

THE SAYINGS OF JESUS AND THE MIDRASH*

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In studying a book which is in fact a collection of traditions, one is sometimes tempted not only to content oneself with understanding the text as it is, but also to unveil the original meaning of the *traditions* on which the text is based, disregarding the question of the “authenticity” of these traditions.¹ The Gospels in

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Translation by Jackie Feldman.

* In this article, I could not systematically dwell upon the immense body of scholarly literature on the topics discussed.

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1. A good example of this is the parallel of the story of the healing on the Sabbath in John 7:21-23. There it is written: “Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers — [this is certainly an interpolation] and ye on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the Law of Moses should not be broken (sic!), are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?”. Jesus’ reasoning is strange and incomprehensible, especially the argument “that the Law of Moses not be broken.” This seems to be, if anything, an argument *against* Jesus’ action. But the essence of Jesus’ saying appears in *Mekhilla, Ki Tisa* (Horowitz-Rabin edition, Jerusalem, 1960, p. 340; translation according to Lauterbach, vol. III, p. 197): “Whence do we know that the duty of saving life supercedes the Sabbath laws? . . . If in performing the ceremony of circumcision, which affects only one member of the body, one is to disregard the Sabbath laws, how much more should one do so for the whole body when it is in danger!”

particular provide us with the opportunity to perceive the great variety of traditions, to trace their sources, their development and the changes which occurred in them.² We intend to deal with several of these traditions and to compare them with the sayings of the Sages.

We also find a parallel in *Tosefta*, Shabbat 15 (16):16 (Lieberman ed. New York, 1962, Vol. II, p. 74): "In order to perform a circumcision one may transgress the Sabbath laws. Why? Because one is punishable by premature death (*karet*) (if the circumcision is performed) after (the prescribed) time (i.e., the eighth day). We may learn this from a deduction *de minorum ad majorum* (*qal vaḥomer*): if we may disregard the Sabbath laws for one member of the body, certainly we may disregard the Sabbath laws for the entire body."

See also Lieberman in *Tosefta Kifshuta*, New York, 1962, III: 261, who explains that the clause "because one is punishable by premature death," etc. refers to the *infant*, who is in danger of premature death if the circumcision is not performed in the proper time. Thus, it may be that the words "that the law of Moses not be broken" "ἵνα μὴ λυθῇ ὁ νόμος Μωϋσέως" (John 7:23) are a corruption of the words "because it is punishable by premature death (*Karet*)", which were improperly understood. The New Testament author understood these words as meaning that "Because they (the *adults*, if they fail to circumcise the child) violate the Law, they are punishable by premature death." The author-redactor was unfamiliar with this kind of halakhic argumentation and, as a result, was led to this misunderstanding.

The essence of this analysis was already noticed by Strack-Billerbeck in their *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, München, 1922, in their commentary on the above-mentioned verses. We repeated these arguments here only because of the primary importance of this example for the subject under discussion.

In this case, the close resemblance of the Midrash and the Gospel texts allows us to present fairly certain assumptions. In other cases, where corresponding rabbinic material is lacking, the Gospel text remains obscure. For example, in Matthew 9:13, in a phrase lacking in parallels in the other Gospels, Jesus responds to the accusation that he eats with sinners by saying: "But go ye and learn what that meaneth 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6), for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance". The Biblical verse in Hosea, however, does not fit the New Testament context. (See ICC on that verse and the suggested solution of D. Hill, in *NTS* 24 (1978) pp. 107-109). Nevertheless, the words "go ye and learn" indicate that the biblical verse was meant to serve as the scriptural basis for Jesus' words (this being a rendering of the Rabbinic term, *se u-lemad*). [We might suggest that perhaps a more suitable scriptural basis for this saying of Jesus would be Psalms 51:16-19: "Then shall I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee . . . for thou desirest not sacrifice: else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Here, the end of the passage conveys an idea similar (but not identical) to that of the passage in Hosea, while the beginning of the passage might have served as a response to Jesus' opponents: "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways" (verse 15).] As for the free style of citation of Biblical passages in the New Testament, compare Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 with the verses they cite — Isa. 62:11; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 9:9. See also the critical comments in *Haṣofeh le-Hokhmat Yisra'el* 4 (1905), pp. 84, 90. For another view, see K. Stendhal, *The School of St. Matthew*, Philadelphia, 1968, pp. 118-120.

2. S. Lieberman in "Tanna Heikha Ka'i," *Qoveṣ Mada'i L'zekher Schorr*, New York, 1945, pp. 185-186 says of the Talmudic literature: "We often find fragmentary passages and pieces of *haggadoth* which can only be understood in the context of the original source . . . These are surviving fragments of complete sermons delivered in the synagogues and study halls (*bet ha-midrash*). Were we to know the event and the Biblical portion which served as the basis for the sermon, we would far better understand the fragment of the sermon preserved in the Talmud." If this is true for the Talmud, how much more so in the case of the New Testament!

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity (πνεῦμα ἀσθενίας) eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him and said unto her, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, "*There are six days on which men ought to work* (δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι): in them therefore (σὺν) come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." The Lord then answered him and said, "Thou hypocrite, does not each of you on the sabbath loose *his ox or his ass* from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed. . . . (Luke 13:10-17)³

It would seem that in this version⁴, the ruler of the synagogue bases his argument on the Biblical passage Exodus 23:12:⁵ "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest, that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid and the stranger may be refreshed." The ruler of the synagogue cites only the first part of the verse, but deduces his argument from the entire verse — a common phenomenon in the Mishnah⁶ and in Midrashic literature (Occasionally the saying is derived solely from the portion of the verse *not* quoted in the text). The ruler of the synagogue argues that the verse teaches us that work is permitted only on the six days of labour and therefore the Torah prohibits *all* kinds of work on the seventh day, healing included.⁷

What is Jesus' response to the claim that his action is prohibited by the Torah? Could he possibly have responded to this argument by referring to the behaviour of farmers towards their animals? It is not improbable that Jesus' response in our source relates not to the farmers' custom itself, but to the end of the verse in Ex-

3. Parallels: Luke 14:2-6; Matthew 12:10-13; John 7:23 (see n. 1 above).

4. For the halakhic problems in the other versions, see J.N. Epstein, *Mevo'ot le-Sifrut ha-Tanna'im*, Jerusalem, 1957, pp. 280-281. On the halakha in our version compare with Tosefta, Shabbat 7:23 (Lieberman edition, p. 29): "One may not whisper in matters of evil spirits (*eyn lohashin bi-devar shedim*) (i.e., on the Sabbath)." See also Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-feshutah*, p. 104. We should note that Luke 13 (unlike his parallels) explicitly mentions healing by exorcising evil spirits. Compare also D. Flusser, *IEJ* 7 (1957), p. 107.

5. Cf. also parallel verses in the Old Testament. See below.

6. See, for example, H. Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah* Tel-Aviv, 1959, pp. 57-58.

7. Perhaps the ruler of the synagogue argued that on the Sabbath, it was prohibited to perform any kind of work classified by the Sages as "*shevut*" — i.e., occupations which were not directly forbidden by the Law, but prohibited by the Sages, in order to distinguish the Sabbath from other days. (Compare also with Albeck's edition of the Mishnah, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1959, introductory note to Shabbat, *Mo'ed*, p. 11).

odus: “that *thine ox and thine ass* may rest”. The Mekhilta explains this verse as follows: “that thine ox and thine ass may have rest (*yanuah*) — this passage gives an additional ‘rest’ (*nyyh*) for the animal, intimating that it (i.e. the animal) should be allowed to pluck food from the ground and eat it. You say it comes from this. Perhaps, however, it only means that one should lock it up in the house? You must admit, however, that this would be, not rest (*nyyh*),⁸ but suffering. And when the Scripture says: that thine ox and thine ass may have rest it must mean to give an additional rest to the animal that it be allowed to pluck food from the ground and eat.”⁹ Jesus’ response may be based on a Midrash like this one although he applies it to a different context.¹⁰

It seems that the “author” or “redactor” of Luke 13:10ff did not comprehend the halakhic problem and the Midrashic basis for this tradition of Jesus, even though the reworking of the text is minimal and we are able to uncover the Midrashic core without great difficulty (and the question of whether the New Testament parallels are independent traditions or different branches of one original tradition remains unanswered).¹¹ In any case, if our assumption is correct, we have here very early evidence of a tradition concerning a halakhic debate between Jesus and other Jews in Midrashic style.¹²

8. The Hebrew word *nyyh* also has the meaning of “pleasure” (*nahat*).

9. *Mekhilta deRabbi Yishmael*, Mishpatim (Horowitz-Rabin edition, p. 331; trans. Lauterbach, III, pp. 177–178).

10. Perhaps this explains the special emphasis in Luke 13:16 “And this woman, a *daughter of Abraham*” — as opposed to the Biblical verse “so that *the son of thy handmaid and the stranger* may rest”. (Without committing ourselves to any particular reconstruction of the *text*, we might suggest the following reconstruction of Jesus’ original *argument*: “If you free *your ox* or *your ass* (‘your’ — exactly as in the verse in Exodus) from its manger on the Sabbath and allow him to rest . . . how much more so . . . a *daughter of Abraham!*”)

11. The text of Matthew 12:11, “And he said unto them: what man shall there be among you, that shall have *one sheep*, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?”, may already indicate the influence of the typology of parables such as that in Luke 15:4. Its relation to the halakha is to some extent weaker.

12. Compare with Flusser, “Die Auslegung der Bibel im Neuen Testament,” in *Juden und Christen lesen dieselbe Bibel*, 1973, p. 79: “Seine (= Jesus’) Art war es nicht in Midraschim zu sprechen.” This source may also be significant as a rare and early piece of external evidence of a halakhic debate in the style of the Midrash. We take it for granted, both here and in the following paragraphs, that “sayings quoted in halakhic Midrash literature, which are not attributed to any particular sage, may be very early. Furthermore, even when Midrashim are attributed to tannaim of the later generations, those Sages are to be considered as no more than transmitters of more ancient traditions” (J.N. Epstein, *Mavo le-Sifrut ha-Tannaim*, p. 513).

In light of our previous discussion, let us now approach a much more complex and problematic text — the Sermon on the Mount.¹³ We will attempt to present a *possibility*, and no more than a possibility, for interpreting the first section of Jesus' sermon (Matthew 5). We now know that Jesus¹⁴ does not attempt to contradict the Torah; just the opposite is true.¹⁵ As the structure of the Sermon closely resembles that of a Midrash,¹⁶ it might be worthwhile to scrutinize the problem whether Jesus teaches in Midrashic style, interpreting the verses of the Bible which he quotes at the beginning of his utterances.¹⁷

We find an interesting parallel to the verses dealing with adultery in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:27-30:

13. On the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, see Flusser. *op. cit.* (no. 12), "Die Torah in der Bergpredigt," pp. 102-113.

14. Flusser, pp. 102ff. In this article, Flusser touches upon several important problems, the details of which we intend to elucidate here: The particle δὲ in the phrase "ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω" (Heb. — *va'ani omer*) — "And I say . . ." has been understood as an expression of opposition to the Biblical verse as early as in the present redaction of Matthew (See Matthew 5:3, 43 in their present textual form and compare with the structure of Mark 7:10 — Matthew 15:4). In the language of the rabbis, however, *Va'ani omer* may mean "and I, too, say" (See Tosefta — Pesahim 1:6; Lieberman ed., p. 142 and his explanation of that passage).

15. We find no substantial disagreement with Biblical law in the main part of the Sermon (see previous note). If we assume, however, that Jesus *only* seeks to add to the Law, one group of verses, Matthew 5:38-43, remains problematic: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth': but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: and whosoever shall smite ye on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Flusser (p. 103) writes that these verses are based on the second part of the Biblical verse, Exodus 21:24-25, (which is not quoted): "a wound for (*tahat*) a wound, a stripe for (*tahat*) a stripe". Flusser suggested that Jesus might have understood the Biblical verse differently, explaining the word *tahat* not as "for" or "against" but as "another". Thus, "a wound and another wound." Admittedly, this explanation of the Biblical word *tahat* is a bit far-fetched. (It may be of some significance that the verses expounded here differ from the verses of the Ten Commandments which form the basis of the rest of the Sermon). Yet this problem is unsolved and requires further study.

16. This fact was already noted by Schechter, who attempted to "reconstruct" a Midrash underlying the Sermon. His reconstruction deviates significantly from the text of the New Testament. (See S. Schechter, "The Rabbinical Conception of Holiness", in *JQR* (o.s.) 10 (1898), p. 11 and note 3).

17. We will analyze this source in its present form, disregarding the question of the authenticity of the various sayings attributed to Jesus. We assume, however, that the Sermon on the Mount, unlike some of the other speeches in Matthew, is not an artificial composition made up of individual sayings of Jesus by the redactor himself, but an original source of Jesus' sayings. (See also Flusser, *op. cit.*, p. 102 and footnotes 2 and 14, above and in section III of this paper about artificial compositions of Jesus' sayings in Matthew).

Ye have heard that it was said by them in old time. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." And I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

As in most of the Sermon on the Mount, the idea itself was already known in earlier times (Job 31:1). Can we explain, however, how Jesus deduced this midrashically from the verse "Thou shalt not commit adultery"? Rabbi Ishmael interpreted this verse: "*lo tin'af*" (thou shalt not commit adultery) — *lo tehane l'af*,¹⁸ You shall not commit adultery with either your hand or your leg."¹⁹ While the beginning of the Midrash is obscure, its meaning may be elucidated by an early *piyyut*²⁰ according to which the clause, *lo tehaneh la-af* means: "You shall not derive pleasure by looking at a beautiful face²¹ (of a woman)." Consequently, Rabbi Ishmael's interpretation is: Thou shalt not commit adultery. You shall not derive pleasure by (*looking*) at a beautiful *face* (of a woman). You shall not commit adultery with either your *hand* or your *leg*. The similarity of this interpretation to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:30 — both in content and in structure — is evident. (Compare also the order of the members of the body in Mark 9:43).²²

A more problematic parallel is in the subsequent verses: there, an odd manner of quotation and severe synoptic problems complicate the matter considerably.

It hath been said, "Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement." And I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32)

It is well known²³ that the teaching of these verses corresponds (though not completely) to that of the School of Shammai in the Mishnah, Gittin 9:10 (and parallels): "A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity (*devar 'ervah*) in her, for it is written 'because he hath found in her indecency (*'ervat davar*) in anything'" (according to Danby's translation). Both the utterances of the School of Shammai and that of Jesus are deduced from the same Biblical

18. = *be-af*. See S. Lieberman "Hazanut Yanai", *Sinai* 4 (1939), p. 231.

19. BT, Niddah 13b. See Lieberman, *ibid*.

20. Zulai, *Piyyutei Yanai*, Berlin, 1938, (included among those poems of doubtful attribution), p. 373.

21. Here *'af* is the equivalent of *'apayim*, face. So that *'af* in the sense of "face" appears here in a source which is apparently earlier than those cited by S. Abramson "*'Af=Wajh = face*", *Sinai* 12 (1943), pp. 450-452.

22. The origin of the parallel in the late anthology, *Midrash HaGadol* cited by Flusser, p. 233, is unclear.

23. See, for example, Strack-Billerbeck and ICC on Matthew 5:31-32.

verse.²⁴ Deuteronomy 24:1. One may assume that in our passage, Matthew 5:31-32, the method of deduction was the same, despite the truncated citation of the verse.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them in old time, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but thou shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths": and I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne: nor by the earth, for it is his footstool . . . And let your communication be: Yea, yea: Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (v. 33-37)

These verses are problematic. Every commentator was at pains to identify the Biblical citation at the end of verse 33: "ἀποδώσεις τῷ κυρίῳ τοῦς ὄρκους σου."²⁵ It seems that the most likely scriptural basis for this phrase is Deuteronomy 23:21-23: "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not be slack to pay it . . . but if thou shalt forbear to vow,²⁵ it shall be no sin in thee". Verse 23 might easily serve as a basis for Jesus' words, but the Gospel in fact quotes only the less relevant earlier verse, v. 22, as is its usual way.²⁶

Ye have heard that it hath been said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." And I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the

24. Similarly, in Matthew 19:9. In the parallel in Mark 10:11, a different rule is given — that it is forbidden to divorce one's wife for any reason whatsoever. While it is possible that Matthew revised the texts in both cases, one may offer an alternative suggestion: the reason offered by Jesus in Mark 10 (and later adopted in Matthew 19 — with alterations) resembles that of the Dead Sea Sect. (See Damascus Covenant VI, line 21; C. Rabin edition, *The Zadokite Documents*, Oxford 1958, p. 17). Both the verse cited in both documents (Genesis 1:27), as well as the terminology employed, are similar. Mark 10:6, "From the beginning of the creation (ἀπὸ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως), God made them male and female" is apparently a reworking of "and at the *source of creation*, He made them male and female" in the Damascus Covenant (Such an observation was made by J.L. Teicher, *JJS* 5 (1954), p. 38. I am indebted to Professor Flusser for drawing my attention to this article.) Perhaps these two differing opinions on divorce attributed to Jesus reflect the "Pharisaism" of the Sermon on the Mount and the influence of the Dead Sea Sect in Mark. As both elements were absorbed into early Christianity, they influenced each other as regards the textual form of citation in the S.M.

25. For the equivalence of *neder* (vow) and "ὄρκος" (oath), see Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine, New York, 1942, p. 117, note 17. (henceforth: Lieberman, *Greek*).

26. Compare with Sifre, Devarim par. 265 (Finkelstein edition, New York, 1969, p. 286 and parallels). "'But if thou shalt forbear to vow (it shall be no sin in thee)' — Rabbi Meir (in some parallels we find 'Rabbi Yehuda'. See Finkelstein's note on the passage) says: 'It is better that you not vow at all than that you vow and not pay. Even better than both is that you not vow at all.'" But this passage deals with vows rather than with oaths.

publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (v. 43-48)

These verses are extremely problematical, since “thou shalt hate thine enemy” *μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου* does not appear in this form anywhere in the Bible, and it certainly does not, in this form, serve as the basis for a Midrash of Jesus.²⁷ I suspect that any explanation of the meaning and location of this Biblical verse will necessarily be forced, given the current state of research, so that a proper understanding of the verse is hopeless. On the other hand, Jesus’ words beginning with verse 44 may be a Midrash on Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, I am the Lord”. Many Midrashim²⁸ developed around the final words of this verse as early as the end of the Second Temple Period,²⁹ so

27. If we eliminate the words, “Thou shalt hate thine enemy,” Jesus’ argument here, as everywhere else in the Sermon, will accord with the biblical law (see note 15).

28. See *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, version A, chapter 16 (according to the text of the S.Z. Schechter edition, New York, 1945², p. 64; the translation here is mostly according to J. Goldin, *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan*, New Haven, 1955, pp. 86-87): “‘And hatred of mankind’: What is that? This teaches that no man should think of saying, ‘Love the rabbis but hate the disciples’ or ‘Love the disciples but hate the *‘am-ha-‘ares’* . . . On the contrary, love all these. But hate the sectarians (*minim*), apostates and informers, and so said David: ‘Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? . . .’ (Psalms 139:21ff). (But) Does it not say, ‘But thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, I am the Lord (Lev. 19:18)’ who has created him. Indeed: If he acts as thy people do, thou shalt love him; but if not, thou shalt not love him. Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar says: Under solemn oath was this statement pronounced, ‘But thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ (for) ‘I the Lord have created him’ (Isaiah 45:8). If thou lovest him, I am faithful to reward thee in good measure; but if not, I am judge to punish.”

For a discussion of the difficult textual problems of this passage and for variant readings, see Finkelstein, *Mavo le-Masekhtot Avot ve-Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, New York, 1950, pp. 47-51. But even after Finkelstein’s discussion, this passage is not quite clear. It seems that two Midrashic perceptions were combined here. The first emphasizes the final clause of this verse, “I am the Lord,” and considers this clause as an essential element for the understanding of this verse. Thus, this verse indicates that all people should be loved because they are created by God. This view is similar to that of Jesus and perhaps to his understanding of the verse in Leviticus. The second, “If he does the deeds of *your people*, you shall love him . . .” refers to the beginning of the verse in Leviticus 19:18, “Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against *the children of thy people*” and understands the meaning of the end of the verse, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”, as a continuation of the passage.

Also, compare this with the Damascus Covenant, ix lines 2-5 (Rabin edition, p. 45): “And as to that which He said: ‘Thou shalt not take vengeance nor bear rancour against *the children of thy people*’ — every man of *the members of the covenant* who brings against *his neighbor* an accusation without reproving before witnesses and brings it up when he grows angry or tells his elders to make him contemptible, he is one who takes vengeance and bears rancour. (Indeed) nothing else is written than: ‘He (*hu* — God?) taketh vengeance on His *adversaries*, and He reserveth wrath to His enemies’” [and therefore only *this* is legitimate — M.K.] My translation and interpretation differ from those of Rabin. This matter requires further study.

29. *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, Schechter edition, Version B, Chapter 26, p. 53. See also Flusser, “A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message” in *HTR* 61 (1968), pp. 115-116.

that Jesus might have understood the final words "I am the Lord" as teaching that a man ought to treat his enemies as God treats His own.³⁰

Finally, Matthew 5:17-20, which has been recognized as an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, may be intended first of all as a justification for the use of the Midrashic method as such (and perhaps for the independent approach, unlike that of the scribes and Pharisees — see verse 20)³¹ by asserting the validity and importance of every jot and tittle of the Law.³²

As we mentioned earlier, this, as well as the other suggestions made in this article, are only possibilities for the interpretation of the Gospels. They nevertheless raise another possible aspect of the much-discussed and important subject of the relationship of the Gospels and contemporary Jewish sources.

III

The following example may serve to illustrate the importance of reading the Gospels in terms of internal Jewish polemic and the various types of Rabbinic literature:³³

30. At the beginning of the chapter in Leviticus we read: "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord, your God am holy" (Lev. 19:12). The constant repetition of "I am the Lord" throughout the chapter hints, as it were, that one ought to try to imitate the Lord in every way.

31. Cf. (for the problem in general) in E.E. Urbach, "ha-Derashah ke-yesod ha-halakhah u-ba'ayat ha-sofrim", *Tarbiz* 27 (1948), p. 176. We also find traditions in which Jesus accuses the Pharisees of violating the Law for the sake of their "traditions" (as in Mark 7:9-13 and parallels). [There, too, Jesus' argument is grounded on an interpretation of Biblical verses: "For Moses said: 'Honor thy father and mother' and 'He who scorns (*meqallel*) his father or mother, let him die the death' (Exodus 21:17). But ye say: 'If a man shall say to his father or mother, it is korban, that is to say, a gift, whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, he shall be free.' And ye suffer him no more to do aught for his father or his mother" (Mark 7:10, 11).

In the New Testament text, the verse quoted, Ex. 21:17, was understood as implying one who *scorns or despises* his father or mother (See the dictionaries of Kittel and Bauer under the entry "καταλογέω"). Unlike the rabbinic *halakhic* sources, which understand the verse as referring only to one who *curse*s his father or mother, the Palestinian Targum (Vatican manuscript, 440) is similar to this interpretation (See E.B. Levine, "Parallels to Exodus of Pseudo-Jonathan in A. Diez Macho," *Neophity I*, Volume III, Madrid-Barcelona 1971, p. 547.) It seems that this passage in Mark emanates from a different circle (in the early Christian community). (For *qillel* in the meaning of "to scorn, to despise," see Biblical and Talmudic dictionaries and Avot de Rabbi Nathan: version B, Chapter 34, p. 76 (Schechter edition) and the comments of the late E.S. Rosenthal in Deut. R., (Lieberman edition, Jerusalem, 1974³, p. 139); and see also Ben-Sira 3:11.

32. It is extremely difficult to find a Midrashic basis for Matthew 5:21-26, especially as we cannot definitively identify the Biblical verse cited in Matthew 5:21.

33. For several examples, see, e.g. M. Smith, *The Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels*, Philadelphia, 1951.

In Matthew 23:16-22 there is an halakhic polemic of Jesus against the “scribes and Pharisees”³⁴ beginning with the words “woe unto you” (σῶται ὑμῖν) and discussing a certain law³⁵ using an inference *a minori ad majus* (*qal vaḥomer*). This is followed by other polemics (v. 23-27) which, in the parallel in Luke 11:43-49, are directed solely against the Pharisees. The unique feature of these disputes is their connection to the halakha. They all begin by mentioning a halakhic issue, such as impurity or tithes, and end with an ethical demand of Jesus. We see here a sophisticated rhetorical device. The polemic is disguised as a halakhic argument, “Woe unto you, Pharisees, who tithe the mint and the herbs”, whereas towards the end it reveals its true intent, namely, to assess the importance of the ritual halakha within religious life: “and have omitted justice and love of God. These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Similarly, the polemic about the inside and the outside of the cup and platter (Matthew 23:25-27; Luke 11:39-41) begins by discussing a halakhic problem and ends with a polemic symbolically referring to the internal and external *in man*.³⁶ Furthermore, Y. Baer³⁷ has suggested that the introductory expression “οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τῶς φαρισαίοις” is related to the expression in the Mishnah and Tosefta, at the end of Tractate Yadayim “The Sadducees say: ‘We cry out against you,³⁸ Pharisees, for you . . .’”.³⁹ Accordingly, we can discern here an argumentation using the style of current polemics between the Jewish sects at the end of the period of the Second Temple about halakhic *details*; but here this type of discussion is used to contest the importance of halakha when not accompanied by the fulfillment of moral duties.

Matthew, however, has an additional verse (v. 24) not found in parallels in the other Gospels: “ὁδηγοὶ τυφλοὶ οἱ διὑλίζοντες τὸν χῶνονπα τὴν δὲ κάμηλον

34. Cf. Luke 11:39; the chapter in Matthew is an extension of the text in Luke. It seems that Jesus' polemic was directed originally solely against the Pharisees. See also D.E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, Leiden, 1979, for an attempted analysis of this chapter in Matthew, and the bibliography there.

35. On this matter, see Lieberman, *Greek*, p. 134.

36. We find ethical sayings based on the halakha in rabbinic literature as well. See Tosefta, Demai 1:14 (Lieberman ed., New York 1955, Part L, p. 65) and Lieberman's commentary in *Tosefta Ki-feshutah*, New York, 1955, vol. 1, pp. 199-209.

37. See Y. Baer, “Leba'ayat demutah shel haYahadut ba'Evangelionim hasinoptiyim”, *Zion* 31 (1966), p. 127. Of course, this cannot serve as a proof for Baer's theory.

38. In the commentary of the Geonim on Tahorot attributed to Rav Hai Gaon, (J.N. Epstein edition, Book II, Berlin 1914), the word *qovlim* (“we cry out”) is explained “as it is written: and if he shall cry out to me” (Exodus 22:26) which is rendered in the Targum as “*arey yiqbal*”.

39. There is also a similarity in the style of argumentation in the halakhic polemic mentioned above (Matt. 23:16-22) and in Mishnah Yadayim, where the polemic is directed against the Sadducees (Mishnah, Yadayim 4:7), the “Galilean heretics” (*ibid.*, 4:8) and the “early morning dipper” (Tosefta Yadayim 2:20). All these polemics are directed against heterodoxical sects.

καταπίνοντες” (“Ye blind guides,⁴⁰ which strain at a gnat,⁴¹ and swallow a camel”). Strack-Billerbeck (see n. 1) cited a parallel source for that verse, dealing with the straining out of gnats, in the Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 67a. They ignored, however, a far more enlightening source — Tosefta, Terumot 7:11 (Lieberman edition, New York, 1955, v. I, p. 145): “It is permitted to drink wine or vinegar which contains gnats. If strained out, it is prohibited (to eat the gnats). Rabbi Judah says: ‘Whoever strains wine or vinegar and blesses the sun, this is a heretical way.’” In other words, the Jews were divided in their opinions regarding the straining of gnats even in the time of Rabbi Judah. Thus, we see that this fragmentary sentence in Matthew 23:24, like the other two “woe” verses, begins by mentioning a halakhic issue, condemning those who are rigorous in their observances and strain out gnats from wine and vinegar. It ends up condemning them for committing far more severe sins,⁴² indicated in the expression “swallowing the camel”.

Interestingly, the baraita in the Tosefta indicates that straining out gnats was not accepted among the Sages (i.e., the Pharisees) at all, and some considered it as a heterodoxy of a certain sect.⁴³ Lieberman⁴⁴ has demonstrated that this custom (and the other one mentioned by Rabbi Judah in the Tosefta) can be traced to the halakha of the Dead Sea Sect. He showed that members of the sect made sure not to swallow insects in liquids they drank (Damascus Covenant — XII: l. 11-13; Rabin edition, pp. 61-63). Perhaps, then, this argument of Jesus is directed not against the Pharisees, but against some other sect.

In any case, we have here an interesting illustration of the complexity of sources in the Gospel of Matthew. Only through knowledge of the literary and halakhic background of Judaism at the time of Jesus, can we achieve complete understanding of this fragmentary saying.

40. This is one of Matthew’s extended renderings in this chapter. Thus Luke 11:40 has ἄφρονες (fools) — a common epithet in rabbinic disputes, while Matthew 23:26 has φαρισαίε τυψιλῆ (“blind Pharisee”), and compare Matthew 23:12 — μωροὶ καὶ τυροὶ (“blind men and fools”) and Matthew 23:19.

41. See Strack-Billerbeck on Matthew 23:24. See also W.F. Bauer, W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1957, s.v. κῶνωφ, p. 463.

42. the contrast gnat-camel, flea-camel, etc. is common in rabbinic literature. See for example Strack-Billerbeck on Matthew 5:24; cf. *Genesis Rabba*, Theodore-Albeck ed., Jerusalem, 1965, p. 38, line 5 and footnote.

43. Lieberman drew this conclusion from the proximity of two laws in such radically different fields in the saying of Rabbi Judah.

44. *Ibid.*

Recently, S. Safrai and D. Flusser have shown⁴⁵ how the source of a saying of the Gospels may be preserved in Amoraitic literature. They showed that the homily of the servant and his two masters (Luke 16:13 and parallels) is found in Ruth Rabba 3:⁴⁶ “The servant is free from his masters’ (*ma-adonav*) — man, as long as he lives, is a servant to two inclinations (another version: masters), a servant to his creator (*yošro*) and a servant to his passion (*yišro*). When he performs the will of his Creator, he angers his passion and when he performs the will of his passion, he angers his Creator. Once he is dead, he emerges into freedom.” Safrai and Flusser assume that “passion” (*yešer*) in the early homily is identical with “Mammon”. The early date of this Amoraitic Midrash is supported by a passage in the Testament of Judah, which already has been compared with the New Testament. The passage says that whoever bears a love for money and a desire for women “is a slave to two contrary passions and cannot obey God⁴⁷”. (δουαί’ γὰ’ρ πᾶθεσιν ἐναντίοις δουλεύει καὶ θεῷ ἀποκοῦσαι οὐ δάναται). Thus, we learn that in some circles, at an early date, a saying on the two passions (*πᾶθεσιν*) and the worship of God was combined with negative views on money (Mammon).

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45. S. Safrai and D. Flusser, “The Slave of Two Masters”, *Immanuel* 6 (1976), pp. 30-33.

46. According to M.B. Lerner, *Agadat Ruth uMidrash Ruth Rabba* (dissertation), Jerusalem, 1971, vol. 2, pp. 80-81.

47. Testament of Judah 18:16. In other versions we find “δουαί’ γὰ’ρ πᾶθεσιν ἐναντίοις τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (δουλεύων)” — “for two passions (love of money and women) are contrary to the Commandments of God”. For variant readings, see R.H. Charles, *The Greek Version of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 1908, p. 94. Charles, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Translated from the Editor’s Greek Text*, etc., London, 1908, ad loc.; idem, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha . . . II*, Oxford, 1913, p. 321 pointed out the New Testament parallel to this verse.