

A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

By Rav. David Pollina

This last Chodesh, March 2005 by the Gregorian calendar, and the dispute over whether it is the Chodesh ha'Abib, the first Chodesh of the biblical year, has served to highlight a critical issue facing us as believers today - AUTHORITY. Who is an authority within the body, according to Torah, and to whom must Messianic believers answer for halacic practice?

There are many well intentioned brethren who look on the traditional Sanhedrin system as being authority for all Yisrael - ordained by Yahweh. This system was interrupted in the fourth century, and most sects of Judaism today still look to the rulings and decisions made by this body in forming their halacah - their guidelines for practicing Torah in everyday life. The basis of all such halacah is the Mishnah and the various discussions of the sages, and to some degree, the revisions made later by Maimonides (12th century), Karo (16th century), and Danzig (19th century), or others.

In looking at this ancient body of discussion, what is often missed is that it is not all in agreement. Different Rabbis expressed their own interpretations, and if a ruling is made, generally many sides of the case are still recorded. To compare this process to a modern equivalent would be what in the legal profession we call "case-law" - decisions made by courts interpreting various statutes in particular situations. Civil and criminal courts look first to statute law, and then to 'case-law' in rendering decisions.

The effect of this system can be good - a court has the benefit of seeing how similar situations have been dealt with in the past. BUT, it can also be very dangerous - a court can begin to make the laws which is not its job. This situation has become very prevalent in the American judicial system in particular.

The implications of this issue to the Messianic community are more serious than many people yet realise. A time is coming where the decision about authority may very well affect your physical life or losing it. More importantly, and right now, the decision you make about authority can affect your salvation, and it has for many. This is a serious issue and at the same time a very poorly understood one.

Right now, there is a new Sanhedrin which has formed in Yerushalaim. This has been attempted before, without success, but the political conditions at present represent a unique window of opportunity for this body to establish its legitimacy. I refer of course to the pending "disengagement" plan of the Sharon government, which is nothing more than an anti-Torah uprooting, and which the new Sanhedrin is strongly opposing. Any confrontation between the government and the council will only serve to rally the citizenry and give more credence to this new Sanhedrin. Once they are firmly established, the drive will focus on building the third Temple.

I have discussed over the last few years with many other Messianic leaders, what I view as the meaning of Yeshayahu/Isaiah 11:13 - the "Jealousy of Ephraim". The Hebrew here uses QANA/QINAH, a base emotion of desire, jealousy, which can be channelled positively or negatively, but in this case the negative is in view. Ephraim returns to Yisrael today usually from a pagan church system full of false teachings, and become enamoured over the traditions of Judah. Without realising it, many then begin to adopt and accept those traditions with the same blind acceptance they had once embraced christianity in. This is dangerous.

Now here is where I often get accused of "throwing out what Judah brings", or where verses showing how Judah was "entrusted with the oracles" start to fly. But this has nothing to do with anything BUT Torah, and following Y'shua. EVERY tradition and teaching needs to be held to the same light - HIS light. Those from Judah do not get a free pass!

These kinds of attitudes all stem from Ephraim wanting what Judah has - including an organisational structure. What is often forgotten is to go back to Torah and let Yahweh tell us directly what HE wants, how HE wants us to structure our lives. Yes, we listen to the sages and Rabbis, but we are Bereans, and hold their teachings to the SAME kind of scrutiny we would subject those of anyone to. It's about equal measures. Start with Torah and Y'shua.

So what does Torah have to say about how we are to conduct corporate governance? Zilch. Oh, don't worry, this is not something Yahweh simply forgot to put in there, bear with me as we take a jaunt through history...

The Hebrew people, like most paleo-tribal societies, were patrilineal and elder governed. This means that political governance rested with the eldest males, the ZAQANIM, literally "those with beards". It is no shock

that this model was prevalent through almost all ancient societies, for it was part of Yahweh's judgment against the woman:

"You will stretch out to your husband and he will rule over you"

- Bereshit/Genesis 3:16b

The judgment that the man would MASHAL (4910) over his wife was against her original purpose to be his partner, and mirrored the enmity between the Seed and the serpent, breaking the harmony of creation. Instead of completing him, she would now compete with him. And so men dominated society. Throughout the Tanakh, we see this pattern of eldership in a patriarchal society. Women were second-class citizens, and often considered property. Yisrael had Zaqanim in place, even in Egypt, and Yahweh sent Moshe to speak to THEM on His behalf (Shemot/Exodus 3:16, 18, 4:29, 12:21).

The question to consider is whether or not this system is Yahweh's ideal, or was it simply cultural and allowed by Him? Other than the CURSE in Bereshit, we have no direct evidence that Yahweh instituted this system, and given that it was a curse, we can safely assume that it is not His ideal! (and all the ladies said awmain).

Yahweh actually worked WITHIN the culturally existing human political system however, in supporting the authority He DID directly commission Moshe with. When the Yisraelites grumbled, Yahweh told Moshe to strike a rock for water - in the presence of the elders, the Zaqanim (Shemot/Exodus 17:5-6). It is important to understand the cultural implications of WHY this was done. In ancient cultures, the civil judicial system revolved around the elders. If one person was to enter into a contract with another, they would go to 10 or 12 elders and make their transaction in front of them as witnesses, sealing the deal with the exchange of a shoe or other token object. The object and the witnesses were the proof of the deal, and could be called to testify in any later dispute.

So here we see Moshe's authority being questioned, and Yahweh entering into the same kind of legality to prove the authority given Moshe in plain view of the Zaqanim. This scene would again be repeated on Mt. Sinai as seventy of the Zaqanim were privileged to see Yahweh (Shemot/Exodus 24).

In the Gospels, we see Y'shua picking twelve of His many disciples and naming them 'apostles' (Luqa/Luke 6:13). The purpose of this was simple - "you will be my witnesses" (Yukhanan/John 5:27). When Judas betrayed

Y'shua and then took his own life, the apostles had to choose a new 12th apostle to fulfil this legal duty (Acts 1:20-22). It had to be someone who was an eyewitness from the very beginning, and at this gathering of 120, only 2 qualified. Again we see Yahweh working within a culturally established system of political and legal governance.

An interesting lesson to learn from this is that NOT ALL authority is directly ordained by Yahweh - MOST of it is man-made and under a fallen, cursed natural order. MOST authority is man-made, yet Yahweh will still work within the systems man establishes. We can NOT necessarily infer that any existent system of authority is His ideal nor that it is ordained.

When He took Yisrael out of Egypt, He also took DIRECT authority over Yisrael Himself. He appointed a prophet, Moshe, through which He would communicate with the nation, and He gave Torah as a set of guidelines for living. Initially, Moshe was prophet AND judge, a task which wearied him, quite understandably! Because of this, and at the suggestion of Jethro, he selected a large number of men to be judges over Yisrael (Shemot/Exodus 18). Note that this was NOT at the direction of Yahweh, but at the council of Jethro, yet Yahweh allowed it and worked within the system Moshe had set up.

Yet, now we come to a different time, where Yahweh HIMSELF ordained a shared authority - Bamnibar/Numbers 11.

"And Yahweh said to Moshe: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Yisrael, whom you know to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. And I will come down and speak with you there; and I will take of the spirit which is on you, and will put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you bear it not yourself alone.'

Bamnibar/Numbers 11:16-17

The men selected were selected by Moshe. The anointing and sanctioning was by Yahweh, and the evidence of that anointing was the giving of the Ruach haKodesh accompanied with the sign of prophesying (vs. 25). Without going into a lengthy explanation of the word NABA (5012) in the form YITNABU - "they prophesied", I believe that such is the manifestation of tongues, but the point is that there was a divine sign gifting accompanying their ordination. It is also interesting to note that the end of this verse tells us "they did not do so again" (JPS), where the KJV errantly has "without ceasing". This was a one-time sign gift, not a continuing occurrence of tongues.

It is at this point in our study of history that we note the number seventy, for it is to this group of seventy that the later Sanhedrin would claim succession. In fact, the Mishnah specifies a similar pattern for forming a Sanhedrin after it has been dissolved, by first appointing a single person (like Moshe) who then appoints the seventy.

Yet, it is undeniable that NOWHERE in Torah did Yahweh command that there would be a council of seventy to govern Yisrael for all ages, or that this was to be instructive in form for us at all. To the contrary, it was always HIM in charge and Moshe and the council hearing from Him. This is the last time in Tanakh where we see a council of seventy.

When the people became jealous of the other nations and wanted to be governed like them, Yahweh allowed them to appoint themselves a king, which was really a rejection of Him (Sh'muel/Samuel 8:7). Samuel warned them that this system would lead to trouble, but they would not listen, so Yahweh allowed them to institute the system they wanted - BUT - HE selected the king! This system remained in place for the united nation Yisrael, and then split in two, finally ending as each house went into dispersal or captivity.

During the monarchy, it was the KING who selected elders, not Yahweh. There is absolutely NO truth to an unbroken line of Sanhedrin succession from the wilderness any more than there is truth to Peter being the first 'pope' of the catholic church!

So who was this group that was in power at the time of Y'shua, claiming they were the successors in Divinely ordained authority? Simply put, they were a politically opportunistic and corrupt organisation of man-made authority. Yes, they arbitrated disputes, declared the calendar, and performed other such functions, but there is no proof that they were anointed by Yahweh, and in fact, they rejected and crucified Him, which IF they HAD HAD the Ruach they would not have done.

But yet, few know that there WAS a group of seventy at that time which WERE anointed with power and authority - they were disciples of Y'shua! Luqa/Luke 10 tells us how Y'shua ANADIKNUMI (322) seventy disciples to go ahead of Him. The Greek here is actually a conjunction that means "to show visibly from among", in the Aramaic P'RASH, "an appointment by separating out". I bring up both words here to show how the concepts they relate are tied together - it is a VISIBLE sign which distinguishes those separated out with divine authority. In this case, the seventy disciples went out and had authority even over demons (vs. 17), and to heal (vs. 9). I find it remarkable, that while seventy man-appointed elders prepared to sit in judgment over Moshiach, seventy other faithful

followers were the ones appointed with REAL authority, attested to by signs and wonders.

Here is where many get confused - by not properly distinguishing between Yahweh-ordained authority and man-made authority. The Sanhedrin were a man-made authority, and while we are to respect man-made authority, we are NOT to do so at the expense of obeying Yahweh. It is not automatically obeying Yahweh to obey set authority. Peter and John ran into this conflict in Acts 4:19 where they responded "Whether it is right before Elohim to obey YOU rather than Elohim, you decide". When they continued to preach the Gospel, the High Priest had the apostles arrested (Acts 5:18), and before he could get them to trial in front of the Sanhedrin, an angel took them out of jail and told them to go back to the Temple and preach. When the Sanhedrin realised this, they brought the apostles before the council, and notice what Peter said:

"Towards Elohim it is proper to be persuaded more than towards men. The Elohim of our forefathers raised Y'shua who you killed when you hung Him on the tree. He, this one, has Elohim established as a prince and a saviour and He has exalted Him by His right hand so that he might give repentance of forgiveness of sins to Yisrael. And WE are witnesses of these words, and the Ruach haKodesh, who Elohim gives to those who believe in Him."

Acts 5:29-32 (from the Aramaic)

The reason that the Sanhedrin then sought to kill them is quite plain - the apostles stated that there was NO AUTHORITY remaining with the Sanhedrin, but that ALL authority had been transferred to Y'shua and to them as His witnesses! This was a direct extension of what Y'shua said:

"All authority in heaven AND ON EARTH is given to ME"

- Mattai/Matthew 28:18

And He goes on to COMMISSION them, and by extension, us, with the Great Commission.

There can be NO valid Sanhedrin until the return of the "Prophet like Moshe", Moshiach Y'shua to select them. Until that time, we are all brothers and fellow labourers, and are instructed not to 'lord over' each other, but to listen to Torah. This is the true meaning of Y'shua's discourse in Mattai/Matthew 23:1-12, Marqus/Mark 10:42-45, and Luqa/Luke 22:24-30. These are three SEPARATE times when Y'shua

specifically instructed His disciples NOT to exercise authority over each other like the Sanhedrin of the Jews OR the rulers of the Gentiles.

They didn't really get it, for even after the first two instructions, when they came to the last supper (Luqa/Luke), they were STILL arguing over who was going to be in charge! Y'shua, after for the third time rebuking their desire for authority over each other, tells them that they WILL sit on twelve thrones and judge all Yisrael (Luqa/Luke 22:30).

One of the most often mis-applied sections of the New Testament is Mattai/Matthew 18:18, the "binding and loosing". This is often combined with the "keys of heaven" given Peter in 16:19 along with the same authority to bind and loose, to mean that the 'leadership' of X group has continuing 'apostolic authority' or can make halacah decisions for the group which are then backed up by the power and authority of Elohim. This view is as deceitful and self-promoting as the pit of human depravity from which it springs!

Right off in Mattai/Matthew 18:1, the context is set with the disciples seeking to know who will be the greatest. Y'shua sees right through the thinly veiled religiosity with which they bring the question, and shows them that they all must be humble as a little child. Then in verses 15-17, He gives us guidelines for dealing with offences AGAINST US - and note this very well - this is for PERSONAL offence, not for creating doctrinal disputes - speaking privately, then taking two or three witnesses, and finally bringing it to the BODY. No, there is a mistype there, He meant bringing it to the Rabbi and the Deacons/Elders, right? Y'shua is explicit that in any gathering of two or three, HE is there with us, and thus the authority to render judicial decisions rests with the WHOLE BODY! Binding and loosing is a BODY authority, NOT a leadership authority!!

All it takes to render a judicial determination in Yisrael as to any offence against EACH OTHER is a gathering of two or three believers. The 'court of appeal' is the entire local assembly. NOWHERE is any believer given the right to bind or loose as to affect or change Torah. Thus halacah, or guidelines for walking in Torah, can be given as guidance, but such is NEVER binding, and the ultimate responsibility for how one walks rests with the individual and the judgment of Yahweh.

So we see a pattern clearly emerging from the Bible:

- Yahweh is the ultimate authority in the universe.
- Sometimes He allows authority among men to arise as men wish.

- Other times He directly appoints authority, ALWAYS accompanied by signs of attestation.
- All authority rests with Y'shua.
- He has delegated that which is necessary to His disciples.
- The apostles will be the twelve judges of Yisrael in the Kingdom.
- But EVEN they were not to exercise earthly lordship over others, much less were we to do so.

It is abundantly clear then that the Sanhedrin of old had NO Yahweh-given authority. The Sanhedrin of Hillel II likewise had NO Yahweh-given authority. The Sanhedrin forming now has NO Yahweh-given authority.

Many Messianics, in their zeal fall into the trap of Ephraim's jealousy and want to be a part of Judaism. They do not correctly distinguish between respect for man-made authority and allegiance to Yahweh-designated authority. They place themselves in bondage, under the authority of those who deny Moshiach, in a mis-placed hope that they will be saved through such. This is NOT how the apostles conducted themselves, they did not submit to the Sanhedrin, rather they chose to obey Yahweh rather than men.

There is grave danger to salvation in following this trend. If one places as authority over oneself those who do not accept Moshiach, it is only a matter of time before that belief is adopted. There was a study a couple years ago which found that the Messianic movement has seen 30,000 Jews accept Y'shua as Moshiach, but 200,000 Christians convert to Judaism and deny Him!! If THAT does not raise the alert condition, and it has not done so, I really don't know what will!

Mishpocah, WE ARE NOT JEWS, WE ARE MESSIANIC YISRAEL! I LOVE my brothers from Judah, I love the nation of Israel, but until we are willing to face the facts that the nation of Israel and the Yisrael of Yahweh overlap but are NOT the same thing, we will be ineffective. Until we are willing to admit that a Jew following Torah but consciously denying Y'shua is EQUALLY as lost as a pagan, and CUT-OFF from Yisrael, we will not reach them with the truth. ALL genetic descendants of Ya'acob, from all twelve tribes, along with Gentiles who join in, share the PROMISE equally, and need Moshiach equally. Taking ANY other position on this makes Y'shua out to be a liar when He said repeatedly that HE is the ONLY way to the Father, the DOOR, that NO MAN comes except through HIM! He didn't

say that Judah can come through Torah alone, rather that IF THEY UNDERSTOOD TORAH THEY WOULD RECOGNISE HIM.

We need to be about the business of following Torah and by our example pointing Judah to Y'shua.

If we seek to place ourselves under the authority of a non-believing Sanhedrin, or any system which denies Moshiach, we are unequally yoking ourselves with non-believers. We are to be a light, not under a bushel of darkness. Our TRUE authority is Y'shua Himself who has revealed Himself to us through Torah and given us the Mitsvot to follow. Read, study, learn, discuss, be accountable to each other, these are things we must do, but having any man-made authority structure which is not DIRECTLY ordained by Him is asking for trouble and invariably will wind up there. All of us who lead congregations and ministries must be ever mindful that WE are NOT in charge, we are the servants of all whose job is NOT to tell others what to do, but to teach from Scripture alone and make DISCIPLES as followers of Y'shua, not clones of ourselves.

Shalom w'Baraka,

(Peace & Bless You)



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