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A HISTORY OF THE TALMUD, 'THE ORAL LAW'

In an effort to find some support for using the Jewish calendar, and claiming that this calendar is supposedly "sacred" and "God given" and "inspired", a number of people have appealed for support to "THE ORAL LAW" of the Jews.

Exactly what is this "oral law"?

Some people simply make statements like "the Jews preserved THE ORAL LAW, which is IN ADDITION TO the written law", without really realizing exactly what they are saying. Apart from the Old Testament the Jews simply do not have ANY set of laws which could even remotely be described as "inspired by God".

Let's look at the facts!

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 we really need to go further than the first sentence of the book? Do we grasp what is meant by "oral law"?

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.

In other words, if Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong had lived 1900 years ago, then his teachings and his writings and his Bible Studies would have become a part of "the oral law" (as seen from our Church of God perspective).

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

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! They are one and the same thing!

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

"the Jews, at God's instruction, preserved 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."

Can 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 you to interpret His Word FIGURATIVELY? Because that is precisely what "the oral law" of the Jews does.

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 of 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.]

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!

After the split in the schools of Hillel and Shammai, 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".

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)

This 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 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 could have been a man who helped the Jewish leaders. But the very thought that they could 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"? Only because Satan APPROVES of the Jewish "oral law". Can you think of any other possible reason?

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!

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? There is no proof that any of them really were FAITHFULLY preserved from the time of Moses.

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. But it is not ... it is the Talmud (the oral law) which is that foundation.

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!

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 Boraitoth and Tosepeth 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 Baraitoth 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 as 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.

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 MISHNAYOTH = 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. In my paper on "The Jewish Calendar and God's Holy Days" I gave a few examples from the Talmud itself. 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 Sam. 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.

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 passages 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 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.

Now as I mentioned at the start, 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 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?

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

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