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JUDAISM AND BAAL WORSHIP

I never cease to be amazed by the number of people in the Churches of God who feel the need to look to Judaism and the religious practices and customs of the Jewish people for guidance and direction as to how GOD wants us to understand His Word and His instructions.

Recently someone sent me a posting which basically stated that the Jewish people are agreed that the Passover in Egypt was eaten at the beginning of the 15th of Nisan, in clear contradiction to the plain biblical statements. Other people urge us to follow the Jewish custom of eating "matzos" at the Passover ceremony and during the Days of Unleavened Bread, as if "matzos" somehow

symbolize the broken body of Jesus Christ, and typify fulfilling God's instructions to eat unleavened bread. Other people try to extract special significance from the Jewish customs surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Other people again assert that the Jews have preserved "God's SACRED calendar".

The whole implication seems to be that, since Hebrew is THEIR language, the Jews supposedly know better how the laws of God should be applied and observed, that they are somehow one step closer to the truth of God in the customs they practice and in the traditional understanding they have.

NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH!

In this article I am going to openly confront something that seems to be a bit of a sacred cow for many people, because it needs to be confronted and faced. It is an unsubstantiated bias which many people assume to be true, and which they feel needs no proof.

The point we need to understand is this:

THERE IS NO MORE MERIT TO THE RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE JEWS THAN THERE IS MERIT TO THE RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROMAN CATHOLICS OR OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX RELIGION OR OF ANY OF THE PROTESTANT RELIGIONS!

THE ADVANTAGE OF THE JEW

You might by now be thinking of Romans chapter 3. Let's look at it.

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit [is there] of circumcision? (Romans 3:1)

That is the question Paul posed. And here is his answer:

Much every way: chiefly, because that UNTO THEM WERE COMMITTED THE ORACLES OF GOD. (Romans 3:2)

What is the advantage of the Jew? Is it right "RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS"? Is it better "RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING"? No, these things are not "the advantage".

The expression "the oracles of God" is translated from the Greek "ta logia tou theou", where the word "logion" is probably the diminutive of the word "logos". The expression refers to "the words of God", or "the concise sayings of God" (as compared to the pagan oracles which were always short and concise utterances). It can certainly also refer to the whole Old Testament.

The point is: the advantage of the Jews is that to them were committed the Old Testament words of God, even as after Paul's time the New Testament words of God were committed to the Greeks.

Are we told that THE CUSTOMS of the Jews are an advantage? No! Are we told that the religious UNDERSTANDING which the Jews have is an advantage? No! The advantage is that they were used TO PRESERVE the words of God. But "preserving" the words of God has nothing to do with "better understanding".

Yes, certainly, "preserving" the words of God implied a certain amount of ACCESS to those words, access which other nations simply did not have. But "access" does not automatically imply "a GOOD understanding". A good understanding requires a lot MORE than just "access", as we'll see later.

There will be those who will perceive the things I will say in this article as "anti-Jewish". But that is not correct. It is the Jewish religious customs and ideas that are in clear conflict with the teachings of the Bible. To openly point out and highlight such conflicts is a matter of facing the facts. It is the Jewish RELIGION that is in error and which errors need to be pointed out. But that is no more an attack on the Jewish people, than exposing the flaws in the Lutheran religion is an attack on the German people, or exposing the flaws in the Roman Catholic religion is an attack on the Italian people.

So let's now look at some facts.

THE HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL

After God brought Israel out of Egypt, what did they do? You already KNOW all that, right? They couldn't stay away from idolatry! It started with the golden calf ... and it just never really stopped! Eventually God punished both, the house of Israel and the house of Judah, with national captivities.

When they had good leaders, things seemed to go well, though it is doubtful that the people as a whole ever followed the right examples of the good leaders ... as evidenced by the ease with which the people would so quickly and so readily sink into the most perverse forms of paganism when evil leaders appeared on the scene.

What happened in the days of the prophet Elijah? Why, all of Israel had once again sunk into total paganism. Apart from 7000 men the entire population had been drawn into Baal-worship, right? See 1 Kings 19, where Elijah felt he was the only one left who had not accepted this idolatry. When God said ...

Yet I have left [me] seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him. (1 Kings 19:18)

... it was an acknowledgment that THE VAST MAJORITY of the people of Israel at that time HAD INDEED ACCEPTED PAGANISM! Things haven't really changed since then; human nature today is still the same as it was 3000 years ago.

What happened after the days of Ezra and Nehemiah? The Jews who had returned from Babylon absorbed and accepted on a large scale the PAGAN ideas and customs which had been introduced by the conquering Greeks. They simply "converted" these pagan customs into acceptable forms ... very much like so-called "Christianity" "converting" the pagan customs of Christmas into an acceptable form. The Jews became thoroughly hellenized in their customs and traditions. Reform movements (like the Maccabees) did little to stem this tide of absorbing the customs of the pagan world around them.

[To illustrate: several months ago I played a game of bridge with an elderly Jewish gentleman in his 80's, who had been raised in a Jewish community in Germany in the 1920's. There is no question that this man is Jewish, and he has always been Jewish, and he is assuredly proud of his Jewish heritage. Yet he himself PROUDLY explained to me that IN HIS PARTICULAR JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE 1920's all the Jewish families ALWAYS also observed Christmas with a Christmas tree in the house and all the other Christmas customs. It was simply "a tradition" in his particular Jewish community. And this man's example is not unique ... it is not the first time that Jewish people simply accepted and adopted pagan customs as their own.]

By the time of Christ's ministry the religion of the Jews was thoroughly paganized through the infusion and absorption of Greek, Egyptian and Babylonian customs. Attempts to justify these pagan customs with the claims that they were really only an expression of "the ORAL law", something that was SUPPOSEDLY handed down verbally from the time of Moses, that these customs therefore represented "the traditions of the elders" do not disguise the pagan origins of these customs. The influences of paganism had been a problem since the time of Moses, and it was still the same problem at the time of Christ's ministry; only by then many of the pagan customs had been disguised to some degree.

AT THE TIME OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

Let's notice some things from the time when Jesus Christ was here on Earth. Let's start with Matthew chapter 15.

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. (Matthew 15:1-2)

Note carefully! The thing that was important to these religious leaders was "the tradition of the elders"! These so-called "traditions" had absolutely NOTHING to do with the Bible, with God's laws, or with obedience to God. These "traditions" were most emphatically NOT BIBLICALLY BASED! But they were of the highest importance to these religious Jews. And transgressing these non-biblical "traditions" was a major issue to these Jews.

What happened to all these "traditions of the elders"? Where are those "traditions" today? Why, they are at the heart and core of modern Judaism! That is what Judaism and its view of the Old Testament is built around. Those "traditions" form THE FOUNDATION on which Judaism today is built!

Do you grasp this?

It is a simple matter to show that modern Judaism and its understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures is directly descended from the religion of the Pharisees of the first century A.D.. And those "traditions of the elders" have been carefully preserved in the vast work known as "the Talmud"! Understand that the Talmud (there are two versions ... the so-called "more authoritative" BABYLONIAN Talmud, and the lesser PALESTINIAN Talmud) is nothing more than a preservation of "the traditions of the elders".

So how did Jesus Christ view these "traditions of the elders"? How important were they to Him? Notice Christ's reply:

But he answered and said unto them, WHY DO YE ALSO TRANSGRESS THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD BY YOUR TRADITION? (Matthew 15:3)

Notice it!

These "traditions of the elders" were a way of TRANSGRESSING the commandments of God. So how good are those "traditions" really? They are not good at all ... if we are going to believe the words of Jesus Christ!

Understand that what Jesus Christ said here was not just a gentle and polite reprimand. IT WAS A MAJOR INDICTMENT AGAINST THE "TRADITIONS" these Jews adhered to! It should be clear that Jesus Christ did not in any way endorse the "traditions" on which modern Judaism is built.

In the next few verses (Matthew 15:4-6) Jesus Christ gave one single simple straight-forward illustration of HOW the "traditions" lead to transgressing the commandments of God, the example being how the traditions were used to break the fifth commandment. The statement at the end of verse 6 is very significant.

And honour not his father or his mother, [he shall be free]. THUS HAVE YE MADE THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OF NONE EFFECT BY YOUR TRADITION. (Matthew 15:6)

Jesus Christ gave ONE EXAMPLE of how the traditions are used to get around the real intent of the commandments of God. And that is precisely what most of the other "traditions" also do ... they are ways TO GET AROUND THE REAL INTENT OF GOD'S LAWS! The Jews themselves are deceived and they don't even understand the real effect their "traditions" have.

The traditions create AN APPEARANCE of being righteous and submissive to God, but they have nothing to do with the real intent of God's instructions to us in the Bible. And that hasn't changed since the time of Jesus Christ; that is still true for modern Judaism, even as it was true for the religion of the Pharisees in the time of Christ.

Notice how Jesus Christ continued:

[YE] HYPOCRITES, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and HONOURETH ME WITH [THEIR] LIPS; BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME. (Matthew 15:7-8)

WHY did Christ call them "hypocrites"? Was He trying to insult them? WHY was their heart far from real obedience to God? If their hearts were "far" from God, what is it that their hearts were "NEAR" to?

The word "hypocrite" simply means: actor, pretender, role-player. The word implies a lack of sincerity. Jesus Christ was assuredly not just using the word in order to insult the Pharisees. He used the word with its full meaning: He was telling us that the Pharisees, who cared so much for "the traditions of the elders", were insincere actors playing the roles of being religiously righteous, but not really caring about God's REAL instructions to us. Their hearts were "near to" their traditions; they were not "near to" the Word of God.

THIS IS ALSO TRUE FOR MODERN JEWISH AUTHORITIES!

Jesus Christ continued to say:

But in vain they do worship me, TEACHING [FOR] DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN. (Matthew 15:9)

Their "traditions" had absolutely nothing to do with the Bible and God's instructions to us! Their traditions were nothing more than HUMANLY DEVISED COMMANDMENTS ... that is what Jesus Christ is plainly telling us in this verse.

THE SAME IS STILL TRUE TODAY! MODERN JUDAISM TEACHES NOTHING MORE THAN "THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN"!

Do the people who want to look to the Jews for a better understanding of the Word of God understand this? Do we really want to look to "the commandments of men" for a better understanding of the Word of God?

Look at verse 9 again. The word "doctrines" refers to THE TEACHINGS. What Jesus Christ plainly said is that THE TEACHINGS of the Pharisees (and thus also of modern Judaism) are nothing more than "the commandments of men". It is "THE TEACHINGS" of the Pharisees, and of modern Judaism, that are the problem.

Now if those teachings were (and still ARE) "the commandments of men", then they obviously didn't come out of the Bible. So they must have come from somewhere else. And that "somewhere else" is the same place from where their religious ideas had always come in the past ... FROM PAGANISM!

This can be shown from many Scriptures. Let's briefly notice the summary Stephen presented in Acts chapter 7:

And THEY MADE A CALF in those days, and OFFERED SACRIFICE UNTO THE IDOL, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up TO WORSHIP THE HOST OF HEAVEN; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices [by the space of] forty years in the wilderness? Yea, YE TOOK UP THE TABERNACLE OF MOLECH, AND THE STAR OF YOUR GOD REMPHAN, figures which ye made TO WORSHIP THEM: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. (Acts 7:41-43)

YE STIFFNECKED and uncircumcised in heart and ears, YE DO ALWAYS RESIST THE HOLY GHOST: as your fathers [did], SO [DO] YE. (Acts 7:51)

Understand that NOTHING HAS CHANGED! What was true in Stephen's time is still true today! So how much value can we place on the understanding of people who are "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" and who "ALWAYS RESIST" the correct understanding, which only comes through the Holy Spirit (as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 2:11)? How can we possibly look to the spiritual descendants of the Pharisees for a correct understanding of the truth of God?

It's no surprise that they killed Stephen. They didn't like to be told how much and how often they had

been involved in paganism. And, as it happened, in Matthew chapter 15 the Pharisees DID end up being offended (see Matthew 15:12), but all Jesus Christ had done is speak the truth. It just shows that people will easily take offence at the truth.

Notice also the parallel account in Mark chapter 7. This account also brings out the great importance which is attached to "traditions" amongst the Jews, and which traditions Christ's disciples paid no attention to.

For THE PHARISEES, AND ALL THE JEWS, except they wash [their] hands oft, eat not, HOLDING THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS. (Mark 7:3)

Mark's account repeats the information given in Matthew's account and then adds the following things in Christ's response to the Pharisees. Notice:

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with [their] lips, but THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, TEACHING [FOR] DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN. (Mark 7:6-7)

Now notice how Christ elaborated on these statements:

For LAYING ASIDE THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, ye hold the tradition of men, [as] the washing of pots and cups: AND MANY OTHER SUCH LIKE THINGS YE DO. (Mark 7:8)

Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, clearly tells us that in order to adhere to their traditions the Pharisees "LAID ASIDE" --- REJECTED(!) --- THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD!

That hasn't changed, as far as modern Judaism is concerned. In their teachings and their understanding the Jews today STILL "lay aside" the commandments of God.

Notice also that while Jesus Christ just presented one example of this, He clearly stated they in fact did MANY OTHER SUCH LIKE THINGS! That was not the only "tradition" which laid aside the commandment of God. The same is also true for many of the other traditions the Pharisees (and modern Judaism) held to, the Jewish traditions about "the Passover" being only one specific case in point.

Clearly "the traditions of the elders" are in conflict with the laws of God! These two, the laws of God and the traditions of the elders, are mutually exclusive. You can't have them both. You either keep the commandments of God, or you keep the traditions of the elders which require you to REJECT the commandments of God. Does that statement sound too strong? Well, that's precisely what Christ said in the next verse:

And he said unto them, FULL WELL YE REJECT THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:9)

This statement by Jesus Christ is still true for modern Judaism. They haven't changed in their approach or their understanding. They still adhere to their traditions rather than to the commandments of God.

Jesus Christ meant every word He said! Mark 7:9 is not an idle statement! The traditions of Judaism

amount to a REJECTION of the commandments of God. The verb "reject" in Mark 7:9 is translated from the Greek verb "atheteo", and it means: to do away with, to despise, to set aside, to disregard, to nullify, to make void, to reject, to refuse, to bring to nothing, etc.. And these are all the things which "the traditions of Judaism" do, according to the words of Jesus Christ.

After again recording the example of how the traditions were used to break the fifth commandment, Mark then records Christ's words in verse 13:

MAKING THE WORD OF GOD OF NONE EFFECT THROUGH YOUR TRADITION, which ye have delivered: AND MANY SUCH LIKE THINGS DO YE. (Mark 7:13)

Here we have Jesus Christ's explanation for what the traditions of Judaism actually do. These traditions NULLIFY THE INTENDED EFFECT OF THE WORD OF GOD! They "neutralize" the Word of God; they take the power out of God's instructions. They replace God's instructions with some meaningless ritual! And again, "MANY" such traditions do this!

These words by Jesus Christ are very clear! Christ unequivocally rejected "the traditions of the elders", since they didn't come from "the elders" anyway ... as Christ said, they were nothing more than the commandments of men. They assuredly did not come from "Moses". They really came out of paganism.

Jesus Christ said plainly in reference to the Jews:

And these things will they do unto you, BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN THE FATHER, nor me. (John 16:3)

Earlier in His ministry Christ had already said the same thing:

Yet YE HAVE NOT KNOWN HIM (God the Father); but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. (John 8:55)

What did Christ mean? He meant that they didn't really understand the Old Testament; they didn't understand the facts about God the Father. In fact, Christ had already said a few verses earlier:

YE ARE OF [YOUR] FATHER THE DEVIL, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

What did Christ mean by THIS statement? Christ was saying that their understanding didn't come from God; it came from Satan! Satan was their spiritual "father" ... that's what Christ said. And the views of the people Jesus Christ was speaking about have been meticulously preserved in modern Judaism; it's the same religion today as the one the Pharisees adhered to over 1900 years ago. So how much credibility do the statements of JESUS CHRIST give to the "official Jewish understanding" of the Scriptures? Should we, as members of God's Church, be looking to the Jews in order to understand the Scriptures? Should WE be looking to those whose "father" (according to Jesus Christ!) was Satan, to help us understand the Word of God?

Do we really think that GOD, who has called us and opened our minds to understand His will and

His purpose, expects us to look to the Jews, who are BLINDED, and look to THEIR customs and THEIR understanding, to help us understand what God is trying to tell US in His Word?

WHAT ARE THE THINGS PAUL COUNTED AS "DUNG"?

You probably know the account in Philippians 3:4-6, where the Apostle Paul enumerated his own "qualifications", i.e. his background in Judaism. After stating those things, Paul then said the following:

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things [but] loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS, AND DO COUNT THEM [but] DUNG, that I may win Christ, (Philippians 3:7-8)

Let's not just rush over these statements by Paul. Exactly "WHAT THINGS" did Paul now consider to have no more value than "dung"? After all, that's a rather strong and emphatic statement, not something Paul said very often. Paul was not just making some ethereal statement ... he had specific things in mind. So what were those specific things? Well, let's look at what he had stated just before these statements in verses 7-8. Notice verse 5:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; AS TOUCHING THE LAW, A PHARISEE; (Philippians 3:5)

Paul had been thoroughly steeped in the traditions of the elders, like every other Pharisee. When God opened Paul's mind, then Paul REJECTED the traditions of the elders (which Jesus Christ had so sharply criticized) and everything else the sect of the Pharisees stood for. In the process he "lost" the prestige and the honour which the community in general, as well as his peers in the sect of the Pharisees, bestowed on prominent Pharisees. The things he had given up and the things he had lost held no more value for Paul than "dung".

SO WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE "THE TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS"? WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE TRADITIONAL JEWISH OPINION REGARDING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCRIPTURES?

Since Paul did not single out any specific things in his past life as a Pharisee for this designation of "as worthless as dung", it follows that he was applying this "valuation" to everything lumped together. And that certainly INCLUDES his past zealous observance of and adherence to the traditions of the elders.

So if we are to believe Paul, then the traditions of the elders are worthless, and we can count them but as dung. It doesn't help to get upset with me over this statement. It's not my idea; it's an assessment the Apostle Paul made, and he was as qualified to know as anyone could have been!

Notice also what Paul said when he appeared before the Roman governor Felix. This is recorded in Acts chapter 24:

But this I confess unto thee, that AFTER THE WAY WHICH THEY CALL HERESY, SO WORSHIP I THE GOD OF MY FATHERS, BELIEVING ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE LAW AND IN THE PROPHETS: (Acts 24:14)

It was the Pharisees, the inventors and the guardians of the traditions of the elders, who were accusing Paul in this instance. Notice two things about this verse:

1) Judaism refers to the new understanding the Apostle Paul had come to as "HERESY". It is clear that Judaism (as represented by its chief exponents, the Pharisees) did NOT understand the Old Testament Scriptures in the same way that Paul understood them.

2) Paul made clear that he believed the entire Old Testament. Implied in Paul's statement is that there are SOME things in the Old Testament which the Pharisees did NOT really believe! Paul believed "all things" which are written ... but they didn't! Now if they didn't believe "ALL" things which are written in the Old Testament, then that is a problem! It is a BIG problem, as far as their overall understanding is concerned. Here's why.

The fear of the LORD [is] the beginning of wisdom: A GOOD UNDERSTANDING HAVE ALL THEY THAT DO [HIS COMMANDMENTS]: his praise endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:10)

Those who don't believe ALL of God's revelation (in the case of the Pharisees that would have been the whole Old Testament, every verse in it) lack a certain amount of "the fear of God". They will also assuredly LACK UNDERSTANDING! That's what Psalm 111:10 tells us. The ability to speak Hebrew doesn't change this in any way.

It should be self-evident that the Pharisees at Christ's time did NOT have "a good understanding". We have also already looked at Christ's statement that they "laid aside" the commandments of God. That is evidence that they lacked the fear of God.

Therefore:

How can we possibly look for a correct understanding of the Scriptures to people who:

- A) Lay aside the commandments of God,
- B) Lack real understanding,
- C) Lack the fear of God?

Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul counted his entire spiritual past as "dung"? Exactly what was there in his pharisaical background that was worth preserving? Was it the customs and rituals he had zealously adhered to? Was it the understanding of the Scriptures he had gained in his studies as a Pharisee? No, there wasn't anything worth preserving. Paul had to have his mind RENEWED when he came into God's Church, and Paul is the one who explained this NEED for our minds to be renewed.

And be not conformed to this world: but BE YE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

He explained this because he himself had already gone through this process! And when the mind is "renewed", that opens the mind to a better understanding.

THERE REMAINS A VEIL OVER THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE JEWS

Let's notice something else the Apostle Paul explained. This is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. Notice what he said:

And not as Moses, [which] put A VAIL over his face, that the children of ISRAEL COULD NOT STEDFASTLY LOOK TO THE END OF THAT WHICH IS ABOLISHED: (2 Corinthians 3:13)

When Moses returned from having met with God (i.e. with Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament, the One who consistently dealt with Israel) and brought God's instructions to Israel, the people were afraid of him, and so Moses put a veil over his face (see Exodus 34:29-35). The point Paul is making in this verse is that the people of Israel could not "look to" (i.e. understand) "THE END" (i.e. the outcome, goal, purpose and intent) of God's instructions.

Now notice Paul's next statement:

But THEIR MINDS WERE BLINDED: FOR UNTIL THIS DAY REMAINETH THE SAME VAIL UNTAKEN AWAY IN THE READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT; which [vail] is done away in Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:14)

Did we get that?

Paul clearly states:

- 1) The minds of the Jews are blinded.
- 2) It's been that way since the time of Moses.
- 3) It is STILL that way ... "UNTIL THIS DAY".
- 4) This "blindness" applies when the Jews read the O.T..
- 5) That veil is only removed when we come into God's Church, which Paul expresses as "is done away in Christ".

Now if there is "a veil" over their minds when they read the Old Testament, it means that the Jews DO NOT READ THE OLD TESTAMENT CORRECTLY! AND THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE OLD TESTAMENT CORRECTLY!

Is 2 Corinthians 3:14 an inspired statement or not? If it IS inspired by God, then we should not look to those who are blind and who cannot read the Old Testament without a veil being over their minds, for guidance in understanding the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ said very plainly about the religious leaders:

Let them alone: THEY BE BLIND LEADERS of the blind. And IF THE BLIND LEAD THE BLIND, BOTH SHALL FALL INTO THE DITCH. (Matthew 15:14)

Jesus Christ is obviously telling us not to follow those who are blind. And Paul tells us that the Jews are blind when it comes to reading the Old Testament.

So we should NOT be looking to the Jews for an understanding of the Old Testament.

Notice Paul's next statement:

But even unto this day, WHEN MOSES IS READ, THE VAIL IS UPON THEIR HEART. (2 Corinthians 3:15)

How plain! And that's "the plain truth". When the five books of Moses (and also the rest of the Old Testament, as mentioned in the previous verse) are read, the Jews simply don't really understand the truth. And that veil remains over them UNTIL they come to a real repentance. This is what Paul explains in the next verse ...

Nevertheless when it (i.e. their heart) shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. (2 Corinthians 3:16)

So how can we possibly look to unconverted Jews (i.e. Jews whose hearts have not yet 'turned to the Lord') for a correct understanding of what Moses said? The answer is: we can't look to them at all for a correct understanding!

A few verses later, in the next chapter, Paul wrote the following well-known verse:

In whom THE GOD OF THIS WORLD HATH BLINDED THE MINDS OF THEM WHICH BELIEVE NOT, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Do the Jews as a group today "believe" the truth of God? No, they don't! Have their minds been blinded? Yes, they have, as Paul has already clearly stated in the previous chapter. So are they basically in the same situation as people in other religious affiliations, whose minds are also blinded (e.g. Catholics, Protestants, etc.)? Yes, they are! So is the spiritual understanding of the Jews of more value than the spiritual understanding of other blinded religions? No, it is not! So is a Jewish commentary on any part of the Bible inherently of more value than some non-Jewish commentary? No, it is not!

As Paul said, the veil remains "untaken away" from them!

THE JEWS "ERR" WHEN THEY READ THE SCRIPTURES

Notice this account of an event during Christ's ministry:

The Sadducees had come to Christ with what they felt was a sure-fire trick question, which He (they thought) would not be able to answer. Here is how Christ replied to them:

Jesus answered and said unto them, YE DO ERR, NOT KNOWING THE SCRIPTURES, nor the power of God. (Matthew 22:29)

The parallel account in Mark 12:24 reads:

And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, BECAUSE YE KNOW NOT THE

SCRIPTURES, neither the power of God? (Mark 12:24)

Jesus Christ was pointing out that they ERRED because they did not really UNDERSTAND the Scriptures; they would read their own wrong meanings into the Scriptures.

While in this particular example Jesus Christ was speaking to the Sadducees, the same is also true for the Pharisees (and thus for modern Judaism): they too ERR because they don't really understand the Scriptures. They couldn't and still can't help erring, because they are blinded to the truth.

Things haven't changed. Today they still "err" just as much as they did nearly 2000 years ago. So therefore their customs and traditions and understanding are not necessarily a true reflection at all of what God reveals to us through the Old Testament Scriptures. Today they still err by reading their own ideas and traditions into the Bible.

So don't expect to find more truth in the traditional Jewish understanding.

THE JEWS NEVER DID UNDERSTAND THE OLD TESTAMENT CORRECTLY

Notice also what the Apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 ...

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, [even] the hidden [wisdom], which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for HAD THEY KNOWN [IT], THEY WOULD NOT HAVE CRUCIFIED THE LORD OF GLORY. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Corinthians 2:7-9)

It was the Pharisees, the religious leaders at that time (and by "princes" Paul is referring to leaders), who stirred up and initiated the events that led to Christ's crucifixion. Paul is here saying that these Pharisees didn't understand the Old Testament at all, and therefore modern Judaism also doesn't really understand the Old Testament.

Let's now look at some facts about Judaism.

THE FACTS ABOUT "THE TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS"

Exactly 100 years ago now, in 1897 A.D., Michael L. Rodkinson brought out a copy of "The Babylonian Talmud", a monumental task. This set of volumes was published by the New Talmud Publishing Company in New York. It should be clear that Michael L. Rodkinson knew as much about the Talmud as anyone else, and a great deal more than most people. Six years later, in 1903, Michael L. Rodkinson wrote a series of books entitled "THE HISTORY OF THE TALMUD". These books were published by the same publishing company.

With his background he was as qualified to write such a series of books as anyone could be. The following information and quotations are all taken from Volume 1 of "THE HISTORY OF THE TALMUD" by Michael L. Rodkinson.

Are we ready for the facts?

Here is the opening sentence of chapter 1, on page 5:

"The name 'written law' was given to the Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa, and that of 'ORAL LAW' TO ALL THE TEACHINGS OF THE 'SAGES' CONSISTING OF COMMENTS ON THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE."

Do you grasp what is meant by "all the teachings of the sages"? Those are "the traditions of the elders". They are also known as "the oral law". These three terms all refer to exactly the same thing.

The word "sages" is defined in Webster's Dictionary as:

- "1. one (as a profound philosopher) distinguished for wisdom;
2. a mature or venerable man sound in judgment."

So right up front, in the opening sentence of the book, Michael Rodkinson defines "ORAL LAW" for us. Here are the points of the definition:

ORAL LAW = ALL THE TEACHINGS of the "profound philosophers";

ORAL LAW = ALL THE TEACHINGS of the "venerable and wise men";

ORAL LAW = ALL THE TEACHINGS of the "men sound in judgment";

ORAL LAW = ALL THE COMMENTARIES these men produced.

To put this into a Church of God perspective, if Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong had lived 1900 years ago, then his teachings and his writings and his Bible Studies would have become recognized as a part of "the oral law".

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING MORE TO "THE ORAL LAW" THAN THE TEACHINGS OF MEN AND THE COMMENTARIES OF MEN AND THE IDEAS OF MEN!

And it has absolutely NOTHING AT ALL to do with any "laws" or "information" or "oral instructions" that were supposedly handed down from the time of Moses or any of the subsequent prophets up to the time of Malachi. ALL of these teachings that are found in the Talmud are from "sages" who lived AFTER the close of the Old Testament. This makes clear that this "oral law" has nothing at all to do with any revelation from God.

The next sentence on page 5 reads:

"The word Torah alone was applied to the entire Bible, THE TERM "TALMUD" WAS RESERVED FOR THE ORAL LAW, though the meaning of these two words is identical; namely, "teaching" or "study".

Understand that the Talmud IS "the oral law"; and the oral law IS the Talmud; the Talmud is equal to "the traditions of the elders"; and the traditions of the elders are recorded in the Talmud. These terms refer to one and the same thing!

People hide behind impressive words. The expression "oral law" sounds much more credible than the expression "the Talmud" or the expression "the traditions of the elders". Would ANYONE in the Church of God today honestly claim:

"the Jews, at God's instruction, preserve THE TALMUD which is IN ADDITION TO the written law"?

Does anyone honestly believe that God "GAVE" the Talmud to the Jewish people to preserve?

Let's continue our quotation from page 5:

"The name 'Talmud' was applied to what was styled by the long phrase 'ORAL LAW' (Torah-she b'al-Peh). THIS WORD DESIGNATED ALL THE COMMENTARIES OF THE SAGES ON THE SCRIPTURES WHICH THE PHARISEES HAD BEGUN TO INTERPRET FIGURATIVELY."

Do we grasp the significance of this candid admission?

The "oral law" is a FIGURATIVE INTERPRETATION of the Scriptures! And it is nothing more than "commentaries" of "wise men" ... like Mr. Armstrong and those who wrote booklets for the Church of God to publish (to see it in our terms).

Is that what you want ... a FIGURATIVE interpretation of the Scriptures? That is precisely what the Worldwide Church of God has started to do in recent years. Do you really BELIEVE that God intended for you to interpret His Word FIGURATIVELY? Because that is precisely what the traditional Jewish understanding is all about.

Now it is one thing to claim that God USED Mr. Armstrong to make known and to teach truths that had been lost; it is another thing altogether to elevate Mr. Armstrong's writings to the level of "ORAL LAW". Besides, while most of us accept that God did indeed use Mr. Armstrong to restore truths which had been lost, most of us would also strongly question that God continued to work through the Jewish "sages" up to the beginning of the 5th century A.D.. And if we would then actually make the effort to READ what these "sages" wrote, how they argued about trivial and totally irrelevant issues, then we would very quickly be convinced that God was assuredly NOT working through those "sages".

On page 6 Rodkinson states:

"All the sages who interpreted the biblical passages figuratively, unlike the Samaritans, were called 'Pharisees'."

This acknowledges that the oral law, the figurative interpretation of biblical passages, is the product of the Pharisees. It is synonymous with "the teachings of the Pharisees".

Now notice this statement, also from page 6:

"They [i.e. the priests] founded a distinct sect, styled 'Sadducees' (after Zadok), AND THE DISPUTE WITH THE PHARISEES AND THEIR TEACHING, i.e. WITH THE TALMUD, WAS BEGUN."

What was the source of the dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees? It was over "the ORAL LAW", the Talmud. The Sadducees did not accept the figurative interpretations which the Pharisees had invented for the Talmud. The Sadducees DID NOT ACCEPT THE ORAL LAW AS VALID! So should YOU be accepting it as valid? [The Sadducees also kept the Passover at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan and they always observed Pentecost on a Sunday, because they rejected the Pharisees'

interpretation of the instructions for the Passover and for Pentecost.]

Here is the next quote, found on pages 6-7:

"Then [i.e. eventually] the Pharisees triumphed over their foes, AND THE ORAL LAW WAS THE ABSORBING SUBJECT OF THE SANHEDRIN, under the leadership of Joshua b. Prachia, Simon b. Shetah and Jehudah b. Tabai. The Talmud was then studied in all colleges of Palestine, Egypt and wherever Jews lived."

The "oral law" replaced the written Word of God as being the most important thing. That is exactly the same situation TODAY amongst the Jews ... the Talmud is studied in far more detail and is considered to be a higher authority than the Scriptures. In this regard it is no different from the Catholics, for whom the writings of the "church fathers" and the decrees of the Catholic Church carry a higher authority than the Bible.

Next, on page 7 we are told:

"The Pharisees studied the ancient Mishnayoth, ADDED TO THEM, and explained the biblical texts. ALL THIS WAS TITLED ORAL LAW, OR, SHORTLY, 'TALMUD'."

There you have it again! The "Oral Law" is nothing more or less than THE WHOLE TALMUD!

Now notice the next statement, also from page 7:

"After the triumph of Simon b. Shetah over the Sadducees, when he had finally cleared the Sanhedrin of them, AND ONLY THE PHARISEES REMAINED THERE, THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TALMUD PROGRESSED RAPIDLY, for the number of the sages, THE ADHERENTS, REVERERS, SANTIFIERS OF THE TALMUD, increased greatly in the colleges of the Ashkaloth (Duumviri) who succeeded to ben Shetah ..."

Once the Pharisees had managed to kick ALL opposition out of the Sanhedrin, THEN the development of the oral law really took off! Notice how they approached the Talmud (the oral law) ... as "reverers and sanctifiers". The oral law clearly became the all-important thing ... the Bible itself very much took a backseat.

On page 8 Rodkinson writes:

"Besides, the disciples of Jesus, who then believed in his Messiahship, but not in his divinity, began secretly to undermine the Talmud, WHICH LAID MORE STRESS ON EXTERNAL CEREMONIES THAN THEY DEEMED NECESSARY, and endeavored with all their might to weaken its influence among the populace, but ..."

Notice that the oral law lays a lot of stress on "EXTERNAL CEREMONIES". That doesn't sound like anything God would inspire AFTER the ministry of Jesus Christ, does it? I mean, if Christ didn't give any of these "external ceremonies" to His disciples for the Church to observe, then WHY would God have possibly inspired such external ceremonies to be a part of "THE ORAL LAW"? The truth is that the oral law is nothing more than the ideas of men! Its roots can be found in pagan customs and ideas.

Notice also that Rodkinson claims that "the disciples of Jesus" secretly undermined "THE TALMUD"; it isn't claimed that they undermined "THE BIBLE" or "THE OLD TESTAMENT" ... no, the Talmud was the all-important thing to guard and to protect. Note also that historically "the disciples of Jesus" UNDERMINED the Talmud ... yet TODAY there are "disciples of Jesus" (i.e. people in God's Church) who want to look to and endorse the teachings found in the Talmud. That is the opposite of what "the disciples of Jesus" have done in the past.

After the split in the schools of Hillel and Shammai (both schools represented the Pharisees), the oral law was interpreted differently by these groups. Notice this quote from page 9:

"Thus the teaching of the Talmud was DIFFERENTLY INTERPRETED by two parties, AND WHAT THE ONE PERMITTED, THE OTHER FORBADE."

That is confusion! But it is PRECISELY what the "oral law" enables people to do ... to INTERPRET things just as they want to interpret them. God is not anywhere in the picture when we talk about this "oral law" or about modern Jewish understanding.

Here is another statement from page 9:

"At the end of the first century it [i.e. THE ORAL LAW, THE TALMUD] was to them A SUBSTITUTE FOR THEIR DESTROYED TEMPLE; it was their stronghold, their entertainment by day and by night ... IT WAS THE SOLE BOND WHICH KEPT TOGETHER THE SCATTERED COLONIES OF ISRAELITES, which strengthened them to bear the yoke of the Romans."

Notice! It was NOT THE BIBLE which kept the scattered colonies of Jews bonded together ... it was the oral law, the teachings of the profound philosophers and wise men, who specialized in finding FIGURATIVE explanations for the biblical texts! The only reason for the Bible in this picture of things is to provide a valid reason for the existence of the oral law. That's all! Having thus justified the existence of the oral law, the Bible itself (i.e. the Old Testament) could conveniently be pushed into the background. And it was! The Talmud was the "SOLE" bond.

When Hadrian became emperor, he issued a decree that if any of the old rabbis should qualify a young rabbi for Israel, "both should be put to death" (page 11). As the author states:

"... because he [i.e. Hadrian] very well knew that AS LONG AS THE TALMUD EXISTED there was little hope for the assimilation of the Jews with other nations."

Next Rodkinson explains:

"The translation of the Bible (written law) into Greek also contributed very much to the popularization of the Talmud. AS LONG AS THE TORAH WAS IN THE SACRED LANGUAGE ONLY, ALL JEWISH SECTS AND FOREIGN SCHOLARS INTERPRETED IT IN THEIR OWN WAY." (pages 11-12)

Do you understand the significance of this statement?

There are people in the Churches of God today who feel that it is imperative to study the Old Testament in Hebrew. Yet here A HEBREW SCHOLAR AND EXPERT, Michael Rodkinson, tells us that when it

comes to the HEBREW text, then "all JEWISH sects" interpret it their own way! They disagree with one another!

Do we grasp this?

If you are a non-Jew who does not understand Hebrew, you are likely to assume that "the Jews" somehow CLEARLY UNDERSTAND what the Old Testament Scriptures say and mean. That couldn't be further from the truth! Here an authority on the Hebrew text plainly says that when the Jews read the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, then they ... "INTERPRET IT IN THEIR OWN WAY", i.e. they disagree with OTHER Jews who interpret the same HEBREW text differently.

THE JEWS ARE CLEARLY DIVIDED IN THE WAY THEY UNDERSTAND THE OLD TESTAMENT.

This quotation from Rodkinson makes clear that the Jews themselves commonly disagreed on what the biblical texts actually mean. This is where the Talmud comes in, to attempt to achieve a uniformity of belief ... but at the expense of not actually examining the biblical texts themselves.

That same purpose is served in the Roman Catholic religion by the "CATECHISM". Webster's Dictionary gives the first meaning for the word "catechism" as "ORAL INSTRUCTION" ... in other words, to the Roman Church the catechism represents "THE ORAL LAW". It is exactly the same thing and serves exactly the same purpose as does the Talmud to the Jewish people.

After Hadrian died in 138 A.D. and was succeeded by Antonius Pius as emperor, three leading rabbis went to Rome to petition the new emperor to repeal the decree of Hadrian, which prohibited the study of the Talmud. Rodkinson writes on page 12:

"... to repeal the decree, which according to the tradition of the Talmud, they affected ONLY through the intervention of 'BEN TEMALION' (A DEMON ACCORDING TO SOME; A MAN ACCORDING TO OTHERS)."

It is interesting that, according to the oral law, A DEMON helped the Jewish leaders to have a Roman law, which prevented the study of the Jewish oral law, repealed. As usual, the oral law also offers another alternative ... that it was a man (unknown and unidentified except by an unrecognized name) who helped the Jewish leaders. But the very thought that they "might have" enlisted the help of a demon to help them uphold the oral law casts a rather dubious shadow over the whole oral law. WHY would a demon want to help them retain their "oral law"?

You can't help but think of John 8:44 ...

On page 13 Rodkinson writes:

"The sages, the commentators of the Talmud, differed in opinion as to the epoch WHEN THE TALMUD BEGAN TO BE WRITTEN DOWN. The scholars of Spain, and their colleagues and disciples, said that it had been recorded from notes possessed since schools had begun in Israel, a long time before R. Jehudah the Nasi. The scholars of France, among them "Rashi", however, declared that not a line was written till the completion of the Talmud, before which its study had been oral. EACH SCHOOL ADDUCTED PROOFS IN BEHALF OF ITS ASSERTIONS. Modern scholars have made a compromise between these various versions ..."

Again, we have confusion. Some people claim one thing and some people claim another thing. And that is the way it goes for the oral law. We have nothing more than opinions and assertions on the part of the proponents of this oral law.

In speaking about the chief Jewish leader at that time, R. Jehudah the Nasi, who was the grandson of Gamaliel the Elder, Rodkinson writes, also on page 13:

"Still he met with many obstacles. THE CHIEF ONE WAS THE DIVISION OF OPINION AMONG THE STUDENTS OF THE TALMUD THEMSELVES."

The students of the oral law (not "the students of the Bible") couldn't even agree amongst themselves regarding many of the points of this oral law.

Page 14 states:

"The second difficulty was in selecting, FROM AMONG THE MASS OF INCONGRUOUS DOCTRINES AND LAWS --- many of which had become obsolete, and others found to be unnecessary or impracticable --- those which were both practicable and of direct application (for a tradition relates that Rabbi [the chief leader who died around 223 A.D.] found SIX HUNDRED SECTIONS of Mishnayoth; and even if we admit that this number is greatly exaggerated, still if even one hundred existed, it was no light task to reduce them to six).

Note this state of affairs ... "INCONGRUOUS DOCTRINES AND LAWS"!

At the time of Rabbi there were from 100 to 600 different sections of Mishnayoth in existence, which Rabbi reduced down to just SIX! How many of those from 100 to 600 sections of Mishnayoth were in fact faithfully handed down as "ORAL LAWS" from the time of Moses? None at all!

On pages 14-15 he writes:

"Reason compels us to admit, at least, that there were passages in the Mishnayoth concerning Jesus and his teachings ... We must, therefore, conclude that Rabbi [i.e. the man who died around 223 A.D.] thought it well to clear the Mishnayoth of any reference to the occurrence itself [i.e. to Jesus Christ and His ministry], as well as to the adherents of the new faith. IN THIS HE ACTED WISELY, for he knew beforehand that the Mishnayoth would be THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH JUDAISM and the Talmud SHOULD BE BUILT, AND THAT THE INTERPRETATIONS OF IT WOULD BE MANY, EACH INTERPRETER FOLLOWING THE BIAS OF HIS MIND. Therefore it was deemed best by him to avoid all mention of the new event, to treat it as though it had no existence."

It is this oral law, and NOT the written Old Testament, which is "the foundation of Judaism". This is something most non-Jews don't really understand ... they tend to ASSUME that the foundation of Judaism IS the Old Testament. In fact, even many JEWS don't really understand this ... they too tend to assume that their customs and their understanding and their traditions come from the Old Testament. But that is simply not the case! It is the Talmud (the oral law) which is that foundation. It is really the same thing as so-called "Christians" assuming that the teachings of their church come out of the Bible, when in fact that is not the case at all.

Page 15 continues with:

"... he [i.e. Rabbi] was finally enabled to arrange in order SIX SECTIONS OF MISHNAYOTH, CONDENSED FROM HUNDREDS. Each section is given up to a general subject, and is subdivided into tracts dealing with matters which come naturally within the scope of the section. The tracts are further divided into chapters."

So here is what the Mishnah part of the oral law looks like:

- there are 6 Mishnayoth;
- Each Mishnah is divided into Tracts;
- Each Tract is divided into Chapters.

The subjects of the 6 Mishnayoth are as follows:

- 1) The Section of Seeds,
- 2) The Section of Festivals,
- 3) The Section of Women,
- 4) The Section of Damages,
- 5) The Section of Sacred Things (sacrifices),
- 6) The Section of Purifications (Tohoroth).

On page 16 Rodkinson makes the following parenthetical statement:

"(Sections "Festivals and Jurisprudence" [meaning Sections 2 and 4 above] have been already translated into English by us IN EIGHTEEN VOLUMES; the synopsis of which will be here appendixed.)"

This gives you some idea of the scope of these 6 Mishnayoth ... when 2 of them alone require 18 VOLUMES of text. They represent a staggering amount of material, all expressing the ideas of men, trying to give FIGURATIVE explanations for the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

On page 16 Rodkinson sums it up as follows:

"Thus the Mishna is an explanation of and a comment upon the Pentateuch, and teaches men how to conduct themselves in relation to their fellow-men, and incites them to all good and praiseworthy (actions)."

THUS THE MISHNA HAS REPLACED THE BIBLE!

All the teachings you could possibly need are found in the Mishna. So why would you even want to bother looking at the Bible itself? You don't really NEED the Bible ... when you have this Mishna. The Bible has been relegated into the background.

BUT THE MISHNA DOES NOT REPRESENT ANY "ORAL INSTRUCTIONS" WHICH HAVE SUPPOSEDLY BEEN PRESERVED FROM THE DAYS OF MOSES!

The next sentence on page 16 reads:

"In the short introduction to 'Sabbath' we have already described briefly the character of the Mishnayoth, which Rabbi arranged, AND HOW HE SUCCEEDED IN IMPARTING TO IT THE SANCTITY OF THE PENTATEUCH ITSELF, SO THAT NOTHING IS TO BE ADDED TO THEM, and what was done later after Rabbi's death, is not the place to expatiate on this subject; we may, however, state briefly that as soon as the Mishnayoth was completed, colleges were founded in Palestine and Babylonia to explain the meaning of the Mishnayoth AND DEVELOP THEIR LAWS TO THEIR ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCES."

NOTICE THIS ADMISSION!

This Jewish leader imparted to the oral law THE SAME SANCTITY as to the Word of God itself!

That is one major ENORMOUS problem!!

Imagine us today imparting to Mr. Armstrong's writings "the same sanctity" as to the Bible itself! The thought is preposterous, though there are a few people who have tried to do just that!

Those who appeal for support to the "oral law" don't really understand that to the Jewish religious authorities this "oral law" has REPLACED the WRITTEN LAW! And it is nothing more than the ideas and opinions of men.

Then, after Rabbi's death in around 223 A.D., other documents came to light, which in many places CONTRADICTED the Mishnayoth which Rabbi had compiled. So Rodkinson explains on pages 16-17:

"After Rabbi's death, when Boraithoth and Tosepheth were discovered which did not form part of his compilation AND WHICH IN MANY PLACES CONTRADICTED THE MISHNAYOTH, these colleges busied themselves in reconciling them with the Mishnayoth AND WITH EACH OTHER. They accounted for contradictions in Baraithoth (sic) by saying that one spoke of a case under same circumstances, while another meant a like case under different circumstances. SO THEY EXPLAINED THE DIFFERENCES IN THE MISHNAYOTH THEMSELVES, OFTEN DIVIDING A MISHNA, WHOSE PARTS SEEMED TO CONTRADICT EACH OTHER, and giving an explanation of the contradictions that the first part was according to one tana, but the latter part according to another."

TOTAL CHAOS AND CONFUSION!

Here is an admission of the obvious ... that this "oral law" is FILLED with contradictions. You are almost guaranteed to find something in the Talmud to support your own personal ideas, even if your own personal ideas can be shown to be wrong from the Word of God ... if you just search the Talmud long enough.

[As an aside: I remember my Jewish stepfather at various times quoting statements he had been taught in his youth, supposedly from "the good book". However, they were invariably quotations from the Talmud. NEVER ONCE DID HE QUOTE SOMETHING DIRECTLY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT. Yet my stepfather was convinced that he was quoting from the Bible. Many Jews today would feel the same

way ... that when they quote some statement from the Talmud, they themselves think that they are quoting from the Bible.]

Continuing our quotation from above:

"... but the latter part according to another. These discussions and comments on the Mishna they called 'Gemara', which also signifies 'TEACHING' in Aramaic, which was the spoken language of the sages of the Gemara, and to the combined Mishnayoth and Gemara they gave the old name, 'Talmud'."

There you have it. Now you know what the oral law is all about. Here it is in summary:

THE ORAL LAW = THE TALMUD;

THE TALMUD = THE MISHNA + THE GEMARA;

THE MISHNA = 6 DIFFERENT MISHNAYOTH;

EACH MISHNA = DIVIDED INTO TRACTS AND CHAPTERS;

THE GEMARA = THE COMMENTARIES ON THE MISHNAYOTH.

Two other words you need to know are: Halakha and Hagada. The Talmud contains both, Halakhas and Hagadas. "Halakhas" are decisions and doctrines of the sages and the scholars; "Hagadas" are legends and anecdotes. Many times in the Talmud a Hagada is interpolated in the middle of a Halakha.

The sages of the Gemara were called "Amoraim". These scholars did their utmost to justify all the contradictions in the Mishnayoth. They were around until about 500 A.D. when Mar b. Rah Ashi was one of the last of the Amoraim. As Rodkinson says on page 18:

" The Babylonian Talmudists ... their acuteness is evinced in their SO HARMONIZING THE CONTRADICTIONS AND DISAGREEMENTS, that they APPEAR to point to the same meaning. Not only did they interpret the Boraithas AT VARIANCE WITH THE MISHNAYOTH, but when even one of the great Amoraim appeared to differ from the Mishna THEY SO DISTORTED THE LATTER that it should seem to agree with the Amora. A similar difference existed among the authors of the Hagada; SOME GAVE TO BIBLICAL TEXTS A NEW READING REMOTE FROM THE PLAIN MEANING, interpreting them in strange and marvellous ways, and basing on them legends of natural impossibilities, while some adhered closely to the literal meaning of texts, without adorning them with exaggerations."

This makes clear that you cannot give any credibility to either, the legends (Hagadas) or to the laws, decisions and doctrines (Halakhas) of the oral law. Both are filled with contradictions, disagreements and distortions. Here is one typical example of how the writers of the Gemara tried to reconcile contradictions:

A) The Talmud claims that Isaac was conceived in Tishri;

B) The Talmud also claims that Isaac was born at the Passover;

C) The time between these two events is less than 7 months! Therefore "the sages of the Gemara"

JUSTIFIED this contradiction by claiming that that year was a leap year with 13 months in it. And so the Babylonian Talmud presents this justification as follows:

"... a similar objection may be made, for who bears children in the sixth month of gestation? This last objection could be answered according to the following Boraitha: We have learned that that year was a leap year, and Mar Zutra says that although a child born during the month (but only at the end of the required time), **STILL A SEVEN MONTHS' CHILD CAN BE BORN BEFORE THE SEVENTH MONTH IS COMPLETE**, as it is said [1 Samuel 1:20]: "And it came to pass, 'li-tequphath ha-yamim' (when the time was come about)"; the minimum of 'tequphoth' is two and of 'yamim' is also two (i.e. **AFTER SIX MONTHS AND TWO DAYS' GESTATION, CHILDBIRTH IS POSSIBLE**)." (Babylonian Talmud)

The reasoning is absurd! Yet there are **MANY HUNDREDS** of examples of this type of reasoning, which attempt to justify blatant and obvious contradictions within the Talmud, the oral law. And Rodkinson freely acknowledges this state of affairs.

People in God's Church who don't have the faintest idea about how these hagadas (legends) originated (namely, as the figment of the imagination of men who tried to reconcile irreconcilable contradictions in the oral law) have at times appealed to some of these hagadas for support for their own ideas! For example: a minister in God's Church, in an endeavour to provide further information, which is simply not provided in the Word of God, may support his own presentation with a statement like: "ACCORDING TO JEWISH TRADITION ..." Abraham did this, or Isaac did that, or Isaiah was sawn asunder, or the prophet Jonah did such-and-such, or Nimrod did this or that, etc. ... and they don't understand that the so-called "sages" themselves **MADE UP** all these "traditions", even as they did about Isaac's conception and Isaac's birth.

THERE IS NOT THE SLIGHTEST SHRED OF PROOF TO SUBSTANTIATE ANY OF THE NON-BIBLICAL TRADITIONS OF THE JEWS!

For example, the Jewish tradition that Isaac was **CONCEIVED** at a certain time of year is just as much nonsense as the Jewish tradition that Isaac was **BORN** at a certain time of the year (and the two traditional dates are not really nine months apart)! It is just as much nonsense as the Jewish tradition that the prophet Samuel was conceived at a certain time of the year! It is just as much nonsense as hundreds of other Jewish traditions about the Scriptures.

DOES THAT SOUND TOO STRONG TO YOU?

Well, if it does, it is because you haven't taken the time to **READ THE TALMUD** as I have done (small sections of it, to be sure). If you take eight hours in a library which has a copy of the Talmud (as I have done) and just read as much as possible, you simply **CANNOT AVOID CONCLUDING THAT YOU ARE READING "TOHU AND BOHU"**!

The contradictions, often on the same page, are unbelievable! It is the most chaotic work you could ever attempt to read. And you would have to do the same as the scholars of old did ... attempt to reconcile irreconcilable statements. On top of that, the discussions are so picky and so irrelevant and, in many cases, so absurd that it should very quickly be obvious to you that you are dealing with the thoughts and opinions and ideas of totally carnal men! What you would read in this "oral law" has really nothing at all to do with the law of God. And if you do indeed have God's Spirit guiding **YOUR** mind, then it should not be difficult for you to recognize that "as far as the east is from the west" so far is "the oral law" from the law of God ... they are the expressions of totally different minds.

To continue, after explaining that the Talmud really flourished in Babylon, since the Persian rulers were tolerant of it, Rodkinson then says on page 21:

"And so the Talmud became a vast sea, and its waves rose with might. R. Ashi (355-427) saw, therefore, that THE TIME HAD COME FOR REVISING, SYSTEMATIZING AND CONCLUDING IT, when he came to restore the college of Sura (Matha Mekhasia), which had fallen into decay on the death of Rabh."

So here was a man who in effect said:

"Okay, we've now got enough oral laws. Let's revise and edit them so that we can CONCLUDE the whole thing. We don't need any more input after this."

I could continue to present quotation after quotation to show that this whole oral law is nothing more than HUMAN IDEAS AND UNINSPIRED AND CONFLICTING COMMENTARIES on statements from the Bible.

It is exactly as the opening sentence of the book tells us ... the oral law consists of nothing more than the teachings of the learned men and their specific commentaries on texts in the Bible.

AT NO STAGE IS THERE EVER A HINT THAT SOMETHING WAS "ORALLY PRESERVED FROM THE TIME OF MOSES AND PASSED ON" FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT!

That is really SO OBVIOUS from the fact that everything is always attributed to a specific leader or teacher. HE TAUGHT that ..., or HE SAID that ..., etc.. When cases are documented, then the source of this law or of that teaching is always one or other of the rabbis. It doesn't go further back than some teacher who is not mentioned in the Bible itself. When the claim IS made that a certain teaching comes from Moses or from some other biblical figure, then for such assertions NO PROOF is ever provided. And in many cases those very things are in conflict with clear statements in the Bible.

For anyone reading the oral law, the thing which will probably make the greatest impression is the endless stream of CONTRADICTIONS! The attempts at reconciling these contradictions are absolutely unbelievable; but that is what Rodkinson has told us to expect.

Furthermore, we cannot trust the writings of even the best-known of ancient Jewish historians, Josephus. Let's just look at one example here from Josephus, who himself was also a Pharisee, and steeped in the traditions of the elders.

In his book "Antiquities of the Jews", Josephus wrote the following about Solomon in Book 8, Chapter 7, Section 8 (209):

8. (209) So Jeroboam was elevated by these words of the prophet; and being a young man, {e} of a warm temper, and ambitious of greatness, he could not be quiet; and when he had so great a charge in the government, and called to mind what had been revealed to him by Ahijah, he endeavoured to persuade the people to forsake Solomon, to make a disturbance, and to bring the government over to himself; (210) but when Solomon understood his intention and treachery, he sought to catch him and kill him; but Jeroboam was informed of it beforehand, and fled to Shishak, the king of Egypt, and there abode till the death of Solomon; by which means he gained

these two advantages, to suffer no harm from SOLOMON, and to be preserved for the kingdom. (211) So Solomon died when he was already an old man, HAVING REIGNED EIGHTY YEARS, and lived ninety-four. {} He was buried in Jerusalem, having been superior to all other kings in happiness, and riches, and wisdom, excepting that when he was growing older, he was deluded by women, and transgressed the law; concerning which transgressions, and the miseries which befell the Hebrews thereby, I think proper to discourse at another opportunity. (my emphasis)

To preserve the context, I have here quoted the whole paragraph, in which Josephus claims that Solomon reigned EIGHTY YEARS! This is in blatant, open opposition to the Bible, which states that Solomon reigned FORTY YEARS!

And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was FORTY YEARS. (1 Kings 11:42 AV)

Clearly the Pharisee Josephus was not telling the truth when he boldly stated that Solomon had reigned 80 years. There are MANY examples of such discrepancies with biblical facts in the writings of Josephus.

The point is this: not only did the so-called "sages" simply make up the things that are written in the Talmud, but even the Jewish historian Josephus did the same thing. Josephus didn't do much of a job at "accurately preserving" how long Solomon had reigned.

To get back to us today:

There are people in the Church of God who claim that the Jews preserve "the oral law" in addition to the Old Testament. Now think about that for a while!

IF there really was SOME TRUTH which God WANTED preserved, and which the Jews WERE preserving ... THEN WHY ARE WE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD NOT MAKING A DILIGENT STUDY OF ALL OF THE ORAL LAW WHICH THE JEWS ARE SUPPOSEDLY PRESERVING at God's instruction? How can we possibly have the attitude of saying:

- 1) YES, the Jews ARE faithfully preserving some oral law.
- 2) BUT NO, we aren't really interested in studying that oral law ... unless there is a snippet here or there that we can use to support our own ideas?

How can we possibly bestow the judgment "FAITHFULLY PRESERVING THE ORAL LAW OF GOD" without so much as making even the slightest effort to examine what that "oral law" is all about? We don't do that with the writings of the Catholic Church ... so how can we do it with the writings of the Jewish Church? Are we afraid to put the "oral law" to the test?

I have taken the trouble and the time to read for myself in this "oral law", something the majority of you have up to this point very likely not yet done. Yet many of you have firm opinions about this oral law. That is something I find amazing ... you have an opinion about the oral law without ever so much as having read at least ten or more consecutive pages of this oral law. You are (in many cases) convinced of certain things about this oral law ... yet you don't make the effort to prove for yourself whether your convictions in this regard are an accurate reflection of the facts. You hold your convictions about the oral law "on faith". If this is the case for you, then I will tell you that you have a BLIND faith as far as the oral law of the Jews is concerned.

What I have shown you in this section is that what the Jews call "the oral law" is nothing more than a collection of the confused and contradictory ideas of men.

Also, I have shown you the words of a JEWISH scholar! Michael Rodkinson was thoroughly versed in the customs and traditions of his own people. He had edited the English edition of the Babylonian Talmud. He had later written a series of volumes on the history of the Talmud. And his open statements and explanations about the Talmud, which I have quoted above, stand above question.

AND I HAVE NOT MISQUOTED MICHAEL RODKINSON!

From these clear statements by Michael Rodkinson about the Talmud and about "the oral law" and about the traditions of the Jews it becomes clear that the Jewish religion is nothing more than a collection of HUMANLY DEvised IDEAS! And that is basically what all paganism is ... it is humanly devised ideas about God and about religion and about how to serve God. As such, Judaism doesn't really differ all that much from the religion of Baal! If this statement offends you, I suggest that you personally take the time to study the oral law of the Jews for yourself, and carefully compare it with the Bible. If you are not prepared to do this, then how can you possibly have an opinion on the subject?

Now let us look at the message I referred to at the start of this article, the Jewish claim that the Passover in Egypt was eaten at the beginning of the 15th of Nisan. This is in a message from Mr. Mark Kaplan of the United Church of God.

Here are the background facts.

THE JEWISH VIEW OF THE PASSOVER, AS EXPOUNDED BY MARK KAPLAN

During April 1997 Mr. David Cinardo of the Phoenix East UCG congregation sent a question about the Passover to Mr. Kaplan. To this question Mr. Kaplan sent a reply on May 1. In his reply Mr. Kaplan stated the following:

"There is no debate in the Jewish community concerning the plain facts that the Passover lamb was slaughtered at the end of the fourteenth of Abib and eaten on the very beginning of the fifteenth, the beginning of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The matter is not debatable. Years ago, Mr. Armstrong determined from his understanding of material in the Synoptic Gospels that a position should be taken on the chronology of Exodus 12 that is actually in opposition to all competent authorities and to Jewish practice. We tried to correct the problem in 1978.

Since that time, the CGI community has taught this matter correctly. We thought that we had succeeded in solving the problem in 1990. Excellent material was published and a video tape was distributed to the DELS lectures." [end of quotation]

In response to this reply by Mr. Kaplan, a member of the Randburg, South Africa UCG congregation, Mr. Richard Moore, sent another question to Mr. Kaplan on May 5. Mr. Moore wrote:

"First you state that there is no debate amongst the Jews about when the Passover lamb is slain to be eaten etc. I quote from a paper by Frank Nelte in which he has quoted the Jews as follows:
... "

... and then Mr. Moore quoted sections from The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (UJE), copyright 1942, and from The Encyclopedia Judaica (EJ) of 1974, quotes which I have presented in my article "When Should We Observe the Passover".

To this message Mr. Kaplan responded on the same day, May 5 (California is 10 hours behind South Africa ... so when Mr. Kaplan composed his message, it was already May 6 for Mr. Moore in South Africa).

In his response Mr. Kaplan wrote:

"Thanks for your note. The UJE article has been misquoted. Please check the original source and prove this for yourself. After you have read the article for yourself, you will see that there is no disagreement among the Jews concerning the biblical instructions as regarding killing the lamb at the end of the fourteenth and eating it at the beginning of the fifteenth. There was a disagreement regarding how early at the end of the fourteenth to begin killing the lamb. An extreme view would start after noon. Some would argue that one should wait until it is almost the fifteenth. The standard practice was to begin at 3 PM on the fourteenth, which is when Christ died. Please let me know if you are unable to obtain a UJE so as to prove that the article has been misquoted."

So Mr. Kaplan has stated that I misquoted the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia! But I have NOT MISQUOTED AT ALL!

Here is the entire paragraph, from which I had quoted. It is exactly as it appears in the UJE in the article "PASCHAL LAMB" on page 406 of Volume 8. All the punctuation is as it appears in the article; only in order to highlight the sentence I quoted, and which Mr. Kaplan accuses me of misquoting, I will CAPITALIZE that whole sentence. Here is the whole paragraph:

"This story of the first paschal lamb, as related in the Bible, became the pattern for the observance of Passover during the period of the Temple, but with a few modifications. Thus the sacrifice took place in the sanctuary and the blood was sprinkled upon the altar. THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES HAD A DISPUTE AS TO THE TIME WHEN THE SLAUGHTERING SHOULD TAKE PLACE; THE FORMER HELD IT SHOULD BE IN THE LAST THREE HOURS BEFORE SUNSET, THE LATTER, BETWEEN SUNSET AND NIGHTFALL. While the sacrifices were being made, the Levites sang Hallel Psalms; these psalms were later sung by the participants in the paschal meal, and many of them glorified the Exodus and the significance of the festival. With the destruction of the Second Temple the Jews ceased to sacrifice the paschal lamb, and only the lamb-bone on the Seder table recalls it; the Samaritans have retained the ancient rite to the present day." (UJE, Vol. 8, page 406)

What Mr. Kaplan really SHOULD have done is:

- A) Present my quotation from UJE;
- B) Present the correct quotation from UJE;
- C) Highlight where my quotation supposedly differs from the source document.

THIS MR. KAPLAN HAS NOT DONE! INSTEAD, HE SIMPLY CLAIMED THAT I WAS

"MISQUOTING" THE ENCYCLOPEDIA!

He expected Mr. Moore to simply accept his assertion that I was misquoting ... but he did not provide any proof. So look at the above paragraph from the UJE.

Where have I misquoted this JEWISH reference work? I have not misquoted at all! Mr. Kaplan's claim that I misquoted the UJE is simply contrary to the facts.

THE FACTS ARE:

1) The UJE points out that THE PHARISEES kept "their" Passover in the last three hours before sunset (i.e. from about 3:00 p.m. to about 6:00 p.m.). That is clearly THE END OF THE DAY! When the sun set, then the 14th day had ended!

2) The UJE points out that THE SADDUCEES kept the passover BETWEEN SUNSET AND NIGHTFALL! Since a day starts with sunset, therefore the period "between sunset and nightfall" must be THE BEGINNING OF THE DAY! There is no other option.

3) The UJE specifically states that the Pharisees and the Sadducees "HAD A DISPUTE" over the timing of the Passover. But that dispute had NOTHING TO DO WITH "NOON" as a possible start for the time of the Passover! The UJE mentions TWO specific periods of time: for the Pharisees it mentions BEFORE sunset and for the Sadducees it mentions AFTER sunset! Mr. Kaplan's introduction of "noon" as one extreme view has nothing at all to do with the CORRECT quotation I have presented from the UJE.

4) It is a fact that Jesus Christ kept the Passover with His disciples between sunset and nightfall, at the same time when the Sadducees kept it according to this Universal Jewish Encyclopedia.

5) The information I presented earlier from Michael Rodkinson about the history of the Talmud also makes clear that the Pharisees did not succeed in kicking the Sadducees out of positions of influence until the time of Simon b. Shetah, long after the ministry of Jesus Christ. Recall also the quote where Rodkinson refers to the Sadducees as "THE FOES" of the Pharisees!

6) Michael Rodkinson has also pointed out that the Pharisees are the ones who rejected the literal meaning of Old Testament Scriptures in favour of figurative meanings.

7) The UJE's statement that the Sadducees kept the Passover "between sunset and nightfall", and therefore AT THE START OF THE 14TH, is simply an honest statement of the facts ... as it was at the time of Christ's ministry. Mr. Kaplan's assertion that ...

"After you have read the article for yourself, you will see that THERE IS NO DISAGREEMENT AMONG THE JEWS concerning the biblical instructions as regarding killing the lamb at the end of the fourteenth and eating it at the beginning of the fifteenth."

... is simply not true!

Today there is no disagreement amongst the religious Jews regarding when they observe their Pesach, but DURING THE FIRST CENTURY A.D. there was indeed a disagreement, as the UJE article plainly states.

8) Several years ago, around 1990, when WCG was planning to change the observance of the Passover and to twist the historic facts, they realized that they could not argue with the fact that the expression

"between the evenings" (see Exodus 12:6) refers to the time between sunset and nightfall ... just as the Sadducees understood it to be.

THEREFORE the only course of action open to WCG was to claim that the day does not start and end at sunset, but rather that it starts and ends at total darkness. In that way they then tried to assert that the Passover in Egypt took place at THE END of the 14th, because the 14th would only have ended with total darkness that night.

But even those who wanted to distort the truth about the Passover (i.e. WCG) realized that there was no way they could claim that God's instruction to kill the Passover "between the evenings" could be construed to mean any time BEFORE sunset!

Let's continue with Mr. Kaplan's response to Mr. Moore's questions. Next Mr. Kaplan wrote:

"The EJ article was only partially quoted and applied incorrectly. The EJ was written to include a secular audience and was dominated by secular scholars. When it covers the Holy Days, the pattern is to cover the traditional material, and then to explain what is clearly labeled, "The Critical View." The Critical View section gives the opinion of secular scholars who do not accept the divine authority of scriptural explanations for the origin of the Holy Days. The Critical View is not the view of "Jewish" authorities but of modern secular scholarship.

No competent secular scholar, however, including any of the ones in the EJ, would deny that the biblical instructions call for the sacrifice of the Passover lamb at the end of the fourteenth, and for its eating at the beginning of the fifteenth. The Critical View was not offered to try to reinterpret the biblical command, but rather to explain its origins to people who will not accept the biblical explanations for the origins of the Holy Days." [end of quote]

COMMENTS: Of course, the article is only "PARTIALLY" quoted ... it is several pages of small print in its entirety. What do you expect ... the whole, complete article?

Yes, the quote is from the section labelled "CRITICAL VIEW". So what? Does that make it untrue? No, it doesn't make it untrue!

First of all, the scholars who wrote this article in the EJ "ARE" most assuredly "Jewish" ... the article entitled "Passover" was most emphatically NOT written by a "non-Jew"! And the view expressed in this section "Critical View" is the view of certain JEWS!

Next, it is patently UNTRUE to imply that the "other" Jewish scholars (i.e. those who don't qualify for the term "secular scholars") somehow "ACCEPT THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURAL EXPLANATIONS"! Those "non-secular" scholars don't accept "divine authority" any more than the secular scholars ... what they really accept is THEIR TRADITIONS! And they accept "FIGURATIVE" interpretations of the Scriptures, as Rodkinson has so clearly explained.

To the RELIGIOUS Jewish scholars Jesus Christ says very plainly:

FULL WELL YE REJECT THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, THAT YE MAY KEEP YOUR OWN TRADITION! (Mark 7:9)

To the RELIGIOUS Jewish scholars the Apostle Paul says:

FOR UNTIL THIS DAY REMAINETH THE SAME VAIL UNTAKEN AWAY IN THE READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (2 Corinthians 3:14)

Where on earth do you get the idea from that the Jewish scholars (outside of God's Church) "... ACCEPT the divine authority of scriptural explanations"?? Did they "accept" the truth about Psalm 82:6 in the days of Jesus Christ? No they didn't! As Christ explained in John 10:34, quoting Psalm 82:6:

Jesus answered them, IS IT NOT WRITTEN IN YOUR LAW, I SAID, YE ARE GODS? (John 10:34)

Do these Jewish scholars accept the truth of Psalm 82:6 TODAY? No, they still don't accept that truth! They twist it and distort it so that it no longer means what it plainly says ... something the Pharisees specialized in doing.

So don't be taken in by the claim that the religious Jewish scholars somehow accept THE TRUTH of God's instructions in the Old Testament. The Jewish scholars have not changed since the time of Christ's ministry. What Jesus Christ said about them over 1900 years ago is STILL TRUE TODAY!

Furthermore, the minds of Jewish scholars, who are not also repentant and converted Christians, are just as HOSTILE to the laws (i.e. instructions) of God as the minds of unconverted non-Jewish people. Unconverted Jewish scholars are not somehow more receptive to the true teachings of the Old Testament. Romans 8:7 applies "TO THE JEW FIRST, and also to the Gentile ...".

BECAUSE THE CARNAL MIND [IS] ENMITY AGAINST GOD: FOR IT IS NOT SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF GOD, NEITHER INDEED CAN BE. (Romans 8:7)

Here is the quotation from the Encyclopedia Judaica:

"Critical View: The feast of Passover consists of two parts: The Passover ceremony and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Originally both parts existed separately; but at the beginning of the Exile they were combined.

Passover was originally not a pilgrimage feast, but a domestic ceremony consisting of the slaughtering and eating of the paschal animal." (EJ, Vol. 13, page 169)

This is called "the critical view", but that does not mean it is incorrect. Where did the "critical" authors get this idea from ... that "ORIGINALLY BOTH PARTS EXISTED SEPARATELY"? Did they get that idea from some "secular source"? No, they didn't! Did they come up with this idea just to please some people ... "who will not accept the biblical explanations for the origins of the Holy Days"? No, they didn't! Where did they get this idea from?

They got it from the text of the Old Testament! They got it by reading the first five books of the Bible! Because it is THE BIBLE which makes very clear that "ORIGINALLY" the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread existed separately. It is THE BIBLE that makes clear that:

IN THE FOURTEENTH [DAY] OF THE FIRST MONTH at even [is] the LORD'S PASSOVER.

(Leviticus 23:5)

AND ON THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF THE SAME MONTH [is] THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. (Leviticus 23:6)

THE BIBLE makes clear that the one event is on the 14th and the other is on the 15th! And so the Encyclopedia Judaica is doing nothing more than making A FACTUAL OBSERVATION, based on the Old Testament. This observation is, however, critical of the TRADITIONAL view of Judaism, and thus it could not really appear under the main heading of this article.

So what is the real problem with Mr. Kaplan's comments about the Passover?

The real problem with Mr. Kaplan is that he really hasn't changed in his understanding since coming into God's Church. His view is nothing more than the "TRADITIONAL" Jewish view; it is the view of those over whose eyes there is a veil when they read the Old Testament; it is the view of those who FULL WELL REJECT THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD in order to maintain their own traditions; it is the view of those who LAY ASIDE the commandments of God; it is the view of those whose minds are AT ENMITY to the laws of God; it is the view of those who give greater credibility to "tradition" than to the Word of God. That is the view Mr. Kaplan's ideas are shackled to.

AND THAT IS THE REAL PROBLEM!

What we have in the traditional Jewish view of the Passover is A CLASSIC EXAMPLE of how the Pharisees reasoned around clear biblical statements, how they tried to reconcile contradictions to their own traditions. It is a classic example of what Michael Rodkinson explains in his books about the history of the Talmud.

For example, you will notice that Mr. Kaplan at no stage reasons from the Scriptures themselves! Instead he appeals to "competent authorities" and to "Jewish practice" (letter to David Cinardo). WHO CARES about "competent authorities"? WHO CARES about "JEWISH PRACTICE"? It was "competent authorities" and "Jewish practice" which rejected and condemned Jesus Christ over 1900 years ago! [Yes, if we had been there, we too would have been involved in the condemning. I am not trying to imply that we would have done differently under the circumstances. But it was the Jewish RELIGIOUS LEADERS who instigated things.]

"Competent authorities" is nothing more than a synonym for "the official views of the sect of the Pharisees". Rodkinson's work makes this very clear. There is a vast difference between "competent authorities" and "Jewish practice" on the one hand, and "THE TRUTH" on the other hand. There is only ONE competent authority, and that is God! The Word of God must be the standard, not some human practice or custom. As we are told in the book of Isaiah:

To the law and to the testimony: IF THEY SPEAK NOT ACCORDING TO THIS WORD, [IT IS] BECAUSE [THERE IS] NO LIGHT IN THEM. (Isaiah 8:20)

How can you possibly trust an explanation of a biblical instruction if that explanation is not supported by the Bible itself? Without such support there is no "light" in such an explanation.

So now, first let's look at the biblical facts about the Passover, and then let's examine this example of how the Pharisees reasoned around God's clear and straight-forward instructions in order to "lay aside" the commandment of God.

THE FACTS ABOUT THE PASSOVER IN EGYPT

The basic instructions for the Passover are found in Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5 and Numbers 9:2-3. Notice:

And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it IN THE EVENING. (Exodus 12:6)

In the fourteenth [day] of the first month AT EVEN [is] the LORD'S passover. (Leviticus 23:5)

2 Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season. 3 In the fourteenth day of this month, AT EVEN, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it. (Numbers 9)

The first FACT about the Passover is that it is to take place ON THE 14TH DAY OF THE FIRST MONTH. And it is to take place either "IN" the evening, or "BETWEEN THE EVENINGS".

The next basic fact to establish is to determine when GOD tells us that a day starts. This we find at the very start of the Word of God, in Genesis chapter 1. There we are told repeatedly that "THE EVENING AND THE MORNING" were ... the first day, the second day, etc..

Genesis chapter 1 makes quite clear that "THE EVENING" is the start of a new day, as far as God is concerned.

From the above two points it becomes quite clear that the Passover must take place AT THE START OF THE DAY! God tells us that a day starts with "the evening", and then God tells us that the Passover is to be observed "in the evening".

The word "evening" refers to either A PERIOD OF TIME or to A SPECIFIC POINT IN TIME. As a period of time, it is the period from sunset until nightfall (or darkness). This is also referred to as "dusk". The Hebrew word for "evening" comes from a root word which means "to grow dark". Thus "the evening" is the time when it grows dark, but before full darkness sets in.

When we are given the instruction that the Passover is to be "BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS", then the word "evening" is used to refer to a specific point in time, rather than to a period of time. As a specific point in time, the word "evening" refers to THE START of that period of time. Thus "SUNSET" is the specific point in time called "the evening". Thus, when the Sabbath is observed "from even unto even", it means from sunset unto sunset.

When there is a reference to "between TWO evenings", then it refers to the two limits of the period of time known as "evening". In that case "the first evening" is at sunset, and "the second evening" is at the point when full darkness sets in. Therefore the Passover was to be observed between sunset and full darkness ... between the two evenings.

The key is to remember that the word "evening" can refer to either, a specific point in time, or to a period of time.

6) This understanding that the Hebrew expression "between the two evenings" refers to what we call "dusk" is also made very clear in the Old Testament translation of the JEWISH PUBLICATION

SOCIETY. The 51st impression, dated May 1967 and which is based on the copyright dates of 1917 and 1945, translates Exodus 12:6 as follows:

"... and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it AT DUSK." (Exodus 12:6, JPS)

This should make very clear that the JEWISH authorities understand this expression "between the two evenings" to refer to "DUSK". And THEREFORE the first evening simply MUST refer to "sunset" and the second evening MUST refer to "total darkness". The word "dusk" identifies the two evenings which are involved.

This translation as "dusk" by the Jewish Publication Society makes very clear that in their minds there is no doubt about what is meant by "between the two evenings". In spite of the custom of killing the lamb at around 3:00 p.m., and in spite of Mr. Kaplan claiming that the Passover lamb was to be killed at the end of the 14th day (and thus BEFORE dusk!) and that "the matter is not debatable", the Jewish translators nevertheless correctly translate this Hebrew expression as "DUSK".

SO THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE INSTRUCTION IN EXODUS 12:6 REFERS TO "AT DUSK", IN SPITE OF MR. KAPLAN'S SWEEPING CLAIM THAT "THERE IS NO DEBATE IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY" OVER THIS!

This is as clear an example of Christ's admonition ("full well you REJECT the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition", Mark 7:9) as you could hope to find.

Without contradiction "SUNSET" is a point of transition or a dividing line. It is also one specific point in time, which can be pinpointed with reasonable accuracy. It is also something objective ... the sun either has or it has not set for the day. Sunset is not influenced by the absence or the presence of clouds. It is not influenced by our ability to see it ... the time of sunset can be determined even when we are inside a building without windows.

The point of "DARKNESS", on the other hand, is something very subjective. Darkness IS influenced by the presence or the absence of clouds. It is influenced by a person's eyesight ... for those with poorer eyesight darkness occurs earlier than for those who have better vision. For those who are outside, their eyes become conditioned to the gradual transition to darkness, where those who suddenly emerge from a well-lit building may perceive it to be considerably darker than those who have been outside all along.

The period of dusk is not consistent ... on a cloudless day it will be longer than on a heavily overcast day. The length of dusk is very much subject to specific weather conditions, whereas the time of sunset is independent of weather conditions.

As God instituted it in Egypt, the Passover involved a meal! Thus the Bible speaks about "EATING the Passover". Notice:

And THUS SHALL YE EAT IT; [with] your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and YE SHALL EAT IT IN HASTE: IT [IS] THE LORD'S PASSOVER. (Exodus 12:11)

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This [is] the ordinance of THE PASSOVER: There shall no stranger EAT THEREOF: (Exodus 12:43)

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for NO UNCIRCUMCISED PERSON SHALL EAT THEREOF. (Exodus 12:48)

For a multitude of the people, [even] many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, YET DID THEY EAT THE PASSOVER otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one (2 Chronicles 30:18)

[In this last example some people had not prepared themselves ceremonially before EATING the Passover.]

Therefore: the Bible makes quite clear that the Passover is something people in O.T. times were "TO EAT"! It also makes clear that the Passover is to be on the 14th day. Therefore it is contrary to biblical revelation to attempt to separate the eating part from the sacrifice part (i.e. saying the sacrifice is to take place on the 14th, but the eating is to only take place one day later, on the 15th). Both parts form one single occasion, called in the Bible "The Passover of the LORD".

It is contrary to the Bible to want to limit God's instructions for the "Passover" on the 14th day to refer only to the sacrifice part of the occasion.

WITHOUT THE EATING, THE SACRIFICE IS ABSOLUTELY MEANINGLESS!

Do we understand this? There is no meaning at all to Christ's sacrifice UNLESS there are some people who can "eat" (and thus benefit from that sacrifice). Yet Judaism has separated the sacrifice (on the 14th) from the eating (on the 15th).

To overcome this problem the Jews refer to THE MEAL they eat on the 15th as "Pesach", the Passover. Yet nowhere does GOD ever refer to the 15th as "the Passover". The Passover observed by the Jews is in violation of God's clear instructions.

God never assigns meaningless names, as we sometimes do to our children (e.g. people who give their children a name that has a nice phonetic sound, but doesn't really mean anything). With God every name has a meaning.

So WHY did God call the Passover "PASSOVER"? The answer should be self-evident. Notice Exodus 12:27:

That ye shall say, It [is] the sacrifice of THE LORD'S PASSOVER, WHO PASSED OVER THE HOUSES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. (Exodus 12:27)

God wanted this observance called "Passover" BECAUSE that was when God "PASSED OVER" the houses of the Israelites. When the people of Israel had put the blood on the doorposts, and while they were INSIDE these houses "EATING" the Passover, God "PASSED OVER" their houses.

It should be self-evident that "the LORD's Passover" is WHEN THE LORD PASSED OVER THEIR HOUSES. According to the Jewish tradition, when they eat the Passover on the 15th, they are saying that God only "passed over" their houses on the 15th! But God consistently tells us that THE

FOURTEENTH is His Passover.

So GOD calls the 14th the Passover, but the Jews claim that God only passed over their houses on the 15th, and so they call the 15th their "passover", or "pesach".

There is "a veil" over their eyes alright! This is something you won't be able to explain to them. Yet it should really be so obvious to people who have God's Spirit.

THE PASSOVER AND JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is recorded in the New Testament as making some very specific statements regarding the Passover. Let's notice some of them:

Now the first [day] of the [feast of] unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare FOR THEE TO EAT THE PASSOVER? (Matthew 26:17)

The disciples very clearly expected Jesus Christ to eat A REAL PASSOVER! They were not thinking of some kind of substitute on a different day ... in their minds they were going to eat A REAL PASSOVER.

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou THAT WE GO AND PREPARE THAT THOU MAYEST EAT THE PASSOVER? (Mark 14:12)

Mark records this same point.

And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, THE MASTER SAITH, WHERE IS THE GUESTCHAMBER, WHERE I SHALL EAT THE PASSOVER WITH MY DISCIPLES? (Mark 14:14)

These are the words of Jesus Christ Himself. Here Christ was sending His disciples to a stranger to tell this stranger that they wanted a guestchamber in order to keep the Passover.

Did this landlord, the owner of the guestchamber, know when people would keep the Passover in Jerusalem? Would he have told the disciples: "You fellows are one day too early. Don't you mean that you need the room only for tomorrow?"

I have already shown you the quotation from the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, which makes clear that the Sadducees kept the Passover between sunset and nightfall. So it follows that people in Jerusalem were accustomed to BOTH, some people keeping the Passover at the beginning of the 14th (i.e. those who adhered to the teachings of the Sadducees), and other people keeping the Passover at the end of the 14th (i.e. those who adhered to the teachings of the Pharisees).

Also, again notice Jesus Christ's clear statement "I SHALL EAT THE PASSOVER" in Mark 14:14 above.

And he sent Peter and John, saying, GO AND PREPARE US THE PASSOVER, THAT WE MAY EAT. (Luke 22:8)

Again, Jesus Christ clearly said that He was going to eat THE PASSOVER! It was not going to be a

make-believe Passover, or a "genuine imitation" Passover, or an "almost real" Passover.

IT WAS THE PASSOVER JESUS CHRIST WAS GOING TO EAT!

And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, WHERE I SHALL EAT THE PASSOVER with my disciples? (Luke 22:11)

This is as plain and as clear as it could possibly have been stated. Yet there are people who will claim that what Jesus Christ and His disciples ate wasn't a real Passover because it didn't have all the features of the ritualistic "Jewish seder".

Have you heard that sort of reasoning?

If you have, then you have witnessed an example of where people REJECT the commandment of God in order to uphold their own tradition!

People argue: "Yes, Christ used THE WORD 'Passover'; but He didn't really mean what He said. He really meant that He was just going to have some kind of special meal with His disciples, but certainly not a real Passover. He COULDN'T have meant a real Passover because that would contradict the traditions of my fathers. And all Jews are agreed that the Passover should be eaten on the 15th ... that matter is simply not debatable. Therefore Christ could not have eaten a real Passover."

And so they lay aside the clear revelation from God in order to uphold their own traditions.

Now let's see an example of what Michael Rodkinson explained, how the Pharisees would twist things in order to make them say the opposite of what God was actually revealing. Let's look at how they twisted these basic facts.

HOW THE PHARISEES HAVE REASONED AROUND GOD'S CLEAR REVELATION

Here are some points to consider:

1) For a start the Pharisees ignore what the Old Testament actually says! They don't read the Scriptures relating to the Passover on their own merit; instead they filter the Scriptures through their own biased ideas and traditions. They filter the Scriptures through the opinions expressed in the Talmud.

2) They know that "between the two evenings" means between sunset and nightfall, as evidenced by the JPS translation of this expression as "DUSK". So, to uphold their own traditions, they simply RE-DEFINE THE WORD 'EVENING'! Some decide the word can refer to any time after noon. THAT IS ABSURD! Noon is the very middle of the daylight portion of a 24-hour day ... and they claim the Bible refers to it as "EVENING"! Others, in order to seem 'more reasonable', claim that "evening" refers to any time from about 3:00 p.m. onwards. THAT IS EQUALLY ABSURD! The middle of the afternoon is NOT "the evening". You really don't need to know anything about Hebrew to grasp this ... that 3:00 p.m. is assuredly NOT "the evening". This has got nothing to do with the Hebrew language; this is just a matter of COMMON SENSE!

When we read in Leviticus 23:32:

"... from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath"

... do you really believe that God means we are to celebrate the Sabbath ... "FROM NOON TILL NOON", or ... "FROM 3:00 P.M. TILL 3:00 P.M."? That would indeed be absurd.

In order to get around God's instructions, the Pharisees bend and twist the meaning of the words God used (here the word "evening"), all the while knowing what the words mean in actual fact. Truly, FULL WELL THEY REJECT ...!

3) They know that the Bible instructs the Passover to be on the 14th day. So, in order to uphold their traditions, they once again INTERPRET this instruction to fit with their practices. They claim that this instruction refers to THE END OF THE 14TH! But that is not true!

There is no indication anywhere that God instructs: "THROW AWAY the first 21 hours of the 14th day; and THEN THE LAST THREE HOURS ARE MY PASSOVER! I am not interested in the first 21 hours of that day; they mean nothing to Me. As long as you "KEEP" the last 3 hours of the 14th, you have fulfilled My instructions, and I will be well-pleased with you."

When God instructs us to observe His annual Holy Days and His festivals, then there is no day amongst this group of days where God says: "You can ignore the first 88% of this particular day, because I am really only interested in the last 12% of that day, the last 3 hours out of that whole 24-hour period."

WHY would God possibly give an instruction for a particular day, which totally ignores the first 21 hours of that day? That also doesn't make sense, and that is not the way God works.

BUT IT IS THE WAY THE CARNAL MIND WORKS IN ITS EFFORTS TO GET AROUND GOD'S CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS!

When God gives us instructions for a specific day, then in every case all those instructions apply from the start of that day onwards. Thus:

- We are to observe the weekly Sabbath day from the time it starts, from sunset onwards. We don't only start observing the Sabbath from Saturday noon onwards.

- We are to observe all of the annual Holy Days from the time they start, in each case from sunset onwards. Again, we are not to wait until noon on the next "day" (i.e. the same day by God's reckoning) before we start observing the Holy Days.

- God's instructions for the Passover are patterned along the same lines, because that's what God means when He refers to a day. God means from the very time that that particular day starts. So God's instructions apply to when the day starts, and not to 21 hours later!

The reasoning that attempts to shove God's instructions for the Passover into the last 3 hours of that day is SO CARNAL AND SO TYPICAL OF THE REASONING FOUND ON ALMOST EVERY PAGE OF THE TALMUD, that it is blatantly obvious to me that this reasoning, which puts the Passover into the last 3 hours of the 14th day, is the product of EXACTLY THE SAME MINDS which produced the carnal and confused and conflicting reasoning that makes up the Jewish Talmud.

4) To confuse the issue further, the Jews have turned the Passover into a ritualistic ceremony, and if all the steps THEY have determined are not present in the occasion, then they assert that therefore it cannot be a "real" Passover. The steps the Jews have devised for their Passover Seder have nothing to do with the Bible; they are once again only "the traditions of the elders". And so "by their tradition" they transgress the commandment of God, as Jesus Christ explained in Matthew 15:3, and in that way they

make the Word of God "of none effect" (see Mark 7:13).

It is precisely this sort of carnal reasoning that some people use to assert that the Passover Jesus Christ observed somehow wasn't a real Passover ... because it supposedly didn't contain all the elements of a ritualistic Jewish Passover Seder.

And so ...

- by ignoring what the Bible actually says
- by re-defining the word "evening"
- by pushing the Passover into the last 3 hours of the day
- by turning the Passover into a ritualistic ceremony

... the Jews have managed to hold fast to their own traditions and to reject the instructions from God regarding the Passover.

SOME FURTHER COMMENTS ON MR. KAPLAN'S LETTER

Let's notice a couple of other points from Mr. Kaplan's letter to Mr. David Cinardo.

After stating that Mr. Armstrong took a position ... "that is actually in opposition to ALL COMPETENT AUTHORITIES AND TO JEWISH PRACTICE" [Comment: though assuredly NOT in opposition to the Bible!], Mr. Kaplan then made the following statement:

"WE TRIED TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM IN 1978. SINCE THAT TIME, THE CGI COMMUNITY [Comment: That's the Church Ted Armstrong started after he had been disfellowshipped by his father] HAS TAUGHT THIS MATTER CORRECTLY."

First of all, who is "WE" in "WE tried ..."? That sounds like a type of CONSPIRACY to me! I thought that those who were a part of that "WE" had been put OUT of the Church?! At least, that was what Mr. Armstrong "tried" to do back in 1978 ... clear the Church of all those who had been introducing heretical ideas into the Church. Mr. Kaplan seems to speak for a group of men who "TRIED" to change the teachings of God's Church!

It is precisely because there were men who "TRIED" to change the Church's teachings that God brought Mr. Armstrong back from total heart failure to lead the Church (on the human level) for another seven years. We should have learned something from the fact that God used Mr. Armstrong to set the Church back on the right track, after his son had led the Church OFF the track.

But here is the main point as far as I am concerned:

HOW ON EARTH DID MR. KAPLAN EVER END UP IN THE CHURCH?

I mean, IF he was convinced that the leader of that Church was insisting on a Passover practice that is (supposedly) "in opposition to all competent authorities" ... WHY did he then still bother to join that Church? If I myself had been convinced that Mr. Armstrong was teaching something that is biblically clearly wrong, then I would never have joined the Church in the first place! So WHY did Mr. Kaplan proceed to join a Church that he was convinced was teaching error?

The next statements in Mr. Kaplan's letter to Mr. Cinardo read as follows:

"WE THOUGHT THAT WE HAD SUCCEEDED IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM IN 1990. EXCELLENT MATERIAL WAS PUBLISHED AND A VIDEO TAPE WAS DISTRIBUTED TO THE D.E.L.S. LECTURES."

Again we are dealing with a group of men Mr. Kaplan only identifies as "WE". Who did the group include in 1990? Did it include all those men at the helm of WCG who were methodically working at leading the Church into apostasy? Since this same false teaching was sent out as part of the D.E.L.S. lectures, it implies that the "we" must have included all those who were authorizing those D.E.L.S. lectures. If that is the case, then those names aren't exactly a great recommendation for upholding the truths of God's Word, are they?

[COMMENT: "D.E.L.S." stood for "Deacons and Elders Lecture Series". The REAL motive for those lectures was to pressure the ministry of God's Church to accept whatever teachings were passed down from Pasadena, accept them like some dumb, mindless "water conduit". And judging by the results, with a considerable number of ministers they achieved this goal perfectly.]

When Mr. Kaplan refers to "excellent material was published", then that is obviously a very subjective and biased opinion. Having been at the receiving end of that material and those D.E.L.S. lectures, I personally felt that "ranging from a waste of time to perverse" would have been a far more accurate assessment. At no stage would I ever have evaluated the material in the D.E.L.S. lectures as "excellent", but then I also saw through the motive behind those lessons from lesson one onwards ... which was to prepare the leadership in the local congregations to accept in an unquestioning way whatever changes Pasadena would pass down this "conduit"!

So in 1978 this false teaching (that in Egypt the Israelites killed the Passover at the end of the 14th day) had the blessing of Mr. Ted Armstrong. And in 1990 this false teaching had the blessing of Mr. Tkach and those around him. Both of those administrations were instrumental in leading God's Church AWAY FROM THE TRUTH, yet both fully supported the teaching Mr. Kaplan now wants to see accepted in God's Church. Do we really think that sweet water comes out of the same fountain as bitter water?

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet [water] and bitter? (James 3:11)

The answer James implies is an emphatic NO! Both, Mr. Ted Armstrong and Mr. Tkach, introduced a lot of "bitter water" into God's Church. Yet Mr. Kaplan wants to persuade us that, as far as understanding when the Passover took place in O.T. times is concerned, both men wanted to introduce some "sweet water". It doesn't really make sense, if we are to believe the Apostle James.

Furthermore, by referring to two different periods when he himself was involved in attempting to introduce changes into the teachings of God's Church (i.e. in 1978 and in 1990), it should be obvious that this specific change was not the only one earmarked for introduction into the Church. What were the OTHER changes that were contemplated in 1978 and in 1990, which Mr. Kaplan also supported? From 1990 onwards the introduction of changes was VERY SUCCESSFUL, yet most of us can now see that those changes were leading the Church away from God's truth.

Since Mr. Kaplan is STILL working at introducing this false teaching about the Passover into God's Church, the question arises: "Are there OTHER CHANGES which Mr. Kaplan is ALSO STILL WORKING AT INTRODUCING INTO GOD'S CHURCH?" If so, what are they? Specifically: does Mr. Kaplan again want to persuade God's people that according to the Bible "a day" starts with darkness rather than at

sunset ... since that is the only way to justify a Passover at the end of the 14th day?? It was about 1990 that Pasadena presented THIS idea to the Church, the same time when Mr. Kaplan was busy sending out "excellent material" to the ministry.

Anyway, so much for Mr. Kaplan's letters in regard to the Passover. Now let's get back to the fact that Judaism doesn't really teach the truth as far as the Old Testament is concerned. Since this article is somewhat lengthy, let's summarize the points we have covered thus far in this regard.

SUMMARY OF THE FACTS ABOUT THE RELIGION OF THE JEWS

1) The "advantage" of the Jews is that they were used "TO PRESERVE" the Old Testament. But such "preserving" does not necessarily imply "a better understanding" any more than the Greeks have a better understanding of the New Testament, simply because they "preserved" it.

2) Israel's history is an endless story of idolatry! That never really changed, except for very brief periods when there were righteous leaders. It still hasn't really changed.

3) At the time of Elijah Israel was steeped in baal-worship. When John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah ... what was the spiritual state of the Jews like? When God will again send someone in the spirit and power of Elijah ... what should we expect the spiritual state of the Jews and of all Israel to be like? Should we really expect the Jews to have A TRUE UNDERSTANDING at that point in time? Or will it not be a matter that once again Judah will have to be confronted with:

... IF THE LORD [BE] GOD, FOLLOW HIM: BUT IF BAAL, [THEN] FOLLOW HIM. And the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

4) After the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the Jews became thoroughly hellenized, which is a synonym for: "they accepted pagan teachings"! The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C. to 50 A.D.) is a typical example. The historian Josephus is another typical example.

5) At the time of Christ's ministry the thing that was of uppermost importance to the religious leaders, the Pharisees, was not the Bible (i.e. not the Old Testament), but rather "THE TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS".

6) Jesus Christ very clearly showed that these "traditions of the elders" did the following things:

A) they caused people to TRANSGRESS the laws of God;

B) they made the laws of God OF NONE EFFECT;

C) they were only THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN;

D) they LAID ASIDE the commandments of God;

E) they amounted to A REJECTION of the laws of God.

7) Stephen, the first martyr of the N.T. Church, chronicled Israel's constant regression into idolatry. For this witness the religious leaders stoned him. But that constant regression into idolatry hasn't changed ... it is still as true for Judaism today as it was at Stephen's time.

8) Jesus Christ made clear that the Jews "didn't know" God the Father. That is still true today.

- 9) Jesus Christ made clear that the religious Jews were the spiritual children of Satan the devil. That is still true today, even as it is true for every other religion apart from God's true Church.
- 10) The Apostle Paul explained that his past religious training as a Pharisee was as worthless as dung, as far as he was concerned. **THAT SHOULD BE TRUE FOR EVERY OTHER JEW WHO COMES TO A TRUE REPENTANCE BEFORE GOD.** It should be equally true for every non-Jew who comes to a real repentance, irrespective of what that non-Jew's past religious background may have been.
- 11) Paul made clear that the Jews refer to the way he understood the Bible as "heresy". Clearly there was a difference between the way Paul understood the Scriptures and the way the Pharisees understood them. That should still be true today ... there should be a difference between the understanding a truly converted Christian has and the understanding of an unconverted Jew.
- 12) It is obvious from the New Testament that the Jews lacked "the fear of God", since they esteemed their "traditions" above the clear instructions of God. **THEREFORE** it was inevitable that they also lacked real understanding. Without the fear of God there cannot be any real understanding. This is still true for the Jews today!
- 13) Paul pointed out that we need to have our minds "transformed" by God's Holy Spirit. Without this transformation we will not really understand the truth. The Jews did not back then, and they still do not today, have their minds transformed.
- 14) Paul made clear that when the Jews read the Old Testament (their own Scriptures in their own language, Hebrew!) that there is **A VEIL OVER THEIR UNDERSTANDING!** Therefore it should be obvious that we cannot look to the Jews for guidance if we want to understand the Old Testament correctly.
- 15) Paul pointed out that this veil is only removed "in Christ"; i.e. when they come to a real repentance. That has not yet happened for the Jewish "competent authorities". So they are **STILL** under this veil.
- 16) Jesus Christ said that the Pharisees were blind leaders of the blind. Modern Judaism is the same as the religion of the Pharisees; so modern Judaism is also nothing more than "blind leaders of the blind".
- 17) Jesus Christ also pointed out that the Jews "err" because they simply do not understand the Scriptures. This applies equally to all sects of Judaism. Though they may have some things correct, yet they never come up with the whole correct picture; and they all lack an understanding of God's overall great masterplan.
- 18) In 1 Corinthians 2:7-9 Paul pointed out that the Jews never did understand correctly.
- 19) In 1897 Michael Rodkinson published an English edition of the Babylonian Talmud, an enormous work. Six years later Michael Rodkinson published a series of books entitled "A History of the Talmud". There is no question that Michael Rodkinson was an authority on Judaism.
- 20) Michael Rodkinson makes very clear that the so-called "oral law" is nothing more and nothing less than "the Talmud". It is also exactly the same thing as "the traditions of the elders", which "traditions" Jesus Christ had rejected and sharply criticized.
- 21) If Jesus Christ so sharply rejected "the oral law", how can anyone in God's Church possibly **EVER** appeal to this "oral law" for authority?
- 22) Michael Rodkinson makes quite clear that the Pharisees interpreted the Scriptures **FIGURATIVELY**,

which is a way of doing away with the literal meaning. That is the same thing WCG has done in recent years.

23) Rodkinson makes clear that the dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was over "the Talmud", over "the oral law", which the Sadducees rejected. In this regard the Sadducees were correct ... the Talmud SHOULD BE REJECTED!

24) Rodkinson makes clear that the Pharisees eventually kicked all Sadducees out of the Sanhedrin. And from then onwards the Talmud (and NOT the Bible!) became "the absorbing subject of the Sanhedrin". This means that, from a Church of God perspective, from at least then onwards the Sanhedrin and its decrees and its decisions became UTTERLY WORTHLESS! The Sanhedrin had reached exactly the same point which WCG reached a few years ago, when all of us simply walked away from WCG, because the functioning of WCG had become UTTERLY WORTHLESS!

THIS IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND!!

There are people who want to look to the decisions of the Sanhedrin in the 350's A.D. (calling it "The Court of Hillel II) and claim that those decisions are somehow BINDING ON THE PEOPLE OF GOD"! That is not correct! It is equivalent to saying that the decisions which WCG NOW, in 1997, makes are somehow "BINDING" on all of us who have left WCG because its operation had degenerated to the point where THE IDEAS OF MEN (just like the Talmud) were "the absorbing subject".

Understand this!

When the last people, who put a brake on accepting "the traditions of the elders" as inspired, were kicked out of the Sanhedrin, and when then this "oral law" became "the absorbing subject of the Sanhedrin" THEN, at the very latest, the Sanhedrin also ceased to be an entity that had any kind of authority over the people of God!

25) Rodkinson makes very clear that then the Pharisees ADDED to the Mishnayoth that already existed.

26) Rodkinson also makes clear that those in the Sanhedrin became "THE REVERERS AND SANCTIFIERS OF THE TALMUD". It should be clear to us that the Talmud, which Jesus Christ rejected so sharply, should be neither "revered" nor "sanctified"! It should also be clear that the biased opinions of those who DO "sanctify and revere" the Talmud simply cannot be trusted.

27) Rodkinson also repeatedly makes very clear that those who wrote the Talmud and those who studied the Talmud and those who added to the Mishnayoth constantly DISAGREED amongst themselves. It is this constant disagreement amongst those who wrote the Talmud and those who expound the Talmud that enables people to find support in the Talmud for conflicting ideas. If you search the Talmud (the oral law!) long enough, you're bound to find something that will agree with what you would like to believe.

28) Rodkinson also points out that after the destruction of the Temple it was THE TALMUD, and NOT the Bible, which became "THE SOLE BOND which kept together the scattered colonies of Israelites, which strengthened them to bear the yoke of the Romans."

29) Rodkinson mentions that in 138 A.D., when the Jews wanted the decree of Hadrian (forbidding the ordination of new rabbis) lifted, they achieved this only with the help of "Ben Temalion", which Rodkinson says could have been a demon. Even if that was not the case (that a demon was involved), it still does not improve the credibility or the image of "the Talmud".

30) Rodkinson points out that a major difficulty which faced those who put together the Talmud was to select which laws to keep and which to reject "... FROM AMONG THE MASS OF INCONGRUOUS DOCTRINES AND LAWS"! What they had was CHAOS! It was just like it had been during the time of the Judges when ...

... every man did [that which was] right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

There was no divine guidance, no direction from God, no clear indication regarding what to keep and what to reject.

The Talmud is a condensed version of chaos! It is still chaotic today, but not nearly as chaotic as it had been at the time of the leader of the Pharisees named "Rabbi", who died around 223 A.D..

31) The man "Rabbi" is credited with having condensed 600 different Mishnayoth down to only 6 different Mishnayoth. And those "6 Mishnayoth" are still as long as a set of encyclopedias! In the process Rabbi obviously rejected VAST AMOUNTS OF WRITINGS. Rabbi rejected well over 90% of the Mishnayoth that existed at his time. What Rabbi rejected has disappeared for ever, which isn't necessarily a loss. Rodkinson speculates that Rabbi rejected and edited out all references to Jesus Christ, which, as far as I am concerned, also decreases the credibility of this man "Rabbi".

32) Rodkinson states that Rabbi ...

"knew beforehand that the Mishnayoth would be THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH JUDAISM and the Talmud SHOULD BE BUILT, and that the interpretations of it would be many, each interpreter following the bias of his mind".

In other words, Rabbi KNEW that people could interpret the Mishnayoth he was preserving just as they wanted to interpret them. Note that the Bible is NOT "the foundation" of Judaism; that foundation is the Talmud!

33) Rodkinson makes clear that the Mishna REPLACED THE BIBLE as the source of information. Again: this means that the Sanhedrin from (at least!) then onwards ceased to have any kind of authority to make decisions that would be binding on the people of God!

34) Rodkinson points out that Rabbi ... "SUCCEEDED IN IMPARTING TO IT (i.e. the Mishnayoth) THE SANCTITY OF THE PENTATEUCH ITSELF, SO THAT NOTHING IS TO BE ADDED TO THEM". That is as plain as you could have it! The traditions of the fathers had assumed the same sanctity as the Word of God itself! This is exactly the same as is the case in the Catholic Church ... where the Bible takes second place to the traditions of the Catholic Church.

35) Rodkinson mentions that after Rabbi's death "Boraihoth and Tosepheth were discovered which did not form part of his compilation AND WHICH IN MANY PLACES CONTRADICTED THE MISHNAYOTH". Again this is confusion! So the scholars busied themselves trying to reconcile these contradictions. There is no consistency in the Jewish ideas.

36) The "hagadas" are legends which have no biblical support. The hagadas about Isaac's conception and birth are a typical example. They are nothing more than the inventions of some men's minds. We should be careful not to look for "traditions" which fit in with the way we would "LIKE" to believe things happened. All of the traditions of Judaism are nothing more than speculations, even when they sound logical and plausible. There is no proof for these hagadas. And many of them are extremely fanciful.

37) Rodkinson tells us that the Babylonian Talmudists were experts in "... SO HARMONIZING THE CONTRADICTIONS AND DISAGREEMENTS that they APPEAR to point to the same meaning." That really took some skill! But that is the length people will go to in order to hold fast to their own traditions. A converted mind, by contrast, would say: "with a mountain of contradictions like this it should be obvious that there is nothing good or sacred about all these conflicting ideas".

Rodkinson goes on to say that some of these Babylonian Talmudists ... "GAVE TO BIBLICAL TEXTS A NEW READING REMOTE FROM THE PLAIN MEANING, interpreting them in strange and marvellous ways, and basing on them legends of natural impossibilities". That's the "oral law" for you! And there are people who actually want to quote these "legends of natural impossibilities" (like Isaac being born 6 months after he was supposedly conceived).

38) It should be quite clear to anyone who takes the trouble to actually read the Talmud, that "the oral law" has no credibility at all. A lot of it is nothing more than a fairy tale.

39) We should be able to understand that even when Jewish scholars are "religious", this does not necessarily mean that they accept "the divine authority of scriptural explanations". They didn't in the time of Christ's ministry, and they still don't! They haven't changed in the past 1900 years.

40) For anyone who takes several hours to just read this "oral law", the one dominant impression that is made is: the Talmud is nothing more than AN ENDLESS STREAM OF CONTRADICTIONS! The Bible and the Talmud are as different as day and night. They project a totally different mindset. And if the Bible represents the mind of God, then the Talmud represents the mind that is at enmity to the law of God. They are opposites. The Talmud is nothing more than the nucleus of one of this world's religions, which is as cut off from God as all the other religions. The religion which "the oral law" represents is neither better nor worse than this world's other religions.

41) I presented some facts about God's instructions for the Passover, which show that the Passover in Egypt took place at the start of the 14th day of the first month.

42) I then showed how Judaism reasons around those clear biblical statements in order to justify holding on to their traditions.

43) Since Mark Kaplan of the United Church of God accused me of "MISQUOTING" the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, I also presented the facts in this regard. I also examined Mr. Kaplan's two letters at some length.

44) Regarding the idea that in Egypt Israel kept the Passover at the END of the 14th day, we should also keep in mind that already twice before have there been attempts to change this teaching of the Church. Mr. Kaplan reveals that those two attempts took place in 1978 and in 1990. Thus far they have still not succeeded. So I suppose we can say that NOW is the third attempt to persuade God's people to accept this Jewish tradition, which contradicts the facts laid out in the Bible.

That concludes the summary of what I have presented in this article.

It should be clear that Judaism is NOT the religion God gave to Moses. It is nothing more than the ideas of men, and the Bible only features in an incidental sort of way. As such, Judaism is no different from any of the other religions of this world. So be cautious about looking to the "Jewish understanding" of specific Scriptures for guidance. Yes, there may be times when that understanding is correct. But that "correctness" is determined not because it happens to be the Jewish understanding, but because it can be substantiated by the Bible itself. However, the same will be true for the Catholic religion and the Protestant religions ... there will be times when they DO understand some Scriptures correctly.

TO CONCLUDE:

I wish to make clear that I have nothing against Mr. Mark Kaplan personally. However, since he boldly stated that I have "misquoted" the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, I felt that this was a challenge to my credibility. Since his statement is clearly incorrect, I felt that I should set the record straight. That is what I have endeavoured to do.

I'd like to also state that I have nothing against the Jewish people. I am not in any way "anti-Jewish". If this paper seems a little hard on the Jewish religion, I will just say that it is no harder than I am on the religious heritage of my own people (the German Lutheran Church). It is no harder than I am on the religious customs of the religion that was the dominant influence in my schooling, the Catholic religion.

It might be worthwhile to note that the Apostle Paul was EXTREMELY HARD on those Jews who attempted to introduce Jewish customs (especially circumcision) to the Christians scattered throughout the area of Galatia (see Galatians 1:6-9; Galatians 5:11-12; Galatians 6:12-13). But the Apostle Paul, himself a Jew, could hardly be accused of having been "anti-Jewish", because he also wrote:

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: (Ro 9:3 AV)

So it would be unfair on Paul to conclude from the Book of Galatians that he was "anti-Jewish". In actual fact Paul was only against JEWISH TEACHINGS finding their way into God's Church. Similarly, my concern is that the wrong Jewish teachings don't somehow find their way into the Church of God. On a personal level, I have probably had far more contact with Jewish people throughout my life than the vast majority of members of the Church of God, simply because my stepfather was Jewish, and I have never had any kind of negative feelings towards the Jewish people.

But the Jewish religious ideas are NOT "the religion of Moses"!

Frank W. Nelte