

HUE AND CRY: The Power of Religious Propaganda

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Words and what they convey are powerful, especially if those words are deceiving. Remember the adage attributed to Nazi party Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels: **“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”**

In the political arena this makes sense. But have you ever considered how this applies in the religious world? Have you ever thought that perhaps some of the teachings you receive are simply a reiteration of false teachings that over time make themselves out to appear to be the truth—primarily because *you* have heard them repeated so many times over that you begin to believe such things without questioning them or thinking critically?

To the children of God who understand the sanctity of life and what the Almighty considers to be a proper marriage, the truth is black and white. When political statements promoting abortion, infanticide, or alternative lifestyles arise, the revulsion shocks the soul. However in murkier spiritual waters, when it comes to teachings on subjects where the students have had little or no previous research or instruction, and often lack the right resources to confirm what is being said, the ability to recognize hype, misinformation, or distorted details—and adamantly reject them is lacking.

Our ministry has taken it upon itself to confront a great number of things that damage the credibility and believability of the emerging Messianic movement. We get asked a great number of questions that concern those who actually desire confirmation of what they have heard from a multitude of voices. They respect our ability to honestly and sincerely look for confirming evidence in the wide array of Biblical scholarship that has been made available in the past century by diligent Jewish and Christian scholars. The FAQ section on the TNN Online website has been put together to tackle a great number of the inquiries we receive.

Each of us—Margaret, John, and myself—spends a great deal of time reading and researching. We each have a little stack of books and/or articles that we are reading through, be they books we *want* to read or books we *have* to read. This is how teachers remain informed about what is going on in the world of Biblical Studies, and the topics that they need to know about as they function in their respective callings. Unfortunately, not many of the books that each of us reads are those we *want* to read, but instead regard those topics that you have specifically asked us about. This was the case this morning, as I was specifically asked about a particular teaching.

This book was not that long, but it did make some statements about a topic that many Messianics are interested in: the Hebrew language. Having a working knowledge of the Hebrew language is certainly important for one’s study of the Tanach Scriptures. It is especially important when one understands that there are only about 3,000 words in Hebrew, compared to almost 150,000 words in English! Many words in Hebrew have to not only play double and triple duties, but in some cases have nine different usages. If one reads a book about the Hebrew language these are the kinds of things one would expect to see addressed (i.e., C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1995]). But the book I was reading, did not explore these facets of the Hebrew language. Instead, it made a number of statements that were well outside of the academic discussion—even though they are repeated over and over again by many of today’s Messianic “experts.”

The following is a statement that caught my eye in my reading, and I’m sure it would have caught yours as well:

Prior to the incident of the Tower of Babel, which will be discussed later, only one language existed;

“And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” (Genesis 11.1)

From this we can conclude that God, Adam and Eve and their descendants spoke Hebrew.

While this proposition—that the “one language” referred to here is Hebrew—is interesting, it is not a claim that is made by the Biblical text. The whole events described at the Tower of Babel, and immediately before, were not recorded as authoritative Scripture until after the Exodus by Moses for an Ancient Israel that spoke Hebrew. This was *after* the Tower of Babel. Simply making the assumption that all of mankind spoke Hebrew *before* this event—especially without any respected opinions or references to substantiate it—is not enough to be taken seriously.

When looking at the book’s bibliography, I realized that its author had little, if any formal training in Ancient Near Eastern languages. Some of our favorite books that deal with this period, such as *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* by Walter C. Kaiser (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) and the massive work *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* by K.A. Kitchen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) are produced by two scholars who spent their whole lives teaching from the Hebrew Scriptures (Kaiser), and defending the veracity of the Hebrew Scriptures (Kitchen). Both are well known in various Jewish as well as evangelical Christian circles.

Still, conclusions are being made that should absolutely alarm anyone with just some basic Bible training. The presupposition is that only Hebrew could have been the spoken language that God used to communicate with Adam and Eve demands more evidence! This is an assumption by the person I read this morning, written in such a way that it is an indisputable fact. The problem with this is that there is no way—save inventing a time machine—anyone can verify what language Adam and Eve actually spoke. But it is obvious that their language was the first!

This is disturbing because whether we are reading a book or listening to a CD without any credible references, the possibility that people will believe something and incorporate it into their thinking becomes very real. Various presuppositions, then, have the capacity to lead people astray—both spiritually and theologically—in ways similar to when political propaganda influences people, parties, and even countries.

The warning I issue is simply this: **Just because someone says something on a CD or DVD or writes something in a paperback book, does not mean that it is accurate.** Check the sources. Remember the Torah principle that by the testimony of two or three trustworthy witnesses a fact is to be established (cf. Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19). **Just because something “makes sense” does not automatically make it a fact.**

There have been many men and women who have devoted their entire lives to the study of Ancient Near Eastern languages, from whose work we can greatly benefit. They have not come to this simplistic conclusion about Hebrew spoken by Adam and Eve. As a community of faith, Messianic Believers need to get beyond some of these obvious errors. **Let us not let religious propaganda bring justified castigation upon our efforts to encourage people to return to the ancient paths!** Perhaps if we spent more time focusing on the message of holiness, righteousness, and making a difference as taught to us by the Torah, then we would not be led down such ridiculous paths.

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