

A Little Black Book

(Zvi Kalisher's Testimony)

Following the War of Independence, Zvi left Haifa with a treasure tucked under his arm. He had picked up a copy of the Bible written in Hebrew. It would, he figured, meet two primary needs. First, he could learn the answers to some of his questions about God. Second, it would be a great tool in helping him with his mastery of Hebrew.

Back in Jerusalem, he spent many hours with his new source of information. Whenever he could persuade one of his companions to share some tent time assisting him with his reading program, he was a happy man. Soldiers had an abundance of time on their hands now, and consequently it wasn't too difficult to find a temporary tutor.

One afternoon he was puzzling his way through the Psalms when he came across a statement that brought him to attention: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path..." (Ps. 27:10-11).

"Who said this?" he asked the Sabra who had been chosen teacher for the day.

"King David.," said his young comrade. "He was the second king of our nation. It was he who came here and made Jerusalem the royal city of Israel.

"If he was a king, living in a palace, why would he say a thing like this?" Zvi wondered.

Very simple," said his instructor. "He was a king, yes, but a man with many troubles. He had great enemies from whom he was forced to flee. At one time even his son turned against him. Many of the things he wrote in the Psalms were about his times of trouble."

This David, Zvi concluded, was a man after his own heart – trouble upon trouble. Maybe he could learn something from a man who had spent time in the same boat as the maturing Jew from Poland.

Zvi's mother and father had forsaken him too. Of course, it was something over which they had no control, and he had nothing but love for and fond memories of them. Nevertheless, he had known the life of a forsaken waif, alone and surrounded by a host of enemies.

This man David said, when it had happened to him, that the Lord picked him up. Then he asked God to teach him and lead him in a plain path. It seemed astonishing to Zvi that one who lived so long ago could feel exactly as he did now. From now on, he determined, his prayer would be the same – that God would teach him and lead him in a plain path.

Zvi's tent home was something less than palatial, so he packed his belongings, folded his tent for the last time, and set out for new quarters at Talpiyot. The settlement center was located on the Bethlehem side of Jerusalem in an area that had been settled by Jews in 1924.

She came to Talpiyot after he had been there about two months. She was obviously a European – from Switzerland, he was to learn. Zvi judged by her looks that she was in her early sixties. The man carried a bag full of little black books. He was seated outside his barrack home when she came by. The two of them shared a few minutes of pleasant conversation before she reached into her bag. "I would like to give you a book," she said.

"What kind of book is it?" Zvi asked.

"This is a New Testament written in Hebrew," she answered cheerfully.

And what is a New Testament?" he queried.

"It is part of the Bible," she explained. "It will tell you about the Messiah.

He had heard references to the Messiah in his ghetto days in Europe and from religious Jews in the army. "I have heard something about the Messiah but know little beyond the name."

"Then this book will answer your questions," the woman told him earnestly. "There is only one stipulation in my giving it to you: You must promise that you will read it."

"Yes, I will be glad to read it," he promised.

"Read slowly," the woman said, "and ask the Lord to lead you to understand what you read."

Zvi accepted the little black book with words of gratitude.

When the woman was gone, he thought about what she had counseled him to do. "Ask the Lord to lead you to understand what you read." This is what he had read in the Psalm where David asked the Lord to lead him. The woman's words struck a chord in Zvi's spirit.

Zvi had read magazines in the past, and from time to time novels had fallen into his hands. He found, however, little to interest him in these volumes. The Swiss woman's little black book was another story. As the youthful searcher began to work his way through its pages, he found that it breathed with a vibrancy he had never encountered in a book before. Many of the quotations and references were somewhat familiar to him from what he had read in the Hebrew Bible he had picked up in Haifa. This book spoke about many places in Israel that were known to him. The stories and lessons of the Gospels began to give him answers to some of his questions, and his reading gave rise to a great many more questions.

Before long, his hunger for the content of his most precious possession began to approximate the drive he had long felt to know God. Zvi had no explanation for the way he felt. Yet he was intensely aware that this book drew him to it like a magnet. After awhile, he began to leave the busy and distracting atmosphere of the crowded camp to seek out the quiet parks of Jerusalem. There he would sit for hours, glued to the book.

Central in his thoughts was Jesus. The woman had told him this book would speak to him about the Messiah. It didn't take long for him to recognize whom his little book identified as that distinguished personage. Jesus of Nazareth intrigued him. He was thoroughly captivated by the unfolding of the Carpenter's life on the pages before him.

Above everything, he was impressed with the troubles Jesus encountered. This man did nothing but good, yet some men hated and opposed Him. Later they succeeded in nailing Him to a cross. He found it difficult to comprehend why this would happen. When he considered it carefully, he thought about how his own people - and he himself - had suffered without a reason.

One day, a friend discovered what he was reading and said, "That is not a book for Jews. It is just fairy tales and bluffs made up by Christians."

Zvi was puzzled. "I have read this book for many days now, and I admit that there is much about it I do not understand, but I have not read anything that has done me harm or caused me to want to become a bad person. I have read only good things in this book."

Wherever he went and whatever he was doing, his little black book was with him. He was afraid to leave it behind in his room for fear someone would take it. Whenever he had a few minutes, he could be found off to himself carefully perusing the open pages before him. Without a hand to guide him or a human voice to counsel him, he stayed close to the book that he somehow knew held the answers to his longings.

It was a sunny Wednesday evening. As Zvi returned to Talpiyot from his day's work in Jerusalem, he passed a small building. He could hear the sound of people lifting hearty voices in song. The words that came to his ears were from a hymn telling of the person about whom he had been reading - Jesus. Although it was not obvious from the external appearance of the building, he knew it must be a meeting of believers in Christ as Messiah.

For the next few evenings, he arranged his routine so he would be in that vicinity at the same time. He saw no life around the place until Sunday night, when once again he saw people filing into the building.

Dare I enter?" he asked himself.

The following Wednesday evening, he did. There was singing, prayer, Bible reading, and the pastor spoke at length about verses that told of Jesus' prayer for His disciples and His love and concern for His people.

He returned the next Sunday, and the message was different. The pastor spoke of Jesus as the Sinbearer, the one who came as a substitute and took the sins of people on Himself, making it possible for men and women to be saved from their sins. "People," he said, "must turn from their sins and accept what the Messiah has done for them. We must be delivered from our sins by the sacrifice provided by the Messiah, Jesus.

The talk squared with the general concept Zvi had formed in his mind regarding the Messiah. For sometime to come, he came faithfully to the services.

But one Wednesday night Zvi left the service feeling depressed. He couldn't understand what was happening to him. Then, slowly, it came to him. He needed to do something about what he had heard and read - Zvi needed to be saved from his sin. That was it! That was what had made him feel so miserable. For awhile now, he had heard about the Messiah - words that agreed perfectly with what he had read in the Bible - but he had not done anything about it.

The next Wednesday night, he asked to speak with the pastor after the service. Following a long discussion, Zvi said, "It comes down to this: I want you to explain to me what I have to do to be saved."

The pastor was more than happy to answer all of his questions about Jesus, his own sin, and his need for a Savior. Then he asked, "Do you believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and are you willing to accept Him as your Savior and Lord?"

"Yes! Yes! Without any question," said Zvi, "I am convinced that He is the Messiah and my Savior."

The two men prayed together, and the simple transaction was completed - simple, yet profound beyond anything that can be computed or communicated through human phraseology. Zvi, survivor of the Holocaust, had experienced the new birth. Since boyhood, he had longed for and sought after a new beginning - now he had found it. He was a new creation in Jesus the Messiah.

-Excerpts from the book ZVI
by Elwood McQuaid