

*Is JUDAISM
the RELIGION OF MOSES?*

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Is JUDAISM the RELIGION OF MOSES?

Introduction

People assume that Judaism is the religion of Moses—that Jesus brought a message opposed to the Old Testament—that He came to nullify the teaching of Moses. It is taken for granted that the New Testament presents a Gentile religion and that the Old Testament teaches Judaism!

Yet all these assumptions *are absolutely false!*

Shocking though it may seem, history proves that Judaism is *not* the religion of the Old Testament Scriptures. Judaism is plainly and simply the religion of the Jews—a religion manufactured by their own ingenuity. The Jews of Roman times had appropriated the name of Moses as the author of their religion—but in actuality, they had rejected Moses. Jesus said: "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me . . . but ye believe not his writings" (John 5:46,47). The Jews used the name of Moses, but they didn't practice what he commanded.

Just as today, there are hundreds of denominations and sects in what is commonly called Christianity, all appropriating the name of Christ—saying they are Christian—but contradicting each other and failing to practice what He taught! And history proves that the Jews had misappropriated the name of Moses.

In effect, Judaism was a man-made religion! Jesus said that they were "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

It is time we looked into the records of history. It is time we learned how the Jews departed from the religion of Moses. We will be dumbfounded to discover that Jesus, in reality, re-emphasized the message that Moses brought—in its true spiritual intention. And, instead of nullifying Moses' teaching, He magnified it, having in view the true spiritual purpose originally intended.

The time has come to get our eyes open to the facts! Judaism was not, and is not, the religion of Moses!

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Chapter 1

IT IS obvious to the most superficial reader of the New Testament that a fundamental difference existed between the teaching of Jesus and the Judaism of His day.

Why?

The answer is surprising!

History shows—and the Jews themselves admit—that their religion had drifted far away from the simple doctrines of Scripture—commonly called the "Old Testament." The Jews had modified God's law and even instituted laws and commandments of their own which were, in many instances, diametrically opposite to the precepts of Moses.

It is time we realize that Christ came to a people who had, through their human laws and traditions, rejected the religion of the Old Testament which God had given to their forefathers.

These are the plain facts of history. It is important that we understand this if we are to comprehend the significance of events in the New Testament period. Christ, in effect, came to retrieve the Jews from their apostasy—from their rejection of the laws of God. And, He came to reveal to them the Gospel—the New Testament revelation—to complete the promises that God gave to Moses, not to do away with them!

The Divisions of Judaism

Many people have erroneously assumed that the Judaism in the time of Christ was a religion united in a common bond—every Jew believing about the same thing—all united into one major Jewish denomination.

This is the first illusion that history reveals.

Judaism was divided into *many sects* in Jesus' day. Each had its peculiar beliefs. One of the most authoritative Jewish writers on Judaism, Dr. Herford, tells us: "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 was not one unified organization. Actually, there were many religious sects comprising it. And, even within some of these major sects there were many "splinter" groups which had their own ideas and beliefs. In many respects, the Judaism of Christ's time was not unlike our own world. We have many competitive sects representing "Christianity." So likewise, the Jews had their divisions, differing sects representing "Judaism."

Some of these sects will be familiar to readers of the New Testament. There were the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, Zealots and Herodians. However, there were many more divisions of which we have a good deal of history. Some of these were the Essenes, the Qumran sects (who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls of which so much has been written lately), and others who are called, by contemporary religious historians, Apocalyptic.

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There were other divisions among the Jews who lived in the surrounding areas, such as Egypt, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Greece, etc. There certainly was not just one single Jewish sect—Judaism was split into many fragments.

But history reveals another shocking and little-understood fact. It will eradicate the fiction from many people's minds that the Jews, as a whole, were deeply interested in religion at this time in history.

A Surprising Fact Comes to Light

The records show that far less than 5% of the total Jewish population of Palestine belonged directly to any of the religious groups mentioned above!

Unbelievable as it sounds it is true! Over 95 % of the total Palestine population were neither Pharisee, Scribe, Zealot, Herodian, Essene, Qumran, or Apocalyptic. These people—the overwhelming majority in Palestine—had no direct membership in these religious denominations of Judaism and in most cases were not particularly religious at all.

The Pharisees referred to the mass of the people as the *Am ha-aretz*, This word is Hebrew and signifies "The People of the Land," or simply, "The Common People."

These people were the multitudes who lived in the cities, towns, and country. They were, in many respects, like many non-church members today—some went to the synagogues frequently, many only occasionally, and many never attended at all.

The scholar Herford has this to say about these people:

"It is clear that the *Am ha-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-gatherer (publican) and the tradesman, so, on the religious side, they included those who were just not Pharisees, and those who paid little or no heed to religion at all, with every shade of piety and indifference in between" (*ibid.*, p. 72).

The Population Analyzed

We can demonstrate quite easily that far less than 5% of the population in Palestine belonged to the Jewish religious sects in New Testament times. By comparing the number of members within the Jewish religious sects with the sum of the total Palestine population, we will arrive at some surprising answers. The figures should be interesting.

The *Encyclopedia Biblica* records that the population of Palestine must have been somewhere between 2½ and 3 million inhabitants at this time (Column 3550). This is the figure that most scholars represent as the total population of Palestine.

There is a full discussion on the Palestine population question in Salo Baron's, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. i, pp. 370-372. This Jewish historian has summed up the opinions of the experts in this matter. He quotes as his conclusion to the whole question, the findings of Dr. J. Klausner, a contemporary Jewish scholar:

"J. Klausner, finally, 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 3 million Jews, not including half of a million Samaritans, Syro-Phoenicians, Arabs and Greeks'" (*ibid.*, vol. i., P. 372).

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This figure should not be far from right. There were nearly 3,000,000 Jews living in Palestine in the days of Christ.

How Many Jews Belonged to the Religious Sects?

The most prominent sect in Judaism at this time was the Pharisees. This was the group Christ had more to say against than any other. One of the reasons for this is because the Pharisees were the most influential group and had more members than any of the other sects. They also had direct control over the majority of synagogues and schools, and in this respect, were the most Popular with the people. But yet, even though the Pharisees were the most influential and the most prominent religious group among the Jews in the time of Christ, it is astounding and dumbfounding to realize that out of 3,000,000 Jews in Palestine *only a mere 6,000 were Pharisees*. The Jewish historian, Josephus, who was a contemporary of the Apostle Paul, and a Pharisee himself, informs us of this fact in his history *Antiquities of the Jews*, xvii, 2, 4.

But just imagine what this means! Here were the Pharisees, the major religious sect among the Jews, representing nothing more than an insignificant .2% of all the Jews in Palestine. These facts will have to change the convictions of many people who have had the erroneous idea that most of the Jews in Christ's time were Pharisees.

Most readers of the New Testament have never thought it necessary to ascertain the religious condition of the Jews in Roman times. And because of this, most people have been making erroneous assumptions based on our own contemporary conditions.

The Other Jewish Sects

All other sects within Judaism *were of less significance* than the Pharisees. The Sadducees, for example, were a sect that Christ came into contact with frequently, but they were less prominent than the Pharisees. There is no question about the fact that they had fewer members (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii, 1, 4 and *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, p. 322). If we number the Sadducees at less than 3,000 members we will not be far from the truth.

Another sect among the Jews at this time, but not mentioned in the Bible, were the Essenes. Josephus informs us that there were *only about 4,000 of them* (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii, 1, 5). A group known as the Qumran, associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls just recently found, were a part of this Essene sect and represented part of the 4,000 members.

The rest of the sects in Palestine were of minor importance and definitely had fewer members than the Pharisees, Sadducees or Essenes (e.g., Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, pp. 127, 128).

These figures represent the startling truth that the overwhelming majority of Jews DID NOT belong to the religious sects.

With the facts staring us directly in the face, it should not be difficult to understand why it can be stated with absolute assurance that FAR LESS than 5% of the 3,000,000 Jews of Palestine belonged to these religious sects.

Some Common People Were Religious

The majority of people, known as the *Am ha-aretz*, the Common People, who were not members of the religious sects, represented all classes and varying degrees of feeling in regard to religion.

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It is definitely known that some of these Common People were not totally irreligious. Some of them did hold to a form of religion, even though they did not belong to the accepted religious sects.

Since there were synagogues scattered throughout Palestine, it is altogether obvious that those Jews who did attend had some form of religious conviction. Because the "ministers" in charge of most of the synagogues were Pharisees, it is likely that much of the Pharisaical teaching influenced them. However, these Common People *were not Pharisees!* Most of the people had no desire to practice the strict and disciplinary rules of the Pharisees. Nevertheless, some of the people did attend the Pharisaic synagogues to hear the Scriptures expounded on the Sabbath or on other occasions.

The Common People who did attend the synagogue services, however, were not required to hold to the teachings of the Pharisees. The Pharisees exercised little real authority over the religious life of the people. If a person desired to attend the synagogue, he could; if he obliged himself to stay away, that was his prerogative. There was no coercion to attend Sabbath services, for **THERE WAS LITTLE EXERCISE OF ANY CENTRAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY WITHIN JUDAISM AT THIS TIME.** "*Pharisaism*" had no means of compelling those who were not in their fellowship to conform to their requirements" (*ibid.*, p. 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*, p. 160).

It was only over the lives of the "pious" that the Pharisees saddled a harsh religion of "do's" and don't's."

Were Synagogues Frequented by the Jews?

Even though the synagogues ruled by the Pharisees were open to all the Jews and they could attend them on the Sabbaths, this does not mean that all the Jews attended. In fact, from the available evidence, it appears quite strongly that only very few Jews, relatively speaking, attended the synagogues regularly. At least, if the size and number of synagogues, of which records exist, are any guide, and they obviously do represent a guide, then we can safely say that very few of the Common People attended the synagogues with regularity.

Take as an example the Capernaum Synagogue.

Capernaum Synagogue

It is a matter of history, recorded in the New Testament, that there was only *ONE* synagogue in the city of Capernaum in Galilee—and even that was built by a Gentile (Luke 7:1-5). That *only one* synagogue existed in such a large city *surprises* even Edersheim (one of the foremost Jewish writers on early Judaism), because Capernaum was very significant in New Testament times and had a considerable Jewish population. See *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, Pp. 365, 432, 433.

The ruins of this synagogue show that it would have probably seated around 500 people at the very most. This was certainly not large for the city of Capernaum.

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). There is no reason to doubt Josephus' statement regarding this, for he should have known. He was governor of the province of Galilee under the

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Romans and was well aware of the number of his constituents, especially since he was responsible for collecting taxes from them. So, from Josephus, we can be certain that Capernaum had at least 15,000 inhabitants, but from other evidence which shows its political importance in Galilee, there must be considerable more inhabitants.

Most of the people in Galilee were Jews (Mathews, *History of New Testament Times in Palestine*, p. 149). And of this Galilean population it is said that "no region was more punctual in observance of the Sabbaths and feasts" (*ibid.*, p. 150). And yet there was only one synagogue in Capernaum—one of the chief cities of Galilee.

The importance of Capernaum in New Testament times has been recognized by our contemporary historians (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 566). It is known that the city was the residence of a high officer of the king (John 4:46) and significant enough to have a customs station (Matt. 9:9 and 17:24).

Nonetheless, even being one of the chief cities of Galilee and having a considerable Jewish population it had ONLY ONE synagogue. (In the New Testament, the definite Greek article is used, which indicates only one synagogue). It would have been virtually impossible to get even 10% of the Jewish population into this synagogue for Sabbath services. This serves to indicate that only a small minority of the Jews attended.

The Nazareth Synagogue

It is known that the great bulk of the synagogues of Galilee were quite small in size even though there were a considerable number of Jews living in every city. (Mathews, *History of New Testament Times in Palestine*, p. 149). In Nazareth, where Jesus was brought up, there was one synagogue. This, in itself, is not surprising, for Nazareth was not of the same prominence as Capernaum. Yet, Nazareth, with its immediate environs, to again cite Josephus, had at least 15,000 inhabitants. It was certainly no mean city, even though it was smaller than Capernaum.

Edersheim informs us that Nazareth was a religious center for certain of the priests who ministered in the temple (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, p. 147). Also, Nazareth was one of the major cities located on the great caravan route from the Mediterranean Sea to Damascus (*ibid.*). This location gave it a particular importance.

But even with these advantages, the ruins of the synagogue at Nazareth show that it was so small that it could hardly seat more than 75 souls. This size shows how insignificant was the synagogue compared to the population of the township of Nazareth, which numbered over 15,000 inhabitants. This again serves to indicate that the synagogues were not attended regularly except by the most pious of the Common People. The rest of them were not particularly interested in religion. Undoubtedly many of them did attend the annual festivals which were held in the synagogues and at the Temple in Jerusalem. To the Jews the annual festivals were like national holidays. But the evidence is clearly against the masses attending the synagogues *regularly* every Sabbath.

It has been conjectured by some that the Nazareth synagogue may have been built later than the time of Christ because it was not situated in the highest part of the city, as they supposedly think it should have been. However, Edersheim shows that this is not a proper criterion and rejects the supposition. (*ibid.*, Vol. i, p. 433). There is every reason to believe that this small synagogue was the one Jesus attended. In their visit to Nazareth in 1956, both Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong came to the same conclusion as did Edersheim—it is the very synagogue that existed in Jesus' day.

This religious condition in Palestine nearly 2,000 years ago should not surprise us much. Today it is common for many of the people who profess Christianity to attend church only on the

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two pagan holidays that almost all churches celebrate today-Easter and Christmas. The rest of the year finds the majority not attending church with any regularity. The Jews, in Christ's day, can be compared in like manner with the common tendency today.

How Many Synagogues in Palestine?

It is not known exactly how many synagogues there were throughout Palestine in Christ's time. However, there are some hints as to the number.

Herford tells us that almost every area which had a considerable Jewish population had at least one synagogue in each of its cities. (*Judaism in the New Testament Period*, pp. 27, 133). It must be remembered that Capernaum, as large as it was, had *one* synagogue. There can be little question about the fact that there was at least one synagogue in almost every town of any size. This seems to be a foregone conclusion of all the writers on the subject.

We happen to know, again from Josephus, that there were 240 cities and villages in all of Galilee (*Life of Josephus*, p. 45). Galilee was much more prosperous than Judea in the south, and in fact, Galilee was far and above the province of Judea in material blessings. Edersheim says the cost of living in Judea, for example, was five times that of Galilee because of Judea's relative sparsity of good soil and crops (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. i, pp. 224, 225). However, if we allow Judea to also have had about 240 cities and villages as did Galilee (although there were probably less), then we arrive at about 500 cities and villages in all of Palestine that could have had a synagogue. This would represent about 500 synagogues. But, if we allow some of the cities to have had two or more synagogues, the number could be raised to about 1,000 synagogues. That is, if every city and village did have a synagogue.

If there were, being extremely liberal, about 1,000 synagogues scattered throughout Palestine out of a population of 3,000,000 people, this would mean one synagogue for every 3,000 people. The sizes of the synagogues were from the very small, held in the home (*ibid.*, vol. i, p. 433), to the size of the Capernaum synagogue with as many as 500. There were certainly none which could hold 3,000, nor even a third of that amount. And the majority were small synagogues not much bigger than the one in Nazareth.

That there could hardly be more than 1,000 synagogues throughout Palestine is obvious in another respect, too, when we consider that there were only 6,000 Pharisees to minister in these synagogues. THE PHARISEES WERE THE SYNAGOGUE RULERS (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, P. 134). However, not all Pharisees were religious leaders in the synagogues. For example, Josephus, the Jewish historian, was a Pharisee but was not a ruler or synagogue official. In fact, a good percentage of Pharisees were not a part of the synagogue government.

And besides this, there were several offices to be filled in each synagogue (ISBE, vol. v, pp. 2878, 2879). The limited number of Pharisees available could hardly have filled the necessary posts for more than 1,000 separate synagogues.

With about 3,000 Jews for each synagogue in Palestine, and the synagogues ranging in size from around 75 members (even 10 if held in a home, as was sometimes allowed) to around 500 people, it can easily be seen that a good number of the Common People *did not attend*.

Popular Judaism Like Popular Churchianity

The religious condition of the Jews during the days of Christ can be compared with our own society. Today, there are about 750 million people who claim to be Christians, but how many of these are fervent in their beliefs? How many are consistent church goers? How many are

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zealously interested in their church? How many put their church above anything else in their lives? How many really know God?

Even the major Protestant and Catholic leaders are appalled at the seeming lack of real interest expressed by so many of their members. It is a known fact that the majority of people today just aren't interested in real, heart-felt religion at all—even though most claim to be Christians.

Should we then be amazed that over 95% of the Jews of Christ's time were no more religious than our own people? Of course not! People were the same then as they are today.

The false notion that the Jews of Christ's day were intensely interested in religion—the religion of Moses—must be eradicated from our minds. Such deception must be replaced by the cold facts! The Jews were no more fervent about the religion of Moses than the majority of Christians are today about the religion of Christ!

Yet when they heard Christ's message it began to awaken them to their senses, just as millions are being awakened from their lethargy today by the **WORLD TOMORROW** broadcast.

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Chapter 2

How much do you know about the Jewish sects mentioned in your New Testament—the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and the Herodians and Zealots? Were they all really God’s Old Testament Church?

HUNDREDS OF *denominations and* splinter sects are represented in so called Christianity today. It is possible to find any variety that might suit the fancy.

A Sect for Every Whim!

There are “pentecostal” sects that cater to those of certain emotional tendencies. Others appeal to the educated and the intellectual. There are puritan and fundamentalist denominations and at the other extreme, cold, formal and modernistic ones. On the other hand, we find certain denominations having a strong central government and in others the congregations rule. There are those with pomp and ritual, and those having no religious adornment. And yet, the irony of the whole thing is the fact that all these opposing and irreconcilable denominations claim to be the Church that Christ founded while they preach conflicting and contradictory “gospels.” It certainly is obvious that they are not preaching the ONE Gospel of Christ (I Cor. 1:10-13).

Our people—claiming to be Christians—have gotten themselves into a chaotic state of confusion in regard to religion. They have abandoned the Gospel of Christ—which is clearly and plainly revealed in the Word of God—and substituted for it their various opinions and beliefs resulting in our modern denominationalism.

It should therefore not be surprising to us today, who are so used to the splits and schisms based on the opinions of men, to find that the Jews in the New Testament times were ALSO SPLIT UP INTO MANY DIFFERING AND OPPOSING SECTS.

The Denominations of Judaism

It is a common law of human nature that when mankind uses human reasoning to arrive at the truth of a religious subject, there are going to be many differences of opinion. The Jews in the New Testament period were not one unified denomination preaching one message. They were far from common agreement with one another in many basic points of religion.

Judaism had its sectarian divisions as we have ours. How did they originate—and why? Let the Jews themselves answer.

Here are the candid admissions of Hereford:

“If it were possible to analyze the Judaism of the New Testament Period into all its component elements, the result 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” (Hereford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, pp. 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 from 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 words of Montifiore, that THERE WERE ‘MANY JUDAISMS’ ...” (ibid., p. 14).

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The fact that there were all types of conflicting and opposing sects in Judaism is important to recognize if an adequate understanding of the New Testament Period, and especially Paul's writings, is to be gained. These various sects, TO WHICH ONLY A VERY SMALL PART OF THE POPULATION BELONGED, disagreed among themselves on many religious doctrines. Even within the sects, many individuals or groupings were at variance with one another.

This condition of religious discord among the various sects, with the independent and differing views of many even within the sects, undoubtedly was a prime factor in causing the Common People of the land to dissuade themselves from joining the sects of Judaism. When there is not unanimity of belief in religious teaching, there is a natural repulsion on the part of most people to religion itself—or at least in taking a serious interest in it. This is the condition existing in our contemporary world, and it was the very condition that existed among the Jews of Palestine during the days of Christ. The overwhelming majority of the Jews did not directly belong to the religious sects, and the sects, themselves, were in a state of confusion as to religious belief.

Let us look at some of these divided sects of Judaism in order to help us better understand the New Testament period.

The Pharisees

The major sect among the divisions of Judaism was that of the Pharisees. This was the most influential group at the time and can be called the leading division.

Even though their membership was only 6,000 out of a population near 3,000,000, they had greater religious influence over the people than any other group. The main reason for this is because the individuals in charge of the majority of synagogues were Pharisees. Being in charge of the synagogues gave them a certain amount of sway over the Common People who attended the synagogue services. We must remember, however, that the evidence shows that only a minority of the Common People attended the synagogues with regularity. The Pharisees had no direct control over the bulk of the people at all.

Who Were the Pharisees?

The Pharisees were not exactly like a church as we know it. They were, instead, a group of men, and even some women, representing many different walks of life—teachers, ministers, businessmen, politicians, etc. These men had voluntarily bound themselves together in a covenant to live a particular manner of life. Instead of calling them a church, they can best be described as a RELIGIOUS FRATERNITY or ASSOCIATION (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, p. 311). These were Jews who bound themselves together into an exclusive fraternity to perform certain religious customs and traditions that the Common People did not wish to keep, or did not wish to keep with the strictness of the Pharisees.

Edersheim continues:

“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, p. 311).

It is important to note that the Pharisees were merely an association of men who had bound themselves to keep the Levitical laws of purity and also to conform very strictly to the laws or tithing. THEY HAD NOT BOUND THEMSELVES TO ACCEPT ANY CREED OR SET OF DOCTRINES.

“The Pharisees WERE NEVER a homogeneous body possessed of a definite policy or body of doctrine” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. xxi, p. 347).

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AT NO TIME WAS IT REQUIRED OF ALL PHARISEES TO BELIEVE ALIKE. This fact is very important! By understanding this, we can come to a clear comprehension of the true activity of the Pharisees during the time of Christ.

It can be plainly shown that the Pharisees exercised little central authority among themselves at all. In fact, other than their uniformity in their desire to keep the laws of purity and the other religious dues, the Pharisees represented a group of men WITH UNLIMITED DIFFERENCES OF OPINION. They were not one unified group in the matter of religious doctrines. One Pharisee would teach his opinion on a religious question and another would teach another opinion, in many instances, often totally different or diametrically opposite. Each Pharisee could teach whatever he pleased concerning the Scripture and STILL BE A PHARISEE so long as he kept bound to the Pharisaical rule of life.

You can imagine what confusion this would bring among the Pharisees!

The Pharisaical Schools

JUST A FEW YEARS BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, and also during His lifetime, we have record of many divisions within the Pharisaical group. These divisions resulted from differences of opinion among the Pharisees. Some Pharisees, who might believe one particular set of doctrines, would tend to associate themselves together into their own societies. Some of the prominent of these societies would also form themselves into schools where any differences of opinion on religious questions among themselves could be discussed and then accepted or rejected by the whole of the school.

Two of the most distinguished schools at this time, representing the two major divisions of the Pharisees, were the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. These two schools were the rivals of one another. The points over which they disagreed were practically innumerable (*Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, by McClintock and Strong, vol. ix, p. 472). There was 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, p. 13).

These two schools were NOT THE ONLY DIVISIONS of the Pharisees, however. There were many more! Dr. George H. Box, of the University of London, informs us: "The Pharisees at this time WERE SHARPLY DIVIDED INTO VARIOUS SECTIONS which were NOT exhausted by the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai" (*Abbingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 841). There were many other splinter groups existing even among the Pharisees, almost all teaching different doctrines.

The Pharisee Synagogues

It is readily understandable why the rulers of the synagogues were adherents to the code of the Pharisees. It was a mark of religious piety to keep the Levitical laws of purity and to be scrupulous in keeping the laws of tithing, etc. So, the majority of the rulers or the synagogues (ministers) were Pharisees.

This does not mean that these synagogue rulers taught a unified creed. The ruler of the synagogue, in most cases, would teach what he, himself, thought was proper. Some of these Pharisees would conform as near as possible to the Hillel School of interpretation. Others would lean towards the Shammai School. Many would teach a combination of the two schools' doctrines infused with their own peculiar beliefs. No creed existed in the synagogues ruled by the Pharisees. This is the reason why almost every opinion was tolerated in the synagogues.

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THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES NEVER TAUGHT WITH AUTHORITY as did Jesus! (*Herford, Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 170).

Now we can understand why it was not difficult for Christ and the Apostles to speak in most of the synagogues without molestation. Each ruler of the synagogue could teach what he pleased and he allowed those of the congregation to express their opinion if they wished. There was little government of God—and there was little truth.

The Apostle Paul spoke many times in the Jews' synagogues about the TRUTH of Christianity (Acts 13:15; 14:1; 17:1-2). Sometimes Paul met with approval and other times with opposition.

Jesus also preached the true gospel in many of the synagogues throughout Judea and Galilee without being prohibited (John 18:20).

Because the majority of the synagogues were under the control of individuals who were Pharisees, it is safe to conclude that the Common People who attended endeavored to keep some form of the Pharisaical teaching. In this sense, it would be proper to say that those who attended the synagogues were following a type of NOMINAL Pharisaism—even though they were not Pharisees themselves.

“The popular religion therefore, SO FAR AS IT WAS ENTITLED TO BE CALLED JUDAISM, might be described as more or less DILUTED PHARISAISM” (*ibid.*, p. 136).

And because the Pharisees did control the synagogues, and had greater influence over the Common People who attended, they assumed the position of being the major sect of Judaism. They by no means represent the only religious group, however. There were many more!

The Scribes

Along with the Pharisees it is necessary to mention the Scribes. They adhered to the Pharisaical rules of piety and, in fact, represented a particular group within the Pharisees. They were the SCHOLARLY PHARISEES—sometimes called “doctors of the law” (Luke 5:17).

In other words, they were the ones most learned in the Law. Both Hillel and Shammai, who founded the two prominent Pharisaic Schools, were Scribes, or Doctors of the Law. Not all Pharisees were Scribes, but ALL SCRIBES WERE PHARISEES (*ibid.*, p. 158). To them was committed the copying of the Hebrew Bible.

The Sadducees

Another major group within Judaism at this time were the Sadducees. Even though the members in this sect were fewer than the Pharisees, they could command attention because they were in influential political positions in Jerusalem. Actually, MANY OF THE SADDUCEES WERE PRIESTS who ministered in the Temple in Jerusalem. Performing these functions was about the ONLY religious service that the priests were doing at this time.

In the distant past, it had been the job of the priests, along with the Levites, to be the religious leaders in Israel. But, by the time of Christ, the Pharisees, who were not priests, had been allowed by Queen Alexandra (79 B.C.) 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 Pharisees' authority, however (Mat. 23:2-3).

Because the Pharisees had deprived the priests of their rightful position as teachers of the people, we can see one reason why the priests did not favor the Pharisees nor what they taught. This is why the majority of priests were Sadducees! They had a spite for the Pharisees, so they joined themselves to the sect which disapproved of the Pharisees the most.

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The Sadducees had no set religious creed EXCEPT that they ALL DISBELIEVED in the resurrection from the dead, in angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8). They claimed to believe explicitly in the Scriptures, but even in their fundamental doctrines just quoted, it is clearly obvious that they rejected much of the Scripture, for the Word of God plainly teaches the resurrection, the existence of angels and spirits (Job 14:14; Eze. 37:1-14; Dan. 12:1-3; Ex. 14:19; Dan. 6:22; I Sam. 18:10). Probably they rejected such essential and basic doctrines because the Pharisees held all of these as indispensable doctrines of the Scriptures. Perhaps it was out of spite that the Sadducees rejected them. They certainly had no Scripture proof for doing so. It is known that the Sadducees detested the Pharisees so much that they would counter almost every belief the Pharisees would teach.

These doctrines of the Sadducees were not popular with the people. Very few of the Common People ever joined with them. And, the Sadducees made no attempt to proselyte. They also had no synagogues in which to worship (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 122). Nor did they have any real centralized authority among themselves. The individual members of this group could believe whatever he pleased, and there was "A CONSIDERABLE VARIETY OF TYPE AMONG THE SADDUCEES," declares Herford.

Their real prominence was mainly POLITICAL. During the time of Christ, the Sadducees were in control of the civil Supreme Court of the Jews (the Sanhedrin). Because of their being majority leaders in this powerful judicial organization, they had recognizable respect from the people. The Sanhedrin was the high civil court, allowed under the Romans to try legal disputes which would arise between Jews. It even had power, in some instances, to give capital punishment. And, by the Sadducees having the majority vote in this court (called "the council" in the New Testament—Luke 22:66), they could command certain political esteem from the people—even at times from the Pharisees. Religiously speaking, however, very few of the Jews were Sadducees. Their materialistic concept of Scripture and the fact that they were mainly priests plus some rich and influential men, caused this sect not to be in any way popular. "The priestly and aristocratic Sadducees were rigidly exclusive, and insignificant in numbers" (*The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, p. 134).

The Essenes

The last MAJOR group of Judaisers to be considered as representing Judaism, and having about 4,000 members, were the Essenes. This sect is not mentioned in the New Testament, although they were in existence at the time.

Because Jesus never directly by name condemned this group, as He did the Pharisees and Sadducees, some modern scholars have been led to assume that perhaps Jesus was a member of this sect! Nothing could be further from the truth!

Members of this group were ascetics who lived in the desert near the Dead Sea. They were anti-social in the extreme, withdrawing from society altogether, having no social intercourse with any except members of their own sect. They practiced celibacy (repudiating marriage entirely), drank no wine, did not attend Temple services, nor did they sacrifice (*Cyclo. Bib., Thes. & Ecc. Lit.*, vol. iii, p. 302). Their order was similar to the practices in monasteries and nunneries of the Catholic Church with which we are familiar (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 63). They even had their own synagogues in which to practice their ascetic customs.

Christ practiced none of their basic tenets! Simple reference to the New Testament shows us that He was certainly not an ascetic. HE CAME EATING AND DRINKING WINE (Matt. 11:19). He went out into the highways (Matt. 22:9) and even ate with the Common People of the land, called SINNERS by the Pharisees (Matt. 9:11). He attended the annual Holy Days ordained of God (John 2:23; 5:1; 7:14). ALL these things the Essenes WOULD NOT DO!

The Apostle Paul CONDEMNS asceticism as a way of life (Col. 2:21-23), while the Essenes believed in it as a fundamental doctrine. Neither Paul nor Christ was in any way connected with

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this sect of the Jews nor did they propound any of this sect's peculiar doctrines. Even the most skeptical of scholars must admit this fact (*Abington Bib. Com.*, p. 842). Most of the doctrines adhered to by the Essenes actually came from heathen influences, not from the Bible.

The Qumran

Another sect—or perhaps sects—connected directly with the Essenes, were the Qumran group. Before 1947, no one knew that this sect existed in Palestine. In that year, however, some scrolls were found by an Arab in a cave near the Dead Sea. It was found that these scrolls were hidden by this sect now known as the Qumran.

Subsequent archeological discoveries revealed that this group were like the Essenes in many ways. They preferred a life of asceticism and lived in monastery-like institutions (Thompson, *Archaeology and the Pre-Christian Centuries*, p. 107). However, a study of their writings indicated that they may have been a splinter group of the Essenes. Their own writings tell us that there were differences of opinions among themselves and that there were different sections within the group (*ibid.*, p. 115).

That Jesus had nothing to do with them is apparent! Professor Thompson says that the teaching of these Qumran sects differed from that of Christ in a thousand ways (*ibid.*, p. 118).

The Zealots

The Zealots were a religious group (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 66), 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 (*ibid.*, p. 68). But they were not Sadducees! They held that the Law of Moses was sufficient to guide the religious life, and that it did not need the extra teachings of the Pharisees or any other group to make it clear. It is not known just how fervent they really were in adhering to this religious conception.

Their main point of doctrine, and the one which gave them their name, was their ZEALOUSNESS for the Law. They were supposedly willing to fight or even to die for the Law if necessary. However, we find that this seemingly good quality was actually a tool by which they could 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. It was the overthrow of the Roman yoke more than anything else that gave them impetus for zealotry.

We often meet with this sect in the New Testament only because one of the Apostles WAS ONCE a member of it before becoming a Christian (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

Their importance was not overly great during the time of Christ, but their influence grew, after the crucifixion, to the extent that much of the blame for the rebellion against Rome, that caused the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D., is to be accorded directly to them. Their fundamental doctrine of rebellion against all foreign domination (using the pretext of fighting for the Law of God) brought much of the misery the Jews suffered during the destruction of Jerusalem nearly 40 years after the crucifixion. This sect was extinguished from Judaism after that destruction.

The Herodians

During the time of Christ there was another minor group represented in Judaism called the Herodians. They are mentioned twice in the New Testament (Matt. 22:16, Mark 12:13), and are in both cases aligned with the Pharisees against Christ. Little is known of them except that they

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had independent doctrines of their own. It has been CONJECTURED by some that they were endeavoring to proclaim Herod the Great as the King and Messiah. The Jews were well aware that the Messiah was to come at about this time because of the prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. It is possible—say some scholars—that the Herodians were proclaiming Herod as their coming King. However, this is entirely conjecture.

It is not known how many members were in this MINOR group, nor is it really known what they taught.

Other Sects in Judaism

Other than the sects and divisions already mentioned, THERE WERE MANY OTHER MINOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN JUDAISM. That these sects existed is readily recognized because they wrote many erroneous and fantastic apocryphal books which show that they were people who believed doctrines totally different from the common sects. These books express different opinions among themselves as well, and in every case endeavor to teach what the Bible clearly does not teach.

The name that has been applied to many of these small and independent groups, or perhaps they represent nothing more than a few individuals, is Apocalyptists. The word means “the revealing-ones” or those who purport to give SECRET doctrines or prophecies never heard before.

Many of the writers of these books 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. See R. H. Charles', *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Oxford University Press, page 123, for the evidence of this.

Instead of revealing many hidden truths, these books reveal only the errors that some of the Jews had foolishly come to believe. The important point to realize is the fact that these false books are at variance with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. THEY DO NOT BELONG IN THE BIBLE! They were all rejected by the Jews of Palestine. In a future chapter we will see just what books really belong in the Old Testament and who had the authority to decide it. It is important to know!

Points to Remember

Let us summarize the religious condition of the Jews during the time of Christ.

Out of a total population of about 3,000,000 Jews in Palestine, there were only about 6,000 Pharisees, about 3,000 Sadducees, 4,000 Essenes, and a few thousand representing the other sects of Judaism. Those belonging to the religious sects represented only a mere fragment of the population—less than 5% of the total population.

The evidence shows that, relatively speaking, very few of the Jews attended the synagogues each Sabbath. The synagogues were just too small or there were not enough of them to allow all to attend.

Of the sects themselves, the Pharisees, the major group, WERE DIVIDED into many opposing divisions. Nor were the Sadducees a unified group, for there WERE MANY VARIETIES OF BELIEFS AMONG THEM. The Essenes and Qumran, by their own writings, were not a uniform group, BUT WERE DIVIDED INTO VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF BELIEF. The rest of the sects were minor in importance. Even the writings of the Apocalyptics show a variety of opinions. They certainly did not agree with one another—and especially they did not agree with the Bible.

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Among all these differing sects we find some keeping the traditions of the elders. Some believed in asceticism; others repudiated it. There was disagreement over the rituals, marriage, the Sacred Calendar, the correct observance of the Holy Days, etc. In fact, the points of disagreement were virtually INNUMERABLE.

About the only things held in common by them all were some kind of observance of the Sabbath, the rite of circumcision, the calling of Israel “a chosen people” and the expectancy of the Messiah. However, even in these fundamental doctrines there were countless shades of interpretations.

The condition of the Jews in New Testament times can best be described by the statement in the Bible: “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

There is no question but that the religion of the Jews, as taught by the differing sects, was not the religion that God gave Moses. In truth, the message that Christ brought re-emphasized the religion of Moses IN ITS TRUE SPIRITUAL INTENT, and to give it to a people who had forgotten the true spiritual application of the Law!

In the next chapter we shall see how the Jews originally departed from the Mosaic faith; how they instituted the commandments of men which Christ condemned (Mark 7:7); how the religious sects first arose; and why the Jews came to such a state of religious confusion during Christ’s time.

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Chapter 3

Here is the third installment—revealing what really happened under Ezra and Nehemiah, and how the Government of God functioned in the Old Testament Church.

THE religious condition of the Jews during the time of Christ had not evolved in just a few years. It took over 200 years for Judaism to firmly implant itself in Palestine.

If we are to adequately understand the full development of Judaism, we will have to go back in history over 500 years before Christ. In these centuries history shows why and how “Judaism” replaced the Law of Moses as the religion of the Jews!

The Babylonian Captivity

The proper place to begin a study of the development of Judaism is with the Babylonian captivity of the Jews.

Between the years of 604 B.C. and 585 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians, made war with the Kingdom of Judah. The Jews were not successful in any or the skirmishes with the Babylonians. In the first years of this war, Nebuchadnezzar carried away the majority of the Jews from Judah to Babylon. At the end of the war, in 585 B.C., ALL THE JEWS, except those under Gedaliah, were finally carried to Babylon. And even those under Gedaliah finally fled Palestine. This was a complete captivity.

The Babylonian captivity came to an end with the downfall of the Babylonian Empire in October 539 B.C. Isaiah had prophesied, about 200 years before, that Cyrus, the king of Persia, would be responsible for the overthrow of Babylon and for making it possible for the Jews to return to Palestine (Isa. 45:1-4). Thus, Cyrus and his armies captured the capital of the Empire and Babylon was absorbed into the Persian Empire.

Cyrus was so betook over the exact prophecy by Isaiah concerning himself, that he determined to honor the God who had granted him victory over the Babylonians. He issued an edict that the Jews who had been carried captive by the Babylonians could return to Palestine and rebuild the Temple of God (II Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1,2).

The issuance of this decree resulted in about 50,000 Jews later returning to Palestine. These Jews were under the leadership of two men. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, and Joshua, the High Priest. The reason for the Jews’ return was to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians, and to again establish the true worship of God. The books of Haggai and Zechariah were written during the period when these Jews were returning to Palestine and during the building of the Temple. These books describe the condition of the Jews at this time.

Majority did NOT Return

It must be remembered, however, that the majority of the Jews did NOT return to Palestine. Most of them elected to remain in the Babylonian area. Under the benevolent rulership of Cyrus, many of the Jews had their own homes, substantial properties and not a few were wealthy and influential. They did not want to give all of this up in order to go back to the wasted land of their forefathers. Even Cyrus did not want all of them to leave the Babylonian area since the bulk of the population in some provinces was principally Jewish. Depopulation would have been a serious setback to the ECONOMY of the area (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, p. 8).

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The majority of the Jews were content with the situation in Babylon. They had no desire to return, and in consequence, they built permanent schools, colleges, and synagogues. They were settling down to stay. And, even though there were several migrations from Babylon back to Palestine, the bulk of the Jews remained in the Mesopotamian area. Even as late as the New Testament times, there were still more Jews in Babylon than there were in Palestine (ibid., vol. i, pp. 7-9). THIS EXPLAINS WHY THE APOSTLE PETER WAS IN BABYLON IN THE LATER YEARS OF HIS LIFE. He wrote his two epistles from near Babylon on the Euphrates (I Pet. 5:13). Since the Apostle Peter was the apostle to the Circumcision scattered abroad—the Jews in the Diaspora (Gal. 2:7), it is not difficult to see why he went to Babylon, where many of the Jews lived.

Ezra Goes to Jerusalem

After the deaths of Zerubbabel and Joshua, who led the first wave of returning Jews to Palestine, the people began to take a lackadaisical attitude concerning the services in the Temple and religion in general. Even though the Temple had been completed in the early months of 515 B.C., the people of Palestine took no interest in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. It still remained in ruins! The people had also begun to intermarry freely with the idolatrous Gentile people round about. The religious life of the people in general was becoming corrupt. This condition was prompted because the people in general did not have any real spiritual leaders after the death of Zerubbabel and Joshua. As the years rolled by, the condition became worse and worse.

Finally, in the summer of the year 457 B.C., the seventh year of Artaxerxes, Jewish reckoning, Ezra came to Palestine to rectify the situation that was beginning to get out of hand (Ezra 7:7-8).

Ezra was a priest of no mean standing. He was a direct descendant of Aaron and some of his forefathers had been former High Priests in Israel. His grandfather was the High Priest who returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua to Jerusalem in the first migration back to *Palestine* (*Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. iii, p. 435). Ezra, himself, was a “scribe,” a “ready scribe of the law of Moses,” “a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord and of His statutes to Israel,” “a scribe of the law of the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:11, 12). He was considered by Josephus, the Jewish historian of the apostles’ days, to have been, in a sense, the “High Priest” of the Jews who were still living in Babylon (“Antiquities of the Jews,” xi, 5,1).

The Scriptures say that Ezra “had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). From these Scripture references alone, we can say confidently that Ezra was determined to live by the laws of God and to teach them to the people. So profound an influence had Ezra over the Jews, and so righteous was his character, that a later Jewish writer said he would have been the lawgiver to Israel had not Moses preceded him (*The Talmud, Sanhedrin*, c.ii).

Ezra knew the laws of God—he was well trained in them. And God directed that he go to Jerusalem to beautify the Temple, establish its services in proper order, to teach the people the laws of God, and to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

He went to Palestine, in the year 457 B.C., with authority from the Persian government to carry out these reforms. About 2,000 people went with Ezra to Palestine. These were notably priests, Levites and servants of the Temple. The object of Ezra and these other important dignitaries in going to Jerusalem, was to restore the worship of God that was fast becoming defiled.

Ezra’s Restoration

When Ezra and his retinue went to Jerusalem from Babylon, they went with a royal decree from the king of Persia—Ezra had the power he needed to carry out the reform. The decree gave him authority not only to establish the true religion in its purity, but also he had governmental

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orders to “appoint magistrates and judges which may judge all the people that are beyond the river (in Palestine), all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye him that knoweth them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God and the LAW OF THE KING, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment” (Ezra 7:25, 26). In other words Ezra was going to Jerusalem not only as a priest of God to reestablish the religious worship, but also to establish law and order by rebuilding Jerusalem as a Jewish capital city.

Why was the king of Persia so interested in the Jews’ religion and why did he want Jerusalem to be rebuilt and inhabited? The answer is plain.

The Bible records how Esther, a Jewish girl from the tribe of Benjamin, became Queen of Persia, and Mordecai, her uncle, became Prime Minister of the kingdom (Esther 2:17; 10:3). Esther was married to King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) who ruled according to Persian reckoning, from 485 to 465 B.C. The king under whom Ezra was appointed to rebuild Jerusalem was Artaxerxes I—the son of Xerxes. Esther was still, undoubtedly, the Queen Mother, when Ezra left for Jerusalem in 457 B.C. Thus we see that there was considerable Jewish influence in the king’s palace at this time. No wonder Ezra was given such responsibility by the Persian king. He had power from the king to perform the needed restoration. Ezra’s personality and authority had a tremendous effect on the people.

The real intent of Ezra was to establish the Law of Moses as the constitutional law throughout Judea (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 33) -- to make Judea a model state within the Persian Empire—one adhering to the law of Moses. The laws of the king were to be few, dealing mainly with taxation. Herford, the Jewish scholar, continues, “The Persian rulers, living far from Judea, seldom interfered with the internal affairs of their Jewish subjects, and were content to leave their public business in the hands of the governor of the province. If the royal taxes were paid, and order maintained, the Jews might organize their own life as a community in the way that seemed best to them” (ibid. p. 45). This was the policy of the Persian rulers for the two centuries they governed Palestine. This gave the Jews ample opportunity to settle down firmly in Palestine and to practice their religion without undue molestation.

Jews Had Married Foreign Wives

The first thing Ezra found upon his arrival in Palestine was that most of the people possessed only a nominal religion. The Temple services were not being conducted properly and a great number of the people had intermarried with foreign women. Ezra, in no uncertain terms, warned the people that these very acts were violations of the Law that caused their forefathers to be carried into captivity (Ezra 9:5-7). Upon hearing this, many of the people covenanted before God to disentangle themselves from their foreign wives (Ezra 10:2-5). However, we find that not all of the people were so willing to do this. Some became quite obstinate. It took about 13 years to get all the people to forsake their own ways and be obedient to the Laws of God.

The reason that the Law had commanded the Jews not to marry with the heathen is that the natural tendency of a person is to lean towards the religion of the wife or husband. Solomon even set up heathen idols in Jerusalem and throughout Israel to please his pagan wives (I Kings 11:4). And because the Law specifically commanded the Israelites not to marry heathen women or men (Exodus 34:15, 16), Ezra commanded the Jews to repent of their erroneous ways and to begin keeping the Law. (See also Deut. 7:3.)

A paramount issue in the mind of Ezra was the establishment in Palestine of the civil Law as given by Moses. In other words, he was determined to see that the Jews obeyed the commandments of God as revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Within these four books are found the basic spiritual commandments of God, plus many basic laws and statutes of a civil nature for the governing of the physical nation of Israel. Also within these books are the ritualistic and ceremonial laws of purity and the sacrificial ordinances that formed

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such a distinctive part of the Law of Moses that by New Testament times the term “Law of Moses” often became a special and exclusive term for the sacrificial ceremonies and physical rituals (Acts 13:39; 15:5). Ezra was commissioned by God to teach the people ALL these laws—from obedience to the spiritual laws to the observance of physical rituals.

Ezra was fully qualified in education, political power and divine favor to accomplish the job of establishing the Law of Moses as the law of the land.

“To place the Torah (the Scriptures) in the position of supreme authority in Judaism, and to win the people to that recognition and acceptance of that supreme authority was what Ezra set out to do” (Herford, “Talmud and Apocrypha,” p. 37). And, we find that Ezra succeeded in transforming the Jews from a nominal Mosaic religion to the real thing. It took, however, the help of Nehemiah to finally and fully implant the Law of Moses as the law of the land.

Nehemiah Comes to Jerusalem

Nehemiah was a Jew who was a high government official in the Persian kingdom (Neh. 2:1-8). After learning of the plight of the Jews in Palestine and the difficult time Ezra was having getting the Jews to obey the laws of Moses, he resolved to do something about the situation. Being in close communication with the king of Persia and in good favor with him, he petitioned for the right to become governor of the province of Judea, directly under the king himself. The petition was granted!

Ezra, who had also gone to Palestine in an official capacity, was not the governor of the province. He acted more as a civil servant of the king. But Nehemiah came with much more power. He went to Jerusalem as governor of the whole province of Judea.

Upon the arrival of Nehemiah in Artaxerxes’ twentieth year, Ezra’s position was greatly strengthened. Nehemiah was as much inclined toward getting the people back to God as was Ezra. Nehemiah and Ezra both worked together in harmony towards accomplishing their goal. And accomplish it they did! They established the Law of Moses as the law of the land, they set up the Temple service in proper order and they made the people put away their foreign wives. They established meeting places where the law was preached and expounded. The ordained priests were judges, teachers, and administrators of the government. This was a phenomenal task to accomplish among thousands of Jews who were not always in favor of the law. But it was done.

Jews Sign a Covenant With God

Ezra and Nehemiah brought all of the leaders of the people, the priests, Levites, and all the principal men, and had them sign a covenant that they would henceforth obey the laws of God. In the covenant they signed, they all agreed to perform seven things. These articles of the covenant were mandatory: 1) They were to keep all the laws, statutes, judgments and commandments of God; 2) not to intermarry with the heathen; 3) to keep the Sabbath holy; 4) to observe the Sabbatical year; 5) to pay the annual third of a shekel for the upkeep of the Temple; 6) to supply wood for the altar in the Temple; 7) to pay all the tithes that were commanded in the Law (Nehemiah 10:28-39).

The leaders signed the covenant on behalf of all the people. Consequently, all the Jews who lived in Palestine, solemnly entered into this covenant. They all pledged to carry out its requirements.

Before this time, the people were content with a nominal form of religion, but after the surge of spiritual zeal and determination of Ezra and Nehemiah, with the Persian monarch backing them up, the people took on a new outlook towards the truth of God. There arose a new kind of constitutional government—a government which had as its laws the Law of Moses. It was a kind of Church and State government, under the authority of the Persian kingdom, but with its

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own schools, colleges, synagogues, court houses and Supreme Court. With this kind of central government established in Judea, the result was a religious unity not known since the days of Joshua. No wonder that Ezra, the principal figure of the time, was called the “second Moses.” This was a new beginning in the history of the Jews.

The Great Assembly

The convening of these Jewish elders was of great importance. This assemblage was actually a religious and political body of priests which was, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, empowered by God to maintain the obedience of the people to the Law of Moses for that and future generations.

This organization was known as “The Great Assembly.” It was an assembly comprised of Ezra and Nehemiah, two of God’s chosen ministers, along with all the principal priests of the Jews. This assembly was the ruling institution to guide the religious life of the Jews. It was the religious supreme court. It was the center of authority in regard to education and regulating the priests and Levites in teaching the people the Law of Moses. In effect, the Great Assembly was the governing body of the Jewish people in Palestine.

This assembly initiated by Ezra and Nehemiah has often been called by the Greek name “The Great Synagogue.” The word “synagogue” in Greek means ASSEMBLY. This is the name most modern writers use when referring to this authoritative body of priests. But whether the name Great Synagogue or Great Assembly is used, it represents the same institution.

“According to the most ancient tradition, this assembly or synagogue was styled GREAT because of the great work it effected in restoring the divine law to its former greatness, and because of the GREAT AUTHORITY AND REPUTATION WHICH IT ENJOYED” (*Cycle. of Bib., Thee., and Ecc. Lit.*, vol. x, p. 82).

This assembly actually represented the executive, judicial and legislative congress of the Jews. It was convened to insure the observance of the Law of Moses. From history we know that it accomplished its task. It brought the people back to the Law of Moses, and established that Law as the constitutional law of the land.

Some of the decisions of this Great Assembly have had far-reaching effects—even unto our present age. It is necessary that we learn about this organization established by God under the supervision of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Members of the Great Assembly

The Jewish historians are united in telling us that there were 120 members in the original Great Assembly (*Berakoth*, ii, 4; *Megillah*, 17b). All of these members WERE PRIESTS (Herford, “Talmud and Apocrypha,” p. 59). There were no laymen in this authoritative assembly.

The president or ruler was the High Priest. According to rank, this should always be the case. However, when the Great Assembly was organized by Ezra and Nehemiah, the High Priest, Eliashib, did not meet with the Assembly. He did not entirely agree with the covenant that the Great Assembly made binding. See Nehemiah 13:4-7.

He did not agree with the specific part of the covenant which commanded all Jews to give up their Gentile wives. His grandson, Manasseh, was married to a very important Gentile woman, of which more will be said later, and Eliashib did not necessarily want this particular union to be broken. Because of this attitude, he was rejected from having a part in the Great Assembly. Later on, however, the High Priests did assume their proper place as head of the Assembly.

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The rest of the Great Assembly were priests of varying rank occupying different positions within the institution. Their jobs were to carry out the actual work of the Assembly while the High Priest would supervise and oversee.

These priests were the leaders of the Jewish nation at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, about 440 years before Christ. They and their immediate successors were responsible for many weighty and authoritative decisions that affected the whole mode of Jewish life, and, in reality, settled a very important question, the effects of which reach unto our own day.

We shall see in the next installment, how this Great Assembly, with the Spirit of God guiding them, put together the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Our Old Testament comes to us because of the work of this Great Assembly!

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Chapter 4

Which books belong in the Old Testament? What about the Apocrypha? In this fourth installment you will learn how and by what authority the canon of the Old Testament was determined.

THE LAST installment revealed how Ezra and Nehemiah reestablished God's Government in the Old Testament church.

The central authority in Palestine to carry out that government has often been called by the Greek name "The Great Synagogue." The word "synagogue" in Greek means ASSEMBLY. This is the name most modern writers use when referring to that authoritative body of priests established by Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 10). But whether the name Great Synagogue or Great Assembly is used, it always represents the same institution.

We shall see in this installment how this Great Assembly, with the Spirit of God guiding them, put together the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Our Old Testament comes to us because of the work of this Great Assembly!

What the Great Assembly Did

The firm reestablishment of the religious and political government in Palestine was accomplished by Ezra and Nehemiah. They convened the Jewish elders for the purpose of signing and officially sealing a covenant to keep God's commandments. It brought about the inauguration of a constitutional government in Palestine. **THE CONSTITUTION WAS THE LAW OF MOSES!**

Both Ezra and Nehemiah were at this covenant—signing, with the leaders of the Jews, to acknowledge **THE WRITTEN LAW OF MOSES** as the law of the land—as their constitution. All the Jewish leaders, except a very small minority, happily covenanted to perform the requirements of the Law. In consequence of this, the people put away their foreign wives, started tithing, established proper Temple services and began to keep God's Sabbath!

This is the real beginning of the religion of Moses after the Babylonian captivity. And it was the true religion of Moses, no additions or subtractions!

New Controversy Arises

In the previous installment we found that Eliashib, the High Priest at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, did not countenance the decision of the Great Assembly in regard to the putting away of foreign wives. One of his older grandsons was involved in such an illegal marriage. This grandson, Manasseh, was married to one of the daughters of Sanballat the Horonite—a Gentile.

Had Manasseh been married to an ordinary woman of no repute, it probably would not have made a great deal of difference. But he was married to the daughter of Sanballat who was governor of the northern province of Samaria. Sanballat was an influential government official of the Kingdom of Persia.

The grandson of the High Priest of the Jews being married to the daughter of the governor of Samaria offered a type of alliance between the two peoples. This presented a delicate political situation. If Manasseh repudiated his wife, in order to keep the Law, this friendly relationship would undoubtedly have ceased.

There were a few other Jews along with Eliashib and Manasseh who felt that this marriage should not be terminated even if the Law of Moses and the decision of the Great Assembly

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commanded it. So, Manasseh openly rebelled against God's Government—the constitutional law—defying Ezra and Nehemiah and the Great Assembly.

When Manasseh refused to adhere to the Law, Nehemiah, who was governor of Judea, excommunicated him from the Jewish society and banished him from the country (Neh. 13:23-31).

Manasseh was exceedingly indignant over the excommunication. He especially was angered because he would have become High Priest of the Jews upon his father's death, had he remained faithful to the Law and had not been excommunicated. In lieu of this, he, and some of his Jewish sympathizers, even some of the priests, left Judaea and went northward to Samaria.

Samaritans Enter the Picture

The Samaritans, who nominally adhered to some points of the Law of Moses, only as it suited their fancy, readily accepted these renegade Jews. The Samaritans had no scruples over marrying Gentile wives, for they themselves were Gentiles who had been placed in central Palestine about 250 years before by the Assyrians.

With the arrival of Manasseh in Samaria, Sanballat, his father-in-law, sympathized with him because he had been deprived of the opportunity to be High Priest among the Jews. But Sanballat had cunningly devised plans to honor his son-in-law for his rebellion against Nehemiah and the Great Assembly.

Since the Samaritans had no temple in which to worship, SANBALLAT PETITIONED THE PERSIAN GOVERNMENT DO GRANT HIM PERMISSION TO BUILD A TEMPLE FOR THE SAMARITAN PEOPLE. Because it was the general policy of the Persians to allow their captive nations to worship their own gods, this permission was granted.

It was the design of Sanballat to build this temple and install Manasseh, the son of the Jewish High Priest, as the High Priest of the Samaritans. This plan was carried out.

The Samaritan temple was built on Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Manasseh received his schismatic priesthood. This is the beginning of the Samaritan religion.

Manasseh's Further Rebellion

The first act of Manasseh after being installed as the Samaritan High Priest was to repudiate the true Temple of God located on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. He did this by maintaining that the Temple should be located on Mount Gerizim and not in Jerusalem. Manasseh's rebellious motive was to strengthen his own position among the Samaritans and perhaps to gain some of the Jews in Judaea to his side.

In maintaining that the Temple should be situated on Mount Gerizim, he encountered, however, an embarrassing situation. Throughout the writings of the Old Testament prophets were the clear prophecies that the Temple of God should be located only on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2 and Micah 4). The prophecies concerning this fact were so conclusive, so decisive, that it was impossible for Manasseh to reconcile his temple being located on Mount Gerizim with the statements of the prophets.

Realizing that the writings of the prophets and many of the Psalms specifically taught just the opposite from what he was endeavoring to maintain, he seized upon the only alternative to seemingly justify his temple being on Mount Gerizim. His way out of the dilemma was to formally REJECT THE WRITINGS OF THE PROPHETS. To do this, he had to represent them as the uninspired opinions of men.

As a result of this, Manasseh acknowledged that the only books which were really the inspired words of God were the books of Moses—the first five books of the Old Testament. The reason

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he accepted this portion of the Old Testament was that in this section there was no direct mention of the necessity of having the Temple of God on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. By accepting only the first five books of the Bible and none other, he put his own authority ahead of the Word of God.

With Manasseh ruling as the Samaritan High Priest and finally claiming that only the books of Moses were the inspired word of God, the situation called for drastic action by Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly. Here was a new temple built in Samaria, and Manasseh loudly proclaiming that all the Jews in Judaea were in error.

Something had to be done about this situation.

Ezra and Nehemiah knew it was possible that there might be an internal disruption of the Jewish society that they were developing in Judaea, unless a determinate and authoritative counter-action could be launched against the falsehoods of Manasseh and his heretical followers, especially since many of his ideas were being subversively planted in the minds of many Jews in Judaea. The people had to know who was right, Manasseh -- or Ezra and Nehemiah!

The Great Assembly Settles the Question

Under the divine inspiration of Almighty God, Ezra and Nehemiah with the Great Assembly convened to settle the matter. These two authoritative 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, for they were already written. They had to assemble the already acknowledged inspired books into one book in a final order.

Thus, we read: "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" (*Cycle. of Bib., Thee. And Ecc. Lit.*, vol. x, p. 83).

The Canon of the Old Testament

That 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, p. 75).

All of the Old Testament books, remember, WERE ALREADY WRITTEN. The task of the Great Assembly was merely to put them together into one book in proper order! And this they did!

It has been thought by some modern critics that Ezra and the Great Assembly may have sanctioned only the Law of Moses, the first five books. This is decidedly not the case! The very reason the canon of the Old Testament had to be defined at this time was that the renegade Jew, Manasseh, erroneously maintained that the first five books of Moses were the only inspired books. He, out of his own vanity, rejected the inspired books of the Prophets and Psalms. These books were already as much a part of God's Word as the Law of Moses.

It was not necessary to OFFICIALLY proclaim the Law of Moses AS BEING INSPIRED FOR IT HAD ALREADY LONG BEEN RECOGNIZED AS GOD'S WORD. (See II Kings 22:8.)

It was, of course, God's purpose that all the writings of the Prophets be transmitted to those of future eras in final and unchangeable form. The books of the Prophets, the Psalms and the other books were now officially established, properly placed in the canon and PROCLAIMED as the authoritative Word of God.

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Proofs that Canon was Compiled Under Ezra and Nehemiah

We have the testimony of Josephus, the Jewish historian, that the complete Old Testament was finally settled and established in the days of Artaxerxes, king of Persia (*Against Apion*, I, 8). By this, Josephus meant that the Old Testament canon was completed in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, for these two men of God lived in Artaxerxes' time.

Josephus also mentions 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 therefore 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 completed under Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Three Divisions of the Old Testament

When Ezra and Nehemiah compiled the Old Testament books they placed them in three general divisions. These are known as the Tripartite Divisions. The first division was called THE LAW, and consisted of the first five books. The second was called THE PROPHETS. The third division was called, in Christ's day, THE PSALMS, because this division commenced with the book of Psalms.

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. This 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*, p. 252; Angus, "Bible Handbook," p. 568). There is no question about this fact.

Historical References to the Tripartite Divisions

There are several early references which show that the Old Testament was divided into the Tripartite Divisions. One notable mention is that of 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 Prophecies," and "The Rest of the Books." This is a clear reference to the authoritative Tripartite Divisions established by Ezra and Nehemiah.

You will perhaps notice that the grandson of Sirach did not use the name "The Psalms" for the third division. This is easily explained. This third section did not have a proper name in the time of Sirach. It became popularly called "The Psalms" by the Jews of Christ's time because that particular book introduced 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*, 3). Later, in the third century A.D., however, the Jews began to refer to the third division as "The Writings." This designation has been used by the Jews up to our own times.

Christ Sanctions the Tripartite Divisions

It is important to realize that the Jews accepted only the books within the Tripartite Divisions as inspired. No other books were ever recognized as being canonical. The Apocrypha were never accepted. But regardless of the beliefs of official Judaism, we have the testimony of much greater authority, telling us of what books the inspired Old Testament consisted. That witness is

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Christ Himself—the very One who inspired the prophets of the Old Testament (See Colossians 1:15-17).

After the resurrection of Christ, we are told in the Gospels, He began to teach His disciples many important truths from the Scriptures. On one occasion, mentioned in Luke 24:45, Christ referred to “THE SCRIPTURES” of the Old Testament and about the prophecies concerning Him. What books did Christ mean by the expression, “the Scriptures”? What was the Old Testament to Him? Notice what Christ Himself related:

“And He said unto them, these are the words 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).

Yes, the inspired Old Testament Scriptures for Christ comprised those books found in “The Law, The Prophets, and The Psalms”—the Tripartite Divisions. These were the very books compiled by Ezra and Nehemiah, and the very books which have come down to us today in the King James Version. We can assuredly know that OUR OLD TESTAMENT is the complete Old Testament of God. Christ has told us this in the plainest of words.

The Arrangement of the Old Testament Books

You will notice that the Old Testament in the King James Bible begins with the book of Genesis and ends with the book of Malachi. However, in the original authoritative arrangement of the Old Testament books by Ezra and Nehemiah, this was not so. The Jews have never approved the King James arrangement because ITS ORIGIN WAS IN EGYPT. About 250 years before Christ there was a Greek translation made of the Hebrew Old Testament. This has become 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 in it. The Latin translations followed the Septuagint Greek translation made in Egypt. The Septuagint does not follow the original Hebrew order established by Ezra and Nehemiah.

When the Jews of official Judaism recognized the corruptions in the Septuagint Version, 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*).

It will be profitable for you to know what the authoritative order of the Old Testament books really is. And notice that originally, before printing, the number of scrolls were 22 -- now subdivided in the King James Version into 39.

The LAW:

- 1) Genesis
- 2) Exodus
- 3) Leviticus
- 4) Numbers
- 5) Deuteronomy

The PROPHETS:

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- 1) Joshua & Judges
- 2) I & II Samuel & I & II Kings
- 3) Isaiah
- 4) Jeremiah
- 5) Ezekiel
- 6) The Twelve:
 - 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. You will notice that 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. The last books are actually I and II Chronicles.

This authoritative arrangement of the Old Testament books is the one which the official Jewish community has always recognized as authoritative.

Other Books Rejected

Let us clearly understand that the books of the Apocrypha and all other spurious books NEVER found a place in the official Tripartite Divisions of the Jewish Old Testament. All these “outside” books were totally rejected by the Jews. You will recall that 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.

“It is true,” says Josephus, “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*, I, 8).

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Yes, the last prophet to write an inspired book was Malachi— a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Christ Used Only the Inspired Old Testament

Another proof that Christ used only the Scriptures recognized by official Judaism is the fact that He never once quoted from or alluded to any of the Apocrypha or other spurious books. Had He made even the slightest indication that the sources 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. But the Jews NEVER had an opportunity of accusing Christ of such things. They railed Him for going contrary to the doctrines of the Jewish denominations of His day, but they never criticized Him for using uncanonical books. The silence of any Jewish censure on this point IS DEFINITE PROOF that Christ utilized only the inspired books in the official Jewish Old Testament as the Scriptures.

Further Witness From the New Testament

We have further evidence throughout the New Testament that Christ and the Apostles recognized only the books of the Jewish Version as the complete Old Testament. Notice how it is taken for granted, in so many parts of the New Testament, that the Jews had the “Scripture” (John 10:35; 19:36; II Pet. 1:20), “the Scriptures” (Matt. 22:29; Acts 18:24), “Holy Scriptures” (Rom. 1:2, II Tim. 3:15), “the Law” (John 10:34), “the Law and Prophets” (Matt. 5:17; 22:40), and the Law, Prophets and Psalms (Luke 24:44). All the New Testament writers recognized the Jews to have had the complete Old Testament.

Paul was also careful to let the Romans know that unto the Jews, “WERE COMMITTED THE ORACLES OF GOD”—the Old Testament (Rom. 3:3; 9:4). Paul was fully aware that the oracles of the Jews were the inspired books of the Jewish canon—the same books that are in our King James Version today.

It is very clear, from secular history, and especially from the Word of God, that we have the complete Old Testament. ALL OTHER BOOKS NOT FOUND WITHIN THE BIBLE as we have it are entirely worthless for teaching true doctrines, and are to be completely rejected in this respect. The Apocrypha, and all other books, are the writings of men, not of God.

With the canonization of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Jews of this time entered into a period of prosperity and happiness. They were keeping the Law and being taught by the Great Assembly. This period from about 430 B.C. to 331 B.C., until the overthrow of the Persian Empire by the Greeks, can be called a time when the Law of Moses was adhered to by the people.

We are now compelled to look to a period later than the time of Persian control for the origin of the confused and mixed-up condition of Judaism. The next installment will plainly reveal the source from whence Jewish denominationalism arose.

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Chapter 5

When was the Old Testament completed? Who authorized the building of synagogues in Judea? In this fifth installment you will learn how the Jews continued under the Government of God to the time of Alexander the Great.

THE canonization of the Old Testament by the members of the Great Assembly was the real stabilizing factor in the religious life of the Jews. Ezra and Nehemiah bound upon the people the Law of Moses as the constitutional law of the land. And the Great Assembly, after the deaths of Ezra and Nehemiah, enforced THIS SAME LAW in every respect.

Life Under the Persians

Even though Judea was properly a province of the Persian Empire, the Jews maintained a semi-independent community. Since the days of Ezra, the Persians had shown extraordinary consideration to the Jews. “God ... hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia” (Ezra 9:9).

“The Persian rulers,” says Herford, “living far from Judea, seldom interfered with the internal affairs of their Jewish subjects, and were content to leave their public business in the hands of the governor of the province. If the royal taxes were paid, the order maintained, the Jews might organize their life as a community in the way that seemed best to them” (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 45).

The Persians had rule over Palestine until 331 B.C.—for about one hundred years after Ezra and Nehemiah. During this entire period, the Jews were allowed full freedom to practice their own customs and traditions. This Persian period was especially propitious to them because they were allowed to observe the Scriptures as ordained of God (Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 224). And during this period the Law of Moses was kept!

At this time, the Jews were under the direction of the High Priest, the president of the Great Assembly, and the other authoritative priests who comprised its membership. No religious splits or schisms were tolerated and all the people were kept in obedience to the laws of the Old Covenant. This peaceful condition in Palestine led to many advances in the social and religious life of the Jews.

The Priests Teach the Truth of God

The canonization of the Old Testament, and the establishment of the Law of Moses as the constitutional law brought about the necessity of teaching the law to the people on a grand scale.

Ezra had brought back with him from Babylon a good number of priests to add to the 4,000 who had come back from the Babylonian captivity at an earlier time (Ezra 8:17-20). These priests were brought back to Palestine in order to assume their position as religious teachers of the people, for the Bible had ordained that priests were to teach the people the laws of God (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 24:8; 27:14, etc.). The book of Malachi, written immediately after the return of Ezra and Nehemiah, records what these priests were ordained to do. “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7).

Because the Law of Moses had become the law of the land, it became the priests’ job to teach the law. These commands required meetings every Sabbath in all the villages and towns around Judea. It was these Sabbath services that finally merged into regular synagogue services.

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In time, all the areas within Judea began to build their own synagogues. In some of the larger areas, a body of priests would take up residence and have charge of the synagogue. Before the Babylonian captivity, synagogues had existed throughout Israel and Judah (Psa. 74:8), but because all these previous synagogues had been completely destroyed by the invading armies of the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Jews had to start afresh after their return from Babylon to build completely new synagogues. This fact has led some commentators to erroneously assume that synagogues had their first development ONLY AFTER the Babylonian captivity, and that they were not in existence before. This, however, is not true! These new synagogues which were built in Palestine, were certainly built from scratch. But there had been synagogues before.

Buildings for religious assemblies are essential in every age and dispensation. It was impossible for all the Jews throughout Judea to journey each Sabbath to Jerusalem and to the Temple in order to learn of the law and to worship God in holy convocation. The people had to have instruction by the priests every Sabbath in their own communities. The proper instruction of the Law of Moses could only be accomplished by the establishment of synagogues throughout the land. And, under the benevolent rule of the Persians, with peace and safety everywhere, there is no reason to doubt that synagogues dotted the land from one end to the other (Herford, "Talmud and Apocrypha," p. 58).

Not only did the synagogues offer opportunity for worship of God on the Sabbaths, but we are informed in a Talmudical reference that Ezra ordained the priests to hold periods of religious instruction on the regular market days of the week—Mondays and Thursdays (*B. Kamma*, 82a, b). From this evolved the custom of having instruction in the Law on those two days of the week. This custom was even carried down until the time of Christ.

Priests and Levites in Authority

It is plain that the people during this one hundred year period under the Persians had adequate instruction in the Laws of God—not only on the Sabbaths and Holy Days, but even on two market days during the week. The priests were kept busy in the occupation of teaching the people the Law. For their helpers the priests had the regular Levites who gave them proper assistance in teaching the people. These Levites really did much of the actual teaching, and the priests were the supervisors. It was impossible for the limited number of priests to do all the necessary duties. For that reason, a good deal of the help in teaching, judging, being dieticians and, in a limited way, being policemen, fell to the Levites.

In effect, the Levites represented the professional class among the people. They were under the authority of the priests, however, who were the responsible organization for the over-all well-being of the nation (*ibid.*, p. 59). The real leader of the whole nation was the High Priest, who was actually the head of state being the leader of the Great Assembly.

The Great Assembly was the one organization that was the governing authority. This religious assembly, as previously pointed out, was composed of the chief priests of the land with the High Priest as official president and over-all ruler. All members of this authoritative assembly in the Persian period were priests AND PRIESTS ALONE (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 28).

"For the priests were the actual leaders of the community, since they alone were recognized by the Law (Deut. 17) as its official teachers and competent interpreters" (*ibid.*, p. 28). These priests were not elected by the people to hold a high office in the Great Assembly. They assumed this position by heredity, as ordained by God (Deut. 17). Actually, no one but the priests, according to the Law of God, could teach or direct the people in their religious life. This is the reason why the Great Assembly was composed exclusively of the priests, with the High Priest being the recognized leader.

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With the canonization of the Scripture and the establishment of synagogues throughout the land, a problem confronted the Great Assembly. In order to teach the Law of God, it was necessary that the priests and Levites have copies of the Scriptures. Up to the time of the canonization, books were not made with ALL twenty-two scrolls of the Old Testament combined together.

Many Scrolls of Scripture Made

Now that the Scripture had been authoritatively assembled, it became necessary to distribute the complete word of God. The synagogues needed the Holy Scriptures as did many individual priests. So, it fell the lot of the Great Assembly to remedy this situation. They had the responsibility of seeing that many scrolls of Scripture were made and distributed to those who were in authority to teach the Word of God. And, too, they had to be extremely careful and make sure that only individuals who were thoroughly qualified would undertake such a sacred task of copying the Scriptures. Such a job could not be entrusted to just anyone, lest from inexperience or carelessness the transcription was not an exact reproduction.

It became obvious that the only body or men who were qualified to do such a work were the members of the Great Assembly THEMSELVES. It was necessary that the new scrolls be perfect and that each scroll be sanctioned by these authoritative priests. This led the Great Assembly to assume the task of copying the Scriptures. They assumed this occupation sometime not long after the deaths of Ezra and Nehemiah.

From this time forward, the members of the Great Assembly became known as “Sopherim.” The word “Sopherim” in Hebrew signifies “counters.” “They were called ‘Sopherim’ because they COUNTED all the letters in the Torah [the Scriptures] and interpreted it” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 44).

In order to have an accurate transcription of the Scriptures, the Sopherim, the members of the Great Assembly, counted each letter on each section of a scroll. They made sure that when they copied the letters onto a new scroll, that there would be EXACTLY the same number of letters on the new section as had existed on the old. To do this, they had to COUNT each of the letters on the new scroll several times to make certain that the exact number was transcribed.

This method of copying the Scriptures was followed by later Jews until the invention of the printing press. In fact, about eight hundred years AFTER Christ, this method was so highly developed among the Jews that they knew the middle letter of each book in the Bible, and, even the middle letter of the whole Bible. There were many nonessential features developed from this method of counting the letters of the Scriptures. For those who may be interested in some of these features, see *Ginsburg’s Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (this book is now out of print and would be found only in some of the larger libraries).

Sopherim Taught the Law

Once the members of the Great Assembly became the copiers of the Law (the Sopherim), we find the two names synonymously referring to the ONE group of priests. To speak of the Sopherim was to speak of the Great Assembly, and vice versa (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, pp. 44, 45). For convenience’s sake, we will refer to these men by the name most used in history—we will call them the Sopherim. The term “Sopherim” denotes that the one major job of the Great Assembly was to copy faithfully the Scriptures, and teach these Scriptures to the priests of lower rank who in turn would teach the people. Their lives were centered in the study of the Scriptures and in teaching the Law of God. This was, after all, the occupation that God had ordained for the priests. They were also to regulate the religious life of the people. And, history shows that the members of the Great Assembly, the Sopherim of Persian times, following the examples of Ezra and Nehemiah, carried out their commission with fidelity.

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Sopherim Interpreted Scriptures Correctly

We read in the Scripture that Ezra “read in the book in the law of God **DISTINCTLY**, and **GAVE THE SENSE**, and caused them [the lay people] to understand the reading” (Neh. 8:8). When Ezra taught the people, he would read from the Law of God and then **GIVE THE SENSE OF IT**, that is, he would give the true explanation of it so the common people could understand what God meant from the Law.

This is what any true minister of God will do. All that is necessary to understand God’s Word is to have it properly explained by dedicated teachers who know the Scriptures thoroughly. A true minister of God will allow the Scripture to interpret Scripture. This is the only way of arriving at the truth of God’s Word. This is the reason the World Tomorrow program and the Plain Truth magazine interpret Scripture with Scripture. This is exactly what Ezra and his successors, the Sopherim, did! They simply expounded the Law of God, the Scriptures. They did not make up their own ideas about Scripture teaching. They taught the Word of God, **AND IT ONLY!**

This manner of teaching the Scriptures, and which is the only proper way, is known among the Jews as the **MIDRASH-FORM!** The word Midrash means “to comment.” And the term “Midrash-form” designates that manner of teaching which depends **ONLY** on the written Word of God for doctrines—letting the Bible explain itself.

The reason this type of teaching has a special designation among the Jews is because they later had **DIFFERENT METHODS OF TEACHING** which did not rely upon the Word of God. And, it became a later custom to refer to the true type of teaching, which expounded or commented on the Scriptures, **AND THE SCRIPTURES ONLY**, as teaching in the **MIDRASH-FORM**.

This Midrash-form is the type of teaching that the Sopherim used, for they were following Ezra’s example of reading in the Scriptures and then giving the sense or the meaning so the common people could understand. This is the method of teaching that began with Moses and was exclusively used from his day and throughout the period of the Sopherim. For it was, and still is, the only proper way to teach the Word of God (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 47).

“The Midrash-form was supposed to be that in which Moses had originally taught the Torah, and to use that form was called ‘**TEACHING AFTER THE MANNER OF MOSES**’” (Ibid., p. 47).

The later Jews, as previously mentioned, came to the place of teaching religion in an entirely different method than “after the manner of Moses” and the Sopherim. We will see that they did not utilize the Midrash-form as the **ONLY METHOD OF TEACHING**. However, Ezra and the Sopherim, following the example of Moses, taught exclusively in this correct form. They never departed from teaching directly from the Word of God. No other form of interpretation was used or allowed!

Sopherim Complete Final Additions to the Old Testament

The Sopherim, being the successors of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as being the custodians of the Scriptures, were responsible for adding the final portions to the Old Testament. While they were in authority among the Jews, they added a few names to certain genealogical tables in order to bring them up to date. In I Chronicles 3:17-24 and Nehemiah 12:10,11, there are recorded lists of certain men. The last mentioned of these men lived just before the coming of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.

Notice I Chronicles 3:17-24. There is mentioned a sixth generation after Zerubbabel. This last generation would have lived about the time of Alexander the Great. Nehemiah 12:10,11 refers to Jaddua the High Priest who was alive when Alexander the Great came to Palestine (Josephus,

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“Antiquities of the Jews,” xi, 8, 4). Thus, the names were added to the genealogical tables by the Sopherim just before the coming of the Greeks in 331 B.C.

This shows plainly that the Sopherim, who were established about 440 B.C., were in authority for a period just over one hundred years—until 331 B.C. And also that the Old Testament, as we have it today, was made into its final form by the Sopherim with the addition of a few names to the genealogical tables, about 330 years BEFORE the birth of Christ!

The Sopherim had complete authority for doing this. They were the proper custodians of the Law and ordained of God for this purpose.

What All This Means for Today

It must be emphasized that the Sopherim were all priests— there were no laymen among them.

“In the days of the Sopherim, when the High Priest was the head of the community, and when the teachers under his leadership formed an official body vested with authority to arrange all religious matters in accordance with the Law as they understood it, the knowledge of the Law was limited to the priests who were the ONLY OFFICIAL TEACHERS. On the one hand, the priests who were in possession of the Law and tradition of the fathers considered the teaching and interpreting of the religious law as their priestly prerogative” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 197).

This priestly authority was in accord with the Word of God. The priests had been ordained to be the teachers of the people in religious matters. No layman was permitted to assume this authority. As long as the Sopherim remained as the official body among the Jews, this direction of God was adhered to. And during the entire period of the Sopherim—from the days of Ezra until the coming of Alexander the Great—the Jews were keeping the Law of Moses. However, in 331 B.C., when Alexander came to Palestine and defeated the Persians, the whole complexion of Palestine government changed.

The Greeks, unlike the Persians, did not allow the Sopherim to hold their authoritative position among the Jews. In fact, after 331 B.C. the Sopherim disappear from history as a body of priests directing the religious life of the people. The whole organization was dismantled by the Greek conquerors.

The coming of the Greeks brought a complete change in practically every mode of life in Palestine. With the Sopherim taken away from their position of authority, the Scripture teachings ceased being enforced. A whole new way of life was forced upon the Jews.

The next chapter will elucidate what happened in this very important period in Jewish history!

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Chapter 6

At last we come to that shocking period in Jewish history when “Judaism” commenced. Here is how Greek tradition replaced the Law of Moses in the third century before Jesus’ birth.

THE ONE hundred years following Ezra and Nehemiah can properly be described as a time of peace and prosperity for the Jews (Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. i, pp. 406, 407). The Jews had established themselves firmly in Palestine—in every section of the province of Judaea. They were observing the Law of Moses in its entirety. It was the constitutional law of the land.

The Great Assembly, established by Ezra and Nehemiah, was the head of Jewish state under the Persian governor. This great religious assembly of priests directed the people in observing the Laws of Scripture. The priests saw that the people had proper religious instruction every Sabbath in the local synagogues scattered throughout the land. The children were educated in the elementary schools that were attached to the synagogues.

As long as the Jews were under the authority of the Persian Empire, they were allowed to carry on their own religious customs without interference. The Persians seemed to care little how the Jews worshipped God as long as the tax was being paid and a respectable amount of loyalty was being shown to the governor and king. The Jews were disposed to keep the good graces of the Persians by submitting to their benevolent rulership.

The extraordinary goodwill that the Persians had for the Jews came to a sudden end in 332 B.C. At that time, Palestine—a part of the Persian Empire—was conquered by a rising young Empire in the West—the Empire of the Greeks!

Alexander the Great

Beyond the western frontier of the Persian Empire, while the Jews were enjoying their peaceful existence in Palestine, a young general was preparing an army for the conquest of Persia and the East. In 334 B.C., after amassing an army of considerable strength, Alexander the Great swept over the Hellespont and into Persian territory.

Moving with such rapidity, and with such remarkable successes, Alexander the Great in 10 short years conquered the Persian Empire and all of civilized Asia to the Indus River, as well as Egypt on the south. The Jews, because of this, came under the domination of the Greeks.

A New Way of Life—Hellenism

With the coming of the Greeks, a whole new manner of life was brought into Palestine and among the Jews. Under the Persians, the Jews had been allowed to observe the Law of Moses with the Great Assembly (the Sopherim) as their religious leaders. But this was all changed with the advent of the Greeks.

Alexander the Great was steeped in the belief that the Greek way of life was the only suitable one for mankind to follow. He was imbued with the enthusiasm of infusing the culture and society of the Greeks among all the nations he had conquered. And Palestine was no exception.

“Hellenism” is the term to describe the belief in practicing the manner of life of the Greeks—to imitate every phase of Greek society, its politics, domestic life, philosophies, religions, etc.

The basic philosophy behind Hellenism was this: EVERY MAN HAD THE RIGHT TO THINK FOR HIMSELF ON ANY MATTER AS LONG AS THERE WAS NOT A REAL DEPARTURE FROM THE CUSTOMS THAT WERE ESSENTIALLY GREEK.

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This philosophy—freedom of thought or individualism— which is seemingly altruistic in principle, resulted in myriads of confusing and contradictory beliefs among the Greeks in every phase of life. Every man was allowed his own ideas about the sciences, the arts, laws AND ABOUT RELIGION. So varied were the opinions among the Greek scholars in the various fields of study that individuals took pride in contending with one another over who could present the greatest “wisdom” and “knowledge” on any particular subject.

The Greeks sought wisdom in order to understand the world they lived in and the reasons for life. And their confusion of beliefs resulted from the fact that their ideas came from their own rationalizing—their philosophies represented almost EVERY HUMAN IDEA.

Here was the beginning of the philosophy of individualism—a product of Hellenism. When the Greeks came to Palestine they brought all their conflicting secular teachings as well as their many religious doctrines, all of which were prompted by the individual philosophies of men.

It would be unfeasible to even attempt an adequate description of the manifold religious cults among the Greeks, or of their heathenistic doctrines. Their various religions and religious beliefs were the man-made products of the philosophy of individualism. Practically every religious belief capable of being devised by the human mind was found in pagan Greece. In their religious beliefs “we find ghosts and spirits and nature gods, tribal religions, anthropomorphisms [gods in human form], the formation of a pantheon [a temple for the worship of many pagan gods], individual religion, magical rites, purifications, prayers, sacrifices [animal, vegetable and human] -- ALL ARISING FROM THE COMMON STOCK AND THE SUCCESSIVE PHASES OF RELIGIOUS HUMANITY” (Harrison, “Religion of Ancient Greece,” pp. 12, 13). Many of their doctrines and customs will be relevantly discussed in future pages of this thesis.

Hellenism Spread Throughout Alexander’s Empire

Wherever Alexander or his successors went, they carried with them an intense desire to Hellenize all nations. They took with them Greek society and imposed it upon all their captive peoples.

They spread Hellenism from one end of the new Empire to the other. Palestine was as much infused with the New Greek culture as any other nation.

The Greeks considered it their right to govern in the way they deemed most suitable. In consequence of this, the Greeks disbanded the official Sopherim, the religious guardians of the Law of Moses. They would not tolerate the Jews being taught a different way of life from their own. Hellenism was established throughout the whole of Palestine.

Sopherim No Longer in Authority

It is not known how the Greeks dismissed the Sopherim from their official capacity as teachers of the Law. But within a score of years after the coming of the Greeks, the Sopherim disappear from history as an organized body having religious control over the Jews. It is obvious that the Greeks took away the authority of the Sopherim and forbade them to teach. Whether this was done forcibly or by peaceful methods remains a mystery. But it is definitely known that their authority was very soon taken away.

Without the religious guidance of the Sopherim, many of the Jews began to imbibe the customs and ideas of the Greeks which were inundating the land. The Greeks were establishing their whole society firmly in Palestine and all the Empire.

“With the change from Persian to Greek rule, Hellenism made its influence felt, AND CAME POURING LIKE A FLOOD into a country which had known nothing of it. THERE WAS NO ESCAPE FROM ITS INFLUENCE. IT WAS PRESENT EVERYWHERE, in the street and the

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market, in the everyday life and ALL THE PHASES OF SOCIAL INTERCOURSE” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 77).

When the Sopherim were removed from the scene, along with the teaching of the Law of Moses, and this new culture substituted for the Law, we can comprehend why the Jews began to absorb many elements of Hellenism. The Jews had no one to guide them in understanding the Law of Moses, except a few isolated teachers here and there who had no authority as the Sopherim.

It will soon be shown that after a few years of this influence, the people literally came to a state of religious confusion. Some were endeavoring to keep a form of the Scripture teachings, but with Hellenism everywhere, it became almost impossible to keep the true form of the Law of Moses. The Greek way of life was entirely different from that promulgated by the Scriptures, and the two were not compatible.

The human opinions of the Greek poets and philosophers, as well as the doctrines of the various heathen sects of the Greeks, were propagated among the Jews. Almost everything the Greeks brought to the Jews was antagonistic to the Laws of God and, without the religious guidance of the Sopherim, many of them began to tolerate these innovations and even, as time progressed, to take up many of the Greek ideas and customs themselves.

Alexander Recalls a Vision

Josephus, the Jewish historian, records an interesting incident concerning Alexander the Great when he had conquered the Palestine area and was about to enter the city of Jerusalem. He was met on the outskirts of the city by Jaddua, the High Priest, with many inhabitants of Jerusalem. The High Priest was bedecked in his priestly robes and leading the procession of people who met Alexander.

Upon seeing the High Priest and the procession following him, Josephus says that Alexander recalled a dream he had had previously in which such a procession was seen with a person dressed in exactly the same attire of the High Priest leading it. Alexander reckoned that his dream was a sign to leave the inhabitants of Jerusalem alone. He entered the city peaceably with the High Priest and offered a sacrifice to God. Afterward, he was shown the prophecy of Daniel 11:2-3, which revealed that a mighty king from Greece would conquer the Persian Empire. Josephus says that Alexander recognized that Daniel was writing of him. After reading this prophecy, Alexander became very glad and gave favors and gifts to many of the Jews. (See *Antiquities of the Jews*, xi, 8, 5 & 6.)

The prophecy of Daniel had more to say of Alexander and his Empire. In Daniel 11:4 we read: “And when he [Alexander] shall stand up [be in his power], his kingdom SHALL BE BROKEN, AND SHALL BE DIVIDED TOWARDS THE FOUR WIND of heaven ...” This is exactly what happened! Upon the death of Alexander, his Empire was divided into FOUR SECTIONS. Each section was headed by one of Alexander’s former generals: Cassander, Lysimachus, Seleucus and Ptolemy.

The Palestine area fell to the Grecian Ptolemy of Egypt. However, the Seleucid kingdom on the north also laid claim to Palestine and had loyal troops stationed within the area. Neither kingdom was willing to concede that the other was the sole ruler of this territory.

In order to firmly secure Palestine to himself, Ptolemy of Egypt in 320 B.C. attacked the Seleucid garrisons stationed in it and conquered the country. However, the Seleucids took it back in 315 B.C. But again, the Battle of Gaza in 312 B.C. gave Palestine back to Ptolemy. There were many more skirmishes between these two kingdoms until the year 301 B.C. At that time, the Greek government of Egypt took final control of Palestine and maintained that control for a little over one hundred years— until 198 B.C.

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Life Under Greek-Egyptian Control

This one hundred year period of Greek-Egyptian domination is very important as a period in the religious history of the Jews. This is the period that great and significant changes took place in the religious life of the Jews.

While in this period of Egyptian control, the effects of Hellenism upon the Jews were extremely great. What had been started by Alexander the Great was brought to its greatest degree of perfection among the Jews during this one-hundred-year period. The customs and traditions that had been handed down by the Sopherim were completely overshadowed by the Hellenistic culture of the Greeks as promulgated by the Egyptians. In plain language, the Jews during this period of Egyptian control, by the sheer force of environment and circumstance, surrendered themselves to Hellenistic ideas and ways of life.

“During the comparatively quiet rule of the Ptolemies [the Egyptians], Greek ideas, customs, and morality HAD BEEN MAKING PEACEFUL CONQUESTS IN PALESTINE. Their own inherent attractiveness, and the fact that they were supported by the authority of the dominant race, cast a glamour about them [the Jews] which made the severe religion of Jehovah [to Hellenistic minds], the simple customs and the strict morality of the Jews, seem barren and provincial. All the other peoples of Palestine Hellenistic Greek was the language of commerce and polite society. Greek literature was widely studied. Greek manners were the standard throughout southeastern Palestine” (Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, pp. 320, 321).

Everyone in Palestine was affected by the new Hellenistic culture. The Ptolemies of Egypt were anxious, following the example of Alexander the Great, to see that manners of the Greeks were implanted throughout their Empire. All phases of life connected with Hellenism were being practiced in Palestine during this period.

“It is safe to say that NO ONE, HIGH OR LOW, who was living in Judea in the period which includes the whole of the third and the beginning of the second century B.C., WHOLLY ESCAPED THE INFLUENCE OF HELLENISM ...” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 77).

Egyptian Rule Comes to an End

In 198 B.C., the Seleucid Kingdom on the north again came into Palestine and drove out the Egyptians.

The rulers of THIS kingdom were equally Hellenistic in their beliefs as were the Egyptians. However, the new ruler expected the Jews to follow their ways—and only their ways—of interpreting Hellenism. Only the Hellenism that supported the aims and customs of the Seleucids was allowed to exist.

Many of the Jews, after a century of Hellenistic influence, accepted this new enforcement of Seleucid Hellenism. About the only difference between the Egyptian Hellenism and that of the Seleucids was in the national aspect. The Seleucids demanded loyalty to THEIR rule and THEIR customs. The whole Hellenistic system was as much in effect among the Seleucids as with the Egyptians. In fact, if anything, the Seleucids were stronger in their Hellenistic convictions.

“A passion for Greek costumes, Greek customs, and Greek names SEIZED THE PEOPLE. Large numbers were enrolled as citizens of Antioch [the capital of the Seleucid Kingdom]. Many even endeavored to conceal the fact that they had been circumcised. To the horror of the faithful, HELLENISM SEEMED TO BE CARRYING ALL BEFORE IT ... To demonstrate that he had LEFT ALL THE TRADITIONS OF HIS RACE BEHIND, Jason [the High Priest himself] sent a rich present for sacrifices in connection with the great festival at Tyre IN HONOR OF THE GOD HERCULES” (Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, pp. 324-325).

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It is remarkable the extent of the paganism that the Jews were observing at this time. So strong did Hellenistic beliefs become, that the High Priest himself was offering sacrifices to pagan gods. Because of this a reaction began to take place among some of the Jews. Some of them could not bring themselves to go as far as the High priest. However, the vast majority had fallen under the sway of the Hellenism of the Seleucids as they had under the Egyptians.

The Prophecy of Daniel

The eleventh chapter of Daniel is the longest single prophecy in the whole Bible. It deals with events from the time of Daniel right up to the end of this age. The prophet Daniel in this long prophecy foretold that the Persian Empire was to fall. It was to be conquered by a mighty king from Greece (v. 3). That king was Alexander the Great. In the height of his glory he was to die (which Alexander did in the thirty-third year of his life) and his kingdom was to be divided into FOUR divisions (verse 4).

This happened exactly as foretold.

The prophecy continues the foretelling of Palestinian history by revealing in verse 5 that two of these four kingdoms would be fighting over Palestine for many years. Daniel calls the respective kingdoms, “the king of the south” and “the king of the north.” These two kingdoms were specifically the Egyptian kingdom (Ptolemies) on the south, and the Seleucid kingdom, on the north. This prophecy shows, over 300 years in advance, the exact political conditions in Palestine during our period of discussion. History proves that this prophecy gave the precise state of affairs that did exist.

Daniel did not stop in verse 20, however, concerning the political situations in Palestine. In verse 21 Daniel speaks about a “vile person” who was to arise in the kingdom of the north—the Seleucid kingdom. This person was to be most wicked and was to cause many terrible indignities to the Jews. Verses 21 through 39 describe the activities of this man. And, the prophecies concerning him were fulfilled to the letter. This king of the north—the vile person—was Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus Epiphanes Appoints Jewish High Priest

In the year 175 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes obtained the throne of the Seleucid kingdom, and thereby assumed control of Palestine.

When Antiochus took over the Seleucid kingdom there was a reaction between several of the priests in Jerusalem who were contending for the position of High Priest among the Jews. Jason, the brother of the reigning High Priest, persuaded Antiochus Epiphanes to permit him to be High Priest in his brother’s stead. Because of the large sum of money he offered for the honor, Antiochus transferred the priesthood to Jason. The position of High Priest had dwindled to more of an aristocratic political honor. There was little regard paid to the Law of God by these High Priests. Most of them were outright Hellenists. (See *Cyc. Bib. Theo. and Ecc. Lit.* vol. i, p. 271.)

About three years later, however, a Jew, Menelaus, of the tribe of Benjamin (not from Aaron), offered Antiochus Epiphanes a larger bribe than Jason, and he was named High Priest instead. Because of this, Jason fled beyond Jordan to the Ammonites for refuge.

Many of the Jews thought that Jason had been unjustly deprived of his priesthood. A good number of the Jews in Palestine began to take sides—between these two men—some were for Jason and others for Menelaus. So hot did tempers become between these factions that a good deal of violence broke out between them. Actually, those on the side of Jason were fighting in rebellion against the recognized authority that Antiochus Epiphanes had set up. The High Priest, Menelaus, had been given his position by the Seleucid government—even though Menelaus had

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bribed Antiochus into giving it to him—and fighting against this authority constituted fighting against the dictates of the Seleucid Kingdom. (See *Antiquities of the Jews*, xii, 5, 1-5.)

The Jewish War for Independence

The Jewish war for independence from the Seleucid Kingdom has often been called the Maccabean Revolt. Some people have hastily assumed that this revolt was begun because the religious Jews wanted to rid Palestine of the pagan influences that had been in the land for one hundred fifty years or more. However, such was not the case. The Jews, on the whole, had accepted Hellenism to a major degree, as had all the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region. It was not the desire to eradicate Hellenism from Palestine that prompted the Maccabean Revolt, surprising as that may seem.

“The one rebellion which had been recorded in history as directed against Hellenism, that of the Maccabees in Judea WAS NOT, in its origin, A REACTION AGAINST HELLENISM. From the contemporary or almost contemporary accounts in I and II Maccabees it is clear that HELLENISM HAD PROCEEDED FAR INDEED, AND APPARENTLY WITHOUT PROTEST, before the insurrection began. VIOLENCE STARTED in consequence of rivalry between equally hellenized contenders for the high priesthood, AND RELIGION WAS NOT AN ISSUE” (Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture*, p. 43).

The revolt began when fighting broke out between the Jews on the side of Jason, the deposed High Priest, and those on the side of Menelaus, the High Priest appointed by Antiochus Epiphanes. It infuriated Antiochus that many of the Jews began to take sides against his appointed official—in fact, against the government! When a good number of the Jews gathered to the side of Jason, the real reason for the revolt, the desire for independence from the Seleucid yoke, began to be voiced. Religion did not enter in the controversy at first, for Jason was as Hellenistic in his beliefs as Menelaus. The insurrection began as a POLITICAL REVOLT for independence from the Seleucid Kingdom.

“The Maccabean uprising, at least in its initial stages, WAS NOT AGAINST HELLENISM BUT FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE” (Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha*, p. xiv).

Religion Becomes A Factor

However, religion was later brought into the matter. In order to get the whole of the Jews in a revolt against the Seleucids, the dissenters began to point to the heathenistic beliefs of the Seleucids and of Menelaus the High Priest, claiming that such things were anti-Jewish. Thus, the rebels brought religion into the issue, which they reasoned would serve as a mark of distinction between the Jews and the Seleucids. So, in various quarters the cries went up that the government was proclaiming policies that were fundamentally anti-Jewish—especially to the religious customs of their forefathers.

In 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes, while endeavoring by war to take over the Egyptian government, was forced by the Romans, after a humiliating experience, to withdraw from Egypt and to forget his plans of conquering that country. On his way back to Antioch, his capital to the north of Palestine, he determined to put an end to the rebellion that was beginning in Judaea.

Because the issue of religion had been brought up in the insurrection, and because many of the rebels were proclaiming that their struggle was for religious freedom, Antiochus Epiphanes in a maddened frenzy, determined to obliterate any vestiges of the religious customs of the Jews! He boldly repudiated God and entered the Temple in Jerusalem and dedicated it to the pagan god Jupiter. He set up an idol which he called the “lord of heaven” but which is referred to in the Bible as the “abomination of desolation” (Dan 11:31). He also offered swine’s flesh on the Holy Altar and polluted the Temple with all the indecencies he could perpetrate. He even turned the Temple into a center of prostitution.

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Notice some of the things commanded by Antiochus Epiphanes in his desire to exterminate any semblance of the commands of God. We find that many innocent Jews who had no thoughts of rebellion suffered many indignities as well as the guilty.

“By royal decree, the observance of the SABBATH or of the SACRED FEASTS, and practicing the rite of circumcision, WERE ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN UNDER PENALTY OF DEATH. ALL COPIES OF THE LAW WERE DESTROYED. Heathen altars and temples were erected throughout Judaea, and every Jew was compelled in public to sacrifice to idols, swine’s flesh or that of some other unclean beast, AND TO PRESENT CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE THAT HE HAD CEASED TO OBSERVE THE LAWS OF HIS FATHERS” (Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, pp. 328, 329).

All women who had their sons circumcised were publicly marched around the city of Jerusalem and then thrown from the high walls to their death. One group of people who fled to a cave near Jerusalem in order to keep the Sabbath service were surprised and committed to the flames. Such things were everyday occurrences against the Jews who failed to abide by the decrees of Antiochus Epiphanes. (Margolis, *History of the Jewish People*, pp. 137, 138).

Judas Maccabeus

Because of the outrages of Antiochus Epiphanes, many of the Jews became more than ever desirous of independence from the rule of the tyrant. Among them was Judas Maccabeus and his four brothers. They abhorred the actions of this crated ruler from the north, and not desiring to put up with the abuses that were being done to the Jews, they fled for refuge to the mountains of Judaea. While there, they gathered together many more of the dissenting Jews and formed an army. Their vow was to exterminate the foreigners from Judaea.

After a series of successful skirmishes, these men gathered more and more Jews to their cause. Surprisingly, in three short years (by 165 B.C.) they had defeated the Seleucids to such an extent that, for all practical purposes, their desire for an independent autonomous Jewish state was realized. The Maccabees became the leaders of this new state.

Why the Maccabean Revolt?

It should be remembered that this revolt of the Jews was not at first a matter of religion. The main reason for the insurrection was to establish an independent Jewish state.

“The Maccabean uprising, at least in its initial stages, was not against Hellenism BUT RATHER FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE. And when independence, real or nominal, was secured, the object of the Maccabean principality was to hold its head up among other principalities that had arisen out of the ruins of the Seleucid Empire; there was NOTHING LIKE AN ANTI-GREEK PROGRAM” (Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha*, pp. xiv, xv).

The majority of Jews had not been anxious to depart from their Hellenism. What they wanted primarily was their freedom from the foreign yoke. The matter of religion was really invoked to get the people united in one common cause—to drive the foreigner from Judaea. There was no real desire among the multitudes to get back to the Law of God. And religion only became a major issue when Antiochus Epiphanes voiced his anti-religious decrees.

The Jewish historian, Moses Hadas, adequately describes the situation during the Maccabean Revolt.

“The standard of religion was raised in the countryside, and then served to rally the people to the cause. It was only after religion had become the battle cry of the rebels that Antiochus IV [Epiphanes] issued his decrees against the observance of central religious rites, and it is highly significant that as soon as the anti-religious decrees were rescinded the pietest group [the religious people] withdrew from the fighting. The object of the Hasmonaean [Maccabean] rulers

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WAS NOT TO PROTECT RELIGION ... but to maintain a sovereignty ... among others which were being carved out of the weakened Seleucid empire” (*Hellenistic Culture*, p. 43).

After independence was realized, the Hellenistic element still remained among the Jews. They had been so wedded to its influence for so long that it was an impossibility to remove that influence from them. We will read more of this next month!

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Chapter 7

We continue the shocking period in Jewish history when “Hellenism” spread. Here is how Egyptian tradition replaced the Law of Moses in the second century before Jesus’ birth.

LAST installment we discovered that the coming of the Egyptians and finally the Syrians, caused violent changes among the Jews in Palestine.

The authoritative Sopherim, the rightful teachers of the Law of Moses, were divested of all prerogatives. So thorough was the dissolution of the Sopherim as a corporate body that we hear nothing more of any of its members outside of Simon the Just, the High Priest who died in 270 B.C. (*Aboth* i, 2). Simon is described as the last remnant of the group. What happened to the remainder of these teachers is not known. It is obvious from the silence of history that the Sopherim, as the religious authority among the Jews, became extinct within about a score of years after the invasion of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.).

Wars Cause Political and Religious Disruptions

The series of wars over the control of Palestine between the Egyptians on the south and the Syrians on the north—both under Greek domination—created great political and religious disorder within Palestine. The land was attacked by invading armies no less than four times between 330 B.C. and 301 B.C. In the latter year, the land finally succumbed to the rulership of Ptolemy of Egypt (M. Margolis, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 128). Palestine remained under the direct control of the Egyptian government until 198 B.C.—just over one hundred years.

Notice that it was during the early part of this period of Egyptian domination that Simon the Just, the last survivor of the Sopherim, died (270 B.C.). WITH HIS DEATH A DARK CLOUD PASSES OVER ALL THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE JEWS. We are informed by Lauterbach, the learned Jewish scholar, that Jewish tradition knows of no religious teacher who taught any form of religion from the death of Simon the Just until about the year 190 B.C. (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 196).

“This [silence] would have been impossible,” says Lauterbach, “if there had been any official activity of the teachers in those years” (*ibid.*, p. 196).

Think of what this means! For a period of nearly one hundred years, approximating the time of Egyptian rule, there is no record of any religious activity among the Jews! This is the only period in the history of the Jews in Palestine of which NOTHING is recorded!

What all the factors were that caused the Jews to be in such a condition, cannot now be known. What we do know is that one of the major reasons was the influence of Hellenism—the culture of the Greeks—as propagated by the Egyptians.

This philosophy of life—Hellenism—was exerted upon all peoples subject to the Egyptians. It was taken for granted that all persons within Egyptian territory would follow the dictates of the government in this matter. If, however, any individual or group of people felt inclined to resist this Hellenistic culture, the government took matters into its own hands and compelled the people to do their bidding.

The Gift of Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great had left, as a gift to his successors, the conception of Hellenizing the whole of his empire. His reason for this was strictly political. He fancied that all his subjects,

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being Hellenists, would represent a unified empire, not one of diverse ideas and philosophies constantly causing troubles with inevitable bickerings and strifes.

This same belief was existent in the subsequent divisions of Alexander's Empire. Alexander's successors saw that the continued dissemination of Hellenism would work to their advantage. This was certainly true in Egypt. Ptolemy—Alexander's successor in Egypt—carried on the campaign of preaching this Greek culture to his subjects—and the Jews did not escape its influence.

It was impossible to avoid its influence. The Greek language was the language of commerce and social intercourse generally, and it became a matter of necessity to acquire fluency in Greek (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 77).

By the constant hearing and speaking of Greek it was a natural consequence that the ideas which lay behind the language would become known, and in many cases, begin to be practiced. "There was no escape from that influence [Hellenism]. It was present everywhere, in the street and the market, in the everyday life and all phases of social intercourse" (ibid., p. 77).

The Jews, of all people conquered by Alexander the Great and his various successors, were seemingly the least likely to adopt the Greek culture. **BUT THE VERY NOVELTY OF IT, THE VARIETY OF ITS NEW INTERESTS AND PLEASURES MADE IT EXCEEDINGLY ATTRACTIVE TO THE MAJORITY OF THE JEWS!**

It is, of course, not to be supposed that every individual was naturally attracted to Hellenism. This was not the case. But, everyone was affected by it, some to a limited degree, while others became outright Hellenists.

"It is safe to say that **NO ONE**, high or low, who was living in Judea in the period which includes the whole of the third and the beginning of the second century B.C., **WHOLLY ESCAPED** the influence of Hellenism" (ibid., p. 77).

The ones especially affected by this new culture were, rather ironically, the leaders of the Jews—the chief priests themselves. Most of the other influential Jews, because of their positions, also fell under the sway of Hellenism. In effect, all the intellectually able individuals, who should have been leading the common people towards the observance of the Law of God, were following after this culture as preached by the Egyptians. This is the reason no religious teacher of the Law is mentioned by the Jewish histories as having existed during this period of Egyptian domination. There simply was none—except perhaps an insignificant individual here and there who had no real effect on the people.

You can imagine what such a condition did to the religious life of the people as a whole! They were completely surrounded by the influence of Hellenism, having to incorporate it into their lives in order to carry on normal daily living, having no real teaching in the Law of God and having their leaders completely devoted to Hellenism.

What was the natural result?

Lauterbach gives us the answer:

"There prevailed a state of **RELIGIOUS ANARCHY**, wherein the practical life of the people was not controlled by the law of the fathers as interpreted by the religious authorities, nor were the activities of the teachers carried on in an official way by an authoritative body. This chaotic state of affairs lasted for a period of about eighty years ..." (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 200).

(See also Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 57. But this is not all.)

The Key to the Understanding of Judaism

The recognition of this religious anarchy among the Jews during the Egyptian domination is the veritable **KEY** that explains the reason why the Judaism of Christ's day arose. Had this

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religious anarchy not occurred there would have been no JUDAISM for Christ to contend with. If conditions remained as they were under the Sopherim, then Christ would have come to a people who were fully obeying the Law of Moses! But instead, we find a people who were practicing Judaism—the religion of the Jews—not the religion of Moses!

The knowledge of this religious anarchy gives us a KEY to unlock the doctrines and teachings of Judaism. History proves that Judaism evolved out of, and was directly guided by, the inherited principles of pagan life acquired during that religious anarchy! The very foundations of Judaism, its underlying principles, though later covered with a veneer of the Law of Moses, have their origin within this period of religious chaos!

New Laws and Customs Inherited

Now let's consider how this period of religious confusion under the influence of the Egyptians brought about these significant changes in the Jews' manner of living.

Being under the persuasion of an all-encompassing Hellenistic culture, and with no real teaching of the Law of Moses, even the most nationalistic Jew found himself of necessity practicing many of the customs and habits of the Hellenistic Egyptians. There was little the people could do about it under such environmental conditions. Hellenism was in all of Palestine, even in all the known world. There was no way of escaping it. Instead of openly protesting against the new culture, the majority of Jews had to accept it, in one way or another.

It is valuable now to quote two scholars who are recognized among Jews and others alike as pre-eminent historians, particularly for the period under discussion. Both of these men, Lauterbach and Herford, were fully aware of the chaotic conditions which existed in the Egyptian period.

Lauterbach mentions: "During the seventy or eighty years of RELIGIOUS ANARCHY, MANY NEW PRACTICES had been gradually adopted by the people" (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 206).

Herford adds this: "In the absence of authoritative guidance, the people had gone their own way; new customs had found a place amongst old religious usages ... new ideas had been formed under the influence of Hellenism which had permeated the land for more than a century, and there had been no one to point out the danger which thereby threatened the religious life of the people" (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, pp. 64, 65).

There must have been a few Jews endeavoring, in a limited way, to observe the Sabbath and perhaps the Sacred Festivals. But many of the Jews rejected the use of the Scripture and its teachings. It is even certain that the unknown few who attempted to keep some semblance of God's Word on their own, imbibed new customs "amongst old religious usages."

"The people who had now been in contact with Greek culture ...ACQUIRED NEW IDEAS AND BECAME FAMILIAR WITH NEW VIEWS OF LIFE, other than those which they had been taught by their teachers in the name of the law of their fathers. The rich and influential classes accepted Greek ideas and followed Greek customs. The leaders of the people were no longer guided by the laws of the fathers, nor was the life of the people controlled solely by the laws and customs of the fathers as contained in the Torah" (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 194).

Even Scattered Jews Affected

This condition of general religious anarchy among the Jews was not limited to Palestine. The Hellenic culture had been spread WHEREVER THE JEWS LIVED—throughout all of civilized Asia and in many parts of Europe. It was especially thoroughly implanted in Egypt. Wherever

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Jews were, they encountered Hellenism, its philosophies, ways of life and its religious customs and beliefs. There was no way of escaping it!

New ideas and customs everywhere supplanted the ones they had been used to under the Sopherim. The new luxuries and the extravagant habits of the Hellenists were attractive to the rich and influential Jews and the acquiring of Hellenism's new manners for everyday living and public communication became an economic necessity for the common Jews.

Many Jews enjoyed the new culture, the new types of learning and philosophies of thought that came with it. The Greek philosopher, the Greek artist and the Greek man of letters became figures of great respect and admiration to the majority of Jews -- especially of the learned classes. Almost everything that was Hellenistic became the object of imitation. The older customs were looked on as relics of antiquity that, if they were to be observed at all, had to be greatly modified according to the new methods of interpretation promoted by Hellenism.

“Greek culture, Greek literature, were thrown open to the peoples of Nearer Asia, and they pressed into its pale. They had native literatures [including the Scriptures], BUT THESE IN THE NEW DAYLIGHT LOOKED POOR AND UNFORMED: NOW THOSE WHO WROTE MUST WRITE GREEK, THOSE WHO THOUGHT MUST THINK ON THE LINES OF GREEK SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY” (Bevan, *Jerusalem Under the High Priests*, p. 37).

Virtually everything was changed to conform to this new way of life. EVEN THE SCRIPTURE, WHEN READ, WAS INTERPRETED IN THE NEW LIGHT OF HELLENISM (Lieberman, “Hellenism in Jewish Palestine,” pp. 62-64). The people abandoned the simple teachings of Scripture and modified or disregarded them, and in its place substituted the new customs and practices of Hellenism.

It is not at all amazing that within the space of a short hundred years that such a change could take place. The same thing has happened in the Christian world in the century following 1850 with the introduction of evolution and higher criticism.

The Jews in Egypt

At the beginning of Egyptian rule in Palestine, many thousands of Jews were carried captive to Egypt by Ptolemy I. These Jews were taken there as slaves to do menial tasks for the Egyptians or for garrison duty in Ptolemy's army. But under Ptolemy II these Jews gained their freedom. Ptolemy II was inclined to favor the Jews as a whole AND HIS KIND TREATMENT PROMPTED MANY JEWS TO ACCEPT HELLENISM EVEN THAT MUCH MORE. As a result of Ptolemy's clemency toward the Jews, many thousands of others voluntarily left Palestine for Egypt. The majority of these settled in Alexandria on the north coast of Egypt. In a very short time there were so many Jews in Alexandria that a full quarter of the city was Jewish!

Those Jews who went to Egypt abandoned the Hebrew language and completely adopted Greek. Alexandria became one of the centers of Hellenistic influence in the world at that time, and the Jews who resided in the city assimilated the Greek culture with even less inhibitions than their brethren in Palestine. In Alexandria there was virtual adherence to Hellenism's doctrines by all the populace.

The Septuagint Translation

It was during this time of religious anarchy in Palestine and Egypt, that the Old Testament was corrupted and then translated into Greek. This first Greek translation is called the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament.

Tradition has it that Ptolemy II wanted to have a translation of the Jewish Scriptures made for his library. In the course of time, certain Jewish scholars were invited by Ptolemy II to accomplish the task. Thus, the Septuagint Version was born.

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Needless to say, this translation abounds in Hellenistic interpretations. This Version was rejected by later Jews as totally unacceptable because of its variations from the original, inspired and authoritative Palestinian Hebrew Text and because of its inclination to improve” the text in order to please or displease as the case may be, its Gentile reading audience.

The translators of this Version thought nothing of adding to the text or of taking away from it whole verses and even whole chapters! No wonder the later Jews renounced this product of Egypt which was translated during the time of the religious anarchy.

Christ and Apostles Did NOT Use Septuagint

It has often been assumed that the Septuagint Version, instead of the original Hebrew Text, was the Old Testament of the early Christian Church. This is decidedly not the case.

It can be shown quite plainly that Christ did not set the example of using the Septuagint Version. It was His custom to quote from the original Hebrew scrolls (Luke 4:16, 17). Also, Christ referred to the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible as THE SCRIPTURE (Luke 24:44, 45) -- the Septuagint Version DID NOT contain these three divisional designations (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. I, p. 555). Christ NEVER referred to the Septuagint Version as the official Scripture to follow.

Some scholars have endeavored to maintain that the apostles used the Septuagint Version AS THEIR Old Testament, and that their Old Testament quotations in the New Testament were from the Septuagint. However, we are informed by *Collett (The Scripture of Truth*, pp. 142, 143), that of 263 direct quotations from the Old Testament, only 88 are verbal quotations that agree with the Septuagint. Does this prove the apostles used this Version? The answer should be obvious—it does NOT! And, out of 263 quotations, it is only rational to believe that 88 could have coincidentally agreed with the Septuagint Version. Both the translators of the Septuagint and the apostles used the Hebrew original from which they translated these quotations into Greek, and it is conceivable that once in a while the translations would agree. Instead of proving the apostles used the Septuagint as their Old Testament, this evidence proves just the opposite.

And, it is important to note that the Jews of Palestine, because of the variations in the Septuagint from the original Hebrew text, regarded the day the Septuagint was translated as a great calamity equal to the worship of the golden calf (*Sopherim*, i, 7).

For an extensive discussion on these variations, (see *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. IX, pp. 533-554).

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Chapter 8

The beginning of the Sanhedrin, the origin of the “traditions of the elders,” the surpation of authority by laymen—these are discussed in this installment.

IN previous installments we followed the Egyptian rule of Palestine until 198 B.C. In that year the Syrian kingdom on the north invaded and conquered the territory of Judea. The change in government from Alexandria to Antioch in Syria—and the resultant establishment of the Syrian way of life in Palestine— meant that a readjustment had to be made in the Jews’ manner of living inherited from the Egyptian Hellenists.

The Syrians were Hellenists as much as the Egyptians were but there was quite a difference in their mode of observing it!

The Religious Anarchy Ends

When the Syrians assumed control of Palestine, the Jews were fully conscious that something new was taking place. It was this contrast between the Egyptian Hellenism they had been used to and the Syrian Hellenism which they were now obliged to follow, that shocked a few Jews into becoming cognizant that another way of life was possible—their old way of life—living by the Holy Scriptures! The Jews knew the Scriptures plainly did not recognize either form of Hellenism. New interest in God and the religion of Moses began to revive.

Beginning of Sanhedrin

This new interest in the religion of their forefathers caused some of the Jews to reflect on the past in order to ascertain how their forefathers had been governed in their religious life. They recognized that from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah to Alexander the Great, the Sopherim had been the religious leaders and teachers of the people. The Sopherim, remember, had disappeared from the scene—Simon the Just was the last of them.

Understanding that some organization like the Sopherim must exist if there was to be religious unity and the people properly taught the Law, the leaders of this new revival decided to meet in council with one another. Its avowed purpose was to direct those who were desiring to live according to the Law of their forefathers. This council became known by the Greek name, THE SANHEDRIN.

It is not clear when the Sanhedrin first began meeting. It must have been just a short time after the Syrians came into Palestine, perhaps about 196 B.C. or immediately thereafter (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 207).

The influence of the Sanhedrin was not great at first. Not many of the Jews recognized its authority or adhered to its injunctions. Yet, with its establishment, we can say that outright religious anarchy came to an end, even though the majority of the Jews were still greatly affected by Hellenism.

Fanatical Zeal of Syrian Hellenists

When the Syrians subdued the Egyptians in Palestine in 198 B.C., they brought to the Jews their own ideas concerning Hellenism. To the Syrians there must be nothing that rivaled their way of thinking.

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Egyptian Hellenists had allowed the Old Testament to be used. The interpretation of it, however, must be by Greek methods—it had to be Grecianized. Thus, we have the Septuagint Version. BUT THE SYRIAN HELLENISTS WOULD NOT ALLOW THE OLD TESTAMENT EVEN TO BE IN EXISTENCE. Only Greek ways were allowed. No form of individual or nationalistic religion was allowed to exist that conflicted in any way with the doctrines of the Syrians.

The outstanding advocate of this philosophy was the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, who ruled from 175 to 164 B.C.

Antiochus Epiphanes was a Hellenist enthusiast, proud of his Athenian citizenship and bent on spreading Hellenic civilization throughout his domains. He built various temples to Apollo and Jupiter. He observed, and commanded his subjects to observe, all the pagan Greek festivities to the heathen gods. So fanatical was he in his zeal to implant his beliefs on all others that some of his contemporaries called him HALF-CRAZED (Margolis, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 135). He let nothing hinder him from realizing his desires.

A large number of the Jews readily accepted the newly established Syrian doctrine of complete surrender to the philosophies of Hellenism. Most of the Jews were thoroughly accustomed to much of the Greek culture anyway, and it was no hard thing to transfer allegiance from the Egyptians to the Syrians.

Yet, by the time of Antiochus Epiphanes other Jews had also begun to take a new interest in religion—the religion of their forefathers. This new concern for religion was beginning to spread among the Jews of Palestine.

When Antiochus Epiphanes heard that some of the Jews were rejecting his doctrines of total adherence to Hellenism, he began to persecute many of them. The persecution inevitably caused more Jews to side with the cause of religion. This stubbornness of the Jews infuriated Antiochus. He then began—in a fit of demoniac insanity—widespread persecution, committing heinous indignities against all those who would not conform to his ways.

Not all the Jews were in disfavor with Antiochus. Many of the wealthy and influential families, and specially many of the chief priests, wickedly supported Antiochus in his wild schemes. As the persecution grew more intense, a great many of the common people went against Antiochus. The result of this unparalleled persecution by this madman inevitably brought a further quickening interest in the Scriptures. Many began to take up arms against the Syrians. The cry went throughout the land that, in reality, this was a RELIGIOUS WAR and that the Jews were fighting for their Law and their God. This belief boosted renewed interest in fighting against Antiochus. See page 15 of the May issue for a detailed description of the atrocities that made Antiochus so hated by the Jews.

Judas Maccabee

The Jews, in order to band themselves together against the Syrians, came to the side of Judas Maccabee and his four brothers. An army was formed for two purposes: 1) defeating Antiochus Epiphanes and 2) driving out the Syrians from Palestine. This army was quickly put into action. After many successful battles, in succeeding decades, this Jewish army managed to accomplish both things! Antiochus' armies were defeated in 165 B.C. and by 142 B.C. the Syrians were completely driven from the land. Practical independence for the Jews resulted.

Religious Authority Re-established Among Jews

With the defeat of Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 B.C., the religious history of the Jews enters a new phase. The Sanhedrin, which had been feebly established some thirty years before, was now OFFICIALLY DECLARED THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AMONG THE JEWS OF

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PALESTINE. Being in virtual control of the land, the Jews were in position to re-establish the religion that had been in a state of decay for so long.

Now, for the first time since the period of the Sopherim, they had independent religious authority. The Sanhedrin took the place of the Sopherim in directing the religious life of the people. But, this governing body of men was to be greatly different from the priestly Sopherim.

During the period of religious anarchy before Antiochus Epiphanes, a fundamental change took place in the attitudes of the priests. Many of the priests were outright Hellenists and steeped in the pagan philosophies of that culture. Not only that, many of them had sided with Antiochus Epiphanes against the common people during the Maccabean Revolt. Such activities caused the common people to be wary of the priests and their teaching. There was a general distrust for anything priestly at this time.

A few priests had not allied themselves with Hellenism and Antiochus Epiphanes. But the large majority, in one way or another, were not faithful to the religion of their forefathers.

This general lack of trust for the priests led most of the common people to disapprove of their re-assuming their full former role of being religious authorities. Only those priests who had not been openly in favor of Hellenism were sought and allowed to take their former positions. The common people could not bring themselves to entrust the other priests with the right to help regulate the religious life of the Jews. Only to these faithful priests were committed chairs in the new Sanhedrin (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 209).

Non-Priestly Teachers Assume Authoritative Positions

Under Egyptian control, within the period of the religious anarchy, Palestine had no official teachers of the Law. A few individuals here and there endeavored to study the Scriptures in a personal way. Without official teachers, the study obviously had to be personal and in private. The fact that a few independent students of the Law existed is proved by the few learned men who came to the fore with the establishment of a Sanhedrin. We are further assured of this when we realize that this new Sanhedrin, organized about 196 B.C., was composed of LAY TEACHERS as well as some priests.

“The study of the Law NOW BECAME a matter of private piety, and as such WAS NOT LIMITED TO THE PRIESTS” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 198).

This private study, without proper guidance from recognized authority such as the Sopherim were, brought about some surprising results.

(This is the same condition that happened in the Protestant Reformation. Many lay teachers arose, because the Bible was made available by the printing press, and many confusing and contradictory divisions arose amongst those who were coming out of the Catholic Church.)

Many of these Jewish teachers, likewise, because of their independent private study in the Scripture, were not in unity on many of their teachings. And, too, many of these teachers were variously affected by Hellenism.

“We shall therefore be not far from the truth if we represent the Sanhedrin, in the years from its foundation down to the outbreak of the Maccabean Revolt, as an Assembly of priests and LAYMEN, some of whom inclined to Hellenism while others opposed it out of loyalty to the Torah” (Herford, *The Pharisees*, p. 27).

The differing degrees of Hellenic absorption among the teachers, mixed with independent study of the Scripture, brought about a new variety of opinions. And, in the discussions that followed to determine which opinions to use, the LAY TEACHERS claimed as much right to voice their views as the priests. The lay teachers were assured of the common people being behind them.

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“At the beginning of the second century these non-priestly teachers already exerted a great influence in the community and began persistently TO CLAIM FOR THEMSELVES, as teachers of the Law, THE SAME AUTHORITY WHICH, TILL THEN, THE PRIESTS EXCLUSIVELY HAD ENJOYED” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 28).

Such privileges that the lay teachers were usurping to themselves would never have been permitted while the Sopherim, the successors of Ezra and Nehemiah, were in authority. The Law of Moses, which God had directly commanded him, clearly enjoined that the priests, with their helpers the Levites, were to perform the functions of teachers, not just any layman who would presume to do so.

Some of these priests were in the Sanhedrin and were willing to re-establish the religious life of the people, in accordance with the directions in the Law. But the new laymen, who had now also become teachers of the Law because of their independent study, were not willing to give up this new power they had acquired. Human reason insisted that they were as competent to teach the people as the priests.

Lay Teachers Reject Sole Authority of Priests to Teach!

When the Sanhedrin was re-organized after Antiochus Epiphanes, the lay teachers exhibited more power than ever before. The priests, who were under a ban of discredit before the Maccabean Revolt, were even more so afterwards. The lay teachers repudiated the claim that the priests had an exclusive right to be in authority.

Lauterbach says that these lay teachers “refused to recognize the authority of the priests as a class, and, inasmuch as many of the priests had proven unfaithful guardians of the Law, they would not entrust to them the religious life of the people” (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 209).

This privilege, of assuming the role of the priests, was not a complete usurpation of every prerogative of the priests. They still were the only ones allowed to perform the ritualistic Temple services, etc. No lay teacher ever thought of taking over this exclusive position of the priests.

But from the time of the re-establishment of the Sanhedrin, after the Maccabean Revolt, the lay teachers became the important RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

Sanhedrin Faces Many New Problems

The establishment of the Sanhedrin was recognized as a necessity in order that there could be a resumption of some form of the religion of Moses.

“The members of this Sanhedrin took up the interrupted activity of the former teachers, the Sopherim, and, like them, sought to teach and interpret the Law and to regulate the life of the people in accordance with the laws and traditions of the fathers. But in their attempt to harmonize the laws of the fathers with the life of their own times, THEY ENCOUNTERED SOME GREAT DIFFICULTIES” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 105).

The people were keeping so many new customs, not observed by their forefathers, that the members of the Sanhedrin became perplexed over what to do.

It was not easy to find support from the Scriptures which might condone some of the practices of the Jews at this time. The members of the Sanhedrin began to look for ways of JUSTIFYING the people, rather than following the Scripture commands to correct them (Deut. 32:1-47).

“Many new customs and practices for which there were no precedents in the traditions of the fathers, and NOT THE SLIGHTEST INDICATION IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, were observed by the people and CONSIDERED BY THEM AS A PART OF THEIR RELIGIOUS LAWS AND PRACTICES” (ibid., p. 195).

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The majority of the teachers in the Sanhedrin came to the conclusion that the proper thing to do was to find some way to authoritatively justify these new customs. They were well aware that they could not go to the Scripture for their support. This presented a troublesome situation to the Jewish teachers.

“The DIFFICULTY was to find a sanction in the Torah for the new customs and practices which had established themselves in the community ...” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 66).

The only commands the Jews had from God in this matter were clearly negative. “Learn not the way of the heathen” (Jer. 10:2).

“Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them [the heathen] ... and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations [the heathen] serve their gods? EVEN SO WILL I DO LIKEWISE” (Deut. 12:30).

How to avoid these plain Scripture commands, and get these new customs sanctioned as proper religious observances? The teachers thought it would have been misadventurous to tell the people who wanted to retain these customs the simple commands of the Scriptures. The people were not about to give up these new customs. The teachers were assured of this.

What, then, did the teachers do to finally get these new religious customs and practices authorized and as having the sanction of God? They came out with a most ingenious fiction which shows an amazing and clever display of human reasoning.

Teachers Pronounce Heathen Customs Jewish in Origin

The conclusion of the Jewish teachers may surprise you. They merely taught that all the customs and practices which the Jews were now observing were actually Jewish in origin!

“They reasoned this: It is hardly possible that FOREIGN CUSTOMS AND NON-JEWISH LAWS SHOULD HAVE MET WITH SUCH UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE. THE TOTAL ABSENCE OF OBJECTION ON THE PART OF THE PEOPLE TO SUCH CUSTOMS VOUCHERED FOR THEIR JEWISH ORIGIN, IN THE OPINION of the teachers” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 211).

The Jewish teachers told the people that it was simply not possible for them, being Jews, to have inherited any heathen custom or practice!

Since the Jewish teachers accepted these customs as actually being Jewish in origin, it became necessary to carry the theory just a little further. The theory went like this: Since the customs were supposedly Jewish, then they must have been taught by the prophets and the teachers of Israel, even by Moses himself! That is how the customs and practices of the Jews, which in reality they had inherited from the heathen within the period of religious anarchy, were falsely termed the “traditions of the fathers”—handed down from Moses, the prophets and teachers of old!

These traditions Jesus condemned.

There was, however, one difficulty for the Jewish teachers to overcome in this interpretation. There were no such customs and practices as these mentioned in all of Moses’ Law nor in any other part of the Scripture.

This did not dampen the spirit of the Jewish teachers! They also had an answer for this. They maintained that these customs were not put down in written form, and because of this, were not found in the text of Scripture. “These customs were handed down ORALLY from Moses,” was their assertion! “They were passed by word of mouth from Moses through every generation.”

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By assuming that there was an Oral Law, called the “traditions of the fathers,” this freed the Jewish teachers from having to appeal to the Written Scripture for evidence to back up their statements.

“Accordingly, the teachers themselves CAME TO BELIEVE that such generally recognized laws and practices MUST HAVE BEEN old traditional laws and practices accepted by the fathers and transmitted to following generations IN ADDITION to the Written Law. Such a belief would naturally free the teachers from the necessity of finding SCRIPTURAL PROOF FOR ALL THE NEW PRACTICES” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 211).

These traditional laws—the Oral Laws—were not from Moses nor any of the prophets. There is not a single reference in the Scripture that Moses gave the Israelites any Oral or Traditional Laws that were to be handed down along with the Written Word. The Bible states just the opposite. It plainly says that Moses WROTE THE WHOLE LAW IN A BOOK. There was no such thing as an Oral Law of Moses.

Notice:

“And it came to pass, when Moses had MADE AN END OF WRITING THE WORDS OF THIS LAW IN A BOOK, UNTIL THEY WERE FINISHED, that Moses commanded the Levites ... saying, TAKE THIS BOOK OF THE LAW, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there FOR A WITNESS AGAINST THEE” (Deut. 31:24-26).

Moses wrote the Law in a book. And it was this written Word of God that was to be a witness against the Israelites for future generations, not any so-called Oral Law.

Notice this confession of Dr. Lauterbach:

“These traditional laws naturally had no indication in the Written Law and no basis in the teachings of the Sopherim, BECAUSE THEY DEVELOPED AFTER THE PERIOD OF THE SOPHERIM” (ibid., p. 206).

In other words tradition originated in the period of the religious anarchy, when the Egyptians were in control of Palestine.

“The reorganized Sanhedrin had to reckon with these NEW LAWS AND CUSTOMS, NOW CONSIDERED AS TRADITIONAL because observed and practiced by the people FOR A GENERATION OR MORE” (ibid., p. 206).

We should not suppose that this theory of the origin of the Traditional laws was wholeheartedly accepted by all the teachers and members of the Sanhedrin.

Some Teachers Disapprove of New Interpretation

“The theory of an authoritative traditional law (which might be taught independently of the Scripture) WAS ALTOGETHER TOO NEW to be unhesitatingly accepted ... THE THEORY WAS TOO STARTLING AND NOVEL to be unconditionally accepted” (ibid., p. 211).

The Jewish teachers who were the most prone to accept the new fictional interpretation were the lay teachers. Some of the priests were not quite sure this was the way of handling the situation. They maintained that the Sopherim of old had always relied upon the Scripture, and that they would never have countenanced such interpretations which completely side-tracked the Word of God.

“In their [the priests’] opinion, the main thing was to observe the laws of the fathers as contained in the Book of the Law, because the people had pledged themselves, by oath, in the time of Ezra, to do so. If changed conditions required additional laws and new regulations, the PRIESTS and RULERS were competent to decree them according to the authority given to them in Deut. 17:8-13” (ibid., p. 209).

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The priests, as a whole, declared that the Scripture was the only necessary code of laws to obey.

“This apparently simple solution offered by the priestly group in the Sanhedrin DID NOT FIND FAVOR WITH THE LAY MEMBERS OF THAT BODY” (ibid., p. 209).

The lay teachers, who outnumbered the priestly group, claimed the only way of reconciling these new customs with the Scripture was to recognize them as Oral laws handed down from Moses.

They began to formulate methods of explaining how these laws were ordained by Moses and transmitted to the Jews then living. Their explanations were not true, but they deliberately taught them anyway.

Lauterbach says that these lay teachers of the Sanhedrin devised the “methods for connecting with the Law all those new decisions and customs which were now universally observed by the people, THUS MAKING THEM APPEAR as part of the laws of the fathers” (ibid., p. 210). Notice, THEY MADE THEM APPEAR as if they were actual traditions of Moses!

Clever Answers to Opponents

The lay teachers had an answer for almost every question that an opponent might ask them concerning the validity of these Traditional laws.

If one would mention that Deuteronomy 4:2 forbade the addition to the Law, the lay teachers would readily admit that fact but staunchly affirm that the recognition of the Traditional laws was not adding to the Law of Moses. They claimed these laws originated with Moses and represented the complete revelation that God gave him (ibid., p. 44).

If some opponent would voice the truth about the recent origin of these laws, the lay teachers merely declared that the laws were actually Mosaic but had been long forgotten and had just been recalled and reintroduced (ibid., p. 45).

And when someone would prove beyond question that these laws were nothing more than pagan practices, Lieberman points out that in such cases the JEWS COULD MAINTAIN THAT THE HEATHEN WERE FOLLOWING JEWISH PRACTICES AND NOT VICE VERSA” (*Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, p. 129).

Such interpretations were absurdly extreme, completely unjustified and utterly false! How they managed to palm off such fallacious interpretations as actual truth can be understood only if we recognize that THE PEOPLE WANTED TO RECEIVE THIS ERROR. With the people behind them, the lay teachers could teach about what they wished.

“Certain religious practices, considered by the later teachers as part of the traditional law, or as handed down by Moses, ORIGINATED IN REALITY FROM OTHER, PERHAPS NON-JEWISH SOURCES, AND HAD NO AUTHORITY OTHER THAN THE AUTHORITY OF THE PEOPLE WHO ADOPTED THEM” (ibid., p. 241).

With the acceptance of these new customs and practices we can date the true beginning of Judaism as a religion! The opportunity of returning to the Law of Moses was rejected. From that time forward, about 150 years before Christ, we become familiar in history with the real Judaism—a religion which the apostle Paul calls the “Jews’ religion.”

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Chapter 9

The Pharisees seize authority from the priests, the “traditions of the elders” replace the Bible, laymen claim to be prophets—these surprising facts are discussed in this ninth installment.

THE last installment revealed how laymen came to power through “Judaism”—how they called pagan customs the “traditions of the elders.”

Now see what occurred in the century just before Christ’s birth.

Innovation of Precedents Which Helped Form Judaism

The acceptance of the “traditional laws,” supposedly handed down from Moses, placed the lay leaders in a position of power and authority among the people. It was the people themselves who had inherited the many new customs, and when the lay leaders condoned the customs, claiming them to be Jewish in origin, the people looked upon the lay leaders with honor and respect.

The lay leaders were quite aware that there was no truth in their assertions that these new customs came from Moses. But in order to please the people they deliberately propagated this falsehood. In consequence of their newly found authority, the lay leaders set themselves up as ultimate teachers in matters pertaining to every phase of religious activity. In the matter of accepting the customs inherited from Hellenism, they maintained their prerogatives, as religious authorities, to decide which of the customs to accept and which ones to reject.

“No one except the recognized teachers could say what the tradition contained” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 68). Of course, the customs to which the People were most wedded were necessarily accepted.

Many of the priests in the Sanhedrin objected to the lay leaders’ assumption of power and especially of their raising to divine law the new customs from Hellenism. The priests were also obstinate in their belief that the authority to rule should be accorded to them alone, for they properly maintained that they were the descendants of Aaron and the only ones recognized by Scripture to be in authority to rule over the people. But the lay leaders would not concede to the priests’ demands, and they had the majority of the people behind them. Too many of the priests had deserted to outright Hellenism in the anarchial period and the people were still wary of their tactics.

The Pharisees and Sadducees

The differences of opinion between the lay leaders and the priests caused a permanent breach between these two groups. The lay leaders, with the religious Jews on their side and believing in the traditional laws, gathered themselves together into one major group. The priests, on the other hand, who tended to agree with one another, gravitated into another group.

This breach between the two leading religious factions among the Jews was the beginning of two prominent New Testament Jewish sects: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The lay leaders comprised the Pharisaic group. Most of the priests represented the Sadducees. Members from both groups remained in the Sanhedrin, but they were almost always divided on policy.

It is not to be supposed that the whole Jewish population was anxious to get back to some form of religious observances after the period of religious anarchy. The great majority of people were not overly interested in religion. As stated before, 95% of the Jews in Christ’s time were not members of the Jewish sects. This lack of real interest in religion among the Jews in New Testament times had its origin within the period of religious anarchy.

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THE JEWISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE NEVER RECOVERED FROM THE CONDITION THAT EXISTED WITHIN THAT ANARCHIAL PERIOD. There was, of course, a limited amount of religious compunction, but not enough for the whole nation to become members in the sects of Judaism.

The Pharisees, however, did have on their side those Jews who were religiously inclined, but the majority showed varying degrees of indifference to the religious squabbles among the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, has this to say about these Pharisees and Sadducees:

“The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, AND ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THE LAWS OF MOSES; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our fathers. And concerning these things it is that GREAT DISPUTES AND DIFFERENCES have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, 10, 6).

Pharisees Repudiate Sole Authority of Priests to Teach Law

A major decision of the Pharisees was that of rejecting the sole authority of the priests to be the religious authorities. The Pharisees admitted that the priests were the only ones with the right to perform the ritualistic services in the Temple. But other than this minor role in directing the religious life of the people, the priests henceforth had little to do, religiously speaking. The Pharisees came to RECOGNIZE THEMSELVES as the only real religious leaders.

In assuming the religious leadership, the Pharisees reasoned that they were taking the place of the priests whom they considered unfit to govern the people on account of their rejection of the traditional laws.

Pharisees Reckoned Themselves as Prophets

Upon appropriating to themselves the religious authority among the Jews, the Pharisees thought themselves also competent to be the ultimate judges concerning all religious questions. This gave them, so they reasoned, the right to speak in the name of the Eternal even as the prophets of old had done.

“IT IS CERTAIN that they [the Pharisees] regarded themselves as the SUCCESSORS OF THE PROPHETS, and that not merely in fact BUT BY RIGHT” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 71).

The Pharisees contended, by their own statements, that they had been given the spirit of prophecy as had the prophets of old.

They had already accepted the new customs as divine law—and they reckoned that only individuals under the influence of the Spirit of God could do such things! In the Jewish Talmud, a compilation of Jewish writings from the days after Alexander the Great to about 400 years after Christ, there are several statements of these early Pharisees in regard to their belief that they had the same authority as the prophets. In the talmudical tractate called “Baba Bathra,” in section 12a, we read this: “PROPHECY WAS TAKEN FROM THE PROPHETS AND WAS GIVEN TO THE WISE [the Pharisees].” To this remark is added: “AND IT HAS NOT BEEN TAKEN FROM THESE.”

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Herford deduces from this particular reference, among many others in the Talmud: “The relevance of this passage ... is that the Rabbis [the Pharisees] felt that they had, NO LESS BUT EVEN MORE THAN THE PROPHETS, DIVINE AUTHORITY FOR WHAT THEY TAUGHT, and that this was given to them after the time when the prophets ceased to function. It was the way of expressing the belief that the REVELATION DID NOT CEASE with the extinction of prophecy” (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 72).

The audacious Pharisees considered their laws and commandments as having more weight than those of the Prophets! That divine revelation did not cease with the prophets, but was now in action in the Pharisees as well! They were confident that what they were teaching—even though in so many cases it did not agree with the plain and simple commandments of God as revealed in Scripture—was divine teaching as prompted by the Spirit of God.

The Pharisees felt that God was “revealing Himself now as He had revealed Himself to the prophets, AND SPEAKING NOT ALONE IN THE WORDS OF AN ANCIENT TEXT, but in words which came FROM THE HEART AND CONSCIENCE OF MEN who felt His hand laid upon them to ‘guide them into all truth’” (ibid., p. 69).

Notice this! The Pharisees came to the place of believing that God did not reveal Himself in the Scriptures alone—“speaking not alone in the words of an ancient text”—but that He was actively revealing His present truth to the Pharisees through influencing their hearts and consciences! You can imagine what unlimited authority this gave the Pharisees among those who accepted their beliefs.

By appropriating the role of modern prophets, they maintained the right of free prophetic utterance. That is, they claimed the prerogative to speak the current will of God without the necessity of appealing to the Scriptures. They did not believe they had to be shackled to the teaching of the Scriptures!

This opinion gave the Pharisees extreme latitude. They believed, as Herford puts it, “IN THE CONTINUOUS PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD, AND THAT HIS AUTHORITY WAS MADE KNOWN IN THE REASON AND CONSCIENCE OF THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO KNOW HIS WILL, AND NOT ONLY IN THE WRITTEN TEXT OF THE TORAH [the law of God]” (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 73).

The ideas and beliefs of the Pharisees originated in their own minds!

The Pharisees claimed that the Holy Scriptures alone were NOT SUFFICIENT to give the complete truth of God—especially since environmental conditions change. To the Scriptures, they claimed, had to be added the so-called traditional law (which they determined to be the Word of God).

There are Churches today who claim the same prerogative. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, does not derive its authority from the Bible. It rejects, in many cases, the plain teaching of Scripture to proclaim its own church doctrines.

“THEY [THE PHARISEES] UPHELD THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION AS SUPERIOR TO INDIVIDUAL INTELLIGENCE, and taught that no Scripture should be of unauthorized, or private, interpretation” (Conder, *Judas Maccabaeus*, p. 203).

It is indeed amazing to what extent the Catholic Church parallels the actions of the Pharisees in this matter.

New Doctrines Taught Independent From Scripture

With the “feeling” that they had the spirit of God guiding them, the Pharisees began to make more laws and commandments of their own, without appealing to the Scriptures.

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The first Pharisee we have record of who began to teach new commandments of his own, without any Scripture basis, was Joseph ben Joezer. This Pharisee lived at the time the majority of the Pharisees erroneously accepted the traditional laws as the “Oral Law of Moses.”

Joseph ben Joezer made three new laws completely independent of Scripture. In fact, what he commanded was not only independent of Scripture but WAS NOT EVEN PERMITTED BY THE LAW OF GOD. His commandments in themselves were not earth-shaking violations, but they were only the beginning of a new trend.

His first law permitted the Jews to eat an insect related to the locust family which all Jews previously had considered unclean! Also, he permitted the Jews to eat of the liquids of the slaughtering place (apparently blood, etc.). This, of course, was contrary to many Scriptures (Lev. 3:17, etc.). His last commandment concerned the touching of a dead body. He permitted persons to be ritualistically clean even if they were in constant contact with individuals who had become unclean by touching a dead body (Lev. 11:27, 31, etc.). For making all these new laws, which permitted people to do what had been previously forbidden in the Law of God, he was named by his contemporaries “Joseph the Permitter.”

“Joseph is called ‘the Permitter,’ evidently because in all three decisions he permits things that were formerly considered forbidden” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 219).

These three new commandments were not the only ones to be enacted by the Pharisees. The action of Joseph the Permitter was the setting of a precedent! His commandments were a little reluctantly received at first, but the reluctance did not last long. From that time forward a FLOOD OF NEW COMMANDMENTS began to come forth from the Pharisees.

These new laws, which Jesus called the commandments of men (Mark 7:7), the Pharisees called by the Hebrew name “*Halachah*.” This Hebrew word in English means “rule” or “decision.” It denoted a new rule of decision of the Pharisees. The term *Halachah* (or sometimes the plural “*Halakot*”) will be used in succeeding parts of this thesis series to denote the human commandments of the Pharisees.]

Now notice what Herford says concerning these three new commandments (*Halachah*) of Joseph the Permitter. “The *Mishnah* [a part of the Talmud] records three halachahs which were declared by him ... but which evidently met with some objection and gave occasion to his colleagues to call him ‘Joseph the Permitter.’ This was because ... he was able to declare THAT to be allowable WHICH TILL THEN HAD NOT BEEN ALLOWABLE, SINCE NO INTERPRETATION OF THE WRITTEN TEXT [the word of God] HAD BEEN FOUND WHICH WOULD JUSTIFY HIS CONCLUSION” (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 67).

These new Halachah of Joseph the Permitter were not customs or habits that had been inherited from the days of the religious anarchy. Or, to put it another way, these were not laws which the Pharisees claimed to be part of the traditional laws from Moses. These NEW LAWS were nothing more than commandments originating in the mind of Joseph himself. Notice what Lauterbach says:

“It is therefore evident that these *Halakot* ... were not older traditional laws transmitted by Joseph as a mere witness, BUT JOSEPH’S OWN TEACHINGS. HE WAS THE ONE WHO ‘PERMITTED’ AND HE DESERVED THE NAME [the Permitter]” (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 218).

Pharisees Adopt Precedent of Joseph the Permitter

Because Joseph the Permitter was one of the chief leaders among the Pharisees immediately following the Maccabean Revolt (168-165 B.C.), other Pharisees immediately followed his authoritative example and made new commandments or Halachah on their own. This method of teaching was not whole-heartedly accepted by all Pharisees immediately. It took about a generation to establish the new method of teaching firmly among the Pharisees.

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If the majority of Pharisees agreed with the new commandments, they would then be accepted as the Word of God—even if the commandments taught just the opposite from the teaching of the Scriptures. **IT ALL DEPENDED UPON WHETHER THE PHARISEES, AS A WHOLE, THOUGHT THE NEW COMMANDMENTS WERE NECESSARY FOR THE PEOPLE TO OBSERVE.**

This practice gave rise to the theory that new rules—though contrary to Scripture—had to be established to meet the needs of the changing times! Notice Herford’s summary of this whole situation:

“The lead which Joseph ben Joezer had given **WAS FOLLOWED**, but only gradually; and though the theory of the Unwritten Torah [the traditional laws] was finally accepted and worked out to its furthest consequences, as seen in the Talmud, yet those who most firmly maintained it **WERE QUITE AWARE OF THE WEAKNESS OF ITS FOUNDATION**. They knew that it cut the connection between the halachah [the rules of the Pharisees] and the written Torah [the Scriptures], and **THEY KNEW THAT IN APPEARANCE, AT ALL EVENTS, IT GAVE THE TEACHERS FREE SCOPE TO TEACH WHAT THEY THOUGHT FIT**” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 68).

Pharisees Viewed Scriptures as Out of Date!

Because the Pharisees considered themselves Prophets and able to give the **CURRENT** will of God, they reasoned that in many cases the **CURRENT** will of God may be completely different from His will as expressed in past times. They maintained that many of their new teachings, which were clearly contrary to the written Word of God, were actually the **PRESENT** will of God. This is one of the reasons the Pharisees taught new commandments without Scripture proof!

The Pharisees were confident that as times changed and when the people would be under new environmental conditions that certain of the Laws of God, as revealed in the Scripture would, of necessity, become obsolete and have to be changed. And, feeling that they had the power of prophets, they felt no compunction about teaching new commandments to meet the needs of the time, regardless of whether those teachings contradicted the Word of God or not.

Herford shows us that this was the very attitude of the Pharisees:

“The written Torah was good for the age in which it was given, or in which it was first read; **BUT THE WRITTEN TORAH ALONE COULD NOT SUFFICE FOR LATER AGES**” (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 113).

With this attitude concerning the Scripture the Pharisees could always maintain that God’s will had changed in the matter -- that He had revealed His present will to the Pharisees.

This is the very same philosophy that is pervading our modern Christianity! How many times do we meet with statements from the learned theologians of the various Christians’ sects saying the same thing today? Almost everyone feels that the Bible **IS OUT OF DATE—IS OLD FASHIONED**. Millions assume it is impossible to keep God’s laws and commandments in this “modern” age. Let us clearly understand that the Bible **IS NOT OUT OF DATE**. It can be obeyed, and in fact, it had better be obeyed! Let us not be like the Pharisees who rejected the Scripture. They received the stern rebuke of Christ. Let us, on the other hand, **OBEY—live by—every word of God** (Matt. 4:4).

From this time forward, we see the development of the Pharisaical Judaism of New Testament times. All the many arduous and burdensome laws concerning the Sabbath—the laws of washing the hands, pots, pans, etc.—laws regarding fasting—and myriads of others had their development in the minds of the Pharisees between the year 165 B.C. and the coming of Christ.

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Once we understand the basis upon which popular Judaism in the days of Christ was founded, we will understand why Christ so severely condemned the practices of the Pharisees and of the other sects!

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Chapter 10

This tenth installment reveals the truth about the Jewish sects in Palestine in the days of Christ.

ALL the sects of Judaism in the New Testament period had their roots within the time of religious anarchy after the death of Alexander the Great. That was the time the Egyptians and then the Syrians dominated Palestine.

When these foreign elements came into Palestine, they brought with them their respective cultures—their forms of Hellenism. Every phase of life was affected by Hellenism. Nothing escaped its influence. That attractiveness of the new culture was overwhelming. The Jews accepted it almost as readily as any of the countries of the East which had been conquered by Alexander the Great.

Now let's continue this series.

Sects of Judaism

“Because the Jews represent the major non-Greek element in the eventual fusion it is important to observe that their reaction to Hellenism was INITIALLY NO DIFFERENT from that of other non-Greek peoples” (Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha*, p. xiv).

The Jews, after the peaceful introduction of Hellenism by the Egyptians, accepted it almost totally. And not the least affected by this acceptance of Hellenism were former religious beliefs of the Jews. Changes were made in the Jewish religious services. The foreign influence was so strong and the religious inclination so weak that the period had been called, as we have before mentioned, a time of religious anarchy.

The very basis of Hellenism was the philosophy of “free-thinking”; the right of the individual to think and reason for himself. This philosophy of individualism was accepted by the Jews. The Jews, like their Egyptian rulers, began to think on their own in regard to the arts, sciences, religion, etc.

As with Hellenism in Greece, Syria and Egypt, so in Palestine, the INDIVIDUAL and HIS OPINION became important to the educated. The study of Scripture, when indulged, became more of a private matter and of individual interpretation, as it is commonly done today, rather than of collective interpretation from an authoritative body, like the Sopherim were. In most cases the Scripture became interpreted according to the prevailing custom of viewing everything in the light of Hellenistic “enlightenment.”

We find that during the period of religious anarchy there arose a number of individuals endeavoring to teach the Scriptures. These men were almost wholly laymen—the priests, on the whole, thought it not necessary to bother themselves with teaching or studying the Scriptures of their forefathers. At the end of the anarchy, we find these individual laymen establishing themselves, with a few of the faithful priests, into a body of religious authority among the Jews. However, when these men came together they brought with them many varying opinions of the Scriptures they had learned in independent study. Some of the laymen and priests had accepted much of the Hellenistic ways of teaching as well as many Hellenistic customs and practices. There were some teachers, however, who were less inclined towards Hellenism. Yet all these teachers in one way or another were influenced with Hellenism. There is no doubt of this (Herford, “Talmud and Apocrypha,” p. 77).

The differences of opinion among these various teachers finally evolved into the real beginning of the sects of Judaism. All of the sects can be shown to have had their origins within or immediately after the period of religious anarchy. And it is also important to indicate that ALL

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the sects which came out of that anarchy had some form of Hellenism attached to their beliefs. In fact, the various sects of Judaism can be categorized according to the amount of apparent Hellenization that each sect absorbed. There were some sects which embodied much of the Hellenistic spirit; others a moderate amount; but hardly one which absorbed little.

It will be profitable to briefly survey the sects of Judaism which existed in the days of Christ. It will be obvious that none of them were keeping the true and unblemished Law of Moses.

The Truth About the Essenes

The first sect to be dealt with will be the Essenes. This group is placed first because they represent the sect which consumed the greatest amount of foreign doctrine.

“Greek culture must have had a POWERFUL INFLUENCE upon Palestine since the time of Alexander the Great—it was not repressed until the Maccabean rising—it is only natural, if we find ACTUAL PROOF OF THIS INFLUENCE OF HELLENISM IN THE CIRCLE OF THE ESSENES” (Schurer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. ii, p. 218).

There were certain religious customs and beliefs of the Jewish sect of the Essenes which were totally Hellenistic in origin. For one, Josephus tells us they accepted the doctrine of the immortality of the soul (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii, 1, 5). He mentions this foreign belief of the Essenes in several places.

Notice:

“For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of is not permanent; but THAT THE SOULS ARE IMMORTAL, AND CONTINUE FOR EVER ... And IS LIKE THE OPINIONS OF THE GREEKS, that good souls have their souls beyond the oceans, etc.” (*Wars of the Jews*, II, p. 11).

Josephus goes on to say, speaking of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul: “And indeed the Greeks seem to me TO HAVE FOLLOWED THE SAME NOTION” (ibid.).

Notice that Josephus says that these Essenes taught their doctrine as did the Greeks. This doctrine is certainly of foreign origin, for no such doctrine is found in the Scriptures.

“According to him [Josephus], the Essenes had always professed the PUREST DOCTRINES OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY concerning THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL” (Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, vol. v, p. 56).

This particular teaching IS OF ITSELF PROOF OF THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN PHILOSOPHIES (Schurer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. ii, p. 214). And further, he says:

“If then only one sentence which he (Josephus) says concerning the anthropology of the Essenes is true, IT IS CERTAIN THAT THEIR DOCTRINE OF MAN IS DUALISTIC, i.e. NON-JEWISH” (ibid.).

There is absolutely no doubt that the Essenes had accepted the doctrine of the immortality of the soul directly from Hellenism. This doctrine is completely foreign to Scripture.

Other Heathen Doctrines

The Essenes also adhered to the doctrine of asceticism—the doctrine of perennial self-denial of even the good things of life. This belief as a continuing custom is entirely alien to the teachings of the Scriptures. However, such practices were common among certain Greek sects and Egyptian philosophies (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. ii, pp. 717, 720).

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Because of this peculiar belief (which was condemned by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:23), the Essenes developed themselves into monastic orders and repudiated marriage (“Wars of the Jews,” II, 8, 2). In no place does the Scripture command an individual to withdraw into a monastery or nunnery and live a life of celibatic asceticism. In fact, the New Testament commands a person NOT to deliberately withdraw himself from society (I Cor. 5:9-10) and it teaches that marriage is entirely honorable and holy (Heb. 13:4).

Essenes Worshipped Toward Sun

While the Temple was on earth, the worshippers of God prayed facing the Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:28, 29). Daniel prayed three times a day in this manner (Dan. 6:10). The Temple in Jerusalem was designed symbolically, from its origin, to be the residence of God, and the people were to sacrifice at the Temple and pray toward it.

The Essenes, however, omitted two requirements of God which were obvious violations of Scripture. They refused to sacrifice at the Temple, or anywhere for that matter; and they did not face the Temple when they prayed. They worshipped and prayed TOWARDS THE SUN! (“Wars of the Jews,” ii, 8, 9.) This act was strictly forbidden in the Scriptures (Ezekiel 8:15, 16), but nevertheless, the Essenes turned their backs on the Temple and prayed towards the sun.

Relative to this esteem of the sun by the Essenes, Schurer writes that this clearly “leads to the conclusion, that they were in real earnest IN THEIR RELIGIOUS ESTIMATION OF THE SUN. However this may be, the very turning to the sun in prayer WAS CONTRARY to Jewish customs and notions, which REQUIRED THE TURNING TO THE TEMPLE and expressly repudiated THE DIRECTION TOWARDS THE SUN AS HEATHENISH” (*The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec ii, vol. ii, p. 213).

To this, Schurer adds:

“Thus are we more and more driven to the view, THAT FOREIGN INFLUENCE COOPERATED IN THE FORMATION OF ESSENISM” (ibid., p. 214).

Essenism Was Extreme Pharisacism

It must not be supposed that Essenism, or any of the sects of Judaism, were completely heathen in doctrines in all respects. This was not the case! What existed was a combining or a blending of pagan doctrines with certain teachings of the Scripture. The Essenes kept the Sabbath, circumcision, and many of the other customs common to the Jews. They also kept many of the traditional laws of the Pharisees. We are told expressly by Schurer (ibid., p. 209) that the rigid religious legalism of the Essenes and their punctilious care for ceremonial cleanness, were genuinely Pharisac in origin.

The Essenes were, however, not a part of the popular Pharisee sect. They were entirely separate and on their own. They may, however, have represented a group that began as a division of the Pharisac sect and broke away early after the religious anarchy ended. For even though there were many doctrinal differences between the two sects, there were certain similarities. Schurer again tells us: “Essenism then is in the first place MERELY PHARISAICISM IN THE SUPERLATIVE DEGREE” (ibid.).

The sect of the Essenes were actually more rigorous and exacting (if that were possible) than the Pharisees as a whole. They even went beyond the Pharisac commandments in regard to being ritualistically clean.

“The Essene completely separated himself from the multitude and formed exclusive societies, in which similarity of disposition and endeavour afforded the possibility of realizing the ideal of a life of absolute ceremonial cleanness” (ibid., pp. 210, 211).

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Thus, this extreme Pharisaicism led to asceticism and their other peculiar customs that most Jews completely disavowed. The Essenes went quite a bit farther than the Pharisees in accepting, outright, many of the customs of the heathen they learned while under Hellenistic influences.

“The doctrines of the Essenes were, however, tinged by FOREIGN INFLUENCE. In their neglect of the Temple sacrifices, and in their condemnation of wedlock, THEY DEPARTED from the full observance of the Law ... THEY ALSO APPROACHED THE EGYPTIAN SCHOOL in their allegorical interpretation of many parts of Scripture” (Conder, *Judas Maccabaeus*, p. 210).

There is no question that the Essenes were recipients of many pagan doctrines—and many of them came from Egyptian Hellenism. Schurer again tells us that Essenism represents “a Judaism of quite peculiarly blended ultra-Pharisaic and Alexandrian views [and] appears in alliance with Pythagoreanism [a pagan philosophy] AND WITH MANY RITES OF EGYPTIAN PRIESTS” (ibid., p. 208).

It is clear that Egyptian Hellenism, the Greek philosophies inherited by Egypt, was the primary influence upon the Essene doctrines. Their teachings were certainly far from those of Moses.

“So Essenism can be understood ONLY WHEN REGARDED AS A BLENDING OF JEWISH AND GREEK IDEAS” (*Ency. Biblica*, col. 2011).

The Truth About the Pharisees

Like the Essenes, many of the Pharisees had adopted the pagan belief in the immortality of the soul (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 8, 14). This doctrine is plainly recognized by scholars, as has been shown above, to have come from heathenism, not from Scripture.

However, it seems as if the Pharisees were not willing to go as far as the Essenes in its complete pagan interpretation. Some of the Pharisees seem to have had certain reservations concerning the new doctrine. Josephus, himself a Pharisee and thoroughly acquainted with their doctrines, makes a vague distinction between the Pharisee belief and that of the Essenes. He says the Pharisees believed in an “immortal vigour” to be in the body; while the Essenes believed outright in the “immortality of the soul” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii, 1, 3 & 4).

There seems to have been doubts in the minds of some Pharisees in regard to this doctrine. However, it appears certain that most of them believed in it, but with varying degrees of interpretation.

Of course, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not taught in the Scripture. In fact, the Scripture teaches just the opposite. For example, we read in Ezekiel 18:4, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” See also verse 21. Clearly, a soul can die! And also, the New Testament teaches that only Christ has now immortality—no other man has (I Tim. 6:15, 16).

Who Were the Apocalyptists

In the second installment of this series mention was made of other minor religious sects which have been called by our modern historians by the name Apocalyptists. The name denotes those who supposedly reveal “hidden truths” or “secret doctrines.”

There are extant several books written by these minor sects, or perhaps only by individuals, which show their peculiar beliefs or their prophetic expectations. These sects certainly differed from the major groups of Judaism. And they assuredly do not represent any large religious movements among the Jews.

“The Apocalyptic literature certainly represents an element in the Judaism of its time, BUT IT WAS AN ELEMENT OF VERY MINOR IMPORTANCE compared with those [the Pharisees,

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etc.] in which lay the real vitality and strength of Judaism. It is a fundamental mistake to suppose that the Apocalyptic literature can explain what Judaism really stood for, in that or any other age” (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 11).

The writings of these few individuals or religious sects were completely rejected by the Jews. Some of the reasons for their rejection by the other sects is because they were obviously contradictory with one another in many ways; they were at variance with the popular teaching of the Scriptures.

All of the writings of these Apocalyptists were written DURING or sometime after the period of the religious anarchy. Some were written even as late as the First Century A.D.

Their teachings on the whole, while having a Jewish basis, reflect men’s opinions and ideas which were absorbed from Hellenism. The teachings of the various books are extremely diverse. Strong elements of Hellenism are found in some, and in others to a lesser degree (*Ency. Biblica*, col. 2010, 2011).

There is no question that some of their teachings, even the manner in which some of them wrote, were directly influenced by Egyptian and Syrian Hellenism. Their teachings represent those of some individual teachers who, after the religious anarchy, began to teach their own religious beliefs independent of the Pharisees, but nonetheless, equally as erroneous.

“Traces of Syrian Hellenism, which had been implanted among the less educated masses, endured, and the victorious Judean people [after the successful Maccabean Revolt] harbored a growing semi-Hellenized crowd who had NEITHER GRASPED THE PURE HEBRAIC FAITH nor received the pure Hellenic spirit. This populace [certain leaders among them] FOSTERED THE APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE WITH ITS FANTASTIC AND YET SOMEWHAT MATERIALISTIC SPIRITUALITY, which, while it was largely an expression of the Hebraic mind and a development of the prophetic vision, SHOWS A MARKED IMPRESS OF FOREIGN DOCTRINE” (Bentwich, *Hellenism*, p. 335).

The principles behind the apocalyptic literature are an infusion of certain Jewish beliefs with Hellenism. All of the writings of these minor sects, or perhaps only individual writers, were quite varied and contradictory.

“The aspect that that literature presents is of so diversified a character that it is difficult to combine all the DIFFERENT ELEMENTS into one connected whole” (Schurer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. iii, p. 1).

Were These Groups Akin to the Essenes?

Because so many of the doctrines of the writers of these various books seem to show a near kinship to certain Essenistic beliefs, some scholars have endeavored to show that the authors were undoubtedly part of that group (“International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,” vol. i, p. 164). This may well be the case. Josephus mentions that the Essenes were fond of keeping “secret” books that related doctrines only the initiated could know (*Wars of the Jews*, ii, 8, 7). At least we are assured that these sects who wrote the various apocalyptic books were closer in doctrine to the Essenes than any other religious group among the Jews. They were not Pharisees; this much is certain!

“Those who really do know the Pharisaic literature, INCLUDING ALL THE GREAT JEWISH SCHOLARS, agree in the view that the Apocryphal and Apocalyptic writings represent a type (or types) of Judaism DIFFERENT from the Pharisaic type” (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 123).

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The Truth About the Sadducees

The Sadducees completely rejected the traditions of the elders. They maintained that the Scripture alone was sufficient for religious truth (Lauterbach, “Rabbinic Essays,” p. 209). In this connection, the Sadducees were certainly right.

The actions of the Sadducees against the erroneous opinions of the Pharisees seemingly puts them in a good light—as though they were zealously upholding the Law of God and His divine truth. However, the Sadducean position was not as roseate as it may appear on the surface. There were real reasons behind the Sadducees’ apparent stand for the acceptance of only the Scripture, and those reasons were not always out of honor for the Scripture or even God.

Can we say the Sadducees respected the Scripture when many of the plain teachings of the Word of God they openly renounced? They clearly rejected the Scripture teaching of the resurrection; they did not believe in angels nor spirits. Yet the Scriptures taught these truths! (See Job 14:4; Eze. 37:1-14; Dan. 12:1-3; Exo. 14:19; Dan. 6:22; I Sam. 18:10, etc.) To reject such fundamental doctrines as the resurrection and the existence of the spirit world, shows that the Sadducees did not hold the Scripture teaching in very high esteem.

Why Sadducees Rejected Traditions of Elders

It will come as a surprise to many people to realize that the reason the majority of Sadducees rejected the Pharisaic traditions of the elders, so-called, was NOT because of a reverence for the Scripture and an abhorrence for heathen customs. Their motive for rejecting these new religious laws, in reality, was on account OF THEIR LACK OF INTEREST IN RELIGION. They did not care for ANY MORE religious laws than were necessary.

It is clearly known that the majority of Sadducees were not zealous for religion. Their main interest lay in securing for themselves political positions of power among the influential people in Palestine—they revered the gaining of wealth and power more than anything else. They did not want to subject themselves to any of the religious laws of the Pharisees, nor [even] of the Scripture, as we will soon see. The Sadducees represented the “worldly-minded” sect of the Jews—not especially interested in religion. (Almost every society has had or presently has such religious sects, and the Jews were no exception—they had their “Unitarian” sect.)

“They [the Sadducees] saw in the traditions of the elders an excess of legal strictness which they refused to have imposed upon them, while the advanced religious views [of the Pharisees] were, on the one hand SUPERFLUOUS TO THEIR WORLDLY-MINDEDNESS, and on the other, inadmissible by their higher culture and enlightenment” (Schurer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. ii, p. 41).

The Sadducees simply did not want to be burdened with more religious laws. They thought the Laws of Scripture were certainly enough, without adding more! And, in fact, sometimes, if the Scripture did not teach what they wanted, they would even disallow it.

“The Sadducees, with the easy indifference of men of the world, finding that THERE WAS QUITE ENOUGH IN THE LAW FOR THEM TO OBEY, denied that there was anything obligatory outside the Books of Moses (Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, vol. 5, pp. 41, 42).

With their rejection of the traditions of the elders and their acceptance of only the Scripture, it is not to be supposed that they were interested in getting the people back to the religion of Moses or in bringing the people to a proper reverence for the Scripture. They were willing to accept just what they had to, in order to retain THEIR political positions among the rich and wealthy of Jerusalem (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii, 10, 6).

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“Their whole doctrinal position GAVE THEM LIBERTY TO FOLLOW THEIR DESIRES FOR POLITICAL POWER AND WORLDLY SATISFACTION. Hence they had a DEEPER INTEREST IN SUSTAINING THE POWER OF THE REIGNING PRINCE [whether Jewish or Roman] THAN IN MAINTAINING THE OBSERVANCES OF MOSES” (Riggs, *A History of the Jewish People*, p. 111).

While on the surface it may have seemed like the Sadducees were a little closer to the truth, because they maintained that the Scripture was sufficient Law to have, yet the fact is, they were just as far away from the truth—even farther! While the Sadducees blamed the Pharisees for not adhering to Scripture for their doctrines, they themselves were rejecting doctrine after doctrine of plain Scripture. They were no more following the complete directions of the Scriptures than were the Pharisees.

Sadducees Reject Other Scripture Teaching!

Throughout the Scriptures we are distinctly shown by prophecies and by examples that God at certain times intervenes in the affairs of individuals and of nations. There are multitudes of prophecies which show that God is very soon going to personally intervene in the affairs of mankind. See, for example, the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

But the Sadducees believed not a word of this! They believed that God did not direct the mind of man in any form or manner— all things that happened were the result of man’s own doing, God never intervened!

“And for the Sadducees, they take away fate [the determination of God], and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its [God’s] disposal; but they suppose that ALL our actions are in our power, so that we are ourselves the cause of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xiii, 5, 9; *Wars of the Jews*, ii, 14).

The Sadducees were wrong in this! In the Scripture it shows that God at times directs individuals and nations to do certain duties (Isa. 10:13-15, etc.). Of course, not every single action an individual does is being determined by God (Eccl. 9:11). The Pharisees, in this case, understood correctly that God intervenes in the affairs of mankind when He considers it necessary for the carrying out of His plan, but on the whole, mankind’s actions are his own (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xiii, 5, 9).

The Sadducees certainly did not have belief in many truths of the Scripture. By disbelieving in the resurrection, disbelieving in the spirit world and also rejecting the fact that God ever intervenes in the affairs of man, they show clearly that they had little regard for the Word of God.

“They [the Sadducees] were very nearly free-thinkers, and in all cases were men of little religion, mere worldlings. Their wisdom was all worldly. The doctrines attributed to them by Josephus, concerning liberty and divine Providence [that is, the lack of divine Providence], are interpretations or compromises after the Greek fashion. For them all [the Sadducees] this was only an attempt to reduce the supernatural to its minimum, a process for eliminating God” (Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, vol. v, p. 40).

As pointed out by Schurer: “THEIR INTERESTS WERE ENTIRELY IN THIS WORLD, AND THEY HAD NO SUCH INTENSIVELY RELIGIOUS INTEREST AS THE PHARISEES” (“The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ,” sec. ii, vol. ii, p. 39).

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Brief History of the Sadducees!

When religious authority was again established among the Jews after the period of religious anarchy, the Pharisees were anxious for the people to start living a religious life, even though they brought into their religion many of the new customs from Hellenism. However, the majority of Sadducees made no real attempt to return to religion. They certainly saw no reason for accepting the many new customs as extra religious duties to perform.

The majority of Sadducees were priests (*Cycl. of Bib. Thee. and Ecc. Lit.*, vol. ix, p. 238) who had been ordained of God to teach the people the Scriptures. The forefathers of the priests, the Sopherim, were entirely faithful in their appointed task. But the majority of priests after the period of religious anarchy MADE NO ATTEMPT to teach the people the Scriptures. One of the main reasons for their attitude was because most of them had been out-and-out Hellenists! (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, pp. 77, 78). Among all the Jews in Palestine, the priests had become the most Hellenistic.

After the religious anarchy, when the lay leaders, the Pharisees, began to exert an influence over the people, they “refused to recognize the authority of the priests as a class, and inasmuch as many of THE PRIESTS HAD PROVEN UNFAITHFUL GUARDIANS OF THE LAW, they would not entrust to them the religious life of the people” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 209).

Thus, many of the priests joined with, or rather comprised the sect of the Sadducees, which, in all principles, rivaled the Pharisees. The origin of the priestly sect of the Sadducees was actually prompted as a reaction to the Pharisees’ taking over much of the religious control of the Jewish people. The Sadducean sect was not formed because of any endeavor on the part of the priests to return to the original Law of Moses; nor did the priests attempt to gain the people to accept only the Scriptures as Law. This sect evolved as merely a reaction to the assumption of power by the lay Pharisees.

Many Priests Continue in Hellenism

After assimilating much of the “higher culture and enlightenment” of Hellenism, the priests were not altogether ready to disengage themselves from it. Even after the religious anarchy, many of the priests retained their love for the culture.

The Sadducees actually represented the division of the Jews which continued a reverence for the ETHICAL VIEWS of Hellenism. It is true that they did NOT hold to the many RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES of the pagan cults of Hellenism, but they did retain many of the social aspects of the culture. It was almost imperative that they did, so the Sadducees thought, for they were in constant contact with the political powers in Jerusalem who found it necessary to adhere to much of the Hellenistic beliefs in order to carry on matters of state with the other countries around. Thus, many of the priests did not completely repent of their secular Hellenism, even though on the religious side they acknowledged the Scriptures as the only Law.

“They [the Sadducees] made, however, THE OPEN DOOR THROUGH WHICH GREEK INFLUENCES CAME BACK INTO THE LAND, and, as another has tersely said, ‘the antagonism between them and the Pharisees was really A SECONDARY VERSION of the old feud BETWEEN THE HELLENISTS AND THE HASIDEANS’” (Riggs, “A History of the Jewish People,” p. 111). The Hasideans were those Jews of the Maccabean Revolt who maintained a zeal for religion, and, of course, the Hellenists were the Jews, many of them priests, who had no interest in religion.

It is clear that this comparison is correct. The Sadducees were simply the remnants of the Hellenists who cared nothing for religion, while the Pharisees were descendants of the religionists—the Hasideans.

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“Politically, the Sadducees were, as a party, OPEN TO FOREIGN INFLUENCES, and it was through them THAT HELLENIC CULTURE SPREAD IN ISRAEL” (*The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, p. 134).

In other words, the Sadducees were really secular Hellenists. Their acceptance of the Scripture as the only code of Law, even though they rejected much of its teachings, was really out of spite to the Pharisees who accepted the so-called traditions of the elders. The Sadducees saw no need of being overly religious by the acceptance of burdensome customs and rites.

“THEIR INTERESTS WERE ENTIRELY IN THIS WORLD, AND THEY HAD NO SUCH INTENSIVELY RELIGIOUS INTEREST AS THE PHARISEES” (Schurer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. ii, p. 39).

They had no desire to practice real religion, neither did they think it necessary to teach the people the Laws of God. Even though the majority of Sadducees were priests, and were ordained of God to instruct the people in righteousness, they totally renounced their responsibility.

“Such as they were, the Sadducees had little or no direct influence upon the mass of the people, nor did they seek to have. They made no effort to teach the people, presumably because THE THOUGHT OF DOING SO NEVER ENTERED THEIR MINDS” (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 122).

“We shall perhaps be not far wrong if we represent the Sadducees as holding the ancestral religion MAINLY AS AN INHERITANCE and NOT AS A LIVING REALITY ... It is in accordance with this view that THEY DID NOTHING TO ENLARGE THE MEANING OR INCREASE THE INFLUENCE OF THE TORAH as the Pharisees did” (ibid., p. 121).

The Sadducees made no attempt whatever, that we have record of, to make the Scriptures known to the people or to carry out their God-given function of instructing the people in the Law. They did not see the importance of it! In fact, they were even willing to sacrifice the Laws of Scripture if they could gain politically from it.

“They were the LESS RESTRAINED BY ANY RELIGIOUS SCRUPLES from engaging in public affairs WHICH INVOLVED SOME AMOUNT OF COMPROMISE WITH GENTILES” (ibid., p. 122).

Thus, Schurer adequately describes the Sadducees as pre-eminently having “A RECESSION OF THE RELIGIOUS MOTIVE” rather than a zealotry for the Scriptures (*The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. ii, p. 39).

What You Should Remember About the Sects

It becomes quite obvious, when the truth is known, that the sects of Judaism were not really teaching the Law of Moses. What all of them had done, in one degree or another, was to blend many pagan customs and beliefs, along with various man-made opinions, with the Law of Moses and then endeavored to teach their contradictory doctrines as the truth of God.

The Pharisees had accepted many customs of the heathen as so-called traditional laws from Moses. They had also enacted many of their own commandments which by-passed the commands of the Scripture and in fact, the Pharisaic commands even annulled, in many cases, the plain commandments of God.

The Sadducees were disinterested in religion! The only reason, in reality, that they had any connection with religion at all was because most of them were priests who had the hereditary right to minister in the Temple and to have an association with the religious life of the people. They maintained their hereditary religious right mainly for political purposes in order for them to

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more easily pursue their worldly-minded aspirations, not out of any desire to teach the people the truth of God.

The Essenes had accepted many heathen customs and beliefs without reservation. Almost all their doctrines were antagonistic to the Law of Moses.

The writers of the Apocalyptic books also show, in varying degrees, an impress of foreign doctrines and philosophies. All of the books are different from one another and represent the contradicting opinions of certain individuals or minor sects. The writers of the Apocalyptic books were probably, in one way or another, connected with the Essenes.

Thus, all the religious sects of the Jews can be adequately shown to be schismatic deviations from the pure and simple Law of Moses. They were all affected by the beliefs that were encountered by the Jews during the period of religious anarchy when Egyptian and Syrian Hellenism were rampant throughout Palestine.

The combined numbers of the Jews who belonged to the religious sects of Judaism, however, numbered less than 5% of the total Jewish population of Palestine in the days of Christ. The great majority, the Common People, were not overly interested in religion. From the time of the religious anarchy, there was never any real collective religious authority among the Jews like the Sopherim. All the people went their own ways. The majority never got back to religion as during the days of the Sopherim. Outside of a nominal adherence to some basic forms of religion, the masses were not zealously concerned. And, there can be no doubt that the confusing and contradictory examples of the various sects were discouraging to the populace. Truly, Christ came to a people who had no shepherd to guide them into the truth of God (Matt. 9:36).

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Chapter 11

This eleventh installment brings us to time of Jesus—and explains how the Jews attempted to justify their human traditions.

WE CONTINUE with the story of the Pharasaic doctrines. Their teachings represent by far the major part of Judaism and its beliefs in Jesus' day. The other sects were of much less prominence during the time of Christ, and after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the other sects virtually disappear from Judaism. The most important denomination to study is Pharisaicism—the heart and core of Judaism.

We found in previous chapters that the Jews originally used Scripture to interpret Scripture. This was and is the only method to use for a proper understanding of God's Word. We today are told to use this very method if we are to understand the true doctrines of God. See Isaiah 28:9, 10.

With the introduction of the so-called traditional laws of the elders by the Pharisees, a NEW method of teaching had to be used in order to teach these new laws. The Scripture could no longer be used to teach the new traditional laws for there was no indication of them in the Word of God. The Jews therefore adopted what has become known as the "*Mishnah*-form."

The Mishnah-Form of Teaching

The word "*Mishnah*," in Hebrew, means literally "second!" The *Mishnah*-form of interpretation means "the second-form." The true Scriptural form was to the Jews the "first-form" or the one used by Moses and the prophets. But all of the traditional laws of the Pharisees were accepted by appealing to the new *Mishnah*-form. When the *Mishnah*-form was used, it was not necessary to appeal to Scripture for proof; the authority of the teacher or teachers who issued new commandments independent of Scripture was assumed sufficient to consider them to be the Word of God.

Mishnah-Form of Interpretation Used Sparingly—At First!

The first use of the *Mishnah*-form by the Pharisees was in their acceptance of the so-called traditional laws the customs inherited from Hellenism. The Pharisaic leaders were forced to recognize these new customs as proper religious practices, for they knew the people would not give them up.

The Pharisees did not first invent the *Mishnah*-form and then use it to teach the traditional laws. Just the opposite occurred. The acceptance of the new customs from Hellenism, without any Scripture proof, brought the Pharisees to realize they were teaching IN A NEW FORM NOT PREVIOUSLY USED. The Pharisees recognized that they had begun to use a new method of teaching by accepting the traditional laws without Scripture proof.

"FINDING NO CONVINCING PROOFS FOR SUCH LAWS IN THE BIBLE, THEY TAUGHT THEM INDEPENDENTLY OF SCRIPTURAL PROOF i.e. IN THE MISHNAH-FORM" (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 229).

Though all the Pharisees agreed that the traditional laws had to be accepted, many of them were reluctant about perpetuating the new form of teaching. Many of the early Pharisees thought that the use of the *Mishnah*-form was proper in admitting the traditional laws into the religious requirements of the Jews, but they did not want to see its indiscriminate use in the future. It was

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obvious that the use of this new form could bring about multitudes of new traditions—all of them without Scripture proof.

The inevitable happened!

Instead of the *Mishnah*-form being discarded after the traditional laws had been brought to the place of divine law, its use was increased. You will remember that Joseph ben Joezer, called “the Permitter,” issued three new laws which were completely devoid of Scripture proof. These three laws were enacted by using the *Mishnah*-form! His laws were the first ones to be enacted after the traditional law became a part of Pharisaic belief.

Lauterbach tells us that many of the Pharisees did not appear overly enthusiastic when Joseph ben Joezer introduced his teaching in the new *Mishnah*-form.

“When he [Joseph ben Joezer] used new methods of interpretation for the first time, his colleagues hesitated to follow him ...” (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 228).

The Pharisees knew full well that it was wrong to use the so-called *Mishnah*-form for making laws. Even though they had all accepted the customs of the heathen, by using this form, some of them balked at making further laws without any Scripture backing at all. However, this reluctance did not last long! The very fact that the Pharisees considered themselves as having the spirit of prophecy—having the power to teach the current will of God, gave them incentive to further utilize this new teaching occasionally, especially since they had the precedent of Joseph ben Joezer. Thus, after the time of Joseph ben Joezer, we find the *Mishnah*-form being used more and more as time progressed.

These subsequent teachings of the Pharisees were termed “traditions of the elders.”

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had developed the *Mishnah*-form so extensively that they were teaching for doctrines hundreds of commandments of men without the slightest backing of Scripture (Mark 7:7).

“THEY INSISTED THAT THEIR DECISIONS MUST BE ACCEPTED AS AUTHORITATIVE ...” (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 235).

If anyone would oppose them, such as the Sadducees or other groups, when the Pharisees taught their laws independently of Scripture proof, the Pharisees would haughtily maintain that they did not need the Scripture to back them up. They felt they could teach in the *Mishnah*-form any time they pleased and needed no Scripture proofs for their teachings.

It is difficult to believe that men who claimed to be the servants of God would resort to such deductions. But the Pharisees did!

And today there are many church denominations claiming to be Christian which do THE VERY SAME THING. There are millions of people, calling themselves Christian, who feel they do not have to keep the Words of the Bible, but rather must obey the words of their religious leaders who teach many doctrines completely contrary to the Bible.

There are millions of people in the world today who are no better than the Pharisees. Many church denominations today use the same *Mishnah*-form of interpretation (not using the Scripture for their doctrines), just like the Pharisees did before and during the days of Christ. Christ condemned the Pharisees for teaching as true doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7). The Jews *then*—as many *now*—knowingly taught their new laws and commandments “*on the authority of their own reason and conscience, and not by seeking their authority in the written text [the Bible]*” (*ibid.*, p. 70).

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If we are the children of God, we had better be obeying EVERY word of God as Christ commanded (Matt. 4:4).

The Pharisees had their chance to follow the Scriptures before they accepted the customs of the people that had been inherited from Hellenism. But to please the populace as a whole, they adopted the new customs and rejected the Word of God which commanded them not to do such things (Jer. 10:1-4). The Word of God was rejected, and in its place was instituted the religion of Judaism.

Lauterbach tells us why the Pharisees had to practically abandon the older method of teaching that was used by Ezra, Nehemiah and the Sopherim—termed the *Midrash*-form. Notice what he says:

“The exclusive use of the *Midrash*-form threatened to endanger the authority and teachings of the Pharisees. These apprehensions caused the Pharisaic teachers to make more extensive use of the *Mishnah*-form and in some cases even to prefer the same to the *Midrash*-form. For to give all the *halakic* teachings [new laws] of the Pharisees in the *Midrash*-form as based on Scripture WOULD HAVE EXPOSED THESE TEACHINGS to the attack of the Sadducees” (ibid., p. 231).

In other words, the Sadducees, who were mainly priests and maintained that all teaching should be dependent upon Scripture, could easily counter the Pharisees as long as they taught in the *Midrash*-form of trying to appeal to Scripture. So, the Pharisees taught in the *Mishnah*-form which did not have to rely upon the Scripture for support.

Pharisees Used Scripture at Times

The Pharisees would, at times, it is true, make reference to certain scriptures that might seemingly give support to their independent teachings. In doing so, the Pharisees became notorious for their methods of forcing the Scripture to teach what they wanted it to teach.

When they endeavored to use the Scripture, the Pharisees would, in almost every case, have to stretch the plain meaning in order to make it mean something entirely different from the actual meaning. Using this forced method of appealing to Scripture opened them up to further attacks by their opponents, and it is not surprising that appealing to the Scripture became unpopular with the Pharisees.

“If the Pharisees arrived at a certain decision by means of a new interpretation, the Sadducees COULD ALWAYS dispute that decision by refuting the scriptural proof offered for it. IT WAS POSSIBLE for them to argue that the Pharisaic interpretation was unwarranted and that the scriptural passage DID NOT MEAN WHAT THE PHARISEES TRIED TO READ INTO IT ... THE PHARISEES WERE WELL AWARE THAT SOME OF THEIR INTERPRETATIONS WERE RATHER FORCED, AND THAT THEIR OPPONENT’S ARGUMENTS AGAINST THESE INTERPRETATIONS WERE SOUND” (ibid., p. 232).

This method of reading into the Scripture what it clearly did not teach was a method of interpretation inherited from Hellenism during the period of the religious anarchy.

In a book published by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, entitled “Hellenism in Jewish Palestine,” by Dr. Saul Lieberman, new, startling information confirms this. Dr. Lieberman states that the Greek Law Colleges taught their students the art of twisting the law according to the required aim and purpose (ibid., p. 63). During the religious anarchy, many Jews attended these schools. The Greeks took great pride in being able to make a law teach what in reality it did not teach. The Pharisees used this same method!

“THEY [the Jews] WOULD CERTAINLY NOT HESITATE TO BORROW FROM THEM [the Greeks] METHODS AND SYSTEMS WHICH THEY COULD CONVERT INTO A MECHANISM FOR THE CLARIFICATION AND DEFINITION OF THEIR OWN

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TEACHINGS” (ibid., p. 64). Lieberman informs us that “RABBINIC LITERATURE ABOUNDS IN SUCH ARTIFICIAL AND FORCED INTERPRETATIONS” (ibid., p. 63).

He cites an example from the Talmud that illustrates how forced interpretations of the Scriptures were used. An example is recorded in *Sanhedrin* 17a. It states that one prominent Rabbi insisted that no individual could be admitted to the Sanhedrin UNLESS HE WAS ABLE TO PROVE FROM THE SCRIPTURE THAT REPTILES WERE CLEAN. Of course, the Scripture plainly states that all reptiles are unclean (Lev. 11:41-42).

The reason that such fallacious interpretations were required of the Rabbis was to see if members of the Sanhedrin were skilled enough in the Law, so they could, if necessary, twist the plain meaning of the Law to meet any requirement of a particular case.

Another Rabbi, using the same illustration, thought that a man was not qualified to sit in the Sanhedrin unless he could give a hundred arguments for declaring a reptile clean or unclean. The Rabbis reasoned that a person who could accomplish such a task was qualified to sit in judgment over others, because, if necessary, adequate grounds for acquittal could be given in any case (ibid., p. 63).

This deceptive skill enabled them also to EFFECTIVELY give false grounds for CONDEMNING THE INNOCENT, as they did in the case of Jesus Christ!

Pharisees Admit They Left the Teaching of Moses

The Pharisees were well aware that they were leaving the religious teachings delivered by Moses and the Prophets. Records are found in the Jewish Talmud which register many statements of the early pre-Christian Pharisees. Notice that their own words are a witness to the fact that they were well aware that they were leaving the ways of Moses.

In a book of the Talmud called *Temurah*, in section 15b, we have the statement of one eminent Pharisee. It reads as follows:

“All the teachers who arose in Israel from the days of Moses until the death of [last days of] Joseph ben Joezer STUDIED THE TORAH AS MOSES DID, BUT AFTERWARDS THEY DID NOT STUDY THE TORAH AS MOSES DID.”

The statement could hardly be plainer. This is a clear admission that the Pharisees, beginning with the days of Joseph ben Joezer DID NOT STUDY AND TEACH AFTER THE MANNER OF MOSES. The Pharisees, from this time (160 B.C.) stopped teaching the Word of God as had Moses!

The Pharisees KNEW they were departing from the truth. They KNEW that they were enacting new commandments which had not the slightest hint of authority in the Law of Moses! Pharisaic Judaism, with its innumerable man-made commandments, was never the religion of Moses! Judaism represents a departure from the religion of Moses, and the Pharisees themselves candidly admit it.

Let us notice another example from the Talmud.

Another statement, in *Yebamoth* 72b, concerns one Eleazar, the son of Pedat, who happened to use a Scripture text to refute the personal opinion of his opponent, another Pharisee, on a particular question. The opponent, endeavoring to repudiate the son of Pedat in front of the other Pharisees, answered with these words: “I see that the son of Pedat STUDIES IN THE MANNER OF MOSES.”

Notice the plain implication here! If a person used the Scripture to prove or to disprove a particular point of doctrine, he was contemptuously accused of teaching IN THE MANNER OF MOSES -- as Moses did!

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The Pharisees were fully conscious of the seriousness of the actions they were taking. They actually knew better! But they went ahead with their designs to teach without any Scriptural support.

“The teachers who introduced the conception of the Unwritten Torah [the traditional laws] ... WERE QUITE AWARE OF THE EXTREME GRAVITY OF THE STEP THEY WERE TAKING” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 113).

No wonder Christ rebuked the Pharisees so strongly. “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” (Matt. 23:13)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” (Matt. 23:15)

Pharisees Enact Multitudes of Commandments Without Scripture Support

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had made new commandments numbering into the thousands. They dealt with every phase of religious life among the Jews. Christ said that these COMMANDMENTS OF MEN were so burdensome that they were extremely difficult to bear, and in fact, many of them were impossible of fulfillment (Matt. 23:4). (We will see what some of these man-made commandments were, in later installments.)

To show you how multitudinous they were, we need only turn to the Jewish Talmud. The English translation of the Talmud, which contains the major part of the independent teachings of the Pharisees, is a huge work numbering 34 volumes.

Some of the laws recorded in the Talmud were enacted after the time of Christ, but the majority were in existence during New Testament times. Even the Judaism of modern times is based upon these Pharisaic laws. The modern orthodox section of Judaism adheres almost completely to these laws recorded in the Talmud.

Later Judaism

The Rabbis, one- to four-hundred years after Christ, did not dare discuss the origin of the traditional laws nor how the Pharisees came to teach without using the Scripture. These later Rabbis knew quite well where the traditional laws had come from, but they did not want the lay people to know that these laws, which had been falsely taught to the lay people as coming from Moses, were not originally from Moses at all. It would have been disastrous to Judaism to teach that the traditional laws were really not from Moses and that the commandments of the Pharisees were nothing more than the commandments of men, because THE WHOLE FOUNDATION OF JUDAISM rested on these fallacious laws.

Thus, among the 34 volumes of the English translation of the Talmud wherein are recorded these traditional laws, there is no mention whatever of how these traditional laws came to be accepted.

“The history of the development of the *Mishnah*-form REFLECTS UNFAVORABLY upon the TRADITIONAL CHARACTER of the Pharisaic teachings. THIS IS THE REASON FOR THE TALMUDIC SILENCE ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE MISHNAH-FORM” (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 248).

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From this, we should have no difficulty in understanding why thousands of Jews were brought to the truth of Christianity in the First Century. They were told the truth about the laws of the Pharisees by the true ministers of Christ. Once the Jews came to a knowledge of the truth in this matter, many of them abandoned the commandments of men for the truth of God. This is one of the main reasons the Pharisees, and the later Jews, had such an abhorrence for Christianity. The acceptance of Christianity meant the rejection of the teachings of the Pharisees in Judaism, and a return to God and His commandments.

In the next installment we will see how the Pharisees thought to ANNUL some of the laws of God, when it suited their purpose.

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Chapter 12

Why were the Pharisees in New Testament times divided among themselves? Why did they come to Jesus to ask Him to settle disputes? Here is the answer!

PREVIOUS installments of this series have shown how the Pharisees and the other chief leaders of the Jews disregarded the Word of God. They had accepted customs that came directly from heathenism, which the Scripture clearly commands us not to do (Jer. 10:1-4). In many cases they knowingly taught commandments that were completely contrary to the plain words of God. They even ADMITTED that in so doing THEY WERE LEAVING THE TEACHINGS OF MOSES.

The majority of these commandments of the Pharisees were enacted on the pretext that they had special divine revelatory powers from God to reveal to the Jews His PRESENT will. The Scriptures, to their reasoning, could not suffice alone for teaching the people.

“The written Torah [the old Testament] was good for the age in which it was given, or in which it was first read; but the written Torah alone COULD NOT SUFFICE FOR LATER AGES” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 113).

This prevailing opinion of the Pharisaic teachers is manifest today also in modernism among Protestants.

Pharisees Make Void God’s Law

The Pharisees were confronted time and time again with many Mosaic commandments which they considered impractical in the society in which they were living. This led them to a dangerous conclusion. Since they were living in a later age than Moses and because times had changed considerably, they felt that many of the Laws of the Scripture had to be drastically altered or, in some cases, completely annulled. The Pharisees saw no reason why such alteration or rescission should not be done, especially since they convinced themselves they were in authority to reveal the CURRENT will of God.

Herford says that these Pharisaic teachers came to the place many times of “ACTUALLY ANNULLING AN EXPRESS COMMAND IN THE WRITTEN TORAH [the Scripture] AND REPLACING IT BY A HALACHAH [their own law] IN ACCORDANCE WITH A [supposed] HIGHER MORAL STANDARD” (*Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 73).

Jesus refers to one Law of God, among many, that they completely set aside or annulled. Notice Mark 7:10-13:

“For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die’; but you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, “given to God”) -- then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, THUS MAKING VOID THE WORD OF GOD through your tradition which you hand on. AND MANY SUCH THINGS YOU DO” (RSV).

In this case, they had actually annulled a specific one of the Ten Commandments of God that had been given through Moses. They claimed to have given to God offerings that should have been used to help Father and Mother.

We are left in no doubt about the attitude of the Pharisees in regard to Moses and his teaching. If they did not approve of what Moses taught, they rejected him! It was just that simple! Jesus said: “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me ...BUT YE BELIEVE NOT HIS WRITINGS” (John 5:46, 47).

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Actually, the Pharisees had come to the place of believing it impossible to keep the civil Law of Moses. The only thing they could do, they reasoned, was either to alter, or disregard, many of its “impractical” instructions. They had no hesitation in carrying out their intentions.

“The teachers ... were quite aware of the extreme gravity of the step they were taking. THEY INTENDED TO MODIFY THE WRITTEN COMMANDMENT IN VARIOUS WAYS, and in the course of time ACTUALLY DID SO IN NUMBERLESS CASES. YET THEY HAD BEFORE THEM THE PLAIN INJUNCTION (Deut. 4:2): ‘Ye shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it; that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you’” (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 113).

It is almost impossible to believe that religious leaders claiming to serve God would be so bold as to do such things, but the Pharisees intentionally did so.

“This conclusion that the written word of the Torah MIGHT BE MODIFIED OR SET ASIDE, OR EVEN ANNULLED (AS WAS SOMETIMES DONE), WAS DELIBERATELY DRAWN AND CONSISTENTLY ACTED UPON by the teachers who developed the ‘halachah’ [the new Pharisaic laws]” (ibid., p. 112).

Why Christ Condemns Teaching of Pharisees

Is it any wonder that Christ was so indignant at the doctrines of the Pharisees? Should we be amazed that He so sharply rebuked them?

“Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, this people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 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 ... FULL WELL YE REJECT THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, THAT YE MAY KEEP YOUR OWN TRADITION” (Mark 7:6-9).

Now that we have the background to the beliefs of the Pharisees and their attitudes regarding the Word of God—as has been presented thus far in this series—this Scripture should take on much more meaning. Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees as they had never been rebuked before. And they needed every bit of it!

Notice what Christ said elsewhere!

“Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your own tradition?” (Matt. 15:3.)

“THUS HAVE YE MADE THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OF NONE EFFECT BY YOUR TRADITION” (Matt. 15:6).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:27,28).

Today’s Churches Follow Pharisees

In contemporary secular Christianity we find millions of individuals like the Pharisees of New Testament times. Numerous professing Christian denominations have MODIFIED the commandments of Christ; many have SET ASIDE or DISREGARDED His commandments; and

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many of them have intentionally ANNULLED the commandments of Christ! Yes, our modern Christian civilization of this Western World is in the same or worse spiritual condition as were the Pharisees.

The past and present leaders of Christian churches have certainly resorted to the same tactics as did the Pharisaic leaders. It is time we realize that modern Christianity has paralleled the Jewish leaders of New Testament times in assuming the prerogative of altering, overlooking and rescinding the plain commandments of the Scripture. Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8), condemns it! “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 ... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:7-9).

Why Churches Modify Commandments of Christ!

There are millions of individuals today who, like the Pharisees, claim to follow Christ, and yet have modified the plain and simple commandments of Christ. Here is one example among many, to illustrate this fact.

In Matthew 5:38,39, we read: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, THAT YE RESIST NOT EVIL: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

This is a classic statement of Christ which has been modified by different groups in numerous ways. Most of the Christ-professing ministers today assume Christ meant just the opposite from what He said in the above passage. Most reason that Christ surely could not mean that you are not to resist evil people and kill them if need be! Is this what Christ said? No! Christ said just the opposite—“love your enemies”—A PLAIN AND SIMPLE STATEMENT that any ten-year-old can read and understand. But today, this command of Christ in particular is MODIFIED by interpretations so that it says just the opposite from what Christ taught. The Pharisees were doing the same thing with the Law of Moses!

Let us notice another commandment of Christ that has been completely disregarded by the overwhelming majority of modern denominations. It is Jesus’ command found in John 13:14,15.

“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. FOR I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

How many Christ-professing churches do you know which follow this command—an example that Christ gave to His disciples? Very few! Most people have completely disregarded this command and example as though it were not even in the Scriptures. Some ministers, endeavoring to explain away the illustration, say that this was an example for the original twelve disciples and not for us today. But notice Matthew 28:19, 20: “Go YE [the original twelve disciples] therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them [all nations] to observe ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU ...” The example of foot washing was commanded to the disciples, and Christ ordered them to teach all NATIONS the very things He had taught them. But again, the majority of ministers today are using the same reasons for disregarding the Scriptures (i.e., times have changed) as did the Pharisees in Christ’s day.

Take another example. All readers of the Bible, scholars and laymen alike, are quite aware that the Sabbath is the day set aside by God for divine worship (Gen. 2:1-4; Lev. 23:1-3; Isa. 58:13, 14). The Sabbath day is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. All true followers of God have kept this day as the day of rest and worship. The Jews of Christ’s day as well were observing this day. Christ, Himself, kept the true Sabbath, having ordained it at re-creation as a day for the benefit of all mankind (Mark 2:27, 28). The early New Testament Church observed

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the Sabbath, and that day only, as the weekly day of rest AND worship. This was the only day which the early Church observed: this all competent Church Histories affirm.

There is no indication, or even the slightest hint, in the Scripture that the Sabbath was to be abrogated and another day substituted for it. In fact, you might ask yourself the questions: Just why should the Sabbath have to be changed? Wasn't it good enough? Was there something inherently WRONG with that particular day—so that a BETTER had to be found as a substitute? Just WHAT could make one day BETTER than another? And if one day is not inherently better than another, why should it be set apart—sanctified—by any other authority than God's express commands?

But there are millions of people today who claim to be following Christ and the Bible who repudiate the plain command of God in regard to His holy day, the Sabbath, by observing another day. These people are not following the Bible command but are rather following the command of the Roman Catholic Church which admits that it, not the Bible, is the author of Sunday keeping. (See *Who Changed the Sabbath?* pp. 1-5, Published by Knights of Columbus, St. Louis, Mo.)

The majority of professing Christians today assume the Sabbath command has been ANNULLED. But it certainly has not been done away with IN THE BIBLE. It has only been supposedly annulled by the Roman Catholic Church and all the Protestant denominations which follow her decision in this matter.

Our Western World is doing today exactly the same thing the Pharisees did in New Testament times. It is about time we wake up and get back to the true faith which was ONCE delivered to the saints of God (Jude 3).

God's Church today does not add to His words, neither does it subtract from them. It is in obedience to His commandments.

“And hereby we do know that we know Him, IF WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. He that saith, I know Him, AND KEEPETH NOT HIS COMMANDMENTS, IS A LIAR, and the truth is not in him” (I John 2:3,4).

Pharisees' Commandments Considered More Binding Than Scripture

The Pharisees did not stop with merely modifying, disregarding or even annulling Scripture. They maintained that the commandments they enacted in the place of Scripture were of MORE IMPORTANCE than the Scripture itself!

“The law of custom was quite as binding as the written Torah; nay IT WAS EVEN DECIDED THAT OPPOSITION TO THE DECREES OF THE SCRIBES WAS A HEAVIER TRANSGRESSION THAN OPPOSITION TO THE DECREES OF THE TORAH” (“The Jewish People in the Time of Christ,” sec. ii, vol. i, pp. 333, 334).

Now let us go to the Talmud itself and notice some of the statements of some of the early Pharisees themselves. Their situation in regard to their own teachings will be obvious.

From the Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakoth* i, 7, we read: “The sayings of the elders HAVE MORE WEIGHT THAN THOSE OF THE PROPHETS.” The elders, in this case, are the Pharisees.

In *Sanhedrin* xi, 3, it says: “An offense against the sayings of the Scribes IS WORSE THAN ONE AGAINST THOSE OF SCRIPTURE.” They demanded the people refer to them as spiritual “Father,” “Rabbi,” or “Master” (*Makkoth* 24a and Matthew 23:7-10). The Pharisee teachers even required the people to reverence them almost as God Himself. “Let thine esteem for thy friend border upon thy respect for thy teacher, and respect for thy teacher ON REVERENCE FOR GOD” (*Aboth*, iv, 12).

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“Each Scribe [learned Pharisee] out-weighted all the common people, who must accordingly pay him every honour. Nay, THEY WERE HONOURED OF GOD HIMSELF, and THEIR PRAISES PROCLAIMED BY THE ANGELS; and in heaven also, each of them would hold the same rank and distinction as on earth. Such was to be the respect paid TO THEIR SAYINGS, THAT THEY WERE TO BE ABSOLUTELY BELIEVED, even if they were to declare that to be at the right hand which was at the left, or vice versa (i.e. even if they proclaimed doctrines contradictory to Scripture)” (Edersheim, “Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,” vol. i, p. 90).

Because of the religious authority that the Pharisees claimed they had, they in general demanded the first rank in all circumstances. “They loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi” (Matt. 23:6,7). The term “Rabbi” means, literally, “MY MASTER.” It denotes the personal ruler or leader of the people.

Edersheim records an incident of two great Rabbis who were complaining because they had been greeted in the market place by the common greeting “May your peace be great” without the added “My Masters” (“Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,” vol. ii, p. 409). “So weighty was the duty of respectful salutation by [use of] the title Rabbi, that to neglect it would involve the heaviest punishment” (ibid., vol. ii, p. 409).

The unusual esteem accorded to the Pharisaic teachers is purely a product of Hellenistic influence. The Greeks maintained a high reverence for the scholars, teachers and men of wisdom. Titles of respect and reverential honor were used in the Greek schools for their teachers. The use of “Rabbi,” “Master,” “Father” and various other exalted titles of the Pharisees was certainly borrowed from the examples of the Greeks. A learned Jewish historian, Moses Hadas, admits that these various customs of the Rabbis “were parallel to Greek usages, and shall suggest that since they were introduced after the spread of Hellenism they might have been inspired by Greek practice. The extraordinary reverence paid to learning may be part and parcel of this same influence” (*Hellenistic Culture*, p. 71).

True Christian disciples are warned not to assume these exalted titles of “Rabbi,” “Father” or “Master.” Such high, eminent titles of respect are deserved only by God. He is MASTER AND LORD. He is the spiritual Father of the faithful. The Pharisees had no right to arrogate to themselves such titles, and neither does any minister. Today, however, the majority of Christian ministers are appropriating as a designation the very names that God says not to use. How many priests today are called “Father”? How many ministers use the title of “Reverend” which, in the Scripture, is used only as a designation of God? (Psa. 111:9.)

Pharisees Contradict Each Other

Just before the birth of Christ, many of the Pharisees had formed themselves into institutions, or what became known as Schools, for the purpose of study and for counsel concerning the legislation of new laws. Those who felt one particular way in regard to new legislation would assemble with other Pharisees who believed in a similar vein.

The two major Schools of the Pharisees were the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. The two founders of these Schools, Hillel and Shammai, gathered together other Pharisees who believed in many ways similar to themselves. Both these Schools issued new commandments in regard to religious worship.

These two major Schools of the Pharisees were the rivals of one another. The points in which they disagreed were virtually INNUMERABLE (*Cyc. of Bib., Thee. and Ecc. Lit.*, vol. ix, p. 472).

It has been supposed that the tendency of the Hillel School was to make the new commandments they enacted less burdensome, and that the Shammai School made commandments which were heavier and more burdensome. However, both Schools legislated

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many strict and burdensome commandments, over and above the requirements of Scripture, and Edersheim shows that the Hillel School was even more strict than the Shammai in some cases (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii, p. 407).

The commandments of these two Schools covered practically every religious practice of the Jews. They made many ridiculous and overly burdensome commandments concerning the observance of the Sabbath. They enacted strict ritualistic laws regarding the washing of the hands, pots, pans, jars, etc. They also made numerous ritualistic regulations regarding the preparing and eating of foods. Their teachings extended to all phases of physical worship.

It is rather ironic that these two Schools were both composed of Pharisees and yet their teachings, in so many cases, were totally at variance with one another. One School would bring out a new commandment regarding a particular religious rite or custom, and proclaim that the new commandment was mandatory for all pious Jews to perform. In consequence of this, the other School would issue a similar commandment, usually as a rebuttal and in most cases diametrically opposite from the other.

“Controversy between these two groups extended over many topics and excited considerable warmth of feeling” (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 160).

As mentioned before: “THE POINTS ON WHICH THEY DIFFERED WERE ALMOST INNUMERABLE” (*Cyc. of Bib., Thee. and Ecc. Lit.*, vol. ix, p. 472).

Both Schools Vied for Absolute Authority!

The controversies between these two major Pharisaic Schools were undoubtedly sparked by the desire of both of them to be the ultimate authority among the Pharisees.

Edersheim says: “IN TRUTH, their differences seem too often PROMPTED BY A SPIRIT OF OPPOSITION, so that the serious business of religion became in their hands one of RIVAL AUTHORITY and mere wrangling” (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii, p. 407).

This was the condition of the Pharisees just before and during the days of Christ! Like professing Christianity today, the Pharisees were in confusion over their own doctrines. Their continual arguing among themselves placed them in embarrassing positions among the People and the other religious sects. Yet, they continued their squabbles and controversies! Little wonder many sought to hear Christ.

“MANY, VERY MANY OF THEM [their controversies] are so utterly trivial and absurd that only the hairsplitting ingenuity of theologians can account for them: OTHERS SO PROFANE that it is difficult to understand how any religion could co-exist with them. Conceive, for example, two schools in controversy whether it was lawful to kill a louse on the Sabbath” (*ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 407, note 4).

The controversies between these two Schools were so numerous and some so vulgar—that it is impractical to list them all. For any who may be interested in them, a list has been prepared by Schurer. (See *his The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. i; p. 361.)

You can imagine what the controversies between these two prominent Pharisaical Schools did to the faith of the people who were endeavoring to observe the teachings of the Schools. Who were the people to believe? Both schools claimed to be speaking the words of God, and yet they violently disagreed with one another in almost every point.

These two Pharisaic Schools were not the only dissentious bodies among the Pharisees.

“The Pharisees at this time were SHARPLY DIVIDED INTO VARIOUS SECTIONS which were NOT exhausted by the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai” (*ABC.*, p. 841).

“THE PHARISEES WERE DIVIDED INTO MANY SECTS, and the doctrines of individual teachers were often contradictory ...” (Conder, *Judas Maccabaeus*, p. 205).

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It is important we realize that no real creed existed among the Pharisees. “The Pharisees WERE NEVER a homogeneous body possessed of a definite policy or body of doctrines” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. xxi, p. 347).

The differences of opinion among all the Pharisees, remember, arose with the making of new commandments, in the Second Century B. C., by Joseph ben Joezer, called “The Permitter.”

This reminds a person of modern Christianity with all its differing doctrines and conflicting beliefs. And yet, each church, today, claims that it is preaching the truth of Christ.

Contradictory Commandments Called Those of God!

We have the records of some Pharisees who attempted to conciliate the differences between the two main antagonistic divisions of the Pharisaic group. But, in their undertaking to reconcile the groups, they still had to maintain that both divisions were truly teaching the Word of God.

Lauterbach records an attempt to reconcile the teachings of the Hillel and Shammai Schools and still show that both their teachings were the Words of God. He refers to a statement in the Talmud found in *Erubin* 13b. Lauterbach records:

“A heavenly voice was heard declaring that BOTH the words of the School of Hillel and the words of the School of Shammai [despite their disagreements] ARE THE WORDS OF THE LIVING GOD, but the practical decision should be according to the words of the School of Hillel” (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 243, note 78). (The bracketed portion of the above quote is Lauterbach’s.)

The majority of Pharisees favored the Hillel School more than any other, and this led to the conciliating parties leaning toward that particular School’s teachings.

In the Talmud, *Gittin* 6b, there is another reference, this time to a Jew named Elijah [not the prophet] who endeavored to reconcile the differences between two Pharisaic teachers. Elijah is reported “to have said that GOD DECLARED BOTH THE OPPOSING VIEWS of Rabbi Abiathar and Rabbi Jonathan TO BE THE WORDS OF THE LIVING GOD” (*ibid.*, p. 243, note 78).

What nonsense!

“All these utterances were intended to serve as a refutation of the attacks made against the teachings of the Rabbis [Pharisees] ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR DISAGREEMENTS” (*ibid.*, p. 243, note 78).

It was impossible for the Pharisees to directly admit that one or the other School was wrong (or as actually was the case, that both were wrong). They were forced to concede that both Schools’ conflicting teachings WERE FROM GOD.

Hillel School Becomes Most Important

The proneness of the majority of Pharisees to follow the decisions of the Hillel School (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, p. 239), finally led to the complete ascendancy of that School. It was not until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and the subsequent dispersal of the Jews from Palestine, that the Hillel School became the paramount teaching body. During the lifetime of Christ and the Apostle Paul, the Pharisees were still divided into the various Schools. But with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews tended to solidify their schismatic groups. Even many of the Jewish sects became extinct after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and most of the Jews gravitated towards adhering to the Hillel School of interpretation. Orthodox Judaism today has for its basis the teachings of Pharisees who maintained the commandments and principles of the Hillel School.

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However, in the days just before and during the life of Christ, the Pharisees were still having their rivalries among themselves. They were teaching their manifold contradictory commandments from the various Schools.

It should not be difficult to understand why Christ condemned the Pharisees for rejecting the commandments of God and for “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” They had left the simple and plain Law which God had given them through Moses and had replaced it with their own set of commandments.

The next installment will reveal more surprising Pharisaic traditions.

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Chapter 13

This thirteenth installment reveals the truth about the Jews' laws which turned the Sabbath from a blessing into a burden—and how close some today approach this narrow-minded attitude toward the Sabbath

Synopsis:

WE found in the last issue that the Pharisees were divided into two Schools, the Hillel and Shammai.

The Hillel School emerged the victorious Pharisee group among the Jews. Within one to two hundred years after Christ, the Jews, as a whole, gravitated to complete devotion to the teachings of this School. There remained remnants of the older denominations which existed in Christ's day, but these remnants were only individuals scattered here and there. Only *Pharisaic* Judaism became the real teaching of the Jews, and to this day it is the basis of contemporary Judaism.

Burdens Saddled on the People

The many commandments that had been enacted by the Pharisees from the time of Joseph ben Joezer, "the Permitter," until a short time after the destruction of Jerusalem, were compiled into a book about A.D. 200. This book was later incorporated into the Jewish Talmud. It was called the *Mishnah*.

The Jewish Talmud was written over a period of years from A.D. 200 until about A.D. 500. The Talmud is composed of two sections: the original *Mishnah* and a commentary on the *Mishnah* called the *Gemara*. The commentary, the *Gemara*, is the largest part of the Talmud. Both sections together comprise 34 huge volumes in the English translation of the Jewish Talmud!

The Talmud is a vast storehouse of Jewish laws and commandments, plus the discussions and commentaries on them. It is not necessary to review the whole of the *Mishnah* in order to understand the spirit behind the Pharisaic commands. Only certain special examples of Jewish teachings are necessary to notice. These examples illustrate that the Judaism of Christ's time was not the religion of Moses!

The Perversion of the Sabbath

The basic Sabbath Law of God was not annulled by the Jewish leaders. However, *it was modified* in many, many ways which are only hinted at in the Scriptures.

In the divine Scriptures God does not take volumes of texts to explain what a person's every activity on the Sabbath should be. Rather, we find basic and fundamental *principles* of Sabbath observance. See especially Isaiah 58:13, 14. But the Jews of Christ's day were not content with Sabbath *principles*—the principles of rest from labor, of having time to study, pray, meditate and go to Sabbath service. They sought to do what the inspired Moses and the prophets never thought necessary.

The Pharisees enacted law after law to regulate every single activity that could be done on the Sabbath. They discarded the plain principles of the Scriptures. They instituted in their place without any Scripture authority, the cold and formal Sabbath rules of legalistic Pharisaism, in which no real principles were left—only a maze of exacting and over-burdensome laws.

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The Sabbath laws of the Pharisees were part of their erroneous teaching which prompted Christ to denounce their binding heavy burdens "which were grievous to be borne" (Matt. 23: 4). And burdensome they were! And absurd!

Edersheim has this to say concerning these man-devised Sabbath laws of the Pharisees. "They will show ... how utterly unspiritual the whole system was, and how it required no small amount of learning and ingenuity to avoid committing grievous sin" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii, p. 779).

There is a direct analogy between the laws of the Rabbis and those of the Greek philosopher Plato. The Jewish historian, Moses Hodos, admits: "The rabbis were men of faith, and their object was the service of religion, *but their method for securing discipline was, like Plato's, to provide authority for men's smallest actions*" (*Hellenistic Culture*, p. 82). Such laws as enacted by the Rabbis were never conceived *until after Hellenistic influence* had implanted itself strongly in Palestine.

Let us notice some of their man-made commandments concerning Sabbath observance.

First of all, the Pharisees decreed a person would be guilty of breaking the Sabbath if he carried from one place to another any food which weighed *as much as a dried fig! Only the weight of half a dried fig or an olive was allowed*, otherwise it would be considered, by the Pharisees, as work, and was prohibited (*Shabbath*, 28a, 70b, 71a).

A person would also be guilty of desecrating the Sabbath, in their eyes, if he carried more than *one swallow of milk or enough oil to anoint a small part of the body* (*Shabbath*, 76b).

Even to carry a sheet of paper was forbidden (*Shabbath*, 78a).

If a fire broke out on the Sabbath in a person's home, he could carry out only the necessary food for the Sabbath. It was interpreted in this manner: If a fire broke out Sabbath evening (Friday night), the owner could take out enough food for *three* meals; if the fire broke out on Sabbath afternoon, he could take out only enough food for *one* meal. All the rest of the food had to be left to burn up with the building, for the Pharisees prohibited putting out such a fire—that would be working and constitute a grievous sin (*Shabbath*, 115a-118b).

Also, the victim could take out only necessary clothes. It was permissible, however, for a person to put on a few extra clothes, as long as they were worn. Thus, a person could take out some clothes from the burning building, take them off, then go back and put on more clothes, continuing until he was unable to reenter the building (*Shabbath*, 120a).

It would be possible to go *on and on* with a multitude of *similar* examples. But from these few, the carnal spirit of Sabbath legislation of the Pharisees can be seen.

Christ's Teaching About the Sabbath

Christ taught the Jewish people the true spiritual intent of the Sabbath. God's Sabbath is not a burden to man. It is a spiritual blessing. Christ said: "The Sabbath was made FOR man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28).

To do good works on the Sabbath, however, was forbidden by the Pharisees. Notice how they sought to accuse Christ for healing a person on the Sabbath.

"And He entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; THAT THEY MIGHT ACCUSE HIM. And He saith unto the man which had a withered hand, Stand forth.

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And He saith unto them, is it lawful *to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil?*" (Mark 3:1-4). The Pharisees could hardly answer the question, and they did not! They knew that they could not say it was right to do evil. But they also knew that their laws forbade doing this kind of good on the Sabbath. So, the Pharisees "held their peace."

The Washing of the Hands

The Pharisees had many other burdensome commandments such as the ritualistic washing of the hands before eating. The Bible records the attitude of Jesus and His disciples to these commandments of men.

"Then came together unto Him the Pharisees and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash, they eat not ... Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, 'Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?'" (Mark 7:1-5).

The Pharisees called this rite a custom of the elders, of Moses and the prophets. But it was nothing of the kind. Edersheim gives reference to the fact that the washing of the hands was similar to rites that were used in heathen religious ceremonies (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii, p 9, note 2). There can be no doubt that many of these foolish rites of so-called cleanliness came directly from heathenism during the time the Jews were under the domination of Hellenism. As Lauterbach says:

"Certain religious practices, considered by the later teachers as part of the traditional law, or as handed down from Moses, *originated in reality from other, perhaps non-Jewish sources*, and had no authority other than the authority of the people *who adopted them. This, of course, reflects unfavorably upon the authority of the traditional law in general*" (*Rabbinic Essays*, p. 241).

The first traces of the tradition of washing the hands before meals, in a ritualistic sense (the rite was never intended to be strictly a Mosaic hygienic one), is found in certain Jewish writings having their origin in Egypt immediately following the period of the religious anarchy—about 160 B.C. In the Sibylline Books, there is mention of some Egyptian Jews continually washing their hands in connection with prayer and thanksgiving (*Sibyl*, iii, 591-593). The Jews in Palestine were also using this new custom. However, Edersheim tells us: "It was reserved for Hillel and Shammai, the two great *rival* teachers and heroes of Jewish traditionalism, immediately before Christ, to fix the Rabbinic ordinance about the washing of hands ... *This was one of the few points on which they agreed...*" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii, p. 13).

This particular rite was made into Law just before the days of Christ. Edersheim continues, concerning this rite: "It was so strictly enjoined, that to neglect it was like being guilty of gross carnal defilement. Its omission would lead to temporal destruction, or, at least, to poverty. Bread eaten with unwashed hands was as if it had been filth. Indeed, a Rabbi who had held this command in contempt was actually buried in excommunication" (*ibid.*, vol. ii, pp. 9, 10).

Washing of Pots, Pans, Cups, Tables

Connected with the religious rite of washing the hands before meals was the custom of ritualistically cleansing any article which might be considered to have ever come in contact with any unclean thing. The Pharisees were ever meticulous in matters such as this.

They were especially concerned about cleansing any article that may have been touched or manufactured by a Gentile.

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"They [the Gentiles] should, so far as possible, be altogether avoided, except in cases of necessity or for the sake of business. They and theirs were defiled; their houses unclean, as containing idols or things dedicated to them; their feasts, their joyous occasions, *their very contact*, was polluted by idolatry; and there was no security, as if a heathen were left alone in a room, that he might not, in wantonness or by carelessness, *defile the wine or meat on the table*, or the oil or wheat in the store. Under such circumstances, therefore, everything must be regarded as having been rendered unclean" (ibid., vol. i, p. 92).

Theirs was a physical, carnal religion—not spiritual worship.

"Milk drawn by a heathen, if a Jew had not been present to watch it, bread and oil prepared by them, were unlawful. Their wine was wholly interdicted—the mere touch of a heathen polluted a whole cask; nay, even to put one's nose to heathen wine was strictly prohibited!" (ibid., vol. i, p. 92).

Because the Pharisees did not want to take any chances on any of their utensils being defiled, they kept up the meticulous custom of washing their Cups, Pots, brazen vessels, and their tables (Mark 7:4). Indeed, not only were the Pharisees afraid the heathen might deliberately defile some of their utensils, but even the Common People of the Jews were distrusted and looked upon with disdain by the Pharisees.

"As an Israelite avoided as far as possible all contact with a heathen, lest he should thereby be defiled, *so did the Pharisee avoid as far as possible contact with the non-Pharisee*, because the latter to him included in the notion of *the unclean Am ha-aretz* [the common Jew]" (Schurer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. ii, vol. ii, P. 24).

The Common People of the Jews *were considered unclean* by the Pharisees because they did not hold to the strict rules of the traditions of the elders. Notice some of the opinions about the Common People that the Pharisees held, in the Talmud:

"The garments of the Am ha-aretz [the Common People] *are unclean* for the Perushim [the Pharisees]" *Chagiga*, ii, 7).

"If the wife of a Chaber [an associate, member of the Pharisee fraternity] has left the wife of an Am ha-aretz grinding in her house, the house is unclean if the mill stops; if it goes on grinding, *only unclean so far as she can reach by stretching out her hand*" (*Tohoroth*, vii, 4).

The meaning of the last quotation is that only the flour that was in arm's reach of the Commoner was unclean, all the rest, which could not be touched by her, out of arm's reach, was still clean.

From these quotations, you can see just how ridiculous, how absurd the Pharisaic commandments were!

Pharisees Could Not Associate With Common People

Even though the Pharisees were the rulers of the synagogues, and though some of the Common People consistently attended them, nevertheless, the Pharisees remained aloof socially. The Pharisee was not to invite a common person into his home, nor was he to go into the home of a commoner.

"A Chaber [an associate of the Pharisee fraternity] does not go as a guest to an Am ha-aretz nor receive him as a guest within his walls" (*Demai*, ii, 3).

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You can imagine what this snobbish exclusiveness of the Pharisees did to the religious zeal of the Common People. No wonder that most of the people stayed away from the synagogues ruled by the Pharisees.

The Pharisees looked upon the Common People as having on them a *curse* of God since they did not follow the rules of the Pharisees. In the New Testament it is recorded that the Pharisees accusingly asked an officer: "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people [the multitudes, the *Am ha-aretz*] who knoweth not the law are *cursed*" (John 7:47-49).

The example of Christ and the disciples, by contrast, was one of love and compassion for the people at large. No wonder many of the people were beginning to believe on Christ—these were the *Am ha-aretz*.

"And He went forth again by the seaside; and all the multitude [the Common People] resorted unto Him, and He taught them. And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, 'Follow me.' And he arose and followed Him. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans [tax collectors] and sinners [the ordinary term used by the Pharisees for the Common People] *sat also together with Jesus and His disciples: for there were many and they followed Him*. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto His disciples, 'How is it that He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?' When Jesus heard it, He saith unto them, 'They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Mark 2:13-17). Also Matt. 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32.

The Pharisees would not have thought for a moment of going into the home of a commoner and partaking of a meal with him. That was just not done! It was the practice of Christ and His disciples to eat with the *Am ha-aretz*—the Common People.

Christ's opinion of the ridiculous and snobbish commandments of the Pharisees is summed up in Mark 7:4-8. Notice! "And when they come from the market [where many Common People worked), *except they wash, they eat not*. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables*. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, 'Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?' He answered and said unto them, 'Well hath Isaiah prophesied *of you hypocrites*, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 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.'"

Christ Kept Scripture Commands

Christ taught the disciples to obey the commandments of God and reject the commandments of men. Actually, Christ came to restore the Laws of God among a people who had lost them. The Pharisees had become blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 15:14).

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." The disciples, upon hearing this remark of Christ, thought He was talking of leavening that was put in bread to make it rise. Then Christ answered: "How is it that *ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread*, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then they understood how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, *but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*" (Matt. 16:6-12).

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Christ came to a Jewish world which, in most part, had totally left the simple Laws of the Scriptures. Most of the people were not really religious at all. The Common People, over 95% of the population, were truly sheep without a shepherd.

Christ came into a world which *needed* Him and His Message. They needed God's Laws and His commandments restored. God the Father, at the appropriate time, sent His Son into the world to give it the unadulterated Laws of the Scripture in their full spiritual significance. Christ not only came to restore the Scripture as the proper guide to the people. He also came with the New Testament revelation which gave completeness to the Scripture.

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Chapter 14

Jesus said: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: whatsoever they bid you, that do!" What did Jesus mean? What was "Moses' seat?" What was its authority?—and what about that authority today?

CHRIST said: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: *all* therefore *whosoever* they bid you observe, *that observe and do...*" (Matthew 23:2, 3).

Scribes and Pharisees Sat on Moses' Seat

What did Jesus mean?

This command has perplexed many people. The example Jesus gave while on earth was clearly *against* the tradition and commandments of the Pharisees. Christ *openly* repudiated not a few of them, claiming them as nothing more than the commandments of men (Mark 7:7).

He rejected, for example, the Pharisaic commandments when He healed on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). When He and His disciples got some handfuls of grain to eat on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees told Him He broke *their* law (Luke 6:1-2). Christ also rejected the traditions of the elders which required the ritualistic washing of the hands before meals (Luke 11:37, 38). Christ and His disciples did not fast each Monday and Thursday according to the laws of the Pharisees (Matt. 9:14 and Luke 18:12).

Does this mean that in some parts of Scripture, Christ taught His disciples, by example and by commandments, not to acknowledge the traditions of the Pharisees, and then in Matthew 23:2, 3 He commands them to observe them *all*? Does this mean that the teachings of Christ are inconsistent? Not at all! The KEY is to understand the *difference* between the Jewish traditions and the authority vested in certain leaders when they sat on Moses' seat.

What Did Christ Mean in Matthew 23?

The teachings of Christ are completely consistent! He was not commanding His disciples to reject Jewish traditions in one breath and then to obey them in another. Even so, to obey every single teaching issued by the Pharisees would have been impossible of fulfillment! Conceive trying to observe one teaching from the School of Hillel and another completely opposite teaching from the School of Shammai.

What, then, did Christ mean?

The important point to note in Matthew 23 is that Christ told His disciples to obey *everything* the scribes and Pharisees issued *FROM MOSES' SEAT!* These *laymen* had seated themselves on Moses' seat of authority in place of the Levites. Even so, they were to be obeyed when acting in that capacity. There was a difference between the ordinary independent teachings of the Pharisees which varied from time to time—and were often contradictory with one another—and the commands which came *from Moses' Seat*. The commands *from Moses' Seat* did not entail matters of opinion among differing Pharisees, but rather they involved decisions of community importance which affected the whole of the Jewish nation. The commands from *Moses' Seat* were not enacted exclusively *for* the Pharisees, as were the Pharisaic commands. They were *for all Jews*. Christ is not telling His disciples to obey the ordinary teachings of the Pharisees, but He *is* commanding them *to obey every command* that came from Moses' Seat.

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What Was Moses' Seat?

In New Testament times there were two organizations under the Romans which were governing the Jews. One was called the Sanhedrin. This body of men has already been mentioned. The Sanhedrin was the successor to the Great Assembly, the governing body among the Jews in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Great Assembly was composed only of priests, but the Sanhedrin, which was established after the period of religious anarchy, was composed of laymen and priests alike. The functions of the Sanhedrin were similar in many ways to the older Great Assembly, but there was one main difference in New Testament times. The Sanhedrin had gravitated to being more or less a *civil* Supreme Court among the Jews, while the Great Assembly had been both civil and religious.

That brings us to the second organization among the Jews in Christ's time. This organization was attached to the Sanhedrin, at least in principle, but did not form an integral part of the Sanhedrin. This was called the *Great Beth Din*—which means in English *the Great House of Religious Judgment*. This was the *religious* Supreme Court of the land, while the Sanhedrin was primarily the *civil* Supreme Court. There was a major difference between the two. In the Sanhedrin there were represented both Sadducees and Pharisees, but the Great Beth Din was composed *only* of the scribes—the authoritative copiers of the Bible—and Pharisees—the most eminent of religious leaders, the Doctors of the Law. (See Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, pp. 153, 154.)

"The Great *Beth Din* ... was entirely Pharisaic and composed of 'doctors of the law'" (ibid., p. 153).

There were minor civil and religious courts among the Jews throughout the land; but in Jerusalem were the Sanhedrin—the civil Supreme Court, and the Great *Beth Din*—the religious Supreme Court. Both these organizations were of national importance to all Jews everywhere (ibid., pp. 153, 154).

"The Great *Beth Din*, as the final court of appeal, was undoubtedly a body of experts, the most eminent and experienced teachers of the time" (ibid., p. 157).

The scribes and Pharisees who sat in *this* religious Supreme Court—the Great Beth Din—were the religious judges over the entire nation of the Jews. When they issued a decision in their official capacity as members of the Great *Beth Din*, that decision was mandatory *on all Jews*. Thus it was the scribes and Pharisees who were members of the Great *Beth Din* **WHO SAT IN MOSES' SEAT!**

Only very few Pharisees sat in this religious Supreme Court; the majority of the Pharisees had nothing to do with its function. This was the organization to which Christ was referring when He commanded His disciples to observe all they commanded even if their commandments were burdensome and hard to bear. He said to obey all the commands issued from Moses' Seat!

Only Those in Great Beth Din Sat in Moses' Seat!

We have clear proof from the Jewish history, in *Rosh Hashanah* 25a, 25b, that only members of the Great *Beth Din* were sitting in Moses' chair of authority. What was commanded from the Great *Beth Din* was, in the Old Testament congregation, of the same authority as Moses. And, when we understand what kind of decision emanated from this religious Supreme Court, we can easily perceive why such authority was given to it.

One of the major tasks of the Great *Beth Din* was to proclaim each year the proper time for the beginning of the calendar year. The Great *Beth Din* had to give their learned and authoritative approval before the calendar year could officially begin. The mathematical calculations used to

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determine when the year began were understood by many, but the authoritative pronouncement of its beginning had to come officially from the Great *Beth Din*—from Moses' Seat.

"It (the Great *Beth Din*) had entire charge of the calendar system, and hence became the religious and national center not only of Palestine, but also of the Diaspora [the dispersed Jews]" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. III, p. 114).

The Great *Beth Din* also determined the settlement of religious matters that were *too difficult for individuals to ascertain on their own*. It was to this organization, the Supreme Court—those in Moses' Seat—that Christ was referring when He told His disciples and the multitudes to observe all they commanded.

How plain! The decisions of the Great *Beth Din* affected *all* the Jews, and were unlike those varying and conflicting teachings issued by the various Pharisaical Schools which were designed mainly *for the Pharisees* only to observe.

Why the Expression: "Moses' Seat?"

The organization of the Supreme Court of Israel goes back to Moses. He was the first ruler, under God, of a Great *Beth Din*. Notice Exodus 18:13-26. In this section of Scripture we find that many of the Israelites were coming to Moses with their various problems. They were completely overburdening Moses with their many problems—wanting to understand the will of God in particular matters. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, told Moses that the proper thing to do was to ordain local judges (*local Beth Dins*) over the people and that only the most difficult cases should be brought to Moses.

"So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged [in courts] the people at all seasons: *the hard cases they brought unto Moses*, but every small matter they judged themselves" (Exo. 18:24-26).

This was exactly the same manner in which the Jews were being judged in the time of Christ. There were the lower Courts of judgment for minor questions and also the Supreme Court—Moses' Seat!

As long as Moses was alive, he sat, under God, in the highest chair in the Supreme Court. It was he, and the other few leaders of Israel, who anciently determined when the calendar years would begin. He and the others in the Supreme Court also judged what the will of God would be in the hardest cases of disagreement among the people.

The Supreme Court did not cease with Moses. Moses was the first to sit in that highest seat of authority in the *Supreme Court*. But after him were to come others who would assume the same authority—others who were to sit in Moses' Seat.

Just before his death, Moses ordained that the Supreme Court be perpetuated in Israel. In Deuteronomy 17:8-13 you will notice the express commands of God, issued through Moses, concerning the duties of the judges of Israel who were to sit in the place of Moses after his death. They were to carry on the same form of organization set up by Moses, and the people of Israel were to obey explicitly whatsoever was issued from the Supreme Court as though it were from Moses himself. Notice the instructions to the Israelites as recorded in Deuteronomy 17:8-11.

"If there arise a matter *too hard for thee in judgment*, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates [within Israel]: then shalt thou arise, and get thee tip into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose;

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and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and UNTO THE JUDGE *THAT SHALL BE IN THOSE DAYS*, and enquire; and they shew thee the sentence of judgment: and thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall shew thee; *AND THOU SHALT OBSERVE TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT THEY INFORM THEE: according to the sentence of the law* which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, *THOU SHALT DO*: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand nor to the left."

Notice the striking similarity of the language used by Christ in Matthew 23:2, 3. Following the pattern of Deuteronomy, He said the scribes and Pharisees "sit in Moses' seat: *all* therefore *whatsoever* they bid you observe, *THAT OBSERVE AND DO...*" Christ is paraphrasing Deuteronomy 17: 10, 11!

Yes, as long as the decisions of the scribes and Pharisees were issued from Moses' Seat-in the capacity of religious judges, making decisions for the whole of the people—all those decisions **HAD TO BE OBEYED!**

If Christ had told the multitudes and His disciples to disobey the decisions of the religious Supreme Court established by God, He Would have violated a fundamental teaching of Scripture. Therefore, Christ commanded the people to respect in every way the decisions which came from Moses' Seat—all of them!

While Moses was still living, he and the other elders of Israel formed the Supreme Court, but the command of God said that the decisions of the judges "in those days"-at later times were also to be observed just as the Israelites had obeyed the decisions of Moses. God said that no Israelite was to decline either to the left or to the right from observing the decisions of Moses' Seat.

The next ruler of the Supreme Court after Moses was Joshua. He was ordained to sit in the same chair of authority as Moses (Deut. 34:9). Many others followed Joshua on down to Ezra and Nehemiah (*Rosh Hashanah*, 25a, 25b). And, in the days of Christ, there were some of the eminent leaders of the Jews also sitting in Moses' Seat such as Gamaliel who instructed Paul.

Decisions of the Great Beth Din

The decisions of the religious Supreme Court were not the commandments of men enacted by the Pharisaic Schools. The Pharisaic commandments were mainly intended for the Pharisees themselves or those who desired to follow their ways. But, the decisions of the Great *Beth Din* affected all the Jews. The Zealots, Herodians, Sadducees, and other sects were to follow the decisions issued by the Great *Beth Din*.

As long as Jewish Christians attended sabbath services in synagogues and were thus *part* of the *religious* Jewish community they had to obey the Great House of Judgment—the Beth Din. This ceased when Jewish Christians were forced to flee Jerusalem after Cestias' Roman army surrounded the city in 66 A.D. Thereafter, Christians in Judaea were forced to live separate from their Jewish neighbors.

These facts of history show that the authority of the Great Beth Din always *exceeded* that of the Pharisaic Schools alone. The independent teachings of the Pharisees were never issued from Moses' Seat.

The only authority of the Great *Beth Din* today is in the matter of the continual preservation of the written Word of God—the Bible—in Hebrew. God has committed this responsibility to them as leaders of the Jewish community.

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Chapter 15

This fourteenth [fifteenth] and final installment reveals why the Jews knew the Old Testament was not to be all of Scripture--and why the Jews rejected Jesus as the Christ when they knew better!

Synopsis:

IN THE last installment we discovered that Christ recognized the authority of the Scribes and Pharisees when they sat in "Moses' Seat" – and that "Moses' Seat" represented the authority that God vested in Moses. After Moses, God exercised His authority in the Old Testament Church through judges, then high priests and finally the Sopherim, under Ezra and Nehemiah.

By the time of Christ, the authority in the Old Testament Church had been usurped by the Pharisees and scribes—who were mostly laymen, not priests. The priests, of course, performed the temple rituals, but the authority in the Church was exercised by others. Even though God did not choose the laymen to exercise the authority of His government over the people, He nevertheless allowed them to remain in office. And as long as they were allowed to remain "in Moses' Seat," they were to be obeyed when they spoke with authority.

The KEY to this enigma is made plain in Scripture. The scribes and Pharisees usually spoke in their own name—not in the name of Moses. That is why the New Testament constantly states that Jesus taught with authority, "not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29). They did not teach with authority unless they came together as the *Great Beth Din*—the Great House of Judgment—to make binding decisions in Moses' name on the whole community. In other words, the authority vested in the scribes and Pharisees had nothing to do with the daily speculations of the scribes—which they knew they had no authority to teach. When the *Great Beth Din* had to make decisions for the entire community, Jesus told his disciples in the Old Testament Church: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do..." (Matthew 23:2,3).

But what if the scribes and Pharisees should err in a decision? Were the people to obey them then? Of course! "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do!" ordered Jesus! It was God's responsibility to judge those in the Great Beth Din, not the people's. The point is this: as long as God allowed them to exercise that authority, they were to be obeyed. If God removed them—as He later did, then the people were to follow that *new* authority which God installed in their place—to carry out His Government.

Now take an actual example of what did happen just before New Testament times—and notice what God required of His people!

Power to Bind and Loose

Those in Moses' Seat had authority to make binding decisions regarding the observance of Scripture commands. For example, in the Scripture is the command that every seventh year all debts are to be cancelled (Deut. 15:1-8). God specifically commanded that no one should refuse to lend to a poor brother when the year of release draws near (verses 9-10). But, about fifty years before the birth of Christ there were so many Jews disobeying this command that when the sixth year would come around, the poor people who needed to borrow money to bring in their crops (or buy goods) for that working year were forced to go without the necessary money. Virtually no one would loan out their money in the sixth year.

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Because the majority of people who had money would not obey the spirit of the Law and love his neighbor properly (Deut. 15:9), the Great *Beth Din* temporarily suspended the necessity for all debts to be released in the seventh year.

This enactment was not for the benefit of the rich. It was for the benefit of the poor who needed to have, and could now borrow, the money in order to earn a living. As long as the Great *Beth Din* commanded such a decision *it was as if Moses himself had made it*. Even the disciples were obliged to obey this decision of the Great Beth Din, for Christ told them to obey *all things whatsoever* they bid you observe.

Such a decision, however, would not have had to be given by Moses. The reason should be obvious. Moses had both civil and religious power *to command* individuals to loan money to the less fortunate in the sixth year, if he thought it necessary. However, in the days of Christ, and just before, the *civil* jurisdiction was not in the hands of the Great *Beth Din*—the Romans were in control. Unlike Moses, the Great *Beth Din* had *only religious authority* over the people, not civil authority. And the Romans, who had no sympathy with the Law of God, favored the position of the creditor who refused to loan money in the sixth year. This prompted most of the Jews who had money to disregard the Law of God. Because the Great *Beth Din* had no authority to force the people to obey it, the Great *Beth Din*, for the sake of the poor who needed the money in the sixth year, temporarily suspended the release of credit in the seventh year until such a time in the future when they could regain their proper civil authority. However, the people who were desirous of serving God were encouraged to maintain this Law and voluntarily release their creditors.

This particular resolution of the Great *Beth Din* was not an independent teaching of the Pharisees or a commandment of men. Schurer tells us that this authoritative decision, among others, was "*a registered declaration*" of the type which "*were deposited among the archives at Jerusalem*" (*The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, sec. 11, vol. 1, p. 363).

The decisions from the Great *Beth Din* which affected national policy, such as the above decision, were officially entered in the authoritative archives in Jerusalem. These decisions were not the ordinary trivial commandments of the disagreeing schools of the Pharisees which voiced independent opinions, but were far more important—these were from Moses' Seat!

Take another example.

About four years before the destruction of Jerusalem, in about 66 A.D., there were eighteen decrees issued by the Jewish Great *Beth Din* which became mandatory for all Jews to observe. These decrees—issued after great strife in the Court—were entirely anti-Gentile in every way. They demanded complete separation of the Jews from the Gentiles. See Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, p. 239.

One of these decrees made it a sin to offer a sacrifice to God on behalf of the Roman Emperor. This repudiation of the Emperor was tantamount to a declaration of war with Rome. And, four years later the Romans completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple.

To enact the eighteen decrees against contact with the Gentiles, it became necessary for the leaders of both the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai to assemble together in order to make these decisions appear to have the authority of Moses. Either School alone did not have power to make such authoritative decisions for *all* Jews, they only had authority among members of their own groups. But, when the eminent scribes and Pharisees assembled in the capacity of the Great Beth Din, the decisions were reckoned as being from Moses' Seat and were mandatory for all Jews.

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This situation is very similar to what God's Church faces today. There are some areas in the southern United States, and also in South Africa, where human governments prohibit whites from assembling together each Sabbath with Negro brethren. Today is little different from apostolic days just before the destruction of Jerusalem!

Government in the New Testament Church

Christ told the disciples even before His death and resurrection that among themselves they were to exercise God's government in His New Testament Church. Notice Matthew 18:15-20.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, *tell* it unto the church [the authorities in the Church]: but if he neglects to hear *the church*, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, *whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*"

This was exactly the same procedure used by those Jews who were sitting in Moses' Seat—in the Great *Beth Din*. Remember how Christ said that the scribes and Pharisees who were sitting in Moses' Seat were *binding* upon the people *heavy burdens* which were grievous to be borne? (Matt. 23:4.) Jesus' disciples did not seat themselves in this authority. Christ put them there because they had been tried and tested. They qualified to sit in positions of authority in the New Testament Church. Just like those in Moses' Seat, in the Old Testament Church, they were to have power *to bind or to loose!*

Notice another of Jesus' commands: "Again I say unto you, that if TWO of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, there I am in the midst of them."

When the apostles heard Christ give that remarkable statement, they knew exactly what He meant! He was clearly telling His ministers that they were to carry out Christ's Government over the Church.

The wording of Matthew 18:18-20 is in itself proof of this. The Jews leave us historical evidence which shows that it took TWO or THREE members of the Great *Beth Din* to form a quorum before *any binding decision* could be made. See *Baba Bathra*, 160a. The bare minimum to form a quorum was TWO, but the Great *Beth Din* always endeavored to have at least THREE present before binding decisions were enacted. Christ gave His disciples this same requirement.

The Church Exercises Its Authority

In the New Testament we have an example where the leaders in the Church utilized their high authority that Christ had given them. Christ made a decision through them *binding* upon all Gentile Christians.

We read in Acts 15 that a misunderstanding came up between certain members in the Church in regard to circumcision. The matter concerned whether the Gentile Christians were required to be circumcised or not. Some of the Jews who had been converted thought that anyone in the faith should be circumcised, whether Jew or Gentile. (See verse 5.) Others thought it not necessary to burden them with this physical rite. Peter mentioned that God had called the Gentiles into the Church without their being circumcised (verses 7-9). The testimony of Barnabas and Paul was that God had given the Gentiles His Spirit even in their physical uncircumcision (verse 12).

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A decision had to be made in this case. And, since the Church had been given authority to bind or loose, a decision *was* made! Peter spoke the decision. The Headquarters Church issued the decision. Its chief minister was James, the physical half-brother of Christ (James was Joseph's first son, while Christ was the firstborn of God the Father). In explaining the decision, James appealed to the Scriptures, "Wherefore *MY SENTENCE IS*, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turning to God" (Acts 15:17-19).

And verse 28: "For it seemed good *to the Holy Spirit*, and to us, *to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.*"

The Holy Spirit was guiding them into *all truth* as Christ had prophesied (John 16:13). So, by the authority given them by Christ, *they bound only the NECESSARY* things on the Gentiles. This was unlike the decisions of the scribes and Pharisees when they were sitting in Moses' Seat, for Christ said that they "*bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders*" (Matt. 23:4). The apostles "*lay upon [them] no greater burden than these necessary things*" (Acts 15:28).

God's Church today has divine authority to reveal the will of God in matters of Scripture too hard for the laymen to decide.

"Verily I say unto you, *whatsoever* ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and *whatsoever* ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18: 18).

Christ gave this authority to His true Church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15). Let us always be in obedience to God by keeping His commandments and acknowledging and heeding the decisions of God's Church.

Old Testament Not All of Scripture!

The Jews were authorized to guard the three sections of Holy Scripture that compose our Old Testament—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. But the Holy Scripture was not completed with those three sections alone. Four more sections had to be added which would make *seven* complete sections in all. These four sections comprise the New Testament Scriptures. It was prophesied in the Old Testament that more Scriptures were to come when the Messiah made His appearance. Let us understand this clearly!

Moses Was Lawgiver and Type of Christ

Moses was a most extraordinary prophet of God. The task that God had given him to accomplish was so great, so important, that Moses received a designation from God that no other person—except One—has ever received. Even Aaron, being a type of High Priest, was of lower rank. Aaron was, in a sense, the prophet of Moses, and Moses was like God to the people (Exo. 7:1).

Why was Moses given such a high office? The reason is plain! God used him to accomplish something that had never been done before. Moses was commissioned to give the people the written and codified Law of God. The Law was known before (Gen. 26:5), but it was not completely written in a book and codified.

God spoke the Ten Commandments with His own mouth (Ex. 20:1). Never had God come to a people with such physical demonstrations of power and glory as when He revealed His Law.

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The rest of the law God commanded Moses to write. God used *only one man* to reveal His civil Laws to the Israelites. That man was Moses. All subsequent Scripture is based on the laws revealed by God through Moses.

God told Moses to warn the Israelites that there was to come another person like Moses. Notice Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19.

Another Like Moses

Moses said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, *LIKE UNTO ME; unto him ye shall hearken.*" Then God says, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren *like unto thee*, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, *I will require it of him.*"

Notice! There was to be another prophet *like Moses*, In other words, *another lawgiver* was to arise. Why was this necessary? Because the people had not been given by Moses the complete spiritual revelation of God! Isaiah 42:21 prophesied there was One coming who would "*MAGNIFY the Law and make it honourable.*"

By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, *that Prophet still had not come!*

In New Testament times, the Jews were still looking for *that prophet* who was to be like a God to Israel and have the power of being lawgiver, as Moses had been! When John the Baptist appeared in Judea, he was questioned as to who he was. "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And when they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. *Art thou THAT PROPHET?* And he answered, No" (John 1:19-21).

Who Was That Prophet?

There has been only One individual since the time of Moses to fulfill the role of Lawgiver and God. This One is Jesus Christ! He fulfilled the role of THAT PROPHET to the letter. Even many of the Jews themselves, after observing the mighty works done by Christ, recognized that He was the One like unto Moses. Notice. "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth *THAT PROPHET that should come into the world*" (John 6:14).

And, by simply reviewing the "Sermon on the Mount" we can easily perceive that Jesus was the lawgiver that was to come. Notice the successive statements of Jesus: "Ye have heard that it hath been said ... *but I say unto you*" (Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, etc.). Jesus gave the true spiritual meaning of the Law. He, in effect, was giving new commandments (e.g., John 13:34)– and commandments which magnified the ones given of old (Isa. 42:21).

The teaching of Jesus was also *to complete* the final written revelation of God–the Bible!

Isaiah 8:16 shows what Christ was to do. He was to "bind up the testimony," that is, He was to complete the witness of God–the Scriptures; and to "seal the law," or put His stamp of approval on the spiritual law of God–Hebrews 9:10. This binding and sealing was to be done "among His disciples" or by and through His disciples. This is exactly what Christ did! He gave us the complete Scriptures by the hand of His disciples. To the three sections already recognized by the Jews, He added, by His disciples, the remaining four sections: 1) the Gospels, 2) the Acts of the Apostles, 3) the Epistles, and 4) the book of Revelation. This makes seven complete sections in all. With these seven sections the Holy Scriptures were bound up–completed, from Genesis I to

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Revelation 22. No more were ever to be added for there was to be only one other prophet like Moses to arise, and that prophet—Jesus Christ—completed the Word of God through His disciples.

Conclusion

Is Judaism the religion of Moses? A simple comparison with the Scriptures and with the Judaism of Christ's day will show, without controversy, that it was not!

Judaism had its beginnings within the period of religious anarchy (301 B.C.-165 B.C.). It represents a combination of certain Scripture truths with many ideas and customs of the heathen and the varied opinions of men (Mark 7:7). Judaism represents an abandonment of the original Law of Moses, the Law they called "out-of-date," so they could do as they pleased. But Christ came to magnify it and make it honorable!

Let us all, Jew or Greek, Israelite or Gentile, get back to the Bible—the Word of God. Let us reject our human opinions and the pagan customs our society has inherited, and return to God and to His Word. Let us humbly bow before the God of the universe—the God of the Bible—and acknowledge our faults and ask Him for His mercy to bring us back to His precious truths.

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose ye this day whom ye will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

THE END

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