–Save This Page as a PDF–

Yeshua on the Handling of Food
Mark 7: 1-15

Yeshua on the handling of food DIG: According to Jewish tradition, what did the apostles do wrong? What three areas did Yeshua find so hypocritical about the Pharisees and their traditions? How does the quote from Isaiah address the issue at hand? What is the source of true uncleanness? Why can't external things defile a person? What is the meaning of Yeshua's parable? Why didn't the talmidim understand it? Why was it easier to follow religious rules rather than to develop an intimate relationship with ADONAI?

REFLECT: Which of your family traditions would be difficult to change? What traditions do you follow that are part of your religious heritage? What do you do to appear holy? When are you most likely to uphold outward religious tradition rather than honor God in your heart? What is wrong with measuring spirituality by outward actions? How can you make sure traditions and outward actions do not replace true holiness? What can you do to have a pure heart?

Yeshua Messiah took issue with the Oral Law and declared that no food could be rendered ritually unclean by being eaten with unwashed hands.

Yeshua's popularity sparked envy and concern among the religious leaders of **His** time. **The troublemaking Rabbi** was breaking too many rules. **His talmidim** were ignoring **traditions** held for centuries. A huge collection of rules for living had gradually developed that was supposed to reflect the central teaching of **ADONAI's** Word. Many of these, however, turned out to be subtle ways to deflect and actually contradict **His commands**, as **Messiah** pictures here.

By the time of our **Savior**, **the tradition of the elders** or **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Ei – The Oral Law**), had become equal with Scripture in the eyes of **the Jews**. In fact, to some **Jews** it had

even become **greater** than the TaNaKh. **The rabbis taught that it was more punishable to act against the words of the Scribes, than the words of the Scriptures. They** had many other sayings that, in effect, said the same thing. **The rabbis had a saying, "He that says something he did not hear from his rabbi causes the Sh'khinah glory to depart from Israel." They also said, "He that contradicts his rabbis is he that will contradict the Sh'khinah glory. He that would speak against his rabbi is he that would speak against God."** Shockingly, **the rabbis said, "My son, give my people words of the rabbis, *then* give them the words of the Torah."** In that same line of thinking, **the rabbis taught that to study the Scriptures was neither good nor bad. But to study the Oral Law was a good habit that brought reward.**[176]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, **You** alone are holy and worthy of my complete worship. No person can come anywhere near how special and wonderful **You are**. Only **You, God,** are my perfect **Lord, Master** and **Father** whom I desire to please. When anyone or anything else is put as first place in someone's life, they are doing the evil that **You** warn against doing. **They traded the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Romans 1:25).** How sad it is, when one sinner leads another into sin causing them both to be judged for their wrong. **Though they know God's righteous decree – that those who practice such things deserve death – they not only do them but also approve of others who practice the same (Romans 1:32).** It is so foolish to worship **the traditions of men**. What a joy it is to focus on **You** for you alone are **Holy, Almighty, All Powerful**, and **All Wise,** and You also are our **Forgiving Savior** and **Loving Father**! Wow! **There is none holy as ADONAI, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God (First Samuel 2:2).** I love to meditate on **Your** so many magnificent and wonderful qualities! In Holy **Yeshua's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill Him (John 7:1). From now to the end of **His** public ministry, hostility to **Messiah** continued to grow. As the hatred of **His** opponents deepened, it meant that **Yeshua** could no longer move openly. We have already seen two major areas of confrontation between **Yeshua** and **the Jewish** leadership concerning **the Oral Law: fasting** (see **The Life of Christ Dq – When You Fast, Put Oil on Your Head and Wash Your Face**) and **the proper ways of keeping the Sabbath**

(see **The Life of Christ Cs – Jesus Heals a Man at the Pool of Bethesda**), (see **The Life of Christ Cv – The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**), and (see **The Life of Christ Cw – Jesus Heals a Man With a Shriveled Hand**). Here we see a third major confrontation over **hand washing**.



And some Pharisees and some of the Torah-teachers who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Yeshua. Mark begins **his** account of this confrontation with the word **and**, or the Greek work *kai*. This connects what follows very loosely with what went on before; namely, contrast between the phenomenal popularity of the people and the extraordinary hostility of pharisaic Judaism. **They saw some of his talmidim eating bread with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed (Mark 7:1-2). Bread** is plural in the Greek, and is preceded by the definite articles. The article points to some particular bread known by **the Pharisees** and **the Lord**. The plural number speaks of loaves of **bread**. The reference evidently was to **the talmidim eating** some of **the bread** preserved in the baskets from **the mountainside near the town of Bethsaida** (see **The Life of Christ Fn – Jesus Feeds the 5,000**). There was no specific opportunity at that time to wash **their hands**, which would have been a good thing to do. But it was a much more serious issue with **the Pharisees** because they were thinking only in terms **of their traditions**.

The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ritual washing, holding to the tradition of the elders (Mark 7:3), or **the Oral Law**. The word **elders** referred to **the members of the council** (see **The Life of Christ Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**). In early times **the rulers of the people** were chosen from the elderly men. **The washing** was done with the fist clenched. The person rubbed one **hand** on the arm up to the elbow with the other **hand** clenched.

The "hand" was considered from the tip of the fingers to the elbow. Then that person would rub using the palm of the other **hand** with the other clinched, so as to make sure that the part that **touched the food** would be **ritually clean**.[177]

When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. It was acceptable to **touch ritually unclean** things, but **the Oral Law** said **they** needed to **wash their "hands"** from the elbow to the fingertips before **eating. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles (Mark 7:4). The Jews** were careful to **wash their hands** before **eating** anything. **They wouldn't eat** the smallest seed until **they washed their hands** first, even though Moses never commanded it.

Orthodox **Jews** today observe **hand washing** before meals. The rationale for it has nothing to do with hygiene but is based on the idea that "a man's home is his Temple," with the dining table his altar, **the food** his sacrifice and himself as the priest. Since the TaNaKh requires priests to be **ritually clean** before offering sacrifices on the bronze Altar, **the Oral Law** requires the same before **eating** a meal.[178]

To give you an idea of just how radical **they** were about this, here is what **the Oral Law** says about **hand washing**. **The rabbis taught that it was better to have to walk four miles to water, than to be guilty of neglecting to wash their hands. They also said that the one who neglects hand washing is as bad as a murderer.** Along that same line of thinking, **they said the one who neglects hand washing is like one who goes to a prostitute. They also said that three sins bring poverty after them, and one of them is neglecting hand washing** (In other words, if you don't want to die poor, wash your **hands** before you **eat**)**.**[179]

The Sages inferred from the mitzvot of the Torah that food could be rendered ritually unclean by being handled with unwashed hands. Their reasoning came from the Torah, which says that humans can become ritually unclean and even ritually contaminating. For example, someone who has touched a corpse not only becomes ritually unclean, but anyone he touches thereafter also would be rendered ritually unclean. In addition, the Torah specifies that the meat of certain animals is ritually unclean and therefore forbidden for consumption, whereas others are ritually clean and therefore permissible. The Torah also tells us that otherwise ritually clean food can be rendered ritually unclean if the carcass of a ritually

unclean animal falls into it or touches it (see **Bk – Ritually Clean and Unclean Animals**).

The Oral Law took these basic Torah concepts and combined them for what would seem to be a logical conclusion. In the Oral Law we learn that touching bread with ritually unclean hands rendered the bread unclean. According to such a mitzvah, a ritually unclean person handling otherwise ritually clean food, rendered that food ritually unclean and therefore unkosher. Thus, if you were ritually unclean (for whatever reason) and went to eat a peanut-butter sandwich with ritually unclean hands, that sandwich would be rendered ritually unclean by your touch. Suddenly, the peanut-butter sandwich would be as ritually unclean as a ham. This was a tradition of the Pharisees, but it was not **Torah** from Sinai.[180]

But when **Yeshua** didn't follow **the traditions of men He** was viciously attacked. **So the Pharisees and Torah-teachers asked Messiah, "Why do Your talmidim break the tradition of the elders instead of washing their hands before they eat" (Mark 7:5)?** It is worth noting that **the Pharisees and Torah-teachers** never had a single opportunity to accuse **Yeshua** of violating **the Torah**, because **He** kept it perfectly (see my commentary on **Exodus Du – Do Not Think That I Have Come to Abolish the Torah and the Prophets**). Every argument **they** had, *without exception*, was over **the Oral Law**. This was the basis of **His** rejection. **Then Jesus points out three areas where pharisaic Judaism was a sham.**

First, He said the true nature of the traditions of men was hypocrisy. He replied: Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules (Mark 7:6-7; Isaiah 29:13). Legalism gives the outward sense of spirituality, or of being religious. They appear to be spiritual or religious because they live a legalistic lifestyle. They believe they are honoring and worshiping **God** by trying to keep this set of **human rules**.

Secondly, sometimes to keep the traditions of men, they actually had to *ignore* a divine commandment. You have [abandoned] the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men (Mark 7:8). Yeshua admits to breaking **the Oral Law**, and, as we shall see later, **He** goes out of **His** way to break it.

Thirdly, sometimes to keep the traditions of men, they had to *reject* a divine commandment. Then **He** immediately gives an example of **their** hypocrisy. **Yeshua's** response was both simple and forceful as **He** answered **their** question with irony and biting sarcasm when **He** asked: **Why do you break the command of God by your tradition?** They made **God's Word** null and void, and caused untold many to stumble. **For God said** through **Moses, "Honor your father and mother," and** in conjunction with that mitzvah, **the Torah** also states that **anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death (Mark 7:9-10).** At that point, it was still the commandment for breaking **the Torah**. **But the Mishnah declared, "He who curses his father or mother is not guilty unless he specifically curses them with the name of ADONAI" (Sanhedrin 7. 8).** Although these are clear **Torah** commands that any rabbi would surely respect, **Messiah** points out how, by means of a theological debate, **the Oral Law** skirted around the original intent of the commandment.

But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is "devoted to God" or **Corban (Mark 7:11).** **Yeshua** was referring to **the Oral Law** when **He** responded with the phrase **but you say**, instead of the familiar wording **it is written.** At any time a **Pharisee** would wave **his hand** above **his** head and say the magic word: **Corban**, which meant *dedicated to the Temple treasury*, then anything **he** owned at that time became **devoted**, or *set aside*, for **God.** That meant **he** could do one of two things with **his Corban**. **He** could give all of it, or part of it, to the Temple treasury, or **he** could keep it for **his** own private use. What **he** could not do with it was to give it away for someone else to use.

Moshe said: **Honor your father and mother** (see my commentary on **Exodus Do – Honor Your Father and Your Mother**)**.** The implication of that commandment was that children were responsible for the welfare of their older parents when they became incapable of taking care of themselves. That was what **the Jews** believed **Moses** meant when he gave that commandment. But **the Pharisees** were extremely reluctant to share their wealth with anyone who was not a **Pharisee**. The problem was **their** parents were not **Pharisees**. To skirt around the issue, if a **Pharisee** saw **his father** approaching, knowing **he** might ask for something, **he** would merely wave **his hand** above **his** head and say: **Corban**. When **his father** stated **his** need, **the son** would say, "Golly gee dad, I wish you would have asked me earlier. I have just declared all of **my** possessions to be **Corban**." That was why **Yeshua** said: **Then you no longer let them do**

anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you (Mark 7:12-13). Then **Yeshua** pointed out that this was not something new. **He** quoted a verse from the TaNaKh in which **Isaiah** rebuked some of **his** generation as well. **These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules (Matthew 15:8-9).**[181]

Here is another example of **their** hypocrisy. **The Torah** said: **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. On that day you shall not do any work (Exodus 20:8-11).** But many of **the Pharisees** wanted to be at the Temple, or would have to carry out business in different towns. So to get around this, the school of Sophim said, "Alright, we cannot go more than a Sabbath day's journey from where we live. So how do we define where our home is?" **They** defined a "home" was where your possessions were. This solved the problem! **They** would send out slaves standing a mile apart each holding one of **his** possessions. As a result, each mile was **his** "home." **They** did **many things like that**.[182]

We are reminded here that **Yeshua** came as **the Meshiach** for Isra'el and, as such, a prophetic voice to correct the errors of **His** generation. So in that sense, **Messiah** called **His** generation (and really every generation) to a purer understanding of **the Torah** even if it means giving up some of **the traditions of men** that have accumulated over time. The Talmudic **tradition** is of great value and interest to both Jewish and Gentile believers today, especially in the context of understanding the Gospels that were written in the first century. In spite of that, there are times when **the tradition of the elders** must take a subordinate position to the written Word of **God**, just as **Yeshua Messiah** taught here.[183]

We know that external behavior and measurements are both highly inaccurate. Looks deceive as often as they convey the truth. But that's how we tend to judge other people until it occurs to us that **Ha'Shem** is neither impressed nor fooled by appearances. But **God** looks at **the heart**, and **He's** the expert at cleaning **hearts**. Being **pure** in **ADONAI's** sight doesn't mean we are perfect; but it means that we take steps to make sure that the internal and external aspects of our lives are consistent. King David would say: **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from Me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and**

grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me (Psalm 51:10-12; also see **Second Corinthians 4:16-18; Hebrews 12:14).**[184]

At this juncture, **Yeshua** turned the discussion away from **the Pharisees** to **the crowd** around **Him**. **Again Messiah** taught **the masses** by the use of a parable so that only those of faith could understand **Him**. Not even **His disciples** understood at first (see **The Life of Christ Ez – The Private Parables of the Kingdom in a House**). **He called the crowd to Him and said: Listen to Me, everyone, and understand this. What goes into someone's mouth** (like **food**) **does not make them ritually unclean, but what comes out of their mouth** (like **the Oral Law**)**, that is what defiles them (Mark 7:14-15).**