

An open Letter on:

Lunar Calendar and the Aviv Barley

What is the Correct Rendering for the Appointed Times?

This Open Letter is for: D. Thomas Lancaster, Director of Education, First Fruits of Zion, the First Fruits of Zion ministry itself, and to the scattered Remnant of Israel to whom these matters are of vital concern.

Reference: This is a response to the position paper by the same title as above by D. Thomas Lancaster, posted at the First Fruits of Zion website at: <http://www.ffoz.org/downloads/Lunar-Calendar-and-Aviv-Barley.pdf>

Dear Brother Lancaster,

Let me begin by saying that I am a friend of the First Fruits of Zion ministry. I greatly appreciate many of the excellent Torah teaching aids produced by your ministry and have sometimes enjoyed employing them in my own ministry. I also appreciate the purpose of your ministry, stated as part of the FFOZ logo on the above referenced page, namely, *Proclaiming the Torah and its way of life, fully centered on Messiah, to today's people of God.* That is a purpose that I can and do totally get behind.

That motto of FFOZ encapsulates the reason why I am forced by the Spirit within me to write this letter. To get to the point, the position paper you have written is not in keeping with the worthy standard emblazoned upon it, and, since no one else has stepped up to the plate that I know of, it is left to me to do my duty as your brother in Israel and as a servant of Yeshua to encourage you onto the Way in this matter. I need to do this publicly because FFOZ has enormous influence and your position paper is public and may have already led many other believers into error. This is not meant to accuse you of deliberate error, since you have only echoed a position that is commonly held in Messianic circles but which is, nevertheless, out of order with the authority of Messiah. My hope is that FFOZ will respond positively to the truth once it is clearly stated and then we can all go on together at a higher level of service to Messiah. In other words, my intentions in writing this letter have an entirely positive purpose and are not meant to tear down your ministry or to unnecessarily cause dissention among the people of God.

Who you are or who I am is not the issue here, although it may matter to some that I am a completed Jew. What really matters though, is what the truth is. I know the truth about the issues you have raised, so I am obligated to speak up. For me to do my duty here I accept the responsibility to articulate where your paper has deviated from the stated purpose of the FFOZ ministry, and more importantly, deviates from the Torah and a walk fully centered on Messiah. I do this in the sense of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15) and not as personally attacking you or anyone. With my intentions explained, I will now address the teachings articulated in your paper.

Before I get to the key issue, I would like to mention your reference to the Karaites as the champions of a system of time-keeping that does not conform to Rabbinic Judaism. This reference was likely intended to counter Nehemiah Gordon and his Karaite website that has made such a stir among many Messianics. This reference in your paper is a red herring. The Karaites do not believe in Yeshua the Messiah and what they teach or don't teach has nothing to do with what the truth of this issue is from a true Messianic perspective. I can confidently tell you that I never learned any of what I know about the topic under discussion from the Karaites, but only from Torah. If God uses one of them to focus attention on the issue of what is the correct calendar, then so be it. He can and does make rocks cry out and donkeys talk, if he is short of one of His own to speak up. As for me, what I have to say on this is entirely unrelated to the Karaites, or any other sect, and I want you and everyone reading this to know it. Now, on to the salient issue.

The theme of your paper is about "the lunar calendar and the aviv barley." However, that is not the heart of your paper. What your paper is about is the question of authority. You state this in the first paragraph of your paper saying; "Only the duly ordained and recognized leadership of the Jewish community—those that sit in the seat of Moses—actually have the authority to determine New Years and calendars." Your paper champions Pharisaic authority and its historical descendant, Orthodox Rabbinic authority, as the authority that believing Israel must

recognize today. You assert by various arguments that Yeshua and the first century disciples accepted that authority, and therefore, we must also. By this logic you would put believing Israel under the yoke of unbelievers in spiritual matters. I will demonstrate that this logic is seriously out of order and that it is, in fact, contrary to the message of Messiah for believing Israelites to do what you suggest.

...whatever Moses bid you observe

Your reference to “those that sit in the seat of Moses” is a quote from Matt 23:2, where, in some versions, Messiah said “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.” This is seen by some as a recognition of Pharisaic authority by Messiah. It is of interest, however, that the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew (which is likely a closer rendering of the original Hebrew Matthew in this verse) says “what Moses bid you observe” – leaving the verse to say that Messiah said we should observe and do the Torah. It is much more in character for Yeshua to have said “whatever Moses bid you observe” then to say “whatever the Pharisees bid you observe.” We have numerous verses in which Yeshua and the disciples DID NOT “observe and do” what the Pharisees bid them – but did something else altogether in keeping with the true intent of Torah. Often, when that happened, Yeshua quoted the Torah to them as His justification, showing that He held the Torah itself as a higher authority than the authority the Pharisees claimed for themselves. Here are a few examples of what I’m talking about:

Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" Matt 9:11

At that time Yeshua went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." Matt 12:1,2

Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. Matt 12:13, 14

After Yeshua called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand. "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." Mat 15:10-14

The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Yeshua, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away. And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. And Yeshua said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Mat 16:1-6

"How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matt 16:11, 12

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Yeshua from Jerusalem and said, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? Mat 15:1-3

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any." Matt 22:15

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." Matt 23:13

Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.

And so on ..and on ..and on. Over and over again Yeshua and the disciples taught and did contrary to the traditions of the Pharisees and were known for doing so. Far from telling the disciples to obey the Pharisees, Yeshua told them just the opposite – to “let them alone” and “watch out and beware” of them. As to authority, Yeshua called the Pharisees “blind guides” and He warned that all those who follow them will fall into the same pit! That is hardly a rousing endorsement of Pharisaic authority!

By saying “every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted” and calling them “blind guides” Yeshua was clearly saying that the Pharisees were not planted by God and did not represent Him – and was also saying that they would be “uprooted” from any supposed authority they claimed. Yeshua made this point multiple times to His disciples in various ways. (Matt 15:10-14)

The kingdom of God will be taken away [from the Pharisees]

I find Matt 21:42-45 especially powerful. I am quoting the NIV here because it gives a correct, non-replacement theology translation in this instance. *"Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them." Matt 21:42-45 (NIV)*

Yeshua said that the key to Kingdom authority in Israel would revolve around the “stone the builders rejected” – Himself. What builders? Yeshua was talking about the religious leaders and Pharisees and the verse says they knew it! He clearly said that the Kingdom (i.e. authority) would be taken from them and given to others. Whom? “...a people who will produce its (the Kingdom’s) fruit.”

This does not mean that the authority would be taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles as some replacement theology advocates claim. This verse is talking about the leadership of the Kingdom of Israel which the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the day claimed for themselves. Note that the Kingdom had been in the hands of the chief priests and Pharisees – BUT WOULD BE TAKEN FROM THEM! That happened long ago. After Yeshua was raised and seated in glory He poured out the Spirit of Power upon His Kingdom representatives on Earth, who were to produce the fruit of the Kingdom. They were the faithful Remnant of Israel who carried the torch for all Israel in their day. They had a Sanhedrin of their own, namely James (Jacob), the brother of Yeshua as executive officer, and the twelve apostles, the number twelve representing the government of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Kingdom was given to them and the other officers of the Kingdom as the leadership of the Remnant of faithful Israel. (See Eph. 4)

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven

It is this Sanhedrin of the Remnant of Israel that was given the Kingdom authority to decide questions requiring a ruling. It was to them that Messiah said; "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19). After Messiah ascended to the Throne in Heaven this believing Sanhedrin exercised this authority to the blessing of the people of God, as in Acts 15. It is to the apostolic traditions established by the Sanhedrin of Messianic Israel, and not to the tradition of the Pharisees whom Messiah had rejected, that your theme verse and other similar verses thus rightly apply. (1 Cor. 11:1-2, 1Cor.11:23; 1Cor.15:3; 2Thess:2:15)

All of the foregoing would indicate that by advocating the traditions of the Pharisees rather than Torah itself you are not, in this matter, "proclaiming the Torah and its way of life" but are in fact proclaiming the traditions of men instead. Neither are you "fully centered on Messiah" in this matter since you would center the people of God on the traditions of unbelievers whom Messiah Himself has labeled as "blind guides" and has expressly commanded us NOT to follow! We should know already where the course you suggest will take us, because Messiah Himself said it, namely; "into the pit." Brother, please prayerfully rethink your position.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers

It is a sad historic tendency of our nation, in times of stress, to follow its blind guides and false leaders into a pit rather than to cling to Torah and a living relationship with the Eternal. How often have we stoned the prophets and driven the righteous into hiding, while clinging to unrighteous leadership in Israel? Is not the loss of two Temples and the sacking of our holy city, not once but twice, enough deterrent from this foolhardy behavior? If not that then the scattering of our nation to the four winds? When will we learn that uncertainty and change is no good reason for us to look to blind guides as our source of unity?

Besides, I don't mean to offend, but I can't help but observe that you sound as if our King is in the grave awaiting a resurrection in some future day. The Lord reigns! He is on the Throne right now! We are not at the mercy of some Pharisaic Sanhedrin that may never be convened in order to keep the moedim at the time our Father has set. Messiah has the authority and the means to decide this and other controversial issues right now and He knows who speaks with authority from Him. He sends forth his true officers of the Kingdom to speak forth the truth even now. We have no need of unbelievers to guide us nor should that ever be even considered as an option. "*Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?*" (2 Cor. 6:14) If we, believing Israel, will stop looking to the unbelievers for leadership and instead exercise the authority of Messiah that we already possess then perhaps we will start to get somewhere in the process of settling some of these sticky issues that frustrate our unity. Let's show a little faith!

Ephraim and Judah

You and a lot of others may think a united Israel will come about by believing Israel accepting the authority of the unbelieving leadership of the sons of the Pharisees. I can only say that this is, at best, misguided thinking. We must get over trying to make the unbelieving Pharisees accept us as Israelites. Even if they do accept us on their terms we will have lost our Kingdom authority and power in the process. What we need to do is BE Israelites – and true Israelites must fully submit to the Kingdom authority of the Messiah of Israel – and none other! Once we do this WE will be providing the leadership in Israel that right-hearted but yet unbelieving Israelites crave. This true godly authority in Israel is what will bring the unbelieving children of Abraham back into Messiah's fold. Ephraim and Judah must be united once again IN MESSIAH. Except that it is in Him, it will never happen.

Enough of the Pharisees!

I say again; "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matt 15:10-14). Many of the Remnant of Israel have had enough of the Pharisees. I know I have. We don't need or want all the Pharisaic trappings and paraphernalia we are told will somehow make us feel more like Israelites. We ARE Israelites already without all the Pharisaic props because our Father in heaven made us to be such. Not only that, we have been dispersed throughout all the earth and speak many different native languages. Yes, we gain a lot from learning to speak Hebrew, but if we don't yet speak Hebrew that doesn't make us any the less Israelites. An Israelite who reads the Scriptures in only his birth language but who is vitally connected with Messiah by the indwelling Spirit is infinitely more qualified to understand the Scriptures than are the blind guides, experts in Hebrew though they may be. That is not to say that those who are blessed by including certain Jewish customs in their worship are necessarily sinful or wrong. Only when these conflict with Scripture is there a problem. These customs are not required to be an Israelite nor is submission to Pharisaic tradition required, or even desirable, in light of what Messiah has said about it. Being an Israelite is a fact, like being born short or tall, black or white – and it is a state of heart as well towards our Messiah. It is time we acknowledge that and focus on that which is truly Messiah-centric, which is also Torah observant in the truest sense of the term.

Bring on the holy battle

Boy, that sounds scary doesn't it? I know what some will say; "If we depart from Rabbinic authority there will be chaos. Besides, we have no Sanhedrin of believing Israel, as they did in the first century." Yes, there will be chaos. There already is chaos, in fact. Will that be helped by the false sense of unity that following blind guides imparts? Such unity is no unity at all, but is only an illusion. As for a modern day Sanhedrin – perhaps if we would love the truth enough to come to grips with the issues, in the midst of the chaos our King would raise up the leadership we need. One thing I know, clinging to traditions that are contrary to Torah will not tend toward sanctifying us nor will it form us into the spotless Bride that is His aim for us. The quest for excellence for our Bridegroom requires constant enquiry and growth in the Word. Standing still in the traditions of men is stagnation and death. Clinging to Pharisaic tradition led many to unbelief in Messiah's day and it is capable of the same in our day. It is no wonder that Yeshua told his disciples 'don't go there.'

Finally, to the remnant of Israel I would say this: Preserving traditions of men at the cost of Torah truth, all in the name of unity, is contrary to the example and Spirit of Yeshua. Yet, this is the growing attitude of many today. This must not go unchallenged. As we are able, we need to be a correcting influence as gently as possible. However, when that fails the issue involved is nothing less than the difference between faithfulness and apostasy. It will be calamity for us if we fail to act. Remember that, when required, Yeshua did not shy away from fighting it out with the Pharisees and neither did the disciples, and neither should we. Ultimately true unity can emerge only after fighting the wars of God and vanquishing the enemies of peace. Father David is an example of this. He fought the wars of God and vanquished the enemies of Israel, both within and without. In so doing he laid the groundwork for the Kingdom of Solomon after him, which was the height of our unity, peace and glory for centuries. Spiritually speaking, we are in a time like that which David came up in. We have enemies on every side and we ourselves are in disarray with present leadership in Israel that is not always stayed upon obedience to the Word and loyalty to the King. It is time for the scattered Remnant to make a stand. Bring on the holy battle that we may fight our way through to the real unity and peace of the Kingdom that only utter surrender to Messiah and obedience to the Word can usher in.

Wake up! Arise, O Remnant of Israel! This is your day to shine!

Eliyahu ben David, bond-slave of Yeshua the Messiah

PS – I did not address the calendar issues at all in this paper because they are secondary to the principle issue of authority. However, it is a fact that the Rabbinic Calendar is grossly contrary to the Torah Calendar and therefore is simply incorrect and unfit. It is an example of "voiding the commandment of God by your tradition." How so? This year of 2005 those following the Rabbinic Calendar are a month late for Yah's Passover Appointment! Do not believe that the Scripture is not sufficient to know the Torah Calendar without the aid of the Pharisees. Messiah did not leave us without the help we need; "But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). Surely "all truth" includes the correct timing of the moedim we are commanded to observe.

For solid Biblical proof regarding the Torah Calendar enquire at www.tsiyon.org.