

JUDAISM PART 2

“WAS THE RELIGIOUS SECTS OF JUDAISM THE RELIGION GOD GAVE TO MOSES?”

At the end of Part 1, a statement was made that Catholicism and Judaism came out of Babylon. According to the book “Spiritual Pilgrimage-- Text on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995”, Compiled by the Anti-Defamation League, Page xxii. Pope John Paul II/Spiritual Pilgrimage. In assessing the major events of the year 1986 in the Diocese of Rome, the pope singled out his visit to “our elder brothers in the faith of Abraham in their Rome Synagogue” as his most significant action of the year (National Catholic News Service, December 31, 1986).

“The Spiritual bond between the Church (Catholic) and the Jewish People. The Special Relationship. The notion of a "spiritual bond" linking the Church (Catholic) and the Jewish people (Abraham's stock) was central to Nostra Aetate.” It has become a major theme of Pope John Paul II's own reflection on the subject over the years, one which he has consistently tried to probe and refine. In his first address to Jewish representative, for example, he interpreted the conciliar phrase as meaning "that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective identities" (March 12, 1979), and he spoke of "fraternal dialogue" between the two.

Using terms such as fraternal and addressing one another as brothers: and sisters, of course, reflect ancient usage within the “Christian” community. They imply an acknowledgment of a commonality of faith, with liturgical implications. It was an ecumenical breakthrough. Pope John Paul II extension of terminology to Jews, therefore, is by no means accidental.”

"The spiritual bond with Jews, for the pope, is properly understood as a "sacred one, stemming as it does from the mysterious will of God." (October 28, 1985) pg. xxii, “Spiritual Pilgrimage”- Text on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995," Compiled by the Anti-Defamation League.

It is important here to point out a fallacy, so long taught by the Christian Churches, that the Jews first gave us Christianity. This is not scriptural for they not only opposed the Redeemer and King, but crucified Him and persecuted His followers. It was from Galilee that Jesus chose most of His disciples. Peter a Galilean, was know by his speech that he was not from Judea. "And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee" (Matt. 26-.73). The Apostle Paul tells us he was of the tribe of Benjamin, though by religion he was a Jew. "I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom. 11: 1). "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day" (Acts 22:3). The religion of the Jews was Judaism! Gamaliel taught from the teaching of the Babylonian Talmud, mixing it with the religion of the Old Testament.

Because the Jews refused to bring forth the fruits of righteous administration, Jesus said to them, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The kingdom was delivered to the outcast Israel of the ten tribes whose redemption Jesus accomplished on the cross. The Jews knew the House of Israel was in existence beyond Palestine, for when the Pharisees sent officers to arrest Jesus, He said that a day would come when they would seek Him and would not find Him. The Pharisees asked, "Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will He go, that we shall not find Him? Will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" (John 7:35). During the ages after Christ's death, the outcast of Israel, Anglo-Saxon-Celtic people became Christians and carried on preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just as there is many different denominations of Christianity, there were and are many different sects of Judaism. The Jews of the New Testament period were many. There was not one unified religious group practicing Judaism the same way.

There were many differences of opinions. How did all the differences originate? "If it were possible to analyze the Judaism of the New Testament Period into all its components elements, the result of the process would be to show how complex a variety is summed up under the name, and how far from the truth it is to speak of 'the Jew' collectively as if they were all alike, in respect to their Judaism" (Herford, "Judaism in the New Testament Period" pg. 41,42).

"When looked at from a distance, as is usually the case with non-Jewish students, Judaism appears to be a well-defined and fairly simple system, with a few strongly marked lines of thought and practice capable of easy description, and supposed to be not less easily understood. But, when studied from near at hand, and still more when studied within, Judaism is seen to be by no means simple. There were many more types than usually appear, many more, shades of belief and practice than those which are commonly described. In this sense it is true to say in the word, that there were many Judaism's....." (Ibid, pg. 14).

It is a known fact that there were many types of conflicting and opposing sects of Judaism in Christ's time as there are in Judaism today. To understand Paul's writings and the New Testament teachings, we must realize that only a small part of the population belonged to the various sects. They disagreed among themselves on many religious doctrines. Hence the different teachings and beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

This discord among the various sects with the independent and differing views of many even with the sects, was the main reason the common people did not join the sects of Judaism.

When there is no unity among religious teachings, there is a natural turning away from religion altogether. Note the happenings of God's Church today. Many different groups, each with different teachings and no real agreement!! This same condition existed among the Jews of Palestine during the days of Christ, just as it does today!! Let's look at some background on the differing sects of Judaism at the time of Christ.

The Pharisees:

"The Pharisees were not like a church as we call churches. They were a group of men and even some women representing different walks of life. Some were teachers, ministers, business men, politicians, lawyers. "These people bound themselves together in a covenant to live a particular manner of life. Instead of calling them a church, you can best describe them as a religious fraternity or association" (Edersheim's "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," Vol. 1, pg. 311). They were an exclusive fraternity to perform certain religious customs and traditions that the Common people did not wish to keep with the strictness of the Pharisees.

According to Edersheim, "The object of the association was twofold- to observe in the strictest manner, and according to traditional law, all the ordinances concerning Levitical purity and to be extremely punctilious in all connected with religious dues (tithes and all other dues)" (ibid, Vol. i, pg. 311).

The Pharisees were the major sect of the many divisions of Judaism. They were the most influential group. Their membership was only 6000 out of a population near 3,000,000. The main reason they had the most power was because they had control of the local synagogues. Being in charge gave them advantage over the common people who attended synagogue services. We must remember that the Pharisees had no real control of the bulk of the population.

"The Pharisees were never a homogeneous body possessed of a definite policy or body of doctrine" ("Encyclopedia Britannica," 11th Edition, Vol. xxi, pg. 347). At no time was it required of all Pharisees to think alike. By understanding this fact, we can see that at the time of Christ, the Pharisees exercised little central authority among themselves at all. One Pharisee would teach his opinion on a religious question and another would teach another opinion. (A standing joke among the Jewish people today, "When you have two Jews together, you have three opinions!"). Can you see why there is so

much confusion about Judaism today?

There were two distinguished schools of Pharisees teachings at the time of Christ, the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. "These two schools were rivals. They disagreed over almost all points" ("Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature," by McClintock and Strong, Vol. ix, pg. 472). There were hardly a point of religious doctrine that these two schools completely agreed on. Edersheim says that, "at one time there was such violent disagreement between these two schools that blood was shed between them" ("Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," Vol. ii, pg. 13).

The synagogues rulers adherents to the code of the Pharisees. It was a sign of piety to keep Levitical laws of purity and to be scrupulous in keeping the laws of tradition. This does not mean that the synagogue rulers taught a unified creed. The rulers of the synagogue would teach what he, himself individually, thought was proper. Some would conform to the School of Hillel and other rulers would conform to the School of Shammai. Many would teach a combination of the two schools doctrine and inject their own peculiar beliefs. This is the reason why every opinion was tolerated in the synagogues. "The scribes and Pharisees never taught with authority as did Jesus " (Hereford, "Judaism in the New Testament Period," pg. 170). "And they were astonished at His doctrine: for His word was with power" (Luke 4:3 2).

We can see now why it was not difficult for Christ and the Apostles to speak in the synagogues. Each of the rulers of the synagogue could teach what he pleased and allow whoever he wanted to speak and express their opinions. There was little government of God and there was very little truth!

Jesus spoke many times in the synagogues. "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). Paul also spoke many times in the synagogues about the truth of Christianity! His teaching was not always accepted. "And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on" (Acts 13:15). "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed" (Acts 14: 1). "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures" (Acts 17:1-2).

"The popular religion there, so far as it was entitled to be called Judaism, might be described as more or less diluted Pharisee-ism " (Hereford, "Judaism in the New Testament Period," pg. 13 6). They were in the position to be the major sect of Judaism.

They adhered to the rules of the Pharisees --- they were the scholarly Pharisees --- sometime called 'doctor of the law.' "And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them" (Luke 5: 17).

They were the ones most learned in the law. Hillel and Shammai, who founded the two prominent Pharisaic Schools, were Scribes or Doctors of the Law. "Not all Scribes were Pharisees " (ibid, pg. 158)

The Sadducees:

This was another major group within Judaism at the time of Christ. They had an influential political position in Jerusalem. Many of the Sadducees were priests who ministered at the temple. Performing these functions were the only religious service the priest were doing at this time. In times past the priest had important jobs. But at the time of Christ, the Pharisees, who were not priests, had been allowed by Queen Alexandra (79 BC) to take this leadership to themselves,

while the priests were relegated to the place of performing only the rituals at the temple. Jesus recognized the civil authority that was given by Queen Alexandra. "Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:2-3). Just as Moses had civil authority, he had no authority to change the laws of God. So the Pharisees had civil authority, but no authority to change any law of God!

The Pharisees had taken the rightful position as teachers of the people away from the Priest, so we can see why they did not favor the Pharisees. The majority of priests were Sadducees! The Sadducees had no set creed, except they did not believe in the resurrection, angels or spirits. "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both" (Acts 23:8). Maybe out of spite the Sadducees rejected these doctrines. They detested the Pharisees so much they would counter almost every doctrine and belief the Pharisees would teach.

"The Sadducees would not proselyte. They were not very popular so few Common People joined with them. They also had no synagogues to worship in" (Herford, "Judaism in the New Testament Period," Pg. 122), They had no central authority among themselves. The individual member could believe whatever they pleased.

During the time of Christ the Sadducees had majority control of the Sanhedrin. Their real prominence was political. Religiously speaking few Jews were Sadducees.

The Essenes:

The last major group of Judaisers. "They had about 4000 members, although this sect is not mentioned in the New Testament they were in existence at that time. Members of this group was ascetics who lived in the desert near the Dead Sea. They practiced celibacy, no social contact except with their own sect, drank no wine and did not attend Temple services" ("Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature," by McClintock and Strong, pg. 302). "Their religious practice -was on the order of Catholic monasteries and nunneries" (Herford, "Judaism in the New Testament Period," pg. 63).

Some have said Christ might have been of this sect, but we can see He never practiced any of their basic teachings. Christ came eating and drinking. He mixed with all types of people and attended Holy Day services at the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Apostle Paul condemned asceticism! "(Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col. 2:21-23). Most of the doctrines of the Essenes came from heathen practices, not the Bible!

The Qumran:

This sect was not known before 1947 when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. These scrolls were hidden by this sect." They preferred a life of asceticism and lived in monastery-like institutions" (Thompson, "Archaeology and the Pre-Christian Centuries," pg. 107). Professor Thompson say that the teaching of these Qumran sects differed from that of Christ in a thousand ways (ibid., pg. II 8),

The Zealots:

According to Herford, "Judaism in the New Testament Period," pg. 66, "The Zealots were a religious group, who had as their basic philosophy--the defense of the Law of Moses. At least this was their supposition. In their religious beliefs they

sided with the Sadducees in one respect: they rejected the authority of the Pharisaic teachings” (pg. 68).

Their main doctrine was they were zealous for the law. They were willing to fight to the death for the law if necessary. This seemingly good quality was used as a tool to get the Common People to come to their aid in order to accomplish their own nationalistic desires of driving all foreigners from the land of Palestine. Their zeal came from wanting to overthrow the yoke of the Roman government. They were blamed for the rebellion against Rome, that cause the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Herodians:

This was a minor group during the time of Christ. They are mentioned twice in scripture. "And they sent out unto Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men" (Matt. 22:16). "And they send unto Him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch Him in His words" (Mark 12:13). For the most part they aligned themselves with the Pharisees against Christ. Little is known of them. Some say they were endeavoring to proclaim Herod the Great as the King and Messiah. The Jews at this time were aware that the Messiah was to come.

There were many other sects of Judaism at the time of Christ. They represented a very few individuals. "Some were known as the Apocalyptists. The word means "the revealing ones" or those who purport to give secret doctrines or prophecies never heard before. Many of these writers claimed the names of famous Old Testament personalities, such as Enoch and Moses, as the supposed authors of their books. However, it is well known that these books were written about one to two hundred years before Christ" (R. H. Charles, "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," Oxford University Press, Page 123).

REMEMBER:

The religious condition of the Jews during the life of Jesus Christ shows that very few of the Jews attended religious services. Most of the population were not religious. In the sects themselves they were divided in belief and doctrine. There were disputes over the rituals, marriage and the Sacred calendar, the correct observance of the Holy Days. The only thing they had in common were some observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, the calling of the Jews the chosen people and the expecting of the Messiah. Even in these fundamental doctrines there were countless ways of interpretations.

We can see that Judaism in the days of Christ is described by Judges 21:25: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

THE RELIGION OF JUDAISM----- IS NOT THE RELIGION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT!

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

Information for this article was taken from the Good News Magazine, December 1960, published by Ambassador College We encourage you to read the article titled "Is Judaism the Religion of Moses?"

