



# Walking God's Paths



## 2: Shared Origins, Diverse Roads

### SCRIPT

[See the [Information Sheet](#) for further details about items in **red letters**.]

#### NARRATOR

The **Second Temple in Jerusalem**, spectacularly renovated and enlarged by the Roman-appointed king, Herod the Great, beginning in 20 BCE. Until its destruction by Roman legions ninety years later, it would serve as the center of the very dynamic and very diverse spiritual life of Second Temple Judaism. After it was destroyed, two Jewish movements would emerge onto the world stage – Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism.

#### PROF. KIMELMAN



Judaism in the second temple period was characterized by overwhelming unity on essentials and diversity on secondary matters. The attitude toward other human beings, monotheism, commitment to the temple, commitment to the Sabbath, commitment to the dietary laws seem to be almost universal. On the other hand there was very significant diversity with regard to messianic expectations, ideas of revolution with regard to the Roman Empire and the theological status of the Roman Empire vis-à-vis the Jews.

#### NARRATOR

Among the various Jewish groups when Herod's Temple was at its glory were the Sadducees, probably connected with the Temple aristocracy in Jerusalem. There was a priestly group who thought the Temple leadership was corrupt and set up an alternative community at Qumran by the shores of the Dead Sea. There were students of the scriptures of Israel called Pharisees. They sought to interpret the written Torah creatively to make everyday life as holy as if one were

within the Temple precincts. They interpreted the Torah flexibly to confront contemporary challenges. There were also supporters of a number of Jewish individuals who started popular movements of various types. Such leaders included Theudas, John the Baptizer, and Jesus of Nazareth.

## **PROF. LEVINE**

Jesus' Movement was one of many Jewish movements in the first century, which was interested in trying to determine how best to live out what God wanted. So we might compare him, for example to people who surrounded John the Baptist, in a sense of a renewal movement. Jesus is interested in preparing people for what he perceived to be the inbreaking kingdom of God.

## **FR. SMIGA**

The **mission of Jesus** was to announce to Israel, to announce very specifically to the poor in the Galilee area where he did most of his ministry, that there was indeed a loving God who was going to bring about God's kingdom, which would involve the destruction of evil and the establishment of all the good promises that had been passed down as part of the Jewish faith for centuries.



## **SR. BOYS**

Very often today when we are talking about the ministry of Jesus, the preaching of Jesus, the healings and so forth, we talk about "Jesus' movement"; that is Jesus' with an apostrophe. That is not a movement about Jesus, but the movement he led or as some people prefer "The Reign of God Movement" because what Jesus comes to announce is that the kingdom of God, the reign of God is at hand.

## **NARRATOR**

According to the writings that became the Christian New Testament, Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's Reign through welcoming fellowship meals and through challenging parables. Through his healings and his ministry he offered a foretaste of what life in the Kingdom would be like. Through symbolic deeds he announced Israel's renewal and freedom from evil powers and rulers. He interacted in various ways with Jewish contemporaries, including, most notably, the Pharisees.

## FR. SMIGA



If we were to look at the lifetime of Jesus, of the various groups that would be present during that period, I think most scholars would say that Jesus was probably closer to the Pharisees than he was to any other Jewish group that we can pinpoint at that time. The reason we know this is because many of the teachings of Jesus have a very pharisaic ring. It was the Pharisees who promulgated, or tried to put forward, the notion of God as a loving father. We know how central that was to Jesus's teaching. The idea of holiness and living out that holiness in daily life is something else that resonates well with Jesus' teachings.

## SR. BOYS

They cared a lot about their tradition. They cared about the maintenance of boundaries because after all they were in a Roman-ruled state keeping their identity alive by virtue; say ways of eating together, dietary laws, keeping norms of purity that were very much a part of the cultures of the first century world. So they seemed to be people who were intent practitioners.

## PROF. LEVINE

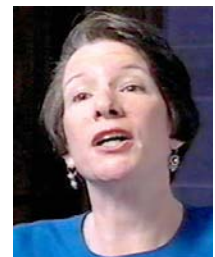
There's a good deal of polemic against the Pharisees placed on the lips of Jesus according to the gospels. Matthew 23 is the best example. But I suggest Jesus may well have had a great deal of respect for these people. You don't fight against people who you think have nothing to say, who you think are totally worthless. Indeed Jesus and the Pharisees are both in the business of trying to figure out how best to live out *Halakhah*, the way, the path we walk God's will.

## NARRATOR

However, Jesus' proclamation of God's coming Kingdom was seen as seditious by the governing Roman authorities. The Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, took action. With the aid of the chief priest, Caiaphas, whom Pilate had appointed to oversee the peaceful functioning of the Temple, Jesus was clandestinely taken into custody. Around the year 30 C.E. Jesus was executed by crucifixion as a pretender "king of the Jews."

## PROF. LEVINE

Jesus dies primarily because he is a political liability. He comes into Jerusalem at Passover time, the feast of freedom. The city has swelled with pilgrims perhaps up to three million and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, recognizes this is a time he needs to bring his troops into Jerusalem, ostensibly to keep order.



## **NARRATOR**

In some of the Gospels, Jesus causes a disturbance in the Temple shortly after his arrival in the city. Whether a prophetic charge that the Temple had been corrupted or a sign that the Temple would be totally rebuilt in the coming Kingdom of God, Jesus' actions triggered a lethal response.

## **PROF. LEVINE**

Now what happens within such a powder keg if the word goes out the son of David has come, a new king has come, our new anointed ruler, *Mashiach*, Messiah has come? If I'm Pilate I take action immediately and in fact if I'm Caiaphas, the high priest concerned about peace and safety for my people in Jerusalem, I want anybody who's going to be the match to light that powder keg out of the way immediately.

## **NARRATOR**

Jesus' violent end could have resulted in him becoming another forgotten Jewish prophet, killed by the powers of the world like so many before him and so many afterwards. However, his name does not vanish into oblivion because of stunning experiences claimed by his followers.

## **FR. SMIGA**

There's a major threshold that we go across when we come to the, I would call the linchpin of the Christian faith, which is the resurrection of Jesus. That event, which is an event that is larger than history, was really **the event that initiated the whole Christian church.**

## **PROF. LEVINE**

At first we just have a group of Galilean Jews who had followed Jesus, who proclaimed his resurrection to fellow Jews, but then the movement very quickly goes out to Jews in the diaspora and then to the Gentiles in the diaspora. And each time it makes another step and seeds in a different area you have a different type of church.

## **NARRATOR**

The Jewish apostles announced the resurrection of the crucified Jesus to Diaspora Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire. They argued that this event proved that God's Kingdom was indeed emerging into the world, just as Jesus had said.

They began sharing their special fellowship meals even with non-Jewish Gentiles because they felt the time had come for the spreading of Israel's light to the nations.

*Biblical texts shown on screen:*

- "Jesus must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration" – Acts 3:21
- "Jesus Christ is Lord" – Philippians 2:11
- "Truly this man was God's Son!" - Mark 15:39

## **NARRATOR**

They began singing about and then praying to Jesus as their Lord and the Son of God. With each step, they were becoming more and more distinctive from their Jewish contemporaries. They were on the path to establishing a separate religious community.

## **RABBI ROSENTHAL**

I guess the most important divisive point was the acceptance of Jesus as a) Messiah and b) Son of God. And, on those two issues alone, the parting of the ways was inevitable. Judaism could never accept the notion of a Son of God.



*Biblical texts shown on screen:*

- "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" – John 1:14
- "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." – John 1:29

## **RABBI ROSENTHAL**

Second, Judaism could not accept the idea of the Messianic fulfillment brought by Jesus, because we insisted that the Messiah would have to bring justice and peace to the entire universe. And, of course, redemption to the Jewish people.

## **NARRATOR**

Their redemption must have seemed far away when Jews rebelled against Roman rule about forty years after Jesus' execution. In suppressing the revolt, the Roman legions destroyed the Temple. This catastrophe deeply affected the diverse Jewish world in all of its movements.

## **RABBI ROSENTHAL**

The temple burnt to the ground, the House of the Lord destroyed. Tens of thousands of people were killed in the battle against the Romans. Tens of thousands were exiled to Rome and elsewhere in the Roman Empire. The mood was one of guilt, sin, of deep depression.

## **NARRATOR**

Members of the church had their own problems with the Roman Empire. A terrible persecution of the Roman church by Caesar Nero showed how vulnerable the new movement was in the Empire. Covert symbols, such as the fish, were developed quite early so that Christians could identify each other without being discovered by the Roman authorities. In addition, the Gospel accounts used various strategies to downplay the part played by Roman officials in the crucifixion of Jesus.

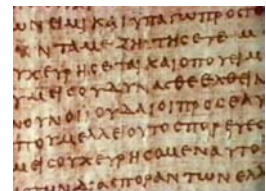
This inevitably accentuated the role of certain Jewish figures, although notably not the Pharisees. This portrayal would affect how Christians would learn about the crucifixion of Jesus for centuries to come. In addition, as part of the competition for influence in the Jewish world after the loss of the Temple, the New Testament writers also used the rhetorical style of the Hebrew prophets to criticize their Jewish kin for not accepting the Christian message.

## **PROF. LEVINE**

There are passages in the New Testament that have led towards animosity toward Jews because they blatantly say horrible things about Jews. ...

*Biblical texts shown on screen:*

- "The Jews tried all the more to kill him." – John 5:18
- "And the whole people said in reply, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'" – Matthew 27:25
- "The Jews ... killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets ... but the wrath of God has finally begun to come upon them." – 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16



... Now there are historical reasons why it's there. The early church is defining itself over against Judaism and when one finds families that fight, the toughest fighting, the most heightened rhetoric tends to occur between siblings, between parents and child. What makes this material so difficult is that even if originally it was Jew talking to Jew the material is now recorded in a text which is a Gentile text found in Christian churches rather than in synagogues.

## PROF. KIMELMAN

There was a Jew was passing a church on a Sunday morning and a man walked out and started beating him up and he said "why are you beating me up?" And he said "because you are a Christ killer" and the Jew said, "but that happened two thousand years ago," to which the man said, "yes, but I just heard about it this morning in church." Now that is an interesting funny story. And one of the great revolutions, especially in the modern Catholic Church, is the effort to contextualize so these texts will lead to understanding and reconciliation rather than as sources of hostility.

## NARRATOR

The destruction of the Temple, the center of Jewish religious life, also led to a period of competition for influence and leadership among surviving Jewish groups. These included the Pharisees and diverse church communities.

## FR. SMIGA

The thing that, in large part, held all those different groups together was the temple in Jerusalem. It was the symbol around which Jewish identity was formed. So, once the temple was destroyed, all who were associated with Judaism went through a process of redefinition and reorientation.

When we look at the community of Matthew in their dialogue or in their interaction with other Jews, the Pharisees at the time, it's good to picture, like members of the family fighting over grandma's tablecloth, you know. Who gets the inheritance? And one side would say, "It's mine," and the other side says that it was mine. So, what we see in large parts of the New Testament is a good deal of argument going on between the followers of Jesus and the larger Jewish community. And unfortunately, a lot of that argument is characterized by negative stereotyping, by violent language, and by harsh condemnation.

## RABBI LEHMANN



I think the general issue was without a temple, what are the vehicles, what are the paths that we have to access God? And I think that **the rabbinic model** that developed, which was an access of God through study, through detailed practice of religious law and a great attention to that, and to a significant emphasis on human relationships and the justice involved in those relationships. That becomes the primary vehicle, and I will put all of that under the heading of Torah.

And, in the Christian community, it seems to me that that access takes place through the personhood of Jesus and through the institution of the church that embodies that teaching and ultimately even access to religious experience.



## **SR. BOYS**

The destruction of the temple in 70 by the Romans had a great effect on early communities; communities that eventually separated and became Jews and Christians. If the Letter to the Hebrews is written after the destruction of the temple one can see that imagery about temple, that is, sacrifice, priesthood, and so forth is now not about the real temple of Jerusalem, the building, the great building as it had been rehabilitated and reconstructed by the Herod the Great. But Jesus is the new temple and the sacrifices that had gone on, on a daily basis at the temple, those are now ended. There's been the one great sacrifice that is the death of Jesus.

## **PROF. KIMELMAN**

So almost everything Judaism sees as salvific, redemptive-oriented or expiation-oriented all becomes focused upon Christ. Therefore Christianity is, in that sense, a Christ-centered Judaism. Now one of the most interesting phenomena of this period is that most of the things which are temple sacrifice-centered disappear in Rabbinic Judaism while they're retained in the Christian Church.

## **RABBI LEHMANN**

The change that took place from the temple period to the post-temple period -- the notion that holiness was going to be democratized to a much larger degree throughout the people, the notion that Torah study would now become the central vehicle for relating to and understanding God, the notion that prayer was going to now become the central mode of worship, the emphasis of the home as a locus of ritual -- all of this takes place largely in the aftermath of the destruction, as does the shift from priestly leadership to rabbinic leadership.

## **NARRATOR**

Two religious communities with shared origins in the Second Temple period now take diverse paths. One focuses on its relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The other seeks to implement the commands of God as understood by the rabbis.



Both will draw upon the written heritage of biblical Israel to define itself. And, as we shall see in the next episode, both will use these common texts to develop different scriptural traditions.