

truths of the word of God. There is no other motive or agenda.

Now let's look at the facts and the history of Old Testament Israel. After God brought Israel out of Egypt, what did they do? You already know all of that, right? They just could not stay away from idolatry! It started with the golden calf, and it just never really stopped! Eventually God punished both, the house of Israel and the house of Judah with national captivity.

When they had good leaders, things seemed to go well, though it is doubtful that the people as a whole ever followed the right examples of the good leaders. As evidenced by the ease with which the people would so quickly and so readily sink into the most perverse forms of paganism, when evil leaders appeared on the scene. Example, What happened in the days of the prophet Elijah? All of Israel had once again sunk into total paganism, apart from 7000 men.

The entire population at that time had been drawn into Baal-worship, Notice 1 Kings 19: 18, where Elijah felt he was the only one left who had not accepted this idolatry. When God said "Yet I have left [Me] seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him." It was an acknowledgment that the vast majority of the people of Israel at that time had accepted paganism!

Things have not really changed since then; human nature today is still the same as it was 3000 years ago. Another example: What happened after the days of Ezra and Nehemiah? The Jews who had returned from Babylon, absorbed and accepted on a large scale the pagan ideas and customs which had been introduced by the conquering Greeks. They simply "converted" these pagan customs into acceptable forms, very much like so-called "Christianity" today, "converting" the pagan customs of Christmas into an acceptable form. The Jews became thoroughly Hellenized in their customs and traditions.

Reform movements (like the Maccabees) did little to stem this tide of absorbing the customs of the pagan world around them. It is not unknown that some Jewish people accept and adopted pagan custom such as observing Christmas, with a christmas tree in their house [See Jer. 10] and many other pagan customs. It is simply a tradition they accept!

By the time of Christ's ministry, the religion of the Jews was thoroughly paganized through the infusion and absorption of Greek, Egyptian and Babylonian customs. Attempts to justify these pagan customs with the claims that they were really only an expression of "the oral law." Something that was supposedly handed down verbally from the time of Moses. These customs therefore, represented "the traditions of the elders." They tried to disguise the pagan origins of these customs. The influences of paganism had been a problem since the time of Moses, And it was still the same problem at the time of Christ's ministry. Only by then many of the pagan customs had been disguised to some degree. Let's notice some things from the time when Jesus the Christ was here on the earth.

Let's start with Matthew chapter 15:1- 2, "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread." Note carefully! What was important to these religious Pharisee leaders. It was "the tradition of the elders!"

These so-called "traditions" had absolutely nothing to do with the Bible, God's laws, or with being obedience to God. These "traditions" were most emphatically not biblically based! But they were of the highest importance to these self righteous religious Jews. And transgressing these non-biblical "Traditions" was a major issue to these Jews

What happened to all these "traditions of the elders?" Where are those "traditions" today? They are at the heart and core of modern Judaism! That is what Judaism and its view of the Old Testament is built around. Those "traditions" form the foundation on which Judaism today is built!

Most of you know this from reading our "Special Calendar Edition" or our booklet "Postponement, Another Mystery of the Ages," along with "Judaism - Is It the Old Testament Religion?" These free booklets show that modern Judaism and its understanding of the Old Testament scriptures is directly descended from the religion of the Pharisees of the first century A.D. And those "traditions of the elders" have been most painstakingly preserved in the vast work known as "the Talmud!"

We need to understand that the Talmud has two versions. The more authoritative Babylonian Talmud,

and the lesser Palestinian Talmud. Both are nothing more than a preservation of "the traditions of the elders." So how did Jesus Christ view these "traditions of the elders?" How important were they to Him? Notice Christ's reply in Matthew 15:3, "But He answered and said unto them, why do you also transgress the Commandment of God by your tradition?" Notice, these "traditions of the elders" were a way of transgressing the Commandments of God. So how good are those "traditions" really? They are not good at all if we are going to believe the words of Jesus, the Christ!

Understanding what Jesus, the Christ said here, was not just a gentle and polite reprimand. It was a major indictment against the Jews "traditions." It should be clear that Jesus Christ did not in any way endorse the Jews "traditions," on which modern Judaism is built.

In the next few verses in Matthew 15:4 - 6, Jesus Christ gave one single simple straight-forward illustration of how the "traditions" lead to transgressing the commandments of God., The example being how the traditions were used to break the fifth commandment. The statement at the end of verse 6 is very significant. "Thus have you made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matthew 15:6). Jesus Christ gave one example of how the traditions are used to get around the real intent of the commandments of God. And that is precisely what most of the other "Traditions" also do. They are ways to get around the real intent of God's laws!

The Jews themselves are deceived and they don't even understand the real effect of that their "traditions" have on other people today. The traditions create an appearance of being righteous and submissive to God, but they have nothing to do with the real intent of God's instructions to us in the Bible. And that has not changed since the time of Jesus, the Christ.

That is still true for modern Judaism, even as it was true for the religion of the Pharisees in the time of Christ. Notice how Jesus Christ continued talking to the Pharisees in verse 7 of Matthew 15: "You hypocrites, well did Esaias [Isaiah] prophesy of you, Saying, "This people draw nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honor Me with [their] lips; but their heart is far from Me." Why did Christ call them "hypocrites"? Was He trying to insult them? Why was their heart far from real obedience to God? If their hearts were "far" from God, what is it that their hearts were "near" to?

The word "hypocrite" simply means: an actor; a pretender; a role-player. The word implies a lack of sincerity. Jesus Christ was assuredly not just using the word in order to insult the Pharisees. He used the word with its full meaning, He was telling us that the Pharisees, who cared so much for "the traditions of the elders" were insincere actors, playing the roles of being religiously righteous, but not really caring about God's real instructions to us.

Their hearts were "near to" their traditions; they were not "near to" the word of God. This is also true for modern Jewish authorities! Jesus, the Christ continued to say in verse 9, "But in vain they do worship Me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). Their "traditions" had absolutely nothing to do with the Bible or God's instructions to us!

Their traditions were nothing more than humanly devised commandments, that is what Jesus Christ is plainly telling us in verse 9.

The same is still true today! Modern Judaism teaches nothing more than "the commandments of men." Reading these verses in Matthew 15, do you, want to look to the Jews for a better understanding of the word of God. Do you really want to look to "the commandments of men" for a better understanding of the word of God?

Look at verse 9 again. The word "doctrines" refers to the teachings. What Jesus Christ plainly said, is that the teachings of the Pharisees (and also of modern Judaism) are nothing more than "the commandments of men." It is "the teachings" of the Pharisees and of modern Judaism, that are the problem.

Now if those teachings were [and still are] "the commandments of men," then they obviously did not come out of the Bible. So they must have come from somewhere else. That "somewhere else" is the same place from where their religious ideas had always come in the past- from paganism!

This can be shown from many scriptures. Let's briefly notice the summary Stephen presented in Acts chapter 7, starting with verse 41, "And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and

rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of Heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets, "O you house of Israel, have you offered to Me slain beasts and sacrifices [by the Space of] forty years in the wilderness? Yea, you took up the tabernacle of Molech, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which you made to worship them: And I will carry you away beyond Babylon" (Acts 7: 41 - 43). Dropping down to verse, 51 **"You stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers [did], so [do] you"** (Acts 7: 51).

Understand – nothing has changed! What was true in Stephen's time is still true today! So how much value can you place on the understanding of people who are "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" and who "always resist" the correct understanding, of God's word, which only comes through having God's Holy Spirit.

Notice Apostle Paul explaining 1 Cor.2:11, "For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God." How can we possibly look to the spiritual descendants of the Pharisees for a correct understanding of the truth of God? It's no surprise that they killed Stephen, they didn't like to be told how much and how often they had been involved in paganism.

The Pharisees were often offended by all Jesus Christ- Stephen and Paul had done by speaking the truth. It just shows that people will easily take offence at the truth. Notice also the parallel account in Mark chapter 7, this account also brings out the great importance which is attached to "traditions" amongst the Jews– and which traditions Christ's disciples paid no attention to. "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash [their] Hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:3). Mark's account repeats the information given in Matthew's account and then adds the following things in Christ's response to the Pharisees. Notice, Verses 6 and 7, "He answered and said unto them, well has Esaias [Isaiah] Prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, this people honors Me with [their] lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men." Now notice how Christ elaborated on these statements in verse 8, "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the Tradition of men, [as] the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do."

Jesus Christ, our God in the flesh, clearly tells us that in order to adhere to their traditions, the Pharisees "laid aside"- rejected - the commandment of God! That hasn't changed, as far as modern Judaism is concerned. In their teachings and their understanding the Jews of today still "lay aside" the commandments of God.

Notice also, that while Jesus Christ just presented one example of this, He clearly stated they in fact did many other such like things! That was not the only "tradition" which laid aside the Commandment of God. The same is also true for many of the other traditions the Pharisees (and modern Judaism) held to.

Example, the Jewish traditions about "the Passover" being one specific case in point. Is the Passover on the 14th or is it on the 15th?

Clearly "the traditions of the elders" are in conflict with the laws of God! They are mutually exclusive. You can't have them both ways. You either keep the Commandments of God, or you keep the traditions of the elders, which require you to reject the Commandments of God.

Does that statement sound too strong? That's what Christ said in the next verse. "And He said unto them, full well you reject the Commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7: 9). This statement by Jesus Christ, is still true for modern Judaism today. They haven't changed in their approach or their understanding. They still adhere to their traditions rather than to the commandments of God. Jesus Christ meant every word He said! Mark 7, verse 9, is not an idle statement!

The traditions of Judaism amount to a rejection of the Commandments of God. The verb "reject" in Mark 7: 9, is translated from the Greek verb "atheteo." It means: to do away with; to despise; to set aside; to disregard; to nullify; to make void; to reject; to refuse; to bring to nothing, etc. These are all the things which "the traditions of Judaism" do, according to the words of Jesus Christ.

After again recording the example of how the traditions were used to break the fifth commandment, Mark then records Christ's words in verse 13, "Making the word of God of none effect through your Tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things do you" (Mark 7:13)

Here we have Jesus Christ's explanation for what the traditions of Judaism actually does. These traditions

nullify the intended effect of the word of God! They "neutralize" the word of God. They take the power out of God's instructions. They replace God's instructions with some meaningless ritual!! And again, "Many" such traditions do this! These words by Jesus Christ are very clear! Christ unequivocally rejected "the traditions of the elders," since they didn't come from "the elders.

As Christ said, they were nothing more than the commandments of men. They assuredly did not come from "Moses." They really came out of paganism. Jesus Christ in John 16: 3, said plainly in reference to the Jews, "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me."

Earlier Christ had already said the same thing in John 8:55, "Yet you have not known Him [God the Father] I but I know Him: And if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: But I know Him, and keep His saying."

What did Christ mean? He meant that they did not really understand the Old Testament; they didn't understand the facts about God the Father. In fact, Christ had already said a few verses earlier "You are of [your] father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). What did Christ mean by this statement? Christ was saying, their understanding didn't come from God, it came from Satan himself! Satan, was their spiritual "father," that's what Christ said.

The views of the people, Jesus Christ was speaking about have been meticulously preserved in modern Judaism; It's the same religion today, as the one the Pharisees adhered to over 2000 years ago.

So how much credibility does the statements of Jesus Christ give to the "official Jewish understanding" of the scriptures? Should we, as called member of God's church be looking to the Jews in order to understand the scriptures? Should we be looking to those whose "father" according to Jesus Christ is Satan, to help us understand the word of God? Do you really think that God, who has called us and opened our mind to understand His will and His purpose, expects us to look to the Jews, who are blinded, and look to their own customs and their own understanding, to help us understand what God is trying to tell us in His word?

We can see - there is confusion. Some people claim one thing and some people claim another thing and that is the way it goes for the oral law. We have nothing more than opinions and assertions on the part of the proponents of this oral law! The only opinion that matters is God's opinion!

In this article, are some of the ramifications of understanding that the Jewish religion is not really based on the Bible, their customs are rooted in paganism, even as are the customs of so - called Christianity, with Christmas, Easter and other pagan holidays.

I want to state that I have nothing against the Jewish people. They are the house of Judah, part of the tribes of Israel. But, I feel that there is a time when we have to be frank about religious doctrine and that's what I tried to be here. " 📧

James Russell

