

ANCIENT JUDAISM IN THE GOSPELS

Some thoughts on the representation of Judaism in
The Evangelists of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

This article is designed to be polemical. With so many inter-faith conferences between Christians and Jews in progress the dialogue has muted or obscured many of the fundamental divergences of the two groups. It is supposed by many that current scholarly advances in the study of Judaism are far more objective in scope than older models often found on the bookshelves of literary scholars. In this short paper this thesis will be observed in fresh light and scrutinized extensively in order to bring the reader along to another perspective on this vital issue.

Scholars have a tendency to revise their predecessors. The reasons for this procedure are many: obvious biases of the author come to light in a new way; new research invites original interpretations of material; texts unavailable in previous generations are discovered and add ancillary information unknown to former generations; stylistically, the language of an older published volume may be out of step with the supposed correct usage of language to date, and also, graduate level and doctoral level studies encourage originality in thesis preparation, which leads students to embrace the popular idea that individual authors read in one's academic work are deserving of revision, and their positions revamped in order to demonstrate a student's ability to perform truly critical work.

The positives of all this is the abundance of specialized materials presently available to readers today. The texts and tools in catalogues are of monstrous size and continue to grow, and still, they provide students with more than enough data to search through for answers to their questions. The negative to this aspect of scholarly work is that oftentimes theses are attacked and overturned for no other reason than that some consensus group decides they no longer find a particular outlook tenable, setting aside evidences plainly read historically and supported in vast amounts of literature.

These debates will continue and should. For scholarship to be able to unceasingly purge itself of so much of the chaff by which it is affected there must be a circular rotation of ideas. If we turn now to the subject of Judaism in the Gospels we begin with an assertion: there are few fields which have been as radically rearranged as have the field positions of modern scholars on the topic of Rabbinic Judaism in Jesus' day. In many ways this is a West versus East perspective and vice versa. Then also it is a regurgitated form of the old battle of Eastern mindset against Western opinions, which one is right? On the basis of the evidence found in

Christian sources today's restatements of Judaism's positions in antiquity relate more to political correctness than to vitally needed textual links.

If we rapidly work backwards to the time of the Gospels publication there are a number of issues that should not be overlooked:

- (1) Since the 1980's most Christian perspectives on Judaism have been shaped by the relativism involved in scholarly debates on the subject. Taking Judaism on its own terms few will author writings which depict one religion as less correct than the other. The disastrous effects of this new methodology have led to misunderstandings of the meaning of "Grace" and "Legalism" in God's kingdom.
- (2) Moreover the Cross of Jesus is downplayed as a New Testament tool needed in the place of the strictures of Judaism's Law. Still, the word "law" is viewed as inconsistent with the genuine meaning of the word "torah" and so the transliteration has taken the place of the word "law". In some places the term "instruction" has been better fitted; although the motivation behind its inclusion was wrong.
- (3) There is also the 'problem' for many with modern Israel.¹ For some, the Church supplanted Israel's favored position when Christ came and began His new Fellowship. This has created a massive problem leading many academics to believe that there is no political or prophetic importance to the reconstituted State of Modern Israel.
- (4) Author's who wrote with the idea that Jewish people's service to God was on the basis of a sort of "works righteousness" are summarily attacked as anti-Semitic, itself a misnomer since Jews are not the only Semitic persons in the Middle East. These authors of old are also viewed as out of step with current Christian/Jewish dialogue.
- (5) Reformation era writers are denounced as illiterate in Hebraic issues—although current models still make use of these reformed predecessors without acknowledgment. It seems many believe they were too Anti-Catholic to be able to be pro-Jewish, seeing the Jewish system of law-keeping as similar to Roman models.
- (6) Medieval writers rarely broached the issue of Judaism. Although they lived and wrote during the times of the great Gaons of Judaism the interaction appears to be slight.
- (7) Today patristic writers are being rediscovered. However, the rediscovery is on a doctrinal level which disallows studies in

¹ There are even Jewish groups opposed to modern, political Israel. For instance, at www.jewsagainstzionism.com thousands of Jews are represented as opposed to Zionism believing it to be man devised and detrimental to the religion of Judaism.

how Judaism was understood in Patristic era material. There have been exceptions to this. Some scholars have slightly reversed the situation by shifting attention to what Talmudic material states about Jesus, his disciples and the Christian movement altogether.

- (8) The early Apostolic Fathers writings have been off limits to many for years. Generally when one thinks of early Church Fathers one thinks of the Greek and Latin authors. Few think outside of this box but there are Syriac, Coptic and others in need of study. The Source literature for anyone who can master it is vast. In the mainstream of scholarship though, most paint the early Fathers as a group of anti-Semitic persons who had little facility with Hebrew or Rabbinic tractates.
- (9) Finally there is the thorny issue of the many “Judaisms” theory created in the wake of on-going discussions surrounding the proper use and understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Of the nine reasons listed above only number nine is of any use to us in this paper. The supposition that there were many varieties of Judaism is an attractive thought. Many are less inclined to follow it since the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls is still so complicated. No one knows to this day who wrote them, what Qumran was actually used for² or why the diversity of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic material found in the caves. One thing is evident though the canonical and non-canonical portions were written by someone (or some persons) and would not have sought to preserve them unless they were considered to be of value.

Bibliography of materials to read: a popular level text is “*What are the Dead Sea Scrolls and why do they Matter?*” It was published in 2007 by David Noel Freedman and Pam F. Kuhljen. For a brief, academic and semi-critical volume read *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A very Short Introduction* published in 2005 by Timothy H. Lim. In 2007 the Israel Antiquities Authority published *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. It contains a short overview along with texts and translations and other items found in the Judean wilderness. A more thorough treatment of the scrolls may be had in the volume by P.R. Davies, G. J. Brooke and P. R. Callaway entitled *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls* published in 2002. As a counterweight to all the above one must slowly digest *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Search for Qumran*, by Norman Golb, 1995. It is a sensible and comprehensive and invasive look at the problems of many scholars’ unconfirmed views of the origins Dead Sea Scrolls.

² The Dead Sea Scrolls are an interesting scholarly topic. The original theory of Essene origin developed in the 1950’s was quickly revised. In fact, the pioneers of early theses have lived long enough to see many of their conclusions overturned by their students thru “critical scholarship”. The only thing certain about the Dead Sea Scrolls today is that they exist few will aver a prompt and definite description how they ended up in Qumran and/or how diverse the movement was in Second Temple period Judaism. And where conjecture is given, it is just that, conjecture!

There is discussion as to how much material in the Gospel might actually reflect Jesus' knowledge of Qumranic ideology. For the most part these considerations are weak, albeit useful only in the sense that scholars are pushed to continue comparative analyses for future studies. When we look at the Gospels we have tracts written with design and purpose. John lists his reasons at the end of his Gospel. His goal is that the reader would come to know Jesus is the Son of God and that believing he might have life through His name (Jn 20:31). Luke's intent is set forth in the first paragraph of his treatise. He writes as one constructing a theological curriculum for an unlearned man named Theophilus. Matthew takes an overt approach of typology and fulfillment, composing his Gospel to inform specifically, (and among other things) Hebraically minded person of their Messiah who has come. Mark writes with little desire for the structural exactitude of the others. He does however have a common goal along with the others, to show that Jesus is the Son of God and is the Christ foretold by the prophets of old.

As it regards Jesus, no study of him can be performed apart from interaction with Gospel material. It alone describes His life, character and teachings. None other enters into the depths of his sufferings or death and resurrection as the Gospels do. Josephus mentions Jesus in a note, Pliny speaks of Christians in his district but little other citations are useful. Romans make use of utilizing Jews as a foil for their own mythologies. This is seen in the writers who viewed Judaism as a backwoods kind of religion when compared to the modern polytheistic religions of the Romans. Here the uniqueness of the Jews needs further clarification too. In the later days of the Hellenistic influences Jewish Rabbis were developing their own systems of thought which later were codified by Rabbi Judah the Prince toward the end of the third century AD.

It is with the codified material—called Mishna, by Jews—that we are to initiate contact if we desire an understanding of Judaism to some degree or another in the Second Temple Period. Interestingly enough modern scholars who promote various forms of syncretism among Jewish and Christian parties have blurred the doctrinal lines of thought. This is a topic for another paper but suffice it to say that when people refer to the Mishna, also called the “Traditions of the Elders” in the Gospels, they rarely refer to various Judaisms.

Mostly Judaism is recognized as a torah keeping community whose love for Adonai made it impossible for them to have been involved with the crucifixion of Jesus. At best, maybe the Romans did Jesus in but not the Jews, and to say there was Jewish involvement is to promote the kind of anti-Semitism which wreaked havoc on the Jewish community through

the ages: from Hitler backwards to the Spanish Inquisitions, to the Muslim conquests and destructions Jewish people have been ill treated for thousands of years.

But is there any significance to the question of Jewish confrontation with Jesus in the Gospel material? Is there a kind of aggression towards Jesus revealed in the narratives? At some point scholars must confront the idea that to lay all or most of the blame on Pilate and the Latin Establishment is a form of anti-Indo-Europeanism, in general, and anti-Romanism in particular. It is clear that Jesus and the various sects within Judaism had multiple engagements and problems. Situating Jesus in His own context alongside rabbis does create exciting allusions for discussion. Yes, in a few ways, he acts like a typical rabbinic leader of the day but in many ways he does not. He was not betrayed and crucified for his perceived resemblances to Jewish ritual leaders but for his radical differences.

This is why the rabbinic constructs are virtually impossible. Jesus was God in the flesh and the Son of Man as foretold by the Old Testament prophetic evangelists. Any attempt to detract or subtract from this uncanny God idea or to distract readers with too much “Jesus and Rabbinic thought” will ultimately lead to the downgrading of the meaning of the Cross as a corrective to Old Testament ritual, and to an exaltation of a religious system and tradition Jesus so evidently sought to sideline with His coming into this world in the fullness of time. As stated in the book of Hebrews, if the Old had been better (or of equal virtue) then there would have been no need for a New Covenant or Testament (Heb. 8:6-7). In our desire to do scholarly work we should not lose sight of what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John set out to do when they began to compose their stories of Jesus. Writing with the aid of their God they fully expected their documents to be treated with respect in Christian circles. This may not be the way of most in critical scholarship but then again, everyone has an axe to grind. If the early Apostles did then surely modern scholars do!

Bibliography of materials to read: still the best introduction in English to the Oral Law is *The Mishna* volume authored in 1933 by Herbert Danby. Of recent volumes, *Making God's Word Work: A Guide to the Mishna* by the prolific author Jacob Neusner is a good way to go. His examination of the material is unique and wholly form-critical. There is also a judicious and substantial treatment of the rabbinical theme in *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* by Brad Young; although his portrayal of Rabbi Jesus lacks the scriptural presentations of Jesus as Messiah or as God in the Flesh, thus countermanding THE main picture freely offered in the Holy Gospels.

The thesis that many Judaisms existed in Jesus day is well attested in the Gospels. Mentioned therein are Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Herodians, Scribes, Lawyers et cetera. The writers of the Gospels take full advantage of their reader's awareness of these sects. Now reading

these documents two thousand later we are tasked with reconstructing the ideas and feelings of these people. Two problems immediately face us. First of all, outside of the Gospels and Mishna there is just not much evidence to go on when speaking of various Jewish sectarians. This leaves us according to the Mishna the same regard as given to the Gospels.

Here is the issue: no good God fearing Jew is ever going to look upon the Gospels as anything other than spurious texts containing a tragic ending for a man who Jewish documents denounce as a heretic. Furthermore sermon after sermon in the book of Acts lays much blame at their Jewish feet (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:13-15; 4:26-29; 7:52; 10:39; 13:26-30; 28:19-28. These are the readings that are foundational to explaining why the Talmudists were opposed to Christianity. They could and did read the early Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek narratives and saw quite clearly how they were portrayed in the Gospels and their recorded *chiddushim, notations*, are proof of this. Secondly no sound-minded Christian who understands Jesus' Redemption can ever look upon the Mishna as an "inspired" document in the way he or she looks upon the Gospels. Therefore our picture of early Christianity is Gospel Focused because of the inherent nature of believing Jesus to be the Messiah of God.

So scholarly swords must cross eventually; however, this does not have to take place in an angry, ugly or evil manner. All acknowledge the 'multiple Judaisms' of Christ day but what must consume our interest in this paper is the fact that the Judaism describe in the Gospels is real, true and authentically portrayed. To say otherwise you must either say that people misinterpreted the written interactions between Jesus and these various sects or one must confess they believe the narratives to be wrong in more than one hundred and forty-five places where these confrontations happened.

For the sake of communion, financial support and one's confession to be Christian in the sense that Jesus' early followers were, most will embrace the first premise of 'the historic Church's misinterpretation of historic facts'. The latter premise—of saying the Gospels are erred documents—would lead to too many calls for resignation. So the current scholarly agnosticism has found a way to trip up the masses by inserting one, main new theory: *Western writers know so little about Hebrew and Rabbinic teachings and thus are wholly unreliable as teachers of dogma when describing matters connected to Jesus and Judaism.*

Would it not be more proper to actually look at the strata of literature in Gospels and make your own decision? Can it possibly be true that the Judaism of Jesus day was salvific to such degree, that two thousand years later conversion to Judaism could provide the same spiritual peace, joy

hope and victory the New Testament proclaims is found only in Jesus? The answer simply cannot result in the affirmative. Otherwise there is little reason for believers to announce the Good News of Jesus. In the final portions of the Gospels the followers of Jesus are never instructed to traverse the world and preach the Good News of Judaism, but to preach the Gospel of the resurrected Messiah.

Let us now look to the Gospels for some inside scoop on the ancient forms of Judaism Jesus encounters.³ All that anyone presently knows of the Sadducees they know from the Gospels. There are no modern Sadducees. No one is keeping to their theological beliefs. Since no temple is extant for Jewish usage their liturgical ritual ceased with the destruction of the Herod's Temple. This lack of modern witness may also be behind the desire to describe the Sadducees as allied to Rome, compromisers of Judaism's ritual, given to covetousness in extremes and, in lieu of the Pharisees, more likely than not, guilty of contributing to the death of Jesus.

Presently there are no credible human claims to Sadducean descendency so scholars are having their way with this theory. But is this a fair portrayal of them? For one thing, the Wohl Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem, Israel tells another story. There you have a high priest's residence remarkably preserved. The *mikvehs*, *ritual immersion pools*, tell a far different story to us of their passion for holiness than is commonly published in journals and monographs today. The Sadducees were oriented towards heavenly things and desired no change in the status quo. The Romans understood this and it bothered them immensely.

Listed below are citations of **Ancient forms of Judaism in the Gospels:**

Zealots	Herodians	Sadducees	Scribes	Phar.
Lk 6:15	Mat 22:16	Mat 3:7	Mat 2:4	Mt 3:7
Ac 1:13	Mk 3:6	Mat 16:1	Mat 5:20	Mt 5:20
	Mk 12:13	Mat 16:6	Mat 7:29	Mt 9:11
		Mat 16:11	Mat 8:1	Mt 9:14
		Mat 16:12	Mat 9:3	Mt 9:34
		Mat 22:23	Mat 12:	Mt 12:2
		Mat 22:34	Mat 13:52	12:14
		Mk 12:18	Mat 15:1	12:24
		Lk 20:27	Mat 16:21	12:38
		Ac 4:1	Mat 17:10	15:1

³ We note here that there were and are still a variety of schools of thought in Judaism. All of them connected to particular rabbinical figures held in high esteem. We have little information in the Gospels on the actual "leaders" of the movements Jesus encountered but the language recorded does provide helpful links for our understanding.

Ac 5:17	Mat 20:18	15:12
Ac 23:6-8	Mat 21:15	16:1
	Mat 23:2	16:6
	Mat 23:13	16:12
	Mat 23:14	19:3
	Mat 23:15	21:45
	Mat 23:34	22:15
	Mat 26:3	22:34
	Mat 26:57	22:41
	Mat 27:41	23:2
		23:13 ⁴
	Mat 27:41 ⁵	

There are 160 references in the Gospels to Jesus' contact with ancient forms of Judaism. Rarely are they observed in context. Yet for the most part they are altogether combustible situations. Except for several cases where the interplay seems congenial the above cross sections of texts often display the hostility and enmity so central to the story of Jesus.



Zealots are popularly known for the stance upon Mount Masada in the Judean wilderness. There they were surrounded by Roman forces only to later commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of their enemy. Excavators have found old scrolls of scripture quite similar to those found a short way away near the caves of Qumran. Their desire to throw off the bands and chains of foreign oppression may have been more widespread than commonly believed today. Their texts contain apocryphal and non-canonical texts and other additions to scripture not found in the traditional rabbinical canon.

Some have even tried to link the Apostle Paul to this group asserting that his predestinarian outlook was more Qumranian than like any other form of Judaism. Although it is plausible that he used language that was indigenous and vogue at the time it is doubtful that he has any identifiable linkage to any Essenic group. It should be remembered no one knows who wrote the Dead Seas Scrolls anyway, so all the reconstruction is hypothetical. It is best to stick with the texts as we have them. Novelties, like the language currency of the day, are useful insofar

⁴ Other references to scribes are as follows: Mat 23:26; Mat 27:62; Mk 2:16; 2:18; 2:24; 3:6; 7:1; 7:3; 7:5; 8:11; 8:15; 10:2; 12:13; Lu. 5:17; 5:21; 5:30; 5:33; 6:2; 6:7; 7:30; 7:39; 11:37-9; 11:42-44; 11:53; 12:1; 13:31; 14:1; 14:3; 15:2; 16:14; 17:20; 18:10-11; 19:39; Jo 1:24; 3:1; 4:1; 7:32; 7:45; 7:47-48; 8:3; 8:13; 9:13; 9:15-16; 9:40; 11:46-47; 11:57; 12:19; 12:42; 18:3; Ac 15:5; 23:6-8.

⁵ For other verses on "Pharisees" see Mk 1:22; 2:6; 2:16; 3:22; 7:1; 7:5; 8:31; 9:11; 9:14; 9:16; 10:33; 11:18; 11:27; 12:28; 12:32; 12:35; 12:38; 14:1; 14:43; 14:53; 15:1; 15:31; Lu. 5:21; 5:30; 6:7; 9:22; 11:44; 11:53; 15:2; 19:47; 20:1; 20:19; 20:39; 20:46; 22:2; 22:66; 23:10; Jo 8:3; Ac 4:5; Ac 6:12; Ac 23:9.

as one is able to establish all the contexts in which vocabulary is given. But we are certain that one member of the zealot movement forsook it in order to follow the messiah.



The Herodians favored the dynastic tradition of King Herod's family. Herod's genius in architecture was renowned and his building projects remain with us throughout the land of Israel. History affords us many contexts for the survival of movements somehow connected to the ruling establishment and the politics of it all make it all the more sensical. The rumors of Jesus as The King would have certainly made their way into the royal halls of Israel's leadership and there is no surprise that on occasion Herodians sought to ensnare Jesus in various word-traps. Blending one's religion with a political ideology is still popular among many groups. Many of these groups could be numbered but for our purposes we mention the many Jews who actively subscribed to the tenets of socialism years ago. Primarily this was for survival but for a few they honestly believed socialism to be a philosophy far superior to all other political strategies. The practice of the Herodians, though repulsive in our today, was an adhoc brand of Hellenism, Romanism blended with the tenets of Judaism. Herod achieved such synchronicity, so those too who supported his politics could they not reach this goal?

In our own day there are multiple groups who claim Christianity as their faith and for all intrinsic purposes are extremely free-thinkers in their outlook on life, particularly when supporting government intervention projects. Thus in Jesus day Herodianism was somewhat omnipresent. The idea that in Jesus day most or all Jews were observant Jews proves a failure to understand why Jesus came when He did come and is a demonstrative error of human thought. Most people today claiming to be adherents to any religion are far from being as observant as they should be. This is seen daily by the programs produced in media, books published, architecture on display and the (mis)handling of family matters. People tend to live far below or too far beyond their own religious texts. In Jesus day there were "holy" factions, and then too there were those whose claims to Judaism were not formed by God but by the polity of the day.



Josephus' remarks about the Sadducees are in dire need of correction and his statements should be read critically. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. He smeared them in a way that is less intriguing to us than the caricatures of the Scribes and Pharisees. Still, the Sadducees were a dominant class of "holy" people in the Gospel narratives and are to be

viewed as such. Their theology differed from others but they retained hold of the Temple for many years. Indeed people came from around the world to participate in the Jewish rites performed by the supposed Roman leaning clergy establishment. But what does that mean though?

Theologically the Sadducees differed from the Pharisees concerning the resurrection and with respect to the traditions of the elders. They, the Sadducees, did not believe in either of the two aforementioned “beliefs.” When the revolt against Rome occurred, the fact that the party of the Sadducees suffered so extensively, even to the point of utter decline after the destruction of the Temple, should have been evidence enough to illustrate their tendentious allegiance to Rome. However few took note of it, most overlooked it entirely. So we have continued to find in print a priestly society who was perceived to be anything but “religious”, just in it for the money per say.

If the Hellenists put the Sadducees in power, then early on they took on a radical theme of independence because Rome never could control them; even though Rome was in control of the High Priest’s garments, releasing them for use as Rome’s leaders desired. The name “Sadducee” means “Righteous ones” so it has always seemed strange to any philologist that a group mentioned in the Gospels as seeking to preserve the virtues of Judaism could come to be regarded as terminally non-kosher. The closest system of belief to them today is found within the Jewish sect called Karaites. They too have no use for rabbinic tradition, although their disuse of historic rabbinic tradition has led them to create their own rabbinic traditions.



As for the Scribes, the lists above ably contradict neutral theories posited in post-modern circles. As a class of people they seem to have developed during exilic times of immediately thereafter. The Old Testament presents scribes in a professional way. They labored in constructing tablet texts, scroll literature and in the mastery of the Law of Moses. The latter was exemplified by Ezra, the scribe. I Macc 7:11-17 speaks of a ‘synagogue of scribes’ who were the inspirational backbone of the Maccabean Revolt. Mainstream Jews did not/do not look upon the Apocrypha as anything other than a series of Greek documents. Now and then though, some historical material can be used to illuminate cultural riddles which plague us still.

The terms scribes and Pharisees are now looked upon dualistically. Very often they are written up as synonyms for one group. This may be an oversimplification of the subjects involved. The Gospel authors wrote and took the time on many occasions to distinguish each of the actors in

the pericopes. There appears to be no rhyme or reason for our propensity to lessen the effect of scribal antagonisms against Jesus. Nevertheless their engagements with Jesus always centered on the “Law of Moses”. Luke 5:17 evidences their presence in every village in Galilee, Judea and also Jerusalem. Some scribes were members of the sect of the Pharisees. Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30 and Acts 23:9 mention the ‘scribes of the Pharisees’.

The scribes were also members of the great council of Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34). This official Jewish institution crafted legal statutes, enforced Mosaic jurisprudence, and assembled for purposes still highly unknown and mysterious to us to this day. Whether or not it was the “Sanhedrin” council which met during the night of Jesus’ fateful judgment is doubtful yet possible. The medley of members among both Sanhedrin and Pharisees makes it highly suspect that, barring the discovery of ancient literary documents we will ever be able to untangle it all. There is a brief mention of Priestly or Sadducee scribes—*hierogrammateis*--in Josephus, *War* book 6. v. 3.

Thus far we have demonstrated that the scribes were connected to the whole of society on many levels. Scribes were also teachers and interpreters of the Law and should be thought of as real doctors of the legal codes of early Judaism. Their persistency in attempting to upstage Jesus led to fierce conversation in a number of situations, cf. Mk 12:38, Lu 20:45, (11:46); positive experiences are noted at Mat. 8:19/Lu. 9:57.



Of all the religious sects mentioned in the Gospels the place-listings of the Pharisees are by far the more numerous. The overwhelming material presented by the Evangelists is hard to undermine, and contemporary textualists are still attempting to do so daily. Since Pharisees are still with us and members of orthodox Jewish communities are proud to be related to early Jewish rabbinic ancestors the contests between Law-Grace admirers is all the more heated and inflamed. Modern Pharisees reconstruct Gospel narratives to posit more favorable views of their community, despite the overtly clear message of the Gospels. If you can find five passages favorable to Pharisees in the Gospel you can also find sixty others that are unfavorable.

The word “Pharisee” derives from the roots “<p-r-sh>”, which inform readers of a cutting or separation. In the case of the Pharisees their separation was on account of sanctification. Historically, Pharisees trace their traditions to the tents of Shem, Noah’s. Believing that since the earliest of times there have always been men who have studied “torah” without regard to other pains is in itself inspiring. It is further believed

that as Moses gave us the written Law, simultaneously a corpus of oral traditions was also given that we might know the way (halakha) we are able to maintain the strictures of the law.

Over time these oral concerns increased and multiplied. Centuries prior to Jesus' emergence, the Men of the Great Assembly in Israel sought ways to protect the each Jew from easy access to the breakage of God's commandments. Creating "fences" became the liturgical buzz word: a fence being other 'man derived commandments' given to keep Jews from transgressing God's precepts. Again, what is at stake is man's status and condition before God. By adhering to these new restrictions and then faithfully passing them down to succeeding generations the oral laws would come to rest aside the written law and be thought essential for the keeping of the whole of the Mosaic Law. In time the two—oral and written—came to be viewed as one piece.

So Josephus: "Of the two first-named schools, the Pharisees, who are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws, and hold the position of the leading sect, attribute everything to Fate and God; they hold that to act rightly or otherwise rests, indeed, for the most part with men, but that in each action Fate co-operates. Every soul, they maintain, is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment." "The Sadducees, the second of the orders, do away with Fate altogether, and remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight, of evil. They maintain that man has free choice of good or evil and that it rests with each man's will whether he follows the one or the other. As for the persistence of the soul after death, penalties in the underworld, and rewards, they will have none of them." (War II viii.4)

By Jesus day, the traditions of the elders were transmitted to disciples throughout the Land of Israel by hundreds of rabbis who practiced a trade along with their duties of instruction. With thousands of traditions extant, Jesus—as God and Man—was well equipped to match wits with all the varying formulators of ancient Judaism. Undoubtedly, the Gospels contain only a sprinkling of these traditions but what is recorded is useful for historical purposes. Two centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection a sampling of the many traditions were compiled by Judah, the Prince and this codex has become the standard text to this day even though there were many other codices compiled in ancient times.

As the standard-bearers of Rabbinic tradition, the methods of Jesus—healing, His interpretations of Hebrew scriptures, rearranging rabbinic sayings and special claims of Sonship and Deity—were intolerable. In spite of the fact that diversity among early Jews was real there in Israel no one should presuppose an easy going atmosphere without tensions. Check the list above for yourself. The objective of this paper is to point you in a scriptural direction and away from Reconstructionist theories,

however plausible they may seem. We must always return to the question, *what does the text say and illustrate?*

The Gospels do also mention Chief Priests and elders, the former were powerful persons in the Temple forum and rotated regularly, and the latter seem to have been comprised of lay persons with minute authority. There is very little clarity other than to parse the Greek and Hebrew words. On the Semitic side an elder could have been one older in years and deemed to be a type of sage. Every community needs wise men. They instill in the community of citizens virtue, a sense of history and *yiras shamayim, the fear of God*. What we read as varied styles of Judaism now may be inconsistent with how each of these communities viewed their relations to one another. Apart from the Dead Sea Scroll conundrum, ancient Jews saw themselves as one community not as multiple Judaisms.

In conclusion we are duty bound to admit our need to be honest and forthright with the truth as presented in scripture. It is not our moral imperative to reorganize the material in ways that seem right in our own eyes. Judaism today is many-sided and the beauties of each movement shine forth extravagantly. Among Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Chassidic Jewish communities one finds a rich tapestry of belief. Aside from Reform Judaism the others are easily perpetuating themselves as they pass on their traditions to inquiring minds. Yeshivas are full all across the world. Young and old fill their minds with Gemara, Rambam, Rashi and others. These torah focused people are diligent, disciplined and faithful to their respective traditions but they are all so different from the faith inaugurated by Jesus, the Messiah, and it is to Him and Him alone Christians should look for an understanding of their ever deepening faith in these very difficult times.

Nebraska

Darrell Sutton