



**THE HEM OF
HIS
GARMENT**

*Touching the Power
in God's Word*

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Foreword

In order to understand the statements Jesus made and the reports of events in his life, we must faithfully employ the grammatico-historical method of scriptural interpretation espoused by the ancient Antiochian School and restored by the sixteenth century church reformers. This linguistic and sociocultural hermeneutic enables us to exegete Scripture tightly within the context of the grammar and the historical and social setting in which it was written, cutting the straight line of interpretation that constitutes “rightly dividing the word of truth.”¹

The lives that Jesus and the apostles lived and the words that they spoke were manifest in the context of their contemporary Jewish culture and of their religion, Second Temple Judaism.² The language they spoke was in all probability Hebrew (or at least Western Aramaic, a sister language of Hebrew).³ Virtually everything they said and wrote was first thought in Hebrew (or Aramaic) and then translated into Greek. If we are to understand the written record of their teachings and of the events of their lives, we must, therefore, study both the *Koinè* Greek of the Apostolic Writings and the Hebrew language and Semitic thought that underlie the Greek text. We must also





have a thorough knowledge of the history, culture, and traditions of the first century Jewish people, including their political milieu, their socio-economic circumstances, and their religious practices.

Frequently, very important—even essential—elements necessary for an accurate understanding of what is recorded concerning Jesus’ life and ministry are obscured by inadequate translation and/or interpretation of the text itself. We must use as a point of initiation for any New Testament exegesis the fact that Jesus was an observant Jew and that everything he said and did was directed toward his Jewish contemporaries. He himself declared, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”⁴ The God whom he addressed as Father was YHWH, the God of Israel; the Bible that he used was the *Tanakh*,⁵ the Hebrew Scriptures; the soil which he traversed was Israel, the land of the Jews;⁶ and the people who were his family, friends, associates, and even his detractors were Jews. In order to understand the record, therefore, we must look at it through Jewish eyes, or at least we must discard our Greco-Roman and Euro-American eyeglasses and don Hebrew lenses. And, we must be sure that our lenses are positioned in the proper direction so that we are reading out of Scripture what is actually there (exegesis) rather than reading ourselves, our cultures, our philosophies, and our traditions into the record of Scripture (eisegesis).

When we engage ourselves in a search of the Apostolic Writings⁷ to discover what the authors said—and not what our presuppositions want them to say—we find a gold mine of enriching truth that transforms our lives into the image of God’s dear Son. Every event reported by the evangelists in the Gospels takes on



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new meaning, because we see the living Jesus not as some extraterrestrial cosmic Christ but as the Son of man, the Jew Jesus living out among his Jewish brethren the paradigm of what it is to be fully human. The *Memra* (*Logos* in Greek), God's eternally preexistent Word, emptied himself of inherent equality with the Father in the *kenosis* of becoming very man. When we see what the essence of God was when he made himself flesh and tabernacled among us, we understand much more about him in his absolute deity. We discover that Jesus truly put a face on the Father⁸ by manifesting himself as the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."⁹

A knowledge of the Hebrew foundations of Christian faith is vital for all believers in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. By understanding the ancient system of praise, worship, and service through which Jesus and the apostles expressed their devotion to God, we comprehend the motivations for their actions and the basis for their teachings. Christian faith acquires a new depth and meaning when it is understood in the light of the Hebrew matrix from which it emerged. Jesus and the apostles are placed in the context of their Jewish brethren and their religion, Judaism, so that the acts of Jesus and the apostles recorded in the Christian Scriptures from Matthew to Revelation maintain continuity with the acts of God recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures from Genesis to Malachi. Faith in Jesus is then elevated and expanded, given new depth and meaning, not diminished or subsumed into Judaism. The living Messiah is truly seen to be the one who elevated the faith of his heavenly Father and of his fathers according to the flesh by fulfilling it,¹⁰ reforming it,¹¹ and restoring it to its inherent ideal.¹²



This book explores just one small area of a significant event in the life of Jesus that has for two millennia inspired millions of people with faith in God. It is but one example of the profound wealth of knowledge and inspiration that is often hidden just beneath the surface of Bible translations which do not convey the details or original import of what is reported in Scripture. There are multiplied thousands of other scriptural events and concepts that yet remain to be explored as we continue to dig into the inexhaustible resources of the infinite Word.

I am deeply indebted to some of my closest colleagues and friends for insights that have formed either the basis or the spark of insight upon which many of the ideas outlined and detailed in this book are based. Among them are Dr. Karl D. Coke, president of Redirection Ministries, for his insightful teaching and his writings that have appeared in “Prayer Lessons from Jewish Culture” in *Restore!* magazine and in syllabi for The Timothy Program International; Dr. Douglas A. Wheeler, president of Mended Wings, for his provocative and challenging article, “The Law of the Fringe,” that was also published in *Restore!* magazine; Dwight A. Pryor, president of the Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, for his informative audio teaching, “The Mystery of Jesus’ Prayer Shawl”; David Bivin, editor of the *Jerusalem Perspective* for his pioneering exposition, “The Hem of His Garment,” that appeared in that journal; and Dr. Charles Bryant-Abraham for his masterful theological and linguistic suggestions and help with the manuscript; and to Judy Grehan and Sandy Clark for their careful and constructive reading of the manuscript.

I believe that as you read these pages you will be





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challenged to draw nearer to the living Jesus, to walk humbly with him in faith, and to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God.¹³ This is the immediate and lasting benefit of understanding the Jewish roots of our Christian faith: we find a foundation of historical and theological truth that anchors our confidence in God's completed work in Christ and sets us on the road to walking with him in maturity and completeness. Understanding the Hebrew foundations of Christian faith is, indeed, a golden key that unlocks the treasures of Holy Scripture.

It is my hope that as you share in this wealth of understanding you will be challenged to "search the Scriptures" to discover for yourself these and untold numbers of additional golden nuggets of truth that will enrich your life. We recognize both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings as the "God-breathed" Word of God¹⁴ when we fully realize that they are inexhaustible and that the mercies and truths of God which are contained therein are "new every morning."¹⁵

John D. Garr, Ph.D.

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¹ 2 Timothy 2:15. The Greek word for "rightly dividing" is ὀρθοτομέω (*orthotomeo*) which means to "cut a straight line."

² By the first century of the common era "Biblical Judaism" had undergone development that began with Ezra and the "Men of the Great Assembly" and continued through the Tannaim, including the schools of Hillel and Shammai. In many ways, Jesus and the apostles sought to reform Second Temple Judaism by restoring it to biblical foundations, perhaps even encouraging a return to biblical Judaism.

³ Historically, conventional scholarship has agreed that Western Aramaic was the predominant language of Judaea at the time of Jesus; however, some more recent scholars have suggested that since personal and business documents found at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew could still have been commonly understood and spoken in Judaea. Since Jesus and the apostles were focused on religious issues, they could well have taken the

tradition of synagogal liturgical use of Hebrew (translated contemporaneously into other languages) as their guide, thinking and teaching in Hebrew. This would explain the insistence of certain of the Apostolic Fathers that Matthew's Gospel was first written in Hebrew.

⁴ Matthew 15:24b.

⁵ The word *Tanakh* is actually *TaNaKh*, an acronym for *Torah* (the Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings—historical and poetic books). Jesus himself made use of this Jewish tradition of the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Luke 24:44).

⁶ Jesus did venture into Samaria (John 4:4-9) and Phoenicia (Matthew 15:21).

⁷ The term *Apostolic Writings* describes what is most commonly termed *The New Testament*. In reality, the New Testament is not a book, but a covenant introduced by Jesus in fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:33. The books of Matthew through Revelation comprise a record by the apostles (or others under their auspices) of the events that occurred under the New Testament.

⁸ John 1:18; 14:9.

⁹ Hebrews 1:3, NIV.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:17-19.

¹¹ Hebrews 9:10.

¹² Matthew 5:21-48.

¹³ Ephesians 4:12, 13.

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

¹⁵ Lamentations 3:23.

*Chapter 1*

A Healing Touch

“If I may but touch his garment, I shall be made whole!” An exclamation of angst, determination, or faith? We can’t be sure. There is no doubt, however, that this statement is the centerpiece of one of the most poignant of all Bible stories, an event that unfolds in what was probably a very ordinary day in the life of Yeshua of Nazareth. The humble, unassuming Galilean peasant had long been sought out by growing throngs of suffering people who desperately needed relief from a virtually unending list of maladies and misfortunes. His compassion for the poor, the infirm, the mentally retarded, the emotionally unstable, and the economically and politically disenfranchised had become legendary. He reached out with an empathy that few had ever seen, and he changed lives with a healing touch that had never been witnessed on planet Earth.

This lowly Nazarene had been born some thirty years earlier under most inauspicious circumstances. While a few enlightened believers understood him to be a virgin’s son, none of those among whom he grew up ever saw anything extraordinary about him.¹ Much of the general public, and certainly his detractors, considered him illegitimate, born in a stable, wrapped in



swaddling clothes. In keeping with the strong devotion to their Jewish faith, his parents had circumcised him on the eighth day, thereby initiating him into the covenant of Abraham. In compliance with the requirements of *pidyon ha-ben* (the redemption of the firstborn), they had presented him at the temple² where the astonishing words of both prophet and prophetess predicted wonderful things for his life that would have far-reaching and profound consequences for Israel and the world.³ He had been reared inconspicuously by his family in a town southwest of the Sea of Galilee whose only claim to fame was that no good thing came from Nazareth.⁴

Jesus had been precocious, to be sure, debating at the age of twelve (possibly shortly after his *bar mitzvah*) with Israel's greatest rabbis during his family's pilgrimage festival observance. But, for the most part, his life was that of an ordinary Jew, being taught in home, synagogue, and temple in Judaism's great truths. He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."⁵ He was employed in his father's business, that of a builder, soiling his hands and straining his body in the construction industry of his day. When he reached the age of thirty, he set out on an itinerant teaching ministry, announcing the imminent breaking forth of the kingdom of God.⁶

Immediately, those around Jesus recognized him to be a rabbi; this, despite the fact that it is nowhere recorded that he had been a student either of Beth Hillel or Beth Shammai, the era's two leading schools of rabbinic thought. He was unique as a teacher, however, for his hearers attested to the fact that he spoke with an authority that the other rabbis of his time did not manifest.⁷ He was a lover of the land of Israel and



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of the 'Am HaAretz (“people of the land”), or the common folk. His teaching championed honesty, integrity, and human dignity.

Jesus also possessed an amazing gift for the supernatural. Though other Hebrew holy men of that time had frequently manifested preternatural powers, when Jesus spoke, he did so with unheard-of authority so that people were healed *en masse*, demons were exorcized, even the dead were raised. Because of this, some began to think that perhaps he was Elijah returned in spirit and power to prepare the way for the Messiah. Others considered that he might be Jeremiah or another of the prophets.⁸ Since there had been no recognized prophet in Israel for some four centuries, this was a distinct honor in itself.

Then, one day as he inquired of his disciples who they considered him to be, Peter, the most outspoken of his followers, exclaimed, “You are he, the Messiah, Son of the living God.”⁹ Jesus reiterated the fact that there was nothing about his person that would identify him as such: it was a revelation of the Eternal Father. Though he had consistently referred to himself as “Son of Man,” both a term of humility (connoting a “human being”) and a Messianic title, and despite the fact that he had ascribed to himself eternal preexistence in his “I AM” statements,¹⁰ Jesus’ identity as the divinely Anointed of the Jewish people and the Savior of the world had been largely hidden from both the public and his disciples.

On this day, therefore, as he went his way, teaching and touching the lives of those who came to him, one of those who had heard of his reputation for compassion and of his power to mend broken, diseased bodies and wounded, troubled souls was a woman with



a life-threatening condition. We cannot be certain about the details of this story, but we can imagine, based on what is recorded, that her condition was grave. Frail, emaciated, anemic, she was but a shell of her former vivacious, ebullient self. Her youthful beauty had dissolved into the haggard look of weakness. Her ashen face was punctuated by the thin lips and the clenched jaw of a determination to survive. She was desperate. “If I can but touch his garment, I shall be made whole,” she said to herself.

This poor woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, probably with menorrhagia, a condition that rendered her both physically weak and psychologically depressed because her malady made her perpetually unclean according to the ceremonial laws of her people and had probably long since been cause for divorce as “unfit for cohabitation.” If she even touched other people, they contracted *tumiah* (“ritual impurity”) and would continue to communicate her “uncleanness” to others unless they immersed in a *mikveh* and waited until evening to be pronounced “clean” again. How embarrassing! In such desperation, these words of hope echoed like a chant, rising like a crescendo in her troubled mind: “If I can but touch his garment, I shall be made whole.”

Trying to find a cure for her condition, she had spent all of her resources on physicians and had only grown worse, perhaps even the victim of medical malpractice or ineptitude. Now, here she was, a poverty-stricken, emotionally-wrecked, physically-broken waif, possessing only one faint hope of deliverance from certain death: “If I can but touch his garment, I shall be made whole!” she repeated to herself.

So, defying all social convention, she mustered



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up the last reserves of her strength and pressed her way through the multitude that was thronging the Rabbi, hanging on his every word, and reacting to his every gesture. How she made her way through the crowd, no one knows, but in her heart of hearts she just knew, “If I can but touch his garment, I shall be made whole!” She didn’t need a word; she needed a touch. And, touch him she did. In one desperate lunge, she reached out her bony, near-lifeless hand and brushed against just the hem of Jesus’ garment. The fact that she touched just the hem of his garment may be an indication that she was crawling through the thronged, huddled bodies. A miracle happened: immediately her hemorrhaging stopped. She was made whole!

Jesus realized that something had occurred because of the release of power from his own person. When he inquired, “Who touched me?”, his disciples replied incredulously, “With this multitude thronging you, how can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” Then she who had been stooped, emaciated, and cowering suddenly stood tall, so tall that she could not hide herself in the crowd, and she confessed to the Rabbi what she had done. Even though he might have been rendered ceremonially unclean by the biblical society’s standards (if she had touched his flesh), Jesus affirmed this woman’s hopes, saying, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”

What a wonderful story of extraordinary and powerful emotion! Desperation and faith produced a profound miracle for a simple daughter of Israel. What a wonderful Savior, this Jesus, who had the power to heal just by being touched even when he was unaware of what had happened! “If I can but touch his gar-



ment, I shall be made whole!”—words that have inspired faith in the hearts of millions of believers in the Jesus of the Gospels.

But, there’s more to the story!

¹ See Matthew 13:54-57 and Mark 6:1-3.

² Luke 2:22-24.

³ Luke 2:32.

⁴ John 1:46.

⁵ Luke 2:52, NIV.

⁶ Matthew 11:12, the centerpiece of Jesus’ proclamation concerning the kingdom should be translated: “The kingdom of God is breaking forth [*like the walls of a sheepfold*], and passionate men press their way into it.”

⁷ Mark 1:22.

⁸ In Second Temple Judaism, the concept of *gilgul ha-nephasot* was a common view, suggesting that the spirit of one prophet could return upon someone else in another era. This concept is alluded to in Luke 1:17 in Gabriel’s annunciation to Zacharias and in Matthew 11:14 in Jesus’ evaluation of John the Baptizer. This phenomenon is likely interpreted as being the return of the spirit (or the frame of mind or line of thought) that motivated a man of God of one era upon another person in another time. It may well also have implied that God could return that measure of his Holy Spirit which distinctively motivated a prophet in one era upon another person at a subsequent time.

⁹ Matthew 16:16 (author’s translation).

¹⁰ John 8:58; 11:25; 14:6.