

HUE AND CRY: Timing is Not Everything

by Mark Huey posted 21 March, 2005 www.outreachisrael.net

Recently, there has been a disturbing calendar debate raging among members of the Messianic community—all who claim to be “enlightened ones” who follow the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For the most part, these people somehow acknowledge a belief that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel. Ironically, perhaps the majority of the influenced witnesses to this dispute (if not the vocal advocates) just a mere ten years ago, did not even know what the terms *Torah*, *Pesach*, *Rosh Chodesh*, *moedim*, or *Aviv* even meant. Now, however, within a few years of receiving “revelation,” it appears from the plethora of e-mail transmissions that are openly floating through the Internet that these “illuminated truth seekers” are now being challenged with a millennia old dilemma about when to celebrate the appointed times of the Creator God. Sadly, reason and engaged dialogue does not seem to be a major focus of the discussions.

Various factions struggling for turf are weighing into the controversy, claiming to have well-researched articles and compelling arguments. Many of these articles simply reiterate traditional Jewish views, mirroring the conclusions of previous generations. At the same time, many other articles espouse new views that repudiate tradition and seek to make a case for “new” interpretations, that have been hidden, or purposefully suppressed, from the faithful. Amazingly, many subliminally claim a certain degree of “authority” in their conclusions, as if they have the “final word” and “speak” for the Holy One of Israel. The brow beating approach I have witnessed is patently absurd!

In my view, knowledgeable and researched opinions are often no more than conjecture. Conclusions that people draw are based on whatever presuppositional bias an author may have. **No person on Earth speaks for our Creator**, and no person can likewise claim full objectivity (myself included). God has already chosen the people through whom He would “speak,” as recorded in the books of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Our challenge is to individually accept and apply those words through the enlightenment provided by the indwelling Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit is limited because we are all human beings and we must make the conscious choice to listen to and obey God, versus following the desires of our flesh.

I personally remember a time in 1999 when I was introduced to the calendar controversy that is currently fomenting consternation among the Messianic community. My “logical” conclusion at the time, as a non-Jewish, Spirit-filled Believer, was that the relatively new Hebraic Roots movement—numerically dominated by non-Jews—was being illuminated to finally “bring the truth” to the Jewish people regarding the proper time, and even the proper way, to celebrate the feasts of the Lord. My view was that even though the Jewish people had been keeping the appointed times for millennia, they were obviously not observing them properly, being blinded by tradition.

My logic seemed reasonable. After all, Judaism often refers to the first month of Aviv by the Babylonian name Nisan. In my naiveté, I reasoned, how could the Jewish people have a Hebrew calendar that used pagan names for many of their months? (I did not realize that Nisan was a term used in the Tanakh in Nehemiah 2:1 and Esther 3:7.) The dispute about the determination of *Rosh Chodesh* or the New Moon further enraged my flesh as I concluded that it was obvious from the Tanakh what was proper and Biblically accurate.

For a brief season, I championed my “opinion,” and discovered that others had equally strong views that did not necessarily agree with mine in all respects. In my “research,” I found that the calendar problems were not simply a Twenty-First Century problem that scientific and Biblical discoveries had recently uncovered. Instead, I realized that disagreements had been thoroughly argued by far more knowledgeable followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob over several millennia. I also realized that the divisive nature of the arguments was one tool that the enemy has effectively used to separate and divide God’s people.

I was pleased to discover that eventually a generation of sober minded leaders of the Jewish community finally agreed to follow the dictates of the Hillel II calendar by the Fourth Century C.E. This came hundreds of years after the Romans had scattered the Jews from the Land of Israel, and the Jewish community—now spread abroad—needed to have a cohesive and unified way regarding how to observe the appointed times. The infighting that had occurred needed to stop, or the fractionalization that would

continue to ensue would likely have resulted in a divided Judaism with competing and contradicting customs and traditions.

Somehow, in His infinite wisdom, mercy, and spoken guarantee to fulfill His Word, I saw that the Lord let the Hillel calendar become the “standard” for the Jewish people who were by then banished to the nations. Notably, I had to see that God entrusted His oracles (Romans 3:2) to the Jewish people, foreknowing that they would persist down through the centuries to be the one people who today are most readily identified as “Israel.” It made sense to me that God would let them finally agree on a common calendar.

For over 1,700 years, the current Jewish calendar has been used to keep a modicum of unity among the Jewish community. I thank God that they persisted, or it is possible that this divisive issue—among others—could have been used to destroy the Jewish people. It is even possible, that if the traditional Jewish calendar was not agreed upon (particularly regarding the appointed times), that the celebrations which many of us are returning to, at this point in time, could have simply been curious rituals of an ancient religion that preceded the work of Jesus Christ.

After I examined the subject of calendars, and took into account many of the admonitions from the Scriptures about Judah’s leadership position (Genesis 49:10) and the responsibility regarding the oracles of God (Romans 3:2)—coupled with the exhortation to provoke the Jew to jealousy (Romans 11)—I was forced to conclude that creating a new calendar **would neither be useful nor constructive in what He is trying to accomplish via the growth of the Messianic movement.** My zeal for “truth” regarding the calendar issues was admirable, but the divisive nature of the varied interpretations about when to celebrate the appointed times was not something worthy of breaking fellowship.

I reasoned that the Jewish people had enough trouble considering our belief that Yeshua is the Messiah, because of the theological issues that have been caused by historic Christianity. Jewish non-Believers are puzzled when they see us keeping the weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat*, rather than the “Sunday thing.” Likewise, they are even more puzzled when they see us observing commemorations such as Passover/*Pesach* or the Day of Atonement/*Yom Kippur*. But are they to be puzzled, being provoked to jealousy—or provoked to anger because we are not only “usurping *their* holidays,” but telling them that for millennia Judaism has been observing them incorrectly?

Consider one’s credibility among Jews if Passover were observed a month earlier or a month later. Consider the further division can take place, especially as non-Jewish Believers have a mandate to provoke them *to jealousy*. When the Jewish and Christian communities have better dialogue than the Messianic and Jewish communities—something is desperately wrong. When I consider this, thoughts of Ephraim’s ancient propensity to “do his own thing” overwhelm the equation. Perhaps my desire to see the prophecies of Isaiah 11:12-13 be fulfilled has influenced my thinking:

“And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart, and those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:12-13).

In a similar vein (without attempting to be controversial), it is equally possible that the Holy One of Israel allowed the Roman Catholic Church to institute its own religious calendar that focuses on the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua, as those dates have been imbedded on the predominant Gregorian calendar of modern usage. Now in 2005 (even this week) when many “Christian” denominations follow various elements of the often vilified “mother Church,” the atoning sacrifice for our sin has been communicated to the known world. In spite of the Church’s inappropriate and overly elaborate trappings, we do serve a God of grace and mercy who is able to use misguided souls to proclaim the salvation available in His Son.

Most who read this article can be thankful for the fact that even with the challenges presented by religious institutions, His faithful remnant has always been able to survive. For those who have the ears to hear, Isaiah again reveals a humbling reality:

“**For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,**’ declares the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

So what is one to do?

Try being thankful for what you do know as the Father is in the process of fulfilling His promise to restore all things (Acts 3:21). Try extending to others, who think differently than you do about this issue, the grace that has been extended to you. Try being grateful for the fact that you now know what a Passover *sedar* actually is, and how it exemplifies the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, our Messiah Yeshua. Try to demonstrate His love to whomever you encounter this time of year: Jewish, Christian, or Messianic, and focus on the things you have in common.

I believe that our Father is truly looking at our hearts and our desire to please Him. Certainly it is important to be Biblically accurate in all things. Certainly *when Yeshua returns—we will be—because He will instruct us directly from Mount Zion*. But in the interim, we have to be cognizant of His timing. Today while scattered abroad, *no one* can claim a corner on the market regarding the calendar controversy, any more than anyone can claim to be keeping Passover perfectly exactly as the Torah prescribes. History and events that have occurred to God’s people have required all of us to make certain “concessions,” which a rigid and strict black-and-white reading of the Biblical text does not allow.

Instead of bickering over these irresolvable issues, perhaps we could be thankful that many are once more again attempting to obey the Holy One, as they seek to assemble at these appointed times. **Would it not be wonderful that at these convocations, if the focus is on the Lord and His mercy demonstrated toward us, rather than these peripheral issues?** Yeshua the Messiah is our atoning sacrifice, and without Him redemption is not possible. Regardless of when you celebrate these things, I hope your celebration is focused around Him and His work for us.

Seeking balance until the restoration of all things...

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