

Ron Cantor: 4 Proofs There Was No Oral Torah

Orthodox Jews maintain that when God gave Moses the written commandments, he also gave him a secret Oral Tradition or *Torah she-be'al pe*. This was a purportedly a code of conduct and interpretation passed down from generation to generation. The Oral Law supposedly was God's instruction on how to live out the 613 commandments in the Torah, in addition to other commands in general.

Interestingly enough, the Oral Law is now written down. Around 200 CE Rabbi Judah Hanasi codified, or put into writing, the foundational documents of the Oral Tradition for fear that it might be lost.

But was there really an Oral Law that Moses received? In short—no. And it can be easily proven.

First, if the Oral Tradition truly came from Sinai then it would have been completely supernatural that it was passed down for over one thousand years unchanged. I can't even remember the five things my wife asked me to pick up at the grocery store—unless I write them down! But, if it was supernatural, then there would have been no need to write out the Oral Torah as Rabbi Judah Hanasi did in 200 CE. If God had watched over it since Moses, surely He could continue.

Secondly, there couldn't have been an Oral Law because in the time of King Josiah, they had lost the Book of the Law and it appears that they didn't even know what Passover was or certainly how to celebrate it! The Temple was in ruins and the King ordered its restoration. In the midst of this great undertaking the Torah was recovered.

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." (1 Kings

22:8)

The king called all the people together and they read the Book of the Covenant. Together, they renewed the covenant with the Lord. King Josiah ordered that the Passover be celebrated.

The king gave this order to all the people: "Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." Neither in the days of the judges who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem. (2 Kings 22:21-23)

To summarize, the Torah had been lost as the Temple was in ruins. The king of Israel and the priests did not even know what Passover was—or at least, the details of proper Passover observance. Since the Mishna (the Oral Law in writing, as part of the Talmud) speaks of the Passover at length—in fact it has an entire tractate (major section) called Pesachim (Passovers) that teaches in incredible detail how to correctly celebrate Passover—it had to have been created after the time of Josiah. (In fact, the instructions are so detailed, that it becomes ridiculous to think that God is that mechanical. If you want a brief look, **check this out.**)

In addition, had there been an Oral Law passed down from Moses it was certainly forgotten. And unlike like a written Torah, that could be found in the ruins of the Temple, it would be impossible to recover an Oral Torah.

Third, we find an interesting passage in the Torah that refutes the idea of a non-written Torah.

When Moses went and told the people *all* the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "*Everything the LORD has said we will do.*" Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. (Exodus 24:3-4a)

Could it be any clearer? God shared *all* His laws with Moses and then Moses wrote down everything. In the Hebrew it says Kol Div're Adonia—all the words of the Lord. There was no secret Oral Tradition; all was written. (Here are a few more passages you can reference: Deuteronomy 30:10, 31:9, 24, 26, and Joshua 1:8).

And fourth, one primary reason the Word of God needed to be put down in words was to protect Israel from deception. An Oral Torah would have led to all kinds of duplicity and many would have changed it for their own purposes. Keep in mind, the Children of Israel, my ancestors, went through many periods where they forsook the Lord. Not only would an Oral Law have been abused by leaders during such a time—it would have been eventually ignored and utterly forgotten.

So Where Did the Oral Law Come From?

One of the most respected Talmudic scholars in the world, Michael Rodkinson, writes in the very first sentence of his highly respected *The History of the Talmud*:

The name *Written Law* was given to the Pentateuch (Torah), Prophets and Hagiographa, and that of Oral Law to all the teachings of the *sages* consisting of comments on the text of the Bible.

In other words, the Oral Tradition was merely the customs, teachings and opinions of Jewish leaders throughout the centuries. It would be no different then the teaching of a popular author today... had he lived millennia ago.

For instance, recently in Israel one of the most influential religious leaders, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, 84, declared that iPhones and other smartphones are immoral (because of ease of ability in obtaining pornography) and that Orthodox Jews cannot own one. In Judaism these types of declarations are binding because it is taught that God has given the rabbis the authority to make these pronouncements. Now if this had

happened around 300 CE (when iPhones were still in the first generation) it would have been recorded in the Talmud.

Not everything in the Talmud is bad and not everything good. It is opinions and traditions. That's it.

The Tradition of the Elders

Yeshua clearly did not believe that the Oral Law came from Sinai, as He referred to it as 'The Traditions of the Elders.' In fact, the Pharisees themselves referred to it as "The Traditions of the Elders" (Matt. 15:2).

Yeshua rebuked the Pharisees for putting these traditions above the Word of God. (Mark 7:9) To be clear, Yeshua was not against all tradition, but against the elevation of mere tradition to Scripture status—and sometimes above it.

While there are many beautiful components in Judaism, there is no Scriptural support for the idea that an Oral Torah accompanied the Torah.

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