

The Term “Rabbi”

By Avinoam ben Mordechai

How is it that a number of Messianic teachers think that they are able to hoodwink the masses into believing that the term Rabbi somehow equals the general word for Teacher? They think this because they have been taught this wrongly. The word Rabbi is related to the Hebrew word **RAV**, which means **GREAT, NUMEROUS, MANY, MUCH, SUPERIOR, SENIOR, MASTER, GOVERNOR, COMMANDER, CHIEF**. Let’s confirm this in Hebrew Scripture (which is always a good idea).

- Ezekiel 17:17. Pharaoh’s army is referred to as **RAV** because it was a **GREAT** army.
- Deuteronomy 28:38. Part of Israel’s curse is that it will plant a **LARGE AMOUNT** of seed (**Zera RAV**), but there will be little gathered.
- Psalm 109:30. The Psalmist speaks of praising YHWH with **GREAT THANKS**, in Hebrew **RABIM**.
- 1 Kings 18:25. Elijah speaks to a **LARGE GATHERING** of the prophets of Baal, calling them **HARABIM**.
- Esther 1:8. The king throws a party for all of his **HIGH COURT OFFICIALS**, calling each of them **RAV** or **GREAT ONES**, in the Hebrew text.
- 2 Kings 25:8. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has Nebuzaradan as the **CAPTAIN** of his bodyguards or executioners, in Hebrew **RAV TABUCHIM**.
- 2 Kings 18:17. The King of Assyria sends his two **HIGH ENFORCERS** to bring a message to Judah’s King Hezekiah. Their names: **Rav Saris** and **Rav Shakeh**.
- Job 16:13. The word here is **RABI** and refers poetically to archers that shoot arrows.

Even cities can be called **GREAT (RAV)** such as these three in Hebrew Scripture:

- Joshua 11:8. Joshua and his army pursue the enemy as far as Sidon and Misraphot Mayim, both cities being called **GREAT** or **RABAH**.
- Amos 6:2. The city of Hamat is called **GREAT** or **RABAH**.

So, with Holy Hebrew Scripture showing us that the word **RAV** means **GREAT, NUMEROUS, MANY, MUCH, SUPERIOR, SENIOR, MASTER, GOVERNOR, COMMANDER, CHIEF OR CHIEF OFFICIAL**, how is it that some certain Messianic teachers can think that they are “**Rabbis**.”? Well, I’m glad you asked!

The idea of **RAV** becoming equated with the word “teacher” is actually an evolving of biblical Hebrew over many centuries. In other words, Hebrew did not stay stagnant over centuries of use; it actually developed and grew in its ideas and meanings. By the time of the Second Temple period, it is true that the term **RAV** or **GREAT ONE** had already developed into the idea of a religious teacher, but not just any kind of religious teacher! **RAV** took on the meaning of an **AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER**; a man with **RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY**. We know this from the Talmud itself, in Sanhedrin 5A. In fact, there were actually three levels of “**RABBIS**” in Yeshua’s day. The lowest level “Great One” was called **Yoreh Yoreh** because he was authorized by the majority of “Great Ones” to pass along the Traditions of the Elders as the Majority Opinion; they were not allowed to simply state an opinion on their own authority. The middle level “Great One” was called **Yadin Yadin** which was a spiritual authorization given to a man by the “Great Ones” that the man could act as a judge in matters of law such as in monetary cases. The highest level of “Great One” was called **Yatir B’chorot Yatir** and this man was authorized in all matters of law concerning the judging of defects in the slaughter of firstborn animals and whether they were perfect or unfit for an offering. Rabbis in Judaism today, when they receive their **smicha** (ordination), it specifies that they are receiving **Yoreh Yoreh** or a teaching authority to pass on the oral traditions. Some rabbis, if they are very advanced, will receive a certificate for **Yadin Yadin** conferring an authorization to judge or decide in difficult cases. However, today there is no level of **Yatir B’chorot Yatir**. All this simply means that not all “Great Ones” are equal in their rabbinic “teaching” authority. In other words, there are even greater ones than the typical run-of-the-mill “great ones.”

The issue of **RAV** evolving into the meaning of an **AUTHORITATIVE RABBINIC TEACHER** or if you will, **A RELIGIOUS TEACHER WITH RABBINIC AUTHORIZATION TO TEACH** comes through the authority of the so-called **oral law**, which is supported through the divine instruction of Exodus 23:2. Here, in Exodus 23:2, there is a principle in Hebrew called “**Acharei Rabim Lehatot**”, meaning “**AFTER THE MAJORITY TO PERVERT**.” The phrase is part of a Divine instruction **AGAINST** following the majority or turning aside after a multitude to do evil or to pervert right judgment. Now, in Hebrew “**TO PERVERT**” is **Lehatot** but “**TO INCLINE**” or “**TO TURN TOWARDS**” is **Lintot**. Both words “**Lintot**” and “**Lehatot**” share the same Hebrew shoshet but carry different meanings because they are built on two different verb conjugations (binyanim). **Lintot** is **Qal** and **Lehatot** is **Hifil** which is a causative action of the idea of leaning into something. A causative action of leaning into something will give you the idea of leaning to the point of perverting. Now, of course the “**GREAT ONES**” of Judaism, as they like to be called, decided to invert the meaning of Exodus 23:2 by interpretively removing the

negative “AL” or “DON’T” and then applying the principle of leaning in TOWARD THEIR GREAT ONES for all the answers to understanding the Written Torah, by way of their ORAL LAW. In other words, the “GREAT ONES” would have all Israel acknowledge their sovereignty in overseeing and applying uniformity (a key word in their teachings) and control in Israel by means of their halacha or Jewish law. BUT, Exodus 23:2 reads perfectly well in Hebrew telling us from its Divine source that we must NOT lean into those that pervert justice and we must NOT go after the MANY (RABIM) and pervert truth.

By extension, since Judaism’s “GREAT ONES” of jurisprudence and law (as they like to be called) believe that they are the authoritative MAJORITY for dispensing law and judgment in Israel, which they arrive at by twisting Scripture out of context from Exodus 23:2, it is therefore “understood” and believed within their own ranks that they are now the authoritative successors to Moses (*in other words, they claim to “sit” in the seat of Moses*) and thus have become Judaism’s GREAT “TEACHERS.” Hence, the term RAV developed into the term RABBI and came to be associated with the idea of a “TEACHER” meaning a GREAT TEACHER AUTHORIZED through the ORAL LAW and its handlers, to PASS DOWN MITZVOT DeRABANAN and the added ORAL TRADITIONS AND ENACTMENTS OF THE ELDERS to all Israel.

So, what these Messianic teachers are doing by saying that Yahweh and Yahshua have called them to be Rabbis (since they wouldn’t dare say that they took the title without a direct calling of YHWH through the Holy Spirit), they are in truth DENYING and usurping “YAHSHUA’S” authority while at the same time lambasting the Karaites for DENYING Him, even though they overlook the fact that the Rabbis also deny Yeshua. What an irony indeed!

For a Messianic teacher to say, “I’ve received a divine ‘smicha’ (ordination) from Yahweh to be called a Rabbi,” this would turn Yeshua’s words upside down by usurping the AUTHORITY of the ONE TRUE TEACHER of HEAVEN, who said in Matthew 23:8, “*But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher (Heb. Matt: “Rabbi”), and you are all brothers.*” This is precisely what Judaism’s rabbis do; they put RABBINIC AUTHORITY and their authorizations to teach above the words of DIVINE SCRIPTURE, all the while twisting it out from its local context in Deuteronomy 30:12 and Exodus 23:2, which they then apply to themselves according to Deuteronomy 17:9-12, by the AUTHORITY of their own.

Ultimately, those of Ephraim’s leaders that use this title “RABBI” or “RAV” are no different than the Assyrian government enforcers Rav Saris and Rav Shakeh (2 Kings 18:17) who came as high officials of the King of Assyria to force King Hezekiah into submitting to the dictate of their master--the Assyrian King. As I see things, this is precisely what these Messianic teachers are doing as they seek to put all Israel under their “official” control in the name of “Ephraimite unity” and “love for the sheeple”, and frankly, I don’t buy it. Again, I think this denies Yeshua (or if you prefer “Yahshua”) and it teaches the body of Israel that the structure of rabbinic Judaism is valid and binding. Yeshua said in numerous places that it wasn’t, period. The structure of the body of Torah Observant Israel should be a leadership built on servant hood one to another, not a system of Babylonian rabbinic authorizations to control and manipulate the masses to make them bow to the unscriptural teachings and practices of those that say they have divine authority to be co-rabbis with Yeshua.

Three more things before I close:

- 1) Read Matthew 23 and you will clearly see that the whole context is about the establishing of RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN THE KINGDOM OF YHWH.
- 2) The issue that Yeshua was referring to, that we are not to call any man FATHER is referring to a RELIGIOUS TITLE, not a biological title. You can see a clear example of this in Judges 17 with a man from the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. In those days there was no King in Israel and thus, no teaching of the Mosaic Torah and every man did was right in his own eyes. In the story, Micah, who is an idolater with a household of graven and molten images and a shrine, invites a Levite priest of Bethlehem to stay with him and perform priestly services. At Judges 17:10, Micah calls his Yehudi priest a “Father” saying, “*Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me....*” This is the point that Yeshua is making about using the term “Father.” And Judaism’s rabbis freely confer this title upon one another based on one’s advanced wisdom, learning and skills in handling the traditions of the elders. Essentially, Yeshua in Matthew chapters 15 and 23 says to NOT do this kind of thing in the true kingdom of Yahweh.
- 3) Yes, there is a five-fold ministry in Ephesians 4 naming teachers, etc. BUT there is no reference that I am aware of, calling any man (including Paul) a RAV or a RABBI, save for Yeshua, since HaMashiach is the GREAT ONE and TEACHER of Israel. There is one reference to Paul being called “BROTHER” in 2 Peter 3:15 and that his calling (his ministry) was that of a SENT ONE or “Apostle” in 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1. There are a few references to Timothy as a BROTHER in Philemon 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1 and Sosthenes as a BROTHER in 1 Corinthians 1:1. But I am hard pressed to find any RELIGIOUS TITLE of RAV or RABBI being given over to any of the talmidim of Yeshua. In this context, Yeshua made it very clear that we are

ALL BROTHERS and should be referred to as such (Matt 23:8).

A true Messianic Ephraimite leader will call himself **YOUR BROTHER** as it is rightfully used in *HaBrit HaChadashah* and will seek to serve you with love in the *Ruach HaKodesh* and direct you to obey the decrees of King Mashiach as His words are found in the Written Torah and reflected in the writings of *HaBrit HaChadashah*. Yes, Torah leaders we need in the body; but there is no need to add religious titles of authority to their leadership. "Brother" or using one's first-name is biblically sound.