

Talmud and Mishnah

In my writings it could seem that I am against the Talmud and Mishnah or that I look on them with disfavor. This isn't the case. They are important commentary and records of tradition and history. But they are written by men and not given by God. And this is my line that I try to draw. Observing the Talmud and Mishnah do not bring salvation nor are they a commandment of God. They are traditions of men.

But, having said that, they are very important traditions of Jewish heritage, and they are connected to the Bible. In the day of Yeshua what we have recorded in the Mishnah was taught Rabbi to student as the Oral Law. And Yeshua observed Torah and followed the traditions as recorded in the Mishnah.

Yeshua was not only fully observant of Torah but he was also fully observant of the Rabbinical teachings of the Pharisees and Sanhedrin which are recorded in the Mishnah in spite of the accusations of the Pharisees.

Let me address some of the Pharisees accusations against Yeshua and provide an explanation from a better expert in the Talmud and Mishnah than myself. I will quote from a wonderful article by Rabbi Isaac called "Yeshua And The Oral Torah" on calledoutbelievers.org.

In John 5:8-16 Yeshua heals a crippled man by the pool of Bethesda, and tells him to pick up his mat and walk on the Sabbath. This is what Rabbi Isaac says:

When Rabbi Yeshua told the man to pick his bed up and carry it on Shabbat he was not denouncing the Rabbinic authority or the Oral Torah, he was in accordance to the Rabbinic authority and the Oral Torah. The laws of Eruv is part of the 7 Rabbinic laws by which the issue at hand proves that Yeshua was in accordance to these laws. The Oral Torah permits carrying within an enclosed "private" area on Shabbat and other holidays (Yom Tov). This area can either be physical or symbolic. Such an area enclosed and considered "private" may vary in size from a small home to an entire community depending on various circumstances and specific situations. The Talmud specifies both the definitions of an enclosure and how to render an entire area a private domain from a small home to an entire community. This is normally done with strings that are fastened around the "private domain". This string indicates where the people may walk and carry on the Shabbat. In a Jewish community, especially where this instance occurred in the N.T. the Pool of Bethesda, indicates the location of where this sick man of many years was with his mat (bed) and Rabbi Yeshua was, there would have been Eruv strings fastened around the domain. We know that by historical records and by traditions that are still practiced to this very day. To think that only in this moment, that the people ran and took down the Eruv string so that Rabbi Yeshua would break the Shabbat is not a reasonable assertion. So we clearly see here, that Rabbi Yeshua did not violate the Sabbath, nor did he teach others to violate the Sabbath. The people who accused him, where either ignorant of the Torah's laws or they were simply hoping on that ignorance to be a means to persecute Rabbi Yeshua. The people who questioned the man and Yeshua, obviously, like this situation, they were uneducated on the subject and made statements and judgements that were incorrect. There are many "fine print" regarding this issue, aside from the fact that this location indicates that the situation occurred with

the Eruv strings... another case can be argued. The man who carried his mat on Shabbat was not breaking the Eruv laws because his home was his bed. He was homeless. The Talmud says in the Shabbat portions that if a person is homeless or cannot afford to set up an Eruv or is unable to do it himself and has no one else to help him... The Eruv becomes himself and his belongings because he is unable to have an enclosed private area... Therefore, Yeshua was not at all violating the Sabbath. There are claims that Exo 16:29 tells us it is forbidden to leave one's home on Shabbat. And many love to use this verse as a way to say Yeshua abandoned the laws of Shabbat. This assertion is false. Talmud Bavli – Erubin 42a – “Rabbi Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel: “if one went out and did not know the legal distance he could traverse, he may walk on for a distance of two thousand medium steps. This will constitute the lawful limit of the Shabbat.” The NT says that Yeshua attended Shabbat gatherings outside of his home, hence he supported Oral Torah Halachot which permits one to leave one's house on Shabbat but no more distance than 2,000 medium steps. Also, you know of the stories of many people walking around the street on Shabbat recorded in the NT. For further proof of this in the Torah, Leviticus 23:3 even says Shabbat is a day of holy gathering. The synagogues that Yeshua visited on Shabbat were obviously local gatherings at places that did not take a great deal of effort to reach. Staying in your “place” is referring to the neighborhood where one lives, not one's home in the literal sense. I am sure you all can relate to the allegorical cliché or figure of speech... that one's village or town is their home.

We find that Yeshua is following the Oral Torah as well as keeping the Torah of Moses. And he is following the traditions recorded in the Mishnah for example he recited the Halachic blessings over matzah and wine when he gave thanks at meals (Luke 22:19-20). He also observed Hanukkah in John 10:22-23 a tradition enshrined in the Talmud not the Torah.

Next Let's let Rabbi Isaac explain about healing on the Sabbath:

When Rabbi Yeshua healed people on the Sabbath, and the people including certain Pharisees / Saducees were in opposition... they were only 1. Uneducated on the matter (the people) and 2. were relying on the ignorance of the people to control them (the corrupted Pharisees / Saducees). According to the Oral Torah or the Talmud... you would find that it is permitted to heal or save a life or tend to any emergent situation on the Sabbath. All laws are suspended to save a life or to tend to a dire emergency. Here, we see that Rabbi Yeshua was in accordance to the laws of the Torah. The phrase, “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,” appears in the Rabbinical material of the Talmud (Mekilta 103b, Yoma 85b). This statement was a teaching by many Rabbinic scholars of Rabbi Yeshua's day. The Pharisee School of Hillel was famous for that quote. Yeshua was not saying anything separate from Judaism, he was upholding the teachings of Judaism. The Sages frequently use the verse from Hosea 6:6, that helping people was of greater importance than observing the rituals and customs (Sukkah 49b, Deuteronomy Rabbah on 16:18, etc.), just as Yeshua did. In fact, they used the same examples Rabbi Yeshua presented, David's eating the Tabernacle bread and the Temple offerings made on the Sabbath, to demonstrate the same general principle, that the needs of life override the Sabbath restrictions (Y'lomm'denu, Yalkut II, par. 130,

Tosefta Shabbat 15b). We can clearly see now that the Pharisees and Seducees who were accusing Rabbi Yeshua were corrupted in their judgements against him. We also can tell very clearly that these particular Pharisees were heretical in the fact that they associated with the Seducees who Rabban Hillel, a Pharisee himself, stated were heretics.

This is what Rabbi Isaac says about Yeshua's disciples not washing their hands (Matthew 15:1-11):

Besides the Sabbath issues mentioned above, this is an argument that people love to use against Rabbi Yeshua's adherence to Rabbinic law and love to use against Judaism. When the certain Pharisees questioned Yeshua about his disciples not doing the hand washing ritual it is important to note that they didn't question whether or not he washed his hands, they questioned his disciples. It is more than likely that he did wash His hands, but the disciples did not. What does this mean? The Talmud states that the ritual of hand washing (Netilat Yadayin) is invalid if the mind and heart is not also "cleansing." In the Talmud, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, stated: "In life it is not the dead who make you unclean; nor is it the water you wash your hands with, but rather the ordinances of the King of Kings that purifies." Much later, Rabbi Maimonides (Rambam) made a similar comment, "For to confine oneself to cleaning the outward appearance through washing and cleaning the garment, while having at the same time a lust for various pleasures and unbridled license ... merits the utmost blame." The Pharisees had judgement in their hearts instead of compassion, and therefore Yeshua contested their teachings because they were breaking commandments in their statements against them. They were not following their own teaching, and therefore were disgracing the laws of HaShem (God). It was by this reason that Yeshua responded that it is not that which goes into your mouth that makes you unclean, but rather that which comes out. He basically held a mirror in front of their faces. Contrary to the teaching that Yeshua was teaching against the laws of Kashrut (Kosher dietary law), he was doing nothing of the sort, rather he was not even discussing the topic of food at all. The passage in Mark 7 has been grossly taken out of context. The tradition of ritual purity; namely, washing the hands; is valid, however, invalid if your mind and your heart is not cleansing. The certain Pharisees were doing things to look pious and special, so others would see... yet they were filthy on the inside. The disciples didn't wash their hands possibly 'because they didn't feel they were clean inside or maybe they forgot, and therefore didn't do it in that instance. But we should consider the other verses that reveal that they certainly did observe this ritual of washing the hands. Ya'acov (James) 4:8 "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you, Cleanse you hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded."

What we find is that Yeshua did not sin against God or man. Yeshua not only followed God's laws, but he also followed and observed the Oral Torah of his day even though these were not handed down by God on Mount Sinai, but compiled by men as traditions, man made rituals, and man's explanations of God's commands. Yet, Yeshua had to remain perfect. No blame was to be found in him, not before God or before man.

An Orthodox scholar and rabbi, Pinchas Lapide, described Yeshua as a traditional, observant Jew. He wrote, "Yeshua never and nowhere broke the Law of Moses, nor did

he in any way provoke its infringement – it is entirely false to say that he did... In this respect you must believe me, for I know my Talmud... this Yeshua was as faithful to the Law as I would hope to be. But I suspect that Yeshua was more faithful to the Law than I am – and I am an Orthodox Jew.”

So, he was blameless, and he laid down his life for our sins.

Now, the fact that Yeshua followed Torah and the Oral Torah, the Talmud and Mishnah has caused some believers to say that we also should follow the Oral Torah. They repeat the sayings of the Rabbi's in the Talmud that say that the Oral Torah was also given to Moses along with the written Torah at Mount Sinai and that the written Torah is incomplete without the Oral Torah.

To this argument we must apply some reason, logic and scripture. First reason and logic. It is reasonable to assume there was more given to Moses at Mount Sinai than just the written Word. God also communicated with him for a long period of time on the mountain, and we see from the text that God and Moses developed a conversational relationship. And it is reasonable to assume that this extra verbal communication he received he conveyed to the people as he acted as judge over them through the wilderness.

However, it is unreasonable to assume that what we read in the Mishnah and the Talmud reflect Moses's thinking in every way. This is not only historically impossible with the many times that the Israelites have fallen away for more than a few generations where each man did what was right in his own heart, and the many times that they have been gathered again. Continuity does not exist. But it is also not logical as we simply look at the Mindset of the Mishna and Talmud. The Mishna and Talmud are both developed on a Greek mindset not a Hebrew Mindset. Putting things in the order of the Mishna is a Greek concept not a Hebrew concept. The Talmud is filled with influence from Plato and Aristotle; the spiritual as greater than the physical and being separated onto a higher plane. While Moses would have a Hebrew Mindset and the love of God with all your heart, soul and strength involved both body and spirit equally.

We see when we look at history that we do not find references to the Rabbinic Oral Law concepts before the Greeks conquered the Hebrews and forced them to learn Greek and be educated with Greek philosophy. This Greek thinking is what started the Rabbinic explanation of God's law. Put it in order. Explain what isn't clear. Define what the Sabbath means. What is work? Etc. The Greek influence that man can through his intellect, which is somehow not fallen like the rest of him, define the will of God. All Greek influence on the Hebrew Torah.

So, Logically and Rationally we would conclude the Rabbinic Oral Torah is not passed down generation upon generation from Moses but is compiled by men influenced by Greek thinking to explain God's law. Although, having said all that, I will concede that it is possible that throughout history a small remnant of God's people remained faithful who did pass down an Oral tradition father to son and so fragments of Moses Oral teachings came to be preserved within the Rabbinic Oral Torah we have today. For example; as traditionally believed, in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, that ten details of Tefillin are Oral laws given to Moses at Sinai. These ten details are believable.

What does scripture say?

We find ourselves repeating Acts 14:5-21. The young church in Jerusalem is discussing what to do with the new Gentile believers, what requirements should they follow? Some Pharisee believers say, they

should be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses. And by this they mean, the Gentiles should convert to Judaism and keep the Torah and the Oral Torah. Peter and James chime in and in the end, they decide to write to the Gentiles and tell them to simply; abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. And as far as following Torah to hear the law of Moses as it is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.

By this they mean that the Torah they should follow will only be the Torah that is read in the synagogue – the written Torah alone.

We find as we study Galatians that Paul goes to great length to stress that his young church the Galatians are not to follow the Oral Torah as the same Pharisee Believers are trying to circumcise and convert his Galatian Christians.

We find James in James 1:22-25 telling Christians not to just be listening to the Torah in the synagogue but to do the Torah. “But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only...” So, again the stress is on the written Torah that is heard in the Synagogue.

And John in 1 John 5:3 “In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.” John uses the term God’s commands to specifically identify the written Torah alone. We see that John says that Christians should be keeping Torah if they love God and by keeping Torah we show love for God.

So, what is the conclusion to the Talmud and Mishnah?

The Believer should read, study and keep the written Torah as from God. The Believer should understand the Talmud and Mishnah because they are filled with the traditions of the Jewish heritage which the Believer should be striving to belong to and be part of. And rich with history.

But, the Believer should always remember that the Talmud and Mishnah are not God’s decrees, they are man’s explanations and often misplaced explanations. And if fragments of Moses’s Oral teachings remain within the Oral Torah they still remain outside God’s commands and only the teaching of a man. Even if that man was Moses.

May Yeshua HaMashiah keep your hearts and minds through his Living Torah.

A Voice in The Wilderness