

Answering the Questions Regarding the Epistle of Hebrews

A Response to Monte Judah's Questions of Canonicity

September 22, 2005 [revised edition October 6, 05]

To whom it may concern:

This document is a collaborated response by various representatives of the ministry of First Fruits of Zion. This response is by no means exhaustive and is composed of the following sections (author in brackets):

- Responsibility (Boaz Michael)
- History (Boaz Michael)
- Defense of Hebrews (Daniel Lancaster and Tim Hegg)
- Moving forward (Boaz Michael)

Overview

This letter addresses the recent announcement on Friday, September 9, by Monte Judah that, "The book of Hebrews is written against every Messianic believer there is. If you're a Messianic believer, the book of Hebrews is intentionally your enemy and against you." Also in reference to Hebrews he states, "We've been bullied into this. This is false teaching. Passed off as the word of God."

Prior to releasing his teaching on the Epistle of Hebrews, Monte Judah had asked the ministry of FFOZ to help him understand the book of Hebrews; he asked to speak with us about some of his thoughts and concerns. Much of his confusion and error regarding the book of Hebrews could have been answered had he been a careful and accountable teacher. He has brought into question the authority and trustworthiness of all of the Scriptures because he has excised the book of Hebrews. Because of this grievous act, we feel it is our responsibility to respond and defend the precious Word of God.

There are two things that need to be clearly communicated on this issue. The first being First Fruits of Zion has chosen to address this issue in order to protect the Holy One's flock against falsehood and confusion. The second, which weighs equally as heavy upon our hearts, is the hope for repentance and ultimate restoration of Monte to the Holy One and the Body of Messiah. In keeping with the Master's instructions (Matthew 18:15-17), First Fruits of Zion admonished Monte privately before addressing this issue publicly.

Responsibility

Messiah instructed us that when we judge, we are to judge fairly, with righteous judgment (John 7:24). We are to use equal weights and measures, and to show no partiality. Torah justice is clear. It requires the testimony of truthful witnesses and the

evidence of wrongdoing/transgression(s). The witnesses must testify that a wrongdoing has been committed and must be the ones who complete the cycle of judgment. It should be clear that this wrongdoing is not a transgression against the witnesses, but a transgression against the Torah: the measure by which all are judged. This is not a sterile procedure where the witnesses are removed from the process, allowing for some dismissed consolation or displacement of responsibility. On the contrary: those who are the witnesses are gripped with the emotion and severity of what they have seen, and they painfully go through the process of being the very agents of the impending justice.

Please hear my heart as I speak of this serious matter. It is not my intention to communicate that First Fruits of Zion is sitting as a judge over Monte or that judgment has been cast against him. We have One Judge appointed over us and He is Righteous and True (James 4:12); however, all of us bear the responsibility of speaking truth to one another and discerning between truth and error as found in the Word of God. What we are attempting to do through this paper is to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Monte has violated the Word of God in his attempt to dismantle the Epistle of Hebrews as authoritative Scripture and attributing this to be a direct revelation from God.

This is difficult for me to write. I would much rather just look the other way and act as if I did not see or hear anything. Due to the serious nature of this matter, I was not able to remain silent. I was enjoying the developing relationship between Monte and myself—for many years I reserved from entering into any relationship with Monte as a result of his 1996 false teaching regarding the return of the Messiah / start of the tribulation. Last year I made a decision to put that in the past and move forward—I have seen so many divisions over the years that I felt, despite differences, that I would begin to reconcile and reach out. The hope was that if two leaders / ministries in this movement could be at peace then we could exhort others to do the same. Based upon seeing the greater need in this movement to be at peace, I agreed to speak at Monte's Sukkot gathering in 2004. I was warmly received and many people commented that it was nice to see this display of unity.

I like it when everything is peaceful and people are happy. In addition, I tend to not involve myself or the ministry of First Fruits of Zion in disagreements of interpretation with other ministries—it has been our long standing policy to not use the forum that we have been graciously afforded by the Father as a platform to publicize our differences with other ministries or individuals. Unfortunately, this is the third time in the last year or so that we have felt it necessary to violate this policy—the first time was a friendly theological debate between FFOZ, Tim Hegg and UMJC representatives on the issues of non-Jewish status within in the Messianic movements. The second time we found it necessary to openly address another ministry and a few individuals in order to defend the authority and accuracy of the Scriptures when the reliability of the Greek text of the Gospels was called into question. Admittedly, in these situations we felt the matter to be of such consequence that we hit it pretty hard. From our perspective the authority and reliability of Scripture is a matter of great importance to us. When voices within the Messianic movement question the inerrancy of the Scriptures, we feel it is a matter of integrity to at least make our position known in order to protect the message of the Torah and Messiah from being marginalized or defamed.

Before we defend the book of Hebrews, I need to give some qualifiers.

First, we have appreciated Monte for the following:

- It appears that his family is in order.
- He has labored for the Kingdom.
- He has called people to be faithful to the Torah.
- He has proclaimed Yeshua to be the Messiah.

I am confident that there are many other things that I could have listed; however, I really do not know Monte that well. I do know that there has been some positive fruit from his labors—I know that the Father has used Monte. I have met many people who have been touched in a positive way by his work. I would characterize myself and First Fruits of Zion as having been acquaintances with Monte and Lion and Lamb Ministries. From my perspective you could distill our respective ministries' messages into two shared beliefs: faith in Yeshua as the Messiah, and the continued authority of the Torah.

Second, demonstrating some behind-the-scenes workings of FFOZ is pertinent to this discussion. For many years the ministry of FFOZ has functioned under the authority of an independent theological committee. This board has had several participants on it over the years and is chaired by Tim Hegg. The purpose of this structure is to have an independent board in place that has the authority to reject, correct or approve any and all teachings that are disseminated by the ministry of FFOZ. Every teaching is first scrutinized by our internal editors and teachers, and then critiqued and approved by the theological committee. On average six different edits / reviews are done to each teaching prior to being presented to our constituents. Books not only go through our internal systems, but are sent to dozens of proponents and opponents of the message to insure its clarity and accuracy. The duration of time for a book to go through these processes is a minimum of six months from the time that we receive a completed manuscript from the respective author. This is an extensive review process that gives us ample opportunity to correct, sharpen and fine tune the message that we intend to convey. Our teaching seminars are typically done many times before they are recorded onto any form of broadcast media. We have implemented these procedures for the following reasons:

- 1.) Our desire to be careful stewards of the Word of God and the sensitivity we have to properly present His precious Words. We are very measured and careful in our presentation as we understand that those who teach will be held accountable to a higher standard. Thus we have placed systems of accountability to insure to the best of our ability an accurate understanding and teaching of the Word of God.
- 2.) Our understanding that we are responsible to one another and that many have come to trust the work of FFOZ to be a consistent and steady voice of balance within the emerging Torah / Messiah movement. In these early years of reformation we realize the critical nature of careful stewardship and delicate delivery of the Word of God. We realize that this message is not about one man or one ministry. This message is not about a single man's personal revelation.
- 3.) Our recognition that we are with flaw. We all have misguided understandings of the Scriptures to one degree or another—through accountability we can minimize

the public's exposure to our personal biblical shortcomings. We have a great sense of responsibility to the message above our own personal passions or beliefs.

History

On September 9, Monte stated, "Quite honestly I asked the Lord—I said 'Lord, please don't make me teach this' cuz I guarantee You that when I teach this I have got myself a pack of trouble." It appears that the only person that Monte checked with concerning this singular revelation and understanding of the book of Hebrews is God Himself. This is delusional and dangerous.

To Monte's credit he did recognize that this would be a very controversial message. I (Boaz) happened to be in Norman, OK, spending the weekend of August 19 to 22 with family. The following timeline is an important element of this rebuke.

- **August 19** we attend the Messianic congregation Monte leads. After the service he tells me that he is having some real difficulties with the book of Hebrews and that he would like to sit with me and Tim Hegg to discuss some of his thoughts and concerns. I tell him that I could not speak for Tim, but I was sure that we could in some manner review his conclusions.
- **August 20** we attend a local gathering of some FFOZ friends in the area. Monte attends this dinner. Monte announces he needs to leave to write his next article. When asked what the subject matter would be, he states, "On Covenant."
- **September 3** Monte delivers the Hebrews teaching in Colorado Springs, CO. FFOZ constituents in attendance contact us with concern—relaying to us that Monte has cast doubt in their minds regarding the accuracy of the book of Hebrews, that they need us to address these issues, and that they are confused.
- **September 4** we receive a note from a concerned FFOZ constituent, "I will share a hermeneutic principle that I learned in a Christian High School...if you do not understand a passage of Scripture, the problem lies with your understanding and not the Scripture... to do otherwise is arrogant and irresponsible to the extreme. I am still shaking my head in disgust. Not only was the Book of Hebrews discounted and doubt cast upon the readership of *Yavoh* [the teaching magazine of Lion and Lamb / Monte Judah], he casually mentioned the Gospel of Thomas... as if it was actually written by 'the' Thomas. So, throw down one book that is in and somewhat elevating a book that is not." At this point we download his two-part article from his website and begin to read and review his work.
- **September 6** Tim Hegg writes Monte the following, "Question Monte, I have read your most recent remarks on the book of Hebrews. One question: I noticed that you did not mention that both in 8:13 and 9:1, the word "covenant" (*diatheke*) is not found in the Greek text, but is supplied by English translators. I'm curious as to why you didn't mention this, as it might bear significantly upon your conclusions."
- **September 6** Monte responds, "Thanks for your question. First, my comments on Hebrews were oblique, not addressing the subject objectively. I am aware of the absence of the Greek work in question and that does lend insight to the final conclusions. I am in the process of addressing the whole question of the book of Hebrews, but my method is rather simple at this point. When you take on a stronghold, or an entire wall set against, you must punch a couple of holes first (to set explosives). My comments were just a couple of holes at this point. I believe that future dialogue and discussion will open this

thing up considerably. I mentioned to Boaz on his recent trip that I would very much like to have a sit down with you guys to explore even deeper questions and issues. Your insights would be particularly helpful in this process. Blessings, Monte”

- **September 9** Monte delivers the Hebrew teachings via PalTalk and Real Audio while teaching at *Bnai Shalom* in Norman, OK. Again we receive multiple requests to address this issue and to clarify our position from concerned and confused people.
- **September 17** we assign a staff member to transcribe Monte’s Friday night teaching in its entirety enabling us to have the ability to clearly analyze what is being said.
- **September 17** we assign a staff member to listen to and transcribe pertinent sections of the debate of April 4-5, 2005 between Monte Judah and Donald Wilson in order to have the ability to clearly analyze what is being said.
- **September 19** we receive the following note, “My family and I were in Oklahoma last weekend to attend a Messianic wedding. We made a long weekend of it and attended a couple of Sabbath meetings. On Friday evening we visited, for the first time, the fellowship that Monte Judah leads. What timing. We were there to hear Monte announce to the Messianic community and the world, via the world wide web (web cam?), that he no longer believed that the Book of Hebrew's should be considered Scripture. My wife and I spoke personally with Monte after the service and he did tell us that he has submitted a paper to you and the FFOZ theological review committee (led by Tim Hegg) concerning this teaching. I won't go into the details since I'm told you are already aware of Monte's position. I'm sharing this with you to request, when possible, that you make us aware of FFOZ's response to what Monte is teaching. Thanks much.”
- **September 20** we receive the transcription of the September 9 teaching and the debate and begin to prepare our response.
- **September 21** we sent a forthright letter to Monte that called for his repentance, retraction, and to make restitution (clean up problem). Additionally, we withdrew our involvement with the Sukkot gathering hosted by Monte. Many communications between FFOZ and Monte followed. We felt on the September 23rd that it would not be fruitful or useful to include those communications in this document at this time.

Although the communications between Monte and FFOZ are long and cumbersome they did not get into the discussions of the text and the matters of Hebrews. These communications will be preserved to show that this matter was not a personal attack nor motivated for personal reasons. The communications establish the grounds in which we feel that we have to involve ourselves in this matter and demonstrates that attempts have been made to bring Monte back to his previous and correct understanding of the book of Hebrews. They will be archived as evidence that we have made every effort to be fair and balanced. [October 6th full disclosure of communications were made available.]

Defense of Hebrews

It is ironic that Monte Judah has chosen the book of Hebrews to de-canonize. While it is true that Hebrews has been largely misread and misunderstood in Christian interpretation, the epistle is actually one of the strongest pro-Torah pieces of the Apostolic Scriptures. Monte rightly points out that Hebrews was one of the last books to receive canonization by the church fathers. The main argument against the epistle’s canonicity was the uncertainty of its authorship. All of the other Apostolic writings have a known or

traditionally accepted author from the apostolic community. Hebrews does not. However, this hesitation was not found in the Eastern Church. As early as Origen, Hebrews was received, read and quoted as an authoritative work of the original apostolic community. Though canonicity was still an emerging concept, the Eastern Church regarded Hebrews as authentic from the outset. Western reluctance may have been based upon more than just the anonymity of the work. The Western Church's reluctance to receive the epistle may have had something to do with the extremely Jewish nature of the work. The Western Church was far more progressive in distancing herself from Judaism than the congregations of the East. As the Western Church rose to a position of dominance, the epistle was suppressed, and it did not emerge again until the time of Jerome or Augustine. By that time, post-Nicea, the divorce from Judaism was complete, and the epistle could be read through the new paradigm of Christianity vs. Judaism. This is why it seems ironic that a Hebrew Roots teacher would side with the early, Western church fathers in rejecting Hebrews.

Monte objects to the canonicity of the epistle on several grounds. His three main objections are as follows:

1. Internal inconsistencies
2. Incomplete or variant textual quotations
3. Covenant incongruity

Our response will briefly examine each of these points. **This is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of these subjects.** See the end of this paper for a list of FFOZ resources that more extensively explain the seemingly anti-nomian passages contained in Hebrews.

Internal Inconsistencies

Monte attempts to demonstrate that the Epistle of Hebrews is inconsistent with the rest of the Bible in order to prove that the text is errant and therefore cannot be construed to be scriptural. However, his reasoning is faulty. The examples he cites and criteria he uses could be used to the same effect on most any book of the Bible to declare it as errant. In fact, other unscrupulous and misguided Hebrew Roots teachers have done exactly that to dismiss the authenticity of the Greek text of the Gospels. The strategy is simple. First define inerrancy as a complete and literal inerrancy. Then find a seeming contradiction, seeming error or even a seeming spelling mistake, and use that as evidence to topple the entire book. But this entire technique is based upon a faulty premise about inerrancy. Starting from this premise, it would be possible to disqualify books of the Bible based upon discrepancies in genealogical charts, census information, parallel accounts, etc., etc. For example, the synoptic Gospels (Mathew, Mark and Luke) tell many of the same parables, the same teachings and the same stories, but have many small discrepancies between them. The Gospel of John contains chronology discrepancies with the Synoptics. Based upon this methodology, we would be forced to conclude that all four Gospels are non-canonical. Obviously Monte has fundamentally misunderstood inerrancy.

As one example of the evidence that the Epistle to the Hebrews is not the inspired Word of God, he points to Hebrews 9:3–4:

Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden

jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tablets of the covenant. (Hebrews 9:3–4)

Monte points out an obvious difficulty with the text. The golden altar of incense stood outside of the curtain, outside of the Holy of Holies, not inside the Holy of Holies.¹ In his Shabbat address of September 9, 2005, Monte had the following comments on the passage:

That is wrong. And any Bible teacher and Sunday school teacher can tell you it's wrong. The Altar of Incense was sitting in the Holy Place right along with the lampstand, right along with the table of showbread. It's not behind the veil and it's not in the Holy of Holies. It sits out in the holy place. The writer of Hebrews doesn't know what he's talking about. He is not accurately representing the divine order of worship and the reason he goes on to tell you that he cannot speak of this in detail any further – at the end of vs. 5 – is because he doesn't know what he's talking about. He gets confused with the details.

Hey, let me just ask you a fundamental question. Is this the evidence of a holy man moved by the Holy Spirit to write inspired Scripture to us that will be teaching material for all generations? Does this compare to the other Scriptures that we have? No, it doesn't even come close to the comparison.

We understand the Bible to be inerrant in its meaning and message. However, because the Word of God comes to us clothed in the garments of human language we often do not fully understand the words and phrases as we should; we are so far removed from the author's time, language, social *sitz im leben*, and culture.

Regarding the above passage, the writer of Hebrews is turning our attention specifically to the Day of Atonement rituals. The Greek word the NASB translates as “golden altar” is *thumiaterion*, a word that probably should be translated as “incense censer.”² It should be noted that in historical versions of the Bible (Darby, Douay-Rheims, Geneva, King James, Tyndale) this word was translated as censer. Having said that, when the writer of the book of Hebrews wants to indicate an altar proper, he uses the Greek word *thusiasterion*.³

Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden censer of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold...

Was there a golden censer of incense inside the Holy of Holies? Yes. Every year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest carried a golden censer of incense into the Holy of Holies and left it there.⁴ According to Talmudic tradition, when the day's rituals were completed, the high priest removed it from there,⁵ but the Bible itself is silent as to the details of its removal. Since the writer of the Book of Hebrews has the Day of Atonement ceremony in view as he creates his *midrash* on the Temple service, it is completely reasonable for him to point us toward the incense service of that day and the censer left within the Holy of Holies.

¹ Exodus 30:6

² Note the three times the word is used in the Lxx: 2Chr. 26:19; 4Mac. 7:11; Ezek. 8:11. Each of these refers to censers, not the altar itself.

³ Hebrews 13:10

⁴ Leviticus 16:12–13

⁵ B. *Yoma* 32; 71

Therefore, Monte's speculation that the writer of Hebrews does not know the details of the Temple service is unfounded—rather his awareness and knowledge is precise.

Incomplete or Variant Textual Quotations

Monte Judah anachronistically assumes that the writer of Hebrews should quote the *Tanach* word for word, as if he has a handy Bible software program from which he could cut and paste as he wrote the document. Monte points to several discrepancies between texts quoted in the Book of Hebrews and the versions extant in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew. When he sees discrepancies, he accuses the writer of Hebrews of intentionally distorting or misrepresenting the Scripture. Monte fails to consider several elements.

The Sages and teachers of Israel during the Apostolic era all quoted Scripture loosely. They had committed the text to memory and could quote a passage, delivering the gist of the passage if not word for word. This method of citing Scripture appears in all rabbinic writings and the rest of the Apostolic Scriptures, including the teaching of Yeshua. Furthermore, the writer of the book of Hebrews leans heavily on the Septuagint (LXX) version of the Scriptures, just as Paul and the other Apostles frequently do while composing epistles in Greek. The Septuagint version contains numerous variants from the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew. Moreover, the Sages and Apostolic writers alike frequently truncated texts, delivering them in an abbreviated form. They assumed that their students were equally well-versed in the Scriptures, and would recognize the method of abbreviation. Modern preachers and teachers do the same, not to deceive, but to communicate in a sort of biblical shorthand. Finally, the authors of the epistles were often translating Hebrew text into Greek in their heads as they wrote, accounting for translation variants.⁶

If we were to reject the book of Hebrews on the basis of imperfect quotations of the Hebrew text, every book of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) would need to be similarly rejected, including the four Gospels. In using this as criteria for rejecting the book of Hebrews, Monte is not using equal weights and measures.

⁶ Monte points out that in Hebrews 8:8, the words “although I was a husband to them” from Jeremiah 31:32 is reported as “I did not care for them.” He accuses the writer of Hebrews of deceit through intentional misquotation of the Hebrew MT. In reality, it is a quotation of the LXX version of Jeremiah. In the Hebrew MT, the line in question is “even though I was a husband to them” (*v'anochi ba'alti vam*), where the verb is *ba'al*, usually understood to mean “to become a husband.” However, there is a direct parallel in Jer 3:14, which, in the context, has the sense of acting like a harsh master. The old Hebrew lexicon by Gesenius has a very interesting note on the verb *ba'al*. He gives a third meaning, “to loath, reject,” as in Jeremiah 3:14. Gesenius notes that in Jeremiah 31:32, the meaning of the Hebrew could well be, “and I rejected them,” which is exactly how the LXX translates it. Then he notes, “In chapter 31, the common signification may do, if it be rendered ‘although (*v'anochi*) I was their lord,’ but it gives a harsh sense; and what weighs with me more, the signification of loathing is not foreign to the primary power of the verb. For there are also other verbs, in which the sense of subduing, being high over, ruling, is applied to the signification of looking down upon, despising, condemning . . .” (and then he notes several Arabic cognates that have this sense). If Gesenius is correct, then the LXX may give a proper sense of the MT, which has been missed by most English translators. Furthermore, the concept of God loathing Israel during the generations of the wilderness is noted (though with a different verb) in Psalm 95:10, so theologically the LXX of Jeremiah 31:32, and the quote in Hebrews 8:8, has not gone astray.

Covenant Incongruity

Monte Judah's main problem with the book of Hebrews is what we might term as covenant incongruity. Like most Christian readers, Monte reads Hebrews 8 and 9 as if the writer of Hebrews is placing the Old Covenant and New Covenant in antithesis. According to this faulty reading of the text, the Old Covenant is the Torah as expressed by Judaism, and the New Covenant is the Gospel as expressed by Christianity.

It is surprising that Monte Judah, a Hebrew Roots teacher, would fall prey to this anachronistic reading of Hebrews 8 and 9. Monte fails to note the Christian bias in the translation from the Greek.

For example, consider the following passage:

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. (Hebrews 8:13–9:1)

In the Greek of this passage, the word "covenant" never appears. It has been inserted by the translators in order to bolster the Judaism vs. Christianity argument. How is it conceivable that Monte missed that point? He is making his case against a translator's insertion, not the original text of Hebrews.

That the covenant antithesis argument is faulty is evident since, even according to the writer of the book of Hebrews, the New Covenant is defined as God's Torah written in the minds and on the hearts of His people:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. (Hebrews 8:10)

The context of the argument of Hebrews is not a question over the authority of Torah or the institution of Judaism. It is a question of the function of and place of the sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood, a question that must have occasioned the writing of the epistle. Given the common tendency to misinterpret Hebrews, *First Fruits of Zion* has dealt extensively with these passages. See Tim Hegg's seminar, *What's So New About the New Covenant*, chapter four of his book *The Letter Writer* and D. Thomas Lancaster's commentary on *parashat Tetzaveh* and *Pekudei* in *Torah Club Volume Five* for an in-depth look at the issues of covenant and priesthood in the book of Hebrews.

To summarize, the writer of the book of Hebrews makes a distinction between two priesthoods: the Aaronic priesthood and the *Melchizedekian* priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood he consigns to the venue of the earthly Temple, representing this world and this present covenantal status. The *Melchizedekian* priesthood he places in the venue of the heavenly Temple, representing the covenantal status of the world to come and the messianic era.

This world is fading and disappearing, but the world to come is permanent. The Temple on earth is a temporary institution, but the heavenly Temple is eternal.

To illustrate the point, he makes a *midrash* on the Temple layout in which he compares the Holy Place to this present world and the purview of the Aaronic priesthood, but he compares the Holy of Holies to the world to come and the purview of the *Melchizedekian* priesthood, that is Yeshua.

However, the epistle does not place the two priesthoods in antithesis to each other. Rather, they operate in separate venues. Thus, he writes,

Now if [Yeshua] were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law. (Hebrews 8:4)

In this passage, the writer demonstrates the ongoing authority of the Torah and the legitimacy of the Aaronic priesthood. Obviously, the priesthood of the New Covenant does not supplant the Aaronic priesthood; rather, it operates in the Heavenly Temple above. If He were on earth, Yeshua would not be regarded a priest in the Jerusalem Temple. Only the sons of Aaron are priests in that venue.

It is an extremely complex *midrashic* argument, employing a variety of rabbinic methodologies and analogies. In reality, when properly understood, it is sheer genius.

Again, Monte points out another passage which he reads as covenantally incongruent:

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood. (Hebrews 9:16–18)

Monte supposes that the writer of the book of Hebrews has mistaken a ‘last will and testament’ for a biblical covenant. In his Shabbat sermon, Monte commented on the text saying:

[Hebrews 9:16–18] is the definition of a last will and testament. That’s not the definition of a covenant made by God. That’s not the definition of the New Covenant – that’s not the definition of any previous Covenant. There is no necessity for anyone to die to make a covenant. When you got married to your wife – when you entered into the vows with your wife, your mother-in-law did not die so that you could be married. Your father did not *die* so that you could be married and enter into the covenant of marriage. Nobody had to die.

You know what the writer of Hebrews has done? He’s changed the definition of the biblical word ‘covenant’. He’s now made it a ‘Last Will and Testament.’ And he’s changed the teaching of the work of the Messiah – instead of Him being the Passover Lamb Who’s come to do the work of redemption – and he’s turned it into: “Well, we had God do this first thing and now God’s come done the second thing because He died and He wrote His Last Will and Testament – that’s the New Testament – and since He died, it’s now in effect and you know, if you write a will – if you write another will after that, then the second will takes effect and the first will’s done away with.”

That’s the logic of the ‘new has made the former’ or the first one obsolete. You know what this is called? In logic? You know what this is called in wisdom? This is called ‘bait and switch.’ This is misrepresentation. This is lying...manipulating.

Once again, Monte has completely misunderstood the passage. He erroneously supposes that the writer of the book of Hebrews is teaching that the covenant is a “will and testament.” Instead, the writer of the book of Hebrews is employing a *midrashic* word-play on the Greek word *diatheke*. In Greek, *diatheke* can mean both a “last will and testament” or a “covenant.” In the Greek and Roman world, the word was a legal, technical term in settling an inheritance.⁷ But the same word is used in the Greek Scriptures to translate the Hebrew term for “covenant” (*brit*). The Epistle of Hebrews compares the biblical covenant to a “last will and testament” (*diatheke*) only for purposes of illustration. Just as a biblical covenant (*diatheke*) is always sealed with blood sacrifice, so too a “last will and testament” (*diatheke*) is also put into effect only after a death. The

⁷ Friberg Lexicon

writer of Hebrews does not mean to imply that a biblical covenant is a “last will and testament.” In standard rabbinic fashion, he is simply making an analogy. There is no bait and switch here. It is simply a verbal analogy meant to illustrate a point, namely that Yeshua’s death provides the sacrificial blood that betokens the New Covenant, a point taught by the Master and the Apostolic community after Him.⁸ It is almost inconceivable that a man who professes to be well-versed in rabbinic materials and Jewish literature could so severely misconstrue the plain intent of the passage.

Summary

Like most Christian interpreters, Monte Judah has misunderstood the message and thrust of the book of Hebrews. On the basis of his misunderstandings, he has decided to rip it out of the Bible. If we applied the same criteria to other books of Scripture, our Bibles would be very thin indeed.

Monte’s arguments against Hebrews demonstrate fundamental misunderstandings of inerrancy and divine inspiration, an ignorance of the Greek text, a low level of common literacy, and a surprising amount of arrogance whereby he assumes that he is a judge appointed over the Scriptures.

It is interesting that in the course of his sermon, Monte often pointed to certain passages in the book of Hebrews and said, “...that by the way, is true.” He wants to retain some parts, such as the discussion of Yeshua’s priesthood, but eject others. This is picking and choosing. If Monte intends to throw out portions of Hebrews, he should also throw out the entire concept of the priesthood of Messiah within the *Melchizedekian* priesthood, but instead he chooses to retain that portion.

It is one thing to misunderstand or misinterpret a portion of the Bible. We all do. It is quite another thing to throw out that portion of the Bible based upon our own misunderstanding. Monte Judah has demonstrated reckless irresponsibility in interpreting the biblical text in the past, and he has generally been allowed to get away with it. This time he has gone too far. He has demonstrated that his scholarship is not credible, nor does he respect the testimony of Scripture. Instead, he has made himself the arbiter of truth, the one determining what is authentic Scripture and what is not. Worse yet, he accredits this to God, indicating that it was God who led him to this conclusion through direct revelation:

And the Lord did not disappoint me by this time in going to Colorado Springs in which He had me share on a particular subject which, quite honestly, is going to rock your boat, something that’s been building, something that the Lord has been trying to show me for a long time and as the result of the events of going and sharing this topic it finally clicked... What I’m about to share with you I have weighed heavily; I have prayed. Quite honestly I asked the Lord – I said “Lord, please don’t make me teach this because I guarantee You that when I teach this I have got myself a pack of trouble.”

With statements like these, Monte Judah once again makes a bid for the title of false prophet. He claims that the LORD revealed to him directly that the book of Hebrews is not Scripture. Not only is Monte exhibiting poor scholarship and exegesis, he is flirting with blasphemy, attributing his own folly to a direct revelation from God. He is right about one thing. He has gotten himself a pack of trouble.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:25

Moving Forward

Rest assured that the book of Hebrews is very important for Messianic believers. It fully affirms that Messiah makes atonement on our behalf, and it fully justifies our Torah-based lifestyle. Let us not be quick to discard difficult words or passages. Rather, we urge you to do your own due diligence to discover the brilliant, constant message throughout the Scriptures: repentance unto Messiah and obedience to Torah.

While you should always make God's Word the ultimate authority in your life, we all need help uncovering the historical, grammatical context of difficult passages and how they apply to our lives. When you do seek man's help interpreting difficult passages, we urge you to be leery of single-leader ministries that are not accountable to other teachers of the Word.

Here are some tips to remember as you continue to study and live out God's Word:

- ***Compare the Text in Multiple English Translations.*** When reading our English Bibles we often forget that our English Bibles are translations, and that every translation has a translator (or a team of translators) who bring their own biases or "lenses" to the work.
- ***Check out Words in the Original Language.*** Some of the Bible's words, thoughts or concepts are nearly impossible to translate into English. For example, the Hebrew word sometimes translated as "offering" or "sacrifice" is the word *korban*, which is derived from a verb that means "to draw close."
- ***Determine the type of literature you are studying.*** God has chosen a variety of literary forms for conveying truth to us. The Bible contains historical narratives, apocalyptic imagery, legal material, poetry, parables and other types of writings or genres, sometimes within the same book or even the same passage. We need to be aware of which kind of literature we are studying in order to understand the truth that is being communicated to us.
- ***Use Scripture to Interpret Scripture.*** We believe that the Bible cannot contradict itself. Because all Scripture is God-breathed, we know that if we encounter a verse or passage that seems to contradict another verse or passage, we need to hold it with an open hand. In most cases, as we continue to study, we will encounter additional passages that shed light on the apparent contradiction and help to reconcile it.
- ***Determine the context.*** The Bible was written in a historical, cultural, social, religious and geographical environment far removed from ours. It is hard to understand the Bible properly unless we are familiar with these factors.
- ***Understand the Bible "Normally" versus "Literally."*** Even though all of Scripture is divinely inspired, it was not all intended to be taken literally. Language uses idioms and other figures of speech that if taken literally, could seriously undermine a passage's meaning.

Finally, to help you in your discernment process, FFOZ has several resources that extensively address the book of Hebrews. If you are wrestling with the book of Hebrews, or your community has been adversely affected by negative messages against the book of Hebrews, we will provide you with these resources free of charge in order to help restore your confidence in the eternal, unchanging Word of God. Until October 31, FFOZ will provide you with the following resources upon your request (please call 800-775-4807 or write: FFOZ PO Box 620099, Littleton, CO 80162):

- ***Torah Club Volume Five, parashat Tetzeveh and Pekudei***
- **CD audio teaching on the book of Hebrews by Daniel Lancaster**
- **What So New about the New Covenant (CD or DVD)**

Additionally we would like it to be understood that this has not been an exhaustive defense of the book of Hebrews. Most likely, much to our consternation, there are to be more attacks against the book of Hebrews. Because of this, First Fruits of Zion may amend this paper or add new papers to address this issue. From Genesis to Revelation, First Fruits of Zion will continue to actively defend the veracity and authority of the Holy Scriptures.

May the Father bless us all in these trying times,
Michael Badgley, Tim Hegg, Daniel Lancaster, Boaz Michael

Revision as of 6 October 2005:

For complete clarity, we have chosen to remove the following quotation from our position above for several reasons. This quote originally appeared in the Defense of Hebrews section. This quote was used in a hypothetical manner; that is to say, if the writer of Hebrews had recorded the word for altar in the passage, this would not have disqualified the writing as Divine inspiration. It should be understood that this quotation was not speaking in support of the partial inerrancy of Scripture. FFOZ supports the full inspiration and complete inerrancy of the biblical text.

“It is completely possible that the writer of the book of Hebrews misspoke when he placed the altar of incense inside the veil. Even so, this would not disqualify divine inspiration. The Holy Spirit did not dictate the Word of God to biblical writers. Rather He inspired them to write.”

Additionally, we have included the brief note:

“It should be noted that in historical versions of the Bible (Darby, Douay-Rheims, Geneva, King James, Tyndale) this word was translated as censer.”

Once again, it should be noted this paper is not an exhaustive defense for the book of Hebrews. Future articles or resources will be developed as time permits to cover a broader scope.