

Birkat Haminim - a blessing or a curse?



The "Big Synagogue" in Rishon

*My mom grew up next door.
Her mother had a regular
sit in this synagogue*

*They heard the Amidah prayer
constantly, and most likely
said Birkat Haminim over and
over again, clueless to
its true meaning*

*I took this picture recently,
on a tour our family did following
the footsteps of my mom.
You can see some of my
family members at the bottom*

The following short stanza tells of an event that changed the course of history for Messianic Judaism:

"In the days of Rabban Gamliel, the heretics in Israel were many, and they caused harm to Israel and led them astray. Seeing that... (Rabban Gamliel II) and his companions designed one benediction to be a request to God to annihilate all the heretics" (Maimonides, Mishne Torah).

What made Rabban Gamliel compose this "blessing"?

After the destruction of the temple (AD 70), a rabbinical court known as the "Sanhedrin" became the spiritual leadership of the nation. The Sanhedrin comprised of the sages of Israel, who guided the nation as much as the Roman governor stationed in Syria would allow. Rabban Gamliel II (son of the Rabban Gamliel mentioned in Acts 22:3), served as its president till the beginning of the second century.

One of the revisions they instituted was the prayer of "Amidah", also known as "Tfilat Shmone Esreh" (The Eighteen Benediction), which is still proclaimed three times a day in every synagogue throughout the world. At first the prayer included 18 clauses, designed to cover every possible need of the Jewish nation and the individual Jew. Rabban Gamliel added the clause which Maimonides mentions above (yet, the name of the prayer did not change, even after it included 19 clauses).

Back then, the faith in Yeshua spread across the nation. There were other Jewish sects during that time, but Rabban Gamliel was particularly concerned with the followers of Yeshua. He decided to act harshly against any Jew that objected the Rabbis' authority and the oral traditions (Torah SheBealPeh). To set a clear boundary between the two, he named all the others sects "Minim".

The Sanhedrin

Included 71 members. Established on 57 BC in Jerusalem. After the destruction moved to Yavne (Jamnia) and later to the Galilee

The Sanhedrin implemented various changes to the Jewish life routine, which was left desolate without the ability to bring sacrifices to God in the temple



"Min" - Type

The word "Min" in Hebrew means "types", and refers to Jews perceived by the Sanhedrin as heretics. Some say that the word Min is an abbreviation of the Hebrew words for Believer in Yeshua from Nazareth (in Hebrew: Ma'amin bYeshua haNotzri). The Sanhedrin forbade the people to trade with them or associate with them in any other way.

How would they know who is a Min and who is not?

That is exactly why they added this clause into the prayer. This clause is called "The Blessing of the Minim", but it is actually a curse.

The earliest version of this clause is found in the Cairo Genizah (old Jewish Archives found in Cairo):

"For the apostates let there be no hope. And let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the nozerim (meaning: followers of Yeshua from Nazareth) and the minim be destroyed in a moment. And let them be blotted out of the book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant".

The word "Nozerim" appears here side by side with the word "Minim", but was later removed and today no longer appears in the prayers being spoken at the synagogues. The meaning behind this "benediction", however, has not changed.

How did the "benediction" work?

In the days of Rabban Gamliel II, the believers in Yeshua still prayed in the synagogues with their fellow Jews. Those who refused to proclaim this "benediction" were hence exposed, which left them with only two options: deny Yeshua or be excommunicated from the synagogue, the surrounding community and their family.

The NT brings a few interesting hints to this "blessing"

"His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be the Messiah, he was to be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22).

"Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42).

"They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (John 16:2).



My mom at the feet of the Lampstand

She loved to hear me teach, and attended some of our workshops. I like to think that God used some of my teaching to open her eyes and reveal His Faces in the Messiah

So why am I telling you all this?

First, because it is a fascinating piece of history. The Judaism that formed during the second temple days and exists to this day is a Rabbinical Judaism, not a Biblical one. It has taken the authority out of the hands of God and placed it in the hands of men. In various ways it is hiding the Faces of the Jewish Messiah and goes as far as cursing three times a day those who believe in him.

After my mom's funeral, my sisters and I sat Shiva (the Jewish traditional seven days of mourning). We met every morning in her little apartment, which is located right next to one of my sisters' home. Four daughters were born to my parents, and all of us but one believe in Yeshua. All but the one who lives next door to my mom. People came every day to share their condolences, sat with us, brought up precious memories. We looked through hundreds of pictures from various periods in my mom's life, read her letters and pieces of her journals (she loved documenting), laughed much, shed some tears and tied many loose ends together.



Those of our family who do not believe in Yeshua chose to mourn her loss in the traditional way: read the Siddur (Jewish prayer book) and listen to a daily lesson taught by the neighborhood rabbi. A group of about 20 men met every afternoon in my mom's yard. They read the Eighteen Benediction prayer, heard a lesson from that rabbi, and then repeated the prayer once more. And so it was that at least twice a day a curse was pronounced upon those of us mourning inside.

There is more: the custom is to provide various kinds of refreshments to those praying. At the end of their prayer, they bless the various refreshments, and then the mourners are required to eat the food prayed over.

Only after they served us with this food it dawned on us that we are actually financing, feeding, and then also eating out of the hands of people that object us, curse us, and do not even realize that's what they are doing.

We hesitated whether we should say anything or not make a big deal about it, and decided to sit down with my sister and her husband and explain how we feel and see it. It was not an easy conversation by far. They insisted that we do not understand, that the real purpose and meaning of the "benediction" is different, that this is the very Word of God, that this is the way to honor our mom's memory. We took it as an opportunity to share that our mother is also included now in this definition of "min", since she chose to believe in Yeshua, and told them why we are so sure of it (this was a piece of information they were not aware of till that point).

The conversation was very emotional, but it enabled us, the believers in the family, to sow seeds of truth and the fear of the Lord in an atmosphere that was almost completely subdued by a spirit of religion.

In my previous update I tried to paint the story of my mother's life as a parallel to that of modern Israel, who cannot see and recognize her Messiah.

The story was meant to express just how well hidden He is from the sight of our people. Even the hiding in itself is concealed, as you can learn from the term "Minim".

An Orthodox Jew doesn't even understand what it means, yet repeats it three times a day. He has no idea that he is actually praying against his own flesh and blood.

When my brother in law realized what he had been doing, his eyes filled with tears.

And what is your place?

I hope this story gives you a deeper, more precise understanding of the way you can pray regarding Israel's widowhood. Widow Israel is not even aware of her widowhood.

- ❖ Pray that God would open the eyes of those who pray this prayer, and cause them to ask some questions, such as: why have the rabbis gone so far in order to hide this man from our nation?
- ❖ You can also pray that the rabbinical exegesis and the unending multitude of commandments will cause our people to actually seek God's Faces, not withdraw from Him.
- ❖ And you are most welcome to pray for the salvation of the unsaved members of my family. The list is long. Pray that God will give us boldness and opportunities.

May God hide the wisdom of the wise and expose to all the True wisdom and knowledge, Israel's Messiah!

Thank you for being a part of my personal journey.

Do you wish to stop receiving our updates? Email us at aletav@netvision.net.il and we will immediately take you off our list

Would you like to sow with us into the field of restoring the widowhood of Israel?

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