

# **Jesus, Pharisees, and the Two Laws**

This document utilizes the Modern King James Version of The Holy Bible which is public domain in the United States of America and available to reproduce and publish without restriction.

Traditional Christian terms and names are intentionally used throughout this lesson book to reach a larger scope of readers and help those who may be beginners in this knowledge learn with ease.

## Did We Misunderstand?

Most of us were brought up lumping the Pharisees together as a bad bunch of people. We've read many arguments in Scripture, including Paul's letters, and saw them as the enemy preaching The Law while Jesus (Yeshua) and Paul condemned The Law.

The question is, "Did we interpret these arguments accurately?"

The answer is No.

We need to better understand the cultural beliefs of the Pharisees to accurately interpret these events in Scripture.

They upheld the written Torah of The Law as given to Moses by God Himself (YHVH in Hebrew or Jehovah in English). They also upheld the Oral Torah, which are man-made laws recorded in the Talmud. This Oral Torah is elevated above the written Torah. This belief is rooted in the idea that God gave Moses both a written Law on stone and oral laws while at Mt. Sinai. Both the written and oral Torah are translated into the word "Law" in most Bibles, causing readers to incorrectly attribute arguments against The Torah of Moses. As time progressed, Rabbinic sages continued to add to this Oral Law. This belief continues to this day.

Let's review some of these arguments.

Matthew 15:1-3 1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. 3 But He answered and said to them, Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

This law comes from the Oral Torah, also known as "the tradition of the elders". There is no such law in the written Torah given to Moses by God (Yehovah). The argument isn't about the general practice of washing hands before eating, but rather the ritual involved with the washing.

He bluntly tells them this:

Matthew 15:6-9 6 and in no way he honors his father or his mother. And you voided the commandment of God by your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 8 "This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 9 But in vain they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

We see this repeated in Mark:

Mark 7:5-7 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, Why do your disciples not walk

according to the tradition of the elders, but eat loaves with unwashed hands? 6 But He answered and said to them, Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 7 However, they worship Me in vain, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Let's take a look at this next passage:

Matthew 23:1-3 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowd and to His disciples, 2 saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do.

When they sat in Moses' seat, they read from the written Law of Moses. Therefore, observe and do that which is spoken or read. Be obedient.

The continuation of this passage speaks of the Oral Torah, the man-made rulings and laws that are recorded in the Talmud. This is what is condemned as a heavy yolk. This is different from His written Torah (The Law) as given to Moses by God (Yehovah) Himself.

Matthew 23:3-5 3... But do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy and hard-to-carry burdens and lay them on men's shoulders. But they will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But they do all their works in order to be seen of men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

Takanot are "enactments." This is the Hebrew word describing the laws enacted by the Pharisees in addition to the written Torah.

Ma'asim are literally "works" or "deeds." It is a Pharisaic term referring to the precedents of the Rabbis that provide a source for Pharisaic rulings.

We frequently see Jesus (Yeshua) condemning this act of adding to His Law with all their man-made rulings. Here are some examples.

Mark 7:7-13 7 However, they worship Me in vain, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, the dippings of pots and cups. And many other such things you do. 9 And He said to them, Do you do well to set aside the commandment of God, so that you may keep your own tradition? 10 For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother." And, "Whoever curses father or mother, let him die the death." 11 But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, Corban! (that is, A gift to God, whatever you may profit by me) 12 and you no longer allow him to do anything toward his father or mother, 13 making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have delivered. And you do many such things.

This is referring to those Takanot and Ma'asim as explained above.

I'm sure you were able to recognize the source of the condemnation this time as being man-made laws.

As we see in this next verse, “the leaven of the Pharisees” is the term used to express Jesus’ anguish over their laws causing perversion of His Law.

Matthew 16:6 And Jesus said to them, Take heed, and beware the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Why are the Sadducees included in this condemnation? The Sadducees rightfully rejected the Oral Law, but they also rejected the resurrection of the dead. Jesus is instructing His disciples to let go of the false doctrine from men that still holds them captive and to come to Him to learn.

Matthew 11:28-30 28 Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

Matthew 15:14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

His yolk is easy. His message is the same message He spoke at Mt. Sinai and to the patriarchs. It is the man-made laws of the Oral Torah that became a burdensome yolk to the people.

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why do you tempt God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

We will now look at Matthew 23. This is Jesus’ scathing response to the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:1-4 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowd and to His disciples, 2 saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do. But do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy and hard-to-carry burdens and lay them on men's shoulders. But they will not move them with one of their fingers.

We already know that this condemnation is about the additions to His Law via the Oral Torah.

Self-righteousness is the inevitable result of Pharisaic legalism. Jesus reveals their true motives below. Let’s continue reading.

Matthew 23:5-13 5 But they do all their works in order to be seen of men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 And they love the first couch at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and greetings in the market-places, and to be called, Rabbi! Rabbi! by men. 8 But you must not be called Rabbi, for One is your teacher, Christ, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no one your father on the earth, for One is your Father in Heaven. 10 Nor be called teachers, for One is your Teacher, even Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he who shall humble himself shall be exalted. 13 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men. For you neither go in, nor do you allow those entering to go in.

As you see in the above passage, pride sprang up. The Pharisees placed themselves on a level with Moses and indeed with God (Yehovah) Himself. Do take notice of the relevance between religious leaders of that day and those of our present day.

When their own Messiah had appeared in Israel they were so blinded by their pride they completely missed Him. Have we done the same? Do we recognize Jesus as the Hebrew Yeshua, the Son of God, our Messiah, that He is? Or, have we turned Him into a Western, Caucasian, Greek speaking man who has no unity of character or speech with His Father? Do we read the Scriptures for themselves and let them speak to us or do we let men pull out a verse here and there and build doctrine from it?

These examples are in Scripture for our understanding.

The origin of these man-made laws is actually quite innocent. They are rooted in the desire to help protect the people from accidentally breaking The Law of Moses. A fence was put up. Then the fence became larger and higher with more and more laws. Over time, one can forget the distinction between which is which. Unfortunately for us, most Bibles translate both sources as “law”. Those not educated in the culture and idioms of the Hebrew people, easily come to the conclusion that The Law was a burdensome yolk that Jesus freed us from. Due to confusion over the writings of Paul, most come to the false conclusion it is done away. This false doctrine is based on not understanding the differences between the written Torah of Moses and the Oral man-made Law.

Let's continue reading Matthew chapter 23:

Matthew 23:14-22 14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and pray at length as a pretense. Therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you compass sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. 16 Woe to you, blind guides, saying, Whoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is a debtor! 19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore whoever shall swear by the altar swears by it, and by all things on it. 21 And whoever shall swear by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And he who shall swear by Heaven swears by the throne of God, and by Him who sits on it.

Faith became replaced with obedience to The Law to earn salvation. It was all about enforcement of their laws and earning righteousness via these laws. Faith became irrelevant. Mercy got lost.

Matthew 23:23-33 23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and you have left undone the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and faith. You ought to have done these and not to leave the other undone.

24 Blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are

full of extortion and excess. 26 Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outside, but inside they are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also appear righteous to men outwardly, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Therefore you are witnesses to yourselves, that you are the sons of those who killed the prophets; 32 and you fill up the measure of your fathers. 33 Serpents! Offspring of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

This next verse speaks of those He sent to speak repentance and return to His written Torah, but the people were offended and filled with too much pride to listen. They enjoyed living as they pleased with their traditions.

Matthew 23:34-36 34 Therefore, behold, I send prophets and wise men and scribes to you. And you will kill and crucify some of them. And some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city; 35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berachiah, whom you killed between the temple and the altar. 36 Truly I say to you, All these things shall come on this generation.

And here we see Jesus' anguish of what has been lost. It's the same as parents who lose their child due to rebellion. Hopes and dreams fractured and destroyed.

Matthew 23:37-39 37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to her, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! 38 Behold, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I say to you, You shall not see Me from now on until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

We now turn to another argument:

John 8:3-11 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman taken in adultery. And standing her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, Teacher, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned. You, then, what do you say?

6 They said this, tempting Him so that they might have reason to accuse Him. But bending down, Jesus wrote on the ground with His finger, not appearing to hear. 7 But as they continued to ask Him, He lifted Himself up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her. 8 And again bending down, He wrote on the ground.

9 And hearing, and being convicted by conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, until the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

10 And bending back up, and seeing no one but the woman, Jesus said to her, Woman, where are the ones who accused you? Did not one give judgment against you? 11 And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin no more.

This was a trick to entice Jesus to break The Law. The Torah says this:

Deuteronomy 22:22 If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die, the man that lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall put away evil from Israel.

Jesus said, “He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her”. They well knew they called for the stoning of a woman without bringing the man involved. This in itself is a transgression against the Torah and was therefore sin. Their purpose in doing this was to try to get Jesus to break the law to prove He was not the Messiah. It is even possible, the Pharisees and this woman were working together in attempting to trick Jesus (Yeshua). The adulterous act may be entirely false for the purpose of entrapment, in which case He saw through their scheme.

Let us take a quick look at an argument between Paul and the Pharisees.

Acts 15:1-5 1 And certain ones who came down from Judea taught the brothers, saying, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

2 Therefore dissension and not a little disputation occurring by Paul and Barnabas, they appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And indeed being set forward by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the nations. And they caused great joy to all the brothers. 4 And arriving in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, and by the apostles and elders. And they declared all things that God had done with them.

5 But some of those from the sect of the Pharisees, having believed, rose up, saying, It was necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Law of Moses.

Acts 15 is describing a dispute between the disciples and the Pharisees of the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel. All three groups upheld the written Torah of Moses.

Shammai and Hillel both upheld the Oral Torah whereas Jesus taught his disciples to forsake these man-made laws.

Paul, educated under the House of Hillel, has no problem in going to gentiles and teaching them about Jesus (Yeshua) and bringing them into fellowship with the community of believers in the various cities to which he traveled.

Pharisees of the House of Shammai objected strongly to this, because in their view, they had no place being in the community of faith in the first place. Anyone wanting to attach themselves to the Jews, needed to undergo full conversion with circumcision.

Continuing with this example:

Acts 15:6-7 6 And the apostles and elders were assembled to see about this matter. 7 And after much disputing, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you recognize that from ancient days God chose among us that through my mouth the nations should hear the Word of the gospel, and believe.

And their conclusion:

Acts 15:19-21 19 Therefore my judgment is that we do not trouble those who have turned to God from among the nations,

20 but that we write to them that they should abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

21 For Moses from ages past has those in every city proclaiming him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

Take note, the gentiles who are coming to faith in Messiah would need to observe those minimum requirements (all of which had to do with pagan worship rituals which they were expected to leave behind) in order to be accepted into the community of faith and into the synagogues. Once they had become part of the community, they would then be instructed in the Torah and its application to their lives by attendance at the weekly Synagogue on Sabbath.

Let's look at other Pharisees from Scripture.

The gospels contain references to a few Pharisees who were admirable men.

Nicodemus is an excellent example. He met with Jesus secretly to learn from Him and to help with the burial.

John 3:1 And there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

John 7:50-51 50 Nicodemus said to them, (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them), 51 Does our law judge the Man before it hears Him and knows what He does?

John 19:39 And Nicodemus also came, who at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin and helped followers of Jesus escape into other lands to continue ministering.

Mark 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable counsellor, who also waited for the kingdom of God, came and went in boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Luke 23:51 this one was not assenting to their counsel and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews; and he also himself waited for the kingdom of God.

John 19:38 And after these things, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews) begged of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate gave permission. Then he came and took the body of Jesus.



There likely were many other Pharisees who followed Jesus secretly.

Luke 13:31 The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying to Him, Go out and depart from here, for Herod will kill you.

Luke 7:36 And one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And going into the Pharisee's house, He reclined.

Let's not forget Gamaliel.

Acts 5:34 Then there stood up one in the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the Law honored among all the people. And he commanded the apostles to be put outside a little space.

Acts 22:3 I am truly a man, a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the exactness of the Law of the fathers, being a zealous one of God, as you all are today.

Why was opposition from the religious leaders so strong against Jesus / Yeshua?

- He spoke as no other man and with great authority
- He gained masses of followers quickly
- He performed many miracles, including that which only Messiah could do
- He condemned the Pharisees in public
- He openly went against their Oral Law
- The esteem given to the Rabbi's was in jeopardy so they were resentful
- He claimed to offer the fullness of Torah
- He claimed His Father, Almighty God, sent Him

Understandably, their opposition against him grew to the point they plotted His death. Pharisees were among those taking part in His arrest.

John 18:2-3 2 And Judas who betrayed Him also knew the place. For Jesus oftentimes went there with His disciples. 3 Then Judas, having received a band and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Matthew 27:41-42 41 And in the same way also the chief priests mocked, with the scribes and elders, saying, 42 He saved others, but he cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

Jesus (Yeshua) repeatedly warns against the corruption of the Torah by man-made traditions and laws. He invited all who desired to serve God (Yehovah) to learn Torah from him. The Torah is the system of laws on how to draw near to Him and serve Him.

Matthew 5:18-19 18 For truly I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. 19 Therefore whoever shall relax one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven. But whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 11:29 Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls.

Brethren, now that your eyes are opened to the political culture during the time of Jesus and beyond, what do you think? Can you now understand the basis of the arguments between Jesus, His disciples, and the religious leaders? Do you see Jesus ever condemning the Law of Moses or only man-made traditions?

Hopefully, you see how vital it is to understand the culture within which the entire Bible is written. With increased understanding of Hebraic culture, language, and idioms, you can begin to read the New Testament (Renewed Covenant) the way it is written and without a host of false doctrine.