Israelites are Salt of the Earth

Summary

"Salt of the earth" is one of Yah'shua's most familiar phrases — and one of His least understood. This article works through everything salt meant in the ancient world to recover the full weight of what He was really asking of His followers.

- Salt's ancient rarity, value, and role in covenant-making ("covenants of salt").
- Salt's purity and resistance to corruption as a picture of incorruptibility.
- Salt's use as flavoring and preservative — positive influence and hospitality.
- A closing case for inward rather than outward beauty (citing Jezebel and 1 Peter 3), explicitly not a condemnation of ordinary grooming or cosmetics.

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In His Sermon on the Mount, Yah'shua took His closest disciples to a secluded place where He personally taught them the way of life that leads to true happiness.

In the course of His teaching, Yah'shua told the disciples - and us today: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown down and trampled under foot by men" (Matthew 5:13). What did Yah'shua mean, and how can salt teach us about the qualities of an Israelite?

Salt occurs commonly in nature. Various industries put salt to about 14,000 different uses. Only about 3 percent of the world's salt production is currently used in the home. Think of the small amount of salt used to season a meal - just a dash, a few grains makes a big difference.

In Yah'shua' day salt was not as readily available as it is now. It was once so valuable that it was used to pay the wages of Roman soldiers. We get the English word "salary" from this ancient practice of paying with salt. Salt was used as payment for buying and selling of Greek slaves. Sometimes today, people still ask whether someone is "worth his salt".

The disciples would have understood the value and rarity of salt. One meaning Yah'shua was illustrating was the rarity of committed Israelites. The people of Yahweh, in whom the Spirit of Yahweh resides *(Romans 8:9)*, are sprinkled across the earth like you would sprinkle salt across food - sparingly. But what a difference they make!

Salt, besides being used sparingly, is pure. Germs or bacteria cannot live in it. The spiritual analogy should be clear - Israelites must be pure - free of sin - impurities. According to Leviticus 2:13, salt was to be a part of all grain offerings. The salt was needed to symbolize the purity of the sacrifice. Israelites under the New Priesthood, are to present themselves to Yahweh as living sacrifices *(Romans 12:1)*. We, as the "salt of the earth", are to be pure.

If we are pure, the work we do must be right *(Proverbs 21:8)*; our hearts must be pure *(1 Timothy 1:5)*; as should our conscience *(1 Timothy 3:9)*; our thoughts *(Philippians 4:8)* and our religion *(James 1:27)*. To be spiritually pure means to be unadulterated with the wrong ways of this world - with false religions, false philosophies, dishonest ways, selfish desires and vain thoughts.

Our most common contact with salt is as a condiment for our food. We know how salt, when used properly, can add taste, and thereby pleasure to a meal. The patriarch Job said: "Can flavourless food be

eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" *(Job 6:6)*.

Salt then is symbolic as a spice or flavouring. Israelite living should add flavour and spice to our own, as well as to other people's lives. Just as salt adds a wonderful dimension to food, the Israelite life should be filled with interest, zip, hope and excitement. Joy is, after all, one of the fruits of His Holy Spirit *(Galatians 5:22)*.

It should be a joyful pleasure for others to be around Israelites. Yahweh's joy should be flowing through us to those around us. We, as the "salt of the earth", should be positive, turned-on people, helping to give zest to the lives of others through the power of His Holy Spirit.

As Israelites, we are to set a good example for the world around us. Just as salt produces physical thirst, our lifestyle should produce a spiritual thirst in those around us. People are to "see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" *(Matthew 5:16).* By our example, we create a positive impression of Yahweh's way of life.

As an essential ingredient of diet, salt has historically symbolized hospitality and friendship. Israelites, as "the salt of the earth", should be the world's most hospitable people, spreading friendship everywhere. In ancient times, many friendships were sealed under a "covenant of salt", as were all important contracts and treaties. The Old Covenant uses this phrase several times, such as in 2 Chronicles 13:5, describing the "covenant of salt" as an unbreakable alliance between friends.

In the same sentence in which Yah'shua instructed the disciples that they were to be "the salt of the earth", He warned them that they should not lose their flavour *(Matthew 5:13).* Salt without flavour is indeed good for little. But how does salt lose its flavour?

Salt is an enduring mineral. The deposits in salt mines are thousands of years old, yet the salt is flavourful. Even refined salt can be stored for endless periods without it losing any flavour. It may grow hard and lumpy, but it cannot spoil or lose its flavour.

Dissolved in water, salt disappears, but its quality remains. Taste the water and the salt is still there. Likewise, evaporate the water, at any rate of speed, and all of the salt is still there. Even when returned to normal temperatures after heating to 801 degrees Celsius, the temperature at which salt melts, it still retains its particular chemical composition and flavour. Pure salt is literally indestructible, just as Yahweh's Word endures forever!

Only when salt is contaminated with some foreign substance, can the flavour of salt be compromised or destroyed. Can you see the implications for Israelites? Yah'shua said that though we must be in the world, we are not to be of the world *(John 17:15-16)*.

Like salt, we can easily become contaminated, or "adulterated" by outside influences, and lose our spiritual "flavour". Choked by the "cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other

things entering in" *(Mark 4:19)*, Israelites can become unfruitful. The effectiveness of Yahweh's Word, when adulterated by the contaminated doctrines of false traditional Christianity, can easily be obstructed. Faithful Israelites must not allow themselves to be contaminated by this world. We are the "salt of the earth", and must not lose our effectiveness; our "flavour".

As true Israelites, as "the salt of the earth", Yahweh has sanctified us - set us apart for His holy use and purpose. We, Yahweh's Elect, are living temples in whom the Spirit of Yahweh resides *(Romans 8:9)*. We become "Holy" upon acceptance of Yahweh's Spirit.

"Do you not know that you are the temple of Yahweh and that the Spirit of Yahweh dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of Yahweh, Yahweh will destroy him. For the temple of Yahweh is Holy, which temple you are" *(1 Cor. 3:16,17)*.

As Yahweh's Elect - as Yahweh's Holy temples, we must take care not to defile, that is, profane that which is Holy to Yahweh. In this context, Yah'shua's teaching us on how to be the "salt of the earth", is perhaps the most fascinating of His parables. Just as salt, in its simple, unadulterated, natural form, is useful as a preservative and for flavour, so it is symbolic of our physical bodies; in their simple, unadulterated, natural form, being useful as living temples - the "salt of the earth", to preserve the Word of Yahweh and to use it to add flavour to the lives of those around us.

Yahweh makes it perfectly clear in His Word, that only Yahweh can make anything Holy. Yahweh also takes care to warn us many times, not to profane or defile that which is Holy to Yahweh. Even things as basic as a stone altar, are important to Yahweh in this context. "And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it *[Yahweh's stone]*, you have profaned it" *(Exodus 20:25)*. In other words, Yahweh is saying that what He has designed and created, is to be left in its most natural and unadulterated state. Man can do nothing to improve what Yahweh has designed and created.

As the "salt of the earth", this applies to our bodies - Yahweh's Holy temples as well. Many passages in the Bible speak of things related to maintaining the body in good health, through common sense, eating the right things and moderate exercise. But there are also many warnings in the Bible about physical vanity and self-esteem.

When speaking His warning of destruction to the vain people of our time, Jeremiah was inspired by Yahweh to write: "The whole land shall be desolate;...every city shall be forsaken, and not a man shall dwell in it...and...what will you do?...Though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life" *(Jer.4:27-30).*

In 2 Kings 9:22, a vain woman named Jezebel is described as a harlot who practiced witchcraft. Later, in verse 30, we are told: "Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head..." A few verses later *(32-34),* we are told how she was thrown out of a window to a bloody death and trampled under foot by horses to the point where there was nothing left to bury!

When the apostle Peter wrote his first letter to the Israelites in Asia Minor, he was inspired by Yahweh to instruct the husbands and wives on proper behaviour. He said to the women: "Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of Yahweh" *(3:3,4)*.

Yahweh naturally expects us to maintain proper decorum with respect to dress and personal hygiene, that is not the point of these verses. The point is that we are not to be overly, or vainly concerned with our outward "appearance", but rather, we are to look within ourselves, for the "substance" that leads to a healthy level of self-esteem.

Yahweh is in effect, saying that if His Spirit is dwelling within us, that we are indeed being perfected from the inside out - His Spirit within us is much more precious than any outward appearance.

Just as table salt, maintains an effective flavour in spite of its being pure, simple and undefiled in appearance, so we are simply meant, as "the salt of the earth", to maintain our physical bodies; our Holy, living temples, as pure, simple and undefiled in appearance, in order that the precious beauty of His Spirit within, will shine on those around us.

This is NOT to be construed as a lesson condemning the use of makeup or cosmetics. On the contrary, the Bible, in fact gives many examples of proper use of fragrant oils and even directs us to wash and anoint ourselves with fragrant oils so that we do not "appear to men to be fasting" as the hypocrites do *(Matt. 6:17)*.

The purpose of these verses as they relate to vanity inherent in humans, is to teach humility. They are to be our guide to the better source of self-esteem - to His Spirit within us. They caution us to beware of the subtle but ever-present temptations we face as humans - of being vainly ensnared by the superficial trappings of this world.

Yah'shua' parable of "the salt of the earth", is perhaps, the most complex of His many simple and profound statements made to His disciples. Retrospectively, it may seem simple and obvious. But the overwhelming significance of the messages within the message is evident.

We are THE SALT OF THE EARTH. We are sparingly present in this world - to make a difference! We are pure - washed from our impurities, our sins, by the blood of Yah'shua *(1 John 1:7-9)*. We are living temples - Holy to Yahweh - unadulterated, uncontaminated by the world. We are examples of the Truth to be seen by all, adding spice to the lives of everyone. Our examples are to produce a spiritual thirst in others. We are to preserve the Word of Yahweh. And we are to do this in a spirit of humility for the glory of Yahweh.

We have been granted the privilege of considering both Yahweh our Father, and the Messiah as our friends. Our commitments to Yahweh our Father and to accepting Yah'shua the Messiah as our Saviour, are as

"covenants of salt" - unbreakable between friends!

Yahweh demonstrated His compassion when He sacrificed His only begotten Son; that through Him, we might be saved. Yah'shua also proved to be quite a friend - "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" *(John 15:13)*!

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