

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Enlightening the Minister Who Said Jews Are Blind



Shortly after moving to California, I was contacted by Herb, an older Jewish man whom a Baptist minister had befriended. Herb invited the minister to his home to speak with his friends and family, and he asked me to present the Jewish point of view.

The discussion lasted several hours, and I was able to refute the minister's prooftexts to the satisfaction of everyone in attendance. However,

the minister became frustrated and blurted out, "Rabbi, you are blind." He maintained that I have a veil over my eyes that prevents me from understanding the bible, and I could remove the veil only if I "accepted Jesus into my heart."

Everyone saw the irony of his statement when I responded, "If, according to you, I have to accept Jesus before I can understand the prooftexts, why bother showing them to me?"

The slur that Jews are spiritually blind is built on the New Testament's distortion of a well-known story in the Jewish bible, which I will soon explain. This anti-Semitic trope was so prominent in Christianity that some medieval churches adorned their buildings with a statue known as "*Synagoga*," depicting Judaism as a downcast and blindfolded woman.

Contrary to the accusation of being blind, the Torah testifies that the Jewish people experienced spiritual revelations of Godliness.

In the Torah portions of *Vayakhel-Pekudei*, (Exodus 35:1- 40:38), Moses communicates to the Jewish people God's requirements for building the Tabernacle. The Torah reading concludes with a remarkable statement. We are told, "*The cloud of the Eternal was above the Tabernacle by day, and at night there would be a fire visible to [לְעֵינַי—in the eyes of] all the House of Israel*" (Exodus 40:38).

I was able to refute the minister's proof-texts to the satisfaction of everyone in attendance.

This verse implies that the Jews did see a manifestation of God's greatness. Furthermore, when God gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, we are told, "*The appearance of the Glory of the Eternal before [לְעֵינַי—in the eyes of] the Children of Israel was like an all-consuming fire on the top of the mountain*" (Exodus 24:17).

With such clear biblical statements, how could Christians mistakenly say we are blind? Their mistake is due to a mistranslation and distortion of another biblical passage.

continued...

The Torah relates that when Moses descended from Mount Sinai, “*the skin of his face was beaming [קרן–karan]*¹ *with light from speaking with God*” (Exodus 34:29). The Jews were awestruck by this radiance and due to their trepidation and Moses’ humility, he wore a veil. However, when Moses spoke to the Jews, he would temporarily remove the veil, as it says, “***When Moses finished [ויכחל–vayechal]*** *speaking with them, he put a veil over his face*” (Exodus 34:33).

Unfortunately, the King James Bible mistranslated this verse to state, “***Until Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.***” By using the word “until,” the translator altered the text to give the impression that Moses spoke to the Jews while wearing his veil.²

This mistranslation reflects the Apostle Paul’s corruption of the original text. Paul said, “*Moses would put a veil over his face to prevent the Jews from seeing God’s glory. But the people’s minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 3:13-14).

Paul’s distorted version of events branded the Jews as blind.

Paul’s distorted version of events branded the Jews as blind, and it resulted in disdain and unspeakable persecution of the Jewish people.

Despite Paul’s false claim, the Torah testifies that the Jews received an unobstructed communication from Moses. Even after Moses started to wear a veil, the Jews completed the Tabernacle and it was done, “*In accordance with all that the God had commanded Moses, so did the Children of Israel do all the work*” (Exodus 39:42).

It is undeniably within our grasp to understand and follow the Torah, as it says, “*It is very near to you; in your mouth and in your heart, so you may do it*” (Deuteronomy 30:14).

For example, this week’s Torah portion also introduces the observance of Shabbos (Exodus 35:2). What could be more meaningful and relevant than a weekly opportunity for self-introspection, spiritual bonding with God, and a reprieve from the stress and pressures of mundane concerns?

The Jewish prophets appreciated the spiritual gift of perceiving God’s Presence, and they looked forward to the day when it will be enhanced, and “*The glory of God will be revealed, and all people will see it together*” (Isaiah 40:5).

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

© 2023 Jews for Judaism

¹ Additionally, the Hebrew word [קרן–karan] was mistranslated into Latin as “horns,” which caused Michelangelo to create a sculpture of Moses with two horns on his head. Anti-Semites also used this mistranslation to stereotype Jews as having horns which fits into their false narrative that the Jews are “*Children of the devil*” (1 John 3:10).

² Clearly, the Hebrew verb [ויכחל–vayechal] means “when he finished,” as demonstrated from the well-known verse, “*The heaven and earth were finished*” (Genesis 2:1).