

Jewish Beliefs and Practices: *Jews, Gentiles, theologies and celebrations*



The New Testament World - Week 5
Adult Education

Jews and Gentiles

Gentiles –

- Unclean, could not fellowship (didn't study Torah or live a proper lifestyle, didn't keep purity laws)
- Could not leave cattle with a Gentile
- Gentile mother could not nurse Jewish baby
- Doctor-patient had to be both Jewish or both Gentile
- *Categories of Gentiles:*
 - *Ger Toshav* (sojourner) – someone who lived in the land with no intention of converting. Required to keep the 7 Laws of Moses – similar to Acts 15
 - *Godfearers* – interested in Judaism but not ready for circumcision. Keep Shabbat, tithe, go to synagogue, keep kosher (to an extent), not tolerated by religious leaders
 - *Converts* – circumcised. Mishnah records a process that didn't exist in Hillel's time. Upon completion, they are "born again" and were completely considered a Jew. If brother and sister both converted, they were no longer considered related. Mikve – cut hair and nails and were not touched, but observed.

Conversion –

- Maccabees would do mass conversion with conquering (Idumeans converted – Herod the Great)
- Some nations converted by choice
 - Adiabene – converted my merchant
 - Queen Helene – brought goods to Jerusalem (1st C)
 - Dhumnuwas – nation converted (8th C)
 - Qu Saria – Black Sea (5th C)
- 139 Jews were expelled from Rome for proselytizing
- Tiberius, Claudius and Domition invoked the death penalty for missionaries and converts
- Converts for fear, love or marriage were accepted
- Time of Ester – unacceptable to convert for position or because they had a dream

Mikveh –

- Emphasis on physical purity in the 2nd Temple period
- Never to cleanse the outer body (symbolic)
- Pharisees – mikveh because of obedience
- Essenes – pure of heart before mikveh
- At conversion

Varieties of Judaism

Judaism in General

- One faith, many expressions
- Mikve before marriage
- Mezuza (found in archeological digs)

- Tefillin (phylacteries)
- Tzit-tzit – worn on the outer garment, possibly by men and women
- Women tied their hair back, but not covered (wearing down was the sign of a prostitute or at a wedding)
- Washing of hands (varied practice – Mark 7:1-23)
- Mo'edim united the people
 - Reenactment of historical and prophetic events
 - Spring holidays have been fulfilled by Yeshua
 - Fall holidays yet to be fulfilled by the second coming
 - Rosh Chodesh – Numbers 28:11
 - Pilgrimage feasts (also “hag”)
 - First harvest is the barley harvest. Sheaf is not from the harvest, it is removed from the field. (Day after the Shabbat of Passover). Shavuot is the first fruits of man and beast.
 - Resurrection – any part of the day (even small) counts for the day
 - Rosh HaShana / Yom Truah – agricultural calendar started. Same holiday by Second Temple Period.
 - Judah counted kings from Nisan - Israel counted kings from Tishri
 - New Year is traditional anniversary of creation

Essenes at Qumran –
First Century Palestine

Essenes dwelt in caves and tents surrounding their main complex.

It seems that the communal area with its numerous mikva'ot was the cultural center of the Essenes. By surrounding this center with their tents, the Essenes appear to have been imitating the ancient Israelites, who likewise encircled the Tabernacle with their tents in the wilderness of the Sinai desert.

It seems that the Essenes interpreted Prophet Isaiah: 40:3 as going 'into the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord' as opposed to coming from the wilderness, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” to go out and prepare the way of the Lord's Coming.

The Essenes' interpretation of life was in contrast to what God spoke through His Word.

For example, God the Son, rather than community, was the suffering servant.

Also, Salvation came through Messiah Yeshua not by withdrawal from sinners. The Essenes also held to a strict oath of membership prior to ritual cleansing. John the Immerser, saw immersion as a beginning to restoration with God through repentance and forgiveness. When John the Immerser saw Yeshua in bodily form of which John had the Spirit of God guiding him to Jesus, He saw the complete picture in Messiah Yeshua: (from immersion to completion)

Matthew 3:13-15 - Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. But John protested strenuously, having in mind to prevent Him, saying, It is I who have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me? But Jesus replied to him, Permit it just now; for this is the fitting way for [both of] us to fulfill all righteousness [that is, to perform

completely whatever is right]. Then he permitted Him.
After Jesus calls and instructs His Twelve Disciples: Matthew 11:1-4 - After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Therapeutae: near Lake Mareotis in Lower Egypt –

Known as 'healers', 'worshippers' or 'miracle workers', this community renounced private ownership in their quest for the vision of God. They also renounced all family life. They spent their days starting with prayer at sunrise, studying scriptures ('law, prophets, and psalms') and writings throughout the day fasting until sunset when they finished their day with prayer. As a community, they saw the allegorical meaning of Scripture and interpreted their daily life accordingly. However, the picture of Scripture points to both and... contemplative life to an active life. For example, inwardly living to going out into the world and living inside out. The actual picture is that of Yeshua who completes the picture for us all.

Zealots, near the Sea of Galilee –

Extreme revolutionaries, these men took their biblical tradition handed down to them and used it as a sword to gain freedom from their oppressors and in this case, the Roman rulers.

They used their practices and traditions as a means instead of a *looking forward to* (Yeshua).

Herodians, possibly a branch from the Essenes –

"party or adherents of Herod", they supported the Herodian dynasty which glorified Herod as a 'god', not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Samaritans, 'keepers of Torah' –

The religious community of the Samaritans encountered in the New Testament and continuing until today appears to have been religiously very conservative and not inclined toward syncretism with paganism.

During the New Testament time, the Jews of the day looked upon Samaritans as foreigners. The Samaritans did not form a uniform community. The point of difference between the Jews in Jerusalem vs. the Jews near Shechem and Mount Gerizim seems to be their adherence to a rival sanctuary on Mount Gerizim instead of Mount Zion. They developed their own priesthood instead of the Jerusalem priesthood. They also preserved their own text of the Pentateuch, the Samaritan Pentateuch, deriving from a Hebrew text at least as old as the second century, B.C. Only the five books of Moses were accepted by the Samaritans as authoritative, a view shared with the Sadducees.

The Sadducees also rejected the resurrection which is a rejection of a prophetic figure, the ta'eb 'the One who restores' or the 'One who returns' in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:18, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."

Judaism in Action

Beliefs and Practices –

Ethical principles seemed to define Judaism as opposed to heartfelt beliefs. In the ancient world, a Jew was identified as a male being circumcised as the seal of belonging to the people, and one who observes the Sabbath rest, other holy days, and the keeping of food and purity laws. One belief that most Jews observed was 'One God' (The God of Israel), the special status of Israel (the chosen and separate people along with the land), and the Torah (the law given by the One God to His chosen people.)

How the beliefs extend into Jewish life is passed down by Rabbi's as an authoritative expression (as opposed to the Holy Spirit interpreting Torah through the light of Messiah).

One God –

For Jews, God is the measure for all things. (God is the eye view) and, because of their reverence for God, the Septuagint translators, the rabbis and the Targumist Jews modified some of the anthropomorphisms of the Bible so as to employ a passive voice 'it was seen before God' 'there was happiness before God'. This aided their resolve to not make God the subject but to revere Him (afar off)

Israel and the Chosen People –

Exclusiveness became the answer to being a holy nation, set apart for God. Some Jews even believed that being buried in Israel guaranteed resurrection and that those buried there would be revived first when Messiah comes.

Torah, Tradition and Scripture –

When tragedy struck the Jewish people, the religious reckoned a failure to keep the law of Moses. The study of the law became a duty of extreme importance so as to redouble the efforts against further tragedy (taken from national tragedy of 586 B.C.).

The Torah governed all aspects of life – the social and legal system as well as religion. Its study was an act of worship.

For the Pharisees and rabbinical Judaism, alongside the written law existed the oral law. "Moses received the (oral) law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets committed it to the men of the great synagogue." The oral law continued down through the ages through rabbis and scholars.

Christianity shared the Jewish conviction that the Scriptures were divinely inspired but it attached itself more to the Prophets than to the Law. This may be seen in the way in which the 'law' was the designation among the Jews for the entire Bible, whereas for Christians 'prophets' became the inclusive designation for the Old Testament.

Proselytes and Godfearers –

Resident aliens friendly to or allied with Jews but not converts to Israel (Gentile sympathizers of the Jews).

To become a Proselyte meant to join a Jewish community.

3 Steps were required of the Gentile in order to be initiated into Judaism: circumcision, baptism, and an offering at the temple.

Gentiles were not bound by the Law of Moses, which was given to the covenant people alone. However, provision was made for Gentiles to come into the covenant and assume the yoke of Torah. The rest of humankind lived under the commandments given to Noah (To share in the world to come: establish a court of justice, prohibit blasphemy, no worship of other gods, do not murder, no incest, do not commit adultery, nor thievery, robbery and do not eat of the flesh of an animal before it dies). (In this case – a set of principles to live by as opposed to system of beliefs).

Messianism and the Glorious Identity –

The Jewish expectation centered on the nation and the age to come rather than on the Messiah, who forms the center of Christian Faith.

Messiah, or the anointed one, was used in the Old Testament for kings, priests and metaphorically for prophets:

- God seen as acting directly
- Supernatural Son of Man comparable to Daniel 7
- Rule of The Congregation 'priest'
- Psalms of Solomon 17-18 'coming king' who will be son of David and 'the anointed of the Lord'
- High priest from the tribe of Levi through Aaron
- Governor and hope for King from the tribe of Judah thru David

Christians saw in Jesus the fulfillment of all these expectations – He was God acting among human beings, the Son of man who arises at the end of the age, the Son of David, the anointed Prophet, Priest and King.

First century Judaism presented a variety of expectations about an age to come.

Afterlife –

- Whether good or bad, the death of a person enters the underworld. The Wisdom of Solomon by contrast although not consistent alludes to the Greek philosophical teaching of immortality with death as the penalty for the wicked.
- The doctrine of the resurrection became one of the essential dogmas of rabbinic orthodoxy, denial of which excluded one from a share in the world to come.
- There was an increasing tendency to use Sheol or Hades for the place of punishment for the wicked.

- The notion of resurrection, found occasionally in the Old Testament (Isa 26:19, Dan 32:2) finds expression reserved for the Godly only.

Festivals and Holy Days –

Jewish religious calendar included observance of the weekly Sabbath, the monthly new moon, and the annual festivals. The 3 great pilgrim festivals – Passover, Weeks (Pentecost) and Tabernacles – brought large numbers to Jerusalem from Palestine and the Diaspora.

Sabbath –

- Observance of the 7th day of each week was an important element in Jewish SEPARATISM. Admittedly, ‘the rules for the Sabbath are like mountains hanging by air, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many.’
- Certain activities took precedence over the Sabbath command – circumcision and sacrifice in the temple.
- Fasting was forbidden – things that might dampen the joy of the occasion, such as mourning and visiting the sick, were limited.

New Moon –

Like the Sabbath rest, the New Moon was equally observed with additional sacrifices at the temple.

Passover –

Passover was celebrated in commemoration of the exodus from Egypt

Festival of Redemption

The waving of the sheaf of barley, the firstfruits of the grain harvest on the Sunday after Passover provides the background to Paul’s language of firstfruits for the resurrection of Jesus

Passover meal was eaten after nightfall in a family group at least 10 persons

Meal included roast lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs –from the bitterness in Egypt

It was eaten reclining, a symbol of being free persons

4 cups of wine mixed with water were passed around during the meal

Passover came in the spring

The lambs were slain on the 13th of Nisan

Meal was eaten on the eve of Nisan 14

Yeshua’s Last Supper: the Synoptics apparently put the meal on Nisan 14 as a

Passover supper, but John apparently has Jesus die at the time the lambs were being sacrificed on the 13th

Pentecost/Shavuot –

Pentecost (or 50th day) –morning after the Sabbath

The calendar followed at Qumran counted from the Sabbath following Passover Week.

A barley festival – celebrating the conclusion of the spring grain harvest

Grain was planted in Palestine allowing to grow during the winter and harvested in Spring

Giving of the Law at Sinai Firstfruits – Acts 2

Sukkoth –

- Feast of Booths – 8 days, coming after the grape harvest
- Commemorating the living in tents during the time of wilderness wandering
- Practice of building individual booths for the week of the festival is referred to in the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:5 - Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.")
- National Deliverance
- Water libation ceremony (John 7)
 - Every morning building to the last day
- Priests were divided into three divisions:
 - On duty during festival (offer sacrifices)
 - Dumped the ashes out of the Eastern Gate into Kidron valley and cut 25 foot long willow branches. Formed a line holding the branches and would march back with the wind blowing through the branches.
 - Brought back water from the pool of Siloam, led by High Priest. Gold pitcher would draw "living water". Assistant to the High Priest had a silver vase containing wine. They would march back at the same time as the branches. Group 2 would enter and circle the altar. High priest and assistant would ascend the altar and people would sing Isaiah. Funnels were for wine and water and it would flow over altar and the willows would form a sukka over the altar.
- Hannukah was possibly the "Feast of Lights" because it was Sukkot celebrated two months later after the Maccabees cleansed the Temple.

Rosh Hashanah/Yom T'ruah –

Blowing of the ram's horn

Began important religious days – Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement

Yom Kippur –

National Atonement

Solemn fast day

Day of repentance

Prayer for forgiveness

The ritual of Leviticus was carried out while the temple existed

High priest annual appearance in the Holy of Holies with blood for the atonement for the nations sins and called upon Yahweh in prayer

Today it's observed as holy 'fast day'

Hanukkah –

Commemorating the rededication of the Temple thru Judas Maccabeus story in 1 Macc 4 and 2 Macc 10: Only one cruse of oil was found when the Jews reoccupied the

temple, but it miraculously lasted for 7 days so the lamp in the temple was kept burning until a new supply of oil could be consecrated

Purim –

- Freeing the Jewish people from being wiped out
- Joyous holiday
- (Book of Esther: Significance of Favor with the King of Kings and dedication to God)

Daily Devotions –

- The faithful Jew recited the Shame not only in the synagogue but daily.
- Deut 6- Confession of Judaism; Recitation of Judaism
- Prayer: twice a day
- Meals – religious context of purification and blessing of the Creator
- Hands were washed, bread was blessed and broken and after the meal was eaten – thanksgiving at the close