



Rev A

Adult Education Lesson 25

Sermon on the Mount - The Law, Torah and Midrash

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Mt. 5:17

Collect

Jesus said:

Mt. 5: 17* ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law (Torah), or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. 18* For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law (Torah), till all be fulfilled. 19* Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so^D, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20* For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Torah

Torah (to-row) is Hebrew for Law . Rashi quoting Rav Yitzak says that Torah is primarily a book of laws, that Torah can never be improved upon, and therefore God will never supersede it by another revelation. This dogma of Judaism is deduced from the text, “It is not in heaven (Deut. xxx. 12), which is expounded thus: “That you shall not say another Moses will arise and bring us another Torah from heaven, I have already made it known to you that “it is not in heaven,” i.e. there is nothing left of it in heaven (Deut. R. viii. 6).

“Even that which an acute disciple shall teach in the presence of his Rabbi has already been said to Moses on Sinai”.^A

Torah is regarded, by Jews, as containing the whole of divine truth, including all that in future ages might be brought to light.



Glen Miller



^D This statement probably aimed at teachers who came after Paul.

The Kingdom of Heaven = the “Church of Jesus Christ?” On this earth in any case.

Saducees (priests) conspicuously absent here. Scribes = teachers of Torah.

Lu 16:17* And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

^A (Talmud - j. Hag. i. 8. 76^C).

Much of this tract is commentary - don't take it as Gospel. It is here to encourage meditation and study. Use your gift of discernment, to find the truth.

Sermon on the Mount - the Law

The Law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai during the 40 days on the mountain with God. Since God could not “speak” Aramaic, nor any language - for God is spirit, and spirit has no physical existence - the transmission of His ideas to Moses was via the “spirit”. God “wrote” onto Moses “heart” or “mind”, the spiritual (“heavenly”) truths and Moses translated these spiritual ideas into 600+ earthly commandments.

Hebrew writing

These commandments were then written down in a new language that the priests developed especially for this purpose. Moses spoke these teachings in Aramaic, and the scribes (priests) wrote them down as symbols onto papyrus writing from the right edge of the scroll to the left in a continuous stream with no breaks between letters .

Oral Torah

The scribes also memorized Moses understanding of the spiritual meaning God had given to him, as best as he could explain it in the common language of the time - Aramaic. The symbols on papyrus were to remind the scribes of the spiritual meaning that lay behind them. The writings were never read aloud, there was no need for any pronunciation guide, and there were no vowels and no sentence structure. Only Moses, Joshua, the Elders, prophets and Priests would have any idea of what the symbols meant. In the *synagogue* (which means *meeting place*) The priests, reading the symbols, recalled the original Aramaic *spiritual meaning* (Oral Torah or Midrash) from memory, and “read” the *spiritual meaning* to the audience.

“Moses taught to Joshua: Joshua to the Elders; the Elders to the Prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly.”

The Talmud states: “One who denies that the rabbinic tradition commonly called the Oral Torah, was given by God to Moses is castigated as someone who “despises the word of God” (Sanbedrin 99a), and Rambam labels such a person as a heretic.” . . . “There were forty generations from Moses to Rabina and Rav Ashi, the redactors of the Babylonian Talmud.”

The written Torah is included in our Bibles in the first five books of the Old Testament. But the Oral Torah has never been included in a Christian Bible. Why not? Because at the time our Bible was being assembled in c. 250 CE, the Oral Teachings was not in writing, and even when it was written, it was incomprehensible to gentile priests.

Understanding An example of Midrash

Written teachings in the Torah, are often metaphors for spiritual truths, which are explained and expounded upon in Midrash.

The oral explanation of the written phrase “eye for eye” (Ex. 21:24) has nothing to do with eyes or any physical punishment, but is a metaphor for a spiritual truth. It means that the compensation (usually financial) for a particular injury or infraction of the law is to be the same regardless of whether the person is poor or rich, and regardless of a person’s standing in the community. If a physical injury, it would also require a request for forgiveness. If the phrase “eye for eye” was used in a Jewish court, everyone would understand that it to refer to this spiritual teaching (*Midrash*).

When later, Jesus said: Mt. 5:38 ¶ *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: only those people who heard the Pharisees discussing Moses would have understood the spiritual meaning of this phrase. Here, addressing the least educated of his disciples - mostly poor fishermen - Jesus gave His own spiritual explanation. It perhaps differed in words from the Pharisees explanation, but carried the very same spiritual message of “equal rights”. Here Jesus was interpreting Moses for the poor and oppressed people, especially those whose “bosses” were not subject to the Jewish laws (mostly Romans). He suggested that even though the offender was not subject to the law of *eye for eye*, the injured person could still demonstrate that what he done that was wrong, and receive compensation in the form of the “spiritual punishment” of the offender.*

Here is how it works: Jesus says: . . . *resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.* (Mt 5:39)

The meaning of “*resist not evil*” is: don’t harbor anger, or hold a grudge against this person. You can also see this idea in the commandment to “love your enemy”. The spiritual truth behind it is that one cannot expect God to forgive one, if one holds back forgiveness - and this is what is expressed in the Lord’s prayer.

Understanding

“shall smite thee on the right cheek”

“Smiting” was slapping with the back of the hand, and was a demonstration of power over someone who was considered “inferior”. By turning his other cheek to offer it up for further abuse, the bully is rendered helpless, since it is impossible to “smite on the left cheek”, from a position in front of the victim, and so he momentarily feels inferior. The victim might have said, ”Now you know how it feels to be me - unable to strike back”.

Thousands of years later Ghandi, who understood Jesus well, used Jesus’s interpretation of this *Midrash* to obtain equal rights for the Indian population under British oppression in India. Martin Luther King, who had studied Ghandi’s writings, used this same teaching to help obtain equal rights for Blacks in the USA.

And we have heard or read about the effect (the “fruits”) of this teaching in the behavior of orthodox Jews.

So, though we might think that this was a new idea from Jesus, we see that it was only a reinterpretation of Midrash *eye for eye* , done in the best tradition of the Pharisaic interpretation of oral tradition.

Without *Mishnah* (the written version of Midrash c. 200 A.D.) to explain the law, we could misunderstand God.

The NT , which is the announcement of the Kingdom of God to the world (Christ in man, man in Christ) contains interpretations of Torah for Gentiles who are new to God’s teachings. If the meaning in the NT is obscure to us, we can consult Torah and *Mishnah* to see which spiritual understanding Jesus was alluding to. Mishnah is included in modern books on Torah (such as the standard reference volume Stone Edition Chumash - see reference above).

The NT has clues to the “rest of the play” embedded in it, and most NT writings refer to a possible OT source. But no Bible contains the Midrash (the spiritual meaning).

The Views expressed here are strictly those of the author and probably disagree with what you have previously thought. Read other commentaries - meditate on the original KJV.

The Stone Edition Chumash	Scherman, Rabbi Nosson	Mesorah Publications	ISBN 0-89906-014-5
Everyman’s Talmud	Cohen, Abraham	Schocken Books	0-8052-1032-6

If you ignore Torah (Our Old Testament - though not quite the same as Torah) and read only the NT, you are like a man who comes into the theater for the last act of Hamlet, and is totally mystified as to why the play ended like that. How could you explain to someone the reason for Hamlet's behavior?

Sometimes we can understand Jesus's quotations of Torah without *Mishnah*, but many times it is a mystery. Until 1931 only Hebrew scholars could refer to the *Mishnah*, for the *Mishnah* had never been translated into English!

In the early Church, *those who understood*: those great interpreters: Philo, Clement, Origen, and Jerome, in Judea and Alexandria, who devoted their lives to the study of Torah for the Christian Church, lived in a community with priests who knew the *Mishnah*. After c. 100 A.D. the Midrash was finally available in writing, though there were very few copies outside of Jamnia and Babylon.

By c. 400 A.D., the gentiles, now in majority in the Church, expelled those Jewish-Christians who still attended Synagogue for *Midrash*. Jewish-Christians were persecuted and driven not only out of the Church but out of the Roman Empire, together with the orthodox Jews. The knowledge of *Midrash* was expelled with them.

Our Protestant Bible has no *Oral Torah*

Lucian, a Christian ("University" of Antioch) in c. 300 A.D. compiled the various Greek gospels and letters that were in use by various Bishops, and together with the Greek Septuagint he prepared a Bible for the Church in Old Latin. It was a "composite" Bible. None of the books was identical with the originating MSS. He "absorbed" differences in conflicting MSS and produced what he thought was the best of the best (that is, he selected those MSS which all the Bishops agreed were the best translations) and this was later called "The received text" or Textus Receptus, and this was the source for the King James Bible of today.

This oral tradition which had been handed down to the priesthood by Moses, prevented misunderstandings of the spiritual meaning of the writings (after 200 BCE the Pharisees safeguarded the spiritual meanings). The writings of Moses and the Midrash comprise the Torah. (A good example of Torah is *The Chumash* - see front page book listings).

The Catholic Bible has no *Oral Torah*

In c. 400 A.D., Jerome, a Roman Catholic Priest, moved from Rome to Bethlehem and established a "University" there to study Torah. Here Jerome translated the Jewish scripture from the Hebrew into Latin. It is certain that Jerome heard Midrash being spoken. Understanding the spiritual meaning of *Torah* helped Jerome with the translation into modern vernacular (classical Latin) of the arcane Hebrew "metaphors" of written *Torah*. His Latin translation eventually was accepted by the Church (after decades of discussion), as the replacement for the Old Latin translation of the Greek Septuagint. This new Latin translation, with modifications because the Church still preferred some parts of Old Latin, became the Latin Vulgate, the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

An Alternative to Midrash

In lieu of the *Midrash*, the Church embarked on a mission of spiritual understanding via the Holy Spirit. Each priest struggled through rigorous training, prayer, self-denial, fasting, and separation from friends and family in order to establish a spiritual connection with God, akin to what Moses and the Prophets had experienced. When God inspired people, especially the Pope, the revelations were adopted into the Traditions of the Church. After fifteen hundred years of revelation, the Church still had not obtained all of the spiritual insight that had been revealed to Moses on Sinai, which was recorded as *Mishnah* in the scriptures of the Jews.

Then, a major disaster for the Church, in the 17th. c. Martin Luther suggested that the German Princes expel the Roman Catholic Church from Germany and seize their landholdings and capital. The priests together with all the traditions of the Church were cast out.

And so, this new "Lutheran" Religion was soon bereft of the spiritual understanding that had been acquired by the Priesthood.

Understanding

The Church of England and Tradition

Happily, the Church of England did not join the protesters. The Pope in thanksgiving, awarded the title of “Defender of the Faith” to Henry VIII. It was only a few years later that England separated from the Church, and established the Church of England. Blessedly the Church of England kept the traditions of the Church, and some of its Bishops.

Keeping The Law

Neither Jesus nor Saul ever suggested abandoning any of the Law. In fact they continued to praise the law and teach the law and interpret from the law. Jesus taught the underprivileged who had not the access to the synagogues, and He tried to persuade the priesthood to become more involved with the spiritual education of the poor.

Saul who was an expert on Midrash, having trained under Gamaliel at Hillel’s school in Jerusalem, brought, to the Jewish Diaspora, the gospel, the good news that Jesus was King and Lord. Paul established schools where disciples studied Jesus’s teaching on Midrash.

The Midrash was the subject of continual interpretation by the Pharisees. Jesus and Saul in different towns were in the thick of the discussions. Jesus was in Galilee in the synagogues every Sabbath, arguing and interpreting Torah. Paul was in Jerusalem.

Amori Christi et Ecclesiae –
Glen C. Miller OSV

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Understanding

The eternal nature of Torah

Torah existed before Israel, before Noah, and before Adam and Eve. According to *Mishnah*, Torah is a timeless teaching, an eternal teaching, which never is altered by man nor God. It can never go away, it can never be replaced. Torah is an idea from which God created the World and man. It is God’s blueprint for the creation of the Universe, the Earth and man. According to *Mishnah*, God created man in order to be able to carry out His Torah.

Jesus confirmed the eternal nature of Torah.

Mt. 5: 17* ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. 18* For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 19* Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and **shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven:** but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20* For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Priests could interpret the Torah, but could make no changes to the law. These interpretations by Priests (after 70 A.D., by rabbis) are as much “scripture” as the original teachings, since they are an understanding of what already exists in Torah. There were two “schools” of rabbinic interpretation - at Babylon and Jerusalem during 2nd c. B.C. - 2nd c. A.D. The interpretations remained oral until the 2nd. c. A.D. at which time they were compiled and written into Hebrew for the first time.

Recommended Books

ISBN

The Stone Edition Chumash	Scherman, Rabbi	Mesorah	0-89906-014-5
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Mishna - the written Midrash

The combination of the teachings of Babylon and Jerusalem, became “Mishna”, and this represented all that was understood of the meaning of both the written and oral teachings.

Written Torah plus Mishna became the entire Torah written down.

After the Jews had been expelled from Jerusalem in 135 A.D. by the Roman Legions, they established a new center of Judaism in Jamnia, and here they wrote down the oral teachings. Since that time, new rabbinic interpretations called “Gemara” have been added. Together all these teachings are called the “Talmud”. When combined with the “Prophets” and “Writings” it becomes Tanakh.

In the 12th. c. Maimonides (Ramban) formulated the Thirteen Principles of Faith, which are incumbent upon every Jew. Two of them refer to Torah: (8). I believe with complete faith that the entire Torah now in our hands is the same one that was given to Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him. (9). I believe with complete faith that this Torah will not be exchanged, nor will there be another Torah from the Creator, Blessed is His Name.

Now, Paul was a Pharisee, as we said, and Pharisees were the interpreters of written Torah, and responsible for *Midrash*. The Sadducees did not consider this oral interpretation as scripture. They would not accept any teaching from *Midrash*. The Pharisees accepted written Torah and Midrash -the spiritual understanding - equally. When Paul said

*Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life., 2 Co 3:6**

he may have been commenting on the Sadducees position which was to ignore the spiritual message of God and so die spiritually, whereas the Pharisees lived by the spirit of the law.

(Acts 5) - Known as the Elder, was a grandson of Hillel, both renowned as Jewish scholars and experts in the Law. Gamaliel represented the more liberal Pharisee tradition compared with the traditional Sadducees. The apostle Paul, in his defence before the crowd in Jerusalem in c AD58 discloses he was trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) The task of Rabbis is to interpret Torah with new understanding and to fit new circumstances, so that people could get a spiritual answer to every question of modern life.

Jesus and the Pharisees

But why does Jesus always criticize the Pharisees in the Gospels?

Much of Jesus’s criticism of the Pharisees was only about **their hypocrisy**. They understood the spiritual truths, and taught God’s Will in the synagogues, but they wouldn’t obey God. Jesus respected their knowledge, their intelligence and and their piety and He argued (lively theological discussion) with them every Sabbath in the Synagogues.

He wanted the Pharisees to take their teachings to the common people that they generally despised (i.e. to go on missions to their own people). In Jerusalem it is estimated that there were 20,000 priests at that time.

Jesus had a great compassion for the Pharisees. He spent most of His time with them in the Synagogues. Even while he called them hypocrites, and children of the devil, He knew they were his best hope for Israel, because God had chosen them to teach the people.

Remember Jesus said to his disciples (and to us all)

*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and **Pharisees**, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:20*

Now, someone whom God has judged righteous is made acceptable to God. Here the word righteousness indicates behavior, working to do God’s Will. The Pharisees were good teachers but they would not do everything they taught. Jesus’s disciples understood that they must obey the Pharisees, and put into action what was taught, in order to exceed their righteousness.

There is no criticism of them by Jesus in John’s writings nor in Paul’s (both Jews). Criticism of the Pharisees appeared in the gospels written by Gentiles.

And Jesus said to them (and us) Saying, The scribes and **the Pharisees** sit in Moses’ seat: **3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do;** but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. Mt. 22:2

Anglican Tradition

Understand with Mishnah

Our difficulties today with understanding *God's Will* is made worse by the lack of material on *Mishnah*, owing partly to it not being translated into English until a few years ago, but mainly due to our ignorance of it.

Happily the Anglican Church has always thought highly of Tradition, though they seem to have temporarily misplaced it, and Anglicans have always encouraged clergy and laity to be open to interpretations of scripture in the light of new understanding. So, let's read *Mishnah* and understand the Old Testament better.

Mr 12:24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?

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