

Reading Questions on Torah Interpretation (Halakha)

The Jewish World of the New Testament

- the Damascus Document x.10-xii.18 (DSS)
- Letter of Aristeas 121-171 (P vol. 2)
- Mishnah tractate Aboth 1; 3.14-17; Yadaim 4.6-7; Shabbath 1-2 (M)

For each of these documents, ask

- What kind of writing (genre) is this? How is it meant to be used? Do we (as Canadian Christians) use any genre of literature that serves a similar function?
- What kind of authority is claimed (implicitly or explicitly) by the author for a given interpretation of a law?
- What does the document say or imply about the place of Torah in Israel's relationship with God?
- What topics and legal issues are addressed in each document? Where are those underlying laws found in the Old Testament?
- Looking at the Old Testament laws that lie behind these documents, what tendencies can you see in the interpretations they offer?
 - Do they make the laws easier to keep? Harder to keep?
 - If the laws are intensified in their requirements, what is the focus of that intensification? What does the author presume we must do with a law in order to observe it more rigorously?
- Where two documents address the same laws, do they interpret them in the same way? If not, what might be the source of the differences?