yet Scripture says, “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (James 4:10 NKJV).

# Contrite of Spirit

One way we try to win God's approval is through striving for perfection. Sadly, none of us achieves this state. We are frail human beings subject to temptation and sin. Did God create us to fail? Is there no hope? Fortunately, God has not made perfection the measuring device. He is looking for people who will react to missing the mark (as the Jewish writers say) with contrition of spirit. When confronted with your sin and failures, how do you respond? Do you try and justify it or continue the practice in defiance? Or, do you fall on your knees, repent and seek God's forgiveness for your failure?

The word "contrite" is from the Hebrew word *dakka* (דָּכָא) and literally means "to bruise or crush." It has the connotation of smitten, maimed, dejected, lame or contrite. In modern Hebrew usage, the word describes a handicapped, disabled or crippled person. Webster's dictionary describes contrition as "sincerely remorseful, having a deep and painful sense of guilt for wrong-doing."

When God says He looks on the man who has a contrite heart, God is saying He is looking for people who, when they sin, respond to their actions with deep sorrow. It is more than mere recognition or acknowledgement of sin. It is a brokenness before a holy God which leads to repentance (turning from the sin and literally running the other way).

Many Christian theologians distinguish between repentance done in fear and repentance accompanied by a love for God and a purpose to amend his or her life.

There is a pure repentance that comes from within, as one recognizes that he needs to change his actions in order to live righteously before God. What a difference between sorrow because you have been caught and the genuine repentance of King David we see in Psalm 51. David had sinned against God and man when he took another man's wife, Bathsheba, impregnated her and then had her husband killed to cover his sin. 2 Samuel 11:27 tells us that God was displeased by David's action, but in Acts 13:22, we read that David was a man after God's own heart.

What happened to change God's attitude toward David? David had a contrite spirit before God. When confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan, David's response was to cry out to God for forgiveness. His words flow from the depths of his broken and contrite spirit, "*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin*" (Ps. 51:1-2).

**God** is looking for people who,  
when they sin, respond to their actions  
**with deep sorrow.**

Yes, David was a man who sinned greatly and grieved God, but he was also a man who loved God and repented with all his heart. Today, when the Holy Spirit convicts us of our transgressions, we would be wise to heed this prompting and repent before God before we make a bigger mess of our lives and get caught. Sooner or later we will have to face our transgressions.

Repentance and forgiveness is a major theme in both Christian and Jewish thought. When Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus told his disciples to repent one day before their death, they asked him how one could know when he would die, and Rabbi Eliezer explained that one must repent daily for fear that he would die on the morrow (Shabbat 153a).

Stephen Katz, a Jewish professor at Dartmouth College, says, “It is not enough for man to hope and pray for pardon: a man must humble himself, acknowledge his wrong and resolve to depart from sin...inner contrition must be followed by outward acts: remorse must be translated into deeds. Two sub-stages are involved in this process: first, the negative of ceasing to do evil and then the positive step of doing good” (Katz 111).

The Jewish sages taught that God is quick to forgive misdeeds against Him but requires that transgressions against another human being must first be forgiven by the injured party (BT Rosh HaShanan 17b).

In Matthew, Yeshua spoke of the same issue: *“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there in front of the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering”* (Matt. 5:23–24).

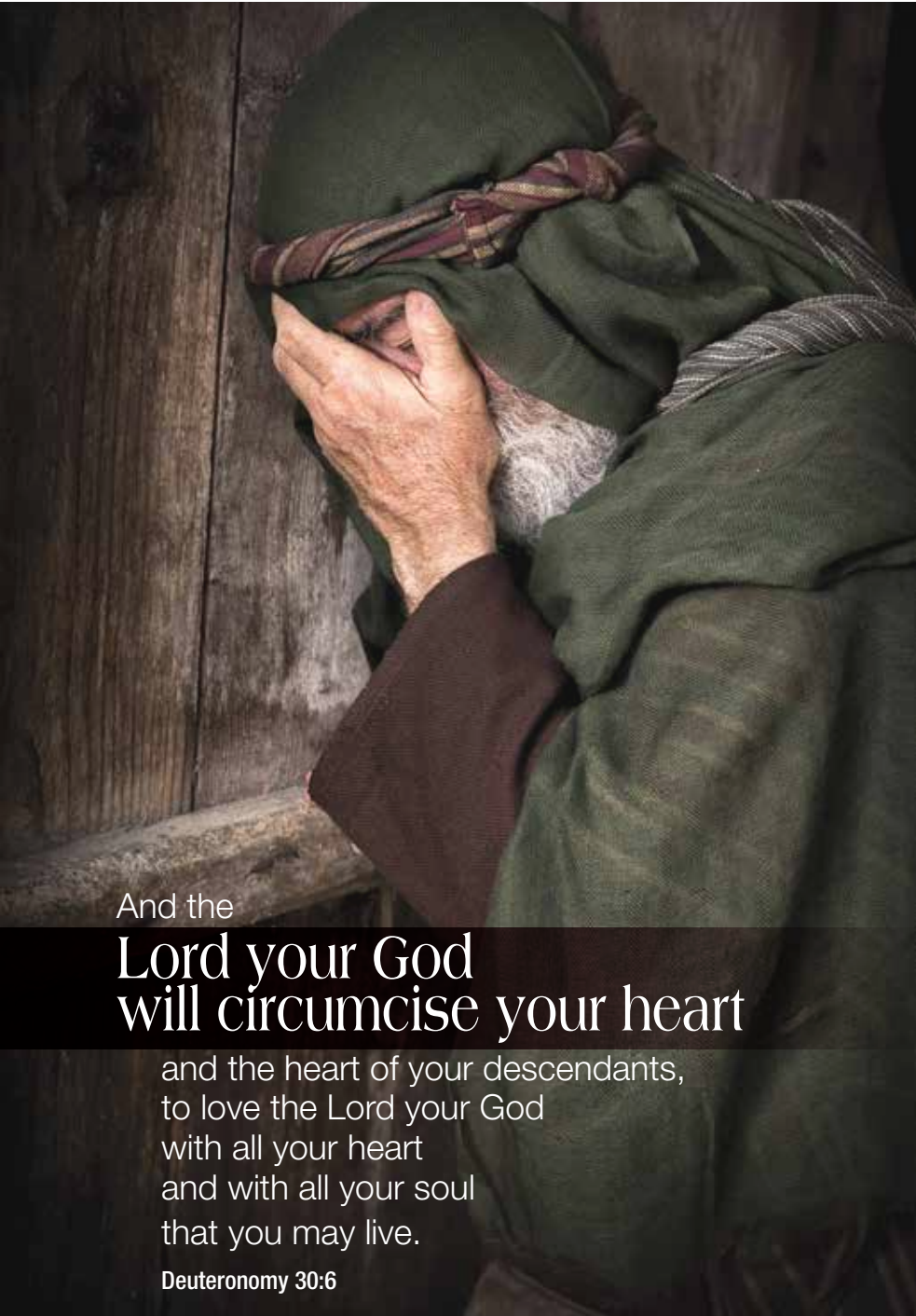
## Circumcision of the Heart

Four times in the *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.), the Children of Israel are told to circumcise their hearts. This is a reminder that God is interested in the condition of the heart. Samuel tells us that *“the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”* (1 Sam. 16:7b NKJV). God’s scrutiny is much deeper and goes to the source of our very being. When the heart is right with God, then outer actions will reflect that reality. Unfortunately, religious people throughout the centuries have proved that it is possible to do all the right things without having a heart that is pure and righteous.

*“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live”* (Deut. 10:6 NKJV).

Remember Yeshua’s criticism of some of the Pharisees saying they were *“like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness”* (Matt. 23:27 NKJV). They looked good and





And the

# Lord your God will circumcise your heart

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Deuteronomy 30:6

righteous and clean from the outside, but that was not the case of what was going on in their hearts. None of us is exempt from this criticism, and we must constantly look at our hearts and motivations and be sure we are pure. David said in Psalm 139:23–24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (NKJV).

Fortunately, the Scripture says that God will circumcise your heart because in our human frailty, we often don’t have the ability to change our own hearts; it takes a divine work of grace.

## Tremble at My Word

In today’s Christian world, it seems as if many have forgotten to reverence the Lord and His Word. God is looking for those people who will take His Word seriously, who will recognize the importance of not only reading but also heeding the Word of God.

I remember hearing the story of a congregation in Soviet Russia who only had one page of the Bible. Their pastor preached for years from that one page. They grew in the Lord but longed for more of His revelation to mankind. When he received an entire Bible, the pastor wept with joy. At the same time, my family had a whole shelf of Bibles, various translations, Bibles with references, commentary, concordances and dictionaries. However, we didn’t have the same sense of awe toward the Word of God that this Russian pastor did. Sad to say, we took God’s Word for granted.

God does not want us to take Him or His Word for granted—He wants us to tremble at His Word. The Hebrew word translated “tremble” in Isaiah 66:2 is *chared* (חרד), which means fearful, afraid, trembling and reverential. Is that how we react to God and His Word? The Bible is His revelation to mankind. He has given us His blueprint for our lives. I wonder how much we grieve Him when He sees us take this rich treasury of truth, promise and blessing so casually.

Bibles and other holy books which have become worn out and unusable are never discarded in Judaism. They are placed in a *genizah*, a hiding space, usually in the wall of the synagogue. If the name of God is written on a paper, it

## The Joy of the Word of God



can never be discarded. Many ancient manuscripts in museums today are there because a *genizah* has been found centuries after the books were put into hiding. The Jewish people believe there is a sanctity in the Word of God which cannot be treated lightly. The holiday of *Simchat Torah* (the Joy of the Word of God) is the day the *Torah* reading cycle finishes Deuteronomy and begins in Genesis again. Every year the congregants of synagogues dance with the *Torah* scroll in their synagogues and often it spills out into the streets of their neighborhood as they display their joy and reverence for the Word of God. This also occurs whenever they receive a new *Torah* scroll.

Oh that we would have so much respect for God's Word that we would not only read it but also act upon the words we read. God wants us to do more than just respect the book which contains His words. We should tremble with fear at the words He has spoken and let them change our lives. The great and mighty Creator of the universe has spoken to us. He holds our future in His hands. We should fall on our faces before Him as men of old did when in His presence.

The prophet Joel says. "*The Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?*" (Joel 2:11).

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# God Is Waiting for Us

**God is not interested in our religious traditions, our self-righteous piety or our human attempts to earn His approval. He is not giving His approval to someone who merely follows the rules or whose heart is far from Him. Instead, He is looking for men and women who will recognize their need of Him. They recognize that without Him they are nothing. He is looking for the one who will walk before Him in humility, who is contrite of spirit—quick to forgive and repent from the heart—and He is looking for the person who will listen to His words and allow His Word to change them from the inside. That is the person upon whom the Lord will look. That is the one who receives the approval of the awesome and holy God of the universe. That is the person we can become as we yield ourselves to Him, take time to learn from His Word and allow Him to circumcise our hearts. I'm ready. Are you?**

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Scripture is taken from the New American Standard version, unless otherwise noted.



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