

*The Talmud*  
*tested by Scripture*

*Alexander McCaul*

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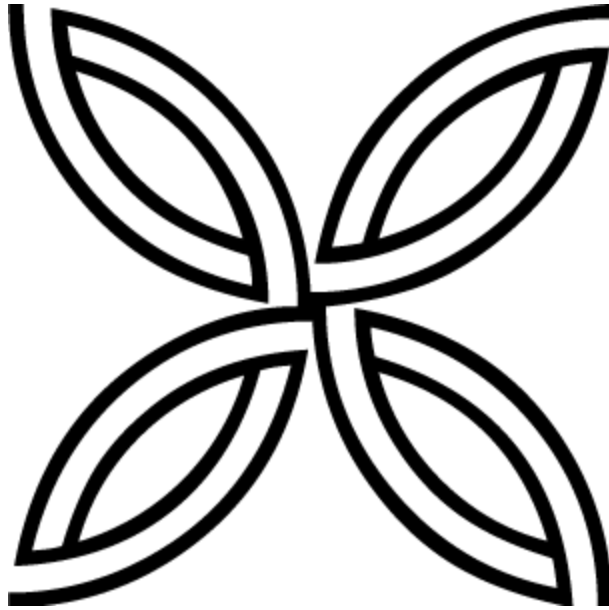
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# **The Talmud tested by Scripture**

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## **No. I.[1] RABBINISM NOT A SAFE WAY OF SALVATION.**

Salvation is of the Jews. Amongst all the religions systems existing in the world, there are but two deserving of attentive consideration, and they are both of Jewish origin, and were once exclusively confined to the Jewish nation. They are now known by the names of Judaism and Christianity; but it must never be forgotten that the latter is as entirely Jewish as the former. The Author of Christianity was a Jew. The first preachers of Christianity were Jews. The first Christians were all Jews; so that, in discussing the truth of these respective systems, we are not opposing a Gentile religion to a Jewish religion, but comparing one Jewish creed with another Jewish creed. Neither in defending Christianity, do we wish to diminish aught from the privileges of the Jewish people; on the contrary, we candidly acknowledge that we are disciples of the Jews, converts to Jewish doctrines, partakers of the Jewish hope, and advocates of that truth which the Jews have taught us. We are fully persuaded that the Jews whom we follow were in the right—that they have pointed out to us “the old paths,” “the good way,” and “we have found rest to our souls.” And we, therefore, conscientiously believe, that those Jews who follow the opposite system are as wrong as their forefathers, who, when God commanded them to walk in the good old way, replied, “We will not walk therein.” Some modern Jews think that it is impossible for a Jew to be in error, and that a Jew, because he is a Jew, must of necessity be in the right. Such persons seem to have forgotten how the majority of the people erred in making the golden calf—how the generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of their unbelief—how the

nation at large actually opposed and persecuted the truth of God in the days of Elijah—how their love of error sent them into the Babylonish captivity—and how there has been some grievous error of some kind or other, which delivered them into the hands of the Romans, and has kept them in a state of dispersion for so many hundred years. But the passage from which our motto is taken sets forth most strikingly the possibility of fatal mistake on the part of the Jewish nation, and also the possibility, in such a case, of God's turning to the Gentiles. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. *Therefore hear, ye nations, שמעו הגוים*, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth; behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because *they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.*"—Jer. vi. 16-19. Who will dare to deny, after such a passage, the possibility of a Jew's being in error? But some may ask, What is Judaism? what is Christianity? Answer.—Judaism is that religious system contained and acknowledged in the prayers of the Jewish synagogue, whether German or Portuguese, and professed by all who use them as the ritual of their worship. Christianity is the religious system taught in the New Testament; or, in other words, Judaism is the Old Testament explained according to the traditional law, תורה שבעל פה. Christianity is the Old Testament explained according to the New. According to this explanation, the Jewish Prayer-book teaches the divine authority of the oral law. Of this there can be no doubt, for, in the first place, the whole ritual of the synagogue service, and the existence and arrangement of the synagogue itself, is according to the prescription of the oral law, as may be seen by comparing the Jewish prayers with the Hilchoth

T'phillah. If it be asked why the Jew uses these prayers, and no other—why he wears phylacteries ( תפילין ) and the veil ( טלית )—why he conforms to certain ceremonies at the New Year, and the Day of Atonement, and the other feasts—why he repeats a certain benediction at the reading of the law—why he reads out of a parchment roll, rather than out of a printed book—why a roll of the law written in one way is lawful, and in another way unlawful, the only answer is, the oral law commands us thus to do. The whole synagogue worship, therefore, from the beginning to the end of the year, is a practical confession of the authority of the oral law, and every Jew who joins in the synagogue worship does, in so far, conform to the prescriptions of Rabbinism. But, secondly, the Jewish Prayer-book explicitly acknowledges the authority of the oral law. In the daily prayers, fol. 11, is found a long passage from the oral law, beginning,

איזהו מקומן של זבחים ,

“ which are the places where the offerings were slaughtered,” &c. On fol. 12, we find the thirteen Rabbinical rules for expounding the law, beginning,

רבי ישמעאל אומר ,

“ Rabbi Ishmael says,” &c. At the end of the daily prayers we find a whole treatise of the oral law, called, פרקי אבות , “the ethics of the fathers,” the beginning of which treatise asserts the transmission of the oral law. In the morning service for Pentecost, there is a most comprehensive declaration of the authority and constituent parts of the oral law. “He, the Omnipotent, whose reverence is purity, with his mighty word he instructed his chosen, and clearly explained the law, with the word, speech, commandment, and admonition, in the Talmud, the Agadah, the Mishna, and the Testament, with the statutes, the commandment, and the complete covenant,” &c., p. 89. In this prayer, as used, translated, and published by the Jews themselves, the divine authority of the oral law is explicitly asserted, and



the Talmud, Agadah, and Mishna, are pointed out as the sources where it is to be found. For these two reasons, then, we conclude that the Judaism of the Jewish Prayer-book is identical with the Judaism of the oral law, and that every Jew who publicly joins in those prayers does, with his lips at least, confess its divine authority.

Having explained what we mean by Judaism, we now go on to another preliminary topic. Some one may ask, what is the use of discussing these two systems? May they not both be safe ways of salvation for those that profess them? To this we must, according to the plain declarations of these systems themselves, reply in the negative. The New Testament denounces the oral law as subversive of the law of God. "Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for commandments the doctrines of men." (Mark vii. 5-7.) The oral law is still more exclusive. It excludes from everlasting life all who deny its authority, and explicitly informs us that Christians are comprehended in anathema,—

ואלו הן שאין להם הלק לעולם הבא אלא נכרתין ואובדין ונדונין על גודל רשעם וחטאתם לעולם ולעולמי עולמים המינין והאפיקורסין והכופרים בתורה וכו' :

*" These are they who have no part in the world to come, but who are cut off, and perish, and are condemned on account of the greatness of their wickedness and sin for ever, even for ever and ever, the heretics and the Epicureans, and the deniers of the law ,"* &c. Here is the general statement. But to prevent all mistake, a particular definition of each of these classes is added, from which we extract the following passage:—

שלשה הן הכופרים בתורה האומר שאין התורה מעם ה' אפילו פסוק אחד

אפילו תיבה אחת אם אמר משה אמרו מפי עצמו הרי זה כופר בתורה וכן הכופר בפירושיה והיא תורה שבעל פה והמכחיש במגידיה כנון צדוק וביתום והאומר שהבורא החליף מצוה זו במצוה אחרת וכבר בטלה תורה זו אף על פי שהיא היתה מעם ה' כנון הנוצרים וההנרים כל אחד משלשה אלה הוא כופר בתורה :

*“ There are three classes of the deniers of the law. He who says that the law is not from God, yea, even one verse or one word: or if he says that Moses gave it of his own authority. Such an one is a denier of the law. Thus, also, he who denies its interpretations: that is, the oral law, and rejects its Agadoth as Sadok and Baithos: and he who says that the Creator has changed one commandment for another, and that the law has long since lost its authority, although it was given by God, as the Christians and Mahometans, each of these three is a denier of the law. ”— Hilchoth T’shuvah, c. iii. 8.*

In the first extract we see that those persons called “deniers of the law,” are, according to the doctrine of modern Judaism, shut out from a hope of salvation. In the second extract we see that Christians are by name included in that class: from the two together it inevitably follows that modern Judaism teaches that Christians cannot be saved. We do not find any fault with modern Judaism for pronouncing this sentence; we do not tax the Jews either with uncharitableness or intolerance because of this opinion. On the contrary, we honour those who, conscientiously holding this opinion, have the honesty and the courage to declare it. If they consider us as deniers of the law, they must, of course, believe that our state is far from safe; and if this be their conviction, the best proof which they can give of true charity, is to warn us of our danger. But, at the same time, when a religious system condemns us by name, and pronounces sentence concerning our eternal state in so decided a tone, and that simply because we dissent from some of its tenets, we not only think that we have a right to defend ourselves and our

religion, but consider it our bounden duty to examine the grounds on which a system of such pretension rests, and honestly, though quietly, to avow our reasons for rejecting it. We know, indeed, that there are some Rabbinical Jews, who think this sentence harsh, and consider themselves justified in denying it, because there is another sentence in this same oral law, which says, “that the pious amongst the nations of the world have a part in the world to come.” But can they prove, by any citation from the oral law, that Christians are included “amongst the pious of the nations of the world?” If they can, then they will prove that in one place the oral law denies, and in another place affirms the salvability of Christians; that is, they will prove that the oral law contains palpable contradictions, and therefore cannot be from God. If they cannot produce any such citation, then the general declaration that “the pious of the nations of the world” may be saved, is nothing to the purpose; for the same law which makes this general declaration, does also explicitly lay down the particular exception in the case of Christians, and that after it has made the general declaration. In fact, the exception follows close on the heels of the general rule. The general rule is,—  
 כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא ... וכן חסידי אומות העולם יש להם  
 חלק לעולם הבא :

*“ All Israel has a share in the world to come ... and also the pious of the nations of the world have a share in the world to come. ”* The words which immediately follow this declaration contain the exception,—

ואלו הן שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא וכו

*“ But these are they which have no part in the world to come ,”* &c. This exception is, therefore, plainly made in order to guard against any false inference from the general statement, and, therefore, according to the oral law, Christians cannot be saved. We proceed, therefore, to inquire into the merits of this system, which makes so decided a statement respecting our eternal state. We have

a standard of comparison to which no Jew will object, even that Holy Book, which contains the writings of Moses and the prophets. We reject the oral law, not because it seems in itself bad or good to our judgment, but because it is repugnant to the plain words of the Old Testament. There is not space to enter at large into the proof at present, but we subjoin one passage, which is in itself amply sufficient to disprove the divine authority of any religious system where it occurs. In the Talmud, in the Treatise Pesachim, fol. 49, col. 2, we read as follows:—

אמר רבי אלעזר עם הארץ מותר לנחרו ביום הכפורים שחל להיות בשבת  
אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי אמור לשחטו אמר להן זה טעון ברכה וזה אינו טעון  
ברכה :

Rabbi Eleazar says, “It is lawful to split open the nostrils of an amhaaretz (an unlearned man) on the Day of Atonement which falls on the Sabbath. His disciples said to him, Rabbi, say rather that it is lawful to slaughter him. He replied, That would require a benediction, but here no benediction is needful.” It is hardly needful to remind the reader that the law of Moses says, לא תרצח , “Thou shalt not kill.” But there is in this passage a sneering contempt for the unlearned, which is utterly at variance with the character of Him “whose mercies are over all his works,” the unlearned and the poor, as well as the mighty and the learned.

Indeed the passage is so monstrous, that one is almost inclined to think that it must have crept into the Talmud by mistake; or, at the least, to expect that it would be followed by reprehension the most explicit and severe. But no, a little lower down another of these “wise men” says,—

עם הארץ מותר לקרעו כדג ,

“It is lawful to rend an amhaaretz like a fish;” and, a little above, an Israelite is forbidden to marry the daughter of such a person, for that she is no better than a beast. But the whole of the preceding passage is so characteristic of the spirit of Rabbinism, that it is worth inserting—

תנו רבנן וכו' ,

“ Our Rabbies have taught. Let a man sell all that he has, and marry the daughter of a learned man. If he cannot find the daughter of a learned man, let him take the daughter of the great men of the time. If he cannot find the daughter of a great man of the time, let him marry the daughter of the head of a congregation. If he cannot find the daughter of the head of a congregation, let him marry the daughter of an almoner. If he cannot find the daughter of an almoner, let him marry the daughter of a schoolmaster. But let him not marry the daughter of the unlearned, for they are an abomination, and their wives are vermin; and of their daughters it is said, ‘Cursed is he that lieth with any beast.’” Here, again, one is inclined to suppose that there is a mistake, or that these words were spoken in jest, though such a jest would be intolerably profane; but all ground for such supposition is removed on finding this passage transcribed into the digest of Jewish law, called the Schulchan Aruch, part 2; in the Hilchoth P’riah ur’viah, by which transcription it is stamped, with all the authority of a law. Here, then, the reader is led to think, that an amhaaretz must mean something more and worse than an unlearned man—that it ought, perhaps, to be taken in its literal signification, “people of the land,” and that it may refer to the idolatrous and wicked Canaanites. But the common usage of the Talmud forbids a supposition. There is a well-known sentence which shows that even a High Priest might be an amhaaretz:—

ממזר ת'ח קודם לכהן גדול עם הארץ ,

“ A learned man, though illegitimate, goes before a High Priest, who is an amhaaretz.” Here the amhaaretz is plainly opposed to him that is learned. And so, on the page of the Talmud from which we have quoted above, we find the following words:—

עם הארץ אסור לאכול בשר בהמה שנאמר זאת תורת הבהמה והעוף כל העוסק בתורה מותר לאכול בשר בהמה ועוף וכל שאינו עוסק בתורה

אסור לאכול בשר בהמה ועוף :

“ An amhaaretz is forbidden to eat the flesh of a beast, for it is said, ‘This is the *law* of the beast and the fowl.’ (Levit. xi. 46.) Every one that laboureth in the law, it is lawful for him to eat the flesh of the beast and the fowl. But for him who does not labour in the law, it is forbidden to eat the flesh of the beast and the fowl.” According to this passage an amhaaretz is one who does not labour in the study of the law; and it being found on the very same page with the above most revolting declarations, it plainly shows the proud and haughty spirit of the authors of the Talmud, and their utter contempt for the poor, whose circumstances preclude them from the advantages of study. But, in reading such passages, the question naturally suggests itself, to which of the two classes does the poor Jewish population of London belong? There must be at the least hundreds, if not thousands of poor Jews in this great city who cannot possibly devote themselves to study. Amongst whom, then, are they to be classed? Amongst the learned תלמידי חכמים or amongst the unlearned עמי הארץ? Are they, their wives, and daughters, as the Talmud says, to be called an abomination, vermin, and compared to the beasts? Or can a religion inculcating such sentiments proceed from that Holy One who is no respecter of persons? See here, ye children of Abraham, whom the providence of God has placed amongst the children of poverty, and cut off from the advantage of a learned education. You are not disciples of the wise, nor the great men of the time, nor heads of synagogues, nor almoners, nor even schoolmasters. You are quite shut out from these classes whom your Talmudical doctors favour so highly. See, then, in the above passages, what the Talmud says of yourselves, your wives, and daughters? Can you believe that this is the law of the God of Israel? Can you think for one moment, that these doctors knew “the old paths,” “the good way?” If you do we must assure you that we cannot.

We rather find it in that book, which says, "Blessed is the man that considereth the poor and needy." (Psalm xli. 1.) And in that other book, which speaks in the same spirit, and says that "God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise; and the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence." (1 Cor. i. 27, 28.)

## **No. II. IMPLICIT FAITH NOT DUE TO THE RABBIES.**

It appears from the undisguised acknowledgments of the New Testament, that the doctors and rabbies of the Jews, the Pharisees, and scribes, were the implacable enemies of Jesus of Nazareth, and that they were the main instruments in effecting his death. The modern Jews consider this fact as a sufficient apology for their rejection of his claims to the Messiahship. They take it for granted that the great and learned men of that day were also good men, and that they had valid reasons for their conduct. They think if Jesus of Nazareth had been the true Messiah, that the Sanhedrin, the great Jewish council of the time, would have acknowledged him, and conclude that, as they rejected him, he cannot be the true Messiah. The New Testament, on the contrary, accounts for their unbelief by plainly telling us, that they were bad men; and that they were enemies to the Lord Jesus, because he told them the truth, and exposed their hypocrisy. Now, which of these two representations accords with the truth? Were the scribes and Pharisees, those great advocates of the oral law , תורה , שבעל פה , good men or bad men? The readers of our first number will be in some degree qualified to answer this question. Could those be good men who profanely talked of the lawfulness of killing an unlearned man, and who contemptuously compared the wives and daughters of the unlearned to “vermin and beasts?” If they could talk with levity of “rending like a fish” an unlearned man, one of their own brethren who had never done them any harm, what were they likely to do with one who exposed their wickedness, and boldly told them that they by their traditions made void the law of God? The very fact, that



Jesus of Nazareth was put to death by such men, is presumptive evidence, that he was a good man, and that his claims were just. But, however that be, it is worth while to inquire into the charges, which the New Testament brings against these learned men, and to see whether they are substantiated by the memorials of their character and spirit, which they themselves have left us in their laws. One of the charges preferred against them is, that they were ambitious men, covetous of worldly honour, and loving the pre-eminence. "But all their works they do to be seen of men; they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments. And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." (Matt. xxiii. 5-7.) Now, is this charge true? Does the oral law justify this assertion, or does it prove, on the contrary, that the enemies of Jesus were humble, pious men, whose piety serves as a warrant for the uprightness of their conduct in their treatment of the Lord Jesus? Let the reader judge from the following laws which these men framed with respect to themselves. In the first place they claim for themselves more honour and reverence than is due to a man's own parents:—

כשם שאדם מצווה בכבוד אביו וביראתו כד הוא חייב בכבוד רבו וביראתו  
: יותר מאביו וכו' :

"As a man is commanded to honour and fear his father, so he is bound to honour and fear his Rabbi more than his father; for his father has been the means of bringing him into the life of this world, but his Rabbi, who teaches him wisdom, brings him to the life of the world to come." (Hilchoth Talmud Torah, c. 5.) This general rule is bad enough, but the particulars are still worse. "If a man should see something that his father has lost, and something that his Rabbi has lost, he is first to return what his Rabbi has lost, and then to return that which belongs to his father. If his father and his Rabbi be oppressed with a load, he is

first to help down that of his Rabbi, and then that of his father. If his father and his Rabbi be in captivity, he is first to ransom his Rabbi and afterwards his father unless his father be the disciple of a wise man ( i.e. , learned), in which case he may ransom his father first.” How fearful is this doctrine! A man is to see his father, the author of his existence, the guardian of his infancy, who has laboured for his support, and watched over him in the hour of sickness, he is to see this friend, to whom, under God, he owes everything, pining away in the bitterness of captivity, and yet, when he has got the means of restoring him to liberty and his family, he is to leave him still in all his misery, and ransom the Rabbi; where is this written in the Old Testament? “Honour thy father and thy mother,” is there the first commandment that follows after our duty to God, and the first movement of natural affection. But this Rabbinical doctrine silences the voice of nature, and makes void the law of God. What is the doctrine of the New Testament here? “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” (1 Tim. v. 8.) The disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ never claimed for themselves any honour like this. In the passage just cited, they plainly declare that the first, in the circle of duties to men, is the duty to our own flesh and blood. And the only case in which the New Testament permits a deviation from this rule, is that where the same exception is made in the law of Moses, when love to parents would interfere with love to God. “If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also , he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke xiv. 26.) Here father and mother, and kindred, are put in one category with a man’s own life, in order to show that there is but one case in which the natural ties of blood may be overlooked, and this is when the service of God requires it. As it is also written in the

law of Moses, "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend who is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers.... Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him, neither shall thine eye pity him," &c. (Deut. xiii. 6-9.) And thus the tribe of Levi is praised, because "He said unto his father and his mother, I have not known him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children." (Deut. xxxiii. 9.) But this Talmudical law is widely different. It has no saving clause to show that the case specified is an exception to the general rule. It does not pretend to suppose that the father is a bad man, or an idolater, or an apostate. It specifies but one exception, and that is, where the father is "the disciple of a wise man;" otherwise, though he be a good man, and a pious man, a loving and tender parent, still he is to be disregarded by his own son, and the Rabbi preferred before him. Is it possible to doubt that the men who conceived, sanctioned, and promulgated a law like this, had an eye to their own personal honour and interest? Is it reasonable to suppose that men who would sacrifice their own father to the honour of their Rabbi, would be very tender about the life of one who appeared, like Jesus of Nazareth, as an opposer of their pretensions? Or can the Jews, with the law and the prophets in their hands, suppose that these men pointed to "the old paths," "the good way?" This is certainly not the doctrine of Moses. He says:—

ארור מקלה אביו ואמו ואמר כל העם אמן :

"Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother, and all the people shall say, Amen." (Deut. xxvii. 16.)

But these men did not stop here. They were not content with being exalted above father and mother. They did not scruple to assert, that their honour was as sacred as that of God himself:—

ואין לך כבוד גדול מכבוד הרב ולא מורא ממורא הרב אמרו חכמים מורא  
רבך כמורא שמים :

“ Thou must consider no honour greater than the honour of the Rabbi, and no fear greater than the fear of the Rabbi. The wise men have said, The fear of thy Rabbi is as the fear of God.”

They endeavour to prove the validity of these extravagant claims by such passages as Exod. xvi. 8, “Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord.” But they have taken for granted what they can never prove, and that is, that every Rabbi is invested with the same office and authority as Moses. But where, in all the law of Moses, is there any warrant for such an assumption? Moses could with all propriety say, “Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord,” for he held a special commission from God, and had proved to the people the reality of his commission by a series of miracles. But this the Rabbies never pretended to do. In this dearth of evidence the advocates of tradition flee for refuge to Deut. xvii. 8, &c. “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates; then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests, the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire, and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment. And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee; according to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do; thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee to the right hand nor to the left.” Here, say the traditionists, is a plain and unequivocal command. No doubt, God here plainly declares what is to

be done in a difficult case. He commands the Israelites to go to the place which the Lord God chose, that is, to the place where was found the ark of the covenant; and to inquire, not of the Rabbies, but of the priests, the Levites, and the judge *השופט* . But this passage, instead of proving that “the fear of the Rabbi is as the fear of God,” proves the contrary. It supposes first, that the Rabbies and learned men may differ in judgment, that there may be a controversy, and consequently, that one party may be in the wrong. It, therefore, effectually overthrows Rabbinical infallibility. It shows that these learned men are, after all, only poor fallible creatures like ourselves, and that, therefore, we are not to fear them as we would fear God, nor reverence their dictates, as the Word of God. It shows secondly, that in a case of difficulty, the Israelites were not to appeal to the Rabbies, but to the priests *כהנים* , and to the judge *שופט* , and even to them only in the place which the Lord should choose. There is not one word said about the Rabbies or the wise men, and, therefore, this passage completely annihilates all their lofty pretensions. For centuries the place which the Lord chose has been desolate, and there has been no priest standing to minister before the Lord. The Jews have thus lost all possibility of appeal. They have neither ministering priest nor judge, and the Mosaic law nowhere recognises the pretensions of the Rabbies. But some Jew may say, that though this passage does not prove the authority of the Rabbies, it does at least warrant the Jews in persisting to reject the claims of the Lord Jesus, for that he was condemned by the priests, and in Jerusalem, the place which the Lord chose. We confess that this objection is plausible; but can easily prove that it is nothing more. In order to this, we ask the Jews, whether the above command to abide by the sentence of the priests is in every case, and without any exception, binding? To this question there are two answers possible—Yes and No. If they say No, then they admit that the priests might

sometimes be in the wrong, and we would, of course, take advantage of this admission to show that they erred in their judgment on Jesus of Nazareth. They will then, most probably, say, Yes; the sentence of the priests, the Levites, and the judges, is in every case binding, and Israel is commanded not to deviate from it, either to the right hand or to the left, upon pain of capital punishment. We beg of them then to turn to the 26th chapter of the Prophet Jeremiah, and to consider the case there set before them. We there find that Jeremiah had delivered a message from God, very similar to our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. "I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." We find, further, that for this message the priests condemned Jeremiah to death, just as their successors condemned Jesus of Nazareth. "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests, and the prophets, and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die." We find, further, that this sentence was pronounced "in the place which the Lord had chosen," in the Temple itself. "And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord." We find, further, that the sentence against Jeremiah was no rash sudden act, but the deliberate judgment of the priests. For when the princes of Judah came afterwards to inquire into the matter, "Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears." Now, then, we ask again, whether the people of Israel was in duty bound to abide by this sentence, and not to decline from it, either to the right hand or to the left? We fearlessly reply, that they were not bound by this sentence, and that, if they had executed it, they would have been guilty of murder, as Jeremiah himself declares: "But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to

death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." We infer, therefore, that it was possible for the priests, assembled in solemn deliberation in the house of the Lord, to err in judgment, and to pronounce on unrighteous sentence. We infer, further, that it was possible for the priests so far to err, as to condemn to death a true prophet of the Lord. We infer, further, that in such a case the people was not bound by this mistaken judgment; but that it was their duty to decline from it, both to the right hand and to the left. We infer, lastly, that as the priests might mistake, and unjustly condemn to death a true prophet, their sentence against Jesus of Nazareth forms no more argument against the Messiahship of Jesus, than the similar sentence just considered did against the true prophetic character of Jeremiah; and that it affords just as little warrant for Jewish unbelief as the former sentence did for putting Jeremiah to death.

But it may be asked, if the judgment of the priests was not infallible, and if men were sometimes justifiable in refusing it, what use was there in the above commandment to apply to them in cases of difficulty, and to abide by their sentence? The answer to this is very simple. The priest that stood to minister before the Lord had it in his power, before the destruction of the first Temple, to inquire of the Lord and to receive a miraculous answer from God himself, which answer was, of course, infallible, and universally obligatory, without the possibility of exception. We find in the Old Testament many instances in which the Israelites availed themselves of this power, as in Judges xx. 27, "And the children of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days: and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the

children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand." And in the history of David's life, there are several instances of his employment of this miraculous power, as 1 Sam. xxiii. 4, "Then David inquired of the Lord yet again. And the Lord answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand." In all such cases where the priest first inquired of the Lord, his sentence was, of course, infallible, and the Israelites were bound to abide by it. But where they did not inquire of the Lord, their sentence was only that of fallible men, and, therefore, not binding upon the consciences of the people. Of this sort was their sentence upon Jeremiah. Being wicked men, they did not choose to ask counsel of the Lord, but pronounced sentence according to the devices of their own hearts. In the case of the Lord Jesus Christ the priests could not ask counsel of the Lord, for in the second Temple the Urim and Thummim, and the ark of the covenant, were wanting; the miraculous power, therefore, did not exist, and for this very reason the sentence of the priests, during the whole period of the second Temple, was only fallible, like that of other men, and, therefore, not binding, and consequently of no force as an argument against the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The above passage, therefore, from the 17th of Deuteronomy, is of no use to the Rabbinical Jews, it does not prove the infallibility of the priests in the second Temple, and is still less applicable for sanctioning the traditions of the oral law, and the extravagant claims of the Rabbies. Having given this passage the consideration it deserves, we now return to the laws which the Rabbies have made in favour of themselves, and for their own honour. We consider that the two passages of the oral law already quoted, prove that the New Testament gives a fair delineation of their character. When men, without any warrant from God's Word, claim for themselves the same



degree of reverence which is due to God, it must be admitted that they are vainglorious and wicked in no ordinary degree. But it is possible to descend to particulars:—For instance, our Lord says, that these men “loved greetings in the market-places, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.” Now one of the laws, still extant, forbids a man, when speaking of his Rabbi, to call him by name:—

אסור לו לתלמיד לקרות לרבו בשמו ואפילו שלא בפניו ,

“ It is forbidden to a disciple to call his Rabbi by name, even when he is not in his presence.” Another law, still extant, prescribes the formula of greeting or salutation:—

ולא יתן שלום לרבו או יחזיר לו שלום כדרך שנותנים לריעים ומחזירים זה לזה אלא שוחה לפניו ואומר לו ביראה וכבוד שלום עליך רבי :

“ Neither is he to salute his Rabbi, nor to return his salutation in the same manner that salutations are given or returned amongst friends. On the contrary, he is to bow down before the Rabbi, and to say to him, with reverence and honour, Peace be unto thee, Rabbi .” The Rabbinical Jews, who see this, must not mistake us. We do not consider it in anywise sinful, but decorous, to treat a Rabbi with all due respect. We should feel no objection ourselves to make a bow to a Rabbi, and to salute him in the prescribed formula. But we cite these laws to show that the New Testament gives a fair representation of the Pharisees: for men, who could gravely sit down and enter into all these details of the mode in which they were to be honoured, and then give out these laws as divine, and, besides all this, call in the civil power to enforce them, must have had no mean idea of themselves and their own dignity. It must never be forgotten that these laws are not the mere regulations of a religious community. When the Rabbies had the power in their own hands, they enforced them by civil sanctions. They were not satisfied with excluding despisers of Rabbinical authority from eternal life, they prosecuted such before the tribunals, and

sentenced them to a pecuniary fine and excommunication , as may be seen from the following law:—

וכל המבזה את החכמים אין לו חלק לעולם הבא והרי הוא בכלל כי דבר יהוה בזה : אף על פי שהמבזה את החכמים אן לו חלק לעולם הבא אם באו עדים שבזהו אפילו בדברים חייב נדוי , ומנדין אותו בית דין ברבים וקונסין אותו ליטרא זהב בכל מקום ונותנין אותו לחכם והמבזה את החכם , בדברים אפילו לאחר מיתה מנדין אותו בית דין וכו' ,

“ Whosoever despises the wise men has no share in the world to come. But notwithstanding this, if there come witnesses to prove that he has been guilty of contempt, even in words, his sentence is excommunication, and the tribunal (house of judgment) excommunicates him publicly, and everywhere mulct him in a pound of gold, and give it to the wise man. He that despiseth a wise man in words, even after his death, is to be excommunicated by the tribunal,” &c. We now ask the Jews of modern times what they think of those who made their own personal honour the subject of legislation, who required the same reverence for their words as the Word of God, and who dragged up him that refused it before a tribunal, had him sentenced to pecuniary fine, and excommunication; and, besides all this, excluded him from the hope of everlasting life? Had such men any idea of liberty of conscience?

## **No. III. RABBINIC INJUSTICE TO WOMEN, SLAVES, AND GENTILES.**

If any of our readers should think that the design of these papers is to represent the oral law as a system of unmixed evil, we beg to assure them that they are mistaken. We are fully aware that a system based on the law and the prophets, must and does contain much that is good and worthy of admiration. Of this nature is the general command to all Israelites to study the law, which is as follows:—"Every man of Israel is bound to study the law. Whether he be poor or rich, healthy or unhealthy, young or old, yea, though he live upon alms, and beg from door to door, and though he have a wife and children, he is bound to set apart a fixed time for the study of the law, by day and by night, as it is written, "Thou shalt meditate therein by day and by night," And again, the maxim, "Every one that is bound to learn is also bound to teach;" and that, "therefore, a man is bound to teach his son and his son's son," &c., is in accordance with the plain command of God, and is therefore good. But the explanation and development of these good principles shows that the system itself is radically bad, and therefore cannot be from God. No one will deny that the Rabbies are right in asserting the obligation resting on every Israelite to study the law: but they are wrong in their explanation of what the law is. Immediately after the above good command, the oral law goes on to say, "Every one is bound to divide the time of his study into three parts: one-third to be devoted to the written law; one-third to Mishna; and one-third to Gemara:" so that the written law of God is to have only half as much attention as the traditions of men. This is bad

enough. But the Rabbies do not stop here. They go on to say, that this third of attention is only required when a man begins to study, but that when he has made progress, he is to read the law of God only at times, and to devote himself to Gemara.

בד"א בתחלת תלמודו של אדם אבל כשיגדיל בחכמה ולא יהא צריך לו ללמוד תורה שבכתב ולא לעסוק תמיד בתורה שבעל פה יקרא בעתים מזומנים תורה שבכתב ודברי השמועה כדי שלא ישכח דבר מדברי דיני תורה ויפנה כל ימיו לגמרא :

“ What has been said refers only to the beginning of a man’s learning, but as soon as a man becomes great in wisdom, and has no need of learning the written law, or of labouring constantly in the oral law, let him at fixed times read them, that he may not forget any of the judgments of the law, but let him devote all his days to Gemara .” It is to be observed that “oral law” is here taken in a limited sense, as referring to the expositions of the written law, or, as Rabbi Joseph Karo [2] explains it, the Mishna; and Gemara signifies the legal decisions which are inferred by a process of reasoning, and to this third topic of Jewish theology the Israelites are commanded to give the chief of their time and attention, rather than to the written Word of God.

The apparent excellence of the above command to study the law is thus utterly destroyed by the Rabbinical exposition of what is to be studied. And if we go on to inquire upon whom this command is binding, the Rabbinical answer will afford just as little satisfaction. When the Rabbies say, that “every man of Israel is bound to study the law,” they mean to limit the study to the men of Israel, and to exclude the women and slaves. The very first sentence of the Hilchoth Talmud Torah is

, נשים ועבדים וקטנים פטורים מתלמוד תורה

“ Women and slaves and children are exempt from the study of the law.” According to this declaration, women are not obliged to learn. The following extract will confirm this

opinion, and at the same time show that there is no obligation on fathers to have their daughters taught.

אשה שלמדה תורה יש לה שכר אבל אינו כשכר האיש מפני שלא נצטוית , וכל העושה דבר שאינו מצווה עליו לעשותו אין שכרו כשכר המצווה ועושה אלא פחות ממנו ואע"פ שיש לה שכר צו חכמים שלא ילמד אדם את בתו תורה מפני שרוב הנשים אין דעתן מכוונת להתלמד אלא הן מוציאות דברי תורה לדברי הבאי מפי עניות דעתן , אמרו חכמים כל המלמד את בתו תורה כאלו למדה תיפלות , בד"א בתורה שבעל פה אבל תורה שבכתב לא ילמד אותה לכתחלה ואם למדה אינו כמלמדה תיפלות :

“ A woman who learns the law has a reward, but it is not equal to the reward which the man has, because she is not commanded to do so : for no one who does anything which he is not commanded to do, receives the same reward as he who is commanded to do it, but a less one. But though the woman has a reward, the wise men have commanded that no man should teach his daughter the law, for this reason, that the majority of women have not got a mind fitted for study, but pervert the words of the law on account of the poverty of their mind. The wise men have said, Every one that teacheth his daughter the law is considered as if he taught her transgression. [3] But this applies only to the oral law. As to the written law, he is not to teach her systematically; but if he has taught her, he is not to be considered as having taught her transgression.”

According to this decision, it is absolutely forbidden to teach a woman the oral law; and the teaching of it is looked upon as the teaching of transgression תיפלות . We cannot forbear asking the advocates of the oral law, whether it does not here testify against itself that it is bad. It declares of itself that it is unfit for the perusal and study of the pure female mind, and that it is as corrupting as the teaching of transgression. We ask, then, can such a law be divine? Can it proceed from the God of Israel, who hath said, “Be ye holy, for I am holy?” What a noble testimony to the superiority of the written Word, and to the justice of the Lord Jesus Christ’s opposition to the oral law! The oral law

itself says, "He that teacheth his daughter the oral law, is to be considered as if he taught her transgression. He that teacheth her the written law, is not to be so considered." With such a confession, we fearlessly ask the sons and daughters of Israel, who then was in the right? Jesus of Nazareth, who opposed it, or the scribes and Pharisees who defended it?

But "the wise men" also forbid Israelites to teach women the written law, and declare that women are not bound to learn. For the prohibition they assign two reasons. First, they say that God has commanded them to teach only their sons, in proof of which they refer to Deut. xi. 19, "And ye shall teach them your children." In the Hebrew it is בניכם "your sons;" and the rabbies infer ולא את בנותיכם, "and not your daughters." [4] Secondly, they say, as we have seen above, "that the majority of women have not got minds fitted for study," and in the Talmud [5] this is attempted to be proved from Scripture. "A wise woman once asked R. Eliezer, How it was that after the sin of the golden calf, those who were alike in transgressions did not all die the same death? He replied, A woman's wisdom is only for the distaff, as it is written, 'All the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands.'" (Exod. xxxv. 25.) We hesitate not to say, that both these reasons are contrary to Scripture. We do not deny that בניכם signifies sons, but we utterly deny the conclusion of the Rabbies, that because the masculine word is used, therefore the women are not included in the command. There is an abundance of instances in which the masculine word בנים is used for children generally, without any allusion to sex. Take for example Exod. xxii. 23 (in the English 24), "And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children בניכם (literally your sons) orphans." Here again the masculine word is used, so that if the Rabbinical argument be valid in the above case, it will be valid here, and consequently the