

# Leading and Following

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On the Occasion of Jacob Faber's Bar Mitzvah

Today, on the occasion of Jacob Faber's *Bar Mitzvah*, we heard Jacob's excellent *d'rash* about the quality of leader that he aspires to emulate and follow. I would like to probe the topic further, by looking, in depth, at both "leading" and "following" as it is taught in the Bible.

I have heard the maxim that one must be a good follower before one can be a good leader. It is true if one means being a leader under God, because we must be obedient to God (and in our case to Messiah Yeshua as well) before we can lead others to Him and in Him. Following men has proven dangerous and sometimes disastrous when they are the wrong kind of men; in Deuteronomy 13:2-4 we read:

"If a prophet or someone who gets messages while dreaming arises among you and he gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes about as he predicted when he said, 'Let's follow other gods, which you have not known; and let us serve them, you are not to listen to what that prophet or dreamer says. For *ADONAI* your God is testing you, in order to find out whether you really do love *ADONAI* your God with all your heart and being."

And more recently, in Matthew 24:4b-5 Yeshua warns us:

"Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray."

I think we can all make the jump to our century, and understand that the kinds of men to NOT follow are those who themselves are not followers of God. But not following men at all is not the answer because Scripture tells us that there are certain men whom we ARE to follow. Consider, for example, Ephesians 6:1:

"Children, what you should do in union with the Lord is obey your parents, for this is right."

Likewise, Colossians 3:20 teaches:

"Children, obey your parents in everything; for this pleases the Lord."

And Proverbs 1:8 exhorts us:

"My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not abandon the teaching of your mother."

So, we are to obey our father and mother whom we assume are godly parents, but Scripture says that there are others we are to obey as well; as starters, consider Hebrews 13:17:

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account. So make it a task of joy for them, not one of groaning; for that is of no advantage to you."

In quoting that Scripture, we understand it to be referring to congregational leaders such as elders, and we are confident in complying because, to be an elder, one has to have attained the standards that Paul establishes in Titus 1:6-9:

"A leader [meaning an elder] must be blameless, husband to one wife, with believing children who do not have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. For an overseer, as someone entrusted with God's affairs, must be blameless- he must not be self-willed or quick-tempered, he must not drink excessively, get into fights or be greedy for dishonest gain. On the contrary, he must be hospitable, devoted to good, sober-mindedness, uprightness, holiness and self-control. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy Message that agrees with the doctrine; so that by his sound teaching he will be able to exhort and encourage, and also to refute those who speak against it."

Likewise, in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Paul writes to Timothy:

"A congregation leader must be above reproach, he must be faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable and able to teach. He must not drink excessively or get into fights; rather, he must be kind and gentle. He must not be a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, having children who obey him with all proper respect; for if a man can't manage his own household, how will he be able to care for God's Messianic Community? He must not be a new believer, because he might become puffed up with pride and thus fall under the same judgment as did the Adversary. Furthermore, he must be well regarded by outsiders, so that he won't fall into disgrace and into the Adversary's trap."

Similar qualifications are stipulated for *shamashim* if we read further in verses 8-13.

All that seems safe enough, but there is another Scripture, Romans 13:1-2, that is more challenging; it begins:

"Everyone is to obey the governing authorities."

Uh-oh! red lights going on! And as we continue:

"For there is no authority that is not from God, and the existing authorities have been placed where they are by God."

More red lights going on! How can that be? We know that there are governments and heads of governments that are downright evil! And the Scripture seems to get worse when it says:

"Therefore, whoever resists the authorities is resisting what God has instituted; and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."

The resolution to these seemingly shocking pronouncements is found in Yeshua's words in Mark 12:17:

"Give the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor. And give to God what belongs to God!"

In other words, a person may be in a position of APPARENT authority but, because all REAL authority is from God, to the extent that a leader is not leading according to godly precepts, his or her APPARENT authority is NO AUTHORITY at all, and anything the leader directs that is against God and against the Bible should not be obeyed. That is the reason that Christianity is perceived to be a threat in atheistic nations such as China. The Chinese leaders know full well that their citizens who follow *Yeshua* will not follow the secular authorities if they lead in what is biblically wrong. And they know "full well" what is right and wrong because, as Romans 1:19-20 states:

".. what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities- both his eternal power and his divine nature- have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse;"

This message is a follow-up to our *Bar Mitzvah* Jacob's *d'rash* on "leading" and "following," and I want to recall something to which Jacob alluded. Jacob told us of his membership in, and respect for, the Civil Air Patrol (the CAP) and, because I read his *d'rash* in advance, I had time to research the CAP's core values, and one of them caught my attention in this following statement:

"You don't need to be a commander to be a leader. Leadership from below is as important as leadership from above."

Beginning with Moses, God gave the Israelites a series of commanders to lead their nation, while always retaining Himself as Commander in Chief. Commanders are leaders who lead through positions of authority, make decisions, and giving orders; that is what the CAP means by leading from above. We can trace the leaders of Israel from commander to commander - Moses, Joshua, David, the Judges, and so on. God authorized that there be secondary commanders appointed as well. In Deuteronomy 1:13-15, Moses spoke to the Israelites and said:

"Pick for yourselves from each of your tribes men who are wise, understanding and knowledgeable; and I will make them heads over you. You answered me, 'What you have said would be a good thing for us to do.' So I took the heads of your tribes, men wise and knowledgeable, and made them heads over you- leaders in charge of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers, tribe by tribe."

But then God did an amazing thing. He spoke to the Israelites through Jeremiah and said:

"Here, the days are coming," says *ADONAI*, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband

to them," says *ADONAI*. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says *ADONAI*: "I will put my *Torah* within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother [saying], 'Know *ADONAI*'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:30-33).

Israel had to wait for centuries to find out how that New Covenant would unfold and exactly what it would contain. And, over the years, the Israelites speculated according to their immediate needs. In bad times, they thought: "Perhaps will God send us a military leader like David to save us." And possibly influenced by Zechariah 9:9 and Psalms 22 they thought: "Perhaps God will send us a leader that is more like Joseph to save us." That is how the idea of two messiahs came about – a "Messiah *ben David*" and a "Messiah *ben Joseph* – the first being a conquering savior, and the other being a suffering servant.

Well, we know that when Yeshua came, He came as a suffering servant – not as a military conquering hero, and his leadership method was not that of a commander, but that of a pastoral teacher, ministering through setting an example of humble servanthood. Although the CAP does not reference Scripture in its core values, that is what it means by "leading from below," and by "Leadership from below is as important as leadership from above." The CAP has it right because, although not stated, its core value was lifted directly from Scripture; and here are verses of Scripture that prove it:

In Mark 10:44-45 Yeshua exhorts His disciples:

".. whoever among you wants to be a leader must be your servant; and whoever wants to be first among you must become everyone's slave! For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve- and to give his life as a ransom for many."

And in Titus 2:6-7, Paul instructs:

"Similarly, urge the young men to be self-controlled, and in everything set them an example yourself by doing what is good. When you are teaching, have integrity and be serious;"

And in 1 Peter 5:1-3, Peter instructs:

"Therefore, I urge the congregation leaders among you, as a fellow-leader and witness to the Messiah's sufferings, as well as a sharer in the glory to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is in your care, exercising oversight not out of constraint, but willingly, as God wants; and not out of a desire for dishonest gain, but with enthusiasm; also not as *machers* [i.e as lords] domineering over those in your care, but as people who become examples to the flock."

And, of course, in the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh*, we are able to lead by example because Yeshua Himself showed us how:

1 Peter 2:21

"Indeed, this is what you were called to; because the Messiah too suffered, on your behalf, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps."

Jacob, today we celebrate your *Bar Mitzvah* – not with an elaborate party, but by your taking your first public step as an adult, of being an example to this congregation by coming up to the *Torah*, reading from the scroll, and delivering your *d'rash*. There are many in this congregation who have never done that, and your example to them gives them confidence and hope that they can also. You are not yet an elder, you are not yet a *shamash*, and you are not yet a *chavurah* leader, but I hope that the Scriptures I have quoted convince you that you are able to lead from below even now, if you are led from above as Yeshua was. Remember, in John 5:19, Yeshua said:

"I tell you that the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; whatever the Father does, the Son does too."

But this is only the beginning, Jacob. From this day on, *Ohev Yisrael* will view you as an adult in its midst, having adult responsibilities. I have already moved your name and email address out from under your parents' listing to a place of your own, so that, from now on, you will directly and individually receive all of the congregational communications that the adult congregants of *Ohev* receive. Also, at this time, the Men's group of *Ohev Yisrael* would like to extend you an invitation at this time. Would [representative's name] please come forward?

[Invitation to attend *Ohev Yisrael's* Men's group is given]

And now, a representative of *Ohev Yisrael's Ozrim* would like to extend you an invitation as well. Would [representative's name] please come forward?

[Invitation to serve with the *Ohev Yisrael Ozrim* is given]

So now Jacob, having received your certificate of *Bar Mitzvah*, your individual *Ohev* email listing and your invitations to join *Ohev's* Men's Group and *Ozrim*, all that is left for us to do, is send you forth with blessing. You already received the blessing of Aaron, and I will add the blessing of Psalms 121 to it:

"If [you] raise [your] eyes to the hills, from where will [your] help come? [Your] help comes from *ADONAI*, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip- your guardian is not asleep. No, the guardian of Isra'el never slumbers or sleeps. *ADONAI* is your guardian; at your right hand *ADONAI* provides you with shade- the sun can't strike you during the day or even the moon at night. *ADONAI* will guard you against all harm; he will guard your life. *ADONAI* will guard your [going out and your coming in] from now on and forever." (edited CJB & NKJ).

I pray this in the Name of Yeshua.

Amen.