

David Cheong

Judaism: Practice and Belief

In E.P Sanders book, "Judaism: Practice and Belief", he shows the first job is to understand the context on how different persons and groups came to "different views about how best to be Jewish" (3). In Palestine, that entailed private behaviour to Jewish state, and in the Diaspora, it included individual and group behaviour. At times blood was shed or there was peace as first-century Jews made an endeavor to be proper Jews and live as God desired. More than the right way of thinking, Judaism was preached to be a way of life. This book covers two things: the agreements and disagreements concerning Jewish practice and the beliefs underlying every practice. Two questions dominated the Jews of Palestine covered in this book: when to fight, yield and when to be content or seek more. And regarding internal issues, the main problem was who could control the national institutions of temple, sacrifices, tithes, other offerings, and administration of the law (5).

Josephus "moved to Rome under the patronage of Vespasian and his son Titus, members of the Flavian family, and took the name Flavius" (7). Josephus was a Jewish author which is the main source for the history of period and social, political, and religious issues. Josephus contributed greatly as a historian despite his many weaknesses and biases. And in addition to Josephus' works, the works of Philo, *The Special Laws*, are also very important. Apocalypticism is not highly explored in this book due to the author not considering it "an ideology that competed with other ideologies" and what seems that Jews did not spend "much *time* contemplating the other world" (11,13).

The Judaism from Josephus from the 50s and 60s in the common era had three main parties: Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes. The Hasmonean revolt against the Seleucid kingdom and period of Hasmonean rule made three things happen: Israel re-established its religious and political autonomy, respectively, merging into Hellenistic culture was rejected, and the Zadokite priesthood that was an old leadership style of Israel was replaced by the Hasmonean family (21). Some key questions as the Hasmonean revolt occurred were regarding Hellenization, the law, the high priesthood, and military control. “Some members of the former high priestly family, the Zadokites, became Sadducees” (42). The Pharisees stood lower than the Sadducees on a socio-economic scale and included Hasmonean supporters, Hasideans “who were disenchanted with their military success and ‘usurpation’ of the high priesthood” (42). The Essenes were made of a mix of Zadokite radicals that did not budge one bit with the Hasmoneans and pietists who had different views from other pietists on many topics like the Pharisees.

There were another group of people or ‘most people’ where it was comprised of both priests’ and laity. They did not affiliate themselves of any party, but they did generally support the Hasmonean family, considered themselves committed to God, the Bible, and Israel. The Hasmoneans also were also not part of any of the named parties, and during Pompey’s (63 BCE), there were nameless pietists who saw the Hasmoneans as evil. But they were neither Pharisees nor Essenes.

Regarding the historical outline of the Roman period, the time of the Hasmoneans to Herod are highlighted. Starting from the internal conflicts of Alexander Jannaeus and Salome Alexandra’s two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (raising armies and going against another) were “temporarily settled by Pompey, who took Jerusalem on behalf of Rome (63 BCE)” (48). Pompey downsized Jewish territory and giving some to Roman rule while also reestablishing

Hyrchanus II as high priest and also giving him title of 'ethnarch', 'ruler of the people.' Antipater, an Idumaeen became the dominant political force until the revolt 129 years happened later on. Civil war occurred between Roman general leaders- Pompey and Julius Caesar. During this time, Antipater wisely supported Caesar.

During this period, the Hasmoneans were also not a force to be neglected. Going further, Herod was able to become king of the Jews, but even while being successful in his reign, "Herod feared for his own security" (49). Augustus at the end of Herod's reign finally split the kingdom into three parts allotting it to King Herod's "three surviving sons" as Herod's insecurities caused him to execute many of his previous sons. Archelaus received Judaea (including Jerusalem), Samaria and Idumaea, and title of ethnarch which was the biggest share of three sons. Antipas got Galilee and Peraea (east of the Jordan), and Philip had several territories north and east of the Sea of Galilee (50). Antipas and Philip were both given the title tetrarch, 'ruler of a fourth'. Archelaus did not succeed as an ethnarch where Antipas did a lot better than him. Antipas ruled for forty-three years until his second wife, Herodias, convinced him to seek the title of kingship. The fruit of this seeking was exile and being deposed. His territory ended up being given to Agrippa I, one of Herod's grandsons. Agrippa's reign was short but he was trusted with Judaea. Agrippa II, his son, "was too young to be given authority" at the time, "so Rome again sent officials to govern Judaea directly" (51). When the revolt began in 66 CE, most of Palestine was still under Roman jurisdiction. Agrippa was "the last notable Herodian" dying around 100 and siding with Rome and being able to maintain some land after the Roman victory (52).

The context of conflict involved revolts and riots that were considered normal in Palestine in both the Roman period and a good portion of the Hasmonean period. Every time a chance was given, an uprising seemed to also occur. This seems to be the standard perspective at

the very least. But emphasizing other sides of the argument, there were times of strong and sturdy governments marked by peace (53). During Antipas' reign as tetrarch of Galilee, no revolts seemed to have occurred and only one war that consisted of only one engagement in his 43 years. Enlarging territory or supporting allies were the only reasons, Herod engaged in war even though he had many fears of it.

Depending on which standard is used (focusing only on stable western democracies vs standard of the twentieth century), Palestine was not violent even though Josephus' descriptions say otherwise. Despite evidence working against the Jewish Palestine gradually climaxing to war, modern scholars accept Josephus' theory that violence increased as the great revolt of 66 drew closer motivated by poor Roman government and Jewish 'brigandage'. It is hard to calculate if insurrection happenings were always there though. The rebels desires changed from each person, groups, and times. Going deeper, people who wanted change disagreed greatly on how to achieve it. Some were very calm, some collaborated with systems in place, and some believed God would intervene, "take a direct hand, and that they did not need to resort to arms" (55). Regardless, physical protection was comprised for those taking a non-physical path leading to execution by sword at times.

Inside of Palestine, what priests and people came to agreement was considered 'normal' or 'common' Judaism. Greek-speaking Diaspora took part in 'normal' and 'common' Judaism but only being able to partake in temple worship was restricted even though it was an important part of Judaism. Where sacrifice may be considered cultish in today's society, sacrifice was the crux of religion in the ancient world. Judaism differed to Greek and Roman ways of sacrifice in two ways. The first being Judaism required sacrifice to happen in only one temple and place

while Greeks and Romans had multitudes of temples and sacrifices even acceptable in places of no temple. Second, Judaism's sacrifices were definitely more costly.

The main difference between Judaism and its counterparts was that Judaism was governed entirely or influenced completely by its divine law while Greeks and Romans were able to govern some parts of their lives to their own discretion to little to great measures. The temple also was beautiful in appearance and great in strength. It was a last resort for place of refuge in times of war. Pompey was successfully able to attack Jewish temples in his day "because he used sabbaths to bring his catapults and battering rams up to the wall" (81). The temple was highly regarded because God was literally present there. Temples were to be well protected, and one must approach God's temple with "great sanctity" (109). This meant that Gentiles were only able to enter the outer court and not any further. This was not always the case as is evident in Numbers that Gentiles were allowed to bring sacrifices as the Israelites did.

So, who were the ordinary people, and how did their daily lives and annual festivals with the temple look like? Palestine Jews generally had the same types of jobs as those in Mediterranean countries. The Mishnah meticulously explained the thirty-nine main types of work where the first seven dealt with outside agricultural work, next four dealing with preparing food inside (everything from grinding to baking), next thirteen having to do with textiles, next seven with hunting, killing, and butchering, two with writing, three with construction, two with fires, and general description of: carrying. What the Mishnaic rabbis knew of their work before the annihilation of the temple was similar socially and economically.

It is observed in the first century, that Jerusalem was a golden location for holding huge amounts of people. This is evident in the way Herod utilized the temple court, its porticoes, and its streets to accommodate for big crowds. Regarding population and peoples' sacrifices, Josephus

estimated about quarter of a million Passover lambs being slain, with about ten people sharing a lamb, and thus giving a good guess that about 2.7 million people were present at Passovers in peak seasons. Josephus even estimated crowds in 65 CE to be around 3 million, and offerings were stored in “two most easily defensible cities and taken to Jerusalem in convoy by ‘many tens of thousands of Jews’ to protect them against Parthian raids” (209).

Two distinctions help comprehend “the law as a whole” (314). First, the law governs relationships between people and God or between people and other people. Second, the law shows that breaking the law is either involuntary or intentional (314). What can arguably be the most important fundamental after the Ten Commandments is the Shema. Which was the biblical passage from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 that says, “Hear [sh’ma’], O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” God commands his people to have his commandments upon their hearts, taught to their children, spoken at home and everywhere they go, and remember it before sleeping and be the first thing remembered and thought of upon waking up. The Jews are to go so far to place God’s Words bounded upon their hands, placed ‘as frontlets’ between their eyes, and put on the doorposts of their houses and gates (321). The reason is so that God’s commandments may not be forgotten but remembered. The Jewish Sabbath (seventh day of the week) began at sundown and not sunrise too. Sabbath was observed because it was one of the Ten Commandments. Depending on if one refers to Exodus or Deuteronomy, the why behind observing Sabbath is either because God rested on the seventh day or because of the exodus from Egypt, respectively.

Even though the Jews “were not the only circumcised males in the Mediterranean world”, both locals and outsiders regarded circumcision that was “distinctively Jewish” (349). Regarding purity, a lot of practices were not condoned in itself, but when a Jew entered the temple, getting

in contact with semen, burying the dead, and having a child or menstruating was considered impure. What later on became known as 'kosher' was what was called 'kashrut' a bit before. It is because the Bible made two huge restrictions: Jews were only allowed to eat a few living creatures, and it forbade them to eat main fatty parts of an animal and its blood" (351).

Regarding corpse impurity, many people saw it as "a positive good" (357). Philo even thought after people mourn for their dead, going home and splashing themselves with water made them 'really pure' (358). Childbirth, depending on the gender of the child, had two ways of making oneself clean. One week was for a boy, and two weeks were observed if a girl. And after these cleansing stages, a presentation of offerings of "either a lamb as a burnt offering and a bird (pigeon or dove) as a sin offering, or two birds if she could not afford a lamb" was done to conclude the cleansing periods (359). Menstruation required seven days of impurity for woman, and then a woman bathed afterwards. Anything a woman touched even if it was her bed was considered impure during this time of cleansing. "Irregular discharges from the genital areas also created impurity" (360). Carcasses and dead swarming things made a person and even moist food, liquids, vessels, and ovens impure (360-361). Water was a pivotal part in cleansing processes where bathing or washing of clothes and object were required. And at times both water and bathing were necessary.

Also, the basic theology of the Jews was that "God was the only true God", he chose them "and had given them his law, and "that they were required to obey it" (397). These foundational beliefs are found in all sources and are the foundation that gave Israel survival, confidence, and rebuilding abilities. The fact that God was the only true God of the universe and had given them his law to fully obey made the Jews confident they were his people "to do his will" (397). And that no matter what happened, God will always "save and protect them" (397).

The most important teaching of the Shema' and the Ten Commandments is that Israel must worship "only the one true God" (398). The original intent was not "a denial that there were other gods", but later on, "Jews had come to the view that the other gods were not real gods" (398). Thus, moving from henotheism (that God is God number one) and monolatry (worshipping God alone) to monotheism (God is the only real God and him alone must be worshipped).

Freedom was greatly longed for in most Jews in Palestine during the Roman period (457). Judaism not only dealt with individual salvation, and more than that, it had an inherent concern "that God should maintain his covenant with the Jewish *people* and that the *nation* be preserved" (457). Hoping for the future resulted in negative expressions like complaints, protest, and insurrections. But some positive hopes were that the Jews looked forward to the restoration of the twelve tribes, the subjugating or conversion of Gentiles, new, purified, or renewed and glorious temple, and purity and righteousness in both worship and morals (473). These hopes stemmed back to the biblical prophets. Though Jews saw the future in unclear terms, they still did expect death not to be the end of everything. The Greek thought and Hellenistic culture definitely influence Jews.

The Essenes at one point became the most popular Jewish group, and because of manuscripts and a settlement found near the Dead Sea, a deep speculation was possible. Even though nothing is none of the Essene party's historical developments and their relationship with other Jews, there are still noteworthy evidence regarding these matters. Archaeological evidence of the settlement in Qumran and evidence of coins, show that a small group of people did live that site until the death of John Hyrcanus (104 BCE) from 150 or 140 BCE. The community was multiplied in two stages, but an earthquake destroyed them later on. But after some decades, they

rebuilt themselves and continued to survive until the Romans destroyed them again in 68 CE. Herod greatly liked the Essenes, and Josephus refers to Essenes in his literature when an individual by the name of Judas the Essene was “said to have predicted the assassination of Antigonus I by his brother Aristobulus I in 104 BCE” (543).

The Essenes were a lot more strict than other Jews in not working on the seventh day. They would not light fire, remove a vessel ‘or even go to stool’ (577). Business was prohibited, limited distances of 1,000 cubits or about 500 meters or yards was enforced. Other restrictions included: not picking up food fallen in the fields, drawing water into a vessel to drink, carrying anything into or outside of the house, opening sealed vessels, assisting animals to give birth, lifting newborn animals out of pits, cleaning one’s house, carrying children, or wearing medicaments even including perfumes (578). Josephus did not mention Essenes’ eschatological hopes, but they did from Josephus’ perspective believe in the forever living of the soul.

The Pharisees and Sanhedrin were known to read many scholarly accounts of Judaism. They seem have been mostly made of laymen. The events of the golden eagle, uprising of Judas the Galilean, and revolt were “especially noteworthy examples of dying for God, for the law, or for the participants’ own cause (these being indistinguishable to most Jews)” (640). Three sources have been used by scholars to depict Pharisaic practice and belief: Josephus’ summaries, New Testament and synoptic gospels especially, and rabbinic literature.