

Who Should We Believe? The Rabbis or Jesus and the Apostles?

In this day of ecumenicism and “political correctness” we have a tendency to want to “make nice” and say we all believe the same thing at heart. It is certainly a good thing that we should celebrate the common heritage Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Christians share. Indeed, we do have many things in common. We both read the same Hebrew Bible. We both believe in one creator God. We both believe God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel. We both believe God worked miracles and brought Israel out of Egypt. We both believe in the coming of a Messiah. So far, so good.

But it becomes very clear we part company when it comes to the person of Jesus! The Orthodox Jewish, or rabbinic, position is that the Messiah has not come. New Covenant believers claim he has come in the person of Jesus, who will come again. When it comes to Jesus we sharply part company. But, in reality, we have parted company long before this. I’ll get to that in a moment.

When the issue is joined as to whether or not Messiah has come it becomes clear that there is something that lies behind examining that question. In fact, the thing that lies behind that question is something that makes consideration of the evidence an impossibility. This basic assumption makes it pointless to debate the question of Messiah with Orthodox Jews’ or, at least, difficult to debate the question until this issue is dealt with. What is that issue? It is the dogma of the authority of the rabbis.

Stated simply, according to rabbinic teaching, the rabbis are the official interpreters of the Bible. Their teachings are recorded in the Oral Law, an ongoing body of work *they claim* goes back to Sinai. Along with the written Torah, the dogma asserts, God also gave an Oral Torah. It is maintained that the Oral Torah gives the definitive interpretation of the Torah and that the Torah is not complete without it. Some particulars of Jewish law are closed matters, some are open. That is to say, there are issues that can still be debated, but if the ancient rabbis have decided a certain point is settled, it is essentially closed to any further consideration. This is especially true if the issue has been concluded by the whole community of the ancient rabbis. If all the ancient (and modern) rabbis agree on something, there is no point in going any further. It has already been settled by the authoritative interpreters of the Torah. Period. Such is the case with the question of whether or not Messiah has come and whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. Simply put, all the rabbis agree that the Messiah has not come and all agree Jesus was not the Messiah. Case closed!

So, reluctantly, when one gets into the issue of whether or not Jesus is the Messiah, one must, at some point take on the assumption that the rabbis are the authoritative interpreters of the Torah. It become necessary to examine the rabbinic claim of authority. One must also scrutinize the claim that the Talmud contains the authoritative interpretation of the Bible.

Why do I say we must do this “reluctantly?” Because anti-Semites have attacked the Talmud and have used their attacks as a justification of hatred of the Jewish people. God forbid anyone should use anything I’ve written as an excuse for anti-Semitism! Let me say this clearly. Jesus said:

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven... Matthew 5:44-45

This means that, no matter what has been said by the rabbis, no matter what may be said by the rabbis, no one can claim to be a follower of Jesus and hate them. To the contrary, Jesus said we must even love and pray for those who oppose us, including the rabbis, who most certainly do! (I’m speaking here especially of certain rabbis who actively teach against the New Covenant Scriptures and oppose efforts to bring the good news of Jesus to the Jewish people.) Let me go further. There are many things found in the rabbinic writings that are insightful, interesting, and wise.

I have no problem saying this as a Christian. There are also some Muslim and Buddhist teachers who have wise and insightful things to say. And there are many Christian writers, who have said things in error. The only questions are: *What is the inspired and authoritative Word of God? And who has the right to authoritatively interpret the Hebrew Scriptures?* We must know what God requires us to believe and obey.

It is a dangerous thing to take anything away from the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is also a very dangerous thing to add to them! Moses spoke under inspiration:

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deut. 4:2).

Having said all this, let us now consider the claims of Orthodox Judaism, specifically the claims that the rabbis are the authorized interpreters of the Torah and that the Mishnah and Talmud are the Oral Law given by God. (Another correlated issue is the authority of Jesus and the Apostles, but this must be addressed at another time.)

Let me start with arguments I found made by the Karaites, a small Jewish sect that does not accept the Oral Law. The Karaite teacher, Salmon ben Yeruham made three arguments against the Oral Law in response to critical attacks made upon the Karaites by Rabbi Saadi Gaon, a great rabbinic sage. The first argument is that the whole assembly of Israel witnessed the giving of the Written Torah, but there is no such similar testimony for the Oral Law. Second, according to rabbinic dogma, the Oral Law was given by God specifically to be transmitted *orally*. If God gave it to be transmitted orally, writing it down was an act of disobedience, so how can we believe the claim itself? Salmon ben Yeruham, put it this way:

The Holy One has given you an oral Law,
So that you would recite it orally,
For, say you, He had deemed it, in His wisdom, a laudable command.
Why, then, did you write it down in ornate script?

Had the Merciful One wished to write it down,
He would have had it written down by Moses.
Now did He not give it to you to be studied orally,
And had He not ordained it not to be inscribed in a book?

Yet they altered God's alleged words and wrote it down,
And instead of studying it orally they transferred it into writing.
How, then, can their words be believed, seeing that they have offended grievously?
They cannot withdraw from his contradictory path.

They wrote down both Laws, thus contemning the commandment of the Almighty.
Where, then, is the oral Law in which they place their trust?
Their words have become void and meaningless,
And out of their own mouths have they testified that they have drawn God's wrath upon themselves.¹

Indeed, Salmon ben Yeruham has pointed out well, it is a contradictory path! Later in his work he takes this a step further. If it is permitted to write down an "oral" law, then why not take it upon ourselves to only transmit *orally* the *written* Law?!

If it is proper for men like us,

Who have none of the holy spirit in us,
To turn the oral Law into a written Law, by writing it down,
Why would it not be right for us to turn the written Law into a Law preserved only in our mouths?

Salmon's third argument is that in all of the books of the Oral Law itself (Mishnah, Talmud, etc.) not once does it say of its own rulings "thus saith the LORD" or "and God commanded" or even "and God said" but, rather it always says "Rabbi so-and-so said" or "others said."² In other words, divinely inspired scripture uses a formula such as "thus saith the LORD" when something from God is about to be proclaimed. Prophets use this formula regularly. Yet we never find this in the so-called Oral Law! Salmon again:

I have looked again into the six divisions of the Mishnah,
And behold, they represent the words of modern men.
There are no majestic signs and miracles in them,
And they lack the formula: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron."

I therefore put them aside, and I said, There is no true Law in them,
For the Law is set forth in a different manner,
In a majestic display of prophets, of signs, and of miracles;
Yet all this majestic beauty we do not see in the whole Mishnah.

Salmon goes on to strengthen his argument "like the power of Samson," yet he adds in humility that what is best always comes from God himself. Salmon continues:

I have set the six divisions of the Mishnah before me,
And I looked at them carefully with mine eyes.
And I saw that they are very contradictory in content,
This one Mishnaic scholar declares a thing to forbidden to the people of Israel,
While that one declares it to be permitted.

My thought therefore answer me,
And most of my reflections declare unto me,
That there is in it no Law of logic,
Nor the Law of Moses the Wise.

I said, Perhaps one of the two did not know the right way,
Wherefore he did not know how to reason it out with his companion;
Perhaps the truth lies with his companion;
Let me look into his words; perchance I will find relief from my perplexity.

But instead I found there other men-
Sometimes they say, "Others say,"
While anon the scholars issue a decision,
Agreeing neither with the one nor with the other, but contradicting both.

So there is internal contradiction in what the rabbis rule, and Salmon goes on to say that sometimes the Oral Law says "others say" without specifying the source. But, he says, why are those "others" necessarily any wiser or more learned than I am? He goes on to say:

The bellowing of the School of Shammai against the School of Hillel, to controvert their words,

As well as that of the School of Hillel against the School of Shammai,
To refute their interpretations of law.
This one invokes blessings, and that one heaps curses upon their heads,
Yet both are an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

Not only contradictions, says Salmon, but contradictory claims of having the one truth! Salmon has more:

Hearken unto me and I will speak further:
If thou shouldst say, "This took place in the days of the Prophets and in the days of Ezra";
Why is there no mention in it of these Prophets
In the same manner as the names of the Prophets are recorded throughout Scripture?

If the Oral Law is from God, then why don't any of the prophets mention it? Moses specifically tells Israel there will be other prophets, yet he does not say there will be other writings apart from the prophets. And the Mishnah and Gemara never claim to be written by prophets.

Deut. 18:18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 18:19 And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. 18:20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' 18:21 And if you say in your heart, How may we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' --18:22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him.³

He answers several of Saadia Gaon's arguments claiming the need for the Mishnah. We still hear these claims today:

May thy steps be hampered in walking,
When thou sayest that my congregation has need of the Mishnah,
In order to know the precise measurements of the ordinances of the ritual fringe, the lulav, and the booth
And that this is why they arranged it and set it down in writing.

Thou has written lies, for not all ordinances have a definite measurement,
And that is why the length of the fringe is not specified in the Law.
If one should forcefully exhibit this argument, how wilt thou distinguish,
And what answer wilt thou make to him, out of the words of the Divine Testimony?

I am delighted to find what Salmon wrote, since this is similar my answer to these claims! First, the rabbis use circular reasoning. The argument goes: "The Torah gives commandment X. But the Torah doesn't spell out exactly how to fulfill commandment X. So, therefore, you need the Mishnah in order to know precisely carry out commandment X." The problem is, the argument assumes what it concludes. *Why* must we believe God *wants* us to be as precise as the Mishnah specifies? Perhaps God is not so obsessive about some of the minute details the Mishnah concerns itself with, but He is instead more interested in the heart, the intention, and the spiritual meaning of the Torah.⁴

Another point before we go to specific Scriptural citations. Even one of the greatest of rabbis, one of the Tannaim, was demonstrably wrong about who the Messiah was. Rabbi Akiba is the one who put the center of the Oral Law, the Mishnah, into its final outline. During the second Jewish revolt against Rome, in 130 AD, Bar Kochba was hailed as the Messiah by Rabbi Akiba. Bar Kochba killed Jewish Christians who refused to deny Jesus. Rabbi Akiba was, executed by Rome in 135 at Ceaserea. *If the very man who put the Mishnah into its final form*

was wrong about the Messiah, why should we believe the Talmudic scholars, who based everything they believed on the Mishnah, when it comes to who the Messiah is?

Now, let me proceed with a few additional arguments. I'll start with indications in the Torah and Prophets that all of the Law was written down and that nothing was left out.

Exodus 24:3 Moses came and told the people *all the words* of the LORD and *all* the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "**All the words** which the LORD has spoken we will do." **24:4** And **Moses wrote all the words** of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Notice the use of the word "all the word." Moses spoke *all the words*, the people said they will obey *all the words*, and then Moses wrote down *all the words*. This excludes there being any "oral" law that was given to the people of Israel at that time. We have another key passage that is related to the ancient practice of covenant making:

Deut. 31:9 **And Moses wrote this law, and gave it to the priests the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD**, and to all the elders of Israel. 31:10 And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time of the year of release, at the feast of booths, 31:11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which he will choose, **you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing**. 31:12 Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, **that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law...**

In Ancient Near Eastern treaty making, the suzerain (emperor) would make a treaty with his vassal nation. The words of the treaty were to be kept in a special box in the temple of their god and it was to be read to the people periodically. There were, in these ancient treaties, a listing of the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. The Holy Ark in Israel's Temple contained the Torah, God's treaty document with his people Israel. God used a literary form and a practice they were familiar with to communicate to the his relationship to them.⁵ Finally, we are told specifically that Moses finished writing down the words of the Law of God:

Deut. 31:24 And it came to pass, when **Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished...**

And, as if we didn't have enough to conclude the matter already, we find during Joshua's leadership a reading of all that Moses had commanded. The covenantal blessings and curses are mentioned, as with ancient treaties, but Joshua goes even further, almost as to give an answer, centuries before, to the rabbinic claims! He says there was *not one word* that Moses had *written* that was not read:

Joshua 8:34 **And afterward he read all the words of the law**, the blessing and the curse, according to *all that is written* in the book of the law. 8:35 **There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel**, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.

So we are *explicitly* told in several places that *everything* Moses commanded was *written down by Moses* and read to the people. What was read was *according to what was written* and not a *word* was left out! So much for the claim that there was additional revelation at Sinai that was left to oral transmission! It is an impossible claim and contradictory to the Bible itself!

Conclusion

Unless one joins the minuscule little sect of the Karaites, there are really only two choices as far as following the Torah today. Both Orthodox Jews and Orthodox New Covenant Believers have their authoritative teachers and authoritative books that explain to them how to understand the Torah and how to live it out. Both groups do not practice certain things commanded in the Torah. Both groups claim the authority of certain teachers and certain books as to why they do what they do or do not do certain things. As the Karaites pointed out, no mention of the Oral Law is to be found in Moses or the Prophets. Yet of the New Covenant it was written by the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 31:32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. 31:33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 31:34 And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The New Covenant claim is that Messiah himself is the God of Israel who came and lived among us. He is Our Rabbi, He is Our Teacher. As it was written by Isaiah: All your sons will be taught by the Lord" (54:13). What better rabbi than God himself? And Our Rabbi appointed men to write down who he is and what he said, men who were taught by him and lived with him, Jewish men empowered by the Spirit of God, who backed up their claim of having seen the Risen One with their lives and their deaths. Which will you choose, and choose you must. Only one claim can be true. Either the rabbis are right and through them Torah is to be followed, or Jesus is Our Rabbi and the New Covenant Scriptures, written by those he taught, who witnessed his resurrection, contain the true understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Go ahead. Read 100 pages of the Mishnah and the Talmud. Also read 100 pages of the New Covenant. Compare the two. Ask the God of Israel to give you wisdom, which was the prayer of Solomon that delighted God. You will find that Messiah is waiting for you with open arms. He is willing to teach you and lead you into the deeper things of the Torah. As the Risen Messiah said:

"These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:44-47)

ADDENDUM:

A Response to Rabbinic Attacks on the New Covenant

Our anti-missionary friends in the Orthodox Jewish community are fond of quoting passages in the New Covenant and finding fault with them in order to dismiss the whole New Covenant Scriptures and to prove that Jesus is a false messiah. I have seen lists of New Covenant quotations taken out of context ridiculing what is written there and discrediting the Messianic Scriptures. Anti-missionary rabbis have claimed the New Covenant scriptures are self-contradictory, anti-Jewish, full of fables and paganism, and that the New Covenant writers (and Jesus himself) quoted the Hebrew Bible ignorantly, deceptively, and erroneously. They say Jesus was a fraud and the testimony of his disciples cannot be believed. In response to that sort of practice by the anti-missionaries, some Talmudic passages are included in this addendum, without comment, for your interest, along with passages from some other rabbinic sources⁶. You will see that passages from any body of work, including rabbinic texts, can always be taken out of context and ridiculed. Once again, let me be quick to say, there are many wise and insightful things to be found in that encyclopedic compendium of rabbinic teaching known as the Talmud. I also will grant that both the Hebrew Bible and the New Covenant Scriptures contain unusual, difficult, and hard to understand passages. We find much that might leave us wondering in the books of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse of John. These are highly symbolic books, and they are clearly symbolic in what they are saying. That is their literary genre. Again, we always must be careful not to take things out of context and to understand the genre. I provide these quotations as a response to rabbinic quotations of the New Covenant for the sake of rejecting it and as an example of rabbinic texts that could be abused. I include the quotations below only reluctantly. I don't want to be misunderstood. Jesus prayed: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" and our attitude must be the same as his if we claim to be his followers. Let no one use these things as an excuse to hate the Jewish people, or even the rabbis. We must love and pray for them. Remember, too, most Jewish people do not believe in the Oral Law of the rabbis and know very little about it. Most Jewish people do not believe, or even know about, most of what the Orthodox rabbis teach! With all that in mind, consider for yourself if these passages, admittedly unfairly taken out of context, could also be ridiculed if one were so inclined to do so.

The Shamir

Our Rabbis taught: The Shamir is a creature about the size of a barley-corn, and was created during the six days of Creation. No hard substance can withstand it. How is it kept? They wrap it in tufts of wool and place it in a leaden tube full of barley-bran (Talmud Gittim 68b).

[Solomon said]: "What I want is to build the Temple and I require the shamir...." [He was told]: "It is in the hands of the Prince of the Sea who gives it only to the woodpecker, to whom he trusts it on oath. What does the bird do with it? He takes it to a mountain where there is no cultivation and puts it on the edge of the rock which thereupon splits, and he then takes seeds from trees and brings them and throws them into the opening and things grow there....So they found a woodpecker's nest with young in it, and covered it over with white glass. When the bird came it wanted to get in but could not, so it went and brought the shamir and placed it on the glass. Benaiahu thereupon gave a shout, and it dropped [the shamir] and he took it, and the bird went and committed suicide on account of its oath." (Talmud Sotah 48b)

Man Shrunk

Rab Judah said in Rab's name: The first man reached from one end of the world to the other, as it is written, Since the day that God created man upon the earth, even from the one end of Heaven unto the other. But when he sinned, the Holy One, blessed be He, laid His hand upon him and diminished

him, as it is written, Thou hast hemmed me in behind and before, and laid Thy hands upon me. R. Eleazar said: The first man reached from earth to heaven, as it is written, Since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from one end of the Heaven [to the other]. But when he sinned, the Holy One, blessed be He, laid His hand upon him and diminished him, for it is written, Thou hast hemmed me in behind and before etc. But these verses contradict each other! Both measurements are identical. (Talmud Sanhedrin 38B)

Some Human Souls Are Born Inferior to Other Souls⁷

See, now. When a human being is born into the world he is given a soul (nephesh) from the primordial “animal” sphere, the sphere of purity, the sphere of those who are designated “Holy Wheels”-namely, the supernal order of angels. If he is more fortunate he will be endowed with a spirit (ruah) which appertains to the sphere of the Holy Hayoth. Should he possess still greater potential merit he is given a soul (neshamah) from the region of the Throne. These three grades of personality are the “maidservant”, the “manservant”, and the “bondwoman” of the King's daughter. And if the newly created being deserves still more, the soul which is put into his bodily form derives through a process of emanation (aziluth) from the sphere of the “Only Daughter”, and is itself called “the King's daughter”. If his merit is still greater he will be endowed with a spirit (ruah), deriving through emanation from the sphere of the “Central Pillar”, and its owner is then called “The son of the Holy One”, as it is written: “Sons are ye to the Lord your God” (Deut. XIV, 1). Should he be of even greater worth he is given a soul (neshamah) from the sphere of Father and Mother, concerning which it is written: “And he breathed into his nostrils the breath (nishmath) of life” (Gen. II, 7). What does “life” signify? It signifies the Divine Name YH; and therefore it is written of such souls: “Let the whole soul (all souls) praise KaH” (Ps. CL, 6). But if he should acquire still greater merit, the Holy Name TETRAGRAMMATON is granted to him in its fulness-the letters Yod, He, Vau, He, representing Man in the sphere of the supernal Aziluth, and he is said to be “in the likeness of his Lord”, and in him the words, “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing” (Gen. I, 28), are properly fulfilled: for his dominion is indeed over all the firmaments and over all the Wheels and Seraphim and Living Beings (Hayoth) and over all the hosts above and below. (Soncino Zohar, Shemoth, Section 2, Page 94b)

Gentile Heathen Who Study Torah Deserve Death

R. Johanan said: A heathen who studies the Torah deserves death, for it is written, Moses commanded us a law for an inheritance; it is our inheritance, not theirs. Then why is this not included in the Noachian laws? — On the reading morasha [an inheritance] he steals it; on the reading me'orasah [betrothed], he is guilty as one who violates a betrothed maiden, who is stoned. An objection is raised: R. Meir used to say. Whence do we know that even a heathen who studies the Torah is as a High Priest? From the verse, [Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments:] which, if man do, he shall live in them. Priests, Levites, and Israelites are not mentioned, but men: hence thou mayest learn that even a heathen who studies the Torah is as a High Priest! — That refers to their own seven laws. (Talmud - Mas. Sanhedrin 59a)

Jesus, Executed at Passover, Was from a Royal Family and Practiced Sorcery

AND A HERALD PRECEDES HIM etc. This implies, only immediately before [the execution], but not previous thereto. [In contradiction to this] it was taught: On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can

say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover! — ‘Ulla retorted: Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a Mesith [enticer], concerning whom Scripture says, Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him? With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government [or royalty, i.e., influential]. (Talmud - Mas. Sanhedrin 43a)

A Gnat Flies Up a Roman’s Nose and Knocks Against It for Seven Years, Various People Are Brought Back From the Dead: They Testify That They Have Been Boiled in Various Disgusting Things (Possibly This Refers To Jesus, Too)

He (Titus) said: Apparently the power of the God of these people is only over water. When Pharaoh came He drowned him in water, when Sisera came He drowned him in water. He is also trying to drown me in water. If he is really mighty, let him come up on the dry land and fight with me. A voice went forth from heaven saying; Sinner, son of sinner, descendant of Esau the sinner, I have a tiny creature in my world called a gnat. (Why is it called a tiny creature? Because it has an orifice for taking in but not for excreting.) Go up on the dry land and make war with it. When he landed the gnat came and entered his nose, and it knocked against his brain for seven years. One day as he was passing a blacksmith's it heard the noise of the hammer and stopped. He said; I see there is a remedy. So every day they brought a blacksmith who hammered before him. If he was a non-Jew they gave him four zuz, if he was a Jew they said, It is enough that you see the suffering of your enemy. This went on for thirty days, but then the creature got used to it.¹⁹ It has been taught: R. Phineas b. ‘Aruba said; I was in company with the notables of Rome, and when he died they split open his skull and found there something like a sparrow two sela's in weight. A Tanna taught; Like a young dove two pounds in weight. Abaye said; We have it on record that its beak was of brass and its claws of iron. When he died he said: Burn me and scatter my ashes over the seven seas so that the God of the Jews should not find me and bring me to trial.

Onkelos son of Kolonikos was the son of Titus's sister. He had a mind to convert himself to Judaism. He went and raised Titus from the dead by magical arts, and asked him; ‘Who is most in repute in the [other] world? He replied: Israel. What then, he said, about joining them? He said: Their observances are burdensome and you will not be able to carry them out. Go and attack them in that world and you will be at the top as it is written, Her adversaries are become the head²¹ etc.; whoever harasses Israel becomes head. He asked him:

What is your punishment [in the other world]? He replied: What decreed for myself. Every day my ashes are collected and sentence is passed on me and I am burnt and my ashes are scattered over the seven seas. He then went and raised Balaam by incantations. He asked him: Who is in repute in the other world? He replied: Israel. What then, he said, about joining them? He replied: Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.¹ He then asked: What is your punishment? He replied: With boiling hot semen. He then went and raised by incantations the sinners of Israel.⁸ He asked them: Who is in repute in the other world? They replied: Israel. What about joining them? They replied: Seek their welfare, seek not their harm. Whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. He said: What is your punishment? They replied: With boiling hot excrement, since a Master has said: Whoever mocks at the words of the Sages is punished with boiling hot excrement. Observe the difference between the sinners of Israel and the prophets of the other nations who worship idols. It has been taught: Note from this incident how serious a thing it is to put a man to shame, for God espoused the cause of Bar Kamza and destroyed His House and burnt His Temple. (Talmud - Mas. Gittin 56b-57a)

ENDNOTES:

1. This was found at http://www.karaite-korner.org/salmon_ben_yeruham.shtml and is from the work of an ancient Karaite teacher. The site says: "The brilliant Karaite Bible commentator, Salmon ben Yeruham (10th century), wrote a devastating criticism of Rabbanite Judaism in his book *Sefer Milhamot Hashem* ("The Book of the Wars of Hashem")."

2. I have paraphrased this from www.karaism.com, a decidedly non-Christian source. As a matter of fact, the Karaites, based on what is to be found on the web, are very active to oppose New Covenant teaching, just as much as any anti-missionary! Notice, also, how Jesus was criticized for saying "but I say to you," which was so much in contrast to the rabbinic style! See Matthew 7:28-29.

3. It is interesting that although God said he would raise up a prophet like unto Moses, when Joshua came who was the clear successor of Moses and was a prophet, we are left still looking for another. Was this an indication that there would be another Moses-like figure, the Messiah, who would be the prophet like unto Moses *par excellence*? Deut. 34:9 And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; so the people of Israel obeyed him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. 34:10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face...

4. Indeed, Yeshua said that all the layers of their hair-splitting tradition can get people away from the heart of the Torah! We see the deeper and more spiritual meaning of the Torah in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, see, for example, Matthew chapters 5-7 and the book of Hebrews.

5. See *The Structure of Biblical Authority* by Meredith G. Kline, ©1972 Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co.

6. These passages are from the CD-ROM version of the Socino Edition of the Talmud, from the Socino Classics Collection available from the Davka corporation. I highly recommend this valuable resource that can be ordered through www.davka.com

7. The Founder of the Lubavitcher Hasidic Movement also had some interesting things to say about Gentile Souls. Sadly, there have been horrible things said about the Jewish people by *some* Christian theologians, notably Martin Luther, and anti-missionaries are quick to point them out. Wicked statements made by Christian theologians are without excuse. (Though do remember the context of the remarks. Luther wrote them in response to the medieval work *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, which called Jesus the illegitimate son of an immoral hairdresser who practiced sorcery learned in Egypt. *Yeshu* is an acronym for "May his name and memory be blotted out." Still, this is no excuse.) Also, remember that these awful things were said, not against Jewish people as a race, but against followers of Judaism. These were religious statements, not ontological statements, but we cannot excuse them. It is interesting to know that there have been offensive statements made on the other side, as well. The example below is not meant to discredit all rabbinic writings, or even Rabbi Zalman, and it certainly should not in any way be seen as reflecting the views of the Jewish people as a whole or even of the rabbis in general, any more than Luther's sad comments were the whole of his thought or representative of Lutheran or Christian teaching in general. This statement cannot justify anti-Semitism any more than Luther's statement can justify hatred of Lutherans or Christians. This quotation is given only to show that

one can find examples on the rabbinic side of biased thinking towards non-Jews.

This excerpt is from the book *HABAD, The Hasidism of R. Shneur Zalman of Lylady*, published by Aronson Press and written by Roman A. Foxbrunner, a Postdoctoral Fellow of the Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies. Foxbrunner has worked under professors Isadore Twersky, Sid Leiman, and Leon Weinberger. His project was sponsored by “The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.” This book was purchased through the **Jewish Book Club. (Aronson Press is a Jewish publication house and publishes many fine works, such as *The Scholar’s Haggadah*.)**

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lylady, (RSZ) was the founder of the HABAD- Lubavitch sect of Hasidism. From pages 108-109:

"Gentile souls are of a completely different and inferior order. They are totally evil, with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Consequently, references to gentiles in RSZ's teachings are invariably invidious. In general terms, they were created only to test, to punish, to elevate, and ultimately to serve Israel (in the Messianic Era).

More specifically, even their wisdom is actually foolishness, because it leads to ego inflation and arrogance rather than to the self-nullification of Hokhmah....All gentile endeavors, including acts of benevolence, are self-serving...Their charity does not meet the requirements of tzedakah because they lack the faith that makes tzedakah so valuable...**Indeed, they themselves derive from refuse, which is why they are more numerous than the Jews, as the pieces of chaff outnumber the kernels. Their souls die with their bodies (while even the animal soul of a Jew is eternal)....In the future, however, they all will achieve the spiritual stature of Jewish women** --and be capable of fulfilling commandments not contingent on a specific time-as well as their level of subordination to Jewish men....All Jews were innately good, all gentiles innately evil. Jews were the pinnacle of creation and served the Creator, gentiles its nadir and worshiped the heavenly hosts.

As servants provide physical sustenance for their masters, the gentile nations were intended to provide physical sustenance for Israel....gentiles were the embodiment of the kepilot ("husks" or "shells" that block the Holy emanations....considered completely evil) and sitra ahra (the evil realm of the kepilot)....”

What can we say about this? The fact is, RSZ made these comments. No doubt he had some bad experiences with Gentiles that lead him to these extreme statements. As I mentioned above, Luther has come into contact with the Sefer Toledot Yeshu, which was the occasion for his horrible remarks. (He had started out extremely pro-Jewish, by the way!) Any excuse we can find for RSZ we can also find for Luther. I don't believe we can excuse EITHER of them! They both sinned, though we might understand their respective temptations which lead them to sin. We need to understand each man in his historical context and we must be charitable in our perspective of each man. God has mercy on us all and forgives those who truly turn to him in repentance and faith, whether Jewish or Gentile. We must always say: “There, but by the grace of God, go I.”

8. According to one Talmudic manuscript [MS.M.], this refers to Jesus. The Jewish writer Hyam Maccoby has stated: “The Talmud contains a few explicit references to Jesus...These references are certainly not complimentary...There seems little doubt that the account of the execution of

Jesus on the eve of Passover does refer to the Christian Jesus...The passage in which Jesus' punishment in hell is described also seems to refer to the Christian Jesus. It is a piece of anti-Christian polemic dating from the post-70 CE period..." --Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, pp. 26-27. (May God have mercy on the Talmudists for saying this!)