
FAQ

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Talmud

J.K. McKee revised 13 August, 2019

What is your position concerning the Talmud?

The two Talmuds, the Babylonian Talmud and the smaller Jerusalem Talmud, both compose several centuries of Rabbinic gemara or commentary on the Mishnah. The Mishnah was composed by approximately 200 C.E. and makes up what is considered to be the Oral Torah. According to Jewish tradition, two Torahs were given to Moses on Mount Sinai: the Written Torah (the Pentateuch or Chumash), as well as the Oral Torah or explanations on how to perform the Written Torah's commandments. In Orthodox Judaism today, both the Written Torah and Oral Torah hold equal status. In non-Orthodox Judaisms, they comprise the basis of Jewish custom and tradition.

The overall Messianic position on the Talmud varies from congregation to congregation. Many agree that the Oral Torah should be given an equal footing with the Written Torah. Others want nothing to do with the Oral Torah and believe that only the Written Torah should be followed. Then again, there are many who fall somewhere in between, recognizing the primacy of the Written Torah, but not discounting the customs and traditions that the Oral Torah represents. This group would recognize that the Mishnah and Talmud contain the "oracles of God" (Romans 3:2), but would urge that we also look for what is spiritually edifying in them employing proper discernment, casting aside those things that clearly are not good (Philippians 4:8).

We would not elevate the Oral Torah or Oral Law over the Written Torah or Pentateuch (what is contained in Genesis-Deuteronomy), but believe that it is a mistake to totally cast it aside. The Mishnah and Talmud, in particular, are valuable sources of commentary, historical data, and spiritually edifying material. They are perfectly valid to use as secondary resources to supplement one's understanding of the Bible. At the same time, the Mishnah and Talmuds are also broad-sweeping collections of literature, so one should expect (particularly with the Talmud) there to be some internal inconsistencies and differences of opinion among Rabbis.

The easiest way to employ the Talmud in your Bible study is to note Talmudic references in a technical commentary as you examine the text verse-by-verse. Some ecumenical study Bibles like the *Jewish Study Bible* or *New Interpreter's Study Bible* have Talmudic references sprinkled in their commentary. The most popular English edition available is the Soncino Talmud. Judaic scholar Jacob Neusner has also edited his own modern English version.