

Unprofitable Disputes

Letters from the MIA Shepherd's Council

By John Conrad

If any proclamation defines the Messianic Israel movement, it is Malachi declaring, "Remember the [Torah] of Moses My servant, *even the* statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for **all** Israel." (Malachi 4:4) When the early church distanced themselves from Torah, they were effectively cut off from Israel. Now the Elijah cry to return to the Torah of Moses awakens the souls of slumbering Israelites and points them homeward. Likewise, the revelation that Yeshua is "Torah in the flesh" renders Torah both priceless and irreplaceable.

Awhile back, I met a couple who attended a Messianic synagogue for several years but quit going. When I asked "why?" they didn't want to say. I persevered and discovered that contentions over Torah drove them away. Liturgy, proper Feast celebration, how to wear tzitzit, dates of the Appointed Times, how to pronounce the names of deity--all furnished endless fodder for controversy. They desired to be faithful to Torah but could no longer face the non-stop wrangling.

Their experience brings to mind Titus 3:9 "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law [Torah], for they are unprofitable and worthless." Without the Ruach, Torah is easy to mishandle. In Matthew 23:4 Yeshua indicts Torah teachers of his day: "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger." Many commentators misconstrue this passage as an attack against Torah. But any student of scripture immediately recognizes Yeshua would never permit attacks against Torah. Instead, he scolds the scribes because "you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition." Matthew 15:6

The issue before us then is how do we correctly interpret Torah? Our forefathers in Israel and the church threw off the yoke of Torah because they believed it burdensome. Yeshua encourages us to "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30) For Ephraimites returning to Torah, too often we encounter the spirit of Rehoboam. "Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." (1 Kings 12:11) Our first reaction to this resembles Jeroboam's response, "What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse." (1 Kings 12:16)

To choose Torah is to choose life! Yeshua is the goal of Torah and the fulfillment of Torah is love. Yeshua established that the weighty matters of Torah are "justice, mercy and faithfulness." (Matthew 23:23) Torah on the outside will not and does not save us. It is Torah hidden in the heart, written there by the Ruach, and humbly implanted in the depths of our soul which saves us.

Detail is important but it must not be allowed to camouflage true meaning. One classic example of this quibbling concerns the command in Exodus 23:13 "Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let *them* be heard from your mouth." Knowing the Hebraic origins of our creator's assigned name helps us in our study of Torah. But it is crucial to understand that a name is more than letters and syllables.

The promise is that "whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." (John 15:15) In our fervor to be Torah observant, this commandment and others like it have been twisted to put

emphasis on pronunciation of the name and not on the relationship with the Father. If I go to Spain and speak in President Bush's name, Spaniards won't check my pronunciation; they will check my relationship with the President to find out if he has empowered me to be his ambassador. When the seven sons of Sceva attempted to exorcise the evil spirit from a man in the name of Yeshua, the demon scoffed, "I recognize Yeshua, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15) The demonized man beat the seven men and drove them away naked. These were sons of the Jewish high priest, Sceva. I suspect they knew how to pronounce the name. What went wrong?

I attended the Promise Keepers' Clergy Conference in Atlanta in 1996. Max Lucado asked the 40,000 pastors present to shout out the name of their denomination or fellowship. Predictably, bedlam and chaos erupted. Next, he asked all of us to proclaim the name we were depending upon for our salvation. All 40,000 men stood and shouted "Jesus!" Electricity crackled through the air. We all knew exactly who we were talking about-the only begotten son of the Father, born of a virgin, from the kingly line of David, who destroyed the works of the devil and satisfied the demands of Torah by his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. If this question were asked at a Messianic event, the response would be pandemonium. Some would say "Yeshua," others "Yehoshua," still others "Yahshua," some "Yehushua," and on and on.

The search for his real name is commendable. However, the teaching that "Jesus" is a pagan god whose name derives from the Greek god "Zeus" is simply pathetic. Likewise, we are told that "God" and "Lord" have pagan origins so speaking these words breaks the commandment in Exodus 23 because we have spoken the names of pagan deities. This kind of instruction reduces the name of YHWH to mere vowels and consonants.

Etymologically these assertions are silly. "God" in English is the synonym for "Elohim" in Hebrew. "Lord" in English is the companion word for "Adonai" in Hebrew. Learning to use the Hebrew names is helpful in recovering our Hebrew roots. YHWH was not telling us to never voice syllables which might describe pagan deities. He was admonishing us to refrain from speaking their names in worship. How many times does YHWH himself speak the names of Baal, Asherah, Molech? Elijah, the great prophet who represents the voice calling us to return to Torah, uses the names of Baal and Asherah in 1 Kings 18. Is he a Torah breaker? Of course not. It is not the words themselves that matter but why and how they are spoken. When we place this over-reliance on the right word or name we enter the world of soothsayers, sorcerers, and magicians. There it matters how the spell is spoken. With YHWH the relationship with the Father determines the outcome.

We are blessed by scholars who have researched the Hebrew names of deity and shown us what we have lost by our march into the nations. Many of them have told me how they believe these names should be spoken, which they do in their personal lives. They do not, however, break fellowship with other believers who don't see it their way. As Israel regathers we must refrain from placing an unbearable yoke upon returning Israelites. The search for true doctrine comes from the Father. However, it must be viewed through the prism of "Shema Yisrael: YHWH Eloheinu, YHWH Echad! Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and might." To which Yeshua added "Love your neighbor as yourself." May the Torah we obey and teach bring joy and deliverance to all Israel.