

# The Galatians 5:19-21 “Sandwich” – The Works of OUR Flesh



I hope you weren't expecting to feel good about yourself and your "whole Bible" "Torah observant" lifestyle today – but as I didn't spare myself, you can't complain much. I call this section of Scripture the

sandwich where we focus on the bread while ignoring the meat, despite the fact that, in practice, we reject the bread and gobble down the meat – from Galatians 5:19-21

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, (yeah. that's right – death to the perverts, idolaters and drug addicts, ha! those rebellious losers!)

enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy (um... my spidey senses are tingling, must be the enemy trying to steal my peace, time to move on)

drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. (yeah, drunken orgy-goers!)

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (that's right – those sex-crazed crazed, drunken idol worshipers aren't inheriting the Kingdom!)

So we have here what I call the Galatians 5 sandwich, or "the other guy" sandwich. We sure do enjoy calling out the first five and the last two of these – and why? Well, because they

are grotesquely obvious sins that only blatant sinners commit, at least in the open, right? No challenge there – and no one feels bad about themselves (not unless they start looking at other, more socially acceptable addictions or questioning themselves about whether watching sex scenes in movies counts as sexual immorality). But we aren't here to talk about those. We're here to talk about the works of the flesh that people pass off as righteous zeal or don't give much thought to at all. Zeal – remember that word, as it will be important later.

Enmity – the state or feeling of being actively opposed or hostile to someone or something. For example: “enmity between Protestants and Catholics”

Whoa there Nelly! If there is one thing I see in too many of the people around me, it is open hostility to people and/or things. I see people who hate Catholics so much that they would rather die horrible deaths than give Catholics credit for the good works they do – and those poor fools who do dare to give Catholics credit get called papists or worse. I actually did get called a Jesuit spy last week for something silly. I see people hostile beyond logic towards Jews and Protestants as well – to the point where everything and anything about them has to be mindlessly attacked and discredited – even if good, or at worst, harmless. That's enmity, living your life in hostility – it is not a Kingdom principle, and more than that, it compromises our ability to love and grow good fruit. And yes, I am sure that, despite the Scriptural warning, the reason why you are personally doing it is entirely justified. (That, boys and girls, was sarcasm. In fact, my eyes rolled so far out of my head when I said it that I had to call my kids to go look for them)

Strife – angry or bitter disagreement over fundamental issues; conflict. For example: “strife within the community”

Disagreement over fundamental issues is not the problem here, you see, but when it becomes angry and bitter – oh yes, big

problem. This is when we see the insults and cheap shots brought to the table instead of just sticking respectfully and honorably to the facts at hand. Of course, we don't limit our anger and bitterness to the fundamental issues, we get angry over the tiny ones as well, our pet doctrines. Of course, our pet doctrines are never small – in fact, there are no small issues in Scripture, and failure to recognize that means that someone isn't really believing the entire Bible. Right? Right? Maybe not. Strife is founded on and rooted in control issues and fear, which are both contrary to the fruit of peace and self-control. There are things to stand our ground on, but not with bitterness; stands to take in passion, but hateful anger? Very few issues actually warrant anger, and when that anger morphs into hatred among believers? Except for our issues, because they are the most important, and we always have the discernment and maturity to hate wisely, don't we? After all, our track record has been spotless so far.

Jealousy – I am going to risk making you really irritated and point out that the word translated as jealousy is *zelos* – yeah, it looks exactly like the word *zealous* for a reason. In fact, half the time this is translated, it is rendered “zealous.” Zeal is probably one of the most self-deceiving forces on earth and there is a big difference between the Jews coming to Yeshua/Jesus in Acts 21:20, who were zealous for the law that they had grown up with and knew inside and out, and when James and Paul combined that same exact word with selfish ambition (James 3.14) and strife (I Col 3:3). Problem with zeal is that I never met a single person who didn't think their brand of zeal was the righteous kind – you know, like Paul when he was arresting and persecuting believers.

Jealousy, the other way to translate this word, is an ugly thing, it is a blinding thing. Twice in my time as a believer, I have had jealous wives after me – the first time because a choir director became strangely fascinated with me (I know, I mean like look at me – lol, what gives? Who knew that albino

oompa loompas were so alluring?) and the second because – honestly, that was nuts because, to me, the guy was just needy and constantly whining and I don't think that any woman (other than herself) would be attracted to that. I certainly never saw him as anything other than annoying. But jealousy is not a logical thing, it doesn't look at the evidence, it is suspicion and paranoia driven. It happens in personal relationships, yes, and also in any situation where people feel threatened.

Fits of anger – this is the one that applies to me more than any other on the list, boy howdy. Just ask my kids. I am one of those people who just BAM! EXPLOSION. As much as I would like to wage a sarcastic defense of this one, it strikes WAY to close to home for me to even joke about. It isn't funny because I hurt people with it. None of the works of the flesh are funny, and this one gets unleashed against kids, and innocent bystanders on social media way too often, when we launch into knee-jerk accusations and insults over very little, when even a lot should never move us into this area.

Rivalries – competition for the same objective or for superiority in the same field. For example: “commercial rivalry”

This should never even begin to happen in the faith world, but it sure does. I have seen people in ministry go to great lengths to halt the popularity of others, sometimes over disagreements in doctrine but sometimes simply over audience share. Problem with rivalry in religion is that it is never above board – we shouldn't be competing against each other, but cooperating. Rivalry in ministry leads to one thing and one thing only – the creation of personal Kingdoms and Empires. We can't build the Kingdom of Heaven by destroying its Living Stones.

Dissensions – disagreement that leads to discord. This goes beyond just being disagreeable in your disagreement (which is

shameful enough); it morphs ruthlessly into a form of disagreement that ruptures relationships. Honestly, when I look at the relationships being torn apart by flat earth/spherical earth, it definitely qualifies. And for that matter, by archaeologically unsupported stories about Nimrod being responsible for Christmas, leading us to accuse our loved ones of gross idolatry based on theories and “just so” stories (and no, I am not going to publish any Nimrod comments, if that is what you take away from this then – dang.). People who actually agree that the Word became flesh, worked miracles, was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father – the very idea that they are going to be driven apart by a piddly little nothing of a debate about what shape the earth is, it boggles the mind. Shame on us if we can agree on the craziest (and truest) story ever told, without a doubt in our minds, and we are daring to call such brain candy salvational. There is a reason that Paul said, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Cor 2:2).

Divisions – this is what happens when dissensions go too far, and generally is coupled with strife and rivalries. We divide up into little groups that are now created in our own image, which each side firmly believes to actually be God’s image. Got idolatry? Yes, most divisions are entirely pride-based, although we tell ourselves differently. We can’t bear to sit and listen to something we disagree with, not even when we are wrong (not that WE are the wrong ones, oh no, they are wrong, and probably because of rebellion and on purpose, to boot; we are just defending orthodoxy). Oh man, the stupid things that divide us when we agree about so much.

Envy – a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else’s possessions, qualities, or luck (no, I will not publish any comments about luck being related to Loki, because you know what I mean). Since coming into the ministry four years ago, I see this a lot more than I used to. People

in the body unashamedly announcing their envy of other believer's money, following, children, health, etc. I admit that I myself, being barren, am prone to ugly fits of envy when X is pregnant AGAIN, and when people with healthy, physically sound kids are complaining about things that seem stupid to me as a special needs mom, or when such and such is complaining about the burdens of being pregnant when I got my kids the hard way, through an adoption contested by a rapist that cost us just about everything. Did you see what I did there? I vocalized what is usually **only** in my thoughts, and I did it to show what envy looks like. Should I be mad that some people don't know the heartache of being barren? Do I want them to be barren? Of course not! Do I want other people's kids to be disabled so they can get a taste of my life? Heavens no! And the last one, good grief, no one should have to endure that. I wish I was the only member of that club. You see, envy isn't just about what they have, it's about unconsciously wishing that someone else was privy to our pain. Envy is entirely selfish and often rooted in ingratitude and pain, and yes, it is a work of the flesh because our pain is no excuse.

These aren't on a different list from "the biggies" – they are included as equals on the same exact list. And the people who do them will not inherit the Kingdom of God – you see why I push character over knowledge?

Each of these despicable heart conditions are sandwiched in between the outward, obvious works of the flesh – the sins everyone can see. Coincidence? No way. This is the sandwich Paul described when he talked about how flawless he was in his Torah observance, while inside being a murderer. Paul kept the Feasts, he kept the Sabbath, he tithed, he ate clean, he threw coins at beggars in his gate – and he was a murderous wretch on the inside. No one cared because he was keeping the letter of the Law in the strictest sense on the outside. Paul knew what he was talking about, and what he was doing when he wrote

this. At least Paul wasn't making excuses for himself anymore, so when are we going to stop rewriting the works of our flesh as somehow being virtuous and justified acts of righteousness? I tell you the truth, we have to want to see ourselves as villains before the Spirit can even begin to get a word in edgewise. Until then, we are just fakers keeping a set of rules and patting ourselves on the back for being so obedient – but image bearers? No, that requires integrity inside and out, that requires picking up our Cross and carrying it. It requires pain, and suffering, to be like the very image of the unseen God.

You need to know that, if after reading all that, your response isn't introspective but a "yeah but what about..." then you have completely missed the point that we are all included in this list, and that this sort of list is meant to offend our flesh. It's our choice, however, whether we give voice to that flesh or simply tell it to shut up for once and stop making excuses.

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## Social Media Bullying: Is Saying God and Lord Acceptable?



You're quite fortunate if you run in social media circles within the Hebrew Roots/Messianic movement or other denominations of Christianity and haven't had a run in with people who are quick

to tell you why this or that is pagan, sinful, or just plain wrong. One of the most popular areas in which newcomers are attacked is in the usage of the honorific titles of Lord and God, which are used as English language equivalents to the Hebrew words, Adonai and Elohim. And I am not referring to people who simply prefer to pronounce the Tetragrammaton, I am talking about the people who go out bent on conquering, making it a salvation issue.

Now, it's one thing when seasoned veterans get bombarded with this stuff – but the folks preaching this, often very unkindly and with threats of damnation, do not pay the slightest bit of attention to whether someone has been a believer one hour, or fifty years, or whether they are thirteen years old, or eighty years old. Truly the great evil of social media religious preaching is that we do not have a relationship with the people we are approaching, and therefore have no idea if we even should approach them. We lack the wisdom to know if we are instructing them or confusing them, or even damaging them. I don't want this to happen to anyone's kid and so after years of pondering this, I am finally setting it down in writing.

So, let's look at the use of honorifics in the Bible – and we will use a specific example from my own social media wall a couple of weeks ago. I was talking about it being the anniversary of coming to an understanding of Torah being for today, and I praised “Adonai.” This was the response I got from someone who I had never heard from before:

“Well, I guess you are still waiting for Him to ask you what His proper name is! His name is not Adonai or Lord or God but...”

FYI, I removed His Name from the quote because the sarcastic and ignorant nature of the comment brought His Name to shame. I literally felt embarrassed for my King. Of course, I know the Name, the four letter Tetragrammaton – it was silly, arrogant, and undiscerning to presume otherwise, just because

I chose to use a formal title that means “My Lord” or “My Master.”

Before I start, I want to give a little bit of an example of how the usage of intimate Names compares with the usage of honorifics when addressing someone with whom we are not social equals:

Your Majesty,

I applaud your Highness on your recent speech to parliament. It was a privilege to hear the wisdom of your Grace addressing the legislature. Long live the Queen!

Okay, that letter was respectful, right? Let’s try it again without the honorifics, but still speaking with nothing but kindness:

Elizabeth Windsor,

I applaud you, Elizabeth, on your recent speech to Parliament. Liz, it was a privilege to hear your wisdom as you addressed the Legislature. I hope you live forever.

Notice that I said nothing uncomplimentary in either letter. But the tone was different – in the first, I was speaking to someone socially way above me and in the second I was either speaking as a peer, a buddy, or a cheeky little monkey. Probably her Majesty would see my impertinence as a qualification for the latter lol. The point is, did I dishonor her in any way by referring to her with honorifics instead of her actual name? Certainly not, if anything, I elevated her – and that is exactly what happens when an honorific title is used instead of the Tetragrammaton or its short form Yah.

So, is there cause to rebuke anyone for using a respectful title? What do we see in the Scriptures? In the Hebrew, and the Greek, do we see the use of titles or only the use of the Name? (I will note here that I have no beef with anyone who

pronounces the Name – we see it used all throughout Scripture as well – just not exclusively).

Let's look specifically at Adonai – first used by Abraham in Genesis 15:2 directly to God, and God doesn't get the slightest bit offended and say, "Why aren't you calling me by my Name? Do you want the pagans to think you are talking about someone else?" Nope – why would God take offense to a man submitting himself as a servant? It was a fitting and appropriate thing to do. The prophets thought so too – as Adonai is used 434 times to describe God as Lord and Master.

How about El/Elohim? El is a word that is the Hebrew equivalent of the English God (which came from the Germanic Gott, and is not to be confused with the pagan deity Gad or the Tribe of Gad in the Bible – there is no link between Semitic and Germanic languages – we can't rightly say that the languages were divided at Babel and also say that they are still all related) and shows up within the monikers El Elyon (Most High God) nineteen times in the Psalms, El Olam (Everlasting God) and the more commonly known El Shaddai (commonly rendered Almighty God) throughout Genesis. Elohim is a generic word meaning mighty one or god, and refers to both the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and various false gods, angels, civic leaders, judges, etc.

Elohim itself is used over 2600 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and has a lot of different meanings – one of which is a title of the Supreme God. Although I could go into more detail on this, suffice it to say that it is used exclusively for God in Genesis 1-4.

One of the really interesting aspects of the charge that it is a sin to use titles or that it is somehow disrespectful, besides the fact that just about every Biblical figure of note uses them when speaking of/to God, is that we also have the testimony of Yeshua/Jesus and the Apostles, none of which ever utter the Tetragrammaton – even though there was one in Greek

that we have archaeological evidence of. In English, the first-century Greek version of the Tetragrammaton would be rendered Iawe (ee-ah-way), and here is a link to [another blog post](#) with the information on that.

So are we to accuse Yeshua of sinning, or of not knowing the Name, or of being disrespectful, or any one of these accusations we see commonly flying around? May it never be! Not only did Yeshua never sin, but He always did the will of His Father. If He said the Name, it would be recorded for us. What we do see is Theos, Kyrios, and Pater – the Greek equivalents of God, Lord/Master, and Father. Abba (Aramaic for Father) is used only once by Yeshua (Mark 14:36) and twice by Paul (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6).

The case for using only a pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton YHVH, yod-hey-vav-hey, or the short form Yah is therefore without merit and would require one to ignore both the Hebrew and Greek canonical text, as well as the Septuagint (LXX), Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigraphic writings, as well as all other Jewish writings through the Millennia. This is really a non-doctrine if someone is trying to enforce it – it has to be strong-armed because it has no Scriptural merit excepting for an out of context reading of verses which promote the proclaiming of the Name – which is problematic to read exclusively as referring to a personal name because the word shem (name) also means reputation/renown. In the ancient Near Eastern world, everything was about honor/reputation/renown – in fact, we still equate a man's "good name" as being equal to his reputation, not a collection of expressed syllables.

So should we be concerned about the Name of God? Absolutely – and I am talking about His reputation here. Speaking syllables is easy, anyone can do it according to their theory of how it was pronounced – but if we speak those syllables with our bad character backing it up, we are dragging that name through the manure we are wallowing in. No, we must take care that our character is superlative, that we go from glory to glory,

becoming more and more like Yeshua, the express image of God and our example in all things.

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## Twisted Scripture: Do We Really Get Blessed for Leaving Our Family?



Someone asked me a question on social media this morning and I am so glad they did! Having just finished a writing book on the community mindset and kinship relations of the ancient Near Eastern and First Century world

of the Hebrew Bible, the time is ripe to tackle Matthew 19:29:

*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (ESV)*

Sadly, in our modern world we get overly dramatic about this very dramatic verse – but in the entirely wrong direction. As Western individualists, we do not even begin to comprehend the absolute uniformity of belief that existed within ancient families – and how radical belief in Yeshua as the Divine Messiah truly became. We presume that this verse gives people permission to abandon unbelieving family, sometimes even over the slightest differences (let's face it, for some folks there are no small issues). Of course, along with these delusions of permission to walk out come fantasies of returning one day with soap poisoning and then they will be sorry, or not. Maybe

not.

Anyway, I routinely get asked about this verse from people who are warned that they are in sin if they don't leave a spouse who does this or that thing because they ***honestly and genuinely*** don't believe that Torah is for Christians today. So, let's investigate this in context. But before we do – I want to tell you what I always tell them:

“Is your spouse guilty of anything other than being the exact same person you fell in love with and swore an oath before God to love, honor and cherish? You changed and they didn't – you don't get to punish them for that. They are the person you committed to, don't blame them for being that person.”

People in the ancient world were defined by their family unit:

Deborah, wife of Lappidoth

David, son of Jessie

Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus

Mary, wife of Cleopas

Jonathan, son of Saul

Identification by family told people who you were, your honor level within the community, identified your beliefs, and whether or not you could be trusted. If the head of the clan believed in and worshiped god X, then so did everyone else in the family from greatest to least. Period. It wasn't like it is today where the same family could conceivably be made up of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. Such a situation in the ancient world was unthinkable! The kinship group (extended family unit) was a sacred thing – loyalty towards one another was at the very core. Many of the commandments we take for granted – loving your neighbor commandments – were instituted because in the ancient world you loved your kin and to heck in a handbasket with anyone on the outside. That kind of absolute

unity required, well, absolute uniformity of belief on everything from religion to politics. Any deviation introduced chaos into the family unit and was seen as the height of selfishness – truly destructive behavior. To have a different belief was to “leave” your house (not your physical abode but your extended family unit’s core values), brothers and sisters (the most sacred of all kinship relations was that with your siblings), father (and the beliefs he set for the family), mother (and her diligent instruction in the beliefs of the father), children (and whatever you might have already trained them up in), and lands (literally meaning cultivated fields, which I believe is metaphoric language relating back to that which is inherited from the fathers – in those times, the most important inheritance was land).

To accept Yeshua as the Divine Messiah and the coming Davidic King, which many were beginning to do before His death, would potentially mean a significant break with the beliefs of the rest of the family. Jews were deeply divided about Yeshua, both before and after His death and resurrection. At one point, it is believed that up to 20% of Jews accepted Him as the Messiah – a staggering number but certainly not the majority. One out of five family members believing something different than the rest – it may not seem huge in a world where we prize individuality and freedom to think and choose for ourselves what to believe – but that world was created at the Cross, before the cross such freedom never existed. It was practically unthinkable and very, very rare.

***It had already begun long before Yeshua’s death – people were divided over Him. It was causing problems but Yeshua assured His followers that it was not, in fact, evil to break with family uniformity in order to come to faith.***

What Yeshua would never countenance is people actually breaking relationship, on their end, with family over Him. Destruction of family strikes at the heart of everything the

Bible stands for. When Abraham left Ur, he was in his seventies, and he took with him his wife and entire family unit. Abraham changed location – he didn't pick up and abandon people just because they disagreed and we have no evidence that he ever broke relationship with his kin – in fact we know he didn't because he sent his servant back to his still loving family in order to procure a bride for Isaac. Abraham moved, yes, but never abandoned. He is our example, and yet in the first century, we add a new wrinkle and Yeshua makes it possible, in fact, gives permission, for people to lovingly believe in Him on an individual basis.

It may not seem radical to us, but Yeshua was addressing a very real problem that existed within very real first century families. It gives us permission to be lovingly separate in a belief, not license to act like boorish toddlers who threaten to run away if everyone refuses to bow to our beliefs. After all, what family would look kindly upon any belief that would break apart loving relationships? They would, rather, see it as proof of being decidedly un-Christlike and perhaps even dangerously cultish.

As my brother [Ryan White](#) mentioned when I brought this up this morning, “Allegiance to your current kinship group should never trump relationship with God.”

Exactly.

An excellent starting place for learning about kinship relations and Biblical social sciences, in general, is David deSilva's Honor, Patronage, kinship and Purity.

Look for my next book in a few months – still waffling on the title.

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# Why Women Should Never Counsel Men Privately on Social Media



Newsflash: Men and women will never be held to the same accountability standards. It isn't right, but as women, we have to come to terms with it and protect ourselves.

Nowhere is this more evident than when one woman makes unsubstantiated claims that she was wronged by another.

Oftentimes, women will be approached on social media by people who claim to have difficulties – the difficulties may be real or imagined: a sick kid or spouse, financial troubles, emotional challenges, past abuse... whatever. It is hard for a woman to turn away a wounded animal – much less a person, we are naturally compassionate and therefore, when anyone, male or female, needs comforting we kinda flow into that perceived vacuum. It's a good thing about us, but it is also easily used by professional victims and those who are merely seeking to have their own needs met. Women, above all else, want to nurture – it is hard-wired into us. We want to heal hurts and make things okay again.

When this person is a woman we have some level of protection from accusation, but not much. If we are counseling someone through abuse and they later accuse us publicly of things that happen during the talks – we are left with a conundrum – yes we are accused, but dare we make the conversations public and expose their struggles? Generally, in such cases, women will just stomp off and not say anything about their former

confidant ***because they do not want to risk exposure*** – but when the willing ear is a woman and the person with a sob story is a man, things can get dicey – leaving the woman with no way to protect herself if accusations are made.

Case in point: What happens when a woman has been counseling a man “and his wife” through some tough times but who has only been led to believe that the wife is privy to everything that has been said? We don’t like to think that someone is actively misleading us, that our compassion has overridden our natural common sense, but it happens. The internet is full of men who want a sister, mother, or sadly, surrogate wife to pour their heart out to. Hopefully, they are only looking for a sister or a mother, but you can never know for sure. A man looking for someone to use as a surrogate wife isn’t exactly going to jump up and reveal his true intentions. Of course not, this counseling situation is all about him – he will do whatever it takes to continue to get his needs met, whatever they are.

If the man is unmarried, it is far too dangerous to speak with him at length privately – emotions can easily get confused when we do not have the professional training to spot and deal with them (and sometimes even that isn’t enough). If a man is married, even if you believe that his wife is in on everything, it is even more dangerous. I am telling you, right now, unless you know everything there is to know about each of them – from past sins to current mental health – a woman is setting herself up to be accused by an angry wife. The would-be friend/counselor’s intentions will not matter when the wife starts making accusations. They won’t ask for proof, or inquire about her mental health, or anything. Accusations against a woman’s virtue tend to stick, regardless of their veracity. Peopleglom onto the perceived victim against the “tainted” woman – even if that victim is, in fact, the perpetrator – it’s why bullies go around on facebook running roughshod over people and then, when they get blocked, go whining that they are being persecuted for righteousness and

why people believe them without asking for details or checking out their story.

If someone's wife makes an accusation of an "internet affair" against you – even if you are guilty of nothing more heinous than listening to him as he laments about how sick she is – she will be believed, without a demand for proof, by the majority of people she talks to because those people will immediately identify with her proposed victim status. Most of the people she talks to, in fact, won't even know a thing about you because it is social media. Even people who don't exactly believe her will figure that you must have done something, they will assume fault – ***not with the husband but with you***. You will be seen as the intruder into the marriage, and there is no way around it – even your own friends will count you as the person who should have known better. That goes especially for men – who just don't understand the compassion that overwhelms us when presented with an apparently hurting person. They don't have that maternal impulse, and so they do not take it into consideration. Other women will see you as, frankly, a potential threat because even if they see you as blameless, you will be regarded as somehow tempting to their own husbands.

Here's the problem – you may not know their past when you start talking to a guy. You may not know that he's been accused before of inappropriate behavior. The guy may actually be an adulterer. He may not be being honest with you about how ***he*** feels about this counseling relationship. When he says his wife knows everything you are talking about, he may be flat out lying so that he can continue using you in order to fulfill ***his*** needs – consequences to you be damned.

If an accusation is made, believe me, he will drop you because he was in this for his own reasons. ***He didn't come to you for your sake, but for his***. When this happens, and if the accusations go public then he will have a choice to make – be a stand-up guy and vindicate you (which will require coming

publicly against his wife), or drop you without a word, treat you like the guilty party and do whatever it takes to mollify his wife. His wife will have a choice to make – blame her husband or blame you. Which of these choices do you think she will make? Clearly, your head is the safest to place on the chopping block and it won't matter how many hours you have prayed for them, or tried to help them, or even if you have sent them money or – whatever. Everything you have done is now irrelevant to both of them – they are in it for themselves. Your own marriage, kids and reputation won't be as real or relevant to them as their own – congratulations, you have become expendable.

To make this situation worse, ladies, mutual friends will resent you for getting them into an uncomfortable situation. The guy and his wife won't be held responsible – you will. The guy and his wife will move on, and they can, since they are not the slandered parties – it will be easy for them. Sadly, women are seen as life's goalies – we aren't supposed to allow anything bad to happen and when it does, we are the ones left looking bad. We are the ones whose reputations are damaged, we are the ones left holding the bag and expected to live with the shame and consequences while everyone else carries on with their relationship normally. People will not want to take sides – and so they won't, kinda. Guess what? Your ongoing pain and shame will not move them to sympathy but to resentment – ***you, and not him, are a reminder that something is not right.*** He will want to move on and forget it while you live with the consequences and ***everyone else will want you to quietly live with the consequences as well.***

Ladies, best not get into that sort of situation in the first place. Yes, God will vindicate you at some point – but until He does you are in for a life of pain that was unnecessary. You put ***your marriage*** at risk, ***your family*** at risk, ***your reputation*** at risk, and ***all your relationships*** at risk – because you cannot control how other people will respond, or

what they will do to protect themselves, their reputations, or even to just make their lives a little bit easier – no matter how much it costs you. Your hurt will simply be an annoyance to others, make no mistake. The Body will almost certainly not come to your rescue.

***Men need to go to other men for counseling. It's as simple as that.***

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## **Is Standing Your Ground Destroying the Goal of God's Word?**



Make sure you read the blog before you accuse me of endorsing sin or anything, okay?

One of the great unspoken truths about families is that we forgo some of our “rights” to individuality when we become part of one. We stop doing what is displeasing to those we love. Every Tuesday night out with the guys or gals might become one Tuesday a month with the guys or gals. Spending money on a fancy date night out often makes way for pizza and a movie in with the kids – at least until they are out of the house again.

We have to change when we become part of a larger community. The family teaches us that on a small scale. Some families won't discuss politics when they are together to keep the peace – which was probably a wise thing this last election cycle. We recognize this restraint, this suppression of ego, as healthy and necessary for a measure of unity and comfort – love requires that we do not do to others what would be hateful to us.

Something I have noticed about the Hebrew Roots/Messianic movement (something I fight very much within myself) is the number of individuals who take the attitude that they will not be ruled over in anything, nor will they compromise on any issue. The local group has to keep my calendar, say the Name my way, believe all the same things that I believe (regardless of how little time I have been doing this or how little I actually study) or I will stay home or try and split the congregation to follow me – because there are seemingly no small issues that are worth bending on. Yet, we all bend for the sake of living in peace with our loved ones (or at least we should). There are too many people out there with the attitude that they will do exactly as they are doing until God Himself shows them differently. And I have said that in the past – to which I say now, “Wow, Tyler, really? I know you are trying to sound like you are just submitted to God but what you are really saying is that you are too proud to listen to anyone but God.”

Before anyone says, “What about Christians?” Well. What about them? Why does everything have to go back to what they are or are not doing wrong? I am tired of hearing people harp on mainstream Christians. We need to stop deflecting – our house is a mess, so let's clean it up and if we do a good enough job then maybe someone might actually want to be like us instead of wanting to avoid the mess! When I get on Andrew's back for not doing his Math homework, the last thing I want to hear is, “Well, Matt didn't do his yesterday.” That's what we sound

like – deflecting tattletales who are just trying to shirk personal responsibility.

Right now, when I look at the online Body of Messiah, I see a field of cells – most of which are as far away from any other cells as possible. Frankly, it looks like someone blew a person up with a bomb. A few are clumped together here and there, but the clumps aren't connected to the Head so much as they are connected to a few choice doctrines. I see preppers clumped together, sacred namers clumped together and then subdivided by the, I don't even know how many theories about, pronunciation, people clumped together over this or that calendar (I think there are like five, next year there will probably be six) – clumps, clumps and more clumps over this or that thing that is not Torah or Yeshua. People who are sometimes only willing to be guided and ruled by those who do not challenge them, or who might cause them to look and ask, "Is this really something to be joined to/divided from other people over or is it a smokescreen hiding my unwillingness to be part of the universal Body that is supposed to be united in Messiah despite differences in all this other stuff?"

Before someone thinks I am picking on people – don't miss the point. Let's look at the ideal situation – even if there was a worldwide Sanhedrin populated only with believers in Yeshua so that we could all come together as one – would you accept that authority if they didn't agree with you on everything? If they made a decision about how and when to say the Name or when to determine the beginning of the month? What doctrines are so important to you that you would refuse to celebrate the Feasts as one people? I have been thinking about this over the last year. I freely admit that, when I began seriously considering it, I felt my desire not to be ruled by anyone, my fears, rising inside me – largely because I have had terrible experiences with leadership abuse in my past. And yet, there is something larger than my own fears – the testimony of Yeshua. It's in shambles because of our over-reaching modern

hyper-individuality. And frankly, the leadership abuse only flourishes because we have no worldwide leadership to appeal to. Heck, no one sane would want to be in leadership of this group of unapologetic individualists? So we have no worldwide leadership because we won't agree to be ruled and we are abused because there is no worldwide standard of leadership. What could go wrong?

We made a transition in my home a year ago. I stopped using our choice of the pronunciation of the Name, and we switched to the Hillel II calendar. I've been using HaShem, Adonai, Lord and God lately when I speak, and not because I hate the Name but because I detest the division that comes with speaking it. I feel like the Name is being defiled because no matter how I say it, someone out there will hear and crinkle their nose in distaste. I am not prepared to any longer be the cause of my God's Name inspiring someone to crinkle their nose in distaste and disapproval. If they are going to disapprove of something – let it be a title! I am also done with the calendar divisions. I can prove through the extra-Biblical writings exactly which calendar will be re-instituted, but it doesn't matter, because "my" calendar causes, again, people to think of the Feasts with distaste if I am not following theirs – which was exactly why the Hillel II calendar was created in the first place, to unite the Jews worldwide. The last Sanhedrin must have seen the potential for what I see on social media every day – the splintering of the Body.

I gave up some of my autonomy for the sake of being connected to the Head and unified to as many other cells as possible. I gave up autonomy, but not the actual commandments – simply gave up where I recognized that my opinions were a source of disunity that was all about me, me, and me under the auspices of being about Him. As I study Scriptural context more and more, I am seeing how my shallow reading of the Word was causing more division than it was curing. I am looking at the bigger picture of what the Body needs right now, and the Body

needs less autonomy and more working together as a cohesive unit with everyone focused on their jobs. If that requires me not doing everything I want to do and being less comfortable, then that is a small price to pay – really, the only price is my ego and my really strong desire not to be a part of a family; or maybe the real price is simply giving up on the secret hope of being the one person in charge of the entire family as they bow to doing everything my way, as though my way is God's way.

But God's way is about restoring what was there in Creation – the entire Bible is about restoring relationship, not about instituting arbitrary rules and regulations. If you can't see restoration as the ultimate goal of a Law, or a prophecy, or absolutely every verse of Scripture – if all you see are rigid standards to be imposed on behavior, then you have missed the point of the Word entirely. The Law is the milk, not the meat. The Law is what gets fed to babes in the faith, giving them a basic outer boundary of what constitutes decent behavior. Within those healthy boundaries we then are required, and guided by the Spirit, to not only be regulated on the outside, but to become transformed on the inside, to have our insides match our outward actions. I think a lot of folks harp on obedience to the Law because they see the Law as the meat of the Word, and have never allowed that Law to do its job – namely inspiring us to the greater works of the Torah, actually literally loving people even to the point of being willing to not always get out own way. Keeping a law in the flesh is easy, really easy. Being transformed into someone who no longer needs that external Law because it is so thoroughly internalised as the bare minimum – that's the tough part. I think as we get that, we will be able to compromise and come together for His sake, and forget about our sake.

I've been feeling this call since summer of 2014, a drawing together – but the cost to self and ego is high. Are we going to remain entitlement-minded, individualistic Americans bent

on our rights and our freedom of speech or are we prepared to become the Body of Messiah and the Nation of Israel, where we relinquish our autonomy for the sake of His glorious witness in the world? Will they know we are His by our self-sacrificing love for one another and our humble servanthood, or will they not want Him because they see how cruel we are when opposed? Are we willing to be a part of a Kingdom? We were not raised to think that this sort of choice is beneficial, but our autonomy will be our ruin if we don't make serious changes.

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## Postpartum Depression after Miscarriage and Stillbirth Part 2: A World Destroyed



That moment when you find out you are pregnant – a new world is created. That child has altered the universe – their existence creates an entire world that will never be the same again. Each person they

interact with will be changed, every person who loves them is changed. They have created an unending ripple in the cosmic reality simply by existing.

Judaism teaches a beautiful concept about murder – I know that sounded strange, let me explain. The great minds of the Jewish people teach us that to murder a person is to destroy an entire world and to save a life is to save an entire world. When Abel was killed, so were all his descendants and all of

the good things he would have done. A world, the world that was meant to have him in it, was destroyed and a new world took its place – a world that wasn't nearly as wonderful. His impact was still felt because he had indeed lived a while, but the world of his future, and his future descendants – was obliterated in a moment of anger.

I know – the very concrete teacher of Ancient Near Eastern context is going all mystical on you – please indulge me just this once.

With my first pregnancy, a world was created – a new phase of reality where I was a mother to this specific child. I was instantly in love, dreaming dreams and so incredibly and blissfully happy. Only now am I beginning to dare remember that sense of peace and happiness once more. What would it feel like to touch the skin of my newborn, what does it feel like when the baby kicks or sits on your bladder? What will my baby smell like when I hold him or her close and what name will we call them by? What quirks of their personality will melt my heart? Will they look like me, or Mark or like both of us? I was so sick – nausea woke me up in the morning and kept at me all day until I fell asleep from exhaustion, but that nausea meant that life was there and would soon be in my arms. At least, that's what I thought.

If you read [part I](#) then you know what happened next, and over and over again so I won't rehearse it. One by one, the worlds created by the conception of my children were destroyed – and no one noticed except for me. Entire worlds were obliterated, but the world just went on as though I shouldn't even pause and in fact irritated by my inconvenient grief. Seventeen years ago I lay on the floor of the nursery wanting to die. I think I would have died without the miracle that postponed my grieving.

I no longer remember the exact desperate, and broken words I prayed that day, but it went something like this:

“God, I want to be a mother more than anything else in the world, but if it is not Your will then I need to know – because I am dying.”

My body suddenly felt like a cool wind swept through me and I knew that we would have two children, neither of them biological. My sadness was still there but I guess you could say that the best way to describe my new state of mind was that it was now focused in a new direction. I pushed the pain into a dark corner, left it there and started researching adoption. A little over a year later, we were the parents of a set of fraternal twin boys – Matthew and Andrew. Andrew was born with serious disabilities and between the surgeries and the fact that the jailed birth-father was contesting the adoption, I was able to keep the memory of the miscarriages somewhat at bay because there was no longer time to think too much about it. (For those of you who are horrified that we were taking children away from their father, let’s just say that the sexual encounter was not consensual, but forced.)

Although I adore my sons and would not give them up for the world, I have always been sad. Part of me died the day my first baby died, and by the third miscarriage, I had sunk deep into depression. Knowing we would adopt was a distraction – a distraction that possibly saved my life – but it was a band-aid. The pursuit of our sons was not a cure for the depression, it simply made it easier for me to ignore it. I was far too busy to be depressed – caring for a disabled child prevented me from having too much time to focus on the root cause of my constant sadness. I loved being a mom, but I have spent all these years under a horrible cloud.

Fast forward fifteen and a half years from the birth of our beloved children, and here I am suddenly in mourning. The first four days were spent screaming, crying, almost insanely grieving – then came the anger followed by absolute exhaustion. My limbs felt weak for some strange reason. I sleep all day because I have insomnia all night, and when I do

sleep, I am having terrible dreams. And then there are the days, like today, where I mostly feel dead inside. I pick up my Bible but my eyes bounce everywhere. I try to study archaeology, but my heart just isn't in it. I did manage to binge watch The Crown. I feel like I haven't slept in years – my mind is exhausted. Sometimes I get enough of a burst of energy to write.

And this is normal. This is what would have happened seventeen years ago if people had encouraged me to mourn, and had validated my losses instead of reducing me to shame. This is what would have happened if the Believing community was genuinely pro-life and not simply anti-abortion.

Losing a child – under any circumstances – there is nothing sane about it. We grieve how we grieve, for as long as we grieve. We grieve because we are moms and dads and grandparents and brothers and sisters and human beings who were meant to share that world with this new and precious person, but that world was destroyed and taken forcibly from us, it was stolen. We mourn because we are human beings who know what it is to love deeply. We mourn because we have lost someone who can never be replaced. We mourn because it is the right and healthy thing to do.

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## **Postpartum Depression after Miscarriage and Stillbirth Pt**

# 1: The Dream



For my regular subscribers, you will have to bear with me for a little while as this is something I am learning about and going through and I feel it is something that needs to be shared for the emotional well-

being of a multitude of women as well as men who are the unfortunate, silent victims of this terrible and politically inconvenient form of suffering.

One week ago, I knew that postpartum depression was something that happened to the women who had given birth to living babies. I thought I knew it, anyway. I am about to share something that may shock you as much as it shocked me. For the record, I don't take kindly to people trying to interpret my dreams and have never had anyone ever give me something that I didn't already know or was just flat out wrong. So please just don't. I am not giving all the details or all the interpretation – just what is necessary.

I had one of my house dreams, but this dream was unlike any I had ever had before. The house, from my view of the inside, was white and beautiful. It had three stories, with beautiful balconies. Now, every other "house" dream I have had showed a lot of damage, much work to be done – done by me. As in real life, God shows us things about ourselves that we need to work on, and then we need to get to work. Every one of these dreams has preceded some sort of blow to my ego as He shows me that I am really not all that and a bag of chips. This dream was completely different – I couldn't see the problems, but a professional contractor was making major renovations. I didn't have to do a thing.

As I went through the house, a house that I was moving into, I

found a file drawer, and in it were the files of the woman who had lived there previously. I went looking for her, not wanting her to forget her private things only to find her outside with her husband and kids, but rather set apart from them. Her kids were reading from a scientific journal with their father and they gave the article to me. I was joking that these should be my kids because I am a scientist and I would love to read science articles with kids who enjoy that sort of thing. I started reading the article and it was about postpartum depression, which I wasn't really interested in until I noticed it was the story of two women who had it – the mother of the two boys I was with and myself. The story said that I had postpartum depression.

I woke up confused. It was a house dream, but this was a ridiculous dream. I had a bunch of miscarriages between 1999 and 2003, but never a live birth – I could not possibly have postpartum depression. I dismissed it, even though I have never ended up having a house dream that wasn't a huge harbinger for change.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning that the overwhelming grief hit me like a freight train out of nowhere. It was as though I had gone back in time seventeen years to the loss of our third baby in an instant. It was like all those years in between had vanished and the pain was back, raw and ferocious as ever.

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We lost our first baby a few days before Mother's Day 1999. I was almost 30 years old and getting pregnant hadn't been difficult. As it turned out – it was staying pregnant that was difficult, or rather, impossible. I didn't know it then, but a spinal cord problem, coupled with a back-flipped and deformed uterus, and a body that only makes two days worth of progesterone a month – well, my ovaries worked, but my womb itself was not capable of supporting life and never had been.

The first miscarriage was grueling, I was in labor off and on for about two months – a constant and cruel reminder that my baby was dead (as if having to sit through a Mother's Day service in Church the very week that I lost the baby wasn't bad enough). But once that passed we were quickly pregnant again, lost that baby as well and by my original due date in January – we had conceived and lost yet another child.

I cannot express to you the depths of my grief. My grief was deep and intense and the attitudes of the people around me were almost always ambivalent, and often cruel. People who railed against the inhumanity of abortion based upon it "stopping a beating heart" gave no thought to saying, "Well, at least it wasn't a real baby."

"It's probably a blessing, the baby was probably retarded or deformed."

"You are obviously cursed, God gives a quiver-full to the righteous."

"Why are you so upset? It was just a miscarriage!"

"You need to relax, your stress is killing those babies!"

"You need to be grateful that you never got to hold them, it would be worse to lose them after birth."

"Hmmm... have you considered praying about this?"

"You need to remember that God is good and be grateful for what you have."

"You want kids? How about you take mine off my hands for a day?"

"I am just speaking the truth in love: You are miscarrying because of unrepentant sin in your life."

The pain that I felt from the death of my precious little ones

was horrible enough, breaking my heart to pieces, but these horrible comments from believing women were destroying me psychologically as well. I felt as though my life was being quickly and systematically dismantled.

For some reason, and I actually know some of the reasons – people don't want us to mourn and so they try and shame us. One of the reasons is the abortion culture – this reason explains why pro-abortion individuals cannot afford to have compassion for people who have miscarried or given birth to stillborn children. They can neither politically nor emotionally acknowledge the humanity of the situation and the actual loss of a real life. We have to have lost a fetus, a sub-human, a potential life – not an actual child. This has resulted in a callous disregard for a huge segment of the population which has been forced to suffer in silence – we are the unreported casualties of the abortion culture. We dare not be named or acknowledged – it would be political suicide to do so. We are expendable, cannon fodder in the drive to make all abortion as available and as guilt free as possible.

But what of the pro-life people who can be are are often even crueler – because their comments often throw God into the mix, undermining what is often our only refuge in the time of our greatest distress? They say they care for life but the truth of the matter is that most of them are simply offended by sin and cannot bear to really seriously contemplate the real lives lost to abortion. I think that living in an abortion culture has simply destroyed our empathy – we cannot care about the miscarried babies because then we would really have to think about what is being done every single day. So we turned all our feelings of outrage towards the sin of murder; we cannot bear to think of all those real little lives. Again, the silent victims of this are those women who have miscarried and given birth to stillborn children. Being self-righteously offended at sin is easier than doing the hard work of being compassionate and loving. I do not see this changing.

Like I said, I was already dealing with all of the cruelty and loss when my original due date hit in January of 2000 and all of those websites I had registered on – the due date websites, and the parenting websites – all of the congratulation announcements started flooding into my email. I laid on the floor of the nursery and tried to die, but I couldn't. I laid there for about a week, completely alone – even my husband couldn't understand. I didn't even understand.

I had postpartum depression. Like any woman who had given birth to a living child, I had gone through the hormonal changes, I had gone through labor – but unlike a woman who has given birth to a living child and is depressed, I had no happy ending to look forward to. I had, beyond just depression, real death and grief to be dealt with. From the responses I have had on social media over the last day or so – I know that I am not alone. There are legions of us who have been given no name for what ails us, because it is not politically expedient to recognize us at all. No one wants us to exist. We represent an inconvenient truth – our pain is proof of the life and worth of the unborn.

But we do exist. Our babies were precious and wanted, and real. They weren't "just miscarriages."

I will continue this in a few days. I need to have you understand why, seventeen years later, I am still suffering with postpartum depression – why a lot of us are and why we will get through it if we do acknowledge our right, as mothers and fathers, to mourn. If you are suffering, I want you to know why, and that you aren't alone, or overly emotional, or unreasonable. Truly, your grief is a measure of sanity in a world gone mad.

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# Persecution or Judgement? When do we cry foul and when do we take our medicine?



I am getting a lot of this kind of correspondence at the moment so I want to cover it here to save me some time in counseling people. Nice when I can just have someone read a blog post. I get letters like this quite

often (this one will be a fictitious amalgam of quite a few situations over the years):

“Dear Tyler.

I have this terrible problem at church/assembly/synagogue/homegroup – the leaders are very controlling and they have suddenly turned on me, shaming me publicly, and even encouraging others to shun me. I don’t even know what I have done wrong – I just disagreed on something that didn’t seem like a big deal. I didn’t deny Messiah or anything, it’s just a doctrinal disagreement for goodness sakes – I never thought they would ever do something like this to me.”

I look at a letter like that and the same thing always goes through my mind, from long experience.

“I need you to be absolutely honest with me, have they ever done this to anyone else?”

“Yes, but...”

“Okay, when they did it to the other people, who did you support?”

“Um... the leadership.”

“Why?”

“Well gosh, I am not really sure – I mean, I guess I thought those other people had it coming and I really didn’t want to rock the boat.”

This is the point where I always /facepalm and /sigh and get very real.

“How is the rest of the congregation treating you?”

“Well, they are supporting the leaders – I have been trying to meet with them and everything, but most don’t want to hear my side of it and I guess they just don’t care – the ones who do listen, they pretend to feel bad about what is happening but they do absolutely nothing about it so they obviously only feel a vague sense of discomfort! I feel like everyone just wishes that I would shut up and go away so that they can continue enjoying their fellowship. I don’t understand why they don’t care that the leadership is treating people this way. Why don’t people care that I am being hurt?”

“When it happened to the other couple, did they try to reason with you about what was happening to them?”

\*silence\*

“Yes, they did.”

“So then – what you did to your neighbor is being done to you now. You are not being persecuted by the leadership, you are being judged by God for standing by and allowing the leadership to persecute other people. Goodness, you may have even financially supported them while they did it!”

“But they are wrong...”

“Yes they may very well be wrong and probably are –

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, because God sent him on that task, but the \*way\* the Babylonians went about it was wrong because they were a wicked people. God has plenty of wicked people on the payroll (and many others in volunteer positions) that He uses to discipline people, He doesn't ask righteous people to do underhanded things to people – He simply allows unrighteous people to do what they are already inclined to do. You took part in something wicked against another family, and now their own pleas of protest are coming out of your mouth. Make no mistake, you will be ignored by your former allies because that is what you did to someone else – but be encouraged because you are being disciplined for a purpose. It would be worse for you if you were simply the kind of wicked person that is actively being used to discipline and refine others. Goodness, congregations are full of people like that who are beyond discipline and have become powers unto themselves – get down on your knees and thank God because He is giving you a chance to get out of that side of the equation. You and the other families in your congregation sinned against that family and YOU are being given a chance to get out and stop being a part of that sin in the future. Your eyes are being opened.”

I've never explained that to a person who didn't understand it but some refuse to accept it – they still strive to show everyone how wronged they were, to a bunch of people who just don't care and may be absolutely incapable of caring at this stage of their walk. It would be nice if people did care when a congregation turns its collective back on someone over something either trivial or questionable, but in general we are a pretty unloving bunch – we generally don't care unless the person being betrayed is someone who we actually do love in an egotistical way (and by that I mean someone who, if they are shamed, it also touches upon our ego – like a spouse, child, or very close friend). Situations like this show how incredibly dysfunctional the Body of Messiah is in every single denomination I can think of – although certainly not

every single congregation!

This goes for a lot of different things (from gossip in the pulpit to full blown sexual abuse silently consented to by the congregation), really, and yes sometimes you will have that rare occasion where a total innocent gets swept up in such a situation – but generally, when it happens to us as adults, we have already watched something similar happen to others and we just didn't care, or worse, we approved and participated. I used to mock people cruelly, and then I was disciplined and pulled out of that lifestyle. Now when I get mocked, I simply sigh and am not as surprised when people rally around the mocker – I remember how fun it was to watch before I was judged and how quickly my flesh moved me to see it as a good thing, to justify it at any cost so that I wouldn't have to peer into the darkness of my own heart. Generally anymore, it just makes me sick – not just to see the public shaming of someone and to understand how much and how deeply it hurts them, but when I watch how people justify the behavior – just like I used to. I get sick because I remember, and it grieves me that I was ever so cruel and so eager to believe that I was righteous as I was doing it.

We need to learn a lesson from the Babylonians – God uses the wicked to refine those who should act righteously. Just because we are being used by God – well, it doesn't mean that we are any better in the inside than Nebuchadnezzar. Coming out of Babylon is much more complex than people give it credit for – in the end, Babylon was judged because of the excessive cruelty with which they treated God's people, even in the midst of the righteous covenant lawsuit judgement against them.

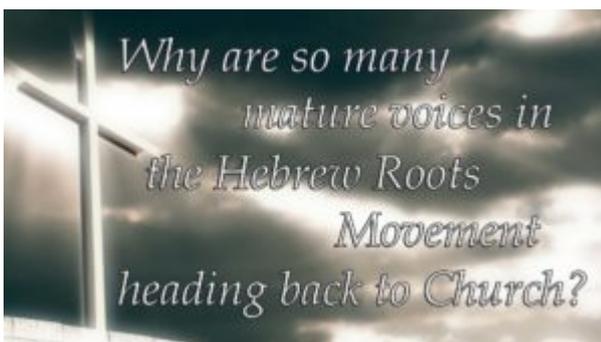
So embrace the judgement and allow it to teach you compassion – the people who do it may seem to prosper, but goodness, Babylon seemed to prosper for a long time too, until another wicked nation was used to judge it. We must be patient and allow God to work within the hearts of individuals, and

sometimes the methods He uses are kinda ugly because... well we are kinda ugly. Until we get to the point where sins against others outrage us more than the sins committed against ourselves, we aren't there yet, and we need every ounce of discipline we can get.

And yet, woe to those who are being used to deliver it!

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## Why So Many Mature Voices From the Hebrew Roots Movement are Heading Back to the Church – Lessons from The Cross and the Switchblade



It's no secret that I believe the Hebrew Roots Movement is dying, and a lot of folks are starting to see it. Too much anger, too much division – and yet, what did we expect to happen?

People came in to this movement and were told that Christianity had “lied about everything.” Christians had “everything wrong,” and their holidays were “full of pagan child sacrifice rituals.” That was the party line. Oh, and the Jews couldn't be trusted to know anything because they were too rebellious to accept Yeshua as Messiah. That left only us,

there in the middle, as the “faithful witnesses.”

Is it any wonder why some people can't hold a conversation about the flaws in this movement without saying something like, “Well, the Jews and the Christians are worse!”? That's like scolding one kid and having them point out the faults of another. As parents, we don't fall for that obvious diversion.

We, the Hebrew Roots Movement, were a bunch of people who felt wronged and lied to and were angry about it. In our passion, or passionate rage, we tried to preach to friends and relatives—who of course didn't believe us. We saw lies everywhere and in everything—to the point where some of us were tempted to throw baby Jesus out with the bath water. We were willing to turn so vehemently on our heritage because we were either sincerely angry about the lies we *had* been told, or we desired to have special insider knowledge. Our new pastors and teachers wrote online articles and uploaded videos, and just like our former pastors, they quoted from books we ourselves hadn't read. But we felt that the people who wrote these articles and produced these videos had to be telling the truth, and furthermore, they *had* to have done their due diligence.

We no longer believed that Christians could be credited with any sound scholarship, but if someone was on the outside – where we were – we gave them a pass on proving their claims. We wanted and needed them to be right. Maybe we were so desirous to have allies that we were predisposed to believe absolutely anything. That was a dangerous and convenient assumption, and it resulted in a lot of angry and desperate Hebrews who mourned their relatives remaining in “Babylonian idolatry.”

So what happened? Angry people were made teachers before they were over their anger phase. Now, instead of being enriched and exhorted by mature teachers who have passed *through* that initial stage and tempered it with wisdom, we have teachers

who encourage anger and division.

With the advent of social media, anyone can teach and produce videos without the usual local controls that keep immature and even unknowledgeable believers out of traditional teaching positions. Some of these started out bashing Christians and then turned on Jews. When they ran out of material, lo and behold, they started devouring people *within* the movement. This should not surprise us.

We have others who make the mistake that Jews warn clearly against: they get into Kabbalistic works like the Zohar before they have spent forty hardcore years studying the Tanakh. Personally, I don't even peek at stuff like that.

Some people came in to the Hebrew Roots Movement simply following the knowledge train: they needed something new to tickle their ears. As Christians, they were bored; then someone taught them something interesting and new. They came in high on the exhilaration of being a remnant "in the know," but that feeling never lasts. And when the anti-missionaries came and offered them even more knowledge, all too often they could not resist; off they went to deny Yeshua as Messiah.

Here's the problem: unlike Christianity and Judaism, we are a movement largely without a safety net in place for new people. Most folks have no chance at a local congregation; they have nowhere to be nurtured and loved through those difficult first few years. As a result, we cannot help but become a movement of radically individualized people who operate as islands on social media. No support, no accountability, no guidance, and oftentimes no real growth of anything except anger and resentment.

A lot of your kinder and more mature voices are heading back into the churches. Why? Well, it isn't to celebrate Christmas and Easter! It's because they are coming to understand that we were never supposed to be individuals but instead a

community—even when we disagree. We are supposed to love one another and cherish one another and be a family; we forgot that in our zeal to convert everyone around us like we were rogue Spanish Inquisitors. We forgot that *our* eyes were opened supernaturally and that we have to allow the same thing to happen to others: not despising God's timing and patience.

I have found that I love teaching children for a specific reason: I am relieved of the burden of teaching doctrine to them. I just give them the tools that will allow them to make sense of the historical context of their Bibles. Wherever they are in their understanding, context will serve them well. Not having to convert people to the way I see things is an incredible burden removed from my shoulders; it keeps me from having to lord authority over people the way the Gentiles do. And let's face it; we still do that because we were Gentiles for way too long. As I like to say it, "We've got too much Egypt in us."

I don't think this movement was ever meant to survive because we lack the infrastructure that all believers need in order to mature. We need real people that we can see, touch, and feel standing beside us. Only the rarest of individuals can thrive without that; we weren't designed to operate in this faith alone. I think this movement was some sort of awkward intermediary sifting phase leading to...?

In David Wilkerson's book, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (which I highly recommend for adults and teens), the author recounts the real-life story of the miracles he saw when God called him out of his cushy pastoral position in a Pennsylvania country town and into the unspeakable horrors of the gang-filled streets of New York. Wilkerson learned that while the Holy Spirit can change any heart, the lack of real, constant personal contact after conversion was often a recipe for disaster – sometimes even leading to death.

Many Hebrew Roots folks have come to see that a nurturing

local congregation is not optional but is instead an absolute necessity. They are coming to find that even where there are disagreements over doctrine, the need for unity outweighs the desire for uniformity. Unity, and a willingness to accept and respect others, is something we have lost along the way in this movement. Though it did not begin this way, we have come to a crisis point.

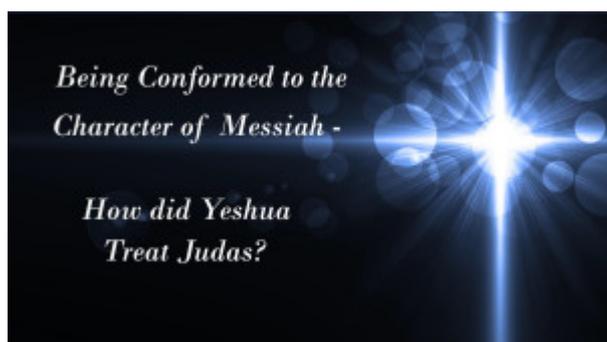
Maybe the Church is the next great mission field: not for the purpose of converting people who are already believers but of being there for people whose eyes are being opened—by God and not by guile, trickery, indoctrination, hounding, or manipulation. Maybe the mature people who are going back with a balanced message will catch these believers before they end up ruined by the social media mess that has destroyed so many thus far. I have to say that I hope that is the case. What I know is this: This social media congregation is not working except in isolated cases by people who have either been very diligent and cautious – or who have been extremely lucky – to avoid the insanity. In truth, we have even more denominations than Christianity because each individual has their own private list of what constitutes a real believer and a real heretic. We have crazier arguments, often crazier beliefs, and we've made it some kind of twisted virtue to have a religion that is more anti-Christian and anti-Judaism than it is pro-Messiah and pro-Torah. This is a recipe for disaster!

I see people going back to Sunday churches, and I don't try and stop them. I honestly think they might be hearing very loudly from the Holy Spirit. I am going to take the advice of Gamaliel the Elder in Acts 5:

“So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”

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# The Character of Yeshua (Jesus) Pt 2: How did Messiah treat Judas?



If you don't want to be seriously challenged then I suggest not reading this because this is not easy material. It isn't the sort of thing that you can respond to with "Yeah, but.."

We are supposed to be conformed to the image of Messiah, which means coming to grips with the fact that He only overturned tables and made a whip twice (and then only within the confines of the Temple where criminal activities were being perpetrated by the Roman appointed High Priest), He saved His rebukes for people who were either actually criminals (like the Sadducees) or who were actively trying to shame Him in honor contests – and He walked side by side with a man, who He knew was going to sell Him out and betray Him, for the entire duration of His ministry and treated him so normally that no one suspected a thing. Ouch.

No one suspected a thing about Judas. Yeshua knew, of course, because He knew the hearts of all men. He chose him, knowing his heart. We walked with him, knowing his heart. He ate with him, taught him, slept alongside him, laughed with him and cried with him.

Yeshua understood the reality of Covenants – and Covenants don't give us the right to be treacherous to those who have

been or will be treacherous to us. Covenants are about loyalty to those with whom we are in Covenant, regardless of their character. It doesn't mean closeness and intimate relationship, and in fact people who have proven treacherous need to be kept at arm's length, but we cannot respond to untrustworthiness with being untrustworthy ourselves. We can't fight the fruit of the evil one with more of his own fruit – we have to respond with the fruit of the Spirit and nothing is harder.

Nothing seems less righteous and less honorable.

There are sometimes some very important lessons to be learned in the myths of ancient cultures and one of the most common is the tale of an Oracle giving someone a prophecy that such and such a person would destroy them. So the recipient of the oracle goes out and preemptively tries to destroy that currently innocent person, setting in motion the very chain of events that eventually leads to their own destruction. Funny how that works, eh?

Yeshua could have outed Judas as a thief, a liar, and a treacherous dog – but He didn't. Yeshua treated Him according to the innocence of His own heart – He gave Judas no reason for betrayal. He also, in responding to the betrayal, didn't call for revenge and resort to name-calling. Yeshua showed Himself the most innocent of the charges in that, once betrayed, He didn't retaliate. Not retaliating is hard, living side by side with someone who you know will or might someday betray you is difficult – excruciatingly so.

We live in a world, especially a religious world, where betrayal is sadly the norm. People think nothing about tearing each other apart, undermining each other, and bringing shame on our God in so doing. Everyone who calls upon Messiah and believes that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's actual begotten Son came in the flesh and dwelt among us, was crucified and was raised from the dead – anyone that foolish

in the eyes of the world is in Covenant together with every other person who believes that. We are joined together by the King of kings and yet we treat each other largely like dogs, and worse than dogs – scoffing and mocking and engaging in the worst kinds of public and private character assassination. Often over nothing, and generally because of our own fears and lack of trust in God, ambition, need for approval, over a misunderstanding, or simple offense.

And yet look how patient God is with us even as we engage in this shameful behavior – not even treating us as we deserve, not preemptively punishing us for what He sees in our hearts.

Covenant means that we are all connected, every single believer according to the current level of revelation of each individual. Covenant means that how we treat each other is actually how we are treating our mutual Master. In the ancient world, if you messed with a man in Covenant, you were messing with absolutely everyone whom that man was in Covenant with. People were a lot more cautious with their mouths and actions, realizing that what they did and said reflected not only on themselves but upon their God and their clan. Nowadays, in our individualistic (and therefore to varying degrees narcissistic) world view, we really don't consider the global or even the local impact of our words or actions – we are blind to the way they effect anyone but ourselves. The Bible wasn't written to people like us, and so when we read the words and try and speak them as individuals, they don't carry the same meaning.

We are all connected, and therefore we all have to be entirely innocent and full of good fruit in our dealings with each other. It is easy to not be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, gentle, faithful and self-controlled and simply call it zeal but zeal has never been an excuse for bad fruit.

Yeshua didn't treat Judas as Judas deserved to be treated. Yeshua dealt with Judas according to the content of His own

character, not Judas' character. He does the same with us, walking with us, teaching us, dealing with us in long-suffering kindness – oh my goodness how can we justify doing any less?

Had a dream in December that I would be dealt with treacherously and by the time I woke up it had already happened. I spent the next two months struggling, hurting, and wanting revenge. Life was an agony in so many ways, so much hurt dredged up as I dealt with the consequences of someone else's publicly vented frustration and wanting so badly to respond in kind, really still wanting to because treachery is contagious (all of the works of the enemy are infectious). Just as I finally began to come to terms with it, yesterday morning I had a dream that it is about to happen again, a different person this time. As far as I know it hasn't happened yet, and I am left with only the example of Yeshua vs all those ancient myths. Do I behave as Yeshua and treat him like Yeshua treated Judas, or do I provoke the treachery by punishing him for something he hasn't even done yet?

I am appreciating the character of our Master now in new and painful ways. He walked side by side with His betrayer, who would all but place Him on the cross. His loving character is beyond overwhelming, and it is, frankly, shaming me in how far I fall short of it.

You know what? Bad things happen to "good" people but more than that, bad things happen to all us normal people too, and it happens so that, if we are willing, it can transform us little by little into the image of our Messiah.