

Part 4

JUDAISM IS NOT THE RELIGION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT!

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The last installment revealed how Ezra and Nehemiah reestablished God's Government in the Old Testament. The authority in Palestine to carry out the government has often been called "The Great Synagogue." The word "synagogue" in Greek means assembly. This is the name used most when talking about the authority given the body of priest established by Ezra and Nehemiah. "The people made a covenant with God to obey His laws. And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it" (Neh. 9:38). "Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah" (Neh. 10:1, see verses 2-29).

We shall see in this article how the Great Assembly, with the help of God's Holy Spirit directing them, put together the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

The Work of the Great Assembly!

Ezra and Nehemiah established the religious and political government of God in Palestine. They called together the elders for the purpose of signing and sealing a covenant to keep God's commandments. This brought about the inauguration of a constitutional government in Palestine. This constitution established the "Law of God as given to Moses." Both Ezra and Nehemiah and the priest were at the signing. This acknowledged the written Law given to Moses by God, as the law of the land. Most of the leaders, except a small minority, happily covenanted to perform the requirements of the Law. This law required the people to put away their foreign wives, start tithing, begin to keep God's Sabbaths and to restore proper Temple services. This is the real beginning of the religion God gave to Moses after the Babylonian captivity. No additions or subtractions!

In Part 3 of this series we have shown that Eliashib, the High Priest, at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah did not approve of the decision of the Great Assembly in regarding the putting away of foreign wives. Eliashib grandson Manasseh, was married to one of the daughters of Sanballat the Horonite--a Gentile. Because Sanballat was governor of the northern province of Samaria, Eliashib did not want to lose the influential government favor.

With the marriage of the grandson of the High Priest to the daughter of the governor of Samaria offered a type of alliance between the two peoples (the Jews and Horonites). This presented a delicate political situation. If Manasseh repudiated his wife, in order to keep the Law of God, this friendly relationship would cease. There were a few other Jews along with Eliashib and Manasseh who did not want this marriage to end even if the Law of Moses and the decision of the Great Assembly commanded it. Manasseh openly rebelled against God's government--the constitutional law--defying both Ezra and Nehemiah and the Great Assembly. Because of this rebellion, Nehemiah as the governor of Judea, banished him from the country. "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled

the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good” (Neh 13:23-31).

Manasseh was highly upset over being

excommunicated. He could no longer become High Priest of the Jews upon his father's death, because he had not remained faithful to the Law of God. He and some of his sympathizers and even some priest left Judaea and went northward to Samaria.

This is where the Samaritans entered the picture. The Samaritans, who followed some points of the Law of Moses (only those that suited them), were glad to accept the rebellious Jews! The Samaritans had no real feeling against marrying Gentile wives, for they themselves were Gentiles who had been placed in Samaria when the tribes of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

When arriving in Samaria, Sanballat, Manasseh's father-in-law sympathized with him because he was no longer in line to be High Priest of the Jews, so Sanballat devised a plan to honor him for rebelling against Nehemiah and the Great Assembly. Sanballat petitioned the Persian government to grant him permission to build a temple for the Samaritan people. It was the policy of the Persians to allow their captive nations to worship their own gods and so the permission was granted.

Sanballat, planned to build a temple and install Manasseh, the grandson of the Jewish High Priest, as High Priest of the Samaritans. This plan was fulfilled! The Samaritan temple was built on Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Manasseh was the High Priest and this began the Samaritan religion.

Manasseh rebelled further! His first act after being installed as High Priest was to repudiate the true Temple of God located on Mount Zion in Jerusalem! He did this to strengthen his own position among the Samaritans. By maintaining the Temple be on Mount Gerizim, he was in opposition to the Old Testament prophets where the prophecies say that the Temple of God should be located only on Mount Zion. “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3). “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem “ (Mic 4:2).

There are many scriptures that prove the Temple shall be in Jerusalem! Manasseh's way out of this dilemma, was to formally reject the writing of the prophets. To do this he had to say they were the uninspired words of men.

Manasseh acknowledged that the only books that were really inspired was the first five books of Moses. The reason for this was because these five books had no reference where the temple should be located. By rejecting the rest of the books of the Old Testament, Manasseh put his authority ahead of the Word of God.

With Manasseh ruling in Samaria as High Priest, and claiming that only the books of Moses were inspired, the situation called for action by Ezra and Nehemiah and the Great Assembly. Manasseh was proclaiming that all the Jews in Judaea were in error. Ezra and Nehemiah knew something had to be done about this situation. They knew it was possible that an internal disruption of Jewish society would develop in Judaea if the falsehoods of Manasseh were planted in the peoples minds. The people had to know who was right--Manasseh or Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly settles the question. Under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, Ezra and Nehemiah with the Great Assembly convened to settle the matter. These two servants of God, along with

the ordained priests of God, were given the responsibility of assembling the inspired books of the prophets and holy men of God. Their task was not to write the books, of the Old Testament, for they were already written!! They had to assemble the already acknowledged inspired books into one book in a final order. "To erect a wall of partition between the Jews and these apostates (Manasseh and his followers), and to show the people which of the ancient prophetic books were sacred...the men of the Great Synagogue (Assembly) compiled the canon of the prophets" (Cyclo. Of Bible, Theo. And Ecc. Lit. Vol. X, page 83).

The Canon of the Old Testament

"Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly, under the divine inspiration of the Spirit of God, compiled the books of the Old Testament is the universal acknowledgment of all early Jews and Christians" (ibid, vol ii, page 75). Remember all of the Old Testament book had already been written. The job of the Great Assembly was to put them together into one book in the proper order.

Some modern critics thought that Ezra and the Great Assembly may have sanctioned only the Law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. This is not true! The reason the canon of the Old Testament had to be defined at this time was because the rebellious Jew Manasseh, erroneously maintained that the first five books of Moses were the only inspired books!! Out of his own vanity he rejected the inspired books of the Prophets and Psalms. These books were already as much a part of God's Inspired Word as the Law of God given to Moses! The law of Moses had already been recognized as God's Word. "And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it" (2 Kings 22:8). It was God's purpose that Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly put all the writings of the Law, Prophets, the Psalms and the other books into their proper place in the canon and they be proclaimed as the authoritative Word of God.

Proof that the canon was compiled

by Ezra and Nehemiah.

Josephus, the Jewish historian testified "that the complete Old Testament was finally established in the days of Artaxerxes, king of Persia" (Against Apion, 1,8). Josephus meant that the completed Old Testament was in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, because these two men of God lived in the time of Artaxerxes. Josephus also mentioned that there had not been any prophet who had left any writings from the time of Artaxerxes until the New Testament period" (ibid). Even the writer of Maccabees recognized that up to his time the inspired prophets had ceased with Malachi. "And there was great stress in Israel (in 168 B.C), such as there had not been since the time when the prophets ceased to appear to them" (I Macc.9:27). Without men of God in a prophetic office, it was impossible to have "inspired writings." It is plain that Josephus, who was one of the leading Pharisees of his day, and other prominent Jews , believed the canon of the Old Testament was compiled under Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Old Testament was compiled into three divisions under Ezra and Nehemiah. They placed them into three divisions. "Thus, the inspired Old Testament, from Genesis to II Chronicles (the Hebrew Order), was divided into three divisions--the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. The first call "The Law" and consisted of the first five books. The second was called "The Prophets" and the third was called "The Psalms" in Christ's day. The arrangement of the books has always been reckoned by the Jews as having had its origin in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah" (Ryle, Canon of the Old Testament, page 252; Angus, Bible Handbook, page 568).

Another proof which shows that the Old Testament was divided into three divisions is mentioned by Sirach's grandson--a Jewish religious leader who lived in the second century before Christ. He says in his prologue to the apocryphal book, Ecclesiasticus, that the recognized Scriptures of Official Judaism were those books found in the Law, the Prophets and the Rest of the Books. The third division called the Psalms by the Jews until the time

of Christ because the book of Psalms was the first book of the division. This is clearly indicated by Philo, a Jew who lived a few years before Christ. He said, "That the Tripartite Divisions were then being called "The Law," "The Prophets" and the Psalms" (On the Contemplative Life, page 3). In the third century A.D. the Jews began to refer to the third division as "The Writings."

It is important that we realize that only the books within the three divisions were recognized as inspired of God by the Jews. The Apocrypha were never accepted. Regardless of the beliefs of official Judaism, we have the greater authority telling us of what books consisted in the Old Testament. That witness is Jesus Christ Himself--- the very One who inspired the prophets of the Old Testament. "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. 1:15-17) . Christ taught His disciples many important truths from the Old Testament Scriptures. "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45). The scriptures Christ was talking about were the inspired Old Testament Scriptures!! These are the very books Ezra and Nehemiah compiled into one book. These are the very books of the Old Testament we have in the King James version. Our Old Testament is the complete Old Testament of God.

The arrangement of the KJV Old Testament Books are different than the authoritative arrangement of the Old Testament book compiled by Ezra and Nehemiah. The Jews have never approved of the King James Version of the Old Testament arrangement because its origin was in Egypt. About 250 years before Christ there was a Greek translation made of the Hebrew Old Testament. This became known as the Septuagint Version. The translators of this version decided to change the order of the books. Our King James Version follows the Latin which had this erroneous Egyptian arrangement of the books. When the Jews of the official Judaism recognized the corruptions of the arrangement of order of the book, they completely repudiated it. Notice how the early Jews looked on this translation: "The day on which the translation of the Bible into Greek was made was regarded as a great calamity, equal to that of the golden calf" (Sopherim, i, 7). "The day on which it was accomplished...was commemorated as a day of fasting and humiliation" (ibid.).

"The Septuagint Version translators did not take away or add to the books of the Old Testament, but they did disrupt the Divine order of the books and faultily translated much of the original Hebrew into Greek" (Prologue to Sirach).

Notice the authoritative order of the Old Testament books. They were originally 22 scrolls--now they were subdivided in the King James Version into 39 books. They consisted of:

The Law: 1.) Genesis, 2.) Exodus, 3.) Leviticus, 4.) Numbers, 5.) Deuteronomy

The Prophets: 1.) Joshua & Judges, 2.) I & II Samuel & I & II Kings , 3.) Isaiah, 4.) Jeremiah, 5.) Ezekiel

6.) The Twelve Minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

The Writings: 1.) Psalms, 2.) Proverbs 3.) Job, 4.) Song of Songs, 5.) Ruth, 6.) Lamentations, 7.) Ecclesiastes, 8.) Esther, 9.) Daniel, 10.) Ezra & Nehemiah 11.) I & II Chronicles.

Notice that the first seven books are the same as in our King James version, but afterward there are considerable changes. Notice, the so-called minor prophets from Hosea to Malachi are not really the last books of the Old

Testament. These Minor Prophets really belong in the center. I & II Chronicles are last books of the Old Testament. This authoritative arrangement of the Old Testament is the one which the official Jewish community has always recognized as authoritative!

The Apocrypha and other spurious books never found a place in the official division of the Old Testament. All these outside books were totally rejected by the Jews. Josephus, the Jewish priest and historian, who represented the beliefs of official Judaism in the days of the Apostle Paul, said that the Jews never accepted any other books as inspired other than those compiled in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Josephus wrote: "It is true, our history has been written since the time of Artaxerxes (the time of Ezra and Nehemiah) very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former (writings) of our forefathers, since that time" (Against Apion, 1,8).

The last prophet to write an inspired book was Malachi--a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. Christ used only the inspired Old Testament!! He never once quoted from or alluded to any of the Apocrypha or other spurious books. Had He even made the slightest indication that the source of His doctrines were from these unrecognized books, the Jews would have vehemently countered Him with all their intellectual might. They would have loudly and persistently pointed out to the people that Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah for He was making use of uninspired books. The Jews never had the opportunity of accusing Christ of using uninspired books!! They railed Him for going contrary to the doctrines of the different doctrines of Judaism, but never criticized Him for using uncanonical books!!! The silence of the Jews on this point is definite proof that Christ only used the inspired books of the Old Testament as the Scriptures.

Christ and the Apostles used the recognized Old Testament as compiled by Ezra and Nehemiah. Many parts of the New Testament tells us that the Jews preserved the Old Testament, but we know they did not keep it according to God's Word. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God"(Matt 22:29). "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus" (Acts 18:24). Christ taught out of the Law and the Prophets. "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? (John 10:34). "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17). "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:40). Christ also taught out of the Psalms! "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). All of the New Testament writers recognized the Jews had the complete Old Testaments.

The Apostle Paul knew the Jews were to preserve the Old Testament. "What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:1-3). Just because they were to preserve the Old Testament, did not mean they kept it the way God intended. Through the teaching of the Pharisees they had corrupted the teachings of God's Word. "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:7-9). In Matthew 23:13-36, Christ tells the scribes and Pharisees all the woe that has come upon them for their unrighteous behavior.

It is very clear from secular history and from the New Testament that we have the complete Old Testament. Paul was fully aware that the oracles of the Jews were the inspired books of the Old Testament canon--the same books that are in our King James Version today!! All other books, not found in the Bible as we have it are entirely worthless for teaching doctrine. The Apocrypha, and all other books are the writings of men, not inspired of God!

In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, with the canonization of the Old Testament, the Jews entered into a period of prosperity and happiness. They kept the law and taught God's way of life. This period from about 430 B.C.

to 331 B.C. until the overthrow of the Persian Empire by the Greeks could be called a time when the Law of God, as given to Moses, was followed by the people!

In part 5, we will look into the time of the Persian control of Palestine for the confused and mixed up conditions of Judaism. This will show how the Jewish denominations began.

(To be continued in the next Prove All Things. Information for this article was taken from the March 1961 issue of the Good New Magazine, published by Ambassador College. We encourage to read the original article entitled "Is Judaism the Law of Moses?" Part 4).

IT IS NOT THE CHURCH OF GOD, IN TRUTH'S INTENTION TO DEGRADE THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IT IS OUR INTENTION TO SHOW AND PROVE THAT JUDAISM IS NOT THE RELIGION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT JUST LIKE CATHOLICISM IS NOT THE TRUE RELIGION OF JESUS CHRIST!