

# How the Evangelical Message of the Hebrew Bible Can Transform the World

---

Ross K. Nichols

The subject at hand presents many questions, requiring a careful and thoughtful exploration. It requires defining and then *re-defining* key terms from a proper biblical perspective. Once the process described is complete, it can be shown that the Hebrew Bible, popularly known as the Old Testament, contains an evangelical message, and that this message can transform the world.

Evangelism is a term that is rarely associated with the Hebrew Bible. This is primarily because of its use in Christianity, where it conveys the idea of conversion, and that to a particular set of doctrines and beliefs related to faith in Jesus as the promised messiah. Central to the Christian evangelical message is the proclamation of what the early Christian writers referred to as the *gospel*, a term that comes to us from the Greek word *evangel* in the first place, bringing us back full circle to the subject at hand. The root meaning of the Greek word has to do with news, particularly good news, and the proclamation of that news. Forms of the word occur nearly 100 times in the Christian writings; some of which contextually point back to passages found within the corpus of texts known as the Hebrew Bible. This then begs the question; does the Hebrew Bible contain an evangelical message, and if so, can that ancient message transform our modern world?

## *The Hebrew Word Behind the Greek*

Variations of the word *evangel* can be traced back to the Hebrew word *basar* (בשר). It is used a total of 23 times in the Hebrew Bible. The root meaning of the verb is translated by Brown, Driver, & Briggs – *to bear tidings*. The following passages use this word in a general sense to describe the one bringing news, or of news itself, or the conveyance of news.

1Sam. 4:17 The **bearer of the news** replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines and the troops also suffered a great slaughter. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the Ark of God has been captured.”

1Sam. 31:9 They cut off his head and stripped him of his armor, and they sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to **spread the news** in the temples of their idols and among the people.

2Sam. 1:20 Tell it not in Gath, Do not **proclaim it** in the streets of Ashkelon, Lest the daughters of the Philistine rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

2Sam. 4:10 The man who told me in Ziklag that Saul was dead thought he was bringing good news. But instead of rewarding him for the news, I seized and killed him.

2Sam. 18:19 ¶ Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Let me run and report to the king that the LORD has vindicated him against his enemies."

2Sam. 18:20 But Joab said to him, "You shall not be the one to bring tidings today. You may bring tidings some other day, but you'll not bring any today; for the king's son is dead!"

2Sam. 18:22 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?"

2Sam. 18:25 The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he drew nearer and nearer.

2Sam. 18:26 the watchman saw another man running; and he called out to the gatekeeper, "There is another man running alone." And the king said, "That one, too, brings news."

2Sam. 18:31 ¶ Just then the Cushite came up; and the Cushite said, "Let my lord the king be informed that the LORD has vindicated you today against all who rebelled against you!"

1Kings 1:42 He was still speaking when the priest Jonathan son of Abiathar arrived. "Come in," said Adonijah. "You are a worthy man, and you surely bring good news."

Jer. 20:15 Accursed be the man Who brought my father the news And said, "A boy Is born to you," And gave him such joy!

1Chr. 10:9 They stripped him, and carried off his head and his armor, and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines to spread the news to their idols and among the people.

As these examples show, the word in its basic form has no significant relevance towards religiosity whatsoever. It means simply to share information, or news with an audience. Sometimes the news is good, but this is not always the case. Ten passages however, in the Hebrew Bible seem to suggest something more specific when the word is used. The writers of the synoptic gospels pick up on this and use it as the foundation for the proclamation of the good news par excellence, but was this application the intention of the original authors?<sup>1</sup> In their use of these passages, do

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Mark 1:1, Matthew 4:23, and Luke 4:18.

they find a program for spreading good news? And if this is the case, what is that authentic gospel message contained within the Hebrew Bible?

### *The Prophet Isaiah's Use of Basar*

A key to gaining a proper biblical understanding of the Hebrew word requires us to look into the words attributed to ancient Israel's prophets, and specifically to the prophet Isaiah. All references found in Isaiah come from what scholars refer to as Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>2</sup>

Is. 40:9 ¶ Ascend a lofty mountain, O **herald** of joy to Zion; Raise your voice with power, O **herald** of joy to Jerusalem — Raise it, have no fear; Announce to the cities of Judah: Behold your God!

Is. 41:27 The things once predicted to Zion — Behold, here they are! And again I send **a herald** to Jerusalem.

Is. 52:7 ¶ How welcome on the mountain Are the footsteps of the **herald** Announcing happiness, **Heralding** good fortune, Announcing victory, Telling Zion, "Your God is King!"

Is. 60:6 Dust clouds of camels shall cover you, Dromedaries of Midian and Ephah. They all shall come from Sheba; They shall bear gold and frankincense, And shall **herald** the glories of the LORD.

Is. 61:1 ¶ The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me as a **herald** of joy to the humble, To bind up the wounded of heart, To proclaim release to the captives, Liberation to the imprisoned;

### *Other Relevant Passages*

The prophet Nahum, in a passage similar to Isaiah 52:7, describes the arrival of the messenger.

Nah. 2:1 ¶ Behold on the hills The footsteps of a **herald** Announcing good fortune! "Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, Fulfill your vows. Never again shall scoundrels invade you, They have totally vanished."

The Psalms contain the following passages related to the current study.

Psa. 40:10 I **proclaimed** [Your] righteousness in a great congregation; see, I did not withhold my words; O LORD, You must know it.

Psa. 68:12 ¶ The LORD gives a command; the women who **bring the news** are a great host:

---

<sup>2</sup> Deutero-Isaiah is a scholarly way of referring to chapters 40-66 of the work of Isaiah.

Psa. 96:2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name, **proclaim** His victory day after day.<sup>3</sup>

Each of these texts seems to refer to *specific* good news. We learn for instance that the message is one of hope. It announces salvation and the revelation of the One God. In some instances, the bearer is a singular figure, in others it is a group consisting at times of males and others of females, and in one passage, the bearer of good news is an anointed one that speaks in the first person!

Taking all of the relevant passages in the Hebrew Bible into consideration, what can one determine of an evangelical message of the Hebrew Bible, and how then can that message transform the world? From the selected passages alone, one cannot discern the sought after answers, but when examined in context a full picture begins to emerge.

### *THE Gospel – One True God Besides Whom There is No Other*

If the Hebrew Bible contains a gospel message, it stands to reason that by examining the relevant passages, one could conceivably discern the content of that good news. Perhaps the foremost point derived from the texts centers on God, the One True God. In Isaiah chapter 40, verse 9, the one bringing good news is told to announce “Behold Your God!” This becomes the primary point of proclaiming the message. The Hebrew Bible presents a consistent message when it comes to God. The writers of Scripture unequivocally speak of One, besides whom there is no other.<sup>4</sup> This One God is presented by name in the Hebrew Bible, and His singularity is proclaimed throughout.<sup>5</sup> Israel was specially chosen as a witness to this point, and charged to share this truth with the entire world.

Is. 43:10-12 My witnesses are you ¶ — declares the LORD — My servant, whom I have chosen. To the end that you may take thought, And believe in Me, And understand that I am He: Before Me no god was formed, And after Me none shall exist — None but me, the LORD; Beside Me, none can grant triumph. I alone foretold the triumph And I brought it to pass; I announced it, And no strange god was among you. So you are My witnesses ¶ — declares the LORD — And I am God.

Is. 44:6 ¶ Thus said the LORD, the King of Israel, Their Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts: I am the first and I am the last, And there is no god but Me.

---

<sup>3</sup> See also I Chronicles 16:23.

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew phrase translated as “no other,” refers to the only true God in the following passages in the Hebrew Bible – Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; I Kings 8:60; Isaiah 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22; Jeremiah 46:9; and Joel 2:27.

<sup>5</sup> The name of God is represented in the Hebrew Bible by 4 letters (יהוה) and occurs approximately 7,000 times.

Is. 44:8 Do not be frightened, do not be shaken! Have I not from of old predicted to you? I foretold, and you are My witnesses. Is there any god, then, but Me? “There is no other rock; I know none!”

Is. 45:5-6 I am the LORD and there is none else; Beside Me, there is no god. I engird you, though you have not known Me, so that they may know, from east to west, That there is none but Me. I am the LORD and there is none else,

Is. 45:18-25 For thus said the LORD, The Creator of heaven who alone is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who alone established it — He did not create it a waste, But formed it for habitation: I am the LORD, and there is none else. I did not speak in secret, At a site in a land of darkness; I did not say to the stock of Jacob, “Seek Me out in a wasteland” — I the LORD, who foretell reliably, Who announce what is true. ¶ Come, gather together, Draw nigh, you remnants of the nations! No foreknowledge had they who carry their wooden images ¶ And pray to a god who cannot give success. Speak up, compare testimony — Let them even take counsel together! Who announced this aforetime, Foretold it of old? Was it not I the LORD? Then there is no god beside Me, No God exists beside Me Who foretells truly and grants success. Turn to Me and gain success, All the ends of earth! For I am God, and there is none else. By Myself have I sworn, From My mouth has issued truth, A word that shall not turn back: To Me every knee shall bend, Every tongue swear loyalty. They shall say: “Only through the LORD Can I find victory and might. When people trust in Him, All their adversaries are put to shame. It is through the LORD that all the offspring of Israel Have vindication and glory.”

Perhaps the most important affirmation of the oneness of God in the Hebrew Bible is known as the Shema. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:4 and says, “Hear O Israel, YHVH our God, YHVH is One.” Israel’s role as a witness is to proclaim the oneness of God to the ends of the earth, throughout time, until finally this message is accepted globally, leading to a reign known in Scripture and religious thought, as the Kingdom of God.

### *The Kingdom of God*

In one of the Hebrew Bible’s texts associated with the good news, the herald announces peace, good, and salvation, further declaring, “Your God is King!”<sup>6</sup> Throughout the Bible, YHVH is referred to as a king.<sup>7</sup> He is called a great king, an eternal king, and these references at the least, infer a kingdom – the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is first alluded to in the Song at the Sea, sung shortly after the Hebrew people had safely crossed out of Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 52:7

<sup>7</sup> See for example Isaiah 6:5, 33:22, 37:16, Jeremiah 8:19, 10:7, 10; Zephaniah 3:15; Zechariah 14:9; Malachi 1:14; Psalm 5:2, 10:16, 22:28, 24:10, 29:10, 44:4, 47:2, 6-8, 68:24, 74:12, 84:3, 95:3, 97:1, 5, 98:6, 99:1-5, 145:1.

<sup>8</sup> See Exodus 15:18 – YHVH will reign forever and ever. The Hebrew word for reign is from the same root as the word for king.

### *The People of the Kingdom*

Israel represents the people of the kingdom. The intention was for Israel to be a kingdom of priests with God as their king.<sup>9</sup> Time and again, the people of Israel are described as a special treasure, a holy people. They are a covenant people and a light to the nations. From the time of the patriarchs, the Bible makes it clear that Israel has a teaching role; they are to serve as priests to the world. They are to be blessed but they also have a responsibility to bless others. A careful review of a sample of the promises to the patriarchs shows this to be the case.

“The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you.”

(Genesis 12:1–3 JPS)

“Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.”

(Genesis 18:17–19 JPS)

“I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”

(Genesis 22:17–18 JPS)

“I will make your heirs as numerous as the stars of heaven, and assign to your heirs all these lands, so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs — inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings.”

(Genesis 26:4–5 JPS)

“Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west

---

<sup>9</sup> See Exodus 19:3-7. While it can be shown that the Torah *allows* the people of Israel to “put a king” over them (Deuteronomy 17), the clear message of Scripture is that this was an accommodation for the people’s desire to be like the nations. See for example I Samuel 8:5-7 where it is revealed that this was viewed as a rejection of YHVH!

and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants.”  
(Genesis 28:14 JPS)

How is it that blessings will come upon Israel and then to the rest of the world? The same way that they came upon Abraham – obedience! Israel was to model the way for the rest of the world, and the nations around them would be so inspired by their example that they would want to adopt these holy ways. In Genesis 18, we read that Abraham was chosen in order to guard the way of YHVH, which is then further defined as “doing justice and righteousness.” These two, justice and righteousness, are mentioned often together in Scripture. God, according to the Psalmist, loves justice and righteousness (Psalm 33:5), and justice and righteousness are the foundation of His throne (Psalm 89:14). The throne represents the Kingdom of God – a kingdom established on justice and righteousness. But this Kingdom will not be brought about easily, not without a fight. There is a hand against the throne of Yah!<sup>10</sup> The people of the kingdom must fight to bring about the manifestation of this kingdom on earth. This is the true meaning of the vision of the son of man of Daniel chapter 7. The vision of the son of man is often interpreted as referring to a coming messianic figure, which receives the kingdom from God, who is portrayed in the vision as the Ancient of Days. While this is the most prevalent understanding of the vision, the context clearly interprets the vision for the reader. The son of man coming on the clouds who receives the kingdom is representative of the people of the kingdom, i.e., Israel! This same people are referred to in Psalm 105 as the anointed (messiah), and so technically the messiah will receive the kingdom. This idea of a corporate messiah may also find support in the book of Habakkuk 3:13. While Israel represents the people of the kingdom, the reign was always intended to extend to all nations.

#### *Universal Aspects of the Kingdom*

The reign of God is one that extends beyond the boundaries of Israel. YHVH is king over all nations, as the Psalms often declare. While presently there are many gods, known by many names, the Hebrew Bible sees a time when this will not be the case. Take for instance the following passage from Zechariah.

“And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one LORD with one name.”  
(Zechariah 14:9 JPS)

This passage contains elements of what we have already identified as pertaining to the gospel of the Hebrew Bible, namely one God, and that God as King. Whereas Deuteronomy 6:4 is Israel’s Shema, this then represents a universal Shema.

Ultimately, Israel will lead the nations in a restorative movement. Nations will

---

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 17:16

realize that they have inherited “lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit”.<sup>11</sup> They will forsake their pagan ways and turn solely to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The nations will at long last seek the True and Living God in Jerusalem. It is there that they will learn of His ways, and from there, that the Torah will go forth to all nations.<sup>12</sup> This brings about a universal era of peace, described in various passages in the Hebrew Bible. The portrait is one worth working towards. There will be no war; nature will at long last be restored to a peaceful coexistence, and the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14). First, Israel must be reunited as they once were. The prophets speak often of this reunion in the latter days, to be followed by an assembly of others, drawn from the nations. They will be accepted based upon their acceptance of, and adherence to the terms of Israel’s covenant.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike the popular evangelical message preached in many circles, the gospel according to the Hebrew Bible is simple and straightforward. **There is One God – YHVH. YHVH is King over all the earth. YHVH has elected a people to represent His way. Others are invited to join in the plan. The realization of the implementation of that plan will bring about universal peace – the Kingdom of God on earth!** Indeed, the Hebrew Bible does contain an evangelical message and the presentation thereof has the potential to transform the world.

### *Summary*

The United Israel World Union proclaims this very message in and through its vision and outreach efforts.

*The United Israel World Union (UIWU) was incorporated under the laws of the State of New York in 1944 by founder David Horowitz who served as President until his death at age 99 (1903–2002). The primary purposes of UIWU are to represent a universal version of the Hebraic faith to the non-Jewish world, based primarily on the Hebrew Bible, as well as to provide a meeting place for Jews with non-Jews who are accordingly drawn to this message. The hallmark of the organization is Isaiah’s prescription that “My house will become a house of prayer for all peoples.” Central to this mission is the conviction that scattered among the Gentiles are untold numbers of descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel who are discovering their identity and their kinship to the Jewish people. Membership is based on the simple declaration of faith in the One God of Israel and a commitment to live according to the principles of the Hebrew Bible. Members, accordingly, observe the Sabbath day, Jewish festivals, and a biblical “kosher” diet, although the manner and extent of such observances is left to one’s individual conscience.*

---

<sup>11</sup> See Jeremiah 16:19

<sup>12</sup> See Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:2-5

<sup>13</sup> See Isaiah 56

Current work involves:

- The publication of books and religious educational materials published by Dr. James D. Tabor
- Weekly teachings by members of UIWU in their places of residence, and in the assemblies to which they belong
- Regular articles of interest related to the Hebrew
- The management of websites and the use of social media to help share biblical truth
- Our Board consists of scholars, business executives, and spiritual leaders

# Test – Evangelical Message Lecture

---

1. Describe the way that you would define the term evangelism before this lecture begins. Is there an evangelical message within the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament?
2. What is the meaning of the term gospel?
3. What is the Hebrew word behind the English word gospel? What does it mean?
4. What is the foundational point of the gospel contained within the Hebrew Bible?
5. What is the first passage in the Bible that “hints” at the Kingdom of God?
6. Who are the “people of the Kingdom?”
7. What is their intended role in the Kingdom?
8. How did YHVH view the request for a king like the nations?
9. What passage in Scripture does Ross call the Universal Shema?
10. Who is the best-looking, male UIWU teacher between the ages of 47-49?