

The Intercession of Yeshua for His Own Encouragement for the Soul from John 17

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Part 1

After Yeshua and His Talmidim shared their final Pesach seder, they crossed over the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives. There Yeshua engaged in prayer to the Father, and in John's Gospel, he gives us the substance of our Master's prayer on that night before His crucifixion. But there is something very interesting about this prayer because Yeshua appears to be speaking to the Father as though His suffering is past and He has already ascended. Note John 17:4–5,

I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

How could Yeshua say that He had “accomplished the work” when He had not yet gone to the cross? Similarly, in v. 11 Yeshua says, “I am no longer in the world ...” yet He was there in the garden with His Talmidim, knowing full well that when the light of day arrived, it would signal the beginning of His suffering! What are we to make of this? The answer is that in this prayer of Yeshua, recorded by John in his Gospel, we have as it were a glimpse into the heavenly Tabernacle where Yeshua intercedes for us as our Cohen Gadol (High Priest). Put simply, in the garden prayer it is as though Yeshua has transported Himself beyond the cross, beyond the grave, beyond the resurrection and the ascension, and, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He prays for His own as their Intercessor. We may therefore look at John 17 and in this inspired text see the requests which form the substance of our Savior's intercession for us now.

When we study John 17 with this in mind, we see that Yeshua approaches the Father with seven requests on behalf of those He has redeemed. And we know, of course, that the Father will grant the requests of His Son in Whom He delights!

The first request is repeated twice: v. 1 – “Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,” and v. 5 – “Father, glorify Me together with Yourself.” Yeshua's first request is that the Father would affirm the full acceptance of His sacrifice for sinners by restoring the glory He had before the incarnation. And this is precisely what has taken place. When Stephen was being stoned he was given a vision of Yeshua standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). The proof that the Father has accepted the work of the Son as being entirely sufficient to procure our salvation is that the Son has been glorified. As the glorified High Priest, the Son is therefore able to secure the salvation of all those the Father has chosen, and in doing so, to bring glory to the Father (cf. 1Cor 15:20–28; Phil 2:5-11).

We may rest assured that our salvation is secure in the work of Yeshua, for the fact that the Father has restored Yeshua to the highest place of honor and glory proves the full acceptance of His atoning sacrifice.

Part 2

The second request of Yeshua's prayer is found in v. 11 –

“Holy Father, keep them (the disciples) in Your Name, the Name which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are”

In this request, our Cohen Gadol is pleading for the eternal salvation of all who are His, based upon the eternal, unchangeable divine nature possessed both by the Father and the Son. This is what is meant by “keep them in Your Name.” The Name is the revelation of God's very nature—His immutable, eternal character as the uncreated Creator. In the same way that God has no beginning and no ending, so the Son, Who bears the same Name, is the Eternal “I Am.” Thus, the eternal salvation of those for whom Yeshua intercedes is just as secure as the very nature of God Himself. Or to put it another way, those for whom Yeshua prays could only be condemned (lost) if God Himself ceased to exist!

What great comfort for the soul this affords! Our salvation is as sure as the very existence of God Himself. Do not fear—what God has promised, He will do. Nothing in this universe could ever separate us from the love of God demonstrated in the salvation purchased for the elect by His Son, our Messiah Yeshua!

Part 3

We are looking at the prayer of Yeshua in John 17 as a model of Yeshua's High Priestly prayer. As the One Who is beloved of the Father, Yeshua represents His own before the Father as their intercessor. As such, He makes requests on their behalf, requests that will certainly be granted!

We have previously looked at the first two requests: 1) Glorify the Son, vv. 1, 5; 2) Keep them in Your Name, v. 11.

The third request of our Savior is found in v. 15 – “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.” Here, as often, the work of the Almighty on behalf of His people is not that He removes them from the source of trouble, but that He protects them in the midst of it. Thus, for example, Israel was protected from the plagues brought upon the Egyptians as they dwelt in Goshen, and Noah and his family were protected within the ark as they went through the flood. Daniel and his friends were preserved in the midst of the furnace, not spared from being thrown into it. So Isaiah writes:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you. (Is. 43:2)

Similarly, Yeshua's request on our behalf is not that we should be taken out of the world in order to escape the engagement of a spiritual battle, but that in the midst of the fray, we should be kept or guarded by the omnipotent power of God Himself. We may rest assured that in the battle against the enemy of our souls, we will emerge victorious, for the prayer of our Lord on our behalf has made this a surety.

The Greek of the final clause of v. 15 could be understood two ways. We could understand it quite generally: “keep them from evil,” or as specifically relating to Satan: “keep them from the evil one.” The word “evil” in the Greek has the definite article (the word “the”) and would therefore most naturally be understood as referring to the Devil, and this is the way nearly all modern English translations render it (NASB, NIV, ESV, NET, NRSV, NKJV). While the more general understanding is surely possible, it seems warranted to understand our Lord's third request as securing protection for His people against the attacks of Satan.

This teaches us several important lessons. First, we know from Yeshua's request that Satan is intent upon our destruction. We should never forget that the Evil one plans to defeat us. Secondly, then, we should always be aware that our struggle to live righteously and to sanctify God's Name upon this earth will inevitably involve engaging the enemy of our souls (cf. Eph 6:12). We dare not be lulled to sleep in thinking that that battle is over. Thirdly, however, we may face the enemy with confidence, knowing that God Himself has determined to protect us from him.

We therefore never need to fear that Satan, who seeks our destruction, will prevail. We may rely fully upon God's protection, knowing that He has granted the request of our High Priest and will “keep us from the evil one.” Our victory is secure; our salvation certain. “...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1Jn 4:4).

Part 4

In our study of Yeshua's high priestly prayer as found in John 17, we come now to the fourth request of our Savior, v. 17 – “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” The word “sanctify” means “to be holy” in the sense of being “set apart to” or “designated for” God. Such sanctification is two-fold, for it involves being separated *from* that which is profane and dedicated *unto* God. Thus, in bringing this fourth request, Yeshua begins: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (v. 16). This is reiterated from v. 14: “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Thus, the sanctification for which our Lord prays is that His people should be distinct *from* the world and set apart *unto* the truth.

What does it mean when Yeshua describes His disciples as “not of the world?” The Greek could be understood to mean “not having one's origin from the world” (literally the Greek has “they are not out of the world”). The disciples of Yeshua have died and risen to a new life. They are therefore “born again” or “born from above” (cf. Jn 3:3). Their new life in Messiah is not the product of the world but the miraculous work of God through His Spirit bringing regeneration and thus changed character. Therefore, the fourth request of our High Priest on behalf of His chosen ones begins by asking that their lives should be in accordance with who they truly are: children born from above. By this very request, Yeshua makes it clear that His disciples have undergone a radical change—they are not who they used to be. They are no longer “of this world” in the sense that their purposes, goals, delights, and perspectives have changed. They are “new creations in Messiah Yeshua” who live to please Him (2Cor 5:17, cf. Gal 6:15). Thus, one who “loves the world” evidences the reality that the “love of the Father” is not in him (1Jn 2:15). In contrast, those who are born from above have their mind set on things above (Col 3:1-3).

In the second part of this fourth request, Yeshua prays for the continuing sanctification of His people. He

prays for the divine power they would need to live out on earth the life of one born from above. Being in the hostile and contrary environment of the world, their only hope for survival was that they should be endowed with divine strength and protection. To be sanctified means to have our own will more and more conformed to the will of God. But such a conformity is seen and known in one's deeds, and thus the request of our Master, in this specific context, is that the lives of His disciples, both inward and visible, would be consecrated to God alone. We may derive this meaning by comparison to v. 19 where the same language is used of Yeshua Himself: "For their sakes, I sanctify Myself." Obvious, He is not speaking of inner personal purification or a need to be made personally better, since He was without sin (Heb 4:15; 7:26). The idea of sanctification presented here, then, is that of full consecration to God. It is this for which our High Priest prays on our behalf and we may therefore rest assured that this is our ultimate destiny. The work that God has begun in us He will surely finish (Phil 1:6)!

And note carefully the environment in which the child of God will be so consecrated: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." It is the truth of God, His eternal and immutable word, that is to surround the children of God and thus to keep them safe—to be the foundation upon which their lives of consecration are ever built and made sure. How precious, then, is the word of God, the Bible, the revelation of God forever inscribed in human language! We must read and study it then, not merely to gain knowledge and understanding, but that such comprehension should bring about a true consecration of life to God.

Part 5

The fifth request of our Lord in His high priestly prayer of John 17 is in vv. 20–21:

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

First, a comment should be made regarding the verb translated "to ask" which has been used throughout this prayer of Yeshua. This verb, *erotao* (found also in vv. 9 and 15) does not so much picture the request of a subordinate but rather the desire of an equal. As Moule notes, "It takes us very near to the Secret Place where the Son holds converse with the Father, not before but upon the throne" (H.C.G. Moule, *The High Priestly Prayer* [Baker, 1978], p. 157).

Here we see the larger picture of those for whom He prays. So far, the Eleven have occupied a central focus in our Savior's prayer, no doubt as representative of all who believe in Him. But here He makes it explicit that the focus of His requests extends beyond the inner circle of the Eleven to all who believe through their word. Now there is a subtle yet important point contained in the grammar here. Naturally, we expect to find a future tense in the word "believe," and in fact, a few manuscripts have it this way. Thus, the KJV, following these few manuscripts, has: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." But it is clear that the better reading is not the future participle ("shall believe") but the present participle ("believe"). In this we see that the prayer as recorded by John is the model for Yeshua's intercessory work at the right hand of the Father, for it is as though His focus is upon all who believe, viewed from the vantage point of eternity.

Now this fact, that those for whom Yeshua prays are all who have believed in all generations, helps us

understand what He intends to convey through this request for unity. His prayer that “they may all be one” does not envision that they all will agree, nor even the idea that they all will be known as belonging to the same visible organization upon the earth. Rather, Yeshua’s request at this point is that the same work of the Spirit should be manifest in each of them, manifesting that changed life of sanctification that marks those who are true believers. Thus, His prayer for unity (note the three times this is repeated: v. 21, “that they may be one,” v. 22, “that they may be one,” v. 23, “that they may be perfected in unity”) is an extension of His previous request for sanctification in the truth. His request for unity is thus primarily founded in the similar work of the Spirit in all who believe, conforming each one to the very image of the Eternal and All-glorious Apostle, the One Whom the Father sent into the world. Such unity is not brought about by the institutions of men, nor even by agreement to some creed or doctrine that defines this denomination from that one, but by the inward work of God in each believer by which he or she is enabled to live a life of righteousness. Even as Yeshua Himself demonstrated a complete and perfect submission to the will of the Father as He walked upon this earth, so His prayer secures the on-going work of the Spirit in believers of every age, perfecting them (v. 23), that is, causing them to attain spiritual adulthood. It is this characteristic of all true believers that stands as the greatest testimony to the world of Yeshua’s incarnation, for the changed lives of those who call Him Lord are proof that He has accomplished the work for which He was sent.

Once again, we may take great encouragement in this request of our Savior! We gain great confidence in knowing that we will prevail in our struggle against inward sin and the weaknesses of our own flesh, for our Master is interceding for us and His requests are always granted. We know, therefore, that we will inevitably be victorious in the battle for righteousness in which we are engaged and that one day we will stand before Him, having “no spot or wrinkle or any such thing” but “holy and blameless” (Eph 5:26–27).

Part 6

The sixth request of our High Priest is found in John 17:24—

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

This is now the fifth time that Yeshua uses the address “Father” in His high priestly prayer (cf. vv. 1, 5, 11, 21). Throughout the prayer, this use of the title “Father” reminds us that there exists a special and unique relationship between the Son and the Father. In Mark’s account of the garden prayer, he records for us that Yeshua used the more common and familial term “Abba”—

And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” (Mark 14:36)

This was not lost on the Apostle Paul, who doubtlessly received the story of Yeshua’s prayer from the Apostles themselves:

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15)
Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6)

Thus, because all who belong to Yeshua are “in Him,” we share in that close relationship with the Father since the Son has face to face communion with Him (cf. Jn 1:1). It is therefore through the intercessory work of the Son that we are given the supreme privilege of addressing the Almighty as our Father. Let us not take this privilege for granted! It is a treasure purchased at a supreme price.

But though we have such a ready access to the Father as His beloved children, the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son is still unique, for it obtains from all eternity. This is highlighted in Yeshua’s request in that He bases it upon the fact that the Father loved Him “before the foundation of the world,” a phrase that denotes eternity past. Since the Son has always existed, He likewise has always enjoyed the infinite oneness mysteriously expressed within the multiplicity of the Godhead. As Paul expresses it, “For in Him (Yeshua) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form...” (Col 2:9).

In this sixth request, Yeshua expresses His deep desire that those people given to Him should be with Him in order to behold His glory. The Greek text, however, contains a subtle yet wonderful truth in this request, for literally the wording is: “Father, that which You have given to Me, I desire that where I Myself am, also they may be with Me...” Now at first the people who form the object of His request are referenced by the singular, neuter demonstrative: “that which.” That this appeared as a grammatical anomaly caused some scribes to change the singular neuter to a plural masculine form, but the strong weight of the manuscripts is in favor of the more difficult singular. What is the point? It is that in the opening of Yeshua’s request, He views the chosen people as one unified whole. He knows that His previous request for their ultimate unity will be granted and that in the world to come, all who are His will stand before Him as His chosen and redeemed bride.

Twice before in Yeshua’s prayer He refers to those whom the Father had given Him (vv. 2, 9, cf. Jn 6:39; 18:9). This expression denotes the mystery of God’s sovereign election in eternity past by which He chose all who would be saved to comprise a gift to the Son. It was this people, here viewed as a single unified whole, who are the object of Yeshua’s intercession. Even as the high priest in the earthly Tabernacle and Temple carried the names of the tribes of Israel upon His shoulders and over his heart, inscribed as they were on the breastplate and signet stones, so our High Priest bears our names before the Father as those bequeathed to Him.

And what is the substance of this sixth request? That all those who are chosen and given to the Son should be with Him where He is in order that they might behold His glory. This, then, secures their eternal destiny, for surely the request of Yeshua will be granted. Even as Yeshua Himself ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high, so we too—all who are in Yeshua—will one day see the fulness of His greatness, for we will see Him just as He is (1Jn 3:2). In contrast to His prayer of agony, in which He said “not My will but Yours be done,” here He asserts His rightful place as the victor, and with full recognition of His sovereign position says, “I will that they be with Me where I am.” But the two are clearly connected, for it was His willing submission to the Father in giving Himself for His people that has secured their eternal salvation.

What great encouragement and solace this gives to every true child of God! Surely what He has begun, He will finish (Phil 1:6) and we therefore rest assured that by His greatness we will one day behold His glory. It is this hope, firmly planted in our hearts by faith, that enables us to persevere, patiently awaiting

the return of our Messiah!

Part 7

The Seventh and final request of our Master's High Priestly prayer is found in vv. 25–26, though it is stated more as a result of what Yeshua has done and will do rather than in the typical form of a request as the previous six have been:

O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:25–26)

Yeshua begins by addressing His Father as “righteous.” In v. 11, Yeshua uses the title “Holy Father” which has a similar sense. “Holy” has to do with the Father's intrinsic character, that He stands in every way apart from anything that is sinful or wrong. All that He does is right and good because He is holy. The concept of “righteous” carries the same essential meaning as “holy” but with an emphasis upon the Father's interaction with the world He created. His righteousness demands that sinners be punished. And if He is intent upon saving some, as He is, then His righteousness demands that their sins be paid for. Thus Paul writes that He is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Yeshua” (Rom 3:26). So, when Yeshua addresses His Father with the added descriptive word “righteous,” He is emphasizing the fact that the work He has accomplished in His sacrificial death will surely gain its intended reward, even the salvation of all those bequeathed to Him by the Father.

But we may also note that in the words of this final request, Yeshua enters into covenant language. When He states “although the world has not known You,” He cannot be saying that the world has no knowledge about or sense of the existence of God. The Psalmist makes it clear that “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Ps 19:1) and Paul teaches this same reality when he writes: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Rather, what Yeshua expresses in His words here by stating that the world does not *know* the Father is that the world at large has no covenant relationship with Him—no relationship wherein they can address Him as “Father.” Knowing God only through the created world renders a person without excuse before the judgment throne of the Almighty but does not make known His mercy and grace, nor does it explain His method of saving sinners. This revelation He has given in the Scriptures and in the Living Word, His Son, Yeshua.

In contrast to the world that has not known the Father, Yeshua states: “yet I have known You.” Here Yeshua rehearses the eternal relationship He has with the Father, a relationship that can only be expressed in the mystery of complete and eternal oneness—“I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

The relationship existing between the Father and the Son is unique, and the words of this final request hint at what Yeshua had categorically stated earlier:

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matt 11:27, cf. Lk 10:22).

Thus, the knowledge each have of the other, the Father of the Son and the Son of the Father, is unique in that such “knowledge” (understood in a covenant sense) is both exhaustive (pertaining to the infinite being of both) and perfect (entirely holy). Moreover, this intimate and perfect relationship between the Father and Son can only be known or entered into when the Son wills to reveal such truth to those He intends to save. It is His perfect and infinite oneness with the Father that enables Him to reveal the Father in truth. He thus says, “I have made Your Name known to them.” Here, as often, the Name stands for the very character and attributes of God. When Yeshua makes the Name known to His disciples, He is revealing to them the very essence of the Father in all of His glory and majesty.

He says not only that He has revealed the Father to the disciples but also that He would yet reveal even more. By this we should understand not that Yeshua would disclose new information before undisclosed, but that His work of revealing the Father would not cease with His ascension but would continue on. For by the Spirit, Yeshua continues to open the eyes of those who are called and to reveal the Father to them in the same way and to the same extent to which He revealed the Father to the Twelve.

And what is the ultimate and final goal of such revelation? “...so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them....” It is interesting to note that it is not the love of the Son for the Father that marks the zenith of this prayer, but the Father’s love for the Son. And how was this love manifest? It was manifest in His faithfulness to the Son Who, in His incarnation, relied entirely upon the Father’s enabling to complete the task for which He had come. In undergoing death, the Son was entirely dependent upon the Father to complete His word of promise—to make Him victorious over death. The resurrection, then, demonstrated both the utter reliance of the Son upon the Father and His Spirit, as well as the faithfulness of the Father to the Son. It is this fidelity of oneness between the Father and the Son that demonstrates the love each has for the other. So too, the prayer of our Lord is that we might likewise know this same love of the Father—that as we lean ourselves out upon Him, understanding our utter dependence upon Him, we too might experience the love of God demonstrated in His unchanging faithfulness.

But the final words of this prayer are also striking. Not only does our High Priest pray that the love of the Father, which He Himself knows, should be in those who are His, but He also prays that He would Himself be “in them.” That is, He prays that all who are redeemed by His blood might know and experience His abiding presence in their lives and in their communities, for He alone embodies the very love of the Father. Thus, in the abiding presence of the Son, the love of God is known. “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him” (1Jn 4:9). This final request, therefore, brings the prayer full-circle, for it begins with the Son and ends with Him as the only way for sinners to be reconciled to God.