

# Are the Rabbis Right?

by Michael L. Brown

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*Michael L. Brown challenges the authority of rabbinic Judaism by questioning the validity of oral traditions and emphasizing a personal relationship with God through the written Torah.*

**Duration:** 55:53

**Scripture:** Exodus 24:1-8, Exodus 34:27, Deuteronomy 5:2, Deuteronomy 31:24, Deuteronomy 32:45, Joshua 1:8, Matthew 24:1-2

**Topics:** "Divine Sovereignty", "Covenant Theology"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of God's decrees and how they can be overruled by the majority. He shares a story from the Talmud about a woman who mistakenly accuses someone of killing her brother, and how her words spread throughout Israel. The speaker also talks about the importance of face-to-face encounters with God, referencing Moses speaking to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. He explains that God made a covenant with the living generation, not with their forefathers. The speaker concludes by mentioning the lack of miracles in rabbinic Judaism and how they were present among the Jews who followed Jesus.

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## Transcript

I want to take a little time with you and ask a very important question, something that you may have thought of, maybe you've never thought of, but the question is simply this. Are the rabbis right? Are the rabbis right? Now, you may ask me, well, who were the rabbis? Do I mean Reform rabbis or Orthodox rabbis? Do I mean Hasidic rabbis of a hundred years ago? Who am I talking about? Well, there are certain foundations of Judaism worldwide that even though you have different expressions, even though you have different communities with different customs, there are certain foundations which basically all Jews hold to. And even believe that there's a God, I'm talking basically about those that accept that there is such a thing as Judaism and that the heads of Judaism are the rabbis.

And basically as the rabbis have taught, so are Jewish people have gone through the centuries. And when I speak of the rabbis, I get upset when I hear anti-semitic slurs. I get upset when I see in our very own country all types of ugliness and an attack on our Jewish people.

And by no means do I want to attack the rabbinic community or criticize. What I want to do is have open dialogue. I've sat down in public and private with many rabbis.

I'm friendly with a good number of rabbis and have had them in my house and been in their home. We've debated in public and in private. So basically what I'm saying to you is I just want to have an intelligent discussion with you and raise some important issues to get you to think about this question.

Are the rabbis right? Now when I quote to you from the Bible, from the Hebrew Scriptures, I'm going to be quoting from the New Jewish Version. This is an accepted authoritative Jewish translation made by the greatest Hebrew scholars of our day, all Jewish men, in consultation with conservative Orthodox and Reform rabbis. So I'll be quoting to you from the New Jewish Version.

And then other sources that I quote are traditional Jewish sources. I'm not going to be bringing in some outside interpretation. I'm going to be challenging you to see what our sources actually say and ask you the question, are they right or are they wrong? Now it's often said by the rabbinic community, the Christians, that you cannot have a Christianity without a Christ.

And it's said in somewhat a negative way. In other words, you can have a Judaism without a Messiah, but you cannot have a Christianity without a Christ. You cannot have a religion that is based on a Savior figure without a Savior.

You cannot have a messianic faith without a Messiah. That's what they're saying. Well, I don't take that as an insult.

I thank God for a Messiah. I thank God that he sent us a Messiah, sent us a Savior. But I want to give you a parallel statement.

You cannot have Christianity without a Christ. Here's the parallel statement. You cannot have rabbinic Judaism without a rabbi.

You cannot have traditional Judaism without a tradition. And according to the rabbinic teaching, and I'll just quote it to you from an introduction to the Talmud by a famous Jewish scholar named Tzvi Hersh Hayes, he said the Torah, divine instruction, is divided into two parts. This is the traditional view I'm giving you now.

The written and the unwritten law. The former, the written law, consists of the Pentateuch, which was divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai. So everyone accepts, this is no longer quoting, I'm just explaining this now, everyone accepts that the five books of Moses are authoritative of the written law that God gave and that formed the basis for all later Jewish thought, all later Jewish law, all later Jewish teaching.

This is the foundation. We agree with this. But now, Hayes goes on to say, the latter, the unwritten law, comprises expositions and interpretations which were communicated to Moses orally as a supplement to the former.

The traditional Jewish view is that God gave Moses the written law, which is concise, which is often obscure, which doesn't tell you everything you need to know. That was put down in writing. Then God told Moses all the other things, really hundreds and thousands of laws and interpretations and insights into the written scriptures.

And then he gave these things to Moses and told him to pass them on, transmit them to Joshua, then Joshua to the elders that lived in his day, then the elders to the prophets, and so on and so forth, right up to Jesus' day. Then after that, right up to the rabbinic community to this day. Some of those traditions got

written down.

That's called the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the later Jewish law codes. Other traditions were just passed on orally. But the fact is, according to Hayes, allegiance to the authority of the said rabbinic tradition is binding upon all sons of Israel, since these explanations and interpretations have come down to us by word of mouth from generation to generation, right from the time of Moses.

Those sentences I just quoted to you are the traditional standard view that the oral law was handed down to Moses, and that he handed it down, directly transmitted it, and it's been transmitted verbatim throughout all the ages. And it says here, they have been transmitted to us precise, correct, and adulterated. And he who does not give his adherence to the unwritten law and the rabbinic tradition has no right to share the heritage of Israel.

And according to the words of Chaim Shemel, a Jewish lawyer who wrote a book called *The Oral Law*, speaking of our Jewish people, he says this, and this is very surprising, they do not follow the literal word of the Bible, nor have they ever done so. They have been fashioned and ruled by the verbal interpretation of the written word, more particularly by the Torah, which embraces both the written and the oral law. Now here's the problem I have with all of this, and it's very simple.

I can show you by the five books of Moses and throughout the rest of the Scripture, that there was no such thing as an authoritative oral tradition. This is something we're going to come back to a little later, but I can demonstrate to you that God made the covenant with Israel, God made a covenant with our people for all time based on a written word and on a written word alone, and that every single reference in the entire Hebrew Bible to violating the Torah of Moses is only a reference to violating the written Torah, and there's never any reference to violating any oral law, oral tradition, or anything. Not at all.

Why? Because it didn't exist. It's something that came up much, much, much, much later, and then in the memory of the people was just put back to an age way, way, way in the past. But yet in spite of that, in spite of the fact that there's no evidence, and I said I'll come back to that, I'm not just making a statement, but in spite of the fact that there's no evidence, let me tell you what the rabbinic community has said about the importance of the oral law.

Quoting from the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Gittin 60b, it says this, the Holy One, blessed be He, did not make His covenant with Israel except by virtue of the oral law. And then in the Jerusalem Talmud, in tractate Phalos section 3, Halakha 3, it says this, and these are words that a rabbi was reflecting on. He was trying to figure out which was more important, the oral law or the written law, which is more valuable.

So he says, words were given orally and words were given in writing, and I didn't know which of the two sets was the more valuable. However, from the verse Exodus 34:27, according to these words, have I made a covenant with you, we learn that those that were transmitted orally are the more valuable. Now let me read to you from the New Jewish Version, Exodus 34:27, and the Lord said to Moses, write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel.

Look at that, write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel. How in the world do they get the interpretation based on Exodus 34:27 that the oral law is more valuable than the written law, because the oral law explains the written law and the oral law interprets the written law? How do they come up with it from this verse? Very simple, it's by a total misinterpretation of the Hebrew words translated in accordance. The Hebrew words are *Al Pi*, and

that sounds exactly like the Torah Sheba Al Peh, the Torah that is transmitted orally.

The Hebrew words Al Pi, if taken separately, would mean on the mouth, and therefore they say, you see, this is the oral Torah, this is the Torah that's transmitted orally by mouth, even though every Hebrew scholar in the world would agree it doesn't mean on the mouth here, it means in accordance. That's the way it's translated in the New Jewish Version and every Jewish translation I've ever seen. So God didn't say I'm making a covenant with you based on the oral law, He said I'm making a covenant with you based on what you're gonna go and write down.

You see, many times the rabbinic community accuses us as Messianic Jews, Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah. We base our faith on the Hebrew Bible, but we're often accused of taking scripture out of context and of twisting the meaning of scripture. And I'd say with all respect to the learning, the great learning that many rabbis do have, that the foundations of rabbinic Judaism are based on misinterpretation and twisting of scripture.

What I want to challenge you with is this, that rabbinic tradition has usurped divine authority. Rabbinic tradition has replaced the prophetic voice. Rabbinic tradition has taken the place of a face-to-face encounter with God.

Let me explain what I mean to you about a face-to-face encounter with God, and then I'm gonna give you some examples that may surprise you, may amaze you, but if you'll study them out, you'll see they're all true. In Deuteronomy chapter 5, this is now Moses speaking to the children of Israel as they're about to enter the promised land after almost 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. He says Deuteronomy chapter 5 verse 2, again reading from the New Jewish Version, the Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb, that's at Sinai.

It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, the living. Every one of us who is here today, face-to-face, the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire. You say, well, what does that mean? Didn't God make a covenant with our forefathers? And here Moses said He didn't.

He didn't make it with our fathers, but only with us. Here's what it means. God made the covenant, Moses said, with us, the living.

Every one of us who is here today, face-to-face, the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire. Yes, He did make a covenant with your fathers, but they're dead now. They're not here anymore.

They died in the wilderness. You that heard God speak from the mountain face-to-face and are still alive, you were the ones that He made the covenant with. Why? Because God doesn't make covenants with dead people, but only with living people.

I can't say, well, God made a covenant with my forefathers, therefore I'm in it. No, I have to myself enter into it. I myself have to have that living experience, that living entering into the relationship of the covenant with God.

Now, if you look over in Deuteronomy chapter 11, it says in verse 2, take thought this day that it was not your children who neither experienced nor witnessed the lesson of the Lord your God. And now He refers to all the great things that God did. His majesty, His mighty hand, His outstretched arms, and so on.

It was not your children, but that it was you who saw with your own eyes all the marvelous deeds that the Lord performed. What's so important with that? You say, didn't God make a covenant with our forefathers? Yes, but they're dead, so we ourselves must enter into that covenant in a living way. But didn't God also make that covenant with our children? Yes, but they themselves must enter into it in a living way.

I remember some time I spent with some Lubavitch Hasidim in Brooklyn, New York. They're very kind and gracious to me. We had some wonderful hours together in dialogue.

But when I asked a man point-blank, why do you do what you do? Why do you live the way you live? The basic gist of his answer was, well, it's pretty good. It's pretty good. My father did it.

I learned it from him. Now I'm going to teach my children, and they're going to learn it from me. And they're going to grow up and do the same things I do.

The question was, have you entered into that relationship with God that Moses and the first generation of Israelites had? Or have you simply mimicked what you learned, and your fathers mimicked what they learned? I don't mean mimic in a negative way. I'm simply saying, follow traditions that have been learned by Roe. Is that what you're doing as a traditional Jew? That's the question that I had to ask him.

Well, the fact of the matter is this. Human authority has replaced divine authority. Human opinion, human learning, human brain power, human study has replaced a personal relationship with God.

I don't know if you've ever heard it said that Jews pray directly to God, but Christians go through a mediator. They have to go through Jesus. Well, that's a totally incorrect concept.

Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, came to earth and made God, His Father, known to us. He came forth from God, and He made God, His Father, known to us. And through Him, we have direct access to God.

Through Him, we can know God personally. Through Him, we can know God face-to-face, so to say. Whereas, it's the rabbinic community that has put an endless chain of tradition between us and Moses.

I know what to do, and I know how to relate to God, because my father told me, and he learned it from his father, who learned it from his father, who learned it from his father, all the way back to Moses. That's what the rabbinic tradition says. So, I say the rabbinic tradition emphasizes the middleman, whereas the Messianic Jewish faith takes the middleman out of the way.

Yeshua made God known to man. He opened the way that we could know God directly. But I don't want to preach at you.

I just want to give you some things to think about. So, let me give you some amazing examples where rabbinic tradition has overthrown the authority of the written word. Let me give you one of the foundations of rabbinic tradition, and it comes at the end of an incredible story in the Talmud.

There are many things in the Talmud I disagree with. There are many things in the Talmud that are wonderful and beautiful, and there's just some brilliant discussion in there, too. It's an incredible document, if you can call it a document.

Volume upon volume, somewhere around two and a half million words of discussion, and that's without all the millions of words of commentary that have been written on it. Well, there's a story about Rabbi Eliezer

the Great, and this is found in the Babylonian Talmud in tractate Baba Metzia, beginning on 59b, if you want to find an English translation of the Talmud and look it up yourself. But Rabbi Eliezer was basically one of the greatest, if not the greatest, sages of his day.

His name is mentioned more in the Talmud than any other scholar who lived at that time. And he got into a debate with the other rabbis, and there was an oven called the Akhnai Oven, and based on his understanding of the way it was constructed, he said that it was ritually clean, and the other rabbis said that it was unclean, it was not fit for use. So, he debated them, and he gave them every possible answer that you could come up with, and they still didn't accept it.

So, he then asked for supernatural proof, according to the story, and he said, if the Halakha, if the legal ruling is according to me, then let this carob tree be uprooted, and let it be moved a certain distance, and it happened. And they said, we don't accept the testimony of the carob tree. Well, he then said, if the Halakha is according to me, then let these waters just stop in their course, as they're flowing by.

And they stopped, and just stood up like a wall, and they said, we don't accept testimony of that. And then, according to the story, he said, if the Halakha is according to me, then let the walls of this house of study, this Beit Midrash, begin to collapse. And they began to collapse, and Rabbi Joshua jumped up and rebuked them, and he said, what is this to you? This is just a dispute between scholars.

And out of respect to Rabbi Joshua, the walls stopped falling, but out of respect to Rabbi Eliezer, they remained half-bent. Well, finally, a voice speaks from heaven. The so-called bat kol, the heavenly voice, speaks forth and says, what are you arguing about? What are you bothering with? The Halakha is always according to Rabbi Eliezer.

In other words, God Himself vindicates the ruling of Rabbi Eliezer. At which point, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Yehoshua, jumps up and says, lo bashamayim hi, it is not in heaven. Meaning, the Torah is no longer in heaven.

It's been given to man. We do not depend on miracles. We are not moved by miraculous testimony.

The only thing that matters to us is what we can figure out, what we can deduce, what we can understand, because it's no longer in heaven. It's been given to man, and therefore, human understanding, human interpretation rules. And a verse is quoted to prove this.

Basically, that if all the rabbis say it's unclean, and one rabbi says it's clean, even if God backs that one rabbi up, you follow the majority. And the verse that's quoted is this. Exodus chapter 23, verse 2, says this, according to the Talmudic quotation, follow the majority, or turn after the majority.

Now, do you know what the English actually says, or the Hebrew, the whole of that Hebrew verse, actually says? You shall neither side with the multitude to do wrong, you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute, so as to pervert it in favor of the multitude. In other words, the Hebrew says, don't follow the majority. I'm making this very simple for you, without getting into a lengthy Hebrew discussion.

The Hebrew says, don't follow the majority, and to try and give you the feel for it in English, what the rabbis did is they knocked out that word, don't, and they just took the end and said, follow the majority. In other words, majority rules. It doesn't matter what God says, doesn't matter what the scripture says, doesn't matter what the interpretation that's correct says, what matters is the majority rules.

If you can't prove your point, and miracles don't count, you can't prove your point, then it's real plain and real simple, the majority rules. I heard a leading rabbi say, I know that Jesus is not the Messiah, because the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish community of his day, said that he was not the Messiah. You ask the question, what if they said he was the Messiah? Then he would have been the Messiah.

There's another man, a well-known anti-missionary rabbi, a man that violently opposes what we do and believe, and when I say violently, I mean with all of his emotion, with all of his desire, and he says that we'll know who the Messiah is, because sometime in the future in Israel there'll be another Sanhedrin, and when they get together and vote and tell us who the Messiah is, then that's who it'll be, that's how we'll find out. Now I don't claim that every Jew on the planet or every rabbi on the planet would agree with such a statement as that. All I'm saying is very simple.

One of the foundations of rabbinic Judaism is majority rules. The only text in the Bible that is used to prove that is Exodus 23:2. Admittedly, if you'll read rabbinic scholars talking about it, it is admittedly taken out of context and changed in meaning. Nowhere does the Bible hint at such a thing as that whatsoever, that the majority of the leaders in the community have the right view.

In fact, many times, basically every time that you read the history of our Jewish people in the Bible, the history of Israel, you'll see very plainly that the majority, even the majority of leaders, was almost always wrong. You say, well, how did you know who was right or wrong? Well, first thing, we had the written word. Whoever violated the written word or changed the meaning of the written word could not be following God.

They could not be right. Not only that, God would confirm his word with miracles, with signs, with wonders. This is not just something that the faith healers talk about and people talk about in weird religions.

No, it was a basic thing. The Israelites knew that their God was the true God because he brought them out of Egypt. There was the Exodus.

There was the triumph over all the gods of Egypt. There was the parting of the sea and the miraculous deliverance. All these great historical events, that's how the children of Israel knew that their God was God.

Just like during the Six-Day War when everyone stood back and was amazed that Israel defeated its enemies so quickly, that was a sign that God was fighting for Israel. Not that God hates the Arabs, but that God was miraculously preserving his Jewish people even up to this very day. Now, another way that God would speak was through the prophets.

These men that he would speak through that would supernaturally speak of things to come and supernaturally reveal the sins of their people and speak for God. But Rabbinic Judaism didn't have any more miracles, wonders, and signs. Where were they? They were with the Jews who were following Jesus.

That's right. The Talmud mentions that you could not go to a Jew who believed in Jesus and have him pray for you and even if he healed you, it was a terrible sin for you to go to him. But it's kind of a backhanded compliment to say that these Messianic Jews, these Jews who said Yeshua is the Messiah, they were going around healing people.

There's even an account of someone who was healed and is criticized for it. And another man, they said it's good that he died before he was healed. It's better than being healed.

Why? Well, the Messianic Jews had the miracles. The Rabbis, the Rabbinic community didn't have it anymore. You say, what about the prophetic voice? What about the prophetic word? Well, I want to share something with you that may surprise you.

One of the greatest Rabbis that ever lived, one of the great geniuses that Judaism has produced, was Moses Maimonides, who lived from 1135 to 1204. And he's called the Rambam by religious Jews. He produced some major philosophical works.

He produced the first systematic law code of Judaism and it's still studied as authoritative to this very day. He also produced a commentary on the entire Mishnah, which was also the first of its kind. And in his introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, he says some very startling things.

He says there, that if you have someone who is a proven prophet, this person is known to be a proven prophet, what they say comes to pass. Not only that, their words are tested by miracles. If this proven prophet tells you to violate what the Bible says, well then he's a false prophet.

In other words, he may have been good, but now he's bad. Strangle him. That's what should be done.

That's the penalty, strangulation. Well, that makes sense. Doesn't matter how many miracles, doesn't matter how true and right on the person's been in the past.

If they get off, if they violate God's word, well then they're no longer his true prophet. But he goes on to say this, if a true proven prophet, so this is someone accredited by miracles and having a track record of what they said coming to pass, if a true proven prophet tells you follow the literal word of the Torah and the literal word runs contrary to the rabbinic interpretation, he's a false prophet. He deserves strangulation.

Did you hear what I said? Study this out on your own. This is in the introduction to the commentary on the Mishnah by Moses Maimonides, written originally in Arabic and translated many times since then into Hebrew and available in English translation. He plainly said that if a proven prophet, this is a man accredited by miracles and with a proven track record tells you follow the literal word of the scripture and that literal word violates the rabbinic interpretation and the rabbinic tradition, he's a false prophet.

Don't listen to him. Listen to the tradition. That is saying that human rabbinic authority is more weighty, more powerful, more decisive than the testimony of a proven prophet following the literal word of the scripture.

You know it says in the Talmud, I know there are many different statements on almost every subject in the Talmud, but it is foundational that the scripture does not depart from its literal plain sense. No, you have to understand allegory, you have to understand parable and poetry, we know that. But the plain sense of the Bible is what's binding, otherwise the sky's the limit.

I can make anything mean anything. And yet Maimonides says, if he tells you, if this prophet tells you follow the plain sense of the Bible and it violates the rabbinic interpretation, he's a false prophet. Don't listen to him.

It says in one of the very early rabbinic interpretations of the five books of Moses called the Sifre, it says there about the book of Deuteronomy chapter 17, and we're going to turn there now, Deuteronomy chapter 17, the Sifre says that you must follow what the judge, which later came to be interpreted to mean the rabbi, you must follow what he says and even if what he says to you sounds like he's saying that the

right is left or that the left is right, you follow what he says anyway. Follow what he says anyway. I've just given you three statements from major Jewish sources, one of the Talmud that we're going to come back to because it's such an amazing story we've got to see the end of it.

One of these interpretations tells us that even though God spoke from heaven he was overruled by the majority. In fact it is taught in the Talmud that God can make a decree but a righteous man can overthrow it. Did you hear that? God can make a decree but a righteous man can overthrow it.

That's actually taught in the Talmud. So we saw that one testimony that the heavenly voice of God can be overthrown by the majority rule. And then I gave you the statement from Moses Maimonides, one of the most definitive scholars in Judaism that's ever lived, that a proven prophet attested by miracle signs and wonders whose words always came true plus the plain sense of the Bible have less weight than rabbinic interpretation and rabbinic authority.

And then the third witness I gave you says that even when the sages tell you go this way and it seems in your judgment to be the exact opposite of what's right, do what they say anyhow because they really know because they really understand. Now bear in mind these sages were not immoral men. These sages were not drunkards.

These sages were not telling people to go out and sin and do horrible things. No, no, absolutely not. Don't ever get that idea.

Don't get the idea that these sages were ignorant fools. No, these were great scholars. These were men who studied for many years but their primary authority was human and not divine and therefore it led to the system where tradition took on a higher plane, a higher meaning, a more important place than truth itself.

Now let me go over to Deuteronomy 17 and then we're going to go back to that story in the Talmud after that. It says in Deuteronomy 17.8, if a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault, matters of dispute in your courts, you shall promptly repair to the place that the Lord your God will have chosen. This is referring ultimately to Jerusalem and the tabernacle that would be there and then the temple that would be built there.

You must appear before the Levitical priests or the magistrate, the judge in charge at the time, and present your problem. When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, you shall carry out the verdict that is announced to you from that place that the Lord chose, observing scrupulously all their instructions to you. You shall act in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you.

You must not deviate from the verdict that they announced to you, either to the right or to the left. Should a man act presumptuously and disregard the priest charged with serving there the Lord your God or the magistrate, that man shall die. Thus you shall sweep out evil from evil, excuse me, you shall sweep out evil from Israel.

All the people will hear and be afraid and will not act presumptuously again. Now in looking at Deuteronomy 17, it seems pretty basic here. The case is too baffling for you to decide.

We had a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault. Now there's a dispute in your court. You shall promptly repair it to the place that the Lord your God will have chosen.

So you had lower courts and this was kind of a supreme court. And you had a dispute, legal dispute, homicide, civil law, or assault. Then basically you had to take it to the supreme court of the day.

I'm making this very basic. You take it to the supreme court, to the Levitical priest or the magistrate. These people had authority in Israel and they would tell you what to do.

They would give you the verdict. And whoever would not follow what they said was to be punished, was to be put to death. You had to do exactly what they said.

Now basically that's just saying follow the ruling of the supreme court. And if I lived in Israel today and the rabbinic court made a decision that said, for example, that a certain type of offense was punishable by thus and such, that someone was guilty of stealing, or evading taxes, that it was punishable in thus and such a way, well I have to abide by that law. I have to abide by that rule as a citizen.

What happened is, as there were no more Levitical priests and magistrates who had authority in Israel, who were governing in Israel, that this authority got transferred to the rabbis. Now this has nothing to do with the rabbis here. This had to do with legal authorities that had national rule throughout the country, not on sages and scholars.

It's not referring to sages and scholars and their interpretation of texts. That's who the rabbis are. It's talking about the people who had legal court authority, basically the supreme court of ancient Israel.

Well what happened was that the rabbis now took the authority here and said that every single area of a man's life, be it rising in the morning, washing one's hands in the morning, what words to say when laying in bed and getting out of bed, how to pray, when to pray, what words to say when praying, when to stop praying, when to continue praying, how to have sexual relations with one's wife, what is right and what is wrong, how to raise one's children, all details, how to celebrate the holidays, to every minor detail, what type of foods to eat and what not to eat, every single area of the religious Jew's life is governed by specific rabbinic law. You say, by what authority? Who ever thought of such a thing? The Torah doesn't deal with all those things. The Torah deals basically with social areas and how to live and how to approach God, the sacrificial system and the priestly system and then basically morality, holiness, etc.

and the feast and holidays, but where does it legislate every little detail like this and where does it get into a man's private life and tell him, yes, there are certain things that are right or wrong, but where does it tell him in his most intimate life how to pray and what words to say? It doesn't. It just gives general guidelines and one or two prayers and that's it. And the rest really was to be worked out by the individuals, by the people, by the community, by the people of faith as things grew over a period of years.

But what happened was the rabbinic authorities usurped authority that didn't belong to them and I'm going to explain that statement in a minute because I know it's a strong statement. I don't mean it again in an arrogant and sinful way that these men were just terrible and they usurped this authority because they were evil. No, I mean they were doing their best to fill in because they had a void.

There was no more prophetic voice. God wasn't speaking from heaven. And they themselves had to figure out how to interpret every little detail of life and because they were convinced that the Torah governed every single area of a man's life from the moment he woke up to the moment he fell asleep, from the moment he was born to the moment he died, that because of those things they had to find all these interpretations and come up with them and one way or another make all these decisions.

Now the first problem is that this had nothing to do with these areas. It was homicide, civil law or assault. Basic court disputes, that's all.

Nothing to do with how a man prayed. Nothing to do with whether he washed his hands a certain way or not in the morning. No, not at all.

Number two is I said it had to do with the court, the Levitical priest, the magistrate who would rule and officiate in that day. Not the religious scholars so much and not the rabbis of later communities. It had nothing to do with that.

And thirdly, when God wanted to communicate his will to Israel above and beyond what was written in the Torah, he raised a prophet. And it says in the very next chapter of Deuteronomy, namely Deuteronomy chapter 18, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people like myself, him you shall heed. This is just what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear the voice of the Lord my God any longer or see this wondrous fire any more lest I die.

Whereupon the Lord said to me, They have done well in speaking thus. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their own people like yourself. I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him.

If anybody fails to heed the words he speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But any prophet who presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I did not command him to utter or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And should you ask yourself, how can we know that the oracle was not spoken by the Lord? If the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord, or the prophet has uttered it presumptuously, do not stand in dread of him.

Well, what it's saying is, when God wanted to communicate his will to Israel, we're not talking about questions, legal questions that the legal authorities have to decide, but when they needed to hear from God, when they needed to hear from heaven, when they needed direction, when they needed guidance, when they needed to know what to do, God would speak to them through his prophets. In fact, when Yeshua, when Jesus walked on the earth, he was recognized by many leading Jews as the great prophet that they were waiting for because there had not been much prophetic activity for a couple hundred years since the last books of the Hebrew Bible were written down and the people began to hunger for a great prophet to arise in their day. And when Jesus came and began to speak forth with his father's authority, with God's authority, the ears of the people turned because no one was speaking like that anymore.

They would simply say, you know, the way they were talking was, I learned it from so-and-so, I heard it from so-and-so, I have it by interpretation, I've learned it from my teacher, and he's learned it from his teacher. Whereas Jesus came and spoke with divine authority. In fact, he warned our Jewish people, and most Jewish and Christian scholars accept this without any question whatsoever, that Jesus warned our Jewish people that if they did not repent, and if they did not recognize him as the Messiah, that the temple, the glorious, beautiful temple built in Jerusalem, beautified by King Herod, that that temple would be destroyed.

And 40 years after Jesus died, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. One generation after he warned it, God gave our people 40 years, the number of trial, the number of testing in the Bible. He gave our people

40 years, we didn't heed, and the temple, in fact, was destroyed just as Jesus the prophet spoke.

And he also spoke that we would not see him return, we would not see him come again as the Messiah, until we as a people recognized him and said the important words from our heart, Baruch haba b'shem Adonai, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. You see, when we spurn the prophetic authority, it's not the rabbinic authority which is crucial, it's the prophetic authority. When we spurn the prophetic authority, that's when we fall under God's judgment, that's when we suffer persecution, that's when we are uprooted from our land, that's when we are forced to wander all over the world, that's when all these terrible things happen to us, when we spurn the prophetic word that God has given.

And I'm sorry to say that our people have not heard the words of the last great prophet that God sent to us, the Messiah, Jesus himself. Well, let me get back to that story in the Talmud, because even within the Talmud itself, you get a feeling that all is not well with this view that majority rule can override and overrule the voice of God. What happened was, after Rabbi Eliezer was rejected, after the heavenly voice was rejected and Rabbi Eliezer's authority was rejected, what happened was, there's a story included there that says later on, some rabbi ran into Elijah the prophet.

According to Jewish tradition, he appears and appeared every so often. And this rabbi said to Elijah, what was God doing? What was God doing at this time when his heavenly ruling was overruled by the majority of the rabbis? And Elijah said, God laughed and said, my sons have defeated me, my sons have defeated me. But the story doesn't stop there.

It goes on to say that on that day, the rabbis took everything that Rabbi Eliezer had pronounced clean and burned it. They said, it's unclean, it's unusable. In other words, they were going against all of his previous rulings.

And they excommunicated him. They excommunicated him. And the Talmud says that when he was excommunicated, he began to sob and weep and he was so broken by it.

And that all of a sudden, the crops were smitten with a plague. Why? It seems that somebody was not happy that Rabbi Eliezer was excommunicated. And even though this thing is just a story in the Talmud, it's believed to have actually happened by many traditional Jews.

Others say it's really an allegory or a story. But the fact is, the point of the story is so clear. It says that everywhere that Rabbi Eliezer looked, that things were scorched in parts like fire going out of his eyes.

And then it says that his brother-in-law, Rabban Gamliel, who was the head of the Jewish community in that day, that Rabban Gamliel, who was the brother of Rabbi Eliezer's wife, whose name was Ima Shalom. So Rabbi Eliezer's wife is Ima Shalom. Her brother is Rabban Gamliel, who was the leading figure of the Jewish community in that day.

He's out on his boat and all of a sudden a great wave comes on his boat and is about to encompass him. And he knew that it was because there was anger because of Rabbi Eliezer's excommunication. It looks like somebody's not happy with all this.

It doesn't look like God's laughing here. And he prays and he says, God, you know that I did this simply so that there wouldn't be disagreements within Israel. And God's anger was stopped for that moment and the waves calmed down.

What happened was that Rabbi Eliezer's wife was concerned that if he would pray this one type of prayer called Tachmanim, supplications, that when he'd fall on his face and begin to weep, that God's heart would go out to him and that judgment would fall and that her brother, who was the leader of the Jewish community, would die. Again, somebody's not happy with Rabbi Eliezer's excommunication. Well, what happened is one day there was a slight mix-up because she just wouldn't let him out of her sight for a moment.

One day there was a slight mix-up. She let him out of her sight. Next thing, he was on his face weeping.

She came in, saw him weeping, and said to him, You just killed my brother. And at the moment those words left her mouth, the word was broadcast out throughout Israel. The moment the words came out of her mouth, the word then went out throughout Israel saying, Rabban Gamliel has just died.

Rabbi Eliezer looked at her and said, How do you know this? She said, I've received it, a tradition from my father's household, that all gates are closed. In other words, that there is a time when prayers are not heard, when gates are closed except the gates of oppression, that those who are oppressed have an open gate always for their cry to be spoken forth and vented to heaven. And I tell you, I read that, and it's a moving, powerful story, one of the most profound stories in the Talmud.

And what it says to me is that God, even in the Talmud, was not happy with Rabbi Eliezer being excommunicated. God was not happy with his voice, so to say, being overruled by the majority. And it's a tragic thing, but it's something that is pervasive in the rabbinic tradition.

There is a reliance on brain power. The great, great scholars in Judaism are not necessarily spoken of highly because they were so godly. I mean, that's part of it.

They were not necessarily spoken of so highly because they were men and women of prayer and devotion to God, although that's part of it. They were mainly praised for their brain power, for how much they knew by heart, for how much they had studied. In fact, it's a Talmudic concept that study for study's sake is the highest form of worship.

The reason is that study, if you'll do it with the right motivation just for study's sake, will ultimately lead you back to the deed. But I mean, this concept, that's the philosophy, but this concept of study for study's sake and logical deduction being the ruling thing. Logical deduction is even made equal to scriptural authority in the Talmud.

I don't know if you know that. But logical deduction is just as important as is scriptural authority or the prophetic voice or a miracle. In fact, in the Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin, the Babylonian Talmud, right around 74 B, you can find it.

There is a proof that murder is a sin that you cannot commit to save your own skin. And you say, well, how do you know that? How can you prove that? And the story's given about one man who was told by the ruler in a city to kill somebody, and he did it, and he came and asked the rabbi, did I do the right thing? Because the ruler of the city said, if you don't kill him, we'll kill you. And the rabbi said, how do you know that your blood is redder than his? Maybe his blood is redder than yours.

In other words, you don't know that your life is more valuable than his life. What gives you the right to take his life to save your own? It's just a logical deduction. You can't do it.

And if you've got a logical deduction in the Talmud, you know that you don't even need a scripture to back it up. It is law. It is so.

Logic rules just with as much authority as the Word of God rules. You see, again, it's that dependence on human tradition, on the Word of man, on the ways of man. There are even examples where just blatant contradiction, the rabbinic tradition violates the written Word.

I'll give you some examples, and I'm quoting from the book on Introduction to the Talmud by Chayes, page 6, according to Exodus 12, 15, Even on the first day ye shall put away eleven out of your houses. According to the rabbinic interpretation, this refers to the day preceding the first day. Hand for hand, eye for eye, Exodus 21, 24.

In its literal sense, we gain actual retaliation in time, that is, to cause the offender exactly the same physical injury. Tradition, however, maintains that it is a matter of monetary compensation. So also the command, Then they shall you off her hand, Deuteronomy 25, 12, literally means the chopping off of the hand, whereas the oral interpretation requires only monetary compensation.

And there I could go on, but even things about why rabbinic Jews cannot eat milk and meat dishes together, that's based on a verse that simply says, Thou shalt not sieve a kid in its mother's milk. That's the entire basis for it. But Chayes says, By exegetical deduction, all law has included in the prohibition the mixing of all manner of milk and meat.

The phrase, From the morrow after the Sabbath, mentioned in connection with the waving of the Omer, means literally the day after Sabbath, that is Sunday. Tradition, however, has interpreted it as the day after the first day of the Passover, irrespective of which day in the week it may be. And you may say, Well, how is it that you can be reading from a traditional book, and it's giving all these places where the rabbinic law contradicts the written law? Well, the answer is simple.

The view is that somehow or another, this is the true interpretation of the written law, even though it seems to contradict what is written down. What I say is this. According to Exodus chapter 24, and I want you to read through the whole chapter, read through verses 1 through 8 in particular, and make things clear.

God made his covenant with the Jewish people, with the people of Israel, based on the commands that were spoken forth from Mount Sinai that all Israel heard, and then based on the written Torah. You can read it yourself. It says that Moses read aloud all the words that were written down in the book, and that was the covenant that the Lord made with the children of Israel.

You can find the exact same thing in Exodus 34, 27, but read all of the chapters. In fact, you go all the way to the book of Deuteronomy, which is at the tail end of the five books of Moses, and it says there in chapter 32, and I'll read to you from verse 45, when Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, Take to heart all the words which I have warned you this day, and join them upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this teaching, all the terms of this Torah. And that refers back to the previous chapter, where it says in verse 24, When Moses had put down in writing the words of this teaching to the very end, Moses charged the Levites, saying, Take this book of teaching, and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and let it remain there as a witness against you.

That's why God could tell Joshua, in Joshua chapter 1 verse 8, Joshua is the successor of Moses. He could say to him, Let not this book of the teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings, and only then will you be successful.

Did you get that? Let not this book of the teaching cease from your lips. That's what God gave to the people of Israel. It's the written Torah.

The oral Torah, the oral tradition is something that came in much, much, much later. The oral tradition violates prophetic authority. The oral tradition usurps the authority that God gave to the rulers of his people.

The oral tradition nullifies the voice from heaven. The oral tradition turns a deaf ear to signs, wonders, and miracles. A very dear rabbi, a very kind and sincere man, I enjoyed the time that I spent with him and speaking with him.

He's been gracious to me, and I've been gracious to him, and I'd love to sit down and just get to know him better, except he lives in another state. But someone asked him point blank, Have you ever received revelation from God? And he answered very honestly. He said, I believe I have received revelation about God, but never revelation from God.

And then he was very clear, I base my beliefs on what I have learned through study. Now my own background, my doctorate is in Near Eastern languages and literature. I take very seriously the need to study and carefully consider all the facts.

I take very seriously the need to look into the sources in the original language and in their context and culture in which they were written. I take very seriously the need for others to study. But I also take seriously that God told our people that when we would be scattered throughout the entire world, if we would seek him with all of our heart, if we would desire him and ask him to show us his way, if we would ask him to help us to go back to his truth, if we would do those very things, then we would know him, we would find him, he would reveal himself to us, and we could experience God again for ourselves.

I thank God for the fact that the Jewish community is preserved in many ways we have been preserved through rabbinic tradition. Like I said at the outset, I'm not hostile, I'm not angry, I'm not saying that the rabbinic community is an enemy of some sinful sort. What I'm saying is, though, that the rabbinic community, the traditions of man, has stood in the way of a face-to-face relationship with God.

And let me just share these last few minutes with you on a more personal level. I remember when I first believed that Jesus was the Messiah, that he had come to fulfill the promises in the Torah that God would raise up a prophet, and that he was the last great prophet that God raised up to speak to Israel. When I believed that, when I understood that he came as the fulfillment of the image of the high priest in the Torah, who would stand and make sacrifice and make atonement for the sins of the people.

By the way, you may not know this, but according to Deuteronomy 35, there is no atonement that can be made for bloodshed. And even if someone innocently killed a person, the lamb was still defiled by the blood. And if a person accidentally killed another person, then the family member would want to take revenge and kill that one, even though it was innocent.

And that person would then flee and run off to what was called the city of refuge, and they were there, and they could be protected, and the avenger of blood, that family member that wanted to take vengeance, couldn't go back and couldn't get into that city and kill that person. But that person could not be released from the city until the death of the high priest. And when the high priest died, that brought atonement to the lamb.

When the high priest died, that then substituted for the innocent blood that was shed, and then this person could leave the city of refuge. And when I understood that Jesus came and he was the high priest, he was the one that made intercession for our sins, and it says over in Isaiah chapter 53, and I'll get to my point in a moment, but it says in Isaiah 53 that the servant of the Lord, who was recognized by many rabbis as being the Messiah, Isaiah 53 interpreted by many, many, many rabbis as referring to the Messiah, even to this day. God says there, I will give him the many as his portion, he shall receive the multitude as his spoil.

For he exposed himself to death and was numbered among the sinners, whereas he bore the guilt of the many and made intercession for sinners. When I understood that Jesus made intercession, made atonement for me, my life was radically changed. I was absolutely totally transformed.

And I would talk to this rabbi that I was friendly with that took over in the congregation in the Shul Raleigh Bar Mitzvah. I would talk to him about my faith and my experience with God, just naturally, not trying to make up a story, but just talking from my heart, and he'd say, Mike, why is it that it seems that God is your neighbor? He said, you seem to have the experience of one of the Old Testament prophets. In other words, you seem to experience God in a real way.

You seem to really know him. When you pray, he answers you. He seems to be actively working on your behalf, and you're totally devoted to him.

Well, it wasn't because of me. It was because of the Messiah. And you see, this is something that's so crucial that you understand.

Our Jewish people understand the need for atonement. And on the Day of Atonement, we pray, and we ask for forgiveness, and we recite all these traditional prayers, and confessing all kinds of lists of sayings, and just a whole litany of every type of guilty act that anyone could have committed. We confess it all, and we ask for forgiveness.

You see, God had ordained that there would be substitutions made for the people, that there would be an innocent victim that would be slain, a lamb or a goat, and that it would take the place of the guilt of the people. It would be symbolic. And then later, Judaism developed the concept that the righteous could sometimes suffer in place of the unrighteous.

In fact, in the Zohar, this is the central book of Jewish mysticism, it says the children of the world are members one of another. So this is under the section Pinchas, it's a lengthy section, but I'll just give you the quotes. The children of the world are members one of another.

When the Holy One desires to give healing to the world, He smites one just man amongst them, and for His sake heals all the rest. Whence do we learn this? From the saying, He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. That comes from Isaiah 53, by the way.

That is, by the letting of His blood, as when a man bleeds his arm, He was healing for us, for all the members of the body. In general, a just person is only smitten in order to procure healing and atonement

for a whole generation. What an amazing quotation! And it's from the Zohar, the book of traditional Jewish mysticism.

Rabbinic Judaism came up with all stories and legends about the binding of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Abraham was going to offer up his own son Isaac to God, because he believed God required him to do that. And then when he was right about to do it, God supplied a ram instead.

But there are all these traditions based on how Isaac was willing to offer his blood, and the blood of Isaac makes atonement, and the ashes of Isaac make atonement. Isaac never died. Isaac never shed his blood.

Yeshua, Jesus, the Messiah died. And yet the mystery of it all is that God proclaimed, in Isaiah 52, 13, at the beginning of this section that runs all the way through 53 to the end of the chapter, Indeed, my servant shall prosper, be exalted, and raise to great heights. Just as the many were appalled at him, so marred was his appearance, unlike that of man, his form beyond human semblance.

Just so shall he startle many nations. Kings shall be silenced because of him, for they shall see what has not been told them, shall behold what they have never heard. I want us to understand this great mystery, that Jesus, who is exalted, and recognized as Messiah, and loved and worshipped by men and women, millions and millions of them, all over the world to this day, is a Jewish carpenter who is nailed to a tree, and despised by our own people, and to this day is despised by many of our own people.

But he is the key. That's the mystery. He was the exalted one, he was the despised one.

It's one and the same. And I challenge you to find out, is he the Messiah? Has he come and provided atonement for our people? And can we know God directly? Maybe the rabbis are not right about all these things after all. You need to find out.

And if you want further information, further literature, why don't you just write to us, write to me, Mike Brown, write to Sid Roth, you can reach us at 9057B, Gaither Road, Gaithersburg, Maryland. The zip code is 20877. God bless you, and I want you to take these things to heart, think about them.

If there's anything we can do to help you in your thinking, in your searching, in your questioning, you write to us and let us know.

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