

Nazarene Jews and the Oral Law

By

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Published by
Institute for Nazarene Jewish Studies

PO Box 471

Hurst, TX 76053

<http://www.nazarene.co.nr>

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PREFACE

Over the last few years, we have noticed a persistent argument against Messianic Jews. This argument is given by members of the very Orthodox Jewish community. The argument is a simple one and is as follows: First is an attempt to show that New Covenant quotations of the Tanakh are misquotes. This is done by showing that the reading from the Massoretic text differs from the New Covenant quotation. Since the Massoretic text is the received Jewish text, the New Covenant is said to be in error, especially in passages in which Yeshua is claimed to be the fulfillment of prophecy. Passage after passage is shown to the new follower of Yeshua and he is brought to great confusion. After this confusion has taken hold, the argument switches. Now the proponent of orthodoxy shows the new believer passage after passage from the Torah which is difficult to understand or apply. The passages from the Talmud (Oral Law) are quoted which untangle the puzzle. At this point the claim is made that the Oral Law of Orthodox Judaism is the true interpretation of the Torah and not the New Covenant. This is often done in the context of "love-bombing" during a prolonged Sabbath weekend.

The first part of the argument is not the primary purpose of our booklet. We will only mention the answer here in our preface since it has adequately been dealt with in several writings the most notable of which is Richard Longenecker's Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period. This was also dealt with in the work of Harvard professor Krister Stendahl's The School of St. Matthew. Basically, the solution is as follows:

1. The meaning of fulfillment in the New Covenant often does not mean to do a prediction. It can mean to do a prediction, but also can mean many other things. Fulfill means to make full or to bring to a climax or to bring out a fullness of meaning. Hence parallels in the life of Yeshua to the history of Israel are seen as bringing Israel's history to a fullness of meaning and hence these parallels are quoted as fulfillment in Yeshua's life. Symbolic connections in types, foreshadowing is also quoted as being fulfilled in the life of Yeshua. This method of understanding was common in first century Jewish circles especially in the Essene communities. To claim that the New

Covenant writer is misapplying Scripture because we do not find a definite prediction of the Messiah in the passage quoted is to misunderstand the New Covenant writer and what he is saying. Sometimes there is a definite prediction, sometimes a parallel or sometimes a symbolic foreshadowing in events and the language of history.

2. The New Covenant often quotes the Septuagint text tradition¹, which was accepted as an authoritative translation accepted by most Jewish communities in the Greek speaking parts of the world. The Septuagint was completed before the time of the Messiah Yeshua. Although the Massoretic text is respected among us, the Septuagint sometimes is a good rendition of what Jewish people before the time of the Messiah thought the text was saying. Furthermore, there are times when scholars who accept empirical methods of text comparison and correction believe that the Septuagint text is more correct than the Massoretic. It is a dogma in many Orthodox circles that the Massoretic text is always the true rendering. However, it is almost universally accepted by scholars who accept empirical methods that the Massoretic text is sometimes in error and the Septuagint correct. The best reading is therefore Kittel's comparative corrected text built from a comparison of all extant manuscripts including the Massoretic, Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

3. The New Covenant sometimes is paraphrasing the Old to bring out a commonly accepted allusion of interpretation. Its readings sometimes parallel the Jewish Aramaic paraphrases known as the Targumim. (cf. McNamara, Targum and Testament).

These considerations more than adequately answer the objections from the accusation of New Covenant misquotation of the Old for the sake or special pleading.

Our booklet is written to answer the question of more limited scope, "Is the Oral Law to be accepted as the Word of God and of equal authority with the written Scriptures?" This of course leads to another

¹ Editor Comment: These could be actual Septuagint manuscripts, or Hebrew manuscripts of the same type from which the Septuagint had been translated. – James Trimm

question: "What is the nature of the Oral Law and its authority?" With these questions we shall now be occupied.

THE ORAL TRADITION IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

I. Introduction

This short work will try to give an objective evaluation of the Jewish oral tradition as it is recollected in the works of the Sages, namely, in the Talmud, the Midrash, and the early commentaries as well as in the code of Jewish law. Our concerns shall range over the issues of the validity of the Oral Law, its applications and its limitations according to its fidelity to the revelation of God given to us in the Bible. This is not an exhaustive work, but a short treatment in order to help the reader to understand the different positions in the Jewish community and outside of it regarding this subject.

This booklet will follow the following outline:

- I. First, the Oral Law, Chapter I will discuss the definition of the Oral Law.
- II. The Origin of the Oral Law, the Balance of the Evidence. This will be divided into three sections.
 - A. The portion from Moses
 - B. Early Authorities and Traditions from Biblical times
 - C. Rabbinical decisions. This last section will cover two areas:
 1. The rabbinical claim that their exegesis enabled them to discover the Oral Law as originally given. Thus there is an admission that the Oral Law was lost but is rediscovered through rabbinical methods of study.
 2. An examination of the subjectivism involved in the use of some of the principles of exegesis used by Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael.
- III. The third chapter will deal with The Oral Law and its Value for Clarifying Scripture.

- IV. Chapter four is the Contradictions to Scripture in the Oral Law.
Two sub-sections
 - A. Contradictions are
 - B. The Written Word and Inspiration.
- V. Chapter five: The New Covenant Use of Rabbinic Tradition

In general, our concern shall be to relate the Oral Law to the New Covenant Scriptures. Our principle is that all interpretation should be tested by its coherence to the written Law and the rest of the Scriptures.

I. The Oral Law

A. What is the Oral Law?

The Oral Law is the received interpretation and application of the different commands of the Bible. According to Rabbinical count there are 613 commandments in the Books of Moses. The Oral Law seeks to answer the concern of how they apply to every part of life. The Oral Law also seeks to provide interpretations of obscure Scripture passages. It contains regulations side by side with commentaries along with ancient traditions about biblical events. The Oral Law was written in the early centuries of this era in two primary sources, the Mishnah and the Gemara. These two make up the Talmud. The Gemara is the interpretation of the Mishnah which is the interpretation of the written Law of Moses. Other sources provide information for rabbinical interpretation, but the Talmud is the key ancient source and will be our primary focus.

B. The Orthodox Understanding of the Oral Law

In traditional Judaism, the legal conclusions and interpretations to be found within the Talmud are either the transmission of the Oral Law given by God to Moses or a rediscovery of this Law. This Oral Law, codified in the Shulchan Aruch (a fourteenth century codification) is of equal authority and importance to the written Law. It was either passed

down through the ages to the Sages of Israel or was rediscovered by the Sages by applying certain rules of interpreting biblical texts.

II. The Origin of the Oral Law The Balance of the Evidence

A. The portion from Moses

The Talmud claims that the Oral Law was given to Moses. (B. Tal. Magilah 19b, Sifrei Bechukotai 81a). However we also read in the Midrash (Exodus Rabba 41:6) that Moses only learned the principles of interpreting the Torah at Sinai and not the whole Oral Law. This is an interesting admission. The rabbis say that the rules of interpretation that are used in their schools bring out the true application of the principles given by God to Moses at Sinai. These interpretations are regarded as having the same weight as the written Word itself. The Rabbis thus regarded their interpretative understanding of the text as equal to the text itself. The Oral Law in rabbinical understanding clarifies the Written Law, but does this with absolute authority. Rabbi Shammai was once asked how many Torahs the Jewish people had. He answered two: the Written and the Oral. (cf. Sifrei Deut. 35:1)

There is some evidence for an oral tradition within the Torah itself.

In Exodus 21:22,23 we read, "If a man strikes and hurts a woman with child so that her fruit depart from her and yet no mischief follow, he shall surely be punished according as the woman's husband will lay upon him and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life."

Within this passage we find that judges have authority to render decisions which could become a legal-judicial tradition. Furthermore, there is no direction as to how this man should be put to death. This is contained within the Oral Tradition. Furthermore in the same chapter a question arises from verses 26 and 27 concerning the injuries of slaves. Are these verses only dealing with these cases or is there a more universal application to injury in general? Or what about the quantities of various offerings which seem unclear in Torah (leket "gathering", shichachaf "forgetfulness", terumah "donation"). The Bible demands that a man leave quantities of wheat in his fields as well as to make

offerings to the Lord. The quantities are not mentioned in the text. In all of these examples, there is a sense that there may have been unmentioned requirements or clarifications that are not mentioned in the text. So there is some evidence of unrecorded divine regulations or at least guidance which is written but may have been known to Moses and his contemporaries. Many other examples can be given. Deut. 25:1-3 refers to accusation and punishment in regards to the laws of marriage, but is unclear in designating which sins require flagellation.

There are several cases in which Moses needed more clarification from God. One example concerns the penalty for the man who gathered wood on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-35, Sifrie 15:35). Leviticus records such a question on blasphemy (Lev. 24:10-23).

Beyond these specific examples, we also find a general principle for applying the Torah in practical circumstances by submitting to the judicial authority of priests and judges. In Deuteronomy 17:8-12a, we read:

"If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates, then shalt thou arise, and get thee up to the place which the Lord thy God shall choose. And thou shalt come unto the priests, the Levites, unto the judgment that shall be in those days and inquire, and they shall show thee the sentences of judgement and thou shalt do according to the judgement which they shall tell thee, thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God or unto the judge, even that man shall die; and they shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear and do no more presumptuously."

The Bible thus speaks about an authority of the priest and the judge. We can infer a very early evidence for a non-written tradition of authority in applying the Law of Moses, which would arise by judicial precedent. Even the Sadducees had an oral tradition, the Book of Decrees, dealing with death penalties etc. (Megillat Taanit).

The Dead Sea Sect also had many oral traditions. The Master Covenant and the Manual of Discipleship are just two of them. However, oral traditions did not supercede the written Word but rather extended it to every specific situation. The sources for other early authoritative traditions came from the prophets, the judges, and scribes. Jeremiah reports to us several customs regarding selling and the rabbis look at these as "Takamah" or a decree. Nehemiah tells us the way they used to worship. Indeed if you examine the synagogue today you will find that the call to worship is based upon it.

"And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered 'Amen, Amen', with the lifting of their hands and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." (Neh.8:6).

The very way that they read the Torah from an elevated platform with at least three persons present is also in the same chapter in the previous verse.

"And Ezra opened the Book in the sight of all the people. For he was above all the people, and when he opened it all the people stood up".

The fact that the platform was made of wood is stated in the same chapter in verse 4:

"And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithiah and Shema and Anaiah on his right hand and on his left."

These traditions are kept by people today. How did other early traditions come down to us? Can we truly accept the rabbis' positions that even Adam and the Patriarchs lived by the whole oral tradition? History gives us reason to disagree.

Let us briefly see how the oral tradition developed beyond the scope of valid judicial precedent to be corrected by the written Law unto a system of tradition over against the Law of Moses and equal to its authority.

In Scripture Moses appointed judges according to the advice of Jethro his father-in-law to deal with specific cases and to apply the principles of Torah. However this judicial material arose after the time of Sinai and was not directly given to Moses at Sinai. Judges and prophets applied the Word to specific situations, but these precedents came after the time of Moses. One of the most important facts is that the whole Hebrew Bible, spanning a period of 1000 years, never mentions an Oral Law directly given to Moses on Sinai.

B. Early Authorities and Traditions from Biblical Times

After the dispersion in Babylon, Scribes arose to explain the Law and shared their function with the priests. However, the Scribes eventually became the more important teachers. In Nehemiah 8:7-9 we read, "The Levites, Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and PeIaiah instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read."

The definition of a scribe and his function is given in Ezra 7:6,10-12.

"This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a read scribe in the Law of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given, and the King granted him all his request according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Lord and to do his will and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. Now this is the copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of Heaven."

In Hebrew we find the word "drash" to explain, which is the same root as in the word "midrash". Midrash came to mean the explanation of the Bible according to the interpretive (hermeneutic) rules of the rabbis.

Ezra's successors were the Soferim or the scribes who maintained a threefold direction in their studies: the midrash, the halacha (the rabbinic regulations and lays which apply the Torah to every part of

life), and the haggadah (the teachings of the rabbis about ancient traditions and stories relating to the Bible). The need for authority to dispel confusion was apparent in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. This authority arose in the Great Assembly, He-Kenesset Ha-G'dolah. Who exactly these were and their number is impossible to determine. The Talmudic tradition is not consistent in this regard. The general consensus is there was about 120 persons. However, there are doubts in this regard (cf. Cohenim, Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, p.309). This body was probably made up of the leading persons in the country; the chief priests, the elders and the judges. There was probably some succession in the great body and more than one Synod in addition to the assembly probably had a very strong authority to apply the rules over the whole country. The nature of their work is given in Pirkei Avot.

"Moses received the Torah from Sinai; he handed it to Joshua and Joshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets and the prophets handed it down to the Great Assembly men. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah."

Shimon HaTsedik, Simon the Just, is described as the last of the Great Assembly, but he may himself not have been a part of it but just an authority figure who continued their tradition. During the troubled times under the Roman Conquest, the sacred studies were probably left to individuals. We have their names in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers). Simon the Just stated the importance of an appropriate teaching of the rabbis on the Torah in order to appropriate it in every day life. We read in Avot,

"The world stands upon three things: the Torah, the working out of the Torah (its practical application) and the practice of charity."

After Simon came the Zugot, the couples of whom Hillel and Shamai were the last. Later on those couples were designated as the Nasi, the President, and the Av Beit Din (the President of the Sanhedrin). In the time of Judah ben Zakai Ha Nasi and a very well known figure from the time of the Maccabees, Simon Ben Shatach, we see that the rabbis had been elevated to their traditional authority and functions. The last of the five couples brings us to the time of Herod and the Messiah

Jesus. By time of the struggle between Judaism and Christianity the Great Assembly had disappeared leaving the Soferim who no longer had judicial power. They became the Zekenim (elders), whose task was basically religious.

It is necessary to return to the period of the Maccabees to understand the divisions between religious parties in the time of Yeshua. Originally, the Hassidim were the party of the Maccabees, the pious ones, who were nationalistic leaders. Many of these later became the precursors of the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not accept the merging of secular power with the priesthood which the Maccabees later adopted. The Sadducees were a more moderate group who sympathized with the later tendencies of the Maccabees. Jonathan Maccabee accepted (from the Syrian ruler) the dignity of the High Priest and combined it with the secular leadership of the country. He then surrounded himself with an eldership, Hever Z'kanim, which was in a sense a renewal of the Great Assembly. The High Priest was the chief representative of the ecclesiastical body of rulers. During the time of later wars, the Pharisee party overtook the Sadducee party and received from Rome the power of greater social jurisdiction so that the High Priest no longer had the same secular and religious authority that he had before. However, the Sanhedrin continued with representation from the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The former had greater numbers from the Temple priests and held sway in the control of the Temple.

During this time the couples came on the scene replacing the Hever as the ecclesiastical authority. They were the leaders of the Sanhedrin. The development of religious authority is clarified by the statements of the Zugot (Couples) and of other rabbis who came after them. These statements are part of the Talmud collected by Rabbi Ben-Meir and finally by Yehudah Ha-Nasi in the Mishnah portion of the Talmud (2nd. Century). Later, rabbis commented on this material from the Third to the Sixth centuries in material now collected the Gemara. The Mishnah and the Gemara together form the Talmud.

C. Rabbinical Decisions

By examining the Talmud we can see how the traditions were handed down. Much came late and much evolved through many centuries. We

have problems in accepting the Talmudic statement based on Ex. 20:1 that God communicated to Moses the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Haggadah, even that which scholars in later times would teach! Another statement based on Exodus 24:12 explains that the tablets or stones, the Ten Commandments, the whole written Law, the Mishnah, the Prophets: the Writings, and the Talmud were all given to Moses on Sinai. (B'reishit Rabbah 11, Berachot 5a). What is the historic basis for this extensive claim? Certainly those cases where the Oral Law does clarify Scripture gives no warrant for this vast claim.

1. The Rabbinical Claim for their Methods of Exegesis

Statements by the rabbis reflect the desire to enhance their authority by claiming the earliest source possible for their teachings. At first the claim could have been that the rabbis sit in the seat of authority held by Moses and are to be treated with great respect and their interpretations with great seriousness. However, as if this claim was not enough, the rabbis argue that their methods of interpretation is a means for discovering the Oral Law originally given to Moses. Evidently, the Oral Law was not passed down intact, but was lost and must be discovered. As we shall see this is admitted.

In Exodus Rabbah 28b and Tanchuma Jethro 20 we read that the source of the halacha of the Rabbis is Divine authority. Furthermore we read that the exegesis of the Rabbis reveals the Torah given at Sinai. The disciples were to teach more than Moses' written law. It is claimed that the rule of the disciples was already conveyed to Moses at Sinai (Jer. Tal. Peach 26, 17a). In the Megillah 11b we read,

"Rabbi Chayah ben Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan, 'What is the meaning of the verse of Deut. 9:10 "and the Lord delivered unto me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God and on them was written according to all the words which the Lord spoke with you in the Mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly?'".' It teaches us that the Holy One blessed be He, teaches Moses (and) showed Moses the minutia of the Torah and the minuteness of the scribes and their innovations, one of the being the reading of the Megillah."

However, the explanation is also given that the men of the Great Synagogue were supposed to have written the laws of the Megillah. In Sifrei Numbers 1.3:4 we find that matters that were not revealed to Moses were Given to Akivah and that Moses did not understand Akivah's own teaching. (cf. Menachot 29b). The reading is really quite astonishing:

Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name, "When Moses ascended on high, He found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in the fixing of crowns to the letters. Moses said, 'Lord of the Universe, who stays thy hand?' He answered, 'There will arise a man at the end of many generations, Akivah ben-Joseph by name who will expound upon each title heaps and heaps of laws.' 'Lord of the Universe', says Moses, 'permit me to see him.' He replied, 'Turn thee around.' Moses went and sat behind eight rows and listened to the discourse on the Law. Not being able to follow the argument he was ill at ease. But when they came to certain subjects, the disciples said to the master, 'Whence do you know it?' And the latter replied, 'It is the Law given to Moses at Sinai. He was comforted. Thereupon, he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, 'Lord of the Universe', Thou art such a man and thou givest the Torah by me?' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is my decree.'"

This passage certainly reflects the later elevation of the later Rabbis. However, by this passage the rabbis themselves recognized the fact that the Oral Law was not Mosaic. Moses did not even understand it! The claim is within this passage that rabbinic authority is like unto the authority of Moses and his Law, but one can not take the idea literally that the Law comes from Moses himself.

The literal claim of the rabbis is that the oral traditions derived from their interpretations are of the same weight as if they were given through Moses himself. The rabbis even say that a halacha should be considered to be given to Moses at Sinai even if it has no Scriptural support when the Hebrew Scriptures are the only major documentary sources for 1000 years of Biblical Jewish history. This is the case for various rules of what is permitted or not permitted and various other rituals and cleanliness rules (Eruvin 4a, Megillah 24b, Shabbat 79b).

All logical deductions are also said to be self-evident and do not need Scriptural proof. They are axiomatic. It was said that whoever wished

to claim an interpretation must bring proof and the "chazakah" or the majority rule. Such deductions and rules have the same authority as Scripture. This point becomes crucial when we will later note more subjective methods of exegesis, which were at the time considered logical. We know that Rabbi Akivah's method of deduction is far more stretched than the principles of Rabbi Shmuel based on the thoughts of Rabbi Hillel. Yet Rabbi Akivah is completely accepted. Which interpretation comes from Sinai, that of Rabbi Shmuel or Akivah? In the Siddur, Rabbi Shmuel's position is accepted!

We now must deal with the question of the main rules of exegesis for understanding the Bible. We will see good principles and principles capable of great abuse and false interpretation.

The seven rules of Hillel are not totally objective, but some are of real logical value. Other later rules are much more capable of being used to support fanciful interpretations. The seven rules of Hillel now follow:

1. Kal vahomer - This states that what applies in a less important case will apply in more important and similar cases.
2. Gezerah Shava - This is an argument from verbal analogy from one verse to another. When the same words are applied to two separate cases, it follows that the same consideration applies to both.
3. Binyan Av Miktuv Echad - This refers to building up a family from a single text. When the same phrase is found in a number of passages, then the consideration from one of them applies to all of them.
4. Binyan Av Mishnei Ketuvim - building up a family from two texts: when a principle is established by relating two texts together the principle is established by relating two texts together: the principle can then be applied to other passages.
5. Kelal Uferat - the general and the particular - A general principle may be restricted by a particularization written in another verse, or conversely a particular rule may be extended into a general principle.

6. Kayotzeh bo mimakom Acher - as it is found in another place. The difficulty in one text may be solved by comparing it with another, which is of general, though not necessarily of verbal similarity.

7. Devar Halamed Me'inyano - the meaning is established by its context. We can see in these principles a grouping and sometimes a discovery of the logical principles of deduction and of empirical induction, which are indeed so useful in gathering evidence for interpretations. Actually, we believe that these principles were always part of man's reasoning equipment. However, full clarity concerning these principles came to us only in the last few centuries. Our principles of induction and deduction are more accurate than the principles outlined by the rabbis although they (rabbinic principles) contain some of these principles in part. Comparing texts and contexts for word definition and interpretation is simply an example of the inductive principle of agreement in which evidence is gathered and a general conclusion is drawn. From the general to the particular is an example of the deductive principle applying universal principles to particular examples.

Rabbi Ishmael expanded these principles to thirteen. The first Four are as Rabbi Hillel. The Fifth is derived from an application of Hillel's fourth. The Sixth is that a general law is limited by specific applications and then limited by specific applications must be interpreted according to the specific regulations when again stated in general terms. The Seventh is that a general proposition requires a particular or specific term to explain it and conversely, a particular term requires a general one to complement it.

Eighth is, when a subject is included in a general proposition and is afterwards particularly extended to give information concerning it, the exception made therein is made not for that one instance alone, but applies to the general proposition as a whole.

Ninth, whenever anything is first included in a general proposition and is then used to prove another similar proposition, this specifying alleviates and does not aggravate the lay of restriction.

Tenth, whenever anything is first included in a general proposition and is then accepted to state a case that is not a similar proposition, this

specifying alleviates in some respects and in others, aggravates the lay of restrictions.

Eleventh, anything included in the general proposition and afterwards accepted to determine a new matter cannot be applied to the general proposition unless it be explicitly done in the text.

Twelfth, an interpretation in use from the text or from subsequent terms in the text; this is like the seventh principle of Hillel, a meaning established by its context.

Thirteenth, in like matter when two texts contradict each other the meaning can be determined only when a third text is found which harmonizes them, and that is like principle six of Hillel.

We list these principles to give the reader a sense of rabbinic rules, but recognize that only a good deal of study will really clarify the distinctions between them. Suffice it to say in regards to the added principles of that most who understand the principles of induction and deduction would say that there is too much vagueness leading to possible misuse. Sometimes by the principles of logic and empirical induction the rule would be found to be true and sometimes the rule would not hold. We do respect the rabbinic attempt to clarify logical principles. However, later lists become more problematic and subjective by far than these. For a summary of these principles the student may refer to Sifrei 3a and to Longenecker's Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period, And Tosafot to Sanhedrin 7:11.

C. An Examination of Rabbinic Subjective Exegesis

We shall attempt in this section to show how the principles of exegesis are vague in some ways so that they are capable of misapplication and abuse. Before doing so we want to note the great subjectivism in the very principles of Rabbi Eliezer ben-Yoseph Hagelili. He expanded the principles to thirty-two. The twenty-ninth is the principle of Gemetria - the constitution of the numeric values of the letter (in Hebrew each letter has a numeric value) and the substitution of other letters related to these numeric values gives new, but previously hidden, meanings. The thirtieth is the Notrikon is the breaking of a

word into two or more expositions of single letters to stand for many words which commence with these letters.

This also gives new previously hidden meanings. The thirty-first is Mukdam Shehoa Mehouchar Bahinyan - One may reverse order in a sentence to gain new meaning. Thirty-Second is Madedem umehoucrar Shehu Baparishyot - many Biblical sections can said to refer to later periods than their original context and visa versa. These principles for interpreting Scripture leads to an amazing variety of meanings that are not intended by the syntax of the text. The student finds amazing exciting discoveries, which are totally subjective and unsupported by any known principles of logic or induction. Sentences, phrases, and even single words may be interpreted independently of the context or historical occasion as divine oracles. Meanings may be derived from detached utterances along with analogies and expressions of purely verbal associations. Actually, one could say almost anything and by these methods find support for it in the Bible. In the halachah where traditions are more strongly rooted in the Bible and earlier periods there is a moderate usage of the rules. However, in Hagaadic exegesis there is greater subjectivism. The general question, which has been also asked by Reform and Conservative Judaism, is do we really wish to give to the Rabbinic tradition an equal authority to Moses? Or should ye rather approach the Rabbinic tradition with respect, learning from correct insights and rejecting those interpretations that differ from the Scripture's intent in the context of the original setting of its writing? We of course choose this latter course.

Let us remember nevertheless, before we show the limitations of Rabbinic exegesis, the reasons behind the Rabbinic methods. According to Rent Bloch it is first a point of departure from Scripture for reflection or meditation on the Bible. Secondly it is hermeneutical (interpretive) and largely originates from the liturgical reading of the Torah. Thirdly, it makes an attempt to analyze the text with the object of eliminating obscurities found therein. Effort is made to explain the Bible by the Bible. Fifthly, according to the Biblical text, the Midrash either tries to discover the basic principles inherent in the legal section with the aim of solving problems not dealt with in Scripture. This is Halachah. Conversely, midrash seeks to find the true significance of the evidence mentioned in narrative sections of the Pentateuch (Haggadah).

Birger Gerhardson explains Midrash as follows. It is normally composed out of already existing material accepted as authoritative because it comes from the tradition. In using the material, new terms, new phrases, new ideas etc. are introduced for the greater part from that which already exists in the authoritative tradition. There are new insights and extensions, but they are referred to something in the tradition which is said to justify them. Midrash starts from a text, a phrase or a single word, but the text is not simply explained. Its meaning is extended and its implication drawn out with the help of every possible association of ideas.

Before we turn to an investigation of the systems of Rabbi Hill and Rabbi Ishmael, let us first show me of the abuses from the principles of Rabbi Eliezer ben Joseph in which substitutions change the very meaning of the Biblical text. Hershel Finkel points out how the Babylonian Talmud contains instances where the rabbis employ dual readings of the text and dual meanings of the words for exegesis by first reading with different vowels and different consonants.

An example of this is found in Bereachot 64a on Isaiah 54:13 which reads Bonayich (your builders) for benayich (your sons). Also we read in Berachot 48b on Exodus 23:25 the reading of uvarech, the imperative, for uverach (and he blessed), a perfect vowel consecutive. By inserting only the weak consonants, Megillah 30 on Esther 2:7 reads levayt (housewife) for levat (daughter). Shabbat 119b on Isaiah 26:2 reads Sheomer "one who reads" for shomer "keeper". By the transposition and change of gutturals, Berachot 132a on Numbers 11:2 reads: al instead of el and Berachot 300 on Psalm 29:2 reads bechedrat, "in the fear of" for behadrat, "in the splendor of". By the alteration of letters that sound alike or look alike, Berachot 57a and Megillah 15b change the letter sin to shin to suit the purpose of the interpreter. Also in Yonah 75 on Numbers 11:32, the reading vayschata is given for vayshtechi they prayed. We even find in Succah 35a that a Greek reading is allowed to determine the Hebrew text. Udor is read for Adar.

The basic point for the reader is to recognize that there are many places in which the Talmud and rabbinic writings depart from the biblical text for their I particular interpretive purposes. It is

hypocritical for Orthodox Jews to argue against the New Covenant because it quotes the Septuagint, a legitimate translation into Greek by ancient Jewish scholars, when the authority they choose is much more abusive of the biblical text. Appeal can not be fairly made from the Massoretic text against the New Covenant quotations of the Tanakh unless the same standard is to be applied to the Talmud's quotation of Biblical texts. There is no doubt that an objective analysis will show that New Covenant quotations and interpretations are much more defensible from the Biblical text than are Talmudic quotations. In a later section we will show how when New Covenant writers use the rabbinical principles of exegesis for illustration and argument, they do not slip into the same subjectivist interpretations found in the Talmud. Rather, New Covenant Exegesis is much more controlled and objective.

We now turn to the principles of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Hillel. In Sanhedrin 19a, we see a misuses of Kal VaHomer in which the rabbis comment on Numbers 15:31 which reads, "because he hath despised the word of the Lord and hath broken his commandments, that soul shall utterly be cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him."

The passage refers to one who does not receive the written Torah as revelation and obey it. The rabbis claim that this refers to one who gives an interpretation of the Torah not according to halachah. Even if you keep the Torah but not according to rabbinic teaching you shall be cut off. What applied to Israel in the days of Moses, applies now under rabbinic authority in this similar case. Yet the context of the passage makes it clear that the issue is one of blasphemy. This is an occasion for a teaching on the equality of the law for all people in the land. It has no reference to rabbinical authority and can not be inferred by Kal VaHomer unless one wants to read this into the text. Further teaching on this text goes on to make it speak to the issue of halachah in minute terms. It is said that even if he admits that the whole Torah is from heaven excepted a particular point of deduction or a *gezerah shava* he is still included therein because he despised the Word of the Lord. This is obviously an overstatement and abuses authority.

We in no way want to imply that Rabbinic interpretation is sometimes not helpful and correct. Our task, unfortunately in some ways, is only to point out the dimensions of fanciful and subjective exegesis so that

Rabbinic interpretation will not be accepted as an authority which can not be criticized and is equal to the Bible. At times the tradition makes the correct decision. In Sanhedrin 34b we can see that the a minori principle would be going against Scripture and is therefore rejected. At times the Rabbis accept the written Scripture as a supreme authority which precludes inferences which could be drawn from their exegetical methods.

In Megillah chapter 2 the Mishnah states,

If one reads the Megillah (Scroll of Esther) in Hebrew but does not understand Hebrew he has performed his obligation. If one reads it while half asleep, he has performed his obligation.

Obviously this is an untrue statement since if a person does not understand the Scripture he has read, but has yet fulfilled a commandment to read the Book, he might just as well read anything foreign; for uncomprehended material has no value before God in regards to all the biblical commands to understand, hear and obey the Word.

Subjectivism and legalism are apparent in many other passages. In the tractate Eruvim, in Sefer Moed we find laws concerning what is forbidden to carry on the Sabbath. A passage of Jeremiah commands against travel and carrying burdens for business on the Sabbath. The rabbis said that this refers also to carrying a prayer shawl (by their method of interpretive extension and the rules of exegesis). One is permitted to carry a prayer shawl in the synagogue. Therefore if you circle a whole town with telegraphic poles then the whole city becomes like one house and you can carry as much as you want in it. Or you can travel a distance from your home and put down some bread and water. This signifies that this is your home and you can go a farther distance from this place!

III. The Value of the Oral Law in Clarifying Scripture

Our last section will show how aspects of rabbinic method and thought is to be found within the New Covenant and is important for New Covenant interpretation. At this point we want to affirm the value of the Rabbinic tradition in clarifying Scripture written before New

Covenant times. As Rene Block said, the intention of the Rabbis was really to bring out the truth of Torah in every specific area of life. Or as Richard Longenecker stated (P. 37),

Midrashic interpretations in effect ostensibly takes its point of departure from the biblical text itself though psychologically it may be motivated by other concerns. It seeks to explain the hidden meaning contained therein by means of agreed upon hermeneutic rules in order to contemporize the revelation of God for the people of God... by the maxim, "What is written in Scriptures is relevant to all situations."

Now this is a far cry from saying that rabbinic interpretation came from Moses. However, we find excellent rabbinic interpretations in many places. We must never forget the proper rabbinic insight that all of the commandments are summed up in maintaining true faith in God which leads to faithfulness.

Micah came and reduced them (the commandments) to three; as it is written, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love justice and to walk humbly with thy God?" Micah 6:8). Isaiah subsequently came and reduced them to two; as it is said, "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye justice and do righteousness (Is. 56:1). Lastly came Habakkuk and reduced them to one; as it is said, "the righteous shall live by faith" Hab. 2:4 (Mak. 24a).

We must not forget the many rabbinic insights which clarify Scripture and give true understandings with foreshadow the New Covenant. Such is Hillel's summary of the law in terms of the golden rule (in its negative form). Yeshua himself approved of the rabbinic lay which allowed circumcision on the Sabbath as not breaking the intent of the Mosaic law. There are passages where Yeshua agreed with the rabbinic tradition as well as disagreed. The rabbis also held a high regard for Scripture as do we.

They held that when passages in Scripture appear to conflict, one should seek a third passage which will harmonize them. This is a valuable principle for all who believe in the importance of the authority of the Bible. We could spend much time showing how rabbinic interpretations of the Law were sometimes valid applications, compassionate and just extensions etc. but our time and space does not

permit us to do so. Yet we want to state that it can be done. It is unfair to vilify the whole Talmud because we disagree in part. These qualifications are necessary in a booklet, which primarily is pointing out the negative so that the rabbinic tradition is not made authoritative.

IV. Contradictions to Scripture in the Oral Law

The rabbis exalt the Oral Law far beyond reasonable and just grounds. The written Law is by its own testimony the basis for testing all later revelation and prophecy (Deut. 13, 18). Unless the Written Law always stands as superior, under which all later interpretation and application is tested, the authority of the written Law will be undermined. We will be given authoritative interpretations of interpretations without ever having the judicious to see if our tradition strays from the written Law. This was the key criticism of the Pharisaic tradition by Yeshua (Mat. 23 etc.). The Written Law must remain the touchstone whereby we always bring later understandings to renewed evaluations according to the intent of the original. Otherwise, the interpretation can so stray step by step from the original intention, that is that contradicts the Spirit (the core intent) of the Written Law.

The rabbis so overestimate the Oral Law that this necessary critical appraisal for each generation is lost. In Baba Metzia 33a we read,

Those who devote themselves to the reading of the Bible exercise a certain virtue. Those who study the Mishnah exercise virtue for which they will receive a reward. Those who take upon themselves the study of Gemara exercise the highest virtue.

We also read in Sofrim 15:7 Vol 13 b

The Sacred Scriptures is like water, the Mishnah wine, and the Gamara aromatic wine.

In Eruvim 21b we even find these words,

My son, give heed to the words of the Scribes rather than the words of Torah, for in the law of Torah there are positive and negative precepts, but as to the law of the Scribes, whoever transgresses any of the

enactments of the scribes incurs the penalty of death. In the case that he should object that they are of real value, why were they not recorded in the Torah, "Of making many books there is no end." Eccl. 12:12

This is a statement by Rabba, a very important Rabbi. We read, "He who transgresses the words of the scribes and more gravely than he who transgresses the word of the Law."

In discussions between Beit Shammai and Hillel in Eruvim 13b, it is stated that the words of both are the words of the living God. This should be compared with Joshua 1:8,9 which states that the book of the Law (written) should not depart out of our mouths, but that by meditating upon it and heeding it, we shall have good success. The tendency above was present in the time of Yeshua. Thus He said, "You make vain the Lord of God through your tradition. (Matt. 15)

Rabbi Akivah taught that there was no repetition in the Bible. However, we know from parallel Near Eastern documents that repetition was a common form of teaching and is found in many ancient texts. This subjective stance let him to teach that the crowns (reading marks) of the Torah are also inspired and gives special meaning. A supposedly parallel passage is really teaching something new and different!

We know that the Bible actually repeats the whole order of sacrifices again and again, especially when various periods of new commitment were recorded. The Shema is repeated in Deut. 6:4-7 and in Deut. 11. The Bible speaks to an oriental mind which enjoys repetition.

New rules were also devised by the rabbinic community to "go around" the commandments. For example, to allow travel on the Sabbath, bread and water can be laid down and the new location can be counted as a residence. One may then continue a new distance beyond the bread and water.

Jeremiah is concerned with the carrying of burdens of business and commerce on the Sabbath, all those burdens that are part of man's economic and material toil. However, the rabbis apply it to even a handkerchief. They say that if you tie the handkerchief around your

neck it becomes a part of your clothing so that you can carry it that way. Is this really in the spirit of the concern of Jeremiah?

Furthermore the rabbis held that if you surround a city all around with telegraphic poles, the whole city becomes one big house. You may carry anything within your own house; therefore you may carry within the city what you may carry in your house. Many other instances are found in Eruvim.

The Scriptures command the carrying of the lulav and the blowing of the Shofar. Yet the Rabbis forbade the taking of the lulav on the day of Succot which falls on the Sabbath in order that they should not be carried in the street in public domain. For the same reason the shofar should not be blown. Yet there is no clear reason to limit these religious commands on the Sabbath connected with the inherent meaning of the day.

So great did rabbinic authority sometimes become that the disciples of Hillel mispronounced words because the rabbis mispronounced them. Somehow we are to believe that the majority opinions of the rabbis is always the will of God, as if the majority can not err. Somehow this opinion is to be taken as the true Word of God. In Baba Metziah 59b, there was a discussion between Rabbi Ben-Eliezar and others about an oven of Knai. Rabbi Ben-Eliezer said, "If I am right, let a heavenly voice confirm that I am right." And it happened that way. "If I am right let a tree jump three times" and it did and the rabbis still did not want to accept his point of view. They said Torah is not in Heaven but given to men, therefore they decided that the majority would rule. This is based on Exodus 23:2.

In the Haggadah, based on this passage in Berachoth 52a and Pesachim, God even says that He accepts the majorities' view and rejoiced that his children have vanquished him.

In Matthew 15:1-6, we find a passage on Yeshua's controversy with the rabbis. There is a two-fold disagreement. One is a disagreement to the multiplication of rules not found in the Torah which lay heavy burdens upon the shoulders of men. The other is the way new principles at times contracted the commandment of the Scriptures. In

this case the first concerns hand-washing rituals, whereas the latter concerns the command to honor our parents. We read,

Then came to Yeshua Scribes and Pharisees that were of Jerusalem saying, "Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders for they wash, not their hands when they eat bread." But he answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandments of God by your traditions? For God commanded saying, "Honor thy father and thy mother and he that curseth father or mother let him die. But ye say whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."

In other words, if one sanctified the money that would have been used to support father or mother by pledging its consecration to the temple, one was exempt from giving it to father or mother.

Yeshua was never anti-Torah. His problem at times was with the Rabbinic interpretation which sometimes enabled one to get around the law and still to hold by Rabbinic Authority that he fulfilled it. To Yeshua, this was dangerous because it could cause a man to think that he was righteous according to the Law. He would thus in pride think that he was not in need of atonement and mercy, but would approach God on the basis of his self-righteousness according to his works rather than upon the basis of God's love and offer of forgiveness. This latter approach required humility.

In this light, Yeshua taught that whoever lessened the law and taught men to break one of the least of the commandments of the written Torah would be called least in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:18). He was speaking directly to the rabbinic practice whereby a man could be taught to think could break the law by a rabbinic provision to fulfill it in some other way. Let us recognize that a majority of Jews did not accept the authority of the Oral Law at this time and could have readily seen the point of Yeshua. The Essenes, the Sadducees and the later Nazarenes are included in this majority. Yet in some doctrinal matters, Yeshua was closest to the Pharisees.

Another example of a law of the Pharisees which brought this type of interpretation into focus, was their reapplication of the year of Jubilee. All lands were to be returned to their original ancestral families every 50 years and all debts were to be canceled. The Bible hence legislated against the creation of a wealthy and a poor class and required the redistribution of wealth. Due to the hardness of man's heart, the rabbis found it necessary to get around this law and provided for the sale of all land to a non-Jew and the resale of it back again after the year of Jubilee so that the land could ultimately be retained by the owner despite the Jubilee command.

The student must make a decision of commitment. If he has seriously studied the Torah and finds its claims to be the foundational authority that tests all further revelation, he can not accept the claims of the Rabbis for the Oral Law. Before cultural influence is brought to bear on the student, let him read the whole Bible including the New Covenant; let him then ask for the Lord's leading and read the Talmud. To us the case for the value of the Talmud is clear, but not for its inspired authority.

We can understand the reasons for the rabbinic decision. There was an unwillingness to lend as the Jubilee drew near and hardship was indeed caused by the provision given for compassion. However, the rabbinic response, definitely not from Moses, enabled the people to think they were righteous by drawing up a contract for sale and resale, even though the whole intent of the command was ignored. If the rabbis truly wanted to find a means to deal with the hardness of men's hearts there were several other ways they could have responded. They could have stuck to the law as written and preached repentance to the nation as the prophets of old.

They could have drawn up another enactment for the redistribution of wealth and the lessening of debts, lessening the stark severity of the Jubilee principle for the owning class. In doing so they could have also made it known that this was a civic principle practically adopted which did not fully fulfill the law. Hence they could have pointed to the need for the whole nation to receive atonement and mercy. Jeremiah condemned the nation for not keeping the Jubilee year law; certainly he could have not done so if there was an Oral Law from Moses which allowed the principle to be put aside as to its literal fulfillment. By

holding to the full authority of the Oral Law, the Rabbis lessened the weight of the written Law before which the people needed to repent.

It is significant that Yeshua, who was angered at those rabbis who made the written Law veiled because of their traditions (Matt. 15) began his public ministry proclaiming a spiritual Jubilee in which the prisoners would be loosed, forgiveness would be offered, and this good news could be preached to the poor. (Luke 4).

We firmly believe that an unbiased study in humility will show the great contrast between the God inspired writings or the Bible, in content and tenure, and the rabbinic writings. Let not the student fear to read the Talmud (at least a few tractates) in the original or a good translation. Let him do the same with the Bible. Let him not be thrown by the pride or other so-called authorities who claim a knowledge or the original in such a fashion that he has to believe their authority and not make his own decision. There will always be a greater authority! One must decide on the basis of his own study and be receptive to new information as he can receive it. We must make decisions on the basis of what we do know, not on the basis of what we do not know. Only then can we make any important decisions at all, for our vast ignorance would otherwise always preclude a decision.

B. The Written Word and Inspiration.

The official Orthodox position on the inspiration of the Bible is very much like the Messianic Jewish position. We believe that whatever Scripture teaches is true and is to be believed and obeyed. However, we also maintain a stronger emphasis that the Bible is to be understood through grammatical-historical exegesis. This last phrase means that we seek to get at the intent of the author by understanding his language usage in the context, or the cultural context or period in which he used it. When we say that the Bible is inspired, we mean that God superintended the writing of the Scriptures in such a way that the Biblical writers conveyed what God wanted them to convey. God did not take away the personality of the writers as if they were only taking dictation. He used their styles and personalities to convey the truth. Second Timothy 3:16 states this well. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The high regard in which Scripture was held by many rabbis is also evident in the Talmud, despite abuses of authority. Maurice Adler in *The Word or the Talmud* makes the following statement (P.21):

Their purpose was to make of the book the primary guide to action and belief. It teaches the motivation of good attitudes and habits. The inspiration to good life and noble character (is prominent) They sought for nothing less than that the book function as the vital and effective central authority in communal and personal life. The book ought to be the greater source of authority. The book was regarded as divine in origin and character. It was the record of historic revelation of God's will and love.

Hence when the rabbis gave a rule, halachah, they tried to find a Scriptural reference for it, even if these references were forced as evidence for the rule. Of Course, Messianic Jews accept the New Covenant as authoritative Scripture and not only the Hebrew Tenakh. Another central difference is that Messianic Jews accept the modern rules for interpreting literature. These rules are based on refinements of the laws of induction and deduction. We are not bound to the rabbinic rules of interpretation which at best sometimes perceived our more scientifically founded rules of exegesis. These inductive rules stress the totality of available evidence for interpreting Scripture. This includes word definitions, syntax, archeological studies, and cultural contexts from a study of the period of writing. All of this furnishes evidence for understanding the meaning of concepts and teachings to be found in the Bible. Of course the Bible as a whole is a key context for understanding each individual passage. Taking a text out of context falsifies the meaning of the text. We must try to understand the text by reference to the understanding of the writer's intent and to what the contemporary reader would have understood. Original language study, literary types and styles etc. all are of value in understanding. Modern commentaries on Scripture by those who believe in both inspiration and Scientific methods of interpretation are the best guides to understanding difficult texts. Of course, the Talmud provides important cultural background material for understanding the New Covenant. So do the Apocrypha, the Dead Sea scrolls and other contemporary literature. Sometimes the Talmud preserves an understanding that objectively helps us understand the Torah as well.

We also believe that we should take the Bible in its natural sense. We have to understand that there are many literary types within the Bible. Literal passages need to be understood as literal, allegory as allegory, poetry as poetry, and symbolic as symbolic. The trees of the field do not literally clap their hands, but their existence brings glory and praise to the creator.

Beyond all the statements above on the importance of scientific interpretation, we want to call attention to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit of God for understanding Scripture. God dwells within those of a humble and seeking heart. A true seeker after the truth will understand much. With a good translation and proper tools such as a good Bible dictionary, a good short commentary, and a good concordance, the Bible student under the power of the Holy Spirit is equipped to study and understand. He should keep an open mind for new information, but should not feel as though his conclusions are invalid because he is not an expert. Yet no matter how expert we become, our knowledge will be in part, for we are finite and imperfect in this world. (I. Cor. 13)

In any interpretation of Scripture, the illumination of the Spirit, and the control of objective exegesis must come together. Without the objective control of the Lord, we sink into subjective quicksand; however, the objective word without the Spirit causes us to fall into a desert of sterility.

Why do we believe in the Inspiration of the Bible? We will provide a very brief answer which can be expanded to form a book. We encourage the student to read books written on this topic.

The first reason is the inner claim of the biblical writings themselves. The Mosaic writings regularly repeat the words, "Thus saith the Lord" claiming instruction directly from God. This is true of most of the material in the prophets and the writings too. The inner claim of Scripture is born out in the testimony of the Jewish community which received it as revelation. Furthermore, whenever historical information can be brought to bear on the Biblical text, not one discovery contradicts a Biblical truth. For example, archaeology shows a record of the conquest of Canaan as in the biblical account. Idols are

unearthed for the Canaanite period, but there is an amazing lack of idols during the period of Israel's faithfulness to God. Prophecies of the future of nations and cities have been amazingly precise.

The Bible predicts the utter destruction of Tyre, but not of Sidon. Even the roadway which was built to finally destroy the ancient city was predicted (cf. Ezek. 26,28). Yet the nearest sister-city, Sidon, is spoken of as remaining. Daniel chapters 2 and 7 predict the successive empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome in amazing faithfulness to the characters of these empires. Most amazing is the Bible's predictions concerning their worldwide dispersion as well as their re-gathering all over the earth is vividly portrayed, even to the description of the renewal of the produce of the land. (cf. Ezek. 36,37; Lev. 26, Is. 11). We also read these amazing predictions: Egypt will remain, but will not again be a world power; Israel as the northern nation separate from Judea, will cease to exist; the Jewish people will remain forever and will reestablish their nation; Moab and Ammon will continue after the Babylon exile in a weakened condition; Edom will cease completely; Sidon will remain; Nineveh will be fully destroyed; Babylon will be fully destroyed; and Jerusalem will remain.

There is an amazing fulfillment of all of these prophecies. Furthermore, we find in the Tenakh the most exalted ethical and moral system ever known to mankind. The laws of the Torah given by the infinite personal God are majestic. The words of the prophets concerning justice and compassion are without parallel. Surely this is the revelation of God given through God's chosen nation.

The teaching of Yeshua and the apostles confirms our view of the inspiration of the Bible. Yeshua taught that until heaven and earth pass away, not a "Jot or a tittle will pass from the law until all be fulfilled."

In John 10:35, he states that the Scriptures cannot be broken. He constantly uses the words, "It says", "the Scripture says," "God says," "It is written" and "Moses said" as interchangeable phrases. Any one of these followed by Scripture settles any argument.

Furthermore, not only did Yeshua teach the full authority of the Old Covenant, but made provision for the New Covenant writings which could be the record of the salvation events of his life. Yeshua certainly

had the credentials to do this. He was the one promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); born of a virgin (Is. 7:14); rejected and died as a sacrifice but rose from the dead (Is. 53, Ps. 22); and came before the destruction of the second Temple as predicted (Dan. 9:25, 26). There are many more beyond these few we mention. Yeshua gave his disciples authority to convey his teachings and to interpret the meaning of his life, death and resurrection. (cf. John 16:12-14 and John 14:26). In Ephesians 2:20, we read that the congregations of Yeshua are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Yeshua being the chief cornerstone. The Scriptures of the New Covenant provide us with the record of the teaching of the disciples and those they accepted into their circle as equal in authority.

Beyond all of this, the resurrection of Yeshua from the dead accredits both the Tenakh and the New Covenant Scriptures. This resurrection was affirmed by the best of eyewitness testimony. Peter said, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but were eyewitnesses of his glory." Paul notes the more than five hundred witnesses to the resurrection, most of who were still alive at the time of his writing. {I. Cor. 15).

The early communities gave testimony to those books which had true apostolic origins. These books were accepted as part of the New Covenant, just as the Jewish community preserved just those books which came from true prophetic origins.

V. The New Covenant's Use of the Oral Tradition

We believe that there is value to the Oral Tradition. Within the tradition there is wisdom and insight. Yet we need to test the Oral Tradition by the Holy Scriptures, our only absolute authority. Any elements which are contrary to the Bible are to be rejected. The traditions which do not help us to appreciate the truth of God must be rejected and only what is consistent with the Biblical teaching and its Spirit is to be accepted. The Bible is the final rule of faith, practice and authority.

A. Yeshua and the Tradition - Literalistic Peshat (Interpretation)
Yeshua drew from the tradition. Here are a few examples:

1. His rendition of the Shema (Deut. 6:4 which He connected to Lev. 19:18) agreed with the Jewish tradition on the importance of the Shema. The love of God and neighbor are true keys to the whole law.
2. When He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Yeshua replied by a literal quotation of Deut. 8:3, "Kow that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Deut. 6:16, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God," and Deut. 6:13, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve Him," are also quoted passages.
3. Yeshua parted ways with the Pharisaic teaching on Ex. 20:12, "Honor thy father and thy mother," and on 21:17, "and he that curseth his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." The Pharisaic allowance of not caring for one's parents if one dedicates that money to the temple was stringently rejected by Yeshua (Mat. 15:1-9).
4. He bases His teaching on the permanence of marriage on Gen. 1:27-52 (Matt. 19:1-9)

For more details see Richsrd Longenecker in *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*. He gives a full account of literal quotation.

B. Midrashic interpretation is also found in the gospel material, but is properly applied. We therefore list some examples:

- 1) Kal VaHomer - light to heavy - If you being evil know how to give bread to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him. (Matt. 7:11 , Luke 11:13)
- 2) In sending the twelve apostles to Galilee, He warns them as follows. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master and the servant as the Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelsebal, how much more shall they call them of his household?"
- 3) Luke 12:8-28 teaches about God's providence. Yeshua uses the same exegetical methods to refute his opponents. He quotes Ex. 3:6, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," in response to the Sadducees concluding that there is life after death. God still has communion with the patriarchs (Matt. 22:23-33). This interpretation is derived from the tense "I am" showing continuing action, rather than "I was" being used. Facing the Pharisees about the keeping of the Sabbath, He used Kal VaHomer, light to heavy (Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-33, Luk 6:1-5, John 7:23. He

uses again Kal VaHomer, "If a man on the Sabbath day receives circumcision that the law of Moses should not be broken, are ye angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath Day?" In John 10:33-39 he uses Psalm 82:6 in a similar way to defend His Messianic claim.

C. Peshet Interpretation is also significantly present in the Gospel materials. Peshet identifies Scriptures which are brought to fulfillment or fullness in the Messiah and introduces them with a formula of "This is That." This was the main method of exegesis used by Yeshua and was prominent among the Qumran communities of Essenes. Yeshua attributed the meaning of various Scriptures to Himself. In Luke 4:16-21, as He read the scroll in the Nazareth Synagogue, he quoted Isaiah 61:1-2, and proclaimed "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

He says in John 5:39, "Search the Scripture for in them ye think ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Yeshua also quoted the text tradition which is closer to the Septuagint in Matt. 21:42 which quotes Ps. 118:22, "Jesus saith unto them, 'Did ye never read in the Scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.'"

This is a fulfillment of his exaltation and rejection. In Matthew 26:31, He quotes Zech. 14:28 and applies it to himself in a similar way, "Then saith Jesus unto them, 'All ye shall be offended because of me this night for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.'"

These passages start with the formula "it is written," and end with the formula, "this is that." This is the typical formula of Peshet exegesis so common in Qumran's Dead Sea Scrolls. Therefore we see that Yeshua did use appropriate methods of Jewish exegesis and tradition.

B. Rabbi Saul of Tarsis (Paul) and the Tradition

a. Literalistic Peshat - Paul uses Scripture in literal quotation to prove doctrine and ethical positions. He uses the ten commandments literally in Rom. 7:7, 13:9, Eph. 6:2 quoting Ex. 20:12-17, Deut. 5:16-21 and

also Lev. 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," in Rom. 13:9 and Gal. 5:14. He also takes literally and as of great importance the monogamous and permanent nature of marriage from Gen. 2:24 and uses those words to warn us of immorality. (Cf. I Cor. 6:16, "What? Know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? For the two saith he shall be one flesh." He also holds to the Jewish tradition that 2 or 3 witnesses are needed to establish a fact. Deuteronomy 19:15 is alluded to in II Cor. 13:1, " This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." He uses, as a very important example from redemptive history, our father Abraham as a prototype of Salvation Rom. 4:17 9:7-9, Gal. 3:8,16).

b. Midrashic Exeegesis - We find the heaviest use of rabbinic methods of interpretation in the writings of Saul beyond all other New Covenant materials. He uses the rabbinic method of pearl-stringing which consists of attaching different passages one to the other in a continuous argument. There are passages having a common subject or wording. This demonstrates the unity of the Scriptures. This is found especially in the Talmud (eg. Babylonian Sabbath 20 and in Rav. Saul in Rom. 3:10-18 which has references to Ps. 14:1-3; 5:9, 140:3; 10:7; Is. 59:7, Ps. 36:1.) In Romans 9:12-29, these passages are connected: Gen. 25:2,3, Mal. 1:2,3; Ex. 33:19; 9:16; Hos. 2 and 1:10; and Is. 10:22, 1:9. (See Longenecker p. 116-117 for a fuller account.)

The seven Rabbinical rules of interpretation attributed to Hillel are found in the writings of Rav. Saul.

1. Kal VaHomer - light to heavy: In Rom. 5:15-21 we read, "If death and sin come through one man how much more will salvation and eternal life come through one man Yeshua. He also shows the contrast between the fall and the fullness of Israel in Rom. 11:12 and contrasts the ministry of death and condemnation which the ministry of life and righteousness in II Cor. 3:7-8. Other examples are found in Rom. 5:6-9, 5:10; 8:32; 11:24 and I Cor.6:2. The use of the "how much more" argument from light to heavy is prominent throughout.
2. Gezerah Shava- If similar phrases are found in the different passages - they may be used to clarify one another. In Rom. 4: 1-12 Paul put together Gen. 15:5 and Ps. 32:1 in regards to the similarity of the mediation of righteousness or non-imputation of sin.

3. Rule 5: Perat Kellal - particular to general - Saul uses this exegetical rule in his teaching about love in action in Rom. 1.3:8-10. The general law implies the particular and the particular is summarized by the general.

4. Hayotzeh mimakom acher - Rav. Saul uses it in Gal. 3:8. This deals with justification by faith in regard to God's promises to Abraham. He refers to Gen. 12:3 and shows Abraham to be the immediate benefactor but the nations to be ultimate benefactors. He refers to Gen. 22:12 which is similar to Gen. 12:3 which speaks of Abraham's seed. This permits him to concentrate his meaning on the word seed as a singular to find its fulfillment in Yeshua which spreads out to all nations.

5. Rule 7: Davar Halamed Me'inyano - A matter learned from the subject matter in context - Rav. Saul demonstrates this in Romans 4:10ff. Abraham was counted as righteous before his circumcision (Gen. 15 preceded Gen. 17). Gal. 3:17 also states, "And this I say that the covenant, that was confirmed before God in Messiah, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after cannot disannul that it should make the promise of none effect."

The promise was confirmed by God 430 years before the giving of Torah (Mosaic Covenant). Therefore justification can be obtained without circumcision and before the law is kept.

c. Earlier Midrashic Traditions - These are traditions about events which are not written in the Bible. In I Cor. 10:1-4 Paul compares the crossing of the Red Sea with an immersion. This is in accord with Jewish tradition which says that immersion was part of the Exodus. This is reflected in the regulations about proselytes who had to be circumcised, immersed and offer their first sacrifices. Hillel said, "As your forefathers entered the covenant only by circumcision, immersion and the sprinkling of blood."

In the Babylonian Talmud 46a, this teaching is based on the fact that they did not sprinkle the blood without immersion. (Bab. Yebamot 46a as a reference to the fact that, they were all immersed unto Moses.) They were incorporated into such relationship with God as had been established by Moses the chosen leader as is written in Ex. 14:31, "And the people feared the Lord and believed the Lord and His servant Moses."

In I Cor. 10:4 we read, "and all did drink the same spiritual drink for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Messiah." This reflects a midrash on Num. 21:11 "Spring up O well, sing ye unto it."

This midrash is found in Targum Onkelos and Yalkut Shimoni (cf. Earl Ellis, Paul's use of the old Covenant p. 66-70). This midrash teaches that the Rock followed Israel in the wilderness and provided drink. Paul then goes on and makes a spiritual point saying that the rock was Yeshua! This rock was said to provide other special services as well. The ancient Midrash was based on Deut. 32:31-32 also, "How should one chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight except their rock had sold them and the Lord shut them up? For their rock is not as our Rock. The Lord is the provider and the Rock of our salvation."

Rav. Saul uses this Midrash in a Messianic perspective. In Yeshua we find the fulfilment of Israel's salvation history. Rav. Saul also uses rabbinic arguments and traditions in other passages as well.

In Gal. 3:19 we read, "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgression till the seed should come to whom the promise was made and was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. There is a tradition that the Torah was given by angels. The Septuagint of Deut. 33:2 reads, "And he said the Lord came from Sinai and has appeared from Seir to us and has hasted out of the mount of Paran with ten thousands of Cades on his right hand were his angels with him." (cf. Josephus Antiquities 15) In Heb. 2:2 and Acts 7:53, the writer showed the superiority of the good news of the grace of God in Yeshua over the Mosaic Covenant by drawing from this tradition.

The Torah was angelically mediated, but the grace of God in Yeshua was not. Rabbi Saul said in Gal. 4:29 "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is. This refers to Isaac's persecution by Ismael and is used to show that believers, the spiritual sons" are persecuted by unbelievers. However, they will prevail.

In II Cor. 3:13 we read, "and not as Moses which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." The veil in Jewish tradition hid the passing of the glory on the face of Moses, rather than the glory itself. Rabbi Saul says that the veil Israel uses today to hide themselves from the greater glory of the Good News.

Rabbi Saul also uses the rabbinic principle of corporate solidarity and historical correspondence and eschatological fulfillment in the Messiah. First Corinthians 9:9 quotes Deut. 25:4 saying, "For it is written in the law of Moses, "thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." From this Rav. Saul teaches that a minister should be taken care of since he works, bringing the Word to his flock. This is a use of the principle from the lesser to the greater. In Galatians 4:21-31, he uses the relationship between Hagar and Sarah to show a hidden symbolic meaning. Rav. Saul and Luke support this allegorical interpretation to which the literal sense will be subordinated but not rejected (E. E. Ellis p. 1-7). The arguments turn into a Kal VaHomer (light to heavy). Yet this passage is due to a special situation that Paul faced and is not his normal exegesis.

Pesher with the "This is that" as the formula showing fulfillment. Ellis says that about 20 of the Pauline quotations evidence Pesher interpretation. In II Cor. 6:2 we read, "for he saith (Is. 49:8). I have heard thee in a time accepted and in the day of salvation have I succored thee, behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation." We can see the "this is that" formula within. Gal. 4:4 says "when the fullness of time was come God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the Law." This refers to the same passage in Isaiah. In the doxology of Rom. 16:25-27 Rav. Saul sees the revelation of the mystery of God in Yeshua, as the fulfillment of prophecy and says, "to the revelation of the mystery... but now is manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets." Another example is given by Eph. 3:1-11. This refers to a mystery known by revelation given by the Spirit for the salvation of all.

CONCLUSION

Yeshua and His apostles bring out the earliest Jewish traditions and illustrate teaching and interpret Scripture by them. They did it of

course in faithfulness to the true meaning of the Scriptures. They used the exegetical rules of consistency and coherence. So, as is demonstrated by our Lord and his apostles, we should perceive the value of parts of the Jewish tradition. We can indeed learn much from the Jewish heritage and tradition (Talmud, Targumim, Midrash etc). All is to be done in submission to the Scriptures and by the leading of the Spirit. The law of Love is to be our guide as it was for Yeshua and the disciples.

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