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### **Summary of *Judaism: Practice and Beliefs***

‘Judaism’ was a way of life, according to E.P. Sanders in *Judaism: Practice and Beliefs*. The book pays close attention to the Judaism in the period beginning with the Roman conquest by Pompey in 63 BCE and ending with the outbreak of revolt against Rome in 66 CE. This paper will give a summary of the chapters of the book which focus on the context of Judaism, common Judaism, observance of the Law by common people, and discussions on Essenes and the Pharisees.

The first five chapters discuss the issues that generated parties, historical outline of the Roman period, the context of conflicts in Palestine, and common Judaism and the temple. To begin with, the Jews of Palestine in this period faced two questions: first, regarding foreign affairs, the question of how to relate to the great empires of the Mediterranean, and second, regarding internal affairs, the issue of who would control the national institutions such as the temple, the sacrifices, the tithes and offerings, and the administration of the law. For Jews, God had views on everything in every area of life, and there were frequent disagreements among the Jews regarding discerning God’s will.

The work of Josephus is the primary source for the study in this book although his work can be analyzed critically, as it frequently seems to be biased. This book also takes a different stance from other scholars who assume there is an actual correspondence between the first-century practice and what the Pharisees or rabbis thought. Sanders asserts that Rabbinic arguments are often only arguments, not laws. He emphasizes that rabbinic legal discussions are sometimes idealistic, not describing how they were done. Another distinctive feature of this book

is that it tries to describe common Judaism for ordinary priests and people. None of the parties had widespread influence on the populace to completely adopt their views.

Judaism as a religion is based on repeated cycles: daily, weekly, seasonal and annual observances. As we investigate the repeated religious cycles, we should also consider the circumstances of the period because the religious behavior of the Jews was closely related to the political and social environment. Also, it was a time where many opinions about religion and politics intertwined. To begin with, shortly before 175 BCE there was a split between Zadokite high priest and his brother. The latter favored Hellenization and some Jews actively promoted it, asking Antiochus IV “to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles.” The conflict between the Hellenizers and those who kept their Jewish identity resulted in contention and even bloodshed. Hasmonean revolt broke out by Mattathias who was a priest, but not of Zadokite, against the defilement of Jewish sacrifice by pagan sacrifice in 167 BCE. Hasideans, the pious mighty warriors of Israel, joined the band. The Hasmoneans successfully took over Jerusalem but neither full independence nor ending of internal strife was achieved. After Antiochus IV and Lysias, Demetrius established himself as king and appointed as high priest Alcimus of the high priestly family, but a Hellenizer. There were many different opinions throughout the turmoil. Unlike modern Western democracy where all the voters are deemed to take the side of a certain party, ancient world saw only small number of people belonged to certain parties with specific practices, beliefs and separate constitution, and the majority remained outside any party with their only membership in the people of Israel. Yet, they had to choose one side or the other regarding the principal questions concerning Hellenization, the law, the high priesthood and military control. Upon gaining complete independence from the Gentiles by Simon in 142 BCE, those issues became settled. Hellenistic culture continued and Simon and his descendants were in

effect kings as well as high priests. During the period of such turmoil, the loyalty to the Zadokite resulted in a new temple in Egypt established by a Zadokite priest and the Dead Sea sect, a branch of the Essene party. The etymology of Sadducee points to Zadokite priesthood, too. In this hypothesis, Zadokite priests who remained in Jerusalem and compromised with the Hasmoneans formed the Sadducees. Pharisees are said to originate from the Hasideans, both of whom interpreted the law more strictly than most Judaens and were somewhat content with the Hasmoneans. All three parties gained full identities at about the same time. The Hasmoneans did not particularly belong to any parties and most people of both priests and laymen without party generally supported the Hasmoneans and considered themselves loyal to God, the Bible and the Israel. To summarize the religio-political sentiment of the Jews, many resented the foreign rule. However, according to Josephus, the majority were prepared to be obedient to Rome if Jewish sensibilities and institutions were to be respected. The Jews protested when outside events affected worship too strongly. Zeal for God's law and worship was one of the principal motives of the actions of the Jews, and belief in an afterlife encouraged them to follow the law even if it meant death.

Common Judaism was distinctive in several ways when compared to Greco-Roman religions. First, in Judaism, there should be only one temple and one place of sacrifice. Second, Jewish sacrificial worship was more expensive than other religions due to the support for the hereditary priesthood by farmers and the use of holocausts. Moreover, Judaism was unique in that it attempted to bring the entirety of life, including ethical behavior, under divine law. Sanders examines the magnificent appearance of the temple based on the various sources, comparing it to other historically well-known architectural works, such as the hypostyle hall in the temple at Karnak, the Parthenon, or Salisbury Cathedral. The temple was built in such a way

that it embodied the sanctity and the presence of God. This was directly connected to the purity law. When building the temple, Herod trained the priests to do the works of masons so that they could build the inner courts, while he hired the Gentile masons to build his palaces at Jericho. Evidence such as this raises questions regarding the degrees to which the Gentiles were treated as impure by the Jews. After exploring mixed evidence concerning this issue, Sanders concludes that, regarding Gentiles, what is certain is that Gentiles were not allowed past the balustrade in the temple area. It could be partly due to idolatry as some suggest, however, it seems Gentiles entering the temple was treated as creating an impurity.

Chapter 8 examines the daily life and annual festivals observed by the common people. The occupations of Palestinian Jews were about the same as those in other Mediterranean countries. Most people made their living by agriculture. Sanders comments that Aristeas, Philo and Josephus exaggerated on the prosperity of Palestine when they remarked on the fertility of the agricultural land since poverty was prevalent and assumed in Palestine. On the topic of clothing, Palestinians wore tunic and men had their beard trimmed regularly just as other people in the Greek-speaking world.

Passover and Unleavened Bread were celebrated for eight days starting on the 14<sup>th</sup> day in the month of Nisan. In the festal period, Jews, whether in Jerusalem or not, gathered in companies and participated in the Passover sacrifice. Passover sometimes offered occasions for riots since the festival embodied the theme of national liberation. Both Feast of Weeks and Feast of Booths were agricultural festivals, marking the season's first fruits and the conclusion of the season of harvest, respectively. Both drew multitude of people and at times provided occasions for riots just as Passover. In counterpoint to the three great feasts was the fast of the Day of Atonement in the autumn, five days before Booths. It was a day of solemn rest and affliction to

the participants. It was not a day for crowds to gather and an occasion for a riot, but it was a day for communal worship. The distinctive sacrifices of the day were a bull and two goats. The goat designated to be called 'for Azazel', the scapegoat, was led out into the wilderness, bearing sins of Israel.

Generally, religion and patriotism were intertwined among the Jews and the threat to the sanctity of the temple ignited the Jewish passion. In addition, the strict adherence to their ancestral faith by the Jews led to criticism of others in various ways as will be discussed below.

Chapter 11 through 14 discuss observing the law of God, including worship, sabbath, circumcision, purity, food, charity and love, common theology and hopes for the future.

In the ancient world, any pagan worship normally consisted of temples, purifications, sacrifices and festivals, just as Judaism did. Yet, Judaism's distinct point was the extension of divine law to all the areas of life as mentioned earlier. Unlike Greco-Roman paganism, the Jewish law was internalized and individualized to certain degree. The law was divided into two categories: (1) the laws governing human relations with God and (2) the laws governing relationships among humans. However, the law was not divided into 'ritual' and 'ethical', the misleading categories into which modern scholars try to divide the law. For the first century Jews, loyalty to God required obedience of all the commandments equally.

In order to worship, Jews privately repeated Shema' at set times and prayed on a regular basis. They publicly met at certain times on the sabbath. The term 'house of prayer' for synagogues, especially used in the Diasporas, indicates that the Jews prayed during sabbath assembly, in addition to studying the law.

Many non-Jewish people regarded the observance of the sabbath as the most unusual aspect of standard Jewish practice. The strict adherence to the sabbath rest by the Jews was

frequently ridiculed, criticized and even taken advantage of by their neighbors. For example, in Ionia, some Jews were taken to court on the sabbath with their hands tied since they refused to appear in court on the sabbath. Keeping the law in Diaspora was apparently difficult. However, it was still possible because, in gratitude for Jewish support during the Roman civil wars, Julius Caesar granted special privileges to Jews, such as the right to assemble to worship, the right to keep the sabbath, the right to have their 'ancestral food', the right to decide their own affairs, and the right to contribute money, among many other rights to follow their own customs. Thus, Jewish way of life could be maintained even in Diaspora as well as in Palestine.

The laws concerning circumcision, purity and food were generally kept by ordinary Jewish people in both Palestine and Diaspora. However, disagreements on interpretations and practices by different groups of people arose regarding these laws. For example, although there was an overall unity among the people to use immersion pools built in bedrocks for maintaining purity, there was also a division of opinions whether to have one immersion pool or to add another smaller pool nearby based on the different views of valid water for the purpose of keeping the purity law.

In the discussion of the laws concerning charity and love, it is emphasized that the commandment to love the neighbor and the stranger in Leviticus is quite specific to be expressed in concrete and achievable actions. For example, one could love the neighbor by obeying the commandment to leave a sheaf behind for the poor. For the Jews in the first century, keeping the law was loving the neighbor or the stranger, which also created the feeling of love. The commandment for fair treatments toward others included Gentiles and enemies. Accusations made by pagans against the Jews of being misanthropic were mainly based on the Jews' lack of participation in sharing pagan culture. Yet, it should be noted that the love toward humanity

regardless of ethnicity or religion was commanded by divine law and was explicitly taught to the ordinary Jews who took the law very seriously. Indeed, the zeal for God and his law was frequently shown through their willingness even to die to protect and obey God's law.

What lay behind the Jewish adherence to the law was their theology examined in the chapter 13. The most significant theological point made through Shema' and the first two of the Ten Commandments is that Israel should only worship the one true God. Over the course of time, Judaism progressed from henotheism and monolatry to monotheism, and in the first century, the Jewish sensitivity to Shema' was high. However, the Jews tolerated temples built for other gods based on their interpretation on Exodus 22:28 which prohibits reviling the gods. Moreover, what the portraits of the Sun, zodiac sign, giant vines or birds depicted on the tiles of a synagogue in this period indicate is that the meaning of monotheism was flexible, and Jews were by no means completely cut off from the influence of the pagan religious world.

In the common Jewish view, God graciously chose Israel and gave them his law and they were to obey it to stay as God's people. Sanders calls this 'covenantal nomism' which can be summarized as follows: as a response to God's election, the Jews obeyed the law, they believed that transgression was punished, and obedience was rewarded; however, God's grace modified punishment since God wished not to destroy, and God displayed mercy to lead the transgressors to repentance. They also believed faithful people could be atoned by being punished. In short, covenantal nomism indicates that they believed the obedience and atonement kept them in the covenant of grace which was initiated by God.

When discussing Jewish hopes for the future, it should be noted that Judaism was not primarily a religion of individual salvation. That God's covenant was with Jewish people and that the nation should be preserved were the main concerns. However, this gradually changed.

Hope for the national freedom was expressed through revolts. The Jews risked their lives in their protest, believing that God would intervene and bring their freedom. When that did not happen, they had the second hope of personal life after death. Thus, the Jewish hope for the nation's freedom inevitably led to the hope for individual life after death. Overall, it can be concluded that the widespread Jewish hope for their better future included the restoration of the people, the building or purification of the temple and Jerusalem, the defeat or conversion of the Gentiles, and the establishment of purity and righteousness.

Now the focus is shifted to the specific groups of Judaism in the next chapters: the Essenes and the Pharisees. Due to the discovery of manuscripts and a settlement near the Dead Sea, we can now have more accurate view of the Essenes which was once mainly speculated. Around 152 BCE a pietist group was joined by a Zadokite priest, 'the Teacher of Righteousness.' It came to be composed of at least two branches, one a monastic sect called the Qumranians, fully isolated itself near the Dead Sea, and another a married and town-dwelling group. According to Philo, the Qumranians were pacifists and did not fight until the settlement was attacked while the town-dwelling branch fought alongside other Jews in the revolt against the Romans. The Essenes lived a life of voluntary poverty, growing just the enough food to sustain life. They participated in community of goods and charity. They were dedicated to living under a strict regimen and hierarchy, without much of personal freedom. However, they practiced democracy in making big decisions, such as entrance to the membership, changes of the rules, expulsions, and food limitations. The Qumran sectarians' separatism and exclusivism were expressed in their practice of not buying or eating other people's food, not associating with others to maintain their purity, and not sharing in temple worship. Such practice reveals their radical sectarian theology that their community functioned as true temple. Under such belief,

while there was a clear distinction between priests and lay people, higher purity law was applied to both classes alike. The idea of community as temple meant atonement without sacrifice. They believed prayer and obedience to the law were enough for atonement while repentance was considered not. In addition, they had no problem believing both predestination and freewill without conflict. They believed in God's gracious initiative in choosing them among the Jews and their subsequent responsibility for responding in obedience. To conclude, through the scrolls written by the sectarians themselves, we know that they were more fervent and extreme in obeying the law than the rest of the Jews. They recognized their worthlessness and their needs of God's grace. At the same time, they aspired to live in a blameless and perfect way according to the law.

Sanders argues that there have been two competing apologetic positions regarding Pharisees which led to misunderstanding of Pharisees among many Christian scholars. These apologetic positions are: (1) that the Pharisees were legalistic and had controlling influence and (2) that the Pharisees were the advocates of love and mercy and had controlling influence. Sanders argues both positions are not entirely correct as they were influenced by the need to explain Christianity's break with Judaism. Jewish scholars have generally seen Christianity's break with Judaism as being based on the doctrine that Jesus was divine. However, when many Christians began to lose confidence in the creeds and defined Christianity by religious and ethical virtues in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they needed Jewish religion to be the opposite of Christianity in that respect. Therefore, Christian scholars concluded that the Pharisees opposed love and mercy and they were legalistic. In response, Jewish heirs of the Pharisees argued that the Pharisaism was full of love, mercy and grace. Moreover, these two competing positions led to the assumption that the Pharisees were the new ruling class of the Palestinian society. Sanders

asserts that Pharisees did hold positions of power for some time until the end of the reign of Salome Alexandra. However, after the time of Salome Alexandra, Pharisees did not have so much power as to have influence over the populace to follow their ways all the time. Sanders concludes that the Pharisees mostly shared the common Judaism. They shared the zeal for the law and obedience in everyday life. Their theology can be described as covenantal nomism which was common to virtually all Jews as mentioned previously and is presupposed in the earliest rabbinic material. They accepted both election by grace and obedience by freewill just like the Essenes did. They indeed had traditions that cut them off from the rest of the Jews, which mainly included rules regarding tithes and purity, and they were scrupulous and strict in keeping the rules accurately. Yet, contrary to the popular notion, their rules, on the other hand, also reveal that they did not despise the common people nor disassociate with them because of their adherence to their traditions.

In conclusion, Sanders mainly discusses the common Judaism by exploring its practices and daily lives of the ordinary Jewish people. He also examines several parties of the Judaism, including the Essenes and the Pharisees. He demonstrates throughout the book how the traditional protestant assumptions have affected the general view of Judaism and distorted the image of Judaism to be negatively associated with legalism, hypocrisy, works righteousness, and salvation through merit. Against the widely held stereotype of the Pharisees as hypocrites, Sanders asserts through the rabbinic literatures and Mishnah that the motive of the Pharisees to obey the law flowed out of their inner piety, devotion and closeness to God. Through reading this book, I have come to re-examine my own view of Judaism and the Pharisees. This book reminds me to have a correct view of Judaism which leads to a better understanding of the New Testament as a whole, not to mention where Paul distinguishes Christianity from Judaism.