

Does any man have the authority to add to, or take away from the law of God?

We read, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Yehovah your God which I command you," (Deu. 4:2). Also, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it," (Deu. 12:32).

So, what does it mean when we read, "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not," (Mat. 23:1-3)? Is this really saying that we should do anything that the scribes and Pharisees tell us to do?

First, let's see what the rest of this chapter has to say about the Pharisees for context:

- Verse 14 – They shall receive greater damnation.
- Verse 15 – Their converts are two-fold children of hell.
- Verses 17 and 19 – They are fools and blind.
- Verses 16 and 24 – They are blind guides.
- Verses 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29 – They are hypocrites.
- Verse 26 – They are blind.
- Verse 27 – They are full of nastiness.
- Verse 28 – They are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (lawlessness).
- Verse 33 – They are serpents and vipers headed for the damnation of hell.
- Verse 34 – They were prophesied to persecute, scourge, and crucify Christ and his disciples.
- Verses 35 and 36 – They are responsible for the killing of all the prophets.

Yeshua would not want us to follow the Pharisees because He tells us that they are blind, fools, and hypocrites who are full of lawlessness and nastiness, and who are headed for hell, as well as making their followers two-fold children of hell.

Earlier in the Book of Matthew, we read where Yeshua warns us of the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. "How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," (Mat. 16:11-12).

In Matthew 23:2, it says that the Scribes and the Pharisees sat in 'Moses' seat'. What, exactly, does that mean? We read, "And it came to pass on the morrow, that **Moses sat to judge the people**: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening...When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and **I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws**," (Exo. 18:13 & 16). Here we read that Moses judged the people according to God's statutes and law. He did **not** add to God's law **nor** did he take away from it.

**"And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws**, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: **And let them judge the people at all seasons**: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said," (Exo. 18:20-24). So here we see that Moses set up judges who were to use God's ordinances and laws. It says nowhere that the judges added new laws or took away what was given in God's laws.

This is what the Pharisees were to be doing – making judgements based on God’s law. But notice what they actually did – “Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do,” (Mar. 7:5-8). Here they condemned the disciples for not keeping the laws that the Pharisees added. “And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye,” (Mar. 7:9-13). And here, Christ rebukes them for taking away from God’s law. Later, after the time of the Apostles, the Pharisees changed the law by saying both circumcision and God’s Holy Days could be postponed from the time they were commanded to be kept. And they added a curse on Christians in their services.

In light of all of this, what does Matthew 23:1-3 mean? *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* says the following:

**“1. Then spake Jesus to the multitude – ‘to the multitudes,’ and to his disciples. 2. Saying, the scribes and the Pharisees sit.** The Jewish teachers *stood* to read, but *sat* to expound the Scriptures, as will be seen by comparing Luke iv. 16 with v. 20. **In Moses’ seat** – that is, as interpreters of the law given by Moses. **3. All therefore** – that is, all which as *sitting in that seat* and teaching *out of that law*, **they bid you observe, that observe and do.** The word “therefore” is thus, it will be seen, of great importance, as limiting those injunctions which He would have them obey to what they fetched from the law itself. In requiring implicit obedience to such injunctions, He would have them to recognize the authority with which they taught over and above the obligation of the law itself – an important principle truly; but He who denounced the traditions of such teachers (Ch. xv. 3) cannot have meant here to throw His shield over these.”

So what is being said here, is that we are to follow the law, and not the tradition of men.

This is made even clearer in the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew. In the Church History of Eusebius (260-340 A.D.), Origen, Irenaeus, Papias and Eusebius testify to the validity of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew. Eusebius quotes Papias (60-130 A.D.), “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and everyone interpreted them as he was able.” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Church History of Eusebius*, bk. III, chap. 39, 16, page 173). Here it is saying that Matthew’s Hebrew Gospel is part of the oracles which is the Word of God. In *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, under ORACLE, it states,

“*logion* (λόγιον, 3051), a diminutive of *logos*, ‘a word, narrative, statement,’ denotes ‘a divine response or utterance, an oracle’; it is used of (a) the contents of the Mosaic Law, Acts 7:38; (b) all the written utterances of God through OT writers, Rom. 3:2; (c) the substance of Christian doctrine, Heb. 5:12; (d) the utterance of God through Christian teachers, 1 Pet. 4:11,” (Vines, Oracle, pg. 449).

Here Papias is referring to the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew as an oracle by Vines definition (d) the utterance of God through Christian teachers. In Rom. 3:2, Paul is speaking of the oracles referenced in Vines definition (b) all the written utterances of God through Old Testament writers. “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God,” (Rom. 3:1-2). So we can see from Vines

the word *logion* in Greek translated as oracle always refers to the Word of God and never as something else like the calendar.

The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew chapter 23 verses 1-3 are as follows:

“1 Then Jesus spoke to the people and to his disciples 2 saying: Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and the sages sit. 3 Now all which (they) say to you keep and do; but (according to) their ordinances and deeds do not do because they say and do not.”

The word ‘they’ here is referring to God’s laws given through Moses. And we are clearly told NOT to follow the ordinances of the scribes and Pharisees.

Christ condemned the man-made rules of the Pharisees, called *halacha*. By 328 A.D. these were written down as the *Mischnah*. The Jews taught that the *Mischnah* was more important than God’s law, the Torah. Eventually a Jewish leader Anan ben David (760 A.D.) led a reformation which rejected the *Mischnah* and relied simply on the Torah. Anan praised Christ’s teachings of the law in rejecting the man-made rules of the Pharisees. Today, these Jews are known as the Karaites.

Unfortunately, some groups today choose to follow the man-made teachings of Jews over God’s law in the area of God’s calendar.