

HUE AND CRY: PanTorah's Box

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There is a serious problem that is today confounding the Judeo-Christian worldviews that have dominated religious circles for the past 2,000 years. Apparently, one short verse of the New Testament, Acts 15:21, is revolutionizing a generation of saints. Until recent years, most Believers in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus) have not benefited that much from the implications of what James the Just, half brother of the Messiah, summarized at the end of the Jerusalem Council:

“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).

The wisdom articulated in this historical fact is now beginning to be understood and applied as Messianic Believers gather today, and consider who God is as demonstrated in the words of Moses. Many people are being exposed to the foundational building blocks of our faith. Many are learning the accounts of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and how their lives affected the worldview of the Apostles. Many are learning more about the struggles that Ancient Israel faced as a nation, and how we can avoid their mistakes as God's people today. Many are repenting of previous errors, and are desiring to live a life more like their Savior, who obeyed the Torah's commandments perfectly.

But this has certainly caused some challenges. On both sides of the theological chasm between Judaism and Christianity, there is sometimes a display of animosity toward those who simply want to obey the Lord, and maintain an active testimony of salvation in Yeshua (Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

Many Messianic Believers today, once faithful churchgoers, can be treated unfairly and with disgust by those with whom they previously fellowshiped. Much of their criticism is generated from the inaccurate idea that Israel and “the Church” are two separate groups of elect with two separate and distinct plans. But is this idea truly rooted in Scripture and in the Messianic prophecies of the Tanakh (Old Testament), or in a false ideology that desires to divide God's people?

When I think about this, I consider the Greek myth of Pandora's Box. Once the box is opened, it can never be closed and its contents are accessible to all. In a similar way when we consider the growth of the modern Messianic movement, boxes and doors have been opened that cannot be closed again. However, there is one clear distinction, as the message of Torah obedience penetrates hearts that desire to live holy lives. Unlike the misery and mistrust that entered the world when Pandora's Box was opened, instead, the blessings of Torah study—now panning the world—are providing much needed answers and clarity to many of life's questions that prayer alone will not help.

At the same time, though, the growth of assemblies that study and focus on the Torah begs some questions. While the Torah will often provide well-needed answers to basic questions regarding life, humanity, morality, and conduct in one's world—studying and following the Torah's instruction alone is not enough. We must remember that **the study of the Torah is not the panacea for all the ills of mankind**. While it forms the basis of Scripture, it by no means makes up the whole Bible.

It is certainly easy for new Messianics to criticize those who criticize them back, who claim that they are misguided legalists at best, those who desire to be under some kind of “yoke” of bondage to the Law. Reversing such claims given by pastors or Bible teachers, referring to them as “lawless,” is easy—especially when you do not have to interact with such people on a frequent basis. But when you are like me, constantly on the telephone and interacting with a wide variety of religious people, defending such behavior is something I cannot do. Certainly, if we are to live out a true life of Torah obedience, respecting others—even those we disagree with—is absolutely imperative. We must seek to establish common ground with all those we try to influence, and demonstrate that a Messianic life of Torah observance is not about “legalism”; it is about being more like our Savior.

Only by demonstrating positive action and change will pastors, Bible teachers, theologians, and rabbis be able to consider the Spirit-led conclusion of James the Just—admonishing the new, non-Jewish Believers to submit to the instruction of the Torah. They will see that by us adopting Torah observance in our own lives that we are making a difference—the difference that Yeshua expects of us.

Certainly, warnings against lawlessness abound in the Scriptures, and many of the arguments against keeping God's Law are very well crafted. We encounter lawlessness today in abundance, unfortunately among many who claim to follow the Lord, but are often ill-equipped to address the ills of modern society. Jude warned the ancient Believers that there would be those who would creep in unexpectedly, taking people to judgment:

"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Messiah Yeshua...These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted" (Jude 4, 12-13).

My friends, while a severe warning for the Believers in the First Century—this trend has not changed! We need to be on guard against any lawlessness we may encounter, from the outside *or* even the inside.

We are not responsible for the actions of those who are presently in positions of authority and influence. We cannot change them, **but we can faithfully pray for them** and show them a better way. At the same time, we must each remember that we are accountable for our own personal relationship with the Holy One of Israel. We will be held to account for how we walk out a Torah obedient lifestyle as we follow the pattern understood and designated by Yeshua and the Apostles.

My prayer is that as you encounter those who "pan" God's Torah, or those who want to keep you in the religious boxes that currently exist, that you rise above their collective ignorance and let the love of the Lord usher forth from your heart. Do not be deterred in your desire to be conformed to the image of our Messiah Yeshua, who is the Word made flesh and who you are desiring to emulate. As you do this, you will be a living testimony of His grace—not just of those who show His love, but also those who demonstrate the obedience He asks.

It is also imperative that you do not find yourself being deceived by those who creep in among you. While we commonly associate "creeping in" with those who bring obvious lawlessness—those who deny the validity of the Torah—lawlessness can also come in with those who use the Torah as a platform to promote a Messiah-less agenda. Doors to these forms of false doctrine and theology have also been opened in recent days (and are often more damaging to us than doors which simply claim that Jesus abolished the Law). Consider the words of the Apostle John, who admonishes his audience to make sure that anyone who enters into the assembly declares that Yeshua is who He says He is:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Yeshua is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antimessiah, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 John 4:1-3).

Brethren, test whatever spirits come into your midst, and pray for the gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10). None of us will benefit from having a Torah foundation if someone ***in any way***, takes our eyes off of Yeshua the Messiah and His completed work for us. As the author of Hebrews summarizes it,

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Yeshua, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Let us always remember that faith in the Lord is the *only* panacea that destroys all the boxes that contain fallen humanity! Following the example of the Lord is the *only* thing that will enable us to survive the deception that is allowed to sweep through the *ekklēsia*!

Until the restoration of all things...

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