

It Is Not in Heaven (Bath Kol)

by Robert Wurtz II

The sermon highlights the significance of the phrase 'It is not in heaven' and its implications on the authority to determine what is acceptable.

Scripture: Exodus 3:4

Topics: "Divine Authority", "Human Wisdom"

Description

Robert Wurtz II delves into the story of Rabbi Eliezer and the authority of a heavenly voice, highlighting the Rabbis' rejection of the miraculous in determining correctness, the disregard for heavenly voices post-Sinai, the shift of authority to the majority, the portrayal of God as outwitted by men, and the Rabbis' tendency to excommunicate dissenters. This story challenges traditional views on divine authority and human wisdom.

Transcript

There reached a point when the credibility of an "audible voice from Heaven" had to be contended with. An audible voice from God was considered authoritative in all matters in the time of Christ among the Jews. But there were too many cases in the New Testament when this happened and it authenticated the New Testament and Christ (among other things). There was only one way for the Rabbi's to deal with this and it was with one fail swoop of a statement... "IT IS NOT IN HEAVEN!" Consider the commonly told story of how this came about. This adaptation is from Lightfoot Commentary on Mark 8, but is commonly found in many sources:

"On that day, R. Eliezer answered to all the questions in the whole world, but they hearkened not to him. He said therefore to them, 'If the tradition be according to what I say, let this siliqua [a kind of tree] bear witness.' The siliqua was rooted up, and removed a hundred cubits from its place: there are some who say four hundred. They say to him, 'A proof is not to be fetched from a siliqua.' He saith to them again, 'If the tradition be with me, let the rivers of waters testify': the rivers of waters are turned backward. They say to him, 'A proof is not to be fetched from the rivers of waters.' He said to them again, 'If the tradition be with me, let the walls of the school testify': the walls bowed, as if they were falling. R. Josua chid them, saying, 'If there be a controversy between the disciples of the wise men about tradition, what is that to you?' Therefore the walls fell not in honour of R. Josua. Yet they stood not upright again in honour of R. Eliezer. He said to them, moreover, 'If the tradition be with me, let the heavens bear witness.' The Bath Kol went forth and said, 'Why do ye contend with R. Eliezer, with whom the tradition always is?' R. Jonah rose up

upon his feet, and said, 'It is not in heaven' (Deut 30:12). What do these words, 'It is not in heaven,' mean?
R. Jeremiah saith, When the law is given from mount Sinai, we do not care for the Bath Kol."

According to Daniel Gruber there is five major things that this story teaches:

1. The Rabbis do not accept the miraculous in determining the correctness of a teaching or tradition. Deuteronomy does warn against following someone with a sign, if they are proclaiming let us go after other gods. So signs can be in an anti-God context.

But the issue with Rabbi Eliezar doesn't fall into this category, since he wasn't talking about following other gods. It wasn't a question of idolatry but AUTHORITY. Can proof be brought from a carob tree or a stream of water or a voice from heaven? Scriptures says so. (E.g., Aaron's rod, or blood in Nile, fleece of Gideon.)

2. The Rabbis paid no attention to a heavenly voice (Bath Kol) after Sinai.

Rabbi Joshua says, "lo ba-shamayim hi, It is not in heaven." So after Sinai, we pay no attention to a heavenly voice. This is quite convenient considering how God spoke from Heaven concerning Jesus SEVERAL times in the New Testament. The ruling was quite ex post facto.

Yet throughout Scripture a voice from Heaven from God speaks out in Job, Psalms, and Ezekiel, God DID speak from Heaven. Indeed, everywhere else in Talmud itself, a voice from Heaven is authoritative.

3. The authority to determine what is acceptable does not rest with God but with the majority. Pay no attention to a heavenly voice (bath kol). Yet in Exodus 23:2. "You shall follow a multitude to do evil," by implication you must follow a multitude to do good. But who defines good? In the story, God didn't know he had decreed this! He didn't know that he'd given up his authority to the majority of Rabbis(?!). In Tanakh (Old Testament), the majority is almost always wrong! Throughout Tanakh, God acts as if he's still in charge, bringing judgment upon the majority when it is in sin.

4. Yet this story portrays God as laughing, "My sons have defeated (outwitted) me!" Yet is God ever portrayed in Tanakh this way? Are men ever smarter than God?

It's a humorous story when you read it, but when you think of it, it's not so funny. Contrast Psalm 2 and other references to God laughing, in supreme authority.

5. The Rabbis will excommunicate anyone who will not submit to their decision.

This is not normative first century Judaism.

It's fitting that it's Rabbi Eliezar the Great that's been excommunicated, circa 115 CE.

Consider these cases in Scripture when a VOICE from Heaven Spoke (bath kol)

Genesis 3:9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

Genesis 22:11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

Exodus 3:4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

Deuteronomy 4:33 Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

Job 38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

Daniel 4:31 While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

Matthew 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Matthew 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Mark 1:11 And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Mark 9:7 And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

Luke 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Luke 9:35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

John 12:28-30 Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.

Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

2 Peter 1:17,18 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

Revelation 10:4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Revelation 11:12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

Revelation 14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

Revelation 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

Notes:

"Five major things" taken from notes and supplemented: "The Day the Rabbis Were Wrong" Yeshiva course at Messiah 2000 taught by Daniel Gruber)

"Consider this list "compiled by: <http://www.mv.com/ipusers/butterfly/rev/bathkol.htm> or philologos.org

Google yields 1,190 entries for "bath kol"

(Encyclopedic Dictionary of Judaica)

Lightfoot commentary can be found at:

<http://www.gospelcom.net/eword/comments/mark/light/mark8.htm>

Daniel Gruber "Rabbi Akiba's Messiah" c. 1999 Elijah Publishing

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