

# The Natzari Yeshua vs. The Karaite Yeshua

A critical review and correction of Nehemia Gordon's,  
"The Hebrew Yeshua vs. The Greek Jesus"

By Shliha Yeremyah

## The Premise

Does the founder of the Nazarenes, Rabbi Yeshua tell us to disregard those who sit in the seat of Moses? Did he reject all man-made customs and Jewish traditions? Karaite Nehemia Gordon proposes that this is exactly what an obscure medieval Hebrew translation of Matthew 23:3 says.

## Ignorance + Agenda = Hogwash

Nehemia Gordon starts off by admitting he knows virtually nothing about the New Testament or the Messiah it purports. Yet he does not hesitate to expound on the finer points of either, causing many to accept him as an authority on these topics. Ironically, Gordon attempts to decide this matter for us, and thus sits in the judgment seat. Rood claims on pg. xv in his introduction that Nehemia actually did sit on the seat of Moses, in the ruins of the synagogue in Chorazin, while presenting his findings! Thus the irony begins.

Although Gordon boasts degrees in archaeology and biblical studies, a thorough knowledge of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a background in Pharisaic Judaism, his ignorance concerning some obvious and well known features of these subjects has bewildered many critics and readers. Is he the right man for the job?

"I was not familiar with the concept of "Moses seat" and asked Michael [Rood] what it meant."-pg. 2

In his footnotes on pg. 3, Gordon presents a myriad of Jewish references, both archaeological and literary, to the seat of Moses, as well as several artefacts. He even claims it is well known!

"It is a basic Pharisaic doctrine that the Rabbis have the authority of Moses. This is expressed in the well-known Mishnaic account about the dispute between Rabban

Gamaliel II and Rabbi Joshua." -pg. 3

"...I was raised an Orthodox Rabbinical Jew, in essence a modern day Pharisee."  
- pg. 3

How is it that he has no knowledge of such a well-known concept in academic and rabbinical Judaism, both ancient and modern? Apparently it is well known to every Jew except Nehemia Gordon. Even here, Gordon misrepresents the Mishnaic account since it clearly does not support nor imply that all Rabbis have the authority of Moses, but that regardless of whether a judge is a rabbi or not, those who sit upon the seat of Moses have authority to decide matters.

Even more surprising is that being a Karaite, and thus supposedly highly focused on the Torah itself, how can he claim ignorance of the commandments concerning the seat of Moses, his court, and his authority and Israel's obligation to obey his rulings? First one should know that Karaites do not traditionally follow these commandments of Torah, unlike some of the Jewish sects they accuse of not observing Torah.

"At first I told Michael that as a Karaite I stick to the Tanach and therefore I did not really have an opinion on the matter." - pg. 2

"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." - Exodus 18:13

"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." - Exodus 18:16

Gordon's view of Judaism implies that, outside of his sect, it is completely unified and monolithic in tradition, custom, interpretation and structure. According to Gordon there was only ever one kind of Pharisee, the bad kind. These are ignorant perceptions, and it is hard to believe that any former university educated Orthodox Jew could hold them. There are various independent Jewish sects and sub-sects with their own independent rabbinical courts, rulings and halacha. The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that there were two prominent and very different Pharisaic schools, that of Shammai and Hillel. It also reveals that there were seven types of Pharisees, five of them considered hypocritical and problematic, and the remaining two were upright - without being uptight.

Gordon may be qualified to translate and mull over the origins of manuscripts, and discuss the Judaisms he is familiar with - as he did manage to get up to speed, at least on the seat of Moses. However, for the disciples of Rabbi Yeshua, Gordon is not qualified to explain doctrine concerning the Messiah or his kingdom. When I asked him about the Peshitta, perhaps the most significant piece of Aramaic literature, the Nazarene scriptures for 2000 years, he did not know what I was referring to. Gordon

does not even yet recognize that Yeshua is a Rabbi, or that he founded a Jewish sect called Nazarenes to which all his disciples belonged. To him, Yeshua is still the founder of Christianity, albeit he realises that Yeshua was much more pro-Torah than he had previously assumed.

My exceptional disappointment with Gordon's study began right from the cover of the book, and continued on every page from front to back. It isn't my intention to judge whether the disastrous scholarship is because of the ineptitude or integrity of author, but whether his claims hold up under scrutiny.

### **Throwing the Baby Out With the Bathwater**

Although many have emphasized the wayward hypocritical Pharisees, the New Testament reveals that Rabbi Yeshua had sympathetic Pharisee supporters and followers. For example Gamaliel (Acts 5), Nicodemus (John 3), Joseph of Arimathea, Paul (Acts 23), and a group of Pharisees (Luke 13:31) another group (Acts 15). Thus both the Jerusalem Talmud and New Testament portray roughly the same variances and ratio of good and bad Pharisees. Therefore, we are not required to reject everything a Pharisee says, just because they are a Pharisee. So we certainly do not have to reject the seat of Moses just because a Pharisee sat there at one time in the past.

"The implication is that a true follower of Yeshua would need to do whatever the Pharisees taught, in order to faithfully obey Yeshua's instructions." - pg. 3

The true implication is to do whatever those who sit on the seat of Moshe say, regardless of who they are, since Yeshua was known to not be a respecter of persons, not necessarily whatever the Pharisees or Rabbis say. Gordon totally misrepresents what Rabbis believed concerning the seat of Moses. see Gordon's footnote #4 pg. 3 (Mishnah, Rosh Hashannah 2:9)

Gordon holds heavy consequences over the heads of his readers for believing and following the traditional version Matthew 23:3. He reasons that Yeshua's followers would thus be obligated to observe every rabbinical ruling, custom, interpretation, etc. invoked over the past 2000 years. This reveals his ignorance concerning the nature of Orthodox Judaism, which does not require anyone to do any such thing. Gordon is totally oblivious to the fact that Yeshua established his own court, invested with the supreme authority he himself received from YHWH, to sit and judge from the seat of Moses. This would mean that his followers would only have to abide by the rulings of Yeshua and his appointed apostles over the past 2000 years, and not those of any another sect, let alone the unbelieving Pharisees.

The consequences of ignoring the authority of those who sit upon the seat of Moses, as Gordon would have us do, is a rejection of the authority and rulings of the

apostles, and Rabbi Yeshua. Further consequences of accepting Shem Tob as the authoritative Matthew is that one would have to accept all the spurious readings and rabbinical/Pharisaical innovations incorporated into the text. Gordon thus short-circuits his premise by insisting that the rabbinical revision of Matthew is the correct one.

Gordon asks a question to which he claims was never answered satisfactorily.

"When I asked to see where God tells us to obey the Rabbis I was told to stop asking so many questions." - pg. 9

Well Nehemia, here is your answer from the Torah.

"And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, [to] the right hand, nor [to] the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel." - Devarim (Deuteronomy) 17:9-12, JPS

Gordon wants us to believe that Rabbi Yeshua tells his followers that they do not have to obey the teaching of a rabbi. How could Rabbi Yeshua then expect his followers to obey his teachings? Besides, Matthew 23:3 says nothing about rabbis it is talking about judges. There never was any commandment to obey or not to obey Pharisees in the Torah, however we are to obey the judges, regardless if they are Rabbis, Pharisees, Karaites, or Nazarenes. Since YHWH appointed the Nazarene Rabbi to the seat of Moses and gave him all authority to judge and select his court, then we are obligated to follow the rulings of Yeshua The Messiah and his council.

The primary purposes of the court as stated in the Torah is adjudication, legislation, and education regarding the law of YHWH. Moses spent his time settling legal disputes, not inventing new traditions. The apostles were given the same responsibilities and power to tighten or loosen the interpretation of the Torah, judge legal cases, and thus free or convict sinners.

**The True Origin of Shem Tob's Matthew**

A Spanish Jew by the full name of Shem Tob ben Isaac ben Shaprut wrote Eben Bohem (The Touchstone) in the Middle Ages, a kind of 'Christianity for Dummies' book which included an annotated version of the gospel of Matthew in Hebrew.

The back cover of Gordon's book contains an inexcusable error, that the Shem Tob Matthew is "ancient" while the Greek manuscripts are relatively "modern". This is completely backwards. The Greek manuscripts (which are monolithic on Matthew 23:3) are from the 300-400s c.e. and the Shem Tob from 1300-1400s c.e. making the Hebrew Matthew 1000 years more modern than the Greek! This propaganda is further perpetuated on pgs. 37 & 45 where Gordon implies that George Howard, who translated Shem Tob into English, believes Shem Tob preserves an ancient Hebrew original.

"Shem Tob's Matthew, as printed above, does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages. Considerable parts of the original, however, appear to remain, including its unpolished style, ungrammatical constructions, and Aramaized forms"- George Howard

"I conclude...that the textual affinities of Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew strongly suggests that this text predates the fourteenth century. It is replete with readings reflected in diverse ancient traditions, some of which were lost in antiquity. These include Codex Sinaiticus, manuscripts used by Eusebius in Caesarea, the Old Syriac and the Old Latin versions, the Lucan version of Q, the Gospel of John, the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, the Pseudo-Clementine writings, the Tol'dot Yeshua, and the Protoevangelium of James." pg. 211, "Hebrew Gospel of Matthew", George Howard

It seems that Gordon has fundamentally misinterpreted Howard's statements, like the one above, about Shem Tob's Matthew predating the 14th century, as meaning it originates in Hebrew, from the earliest Christian centuries. Howard apparently only means that Shem Tob's Hebrew sources are from perhaps a few centuries earlier, which in turn are based upon ancient Greek and Latin traditions.

"I do not know when Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew dates or where it was created. ... I do not write "Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew must be traced to the early centuries of the Christian era."- A Response to William L. Petersen's Review of Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, George Howard, University of Georgia 1999

"...gives the impression that the purpose of my book is to prove that Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew dates to circa 100 C.E.. What I have argued is that a Shem-Tob type Matthean text (not Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew per se) has roots in an early period of Christian history; I do not presume that Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew goes back to early times. This is a text that has been revised repeatedly, has taken on much

textual baggage during transmission, and is probably no more than a dim reflection of a prior tradition. I am unsure what this prior tradition amounts to, whether a complete gospel or simply an undefined source. But, whatever the case, the point of this book is simply to demonstrate that the tradition lying behind Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew predates the fourteenth century, perhaps by several centuries. Nothing more!" -A Response to William L. Petersen's Review of Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, George Howard, University of Georgia 1999

"I show that Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew belongs to a process of textual evolution within a Jewish Hebrew milieu that began in earlier times and culminated in du Tillet in the sixteenth century, or possibly later if other text forms are to be taken into consideration. ... The similarity of Shem-Tob's text of Matthew with the quotations of Matthew in the earlier Hebrew polemical works shows that Shem-Tob's text preserves an already existing Hebrew Matthean tradition that had been in the process of evolution for an unknown period of time."- George Howard, translator of the Shem Tob's Matthew

"Earlier than 900 is unlikely, because of the uniqueness of many of the readings (which are restricted to Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew and the Liège Harmony), and their high-medieval character (the glosses). (Put differently: if this Latin Vorlage were much earlier, then these distinctive readings would be much more widespread within the Western harmony tradition.) Later than 1300 is unlikely, for we know that this Latin tradition must have been in existence by the date of the copying of the Liège Harmony (ca. 1280)." - William L. Peterson - Pennsylvania State University

So Howard, and his critics, believe that the first Hebrew translations of Matthew were made in the Middle Ages from available Greek, Latin, and/or Syriac sources. These were subsequently revised many times until we arrive at the late revision of Shem Tob's in the 14th century c.e. Gordon frames Howard's statements within his own context to make them appear to support the notion of Hebrew primacy. In reality, Howard offers no intentional support of Gordon's theory. Rather, he completely deflates it.

Gordon makes appeals to the ancient type of Hebrew found in Shem Tob as evidence of Hebrew primacy, however, Howard explains why and how Hebrew documents generated in the medieval times would be expected to utilize Hebrew from the Biblical era.

"If it were a matter of an original Jewish composition in the late Middle Ages, one would expect BH [Biblical Hebrew] or even archaic BH to play a dominant role, as is the case with most texts written during this time" - pg. 178, Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, George Howard 1995

Shem Tob's non-Hebraic origin is exposed in Matthew 1:23 where the Hebrew term Emmanuel is accompanied by an interpretive statement that was interpolated by the

author for the benefit of a non-Hebrew readership. Why would it be necessary to tell the reader that you are translating a single word from Hebrew, when every word in the book is, supposedly, Hebrew? The answer is because the text did not originate in the Hebrew language. It only makes sense to interpret a Hebrew name that appears in the middle of a Greek or Aramaic text. These same kind of side-notes can be found in many English translations of Matthew, explaining the meaning of Aramaic names, which would not be necessary if they were merely copies or revisions of the original text in its original language.

pg. 65 Gordon's Hebrew reads exactly the same as the Aramaic Peshitta in Matthew 5:35-37 where it says "swear falsely". Is this not support for an Aramaic original, even the Peshitta?

pg. 77 Gordon points to Papias as suggesting that Matthew was originally written in the "Hebrew language". However other historians such as Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, have said it was composed in "Hebrew letters", others ambiguously "in Hebrew". Aramaic was also written with Hebrew letters, and a Greek who was not well trained in Hebrew and Aramaic both, would not be able to distinguish the two. In fact the Talmud, which was composed in Aramaic, was written in Hebrew letters. If Matthew was originally written in Aramaic, these non-Jewish writers would have called it "Hebrew" anyways.

"The same designation is frequently used by Hellenistic authors to denote the Aramaic language spoken at a later time by the "Hebrews," as the Jews were called by non-Jewish writers. ...More frequently, however, the language is called in later Jewish literature "the Holy Tongue," to distinguish it from the Aramaic vernacular..." - Jewish Encyclopedia re: "Hebrew language"

Strangely, Rood's bible for many years was based upon the Aramaic Peshitta, but he switched to the Masonic King James Version about the time he set out to form his own ministry in the mid-nineties. Well that isn't totally accurate either. Michael also likes to re-mix the KJV with the MIV (whatever that is) with his own made up words into what some might refer to as a Frankenstein Version. When it comes to accurately quoting scriptures, Rood is like a modern day loosey goosey Shem Tob!

Shem Tob's Matthew has no value for those seeking the original form of the gospel, but perhaps is of interest to those who want to understand the Jewish medieval polemical view of Christianity in western Europe. Without Howard's support, upon which Gordon's theory heavily rests, we are left to grasping snowflakes that quickly dissipate upon examination.

Please be sure to read the [Natzari translation of the Aramaic Peshitta Matthew](#) in English.

**All Or Nothing**

If the Shem Tob is to be the new authoritative Matthew, then we should also accept its other conventions, such as the insulting name "Yeshu", for the blessed Messiah. This is an acronym from the book Tol'dot Yeshu which means; "let his name and memory be blotted out". Understandably Gordon is pretty quiet about this feature lest he immediately lose his audience. Another difference is that John the Baptist seems to be portrayed as the saviour of the world in Matthew 17:11.

"In summary, this series of readings asserts that none is greater than John, the prophets and the law spoke concerning John, John (Elijah) is to save all the world, and Jesus' own disciples are disgraced for not having believed John. In traditional Christianity such a description is usually applied to Jesus. Its application to John the Baptist in Shem Tob's Hebrew, elevates the Baptist to a salvific (salvation) role." - Professor George Howard, translator of the Shem Tob's Matthew

Further proof that Shem Tob's Matthew is radically altered is that it interpolates entire sections from other gospels (Mark 19:20-28 between Matthew 17:17 and 17:19), even dropping some verses completely (17:18). Who is ready to start accepting the whole of Shem Tob's Matthew? Gordon realises that no one is ready to take such a leap. He proposes that the portions that disagree with the Greek are the most reliable, and harken back to an original Hebrew autograph. But how would we know for sure? If we were to employ this hermeneutic, it would produce a Matthew that is totally foreign to anyone.

"So when Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew is identical to our modern Greek text, we can learn nothing new; it could just be a "correction" from the Greek. But when Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew differs from the Greek text it may contain "original readings" which were lost in the Greek." - pg. 45, The Hebrew Yeshua vs. The Greek Jesus

Some of the most damaging statements unique to this version is that apparently the message of Yeshua is "AntiChrist"! Since this passage varies from the Greek, Gordon suggests it may reflect the original reading. Oy!

"And this gospel, that is, evungili, will be preached In all the earth for a witness concerning me to all the nations and then the end will come. This is the Anti-Christ and this is the abomination which desolates which was spoken of by Daniel [as] standing in the holy place." - Matthew 24:14 Shem Tob

pg. 29 Gordon implies that (Matthew 15:1-3) traditions of the elders were pronounced from the seat of Moses. This is not true as the purpose of the seat of Moses was not to transmit traditions but to render legal decisions and teach the Torah. These traditions arose outside of the courts among the community. This is why Yeshua was never taken to court or charged with any crime for not ritually

washing his hands, because it was never considered to be a law, but merely a tradition.

pg. 35 Gordon claims that the phrase "and it was" could not possibly be an Aramaism but only a Hebraism. However he is mistaken as this also occurs fluently in the Aramaic Peshitta. See examples Matthew 7:28, Mark 1:9, Luke 1:23.

### **Puns As Proof?**

"In a segment called, "Linguistic Characteristics of the Hebrew Text," I give a brief description of the linguistic nature of the Hebrew text of Shem-Tob's Matthew. I offer this material (consecutive tenses, non-consecutive tenses, infinitives, pronouns, and vocabulary) merely to acquaint the reader with the type of Hebrew employed in the text. In no way do I use this material to argue for the date of the Hebrew text or for anything else. It is pure description." - A Response to William L. Petersen's Review of Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, George Howard, University of Georgia 1999

Gordon defies Howard's intentions and abuses these descriptions in attempt to create the impression that Shem Tob could not have possibly originated from a Greek text. If a text is allowed to be as whimsically and liberally altered as Shem Tob's, and not restrained to a more literal translation, one can find plenty of room to insert new Hebraisms.

pg. 39 Gordon insists that puns are not required to project any kind of message, and indeed his examples appear meaningless. But even if that were so, Yeshua's word plays were always meaningful, not random and without purpose.

Identifying a pun is a rather subjective art more than it is a science. Merely finding two similar sounding terms in close proximity does not amount to a pun. The terms must interrelate meaningfully on some level, so that they amount to something more than a mere rhyme or echo.

"The humorous use of a word or phrase so as to emphasize or suggest its different meanings or applications, or the use of words that are alike or nearly alike in sound but different in meaning; a play on words." - Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)

"A play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words." - American Heritage Dictionary

A legitimate example of a play on words from the Aramaic Peshitta would be between Mathew 16:1-3. Here, Yeshua mocks the name of the Pharisees which means (the discerners, interpreters, distinguishers, parsers, etc.) because of their inability to discern or interpret the signs of the times.

"And the **Prisha** and the Zäduqäya came to him to tempt him, and asked him to show them a sign from heaven. Then he answered, and said to them, When evening comes you say it will be pleasant weather, because the sky is red. And at dawn you say, it will be stormy weather for the sky is red and overcast. You two-faced. For you know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you do not know how to **discern** (prisha) the signs of these times."

Such plays on words are lost in the Greek and Latin translations and also the Hebrew Shem Tob, because it is originally based upon the Greek and Latin. Matthew 16:18, while being a superior example of a play on words, is far too obvious so that all a translator has to do is change the term with whatever means "rock" in their target language.

"Moreover, the style of the Hebrew, including instances of wordplay and assonance, might seem to reflect an originally Hebrew composition. These characteristics should probably not, however, be interpreted as vestiges of an ante-Nicene or even first-century Hebrew gospel." - Matthew 19-28: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew (International Critical Commentary Series) by W. D. Davies and Dale C., Jr. Allison

pg. 40 Regarding Matthew 9:8, Gordon trumpets in footnote 42 that the juxtaposition of two occurrences of virayu in the verse proves Shem Tob's Matthew could not be from a Greek source. However an independent Hebrew translation of the Aramaic Peshitta, (The New Covenant Aramaic Peshitta Text With Hebrew Translation, by the Jerusalem Bible Society,) reproduces exactly the same "word play" in exactly the same place. This shows that it is merely a coincidence and that the source of Shem Tob's Matthew is not necessarily or entirely a Hebrew one.

pg. 42 Gordon asks why Shem Tob would bother to beautify the text with puns. The answer is that he didn't, but rather the text was already beautified. That is, if we can even consider these to be true word plays and not mere random coincidences. No one actually knows the source of his text, but it is certainly possible that a Christian independently attempted to create a Hebrew translation for Jewish proselytes, or by a Jewish proselyte himself.

### **John: One of the Prophets or the Subject of the Prophets?**

"For all the prophets and the Torah up to Yuhänän have prophesied." - Matthew 11:13, Peshitta

pg. 43 Who says that Matthew 11:13 doesn't make sense? It may not make sense to Gordon, but it makes perfect sense if interpreted correctly. Here is how Gordon inserts new words, and thus new ideas, (which do not occur in any version of Matthew) into the scriptures that misdirect the reader.

"Here in black and white the Greek Matthew says that the Tanach was not talking about Yeshua; the Tanach only prophesied up until John the Baptist while Yeshua's ministry was not foretold by the Tanach." - pg. 43

Rather, this is an inclusive statement, that ALL the prophets and Torah INCLUDING John have all prophesied in a unified manner, concerning what - it doesn't matter. The purpose of this statement is to identify Yuchanan among the prophets, and does not directly tell us what they did, or did not, prophesy about. It is not saying the prophets prophesied ABOUT John, as the word is not present. It is describing a period of active prophets, not the subject of their prophecies.

"The Hebrew text makes more sense. The Hebrew is saying that throughout the Tanach there are references to a prophet such as John the Baptist.." - pg. 43

On the contrary, Shem Tob introduces confusion where there was clarity and logic previously. Take for example Matthew 19:22 where Shem Tob's rich man "went away angry because he did not have much property". It only makes sense if for the rich man to be upset if he had much to lose, as all other sources say.

pg. 44 Argument made for ed vs. el works for an Aramaic primacy as well. (Matthew 11:13)

pg. 44 footnote 53 re: Shem Tob's note on Matthew 21:5 states that his source has a male ass (XMRH), but the Aramaic Peshitta has a common or female ass (XMRA). However these may be reversed in Hebrew where the female is XMRH.

pg. 45 footnote 54 Howard says;

"Shem-Tob's Matthew, as printed above, does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages. Considerable parts of the original, however, appear to remain, including its unpolished style, ungrammatical constructions, and Aramaized forms"

The fact that it contains Aramaized forms suggests that there was an underlying Aramaic source.

pg. 45 No examples of Greek forms are provided, they may just be loan words. His premise is completely faulty; that the correct reading is the one that disagrees with the Greek, as if the Greek is always mistranslated. This is completely irresponsible.

pg. 47 Gordon speaks of looking "in the Hebrew text of Matthew" as if there is only one unified Hebrew tradition to examine. In fact there are 9 copies of Shem Tob. One is missing the passage, six of them say "they", one says "he" and it has a copy. Why does he choose this one odd copy with an errant reading? Rather than

reasonably assuming that only one manuscript, and its subsequent copies, might contain an error, he implies that every Greek and Aramaic manuscript contains the error. The only way this could happen is that the error was made in the very first and only Greek translation of the Hebrew original. Then every known Matthew in every language in the world for all time copied this error. However most scholars believe that several independent copies or translations were made from original sources, which accounts for many various readings. Aramaic primacists believe that various first generation translations were made into Greek, easily explaining many of the lateral variants, and their subsequent copies. This would make a universal error among all Greek manuscript families very difficult.

pg. 48 Matthew 23:3 the phrase ...according to their reforms (takanot) and their precedents (meshim)... replaces "works/actions" (edah). (Takanot in Aramaic means "integrity".) This is a free revision not found in any Greek or any other text. The introduction of an entirely new phrase shows that the author was in the middle of freely revising the text as he saw fit.

pg. 48 The faulty logic that Yeshua criticized the Pharisees for not following their own takanot and meshim, but tells his disciples to do the same thing. Making Yeshua the hypocrite. For they say/issue (takanot and meshim) but they do not do it. Really?! The Pharisees did not practice their own takanot and meshim??

pg. 48 What Greek translator is Gordon talking about?

pg. 48 A more plausible explanation is that merely one scribe, while copying The Touchstone, accidentally left a single letter "waw" unwritten. Consider that there are 6 other copies, in two different manuscript families where it is included. Gordon wants us to believe that several incredible things happened. First, that not one Greek translator of the "original Hebrew" failed to add a letter waw to the word yomar. Occasionally letters are added or dropped by accident, but all at the same exact spot, and all adding and not taking away?! What are the odds? Also that all but one copyist made the same bizarre mistake as the Greek translators 1500 years earlier. Also that the early Greek Christians did this in spite of having very anti-Jewish and anti-Torah sentiments? Not only that, but the supposed translators into Aramaic committed the same mistake as well?

pg. 48 Gordon insists that the Hebrew version has Yeshua teaching obedience to Moses, or the Torah. But if we were to obey the Torah, then we have to obey the commandment to follow what those who sit in the seat of Moses say. Either way, we still end up having to obey those who sit in the seat of Moses. The Karaites escape this loop by simply ignoring the Torah and doing away with the commandment, and this is the most likely reason Gordon was not familiar with the concept of the seat of Moses in the first place.

pg. 48 Let's say that the correct version is "Therefore, all that he says to you, diligently do, ..." how do we know that "he" (Moses) is metonymous for the Torah and not for the judge? One clue might be that since Torah is feminine (she) and judge (shopat or dan) is masculine (he), that it refers to the judge that sits in the seat of Moses. Besides, a judge is more akin to Moses than the Torah. The Torah is never referred to anywhere else in the Tanach or New Testament as a "he". Also, Moses is never referred to anywhere else in Shem Tob's Matthew as saying or commanding in the imperfect tense. Rather the verbs are always in the perfect tense eg. 8:4, 19:7, 22:24 with 23:3 being the only exception, and only in one copy. For these reasons, Shem Tob's Hebrew, doesn't agree with Hebrew.

pg. 50 Matthew 15:3 Peshitta has shalem not takanot as in the Shem Tov.

pg. 50 Peshitta Matthew 15:9 also matches Peshitta Isaiah 29:13, so if it qualifies the Shem Tob Matthew it also qualifies the Peshitta Matthew.

pg. 51 Gordon claims that manuscript C mostly escaped harmonizing revisions that the rest suffered in order to conform them to the Greek, and that the changing from he to they was one of those key revisions. Of course there is no way to prove such an allegation.

pg. 51 A major backfire if Yeshua's criticism is that the Pharisees do not follow their own ma'asim or "precedents". Obviously it is being implied that the proper thing to do is to follow the ma'asim. But wait a minute, ....

pg. 52 Faulty logic that Yeshua taught that the Torah covers all situations and simply told his disciples to only look to the Torah for answers and not rabbis. After all, Yeshua was a Rabbi himself.

### **Creating Support from 2 Kings 17:34**

pg. 56 Gordon attempts to rearrange 2 Kings 17:34 in order to find support for rearranging Matthew 23:3.

"Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law or after the commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom He name Israel," - Jewish Publication Society 1917

Gordon mangles the parsing of the Hebrew so that it makes no sense at all. His slight of hand trick is dropping the conjunction (and/or) between the two clauses so that he can cut and paste one of them where he likes. The Aramaic Peshitta makes it much harder for him to accomplish this trick.

"To such a degree today that they are divorced to YHWH and they do according to the customs of the ignorant, their first customs, the abominations of the pagans, and they do not fear YHWH, and they do not according to the covenant, and according to the judgements, and according to the customs, and according to the commandments that He commanded, YHWH to the sons of Yaqub Whom He named the name *Æisræyl*," - Peshitta

This is how it reads in the Peshitta without rearranging any of the clauses. Other than being guilty of run-on sentencing, this Aramaic passage is so naturally congenial to English grammar that such manipulation is unnecessary and unwarranted. Each of the conjunctive clauses here has an equal relationship to the negative adverb (not). Lifting one or more of these clauses out of sequence and inserting them before the negative adverb will reverse their meaning. Let's see what the result of Gordon's transplant surgery would be on the Peshitta.

"To such a degree today that they are divorced to YHWH and they do according to the customs of the ignorant, their first customs, the abominations of the pagans, <according to the covenant, and according to the judgements,>and they do not fear YHWH, and they do not >< and according to the customs, and according to the commandments that He commanded, YHWH to the sons of Yaqub Whom He named the name *Aeisraeyl*," - per Gordon's modification

There are numerous problems with this arrangement, for example we have a hanging conjunction, a scar, that Gordon just simply eliminates. We then have to explain what covenant and judgments did the Samaritans have before. How are the abominations of the pagans according to the covenant? Keeping it in context we learn that this is none other than the covenant referenced again in verses 35 & 37 in the Peshitta. By continuing on in the Masoretic text (below) we see the exact same unbroken, ordered grouping of clauses, all again clearly attributed as originating from YHWH.

"Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law or after the commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom He name Israel, with whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying: 'Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them; but the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, Him shall ye fear, and Him shall ye worship, and to Him shall ye sacrifice; and the statutes and the ordinances, and the law and the commandment, which He wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods; but the LORD your God shall ye fear; and he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.' Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner." - v.34-40

Put back into context, would-be manipulators are denied any wiggle-room. Gordon

wants us to believe the statutes and ordinances (or the covenant and the judgments according to the Peshitta) originated with the pagan Samaritans and the law and commandments originated with YHWH. But the natural reading indicates that all these things originated from YHWH. We do not read about any covenant, judgments, statutes, or ordinances of the Samaritans in this passage or any other. This is not to say they could not have some sort of legal system, but even if they did, the grammar of the Masoretic text claims they did not follow it.

The problem is that the third person plural possessive case (their statutes, their ordinances) is out of place. It does not occur in the Peshitta but does occur in the Masoretic and Septuagint. However, the Septuagint does not contain the negative adverb (not) and gives us yet another unique and stumbling version.

"To this day they were acting according to their judgment. They fear and they act according to their statutes and according to their judgment and according to the law and according to the commandment that the Lord commanded the sons of Iakob him who name he made Israel." - v.34 New English Translation of the Septuagint 2007

What is the point of having two exact and unnecessary copies of the same clause in one verse, unless it was accidental? It appears that the scribe may have made a dittographical error, having skipped over the line "not the LORD and neither did" and repeating the clause "according to their judgment".

What is really being said in the Peshitta is that in mixing their worship they were actually not honouring YHWH, since His covenant of statutes, ordinances, law and commandments forbids such mixing. I believe this verse is a clarification of the previous verse (v.33) which already tells us about the mixed worship, so that the reader knows that in mixing their worship they were not really fearing YHWH.

## **Karaite Contradictions**

pg. 59 Gordon does not appear to be aware of his contradiction when he states "Yeshua was saying ... the Pharisees have their own statutes and judgments which they follow, while at the same time they talk Torah but they do not do Torah." Yeshua only asked us to "do what they say", so if they are talking Torah, what is the problem? This is pretty much what the Greek and Aramaic text says anyways, and now here we have Gordon saying it. So what is going on here? Is it a contest between Karaite agenda and the obvious truth?

How can Yeshua in one breath condemn the notion of rabbinical Judaism, and the issuing of commandments when in the verses following Matthew 23:3 he prohibits roles and titles, reserving the role and title of rabbi for himself alone (23:8)? This would portray Rabbi Yeshua as a grand hypocrite himself.

In order to be consistent, Gordon must also argue that we must not respect our elders, even though the Torah commands it in Leviticus 19:32, because after all, Yeshua blamed the elders for useless traditions in Matthew 15:2-3. How many times are we going to allow a Karaite attempt to lead us away from Torah?

Gordon points out that Shem Tov's Touchstone, which contains his version of Matthew, was designed to equip Jews to participate in the disputations with Christians. Why would the "Pharisee," Shem Tov, introduce Christians to such devastating new ammunition that could be used against rabbinical Judaism? This would give his opponents an advantage that they would otherwise never have gleaned from their Greek texts. This is more evidence to support a scribal error as the origin of this variant, which was made while making copies of Touchstone.

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." - 2 John 1:7, KJV

On Gordon's website under FAQs we read...

"Do Karaites believe in Jesus? No."

and...

"As a Karaite Jew I do not believe in Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth" [karaites-usa.org/nehemias\\_book.htm](http://karaites-usa.org/nehemias_book.htm)

Perhaps he should change it to say; "We only believe in Jesus when we can find an obscure manuscript where he conveniently says something supportive of our beliefs. It's an on again off again relationship. Whenever he expresses Karaite nuances he is our associate, when he supports rabbinical Judaism, he is untrustworthy." Well you can't have your cake and eat it too.

Likewise, Rood's superficial treatment, or rather neglect of Yeshua's message of salvation and conversion throughout his seminars and materials, is only punctuated with carefully selected references that support his agenda. For these two, Yeshua is merely a disposable novelty. His salvation certainly has never been their central focus or concern.

## **Matthew 16:12**

"Then they understood that he did not say to be aware of the yeast of the bread, but of the teaching of the Prisha and Zäduqäya." - Peshitta

"beware of the behavior of the Pharisees..." - Shem Tov

In either case, there is no warning to beware of the judgement of the Pharisees. Here Shem Tob is in agreement with Yeshua's statement in 23:3 concerning the behaviour, not the judgement of the Pharisees. Every point of criticism made by Rabbi Yeshua in passage in Matthew 23 has nothing to say about what the Pharisees say, but rather what they do.

## **Future Tense**

The future tense of *amar* (will say) means that either he or they WILL SAY something in the future. Since the Torah can not say anything that it has not already said, then Moses refers to the interpretation given by the judges, and not literally the Torah itself as Gordon insists.

## **False Prophet + AntiMessiah = Deception**

Nehemia Gordon's investigation began at the instigation of Michael Rood, and it was him who initially coached him regarding the nature of the issue and the meaning of the Greek version.

"It all started when my friend Michael Rood, a Messianic teacher, asked me what I thought of Matthew 23:1-3" -pg.2

"If the problem were simple that he [Michael Rood] did not like what it said in Matthew 23 then there was probably not much I could do to help. " - pg. 2

"This is the revelation for which I have been waiting an entire lifetime!" - Rood, back cover

Yes, any anarchist who reviles authority would be waiting for some kind of biblical justification. Even if Gordon has to put words into the mouth of Yeshua, he is not going to pass up any opportunity to get that endorsement. This is exactly what Gordon does when he states that the Greek version implies that the Pharisees still sit in the seat of Moses, and that followers of Yeshua must obey rulings that have "no scriptural basis" pg. 3. Clearly the disciples did not obey unrighteous rulings.

"And when they had brought them, they set [them] before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." - Acts 5:27-29, KJV

So the followers of Yeshua had no problem standing up to the Pharisees that sat in the seat of Moses. It also demonstrates how the disciples patronized the Sanhedrin which had no authority recognized by YHWH. That authority had already been given

to the very ones standing before them, and it was the old court that was now in fear of being stoned at the word of the disciples of Yeshua.

"Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." - Acts 5:26, KJV

Michael Rood established himself in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a bonafide false prophet by pronouncing many false prophecies. He refuses to clarify his actual theology and religion. At times he claims to be a Christian, Gentile, Jew, Levite, Baptist, Reverend, Rabbi or a Karaite, or the cosmopolitan "Messianic Karaite Rabbi" (Karaites don't have rabbis). That is just about as foolish as Gordon's lectures on "Was Yeshua a Karaite" (Karaites don't believe in Yeshua). It is only fair to ask where he is leading his audience to. He is, no doubt, a clever chameleon. His main drive in life seems to be making a name for himself. At a time when many are calling for Rood's accountability, attacking the authority of Yeshua and his court suits pretenders, panderers, and sinners like him.

Ironically, in Rood's book, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, he states that "gentiles" are not qualified to interpret the scriptures (pgs. 40,96,120), but then goes on to describe himself as a "gentile" (back cover). Frankly, I couldn't agree more.

"We are going to let the Jews interpret the Scriptures that the Jews have written...and on the bottom corner margin of the final page in this book I have reserved ample room for the Gentiles to interpret all of the Scriptures that the Gentiles have written!" - pg. 69, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, Michael Rood

I like Rood's way of thinking, so how about we let the Nazarene Jews interpret what the Nazarene Jews have written. Neither Rood or Gordon are Nazarene Jews, and this puts them at a great disadvantage in attempting to represent the teachings of Rabbi Yeshua Natzraya. Neither respect that Yeshua is a Rabbi and establishes (his) rabbinical authority throughout the New Testament. Neither uses the Natzari gospel of Matthew of the Peshitta. Even more ironic, is Rood's video where he teaches while sitting on a seat of Moses in the ruins of the synagogue at Chorazin. Does that therefore mean we should ignore Rood since he sits on the seat of Moses, as Gordon interprets to him? Is there room for both Rood and Gordon on the seat they love to denounce yet love to sit on? Hypocrites! That is about the same as preaching against the devil while wearing a red suit, horns, pointed tail, and pitchfork.

Even if Rood were a believer in Yeshua, he certainly has no hesitation when it comes to partnering with those who deny Yeshua.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" - 2 Corinthians 6:14, KJV

So what is Gordon's interest in this subject that his first published book would be aimed directly at Rood's audience? Gordon has much to gain by writing a book and going on tour with Rood. Nehemia Gordon and his brand of Karaite Judaism gains a ready-made audience, converts, and sales. Rood needs Gordon, and Gordon needs Rood. Many will justify their own lack of accountability based on their message. I have encountered several persons who have converted to Karaite Judaism, some leaving Yeshua behind, others seeing Yeshua as a Karaite in their mind due to Gordon's message.

Is Rabbi Yeshua a Karaite? If being a Karaite means not issuing halacha, judgement, or establishing new customs and traditions, then no. If Yeshua was really saying that he disagreed with not only the all actions of the Pharisees, but also all their teachings, then how is it that we can find in the Talmud, a Pharasaic parallel for almost every one of his teachings? Certainly he was not saying to disagree with everything they say or do. In fact, he wasn't really saying as much about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:3 as he was about the authority of the office of Moses seat.

The book is squarely aimed at Christians, like Rood, who have always had a grudge against organized, structured religion, and authority - accusing YHWH's commandments of being merely "man-made religion". (If I only had a nickel...) It's a message that resonates with the protest against a great burden of traditions or harmful customs. The fact that neither Rood or Gordon submit to any authority is telling, as Rood consistently refuses to be called to accountability among his peers when he gets into legal trouble. This makes their message appear to be self-serving.

Rabbi Yeshua's message was akin to having to bear with a president who is not well liked. If Yeshua attacked the office of the president and succeeded, then what use would it be for him to aspire to the office of the president in the future? Then, not even a good man could fulfill his role in an office that the people have come to disdain. Rather, he criticized the man who was currently fulfilling the office while leaving the office intact. The problem with the Karaite is that he refuses to distinguish between the office and the officer.

Yeshua upheld all the commandments of Torah or else he would spoil what was about to happen. He had promised his apostles the authority to bind and loose, that is the authority of Moses, his seat. If Yeshua had abolished the authority of Moses, then he would have condemned the Torah and removed the basis for the authority of his apostles, and his followers would not have to obey their decisions. See Acts 15, the council.

Yeshua implied that the official rulings of the Pharisees had been generally in line with the Torah, but what they practiced and their unofficial teachings betrayed their love of self-aggrandizement. Whatever they taught, right or wrong, would not have to

be tolerated much longer anyhow, but the system would be upheld, only transferred to Spirit filled judges. A similar thing was about to happen concerning the office of the priesthood, in that it too would be transferred, as Paul taught in Hebrews.

Karaites believe that each individual is their own personal judge and interpreter. The fruit of this among Karaites is that they have remained divided. There are hardly two Karaites that agree on any significant number of issues according to the Encyclopedia Judaica (see Karaites). They do not offer any kind of impartial settlement of disputes. This especially appeals to Christians who practice a similar personal or individual faith, with a personal saviour and without real accountability to others. The lateral developments and supports are never unified or strengthened. It is the eye saying to the hand that they have no need of each other, and there is no commitment to help others. Self-righteous attitudes tend to develop in this kind of environment. Among Karaites and many Messianics there is no totally cohesive body and no unifying structure as commanded in Torah.

If anything, Yeshua criticizes the Pharisees for not providing more judgment. Not less.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." - Matthew 23:23

Karaites, where is your judgment? Where is your seat of Moses? Without these how can you fully serve the people and be a benefit to them?

When you have the opportunity, ask a Karaite to show you where in the Torah that traditions, customs and judgment are prohibited. Ask them why they have invented that commandment. They might tell you to stop asking so many questions. In the end, perhaps we should conclude; Do like the Karaites say, but do not follow their example, for they say Torah, but they do not do Torah.