

Judaism (Practice and Belief - E.P. Sanders) Review of Chapters 1-5

Judaism is the world's oldest monotheistic religion with a rich law, culture, and traditional heritage. In light of the recent debates on who the real Jews are, this study has highlighted the areas one must consider when seeking to understand their beliefs and history. Hence the history of Judaism is essential to the Jewish faith. E.P. Sanders has brought us a fascinating study that deals with Judaism as a functioning religion in the early Roman period. Chapters one thru five, for example, explore the issues that generated parties, a historical outline of the Roman period, the context of conflict, and common Judaism and the temple. According to Sanders, Judaism is a period that was dynamic and diverse. Therefore, he has delivered a study, although lengthy, is worth reading.

Sander's first task was understanding the context in which various individuals and groups came to different views about how best to be Jewish (Sanders, 3). The Jews, as God's chosen people, lived according to God's will and often got along with each other. Sanders' study of this period in Palestine brought the daily living of the Jewish people to light. Thus, the period begins with the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman general Pompey (63 BCE) and ends with the outbreak of the revolt against Rome (66 CE). The foreign and domestic relations dealt with when to fight, yield, and be content with partial independence (Sanders, 5). The ones that controlled the foreign policy handled the domestic policy as well. Furthermore, the idea was that church, state, religion, and politics were not separate in the eyes of the Jews but considered to be one. God was the one that cared and provided for them in all aspects of their lives. However, there were times, according to Sanders, some Jews didn't see eye to eye but were still tolerant of those who cared more about the government and its relations than the will of God. After some time,

this brought contention among the Jews during the period of the Roman's conquest of Jerusalem. Hence the history of the Jews became tense, leading to three major religions: Rabbinic, Judaism, and Christianity (Sanders, 6).

The well-known Jewish author Josephus is the primary source for the history of the Roman conquest, as for social, political, and religious issues. He was a member of the Jewish priestly aristocracy who lived from about 37 to 100 CE. He studied the various parties within Judaism and decided to follow the views of the Pharisees (Sanders, 6). Due to Josephus's work, we have the rich history we have today. According to Sanders, when war broke out between the Jews and Rome in 66, he was assigned military responsibility for part of Galilee. However, Josephus became a captive after his plan with others to form a suicide pact failed. He surrendered to Vespasian, a Roman general who he predicted would become emperor. Once Vespasian came to power in 69, he freed Josephus and served under him and his son Titus for some time(Sanders, 7). In addition, Josephus took the name of the Vespasian family and became a historian, where he produced his first work, the Jewish War. Sanders states, "History was written with a purpose, and Josephus's purposes are often clear." His sources today allowed us access to the Bible and the Maccabees. He also wrote about the parties in the New Testament we know today as the Sadducees, the Pharisees. In addition to the parties above, he also wrote about the Essenes, which are not mentioned in the New Testament because they had their view, which kept them separate from the other Jews. According to Sanders, there were only a few Sadducees, but there were over 4,000 Essenes and 6,000 Pharisees during the time of Herod. Many of these parties originated during the biblical period and exile. The Jews were prohibited from practicing Judaism, and their temple was desecrated to impose Greek culture and customs; these parties played an important role. The Sadducees supported the Hasmoneans; the Pharisees more or less

were content with the Hasmoneans, and the Essenes, including some Zadokites, who fought against the Hasmoneans. Josephus recorded the events in the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Rabbinic Literature. During the successful Maccabean revolt, three things happened: Israel re-established religious and political autonomy, Jewish life would be lived according to the law of Moses, which separated Jews from Gentiles, and the old leadership of Israel, Zadokite priesthood was restored (Sanders, 21). However, before 175 BCE, there was a split in the Jewish aristocracy between the Zadokite high priest and his brother, who later adopted the Hellenization, the Greek way of life, and found an ally in Antiochus IV. This divide led to a conflict between the Hellenizers and the Jews, who wanted to keep their identity as pure Jews. As a result, the war led to bloodshed due to Antiochus IV forbidding certain Jewish practices. He also built shrines for idols to sacrifice swine and unclean animals and banned the ceremonial practice of circumcision. As a result, Mattathias, a priest who escaped pagan rituals due to his zeal for the law, rose in revolt against such practices.

Shortly after, the Hasmoneans joined Mattathias to resist Hellenization and restored religious practices according to the law. After the insurrection, Mattathias died, and his son Judah Maccabee assumed leadership. (Sanders, 26). Under his supervision, the Jews carried out military operations against the Syrians, which were successfully met (Sanders, 26). In addition, Judah Maccabee regained Jerusalem, where he purged and rededicated the temple. As a result, the Hasmonean family, which included Pharisees, Usurped the high priesthood and occupied the office of the high priest. However, the Essenes, a combination of the Old Priesthood (Zadokite), did not compromise with the Hasmoneans but remained separate, living in the Judaeen desert.

Moreover, Sanders, in chapter three, gave a historical outline of the Roman period from Hasmoneans to Herod. The priest's office was vital during the period Salome Alexandra assumed the office and title as queen of Judea from 76-67 BCE after the death of her husband, Alexander Jannaeus (Sanders, 46). This was the only time a woman inherited the throne from her deceased husband. As queen, she appointed the Pharisees party instead of the Sadducees ruling during her husband's reign. However, the queen died, and the oldest of her two sons, Aristobulus II, fought against his brother in rebellion against his mother's choosing of his younger brother Hyrcanus II and took the throne and the priesthood. Due to the civil rivalry between the two brothers, the period ushered in the arrival of Roman rule in Palestine, thus ending the independence of the Jewish people. The conquest of Judaea by Pompey, also known as Pompey the Great, became a commander and political figure during the late Roman Republic. According to Sanders, Pompey, during his reign, reduced the Jewish territory and reinstated Hyrcanus II as the high priest and governor of the people. However, the priesthood office continues to experience issues due to the ongoing rivalry between the two brothers. When the civil war broke out between Pompey and Julius Caesar, Hyrcanus remained the high priest and governor of the people. After Hyrcanus, the rise of Antigonus became king and high priest. However, Parthia, a fierce military kingdom to the east of Palestine, chained and imprisoned Antigonus, which led to his death. The Parthians continued to be a menace, so Herod, after escaping the Parthians, went to Rome seeking help to withstand them (Sanders, 48). Hence, the senate in 40 BCE named Herod "King of the Jews," which led to the deposition of Hasmoneans. By the year 25 BCE, Herod had a sizable kingdom covering Palestine. Although he was a tyrant, He built buildings, created deep seaports, and constructed an amphitheater. But before he died in 4 BCE, Herod named his son successor to the kingdom. Herod's son Archelaus reigned over Judaea, Samaria, and Idumaea from

4BC -6. However, his reign was short-lived because the Jews and Samaritans accused him of brutality and maladministration. As a result, he was banished to Gaul (France) in 6 CE. After Archelaus' departure, Roman Pontius Pilate assumed power. Throughout the gospel, he is known as Judea's ruler, who had Jesus crucified. After Pontius Pilate's death, King Agrippa II was given increased responsibility for most of Palestine but was still under direct Roman rule when the Jewish revolt started in 66 CE (Sanders, 52).

The Jewish revolt and riots took place during the Roman period and, to a considerable degree, during the Hasmonean period (Sanders, 53). Thus the history of the Jewish people was a story of violence and change. According to Sanders, Josephus' writings express continual upheaval; however, the Jews experienced peaceful years from 1945-1990. Although the Jews experienced peace for many years, the desire for independence was still looming until war broke out. When the Jewish people lacked governance, they fought among themselves due to their lack of freedom and independence. According to Sanders, some Jews were willing to forego independence in one area if they could have it in another. However, some were willing to leave it up to the Roman government for military control and foreign policy if they would not interfere in others-especially the temple. Freedom for some meant different things to others. Hence, not everyone who wanted freedom was viewed as a rebel because the idea of some freedom allowed them to work within the Roman government.

Moreover, the thought that God would step in and overthrow the Roman government would prevent them from taking up arms. Although the promise of the Messiah was still in view, there was hope that the Roman government would allow internal freedom where they could still practice Jewish law. With this hope, the state would become theocratic, where the high priest and his council would govern (Sanders, 56). Although they hoped for a theocratic rule, Herod's

control caused many protests and revolts. From civil war to numerous uprisings, Herod destroyed many Jews in Galilee, leaving many to take refuge in caves while others were taken captive. With Herod in control, little revolts took place due to the fear he imposed on the people. However, when Herod died, there were revolts: the Idumaeans, the insurgency in Galilee led by Judas, son of Ezekias, and Simon's rebellion in Peraea east of the Jordan until Archelaus, aided by Varus, restored order (Sanders, 58).

Common Judaism and Temple worship was what the priests and the people agreed on (Sanders, 69). Normal or common Judaism, according to Sanders, to a limited degree, established a standard by which loyalty to Israel and God. The Jews in Palestine believed their books were the holy scripture because God gave them the law through Moses. Hence, the other books and the prophets were meant for guidance and instruction. As a result, they gathered in houses of prayer on the Sabbath to receive the advice and education needed for day-to-day life, and the Holy Days functioned to renew their covenant with God. The Diaspora, the Jews who returned from exile to Jerusalem, also shared in the practices of common Judaism. Still, temple worship was restricted, and they remained loyal to the law and the temple. However, the Diaspora could also run their lives under their rules. As a result, some converted to other religions combining Judaism practices with local cults. Nevertheless, some remain true to the practice of Judaism, like animal sacrifices which were a norm in most parts of the ancient world like Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

Even so, In Judaism, the priests were chosen by God to offer animal sacrifices to him on behalf of the people's sins. However, The priesthood in Greece and Rome was a profession for the elite. It was an honor like other honorary positions to be a priest. Sanders states, "rulers whom we now think of as generals, conquerors, kings, and emperors were also priests." Julius Caesar was a high priest, and Alexander The Great sacrificed regularly.

On the other hand, the office of a priest in Judaism was hereditary, forbidden to support themselves by working, and the people were responsible for caring for and feeding the priest. Thus the sacrifices were provided for the priest, and the worshiper provided food. But animal sacrifices were eaten in Greece, and the gods usually got only the bones. This was very interesting because in Judaism, the priest, according to Leviticus chapter 1, the entire sacrifice belonged to God. Judaism was very different from other religions because it had a single temple to worship one God. Jews believed God ordained temples, sacrifices, and worship to govern behavior determined by divine law. According to Sanders, ancient authors indicate that most Jewish people supported all aspects of temple worship. Philo wrote that throughout the empire, Jews collected money for sacred purposes and sent it to Jerusalem in aid support. According to Josephus, the Jews in Mesopotamia made regular dedicatory offerings to the temple. Thus Sanders states the temple service was significant, so the offerings were needed. Hence, Sanders's illustrations on pages 119-128 gave us a considerable amount of information to demonstrate how the Jewish temple was structured in light of the temples in the Greco-Roman world.

Life outside the temple was just as important. Observing the law was of the utmost importance in Judaism. As a result, Sanders highlighted two distinctions to understand the law as a whole—rules to govern relations between humans and God and transgressions of the law, involuntary or intentional. There were distinctions between those who sin against the holy things of God and those who sin against each other—crimes of theft required double compensation and those who practice other religions. Thus Philo wrote that the first set of commandments governed piety, while the second set prohibited injustice. Thus gathering in the synagogues on the Sabbath was essential because this was where they learned their ancestral philosophy.

Yet worship in the synagogue and home was based on Shema, the biblical passage that begins with Hear. For example, Deut.6-4-5 states, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might." This command was to be on their hearts and taught to their children, spoken at home and abroad, and remembered before sleeping and each morning before they woke up. According to Deuteronomy, the Shema was also written on their hands, foreheads, the doorpost of their houses, and gate. 6:6-9. Therefore, the book of Deuteronomy mentions Moses' decree to the people that once every week, the people should assemble to listen to the law and to obtain a thorough and accurate knowledge of it. According to Sanders, despite uncertainty about the institution's history, there is no doubt that synagogues were important in Jewish life and worship in the first century. In the New Testament, both Jesus and Paul were seen in the synagogues (Mark 1:21; Acts 13:15)

Besides attending synagogue on the Sabbath, it was also a day of rest. According to Exodus, the seventh day was to be observed because God had rested on the seventh day of creation. Jeremiah and Nehemiah also acknowledged the Sabbath. Work, farming, selling, baking, and cooking were avoided, and there was no fighting unless attacked. The Jews were commanded to keep it holy. However, the Diaspora Jews needed permission to practice their religion. Thus, letters from Roman officials were necessary to assemble and keep the Sabbath. They also required approval to have their ancestral food, decide their affairs, and contribute money to the temple. Therefore, worship and sabbath observance were central to Jewish life. In addition, circumcision, purity of food, and other purity Laws were also essential to Jewish life. Sanders mentioned the final set of laws were charity and love of neighbor. Jesus states in Mark 12:28 that the commandments that govern relations with God and those which govern relations with others are based on charity and love of neighbor. The Jews were ambitious about God and his law; therefore, their commitment to keeping it was often challenged.

Hence, the most critical part of the commandments for Israel was to worship only the one true God. This forbade the worship of other gods. Although it was not a denial that other gods existed but an acknowledgment of the one and true God was to be worshiped. Monotheism was the theme of Judaism, and the Jew was commanded to keep it and was held accountable if he disobeyed it. However, Jews tolerated temples built for other gods both outside Palestine and in the cities of Palestine. Sanders stated, "The Jews who believed that there was only one true Lord worshiped him only." However, the meaning of monotheism was flexible because the Jews were not utterly Isolated from the influence of other religious practices and their environment.

Thus the belief in one God, according to the Jews, was governed by God's will. God made the world and is to be cared for by his people. The typical Jewish opinion is that, just as God had brought the world into being, he controlled its destiny and its end. As a result, Josephus thought that, since God controls history, whatever happened was in accord with his will. Thus he interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment for Israel's sins. Hence the Apostle Paul shared the same thought that Christ saved and the law condemned. Galatians 3:8 states, "God foreordained that Gentiles would be saved by faith, apart from the law. Therefore Paul's mission to the Gentiles was more successful than with the Jews. God's plan to save the Gentiles first was his way to execute his ultimate plan to bring in the Jews through jealousy.

Thus Josephus comments on the fate of the Jews through the eyes of the parties. The Pharisees attribute everything to fate and God, the Sadducees denied fate, but the Essenes fully accepted it, leaving everything in the hands of God. Thus, Josephus, a Pharisee, believed the Jews deserved what happened to them because they had broken the Sabbath and spilled blood in the temple. Despite Josephus' belief, Paul stated that all people needed was to actively call on the Lord's name and confess with their lips to be saved. The idea that everyone was responsible for their deeds allowed them free will and to live without condemnation. However, Josephus' accounts of the parties regarding belief in free will were attributed to the Sadducees and the belief in fate to the Essenes. According to Sanders, when considering sectarian life, there was a strong emphasis on both predestination and freedom of choice. Hence, grace and works combine the feeling of complete worthlessness and total reliance on God's grace with the belief that members can virtually live spotlessly. However, faith in God's sovereignty and grace leads to expressions of divine providence and foreknowledge (Sanders, 658).

Sanders' study of Judaism Practice and Belief gave further insight into the history of Judaism. Palestine Judaism in the early Roman period was more difficult to govern successfully than most parts of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was more forceful and cruel than other empires. Antiochus IV Epiphanes defile the temple. After Alexander the Great, Judah came under the rule of the Ptolemies and later was under the Seleucids. The Maccabees drove the Seleucid from the country, and the family disputes between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, his brother, led to Roman intervention. Under the control of Herod the Great, he was made king of Judea and later all of Palestine. But After Herod's death, his sons, along with Roman procurators, took control which led to the Jewish revolt causing the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed.

Herod Agrippa II, the great-grandson, was next in line to take control, but due to his youth, Agrippa I became king. However, his appointment of several high priests started the separation of parties. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes all played a vital role in the history of Judiean practice. Each party contributed although the New Testament gives a negative view of them, Sanders does an excellent job exploring their history. Sanders states, "The Pharisees did not govern Jewish Palestine, but they debated rules, shared opinions, and influenced their Practice on others." Although the priests were the ones who governed the sacrifice and temple procedure, they were run by the Pharisees. The Pharisees led the copying of scrolls, drawing up legal documents, teachers, and court judges. The influence of the Pharisees party continued through the reign of King Herod. During this period, the Pharisees also persuaded the people to put up with Herod, which restrained Herod to some extent because his influence on the people was significant. According to Sanders, this does not say that the Pharisees kept the populace in line behind Herod for the next dozen years but agreed when they thought the punishment was needed to keep order. However, the Pharisees are also known to cause great trouble by leading

insurrections against John Hyrcanus and the civil strife during Alexander Jannaeus. In addition, parts of the gospel describe Jesus' occasional run-ins with the Pharisees and Sadducees. They accused Jesus of allowing his disciples to work on the Sabbath, speaking blasphemy by making himself equal with God, and associated his power to drive out demons to Beelzebub/ Satan according to Matthew 9:1-3;27-34. Hence, the synoptic gospels represent the Pharisees as Jesus' principal opponents in Galilee.

Today both Jews and Christians scholars believe that the Pharisees controlled the only part of religious life that affected people daily. According to Sanders, the Pharisees were considered true religious leaders of their time. Pharisees shared a common Judaism belief that God was in total control and, therefore, allowed things to happen because it served an ultimate purpose to bring about his will. Hence, obedience to the commandments was essential in everyday life in Judaism. Thus, E.P. Sanders' book on Judaism Practice and Belief (63 BCE - 66 CE) is well-written on all aspects of the Jewish faith. I recommend it to anyone seeking an in-depth understanding of the Jewish religion.