

EPHRAIMITE
ERROR

lashon hara

The Errors of “The Ephraimite Error”

Disposing of the Lies and Hatred



deception

LIES

A Report by Sandy Bloomfield

Introduction

In May 1994, Dan Juster (then president of The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations) opened up a breach within the Body of Messiah, which, to this day, has yet to be resolved. Serious accusations were leveled at that time without benefit of the facts (as repeated requests for meetings to correct and clarify misunderstandings were ignored) and despite several attempts to address the issues, the false allegations continued for the next 15 years. Batya Wootten (later of the Messianic Israel Alliance) was labeled a heretic in an inflammatory and pseudo-scholarly document entitled “The Ephraimite Error,” which used defamatory language such as “racist,” “militant,” and “replacement theology” and was based almost entirely on misrepresentations, errors, and lies.

Hebraic Hate Speech

Most people in Messianic and Hebraic circles are familiar with the term *lashon hara* (the evil tongue), which is considered a sin whether the information involved is true or not. But a second (and even worse) category of evil speech is *motzi shem ra*, literally, “propagating a bad name or bad reputation.” The reason this is worse is that it involves slander and the spreading of lies and disinformation which damages the name of the targeted person. In Judaism, *lashon hara* is considered identical to the sin of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred), and both *lashon hara* and *motzi shem ra* are given the same weight as murder, since they are considered an assassination of another’s character and credibility. This brief summary of the controversy seeks to finally toss into the “eternal trash bin” the evil speech regarding this issue, and is an open call for biblical accountability and restored relationship among and between the Messianic communities. Of course, no one can force affection or fellowship upon another, but we must do our best to be “repairers of the breaches” amongst ourselves. Otherwise, how can we — in good conscience — offer Abba’s love to an unbelieving world when we withhold it from each other?

Controversy Overview

- In 1983 Wootten wrote a newsletter article titled “Is the Church Ephraim?” then the books, *In Search of Israel* (1988), *The Olive Tree of Israel* (1992), and *Who is Israel? And Why You Need to Know* (1998).
- In 1994, Juster, then president of the UMJC, published a 10-page paper entitled, “Is the Church Ephraim?” His paper was not accurate in its representation of the Restoration of Israel teaching, which was its focus. Wootten responded with a 67-page answer that disproved each of his errant claims and was included in a comprehensive 152-page bound report. Copies were sent to UMJC Theological Committee members, asking them to please correct it—with the single stipulation that they use Scripture to refute it—but they did not respond at all.
- In 2000, Kay Silberling, with Dan Juster and David Sedaca, wrote “The Ephraimite Error.”

- Moshe Koniuchowsky learned about “both the houses of Israel” (Isa 8:14) through the Woottens. Starting in 1999, he worked with the Messianic Israel Alliance (MIA) for a time, and was thus named in the paper. Koniuchowsky responded to “The Ephraimite Error” with his own document, “The Truth About All Israel,” but he soon chose to go his own way (early 2001), due to increasing doctrinal differences from those of the Woottens and the MIA.
- In 2000, the Woottens’ newsletter (The House of David Herald) included an article by Israeli author, John Hully, titled, “Do the Rabbis Expect to See the Lost Tribes?” In the article, Hully, a Harvard graduate, soundly refuted Silberling’s mistaken claims about rabbinic opinion in the matter and pointed out fatal flaws in her reasoning.
- In 2001, John McKee refuted the UMJC’s accusations, particularly the false charges against Wootten, in his 102-page work, “‘The Ephraimite Error’ Errors.”
- In 2002, MIA leadership published a concise paper titled, “We Declare,” its purpose being to officially refute the false claims. Copies were mailed to the UMJC, the Messianic Jewish Alliance, and many of their congregations, plus it was (and is) posted on the MIA’s website (www.messianicisrael.com).
- Twice in 2002 and once in 2003, the MIA’s attorney (the late Mary Elizabeth Orr), wrote to UMJC President Russ Resnik, asking for a meeting so their allegations could be confronted. They refused each time.
- Over the years, Angus Wootten, Batya’s husband and founder of the MIA, made repeated phone calls to Juster and Resnik about the situation and even offered to pay the bill if Juster, who was living in Israel, would return his call. (He was told that Juster “could not spend ministry money on phone calls.”) Angus also called David Chernoff of the Messianic Jewish Alliance. All refused to meet with him or the MIA’s leadership.
- In 2003, Dan Juster, Paul Fink and Paul Wilbur met with Monte Judah and Eddie Chumney (of Lion & Lamb and Hebraic Heritage ministries, respectively), both of whom had begun to teach about both houses of Israel. But it was a closed meeting, and they refused to allow the MIA to attend. In fact, Juster encouraged Judah and Chumney to “distinguish their teachings from Batya Wootten’s (the focus of the UMJC papers)” so they might “treat them as brothers with whom we agree or disagree, but who are not considered heretical.” This clear use of “differing weights and measures” raises serious questions about the intentions of Juster and the Messianic Jewish leadership who have been driving the controversy. Holding “secret meetings” does not demonstrate good faith in dealing with brethren, and instead nurtures division and worldly partisan behavior in the Body of Messiah.

These actions are unsupportable and do not deal in truth. “The Ephraimite Error” is rooted in baseless hatred and is the product of an evil tongue. Like trash, it needs to be thrown out. Let’s look once more at some of the false claims made against Wootten that have never been corrected or removed from circulation despite the evidence provided many times over the years.

Indefensible and False Accusations

The Lineage of Israel

FALSE CLAIM: Silberling writes: “Proponents of this movement contend that members of the born-again segment of the Christian church are, in fact, actual blood descendants of the ancient Israelites who were exiled in the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 722 B.C.”

FACT: Batya Wootten did not say they “are, in fact,” but that they could be descendants.

Messianic Judaism says the non-Jew is not part of Israel, but descent from the patriarchs is essentially un-provable, for Jew and non-Jew alike. The Early Church was “Jewish,” and Batya suggests many non-Jewish Believers could be their heirs, that many Believers could descend from exiled Ephraim, and that all Believers in Messiah belong to Israel’s commonwealth. Batya does not seek to prove descent, but to disprove the flawed teaching that non-Jewish Believers are not part of Israel (Eph 2:11-22). She writes in her book *Redeemed Israel*:

“Most people define Israel based on some idea of physical descent, regardless of how abstract or vague their definition. Perceived physical descent from the patriarchs or a presumed lack thereof, is most often the deciding factor in everyone’s ‘Israel decision.’ To understand Israel, we are forced to address this universal standard — because it is the underlying and misleading presumption in most conclusions in the matter. We challenge the validity of this misconceived rule, because the errant answers that have grown out of it have affected the very fundamentals of our faith. When coming to know Messiah Yeshua, one naturally asks some important questions: ‘Who are His chosen people? Who are Abraham’s heirs? Who is Israel?’”

Racism as a Ruse

FALSE CLAIM: In “The Ephraimite Error,” Silberling writes: “The Ephraimite message undermines the great power of ... the Apostolic Writings. It tries to change a message of hope and comfort for all peoples regardless of their heritage... into a racist and race-based plan of salvation for those with the proper bloodlines ... God’s relationship with Israel is not racial. ... Israel ... [has] never claimed racial priority as the basis for their covenant relationship to God. Jewish identity is based not on racial deliberations, but on a shared communal memory and on choice.”

FACT: God’s relationship with Israel is racial to the extent that Abraham’s heir was from his loins, his seed was to be greatly multiplied, and Israel’s heirs are called the chosen people (Gen 15:4; 22:17; 24:60; 26:4; 28:3; Deu 7:6; Jer 33:24; 1 Pet 2:9). Silberling’s charge is disingenuous. Non-Jewish Believers cannot return to the land of Israel based on “shared communal memory” or “choice.” One must instead have a Jewish birth or conversion certificate. Neither can one “choose” to join her organization, which offers full membership only to those who were born Jewish, or are married to a Jew. Non-Jews can be “associate members,” and are encouraged to support the Jewish community

financially, but cannot enter into their “shared communal memory” or “choose” to be a full member. The problem turns serious when they tell non-Jewish Believers they are not part of the people of Israel (despite scriptures like Eph 2:12,13 declaring otherwise).

This has led more than 200,000 to deny faith in Yeshua and convert to Judaism (to be equal to the Jew). In “The Other Side of Evangelism,” Ronda Robinson writes, “A funny thing often happens on the way to trying to convert Jews to Christianity: The Christians convert to Judaism” (*Jerusalem Report Magazine*, Dec., 2001).

The doors to Israel’s commonwealth were to be open to all who wanted to sojourn with them (Exo 12:48-49; Num 15:15-16; Isa 56:3-8; Eze 47:22; Eph 2:11-19). The MIA excludes no one from full membership, yet Silberling calls us “racists.” She uses race(s), racist(s) racism, 39 times in her paper. To the contrary, Wootten says Israel is found in every nation, are likely of every skin color, and no one can know for certain who is a biological Israelite. Silberling falsely claims Wootten promotes “white races” (six times), “Anglo-Saxons” and “British Israelism” (eleven times). Yet, only six times does Batya mention race: once to say it is “wickedness” for man to include or exclude anyone on its basis and once to point out that Peter called the “aliens” a “chosen race” (1 Pet 1:1; 2:9-10). Apart from speaking of fields white for harvest, and of white robes and horses for the righteous, she does not even mention these words.

Use of “Goy” and “Goyim”

FALSE CLAIM: Silberling asserts, “Wootten claims every time the Hebrew word, goy, is employed, it is a reference to a Gentile or a Gentile nation ... The first contention, then, that goy or goyim is always translated as Gentile or Gentiles is patently incorrect.” Yet Silberling footnotes her accusation, and in it, contradicts herself: “Wootten ... acknowledges that it sometimes refers to Israel ... she asserts that by the time of the conquest of the land by Israel, the name referred primarily to the foreign nations” (Who Is Israel?, pp. 82-83).

FACT: It is wrong to say “Wootten claims that every time ... goy, is employed, it is a reference to ... a Gentile nation.” The truth is, Wootten said goy is “primarily used” in this way and gives verses where goy is used to describe Israel. Wootten has never contended that it is “always” translated as Gentile or Gentiles. Silberling proves her own charge is false yet accuses Wootten of “contradictions.”

Blanket Accusations of Heresy

FALSE CLAIM: Silberling and Juster refer to “Wootten and Koniuchowsky” more than 40 times in their paper, which was updated in 2007, but emails sent in 2002 between Koniuchowsky and Juster prove he knew Koniuchowsky left the Woottens/MIA in 2001. It is wrong to continue to categorize Wootten with Koniuchowsky; Juster knows he left because the Woottens would not allow him to continue some of his teachings under the MIA banner. People should be judged on their own works (Jer 31:30; 2 Cor 5:10). Yet, the UMJC accused “Wootten and Koniuchowsky” of things that Wootten never wrote, said, or believed.

In 2002, Juster wrote to Koniuchowsky, “My paper for the UMJC was not a whole-

sale rejection of Batya's work, but nuanced. It argues that there is something prophetic to the Ephraim issue, but that it is wrongly developed." Additionally, his letter to Eddie Chumney and Monte Judah, requesting them to "distinguish their teaching from Batya Wootten so they could be accepted as brothers" presents contradictions and points to a problem beyond scripture interpretation.

FACT: A "nuanced" point speaks of a shade, subtlety, or delicate difference. To be "heretical" is to have an opinion that is profoundly at odds with orthodox views and, for the Believer, in clear conflict with Scripture. Juster, like Silberling, contradicts himself.

The truth is that — over "nuanced" differences in a teaching — Juster, the UMJC, International Messianic Jewish Congregations (IMJC), and the MJAA have blacklisted the Woottens, the MIA, and their associates for years. They warn musicians and speakers that, if they ever participate in an MIA event, they too will be blacklisted. They persist in this despite detailed counter-claims to their false charges.

Replacement Theology

FALSE CLAIM: Silberling uses incendiary words like "replacement," "supplant," and various forms of "supersession" 29 times in her attempts to incite people against Wootten and the Ephraimite teaching, to warn of Wootten's supposed "militant" desire to replace Jewish Israel.

FACT: Batya writes in her book *Who Is Israel?*:

"[Replacement Theology] violates Paul's Romans 11:18 warning ... not to be 'arrogant' toward the Jewish branches. And one definitely finds a taste of arrogance in the bitter fruit of Replacement Theology. Moreover, this insidious ideology added fuel to Hitler's Holocaust flame. By leading people to expect persecution of the so-called 'rejected' Jew, it encouraged a condescending placidity in the presence of gross evil.

"Our God is by no means finished with Judah. For there is coming a time when, 'On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, there will be deliverance ... I will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,' says Yahveh Elohim (Joel 2:32-3:1). ... He 'will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people ... and will ... gather the dispersed of Judah.' And, He caps this promise with a fearsome pledge: 'Those who harass Judah will be cut off' (Isa 11:11-13).

"As promised, Judah is once again in the Land of our forefathers. And in view of the pressure currently being brought to bear against this tiny nation, it is imperative that Believers not be counted among those who, with unrighteous motives, come against her (Joel 3:2).

"Judah remained a kingdom because they were beloved ... This remains unchanged. Romans 11:28 says of the Jew, 'From the standpoint of God's choice, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.'" (pp. 90-92, 31-32.)

Batya Wootten's writings often caution Believers against wrong attitudes toward the Jewish people. She speaks against anti-Semitism, and she also stands up for the non-Jew, showing that they too are part of the "chosen people" (1 Pet 2:9-10). It is good that Jewish Believers are awakening to the Messiah, but they must learn to allow for the hundreds of thousands around the world who are similarly awakening to the truth about

their own role in the coming reunion of Judah and Ephraim (Eze 37:15-28; Jer 50:4-5; Hos 1:11; Zec 10:7-10). There are hundreds of verses dealing with Ephraim's last days return, and we must allow room to "agree to disagree" regarding them without labeling brethren or breaking fellowship. To handle differences in biblical interpretation, we must meet scriptural guidelines and correct with the eternal word of God. Scripture itself gives only three essential salvation doctrines: belief in the deity of Yeshua, in His resurrection, and in our salvation by grace. Apart from these, the Body of Messiah must allow for discussion and exegesis of the biblical text. Exegesis means "to draw the meaning out" which implies some messy digging and earnest pursuit of the truths found there—and in order to divide the scriptures in truth, personal agendas and political motives must be set aside as secondary.

An Olive Branch and a Plea

We sincerely pray that the days of the error-based "The Ephraimite Error" might finally come to an end; that we might collectively dispose of it and begin to walk together as brethren who can appreciate—if not fully understand—each other's different callings and part in kingdom purposes. Why do we bring up this matter up once more? Because many in the Body of Messiah continue to be rejected, confused and even wounded by those who deny their scriptural identity within the commonwealth of Israel. The Nation of Israel needs friends who will stand strong with them.

Understanding about their brotherhood brings rejoicing to both Judah and Ephraim; it leads to a greater honoring of the Father's commands and causes Ephraim to want to stand with and support brother Judah. The Promise to Abraham is clear, and our God is now regathering His scattered and hidden ones. He is doing a new thing in the earth.

Israel's last days' restoration is a glorious thing, and we do not want to be found opposing it. We who see His hand in this choose to enter into that new thing with all our heart (Gen 48:19; Jer 31:7-9 Eze 37:15-28; Hos 5:3; Zec 10:6-10).

Our hope is to make peace with all involved and to step up to a new level of commitment to one another despite our differences, and to stop grieving the heart of our heavenly Father.

So once more, for the sake of a unified Body, we extend the hand of fellowship and humbly invite our brothers and sisters to sit with us and begin dialogue on this important end-time matter. The goal is not for either "camp" to try to convince the other of its truths, but simply to respect and fulfill Yeshua's last prayer for Believers. In John 17 He prayed that we might be unified so that the world may believe. Let us work together toward that scriptural end.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"
(Psa 133:1)

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