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QUOTATIONS FROM THE TALMUD EXPLODE THE MYTH OF 'THE ORAL LAW'

Most of us in God's Church have had very little direct contact with the Jewish religion and the Jewish culture. However, since we observe all of the annual Holy Days, which are often referred to by others as "Jewish" days, many of us have over the years felt a certain kinship with the Jewish religion. After all, we seem to have a few things in common with them ... the weekly Sabbath, the annual Holy Days, the matter of clean and unclean meats, etc..

The Jews have, after all, been the ones to preserve the Old Testament for us. And since it was originally inspired in a language foreign to most of us (i.e. Hebrew), we have tended to look to the Jews for an understanding of the Book they were used to preserve. Surely they must understand it more clearly than anyone else (i.e. the Old Testament)?

If only the Old Testament had originally been inspired in English! That would have made life so much easier for all of us English-speakers. But that is not the way God chose to do things. And so we do, to some extent, depend on the Jewish experts of the biblical Hebrew language to translate difficult and ambiguous and vague passages for us. And as long as none of their own prejudiced views are at stake, I am quite happy to accept the views of Jewish Hebrew scholars in such cases.

HOWEVER, IN MANY CASES MANY OF US HAVE LOOKED TO THE JEWS FOR UNDERSTANDING TO A FAR GREATER EXTENT THAN IS APPROPRIATE!

It is one thing to look to an expert of the Hebrew language and to ask: how should this word or this expression be translated into English?

But it is quite another thing altogether to go to the Jewish authorities and to ask: what is your TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING of this matter? And what EXTRA-BIBLICAL information do you have that could throw further light on this question?

A careful study leads to the inevitable conclusion that the Jewish religion is nothing more and nothing less than one of the religions of this world ... and it is just as cut off from the truth of God as are all the other religions of this world.

It follows that we need to be EXTREMELY CAREFUL in looking to the Jews for help in at least TWO specific areas:

A) In any matter where their own traditions are involved. In those areas they automatically have a vested interest, and impartial, unbiased views will be hard to come by. This is something that is true when you are dealing with ANY PEOPLE ON EARTH, where their own customs and traditions are at stake. Don't assume a Jewish scholar is necessarily going to be any less biased and less prejudiced in an area where his own beliefs and customs are at stake, than would be a scholar of any other nationality in matters where his own personal traditions and beliefs are involved. Just recall your own attempts at trying to reason with your own "Christian" relatives and friends about religious matters.

A knowledge of Hebrew does not change this fact any more than a knowledge of the English language changes this fact for your "Christian" relatives in this world's religions.

B) In any matter involving the supposed words or deeds of biblical characters, where those words and deeds are not recorded in the Bible. It is very tempting to want to believe that the Jews not only know the language in which the Old Testament was originally written; but that they also somehow must have access to ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, information not recorded for us in the Bible. We all WANT to have "additional" information, and, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, the Jews are our only possible source for such "additional" information.

But that reasoning can be EXTREMELY flawed!

There is no extra-biblical information of any kind (about persons mentioned in the Bible) that the Jews today have access to, which would enhance our understanding of the Scriptures. By this statement I mean that the Jews have NOT preserved statements, words or actions of biblical characters, or information about things that may have happened to biblical characters ... when this information is not also found in the Bible itself.

As I intend to show in this article, ALL OF THE EXTRA-BIBLICAL INFORMATION about biblical characters and biblical events that the Jews claim to have is NOT based on some other documents that were somehow preserved; it is based solely on REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES ... and in the overwhelming majority of such cases the reasoning is in fact faulty! In other words: the assertions about biblical characters, which are made by the Jews, are based on biblical statements which simply do not justify those assertions. In plain English: the Jews don't really understand the Old Testament Scriptures correctly!

To make this quite clear: I am not questioning that the Jews have an understanding of certain customs and traditions that may have been extant in Old Testament times; I am specifically referring to Jewish claims about people mentioned in the Old Testament, claims about when such people were conceived and born and when such people died and what such people are supposed to have said or done during their lifetimes. All of the claims of this nature are based on nothing more than falsely reasoning from the Scriptures; they are not based on some other source of information.

When we speak about extra-biblical information, then frequently there is an appeal to one last drawcard. And that is this:

YES, BUT THE JEWS HAVE ALSO PRESERVED "THE ORAL LAW", THINGS THAT WERE FAITHFULLY HANDED DOWN FROM THE TIME OF MOSES, AND WHICH ARE FOR SOME REASON OR OTHER NOT PRESERVED AS A PART OF THE OLD TESTAMENT!

Very few people in God's Church today understand exactly what this Jewish "oral law" really is, or how it was supposedly preserved "orally". Most who accept this claim without any challenge tend to assume that the Jews must have, somehow, by word of mouth faithfully told these things from one generation to the next; and that this process continued faithfully for many generations until these things were eventually put into writing.

But that is simply not correct!

An appeal of this nature is sometimes also presented with the reasoning that the Bible itself in some cases makes direct references to, and in other cases at least alludes to additional sources of information. Therefore it is claimed that Jewish tradition must also have had access to these "additional sources of information". Yes, during the first century A.D., at the time when the apostles Peter and John and Paul were writing some of the books of the New Testament, there seem to have been some books available which do not exist today. But there is nothing to indicate that the existence of some such books

justifies the Jewish claims made about biblical characters. And there is no justification that therefore "other books" (not directly hinted at in the Bible) must surely also have existed, which would have provided additional information.

Let's now look more closely at the "oral law".

THE JEWISH "ORAL LAW"

I have discussed the oral law of the Jews at some length in a previous article. Here are a few paragraphs to summarize this matter.

In 1897 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. Rodkinson was certainly highly qualified to write on this subject.

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

"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." (my emphasis)

A little later, also on page 5, he stated the following: