

Torah Basics II

containing:

Old Testament Canon Integrity
Everyman's Torah
The Other Torah

by
Dean & Susan Wheelock

For this commandment
Which I command you today
Is not too mysterious for you,
Nor *is* it far off.
Deuteronomy 30:11

Hebrew Roots® Press

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Lakewood, WI 54138

~ Table of Contents ~

<i>Introduction.</i>	1
<i>Old Testament Canon Integrity.</i>	2
<i>Everyman's Torah.</i>	13
<i>The Other Torah.</i>	20
<i>Sources.</i>	33

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Printed in the United States of America

The Scriptures used in this booklet are:

The Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)
Jewish New Testament Publications
Clarksville, Maryland, 1998
The Holy Bible - King James Version (KJV)
Oxford University Press
London
The Open Bible
New King James Version (NKJV),
Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, 1985.
The Tanakh (TNK),
Jewish Publication Society,
Philadelphia/New York, 1988

Published by:

Hebrew Roots® Press
PO Box 400
Lakewood, WI 54138
715-757-2775

~ Introduction ~

What shall we say then?
Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?
Certainly not!
How shall we who died to sin
Live any longer in it?
Romans 6:1-2



Perhaps the main difference which separates Messianic Believers from Mainstream Christianity is the Messianic understanding that the advent of our Savior *Y'shua* (Jesus) did not abrogate the commandments found in the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible). Not only has the *Torah* not been "done away," nor was it "nailed to the cross," it still stands firm and resolute as the Standard by which God defines sin:

"Everyone who keeps sinning is violating *Torah*—indeed, sin is violation of *Torah*."
(I John 3:4 CJB)

Over and over, in the New Testament, there are statements which confirm the continued validity of the *Torah* (law) as the Instruction Book which God has given to mankind for the benefit of all. The most direct of these statements comes from *Y'shua* Himself:

"Don't think that I have come to abolish the *Torah* or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete."
(Matt. 5:17 CJB)

Another comes from the Apostle Paul, whom many believe taught that the law had been abolished:

"So the *Torah* is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good."
(Rom. 7:12 CJB)

It is not a set of impossible to keep rules (although no one has ever kept it perfectly except *Y'shua*), but rather a set of guidelines for a way of life that gives the one who practices it a more abundant life:

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

(John 10:10-11 NKJV)

The abundant life promised by *Y'shua* does not necessarily mean one of material riches. Rather, it is a life of spiritual richness -- the end of which is eternal life in the *Olam Haba* (Oh-lahm' Hah-bah' = the World to Come):

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

(John 3:14-15)

The articles contained in this booklet (and in the previous volume, *Torah Basics I*) were written over a period of years and published in the *Hebrew Roots*® periodical. They represent a variety of thoughts with the unifying thread that all righteousness is based upon concepts and/or commandments which are found in the *Written Torah*. They are being collected here in order to make them available when the last stock of the issues in which they originally appeared have been exhausted.

We hope you will find them a blessing in your spiritual walk.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom,
March, 2018

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~ Old Testament ~ ~ Canon Integrity ~

Then He said to them,
"These are the words which I spoke to you
While I was still with you,
That all things must be fulfilled
Which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets
And the Psalms concerning Me."
Luke 24:44

he *Encyclopedia Britannica Dictionary* defines the word integrity as:

"incorruptibility, an unimpaired condition, soundness, the quality or state of being complete or undivided, completeness."

During the 19th century, Biblical scholars began to question the integrity of the Holy Scriptures, both the Hebrew (Old Testament) and the Greek (New Testament). These "scholars" claimed the Scriptures did not come to us in an "unimpaired condition," and that what is generally recognized as being the entire Bible may not necessarily be "complete" and certainly was not "inspired" by the Creator God.

Adding to the problem is the fact that many Christians (who claim to believe the entirety of the Bible is God's Word) do not follow the instructions found in large portions of it. Scholars often point to this type of practice as an indication that most Christians do not accept the entire Biblical *canon* as valid for today and therefore follow only a "canon within a canon" for their "inspired" Scripture. Some scholars also claim that the accepted Scripture, of any particular age, depends upon the common practice during that age. This is true today among some so-called "New Testament" Christians who believe all the commandments found in the "Old Testament" have been "done away" or were "nailed to the cross." It is also true among some Messianic Believers, who disregard certain New Testament books (or even entire authors) because they do not understand correctly what is being taught in those writings.

The goal of this chapter is to explore the world of the canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to determine whether or not the Apostle Paul's claim is true:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

(II Tim. 3:16-17)

It must be remembered that the "Scriptures" spoken of here were the Hebrew (Old Testament) Scriptures, not the Greek (New Testament) Scriptures, for portions of those Scriptures had not yet been written when Paul penned these words.

Skeptics will often ask: How can I be sure the Bible is a true and reliable record from God and not just a selection of myths made up by well intentioned men? While the purpose of this article is not to prove the veracity of the Bible, but rather to demonstrate how it came into existence, nevertheless, let us take a moment to explore this question.

The plain truth is that if a person does not want to believe that the Bible is God's Word, there is little anyone can do to convince them. Conviction is something only the Creator God can accomplish through His divine touching of one's heart and mind.

Nevertheless, there are some things that can be said. David Stern, in the introduction to the *Complete Jewish Bible*, makes the following observation concerning this matter. He writes:

"There are three reasons for considering the Bible inspired by God, God-breathed: it claims to be, it seems to be, and it proves to be.

"The Bible Claims to be God's Word. Over and over appear the words, 'Adonai says,' or, in the thunderous phrase from the King James Version, 'Thus saith the LORD.' These words are found in the Bible some 2,500 times, placed there by numerous authors over a period of more than a thousand years. By itself this claim proves nothing -- anyone can write, 'God says.' But this claim is not made so very often; hence when it is made -- and when many people believe it -- it could be worth investigating to find out if it is true.

"The Bible Seems to be God's Word. Its breadth of subject matter, its wisdom, its deeply felt honesty, its understanding of the human condition, its expressions of joy, wonder, sadness, anger and every other emotion, its way of dealing with history and politics all delineate as the character underlying the Bible an entity, a person, worthy of being called and honored as God, lover and creator of you and me and the universe. ...

"The Bible Proves to be God's Word. While not every statement in the bible can be scientifically verified, some can. Historical and archeological studies are repeatedly providing evidence that places, events and customs the Bible reports about were real. ... They do not prove the existence of God, but they demonstrate the reliability of the writers and suggest that what they say about the unverifiable might also be trustworthy." (p. xxvi)

Each year, as new archaeological evidence is unearthed in Israel, the veracity of the Bible becomes more apparent. The assumption behind this article is that the Scriptures, as we have them today, do reflect the very mind, heart, and will of the Creator God of the Universe. In plain language, we believe they are God-breathed. Our task here is to discover which of the many ancient texts came to be accepted as being God-breathed.

~ The Term Canon ~

Today the word *canon* is used, by both Christians and Jews, to identify the "sacred literature" which they recognize as authoritative and is believed to be "divinely inspired." However, the term *canon* was not used in this manner until the 4th century CE (Common Era a.k.a. AD), and initially only by the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually, however, *canon* became a catchall term to identify the "authorized" books of both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. One question to be explored will be: Who had the "authority" to proclaim that certain books were "authentic" *canon*?

The word *canon* comes from the Hebrew *kaneh* (kah-nayh' - Strong's #7070) and initially meant a "reed or cane:"

"For the LORD [YHVH] will strike Israel, as a reed [kaneh] is shaken in the water." (I Kings 14:15)

Kaneh was later used to designate a "measuring rod" or "rule:"

"He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod [kaneh] in his hand, and he stood in the gateway." (Ezek. 40:3)

From there the word *kaneh* (or *kanon* in the Greek) became a metaphorical term for a "rule or standard of excellence." It was used this way by the grammarians of Old Greek classic literature. In the 2nd century CE the word *canon* came to be commonly used in Christian circles to describe the "rule of faith," or the Church rules. Then, as mentioned, in the 4th century it became a descriptive term for the official "sacred scriptures."

~ Hebrew Usage ~

The Hebrew word *kaneh* was never used in Judaism to describe an "authoritative" set of Scriptural books. However, there is a negative phrase, *Sefarim Hizonim* (Seh-fahr-eem' Hee-tzoh-neem'), used to describe "external books," which refers to those Hebrew writings considered not to be a part of the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, we will use the term *canon* in this article to describe what came to be recognized as the "authorized" Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament.

An interesting phrase which the Rabbis use to describe what was considered to be "canonical" is *mettame et ha-Yadayim* (meht-tah-mee' eht hah Yah-dah-yeem') which means "to render the hands unclean." According to Rabbinic teaching, when a person's hands come into direct contact with a scroll of Holy Scripture, they automatically contract second degree uncleanness (or ritual impurity).

During Temple times, if a person handled a scroll of Holy Scripture and then touched the "holy" offerings given at the Temple, prior to performing a ritual purity hand washing, that single act of touching transferred ritual uncleanness to the offering, thereby making it unfit for Priestly consumption (see Lev. 22:10-14 and Num. 18:8, 11, 12, 26, 30 for more information of the "Holy Offerings").

Hence, the Rabbinic term for the Holy books of the Hebrew Scripture are those "which make the hands unclean." If a book or scroll does not "make the hands unclean" it is considered to be non-canonical or non-sacred.

~ The People of the Book ~

A term sometimes used to describe both Jews and Christians, is that they are "people of the book." This phrase indicates, by its very nature, that both groups have a set of books which they consider to be "holy" or "canonical." Thus, the concept of a *canon* is at the very center of Jewish understanding concerning the manner in which God has interacted with man, even though they did not use that term until modern times. As the *Encyclopedia Judaica* states:

"The canonized Scriptures were looked upon as the faithful witness to the national past, the embodiment of the hopes and dreams of a glorious future, and the guarantee of their fulfillment. ... they represented the force of truth, wisdom, law, and morality. In short, the development of the canon proved to be a revolutionary step in the history of religion, and the concept was consciously adopted by Christianity and Islam." (Article: *Canon*)

~ The Need for Canonization ~

In the ancient world, the last half of the second millennium BCE (1500-1000) saw an outburst of literary activity. This may come as a surprise to many because of the great labor involved in producing written works at that time, but historians tell us this is true. It is confirmed by no less an authority than King Solomon (10th century BCE):

"And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh." (Eccl. 12:12)

This verse seems to imply that there may have been a rather large body of Hebrew literature, much of which may well have had religious orientation. The question for the Israelite religious leaders of the day (the Priests and Levites) would have been the same as today: Which of those many literary works were inspired by God and deserved veneration in an official *canon* of God-breathed Scripture?

To further confirm the point that other "religious" books existed at a very early date we find direct references to some of them within the text of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example:

"Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD [YHVH]:" (Num. 21:14)

Twice mentioned in Scripture is the *Book of Jasher* (the Upright One) which is believed to have contained heroic songs:

**"So the sun stood still,
And the moon stopped,
Till the people had revenge
Upon their enemies.'**

Is this not written in the Book of Jasher?

"So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day."

(Josh. 10:13)

"Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son,¹⁸ and he told *them* to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow; indeed it is written in the Book of Jasher ..." (II Sam. 1:17-18)

There exists today a *Book of Jasher* in modern English which recounts many of the ancient Jewish legends and traditions concerning Scriptural stories. Whether it truly is a translation of the original *Book of Jasher*, or a later writing by a pseudonymous author (one who assumed the name *Jasher*), is unclear.

Scripture also makes reference to other non-canonical books attributed to famous men who lived during the early years of the monarchy. For example:

"Now the acts of King David, first and last, indeed they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer, ..." (I Chron. 29:29)

Of course, we have the book (or books) of Samuel in the Bible, but we do not have the books of Nathan or Gad.

There are other references within the Hebrew Scriptures to books which were written at the time of the dividing of the kingdom (II Chron. 9:29; 12:5; 13:22) and to both David (I Chron. 27:24) and Solomon (I Kings 11:41). In addition, there are external references to a number of other kings of Israel and Judah to be found in I Kings and I and II Chronicles. Most, if not all of this literature, has been lost to the modern world.

This points up the fact that the process of *canonization* required, by its very nature, that a selection take place to determine "scripture" from the ordinary literary and historical works of the time. Also needed was a method for preserving the sacred texts once they had been identified.

~ Determining a Canonical Writing ~

What was the criteria which determined whether or not a writing was "canonical?" For the most part we are unable today to determine why the non-canonical books mentioned above did not make it into the canon since they do not exist today for examination (*Jasher* being a possible exception). Therefore, it is difficult to know what the criteria was for excluding them from the *canon*, even though they are mentioned in Scripture. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* makes an interesting observation in this regard:

"Not everything that was regarded as sacred or revealed was canonized; but sanctity was the indispensable ingredient for canonicity. It was not, in general, the stamp of canonization that conferred holiness upon a book -- rather the reverse. Sanctity antedated and preconditioned the formal act of canonization, which in most cases, simply made final a long-existing situation." (Article: *Canon*, underlining ours.)

In other words, a book cannot qualify for inclusion in the *canon* unless it has "sanctity." What is "sanctity?" It is when something or someone has been made "holy" or "set-apart." What makes something holy? Only God can "sanctify"

something; an example being the seventh day, which He sanctified or set-apart at the time of creation:

"Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." (Gen. 2:3)

The children of Israel are a "holy" or "set-apart" people because God chose them to be set-apart:

"For you are a holy people to the LORD [YHVH] your God; the LORD [YHVH] your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." (Deut. 7:6)

Likewise, Messianic Believers in *Y'shua* are also designated part of a "holy nation:"

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, ..." (I Peter 2:9)

Messianic Believers are said to be "grafted in" to the Commonwealth of Israel:

"For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.¹⁷ And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you." (Rom. 11:16-18)

The first and foremost criteria for any given book to be included in the Hebrew *canon* was that it be "inspired" by God. Such "inspiration" made it "holy" or "set-apart." Let's be clear. God did not personally write any of the books found in the Bible (although He is often quoted and did write the ten commandments on stone with His own finger). However, He did "inspire" "holy men of old" to write them and, for that reason and only that reason, those books became "Holy Scripture."

~ Inspiration ~

The primary meaning of the word "inspire" means: "to breath or blow upon or into." Another definition is: "to cause, guide, communicate, or motivate by divine influence."

Thus, an inspired book is said to be "God-breathed" -- that is, God has breathed into it (inspired into it) His truth. This, of course, also relates directly to the Holy Spirit, for the word "spirit" in Hebrew is *Ruach*, which means "wind, breath, mind, spirit." In Greek, the word for "spirit" is *Pneuma* which is also defined as: "a movement of air ... the wind ... breath ... the spirit."

How can we know if a given book is "inspired" or God-breathed? We refer you back to David Stern's comments about the reliability of Scripture. Does the book claim to be God's Word? In many (though not all) cases they do. Does the book seem to be God's Word? That is something each individual reader must determine for himself. Just because someone says a book is inspired does not make it so.

Nevertheless, if many people identify a given book as God-breathed and inspired, it bears looking into.

~ No Contradictions ~

Another related property of a *canonical* book is that it communicates the will of God. If a book can be found that contradicts another book of Scripture, then it stands to reason that both of them cannot be inspired by God, for He makes the claim of being unchanging:

**"For I am the LORD [YHVH], I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed,
O sons of Jacob."** (Mal. 3:6)

Now some might say there are passages in the New Testament (especially in the epistles of Paul) which contradict the *Written Torah* of the Old Testament. However, the reason this sometimes seems to be the case comes from two possible sources. First, the English translation may not be communicating the message correctly. Second, the reader may not have a clear understanding of what is actually stated, due to years of incorrect doctrinal teaching and a misunderstanding of the culture of the time.

Even the Apostle Peter found some of Paul's teaching difficult to understand:

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ¹⁵ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (II Peter 3:14-16)

Another property of Scripture is that it functions as a source of regulations for both individuals and the body of Believers. This is essentially what Paul said when he wrote to Timothy (as already quoted):

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Tim. 3:16-17)

The idea of the Hebrew Scriptures containing a standard of behavior can be found throughout the Old Testament. One example:

**"For the commandment is a lamp,
And the law a light;
Reproofs of instruction are the way of life, ..."** (Prov. 6:23)

~ The Hebrew Canon ~

Today, the Hebrew Scriptures, as recognized in the Jewish world, consist of three major divisions: the *Torah*, the *Prophets*, and the *Writings*. The total number of books (as listed in some Jewish and most Protestant Bibles) is 39.

However, when one goes to a Roman Catholic Bible, the number of Old Testament books is found to be 46. This is because they have included additional books and writings called the *Apocrypha*. Eastern Orthodox and some Protestant Bibles also contain the *Apocrypha* in various numbers and forms.

Over the centuries, there have been various collections of Old Testament books, primarily in Greek, that were put forth by various "Church Fathers" from both the Eastern Churches (Orthodox) and the Western Churches (Roman Catholic). The lists varied in number from individual to individual.

While modern English language Jewish Bibles usually list 39 separate books in the Hebrew Bible (OT), that was not the way it was divided up in the ancient world or even in a Hebrew language bible today (such as the *Stone Tanakh*). In the ancient world the count was first figured as 22 books, and then later changed to 24, which is still used today.

This does not mean that the ancient Hebrew Scriptures contained less text than a Jewish Bible does today, for the total is really the same (although it would be greater if the *Apocrypha* was included). What accounts for the difference is that when the Scribes began to transcribe the scrolls into *codices* (bound books), they were forced to split some scrolls into two or more parts because they were too large to fit in the early *codex* form. That is why today's Bibles contain a *First and Second Samuel*, a *First and Second Kings*, a *First and Second Chronicles*, and *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* separately. For example, originally, there was only one scroll which combined both books of *Samuel*, and both books of *Kings*.

Another major reason for the expansion of books in modern English Bibles is because the so-called "Minor Prophets" are now listed separately, where in the original scroll format they were all written on one scroll and simply called "The Twelve," with each Prophet's writings contained in separate sub-books.

~ The 24 Book Canon ~

Torah (Greek = *Pentateuch*) - 5 books:

- ◆ Genesis (*B'reisheet*)
- ◆ Exodus (*Sh'mot*)
- ◆ Leviticus (*Vayikra*)
- ◆ Numbers (*B'midbar*)
- ◆ Deuteronomy (*D'varim*)

Nevi'im (Prophets) - 8 books:

(Early Prophets - *Nevi'im Rishonim*)

- ◆ Joshua (*Y'hoshua*)
- ◆ Judges (*Shoftim*)
- ◆ Samuel (*Sh'mu'el*)
- ◆ Kings (*M'lakhim*)

(Later Prophets - *Nevi'im Acharonim*)

- ◆ Isaiah (*Yesha'yahu*)
- ◆ Jeremiah (*Yirmeyahu*)
- ◆ Ezekiel (*Yechezk'el*)
- ◆ The Twelve (*Shneim Asar*)

- Hosea (*Hoshea*)
- Joel (*Yo'el*)
- Amos (*'Amos*)
- Obadiah (*'Ovadyah*)
- Jonah (*Yonah*)
- Micah (*Mikhah*)
- Nahum (*Nachum*)
- Habakkuk (*Havakuk*)
- Zephaniah (*Tz'fanyah*)
- Haggai (*Hagai*)
- Zechariah (*Z'kharyah*)
- Malachi (*Mal'akhi*)

K'tuvim (Writings) - 11 books:

- ◆ Psalms (*Tehillim*)
- ◆ Proverbs (*Mishlei*)
- ◆ Job (*Iyov*)
- (The Five *Megillot* or Scrolls)
- ◆ Song of Songs (*Shir-HaShirim*)
- ◆ Ruth (*Rut*)
- ◆ Lamentations (*Eikhah*)
- ◆ Ecclesiastes (*Kohelet*)
- ◆ Esther (*Ester*)
- ◆ Daniel (*Dani'el*)
- ◆ Ezra/Nehemiah (*'Ezra-Nechemyah*)
- ◆ Chronicles (*Divrei-HaYamim*)

(Hebrew transliterations according to David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible*)

As you can see, the order and division of books is different from Christian Bibles which contain four divisions instead of three: *Pentateuch*, *Historical*, *Poetic*, and *Prophetic*. A modern Christian Bible places *Lamentations* and *Daniel* in the *Prophetic* division, while *Ruth*, *I & II Chronicles*, and *Esther* are placed in the *Historical* division. This causes the last book of the Old Testament, in a Christian Bible, to be the prophet *Malachi*, while in the Hebrew Bible the last book is *Chronicles*.

Jewish Scriptures are referred to as the *Tanakh* (Tah-nakh'). This is an acronym put together from the first letter of each of the three Divisions (TNK); *Torah*, *Nevi'im* (Neh-vee-eem'), and *K'tuvim* (Keh-too-veem').

~ The 22 Book Canon ~

Many ancient Jewish and Christian sources list the scrolls (or books) in the Hebrew Scriptures as 22 in number instead of 24. One of the main sources for this information is the 1st century Jewish historian *Josephus*. In his work entitled *Against Apion*, 1.37-43 (I. 7-8 in Whiston's translation), *Josephus* writes about the divine origin of the Hebrew Scriptures as opposed to the secular writings of the Greeks:

"37 Accordingly ... then, seeing that the writing (of the records) is not the personal prerogative of everyone, nor is

there actual disagreement among any of the things written, but the prophets alone learned the highest and oldest matters by the inspiration of the God, and by themselves plainly recorded events as they occurred, 38 so among us there are not myriads of discordant and competing volumes, but only twenty-two volumes containing the record of all time, which are rightly trusted.

"39 Now of these, five are those of Moses, which comprise both the laws and the tradition from human origins until his passing; this period falls little short of 3000 years.

40 From Moses' passing until the Artaxerxes who was king of the Persians after Xerxes, the prophets after Moses wrote up what happened in their times [or, as they saw things] in thirteen volumes. The remaining four (volumes) comprise hymns toward God and advice for living among humanity. 41 From Artaxerxes until our own time all sorts of things have been written, but they have not been considered of the same trustworthiness as those before them, because the exact succession of the prophets failed.

"42 Now it is clear in practice how we approach our special texts: for although such an age has already passed [since Artaxerxes], no one has dared either to add anything or to take away from them or to alter them. But it is innate among all Judeans from their very first moments of existence to consider them decrees of God, to stand by them, and for their sake, if necessary, cheerfully to die. 43 Thus already many of (our) prisoners of war have on many occasions been seen patiently enduring tortures and the ways of all sorts of deaths in theatres, without letting slip a single word against the laws and the related official records."

(quoted from *The Canon Debate: Josephus and His Twenty-Two Book Canon* by Steve Mason, p. 113, underlining ours.)

It is important to not attempt directly equating the 8 books of the Prophets, as found in modern Hebrew Bibles, to the 13 mentioned by *Josephus*, for he used the term "prophets" in a different context. In fact, *Josephus* implies that all the authors of Holy Scripture were "prophets." This includes Moses plus the writers of the "four hymns and practical advice" (and, of course, what he calls the 13 "prophetic" books). The *Torah* expressly identifies Moses as a Prophet:

"The LORD [YHVH] your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, ..." (Deut. 18:15)

It is also understood that many of King David's Psalms are "prophetic," but their "prophetic" nature (as in foretelling the future) is not the point. The point is that the term "prophet" means someone who is "divinely inspired." A Prophet does not have to be someone who predicts the future, he can be someone who inspires people to follow God.

Thus, it is not possible to know exactly to which books *Josephus* might have been referring when he mentioned the

grouping of 13 "prophetic" and 4 "hymns," since he did not list them. The best we can do is merely accept the fact that in the 1st century of the Common Era (CE), when *Josephus* lived, it was commonly accepted that the Holy Scriptures contained 22 distinctive volumes and they are the same books we have today, just grouped together in a different manner from the 24 listed above.

It is also clear, from all the sources, that the *Torah* was the first division of Holy Scripture and it contained five books -- a tradition that has held since antiquity.

~ Supporting Witnesses ~

Josephus was not the only witness from the ancient world who recognized the Hebrew Bible consisted of 22 books. The book of *Jubilees* is part of the *Pseudepigrapha* (books written under an assumed name) that was believed to have been written some time during the Second Temple period. According to R. H. Charles (in his work: *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis*) some manuscripts refer to a 22 book collection of Scripture, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Although this phrase is not found in the copy unearthed among the Dead Sea Scrolls, nevertheless, Charles believes it should be included because it is found in many other copies of that text. (The debated portion is within the brackets.):

"[As] there were [twenty-two letters and twenty-two books and] twenty-two chief men from Adam until Jacob, and twenty-two kinds of works were made before the seventh day. The former is blessed and sanctified, and the latter is also blessed and sanctified. One was like the other with respect to sanctification and blessing. And it was granted to the former that they should always be the blessed and sanctified ones of the testimony and the first law just as he had sanctified and blessed the sabbath day on the seventh day." (*Jubilees* 2:23-24 from *the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* edited by James H. Charlesworth)

Many of the early "Church Fathers" also testified to a 22 book Old Testament *canon*, although some have a slightly different list and order than others. Among them are Melito (2nd century), Origen (c. 185-254), Athanasius (c. 293-373), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386), Epiphanius (c. 315-403), and Amphilochius (c. 396).

~ Combining Volumes ~

As already mentioned, the volumes of the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) were often gathered into different combinations than what is found in modern English translations. We have already shown how a modern English Old Testament of 39 books, is easily condensed into a modern Hebrew *Tanakh* of 24 books.

In order to make a 22 volume *canon* there needs to be two additional combinations. Most probably that would have been accomplished in the ancient world by bringing together *Samuel* and *Kings* into one scroll (they are found that way in the lists of Melito and Amphilochius) and also by combining *Joshua* and *Judges* into another single scroll. The other possibility is to combine *Judges* and *Ruth*, leaving *Joshua* to stand alone (this

combination is found in the lists of Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Epiphanius). Either way, the end result is a 22 scroll (or book) *canon*.

The problem with combining *Judges* and *Ruth* is that today *Ruth* is part of a five-book subset called the *Megillot*. Each book of the *Megillot* is traditionally read on a particular Festival:

- ◆ *Song of Songs* on the weekly Sabbath during Passover.
- ◆ *Ruth* on *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost).
- ◆ *Lamentations* on the Ninth of *Av* (remembering the destruction of both the first and second Temples).
- ◆ *Ecclesiastes* on the weekly Sabbath during *Sukkot*.
- ◆ *Esther* on *Purim*.

Further support for a 22 book *canon* comes from the fact (mentioned above) that there are 22 letters in the Hebrew *alef bet* (alphabet). This would not seem to be important if it were not for the fact that there are several places in the Hebrew Scriptures where the verses are written in an acrostic based upon the *alef bet*. The most famous is Psalm 119, where each eight verse section begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew *alef bet*, making a total of 176 verses. Two others which have complete acrostics are *Psalms* 111 and 112, where each line of poetry begins with the subsequent letter of the *alef bet*.

Another *alef bet* acrostic is found in Proverbs 31:10-31 (*The Virtuous Woman*) where verse 10 begins with an *alef* (א) and the following 21 verses with each succeeding letter of the *alef bet*.

~ Rabbinic Confirmation ~

Rabbinic tradition divides the *Tanakh* into the tripartite divisions of *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *K'tuvim* (Writings) as in the 24 book *canon* listed above. While the actual process of *canonization* of the Hebrew Scriptures is unknown, we have seen, from the *Josephus* quote above, that the three part division and 22 volume *canon* was well established by the end of the 1st century CE.

Josephus, in his *Against Apion* quote (page 6), points up another tradition -- when the various divisions came to be considered "sacred scripture," containing books "which defile the hands:"

"39 Now of these, five are those of Moses, which comprise both the laws and the tradition from human origins until his passing; this period falls little short of 3000 years. 40 From Moses' passing until the Artaxerxes who was king of the Persians after Xerxes, the prophets after Moses wrote up what happened in their times ..."

In other words, *Josephus*, without question, accepted the tradition that *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) wrote the first five books of the *Tanakh* (which we call the *Torah*) and it was accepted as "sacred scripture" from the beginning.

There is, of course, dispute among modern scholars as to exactly what year the Exodus took place, but for our purposes we will assume that *Moshe* died about 1370 BCE. That means the entire *Torah* was written prior to this time, if we are to

accept the view that *Moshe* was the author, except for the last eight verses of Deuteronomy (34:5-12) which was said to be added by *Joshua*.

Josephus also stated that the 13 books of the Prophets were finished by the time of *Artaxerxes I* the son of *Xerxes*. *Artaxerxes I* reigned in Persia from 465-425 BCE. He was the Persian king responsible for sending *Ezra* back to Jerusalem to reinvigorate Temple worship (which was begun by *Zerubbabel* after the first Jewish return in 536 BCE during the reign of *Cyrus*).

Ezra, who was both a Priest and a Scribe, was given a letter of authority from *Artaxerxes I* to teach the Law of God (*Torah*) to the people living in Jerusalem:

"This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD [YHVH], and of His statutes to Israel:

"¹² Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven:

"Perfect peace, and so forth. ¹³ I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. ¹⁴ And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; ..." (Ezra 7:11-14)

Ezra returned to Jerusalem with the Law of God (the *Written Torah*) in his possession. Using the *Torah* as his tool of authority, he set about to reform Judaism and return them to following the *Torah*. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states:

"When *Ezra* arrived the situation in Judah was discouraging. Religious laxity was prevalent, the Law was widely disregarded, and public and private morality was at a low level. Moreover, intermarriage with foreigners posed the threat that the community would mingle with the pagan environment and lose its identity." (CD - Article: *Ezra*.)

Ezra's work included restoring the *Torah* to its proper role and he is believed to have been instrumental in establishing the *Great Assembly*, a body of elders which was charged with overseeing the revived nation of Judah.

~ The Canonization of the Torah ~

As we have seen, the *Torah* was well established as sacred Scripture long before *Ezra*. Its authority was recognized from the very time that *Moshe* wrote it down:

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD [YHVH] God of your fathers is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD [YHVH] your God which I command you." (Deut. 4:1-2)

While the *Torah* was apparently not added to or subtracted from, it was, at times, totally ignored by the children of Israel. When that happened, they suffered under God's curse until they once again accepted the *Torah* commands as the standard for their individual and corporate lives.

Joshua warned the children of Israel to be sure and follow all of the commands of God as found in the writings of *Moshe*:

"Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, ⁷ and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you." (Joshua 23:6-7)

~ Torah Backsliding ~

During the period of the Judges a pattern reoccurred seven times, where Israel would do evil in God's sight and be put in subjection by the Canaanites. Then God would send a righteous Judge who would deliver the children of Israel out of bondage and back into *Torah* observance. Then, everything would go well for a number of years. For example:

"Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD [YHVH]. So the LORD [YHVH] delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, ² and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. ... (Judges 6:1-2)

Following the victory of Gideon's army, there were 40 years of peace:

"²⁸ Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon." (Judges 8:28)

After the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdoms into the House of Israel and the House of Judah, true *Torah* observance was permanently abandoned in the northern Kingdom of Israel, being mixed with pagan practices. Meanwhile, the southern Kingdom of Judah also found it difficult to follow the *Torah*, even though they had the Temple and a functioning Levitical Priesthood in their midst to guide them.

Two of the worst kings of Judah were King *Manasseh*, who reigned for 55 years, followed by his son, King *Amon*, who reigned for 2 years. During this time it appears as though the *Torah* was forgotten and that Temple worship actually ceased.

Then came the best of the kings of Judah, an eight year old boy named *Josiah*, who reigned for 31 years. As *Josiah* began to mature, he took steps to have the Temple repaired. During that period of restoration, the High Priest *Hilkiah* found a copy of the *Written Torah* in the Temple and brought it to *Josiah*:

"Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD [YHVH].'

"And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ... ¹⁰ Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king.

"¹¹ Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. ¹² Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, ¹³ 'Go, inquire of the LORD [YHVH] for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD [YHVH] that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.'" (II Kings 22:8, 10-13)

What is important about this passage is not just that the House of Judah returned to keeping the *Torah* commandments, but that even after this lengthy time of great apostasy, the Priests of Judah were able to recognize that the *Torah* was God's Instruction Book on how the nation was to be governed and the Temple to be run.

A similar revival occurred during the time of *Ezra*, when once again the *Written Torah* became the basis for worship at the Temple and the functioning of the government:

"Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD [YHVH] had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³ Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law." (Neh. 8:1-3)

This event took place on *Yom Teruah* (Feast of Trumpets a.k.a. *Rosh HaShanah*). The people knew they were hearing the very words of God and they repented of their sins and backsliding. The result of this time of teaching was a renewal of the celebration of the Festival of *Sukkot* (Sue-coat' = Tabernacles), a practice which exists in Judah to this very day.

Thus we see how God preserved the *Written Torah* despite the sins of the leaders and the people of the House of Judah. Against all odds, the *Written Torah* has been kept inviolable as "sacred scripture" from the time it was written by *Moshe* until this time.

~ The Canonization of the Prophets ~

As we have seen, in the 24 book *canon* list (pages 5-6), what Christianity sees as historical works (*Joshua*, *Judges*, *Samuel*, and *Kings*) are considered the *Nevi'im Rishonim* (Early Prophets) in the Jewish *Tanakh*. These books, plus the *Nevi'im Acharonim* (Later Prophets) make up the division in the Hebrew Bible under the general title *Nevi'im* (Prophets).

These volumes were written by various men during the time when the children of Israel were going through their various backsliding and revival periods, and all were probably completed prior to *Ezra's* return from the Babylon Captivity (c. 458 BCE). Although some prophetic books, such as *Ezekiel*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*, were all thought to have been

written during the period of captivity, that does not preclude them being finished by the time *Ezra* returned to Jerusalem, since he returned rather late. Thus, when *Ezra* returned with the *Written Torah* he may have brought the Prophetic books as well.

Tradition teaches that with the completion of these books the "divine spirit" ceased to be active in Israel and with it God-given written prophecy ceased, although certainly men continued to give "prophetic words." Thus, during the Second Temple period, no written works of prophecy were accepted into the Hebrew *canon*. *Josephus* commented on this in *Against Apion* 1:42:

"⁴² Now it is clear in practice how we approach our special texts: for although such an age has already passed [since Artaxerxes], no one has dared either to add anything or to take away from them or to alter them."

The following passage of Scripture seems to confirm this tradition, especially if one accepts the fact that it can have a dual fulfillment:

"'It shall be in that day,' says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts, 'that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land. ³ It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, "You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of the LORD [YHVH]." And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies. ⁴ And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive. ⁵ But he will say, "I am no prophet, I am a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.'"" (Zech. 13:2-5)

The New Testament also seems to confirm the end of Scriptural prophecy:

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, ..." (Heb. 1:1-2)

Another reason in support of the *canonization* of the Prophets during the time of *Ezra*, would be that *Chronicles* is found among the Writings rather than in the division of the Prophets where the similar works of *Samuel* and *Kings* are found. Therefore, it was likely to have been written later, after the Prophetic books were closed.

~ The Canonization of the Writings ~

The eleven volumes of the *K'tuvim* (Writings) were written beginning from the time of the Patriarchs. This is the probable dating of the book of *Job*, although other Rabbinic traditions place *Job* at the time of *Moshe* or even David. One of the last books to be written was the book of *Esther*.

It is believed that *Artaxerxes I* may have been the stepson of Queen Esther. Some claim he was her own son, sired by King *Ahasuerus* (the Hebrew name for *Xerxes*), but there is no hard evidence. In either case, *Artaxerxes* was well disposed

toward the Jewish people and provided them with the official authority to return to Jerusalem and reestablish Temple worship. The book of *Esther* is believed to have been written by her uncle *Mordechai*, but whether *Ezra* brought it back with him to Jerusalem or whether it was sent later is not known.

Ezra may also have brought the book of *Daniel* with him, since Daniel had been a captive in Babylon during the time when it changed hands from the Babylonians to the Persians, many years before *Ezra's* time. Why this book was not included in the division of the Prophets (in the Hebrew bible) is somewhat of a mystery, and it is included in the "prophetic" section of Christian bibles.

Many "scholars" claim the book of *Daniel* is not included among the Hebrew Prophets because it was not written until the time of the Maccabees (c. 165 BCE) by someone who pretended to be Daniel, but that is not the view of the Rabbis. The *Talmud* claims authorship by Daniel himself, as does *Y'shua*:

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ..." (Matt. 24:15)

E.W. Bullinger, in his *Companion Bible* makes this comment concerning the unusual positioning of the book of *Daniel*:

"The position of the book in the 'Hagiographa,' or third division of the Old Testament ('the Psalms see Ap. 1), rather than in the second division ('the Prophets'), may be explained by the fact that, unlike the other three greater prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), it stands in relation to them as the Apocalypse of the Old Testament; and as pertaining to what is yet future. And whereas those three greater prophets speak of the future from an Intro-Israelitish standpoint, Daniel has their prophecies as his background; and, instead of looking at Zion and its neighbouring localised peoples, Daniel has universal Monarchies as his perspective; and is therefore separated from them in the Hebrew Canon, ..." (page 1178)

Certainly, Daniel was a 'prophet' in the sense of the word that he correctly predicted what was going to happen down through the centuries (with many prophecies yet unfulfilled). Nevertheless, in the Hebrew Bible the book of *Daniel* is always found among the *K'tuvim* (the Writings). Perhaps *Daniel* was placed among the Writings because approximately the first half of the book is taken up with history and prophecies of the Gentile nations, rather than Israel. This entire Gentile section (chapters 2 - 7) is written in Aramaic (the language of Babylon) while the first chapter and chaps. 8 - 12 are written in Hebrew, the language of the children of Israel.

Yet another reason why the book of *Daniel* is not included in the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) is because it was not written in the land of Israel. However, the book of *Ezekiel* was also written while Ezekiel was in Babylon, so why should it be included among the Prophets? The Rabbis discussed this in the *Talmud* and came to the conclusion that the book of *Ezekiel* should be included in the division of the *Nevi'im* because his visions were of future events that were to transpire in the land of Israel. This

is not the case with the book of *Daniel*, whose prophecies span the entirety of the world.

~ Ezra Establishes the Canon ~

As we have seen, being both a Priest and a Scribe, *Ezra* probably brought with him, from Babylon, all of the "sacred scriptures" with the possible exception of the book of *Esther* and *Chronicles*. As a priest (with legitimate claims to be High Priest), *Ezra* would have had the authority to guard over the "official" copies of the Scriptures being held in safe keeping in Babylon. He would also have had the proper training to make new copies.

Jewish tradition states that *Ezra* copied all of the Scriptures from the ancient Paleo Hebrew (a pictographic script) into the square letters used today. According to Rabbinic tradition, *Ezra* wrote the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* to record the events which transpired during the building of the Second Temple. He is also credited with writing the genealogies found in *Chronicles*. *Nehemiah* is said to have finished the *Chronicles*.

Thus, *Ezra* was responsible for the final form of the Hebrew Canon, although *Chronicles* may not have been fully completed until after his death by his contemporary *Nehemiah*. This is confirmed by a passage from the book of *II Maccabees* which speaks of a later time when the "sacred scriptures" had to be rescued from destruction:

"13 And the same things were set down in the memoirs and commentaries of Nehemias: and how he made a library and gathered together out of the countries the books both of the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings, and concerning the holy gifts. 14 And in like manner Judas also gathered together all such things as were lost by the war we had and they are in our possession." (II Maccabees 2:13-14)

Tradition has it that many of the books were lost during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanies, and had to be recopied during the time of the Maccabees.

~ Later Canon Controversies ~

There were a few controversies which developed at a later date, that called into question two of the books included in *Ezra's canon*. In fact, these controversies were not fully quelled until the 2nd or 3rd century of the Common Era (CE).

The main period of time when these questionings took place was toward the end of the 1st century CE (after the destruction of the Second Temple) when the *Sanhedrin* was relocated to *Yavneh* (a.k.a. *Joppa*) on the coast of Israel. The two books in question were *Song of Songs* and *Ecclesiastes*. The *Talmud* records this discussion and the final decision was that both books "defiled the hands" and were therefore part of the "sacred scriptures" or *canon*.

The *Talmud* also records some later discussions, however the result of their discussions and questioning always ended with confirmation of the Hebrew *canon* as determined by *Ezra* and the men of the Great Assembly some 500 years previously.

~ The New Testament Confirms ~

The *canon* of the Hebrew Scriptures is confirmed time and again, and in many ways, by the Greek Scriptures (New Testament). The Greek word *graphe* (which is always translated as "scripture" or "scriptures") is used 51 times in the New Testament, 23 times by *Y'shua* Himself when He quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures. This single fact alone shows that *Y'shua*, and the apostles, recognized a body of Hebrew writings which were commonly known as "scripture."

In addition to lumping the Hebrew writings into this one designation, *Y'shua* also used the phrase "the law and the prophets" several times:

"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:40)

Here *Y'shua* used the common designation of His day for the Hebrew Scriptures. The term "Law and Prophets" was understood to mean all of the Scriptures, including the Writings.

In one case *Y'shua* did mention all three divisions:

"Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.'" (Luke 24:44)

Some argue that *Y'shua* was only giving credibility to the book of *Psalms* and not to the other books contained in the Writings. However, a related practice of designating an entire book by using the first word found in the book is well established. That practice is still used today to name the weekly *Torah* readings, i.e. *B'reisheet* for the first reading in the book of *Genesis*. Likewise, by using the single word *Psalms*, *Y'shua* was indicating all of the *K'tuvim* (Writings).

Y'shua not only confirmed the Hebrew Scriptures generally, He also confirmed the order in which they are found in a Hebrew Bible:

"Therefore the wisdom of God also said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute, ⁵⁰ that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation."" (Luke 11:49-51)

The blood of *Abel* signifies the very first righteous man who was murdered:

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." (Gen. 4:8)

The last martyr mentioned in the Hebrew *canon* is that of Zechariah:

"Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them,

'Thus says God:

"Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD [*YHVH*], so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD [*YHVH*], He also has forsaken you."

"²¹ So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD [*YHVH*]." (II Chron. 24:20-21)

Thus we see that *Y'shua* recognized the Hebrew Scriptures in the order still found in a Hebrew language *Tanakh* to this very day, *Genesis* through *II Chronicles*.

However, there is some confusion on which *Zechariah* is being mentioned here. In a parallel passage he is identified differently:

"... from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." (Matt. 23:35)

The Zechariah mentioned in Matthew, as the "son of Berechiah," is the one who wrote the book of *Zechariah*. There is no record that he died a martyr's death as did Zechariah the son of Jehoiada mentioned in II Chron. 24:20. The *Hastings Bible Dictionary* has this comment:

"The reference appears to be to the death of Zechariah, son of Jehoiada; and as *Chronicles* stands last in the Hebrew Bible, the phrase 'from Abel to Zechariah' would indicate the first and last victims of murder in the OT. In Matthew, however, Zechariah is called 'son of Berechiah,' which suggests confusion with Zechariah the prophet, son of Berechiah. No tradition that he died a martyr's death is known. The evangelist [Matthew] or a later copyist may have introduced the father's name, thinking either of the prophet or of a Zacharias son of Baruch mentioned by Josephus as murdered in the Temple by the Zealots." (page 1052-3, underlining ours.)

Perhaps the most obvious confirmation that *Y'shua* and the writers of the New Testament trusted that the Hebrew Scriptures were given by God is the frequency of quotes from the Old Testament. Various counts have been undertaken to determine how many times the Hebrew Scriptures are quoted in the New Testament, but they do not all agree because some count only direct quotes while others count those passages in the Greek Scriptures which also allude to specific Old Testament passages.

Dr. David Stern, translator of *The Complete Jewish Bible*, has found 484 passages from the *Tanakh* cited, or alluded to, in the New Testament a total of 695 times. This shows a significant dependence by the writers of the New Testament on the Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible.

By contrast, there are no direct quotes from any of the books from the *Apocrypha* or the *Pseudepigrapha*, in the New Testament, although there are some passages that seem to allude to certain of those non-canonical writings. To give an example, here is a comparison between a passage in Matthew and I Enoch:

"Blessed are the meek,

For they shall inherit the earth."

(Matt. 5:5)

"But to the elect there shall be light, joy, and peace, and they shall inherit the earth."
(I Enoch 5:7)

Certainly, there is a similarity here since both passages use the phrase "they shall inherit the earth." However, to conclude that *Y'shua* based His statement in Matt. 5:5 on this passage in I Enoch is definitely a stretch, in our opinion. *Y'shua* did not have to base His teachings on the non-canonical writings of dubious authorship, for His teaching came directly from the Father:

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak."
(John 12:49)

~ Summary ~

The Hebrew (OT) *canon* has existed, unchanged, for nearly 2500 years. Although the term *canon* was not used until the 4th century CE when it was introduced by the Roman Catholic Church, nevertheless, there was a 22 book (or 24 depending on how you count them) *canon* that existed from before the time of *Ezra* (c. 450 BCE).

The first division to be recognized as "sacred scripture" was the *Written Torah*. It was accepted from the moment of its writing as being given by God for the instruction and governing of the children of Israel.

The composition of certain books found within the division of the *K'tuvim* (Writings) began very early and continued down to the very time when *Ezra* was reassembling the *canon*. The *Nevi'im* (Prophets), on the other hand, were composed beginning with *Joshua* (just after the death of *Moshe*) and continuing into the period of the Babylonian Captivity. Then the "prophetic" writings ceased. The Prophets were commissioned by God to point out to the children of Israel where they were falling short of the *Torah* commands:

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place,

until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; ²⁰ knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
(II Peter 1:19-21)

Ezra, the Priest and the Scribe, is recognized as being the primary figure in the establishment of the final 22 book (or 24 book) *canon*. He also recopied all of the Scriptures into block script that is still used today in the modern Hebrew language. His cohort, *Nehemiah* also had a hand in finalizing the *canon*, as did, no doubt, other members of the Great Assembly, but we can rest assured that it was fully completed during the early years of the Second Temple period.

During the time of the *Maccabees*, many of the "sacred scriptures" were in danger of being lost, especially the *Written Torah* itself -- for the Jews were forbidden (on pain of death) to read the *Torah* during the time of *Antiochus Epiphanies*. Nevertheless, God raised up the family of *Hasmon* (known as the *Maccabees*) to protect and recopy the "sacred scriptures" so they would not be lost.

Later, in the Middle Ages, many copies of the Holy Scriptures, and other Jewish books, were burned during the Catholic Inquisition. However, by that time there were sufficient copies in existence that none were permanently lost.

Rest assured, we have the complete Hebrew Bible. It has been protected by God down through the ages so that we who live in the end times will know what is the true Word of God. Let us use it as a guide for our lives.

"So the *Torah* is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good."
(Rom. 7:12 CJB)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Everyman's Torah ~

But if a person looks closely into the perfect *Torah*,
Which gives freedom, and continues,
Becoming not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work it requires,
Then he will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:25

If a person will not listen to *Torah*,
Even his prayer is an abomination.
Proverbs 28:9



most serious question has resurfaced which is causing considerable concern within the Messianic Movement:

Are Gentile Believers in Messiah *Y'shua* expected to observe the commandments of the *Torah*, or are they free to worship God and conduct their lives as they see fit, based only upon individual or denominational interpretations of Scripture? Phrased another way; Is there but "one law" for all Messianic Believers, or are there "two laws," one for the Jew and another for the Gentile?

A companion question is:

Are Gentile Believers even allowed to keep the commandments of the *Torah*, if they deem it proper to do so, or is observance of *Torah* commandments strictly limited to Jewish Believers?

Along with these two main questions there are a number of subsidiary ones which will be addressed based upon our conviction that a truly called, committed, and forgiven child of God (no matter what his racial or previous religious background) will strive to be a *Torah* commandment keeping Believer in *Y'shua*, because that is what Messianic Believers are called to do.

Please note: our use of the term *Torah* in this article refers only to the *Written Torah* found in the first five books of the Bible. We are not using it to imply the added rules of the *Oral Torah* or Tradition.

~ Some Historical Background ~

Although there were small scatterings of strictly Jewish Christian congregations back into the 19th century in parts of Europe, the Jewish Messianic Movement, as we know it today, did not begin until 1973. That was when the *Hebrew Christian Alliance of America* changed its name to the *Messianic Jewish Alliance of America* (MJAA).

Up until that time, when Jews became convicted that *Y'shua* (Jesus) was the Messiah, they were expected to join a "Christian" church and effectively give up their Jewishness. For many decades Jewish Believers were called "Hebrew Christians" until eventually, for many, the racial identity of their descendants became lost. Today, many Christians have discovered that they are, in fact, descended from Jews who

converted to Christianity centuries ago -- either willingly or under duress.

Conversion to a mainstream Christian church is no longer necessary for Jewish Believers, for after the formation of MJAA, in 1973, groups of Messianic Jews began to form their own congregations based upon the idea they need not give up the Sabbath, Festivals, and certain traditional Jewish "customs" in order to be saved.

That centuries old Church requirement, for Jewish converts, was the exact opposite of the question which was brought before the Jerusalem Council, as recorded in Acts 15. In the first century the shoe was on the other foot, because some Jewish Believers claimed that Gentiles needed to become Jewish proselytes (convert to Judaism and become circumcised) in order to be saved. Later on, for many centuries, the tables were turned and the Gentile Church said that Jews must give up their "Jewishness" in order to be saved by *Y'shua's* shed blood. Obviously, both positions are wrong.

Realistically, this modern "Messianic Movement" (while it was initially begun by and for believing Jews) now embraces a far greater group of people than just Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*. In fact, there are probably more people whom the Jews would refer to as "Gentile" in the movement than there are Jewish Believers. Thousands of these "Gentile" Believers in *Y'shua* have found that, by embracing the "Hebraic roots" of their Christian faith, they have come to a deeper and more meaningful relationship with our Father and His son *Y'shua*. One of the main reasons for this deepening relationship is because these Gentile Believers now understand that God has a Standard which all those who come to Him are expected to follow. That Standard is found in the *Torah*.

The most common term used to designate this group of Believers (whether Jew or Gentile) is "Messianic." It seems that God had greater things in mind than simply a "Jewish" Messianic Movement:

**"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts."**

(Isa. 55:9)

~ Identity Confusion ~

This development of an inclusive body, involving both Jews and Gentiles, has caused a great deal of confusion in the Messianic Movement. Outsiders often ask non-Jewish Messianics if they are Jewish, because they see them observing the seventh day Sabbath, the Festivals of Leviticus 23, and not eating foods deemed, by Scripture, as unclean. These are the most obvious outward indications that someone has left mainstream Christianity, (although it does not mean these observances are more important than the "weightier matters of the law" such as "**justice, mercy, and faith**," (Matt. 23:23) which involves learning how to love God and love one's neighbor as one's self).

Because of these outward appearances, people also sometimes ask if Messianic Gentiles still believe in Jesus. Different people have different responses to these questions, but the usual answer is something like this: "Yes, we believe that Jesus is our Savior (however, we now call Him by His

Hebrew name *Y'shua*) and no, we are not Jewish, we are simply doing our best to obey all of the commandments found in the Bible."

~ Assimilation Fears ~

One of the great fears among religious Jews generally, is their concern that the Jewish race will become assimilated into the greater Gentile culture of the world -- and thereby disappear through intermarriage and conversion to other religions -- as so many other ancient cultures have done. Many non-Messianic Orthodox Jews view the Messianic Jews as having abandoned their Jewish religion and taken up with a form of Christianity (which they deem pagan), and therefore have, in their opinion, already assimilated.

Meanwhile, Messianic Jews see their strongly held belief, that *Y'shua* is the promised Messiah, as a final fulfillment of their Jewish heritage. They do not consider themselves to be converted to a Gentile form of Christianity, but instead often call themselves "completed Jews." They feel they are "completed" because they have found their Messiah in the person of *Y'shua*.

Nevertheless, there is a latent fear of assimilation among many Messianic Jews as well. When they review Christian church history, they see how the Jewish leadership of the original first century *ekklesia* (congregation of Messianic Believers) was eventually usurped by Gentiles and morphed into a huge Gentile church which has long claimed to have "replaced" Israel as God's Chosen People. Some Messianic Jews have been known to say: "The Gentiles stole it from us once [i.e. in the first and second centuries] and we are not going to let them do it again."

For this reason, a number of Messianic Jews have become very defensive when it comes to their relationship with Gentile Believers who wish to attach themselves to their congregations and begin observing certain *Torah* commandments which are deemed, by Christians, as being "Jewish." As a result, some have reestablished walls of separation between what Jews are allowed to do and practice in the congregations and what Gentiles are allowed to do. (Of course, this degree of separation varies greatly among congregations.) One example: in some Messianic Jewish organizations a Gentile is not allowed to be a Congregational Leader if a male Jew is present who can fulfill that role, even if the Gentile is more knowledgeable and better qualified.

We understand this fear on the part of Messianic Jews, for the movement was originally started in order to be a safe haven for Jewish Believers to practice their traditions and customs in a setting where *Y'shua* is fully recognized as Lord and Savior. It appears they were not prepared for the many "Gentiles" who have come to embrace the Hebraic roots of the Faith.

~ Re-Erecting a Middle Wall ~

Reactions to this problem have found expression in various ways. One of these is in not allowing Gentiles to participate in certain things which are perceived to be strictly "Jewish." Again, practices vary greatly between various congregations, but one extreme reaction is to claim that Gentiles MUST NOT attempt to keep the *Torah* -- that *Torah* is strictly a Jewish book

and it is a SIN for a Gentile to try and keep the law of God, unless they convert to Judaism.

A while back a friend of ours attended a Messianic Jewish congregation where he was told that, because he was considered a Gentile, he must wear a *kippah* (a head covering for men) but must not wear his *tallit* (a prayer shawl with *tzit-tzit* -- fringes or tassels) while attending their service.

However, there is no specific command in the *Written Torah* which requires that a "lay" man must wear a head covering, even though the Priests were commanded to do so when serving in the Temple. Nevertheless, the tradition of head coverings for all men already existed at the time of *Y'shua*. Meanwhile, there is a specific command in the *Written Torah* to wear *tzit-tzit* or fringes:

"Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels [*tzit-tzit*] on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels [*tzit-tzit*] of the corners. ³⁹ And you shall have the tassel [*tzit-tzit*], that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD [*YHVH*] and do them, and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, ⁴⁰ and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God."
(Num. 15:38-40)

Some argue that this command is only for the "children of Israel" which, in their opinion, would be only those of Jewish descent. If that is the case, then all of the *Torah* commandments would be off limits to Gentiles because all of the *Torah* (as revealed at Mount Sinai) was given only to the children of Israel and therefore all of the laws found in the *Torah* would only be for them. This is the extreme position of those who claim that Gentiles must not attempt to keep the commands of the *Torah*.

However, it should be noted that such a position does not take into account that a "mixed multitude" of people, with other ethnic backgrounds, were also present among the children of Israel at Mount Sinai:

"A mixed multitude went up with them also, ..."

(Ex. 12:38)

Of course, this problem could be resolved by having all of the Messianic Gentiles, who wanted to fellowship in a Messianic Jewish synagogue, convert to Judaism. Then they would be allowed to participate in those things deemed "Jewish" by the leadership.

Up until recently there was no legitimate way for a Messianic Gentile to convert to Judaism through a Messianic Jewish Rabbi even if he wanted to do so. However, Seth Dralle, in an article, *The Emergence of Messianic Judaism*, in the Fall 2009 issue of *Messiah Journal* writes:

"Some groups within Messianic Judaism recently began to offer conversion for Gentiles into Messianic Judaism under an official Messianic rabbinical council. In defending this decision, leaders pointed out that Messianic Judaism is the only form of Judaism that previously did not have a conversion process. In order for Messianic Judaism to be a legitimately recognizable Judaism, a conversion process would be necessary. The conversion concept has

caused dissent within Messianic Judaism, and many still hold that Jews should remain Jews practicing in synagogues (whether Messianic or traditional) and that Gentiles should remain Gentiles in churches." (p.29)

Certainly, if there is such a practice, Orthodox Judaism would not approve the conversion, for they would require the Gentile to deny that *Y'shua* was the Messiah, in order to be recognized, a position to which a Messianic Jewish Rabbi would never agree.

A more serious problem, with the Messianic Jewish conversion idea, is that the first century Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) long ago deemed that was not a viable path for a Gentile Believer to follow.

As a result of these (and other) positions, many Gentiles have felt like second-class citizens in the more orthodox Messianic Jewish synagogues, and many have left to start their own "Messianic" or "Hebraic Roots" congregations. Once again, the practices vary greatly. Some of these "Gentile" congregations bring quite a bit of Jewish liturgy into their service, while others use only the *Shema*. Yet, most all of them hold the Sabbath day as set apart, observe the Festivals, and refrain from unclean meats -- the outward signs of Jewish faith.

~ Not New ~

What many 21st century Messianic Believers do not understand is that the practice of Jewish and Gentile Believers observing *Torah* commandments is not a new phenomena. This practice has been going on throughout the last two millennia, ever since the time of *Y'shua*. The Roman Church long ago placed the derogatory title "Judaizer" on such people.

The history of these ancient "Messianics" is obscure in the annals of Christianity, and can only be traced through close investigation of those people and groups whom the Roman Catholic Church identify as heretics. Of course, not all "heretics," as defined by the Roman Church, were *Torah* observant (most were not), nevertheless, "Judaizer" history is scattered in and among the history of the various "heretical" groups.

Over the centuries the ancient *Torah* observing "Messianics" went under different group names, up until the 19th century when many of them became known by the title "Church of God," an English term taken from the *King James Version* of Scripture. Today, there are numerous Sabbath observant groups in America who identify themselves as "Church of God" (usually with another word added to distinguish themselves from one another). In addition, there are Sabbath groups going by other names such as the *Seventh Day Adventists* and the *Seventh Day Baptists*, and a title we find most delightful: *The Hebrew Macedonia Church of God Seventh Day Full Pentecostal*.

While all of these groups hold to a certain degree of *Torah* observance, what needs to be understood is they too take different positions concerning which commandments are applicable today. For example, some hold only to the Ten Commandments (which includes observing the seventh day Sabbath), but teach that the Festivals are "ceremonial" and therefore not to be observed. These groups tend to teach that

only the "moral" commandments are incumbent upon all men, but then cannot agree among themselves as to which commandments are "moral" and which are "ceremonial." (Are not all of God's commandments moral?) Meanwhile, other Church of God groups teach that all of the commandments found in the *Torah* are to be observed.

Over the years, quite a number of Jewish people became members of those *Torah* observant Church of God groups. Up until the emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement, many Jewish Believers found the Church of God groups more in line with Judaism than mainstream Christianity, because of their position that the law was still in effect -- although overt Jewish "customs" were generally not tolerated.

The bottom line is this; to claim that today's general "Messianic" movement began in the late 20th century is simply incorrect -- for these early "Judaizer" groups were really the original "Messianics." They just did not use that title. A great many Believers, who today call themselves "Messianic" or "Hebraic Roots," are spiritual descendants from among those ancient "Judaizer" groups.

~ One Law ~

The term "one law" (or one *Torah*) is also not new, for it is found in the *Written Torah* which was given some 3500 years ago:

"And if a stranger [*ger* = sojourner] dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD [YHVH], just as you do, so shall he do. ¹⁵ One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger [*ger*] who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger [*ger*] be before the LORD [YHVH]. ¹⁶ One law [*torah*] and one custom [*mishpat* = judgment, rule, or court] shall be for you and for the stranger [*ger*] who dwells with you." (Num. 15:14-16)

At this point it is important to understand that the Hebrew word *Ger* (Strong's #1616), as it is used in the *Torah*, does not refer to a person who has fully converted to Judaism (as is now taught by Rabbinic Judaism). If that were the case, then we would have to call our father *Avraham* (Ahv'-rah-ham = Abraham) a convert to Canaanite religion:

"I am a foreigner [*ger*] and a visitor [*toshav*] among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." (Gen. 23:4)

(For more detailed information on the status of the various types of strangers who dwelled in the Land, please see our booklet, *Gentiles and the Law I: Scriptural Background*.):

"And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. ²⁸ So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD [YHVH], to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. ²⁹ You shall have one law [*torah*] for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger [*ger*] who dwells

among them. ³⁰ But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger [*min ha ger* = from the stranger], that one brings reproach on the LORD [YHVH], and he shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ Because he has despised the word of the LORD [YHVH], and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him." (Num. 15:27-31)

Notice, in this passage the *Ger* (stranger or sojourner) will be cut off "from his people" if he "sins presumptuously" (intentionally). This tells us that even though he is a *Ger* or "stranger," he is considered to be a part of Israel, otherwise he could not be cut off "from among his people." He is (in all probability) an uncircumcised but loyal member of Israeli society.

Thus, the same *Torah* Standard applies to both the native born Israelite and the stranger (*ger*) or sojourner who dwells with them. This same principle applies in the case of eating the Passover Lamb. In this example, the *Ger* must first be circumcised, not because he is a *Ger*, but because circumcision is the law for every male who wishes to partake:

"And when a stranger [*ger*] dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD [YHVH], let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. ⁴⁹ One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger [*ger*] who dwells among you." (Ex. 12:48-49)

The "one law," given here, is applicable to the *Ger* and the Israelite alike. It states that only males who are circumcised may eat of the physical Passover Lamb. In addition, the lamb must be slaughtered according to all the proper rites of Passover:

"And if a stranger [*ger*] dwells among you, and would keep the LORD's [YHVH's] Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger [*ger*] and the native of the land." (Num. 9:14)

In other words, anyone uncircumcised, whether a sojourner or a native born Israelite, may not eat of the Passover Lamb unless he first becomes circumcised. (Yes, during certain times there were native born Israelites who were not circumcised, especially among the *Hellenistic Jews* during the period from 300 BCE - 70 CE.) Thus, the "one law," in this Passover case, has to do with circumcision as it relates to eating the Passover Lamb, not to a perceived difference between a sojourner and a native born Israelite. Of course, once a *Ger* did become circumcised it was as though he were a native-born Israelite. In other words, he converted.

God never had a double standard -- one for Jews and another for uncircumcised Gentile sojourners. All stood equal before Him if they came to Him desiring a right relationship. This was true even at the time of the Exodus, when the "mixed multitude" came out of Egypt along with the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is not a

respector of persons but treats all of those who love Him equally:

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)

Ya'acov (James), the Lord's brother, taught strongly against showing partiality among Believers:

"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach], the Lord of glory, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,' ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:1-4)

If you take this passage and substitute "Jewish man" for "a man with gold rings in fine apparel," and "Gentile man" for "poor man in filthy clothes," it is easy to see what God thinks about making those kinds of distinctions when it comes to giving honor. By having two sets of laws, one for Jews and another for Gentiles, honor is automatically given to one group over the other.

~ One Law in the New Testament ~

The "one law" concept was taught from the very beginning of the Messianic Movement by no less an authority than the Apostle Paul:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua]. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's [Messiah's] then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:28-29)

The fact that all Believers (both Jew and Gentile) have become one in *Messiah Y'shua* in no way implies different standards of behavior for each group. In fact, it implies just the opposite -- that both groups will be brought under the same single Standard of commandments. It can, however, allow for different cultural customs between divergent groups, although, any custom which causes a Believer (Gentile or Jew) to break a *Torah* command must be abandoned.

Instead of continued separation there is supposed to be a movement toward increasing unity:

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances [Gk. *dogma* = man made rules], so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." (Eph. 2:14-16)

This "One New Man" (Jew and Gentile alike) must have the same set of legal and moral standards, otherwise there can be no unity. A Believer cannot be "one" with someone who has a different set of standards. Different customs -- yes or maybe, different moral or ceremonial standards -- absolutely not!

There can be no legitimate case made for the idea that only Jewish Believers are allowed to keep Sabbath (a *Torah* command) while the Gentile Believers keep Sunday. Or that only a Jewish Believer is allowed to observe God's Festivals (a *Torah* command) while the Gentile is stuck with Christmas and Easter. Or that only a Jew can wear *tzit-tzit* on a prayer shawl.

Neither does it mean that an individual has the right to choose which commandments he will observe and which he will ignore. All of the *Written Torah* commandments are still in effect and are meant to be observed by those to whom they apply. It is true there are specific commands which apply only to certain people groups, such as the *Cohenim* (coh-heh-neem' = the priests), others only for the Levites, some for men only, and some for women only. However, there are also commandments which apply to everyone, such as:

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD [YHVH], which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'" (Lev. 23:2)

These universal commandments, which were written down at the hand of *Moshe* (Moses), constitute *Everyman's Torah*. They are to be kept by all men who attach themselves to the God of *Avraham*, *Yitzhak*, and *Ya'acov* (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

~ The Children of Israel ~

All of this leads to the next question:

With the advent of *Y'shua's* sacrifice, are the Jews the only people who can still legitimately claim the title "children of Israel?"

There is a common misconception that the "Church" has become the "new Israel" and has "replaced" the physical children of Israel as God's chosen people. This, however, is not the case, for the basic principle taught in the New Testament is that anyone (circumcised or not) who accepts the shed blood of Messiah *Y'shua* as payment for their sins, has been Grafted-In to the *Olive Tree of Israel* and has therefore become part of the children of Israel, just like the *Ger* or sojourner of old. (Please remember that grafted branches will receive pruning once they have been firmly established on the tree.):

"I say then, have they [Israel as a nation] stumbled that they should fall [permanently]? Certainly not! But through their fall [temporary], to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. ¹² Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" (Rom. 11:11-12)

God has a plan that includes a temporary cutting out of certain members of the physical children of Israel so that Gentile Believers may be Grafted-In in their place.

Nevertheless, the *Olive Tree* remains Israel -- it does not become Gentile:

"For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ And if some of the [original] branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

¹⁹ You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' ²⁰ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.'" (Rom. 11:16-21)

This grafted *Olive Tree* remains Israel, but now it has both Israelite (or Jewish) branches, who remain attached to it because of their faith in *Y'shua*, as well as Gentile branches, who also have been Grafted-In by God because of their faith in *Y'shua*. Together these two groups, from very divergent backgrounds, constitute the *Righteous Remnant* of Israel, all partaking equally of the same root (which is *Y'shua*). Taken together this *Righteous Remnant* also becomes part of the greater *Commonwealth of Israel*:

"Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"

(Rom. 11:22-24)

Yes, many of the "cut out" Israelites will, in the end, be Grafted-In again so that Paul is able to say that God will eventually save "all" Israel:

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

**'The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;**

**²⁷ For this is My covenant with them,
When I take away their sins.'" (Rom. 11:25-27)**

Since both Israelites and Gentiles must be called by God in order to have a part in this *Righteous Remnant Olive Tree of Israel*, whose root is *Y'shua*, it does not stand to reason they would have two different sets of laws. That would be like having two different types of sap in a physical tree -- one for the natural branches and another for the grafted branches.

As we have seen, this same conclusion, of a single law for all, can also be derived from the "one law" example which was set in the *Torah* for both the native born children of Israel and the *Ger* or sojourner. Thus the *Torah*, which was originally

given to the physical children of Israel has, through *Y'shua*, become Everyman's Torah for those who believe in Him.

~ The Commonwealth of Israel ~

The *Commonwealth of Israel* embraces a far larger group of people than does the *Righteous Remnant of the Olive Tree of Israel*, for it includes all the descendants of *Avraham*, *Yitzhak*, and *Ya'acov* whether they believe in *Y'shua* or not. With the advent of *Y'shua*, Gentiles were given membership in the *Commonwealth* without converting to Judaism, as was required by first century *Pharisaic* Judaism.

Paul confirmed this message, concerning the equality of Jew and Gentile, by showing that Gentiles who accepted *Y'shua*, are now recognized as part and parcel of the *Commonwealth of Israel*. He began chapter two of *Ephesians* by showing how *Y'shua* had given new life to both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles by saving both groups from their sins, thus making them a *Righteous Remnant* through faith:

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Eph. 2:1-3)

After a brief discourse on being saved by grace in order to perform good works, Paul pointed out that, previous to this time, the Gentiles had been considered aliens from the *Commonwealth of Israel*:

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- ¹² that at that time you were without Christ [*Messiah*], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:11-12)

Because alien Gentiles were not originally members of the *Commonwealth of Israel*, and therefore not a part of God's covenant of promise which He had made with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they were totally without any hope of achieving either individual or corporate salvation. Anciently, only those Gentiles who had attached themselves to Israel by dwelling in the land as *Ger* (strangers or sojourners), or fully converted to Judaism as Proselytes, had that hope.

But now God had, in His infinite mercy, opened a way for Gentiles to become part of the *Commonwealth of Israel*, and therefore, a part of God's chosen people, without full conversion to Judaism or residing in the Promised Land as a *Ger* under Israelite leadership. This new path was through individual faith in Messiah *Y'shua*. To repeat:

"But now in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ [*Messiah*]. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that

is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances [dogma = man made rules], so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him [*Y'shua*] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." (Eph. 2:13-18)

Because of this new path (called faith in *Y'shua HaMashiach*) Believing Gentiles are now considered full members in the *Commonwealth of Israel* whether non-Messianic Jews recognize them as such or not. The important opinion is God's, not man's:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22)

Just as adopted children must live by the same rules of the household as natural born children, so Jews and Gentiles, in the household of God, must also follow the same rule book. Thus, Messianic Gentiles are Grafted-In to the *Olive Tree of Israel* and made members of the *Commonwealth of Israel*, and thereby become a full-fledged part of the *Righteous Remnant of Israel*. Paul called this new method of entry a "mystery:"

"... if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ [*Messiah*]), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ [*Messiah*] through the gospel, ⁷ of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power."

(Eph. 3:2-7)

Here Paul called the Believing Gentiles "fellow heirs" and part of the same body (the Body of Messiah) as the Believing Jews. If all Believers are "fellow heirs," they will have the same inheritance and, in our view, the same Standard to follow while being in the "heir" state.

As "fellow heirs," not only are Believing Gentiles a part of the *Commonwealth of Israel* and Grafted-In to the *Olive Tree of Israel*, they are also, along with Jewish Believers, now called sons of God because they have all become the spiritual "seed of Abraham" through faith in *Y'shua*:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*]. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ [*Messiah*] have put on Christ [*Messiah*]. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is

neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua].²⁹ And if you are Christ's [Messiah's], then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:26 - 29)

The Apostle John confirmed that the *Righteous Remnant*, within the *Commonwealth of Israel*, are truly called children of God:

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ²Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (I John 3:1-3)

~ Sin and the Children of God ~

As the *Righteous Remnant* children of God, Grafted-In members of the *Olive Tree of Israel* (and therefore members of the greater *Commonwealth of Israel*), Messianic Believers in Messiah Y'shua are told not to sin:

"Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God." (I Cor. 15:34)

Most all Believers would agree with that statement, especially since it is found in the New Testament. However, the problem is that while the Christian community generally condemns sin, they cannot agree on a clear definition of sin. This is not because the Scriptures do not define sin, but because many choose not to hear and abide by that definition:

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." (I John 3:4 NKJV)

"Everyone who is a sinner goes against the law, for sin is going against the law." (I John 3:4 BBE)

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (I John 3:4 KJV)

All of the above translations say basically the same thing, even though the wording is different. However, the clearest translation of all is from David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible*:

"Everyone who keeps sinning is violating Torah - indeed, sin is violation of Torah." (I John 3:4 CJB)

If sin is "violating Torah," and we, as Messianic Believers, are not to sin, then the Torah must be the New Testament Standard by which we judge whether or not we are sinning just as it was in the Old Testament. There is no indication given that there is a different Torah for the Believing Jew than there is for the Believing Gentile. The Torah, as written in the books of *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*, is the same for all Believers in Messiah Y'shua.

It truly is *Everyman's Torah*.

~ Summary ~

Scripture does not teach that two different standards of sin definitions exist, either for the physical children of Israel who lived in the ancient nation of Israel (and those strangers who dwelt with them), or in the called out Messianic Community composed of both Jew and Gentile. Thus, the idea that the Believing Jews have one Scriptural Torah which applies to them and that another Scriptural Torah exists, which applies only to the Believing Gentiles, is a false concept. There is only one Torah (Instruction Book), and it applies to all who become part of the *Olive Tree/Commonwealth of Israel*, whether native-born or Grafted-In.

Previous to Y'shua, the only way a Gentile could come under the Torah of Israel was to physically dwell in the Promised Land as a *Ger* (sojourner) or to go through full conversion to Judaism complete with circumcision. By the First Century, only the Proselyte path of circumcision was recognized by Pharisaic Judaism. All others were considered outside the *Commonwealth of Israel*.

However, God made a new path by which Gentiles could become full-fledged members of that *Commonwealth*. That path involved a Grafting-In process which made a Gentile Believer in Y'shua a branch of the *Olive Tree of Israel* and therefore an automatic member of the *Commonwealth of Israel*. This could only be accomplished because Y'shua was the Root of the *Olive Tree*. Paul called this new process a mystery.

Believing Israelites (Jews) and Gentiles are now held to the same Standard because:

- ◆ This was the pattern established in the Torah. (Num. 15)
- ◆ All become one in Messiah Y'shua. (Gal. 2:28)
- ◆ The middle wall of separation has been removed. (Eph. 2:14)
- ◆ God has created "One New Man" from very different people. (Eph. 2:15)
- ◆ Gentiles have been Grafted-In to the *Olive Tree of Israel*. (Rom. 11)
- ◆ Gentiles who were former "aliens" have been "brought near" by the blood of Y'shua. (Eph. 2:13)
- ◆ Believing Gentiles are now "fellow citizens" and "fellow heirs." (Eph. 2:6)
- ◆ All Messianic Believers are now called "children of God." (Gal. 3:26, I John 3:1)

Two divergent groups of people have been brought together through their faith in the shed blood of Y'shua to become one body with one Standard for all:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (I Pet. 2:9-10)

As a unified body -- Messianic Believers all come under the jurisdiction of the Instruction Book of God (the *Torah*). This fact is made clear because the Scriptural definition of sin is the "transgression of God's law or *Torah*." Sin is sin no matter who commits it. Scripture does not teach that sin is different for Jews than for Gentiles.

Finally, the Sabbath day is a gift from God for all mankind, no matter what his ethnic background:

**"Also the sons of the foreigner
Who join themselves to the LORD [YHVH],
to serve Him,
And to love the name of the LORD [YHVH], to be
His servants --
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And holds fast My covenant --
Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for
all nations."** (Isa. 56:6-7)

Indeed, the commandments of God are EVERYMAN'S TORAH.

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## ~ The Other Torah ~

And let them make Me a sanctuary,  
That I may dwell among them.  
According to all that I show you, *that is*,  
The pattern of the tabernacle  
And the pattern of all its furnishings,  
Just so you shall make it.  
*Exodus 25:8-9*



The previous chapter, *Everyman's Torah*, explained how there is "one law" or *Torah* for all Believers, whether Jew or Gentile. That *Torah* is the one which has been written down for all to read in the Scriptures. However, in today's Rabbinic Judaism there are said to be not one but two *Torot* (pl.). These "two laws" are known as the *Written Torah* and the *Oral Torah*.

The *Written Torah* (*Torah she-bi-Khetav*) consists of those commandments (instructions) given by God and written down by the hand of *Moshe*. Today those written commandments can be found in the first five books of any Jewish or Christian Bible: *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. Anyone who owns a Bible, which contains the "Old Testament," has the entirety of the *Written Torah* in their hands.

The *Oral Torah* (*Torah she-be-al Peh*) contains the *Oral Traditions* that explain how the *Written Torah* is to be implemented according to Orthodox Rabbinic Jewish standards. The Rabbis teach that these implementation traditions were given to *Moshe* on Mount Sinai along with the *Written Torah*, and subsequently handed down orally from generation to generation. Today, within Orthodox Judaism, the *Oral Traditions* have come to hold the status of commandments equal to those found in the *Written Torah*.

While the *Oral Torah* was originally handed down verbally from generation to generation, it is now in written form in a book called the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* has been further expanded and expounded upon (via commentary called the *Gamara*) in the *Talmud*. Some Oral Traditions were committed to writing in the first century through the *Pharisaic* schools of *Hillel* and *Shammai*, the two leading Rabbis of *Y'shua's* day. Further codification took place under Rabbi Akiva (50 - 135 CE) after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Final codification was accomplished under the direction of *Judah Ha Nasi* (Judah the Prince) in the early third century CE. The writing of the *Oral Traditions* was done so they would not be lost due to the impending dispersion of the sages of Judah and the disbanding of the *Sanhedrin* (Jewish Supreme Court) by the Romans. We can be thankful for their foresight, for they have left us a valuable historical document.

### ~ The Rabbinic View of Oral Torah ~

By 500 CE, at the completion of the *Babylonian Talmud*, Orthodox Judaism had developed the position that the entirety of the *Oral Torah* was given to *Moshe* on Mount Sinai at the same time the *Written Torah* was given. Here is how the *Encyclopedia Judaica* explains it:

"Oral Law, the authoritative interpretation of the Written Law ... was regarded as given to Moses on Sinai, and therefore coexistent with the Written Law. This view of the Oral Law was a fundamental principle of the rabbis. The Written and Oral Laws constitute together 'two that are one.' ...

"There is a strong and close bond between the Written Law and the Oral Law, and neither can exist without the other -- both from the dogmatic point of view and from that of historical reality. The Oral Law depends upon the Written Law, but at the same time, say the rabbis, it is clear that there can be no real existence for the Written Law without the Oral. The need for the positing of the existence of the Oral Law is inherent in the very character and nature of the Torah. The statutes of the Written Law could not have been fulfilled literally even in the generation in which they were given, since 'that which is plain in the Torah is obscure, all the more that which is obscure' (Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 3, 35)." (*Encyclopedia Judaica CD-Rom Version*)

While portions of the *Written Torah* may seem obscure when first read, it has been our experience that, with careful study, those passages clarify themselves when viewed in light of other Scriptures (including the New Testament). As *Moshe* told the children of Israel near the end of his life:

**"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off.<sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'<sup>13</sup> Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'<sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." (Deut. 30:11-14)**

Despite *Moshe's* claim of *Torah* clarity, the Rabbis teach that the *Written Torah* contradicts itself in places and therefore needs the *Oral Torah* to give the proper interpretation. As an example the *Encyclopedia Judaica* cites the following two passages:

**"You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.<sup>4</sup> And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning." (Deut. 16:3-4)**

Compared to:

**"Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly to the LORD [YHVH] your God. You shall do no work on it."**

(Deut. 16:8)

The Rabbis explain this anomaly by stating (correctly) that only unleavened flour products may be consumed during the entire seven day period. However, because they always celebrate the *Omer Wave Offering* on the second day of

Unleavened Bread (*16 Aviv*), they say that products made from new grain can only be consumed for six days. However, Written Scripture clearly teaches that the *Omer Wave Offering* is to be performed on the first day of the week which follows the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The Rabbi's explanation will only fit if one accepts the *Pharisaic* dating of the *Omer Wave Offering* as always being on *16 Aviv*. (See our special publication, *Shavu'ot: The Feast of Weeks*, for more detailed information on the dating of the *Omer Wave Offering*.)

It has been our experience that Scripture correctly interprets Scripture, and this anomaly can be clarified quickly by searching other passages of Scripture which pertain to the Days of Unleavened Bread:

**"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread."**

(Ex. 12:15)

**"For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, ..."**

(Ex. 12:19)

**"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD [YHVH].<sup>7</sup> Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days."** (Ex. 13:6-7)

**"You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, ...)"**

(Ex. 23:15)

One does not need the *Oral Torah* to explain Deut. 16:8 -- all one needs is the *Written Torah* in its entirety.

So why does Scripture say six days in Deut. 16:8 instead of seven days? Perhaps because God wanted to emphasize the no-work aspect of the Seventh Day of Unleavened Bread, making it the High Day or Holyday which is the culmination of the previous six days of eating unleavened bread. This is really a moot question for gaining a correct understanding of how many days to eat unleavened bread (the "bread of affliction"). It is clear that it is to be eaten all seven days, including the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

To further muddy the water, the *Oral Torah* teaches that in the Diaspora (outside the land of Israel) all Holydays (except *Yom Kippur*) are to be kept for two days. Thus, they add an eighth day to the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread and include the command to refrain from eating leavened bread on the eighth day as well. This is clearly not founded upon the *Written Torah* but on a tradition of men.

### **~ Is Any Oral Torah Valid? ~**

When confronted with arguments like the one above, some people throw up their hands and in the process throw out the baby with the bath water by rejecting all of the *Oral Torah*. In our opinion that is a BIG MISTAKE.

While Rabbinic Judaism may grossly overstate the need to keep all of the *Oral Torah* commands (even some which contradict *Written Torah*), a Messianic Believer must understand that contained within the *Mishnah* and the commentary of the *Talmud* (called the *Gamara*) can be found a

wealth of information about how Judaism has developed their many rich traditions. If implemented into the life of a Messianic Believer, many of those Traditions can have the effect of drawing a person closer to God and, in the process, enhance one's understanding of Scripture.

However, to be up front, we believe that the *Oral Torah*, while a marvelous historical document from which we can learn many fine traditions, does not contain binding commandments upon the Messianic Believer. It is *The Other Torah* as compared to *Everyman's Torah* given by God to Moshe at Mount Sinai.

### ~ The Development of Oral Torah ~

Daniel Gruber is a Jewish Messianic Believer who has a deep grasp of the history and development of the *Oral Torah*. On his Website, [www.elijahnet.net](http://www.elijahnet.net), Gruber has posted a paper, entitled: *The Historical Development of the Oral Torah*, in which he shows how the terms "Oral Law" or "Oral Torah" were not used by *Pharisaic* Judaism until the time of Rabbi Akiva, during the first one-third of the second century CE. Even though there was a significant body of traditional practice, prior to the time of Akiva, the *Pharisees* spoke only of "Oral Traditions:"

"The contemporary sources bear witness that there was a significant body of Pharisaic, and then rabbinic, law in the first century. The sources do not, however, indicate in any way that the Pharisees, and then the Rabbis, claimed at that time that this law came from Sinai or that it was solely an interpretation of the Torah.

"The sources all speak in terms of tradition or an 'oral tradition.' None of them speak of an 'Oral Law.' 'We thus have indications that in the time of Josephus and Philo oral transmission was looked upon as the characteristic medium of Pharisaic tradition.' [quoted from: Baumgarten, J.M., *The Unwritten Law in the Pre-Rabbinic Period*, JSJ, Vol. III, no. 1, 10/72, p.15]. Though Josephus and Philo mention Pharisaic tradition, they do not mention an 'Oral law.'

"The Pharisees did try to increase the force of their tradition by placing its origin as far back in the past as they could. 'Josephus brings this out when he says of the Jewish leaders, "Their endeavour is to have everything they ordain believed to be very ancient." [quoted from: C. Apion, II., xv, 152, in A. Lukyn Williams, *Talmudic Judaism and Christianity*, S.P.C.K., London, 1933, p.46]." [Underlining ours.]

Gruber contends that none of the early sources indicate the presence of something called an *Oral Torah* or *Oral Law* which was binding on all of Judaism during the time of *Y'shua*.

### ~ The Supremacy of the Written Torah ~

In another equally compelling paper called *Tanakh and the Oral Law*, Gruber shows how the *Tanakh* (Jewish term for the Old Testament) consistently pointed the children of Israel to the "written" Word of God, not to *Oral Traditions*. Space does not permit a complete survey of all the many Scriptures he uses

to support this claim, so the following few will have to suffice for now. (For the complete article go to [www.elijahnet.net](http://www.elijahnet.net).):

**"And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD [YHVH]. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ... <sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has said we will do, and be obedient.' <sup>8</sup> And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD [YHVH] has made with you according to all these [written] words.'" (Ex. 24:4, 7-8)**

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.'" (Ex. 24:12)**

*Moshe* knew that the children of Israel would sin and depart from the commandments of God. Chapter 28 of Deuteronomy lists the curses that were prophesied to come upon them when that time arrived. However God, in His great mercy, always extends His hands to the children of Israel and accepts them back when they repent and return to Him in obedience:

**"And you will again obey the voice of the LORD [YHVH] and do all His commandments which I command you today. <sup>9</sup> The LORD [YHVH] your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD [YHVH] will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, <sup>10</sup> if you obey the voice of the LORD [YHVH] your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD [YHVH] your God with all your heart and with all your soul.'" (Deut. 30:8-10)**

It was the *Written Torah* (law) which *Moshe* delivered to the Priests for safekeeping:

**"So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD [YHVH], and to all the elders of Israel. <sup>10</sup> And Moses commanded them, saying: 'At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, <sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD [YHVH] your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.'" (Deut. 31:9-11)**

When Joshua was about to die he charged his successors with keeping the *Written Torah* (law) of God:

**"And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: 'I am old, advanced in age. ... <sup>6</sup> Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, ...'" (Josh. 23:2, 6)**



When the House of Judah returned from Babylonian captivity and rebuilt the Temple, the people received proper instruction because Ezra read to them from the Book of the Law of Moses:

**"Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD [YHVH] had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup>So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law."** (Neh. 8:1-3)

It was the *Written Law*, not *Oral Traditions* which the children of Israel were commanded to obey and preserve.

### ~ Early Oral Traditions ~

Nevertheless, it is also clear that a number of instructions found in the *Mishnah* were received (or conceived) at a very early time. Some of them, which pertain to Tabernacle service, may well have been given to *Moshe* at Mount Sinai. All of those early *halachot* (hah-lah-coat' = rules found in the *Mishnah*) relating to the structure, vessels, offerings, and worship at the Tabernacle were among those very early *Oral Traditions*. We know this to be the case because the *Written Torah* tells us:

**"And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. <sup>9</sup> According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."** (Ex. 25:8-9)

The patterns shown to *Moshe* were recorded in outline form in the *Written Torah*, but many of the details were left out. This is especially true in regard to Tabernacle worship. The pattern for the physical items used in worship were given personally to *Moshe* and/or to *Bezalel*, who was charged with supervising their construction:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. <sup>3</sup> And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, <sup>4</sup> to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship."** (Ex. 31:1-5)

*Bezalel's* chief assistant was a man named *Aholiab*. He worked, along with other artisans, in the construction of these items:

**"And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ..."** (Ex. 31:6)

These men must have received the detailed patterns either orally from *Moshe* or through personal visions. Since the *Torah* states that *Moshe* received the **"pattern of all its furnishings"** (Ex. 25:9), it would seem the information was passed from God to *Moshe* to *Bezalel* and then to the artisans. Today, descriptions of those items can be found in the pages of the *Talmud*, which contains the *Mishnah* plus extensive commentary (*Gamara*). This information has been passed down to modern times from those who had seen and worked with the vessels prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

Joseph and Debbie Good, in their book *Concise Guide to the Mishnah and the Tosefta*, show how important it was for this information to be retained so that some future generation could rebuild the Temple and its accouterments, and so that proper *Torah* ordained worship services might once again be initiated when God decrees it to happen:

"After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the foundation was laid bare and all the buildings were leveled. All vessels and artifacts of the services fell into the hands of the Romans. After some time had passed, the sages realized that it might be years or hundreds of years before the Temple could be restored. ... It could be possible for the following generations that had not seen the Temple or its services to be unable to visualize the requirements for all the needs of the future Temple. Again the sages saw the need to record this information giving future generations the requirements, methods, measurements, and services in the event the Temple could be rebuilt. Otherwise, these understandings could have been diluted or even lost forever. Due to so many of the commandments found in the *Torah* and their expositions in the *Oral Torah* dealing with the Temple and its ceremonies, it was necessary that these expositions be recorded for future generations." (pp 7-8).

This same recording process was used concerning how to properly slaughter the sacrificial offerings so that all of their blood was drained out as the *Torah* commands. The sacrificial blood was captured in specially constructed vessels and poured out upon the altar in various prescribed ways. An entire section of the *Mishnah* (*Seder Kodashim*) is devoted to this topic:

**"For the life [*nephesh* = soul] of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul [*nephesh*]."** (Lev. 17:11)

This same *kosher* slaughtering skill was used when preparing animals for food apart from Tabernacle service:

**"Therefore I said to the children of Israel, "No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.""** (Lev. 17:12)

Tabernacle prayers and liturgy were either given by God to *Moshe* or were developed by the Priests over time. We know that by the time of *Y'shua* they were quite complex. While there may have been additions to the liturgy which developed over the centuries, the essence of the Tabernacle liturgy must have existed from the beginning, since all of the various

offerings began at that time (see the book of Leviticus) and did not change over the centuries. There was a well developed liturgy being practiced in the first century BCE just prior to the birth of *Y'shua*:

**"So it was, that while he [*Zacharias*] was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense."** (Luke 1:8-10)

The worshippers outside were praying the same liturgical prayers that *Zacharias* was praying while conducting the incense altar service inside the Temple. When the worshippers finished those prayers they expected *Zacharias* to appear outside. When he did not, they knew something had happened:

**"And the people waited for *Zacharias*, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple."** (Luke 1:21)

It is our opinion these important elements of worship were probably given directly by God to *Moshe*, passed on to Aaron, and hence to the Priesthood which descended from him. Thus we see that certain portions of the *Oral Torah* are both valid and useful in reconstituting Temple worship as it was practiced during the time of *Y'shua*.

#### ~ Oral Torah Problems ~

While there is a wealth of excellent information to be found in the *Oral Torah*, that cannot be found anywhere else, there are also added rabbinic rules which seem to have been designed to exert control over the lives of those who follow their dictates. One of those areas involves what, they believe, can and cannot be done on the Sabbath day. In other words, the Rabbis have attempted to define "work" in all its details:

**"Six days you shall labor [*avad*] and do all your work [*melakah*] <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD [*YHVH*] your God. In it you shall do no work [*melakah*]: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates."** (Ex. 20:9-10)

The words *avad* and *melakah* are defined in Strong's as:

**5647 עָבַד** `abad {aw-bad'}

**Meaning:** 1) to work, serve 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to labour, work, do work 1a2) to work for another, serve another by labour 1a3) to serve as subjects 1a4) to serve (God) 1a5) to serve (with Levitical service) 1b) (Niphal) 1b1) to be worked, be tilled (of land) 1b2) to make oneself a servant 1c) (Pual) to be worked 1d) (Hiphil) 1d1) to compel to labour or work, cause to labour, cause to serve 1d2) to cause to serve as subjects 1e) (Hophal) to be led or enticed to serve

**Origin:** a primitive root; TWOT - 1553; v

**Usage:** AV - serve 227, do 15, till 9, servant 5, work 5, worshippers 5, service 4, dress 2, labour 2, ear 2, misc 14; 290. [Underlining ours.]

**4399 מְלָאכָה** mela'kah {mel-aw-kaw'}

**Meaning:** 1) occupation, work, business 1a) occupation, business 1b) property 1c) work (something done or made) 1d) workmanship 1e) service, use 1f) public business 1f1) political 1f2) religious

**Origin:** from the same as 04397; TWOT - 1068b; n f

**Usage:** AV - work 129, business 12, workmen + 06213 7, workmanship 5, goods 2, cattle 1, stuff 1, thing 1, misc 9; 167. [Underlining ours.]

These definitions (which are derived from the way the words are used in Scripture), in their simplest form, show that one is not to work at their regular occupation nor have any one work for them on the Sabbath day. Of course, this is only the core explanation, for one can take these definitions and construct a much broader category called "work."

This is exactly what the Rabbis have done by defining 39 categories of prohibited Sabbath "work." They are:

- 1.) Sowing
- 2.) Ploughing
- 3.) Reaping
- 4.) Binding sheaves
- 5.) Threshing
- 6.) Winnowing
- 7.) Selecting
- 8.) Grinding
- 9.) Sifting
- 10.) Kneading
- 11.) Baking
- 12.) Shearing the wool
- 13.) Bleaching
- 14.) Carding
- 15.) Dyeing
- 16.) Spinning
- 17.) Warping
- 18.) Making two loops
- 19.) Weaving two threads
- 20.) Separating two threads (in the warp)
- 21.) Knotting
- 22.) Unknotting
- 23.) Sewing two stitches
- 24.) Tearing for the purpose of sewing two stitches
- 25.) Hunting the stag
- 26.) Slaughtering it
- 27.) Flaying
- 28.) Salting (the flesh)
- 29.) Preparing the hide
- 30.) Scraping (the hair)
- 31.) Cutting it into pieces
- 32.) Writing two letters of the alphabet
- 33.) Erasing for the purpose of writing two letters
- 34.) Building
- 35.) Demolishing
- 36.) Kindling a fire
- 37.) Extinguishing it
- 38.) Striking with a hammer
- 39.) Transferring an object from one domain to another.

Now, as an "enlightened" Messianic Believer, one could make fun of the Rabbis efforts to insure that the Sabbath was

"sanctified" and "set apart" from the six work days. However, we must be careful not to judge another man's method of honoring God, as long as it falls within the confines of the *Written Torah*:

**"Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. <sup>3</sup> And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?"** (Matt. 7:1-3)

On the other hand, that does not mean we need to explicitly follow all Rabbinic *Halacha* (hah-lah-khah = the way one walks), although we can surely learn a great deal from it and may want to implement some aspects of it into our personal walk. The Apostle Paul made a very significant statement in the book of Romans:

**"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."** (Rom. 14:23)

If a person believes that something is a sin -- even if it is not -- then for that person it is a sin because his conscience convicts him. That is why in this particular example (which involved the eating of food) Paul said:

**"It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."** (Rom. 14:21)

There is an old saying, "When in Rome do as the Romans." This could be modified to read: "When in an Orthodox Jewish synagogue, do as the Orthodox Jews." It is not our place to judge their methods of honoring God or tell them they need not observe all of the prohibitions in their *Halacha*. It is our understanding that, in the 1st century, most *Pharisaic* synagogues were under the rulings of either the School of Hillel or the School of Shammai.

#### ~ Reflections on the Oral Torah ~

Joseph and Debbie Good provide the following information about the *Mishnah* tractate *Shabbat* in their book, *A Concise Guide to the Mishnah and the Tosefta*:

"*Shabbat* is the largest tractate of *Seder Mo'ed* and one of the largest of the entire *Mishnah*. There are twenty-four chapters with a total of 138 *mishnayot* to the tractate. An interesting aspect of *Mishnah Shabbat* is that it obviously derived from various sources and different layers can be detected. This tractate has a very conspicuous combination of various *mishnah* collections. It contains materials from the *Mishnayot* of Meir, Judah, Yose, Simeon, and Eleazar [all famous Rabbis of the *Mishnah* period]. In this light two characteristics stand out in the tractate. For one, it contains matters that belong together but are scattered in various places throughout the tractate. Secondly, there are conflicting views scattered everywhere and even sometimes within the same *mishnah*. The following *mishnayot* 1.11; 13.1-3, 6, 8; and 14.3 are clearly of early date. *Mishnah Shabbat* in its present form is primarily the work of Rabbi Akiva's students. ..." (p. 43)

Adin Steinsaltz is a famous contemporary Rabbi, scholar, and teacher who is Head of the *Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications*. In his book *The Essential Talmud*, Steinsaltz makes the following observations:

"The basic view of the Sabbath as a day of rest appears very simple but arouses a number of problems when put into practice. First and foremost, it is necessary to establish the definition of 'labor.' The term may be interpreted to mean any work that entails excessive effort or activity for which payment is rendered, or in many other ways. Each of these definitions lends a new dimension to the interdict and changes the way in which the Sabbath is observed. The oral tradition, which relies on detailed analysis of the biblical sources, arrives at another conclusion as to the nature of the labor forbidden on the Sabbath, ... The prohibition is not related to the definition of labor or to the payment of money but to the injunction to refrain from acts of deliberate creation in the physical world." (p. 108)

The foundation of the Rabbi's definition for 'creative acts' was the building of the Tabernacle. Steinsaltz continues:

"... The Talmud chose an elemental model for those actions prohibited on the Sabbath -- the work of construction of the Tabernacle in the desert, explicitly prohibited by the Torah. A large part of the halakhic discussion in the Talmud on forbidden and permitted acts is an elaboration and expansion of this basic model and the derivation of practical conclusions from it." (p. 109)

However, creative acts were not the only things that were prohibited by the Rabbis. Also included were the *seyagim* (seh-yah-geem') or fences which were placed around the *Written Torah*. Fences are rules that are more stringent than the *Written Torah* commands. A fence, if observed, keeps a person from ever even getting close to breaking the actual *Written Torah* command.

Another area of concern were those things which would highlight the Sabbath as a day of *shevut* or rest. According to Steinsaltz, the primary restriction, in the category of rest, was the Sabbath ban on commerce:

"Commerce as such does not belong within the general framework of creative work, since whatever it produces is not physically evident. Nevertheless, we know that this ban existed as far back as the days of the first prophets. ... The *shevut* [rest] rules encompassed many acts that were not prohibited in themselves but could, however unintentionally, bring about forbidden actions. For example, the practice of medicine was forbidden on the Sabbath (unless a question of life and death were involved), ..." (pp. 111-112)

This prohibition against the practice of medicine or healing, became one of the primary bones of contention between *Y'shua* and the Rabbis concerning Sabbath observance:

**"And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' -- that they might accuse Him. <sup>11</sup> Then He**

said to them, 'What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?' <sup>12</sup> Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' <sup>13</sup> Then He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. <sup>14</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him."

(Matt. 12:10-14)

It is evident the question of how to properly observe some of the *Written Torah* commands is difficult. *Y'shua* showed that, in certain instances, the *Oral Traditions* of the Rabbis went against the spirit of the *Written Torah* and therefore should not be followed. Nevertheless, there are many questions of interpretation to which Messianic Believers need answers. The question is, How does one obtain such answers?

### ~ The "Tell Me What to Do" Syndrome ~

All of this points up a major problem which exists within nearly all religious organizations -- the presumed need of many people to have someone in authority tell them what to believe and what must be the manner of their behavior, apparently not realizing that is one of the primary functions of the *Written Torah*. Coupled with that perceived need are some authoritarian leaders who are more than willing to take these new members of the Faith under their wing and tell them what they "must" do to be saved -- thereby gaining a degree of control over them.

The fact that Believers (especially new ones) may not always be able to discern, through their own understanding, exactly how to apply certain *Written Torah* commands, is not the fault of the Word of God, but points to a lack of training in how to "rightly divide" God's truth:

**"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."**  
(II Tim. 2:15)

The first calling, of a humble righteous leader, is to teach people how to study and correctly apply, in their lives, what they have learned, not just follow a set of manmade rules. A key to this type of training is learning how to discern good from evil:

**"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."** (Heb. 5:14)

As a Believer, if you do not feel qualified to make correct decisions based upon the Word of God, one key to resolving that problem is to pray for wisdom:

**"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."** (James 1:5-8)

A major reason why so many Americans do not feel qualified to study the Bible on their own, and thereby arrive at correct decisions, is because they have not received adequate training in our school systems. The public schools are not geared to teach students how to think, question, and reason properly. Instead, they are places given over to merely learning facts about a subject and then parroting the textbook prescribed answers back on an exam, all the while being made to sit still and be quiet so as not to learn anything through conversation with other students. We need to teach our young people how to think, not how to memorize!

### ~ Slave Mentality ~

The need for specific rules is a natural human desire when one is confronted with information which is not fully understood. It is the slave mentality with which *Moshe* had to contend during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness until all that first generation died. "Just tell me what to do and I will do it, whether I like it or not. That way I won't have to think." This pretty much sums up what the children of Israel told God at Mount Sinai:

**"Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has spoken we will do.'" (Ex. 19:8)**

It is said that, in the original Hebrew, the response of the children of Israel was more like: "All that the LORD speaks we will do, even though we haven't heard all of it yet." Shortly thereafter, the people did not even want to hear what God had to say, they wanted to hear the Word of God only through *Moshe*:

**"Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'" (Ex. 20:19)**

So, God established, through *Moshe*, a training program to help the children of Israel learn how to think as free men, so they could understand the commandments and put them into effect in their own lives. Sometimes *Moshe* himself did not properly understand and had to go back to God to obtain more detailed information. For example:

**"Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. <sup>33</sup> And those who found him gathering sticks [*tree, wood, timber, etc.*] brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. <sup>34</sup> They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him."**

<sup>35</sup> **"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.'..." (Num. 15:32-35)**

It is interesting to note that immediately following the questioning of God about what to do, God gave the command to wear *tzit-tzit* so that the children of Israel would have, in front of their eyes, a constant reminder to keep all of God's commandments:

**"Again the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>38</sup> 'Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels**

on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. <sup>39</sup> And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD [YHVH] and do them, and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, <sup>40</sup> and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. <sup>41</sup> I am the LORD [YHVH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God.'" (Num. 15:37-41)

God wanted each and every individual member of the children of Israel to understand His *Written Torah* commandments and learn how to implement them in their own private lives. They were not given an additional "rule book" to tell them exactly what to do in every detail.

The same is true today. God desires those who are willing to study His word and to learn how to discern right from wrong and good from evil. He wants us to learn the concepts of the commandments, not just the details. God is looking for a few good men and women who are willing to apply their Spirit filled minds and hearts to the task of righteous living:

**"The fear of the LORD [YHVH] is the beginning of wisdom;**

**A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.**

**His praise endures forever."** (Psalm 111:10)

No longer were the children of Israel to live and think in a "salve mentality." They were supposed to learn how to make right decisions based upon the commands which *Moshe* was relaying to them from God -- the commands which now make up the *Written Torah*. These commands not only related to individual morality, but also to the proper way to conduct worship and run a *Torah* based government for the nation of Israel.

The problem *Moshe* faced was that the first generation of the children of Israel never quite got over their slave mentality. Thus, God had to wait until all the men of that generation died before He allowed them to take possession of the Promised Land. Other than *Joshua* and *Calev*, they never fully developed the ability to stand on their own two feet and make right decisions based upon the *Written Torah*, God's great gift of instruction.

The same is true of many people who are coming out of denominationalism today. Even though they have seen some of the doctrinal errors they were taught in the past, and have rejected them, some still suffer under the yoke of having been told what to believe and do for so long they find it difficult to make spiritually discerning decisions based totally upon God's Word. Some still want a leader to tell them exactly how to keep the commandments, not how to think.

Over time, this problem can be alleviated the same way it was in the first century -- by having the *Torah* taught every Sabbath. It has been our experience that questions of doctrine and observance may linger in our minds for many years before God reveals His will concerning a specific matter.

What the Messianic leadership needs to do is teach people how to think -- how to **"rightly divide the word of truth."** (II Tim. 2:15). That way, an individual Believer can make righteous decisions even if they do not have a leader readily available with whom to counsel. However, it is good to counsel if one has the opportunity:

**"A wise man is strong,**

**Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;**

**<sup>6</sup> For by wise counsel you will wage your own war,**

**And in a multitude of counselors there is safety."**

(Prov. 24:5-6)

Notice it says a "multitude of counselors" not just one counselor.

### ~ Other First Century Oral Traditions ~

When discussing the *Oral Traditions* of the *Pharisees*, it is interesting to note that other first century Jewish sects held to somewhat different traditions, most of which have been lost to history. However, mention is made in other literature about a *Sadducean* document called the *Book of Decrees*. Among other things, *The Book of Decrees* gave the traditions concerning capitol punishment; "who were to be stoned, who burnt, who beheaded, and who strangled," methods not clearly delineated in the *Written Torah*.

The *Essenes* probably had the most complete and stringent of all the various traditions, which were recorded in the *Manual of Discipline* and the *Damascus Covenant*, both of which have come down to us, at least in part, in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The *Manual of Discipline* was found in one of the caves at *Qumran* in the spring of 1947. It contains statements which lay out the rules for the "ideal life" which the members of the community pledged themselves to follow. This covenant was renewed each year.

The *Damascus Covenant* was a work which presented the views of an *Essene* sect which had left Judea and emigrated to Damascus. Fragments of this work were also found in the *Qumran* caves. It is divided into two parts. Part One was called "The Admonition" and contained moral teachings and exhortation. Part Two dealt with the laws of the sect and its social arrangements.

Like the *Oral Torah* of the *Pharisees*, these documents were not Scripture, but they were important writings of their time showing how these two sects (*Sadducees* and *Essenes*) were to conduct certain aspects of their affairs. They are comparable, in many respects, to the "Oral Traditions" of the *Pharisees* of that same period.

### ~ Modern Oral Traditions ~

Today there are variations to the *Oral Torah* which exist within differing sects of Orthodox Rabbinic Judaism. This is not surprising since the *Mishnah* itself contains many opposing opinions on certain matters. That is one of the beauties of the *Mishnah*, that the Rabbis who put it together allowed the dissenting opinions to be recorded. Thus, different Orthodox Jewish sects may have certain *Halachic* variations from one another, although they all agree on the most basic commands (such as observing the Sabbath), just not in every detail.

The ancient *Samaritans* (who still exist as a sect in *Samaria* and hold to their own version of the *Written Torah*), also have their own *Oral Traditions* which differ from those of Rabbinic Jews. Likewise, the *Karaites* (a Jewish sect which developed at the beginning of the 8th century) have their own *Oral Traditions* which also differ from those of mainstream Judaism.

Oral Traditions abound within Christianity as well. In the Roman Catholic Church, tradition takes precedence over Scripture, just as *Oral Torah* does in certain sects of Rabbinic Judaism. Protestantism is not free from tradition either. Each of the many denominations have their own set of doctrines and manner of conducting worship service, which members are expected to observe.

The Messianic Community is also not free of oral traditions, as each fellowship and congregation seems to conduct their worship differently from everyone else. About the only thing in common is the singing of the *Shema*, and even there the English translations may vary slightly from one congregation to another. Some congregations have rules about head coverings, but there are a number of differing views. In some places both male and female heads must be covered. In others only the females, in others only the males, and in still others both males and females must worship with their heads uncovered. In still other congregations the matter is left up to individual understanding and discretion.

The truth of the matter is, there must be certain traditions that are accepted within the confines of any religious group for there to be any semblance of unity. Therefore, each congregation or denomination develops its own *Halacha* governing how the service is to be conducted and what types of behavior are expected in order to be a part of that group. Traditions cannot be escaped, for if there were absolutely no Traditions there would be anarchy.

While a certain amount of conformity is necessary, so that chaos does not abound, we believe there must also be a certain amount of freedom, not only between individual congregations but also among individual Believers within a congregation, so each person can develop his/her own understanding as to what is right and wrong in the sight of God. Paul addressed this issue when he wrote:

**"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."** (Phil. 2:12-13)

In our opinion this passage addresses the absolute need for understanding the *Written Torah*, both at the congregational and individual level. All must stand as individuals before the judgment seat of *Y'shua*:

**"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ [*Messiah*], that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."** (II Cor. 5:10)

#### ~ First Century Judaism ~

As we have seen, unity was not a characteristic of first century Judaism any more than it is in Judaism today -- or in

Christianity with its many sects. The three major sects of first century Judaism: *Sadducees*, *Pharisees*, and *Essenes* (there were other smaller sects as well), all accepted the *Written Torah* as coming from God, through the agent of *Moshe*, but they did not agree on its application.

The *Pharisees* tended to be the teachers in the local Synagogues, where some became chief Rabbis, even though most of them were "lay" members and were not part of the Priests or Levites who had originally been given the charge to teach the people *Torah* and make judgments concerning interpretations of the law:

**"If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD [*YHVH*] your God chooses. <sup>9</sup> And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. <sup>10</sup> You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD [*YHVH*] chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. <sup>11</sup> According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you."** (Deut. 17:8-11)

However, by the first century the lay member *Pharisees* ran most of the local synagogues and sat on the local *Beit Din* (Bait Deen = House of Judgment) to decide matters of *Torah* law in those congregations. Therefore, the *Pharisees* held considerable power over the largest people group, the *Am ha Eretz* (Ahm Hah Eh-rehtz' = the people of the land or the common people). Since every Sabbath the *Am ha Eretz* heard the strict *Pharisaic Halacha* brand of *Oral Tradition* preached in the Synagogue, most became indoctrinated in the *Pharisaic* way of life.

Because of the control which the *Pharisees* held over the local Synagogues, when first century Gentiles went through conversion to Judaism it was almost always to the *Pharisaic* brand. Thus, converts to Judaism were expected to keep all of the *Written Torah*, as well as the *Pharisaic* version of the *Oral Traditions* of that day.

#### ~ First Century Messianic Judaism ~

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians he specifically warned them that if they decided to convert to *Pharisaic Judaism*, they would be taking on, not just the *Written Torah* commands, but the *Pharisee's Oral Traditions* as well:

**"And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised [*converts to Pharisaic Judaism*] that he is a debtor to keep the whole law [*both Written and Oral*]."** (Gal. 5:3)

This was the Messianic Jewish *Pharisees* solution to the "Gentile" problem. However, this solution was not accepted by the leadership of the first century *ekklesia* (congregation or assembly) for they, as a body, recognized that individual

salvation comes only through faith in *Y'shua*, not the sectarian manner in which one kept the commandments (although the commandments did need to be observed).

The Apostle Peter expressed it most succinctly at the Jerusalem Council meeting:

**"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them:**

**"Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, <sup>9</sup> and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they."** (Acts 15: 7-11)

The "yoke" Simon Peter spoke about was, in our opinion, the "yoke of *Oral Torah*," as it was developing at that time.

This issue was resolved by a Messianic Council decision and publicly announced by *Ya'acov* (Jacob/James), who was the Council leader:

**"And after they had become silent, James answered, saying,**

**"Men and brethren, listen to me: <sup>14</sup> Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. <sup>15</sup> And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:**

**<sup>16</sup> "After this I will return  
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which  
has fallen down;**

**I will rebuild its ruins,**

**And I will set it up;**

**<sup>17</sup> So that the rest of mankind may seek the**

**LORD [*YHVH*],**

**Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,**

**Says the LORD [*YHVH*] who does all these things."**

**<sup>18</sup> "Known to God from eternity are all His works. <sup>19</sup> Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, <sup>20</sup> but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."** (Acts 15:13-20)

Some read this passage and proclaim that Gentile Believers need only abide by these four decrees and, therefore, all other *Torah* laws have been abrogated:

- ◆ Abstain from things [*foods*] polluted by idols.
- ◆ Abstain from sexual immorality.
- ◆ Abstain from animals that were strangled.
- ◆ Abstain from blood.

There is no mention here about the Sabbath, the Festivals, clean and unclean foods, or the *Torah* teachings concerning how to worship God or love one's neighbor. On its face, the Council decrees seem to have given the Gentiles nearly total

freedom from the law, but this cannot be the case for sin is defined as the:

**"... transgression of the law."**

(I John 3:4)

However, if one does sin there is now provision for the removal of those sins:

**"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, [*under the penalty of the law because of sin*] that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus [*Y'shua*]." (Rom. 3:19-26)**

**"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (I John 1:9)

The real purpose of the four decrees was not to abolish the law for the Gentiles but to establish an entry point for them into the Messianic Community.

There are different opinions as to what these four decrees mean:

- ◆ To refrain from anything connected with paganism -- since all of these four things are said to have been integral to the pagan religions.
- ◆ Since three of the four items have to do with food, it seems apparent that adherence to these food based requirements made it possible for Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles to have table fellowship -- to partake of meals together as brethren (something that was not allowed in the Orthodox Synagogues of that day -- see Acts 11:1-3).
- ◆ Another opinion teaches that the four decrees are a part of the so-called *Noahide* laws -- seven commandments found listed in the *Talmud* though not all of them are validated in Scripture.

What is often missed when reading this passage is that these four decrees were the minimum requirements for Gentile fellowship with Jewish Believers. In the *Pharisaic* synagogues, Gentiles who had not yet become proselytes (fully accepted through circumcision) were not allowed to have table fellowship with Jewish members. Now, in the Messianic synagogues, this ban was lifted, providing the non-circumcised Gentiles agreed to abide by the four decrees.

Another point that is often missed, in this passage, is that *Ya'acov* (James) did not stop issuing the edict with the four decrees but continued on with one more extremely important point:

**"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."** (Acts 15:21)

The assumption of the Council was that since the *Written Torah* was read each Sabbath in the Synagogue, the Gentile Believers in Messiah *Y'shua* would learn all of the *Torah* commandments of God and, as time went on, begin to apply those *Written Torah* principles they were learning in their own lives.

Granted, depending on the teacher in any given Synagogue on any given Sabbath, the Gentile Believers might have also heard how particular commandments were traditionally observed by the Orthodox Jewish Believers. But they may also have learned how the *Written Torah* was observed by those who were not of the sect of the *Pharisees*. It is our opinion that the Gentiles did not have to check their brains at the door and accept, without question, what was being taught, but were allowed to search the Scriptures for themselves, like the Bereans:

**"These [Bereans] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."** (Acts 17:11)

#### ~ A Different Solution ~

The question about following the *Written Torah* was settled in a very different manner for many early Gentile Believers (especially those in Rome) when the Roman Church, in the second century, began to abandon the seventh-day Sabbath. Eventually the church changed the day of worship to Sunday, the first day of the week, and prohibited Sabbath observance entirely. This doctrine of Sunday worship supposedly became "universal" in 325 CE through a decision of the first "ecumenical" council of the "Church" during their meeting in *Nicaea* (in Asia Minor), under the heavy handed leadership of the Emperor Constantine.

In addition to the Sabbath, the Roman Church also ceased observing God's Festivals, as found in Leviticus 23, except for Pentecost which they usually observed on a different day from that of Judaism. Chief among their objections to the Festivals was Passover, which was arbitrarily changed to Easter Sunday and is never allowed (to this day) to be observed on the same day as the Biblical Passover.

These new "church traditions" were, for the most part, accepted by Protestant Christianity as well. Thus, for most "Christians," the question seems to have been settled "way back when." However, there has always been a remnant of people (Messianic Believers both Jewish and Gentile) who insisted on following the commandments found in the *Written Torah* (the first five books of the Bible) as best they could. History does not tell us much about those ancient brave Believers who suffered much persecution, even unto death:

**"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]."** (Rev. 12:17)

Today we find Believers who hold this same conviction of faith in *Y'shua* and *Written Torah* obedience. Many of them can be found among those who call themselves "Messianic." They constitute those, among the people of God, whom the Adversary especially hates.

The question, currently being raised by some, about whether or not Gentiles are expected to observe the *Written Torah* commandments, is not new. It is an ancient question, the solution to which led the "Christian" church to abandon the "law," declaring that it had been "nailed to the cross." The "church" did not even begin to consider keeping the *Oral Traditions*, for they had already disregarded the *Written Torah*. However it is written:

**"One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination."** (Prov. 28:9)

#### ~ How Doctrines Change ~

Hopefully, this brief trek back into church history helps bring a better understanding of what is taking place today, for history does repeat itself:

**"That which has been is what will be,  
That which is done is what will be done,  
And there is nothing new under the sun."** (Eccl. 1:9)

It is much easier to understand the present if one has a grasp of what has occurred in the past. Doctrinal changes of major institutions usually take place over rather long periods of time. They often begin with some "radicals" in leadership coming up with a "new" or "improved" doctrine that is at first rejected by the majority of the leadership. However, as time unfolds and circumstances change, this "new" idea may begin to gain more adherents. In time, if it seems advantageous for the institution to fully embrace this new doctrine, it becomes "church" or "synagogue" law. This is how the *dogma* of any religious institution begins to take precedence over Scripture:

**"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ..."** (Mark 7:8)

#### ~ The Development of Two Torot ~

The final outcome of the continuing development of *Pharisaic Oral Tradition*, as interpretation and addition to the *Written Torah*, was the development of a full blown *Oral Torah* or law. Thus, there came to be two *Torot*, the *Oral Torah* with its traditions and Rabbinic rulings, now made into law, and the *Written Torah* (God's Law) as found in the first five books of our printed Scriptures.

This new *Oral Torah* was based in part on ancient traditional practices plus new rulings that were developed by the Rabbis. It continued to grow and be handed down from these first century Rabbis through to the time of Rabbi Akiva (50 - 135 CE). This was followed by further refinement leading to the writing down of the Traditions in the *Mishnah* (compiled c. 200 CE). Finally came the development of the



extensive commentary (*Gamara*) which is found in the *Talmud* (compiled between 200 and 500 CE).

The intended purpose of the new Rabbinic *Oral Torah* was so that all Judaism would have a similar interpretation of the *Written Torah*, thereby providing a sense of unity to all Jews no matter where they lived -- certainly a worthy goal. However, the end result was that the *Oral Torah* became a law book unto itself, whose rules could take precedence over the *Written Torah* when the two disagreed. Thus, modern Rabbinic Judaism traces its roots not to the *Sadducees* or the *Essenes*, but to the *Pharisees* in general and Rabbi Akiva in particular.

### ~ Scripture Inviolable ~

The Scriptures are clear that one is not to add to or take away from the Scriptures as they were given by God to *Moshe*, the Prophets, and the Apostles:

**"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD [YHVH] your God which I command you."**

(Deut. 4:2)

**"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."**

(Rev. 22:18-19)

**"Every word of God is pure;  
He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.  
<sup>6</sup> Do not add to His words,  
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar."**

(Prov. 30:5-6)

God's word is not to be violated by adding or subtracting to what was given by Him. When the *Oral Torah* takes precedence over *Written Torah* it does just that. In those places where the *Oral Torah* contradicts the *Written Torah*, the *Oral Torah* must not be followed. In those places where the *Oral Torah* compliments and enhances the *Written Torah*, it provides a valuable service to the Messianic Community.

### ~ Y'shua's View of Tradition ~

Messiah *Y'shua* had some things to say about traditions taking precedence over *Written Torah* when a question was raised by some *Pharisees* as to why His disciples did not follow their well developed *Oral Tradition* of performing a ritual hand washing prior to eating a meal (a practice not required of common people by the *Written Torah*):

**"Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. <sup>3</sup> For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup> When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which**

**they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.**

**<sup>5</sup> Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?'"** (Mark 7:1-5)

Let us understand one thing -- it is not wrong to perform a ritual handwashing before eating a meal. There is no *Written Torah* command which forbids it. Ritual handwashing can be a spiritually positive act if performed with the right intent and in the right frame of mind, for it can remind a person Who the Creator is, that He provides all of our needs, and that we need to be pure in His sight. Ritual handwashing was, however, a *Written Torah* requirement for priests when they served in the Tabernacle. It is not a *Written Torah* requirement for common people:

**"You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, <sup>19</sup> for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. <sup>20</sup> When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD [YHVH], they shall wash with water, lest they die. <sup>21</sup> So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them -- to him and his descendants throughout their generations."** (Ex. 30:18-21)

The Rabbinic argument for universal hand washing is that, since the destruction of the Temple, men are considered to be a priest to their family and therefore should obey the command to ritually wash their hands as was required of the priests in the Tabernacle. Notice, however, there is no Rabbinic custom that everyone must wash their feet prior to a meal, a priestly ritual demanded equally with handwashing.

*Y'shua* did not engage in a doctrinal dispute with the *Pharisees* about ritual hand washing, therefore it is our guess He was not opposed to the practice. What He was vehemently opposed to was requiring people to break much more important commands found in the *Written Torah*. Therefore, *Y'shua* used this opportunity to expound on an important moral issue -- honoring one's parents:

**<sup>6</sup> He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:**

**""This people honors Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far from Me.**

**<sup>7</sup> And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'""**

**<sup>8</sup> ""For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.'**

**<sup>9</sup> "He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother;" and, "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." <sup>11</sup> But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban' -- " (that is, a gift to God), <sup>12</sup> then you no longer**

**let him do anything for his father or his mother, <sup>13</sup> making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."**

(Mark 7:1-13)

This is a clear indictment against following an *Oral Tradition* which directly contradicts the *Written Torah*. However, it is not an indictment against ritual hand washing if one wishes to practice it. Also, *Y'shua* did not say that all *Oral Traditions* are automatically wrong just because they are part of the *Oral Torah*. What it does mean is that we need not be slaves to the *Oral Torah* of Rabbinic Judaism -- but must use the *Written Torah* as our guideline for personal and congregational *Halacha*.

However, let us be clear. Tradition (*Oral Torah*) can be good if it is used to enhance our relationship with God and in a manner that does not negate the *Written Torah*:

**"But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, ..."**

(I Tim. 1:8)

~ Summary ~

The subject of *Oral Torah* can be a very volatile one in the Messianic Community. Some believe that any adherence to the *Oral Traditions* of Rabbinic Judaism is to be avoided -- while, at the other extreme, there are those who believe that Messianic Believers should adhere to all of the Rabbinic interpretations of the *Written Torah* which are found in the *Oral Torah*. In our opinion, both of these positions are wrong and both have contributed to untold problems and great hurt to many in this developing Messianic Movement.

One thing for sure. Those who automatically reject all things Jewish (just because they are Jewish) without studying the source material (the *Mishnah* and the commentary in the *Talmud*) are making a great mistake. However, on the other hand, those who accept all Rabbinic rulings and teachings, just because they come from an ancient Rabbinic tradition, are making an equally great mistake, for Paul instructed all of us to search the written Scriptures and come to understand what God wants of His people in a conceptual manner:

**"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."**

(II Tim. 2:15)

One cannot "rightly divide" the Scriptures without understanding what they mean at a conceptual level. Once the concept of the commandment is understood, then the details of how to perform that commandment can be properly worked out. *Y'shua* helped us understand how to do this in the context of the seventh commandment:

**"You have heard that it was said to those of old,**

**"You shall not commit adultery."**

<sup>28</sup> **But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."**

(Matt. 5:27-28)

The concept as stated in the Ten Commandments is that a man is not to commit adultery. Adultery is defined in other *Written Torah* passages as having sexual relations with another man's wife. However, *Y'shua* showed how to carry the concept to a higher level by instructing us not to even look at a woman

with lustful thoughts -- for that is where adultery is conceived, in the mind of the man (or the woman) involved. Thus, a proper application of the concept leads one to a detail which is not overtly stated in the *Written Torah*.

To some degree, this is what the Rabbis have done in the *Oral Torah* -- they have taken *Torah* concepts and fleshed them out with rules. However, in some cases they have gone to extremes with their rules, and thereby have put their people in bondage to those rules -- saying this is how a certain commandment must be observed. Now if someone is comfortable within those Rabbinic rules, fine -- as long as they still maintain their focus on *Y'shua* as Lord and Savior there is no problem.

However, for those who do not wish to be forced into rule bound observance dictated by the Rabbis, who do not believe that *Y'shua* is the Messiah, there must be some allowance made for them to observe the *Written Torah* according to a different detail standard. This is what Peter was referring to when he stated to the Jerusalem Council:

**"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they."** (Acts 15:10-11)

Peter clearly stated that certain rules, which had been established by the Rabbis of his day, were so difficult to observe that no one could be expected to keep all of them. Thus, if one believes they must keep all of these manmade rules in order to be saved, they are definitely in the category of trying to be saved by works and not by faith in the blood of *Y'shua* for the forgiveness of sin. Eternal life is a gift from God and cannot be earned by works:

**"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] our Lord."**

(Rom. 6:23)

There is a great difference between Obedience and Works. Obedience is obeying the instructions of God because we love Him and want to learn how to be like Him. Works is doing something in order to earn a reward. As we just saw in Rom. 6:23, eternal life cannot be earned. The only thing that can be earned is death -- and that is earned through sin, or the transgression of God's *Written Torah* (law).

So then, it is not wrong to follow Rabbinic rules and standards if they add true meaning to one's spiritual life, help one to effectively observe the *Written Torah*, and draw one closer to God. It also is not wrong to work out one's own salvation by learning the concepts found in the commandments of the *Written Torah* and then developing the details of how to implement those commands in one's daily life:

**"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."**

(Phil. 2:12-13)

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