

Antonio J Knox

Professor Jackie Armstrong

Synoptic Gospels Bi-103

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How the Fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah Effected the Development of Christianity

After the death of King Solomon of Israel, the twelve tribes divided into two kingdoms. Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon, became king of the southern kingdom of Judah, which consisted of the tribes of Benjamin and and much of the tribe of Levi, the tribe that served at the temple. Jeroboam, a former servant of King Solomon, became king of northern Israel, which was comprised of the remaining ten tribes.¹ Even though all of the tribes were descendants of Jacob (also called Israel)² and were known as Israelites under the single nation with this name, these people were now separated as two nations.

Ten years after the fall of the southern kingdom to Babylonia, Jerusalem was overtaken and the temple that King Solomon built was destroyed. After the desecration of the Temple and the evil rule of Antiochus, new freedoms were introduced by the Greeks. A Jewish Diaspora spread over the Greek and Roman worlds, where synagogues attracted many Gentile God-Fearers. It was hard to find any cities where Jews had not settled. This reality became the ground on which Christianity would flourish. Unlike Jews living in Jerusalem, Jews living in the Diaspora were often happy to accept a creed that enabled them to abandon circumcision, and many of the

¹ I Kings 11 and 12

² Genesis 32:28 35:10

Mosaic laws while retaining the essence of their faith. Judaism was transformed into a set of beliefs and practices quite different from Old Testament religion.

Jews began to congregate in local places of worship. They drew on biblical texts such as 1 Samuel 15:22 (“To obey is better than sacrifice”) and substituted prayers of repentance and good works as the means of atonement for sin. Because they sought to apply the Law to every area of life, a body of oral tradition, interpretation, and application began to develop around the written Law of Moses to explain how to implement its commandments into new times and places. Both the synagogue and the oral Law featured prominently in Jesus’ interaction with Judaism centuries later. The release from the strict constraints of the law and the increase of Greek believers opened the door way for Paul and others like him to spread the Gospel of Jesus to a people who were opening up to a new way of thinking concerning their beliefs.