

The Oral Law of the Jews or The Written Word of God?

What does God require of His people? Micah 6:8, *'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'*

Abraham based his life upon the way of the Lord. Genesis 18:19, *'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.'* It is the way that results in God's blessings. Proverbs 3:1-4, *'My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.'*

What answer did the Apostle Peter give when the Jews asked "What shall we do?" after they had killed Jesus Christ? Acts 2:37-38, *'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.'* To repent is to walk in the way of the Lord, turning from sin.

The Apostle Paul found some being led astray by false instruction contained in the "works of the law." Galatians 3:1-2, *'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?'* In the New Testament, "works" alone usually means the righteousness of God's law. James 2:20, *'But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?'* "Works of the Law" can mean the oral traditions of the Jews as opposed to the "truth" of God's word (v1). Titus 1:14, *'Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth'*. He answers the Galatians 3 question in Romans 10:17, *'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'* Faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit come by following the instructions in **the written word of God !**

Let's see how Jesus taught. Did He follow the Scribes and Pharisees in teaching the traditions of men? Luke 4:16-17, *'And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written.'*

He took His authority from the Old Testament !

How did Paul teach? Acts 13:14-16 *'But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.'*

He preached Jesus from the Old Testament. Acts 13:27-29 *'For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.'* verse 33 *'God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.'*

The people were delighted, verse 42, *'And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.'* verse 44 *'And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.'*

So was the word of God preached, verse 47-49, *'For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.'*

Even Jesus said we should believe His word because it came from God the Father. John 12:47-50, *'And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.'*

If we truly love God we will keep **His words**. John 14:24-25, *'He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.'*

From the beginning God made sure we would know what He requires of us with regard to His law. Exodus 24:12, *'And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.'* He wanted no confusion, so His commands were written down. Exodus 31:18, *'And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.'*

When Moses broke those tables, who wrote them again ? Exodus 34:1, *'And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.'* God knew that if His law was to be accurately preserved it needed to be written down !

This is stressed again in Deuteronomy 10:1-5. 'At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me. And I turned myself and came

down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the LORD commanded me.'

Moses also had to write down the covenant God made with Israel. Exodus 34:27, *'And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.'*

What did Christ say we must do to enter into life ? Matthew 19:17, *'And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.'*

Time and again God tells us to remember His Commandments. Numbers 15:37-40, *'And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.'*

Psalms 103:17-18, *'But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.'*

If we do, they become a blessing to us – how? Psalm 119:41, *'Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.'* And verses 50-52 *'This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.'* Revelation 1:2-3 *'Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.'*

We learn that God's words are sacred. God is very protective of His words. Daniel 12:4, *'But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.'*

From the start of the bible to the end God gives specific warnings about adding to that which He has carefully ensured has been written. Deuteronomy 4:2, *'Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.'* Revelation 22:18-19, *'For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.'*

When you think about it, it is not easy to add to that which is written is it? But it is very easy to add to that which is passed on orally. Think about the game of Chinese Whispers. It only takes 10 people to pass on a whisper and the sentence can end up totally different.

Where in the bible does it say we should base our beliefs on the oral traditions of the elders? cf Matthew 15:2-3, *'Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But He answered and said unto them, Why do you also*

transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? **These traditions are known as the “Oral Law”, and often contradict the written word..**

We are to learn from God’s word rather than man’s, 1 Peter 4:11, *‘If any man speak, let him speak as **the oracles of God**; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*’ What are these “oracles”?

ORACLE – LOGION, a diminutive of logos, a word, narrative, statement, denotes a Divine response or utterance, an oracle; it is used of (a) the contents of the Mosaic Law, Acts 7:38; (b) **the written utterances** of God through O.T. writers, Rom. 3:2; (c) the substance of Christian doctrine, Heb.5:12 (d) the utterances of God through Christian teachers, 1Pet.4:11. - Vines Expository Dictionary. (emphasis mine)

This is made clear in Hebrews 5:12-13, *‘For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the **oracles of God**; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the **word of righteousness**: for he is a babe.’* The oracles of God are **the words** of righteousness – those we find in the bible!

Many have become confused about what the oracles of God really are. Some believe they are the sayings, traditions and teachings of the Jews. Let’s see what scripture says. Romans 3:1-2, *‘What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.’* Paul is here discussing circumcision, from the law. Leviticus 12:1-3, *‘And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.’*

In Romans 2:17, *‘Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,’* the context is set ...verse 18, *‘And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;’* verses 24-27 *‘For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?’* Here Paul is showing that spiritual circumcision of the heart is what is important – the spirit of the law. Verse 29 *‘But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.’*

In the context of this discussion of the law, Moffat’s translation makes Romans 3 :1-3 clear . *‘THEN what is the Jew’s superiority ? What is the good of circumcision ? Much in every way. This to begin with – Jews were entrusted with **the scriptures** of God.’*

It is clear that Paul is here discussing the written law of God. Let’s prove it - Acts 7:37-39, *‘This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the **lively oracles to give unto us**: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,’* What law was it that they would not obey ?– It was the oracles – the written law God gave to Moses.

Jesus said the Jews of His day were the same. John 5:37-38, *'And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.'* What should they have done ? - verse 39 *'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.'* And verses 46-47 *'For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?'* This applies to us too. If we will not keep the laws God inspired Moses to write, we cannot keep and fully understand Christ's words either !

Jesus Christ came as our example, 1 Peter 2:21, *'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:'* - to show us how to understand and keep God's Law. Matthew 5:17, *'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.'* By His words and His life He explained, expounded and expanded God's law – He showed how to apply it in our lives. Because that example reveals the truth to His followers, unlike the Jews we can have no excuse at all for departing from the laws He kept.

When Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat, Matthew 23:2-3, *'Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not,'* he was talking of the Sanhedrin, the spiritual descendants of the 70 elders Moses established to make judgements and interpretations of the Law of God. As far as they sat in that seat, that is, they based their judgements on the written Law of God, so far they were to be observed and obeyed. But verse 3, their works, the works of the oral law, were their traditions – their strained interpretations and perversions of the law. Whenever these contradict the written law of God we are not to follow!

The Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia states, "The sages, beginning with the Pharisaic teachers taught that in addition to the Written Law there was an Oral Law ... According to this view, Moses himself had not written down these laws, the writing down of them was forbidden."

Who first taught this? – the Pharisees. What had Jesus to say about their teaching ? Mark 7:1,7-9,13, *'Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.'*

God commands us to believe **His written word** and nowhere does the bible mention an oral law. Moses, Samuel and David never refer to this law because they knew only the written word of God. The theory of the oral law was an invention of the Pharisees. The Saducees and later the Karaites and the reform Jews at the beginning of the 19th century denied the oral law came from God or Moses but to this day the Jews count the oral law as equal to the written word of God.

God's word shows that this heresy was being preached by the Jews even in Paul's day.

Acts 24:10-12, *'Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there*

are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:’

Paul then makes it clear that he keeps the written word of God – the Word which the Jews called heresy, Acts 24:13-14, *‘Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, **believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets**’,* because it often contradicts their ‘oral law.’

Which is the true law of God which must guide our lives? Deuteronomy 31:24, *‘And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of **writing the words of this law** in a book, until they were finished,’*

Exodus 24:3-4, *‘And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses **wrote all the words of the LORD**, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.’*

Today the bible contains that law in its entirety. If some would have you believe that it is not enough, and that we need the Jews oral traditions which contradict the written word of God, please remember the warnings of God and the words and example of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Credit is given to the research of George A. Hyde for an article in “Tomorrows News – Today,” to which reference was made.