

Jerusalem's Sanhedrin: Is Submission and Obedience Required?

By Avinoam ben Mordechai

I want to discuss a subject that now appears to be a growing issue among many in the Ephraim/Israelite movement, particularly in North America, but certainly a subject not limited to that geographic location. Quite simply, is Jerusalem's Sanhedrin of 71 Rabbis something that should be obeyed and submitted to in these days in which we live, or is this something that frankly, we should not even reckon with? Put another way, I suppose we should consider asking the question in a different way and with more boldness. Should believers in Yeshua as HaMashiach personally and/or communally through our congregations submit to and obey the Sanhedrin's religious authority and/or legal rulings that it seeks to establish for this generation? Let us take a close look at the subject matter and determine the answer from Jewish history and biblical scriptural context.

To first establish the premise of the situation that is now looming over our heads, let us look at the teaching of Yeshua who spoke on this subject in Matthew 5:21-22:

*You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to **the court.**' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before **the court**; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the **supreme court**; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (NASB)*

A key word in this detailed legal statement of fact is the term "**court.**" Now, what exactly was Yeshua referring to when he said this? According to the underlying Greek text, the first two uses of the term "court" is actually a word that means "judgment," which lines up perfectly with what the written Mosaic Torah says in [Exodus 20:13](#), which was then restated some forty years later to a new generation of Israel in [Deuteronomy 5:17](#); and both of these laws are further "fleshed out" in a number of passages about judgment in the Torah, which includes, but is not limited to [Deuteronomy 17: 1-13](#); [Deuteronomy 16:18](#), [Psalm 82](#), [2 Chronicles 19:5-11](#) and I suppose we could add to the list [Malachi 2:1-9](#). Of course, the Tanakh as a whole unit has much to say about *din* or the requirement that its judges perform righteous judgment in all Israel. So, really the idea of Yeshua's first statement is of no great surprise given that this is precisely what the Torah requires.

Where it gets interesting is when Yeshua then goes on to say, ...*But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before **the court**; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the **supreme court**; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.* According to the Greek text of the New Testament, the NASB term "supreme court" or the KJV term "council" is actually the Greek term *sunedrion*. What is this? According to the *Enhanced Strong's Biblical Lexicon*, the definition is as follows:

1) Any assembly (esp. of magistrates, judges, ambassadors), whether convened to deliberate or pass judgment 2) any session or assembly or people deliberating or adjudicating 2a) the Sanhedrin, the great council at Jerusalem, consisting of the seventy one members, viz. scribes, elders, prominent members of the high priestly families and the high priest, the president of the assembly. The most important causes were brought before this tribunal, inasmuch as the Roman rulers of Judaea had left to it the power of trying such cases, and also of pronouncing sentence of death, with the limitation that a capital sentence pronounced by the Sanhedrin was not valid unless it was confirmed by the Roman procurator. 2b) a smaller tribunal or council which every Jewish town had for the decision of less important cases.

I would say that this is a pretty accurate literary description for the term *sunedrion*. But for the sake of clarity, let us take this one step further. In the days of Yeshua, there were actually three (3) assemblies of sitting judges in Jerusalem: A) *Har Habayit Al Petuach*, the smaller court of 23

that held its proceedings at the entrance to the Temple Mount; B) *Al Petuach Ha'azarah*, the court that sat at the entrance to the courtyard of the Temple; C) *B'lishkat Hagazit*, the court of 71 that sat in the square chamber or what was called the "Chamber of Hewn Stones." On what we would call Monday and Thursday (the second and fifth days of the week), the court at the entrance to the Temple Mount would hear the day-to-day cases of various parties in accordance with its traditions passed down in the so-called "oral law." If this court had a tradition that could solve the problem between the parties then the decision of judges was binding on the parties and the truth is, there was no such thing as an "appeal to a higher court" once a judgment was given at a lower court. If however, the court could not render a decision on a particular matter then the issue was elevated to the next higher level of judgment at the entrance to the courtyard of the Temple itself. If the issue still could not find a solution in the minds of the judges at that level then the matter was once again elevated to the next higher court, which was that of the supreme court of 71 judges sitting in the Square Chamber or what was called the *Chamber of Hewn Stones*; their decision was final and binding whether one liked it or not.

When Yeshua made his famous declaration in Matthew 5:21-22, he was saying something quite remarkable and we'll get to it in just a moment. However, there is one thing that you must know if you do not know it already: there is a growing movement among some leaders in the Messianic movement that would suggest that Yeshua was actually validating the judgment authority of the Sanhedrin in his day, an assembly of 23 and 71 judges respectively, their members consisting of a mix of Pharisees (Rabbis) and Sadducees (Priests). Well, if Yeshua was in fact validating the authority of the Pharisaic/Rabbinic judges of his day, and according to Jewish historian Josephus, they controlled the Sanhedrin's priests ([Josephus Antiquities 18.1.4](#)), then by extension it could also be said that since there is now a Pharisaic/Rabbinic Sanhedrin growing in strength and popularity today in Israel, then by all means, we must submit to their authority and obey them. To determine the veracity of this logical conclusion we must look to Hebrew scripture for an answer.

The leading rabbis today will tell you that the structure for this legal system in Israel is based on Numbers 11:16 in the Torah, which teaches the following:

*YHWH therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from **the elders** of Israel, whom you know to be **the elders** of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you shall not bear it all alone.*

The rabbis today are proud to tell us that this same council first established in Numbers 11:16 has continued uninterrupted from the days of Moses down to Talmudic times (c. 2nd -5th centuries C.E.), but of course with different players. If indeed true, then you would think that there would be some later trace of written Tanakh evidence to support the claim; but really there is nothing at all. Of course, scripturally there are a handful of references to a gathering of Israel's elders in the Tanakh. In Hebrew, they are called *zakanim*, from the Hebrew root *ZKN* in such places as 1 Kings 8:1; 20:7; 2 Kings 23:1; Ezekiel 14:1; 20:1. In each of these cases, the elders do not actually appear to be a regularly organized judicial court, at least not of the type that later appears in Second Temple times, in the days of Yeshua and Paul. Rather, according to Hebrew scripture, it appears that the ancient elders of Israel functioned more as administrators and enforcers of policy than "judges," somewhat like what a city council would do in a community. For example in Jerusalem, there is the *Iriyah* or municipality and its governing officials. Their job is to govern the city and deal with issues that involve city planning and growth, meeting the regular needs of the residents such as making sure there is trash pickup, lights, street cleaning and generally the overseeing of a smooth running infrastructure for the city, which includes making sure its residents are paying their taxes and enforcing all government rules and laws. Scripturally, it is this type of job that the elders were called to do. In the New Testament, we may actually have a model of this in the [Book of Acts 6:1-7](#), [Titus 1:5-9](#), [James 5:13-14](#), [1 Peter 5:1-3](#). On this matter, let us once again return to Numbers 11, but instead of focusing only on verse 16, let us consult the general context of the teaching beginning with Numbers 11:13-14:

Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of YHWH was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. So Moses said to YHWH, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You did swear to their fathers'? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me.

Then, in response YHWH says to Moses in 11:16:

*... "Gather for Me seventy men from **the elders** of Israel, whom you know to be **the elders** of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you shall not bear it all alone.*

It appears from the overall context that the charge of the elders in any community is that of performing an administrative duty in the body and that of enforcing biblical instruction in the Torah and doing so by example. It does not appear however, that they were supposed to function as actual judges and lawmakers. Rather, this was the job of the *kohanim* or priests, even as Hebrew scripture specifies and admonishes in places such as [Deuteronomy 31:9](#), [2 Chronicles 23:18](#), [2 Chronicles 31:4](#), [Nehemiah 8:13-14](#); [Jeremiah 2:8](#); [Ezekiel 22:26](#); [Zephaniah 3:4](#); [Malachi 2:7](#). Again, the job of the elders appears to be that of administration and enforcement of the Torah; men that are supposed to listen to the priests and the prophets. Here are a handful of references in the Tanakh to show you specifically what I am referring to:

*1 Kings 8:1-2 -- Then Solomon assembled **the elders** of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' households of the sons of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of YHWH from the city of David, which is Tzion.*

*Ezra 6:7-8 -- Leave this work on the house of God alone; let the governor of **the Jews and the elders of the Jews** rebuild this house of God on its site. "Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these **elders of Judah** in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the River, and that without delay.*

*Ezra 6:14 -- And **the elders** of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.*

*Nehemiah 2:16 -- And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, **the nobles**, the assistants to the high priest, or the rest who did the work.*

*Nehemiah 5:7 -- ...And I consulted with myself, and contended with **the nobles** and the assistants to the high priest and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them.*

My point is this: it was not until much later on in our history following the giving of the Torah at Sinai, that the term "elder" came to be associated with the function of a judge or lawmaker, as we can all clearly see in the writings of the New Testament. But once again, as I understand things, the judicial role of *din* or judgment was actually reserved for kings, prophets and priests and they were most certainly under obligation to submit to and listen to heaven, which is something that the elders and rabbis of the Second Temple period did not believe in nor did they consider this a part of their function, evidenced by their own entrenched doctrine referred to as *Lo BaShamayim He* – "It is not in Heaven" – a twisted legal reading taken out of context from Deuteronomy 30:12.

Today, *Lo BaShamayim He* is still very much a foundation of rabbinite tradition and teaching as it was put to writing in the Talmud at [Baba Metzia 59b](#).

So, what happened? How did we get so twisted up with corrupted leaders that perhaps spiritually moved or “redefined” boundaries, which is actually physically forbidden to do in the Land of our inheritance ([Deuteronomy 19:14](#))? What took place in those intervening centuries between Moses and Yeshua that resulted in the elders of Israel performing what could be called a “hostile takeover” of the priesthood even as Jewish historian Josephus speaks about ([Ant. 18.1.4](#))? How did they get so much power to go from administrators to a Sanhedrin of judges and lawmakers that could assert full religious and political control over an entire nation of Israelites and Jews? I’m going to leave you to answer these questions through your own research.

In brief, allow me to say this: we know from non-Jewish historians such as Diodorus and Strabo that the Phoenicians had a Sanhedrin or assembly in Tripolis. Also, ancient Lycia had a Sanhedrin as did four Macedonian districts with their *senatores*, who were called Sanhedrin by the non-Jewish historian Livy (Liv. Xiv.32). Given the propensity of Israel’s leaders to continually reject the Kingship of YHWH (see 1 Samuel 8:4-9), desiring instead to follow the customs of the nations and always wanting a king or prince like the nations, it makes perfect sense that Israel’s leaders would eventually find some kind of justification to establish their own system of legal authority, an authority not built on the teachings of the eternal written Torah that was given to us by Yehovah through the hand of Moses. Rather, what we got was a system of taskmasters that ended up asserting full religious control over the nation of Israel by building their model of control on that of the surrounding nations; and this they did in the form of a Second Temple Sanhedrin. Worse yet, by the time of Yeshua, Jerusalem’s Sanhedrin had become such a feared political and religious aristocracy that not only did it regulate the whole internal affairs of the nation but it also was the strong arm of punishment levied against Jews and Israelites that simply did not submit to or obey their authority and law ([Acts 9:13-14](#)). You see, its leaders were doing more than just administratively running the country; they were controlling it with a religion of tradition, even as Yeshua said in [Matthew 15:1-9](#), quoting the prophet [Isaiah at 29:13](#), “*Then YHWH said, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned.”*”

The pre-cursor to all of this can be found in the words of the prophet Ezekiel 34:1-10:

Then the word of YHWH came to me saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds (“rulers”) of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says Adonay YHWH, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? “You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. “Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. “And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. “My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the land; and there was no one to search or seek for them.”” Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH: “As I live,” declares Adonay YHWH, “surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH: ‘Thus says Adonay YHWH, “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I shall demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I shall deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be food for them.””’”

I would strongly suggest that you continue reading through the rest of the context of Ezekiel 34 to get the overall message from YHWH. It appears quite clear that He was not happy with Israel’s religious leaders in the days of Ezekiel, nor was he happy with what the Pharisees and Sadducees had been doing in the days of the Second Temple, through their self-made authority and judgments in law, as it was reflected through the Sanhedrin that I believe Yeshua strongly came against and eventually cursed in the story of the fig tree in [Matthew 21:18-21](#). This political

and religious body – the Sanhedrin -- with its rebellious elders of ancient Israel ([Isaiah 29:13](#)) had lost its focus of Mount Sinai and the words of Moses and his successor Joshua. Nonetheless, in truth, whatever the Sanhedrin grew to become, it was destined to be nothing more than a blip on the spiritual radar screen of heaven because as I said, it was prophesied by the Master that its days were already numbered and it would cease to exist.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the words of Yeshua came to pass and the the Sanhedrin was for all intents and purposes abolished, at least so far as its existing form was concerned. But it seems that Rabbinical Judaism was never quite able to come to grips with the feeling that their old “Sanhedrim” had now become a thing of the past, and certainly there were not going to let it die without a fight. So, they lost no time in recreating for themselves a new center for promoting their authority, judgment and oral law. This was to be done through their new and “improved” academy of authority that was set up at Yavne with the help of the Jewish traitor *Yochanan ben Zakkai*, who came along and made a deal with Roman Emperor Vespasian, in essence saying to him, “*you help us establish Yavne and I’ll help you bring about the destruction of Jerusalem.*” The deal was struck in blood. Under Emperor Vespasian, the Temple was destroyed by his son Titus and the Roman 10th legion. Meanwhile, the academy of Yavne was born, giving long term impetus to yet more of the same old rebellion that the prophet Ezekiel spoke against in Chapter 34. In the centuries that followed, particularly under the teachings of one Rabbi Akiva, rabbinite authority flourished and the “new and improved” Sanhedrin grew out like a shoot from a hewed tree stump. Over the generations, the Sanhedrin moved around a few times finally finding a resting place at the seaside town of Tiberius on the *Kinneret* (Galilee) where it stabilized for a while but then ceased to function as a body in 425 C.E. In October of 2004, it was “miraculously” once again revived and in 2005, it moved to Jerusalem. What does this mean for us today? We’ll come to the answer shortly. In the meantime, I firmly believe that quite soon, we will once again witness the full reemergence of the Sanhedrin’s power as it once was in the days of the Second Temple. When this happens, I believe that “*all hell is going to break loose*” in Judea, Samaria and even unto the four corners of the earth. This is likely to give birth to a number of new “*Apostle Pauls*” before his encounter with written Torah truth ([Acts 9](#)); patsies for the Sanhedrin that will go about the Land of Israel (and other places I’m sure) enforcing rabbinic authority and the oral law, the halacha and traditions of the elders, with the potential of imprisoning believers in Yeshua if they do not comply with the court’s authority and rulings as it is spelled out in the Talmud at Eruvin 21b:

“My Son! Be careful concerning Rabbinical decrees even more than the Torah...the Torah contains prohibitions...but anyone who violates a Rabbinical decree is worthy of death.”

This may very well be the future fulfillment of Revelation 12:17 as it is recorded:

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of Elohim and hold to the testimony of Yeshua.

Okay, so there you have some history and frail human prognostications of the Jewish Sanhedrin in a nutshell. Now, let us return to where I left off regarding its functions in the days of Yeshua and Paul.

When Yeshua said in Matthew 5:22, “...and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘*Raca,*’ shall be guilty before the **supreme court (Sanhedrin, KJV: “council”)**; and whoever shall say, ‘*You fool,*’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (**Gehinnom**),” what was he referring to? Was he actually transferring authority to the judgment power of the court of the Sanhedrin of his day, telling us that if we speak unkindly one to another then we will be subject to the final ruling of the sitting Sanhedrin of any generation? Well, if so, then this would naturally imply that the Sanhedrin of any generation has authority to judge us for speaking with nasty words and if we remain unrepentant in our actions, the court would then have the authority to kill us and throw our dead bodies into the fires of Gehinnom where the birds of the air will pick our bones clean (Jeremiah 7:30-34). But does he really mean all of this? Based on the local context of the entire narrative in Matthew Chapters 5,

15 and 23 in both Greek and Hebrew, plus armed with a little knowledge of rabbinic oral law, it would appear that Yeshua was in reality, making a very bold statement against Pharisaic law and hypocrisy, which he did quite often in a number of other places of the New Testament gospel narratives ([Matthew 6:2](#); [6:16](#); [7:28-29](#); [15:7](#), [22:18](#); [all of Matthew Chapter 23](#); [Mark 1:22](#); [Mark 7:6](#); [Luke 12:56](#); [Luke 13:15](#)). To get a better sense of what Yeshua was referring to, let us consult the *Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew* rendering of Matthew 5:21-22. Here, the word for the Sanhedrin does not appear as it does in the Greek. Rather, in the Hebrew the term “*BaHakahal*” is the operative term and this is extremely interesting to the say the least! In other words, the *Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew* at 5:22 reads this way:

*“...But I say to you that he who angers his companion is guilty of judgment; he who calls his brother inferior shall be guilty of judgment **in (or with) the gathering (BaHaKahal)**; he who calls him a fool (raca) is guilty of the fire of Gehenna.”*

The idea of *BaHakahal* is a unique biblical idea that stems directly from *Deuteronomy 31:12* in Hebrew, when every seven years, YHWH calls all Israel to a nationwide judgment to listen to the words of the written Torah being read **at the gathering of the entire congregation**. You can see another glimpse of this when all the congregation was gathered together for this monumental event as recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Then the people started weeping and put away their rebellion and reaffirmed their commitment to the Torah (*Nehemiah 8:1-8*). I think what Yeshua was transmitting to his listening audience by saying what he said in Matthew 5:21-22 is that the scribes and Pharisees (who controlled the judgments of the Sanhedrin) were always able to escape any judgment that **DID NOT** involve a “material action,” as it was taught in the oral law at Sanhedrin 10a: *“...the transgression of a prohibition involving no material action is not punishable by flogging.”* This concept is nothing obscure. Rather, it appears some 54 times throughout the Talmud; that there can be no stripes given if there is no material action involved. Naturally, speaking unkindly of a brother and even publicly calling him a good for nothing fool is not considered a material action and thus a Pharisee could get away with treating brothers with words of disrespect and escape a court judgment. Yet, from the oral law at Berechot 43b we learn this:

R. Zutra b. Tobiah further said in the name of Rab — according to others. R. Hanah b. Bizna said it in the name of R. Simeon the Pious, and according to others again. R. Johanan said it in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: It is better for a man that he should cast himself into a fiery furnace rather than that he should put his fellow to shame in public.

So, here is a case of extreme hypocrisy where rabbinic tradition teaches that it would better for one to be cast into a fiery furnace than to put a fellow to open shame in public; yet putting a brother to shame in public would not be considered a material action and so one could simply get away with speaking nasty and the court would simply say to the offender, “*Bad boy. Now get out of here*” and slap him on the wrist, so to speak. BUT YET, when it came to rebellion against rabbinic authority and respect for the rabbis, the oral law explicitly teaches the following:

Eruvin 21b -- “...anyone who violates a rabbinical decree is worthy of death.”

Berachot 19a – “Whoever makes derogatory remarks about scholars after their death is cast in Gehinnom.”

Pirke Avot 5:8 – “The sword comes to the world for the retardation for judgment, and for the perversion of judgment, and on account of those who interpret the Torah NOT in accordance with the accepted law (the halacha).”

Pesikta Rabbati 3 – “A person must not say, ‘I will not keep the commandment of the elders because they are not from the Torah.’ No, My son! Rather all that they decree upon you, observe.”

Ketubot 84a – “...the sages have imparted to their enactments the same force as that of Pentateuchal Laws.”

Perhaps you can now understand why Yeshua would say what he said in Matthew 5:22, "...and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the **supreme court (Sanhedrin, KJV: "council")**"); and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (**Gehinnom**)." It appears quite clear that Yeshua was NOT speaking about any rabbinic assembly or Sanhedrin of his day. Rather, he was speaking of how a true righteous court would function and the punishment that it would mete out in the face of those that live lives of pure hypocrisy. In other words, a true court of justice according to Deuteronomy 16:18 would find those Pharisees unrepentantly guilty as charged and as such, they would all be thrown into Gehinnom. But as it was, the courts of Yeshua's day were corrupt and had their priorities all switched around, or putting it in the words of the prophet Isaiah at 5:20-21:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight!

Pay attention to the "Woe" in the statement. It carries the same weight as when Yeshua said in Matthew 23:15, saying:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell (Gehinnom) as yourselves.

Likewise, Paul who grew up as a Pharisee under the stringencies of the oral law (Acts 22:3) said later in his life to the believers in Rome at Romans 2:17-24:

But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

In closing off my thoughts on this particular point, I believe that Yeshua in Matthew 5:21-22 was referring to a non-existent but hoped for assembly of righteous Torah judges based on what the written Mosaic Law taught in Deuteronomy 16:18-20. I believe that he was also telling his followers to not submit to the authority of the rabbinic courts of his day as these courts were conceived in wickedness and grew to become reprobate. So now, let's take this one more step further.

The written Mosaic Torah says in Deuteronomy 16:18-20:

You will appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which YHWH your Elohim is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which YHWH your Elohim is giving you.

This was restated centuries later under the leadership of Judah's King Yehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 19:5-11, where it is written:

"...And he appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. And he said to the judges, 'Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for YHWH who is with you when you render judgment. Now then let the fear of YHWH be upon you; be very careful what you do, for YHWH our Elohim will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe.'" And in Jerusalem also Yehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the heads of the fathers' households of Israel, for the judgment of YHWH and to judge disputes among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then he

charged them saying, "Thus you shall do in the fear of YHWH, faithfully and wholeheartedly. And whenever any dispute comes to you from your brethren who live in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances, you shall warn them that they may not be guilty before YHWH, and wrath may not come on you and your brethren. Thus you shall do and you will not be guilty. And behold, Amariah the chief priest will be over you in all that pertains to YHWH; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, in all that pertains to the king. Also the Levites shall be officers before you. Act resolutely, and YHWH be with the upright."

These words of reform from Yehoshaphat were made because corruption had already found its way into the judicial system of the priesthood long before the Pharisaic-controlled Sanhedrin came on the scene of the Second Temple period. Consider this from Malachi 2:7-9:

For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek Torah from his mouth; for he is the messenger of YHWH Tzvaot. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the Torah; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says YHWH Tzvaot. So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways, but are showing partiality in the Torah. .

These ideas were further restated in the New Testament at 1 Timothy 5:21 and James 2:9, among numerous other places. Among many offenses against the written Torah of Moses, the rabbinic courts of Yeshua's day were heavily biased in some areas and lax in others. Consider this between Yeshua and some Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 15:1-9

*And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of Elohim for the sake of your tradition (your TAKANOT or Court Enactments). For Elohim said, 'Honor your father and mother, 'and, ' He, who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever shall say to his father or mother, "Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to Elohim (Korban –a teaching of the oral law), he is not to honor his father or his mother.' **And thus you invalidated the word of Elohim for the sake of your tradition (TAKANOT = "Rabbinic Enactments")**. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you (Isaiah 29:13), saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. 'But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men, learned"*

In essence what was the crime that these teachers in Israel were committing? I think the Torah tells us quite plainly:

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2)

Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32; Heb: 31:1)

The religious leaders of Yeshua's day were in essence guilty of mocking the authority of Yehovah and then boasting about invalidating the eternal Word of Yehovah, even as the following testimony records from the Talmud, Makkot 7a:

A Sanhedrin that effects an execution once in seven years is branded a destructive tribunal; R. Eliezer b. Azariah says: once in seventy years. R. Tarfon and R. Akiba say: were we members of a Sanhedrin, no person would ever be put to death. Thereupon Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel remarked, and they would also multiply shedders of blood in Israel.

It was this very issue of invalidating written scripture and replacing it with the Pharisaic oral law that was later put to writing centuries later by the famous Rambam who said eleven centuries AFTER Yeshua:

*He who prophesies in the name... **if he changes anything in the oral law, even if the plain meaning of Scripture supports what he says**, for example, if he says, that when the Torah says 'you shall cut off her hand; [show no pity]' (Dt 25:12) that it literally means cutting off the hand and not a monetary fine as we are taught by the oral law, and that prophet attributes his statement to*

prophecy saying, 'The Holy-One, Blesses be He, told me that the commandment that says, 'you shall cut off her hand' is to be understood at face value, that prophet shall be executed through strangulation... Moses Maimonides, Introduction to the Mishnah, Jerusalem 1992 (Hebrew).

This poses a very good reason why the Sanhedrin delivered Yeshua to death. According to the Torah, the AUTHORITY of the WRITTEN LAW was supposed to be upheld by the true Scriptural court of Israel, at least according to [Deuteronomy 16:18](#), but if that court was NOT carrying out their duty to judge according to the WRITTEN WORD and ONLY by its AUTHORITY, then that court was considered a mockery of Heaven. This idea reflects the foundation of the court's primary doctrine "Lo BaShamayim He" ("It is not in Heaven" - [Baba Metzia 59b](#) based on [Deuteronomy 30:12](#)) and *Acharei Rabim Lehatot* ("After the majority 'incline' - [Baba Metzia 59b](#) based on a twisted reading of [Exodus 23:2](#)). Hence, the court of Jerusalem which was controlled by the Pharisees, who made the rules and forced their judgments to be upheld according to the authority of the oral law, is the subject of discussion by Josephus who once again tells us:

...for when they (the Saducees) become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the majority would not otherwise bear them. (Josephus 18.1.4)

Under these conditions, the Pharisees (also called rabbis in the first century [[Matthew 23:8-9](#)] and rabbis today [[Kiddushin 66a/Niddah 33b](#)]) made the rabbinic way of justice to be of more authority than that of Moses, even as I said earlier, which they would later tell us in the rabbinic writings that followed:

"A person must not say, 'I will not keep the commandment of the elders because they are not from the Torah.' The Almighty says to such a person, 'No, My son! Rather all that they decree upon you, observe! As it is written, According to the instruction which they teach you (Dt 17:11). Even I [=God] must obey their decree, as it is written, You will decree and He will fulfill it (Job 22:28).'" (Pesikta Rabbati §3). Also see Rosh HaShanah 25a.

And furthermore, all this was once again later confirmed in writing by the Rambam in his introduction to the Mishnah who reflected this ideas of the oral law:

"If there are 1000 prophets, all of them of the stature of Elijah and Elisha, giving a certain interpretation, and 1001 Rabbis giving the opposite interpretation, you shall 'incline after the majority' and the law is according to the 1001 Rabbis, not according to the 1000 venerable prophets. And thus our Sages said, 'By God, if we heard the matter directly from the mouth of Joshua the son of Nun, we would not obey him nor would we listen to him!' The Sages said further, 'If Elijah comes and tells us, 'The levirate obligation is cancelled through a shoe (see Dt 25:9), we will listen to him [because this is what the Oral Law teaches], but if he says it is cancelled through a sandal, we will not listen to him [because this is contrary to the Oral Law].' ...And so if a prophet testifies, that the Holy-One, Blessed be He, told him, that the law of a certain commandment is such and such, or that the reasoning of a certain sage is correct, that prophet must be executed... as it is written, 'it is not in heaven' (Dt 30:12). Thus God did not permit us to learn from the prophets, only from the Rabbis who are men of logic and reason."

The control of the high court in Israel was nothing more than a religious shell of lies and deception, even as it was spoken about in [Psalm 82](#), where it is said that El Almighty wanted the court to uphold judgment as though it were YHWH Elohim Himself doing the judging (I've taken the liberty of rendering this according to the Hebrew with some of my editorial notes):

Elohim stand in congregation of EL. He judges in the midst of (or through) the Elohim. How long will you judge unjustly (without righteousness), and show partiality to the wicked? (a reference to Deuteronomy 16:18-20) [Selah]. Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked. They do not know nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, "You are Elohim (a reference to Exodus 22:9), and all of you are sons of the Most High. "Nevertheless you will die like men, and fall like any one of the princes." Arise, O Elohim, judge the Land!; for it is you who does possess all the nations.

In summary, in Second Temple times, the religious authorities were teaching and upholding the following ideas:

- 1) A subversion of written Torah truth by upholding the fictional Oral Law and its *Mitzvot De Rabbanan* and their Rabbinic enactments (*Takanot*)
- 2) A circumventing of written Torah truth by showing partiality in judgment in violation of [Deuteronomy 16:18](#)
- 3) A pushing aside of written Torah truth by allowing acts of bribery and showing favoritism in judgment (see the NT book of [James chapters 1-4](#))
- 4) A rebellious pride for NOT making judgments according to the AUTHORITY OF THE WRITTEN WORD
- 5) A replacement of written Torah truth by elevating the Oral Law, all the while nullifying the plain meaning of written scripture.

No wonder Yeshua cursed the Sanhedrin of the day as it is evident from [Matthew 21:18-22](#), when he said to his disciples (with my editorial notes):

Now in the morning, when he returned to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, he came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and he said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. And seeing this, the disciples marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" And Yeshua answered and said to them, Truly I say to you, if you have faith (trust in the authority of Yehovah), and do not doubt (do not show partiality in your judgments- Deut. 16:19-20), you shall not only do the fig tree (a function of performing judgment in Israel as figs were oftentimes likened to the sweetness of the Torah), but even if you say to this mountain (mountains were said to be the teachings of the Rabbinic Traditions- Chagigah 10b), 'Be taken up and cast into the sea (tossed as it were like the sin of rebellion into the waters of judgment),' it shall happen. "And all things you ask in prayer, believing (trusting in the authority of the Name and Its Word), you shall receive" (this is the received "Wisdom of the Torah" that functions in a state of righteous judgment, as James talks about in Chapters 1-4. As a result Yeshua's disciples are then given binding authority as a "Messianic" Sanhedrin to exercise a true righteousness according to the authority of the Written WORD, where you can see a piece of this in Acts 15).

By the prophetic utterance, the words of Yeshua actually came to pass and by 70 C.E. the Pharisee had all but lost their power structure. But it didn't die. It took yet another few centuries until 425 C.E. for the whole thing to lose its impetus like the figs of a fig tree with no leaves on it. They, like a fig tree producing no fruit were to be uprooted and its branches thrown into the fire and burned ([Jeremiah 11:16](#)). This whole scenario becomes ever so clear as you go through the narratives of the gospels and of Acts and you see for yourself what role the Sanhedrin played in their coming against and rejecting Yeshua.

Then the whole body of them (the Sanhedrin) arose and brought Him before Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation (by teaching them to not obey the Oral Law or the Traditions of the Elders) and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Messiah, a King." (Luke 23:1-2)

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a Sanhedrin, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Yeshua was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of Elohim who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. (John 11:47-53)

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men (in other words, a bunch of STUPID MEN UNEDUCATED AND

UNTRAINED IN THE ORAL LAW AND TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS), they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Yeshua (WHO TAUGHT WITH WRITTEN LAW AUTHORITY). And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to go aside out of the **Sanhedrin**, they began to confer with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. "But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name." And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Yeshua. (Acts 4:13-18)

And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the **Sanhedrin**. And they put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law (the ORAL LAW, not the WRITTEN LAW); for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Yeshua, will destroy this place and alter the customs (traditions of the Elders) which Moses handed down to us." And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin saw his face like the face of a Mal'ach or Messenger. (Acts 6:12-14)

But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to **courts (Sanhedrins)**, and scourge you in their synagogues; (Matthew 10:17)

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes (Rabbinic decisors for the Oral Law and Traditions of the Elders); and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him to **the Gentiles**. (Mark 10:33 with a direct contextual connection to Acts 4:25-26, which speaks of the Sanhedrin's rulers, calling them "Gentiles"- see Acts 4:25-26:

--...who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, did say, Why did **the Gentiles** rage, and the peoples devise futile things? 'The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against YHWH, and against His Mashiach.' (Acts 4:25-26).

But be on your guard; for **they (the rulers of the rabbinic courts)** will deliver you to the **Sanhedrins**, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. (Mark 13:9)

And upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the **Sanhedrin** together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. (Acts 5:21ff)

So they went on their way from the presence of the **Sanhedrin**, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)

Centuries later, this teaching was again put to writing by the Rambam, who was simply passing down the traditions that he was taught by the Elders:

אין מעמידין מלך בתחילה אלא על פי בית דין של שבעים זקנים ועל פי נביא, כיהושע שמינהו משה רבינו ובית דין, " וכשאלו ודוד שמינם שמואל הרמתי ובית דין. (רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות מלכים א:ג. A king may not be appointed except by a court of seventy-one elders [=Sanhedrin] along with a prophet, just like Joshua who was appointed by Moses our Rabbi and his court and Saul and David who were appointed by Samuel of Ramah and his court." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 1:3)

Now, consider this in Mark 15:1 and Luke 22:67-71, when the Elders of the Sanhedrin questioned Yeshua about His claim to being King Mashiach:

If You are the Messiah, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF ELOHIM." And they all said, "Are You the Son of Elohim, then?" And He said to

them, "You say that I am." And they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth!

*And early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes, and the whole **Sanhedrin**, immediately held a consultation; and binding Yeshua, they led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate. (Mark 15:1)*

The obvious connection between these ideas is that according to the oral law, the Sanhedrin is the only body in all Israel that is allowed to appoint a King of Israel. But, the Sanhedrin of Yeshua's day rejected His claim and had Him crucified under Pilate and thus, refused to appoint him to anything except to death.

TODAY....and this is very, very important, the Sanhedrin that has been resurrected (as of October 2004) and has now moved to Jerusalem UPHOLDS the EXACT SAME PRINCIPLES and TEACHINGS of the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests that delivered Yeshua up to Rome. So, logic dictates that we ask the following question based on *kal v'chomer* ("light and heavy"): Since the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests of Yeshua's day rejected Him as HaMashiach because they had their own set of Torah and jurisprudence in place, not in accordance with the written Torah of Moses, then are we to submit to their authority through a new and different body of men that uphold the SAME exact principles and teachings of their forebears? I think not.

However, let me make myself perfectly clear: I'm not arguing over the issue of the establishing of a PROPER court in Israel. If there were a PROPER and RIGHTEOUS court we would be obligated to submit to its authority and rulings as we know that they would be according with written scripture. However, the court in Yeshua's day was not upholding written scripture. Rather, they had their own torah-the oral torah and they had their own authority not in accordance with Yehovah's rules.

Hence, the issues are clear for me and I hope for you: We must all do the best that we can and wait for the coming of HaMashiach to set us all straight. But to submit to an unrighteous court made up of religious leaders that believe in the same principles of their forebears namely A) *Lo BaShamayim He* and B) *Acharei Rabim LeHatot*, then this is bordering on our becoming accessories to Torah mutiny. This may be for you, but it is not for me, thank you very much. I will not be so bold as to spit in the face of Heaven and say, "No thank you. I prefer to do things the way of the rabbis." If a rabbinic court today were to reject these two principles of Torah rebellion then they would be guilty of challenging the courts of every generation of judges going all the way back to Gamaliel and yes, even beyond to Moses, or so they say.

If you should submit to any unrighteous Sanhedrin or submit to the authority of the unrighteous rabbis that control it today, you will inevitably become a Yeshua denier. I ask you, Is that really what you want to do? Was it not Yeshua who said in Matthew 10:32-33:

Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

Kol Tuv M'rushalayim
Avinoam ben Mordechai