

THE DAVAR BIBLE SCHOOL

Bible

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

LESSON 9

An Open Letter from the Dean

Greetings and welcome to our growing family of Davar Bible School correspondence course students. This is a totally new and different kind of Bible study course. This informative course of study will help you understand the clear, simple, plain truths of your Bible. The only textbook you will need for this correspondence course is your Bible. You will find these studies fresh and interesting, not dull and dry. You will be richly rewarded with enlightening new truth in each lesson. There is no tuition or cost to you whatsoever, this course is absolutely free of charge. Your enrollment has already been paid by the voluntary freewill tithes and offerings of those who have elected to support this teaching. Those who wish to support this work are gladly welcomed as coworkers in this important effort to proclaim truth to all people. As you read each lesson, make sure you look up each Scripture that is cited. A separate test booklet is provided for each lesson. This way you can keep the lessons for further study, returning only your test booklet to be graded by your teacher. (Alternatively you may just email your answers to us.) It is our prayer that Elohim will bless you as you seek to understand His word.

- James Trimm

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LESSON 9

In Acts 23:6 Paul proclaims without reservation “I am a Pharisee”. This comes as a shock to many Christians who have a poor understanding of what it means to be a Pharisee.

Part of the reason for this is that the Christian understanding of what a Pharisee is has been defined by Christian commentators, not by Pharisaic sources. As a result, in Christian culture, the word “Pharisee” has come to be used idiomatically to mean “hypocrite”.

Of course Rabbinic Judaism is the modern descendant of Phariseeism. If one wants a good understanding of what Phariseeism taught, one should look to primary sources of the actual teachings of the Pharisees, the Mishna, the Talmuds and the early Midrashim.

Upon the invasion of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity the monarchy of Israel was brought to an end. When the Babylonian captivity finally ended and exiles returned, Ezra reestablished the council of Elders: Ezra 7:25; 10:14, 16) which immediately began making halachic decisions (Ezra 10:10-19). This body became known as the Great Assembly.

The Mishna records the foundations of Pharisaic Judaism as follows:

Moses received Torah at Sinai and handed it on to Joshua,
Joshua to the elders,
the elders to the prophets,
the prophets handed it on to the men of the Great Assembly...
(m.Avot 1:1)

This was a body of 120 Elders and is said to have introduced a regular order of prayers including the Shemoneh Esreh (eighteen benedictions) which eventually evolved into the Siddur. The Great Assembly collected the sacred writings and determined which books were to be regarded as canonical.

We do not know much more about the Great Assembly. We do know that one of the last members of this counsel was “Simon the Righteous” (219-196 B.C.E.). The Mishna says:

Simeon the Righteous was of the remnants
of the Great Assembly. He used to say, “On three things
the world stands: On the Torah, On the [Temple] Service,
and on acts of piety (chasidim).
(m.Avot 1:2)

Ben Sira calls him “the leader of his brothers and the pride of his people.” (Sira 50:1) and dedicates an entire chapter to his good reputation. Simon was the earliest post-biblical

sage cited in the Mishna. Simon was succeeded as High Priest by his son Onias III of whom we read in 2Maccabees:

While the holy city was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were very well observed because of the piety of the high priest Onias and his hatred of wickedness.
(2Macc. 3:1)

About this time Antiochus Epiphanies rose to power over Israel and at about this same time period the High Priesthood passed from Onias III to his brother Jason by way of corruption:

...Jason the brother of Onias obtained the high priesthood by corruption, promising the king at an interview three hundred and sixty talents of silver and from another source of revenue, eighty talents... he at once shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life... and introduced new customs contrary to the Torah.
(2Macc. 4:7-8, 10, 11)

Jason's High Priesthood was illegitimate and not regarded as valid as we read in 2Maccabees:

...Jason, who was ungodly and no high priest...
(2Macc. 4:13)

The corruption of the High Priesthood and the banishment of the true High Priest must have forced the disbandment of the Great Assembly.

At this time (175-140 BCE) many who wished to remain true to Torah escaped into the wilderness (1Macc. 1:62-64; 2:29) These refugees became known as the Chassidim (pious ones) (1Macc. 2:42-43).

While we know little about these Chassidim, they were probably led by a certain Antigones of Soko. The Mishnah says of him:

Antigones of Soko received [Torah] from Simeon the Righteous. He used to say, "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of wages, but be like servants who serve their master with no thought of a wage – and let the fear of Heaven be upon you."
(m.Avot 1:3)

The name "Chassidim" probably came from their devotion to the teaching of Simon the Righteous, that "CHASSIDIM" is one of the three things upon which the world stands.

The term CHASSEDIM is related to the same root as CHESED meaning “grace, mercy, loving kindness, charity”. You might say this was as “grace” movement.

One of Antigones’ talmidim (disciples, students), a certain Zadok, apostatized and formed the Sadducee sect (I laid this out in detail in my recent article “Paul argues Talmud Before the Sanhedrin).

The main line of Antigones’ talmidim went on to establish the body we know as the Pharisaic Sanhedrin (not to be confused with the political Sanhedrin that contained both Pharisees and Sadducees). In fact two of his talmidim went on to become the first Nasi and Av Beit Din of this Sanhedrin.

In other words Pharisaic Judaism was the succession of the Chassedim and the main line of Judaism. (The word “Pharisee” means “separate” and may well refer to the fact that the Chassidim had separated themselves from Jason’s corrupt apostasy from true Judaism). This was a CHESED (grace) based movement proceeding from the teachings of Simon the Righteous and Antigones of Soko.

Before proceeding let us therefore seek to understand the point of Antigones’ teaching:

“Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of wages, but be like servants who serve their master with no thought of a wage – and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.”

Antigones taught that we should observe Torah not as one trying to earn something, but as one who serves a master because he sincerely wants to from inside, out of respect and love for Elohim. He taught that Torah Observance meant nothing unless ones heart was right. Without this inner CHESED, Torah Observance was an empty outer expression, works without faith. This was the foundation of Pharisaic Judaism!

The earliest generations of the Pharisaic movement were known as the Zuggot (pairs). Hillel and Shammai were the last two “pairs” to lead the Pharisee Sanhedrin. The rift between them was so great that Shammai, who was known for his bad temper, forced Hillel to sit and listen to him at the point of his sword, as though he were his student. (b.Shab. 17a) The result was a complete split of Phariseism into two Houses: The House of Shammai (the stricter school) and the House of Hillel (the less-strict school).

From this point forward the only Pharisee Sanhedrin we know of was led, not by “pairs” but by Hillel’s descendents.

Pharisees at this time polarized into two schools of thought: The School of Shammai and the School of Hillel. The two schools held differing view on many halachic issues and argued throughout the first century. Eventually the School of Hillel prevailed in these arguments and serves as the foundation of modern Rabbinic Judaism. There are also

many important connections between the School of Hillel and the ancient sect of the Nazarenes.

Within Rabbinic literature we have record of over 350 disputes between the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. Generally Shammai gave the stricter interpretation, while Hillel's understandings were more relaxed. According to the Zohar (Ra'aya Meheimna 3:245a) The School of Shammai was based on GEVURAH ("severity") while the School of Hillel was based on CHESED ("grace"/"mercy").

A classic example of the conflict can be seen in one of the first passages of the Mishna, which records a conflict between the two houses over how to recite the Shema:

The House of Shammai says:

In the evening one should recline in order to recite the shema, and in the morning they should stand. As it is written "when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deut. 6:7)

But the House of Hillel says:

Everyone may recite the Shema in his own way, as it is written:

"And you shall go by the way" (Deut. 7:7)

(m.Berachot 1:3)

Note that the House of Shammai were concerned primarily with the outward expression, with whether one was standing or reclining, while the House of Hillel were less concerned with such outward expression and much more concerned with the way in which one recited the Shema, that they made it their own way, that they meant it and walked in it. Note the difference in emphasis of the two houses.

Hillel was more concerned with the inner man, while Shammai was more concerned with the outer man. Hillel was concerned with the Spirit of the Law, while Shammai was more concerned with the Letter of the Law.

This overriding concept of sincerity is also found in the Mishna in tractate Menachot:

"...all are the same, the one who offers much and the one who offers little, on condition that a man will direct his intention to Heaven"

(m.Menachot 13:11)

You can imagine that a movement founded on sincerity of heart, would have no tolerance for hypocrisy. The Talmud lists Hypocrites as one of four classes who will not receive the presence of the Shekhinah:

R. Hisda also said in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Abba: Four classes will not receive presence of the Shechinah, — the class of scoffers, the class of liars, the class of hypocrites, and the class of slanderers. 'The class of scoffers' — as it is written, He withdrew His hand from the scoffers.(Hosea 7:5) 'The class of liars' — as it is written, He that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight.(Ps. 101:7) 'The class of hypocrites' — as it is written, For a hypocrite shall not come before him.(Job 13:15) 'The class of slanderers

— as it is written, For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee,'(Ps. 5:5) [which means] Thou art righteous, and hence there will not be evil in thy abode.

(b.San. 103a)

The Talmud however does recognize a problem with hypocrisy among the ranks of the Pharisees:

King Jannai said to his wife', 'Fear not the Pharisees and the non-Pharisees but the hypocrites who are the Pharisees; because their deeds are the deeds of Zimri but they expect a reward like Phineas'

(b.Sotah 22b)

It is this problem that Yeshua addresses when he criticizes hypocrisy among the Pharisees. Sincerity of heart is supposed to be the defining characteristic of the foundations of Pharisaic Judaism, Pharisaic Judaism stripped of its core principle became hollow. I believe this is what Yeshua meant when he said:

You are the salt of the earth,
and if the salt has lost its savor,
how will it be salted?
It is afterwards good for nothing,
But to be cast aside,
And trampled by men.
(Matthew 5:13)

Note in Matthew Yeshua says:

...they [hypocrites] delight to stand in the assemblies
and at the corners of the streets to pray,
that men may see them.
(Matt. 6:5)

Some wrongly imagine that this is a blanket attack on a Pharisaic practice. In reality a similar condemnation appears in the Talmud ““One who says the Tefillah so that it can be heard is of the small of faith’.” (b.Ber 24b)

Yeshua continues his attack on hypocrites saying:

And when you pray,
multiply not your words like the Goyim do...
(Mt. 6:7-8)

Like verse 5 many mistakenly take this verse as a reference to Jewish liturgy. In fact the Pharisaic Mishna itself contains a similar instruction for behavior when praying:

Rabbi Simeon says:
Be meticulous in the recitation of the shema and the Prayer.
And when you pray, don't treat your praying as a matter of routine.
But let it be a [plea for] mercy
and supplication before the Omnipresent, blessed be He....
(m.Avot 2:13)

Yeshua continues his criticism of "hypocrites" saying:

...they begrime and disfigure their faces
that they may appear in the sight of men to fast...
when you fast anoint your head and wash your face...
(Matt. 6:16-18)

Here Yeshua is not condemning a Pharisaic practice but an Essene practice as Josephus writes of the first century Essenes:

They think oil is defilement; and if one of them
is anointed without his own approbation,
it is wiped off his body; for they think to be
sweaty is a good thing...
(Josephus; Wars; 2:8:3)

Yeshua continues his criticism of hypocrites saying:

lay up for yourselves stores in heaven,
where caterpillar and moth waste not,
and where thieves do not steal,
for just where your store is,
there your heart will be also
(Matt. 6:19-21)

A similar teaching appears in the Talmud with very similar wording:

Our Rabbis taught: It is related of King Monobaz
that he dissipated all his own hoards and the hoards of his
fathers in years of scarcity. His brothers and his father's
household came in a deputation to him and said to him, 'Your
father saved money and added to the treasures of his fathers,
and you are squandering them.' He replied: 'My fathers stored
up below and I am storing above, as it says, Truth springeth
out of the earth and righteousness looketh down from heaven.
My fathers stored in a place which can be tampered
with, but I have stored in a place which cannot be tampered
with, as it says, Righteousness and judgment are the foundation

of his throne. My fathers stored something which produces no fruits, but I have stored something which does produce fruits, as it is written, Say ye of the righteous [zaddik] that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings. My fathers gathered treasures of money, but I have gathered treasures of souls, as it is written, The fruit of the righteous [zaddik] is a tree of life, and he that is wise winneth souls. My fathers gathered for others and I have gathered for myself, as it says, And for thee it shall be righteousness [zedakah]. My fathers gathered for this world, but I have gathered for the future world, as it says, Thy righteousness [zedakah] shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward.’
(b.Baba Batra 11a)

When Yeshua criticized Pharisees for hypocrisy he was challenging Pharisees to return to the Chassidic roots of Pharisaic Judaism. He was encouraging Pharisees to return to their foundational teachings, the Tanak and the teachings of Simon the Righteous and Antigones of Soko.

Yeshua was teaching CHESED, he was teaching Chassidism and he was teaching the values of Antigones of Soko. He was teaching us that we should not keep Torah as one wishing to earn something, but as one who has a sincere heart and inner desire to serve YHWH out of sincere love and respect for our Father.

In fact the ironic thing is that by this measure it is Christedom which is hypocritical. Talk to a Christian about Torah Observance and invariably they will respond that they do not have to keep Torah to be saved, and therefore they do not need to keep Torah. They are as ones only concerned with doing what they get paid for, and not as one serving YHWH simply out of love and respect for Him.

When Yeshua was criticizing hypocrisy among Pharisees, he was calling for a return to authentic Pharisaic Judaism, which is why Paul was able to say confidently “I am a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6)

There is an interesting parallel in the teachings of a later movement that also took on the name Chassidic and whose founder the Baal Shem Tov (c. 1750) taught that Judaism must be centered not simply around doing the Torah, but around feeling the Torah.

Our Messiah was bringing together Pharisaic and Essenic Judaism. He was introducing Hillel style halachic teachings to Esseneism and introducing Essene Apocalyptic teaching to Pharisaic Judaism.

Now it is important to understand the first century world from which Nazarene Judaism emerged. There were three major sects of Judaism at the time: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.

The first century writer Josephus writes of the Pharisees:

"...the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses;..."

(Josephus; Ant. 13:11:6)

The Pharisees became what is known as Rabbinic Judaism and eventually wrote these traditions (known as "Oral Law") down in the Mishna and later the Talmud. The Mishna and Talmud are not the Oral Law, but they do contain the Oral Law as recorded by the Pharisees.

The core of the Talmud is the Mishna. The Mishna was compiled around 250 CE by Rabbi Y'hudah Ha Nasi from earlier oral and/or written traditions. It cites the opinions of Rabbis and teachers who lived in the generation immediately following Ezra and Nehemiah, up until the time of its composition. The Talmud was compiled around 500 CE and consists of the Mishna written in Hebrew and the commentary to the Mishna, known as the Gemara, surrounding it in Aramaic characters.

The Sadducees rejected these traditions, as Josephus continues:

"...for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are delivered from the tradition of our forefathers..."

(ibid)

The Sadducees HAD to reject the Oral Law. They did not believe in a resurrection or an afterlife. They had rejected the things that Judaism has always held to. It was hard enough to make their views compatible with the Written Torah, it was easier for them to simply reject the Oral Torah out of hand. In fact they HAD to reject the Oral Law if they wanted to reject any understanding of the written Torah that included a resurrection and an afterlife!

Then there were the Essenes, these are they who are believed to have written the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Essenes did not reject the concept of Oral Law, as the Sadducees did, but they did have an ALTERNATE set of such traditions, many of which are recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among the Scrolls is a document called MMT ("Some of the Works of the Torah"). In this document the Essenes point out some of their differences with the Oral Law as recorded in the Mishna. For example in the Mishna (Hullin 4:1-5) there is an Oral tradition forbidding the eating of the fetus of a slaughtered animal, while item 12 in MMT allows the eating of such a fetus. Many of the points addressed in MMT are addressed directly at points of Oral Torah found in the Mishna. Essenes did not reject the Oral Torah, they had their own understanding of it.

Now our Nazarene forefathers had roots in Pharisaic Judaism and in Essene Judaism but not in Sadduceean Judaism.

Yeshua and the Pharisees on Love

One of the most significant parallels between Yeshua and Hillel is Their profound teaching of Love. Yeshua's teaching of love was a radical departure from the teachings at Qumran. Now Philo tells us that the Essenes had great "desire to promote brotherly love" (Philo; The Hypothetica 11:2) this brotherly love seems to have been only to fellow members of the Yachad (unity). This is reflected in the Damascus Document's use of Lev. 19:18. In the Torah Leviticus 19:18 reads:

You shall not avenge,
nor bear any grudge against the children of my people,
But you shall love your neighbor as yourself:
I am YHWH.

Now the Damascus Document interprets this passage as follows:

As for the passage that says, "Take no vengeance and bear no grudge against your kinfolk" (Lev. 19:18) any covenant member who brings against his fellow an accusation not sworn to before witnesses or who makes an accusation in the heat of anger or who tells it to his elders to bring his fellow into repute, the same is a vengeance-taker and a grudge-bearer....
(Damascus Document 9, 2)

Note that this Qumran interpretation of Lev. 19:19 would limit "neighbor" in Lev. 19:18 to "any covenant member" i.e. a member of the Yachad. In fact the Qumran sect taught:

...bear unremitting hatred towards all men of ill repute...
to leave it to them to pursue wealth and mercenary gain...
truckling to a depot.
(Man. Of Disc. IX, 21-26)

By contrast Hillel is quoted as saying:

Be disciples of Aaron,
loving peace and pursuing peace,
loving people and drawing them near to the Torah.
(m.Avot 1:12)

The Qumran attitude was one of hatred to the sinner. There was no concept of "drawing them near to the Torah" but rather to "leave it to them to [sin]... truckling to a depot." Yet Hillel took the opposite approach. Hillel's attitude was to "Love" the men of ill repute and draw them near to the Torah. This was also Yeshua's approach. Yeshua taught:

You have heard that it was said
"You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."
But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you,

do good to those who hate you,
and pray for those who spitefully use you persecute you
that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;
for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good,
and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?
Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
And if you greet your brethren only,
what do you do more than others?
Do not even the tax collectors do so?
(Mt. 5:43-47)

Yeshua here begins by quoting the Tanak "Love your neighbor" (Lev. 19:18) but then gives the Qumran corollary "hate your enemy." Yeshua differs with this "hate your enemy" teaching in agreement with the love philosophy of Hillel. Apparently the Qumran community inferred from "Love your neighbor" (Lev. 19:18) that they should therefore bear unremitting hatred toward their enemies. To Yeshua (and presumably Hillel) the issue is the interpretation of "neighbor." In his Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-36) Yeshua argues that we cannot be sure who our "neighbor" is, so in order to make sure we do not violate Lev. 19:18 we should love everyone.

Pharisees, Yeshua and the Golden Rule

Another strong parallel between Hillel and Yeshua is that of the so called "Golden Rule." There is a story in the Talmud in which Hillel gives a summary of the Torah. The Talmud says:

...it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, "Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Thereupon he repulsed him with the builders cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him "Do not to others what you would not have them do to you: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it."
(b.Shab. 31a)

A similar incident occurs in the Gospels:

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Yeshua said to him, " 'You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' "This is the first and great commandment. "And the second is like it:

'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
(Mt. 22:34-40 = Mk. 12:28-31 = Lk. 10:25-37)

Here Yeshua is pressed to summarize the Torah and answers with the Sh'ma (Dt. 6:4-9) and the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). This is remarkably similar to Hillel's answer to the same question. It is important to note that the Pharisees agreed that Yeshua's answer was correct. Yeshua elsewhere gives a summary of the Torah which parallels Hillel's answer even closer:

Whatever you would that men should do to you,
do you even to them,
for this is the Torah and the Prophets.
(Mt. 7:12 = Lk. 6:31)

Priority of Chesed to Pharisees and Yeshua

Within Rabbinic literature we have record of over 350 disputes between the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. Generally Shammai gave the stricter interpretation, while Hillel's understandings were more relaxed. According to the Zohar (Ra'aya Meheimna 3:245a) The School of Shammai was based on GEVURAH ("severity") while the School of Hillel was based on CHESED ("grace"/"mercy"). This is very significant. In Mark's account of Yeshua's summary of the Torah (Mk. 12:28-33) A "scribe" comes to question Yeshua. In Matthew's account this "scribe" is identified as a Pharisee (Mt. 22:34-36). According to Mark's account this Pharisee not only agreed with Yeshua's summary of Torah and repeated it adding:

...and to love his neighbor as himself,
is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.
(Mt. 12:33b)

It is not unlikely from this context that the Pharisee was quoting a now-lost saying of Hillel here. In making this statement the Pharisee, who apparently was from the School of Hillel, was pointing to Hosea 6:6:

For I [YHWH] desire mercy (CHESED), and not sacrifice;
and the knowledge of ELOHIM more than burnt offerings.

This Pharisee seems to have identified "love your neighbor" of Lev. 19:18 with the CHESED of Hosea 6:6. Remember the relaxed halachic positions of the School of Hillel were based on CHESED, it is indeed likely that Hosea 6:6 served as a proof text for many of their halachic rulings, since this passage assigns a halachic weight to CHESED. We also find Yeshua using Hosea 6:6 in support of his relaxed halachic rulings regarding the Shabbat (Mt. 12:7 = Hosea 6:6) here Yeshua argues from Hosea 6:6 that CHESED is of

greater weight than the sacrifices. Since CHESED out weighs sacrifice, and sacrifice out weighs Shabbat, then CHESED out weighs Shabbat.

It seems that both Yeshua and Hillel emphasised love for all men, Taught the "golden rule" and had many of their halachic rulings rooted in CHESED ("mercy").

The written Torah is not complete in itself. Instead it presupposes that the reader also has access to additional information. For example the observance of Torah involves the use of the Hebrew calendar. Nowhere does the written Torah tell us the inner workings of this calendar, it presupposes that this information was also passed down to us orally by our forefathers.

There are actually two types of "Oral Law" and they are very different from one another.

The first is Oral Torah from Sinai. Moshe was on Mt. Sinai for forty days. During this time he received much of the material that we know as the Written Torah as recorded in the five books of Moses. However if one to get the five books of Moses as a "books on tape" edition, it would not take anywhere near forty days to listen to them. It would not even take one day to listen to them. So is this ALL the information Moses received on Mount Sinai? Why does Leviticus 26:46 say that Moses received "Laws" (plural) on Mount Sinai? Could he have received Torah She-Bi-Khatav (The Written Torah) and Torah She-Al-Peh (The Oral Torah)?

As we stated earlier, there is not sufficient information in the written Torah to allow it to be observed without some additional information.

For example the written Torah says not to go out of ones "place" on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29) but just what does this mean? If the Sabbath starts and I am in the latrine, must I stay there until it is over? If I am in my home and the Sabbath starts, must I wait until the Sabbath end to go out to the latrine? Does it mean I cannot leave my house? my yard? my city? Surely the ancient Hebrews (our forefathers) asked Moses what this commandment meant. Did Moses shrug his shoulders and say "heck if I know", or was this part of the information he also received on Mount Sinai? If so then our forefathers had this information. Is this what the Psalmist means when he says:

- 1: Give ear, O my people, to my Torah: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
 - 2: I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:
 - 3: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.
 - 4: We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of YHWH, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.
- (Ps. 78:1-4)

Another example can be found in Deut. 12:21 which tells us that if we live too far from the Temple and need to slaughter an animal to eat, YHWH says we may do so as long as we do it "as I [YHWH] have commanded you". But there are no instructions for the ritual

slaughter of an animal in the written Torah. This commandment of the written Torah must be alluding to an oral companion to the written Torah.

One can give many more examples. What does it mean not to “work” on the Shabbat? what constitutes “work”? How does one “celebrate” the Shabbat (Ex. 31:16)? What constitutes a “Bill of Divorcement” (Deut. 24:1f) what is it supposed to say?

When Ezra read the Torah to the people in Nehemiah 8:1-8, he and the Levites also “gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (8:7-8). They gave them an oral companion to the written text:

1: And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Torah of Moses, which YHWH had commanded to Israel.

2: And Ezra the priest brought the Torah before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3: And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the Book of the Torah.

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, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

5: 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:

6: And Ezra blessed YHWH, the great Elohim. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped YHWH with their faces to the ground.

7: Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the Torah: and the people stood in their place.

8: So they read in the Book in the Torah of Elohim distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

(Nehemiah 8:1-8)

When the old Worldwide Church of God began observing the biblical festivals, one of the problems they ran into was how to celebrate them. Only sketchy information is given in the written Torah on many of these festivals (we will revisit this issue again later in this article in relation to Yeshua’s observances of Sukkot and Passover).

When it comes to answering these questions, we can turn to the understandings our forefathers had of these things, which they passed down to us orally, or we can make something up. Short of a mutually accepted pipeline to Elohim, those are our only choices.

Another form of Oral Law are the decrees from the Elders. The Elders are said to have had the "halachic authority". Halachic authority is the authority to make halachic determinations interpreting the Torah forbidding and permitting activities based on these interpretations (for example if a matter came up which was not settled by the written Torah), and resolving matters between fellow believers. The word "halacha" means "the way to walk." Torah observance requires halachic authority for three reasons. First there are matters about which the written Torah is ambiguous and must be clarified. Secondly is the matter of conflicting Torah commands. For example the Torah requires the priests to circumcise on the eighth day after a birth, but also requires rest from work on the Sabbath. Which commandment holds priority? Finally the Torah requires us to establish courts (Deut. 16:18).

In the Torah the Halachic authority was originally held by Moses himself (Ex. 18:13) but later a council of Elders were appointed (Ex. 18:13-26; Dt. 1:9-18) These Elders showed men "the way wherein they must walk" (i.e. Halacha) (Ex. 18:20) Their judgments were regarded as the judgment of Elohim himself (Dt. 1:17) and were even called "Torah" (Dt. 17:11) At first these men had authority only in small matters (Ex. 18:22, 26; Dt. 1:17) but later their authority was expanded (Dt. 17:8). This council was later defined as seventy Elders whom Elohim placed his Spirit upon (Num. 11:16-17; 24-25).

The decrees of these elders added to the body of what was known as the "Oral Law" in much the same way as "legal precedence" does in secular law today.

One classic example of a matter settled by a Decree of the Elders was the issue of circumcision on the Sabbath. Circumcision is commanded to be done on the eighth day (Gen. 17:11) yet on every seventh day no work is allowed (Ex. 20:10). The Elders decreed that the commandment to circumcise on the eighth day held priority over the commandment to rest on the Sabbath (as recorded in the Mishna m.Shabbat 18:3-19:2 and in the Talmud b.Shabbat 128a). Yeshua alluded to and agreed with this Decree of the Elders when he said:

If a man is circumcised on the day of the Sabbath
that the Torah of Moshe be not loosed,
do you murmur against me because
I have healed a whole man on the Sabbath day?
(Jn. 7:23)

Similarly we read in the Talmud:

Rabbi Eleazar answered and said: If circumcision
which attaches to one only of the two hundred and
forty eight members of the human body, suspends
the Sabbath, how much more shall [the saving of]
the whole body suspend the Sabbath!
b.Yoma 85b

Yeshua clearly advocated and recognized the authority of these Elders when he said such things as "...whoever shall say to his brother, RAKA, shall be liable to the Sanhedrin..." (Mt. 5:22) and "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat..." (Mt. 23:1).

At the same time Yeshua also took issue with the Decrees of the Elders when they conflicted with Scripture (Mt. 15; Mt. 23)

The Torah also allowed for the Halachic authority to be held by a King (Dt. 17:8-12; 14-20). Eventually the Elders decided to establish such a monarchy (1Sam. 8:1-7). The throne of these Kings was seen as being "the throne of Elohim" (1Chron. 29:23) Their Halachic authority became termed "the key of the House of David" (Is. 22:21-22).

The Pharisees once held the Keys of the House of David. Mt. 23:13 is key to understanding Yeshua's attitude to the Halachic authority of the Pharisees. Here Yeshua says:

But woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men;
for you neither go in,
nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

A parallel passage appears in Lk. 11:52:

Woe to you scribes!
For you have taken away the key of knowledge,
you did not enter in yourselves,
and those who were entering in you hindered.

Now when we look at these two passages together it becomes clear that the "key" in Luke 11:52 had the potential to open up or shut up the Kingdom of Heaven. This "key" is clearly then "the key of the house of David" in Is. 22:22:

The key of the House of David I will lay on his shoulder;
so he shall open, and no one shall shut;
and he shall shut and no one shall open.

The Pharisees took away the key (authority) thus shutting up the Kingdom. They lost the authority, it was taken from them and given to Yeshua's Talmidim:

In Mt. 16:18-19 Yeshua says he would give "the keys of the Kingdom" to Kefa and his other talmidim:

And I also say to you that you are Kefa,
And upon this rock I will build my assembly,

and the gates of Sheol shall not prevail against it.
And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,
and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The Pharisees lost this authority because of hypocrisy. Yeshua describes their hypocrisy in Mt. 23 as follows:

On Moshe's seat sit the scribes and P'rushim.
And all that he (Moshe) says to you observe and do.
But not according to their works,
for they say, but do not.
(Mt. 23:2-3)

Yeshua repeatedly charges the Pharisees with Hypocrisy (Mt. 6; 15:7 and Matt. 23 for examples). Yeshua often charged Pharisees with "hypocrisy" even the Talmud itself makes the same association:

King Jannai said to his wife', `Fear not the Pharisees and the non-Pharisees but the hypocrites who are the Pharisees; because their deeds are the deeds of Zimri but they expect a reward like Phineas'
(b.Sotah 22b)

Job 13:16 says "a hypocrite shall not come before him."

Based on this verse the Talmud itself correctly lists Hypocrites as one of four classes who will not receive the presence of the Shekhinah:

R. Hisda also said in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Abba: Four classes will not receive presence of the Shechinah, — the class of scoffers, the class of liars, the class of hypocrites, and the class of slanderers. `The class of scoffers' — as it is written, He withdrew His hand from the scoffers.(Hosea 7:5) `The class of liars' — as it is written, He that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight.(Ps. 101:7) `The class of hypocrites' — as it is written, For a hypocrite shall not come before him.(Job 13:16) `The class of slanderers — as it is written, For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee,(Ps. 5:5) [which means] Thou art righteous, and hence there will not be evil in thy abode.
(b.San. 103a)

We know from Numbers 11:16-17 that the Elders must have the Spirit of Elohim upon them, but since hypocrites cannot receive the presence of the Shekhinah, they cannot serve as valid Elders.

Job says: "the congregation of the hypocrites shall be desolate" (Job. 15:34)

Thus Yeshua took the Keys from the Pharisees and gave these keys to Kefa and his Talmidim:

This key is the halachic authority. Yeshua recognized that the Pharisees held that halachic authority but he also tells us that they had squandered it by rejecting the Kingdom offer (see article "The Kingdom Offer") and refusing to use the key to help Messiah open up the Messianic Kingdom. The Messiah himself also had the Key of David (Rev. 3:7). In Mt. 16:18-19 Yeshua says he would give "the keys of the Kingdom" to Kefa and his students:

And I also say to you that you are Kefa,
And upon this rock I will build my assembly,
and the gates of Sheol shall not prevail against it.
And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,
and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Let us return to the subject of the Oral Law in general. Now in Acts 23:6 Paul states "I am a Pharisee". The Pharisees maintained a belief in the traditions handed down by their forefathers. As Josephus writes:

...the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; ...
(Josephus; Ant. 13:10:6)

Concerning his Pharisee background Paul says:

And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the tradition of my fathers.
(Gal. 1:14)

Notice that in Acts 28:17 Paul insists:

I have done nothing against our people
or the customs of our fathers.
(Acts 28:17)

Paul writes to the Thessalonians concerning these "traditions":

"Therefore, brothers stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught... withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly and not after the traditions which he received from us."
(2Thes. 2:15; 3:6)

Paul even made use of these oral “traditions” in his writings. Paul says "...they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that rock was Messiah." (1Cor. 10:4). The Torah records more than one occasion when Moshe (Moses) brought forth water from a rock (Ex. 16:4-35; 17:1-9; Num. 20:1-13; 16-20). According to Rabbinic tradition the rock did in fact follow them. The Talmud says that it was "a moveable well" (b.Shabbat 35a) and calls it "the Well of Miriam" (b.Ta'anit 9a). Rashi comments on b.Ta'anit 9a saying that the rock "rolled and went along with Israel, and it was the rock Moshe struck." The tradition of the moving rock known as the "Well of Miriam" is also found in B'midbar Parshat Chukkat. Paul's statement that the rock "followed them" testifies to the fact that he accepted this oral tradition as being factual.

Likewise when Paul addresses the issue of women wearing a veil while praying or prophesying (1Cor. 11) he is writing about Oral Law. Orthodox Jewish women today hold to this practice of the Oral Law that is nowhere spoke of in the written Torah.

The second century Nazarene writer Gish'fa (Heggissipus) made use in his writings of these oral traditions. Eusebius writes of him:

And he quotes some passages from The Gospel according to the Hebrews and from ‘The Syriac’, and some particulars from the Hebrew tongue, showing that he was ... from the Hebrews, and he mentions other matters as taken from the oral tradition of the Jews.”
(Eccl. Hist. 4:22)

Yeshua himself seems to have also accepted the “traditions of our fathers” which had been passed down orally.

In John 7:37-38 we read:

“And on the great day, which is the last of the feast, Yeshua stood and cried out and said, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures have said, rivers of water of life will flow from his belly.”

The occasion is the last great day of Sukkot (Jn. 7:2) and the setting appears to be the water libation ceremony at the Temple as prescribed by the Oral Law. A priest had a flask of gold filled with water and another has a flask of gold filled with wine. There were two silver bowls perforated with holes like a narrow snout. One was wide for the water the other is narrow for the wine. The priests poured the wine and water into each of their bowls. The wine and water mixed together. The wine flowing slowly through the narrow snout and the water flowing quickly through the wider snout. (m.Sukkot 4:9) Yeshua said that this ritual from the Oral Law was actually prophetic and symbolic of himself!

In all four Gospels Yeshua participates in the Passover Seder. The elements of the seder, such as the “cup of redemption”; dipping in bitter herbs; and the afikomen (the last piece of unleavened bread passed around and eaten at the end) all come from the Oral Law as recorded in the Mishna (m.Pes. 10). Yeshua not only accepted and kept these Oral Law rituals, but also spoke of them being prophetic of himself.

There is an interesting story in the Talmud which makes a profound point about the Oral Law:

Our Rabbis taught: A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him, ‘How many Torahs have you?’ ‘Two,’ he replied: ‘the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.’ ‘I believe you with respect to the Written, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the Written Torah [only]. [But] he scolded and repulsed him in anger. When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day, he taught him, Alef, beth, gimmel, dalet; the following day he reversed [them] to him. ‘But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,’ he protested. ‘Must you then not rely upon me? Then rely upon me with respect to the Oral [Torah] too.’ (b.Shabbat 31a)

The point of the story is that the same forefathers that passed the written Torah down to us, also passed the Oral Torah down to us with it. What logic is there in accepting the written Torah that they delivered to us as truth, while rejecting the Oral Law passed down by the very same forefathers?

Now we as Nazarenes do not believe that the Rabbis or Pharisaic/Rabbinic Judaism held the power to bind and loose after the first century, perhaps not even before the first century. Thus we should not simply accept these rulings, on the other hand we should not simply reject them out of hand. In many cases the Talmud or the related halachic Midrashim present the line of logic which led to the decisions being made. We should look at these lines of logic to determine if the decisions were valid and sound.

For example I heard one Messianic Rabbi bashing the Talmud and claiming that the Rabbis had added thirty-nine rules to the simple commandment not to work on the Sabbath. In fact the thirty-nine categories (given in m.Shabbat 7:2) are drawn from the text of the Torah. In the Torah the instructions concerning the building of the Tabernacle are interrupted by a restatement of the commandment not to work on the Sabbath (Ex. 31:12-17). The connection this section of Exodus has with the surrounding material seems to be the word “work” (Ex. 31:14) and “workmanship” (Ex. 31:3) (same word in the Hebrew). Thus the commandment not to “work” on the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14) is restated as a reminder to abstain from the “workmanship” of the Tabernacle mentioned in Ex. 31:3. Thus the term “work” in the commandment not to work on the Sabbath may be elaborated and defined by the thirty-nine categories of “workmanship” involved in building the Tabernacle.

We as Nazarenes should not reject the material in the Talmud out of hand, we should seek to understand it. Then we should “eat the date and spit out the seeds”. The same approach should be taken to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In Acts 22:30-23:10 Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin for judgment. Paul’s defense in this trial has been poorly understood in the past. In order to have a proper understanding of Paul’s defense, requires having a basic understanding of the Talmud.

Paul realizes that he has not been brought before the Pharisaic Sanhedrin, which was headed by Hillel and his descendants, but to the political Sanhedrin made up of Sadducees and Pharisees and headed by the High Priest.

In Acts 23:3 he questions the High Priest’s right to judge him, accusing him of violating Torah. In verse 4 Paul is asked why he dares to criticize the High Priest. In verse 5 Paul responds with sarcasm, saying “I did not know my brothers, that he was the Cohen”. Paul knew that Chananyah was not a valid High Priest, and this was his point in verse 5.

In Acts 23:6 Paul proclaims himself (in the present tense) to be a Pharisee and he then makes the defense “concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead, I am being judged.”

As verse 8 tells us “the Sadducees said there is no resurrection”. The Sadducees (Tzadokim) were founded by a certain Zadok. Zadok was a talmid (disciple) of Antigonos of Soko who misunderstood his teaching. Antigonos taught:

“Be not like servants who serve their master
for the sake of wages, but be like servants who serve their
master with no thought of a wage – and let the fear
of Heaven be upon you.”
(m.Avot 1:3)

The Mishna Avot of Rabbi Natan tells us how Zadok misunderstood the teachings of Antigonos:

Antigonos of Soko had two students. They would con his teachings by rote and then teach the other students... They started to question the meaning of this teaching. They asked themselves why our teachers taught this way. Is it possible that a worker could function faithfully all day long and not receive his just wage at the end of the day? [They reasoned that] if our teachers were sure that there is another world and a resurrection of the dead they would not have worded their teaching in this way. They seceded from Torah and two schismatic schools derived from them: Sadducees and Boethusians. The Sadducees were named for Zadok and the Boethusians for Boethos...
(Mishna Avot of Rabbi Natan 1:3)

Zadok misunderstood Antigonos’ teaching. He wrongly concluded that since we should no keep Torah to gain a reward, that there must not be any reward. Zadok concluded that

there is no reward to be obtained in the afterlife, nor any punishment to be avoided. The Sadducees believed that there is no afterlife and no resurrection. As Josephus writes:

But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies....
(Josephus; Antiquities 18:2:4)

Matthew writes:

...the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection...
(Matt. 22:23)

And as we read here in Acts:

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection,
neither angel, nor spirit...
(Acts 23:8)

Now there is a Pharisaic tradition recorded in the Mishna tractate Sanhedrin which deals with which “apostate doctrines” were worthy of disfellowshipment. The Mishna passage in question reads:

All Israelites have a share in the world to come...
And these are the ones who have no part in the World to Come:
He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which is not
derived from the Torah...
(m.San. 10:1)

The Talmud is made up the Mishna and the Gemara. In the Talmud a passage of Mishna is followed by commentary known as Gemara. In the Talmud the Gemara to m.Sanhedrin 10:1 begins at b.Sanhedrin 90a and runs through b.Sanhedrin 99a.

At around b.Sanhedrin 97a this section of Gemara transitions from a discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection (in 90a-96b) to a discussion on the timing of the coming of Messiah (in 97a-99a). This is not just a random shift, but a logical transition.

The transition point of this Gemara reads as follows:

Rabbi Nahman said to Rabbi Isaac: “Have you heard when Bar Nafle will come?”
“Who is Bar Nafle?”, he asked.
“Messiah,” he answered,
“Do you call Messiah Bar Nafle?”
“Even so,” he rejoined, “As it is written: “In that day, I will raise up the tabernacle of David ha-nofelet [that is fallen]. (Amos 9:11)”
(b.San 97a)

This Gemara defines “David” in this passage to refer to the Davidic Messiah and the “tabernacle” to refer to his physical body. Since the context of this Gemara is that of the resurrection, “raise up” in this context most certainly refers to “resurrection” This is very profound, because we have in this Gemara a reference to a “resurrection” of the physical body of Messiah being seen in Amos 9:11.

There is also evidence that this understanding of the “Tabernacle of David” in Amos 9:11-12 as being a reference to the Messiah existed by the first century. A document found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in cave 4 gives the following commentary in Amos 9:11:

“I shall raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen” (Amos 9:11).
This passage describes the fallen Branch of David,
whom He shall raise up to deliver Israel.
(Q174 III, 12-13)

This must be the reason that Ya’akov cites the verse in Acts 15:16 as having an application not only in the Millennial Kingdom, but in the very time period of the Acts 15 council. Ya’akov was well aware that the “Tabernacle of David” was a reference to the body of the Messiah, and that its being “raised up” was understood as a prophecy of a resurrection of the Messiah after he had “fallen” (died).

But now lets return to Paul’s defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:6. Paul is in effect claiming m.Sanhedrin 10:1 as his defense and in doing so he is also claiming the Gemara attached to that Mishna, the doctrine of the death and resurrection of the Messiah as foretold in Amos 9:11. In fact Paul was appealing to a ruling by the Pharisaic Sanhedrin as recorded in m.San. 10:1. The result is that the political Sanhedrin falls into chaos, because on this very issue the Pharisees of the Pharisaic Sanhedrin had pronounced all Sadducees as apostates.

No doubt, if Paul had not been immediately removed from the room, he would have taken the opportunity to begin proclaiming the death and resurrection of Messiah as found in Amos 9:11 as a prophecy of Yeshua as the Messiah.

(End of lesson nine)