



Be Not Like the Gentiles

Hebraic Leadership – Part 1

by Tim Kelley

I've often said that the Hebraic movement is full of rebels, and I believe that is still a fair assessment. Most of us came out of some church or organization that we claim at least lied to us, and in some cases - abused us, and because we felt betrayed, we decided we would never join anything again, and especially not put ourselves under anyone's authority . . . and rightly so! When it comes to God's people, all He told them to "join" (you might say) was His people – Israel, not some church, organization, or sect.

But, what about authority? Did God make submission to authority optional? Did He allow the Israelites to set their own rules, determine their own times, or establish their own priorities? Absolutely not! Instead, (as we learned in parasha Yitro) God instructed Moses through Jethro to establish a system of judges, men who had the authority to make judgments and determinations - especially in regards to conduct within the community - and whose judgments were binding on the people.

When you really give it some thought, most of us are not opposed to authority; we're just opposed to those who are in leadership positions . . . the one in authority. That was my problem. That's why I was one of those rebels. I had a problem respecting those in authority.

When Messiah returns and establishes His kingdom, will we have a problem submitting to His authority? I would hope not, and I believe I can safely say that if Yeshua leads like He said He would, most of those who love God's law won't have a problem either.

For the next few times I'm teaching, I want to talk about Godly leadership, something that's not talked about much in this movement, but something that is greatly needed. I hope to show that God expects all of us to be leaders, and that as we become leaders, we play a bigger part in joining His people back together.

There are a number of examples of good leadership in the Bible. There are also examples of bad leadership. We can learn from both, but to introduce this topic, I'm going to begin by focusing in on one example that was given shortly before Passover nearly 2000 years ago. This is an example of men who thought they qualified to be leaders simply because of their loyalty to their master, their teacher. It's the story of two brothers, James and John, and their request for high leadership responsibilities in the Kingdom.

In Matthew 20, beginning in verse 20, we see Yeshua and His disciples making their way down the Jordan valley as they were headed "up to" Jerusalem¹. For The Messiah, it would be His last trip to the capital city in this lifetime. As he and the entourage of disciples took a break from their travels, the wife of Zebedee – the mother of James and John, came from out of the crowd to make a very pointed and assuming request. She kneeled before Him and said –

^{ESV} **Matthew 20:21** . . . "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

Yeshua's response was simply –

^{ESV} **Matthew 20:21** . . . "You don't know what you are asking . . .!"

He knew that at the end of this road, when He entered into Jerusalem, he would be facing a very certain and grueling death. It was all part of the plan that would ultimately lead the restoration of the Kingdom of God on the earth. He had spent His lifetime preparing for that day and was ready . . . but were they? Were James and John up to the task? Were they prepared to take on the responsibilities that would be required of someone who would have the honor of sitting on His right hand in the Kingdom?

¹ See the parallel witness in Mark 10:35

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Apparently, they thought they were! For they answered the Master saying –

^{ESV} **Matthew 20:21** . . . “We are able.”

And maybe they were. We see no record of Yeshua disputing their claim, after all, He had taught them that the road to the Kingdom was filled with trials. He had taught them –

^{ESV} **Matthew 10:28** “ . . . do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

What’s more, they had just recently witnessed a remarkable vision where they saw Yeshua standing with Moses and Elijah² – a vision of the Kingdom of God - and they were a part of it!

So Yes – they thought they were ready, and they maybe even thought they were deserving of such an honor as being able to sit at the right hand or the left hand of The King!

So who were these guys – James and John, the sons of Zebedee? We first see them in a boat out in the Sea of Galilee³. They, along with their father, were casting their fishing nets into the sea. Nearby, their fishing partners, Andrew and Peter were cleaning their nets. Yeshua came along, and as usual, there was a crowd following Him. Yeshua needed a little breathing room between Himself and the crowd, so He asked Peter and Andrew to take Him in their boat and go out a few feet into the sea where He could teach the people gathered on the shore. After His teaching, he instructed Peter and Andrew to sail out a little further into the sea and cast their freshly cleaned nets into the sea. “What’s the use?” Peter exclaimed, “We’ve been fishing all morning, and there’s nothing out there.” But Yeshua insisted, so they cast out their nets, and caught so many fish that they had to summon James and John to bring their boat by to take in the part of the catch.

This obviously made an impact on these four fishermen, and as a result, they all left the fishing business and began to follow Yeshua? Now I doubt, nor does the text indicate, that Yeshua was a stranger to these fellows. In fact, just weeks earlier Yeshua was invited to Peter’s house after teaching at the synagogue that Sabbath⁴. While at Peter’s home, Yeshua was asked to take a look at Peter’s mother-in-law who had a high fever, and when He did, she was healed. So these guys apparently already knew that Yeshua was quite likely the promised Messiah who would begin the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel, and the abundance of fish in their nets just strengthened that belief.

It’s quite possible that Zebedee was a priest, a descendant of Aaron, and thus so were his sons, James and John. Evidence of such is found in John’s account of Peter’s denial at the trial of Yeshua. In the recount of his experiences with Yeshua, John states twice that he is known by Caiaphas, the high priest, and was thus granted entrance into the inner courts of the Temple. If they indeed were priests, then their knowledge of the Temple, its services, and the Torah probably surpassed that of their fellow disciples.

Along with Peter, James and John were Yeshua’s closest disciples. They are mentioned together a number of times in the Gospels. For instance, they were the only ones who witnessed the transfiguration, the only disciples at the healing of Jarias’ daughter, the only ones who accompanied Yeshua when He prayed at Gethsemane, and along with Peter’s brother – Andrew, were the only ones who questioned Yeshua about the end-time events. They were certainly part of Yeshua’s inner circle, and in fact, John identifies himself as the disciple that Yeshua loved⁵.

But James and John had a character flaw, and because of it, Yeshua called them “Boanerges”, the *Sons of Thunder*. There is much commentary in regards to the true meaning of “Boanerges”. Does it really mean “sons of Thunder”, or is there a better translation? My Strong’s concordance in Bible Works states

² Luke 9:28; Matt. 17:1

³ Matt 4:21; Mark 1:19; Luke 5:1

⁴ Luke 4:38; Mark 1:29; These two accounts differ on what came first, Peter’s calling, or the visit to his home

⁵ John 13:23

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that the name is a contraction of two Aramaic words that mean “raging bull”⁶. I believe the latter is probably more correct. Here’s why . . .

As we saw at the time when they were called to be disciples, James and John seem to be filled with zeal. Keeping in mind that in those days there was a widespread belief that the advent of the promised messiah was near, and with the coming of the messiah came the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. So when Yeshua showed signs that He was the promised Messiah, they were eager to join in with Him as was their friend Peter. As they continued to follow and draw close to Yeshua, their zeal for Him as well as the Kingdom continued to grow. His words, the crowds that followed, and accompanying miracles encouraged them that the Kingdom was imminent.

Though Yeshua tried to temper their zeal with the reality that things were not going to happen quite as quickly as they believed, they began to build a cocoon of protection around Yeshua. When they found others who were not part of their band of followers casting out demons in Yeshua’s name⁷, they took offense, even forbidding them to cast out demons unless they were a part of their group.

Later, when Yeshua was heading for Jerusalem to die for the sins of His people, they came to a Samaritan village looking for lodging. But because Yeshua was not able to stay long, but needed to move on the next morning, the Samaritans had little interest in Him. James and John took this as an insult and in their zeal to revere Yeshua, offered to rain fire down on the village. Obviously, they had forgotten the earlier time when Yeshua had visited the Samaritans and they were very open to His message.

It appears then, that James and John had a zeal for God, but not accompanied with wisdom. In response to their *fire from heaven* comment, Yeshua said⁸ -

NKJ Luke 9:55-56 . . . "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶ "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save *them*."

James and John were obviously not ready to be the ones who would sit on the right and left hand of Yeshua. They were too impulsive. They didn’t have the big picture in mind. They were focused simply on only one aspect of Yeshua’s mission - the reestablishment of the Kingdom. They had failed to realize that all this had to be tempered with justice, mercy, and faith.

Thus when their mother made her request (on their behalf it seems), Yeshua used it as an opportunity to teach them a lesson about leadership. He answered –

ESV Matthew 20:25-28 . . . "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Because Israel at that time was under Roman occupation, they knew quite well what Yeshua was talking about. The nations (gentiles) conquer other nations by force and subject the people to their will by intimidation and threats. But the Kingdom of God would not be that way. Leaders in the Kingdom would not be arrogant and oppressive, but would be as servants, helping the people see the value of walking in God’s way.

Where did James and John get the idea that they were prepared for leadership? Why did they think that force and intimidation qualified them to be leaders in the Kingdom? Do we have an example that they may have been aware of . . . that maybe they had patterned their lives after? Yes we do.

The first century Jewish people believed that the coming Messiah would restore the Kingdom of Israel back to what it was before it was rent in two following the death of King Solomon. They knew that their Messiah would sit on His father’s throne – the throne of David, and that He, like David, would rule from

⁶ Strong’s H1123 and H7266

⁷ Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49

⁸ The ESV omits everything past “He turned and rebuked them”.

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Jerusalem. Just as David had leaders who were in effect, his *right hand* men, it would be appropriate for Yeshua to have the same.

Who was David's *right hand* man? Very clearly, it was Joab – the commander of David's army. Joab was David's nephew by his sister Zeruah. When David became king over Judah, Joab became his general, and later when David became king over all Israel, David offered the position of commander to the first person who would attack the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Here's how it went –

^{ESV} **1 Chronicles 11:6-8** David said, "Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander." And Joab the son of Zeruah went up first, so he became chief. ⁷ And David lived in the stronghold; therefore it was called the city of David. ⁸ And he built the city all around from the Millo in complete circuit, and Joab repaired the rest of the city.

Joab was fearless. When the opportunity came to lead, he stepped out in zeal. He didn't hesitate, he didn't wait for others, he just acted. He and his brother Abishai, were completely devoted to David. Once, when fighting the Ammonites Joab was close to taking the city of Rabbah, but before entering the city, Joab sent messengers to David telling him to come quickly to Rabbah so that David would be credited with winning the battle instead of him. And when Abishai, Joab's brother, heard Shimei, a Benjamite, cursing David as he fled from Absalom, he offered to cut off Shimei's head to preserve David's dignity as king. Numerous times in his life, Joab "stuck his neck out" in order to preserve David's credibility and dignity. But even though Joab was very loyal to David, his zeal for him often complicated David's life. On two different occasions, Joab killed a man that David had made peace with.

After the death of Saul, Ishbosheth became king over the northern tribes of Israel, and David became king over Judah. Joab, of course, was the commander of David's army, and Abner, the former commander of Saul's army, remained the commander of the army of Israel when Ishbosheth became king.

Soon war broke out between Israel and Judah and as a consequence Asahel, Joab's brother was killed by Abner. Eventually Abner decided he had had enough war and convinced the elders of Israel to forsake Ishbosheth and join in with David. He made a covenant of peace with David at Hebron, and then began to make his way back to Samaria, but on the way he was summoned back to Hebron. When he arrived, Joab killed him to avenge his brother's blood.

In another case Absalom, David's son, rebelled and attempted to take over the throne of Israel. Though some of Judah, including his friend Joab, remained loyal to David, most of Judah as well as all of Israel made Absalom their king, and subsequently, Absalom named Amasa, his cousin, the commander of the army of Israel. As the story goes, Absalom attempted to attack David and his army, but instead got caught in a tree by his hair. Though David had instructed Joab not to harm him, when Joab found out that Absalom was hanging in a tree, he killed Absalom, thus ending the rebellion.

Because Joab had disobeyed David's instructions concerning Absalom, or maybe to entice the northern tribes back under his kingship, David did not kill Amasa, Absalom's former commander, but extended mercy to him and actually made him the commander of Israel's army⁹. Though Joab seemed to be OK with this strange turn of events, it's obvious that anger burned inside him, and when the opportunity arose, he killed Amasa.

Thus Joab, David's trusted "right hand man", killed two men to whom David had extended the hand of peace. Though he was fiercely loyal to David, his loyalty did not extend to Abner and Amasa, men to whom David had extended mercy.

Just before David died, he gave final instructions to Solomon, his son - the new King of Israel. He began by instructing Solomon to always follow the instructions of God, the Torah, so that he may prosper in all he did. Then he gave Solomon instructions pertaining to certain individuals who had impacted his life, one of them – of course – was Joab. This is what he said –

^{ESV} **1 Kings 2:5** "Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of

⁹ 2 Samuel 19:13

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Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet.

David considered what Joab had done as an attack against himself. By killing those to whom David had extended mercy, Joab had in effect – attacked David. And though David did not deal with it in his lifetime, he put it into his son Solomon's hands. He told Solomon –

^{ESV} **1 Kings 2:6** Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace.

After David died, Solomon instructed Benaiah, the new commander of the army of Israel, to have Joab put to death. In his statement to Banaiah Solomon said –

^{ESV} **1 Kings 2:32** The LORD will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah.

What's the lesson we learn from this? Quite simply –

Loyalty to the King, if it doesn't extend to the King's subjects, is not loyalty at all.

And this was the problem with James and John – the *Sons of Thunder*. They were filled with zeal and loyalty to Yeshua, but their loyalty ended there. It did not extend to the others with whom Yeshua was working. It didn't extend to the Samaritans, nor did it extend to those who trusted in Yeshua enough that they could cast out demons in His name. It didn't even extend to their fellow disciples who heard their vain request. They, like Joab, were loyal only to their King, but not to the King's subjects. Thus they were unfit to serve as leaders in Yeshua's kingdom. But that's not the end of the story . . .

Just a few weeks after their mother made her famous request, James and John witnessed their master being nailed to a stake to die the death of a common criminal. Then just a few days later, they witnessed His resurrection and ascension back to His father. Their Messiah's death and resurrection changed things, they became different men, even to the point that Paul described them as pillars¹⁰, the ones who support the movement. James became the first of Yeshua's disciples to be martyred, and John went on to write about love and about those who desire to be above their brothers.

Leadership, especially leadership in the body of Messiah, requires loyalty, not only to God, but to those with whom God is working. We cannot decide for ourselves whether or not we want to honor our brother, if they are walking in the ways of God, we must honor them, because God honors them.

As we continue this study, we'll look at many more aspects of leadership and how as leaders, we can serve the people of God.

Shalom Alecheim!

¹⁰ Gal. 2:9