



# **“Do Not Be Called Rabbi”**

Matthew 23:8

**WHAT CHRISTIANS  
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT  
RABBINIC JUDAISM**

Chuck May  
Dave DeWitt

# Our Purpose

Relational Concepts has been organized to provide motivational instruction for men and women interested in being used by God.

We believe that Christian doctors, mechanics, housewives, realtors, lawyers, secretaries, plumbers, business men, business women, etc. are the most effective spokesmen the church has.

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P. O. Box 88095  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49518-0095

[relationalconcepts.org](http://relationalconcepts.org)

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This booklet was written by Chuck May (BA, Taylor University) and Dave DeWitt (BS, Michigan State University, ThM, DMin, Dallas Theological Seminary).

Chuck and Dave are Equippers and Disciplers in the Relational Concepts' School of Discipleship. Chuck is married to Becky and has two children. Dave is married to Ellen and has three married daughters and nine grandchildren.

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# Introduction

On March 24, 2008, “Time” magazine made some predictions about the future. They called them: “Ideas that Are Changing the World.” This is clearly a secular magazine, which has no particular religious sensitivity. So I was amazed that #10 on their list was “Re-Judaizing Jesus (Scholars are now rereading the Gospels through the eyes of a Jew – Jesus).” The last time I was in Poland (I go twice a year), someone came up and asked me why Christians were so interested in Jews. The question was something like: “Why is it that if Christians say something is true, or if the Bible says something is true, nobody seems to care, but if a Jew says something, even Christians think it is true?”

*Time* (March 24, 2008) listed 10 Ideas that Are Changing the World. They are:

1. Common Wealth (Our survival requires global solutions.)
2. The End of Customer Service (With self-service technology, you'll never have to see a clerk again.)
3. The Post-Movie-Star Era (Get ready for more films in which the leading man is not "he" but "who?" )
4. Reverse Radicalism (Want to stop terrorism? Start talking to terrorists who stop themselves.)
5. Kitchen Chemistry (Why the squishy art of cooking is giving way to cold, hard science.)
6. Geo-engineering (Messing with nature caused global warming. Messing with it more might fix it.)
7. Synthetic Authenticity (Jaded buyers love 'real' products – or at least ones that fake it well.)
8. The New Austerity (Get ready for something truly unheard of: an era of living within our means.)
9. Mandatory Health (Bosses are trying to force their employees to live better. Yep, it's legal.)
10. Re-Judaizing Jesus (Scholars are now rereading the Gospels through the eyes of a Jew – Jesus.)



In western Michigan, where I live, we have Christian churches that read the Talmud to their people every week. They sing songs in Hebrew. They have people chant back Hebrew phrases. They tell Christians that, unless they have some Jews there to give them the cultural significance of what they are reading, they cannot understand their Bible. One teacher says: “You could read a passage of the Bible a thousand times and never understand it if you don’t have some Jews there to explain it to you.” We are told that we are westerners, and we don’t know how to “think eastern,” so we cannot understand the Bible. We need these special teachers, steeped in the knowledge of rabbinic Judaism, to tell us what it means. We are told Jesus was a rabbi, rabbis taught children, therefore, all the apostles were children. So without this special Jewish knowledge, not only can we not understand our Bible, we can’t properly understand ministry, because it should be focused on the mechanical way in which children followed their rabbi.

The Bible tells us the Jews are God's people. They are being preserved by God and returned to their homeland of Israel. A believing remnant will come from them to inherit a kingdom, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. **This is being ignored today.**

Rabbinic Judaism is the religion of the Pharisees. It is not Old Testament Judaism. It does not believe in the sovereign God of the Old Testament. It lives by the traditions of the Talmud, which are not part of the Old Testament. It denies that Jesus was the Son of God or the Christ (the Messiah). It is a religion of traditions, prayers, and humanitarian works. From the standpoint of Old Testament Levitical Judaism, today's rabbinic Judaism is a cult—like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses are to Christianity. **This is being followed today.**

The purpose of this short book is to investigate the claims of the Bible and the claims of the Christians who want to use rabbinic Judaism to interpret the Bible. We will attempt to show what the Bible says and the dangers of following today's Judaizers.

The biblical perspective is in the book of Romans. Paul said of the Jews:

**Romans 11:28**

*From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies  
for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice  
they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.*

So genealogically, they are beloved of God, but religiously, they are enemies of the Gospel.

In this book, we shall refer to Christian teachers, who promote the need to know something about rabbinic Judaism in order to understand or better understand the Bible, as **Judaizers**.

We shall use many direct quotes, so you can read for yourselves what these Judaizers are saying. We have, however, intentionally not footnoted these quotes because we want to give these people the opportunity to retract their positions, and we want you to deal with the teachings (since they are penetrating the Christian community globally), not focus on the individual teachers.

# Chapter 1

## The Future of the Jews

Four thousand years ago, God promised Abraham some amazing things. We read:

*And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:5).*

Later God told him:

*"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:7-8; see also 22:17-18).*

Notice four significant aspects of this promise:

1. The promise was about multiplying Abraham's physical descendants.
2. The promise was an everlasting covenant.
3. The promise included them having all the land of Canaan.
4. The reason for the promise was *I will be their God*.

God repeated that promise for Abraham's son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. For example, God told Jacob:

*"Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14).*

Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and he had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel.

About 500 years later (around 1500 BC), Moses said of those 12 tribes of Israel:

*The LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and **will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you**. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God*

*will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers* (Deuteronomy 30:1-5, emphasis mine).

Moses saw the history of Israel as:

- Entering the land with Joshua
- Being disobedient (most seriously through idolatry)
- Being scattered into other lands in various parts of the world
- Repenting and returning to this same land which their forefathers possessed

Through the prophet Jeremiah (around 600 BC), God said:

*Behold, I am bringing them [Judah and Israel] from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth* (Jeremiah 31:8) ... *In those days* [the last days before the Second Coming of Christ] ***the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance*** (Jeremiah 3:18, emphasis mine).

Notice here: It is not just the southern kingdom Jews but ***the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel***. This prediction of Jeremiah is not the return from the Babylonian Captivity (444 BC) because only the southern kingdom of Judah returned from Babylon (which is why the Hebrews were called Jews—after the tribe of Judah). Jeremiah predicted the return of both the northern and southern kingdoms. That did not happen with any frequency until after World War I.

So Jeremiah predicted that a scattered Hebrew people will one day, in the distant future, be reunited and return to *the land that I gave your fathers*, from places described as *remote parts of the earth*. (Ezekiel repeated this prophecy in Ezekiel 37:15-19.)

Daniel 9:27 refers to the time preceding Jesus' Second Coming and says:

- There will be a Temple in Jerusalem (*the city and the sanctuary*).
- There will be sacrifices going on at the Temple (*sacrifice and grain offering*).
- Jews will be living in Jerusalem under a treaty established by the antichrist (*the prince ... will make a firm covenant with the many for one week*).



- There will be Hebrew people living *in Judea keeping the Sabbath*.

In Matthew 24:15-20, Jesus also taught a preservation of, and a future for, the Jews.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

*I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew* (Romans 11:1-2).

Paul confirms to the Romans that, even though God was currently working with the church (believers of many races and nationalities all over the world), He was not finished with His racially chosen people, the Jews. One of those was the Apostle Paul himself, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

In the Apocalypse, John wrote:

*And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel* (Revelation 7:4).

It would seem that, at the time of the future Tribulation, there will be 12 identifiable tribes of Israel. And all of those tribes, not just the southern kingdom Jews, are part of the 144,000.

We must conclude that the Old Testament, the New Testament, Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles clearly taught that the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will:

- Be preserved
- Return to their land
- Be re-established in a kingdom of God on earth

# Chapter 2

## Levitical Judaism

**Old Testament Levitical Judaism  
was given by God through Moses**

From the time man stepped out of the Garden of Eden, God required a blood sacrifice. Usually, at least in the cases of Noah, Job, Abraham, and Moses' father-in-law, it was presented by the family patriarch. But when God led the Israelites out of Egypt, around 1500 BC, and brought them to the foot of Mt. Sinai, all that changed.

At that time, through Moses and his brother Aaron, God instituted the Levitical priesthood. The book of Leviticus begins with these words:

*Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock ... and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting that he may be accepted before the LORD'" (Leviticus 1:1-3).*

So from 1500 BC until the death of Christ, no one could come to God on their own. The access to God was only through a Levitical priest of the family of Aaron. That ended with the death of Christ on the cross (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3-4). But the New Testament writers constantly referred back to the Levitical priesthood and the Temple in which the Levitical priests carried out the sacrifices.

Christ's priesthood of Melchizedek is contrasted with it (Hebrews 7:7-10). The priesthood of the believer is compared to it (Romans 12:1-2; Revelation 1:6). And the believer's position as the temple of God is illustrated by it (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Those contrasts and comparisons can only be fully realized when one understands the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament.

But notice, concerning our knowledge of the Levitical priesthood:

1. It comes from the Bible, not oral or written traditions, or secular sources.
2. It is inspired of God, so our knowledge of it is inerrant.
3. It is available to anyone who has a Bible.
4. It is understood by reading the Bible in its context.
5. You don't have to know more than the Bible knows to understand it.
6. It acknowledges the necessity and sufficiency of Scripture.

Historically, Levitical Judaism remained until 70 AD, but it began to be replaced by rabbinic Judaism in the 500s BC, during the Babylonian Captivity. By the time of Christ, rabbinic Judaism, the religion of the Pharisees, was the dominant force of Jewish life.

Here is what happened.

# Chapter 3

## Rabbinic Judaism

[Most of this chapter is taken from the Relational Concepts' study book "The Five Major World Religions" by Chuck May.]

From about 500 BC onward, new institutions and ways of life developed that distinguished rabbinic Judaism from the religion of Old Testament Israel. Some of the new things which arose during this period include the synagogue (house of worship and study), the office of rabbi (a leader holding religious authority), and the yeshivot (religious academies for the training of rabbis). These institutions and titles simply did not exist in the Old Testament.

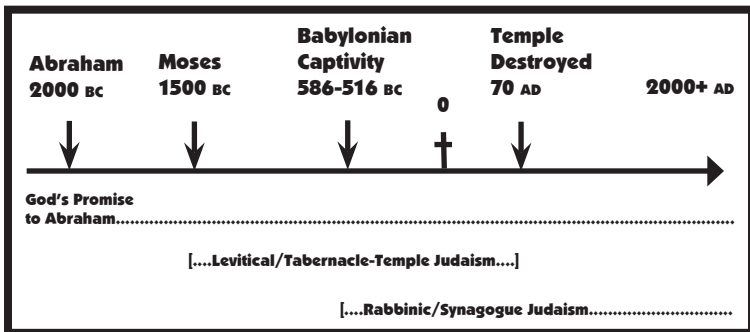
In 586 BC, the Babylonian government destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, which was a major impetus in the development of rabbinic Judaism. This one act resulted in the cessation of sacrifices, which, according to the religion of the Old Testament Jews, could only happen at the Temple. Also, without a Temple, the priesthood could not fulfill their sacrificial duties. Rather than being guided, as they were historically, by priests, prophets, and kings, rabbis became the authorities who established various laws and practices that had normative authority.

The rabbis changed Judaism into a system of works rather than a sacrificial system. After the Roman government destroyed the second Temple in 70 AD, the Jewish people no longer had a God-ordained place for sacrifice. Not accepting the fact that Christ died once and for all to atone for sin, the rabbis were forced to seek a man-made solution for the problem. Reasoning that God would not demand something that was impossible to fulfill (in this case, the Temple sacrifices), they developed a substitute for atonement. Their solution was a three-fold path (or the "Great Three Concepts") which replaced the Old Testament system. This path involves: teshuvah (repentance), tzedakah (righteous deeds), and tefillah (prayer).

In Orthodox Judaism and Conservative Judaism, this system of works became the basis for righteousness.

The years of 400 BC to 200 AD saw the development of oral law, called the Mishna (a rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures). During

the period of 200 AD to 500 AD, the Gemara was developed, which is mainly an explanation and application of the Mishnah. So, the Gemara is really a commentary on the commentary on the [TNK, the Old Testament] Scriptures. The combination of the Mishnah and the Gemara is known as the Talmud (the Jewish library of oral law and tradition). Much emphasis was placed on the Talmud to clarify a code for Jewish daily life.



Here is an overview of the history of rabbinic Judaism:

1. It began during the Babylonian Captivity (in the 500s BC).
2. For the most part, the rabbis were the Pharisees of the New Testament. (The rabbis of the gospels were usually Pharisees.)
3. It interprets and applies the Old Testament Scripture according to the traditions recorded in the Mishna, the Gamarah, and the Talmud.
4. It is like Christian Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in that it uses sacred tradition as a basis for life and worship.
5. It is like a cult in that it has an additional written text, which governs the application of Scripture.
6. It took over Judaism after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.
7. It is the only form of Judaism being practiced today. (Orthodox, Reformed, and Conservative synagogues all come from rabbinic/Pharisaic Judaism.)

But there were no rabbis in the Old Testament. Moses restricted worship to the central sanctuary (the Tabernacle, then the Temple—Deuteronomy 12:13-18). Rabbinic/Pharisaic Judaism gets its authority from their own oral traditions collected in the Mishnah, the Gamarah, and the Talmud. Most rabbinic Jews (if they believe in God at all) believe in a finite God who is all-loving but not all-powerful, so we need to partner with God to help Him out.

Many Christians believe that the Jews have the same view of the Old Testament that Bible-believing Christians have of the whole Bible. Not so.

There are three synagogue distinctions of today's Judaism: Orthodox, Reformed, and Conservative.

Orthodox Jews believe the Torah, meaning essentially the teaching of the five books of Moses, is truth. The Orthodox Jews assert that a true Jew believes in revelation and the divine origin of the oral and written Torah. "Oral Torah" refers to various interpretations of the written Torah, believed to have been given to Moses along with the written Torah. The Torah is accorded a higher place than the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

Reform Jews hold that the Hebrew Bible is a human document preserving the history, culture, legends, and hopes of a people. It is valuable for deriving moral and ethical insights. Revelation is an ongoing process.

Conservative Jews believe that the Hebrew Bible, both the Torah and the other books, are the Word of God and man. It is not inspired in the traditional sense but, rather, is dynamically inspired. Revelation is an ongoing process.

So, as you can see, the Old Testament is not considered the inspired, sufficient, inerrant Word of God by any form of Judaism. The most traditional is the Orthodox. But notice that (1) the five books of Moses are elevated over the rest of the Old Testament, and (2) there is a supposed oral tradition, an "Oral Torah," given to Moses and handed down through history which interprets those first five biblical books.

***In no form of today's Judaism  
does the Old Testament stand alone  
as a sufficient Word of God***

# Chapter 4

## There Is No Access to God Without a Blood Sacrifice

That's just the way it is. If you are trying to get to God without a blood sacrifice, you are wasting your time. If you are satisfying a god without a blood sacrifice, then it is not the God of the Bible that you are satisfying. Except for Christianity, the other four major world religions today (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism) are trying to come to God without a blood sacrifice, or they are worshiping a god who does not require a blood sacrifice.

From the beginning to the end, from the day man was sent out of the Garden of Eden, through all ages, including this one, and on into the Millennial Kingdom, no one comes to God without a blood sacrifice. If you think you are going to come to God through good works, helping the poor, doing penance, baptisms, sacraments, ceremonies/celebrations/services of prayers, confession of sins, Scripture reading, singing and praising—forget it! There is no way to approach God without a blood sacrifice. Period!

The Old Testament Levitical Judaism of Moses taught:

*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement (Leviticus 17:11).*

New Testament Christianity says:

*... without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).*

In both Testaments, the Bible clearly teaches that no one, anywhere, at any time, past, present, or future, has, or will ever, come to God without a blood sacrifice.

But rabbinic Judaism is a bloodless religion of prayers and confessions and traditional ceremonies (works, not faith). There is no concept of the need for a blood sacrifice.

For example, consider the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16 spells out specifically what should take place.

**The 12 Basic Events of the Day of Atonement  
From Leviticus 16**

1. The animals to be sacrificed were selected and presented to the high priest.
2. The high priest put on holy garments.
3. The Lord's goat and the scapegoat were selected by lot, one to be sacrificed, one to be released.
4. The sacrifice animals were killed (possibly the goat later).
5. The high priest entered the Holy of Holies with a fire pan and incense.
6. The blood of the bull and goat were sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant.
7. The blood of the bull and the goat were sprinkled on the altar.
8. The scapegoat was released into the wilderness.
9. Aaron changed his clothes and bathed.
10. The offerings were burned on the altar.
11. The animal carcasses were burned outside the camp.
12. The person releasing the scapegoat and burning the carcasses bathed and washed his clothes.

But the current Jewish festival called Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is almost nothing like the day commanded in the Bible.

**For Yom Kippur (the Current Day of Atonement)**

- There is no high priest.
- There are no Levitical priests of the descendents of Aaron. (There are no priests at all.)
- There are no animal sacrifices.
- There is no application of blood to the articles of the Tabernacle/Temple.
- There is no Tabernacle/Temple.
- There is no scapegoat.
- There is no burning of the fat of the bodies of animals.

For the people, there are five prohibitions given in the Mishnah:

1. Eating and drinking
2. Wearing leather shoes
3. Bathing/washing
4. Anointing oneself with perfumes or lotions
5. Sexual relations



The only similarities between the biblical and modern Day of Atonement are: it is a day of fasting and the sins of the people are confessed. The modern Yom Kippur generally begins and ends with a liturgy carried out in a synagogue by a rabbi.

Since fasting affects the blood, some Jews suggest it is a form of blood sacrifice. But fasting is not a blood sacrifice. Leviticus also requires fasting while the priest is sprinkling blood on the Ark and the altar. It is only the *shedding of blood* that atones for sin.

Of course, it is impossible for the Jews to keep the Levitical Day of Atonement. Since 70 AD, they have had no Temple, and the whole day depends on that. They also have replaced the Levitical/Temple priesthood with a rabbinic/synagogue clergy, which is contrary to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 14:23).

Their real problem is, they have rejected their Messiah, so now they are lost in a maze of traditions with no scriptural basis. They have raked together what the rabbis call their oral tradition in the Talmud. So they have replaced the revelation of God with their traditions (Matthew 15:3; Colossians 2:8). What they should do is receive Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, just like every other nationality, and become part of the church because:

*... now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested ... for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:21-24). ... For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:12-13).*

# Chapter 5

## Using Rabbinic Judaism to Interpret the New Testament

The false teaching working its way around the evangelical community says that you can better understand the Bible, if you understand it through the eyes of rabbinic Judaism. In more extreme cases, this teaching says you cannot understand the Bible accurately (or understand it at all) without having Jews available to give you the proper meaning. The idea [to repeat what we said in the Introduction] is that you are a westerner, and you must learn to think eastern, to think Hebrew. You need to have some Jews (or “scholars” who claim to know Judaism) around to understand ancient culture or you cannot interpret the Bible accurately. We are here calling these teachers “**Judaizers**.”

The impact of the Judaizers is to effectively take your Bible away from you. They claim if you are not familiar with the “eastern,” rabbinic, Hebrew language and culture, you cannot understand the text you are reading. You may understand it superficially, but you cannot get the full meaning (or the correct meaning) without the special knowledge supplied by these Judaizers.

But when you consider what the Judaizers teach, it can actually reverse the interpretation you would get reading the Bible in its context.

So, the teaching of the Judaizers effectively:

1. **Denies the priesthood of the believer**—that any believer illuminated by the Holy Spirit can interpret the Bible.
2. **Denies the sufficiency of the Bible**—saying that the Holy Spirit left out some crucial information which is essential for understanding the text.
3. **Denies context** as a basis for determining the meaning of a text. This denies what everyone has always used to understand every written or spoken message of any kind—the context.
4. **Is a form of Gnosticism**—the belief that some special secret knowledge is necessary which is not available to the average ordinary person on their own.
5. **Uses uninspired cultural teachings** (often from uncertain

or questionable sources) to ignore, change or nullify the clear meaning of the inspired biblical text.

6. **Prioritizes the position of rabbinic Judaism**, an unbiblical religion. Rabbinic Judaism is a cult off of Old Testament Judaism. It's like using Mormonism or Sacred Tradition to understand the Bible.

But [Jesus told His disciples]:

*The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (John 14:26).*

And in the same Upper Room Discourse He said:

*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come (John 16:13).*

In these two verses, Jesus makes some promises:

1. The Holy Spirit will teach the disciples *all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*
2. The Holy Spirit will guide the disciples *into all truth.*

Well .... let's think about that a minute.

- These promises were either fulfilled or they weren't. If they weren't, then Jesus lied, but, of course, He can't lie because He's God.
- Therefore, the promises were fulfilled. But who fulfilled them? They were promises given to the disciples/apostles.
- Question: Did these apostles record anywhere for us anything about Jesus?
- Answer: Yes—in the 27 books of the New Testament. The New Testament is the only apostolic literature we have. In 2000+ years, we have not found one other apostolic document of any kind. So the New Testament is the only place we have writings known to have come from the apostles and their associates.

- THEREFORE, the 27 books of the New Testament are the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to lead the disciples into "ALL TRUTH."
- Notice the word *ALL*.

***All truth means that there is nothing  
that Jesus wants to say to us  
that He hasn't said through the apostles***

If the New Testament is the fulfillment of God's leading us into *all truth* (John 14:26; John 16:13), and if the Bible is **everything** we need for life and godliness through the **true** knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 1:3), then we should start with the pages of Scripture to answer the claims of the Christian Judaizers.

Also, remember the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28.

The Great Commission is a command to make disciples. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded the original disciples to make additional disciples by teaching them to observe *ALL that I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:20). And *all that I have commanded you* can be found in the pages of the New Testament, because the New Testament is **THE only place on earth** we can find the teachings of the disciples who Jesus said would be led *into all truth*.

Therefore, it would be an affront to Jesus Himself to look outside the New Testament for additional insight into disciple making, when He said that the handbook for making disciples is found in the *all truth* given to the original disciples.

# Chapter 6

## The Claim that the Disciples Were Children or Teenagers

Using rabbinic Judaism, the Judaizers claim that Jesus was a rabbi, rabbis taught children, therefore, the 12 apostles were children, or some say, teenagers. For example, a book published (in 2009), referring to the disciples, says: “These guys were no doubt in their late teens.”

Another Christian Judaizer writes this:

“Let’s assume it [the age of the Talmid (students/disciples)] fits the culture. At what age do you join a great rabbi? Fifteen. Do you understand that, culturally, it’s likely that Jesus’ disciples were high school freshmen and sophomores? I know that if Jesus came down to earth to start His movement today and He walked into my first-hour class, He’d pick them ... He wouldn’t go to the faculty room. They’re kids. You say, ‘Oh, wait a minute—Matthew was a tax collector.’ Listen. Tax collecting was not being in the IRS.... Tax collecting was on your knee next to the fisherman, going [counting]: ‘1, 2, 3, ... 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19—you owe me 6. Take the six fish, sell them in town, and bring the money to dad, who is the tax collector.’ Matthew could do that at 18; he could do that at 14. The word for ‘John’ in the Bible, if John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, means ‘pre-adolescent.’ That kid could have been ten. Can you picture John as a ten-year-old?” [parenthetical explanations mine].

Here are some significant problems with calling the apostles children or teenagers.

We can find **no** ancient sources that suggest that the rabbis taught children or teenagers. There are three sources for such information: the New Testament, the Mishna, and Josephus. All of them suggest rabbis taught adults.

Rabbi Aqiba is a very famous ancient Jewish rabbi who lived between 50 AD and 135 AD. In the Talmud, we learn the following about Aqiba’s life:

“At the age of 40, Rabbi Aqiba began his studies, and at the end of thirteen years, he lectured in public” ([sacredtexts.com/jud/t05/abo05.htm](http://sacredtexts.com/jud/t05/abo05.htm)).

So from this ancient Jewish text, we learn that one of the most famous rabbis in history, living near the time of Jesus, **did not begin his study until he was 40 and did not begin his public teaching until he was 53.**

Another famous ancient Jewish rabbi is Eliezer. Chapter 1 of the Mishnah states that Rabbi Eliezer was 22 years old when he first felt a desire for study and wanted to go sit at the feet of another rabbi ([sacred-texts.com/jud/t05/abo05.htm](http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t05/abo05.htm)).

In the Old Testament, Moses commanded children to be taught by parents (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). Every time we encounter the Pharisees in the Gospels, they are interacting with adults. There is not one single biblical example of rabbis teaching children. So, in order to know that children were taught by rabbis instead of parents, we must know more than the Bible knows. We must assume that the Bible is not sufficient.

When Jesus taught His disciples about the humility necessary for entering the Kingdom of God, He brought in a child *and said*, “*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:1-3; see also Matthew 19:13-14).

Why bring in a child? If they were children, why not just illustrate it with one of the disciples? Why did they need to be converted and become like a child, if they were children? Jesus goes on to say: “*See that you do not despise one of these little ones*” (verse 10), as if they were not one of them. The point was that children had no rights or authority. It seems insignificant to illustrate that to children by bringing in a younger child.

The children brought to Him seem to be in contrast to the disciples. The point is, if you read these passages in their own contexts without imposing the “children thing” on the text, you would never conclude the disciples were children or teenagers.

It’s clear, from even a casual reading of the Gospels, that all of Jesus’ parables, encounters, and lessons were to adults about adult issues. For example, in Matthew 19 (one of the chapters mentioned above), Jesus

taught about adultery, divorce, remarriage, becoming a eunuch, selling all your possessions, and leaving your house and family. Does that really sound like teaching for children? No one reading this for 2000 years thought so.

For 2000 years, Bible students and scholars have understood the disciples to be adult men, about the age of Jesus or a little older. (Peter is often painted with gray hair and a gray beard during his interactions with Jesus.) Google “the Apostles,” hit “images,” and you will not find one picture from all of history where the apostles were understood as children or teenagers. This is not to say history interprets Scripture. The point is, nobody throughout history understood the authors of the Bible to say the apostles were teenagers, until this recent teaching.

The disciples Jesus called to follow Him had adult roles. They were adult fishermen, an adult tax collector, an adult Zealot, adults who were married (whose wives later traveled with them, see 1 Corinthians 9:5), and adults living in houses they owned (Mark 1:6; Luke 5:29). Are we to believe children started the early church, preached, taught, chose deacons, were imprisoned, and released? Well, anyway, no such case is reasonable.

In order to make the claim that the apostles were children, you must ignore the plain meaning of the text, in its context. You must assume the Holy Spirit left out some crucial information, that He did not lead the apostles into ***all the truth***, so the Bible by itself is insufficient. You must have this Gnostic-like special knowledge to understand it.

The significant thing is, this takes your Bible away from you. You’d never know the disciples were teenagers without these rabbinic teachers adding this information to the text. But, in Revelation, we read:

*I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them**, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book* (Revelation 22:18, emphasis mine).

One result of this is to focus ministry on young people (or to justify focusing on young people). The idea is, if you focus on the youth, they will be the next generation of leadership. So to focus on the youth is to build the future. And if Jesus focused on teenagers, that’s what we should do, too.

There are two significant problems with that. One is pragmatic. It doesn't work. The Communists did that for 70 years. The whole point of Communism was to ignore the old people, let them die off, and focus on the young people, who would make the Soviet world into socialist Communism. What happened was, as people became adults, they stopped believing in Communism.

For the last 20 (or so) years, Christian churches have focused on young people. Is the church more mature today? Not according to any of the surveys. We are still focusing on young people, and the church is becoming increasingly more ignorant of the Word of God and, for that matter, basic morality. There are more people living in sin, more availability for exercising sin, and a greater tolerance for sin.

When you focus on young people, especially "seekers," you never get around to teaching the mature concepts of the Scripture. You keep "putting the cookies on the bottom shelf where anybody can reach them," but you never get around to teaching about the issues that adults need and maturity requires.

When a person gets into their forties, they begin asking more significant questions. A good number of Christians get into things like sexual affairs, tax evasion, alcohol, drugs, excessive debt, and other life crippling problems. They also are faced with children to raise, getting along with a spouse, financial burdens, health problems, business issues, job loss, and other life situations that come as we get older. That's why Jesus disciplined adults.

The second major problem is biblical. There is nothing in the New Testament that tells us to focus on children or teenagers. Actually, Paul says:

*When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11).*

Not that there is something wrong with youth work, and there were converts and disciples of all ages. But there is no focus on the youth. When Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus and Titus to Crete, it was to find elders, not young people. Peter's focus is on the elders, and James said to call for the elders (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5; James 5). For example, Paul told Titus:



*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you (Titus 1:5, emphasis mine).*

Of course, the apostles were concerned about people of all ages. But they did not take on the role of a rabbi teaching children, nor did they suggest such a role. They reached all ages of people, but their focus was on the maturity of adult believers.

Actually, the Judaizers tend to ignore the epistles. They impose rabbinic Judaism on the Gospels, but do not focus on the epistles, where the apostles applied what Christ modeled, taught, and commanded.

***To sum up, as we've seen, the Bible nowhere states that Jesus' disciples were teenagers. Furthermore, the extra-biblical rabbinic literature suggests that the disciples did not have to be teenagers. Both rabbis Aquiba and Eliezer are examples of becoming disciples as adults, not as children or teenagers.***

# Chapter 7

## The Claim that Jesus Was a Rabbi

The Judaizers claim that Jesus was a rabbi because:

- He was called a rabbi.
- He taught in the synagogues.
- He had disciples (Talmidim), a model that was already being practiced by the rabbis in His day.

Jesus was called a “rabbi” in the sense of being a teacher. For example, I’m a teacher, and a professor at the University of Michigan is a teacher, but that does not mean I’m a professor at the University of Michigan.

The term “rabbi” was apparently a general term used for a respected teacher, or of just a respected person. That’s why those who respected Jesus called Him a rabbi. But Jesus never called Himself a rabbi, and He objected to titles. The term “rabbi” was basically used by the Pharisees for giving honor to one another. Speaking of the Pharisees, in general, Jesus said:

*... they love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being **called Rabbi** by men* (Matthew 23:6-7, emphasis mine).

Jesus went on to tell the disciples not to let anyone call them a rabbi, and that He was their teacher (hence the title of this book). His actual words are:

*But **DO NOT BE CALLED RABBI**; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers* (Matthew 23:8, emphasis mine).

The word *Teacher* Jesus used to describe Himself here is διδάσκαλος (*didaskalos*) not ῥαββί (*rabbi*). He was not a rabbi in any official sense, as a teacher in the synagogues. Almost all of those rabbis were Pharisees.

Jesus taught in synagogues for the purpose of what we call evangelism. It’s the same reason the Apostle Paul taught in synagogues when he did evangelism in a new area. Apparently, any adult Jewish man could stand and speak in a synagogue, so both Jesus and Paul used it as an appropriate place to tell people that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus did not teach as an official rabbi, appointed by the Pharisees, in some synagogue. They hated Him in the synagogues, complained about His teaching in the synagogues and accused Him of being a law-breaker because He healed on the Sabbath, in the synagogues.

The argument, that Jesus modeled what the official rabbis were doing, is unlikely. We do not know from the New Testament anything about rabbis teaching disciples. But to assume that Jesus and John the Baptist copied it from the Pharisees, and their rabbis, is quite unlikely. Jesus and John the Baptist were not people who copied from others. It's more likely that the Pharisees copied from them.

It seems that neither the officials, nor the members, of the synagogues knew where Jesus got His authority. He was clearly not identified with any official Jewish ministry. We read:

*The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as Your authority for doing these things" (John 2:18). ... and, When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" (Matthew 21:23).*

If Jesus was an official synagogue rabbi, there would be no question about who gave Him His authority.

When Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth, we read this:

*When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household" (Mark 6:1-4).*

They didn't seem to think Jesus had the authority of a rabbi, or any authority at all. And Jesus compared Himself and the source of His authority to that of a *prophet*, not a rabbi. In other words, from the revelation of God, not the traditions of men.

We also read:

*They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Mark 1:21-22).*

His authority was not as the scribes (the religious lawyers educated in rabbinic Judaism).

**Mary Magdalene** called Jesus *Rabboni*, meaning “my rabbi” in John 20:15-16. Here’s the passage:

*Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).*

First, I’d like you to notice that Jesus addressed Mary as *Woman*. The Greek word is γύναι (*gunai*), the word for an adult woman or a wife (like the German word “frau”). This word is never used of children or teenagers.

Also notice, Mary was a woman. No matter what their sources, no one would claim that rabbis taught girls. Yet here is an adult woman who called Jesus her rabbi. The only conclusion we can come to is that *rabbi* was used of Jesus as a common term of respect.

The **blind Bartimaeus** also called Jesus *Rabboni*. Here is the account from Mark 10:

*Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”... And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road (Mark 10:46-47, 51-52).*

The blind beggar named Bartimaeus addressed Jesus as *Rabboni*, (“my Rabbi”). But blind Bartimaeus could not have been a child or teenager following Jesus. If he was, why wouldn’t Jesus have healed him

earlier? Clearly, this is Bartimaeus' first encounter with Jesus. And after being healed, Jesus said: *Go; your faith has made you well*. Certainly, Jesus would not tell one of His disciples to go away because He was healed. The only reasonable conclusion we can come to is that the term *Rabbi*, or *my Rabbi*, was a general term of respect for a Jewish teacher.

**Joseph of Arimathea** was called a “disciple” of Jesus (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51; John 19:13). If you interpret “disciple” to mean Talmidim (the followers of a rabbi), then the text makes no sense at all. Joseph was not a teenager, and he did not follow Jesus all the time. He did not train under Jesus for his teenage years. He did not even want people to know he was a disciple of Jesus because he was afraid of the Jews. In short, the description about Joseph by the Bible is fundamentally opposed to the definitions of Talmidim given by the extra-biblical sources. Which one are you going to use? If you use the Judaizer's methods, then the biblical text loses all meaning, for Joseph can't possibly be a Talmidim—even though the Bible says he is a disciple.

The Judaizers claim that Jesus and John the Baptist were rabbis with **smikhah**. It means they were two of many rabbis who could do miracles. The Judaizers claim this was a category of rabbi which was common in that day.

In Mark 2, Jesus healed a paralytic. The onlookers are amazed and say: *“we have never seen anything like this”* (verse 12).

In Mark 4, Jesus calmed the sea. The disciples are amazed and say: *“who then is this, that even the wind and waves obey Him?”* (verse 41).

In John 10:40-42, we read that John the Baptist performed no miracles.

In John 15:24, we hear Jesus saying that He did miracles that no one else did.

The Judaizers say that all rabbis with smikhah did miracles and that John the Baptist and Jesus were both rabbis with smikhah. Well, if John was a rabbi with smikhah, then why didn't he perform any miracles? And if all rabbis with smikhah did miracles, then why were the onlookers so amazed when Jesus did one? And lastly, Jesus Himself said that He did miracles that no one else did. Again, the text makes no sense if you impose rabbinic Judaism on it. There is no evidence from the Bible

that there is any such thing as a category of a rabbi with smikhah. From the Bible, we can only conclude that Jesus was called *rabbi* (not “a rabbi”) as a general term of respect. But Jesus Himself said He was a διδάσκαλος (*didaskalos*) teacher, not a ραββί (*rabbi*). And He told the disciples:

***Do not be called Rabbi***

# Chapter 8

## The Claim that the Disciples Followed Jesus because He was a Rabbi

A prominent Christian leader wrote a book in 2009, which claimed that the disciples initially followed Jesus because He was a rabbi. Here's what he wrote:

"They look up and it's **Jesus ... the headline-making rabbi** who is just starting to catch the attention of the muckety-mucks in Jerusalem. This Jesus, unlike other rabbis who wouldn't have lowered themselves to ask anyone to follow them, is now making an astounding offer. He is asking them ... the losers ... to follow him ... That's why they left it all. For the sheer honor of the upgrade that he offered them" [emphasis mine].

The disciples did not follow Jesus because He was a rabbi, or as students of a rabbi. They followed Him because John the Baptist said He was: *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, and that *He is the Son of God*. When Andrew told his brother Simon (who Jesus called Peter) about Jesus, Andrew said, *We have found the Messiah*. Nothing was ever mentioned about Jesus being a rabbi. Let's read about Jesus' first encounter with His first disciples. The text begins speaking about John the Baptist.

*The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ... "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus... One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ)" [John 1:29, 34-37, 40-41, emphasis mine].*

It's clear, from the context, that the first disciples (Peter, Andrew, and John) followed Jesus because He was *the Lamb of God ... The Son of*

*God ... The Messiah ... Christ*, not because He was a rabbi, a “headline making rabbi,” or any rabbi at all. There is never anything in any passage anywhere that suggests, in any way, that the disciples followed Jesus because He was a rabbi.

And no rabbi would call himself *the Lamb of God* or *the Son of God*. So the disciples would never see Jesus as a rabbi if they saw Him as the Lamb of God, the Son of God, or the Messiah.

The Judaizers claim that the incident where Jesus called the disciples away from their fishing nets was first, and they followed Him first because He was a rabbi, and only later learned that He was the Messiah.

The problem with that assumption is that the incident where Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John from fishing to follow Him (in Matthew 4 and Mark 1) takes place a year after the disciples first followed Jesus because He was the Messiah (in John 1:29-42). This is determined, not from any extra biblical sources, but by simply lining up the events of the life of Christ as presented in the four gospels. [This is confirmed by every “Harmony of the Gospels” that we looked at.]

Before the calling from the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples went with Jesus to the wedding at Cana, where He turned water into wine. Then they went to Capernaum. Then they went south to Jerusalem, where He threw the moneychangers out of the Temple and talked with Nicodemus about being born again. Then the disciples went with Him to Samaria, where He talked to the woman at the well. After that, they went with Him back to Galilee, where He healed a nobleman’s son and was rejected at His hometown of Nazareth. Then, after that year of ministry, they returned to Capernaum where Jesus called them from their fishing boats to follow Him.

The point was: *they were fishermen. And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men”* (Matthew 4:18-19). It was not an upgrade for them to follow some super-star rabbi. The call was for them to be fishers of men, instead of just fishers of fish. Nothing is ever mentioned (here or anywhere) of the disciples following Jesus because He was a rabbi.

How different this looks when we look at the text of the Bible instead of imposing some supposed rabbinic Judaism on it.



# Chapter 9

## The Claim that One Must “Think Eastern” to Understand the Bible

The truth is, there is no such thing as “eastern thinking” and “western thinking.” There is just thinking. This is just a figment of the Judaizer’s imagination. Everybody all over the world thinks the same way everybody else thinks. Of course, our cultures are different. But everybody, from every culture, can understand anybody from a different culture, by simply listening to what they say in context.

Actually, easterners seem to do just fine answering technical questions about western-built systems and equipment. Apparently, cultural differences do not affect communications when words in one language are translated into words in another language.

Businessmen, educators, scientists, and plain folks from the West communicate every day with people from Japan, China, India, Russia, and all over the East. And they understand each other just fine.

Students in college are assigned reading from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and ancient scholars of all different cultures and ages. Then they are examined over those readings. If cultural understanding were necessary, no student could be tested on any ancient reading because he could never know what it really means.

I’ve been to Siberia, Japan, India, South Africa (in the apartheid black communities), Eastern Europe, and the USSR before and after the revolution. I communicated technical/theological information and answered questions. We all understood each other just fine.

Here’s another thing. Luke was a Gentile. Luke wrote Luke and Acts. If Paul didn’t write Hebrews, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other author. He was not a Hebrew, and he did not “think Hebrew,” yet his gospel is as easy to understand as the other gospels.

Christianity was a western thing. God sent Paul in a western direction (Acts 16:6). Paul made it clear in Antioch (Galatians 2:12-13) and in

Jerusalem (Acts 15) that Christianity was not a Jewish thing. Even the gospels were not written to Jews but to an increasingly Gentile church.

And what's with all this Hebrew stuff anyway? We have churches reading from the Talmud to their congregations, repeating Hebrew phrases, singing Hebrew songs, and repeating the name of Jesus in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek, not Hebrew. Jesus' name was always written and spoken in Greek, not Hebrew. And Jesus is constantly referred to as Jesus Christ. "Christ" is **Greek** for "Messiah" (John 1:41). He was never called "Jesus the rabbi" or "rabbi Jesus."

When writing about the conversation Jesus had with *a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews*, recorded in John 3, Greek scholar Dan Wallace says:

"More and more NT [New Testament] scholars are coming to the conclusion that Jesus often taught in Greek. And there is significant evidence that even in Jerusalem—even among the Pharisees, which Nicodemus was—Greek was the only language spoken by them. Thus, we really can't say that this conversation did not occur in Greek" ([bible.org/question/what-language-did-conversation-between-jesus-and-nicodemus-happen](http://bible.org/question/what-language-did-conversation-between-jesus-and-nicodemus-happen)).

# Chapter 10

## The Claim that the Pharisees Were Godly Men with a High View of Scripture

One rabbinic Christian Judaizer teaches that the Pharisees are “the most godly people you will ever meet in the whole world.” The reason he said this is because, if Jesus was a rabbi, then the Pharisees have to be good guys, because the rabbis were almost exclusively Pharisees.

First of all, the Pharisees did not have a high view of the Old Testament Scripture. They wanted you to think so, but they actually had a high view of their traditions, by which they warped the Scripture into what they wanted it to say. Jesus told them:

*Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition (Matthew 15:3)? ... Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men ... You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition ... thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that (Mark 7:8-9, 13).*

The word “Pharisee” is used 98 times in the New Testament. As near as we can tell, the only good thing said about the Pharisees is that they believed in the resurrection—while the Sadducees did not (Acts 23:8).

Other descriptions of the Pharisees are:

1. They were a brood of vipers—Matthew 3:7.
2. They thought Jesus worked by Satan’s power—Matthew 9:34.
3. They conspired against Jesus—Matthew 12:12.
4. Jesus said to beware of their teaching—Matthew 16:16.
5. They were involved in Jesus’ crucifixion—John 18.
6. They were legalists—Mark 7:8-13.
7. They were blind guides—Matthew 23:16.
8. They were hypocrites—Matthew 23:13-15.
9. They were condemned by Jesus in His parables—Matthew 21:45.
10. They were leading people to hell—Matthew 23:15.

Now, one might say “these passages are just describing the ‘bad Pharisees’ who were around Jesus at the time He was teaching. There were also good and godly Pharisees, and Jesus did not condemn them.” But this doesn’t fit the text.

John the Baptist saw *many of the Pharisees* and condemned them all (Matthew 3:7). He did not seem to know anything about them, except that they were Pharisees, and he still called them a *brood of vipers*. They were vipers because they followed the doctrines and practices of the Pharisees, not because they were “bad Pharisees.” The New Testament consistently condemns them, because their whole system was based on works-righteousness, and therefore, if you were a Pharisee, you were a viper. John did not need any other information about the specific individual, just that they followed the Pharisaic teachings.

Also, in Matthew 5, Jesus said that the Pharisees were not righteous. He was not talking about a few of the so-called bad Pharisees who were around at the time. He was talking about the system of righteousness of the Pharisees—works. Jesus said that, even if you kept all of their rules and regulations, you would still be destined for hell. And what was worse was that the Pharisees were teaching the masses to follow their rules (the oral law, the tradition of the elders—Mark 7), rather than following God’s Law, which called for repentance and faith. In this sense, the whole Pharisaic system was evil and produced nothing but vipers.

In Matthew 12:2, we see the Pharisees objecting that Jesus’ disciples were violating the Law. We see through the discourse that they were not really objecting to a violation of the actual Law, just their interpretation of it—the oral law and the tradition of the elders. They put their commentary over the teachings of the text.

In Mark 7, we see the Pharisees actually finding ways around the Law through their traditions. They had no commitment to obedience to the text. They were intent on twisting the actual Scripture to serve their own traditions. Their oral tradition gave them grounds to ignore the intent of the Bible.

There is ample biblical data to show that the Pharisees did not have a high commitment to the Old Testament, nor did they model their lives after it. They were committed to their traditions, and only to the extent that their traditions matched the biblical teaching did they follow the Bible.

Some Judaizers claim that Jesus told His disciples to practice and observe whatever the Scribes and Pharisees tell you. What Jesus really said is found in Matthew 23:2-8.

*The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But **do not be called Rabbi**; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers [emphasis mine].*

Jesus really said that, to the extent the Pharisees teach the Bible, do what they say. It is obvious that Jesus was in no way recommending general adherence to the teachings of the Pharisees, because He denounced them as hypocrites throughout the context of the passage.

# Chapter 11

## The Claim that the Rabbinic Model Is the Model for Discipleship

This is one of the biggest practical problems caused by the Judaizers. Their idea is that New Testament discipleship must be understood with the Pharisees' model of copying the rabbi's life. They understand Paul's statement, *Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:1), to be modeling Jesus as students modeled their rabbi.

For example, a book published (in 2009) by a prominent evangelical Christian leader, referring to the disciples, says:

“... the only way to get to God was to get as close as possible to their local rabbi ... Followers would be so taken with their rabbi that they would begin to dress, look, and act like the rabbi. In fact, if there were more than one rabbi in town, one could tell which rabbi a follower was connected to by simply watching him act and listening to how he talked. Ed, a friend of mine who travels to Israel regularly, tells of the time he was near the Wailing Wall and noticed an old rabbi walking by. Crooked and bent over with age, he walked leaning on his cane, tilting to the right as though one leg were shorter than the other. Ed noticed that walking behind the aged rabbi was a group of his young followers, bent over with canes and walking with a self-induced tilt to the right. When Jesus calls us to follow him, these dynamics are what he has in mind ... to so admire him that we start looking like him ... That's why they left it all. For the sheer honor of the upgrade that he offered them.”

The points Judaizers make, culturally, without any biblical foundation, are:

- Rabbis taught their talmidim (students/disciples) to model them in everything (the way they dress, eat, sleep, walk, etc.), not just to obey their teaching.
- When their talmidim were finished, they were exactly like their rabbi.
- This is the model taught throughout Scripture, from Abraham through the apostles.

**First** of all, the Hebrew word “talmidim” never occurs in the New Testament, even with a Greek transliteration (as is done with some words, like the word “synagogue”). In other words, this word is never used for disciples by any rabbi, nor by Jesus, nor by the apostles, anywhere.

**Second**, notice the discipleship model of the New Testament is not one of following the discipler, but following Christ.

**Third**, following Christ means we should keep His commandments, not look and act like Jesus. Looking and acting like the leader is a Muslim idea. A good Muslim will dress, eat, sleep, and do everything exactly like Mohammed did. But Jesus said:

*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments ... If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (John 14:15; 15:10).*

If you look at the ministry of Paul, it did not follow Christ in a mechanical way. Notice:

- Christ went only to the Jews. Paul went to the Gentiles.
- Christ stayed in territorial Israel. Paul traveled all over the western world.
- Christ had no supporting occupation. Paul began his ministry while working as a tent maker.
- The focus of Christ's ministry was on Himself. The focus of Paul's ministry was on Christ.
- Christ ministered as the perfect Son of God. Paul ministered as a sinner saved by grace.
- Christ looked like the Jews. Paul got his hair cut when he went west.
- Christ had 12 disciples. Paul had a few traveling companions, and sent out a few messengers.
- Christ was alone except for God the Father. Paul had an apostolic network of fellowship.
- Christ suggested no organizing method. Paul started churches and appointed elders.

Also, the apostles did not direct the church to:

- Keep the Sabbath (Acts 20:1-7; Romans 14:4-6)
- Keep the dietary requirements of the Law (Acts 10:9-16; Romans 14:2-3)
- Honor the Jewish holidays

- Worship at the Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19)
- Be circumcised (Acts 15:1ff, Romans 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 7:18).

The rabbis would not have tolerated any of that.

The gospels end with a focus on the church, not the Jews. For example, during His ministry, Jesus told His disciples:

***Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*** (Matthew 10:5-6, emphasis mine).

But after He rose from the dead, Jesus told His disciples:

*Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations*** (Matthew 28:18-20), and, *you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to **the remotest part of the earth*** (Acts 1:8, emphasis mine).

The rabbinic focus ignores the significance of the epistles. The New Testament does not stop with the gospels. Jesus was *born under the Law* (Galatians 4:4). It was a time of great spiritual confusion with rabbis, synagogues, a corrupt priesthood, a corrupt Temple, bent Scriptures, legalistic rabbinic rules, and political unrest, which ended in the dispersion of the Jews in 70 AD.

God doesn't tell us to sift through that mess for our faith and conduct. That's laid out for us in the epistles, where **the word "rabbi," and concept of a rabbi, never occurs.**

We can learn a lot from the life and teaching of Jesus. He was the perfect Son of God. His teaching and life are crucial. He lived under the Mosaic Law, but He trained the apostles to start the church. The life and ministry of Jesus must be applied to this age. The best way to do that is to see how the apostles did it. The apostles did not portray themselves as rabbis, they did not follow rabbis, they did not focus on teaching children as rabbis, or keeping rabbinic customs.

The apostles fought a tough battle to remove Christianity from Judaism. That's the story of the book of Acts and the main point of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Passage after passage in those books slams the door shut on any kind of Judaism. Paul said the Jews have been grafted out and the church has been grafted in (Romans 11:18ff). Sure, Israel will be grafted back in one day, but that's not now. Even Jews today



who accept Jesus as their Messiah are in the church. They should be worshiping and living as Christians, not going back into the cultural traditions of rabbinic Judaism.

We need to study discipleship from the text of the New Testament to see how the apostles applied what Christ did. We do not need to know what the rabbis did, or go back and try to unravel that culture and impose it on the text to understand discipleship (or anything else).

# Chapter 12

## The Claim that We Are to Go "to the Jew First" to Understand the Bible

This reference is to a phrase Paul used three times: *to the Jew first and also to the Greek*. The Judaizers claim that we are being directed to get our interpretation of the Bible from the Jews first. If we don't, we will not understand it correctly.

Here are the three verses where that phrase occurs:

1. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek*** (Romans 1:16, emphasis mine).

Paul is telling us how the Gospel spread historically. God first presented it to the Jews, and when they rejected it, He presented it to the Gentiles. There is nothing here which says we should prioritize the Jews in presenting the Gospel, and certainly nothing which says we should go to them to understand the biblical text.

2. *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of **the Jew first and also of the Greek*** (Romans 2:9, emphasis mine).
3. *but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek**. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law* (Romans 2:10-12, emphasis mine).

Paul is telling us about the judgment of God. The point being, we are all without excuse. But the Jews received the revelation of God before the Greeks, so judgment came to them first. The Jews were given the Law, and they disobeyed it. They sinned under the Law, so they were judged by the Law. But the Greeks (and all Gentiles) have the law of God written on their hearts in the form of a conscience. Therefore, they are also judged. So judgment comes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

But, as you can clearly see, this has nothing to do with going to the Jews for an understanding of the text of Scripture. They were the first to receive the Law and the first to receive the Gospel, so they are the first to be judged by God.

# Chapter 13

## The Claim that Jesus Was a Stone Mason, Not a Carpenter

The idea is that the Jewish culture of the day tells us houses were made out of stones, not wood, and there was a stone quarry near Nazareth, so Jesus was really not a carpenter but a builder using stones. The only text on the subject says:

*“Is not this the **carpenter**, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him (Mark 6:3, emphasis mine).*

The fact that most houses were made from stones does not mean that there was not wood used in construction. Roofs, doors, tables, chairs, and other furniture were obviously made of wood or other combustible material because, when enemies destroyed cities, they burned them to the ground. That would be hard to do if the houses were all made of nothing but stone.

The word for *carpenter* is τέκτων (*tekton*). The “Accordance Bible” software defines it as a “carpenter or craftsman.” “Strong’s Concordance” also defines this word as “a carpenter or craftsman.” The “Louw and Nida Lexicon” says: “There is every reason to believe that in biblical times one who was regarded as a τέκτων would be skilled in the use of wood and stone and possibly even metal.” “Thayer’s Lexicon” says: “From Homer down, the Septuagint [the Greek translation of the Old Testament in 250 BC] uses this word as a worker in wood, a carpenter.”

So it would appear that the word usually means carpenter (a worker in wood) but would also include someone skilled in many materials. It appears that Jesus was not a stonemason who built houses of stone. More likely He built specialty items like wood tables, chairs, doors, and possibly even items made of stone or metal.

So what’s the big deal whether Jesus was a carpenter or a stonemason? In-and-of-itself, nothing. But here’s what’s significant. If you go to Israel, or hear teaching about Israel, which shows you a stone quarry

and says, therefore, Jesus was not a carpenter but a stonemason, and you “oooo” and “ahhhh” over that, you are being amazed by that which is not in the Bible, as a basis for understanding the Bible.

You are being told that you cannot trust your Bible because, if you didn’t have these teachers with this special knowledge, you would never know that. Your Bible is insufficient. The context does not determine the meaning. You cannot know what it means by reading it because you need this special knowledge. The Holy Spirit left out this crucial information. While you are oooooing and aaaaing, you just lost your Bible.

# **Chapter 14**

## **The Claim that Jesus Folded the Burial Napkin**

The following article is being circulated by e-mail. First, we shall include the article as is. Then we shall comment on it. As you read it, see if you can find the problem with it. The article is entitled:

### **Why Did Jesus Fold the Napkin?**

“Why did Jesus fold the linen burial cloth after His resurrection?

The Gospel of John (20:7) tells us that the napkin, which was placed over the face of Jesus, was not just thrown aside like the grave clothes.

The Bible takes an entire verse to tell us that the napkin was neatly folded, and was placed at the head of that stony coffin.

Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.

She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, ‘They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and I don’t know where they have put Him!’

Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb to see. The other disciple outran Peter and got there first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen cloth lying there, but he didn’t go in.

Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying to the side.

Was that important? Absolutely!  
Is it really significant? Yes!

In order to understand the significance of the folded napkin, you

have to understand a little bit about Hebrew tradition of that day. The folded napkin had to do with the Master and Servant, and every Jewish boy knew this tradition.

When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it.

The table was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating, and the servant would not dare touch that table, until the master was finished.

Now if the master were done eating, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and clean his beard, and would wad up that napkin and toss it onto the table.

The servant would then know to clear the table. For in those days, the wadded napkin meant, 'I'm finished.'

But if the master got up from the table, and folded his napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not dare touch the table, because .....

The folded napkin meant,  
**'I'm coming back!'"**

## **Our Comment**

Were you impressed? Did you think:

"Wow, I never knew that! That's really interesting. It tells us Jesus declared that He was coming back."

HOPEFULLY NOT! If you were positively impressed, you just gave a nod of approval to a teaching that takes your Bible away from you.

If this folded napkin theory is valid as a means of understanding the text of the Bible, then your Bible is not sufficient. There is no way you would get this meaning of the burial face cloth from the Bible. But according to this e-mail, the meaning of the burial cloth comes from the Hebrew culture. The e-mail says:

"In order to understand the significance of the folded napkin, **you have to understand a little bit about Hebrew tradition** of that day."

Therefore, the Bible is insufficient. The Holy Spirit left out some crucial information that is needed to understand this passage.

And it is not just that the Hebrew cultural information adds some clarity. It actually dictates the meaning of the text. Without the Hebrew culture, you could not understand it, or you would misunderstand it.

Because we Christians like the punch line—Jesus supposedly, by folding the napkin, said: “I’m coming back”—we get sucked into the idea that we can’t understand the Bible from the context.

But, if the folding of the napkin must be interpreted outside the context of John 20, then how do you know that anything you understand from the Bible is true?

Besides the biggest issue of this denying the sufficiency of Scripture, and hence taking the Bible away from us, there are several other issues.

The text says the cloth was *rolled up* (NASB) or *wrapped together* (KJV), not folded up. Strong’s says this word means: “to twist; to wrap up; rolled (1) , or wrapped (2).” The “Louw & Nida Lexicon” defines this word as “to enclose an object by winding something about or around it—to wrap, to bandage.”

Actually, it’s the same word used in Mark 14:56 and Luke 10:34 to wrap Christ’s body in burial clothes. So the text does not say it was folded like a napkin at all. Therefore, the supposed “Hebrew tradition” of “napkin folding” is contrary to the word used in the passage.

And what is the connection between the dinner table napkin and the face cloth covering a buried corpse? Why would we assume that Jesus is making a connection between eating and a burial site? For that matter, how do we know it was Jesus who rolled up the cloth?

***A biblical text should always be understood  
in light of its own context, not outside information***



# Chapter 15

## The Claim that Justification Is by Faithfulness, Not by Faith Alone

One prominent Christian Judaizer says this:

“For the Easterner, faith is how you live. The Hebrew word is *emunah*. Paul writes, ‘the just shall live by faith.’ He takes that from Habakkuk, and Habakkuk says the just shall live by *emunah*—faithfulness. So Paul actually ends up saying exactly the opposite of what Christians have done. Paul ends up saying the just shall live by faithfulness—**obedience**. And we [Christians] say, ‘No, the just will live by believing because obedience is no longer necessary.’”

In an attempt to demonstrate differences between eastern and western thinking, the author makes the case that faith, for easterners, is about “doing,” while for westerners, it is about “knowledge,” with the exhortation that western Christians should be like easterners.

To make his case, the author undertakes some interesting exegesis. He states that Habakkuk says the just shall live by **faithfulness**, and gives the Hebrew word *emunah* to support his interpretation.

Notice that, if he is correct, Habakkuk is saying that justification comes through, or is characterized by, obedience (faithfulness), not by belief (faith).

It is true that *emunah* can be translated “faithfulness,” but it is also translated as “faith” (see “Strong’s,” #530). The question is not: “How can a word possibly be used?” The interpreter’s question should always be: “How is it used in this context?”

In Habakkuk 2:4, God is contrasting the pagan and the righteous person. But how does God contrast them, by their obedience or lack of obedience? He contrasts them by the condition of their souls. He describes the pagan as characterized by his pride and evil soul. God does not castigate the pagan for unfaithfulness.

*Behold, as for the proud one,  
His soul is not right within him;  
But the righteous will live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:4).*

God then says the righteous shall live by *emunah*. If you take *emunah* as “obedience,” as the Judaizer does, then the contrast makes no sense. For there to be a true contrast here, you can’t take *emunah* as “obedience,” you have to take it as “faith,” in the sense of knowledge or belief. For God does not criticize the pagan for his actions but for his belief. So God must be approving of the righteous, not for their actions (obedience) but for their belief (faith).

Therefore, *emunah*, in Habakkuk 2:4, means faith (belief), not faithfulness (obedience).

What is also deceptive is that the Judaizer seems to say Paul is using the same word, *emunah*, as Habakkuk. But Paul does not use this word. Paul actually uses the Greek word *pistis* (“Strong’s,” #4102). Twice in his writings, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4.

*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;  
as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH” (Romans 1:17).*

*Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for,  
“THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH” (Galatians 3:11).*

The Judaizer says that “Paul actually ends up saying exactly the **opposite** of what Christians have done.” Then he further states: “And we [Christians] say, ‘No, the just will live by believing.’”

Protestant Christianity has historically stated that justification is by “grace alone, through faith alone.” But this teacher states that Paul is saying exactly the opposite of this. Well, the opposite of justification through faith is justification based on works. So by stating that Paul is saying the opposite of what Christians have done, he is saying that Paul is teaching justification based on works (obedience, faithfulness).

To determine who is right, the Judaizer or the historic teaching of Protestant Christianity, let’s see what Paul is really saying.

In Galatians 2, we see Peter choosing to not eat with Gentiles, which is actually being obedient (faithful) to the interpretation of the Law. Paul says that Peter was not being *straightforward about the truth of the Gospel* (verse 14). Paul then continues in what, I think, is the most eloquent statement of justification given in the pages of Scripture:

*... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified ... I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly (Galatians 2:16-21).*

Notice here that Paul explicitly says that justification does not come through obedience/faithfulness to the Law, since *by the works of the Law, no flesh will be justified*. Paul gives the reason for this in Galatians 3:10 and following:

*For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."*

Paul says that no one can be justified by the Law, since, to be justified by the Law, you have to keep ALL OF IT.

This rabbinic Christian teacher, through his attempt to see differences between eastern and western views on faith, has actually denied justification by grace alone, through faith alone.

# Chapter 16

## The Claim that History and Geography Are Necessary for Understanding the Bible

So, is there any value in studying things which are not in the Bible? Yes, of course. But,

**Never use extra biblical knowledge to determine the meaning of the biblical text**

Take the land of Israel, for example. We have gone with groups to Israel for many years. But it's to show them the Bible is true, not to determine what the Bible means.

**The land of Israel confirms the text,  
the land does not explain the text.  
The Bible illuminates the land,  
the land does not illuminate the Bible.**

**Without the Bible, the land is just a pile of rocks.**

The same is true of history and historical culture. History confirms the text, but history does not determine the **meaning** of the text. For example, the writings of Josephus can be used to confirm the text. But they should never be used to determine the meaning of the text. When we do that, we are using an uninspired source (usually written with some sort of prejudice) to determine the meaning of an inspired text.

## The Legitimate Use of History and Culture

**Historical and cultural information is crucial when it is in the Bible**

For example, when Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, the Apostle John tells us:

*Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?”*  
***For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans*** (John 4:9, emphasis mine).

Notice the statement, *For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans*, is not only cultural information, it is crucial for understanding the whole conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. But once again:

- It comes from the Bible.
- It’s part of the context.
- It’s inspired by the Holy Spirit (so we know it’s accurate information).
- It confirms the sufficiency of Scripture.

## **Historical and cultural information outside the Bible is helpful when it confirms the Bible**

It is also sometimes helpful to supply information outside of the text. For example, in his 2008 book “The Jesus You Can’t Ignore,” John MacArthur included this information:

“Joseph and Mary went annually to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. But it is likely that Luke 2 is describing Jesus’ first-ever Passover in Jerusalem. It was customary for boys in their last year of childhood to experience their first feast at the temple. The preparation for bar mitzvah included instruction in the law, including familiarity with Jewish customs, rituals, feasts, and sacrifices. The Passover week afforded an intensive initiation into all of these, so it was common for boys in their final year of childhood to have the privilege of accompanying their parents to Jerusalem for that week of celebration” (p. 41).

Notice that MacArthur used historical information to round out our understanding of the situation, but he never used it to interpret any text of Scripture.

He even speculated about things that may or may not have been true, but he tells us that’s what he is doing. He says, “But it is **likely** that Luke 2 is describing Jesus’ first-ever Passover.” MacArthur doesn’t know that, he’s just guessing, but he tells us that he’s guessing by using the word “**likely**.” He is not saying: Here’s some new information you need to understand this passage.

Extra-biblical cultural information is helpful when it does things like:

- Confirm the truth and accuracy of the biblical text
- Add “colorful” information to help visualize the text
- Supply definitions of terms
- Place a passage in its historical context

But be really careful because you often do not know the accuracy of the cultural information. For example, MacArthur says: “The preparation for bar mitzvah included instruction in the law, including familiarity with Jewish customs, rituals, feasts, and sacrifices.” How does he know that? It sounds reasonable. It does not affect the meaning of any biblical text. But where did he get that information? From the Mishna? From Josephus? He doesn’t say. But wherever it’s from, it isn’t inspired information, so it is only as good as its source.

## **Never use any historical or cultural information from outside the Bible to determine the meaning of a biblical text**

Here are three examples.

(1) Jesus said:

*For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God* (Luke 18:25; see also Matthew 19:24 and Mark 10:25).

You’ve probably heard sermons, or read devotionals, saying the small door in the large gate in the wall of Jerusalem is *the eye of a needle*. A camel would have to be unloaded and get down on his knees to get through the small door. That preaches well, but there is absolutely no evidence, biblical or otherwise, that *the eye of a needle* refers to a door in a gate in Jerusalem. For example, the Hebrew New Testament Studies website reports concerning this:

“A lovely story and an excellent parable for preaching but unfortunately **unfounded!** From at least the 15th century, and possibly as early as the 9th but not earlier, this story has been put forth, however, **there is no evidence for such a gate**” [biblicalhebrew.com/nt/camelneedle.htm, emphasis mine].

Luke uses a different word for *needle* than Matthew and Mark. But, the above web site reports:

“Both [Greek words for *needle*] are synonyms for needles used in sewing, but Luke’s is more likely to be used by a surgeon than a seamstress.”

So the gospel writers see the needle as an actual needle, not some metaphor for a small door in the city gate.

There are two problems here:

**One** is that the cultural information is inaccurate, “there is no evidence for such a gate.”

**Two, and much more significant**, is that the information is used to determine the meaning of the text. It assumes your Bible is not sufficient. Actually, in this case, it reverses the meaning of the text. Where Jesus is saying it’s **impossible** for a rich man to get into heaven (without the cross), this says it is difficult but **possible** for a rich man to get into heaven (without the cross).

(2) There is another claim that the prohibition of women elders and teachers (1 Timothy 2:11-14; 3:2, 8) is because of a dominating Amazon women’s cult in Ephesus. But there is no evidence in the Bible, or any ancient source, that there was ever a dominating Amazon women’s cult in Ephesus. This is just something made up and taught with no basis whatsoever. But when you impose this on the text, you can come to a conclusion which is the opposite of what the Bible teaches.

(3) There is a claim that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 was fulfilled historically when a Caesar of Rome went to Thessalonica to see how they used a gift he gave them. Some Judaizers claim that 1 Thessalonians 4 describes the pageantry of the entry of Caesar into the city of Thessalonica.

The Caesar who gave this gift actually lived much later than when Paul wrote to Thessalonica (so once again, the cultural information is inaccurate). But the point is not that the historical data is inaccurate. The point is, there is no way anybody giving the Scripture a casual reading would conclude this was a Roman Emperor entering the city. Read it in its context and see what you think.

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so*

*God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).*

Martin Luther said: “A plowboy with a Bible knows more than the pope.” That principle, “solo scriptura,” one of the foundational principles of Protestantism, is not true if you believe these modern-day Judaizers. Luther’s plowboy was neither a Jew, nor a Hebrew scholar, nor a cultural expert. He did not know how to think “eastern.” He had no special knowledge from rabbinic Judaism. To him, it looked like justification was by *faith*, not faithfulness. So if we believe the Judaizers, the plowboy’s Bible is of very little use to him.

And this is no theoretical possibility, it is an actual fact. For example, after a series of lectures one of these Judaizers gave at a prominent church in West Michigan, one lady told us that her teenage daughter came up to her and said she was no longer reading her Bible. When the mother asked, “Why?” the girl said: “Because I don’t know Hebrew or Greek, or the ancient culture, or what the rabbis teach.”



# Chapter 17

## What Jesus' Disciples Taught Their Disciples

### What about the Second Century Disciples?

Let's see if any of the disciples of the disciples thought or taught that one should learn to think Hebrew. We're talking about the apostolic fathers who lived during the first few decades of the church after the apostles. Some of these men walked and talked with the original apostles, like Polycarp with the Apostle John and Clement with Paul. Some were disciples of these disciples, like Irenaeus under Polycarp. These apostolic fathers wrote from approximately 97–200 AD. So, did any of these early church leaders, who, by the way, were Greek, believe that they needed to exchange their Greek methods for Hebrew thought patterns to understand the teachings of Christ and the Apostles? Let's see.

### Clement of Rome

Clement was most likely a Gentile and a Roman, writing about 97 AD to the church at Corinth, who were Gentiles. Clement makes strong appeals to the Corinthians for godly living. Never does Clement say anything to the effect that the Corinthians needed to learn to think Hebrew. Never does Clement say that the Corinthians should understand Christ as a rabbi or understand what rabbinic Judaism teaches about talmidim. He makes many appeals to the Old Testament, but never brings in any extra-biblical information to support his claims. He simply assumed that the Corinthians, though they were Greek/western Christians, could read the text and apply it.

Clement of Rome, who was most likely the Clement of Philippians 4:3, knew Paul's doctrine very well. Of salvation, Clement says the following:

“And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (“Epistle to the Corinthians,” chapter 32).

Clement knew that neither he nor the Corinthians should understand justification as coming from obedience, as some of the Judaizers would have us believe. He expounded the same doctrine of justification as Paul did—**by faith alone**.

In Clement, we see a man who spent time with Paul (a former Pharisee—Philippians 3:5), and we see nothing of this belief that we should see Christ as a rabbi or that we should learn to think Hebrew. We see nothing of learning the differences between the ways Hebrews think vs. the ways Greeks think. Clement simply taught the Bible and expected his Greek audience to understand it and apply it.

## **Polycarp**

Polycarp, who spent time with the Apostle John, wrote an epistle to the Philippians—a Greek audience. In it, we see nothing of the aforementioned stresses on Hebrew thinking or seeing Christ as a rabbi. In fact, the word “rabbi” is not mentioned. Polycarp simply teaches and exhorts the Philippians through the use of the Bible.

We could belabor this point by quoting Irenaeus, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and more, but it is not necessary. In fact, in all the writings of Irenaeus, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Mathetes, Barnabas, Clement, and others, we find the word “rabbi” used only three times. One is a title for a teacher. The other two times, it is in a negative context—i.e. *Be not called Rabbi*, a quote from Jesus and hence the title of this book.

Let’s be just a little more thorough and look at the writings of the next generation of church leaders. These would be the things written between 150–210 AD: “The Pastor of Hermas,” Tatian’s address to the Greeks, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagorus, and Clement of Alexandria. Do any of these writings teach the idea that we have to learn to “think Hebrew” or that we should “follow a rabbi”? We searched the 1275 pages of the aforementioned writings, and we cannot find the word “rabbi” one time. To repeat for clarity. **The word “rabbi” is not found once.**

A logical person would think, if this method of understanding the Bible through the eyes of rabbinic Judaism is necessary to “see the depth of the text,” that someone in the first two hundred years of the church would say **something** about it. You would think that they would at least brush on it, mention it in passing, allude to it, reference someone who taught it, or something! These are the men who spent time with

the apostles, who spent time with Jesus, and they don't even mention it once. Not at all. Nothing. Zilch. Nada.

So, given that the *all truth* of the New Testament does not espouse interpreting the Bible through the lens of rabbinic Judaism, nor do any of the early church fathers teach it, nor do any of the church councils mention it, and given that it leads to a meaningless, errant, inconsistent Bible that the general public will not read:

### **Why would anyone want to interpret the Bible through the lens of rabbinic Judaism?**

Conclusion:

There are two major issues at risk with those who impose culture on the Bible to better understand it:

(1) The cultural information may not be accurate. Very often, it is speculative and without historical foundation. At best, it is uninspired of God.

(2) **Most significantly**, when someone uses extra-biblical information to determine the meaning of a biblical passage, they are saying the Bible is insufficient. Many, without thinking, repeat the extra-biblical information of the Judaizers. Even if they don't intent to do so, they declare the Bible to be insufficient.

As John Piper wrote:

“The sufficiency of Scripture means that we don't need any more special revelation. We don't need any more inspired, inerrant words. In the Bible God has given us, we have the perfect standard for judging all other knowledge. All other knowledge stands under the judgment of the Bible even when it serves the Bible”  
[[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/By-Date/2005/1282\\_Thoughts\\_on\\_the\\_Sufficiency\\_of\\_Scripture](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/By-Date/2005/1282_Thoughts_on_the_Sufficiency_of_Scripture)].