

## **Jewish Culture**

(provided by Adam Huschka from his course at The American Institute for Holy Land Studies)

### **Hebrew Language**

- One of the keys to understanding our Hebrew heritage is learning Hebrew.
  - The founding fathers of Yale and Harvard were passionate about people learning Hebrew.
- The Bible is 9 parts Hebrew to 1 part Greek.
- Dr. Blizzard says that reading the OT through a translation is like kissing someone through a veil. He also says that much theological confusion would disappear if Christians could read the OT in Hebrew.

### **Spiritual Disciplines**

#### *Meditation*

- Meditation (hagah) in Hebrew means to mutter, growl, or growl silently or make a sound. You meditate on scripture when you repeat it to yourself over and over, especially when you do this outloud. (Scripture was meant to be heard.)

#### *Prayer*

- Prayer = in everything the giving of thanks. Staying in touch with God all day.
- Prayer Shawl (talit) mentioned in the OT and wore by Jesus.
- Phylacteries were worn on weekdays for morning prayers and not on holidays.
  - Inside of them are 4 portions of Scripture.

#### *Baptism*

- Baptism was self-administered in the day of Jesus.
  - The original Scripture does not refer to John as the Baptizer, but as John the one who caused them to go under.

#### *Lord's Supper*

- The Lord's Supper was originally part of the Seder (Passover) meal.
  - One of the signs of being a free people was reclining while eating.

#### *Study*

- In Hebrew thought one of the highest forms of worship was study.
  - The Talmud says, "He who does not study deserves to die."

### **Theology**

- The *Kingdom of God* refers to those people over whom God is ruling and who are demonstrating this by their lives: individually and collectively.
- *Platonism* had a huge effect on the theology of the church as it moved from an eastern to a western system of thought.
  - Greek thought=Platonic thought=Hellenistic thought (all the same)

- Platonism taught that the material world is inferior to the spiritual world and thus the fleshly body is bad.
- To connect with God one needs to disconnect from the created world.
  - Despite this, the Jews thought of the body and soul as a divine unity.
- Platonism emphasized that salvation involves escaping the world.
  - Jews taught that salvation started now; that it is a this world concept for the here and now.
- As the church moved west 2 things happened to cause a split or separation from the its Jewish roots:
  1. Greek thought became more influential as the church moved further west and as Christianity became less and less welcome in Jerusalem. (Hellenization)
  2. The church became imperialistic/competitive with Judaism. (The conflict became a competition.)
- Studying the land is crucial to understanding an Eastern book in a Western world.
- Marcion lived in the early part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and was a leader in anti-Semitic thinking; he went so far as to suggest that the OT should not be part of the Christian Bible.

## **Family Life**

### *Marriage*

- The 1<sup>st</sup> of the 613 commandments found in the OT is “be fruitful and multiply”.
- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Jewish world (2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism) you loved the one you married. (As opposed to marrying the one you love.)

### *The Home*

- The home was thought to be a small temple (mikdash).
- After the destruction of the temple in AD 70 Rabbis taught that the dinner table was as sacred as the Holy of Holies.
  - It was considered sac-religious to eat a meal and not mention Torah.
- The home was to be the center of discipleship!

### *Parenting*

- The word for parent and the word for Torah are derived from the same word (which means to guide).
- The father of the home was the priest and the teacher.
- The father was to do four things for his son: circumcise him, teach him Torah, take for him a wife and teach him a trade.
- The home was the center for holidays and festivals.
- The home was the center of education.
  - 4 Teaching Methods of Israel:
    1. By word of mouth (not books).
      - Text people, not text books.
      - Memorizing scripture was of huge importance.
    2. Scheduled times & Spontaneous times

3. Music.
4. Word Pictures.

- Rabbis (even today?) count their congregations by the number of families.

#### *Children*

- The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment (honor your father and mother) is repeated 8 times in Scripture *and* it was given to adults!

### New Testament

- There are over 1600 allusions that come into the NT from the OT.
- Luke is the only non-Jewish author in the Bible.
- Jesus is called Rabbi 16 times in the gospels.
- Paul used at least 80 references from the OT.
- The NT was not reduced to writing until 20 to 25 years after Jesus' death.

### Synagogue

- The origins are obscure, but we see it appearing as early as 586 BC (the year the temple was destroyed).
- The concept of synagogues (houses of assembly) was developed during the Babylonian exile as a means of maintaining their worship of Yahweh.
  - It was not considered to be mandatory.
  - Jesus went to synagogue a lot.
  - It was the refining fire and the stabilizing force of Judaism during their years of exile.
- Synagogue is a Greek word that simply means assembly; the Hebrew for this is Bet Knesset.
- The word fellowship actually takes on the meaning of a relationship of participation with each other as well as impartation to one another.
- There were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus.
- Synagogues were to be built on the highest point in the town; if that was not possible they were to put a large pole up so that it could be found.
- When a congregation is finished reading a book of the Torah together the entire community comes together and confesses/declares the words: "Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another."
- 3 functions of the ancient synagogue
  1. House of Study (Bet Midrash)
    - The average child of the Jewish community in Jesus' day would stop their formal education at the age of 10.
    - Bet Sefer (5-10), Bet Talmud (10-15), Bet Midrash (15-33)
    - By age 15, the best of the best of the best went and studied under a famous Rabbi. (The Hebrew scholars tell us that Jesus, because of His words and manner of teaching and the fact that he was constantly called Rabbi, went through all of these stages.
  2. House of Worship and prayer

3. House of Assembly (the community needs were met by it)
- Every synagogue with 120 believers was required to support at least 10 men of leisure (Batlanim); these men's sole job was to study and teach Scripture.
  - Every function of the early church has its background in the synagogue.
    - Shaliach (apostle) = public announcer; person who traveled around and reported information.
      - These men functioned much like missionaries; individual congregations sent them out to dispense information.
    - Rabbi (prophet) = read or preached God's Word
      - Rabbi comes from the Hebrew word "Rav" which means "many, much or great." In the context of Jesus day it meant, "my teacher".
      - The Rabbi was basically a phenomenon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Period.
      - Rabbis used Rabbinic dialogue to teach (question and question method)
      - The ancient rabbi dressed like other males in the society where the men wore a lighter tunic or inner robe which was generally made from linen and went to the ankles and was worn around the house. When they went out, they wore a heavier outer robe made usually from wool that was often called a mantle. This outer covering for the Jewish males was called a talit and it had fringes or tassels (tzitzit) as required by Torah (Numbers 15:38).
      - The rabbis taught from both the written and the oral law.
      - The work of the rabbi was not to come up with new ideas on the Scripture, but to uncover what was already there.
      - In Jesus' day, the two basic schools of rabbinic teaching were Shami and Hillel.
    - Maggid (evangelist) = the golden tongued orator would travel from place to place and speak to different congregations.
    - Gabaem (deacon) = distributed to and met the needs of the poor
    - Batlanim (teacher) = studied and taught Scripture
    - Zakin (elder/pastor/shepherd/bishop) = fed the flock
    - Hanais (administrator/president) = made sure things ran smoothly
  - The original specific functions of the synagogue were designed to minister to the specific needs of the community.
  - As the church moved to the West, these functions took on the form of church offices, rather than meeting the needs of the community.
  - The concept of meeting the specific need of an individual is *tzedekiah*.
    - *Tzedekiah* = alms giving and righteousness
  - In the synagogue, the Torah scrolls are housed in the arc (a cabinet behind the bema seat/pulpit).

### Community

- To be a Jew is first and foremost to belong to a community.
- No Jew is exempt from giving charity (even those who are recipients).
  - In many places this is still practiced today.

- The Jews were the first to have organized education.
- The community was built around the synagogue.

### **Work**

- The Hebrew word for work and serve (abodah) is also the word for worship.

### **Early Believers**

- 1<sup>st</sup> believers called themselves “Messianists” or believers.
- “Church” started on the Jewish festival of Shavuot (Pentecost).
- There were 50,000 to 60,000 believers in Jerusalem by AD 50.
- The rabbinical council held in 90 AD met to decide what to do with the believers because there were so many they were thought to be a threat to other Jews.
- The Lord’s supper was observed every time the original church gathered.
- There are 3 places where the early believers met to worship: in Temple, houses and synagogues.
- Non-Jews (Gentiles) were not permitted into the faith for at least 10 years after Jesus’ death.

### **Church**

- The original definition of the word church meant “to be a witnessing body to the outside community by lifestyle and teaching.”
- The term “called out body” that the church is recognized by today actually means that our real responsibility is out there in the world and that the only reason we come together each week is to get our spiritual batteries charged to go back out into the world throughout the week.
  - Blizzard’s ideal church: gather Saturday evening for worship and teaching; go out on Sunday and serve people/be a witnessing body; gather Sunday evening and celebrate what God is doing.
- The church didn’t start to use the term “New-Israel” until AD 160 (Justin Martyr).
  - Despite this, replacement theology was established by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Tanach & the Talmud**

#### *Tanach*

- Tanach = Jewish Old Testament
  - Better called the older, first or original testament so as to avoid teaching that it is inferior to the new testament
- Tanach comes from acronym
  - Torah = Law
  - Neviim = Prophets
  - Ketabeme = writings

### *Written Law*

- Torah = instruction, direction, guidance (1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of the Bible)
  - Archery terms that means to guide.

### *Oral Law*

- Mishnah
  - Mishnah=oral law
  - Thought to have been originally given by God to Moses at the same time as the written law (Torah); Moses then gave it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets and the prophets to the great assembly.
  - Originally written down by Rabbi Judah the President in 200 AD.
    - The Oral Law was well known in Jesus day.
  - 200 years after Judah put the Mishnah into writing, the Tosephta was written. It was similar but 4 times larger than the Mishnah.
  - The Mishnah and the Tosephta are divided into 6 divisions called orders
    - Zeraim: seeds
    - Moed: feasts and festivals
    - Nashim: women
    - Nezikin damages
    - Kodashim: sacred
    - Tohorot: purity
  - The six orders are divided further into 63 chapters known as tractates.
  - Additional on the books of the Torah with individual commentary on chapter, verse and word is in another 4 books:
    - Mekhilta: measuring vessel (exegetical commentary of Exodus)
    - Sifra: books (entire book of Leviticus)
    - Sifre: Rabbinical commentaries on Numbers and Deuteronomy
    - Bariata: extraneous oral laws not belonging to Rabbi Judah
  - The Gemara is the commentary on the Mishnah.
  - The Gemara plus the Mishnah = Talmud
    - There are two Talmuds, the Jerusalem and the Babylonian.
    - The Babylonian is 10 times larger and is the one being referred to when all one hears is Talmud.
- The oral law was thought to be just as binding as the written by the ancient rabbis.
- There are 42 additional laws found in the Mishnah that are not found in the Torah.
  - The rest of the oral law is implied in the written law.
- Jesus said almost nothing original, but almost all that He said referred back to the OT, the oral law and the rabbinic commentaries on the Law (the Midrash).
- Jeremiah was the 1<sup>st</sup> to refer to Israel as the “olive tree”.
- There are more quotes in the NT from Isaiah than any other OT book. 47 of the 66 chapters are quoted.