



It is obvious to most readers of the New Testament that there is a fundamental difference between the teaching of Jesus the Christ and the Judaism of His day. History has proven and the Jews admit that the religion of Judaism has drifted far away from the simple teachings of the Old Testament. The Jews have modified God's laws and instituted laws and commandments of their own, which in many instances are diametrically opposite to the teachings of God. "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7). When Christ told them they were teaching their own doctrine, they wanted to kill Him. Christ came to a people who had, through their own human laws and traditions, rejected the religion of the Old Testament.

If we are to recognize and understand the plain facts of history, we need to know the events that have led to the apostasy of the Jews --from their rejection of the laws of God. Christ came to the Jews to reveal to them the Gospel--in New Testament times--to complete the promises that God gave to Moses and all Israel.

## JUDAISM DIVIDED INTO MANY SECTS!

Many have assumed that Judaism in the time of Christ was a religion united in a common bond and every Jew believed the same thing and were united into a one Jewish Denomination.

History reveals this to be in error! Judaism was divided into many sects during the time of Jesus. Dr. Herford, one of the most noted Jewish writers said, "If it were possible to analyze the Judaism of the New Testament period into all its component elements, the results of the process would be to show how complex a variety is summed up under that name and how far from the truth it is to speak of 'the Jews' collectively as if they were all alike, in respect to their Judaism" (Judaism in the New Testament Period, pp. 41,42).

Judaism then and today is not one unified organization. There were and are many religious sects comprising Judaism. There are many 'splinter' groups which had their own ideas and beliefs. In many ways Judaism in Christ's time is like our day today. We have many different groups making up the Church of God.

Some of the different sects will be recognized when reading the New Testament. These sects were the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, Zealots, and Herodians. There were many more divisions of which there is a good deal of history. Some of these were the Essenes, the Qumran sects (those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls of which so much has been written), and others who are called by contemporary religious historians, Apocalyptic. There were other different divisions among the Jews who lived in Egypt, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Greece, etc.

There was not one single Jewish sect-- Judaism was divided into many different fragments! History has shown us another mis-understood fact: THE JEWS AS A WHOLE WERE NOT INTERESTED IN RELIGION AT THIS TIME IN HISTORY!

The records show that less than 5% of the total Jewish population of Palestine belonged directly to any of the religious groups mentioned above! Unbelievable as it sounds, over 95% of the population of Palestine were neither Pharisee, Scribe, Zealot, Herodian, Essene, Qumran or Apocalyptic, or Sadducees. The majority of the people in Palestine had no direct membership in religious denominations of Judaism. In most cases people were not particularly religious. These people were referred to by the Pharisees, as the Am ba-aretz, meaning in Hebrew, the "people of the Land or simply, "the common people." Dr. Herford says, "It is clear that the Am ba-aretz (the common people) were not all of one type, either in respect of their religion or socially and economically. Just as they included rich and poor, capitalist and labourer, the merchant, the farmer, the artisan, the tax-gather (publican) and the tradesman, so, on the religious side, they included those who were not Pharisees, and those who paid little or no heed to religion at all, with every shade of piety and indifference in

between" (ibid, pg. 72). Several sources say there were between two and one-half to three million people living in Palestine at the time of Christ (Encyclopedia Biblica--A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, pg. 370- 372). Jewish historians have summed up the opinions of the experts in this matter. Dr. J. Klausner, a contemporary Jewish scholar: has studied in particular, the records pertaining to the wars between 63 and 37 B.C. and has reached the conclusion that at the end of the Maccabean reign there lived in all of Palestine approximately three million Jews, not including half a million Samaritians, Syro-Phoenicians, Arabs, and Greeks" (ibid, Vol. i, pg. 372).

The most prominent sect in Judaism at this time were the Pharisees. Christ had more to say against them than any other group. One of the reasons for this was that the Pharisees were the most influential group and had more members. They also had direct control over the majority of the synagogues and schools and in this respect had the most popularity among the people. Even though they were the most influential and prominent religious group among the Jews in the time of Christ, only about 6000 out of three million Jews were Pharisees! The Jewish historian, Josephus who was a Pharisee himself, informs us of this fact in his history Antiquities of the Jews, xvii, 2,4. What does this mean? The Pharisees, the major religious sect among the Jews represented .2% of all the Jews in Palestine. These facts should open the eyes of many who have erroneous ideas that most of the Jews in Christ's time were Pharisees. Most New Testament readers have never taken the time to really ascertain the religious conditions of the Jews during the life of Christ. They have overlooked Christ's warning not to follow the commandments of men and the traditions of the Jews! "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And He said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:7,9).

The other Jewish sects within Judaism were less significant than the Pharisees. The Sadducees, for example were a sect that Christ came into contact with frequently, but were less prominent than the Pharisees. The Sadducees had control of the temple at the time of Jesus Christ. According to Antiquities of the Jews, xviii, 1,4 and the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol i, pg. 322, the Sadducees numbered less than 3000 members.

Another sect among the Jews were the Essenes. Josephus informs us that there were only about 4000 (ibid, xviii, 1). A group known as the Qumran, were a part of the Essene sect and represented about 4000 members. The rest of the sects in Palestine were of minor importance. All these figures represents the startling truth: the majority of Jews did not belong to a religious sect!!

History has shown that all people were not irreligious. Some did hold a form of religion. Some attended synagogues (assemblies). Because ministers in charge of most synagogues were Pharisees, it is likely that much of the Pharisaical teaching influenced the people. But, most of the people had no desire to practice the strict disciplinary rules of the Pharisees. Nevertheless, some people went to the synagogue to hear the scriptures expounded on the Sabbath. The Common people who did attend synagogue services were not, required to hold to the teachings of the Pharisees. The Pharisees exercised little real authority over the religious life of the people. THERE WAS LITTLE EXERCISE OF ANY CENTRAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY WITHIN JUDAISM AT THAT TIME. "Pharisaism had no means of compelling those who were not in their fellowship to conform to their requirements" (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, pg. 137). "It is perfectly clear that the people at large did not share in the punctilious religious life of the Pharisees, however much they might admire it. In Palestine, as in modern lands, the proportion of those actively engaged in religious service was undoubtedly small" (Mathews, History of New Testament Times in Palestine, pg. 160). It was over the lives of the 'pious' that the Pharisees saddled a harsh religion of "do's and don'ts."

Synagogues ruled by the Pharisees were opened to all the Jews, but not many attended. It appears that very few Jews relatively speaking attended the synagogues regularly, if the size and number of synagogues of which

records exist are of any guide! It can be safely said very few Common people attended synagogue! There is only one recorded synagogue in the city of Capernaum (and that was built by a Gentile). "Now when He had ended all His sayings in the audience of the people, He entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto Him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought Him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue" (Luke 7:1-5). The synagogue at Capernaum held approximately 500 people" (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol 1, pg. 365,432,433).

"Josephus tells us that there was no city or village (township) in all of Galilee that had less than 15,000 inhabitants (Wars of the Jews, iii, 3,3). Josephus was governor of the province of Galilee under the Romans and was well aware of the population, especially since he was responsible for collecting taxes. Most cities of Galilee had only one synagogue. If there were about 15,000 population in the city and the synagogue was small, holding 500 or less, you can see the majority of the people were not religious! Eldersheim tells us that Nazareth was a religious center and it's synagogue was so small that it could hardly seat more than 75 people (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah).

The religious condition of 2000 years ago should not be a surprise to any of us. Popular Judaism is like popular Churchianity! Just as today most people are not religious. Most "Christians" only attend church one or two times a year. How many people really know the true God? How many people are willing to obey His commands? Most people today aren't interested in real, heart-felt religion as taught by Jesus, the Christ, and His word.

Is it so amazing to think that 95% of the Jews at the time of Christ were no more religious than the people of today? It is a false idea to think that Judaism is the religion that God gave to Moses! The Jews as a people (a tribe of Israel) paid no more attention to religion than the people of Britain and America today (modern day Israel).

**BOTH JUDAISM AND CATHOLICISM CAME OUT OF BABYLON!**

To be continued in the next issue of the "Prove All Things" magazine.

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We encourage you to read the original article titled "Is Judaism the Religion of Moses?"