



# Minutes With Messiah

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## TELL NO MAN

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter. (Mk 1:40-45)

This has been an interesting story to many people, mostly because of the next to last verse. Jesus told the leper, whom he had just healed, not to tell anyone about the miracle. How would he expect such a miracle to go unnoticed? Why would he tell the man not to advertise it? There are at least three possible reasons: the common one, the rabbinic one, and the practical one. Any or all may be true.

The common interpretation is based on the final verse of Mark's account. According to Matthew, this happened immediately after the Sermon on the Mount, so it may not have been in Jesus' hometown. Mark says that because of what the leper said, Jesus could not openly enter the city. Jesus may have known this would happen and that it would make his life more difficult. Jesus did not often operate on what would make life easier for him, but this could be one such case. Luke says he took the opportunity to go to a deserted place to pray. There is a certain irony about this situation as well. The leper was forbidden to live in the city. Jesus had a home in a city, if not necessarily that city. But after touching the leper and the man telling what happened, Jesus and the leper switched places. Jesus ended up outside the city.

The rabbinic reason is a little more speculative. The rabbis say that leprosy was a condition that God put upon people who were guilty of bad speech. After all, when Miriam spoke against Moses she was smitten with leprosy. The leper was separated from all people, except,

perhaps, other lepers, so he could not speak about or to others. All conditions point to leprosy as a punishment for evil speaking. If this is true, then it is possible that Jesus thought nobody would believe the man, leaving him open to a recurrence of the disease. If nobody believed him, then he must be spreading rumors, which is evil speech.

As unlikely as that reason may be, the practical one has its merits. Jesus did not just tell him to tell no man, but also to go and show himself to the priest. Leviticus 14:1-9 gives the law for pronouncing a leper to be clean. The priest has to examine the man. Offerings are made. Then after seven further days of exile, the priest again examines him and declares him to be clean. In the case under question, the man could not be pronounced fully clean for seven days. Jesus knew this. Mark makes it clear that there were joined commands. "Tell no man, but show yourself to the priest." If this was not in Capernaum, Jesus might not still be around in seven days. By making him wait until then, he could avoid the issue of not being able to enter the town.

We have only two other instances in which Jesus said to tell no man. In Mark 7 he told the men accompanying one he healed to tell no man. This healing, though, was done outside the Jewish nation and that may be the reason. The other times he gave the command to tell no one was when someone admitted that he was the Messiah. Because his time was not yet completed, it was best not to openly advertise who he was. The Jewish leaders would figure that out soon enough. So this was really a unique situation. Any of the three reasons would end up with Jesus in the wilderness. This would make it harder for people to reach him, and for him to teach. So it was probably best that this man keep his mouth shut. Which, of course, he did not do.

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# A NEW NAME

It is common in English-speaking countries for a woman to take her new husband's surname upon marriage. Only about 20% of women do not change their names. There are various reasons for this. Sometimes the woman's surname is easier to pronounce or spell, and so the man takes her name. Sometimes it is because she doesn't want to deal with the paperwork involved (driver's license, credit cards, government or non-government agencies). Frequently it is because she considers this a sexist holdover from bygone days. If that is what she thinks, she is partly right. For many years women in England were required to change their surname to that of a husband because of the legal doctrine of "coverture." This doctrine states that a married woman's rights and obligations are subsumed by those of her husband; that is, she has legal rights to own property, for instance, only if he grants those rights. In England and the United States today there is case law that countermands that doctrine. A woman may enter into contracts without her husband's knowledge or permission, although in community property states the husband and wife share ownership.

To a certain extent, even the Law of Moses

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## Abraham's new name was the covenant.

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recognized coverture. If a man had only daughters, they would inherit his real property provided she married within the tribe to which her family belonged. Beyond that, coverture extended not only to husbands but to fathers of unmarried daughters. Numbers 30 specifies that if a woman makes a vow (contract), if her husband (or father if she is unmarried) learns about it, he may immediately cancel that vow. If, however, he says nothing to cancel it, the vow stands. Thus, the Law recognized a modified form of coverture. This was, however, before the development of surnames, so she did not take the name of her husband.

Even though there are no examples in the Bible of women changing their names solely because of marriage, there are many examples of people changing their names, or having their names changed. This usually was reflective of a change in status of some sort.

### Avram and Sarai

Perhaps the most famous name change in the Bible, if not in history, came when God made a covenant with a man named Avram (Abram) and his wife Sarai. It is unclear why Nahor gave his son this name. Avram means "exalted father," so it may be that Nahor hoped his son

would make a great name for himself.

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. (Gen 17:4-5)

God changed Avram's name to Avraham (Abraham) because of the covenant He was making. No longer would he be simply an exalted father, but now a father of a multitude. Notice that this name change was made before Abraham had any children with his wife. The new name was the covenant; it was God's promise of a son and many descendants.

"And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be." (Gen 17:15) When God changed Abram's name to Abraham, he also made a name change for his wife. This one, though, is a little more subtle. Her original name, Sarai (properly pronounced in three syllables, sar-ah-ee) meant "princess." It may be that her father (Nahor, Avram's father) was calling her, as many fathers do today, "my little princess." Sara (with or without the h) means "noblewoman." In modern parlance one would think this was a step down—from princess to a mere noblewoman of undetermined rank. Actually, it was a step up. A princess might be so from birth and continue as one throughout life, but a noblewoman denoted the wife of a king. It elevated her from a princess to a queen.

These name changes reflected a new status. Avram moved from a father (exalted though he be) to an ancestor. His new status required a change for his wife as well.

### A change of country

American genealogists sometimes have difficulty in tracing ancestries of children of immigrants from non-English-speaking countries. As their ancestors came through ports like Ellis Island, immigration officers might spell the name like it sounds, or even change the name altogether. There is an old joke about a Chinese man with the name of Stanley Kowalski. When someone asked how he got that name he explained that the man in line in front of him had that name, and when they asked his name he said, "Sam Ting." So the immigration official, hearing "same thing" gave him a Polish name.

The practice of immigration officials changing names of newly-arrived foreigners goes back at least to ancient Babylon. Whether because of pronunciation issues or because a new local name would indicate that they were not going back to Israel, we find at least five people who had their names changed in Babylon or Persia.

Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego. (Dan 1:6-7)

It is possible that the Babylonians objected to Hebrew names containing the name of God (El or Iah). One may infer that from the fact that at least two of them had their names changed to ones containing names of Babylonian gods (Bel and Nego). Perhaps the idea was that if they got used to their new names they would be acknowledging their new gods. In that respect it is interesting that only one other time (Dan 10:1) is Daniel referred to by his new name. Azariah, on the other hand, was referred to by his new name after chapter 1, and most notably in the incident with the fiery furnace.

The fifth person of whom we know with a name change in her new country was a young Jewish girl named Hadassah (Myrtle), who commonly went by the Persian name Esther (Star). In her case the use of the Persian name may have been to intentionally hide her lineage. Because nobody knew she was Jewish, she was in a position to save the Jewish people from genocide.

## Peter and Paul

Two of the leaders of the early Christian church underwent name changes. We can only speculate as to the reasons, but they may be reasonable speculations.

Simon the son of Jonah was a fisherman. The gospels picture him as impulsive, sometimes dangerously so. The first time Jesus saw him he changed his name. "Thou art Simon [one who listens] the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, Peter." (Jn 1:42) This was hardly an apt name for one of Simon's character at the time. It did become an apt name for the apostle that was later to preach the first gospel sermon and (according to some) lead the church in Rome. This has led to speculation that Jesus changed his name in the hope that he would live up to his new designation.

Galatians 2:11 seems to indicate that Peter, on at least one occasion, went back to his old ways. Some older manuscripts use the Hebrew name Cephas in this verse, rather than the Latin Peter. Some scholars, therefore, believe that Paul was referring to another Cephas rather than the apostle. The context, though, seems to indicate that the apostle made an impulsive mistake.

Saul was a rabbi who was zealous for the Law of Moses. As he traveled to Damascus, his life was changed, and he became zealous for the Way. For some time afterward he continued to use the Hebrew name Saul. Beginning with Acts 13:9, and in all his letters, he went by his Latin name, Paul. There are two (or more) possible reasons for this name change. It may have been that he wanted to leave the old life behind. Saul was known as a

persecutor of Christians, and that made his new life difficult. A name change could make his past more anonymous. Of equal importance, though, is his mission. He was specifically sent to make disciples of non-Jews (gentiles). By taking a Latinized form of his name, he might better associate with the gentiles. At the same time as his name change was noted, he was the guest of a governor of Cyprus named Sergius Paulus. It may be that he adopted his new name from his host.

## Christians

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Rev 2:17)

That was what the Spirit wrote to the church at Pergamos. A little later we have this to the church at Philadelphia.

Him that overcometh ... I will write upon him the

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If they used their new names they would be acknowledging new gods.

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name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, ... and I will write upon him my new name. (Rev 3:12)

Some people believe that the new name would be "Christian;" however, that name had been in use about 45 years when the Revelation was written. Others have gone so far as to take a new personal name, as is common in the Roman Catholic Church with a new Pope or when someone takes holy orders.

Since the letters to the seven churches constitute a communication to the whole church, and since the reference to a new name is repeated, it is possible (even likely) that the new name does not refer to either the corporate designation of Christian or personal names. Instead, it is possible that God is telling the church that they are a new creation, just as the New Jerusalem came out of heaven as a new creation. In the light of the previous examples, we can see that this new name represents a new covenant, a new citizenship, and a new history.

Christians are under a new covenant. (Heb 12:24) We are in the world, but no longer of the world; we have a new citizenship. (Jn 15:19) We have entered a new life. The old life has been taken away. (Rom 6: 4-6)

A new name is significant. It marks a change in a life. When a child is adopted and takes on the new parents' name it signifies a new relationship. In like manner, we are given a new name. God even said it was "my new name."

# *JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS*

One of the principal attractions in Acapulco, besides shopping, is the performance of the cliff divers every evening. Unfortunately, most tourists do not get to see them because the cruise ships pull in and out of port long before the performance, or people are not willing to pay the \$30 (at least that was the cost in the late 1980s; now it is nearly \$100) to get a good view from the opposite cliffs. These professional divers leap at night from heights of 100 to 135 feet into the waters at the bottom of La Quebrada cliffs. This has been happening for many years, and the divers are well aware of the condition of the waters below. If you are planning to emulate them at your local swimming hole, you should first check the water for depth and unseen obstructions; otherwise you might be jumping to a conclusion (of your life). People have been jumping to conclusions for a long time.

It might be said that Cain jumped to a conclusion. If Abel's sacrifice was accepted and his wasn't, it might have been Cain's conclusion that the way to be accepted would be to eliminate his brother. That illustrates the problem with jumping to conclusions. You may be wrong.

There is another example in the Bible of someone jumping to a conclusion. But in this case it was handled properly. Joshua 22 tells the story. Some of the tribes of Israel had been given land on the East Bank of the Jordan on condition that their men of war cross over and help conquer Canaan. When the fighting was over and the land had been divided, Joshua told them they could go home. As they approached the Jordan, they built an altar. The other tribes jumped to the conclusion that the two and a half tribes had built the altar to make sacrifices on, in violation of God's explicit directions.

And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. (Josh 22:11; one translation renders that last phrase as, "and they did it on our side of the Jordan.")

The other Israelites wanted to go to war. Joshua had a better idea. He sent Pinchas the High Priest and leaders from each of the ten tribes to talk to the leaders of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. He chose to look before he leapt.

After expressing their concern, these representatives let the others speak. What they said was that the altar was not for sacrifice, but so that future generations would be aware that those tribes east of Jordan had an equal part in Israel. They feared that they would later be looked upon as not part of the nation because of the physical barrier of the Jordan River.

How much heartache would we prevent if we were to follow Joshua's example. When someone shares a post on social media that sounds right but puts someone in a bad light, do we research it to see if it is true, or simply e-gossip? Churches have been split because someone saw or heard part of a story and didn't bother to get the perspective from both sides.

Even if the conclusion to which you jumped is correct, it is still a bad practice. You might have been right once, but what about the other times. The problem with learning to jump to conclusions is that sometimes there might be rocks at the bottom of the cliff. Joshua knew to avoid landing on them.

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