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## Pharisees, Rabbinics and It's Negative Effects on Messianic Judaism

**Matthew 16:5-6 "When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."**

In this study we will be looking at the oral law and the problems that Yeshua had with it as well as the Pharisees ,how the oral law later became the Rabbinic Judaism of modern times and the negative impact that it is having on Messianic Judaism today. We begin our study with the Pharisees. In Yeshuas day there were four main sects of Judaism. They were the Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes and Zealots. Of the four groups the Pharisees believed closer to the New Testament ideas held by the followers of Yeshua than did any other group of the first century. Most scholars believe Jesus held to the tenets of the fundamentalist Pharisees, but not all the traditional fences and the oral laws that were added. The Hebrew word for Pharisee is Perushim which means separatists . The Pharisees were called separatists or puritans because they did not associate with the Am Ha' aretz or the common people who did not tithe and were considered ritually impure and knew nothing about the law **John 7:49** (please read). Members of this group were also known as the society of the pure and called themselves haber or comrade. This was taken from **Psalm 119:63, "I am a companion [haber] of all who fear thee; of those who keep thy precepts."** The Pharisees took up the principle of holiness as a priestly code and regarded themselves as descendants of Ezra.

In Yeshuas time as well as today there were two types of laws being addressed they were the written Torah called "**Torah Sh'bektav**" or "**Mitzvot d'Oraita**" and the Oral torah called "**Torah Sh'b'alpeh**" or "**Mitzvot d'Rabanan**". This oral torah was supposedly a second revelation given to Moses at Mt. Sinai and was passed down by word of mouth until 220 CE with the creation of the written mishna by Judah ha Nasi. The oral law was an interpretation of how to do or keep certain laws and it was fine as long as it did not violate the written code. However by the

time Yeshua comes on the scene the oral law as being taught is directly and blatantly violating the written code. This is what Yeshua rallied against looking at matthew 5 :17-48 we see Yeshua starting by saying he came to fulfill the law this term fulfill meant to interpret correctly and keep correctly and not to abolish or misinterpret or break. Put another way if the interpretation is the oral law then what Yeshua is saying is that I came to give the proper oral law that will guide you in keeping torah or, as verse 48 of the chapter puts it, in being perfect as the heavenly father is perfect. He then goes on to address issues with the oral torah by citing it with the statement "You have heard it said" then giving the proper oral interpretation by saying " but I tell you". One who was not keeping the oral law according to the standards of the pharisees and scribes was said to have been uneducated. This is what is being said of Yeshua in **John 7:15 that says "The Yehudim therefore were marveling saying " How has this man gained such knowledge having never been educated"?** Rabbinic Judaism takes the Messiah out of the picture as well as the rest of the kingdom of heaven and replaces it with the absolute control of the rabbis. This is proven in scripture also by the very life of the apostle Paul who was raised and groomed in one of the finest rabbinic schools of the middle east under rabbi Gamaliel but according to **Acts 9:5** when Paul has his first encounter with Yeshua he says "**Who are you Adonia**". What we see today in modern rabbinic Judaism is the fullness of the corruption of the oral law that was in existence in the time of Yeshua. This teaching took a turn for the worst with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE. At the siege of Jerusalem 66-70 CE. The rabbinic Judaism of Yeshuas day faced extinction. According to the Jewish Historian Josephus When the Romans destroyed the city and the temple in 70 AD, many Jews fled to the mountains along the Dead Sea. A number of them made a futile last stand on a mountaintop at Masada. Others moved further to Bozrah and Petra south of the Dead Sea. This last group was primarily believers in Yeshua. The remaining groups of the scribes, Pharisees and zealots remained in the city and were almost destroyed when a rabbi by the name of Yochanan ben Zakai came up with an idea. He first tried to reason with the zealots and argued in favor of peace; when he found the anger of the besieged denizens to be intolerable, he arranged to be snuck out of the city inside a coffin, so that he could negotiate with Vespasian (who, at this time, was still just a military commander). Yochanan (correctly) predicted that Vespasian would become Emperor, and that the temple would soon be destroyed, in return, Vespasian granted Yochanan three wishes: the salvation of Yavneh (Jamnia) and its sages, the descendants of Rabban Gamliel, who was of the Davidic dynasty,

and a physician to treat Rabbi Tzadok, who had fasted for 40 years to stave off the destruction of Jerusalem.

Upon the destruction of Jerusalem, Jochanan converted his school at Jamnia into the Jewish religious centre, insisting that certain privileges, given by Jewish law uniquely to Jerusalem, should be transferred to Jamnia. His school behaved as a re-establishment of the Sanhedrin, and he soon established the Council of Jamnia (70-90 AD), so that Judaism could decide how to deal with the loss of the sacrificial altars of the temple of Jerusalem, and other pertinent questions. Referring to a passage in the Book of Hosea, which states *I desired mercy, and not sacrifice*, he helped persuade the council to replace animal sacrifice with prayer, a practice that continues in today's worship services; eventually Rabbinic Judaism emerged from the council's conclusions. From this school Rabbi Gamiliel (teacher of Paul) had an additional prayer added to the 18 daily prayers this prayer was in reality a curse on the followers of Yeshua known as the **Birkat haMinim**. This is also what caused a major split between the Church and its hebraic roots. From the acadamey of Yavne came the advent of rabbinic Judaisim as we know it today. Rabbinical Judaism of today uses two main books to formulate its laws these are the Mishnah and the Talmud.

**Mishna:** The **Mishnah** or **Mishna** (Hebrew: משנה, "repetition", from the verb *shannah* שנה, or "to study and review", also "secondary" (derived from the adj. שני)) is the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions called the "Oral Torah" and the first major work of Rabbinic Judaism. It was redacted c. 220 CE by Judah HaNasi when, according to the Talmud, the persecution of the Jews and the passage of time raised the possibility that the details of the oral traditions dating from Pharisaic times (536 BCE – 70 CE) would be forgotten. It is thus named for being both the one written authority (codex) secondary (only) to the Tanakh as a basis for the passing of judgment, a source and a tool for creating laws, and the first of many books to complement the Bible in a certain aspect. The Mishnah is also called *Shas* (an acronym for *Shisha Sedarim* - the "six orders"), in reference to its six main divisions. Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah over the next three centuries were redacted as the Gemara, which, coupled with the Mishnah, comprise the Talmud.

The Mishnah reflects debates between 70-200 CE by the group of rabbinic sages known as the Tannaim. The Mishnah teaches the oral traditions by example, presenting actual cases being brought to judgment, usually along with the debate on the matter and the judgment that was given by a wise and notable rabbi based

on the rules, Mitzvot and *spirit* of the teaching ("Torah") that guided his sentencing. The Mishnah consists of six orders (*sedarim*, singular *seder* סדר), each containing 7-12 tractates (*masechtot*, singular *masechet* מסכת; lit. "web"), 63 in total, and further subdivided into chapters and paragraphs or verses. The orders and their subjects are: Zeraim ("Seeds"), dealing with prayer and blessings, tithes and agricultural laws (11 tractates), Moed ("Festival"), pertaining to the laws of the Sabbath and the Festivals (12 tractates), Nashim ("Women"), concerning marriage and divorce, some forms of oaths and the laws of the nazirite (7 tractates), Nezikin ("Damages"), dealing with civil and criminal law, the functioning of the courts and oaths (10 tractates), Kodashim ("Holy things"), regarding sacrificial rites, the Temple, and the dietary laws (11 tractates) and Tohorot ("Purities"), pertaining to the laws of purity and impurity, including the impurity of the dead, the laws of food purity and bodily purity (12 tractates). The word *Mishnah* can also indicate a single paragraph or verse of the work itself, i.e. the smallest unit of structure in the Mishnah.

**Talmud:** The **Talmud** (Hebrew: תַּלְמוּד *talmūd* "instruction, learning", from a root *lmd* "teach, study") is a central text of mainstream Judaism, in the form of a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history.

The Talmud has two components: the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), the first written compendium of Judaism's Oral Law; and the Gemara (c. 500 CE), a discussion of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Tanakh.

The terms *Talmud* and *Gemara* are often used interchangeably. The Gemara is the basis for all codes of rabbinic law and is much quoted in other rabbinic literature. The whole Talmud is also traditionally referred to as **Shas** (ש"ס), a Hebrew abbreviation of *shisha sedarim*, the "six orders" of the Mishnah. There are two versions of the Talmud. The Babylonian and Jerusalem. There are four areas that Yeshua as well as most of the new testament addresses as problematic in rabbinic Judaism and we will look at each of these areas and scriptures that are dealing with them. They are **Rabbinic Halacha , Minhagim, Takanot/Gezerot , and Ma'asim.**

**Rabbinical Halacha:** A law or laws derived directly from manipulated interpretation of scripture (midrash) or Rabbinic logic that oftentimes uses a

proprietary series of filters from one or more of the many interpretation rules built on the seven rules of Hillel. Hillel was a rabbi of Yeshua's day and the head of one of two prominent schools of thought in Yeshua's day, the other being the school of Shammai. Some of the sayings that Yeshua cites as valid come from his school as well as some of his teaching techniques. Yeshua's summation of the law hinging on Loving the Lord with all of one's heart, mind, and soul and loving your Neighbor as yourself is a direct quote of Hillel as well as the teaching technique Kal veChomer (greater and lesser) ex. Matthew 5:29-30 Halacha outside of Rabbinics is biblical or the straightforward teaching of the written Torah. Here are examples of both.

**No work to be done on the Sabbath Exodus 31:14** here the Torah states that it is forbidden to do any work on the Shabbat yet the rabbis legislated 39 types of forbidden work on the Shabbat.

**Males are to be circumcised Genesis 17:12** Here the biblical text is again straightforward. However, new rabbinic laws were legislated for Gentile converts that were already circumcised or Jews that were circumcised but returning from secularism to Judaism to go through Hatafat Dam Brit and Peri'ah, Metzitzah (recircumcision) This problem is what is being addressed in Acts, Romans, Galatians and elsewhere in the New Testament because many of the converts of Messiah are being told by Pharisaic converts that they must go through this recircumcision to be saved and accepted.

**Not to follow the majority in doing evil and the perversion of justice Exodus 23:2** Here we read "You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to incline after the majority in order to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute" The rabbis strike through all that they feel is irrelevant in this verse which is everything except the words **incline after the majority** From this we get the following in the Mishnah "If there are 1000 prophets, all of them of the stature of Elijah and Elisha giving a certain interpretation and 1001 Rabbis giving the opposite you shall "incline after the majority" and the law is according to the 1001 rabbis, not according to the 1000 venerable prophets.

One may ask how can someone add to or take away from Torah and not consider it a violation however rabbinics has even developed a twisted doctrine in response to this question. From the Babylonian Talmud we read "and even on the

view that precepts cannot nullify each other that applies only to a biblical with a biblical precept, or a rabbinical with a rabbinical precept but in the case of a scriptural and a rabbinical, the rabbinical one comes and nullifies the scriptural one ( Pesachim 115a). Another example is found in Pesikta Rabbati that states " A person must not say , " I will not keep the commandment of the elders because they are not from torah." The almighty says to such a person " No, my son ! Rather all that they decree upon you, observe! As it is written, "According to the instruction they teach you"(Deut 17:11) Even I (Yahweh) must obey their decree, as it is written" you will decree and he will fulfill it" (Job 22:28) Finally Rabbi Baruch Paz wrote in an article titled "adding, uprooting and rabbinic authority" "Rabbinical laws are established and based upon Scriptural passages for support. Temporary suspension of any biblical commandment is also considered Torah for **"It is time to act on G-ds behalf, suspend your Torah"** such is not a violation of the commandment, "You shall not add to it or diminish from it"(Deut 4:2) this is a misquote of psalm 119:126 that says **"It is time for Yahweh to act , for they have suspended your torah."**

One of the most famous examples known in the time of Yeshua was of King Solomon and his violation of **Deuteronomy 17:17** in this text we read **"When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,"<sup>15</sup> be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite.<sup>16</sup> The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again."<sup>17</sup> He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.<sup>18</sup> When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.<sup>19</sup> It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees<sup>20</sup> and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."** However it was known and taught that when king Solomon followed verse 18 and wrote a copy of the law for himself he changed the yud in the verse to read that a king could have many wives, horses and amass gold and silver. When Yeshua says **"not one jot or tittle shall pass**

**away till all is accomplished" in Matthew 5:18** he is referencing this commonly known teaching.

In regards to the land of Israel we are told in the Mishnah in Ma'aser Sheni 5:14 **"Strongly declare that all converts (gerim) are not and will not ever be allowed to have a share in the land of Israel"** ...Hence (Based on the declaration of Dueteronomy26:1-13) it was declared that Israelites and Mamzerim (the rabbis say this means illegitimate children) may make the confession ("I have not transgressed or forgotten any of your commandments"), but not proselytes or freed bondsmen , since they have no share in the land.

**Minhagim:** Customs are traditions enacted as law. This is built on the axiom "minhag Yisrael torah hi" ( A custom in Israel is law). An example of this is Purim and Chanukah as these festivals are not prescribed in the torah but rather became a custom of the people to commemorate certain events. Note that not all customs are bad in that Yeshua did uphold the festival of dedication John 10:22-23. However in many cases within Judaism Minhagim are legislated as absolute law in fact it is said that if a custom is kept three times in Israel it becomes law. For example male Jews in rabbinic Judaism are required to wear a yarmulke as halacha even though this is custom. In fact he may not walk four cubits without his head covered or make a blessing even while seated without his head covered . Another common example of this is the blessing of the kindling of the Shabbat candles that says "Blessed art thou o Lord our G-d king of the universe who has commanded us to kindle the Shabbat lights". The question to be asked is where are we commanded to kindle the Sabbath Candles? We are told in torah to set the Shabbat apart and keep it holy. We are also told in the New Testament to be a light to the world as is commonly said in the blessing here at our congregation.

**Takanot and Gezerot:** Enactments and decrees of the Rabbis fabricated out of thin air on the basis that the oral law allows them to do so. These are also known as the Commandments of the Rabbis and it is said that they were legislated to cure violations of the written torah as the people became more lax in their observances. This was the primary opposition to Yeshuas ministry and what he rallied so hard for believers to come out of. This also constitutes the reason for the epistles of Paul and the problems that were being addressed by them. In Matthew 15:1-9 we read **"<sup>1</sup>Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, <sup>2</sup>"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They**

don't wash their hands before they eat!" <sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup>For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' <sup>6</sup>he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. <sup>7</sup>You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

<sup>8</sup>" "These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>9</sup>They worship me in vain;

their teachings are but rules taught by men" the word for tradition here should be rendered takanot according to the Hebrew matthew.

**Ma'asim:** The deeds or actions of Rabbis or sages, justifying how a tradition should be observed. The ma'asim (works) were derived from stories, incidents and actions of Rabbis for the creation of new laws. This can be likened to Islam's law of hadith. In that if Mohammed did something it is required for Muslims to do that thing even if it is not commanded in the Quran. An example of this is found in Shabbat 21a of the Talmud. " A maseh in which rabban Gamaliel and the elders were traveling on a ship, when a Gentile made a ramp on which to descend and rabban Gamaliel and the elders descended by it " The law here is it is ok to walk down a ramp on the Shabbat constructed by a gentile because here the rabbis did it. A Key word to look for in the new testament is the term" **works of the law**" **Galatians 3:10** reads " For as many as are of the **works of the law** are under a curse for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. **Romans 6:14** " For sin shall not be master over you , for you are not under **works of the law** but under grace".

**Lo BaShamayim Hi " It is not in heaven"** Foundational to all orthodox teaching is a law called Lo BaShamayim taking Deuteronomy 30:11-15 the rabbis disregard the entire verse with the exception of the words "It is not in heaven" in verse 12 and from that we get a law that says "If a prophet testifies , that the Holy One, blessed be he, told him, that the law of a certain commandment is such and such, or that the reasoning of a certain sage is correct, that prophet must be executed... as it is written, "it is not in heaven"( duet. 30:12). Thus G-d did not permit us to learn from the prophets only from the rabbis who are men of logic and reason. With this in mind we must realize that scriptures like Isaiah 53 and many others that reveal Messiah Yeshua are Omitted or are forbidden to be read by students because of this law.

**Fences:** the Hebrew word here is **s'yag** or fence and a fence was something that was placed in order to keep from violating a law. The rabbis teach and justify the use of fences by using Genesis 2:16-17 in comparison with Genesis 3:2-3 and reference this as the first fence. Here we read **"And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."** Then in verse 3:2-3 we read **"The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."** Again fences and calvahomer are good to some degree but must never be legislated as a new law. One of the most familiar of these is found in the verse **"Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk" Dueteronomy 14:21, Exodus 23:19 & 34:26** the law referred to a specific foreign religious practice, in which young goats were cooked in their own mothers' milk, aiming to obtain supernatural assistance to increase the yield of their flocks. More recently, a theogonous text, named *the birth of the gracious gods*, found during the rediscovery of Ugarit, clarified that a levantine ritual to ensure agricultural fertility involved the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk, followed by the mixture being sprinkled upon the fields. The rabbis however have created a fence that says it is forbidden to have meat and milk in the same refrigerator or that one must wait six hours or more after eating meat to ingest a dairy product.

It should be noted that for all that was previously defined there are biblical counterparts. For example the Holy spirit is our oral law as scripture states it was given to lead and guide us in all torah. In effect this is our version of the mishna and Talmud . There is biblical halacha Acts 15:19-21, biblical minhagim Ester 9:27, Biblical Takanot and Gezerot this being the torah itself comprised of the laws, and decrees that Hashem gave at Mt. Sinai and Biblical Ma'asim. In the book of James we are told faith without works (ma'asim) is dead, Yeshua used parables or stories to teach biblical works and Paul said "Imitate me as I imitate Yeshua"1Corinthians 11:1. Many in the messianic community today have come to an understanding of their Hebrew roots to some degree and oftentimes this leads us into the realm of embracing the mishna, Talmud and other rabbinical teachings because we want to get back to what we consider is a part of our heritage. However we must realize several things before doing this . First we must realize that a tradition or anything read should not be in violation of the Torah once this criteria is met we should also understand that a tradition that you may be led to do should not be presented or legislated as law to everyone else. Finally does the tradition lift up Yeshua or teach of him in some way and if you are doing it are you doing it for

your love of Yahweh or just to seem Jewish? Through my studies, I have learned that not all that you read in many of the ancient writings are bad or corrupt but we should filter it through the spirit and torah at all times and we should be very vigilant and have a good understanding of the torah and scriptures before even looking at them. I believe that the messianic communities and even large ones like the Mia and many others face this same threat that tried to seep into the early church and we as believers must as Yeshua said "be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees".