

# What are the True "Oracles" of God?

Just what are the "oracles" of God? Why did Paul say the "oracles" were committed to the Jews? What about the New Testament writings? Is the "Oral Torah" part of the "oracles" of God? Then what is "Torah"? And what is the difference between the "traditions of the elders" and the "customs of the fathers"? What part of "Oral Torah" are Christians obligated to observe -- if any?

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Are the "oracles" of God the Old Testament Scriptures, plus the "Oral Torah?" In an article about the sacred calendar, a few months ago, I pointed out that the oracles of God are "the words, sayings, commandments, teachings of God." I asserted that the teachings of the Jews "as they concern obedience to God's law, were to be respected and obeyed." I made it very clear I do not believe that the authority God gave the scribes and Pharisees -- or the Jewish religious leaders -- was "transferred to the church."

Where do we draw the line, then, between the authority God gave the Jews, and the authority He gives to the ministers of His Church?

The article I wrote on the calendar was necessary because of the vast amount of confusion and dust that has been thrown into the air, over the subject of the calendar, and who has responsibility for it. In recent months, various off-shoots of the Worldwide Church of God, and similar groups, have had to face the issue of "postponements" to the calendar, the correct day on which to observe God's festivals, and who has responsibility to determine the calendar, "New Moons," and such matters. In these "last days," many small groups and churches have adopted a position of "local new moon sightings" to determine the beginnings of months, and the correct day to observe holy days. Yet they are in disagreement on what constitutes a "new moon," how and where to do "sightings," when to intercalate a "leap year," and so forth -- and each "church" or sect seems to be *its own authority* in these matters. The result is terrible confusion, which God abhors (I Cor.14:33).

These groups, however, have one thing in common: They believe they have the right and authority to reject the Jewish calendar, and to determine their own versions of the sacred calendar which God gave to His people in the days of Moses! They believe the "oracles" of God have been committed to them, and that the Jews are no longer responsible for them -- at all!

But is this true? Just what are the "oracles" of God, and who is responsible for them?

### *A New Look at the Oracles of God*

Let's get this straight! In Romans, chapter 3, the apostle Paul wrote: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the *oracles of God*" (Rom.3:1-2).

What was Paul referring to in this verse? The expression "much every way" is the Greek *piolu kata pianta tropion*, and literally means "much, according to every mode." According to the book of Hebrews, "God . . . at sundry times *and in divers manners* spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Heb.1:2). This implies that all divinely inspired prophetic utterances of God's prophets constitute "the oracles of God." This would include all divinely inspired *writings* as well.

Paul wrote to Timothy as follows: "And that *from a child thou hast known the HOLY SCRIPTURES*, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim.3:15). What Scriptures was Paul writing about? Obviously, he was referring to the OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES -- which Timothy had studied and been taught even as a youth! The New Testament had not even been written yet!

Paul goes on, "ALL scripture is given by *inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (vs.16-17).

"ALL scripture" includes the New Testament Scriptures as well. As Peter wrote in his second epistle, "Wherefore, beloved . . . account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as *our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him HATH WRITTEN unto you: as also in ALL HIS EPISTLES*, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, *as they do also the OTHER SCRIPTURES*, unto their own destruction" (II Pet.3:14-16).

Thus when we boil it down, the oracles of God refers basically to the BIBLE, both Old and New Testaments (II Tim.3:14-16; II Pet.3:15-16). The JEWS were given the task of preserving the Old Testament Scriptures (Rom.3:1-3). But the GREEK-speaking Church of the New Testament, and its successors, was given the responsibility of preserving the New Testament, which was of course written in Greek! This fact appears to be alluded to in the book of Romans, where Paul declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom.1:16). This would imply that the Greek-speaking Church then had the responsibility of preserving the New Testament Scriptures, written in the Greek language, for posterity. And the Greek scribes and monks, down through the centuries, did preserve the New Testament, which has come down to us in this final generation known as the *Textus Receptus*.

Obviously, then, the New Testament was never given to the Jews to preserve -- but it also is the "oracles" of God, consisting of His inspired "words, sayings, commandments, teachings" (II Tim.3:16-17). It is the "capstone" of Scripture. The Old Testament leads up to the story of the Messiah, pointing to Him -- and the New Testament tells His story, and the beginnings of the

## Church of God!

The Old Testament, also, is Scripture -- the "oracles of God." However, it is a fact that the Jews over the centuries, because of their anti-Christian, anti-Messiah bias, did a certain amount of "violence" to the Old Testament, particularly those sections dealing with Messianic prophecies. This can be seen by comparing the Jewish "Massoretic text" with the much older Septuagint translation of the original Old Testament Scriptures into the Greek language about 250 years before Christ. Even today the Jews misinterpret such passages, and seem to "translate" them in a way which lessens their impact (e.g., Dan.9:24-27 in the new Tanakh). Isaiah 53 is another example. Modern rabbis deny that this passage even refers to the coming of a Messiah -- they claim it merely refers to the people of "Israel"!

Interestingly, the Jews even changed the order of the books of the Old Testament, so that they would not point to the Messiah! The order of books in the Massoretic text, which terminate the Old Testament with the book of II Chronicles, of all things, is not the oldest order, but the rabbis of the post exilic period adopted the order to weaken Christian assertions of the Messiah. The Septuagint, translated into Greek by Jewish authorities in the third century B.C.E. -- about 750 years before the "Massoretic text" was developed -- preserves the original order of the books, and clearly focuses the OT as preparatory for the coming of Messiah, as it ends so dramatically with the book of Malachi and its Messianic message: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant . . ." (Mal.3:1).

Because of his hatred of the Nazarenes, and their powerful usage of the Septuagint to bring Jewish people to recognize Christ as the true Messiah, Rabbi Aqiba, circa 135 A.D., decided that the LXX should be destroyed, and no longer be used in all Jewish synagogues throughout the Roman Empire. He caused a new and poorer translation to replace it. He also was responsible for the addition of an anti-Christian, anti-Nazarene *curse* to be planted in the daily "amida" prayer in the Jewish synagogues, thus effectively sealing the breach which had occurred between true Christianity and orthodox Judaism of that time. Rabbi Aqiba will have much to answer for, as well as those who followed in his pernicious footsteps, at the day of judgment.

History reveals that there was a unity of observance on the major matters of the holy days between the early Church, the Nazarenes, and Orthodox Judaism as it was represented by the Pharisees and scribes of the first and second centuries. This unity was upset from time to time when Jewish leaders persecuted the fledgling Church. However, shortly after the Church began, in 30 A.D., a leading Pharisee, Gamaliel, advised the Sanhedrin to leave the Church alone. We read in the book of Acts:

"Then stood up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space: And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed

him, were dispersed.

"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:34-39).

After this sage advise, a more or less "peace" existed between the Nazarene community and the Jewish community. Although persecution flared up from time to time (Acts 8:1), the Church had enough peace and acceptance on the whole that by the year 60 A.D., James, the brother of Christ, and head of the Jerusalem church, reported that tens of thousands of members existed in Jerusalem at that time (Acts 20:20).

There was more or less a "truce" between the Church and the Jewish religious leaders until 69 A.D., when the Sadducees killed James the brother of Christ unjustly -- a final despicable act leading to the Jewish-Roman war of 70 A.D.

After that short war, the Jews and Nazarenes continued co-existing, and both attended the same synagogues, in many cases, until the next flare up of rebellion around 130 A.D. Rabbi Aqiba, the leader of the Pharisees at that time, announced that Simon Bar Kochba was the true "Messiah," and that he would lead Israel to victory over the Romans. He demanded that the Nazarenes support the war effort, and when they refused, not acknowledging Bar Kochba to be the Messiah, Aqiba became enraged, and cast them out of the synagogues. The final split came circa 135 A.D. To cement the division and make it permanent, Aqiba introduced the "curse of the Nazarenes" into the daily "amida" prayer said in all the synagogues.

In spite of this devastating development, however, even up till the second, and end of the third centuries, Nazarene Christians and Jews continued using the same sacred calendar, and observing the same Passover at the same time, on the same day. Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi in his epochal book *From Sabbath to Sunday* points out this historical fact.

### ***The Oracles of God and Church Authority***

What does this fact, then, have to do with Jewish authority over the "oracles" of God? Since mainstream Judaism rejected Christ, and kicked out the Nazarenes from the synagogues, does this automatically mean that God cast them aside, rejected them, and no longer used them to preserve the Scriptures, or to be the religious leaders of His people?

The apostle Paul answers this question in the firm negative. He declared, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. . . God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Rom.11:1-2).

Since the Jews rejected the Messiah, do they no longer have any authority regarding the oracles of God? Since they rejected Jesus Christ, does this mean that all authority now rests with the ministry of God's Church? *Not at all!*

If this were true, then we would really be on the horns of a dilemma. Such a position, unfortunately, leads to a terrible situation, because the "church of God" down through the

centuries has been greatly divided into competing sects, cults, and denominations, each disagreeing with the others! The Roman Catholic Church claims all such authority rests with the "pope" at Rome. Other churches claim they are the "ONE and *only* true church"!

If all "authority" over the "oracles" of God had been transferred to the Church, then we would be in a real "MESS," today! Much knowledge, which has only been preserved by the Jews, would have been utterly lost! It is the Jewish people, not the Church, which has preserved the words of the Old Testament Scriptures! After only a few centuries, the professing Christian Church rejected the Old Testament, explained it away as allegory, and dismissed it as being of no consequence. If the Jews had not preserved the Scriptures, they would not even exist today!

Also, if the Jews had NOT preserved the holy calendar, and the holy days of God, then these also would have become LOST in the dustbins of history. The Jewish calendar, if they had not studiously and meticulously preserved it, would have been irretrievably lost, as well as all knowledge as to when to observe the annual holy days and festivals of God.

What is the truth, then, about the "oracles" of God?

### ***God Inspires a Division of Authority!***

Regarding the oracles of God, when we study the subject carefully, it becomes clear that Almighty God inspired what we might call a "DIVISION OF AUTHORITY." That is, God has used the Jews to preserve the Old Testament oracles of God, as a whole; but He has used the Christian Church to preserve the New Testament oracles of God!

Interestingly, God has done this despite the fact that both the Jewish religious leaders have gone astray from the purity of the faith, and the mainstream Christian religious leaders also have become apostate and gone astray! But, as Paul wrote, "For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? *God forbid:* yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged" (Rom.3:3-4).

God can use even unconverted apostates to preserve His Word! There is NOTHING impossible with God!

Jesus Christ declared plainly that the Jewish religious leaders of His day, looked up to and respected by the bulk of the people -- the scribes and Pharisees -- were responsible before God as custodians of the law of Moses, and its essential implementation. They were responsible for maintaining the divine calendar, and regulating it, and holy day observance. Jesus declared to His own disciples: "The scribes and Pharisees *sit in Moses' seat* [i.e., had authority that went back to Moses]: All therefore whatsoever they *bid you observe [as regards the law of Moses], that observe and do;* but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matt.23:2-3).

The Jewish rabbis of Judaism, today, trace their religious authority back to the scribes and Pharisees. They are their descendants, today. Therefore, there is authority preserved in rabbinic Judaism, as the logical and historical descendants of the Pharisees, who "sat in Moses'

seat" (Matt.23:1-3). They possess a certain amount of authority, in preserving and interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures, maintaining the calendar, and explaining how to observe the annual holy days.

Does this mean, then, that the Church must be subject to the Jewish religious leaders in everything? Not at all! The apostle Peter and the early apostles had a "run in" with the Jewish leaders, the Sadducees and Pharisees, as they attempted to preach the gospel in Jerusalem. The Jews beat them, imprisoned them, and even commanded them not to preach in the name of Christ! Peter did not dispute their authority as rulers over the people, but he did counter their command not to preach in the name of Christ, saying in response, "We ought to OBEY GOD rather than man" (Acts 5:29). Obviously, Peter and the other apostles did not regard this commandment [halachka] of the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, as having any validity behind it whatsoever!

On the other hand, however, the religious authority of the Jewish rabbis, who follow in the footsteps of the Pharisees, ought to be respected, and must be followed *so long as it is consistent with Torah -- the written WORD of God* (Old Testament AND New Testament teaching).

### ***Where the Jews Went Astray***

Where did the Jewish leaders go astray? How much of their "oracles" are binding on Christians today? What about the "Oral Torah" and the Mishnah, the scores of technical details they have added to Sabbath observance, and the like? These commands, which have been added to the "written Torah" or Word of God, are generally in the form of oral pronouncements, or "oral laws," and "interpretations." They are generally called "halachka," meaning "rules."

Do these minute and circumspect "rules" apply to Christians?

The Pharisees found fault with Jesus, and His disciples, because they violated these halachkic laws. "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*" (Matt.15:1-2).

Jesus Christ, in response, rebuked the Pharisees for their many "legalistic" interpretations and "halachkic additions" to the Law of Moses. He declared: "Why do ye also *transgress the law of God BY YOUR TRADITION?* For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mayest be profited by me; and honour not his father or mother, he shall be free. *Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by YOUR TRADITION*" (Matt.15:3-6).

Most of the Jewish laws regarding not eating dairy products with meat, wearing long sideburns, wearing the kippas, and wigs for women, fall in the category of "traditions" of men, and are not binding laws of God! In the majority of cases, I would say that most "halachkic" rules fall into that category and should be characterized as nothing more than the "traditions of

the elders" (Matt.15:1-14; Mark 7:1-13), which Jesus Christ condemned in very outspoken terms.

We must distinguish what are "traditions of the elders" (Matt.15:1) in the guise of "halachka" and what are the genuine "customs of the fathers" which are binding and lawful. "Customs" and "traditions" are two different entities. Paul wrote that he "committed nothing against the people, or the *customs of our fathers*" (Acts 28:17). But he surely followed Christ in disapproving the "traditions" of the Jews (I Cor.11:1).

Christ clearly disagreed with the Pharisees and religious Jewish leaders on many points of teaching, generally involving "halachic" interpretations of the commandments. They strained at gnats and swallowed camels. They were blind leaders of the blind. He rebuked them severely, and castigated them roundly, for their hypocrisy, vanity, foolishness, and error (see Matthew 23, the entire chapter).

Yet He also, at the same time, did not disagree with their authority as sitting in "Moses' seat"! In fact, He plainly said to His very own disciples, who would later on become the apostles of His Church, to "observe and do" as the Pharisees taught (Matt.23:1-3). Obviously, He was not telling them to obey the Pharisees where they were wrong. But He was showing that they, and their descendants today, do have authority derived from Moses, and ultimately from God, which must be recognized and respected, and *when in line with the Torah* (Word) of God, must be obeyed!

On the other hand, Jesus warned His disciples, "*Beware the doctrine* of the Pharisees" (Matt.16:6-12). Yet He also told them to "observe and do" as they taught, as sitting in Moses' seat. What does this mean?

Interestingly, in Nehemiah Gordon's new book, *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. the Greek Jesus*, he discusses an ancient HEBREW copy of the gospel of Matthew, preserved by the Jews. In this manuscript evidence, there is an interesting "take" on Matthew 23 and what Jesus really said about the Pharisees and "Moses' seat." Notice!

According to the original Hebrew (and the early church fathers tell us that Matthew originally wrote his gospel in Hebrew), these verses should be translated: "The Pharisees and the sages sit upon the seat of Moses. Therefore, all that HE says to you, diligently do, but according to *THEIR* reforms (*takenot*) and *THEIR* precedents (*ma'asim*) do NOT do, because they talk but they do not do" (Matt.23:2-3, Gordon's translation). In other words, Christ was saying we should follow what MOSES taught, diligently, but not the "reforms" and "precedents" added later on, through the generations, by various "rabbis," which became considered "Oral Torah" by religious Jews.

Do you see? The Pharisees and scribes added many "reforms" and "precedents" to the Torah of God. These they called the "Oral Torah" or part and parcel of it. These they required the Jews to obey and follow, *even more than the Torah and written Word of God itself!*

*Jesus Christ said, NOT SO!* In fact, men are commanded not to add a single word to the LAW of God, as God gave it (Deut.4:1-2).

Interestingly, in Hebrew, the difference in Matthew 23:2-3 is essentially the one word – “he” or “they.” These are two fundamentally different messages – one says, obey “him” – that is, Moses – the other says, follow “them” – the Pharisees and sages (or scribes). Which did Jesus really mean? MOSES! In fact, He later denounces the Pharisees, because they did NOT follow the teachings of Moses, although they claimed to do so!

In the gospel of John we read that He said to them, “There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom you trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:45-47).

The Scripture in Matthew 23 does not mean we should follow the Pharisees, or Orthodox Judaism, no questions asked. Rather, the Messiah was clearly stating that Christians must exercise good judgment, and evaluate the teachings of the rabbis, and not automatically reject and ignore them, or automatically accept them, either.

The Jews have much that is good. On the other hand, over the centuries they have incorporated much that is detrimental, pagan practices, traditions and customs derived from various sources during the post-Temple period, including the wearing of kippas, wigs for women, long black coats, and so forth.

What, then, did Jesus mean when He said we must "observe and DO" that which the Pharisees taught? He was really saying to observe and DO that which MOSES taught! So long as they taught the laws of God correctly, as Moses declared, we should follow them, as they correctly follow Moses. When they depart from Moses, we should depart from them, because God INSPIRED Moses, and when they differ from his teachings, Holy Scripture, then they go into ERROR!

Christ acknowledged that the Pharisees “sat in Moses’ seat.” That is, they had become the "custodians of the Law," and had become the authorities responsible for the interpretation and maintenance of the sacred calendar, holy days, and the setting of the dates of religious observances, through their decisions in the Sanhedrin. They were the religious leaders of Israel (Judah). The Sanhedrin sent delegates to observe the "new moons." They had the "calendar committee" to verify such sightings, and make recommendations. They determined the calendar.

When the Jews were sent into exile, by the Romans, they devised the "Hebrew Calendar," based on anciently received astronomical principles, to insure uniformity and continuity in religious observance of holy days for the Jewish people even though scattered around the world.

But at the same time, rabbi Hillel II in 357-58 A.D. added a series of “postponements” to the calendar, and changed the sights of the New Moons to a mathematical formula which could approximate the new moons centuries in advance. In so doing, of course, the Jews rejected the true calendar which God gave to Moses and Israel.

Today, there are Jews in Israel who have returned to the true calendar given to Moses. They are called Karaite Jews, and their tradition hearkens back to the ancient Sadducees during the time of Christ.

As Christians, or followers of Messiah, today, we should follow Christ, and the same calendar HE observed – which was the original calendar of Moses – in which each New Moon was sighted from Jerusalem, or Israel, and then proclaimed to the people. Read my book, *The True Bible Calendar*,” for a thorough explanation of this subject.

Therefore, today, we should respect the authority of responsible Jews and rabbis, so long as they correctly follow the Torah – the Old Testament Scriptures – and truly obey God’s Law. But when they reject the Torah, or practice their own innovations, then we should reject them and their innovations.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 23 was not "carte blanche." He showed the Pharisees, who represented all the Jewish authorities, did possess authority derived from the time of Moses, as sitting in Moses’ seat, and therefore were not to be casually dismissed and ignored. They were to be respected and *obeyed* so long as their rulings were in conformity with Scripture, Torah, and the entire Word of God. However, they most definitely were not to be followed whenever their pronouncements conflicted with God's truth (Acts 5:29).

### ***What about Church Authority?***

The authority which God gave His Church leaders, indeed, is very comparable to that which He gave Moses, and the Pharisees as the successors of Moses. Jesus Christ declared to His apostles: "I will give thee the keys to the kingdom of heaven [which permit entrance and egress]: and *whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (Matt.16:19).

Jesus gave them authority to "bind and loose" -- authority to make binding decisions, "halachic" type determinations, for the benefit of the Church, to keep the Church unified, and together. Such a decision was made at the first general conference of the Church (Acts 15) when a dispute had to be settled over the question of "circumcision" of Gentile adult males. The ministry decided that adult males who were converted only needed to be baptized, not circumcised (Acts 15:5-21). This decision, once reached, was "binding" on the whole church, and any ministers who deviated from it would have been considered reprobate, apostate, and heretics, and branded as such (Rom.16:17; Gal.5:1-4; 6:12-15).

The authority given to the elders of the Church is very important. Paul declares, "Remember them that have the RULE over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow" (Heb.13:7). He added, "OBEY them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief" (v. 17).

The Church must have ministers who wield "authority" to "serve and protect" the flock of God with love and concern, so they can weed out evil doers and heretics, false prophets and false teachers (Acts 20:28-31; II John 7-10; III John 9-10). This is especially true in these "last days" in which we live, today (II Tim.3:1-7, 13; 4:3-4; I Tim.4:1-2).

Many people, today, are "gun-shy" over the issue of Church authority. One man, who

claims to be a minister of God, has said with fiery language, "I will bow the knee to NO MAN"! He completely rejects the Biblical teaching of church authority.

Yet Christ has placed in His Church different positions of authority -- "And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ, TILL we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [mature, complete] man [spiritually], unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine [and strange ideas], by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph.4:11-14).

There can be no doubt that in recent years, Church "authority" has been greatly abused by many ministers in our time -- they have behaved as "over-lords," dictators, and tyrants, heaping abuse and mischief upon the poor benighted sheep. This is one of the sore trials many of God's people have had to endure and go through, as part of our "character perfecting process."

Nevertheless, there is God-given authority in the Church (Matt.16:18-19; Eph.4:10-18). It is given for the "perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, TILL we all come in [into] the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God . . ." (Eph.4:12-13).

However, let's understand this principle! This God-given Church authority *does not supplant or replace* the authority God gave the scribes and Pharisees! Rather, it *works together with* that God-given authority.

This has not always been an "easy" relationship. Yet both lines of authority are valid. Both are derived from God. Sometimes it has been a "rocky" co-existence; but the Church never replaced Israel, or the Jews, from the responsibilities God gave to them (Rom.3:1-3) concerning the oracles of God (the OT), and the calendar and determination of Holy Days and related matters.

As long as the Pharisees and their successors do their job, and preserve the oracles God has given to them, we must respect them and honor their achievements, as is only right. If they depart from the truth of God entirely, and corrupt the calendar, then we of course would have no other recourse but to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

This is what has happened in the case of the Jewish calendar itself! That is why we at Triumph follow the Jewish Karaites' mode of determining the beginning of New Months, and calendar intercalations to determine leap years, as they are the ones who have gotten back to the original Calendar as God gave it to Israel!

### ***The Corruption of "Authority"***

Church "authority," however, can be, and has been, a terrible problem in itself. There are so many competing, conflicting churches, each claiming "church authority." Which is right?

I have inspected the Worldwide Church of God -- and they have gone totally into mainstream religious apostasy. I have inspected the Church of God International. They have much truth, but have stumbled badly on the annual holy days of Passover and Pentecost, and have fallen down in the understanding of Biblical prophecy. The same goes for the "Church of God, Philadelphia," "The Living Church of God," "United Church of God," and *every single offshoot of the Worldwide Church of God*, with the sole exception of Triumph Prophetic Ministries (Church of God)!

If you don't believe me, then prove it for yourself! Check into it! Compare our teachings, with those of the churches mentioned above, and compare both with your own BIBLE!

Of all the Churches I have "inspected," they all have most serious problems. Most have a cultic outlook, and claim to be "the only true church" and that all others are "apostate." The Messianic Jewish congregations I am aware of also have their own share of serious spiritual, doctrinal, and theological problems, disagreements, and divisions. Some observe Sunday, Easter, Christmas, and have little regard for the Biblical holy days. Others, however, have become card-carrying "Jewish Orthodox" believers in Messiah -- and have returned to the teachings of ultra orthodox Judaism with a vengeance. They have fallen into the trap the apostle Paul warned about -- *legalism!* They observe all Jewish "halachka" and even the rules for separating meat and dairy products!

In fact, some condemn the apostle Paul, as being "too liberal" and an "apostate," and in their own vanity and self-righteousness, they take it upon themselves to re-write and "edit" the New Testament, and throw out all of the writings of Paul, the book of John, and portions of Acts, and other books. Talk about extremism!

Clearly, something is wrong! The various "Christian" churches, with their supposed lock on "church authority," have divided and re-divided, like love-sick amoeba, into *literally thousands* of churches, sects, and cults, today -- all different, all divided, most very confused and spiritually disoriented. Finding true Christians, or the "true church," in this "mish-mash" is worse than finding a "needle in a haystack." In fact, it requires a divine miracle!

Church "authority" has not kept the professing Christian church united; in fact, abuse of "authority" has been a major cause for the church division, splits, and splinters, which we see about us today! Church authority was the first thing Satan the devil got his hands on, and twisted and perverted, for his own ends and purposes, in order to lead millions into utter error and total deception!

### ***Jews and Christians Have Both Fallen into the Ditch***

Sadly, what the Jews call "oral law" today actually is nothing but "oral tradition," in most cases, because it does not conform to Torah, but has become a whole body or corpus of "legalities" which ADD TO the Torah, which God never intended (Deut.4:1-2). Many Jews consider "Oral Torah" as paramount and supreme over "written Torah" -- which is pure

nonsense. Jewish authorities themselves have admitted that modern Judaism is not the "religion of Moses" or the "Bible."

*Both* modern Christianity and modern Judaism have gone astray. *Both* have accepted "pagan" practices and ideas and teachings. There is even movement today of some sort of convergence between Jewish mysticism and Buddhism, and a sharing and interweaving of "meditation" techniques. Some of the most observant of "Orthodox" Jews are actually "atheists" -- a daughter of a former friend of mine, a former Sabbath and holy day observing Christian, converted to Orthodox Judaism and married an Australian Orthodox Jew who is an "atheist" -- of all things!

Apparently the incredible suffering and trauma of the "Holocaust" caused many Jews to lose their faith in Torah, and even in God. Yet they hang on to "tradition" with fierce tenacity, perhaps because it gives them a feeling of "who they are" and "identity," if nothing else. Yet Scripture indicates that after the next "holocaust," the Great Tribulation, many Jews will repent, and turn to the true Messiah -- come out of dead "orthodoxy" and "dead works" and turn to Christ -- Yeshua -- with a new openness and willingness to learn (Zech.9:14-17; 12:6-14).

### *The "Traditions of the Elders"*

The separation of meat and milk products is one of the remnants of "Jewish tradition," and is not Biblically sanctioned. Proof that this idea is a mere human tradition is the fact that Abraham served both together to his guests (Gen.18:7-8). Compelling people to have totally separate cooking and eating utensils for meat and dairy products is another insuperable burden Jewish rabbis have imposed on people, demanding different dishes and cooking utensils for both kinds of products in order to have a "kosher" kitchen. This is a clear example of a "yoke of bondage." It is pure unadulterated nonsense!

Some of the worst "traditions of the elders" which Jewish rabbis and Pharisees added to the laws of God involved 35 categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath day. In short, by the time of Christ the Pharisees had added many detailed and picayunish Sabbath restrictions to attempt to regulate how people were to observe the Sabbath day. They forbade any carrying, lifting, walking more than a Sabbath day's journey, so-called, any "healing" of disease, and any "harvesting," even picking of fruit off a tree to eat, or wheat grains off a wheat plant.

Jesus Christ clearly said these minute and oppressive Sabbath day restrictions were a burden and a yoke of bondage. He repudiated them (John 5:5-16). The Pharisees were so incensed at Him that they plotted to kill Him (v.16). The Jews missed the point of the Sabbath with all their "refinements" and legalistic "baggage" (Mark 2:23-28).

### *The Bottom Line*

When we look at all the facts, we find that there is a "duality" of responsibility, which God has given, regarding His laws and Torah. He holds the Jewish religious leaders who "sit in Moses' seat" responsible for preserving the Old Testament oracles of God, and interpreting the laws in a right manner, and preserving and upholding the sacred calendar with the Biblical holy

days. Their responsibility in these matters is spelled out by Paul and Christ our Lord (Rom.3:1-3; Matt.23:1-3)

On the other hand, God has also given responsibility to the leaders of His true Church to make decisions, which become binding when enacted (Matt.16:18-19). This area of responsibility is concurrent with the responsibility of the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and their descendants or successors, the modern Jewish rabbis. But the bottom line is, both categories of responsibility are based on God's Word, and are subject to God's Word. That is, God will hold the priests and rabbis responsible for teaching His Torah correctly, and for maintaining His Word faithfully. God will also hold His ministers responsible for teaching His Word faithfully and correctly!

The truth is, if it had not been for the Jews, and their tenacity in preserving all the knowledge of God's Word, commentaries on the Scriptures, and even knowledge about the calendar, and especially the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, we would ALL be "lost in the woods" and "without a clue" as to the correct day on which to observe God's annual holy days and sacred festivals!

Isn't it time we give credit where credit is due?

In summary, it is clear that all the rulings of the rabbis down through the centuries -- which the Jews regard as part of the "Oral Torah" -- are *not authoritative* and many times are NOT backed up by Almighty God or His Word. Far from it. The true "Oral Torah" in God's sight is only those decisions made in complete conformity to the Written Torah or Word of God! When there is any "clash," then we must do as the apostles did, and 'obey GOD rather than man' (Acts 5:29).

We should never follow the legalistic dogmas or traditions of men which supplant or invalidate the real written Word of God -- the true written Torah! The true "written oracles" of God are the very words of God from Genesis to Revelation in the Holy Scriptures!

The true "Oral Torah" is not Jewish or rabbinical "halachka" imposed on man from century to century, amounting to a whole lot of excess baggage and man-made striving after "righteousness." As the apostle Paul warned, the Jewish rabbis, all too often, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom.10:3).

However, there are many elements of inspiring truth and vital principles of God's true Torah in the writings of many Jewish rabbis, when they adhere to and support and in no way conflict with the Scriptures. We can learn a great deal from such inspiring works and research!

In determining what is "the oracles of God," and "Torah," we must always keep in mind the words of Jesus Christ, who gave us the underlying principles involved in resolving these matters. He stated with candor and authority:

"The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore

whatsoever *he* bids you, that observe and do; but do not do after their works (halachka and added rules)" (Matt.23:2-3).

Clearly, Christ warned us about following the dictates of ANY group of "supposed authorities" who try to supplant or replace the Word of God by their own rules, interpretations, or edicts, whether of churches or synagogues. He declared, as a warning for us all:

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees and of the Pharisees . . . Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the *doctrine* of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt.16:6, 12).

In our attempt to obey God and please Him, we must simply take whatever decisions have been made by the Jewish rabbis and rabbinical councils – as well as ministers in the Church of God -- and interpret them in the light of the *written word of God* -- Genesis through Revelation. In particular, we must give great weight and importance to the very words of Christ in the New Testament gospels, as He is the one "greater than Moses" who came to "magnify" and elucidate the true meaning of the laws of God (Matt.5:17; Isaiah 42:21).

### ***So What Do You Mean, "Torah"?***

So, in sum, part of the problem of defining what is required of us -- what is God's Law and what is human tradition -- comes when we attempt to define a term such as "Torah." The word "Torah" means different things to different people. The word itself basically means "Revelation," referring to God's revelation to mankind. As such, it includes ALL the Scriptures, including the New Testament. Thus the Jews, who profess to follow "Torah" and claim to be "Torah observant," have actually rejected and ignored the entire "New Torah" -- the twenty nine books of the "New Testament"!

In a sense, therefore, "Torah" includes all God's revelation -- and that would include all inspired utterances, sermons, and teachings of God's true ministers! (John 16:13; Matt.16:19; Heb.6:1-2; I Pet.4:11; I Cor.14:1-4; Rom.10:14-15). One thing "Torah" does not mean, however -- it does not mean "traditions of the elders"!

The "oracles of God" -- as we have seen -- actually can have many definitions. In ancient Israel, the people sought the word of God by going to the High Priest, who consulted the "Urim and Thummim," which for a time God used to give His answers to their inquiries. Beginning with the "Urim and Thummin" responses of God, then, these constituted the "oracles of God." The written laws of God -- the "Torah" -- was also considered the "oracles of God." Eventually, the entire five books of Moses was included. The "oracles of God" also extended to the "Oral Law" which God gave to Moses and Aaron and the priests, to explain to them how to apply the written law (that is, exactly how to perform the duties of the sanctuary, kill the animal sacrifices, and perform the Temple duties related to the daily sacrifice, lighting of the lamps, baking of the shewbread, how to perform the different washings and ablutions, and the requirements of priestly functions on the High Holy Days, etc.), The inspired words of the prophets whom God sent also became the "oracles of God," and the inspired "Psalms" of David and Moses, and the proverbs of

wise king Solomon.

The Old Testament became the "oracles of God," as it was put together, but other statements of the prophets not included in the Old Testament were also considered among God's "oracles." For example, in Matthew 2:23 we read: "And he [Jesus] came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was *spoken by the prophets*, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" This particular statement is found nowhere in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, this must have been a *spoken* prophecy, which had come down to Christ's time, and was obviously a prophecy which Matthew knew about!

The "Torah" and "oracles of God," however, do not stop with the Old Testament Scriptures. The entire New Testament must be added to it, the gospels -- eye-witness accounts of the apostles regarding Christ the Lord -- the letters of the apostles -- and the book of Revelation!

The apostle Peter clearly referred to the writings of the apostle Paul as being "SCRIPTURE" (II Pet.3:16-17). Thus the "oracles of God" includes the entire New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation! These were the writings of the eye-witness apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. No writings from later Christian leaders were ever accepted into the inspired canon, no matter how worthy they might have been. For example, the epistle of Clement is a letter written by Clement of Rome, who very likely is the "Clement" mentioned by the apostle Paul (Phil.4:3), as one of his "fellow laborers" in the gospel work. It is a fascinating and well reasoned epistle -- detailing the on-going apostasy which was occurring in the latter part of the first century. But it did not qualify to be made part of the canon of divine Scripture, since Clement was not an apostle, nor had he seen the Lord or been an eye-witness of the Messiah!

### ***"The Oracles of God" Rediscovered***

However, in a broad sense, all "inspired" articles and "sermons" given by God's servants, true ministers, down through the ages, although not a part of "Scripture," and not part of the holy canon of God's Word, nevertheless, do constitute a part of the "oracles of God."

In other words, the "oracles of God" includes any words written or spoken under "divine inspiration"! As Peter wrote in his epistle, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man *speak as the ORACLES OF GOD*; if any man minister, let him do it *as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ*" (I Pet.4:10-11).

Paul also talks about those who speak as God's "oracles," that is, as His inspired servants and messengers. He writes, "Follow after charity [love], and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy" (I Cor.14:1). He goes on, "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort . . . he that prophesieth edifieth the church" (vs.3-4). He added, "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church" (v.12). Those ministers who speak under divine inspiration of God, who speak the words of God, are speaking as the "oracles of God."

However, this does not apply to every minister. John warns us to "try [examine, test] the

spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). Paul warns us to beware of false ministers and teachers, also, saying, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. *Prove ALL THINGS: hold fast that which is good*" (I Thess.5:19-21).

It is very important that we learn to discern between false messages of false prophets and pseudo-saints and corrupt teachers, and the true inspired messages of God's true servants! The former speak as the "oracles of Satan" the devil. The latter speak as the "oracles of God"!

In general, then a true understanding of "Torah" and the "oracles" of God, would include even "inspired writings and teachings" which are not Scripture -- that is, inspired teachings and messages of God's ministers and end-time servants, today.

To put it plainly: The Torah, and oracles of God, includes the entire Word of God, as well as all *inspired decisions* made by God's servants and ministers of God's Church, and *all inspired writings and sermons*, made by God ministers and servants.

Of course, the key word here is "inspired." Any words inspired of God would constitute part of His "Torah" or "revelation" for mankind, today. Any words inspired by God Himself and given to His servants to teach and explain Scripture would constitute the "oracles of God."

To put it simply, the "oracles" of God are the TRUTH of God! Whatever is *truth* comes from God, ultimately, because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He IS truth. Christ Himself said, "I am the way, the TRUTH, and the light" (John 14:6).

Unfortunately, I have seen many "decisions" reached by so-called "ministers of God" which were *not* inspired by God's Spirit, but by an entirely different source altogether! Therefore, as God's people, we must be *very careful*, and learn to distinguish between the "clean and the unclean" -- between truth and error -- good and evil. As the apostle John wrote: "Beloved, believe not every spirit [or every minister!], but try [test, examine, prove] the spirits [ministers] whether they are of God" (I John 4:1). Check out each teaching carefully -- your very life and salvation could be at stake! Remember the example of the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and *searched the Scriptures DAILY*, whether those things were so" -- the things that were being taught by the apostle Paul (Acts 17:11).

Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians, discussing the ministry of Melchizedek, and said: "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, *seeing ye are dull of hearing*. For when the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the *oracles of God*; and are become such as have need of *milk, and not of strong meat*. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a *babe*. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of *full age*, even those who by reason of *use*, have their *senses exercised TO DISCERN BOTH GOOD AND EVIL*" (Heb.5:11-14). Are you still a "babe"? Or have you begun to grow toward spiritual maturity?

Sadly, many of the decisions made by so-called ministers of God during the past fifty years -- involving counseling, divorce and remarriage, marital counseling, child rearing, job

counseling, health and sickness, and many other areas of life -- have been the very opposite of being the "oracles of God," but merely the misguided and abusive "opinions of men" and "traditions of men." Such decisions are not, obviously, "Torah" or "God's oracles" at all, but sheer unadulterated rubbish.

During the past forty years, I have heard many "sermons" spoken by supposed ministers of God, which were "not inspired" by God at all, but constituted nothing more than a man's opinions, doctrinal error, sometimes even sheer heresy, and out-and-out "nonsense"! On rare occasion could I really say that I really heard a truly "inspired" and "godly" sermon or message from one of the ministers of the old Worldwide Church of God! There always seemed to be a "kicker" -- something that detracted from divine inspiration, and ruined the sermon. Often as not, the "kicker" that spoiled the broth usually turned out to be insistence on obeying "Church government" and "church authority," as if that was the first and last word of the true gospel!

### *To the Law and the Testimony*

What, then, is the final KEY to understanding what constitutes God's Torah, and His "oracles," for us, today?

Obviously it is not the halachkic rules and interpretations of modern Judaism, although their research may be helpful and useful.

Obviously it is not the abusive teachings of false ministers and false prophets who seem to be sprouting up like mushrooms in these last days!

The true "oracles of God" and His divine "Torah" first of all are HIS WORD -- the Old and New Testaments of the Bible! The oracles of God are His divinely revealed TRUTH!

Secondly, the *divinely inspired* utterances and writings of HIS TRUE SERVANTS -- His prophets and inspired teachers -- these would also constitute His "oracles," His word, and part of His "Torah" or "revelation." These would include obviously divinely inspired insights of God-fearing and obedient rabbis who honestly and genuinely seek to obey and please God. It would also include inspired messages or articles written by God-fearing and Spirit-filled ministers who genuinely seek to obey and please God and Christ.

Thirdly, the "oracles" of God would include divinely inspired *decisions* reached by His ministers in counseling the people of God, as God's ministers and servants -- making "binding" and "loosing" decisions, based on the Word of God and the love of God (Matt.16:19). The "key," here, of course, is that the decisions must be "INSPIRED" by God's Holy Spirit!

Always, we are commanded to take nothing for granted -- to assume nothing -- but to "prove all things" (I Thess.5:21), and to "test the spirits whether they be of God" (I John 4:1).

What is the key -- the litmus test -- that we can use, to apply to the utterances and decisions made by any minister or teacher, so we can KNOW whether or not he speaks as the "oracles of God"?

The key to the whole matter is found in Isaiah, chapter eight. Almighty God commands us: "*To the **LAW** [Old Testament Scriptures] and to the **TESTIMONY** [New Testament Scriptures]: if they speak not according to **THIS WORD**, there is **no light** in them*" (Isa.8:20).

*Final judgment* on how a true Christian or Messianic believer should live, and conduct their lives, then, must rest with the Word of God itself. We must judge EVERYTHING by the litmus test of Scripture -- including the ministers of God, and their "advice" and "counsel."

The true ministry of the Church of God -- those men who are educated, converted, and endowed by God with the spiritual gifts to lead His Church -- will speak with the love of God manifest in their hearts (Rom.5:5). They will also speak according to the Scriptures, and will never ask you to "just believe" them, or "trust them." They will encourage you to check up and PROVE all things they teach and say!

God commands His true shepherds: "*Feed* the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being *ensamples* to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Pet.5:2-4).