

TALMUD AND AUTHORITY

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The Seed of Abraham

The Rabbis tell us that the authority of the Talmud, and therefore their authority, is derived from God Himself. The progression goes like this: God gave the Oral Tradition (the basis for the Talmud), to Moses and,

‘Moses passed it on to Joshua; Joshua gave it to the Elders; the Elders gave it to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it to the Men of the Great Assembly’¹ (e.g. the Elders in Ezra and Nehemiah’s day).

The Rabbis teach that Talmud divinely supplements Torah, especially where Torah fails to mention something (like how a Jew is to conduct himself in certain situations or that he must wash his hands and say their blessing before blessing the Lord for food; and how a sacrifice should be slaughtered, i.e. where to cut the throat, etc.). If a Jew doesn’t follow Talmud it is seen as sin. Allegedly, all Talmud is from God. ‘According to Rabbi Pinhas Kehati, a modern Mishnaic scholar in Jerusalem,’²

‘The purpose of this opening statement (in Pirke Avot), is to teach us that *every word* cited in this tractate, as indeed the whole of the oral Torah’ (Oral Law-Talmud) ‘can in their systematic form be traced back through the Prophets to Moshe Rabbeinu’ (Moses our Teacher), ‘the father of all prophets, who received the whole ‘Torah, its laws, rules of inference and interpretations from the Almighty Himself.’³

The problem with rabbinic thought concerning the authority of Talmud is that nothing is seen of Talmud in the Torah, the Prophets or the Writings. which comprise the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament). The line of thought for Talmud begins in Babylon. The Rabbis say that Talmud came from Moses, who got it from God, but there isn’t one rabbi (or anyone else) named in Talmud who goes back before the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. That’s not to contest the fact that the seminal form of Talmud (Mishna) is ancient, but ancient doesn’t equal divine and there’s a long void between Moses and the Babylon captivity—more than 900 years.

There is no authoritative connection between what Moses taught and the Rabbis claiming that their authority was given to them via God through Moses. The Rabbis invented the story that says that Moses handed down the Oral Law to Joshua, etc., *to establish their own authority* as being derived from Moses, who of course, got his authority from God.

Confirming that the Rabbis have made up the story we find three major Scripture problems with it:

1. The first concern is when Joshua led Israel in reaffirming the Covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal (Joshua 8:31-35). In Joshua 8:35 it says that Joshua gave Israel *all* that Moses had received from God: “***There was not a word*** of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the Assembly.” It states that *only what was written* was read, not recognizing an Oral Law.⁴

¹ Ariel & Devorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (Lakewood, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 1996), p. 81. This is from the Mishna, tractate *Pirke Avot* 1:1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 167, from Rabbi Pinhas Kehati, *Mishnah: Seder Nezikin*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1994), VII 7.

⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

1. Josh. 8:32: records: ‘He wrote there on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the Sons of Israel.’
2. Josh. 8:34 states: “Then 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.*” There was no Oral Law mentioned, let alone recognized as authoritative for Jewish life.
2. Just before Joshua dies, he encourages the people and says for them *to cling to all that is written* in the Torah of Moses, so that good will come to them. Again, there is no mention of an Oral Law that the people should also follow because none existed (see Joshua 23:6-8):⁵ “Be very firm, then, *to keep and do all that is written* in the Book of the Law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left.” (Josh. 23:6)
3. The third biblical problem for the Rabbis is when Hilkiyah the High Priest, under the direction of King Josiah, found the Torah (Law of Moses) in the Temple (2nd Kings 22–23), there was no mention of an Oral Law accompanying it nor that an Oral Law even existed.⁶ When they found the Torah the implication is that there was nothing of God they had before to lead them in His Way. If there was an oral tradition it should have helped them. This event took place about 630 BC, or about fifty years before the Babylonian captivity. There is no mention of any Oral Law that had to be obeyed nor that was given by Moses to Joshua.

The facts are that no one named or cited in the Talmud lived before the Babylonian captivity, and neither Joshua or Josiah had any knowledge of an oral tradition. These three points confirm that Talmud did not have its source from God through Moses. It reveals that the authority the Pharisees, and now the Rabbis claim, does not come from God. Talmud, as helpful as it might be on occasion, and as destructive as it can be on other occasions, is not divinely authoritative, but it reveals how bankrupt Judaism is because the Rabbis teach their talmidim (students who study Talmud) to revere it more than God’s Word. The foundation that the Rabbis stand upon crumbles upon inspection. The Rabbis do not speak for God, and their authority has been given to them by themselves.⁷

⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷ Revised on Friday, May 7, 2021.