



2: Shared Origins, Diverse Roads

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

This episode of *Walking God's Paths* provides a historical introduction to the origins of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. It does so in several sections: (1) diversity in first-century Judaism; (2) the ministry and death of Jesus; (3) how the story of Jesus came to be told in ways that would lead to hostility between Jews and Christians in later eras; (4) how the church became a distinctive and eventually separate religious community; (5) the rise and character of Rabbinic Judaism; and (6) how both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism were shaped in their formative periods by the Roman destruction of the Temple. The Information Sheet provides further background on many of these matters.

Various historical items presented in the video may be surprising to viewers. It also offers a lot of information to process in a short time. The discussion questions, therefore, attempt to help viewers work through some of the issues and develop new insights about their own and the other religious tradition.

- 1. Sometimes both Jews and Christians are surprised to learn that Judaism in the late Second Temple period was very diverse and included a variety of groups such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, Hellenistic Jews, the Qumran community, and others. Perhaps this is because twenty-first century people simply assume that rabbinic Judaism (which did not gain ascendancy until centuries later) was already established and dominant. What about your own faith community today? On what things do all Jews or all Christians agree? Are there various types of Jews and Christians and how are they distinguished?**

This question seeks to engender an appreciation of the diversity of late Second Temple period Judaism by recalling the diversity that exists within the two faith traditions today. For Christians, diversity is seen in how the various churches and denominations are organized, how they make decisions, how they understand the authority of the bible, how they worship, and how they have come to adopt distinctive theological approaches. For Jews, the diverse ways of relating the rabbinic tradition to the contemporary world (with consequent differences in practice and liturgy), characterize the Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements.

2. In what ways was Jesus like and unlike his Jewish contemporaries? What was it about his ministry that would concern the Roman governor and the Temple leadership?

By offering a historical outline of Jesus' life, death, and the consequences of his followers' "resurrection experience" of him, the video may well generate different responses from Christian and Jewish viewers. Because of the centuries of hostility committed by Christians against Jews in the name of Jesus, some Jews may find it difficult to be historically "neutral" in considering his life or how Christians came to hold defines beliefs about him. Some Christians may also find it difficult to be historically "neutral" about him because Jesus grounds a Christian's core religious identity and relationship with God.

This question encourages thought on how Jesus was immersed in late Second Temple period Judaism. While his words and actions were distinctive, they were within the range of perspectives held by diverse groups of Jews of the time, perhaps especially (and surprisingly for some) those of the various types of Pharisees.

The final part of the question is meant to draw out the implications of the focus of Jesus' activities: the Kingdom of God. By proclaiming the imminence of a new world of God, Jesus was an enemy of Rome. Although not a violent revolutionary, his proclamation claimed that the Roman-dominated status quo was temporary and would be overthrown by God. The prospect of such an upheaval would concern the high priestly leadership of the Temple. The high priest, who retained his office at the pleasure of the Roman governor, sought above all else to preserve the existence of the Temple against possible Roman retaliation for sedition.

3. The video described some of the reasons why accounts of the execution of Jesus have set Jews and Christians of ensuing centuries against one another. What are some of the relevant factors? Is it important for people today to know about these issues?

When later read in the context of an all-Gentile church, the New Testament narratives of Jesus' execution lend themselves to be read as holding Jews collectively responsible. The gospel writers were variously influenced by such forces as: the competition among the different Jewish movements (including the church), especially after the destruction of the Temple; and the need for Christians to present themselves as not threatening to the Roman Empire (and so the Roman role in the crucifixion tends to be underplayed). There is also a tendency to combine certain distinctive features that are unique to each gospel's presentation with the result that the "Jewish" role is intensified. Thus, the Gospel of Matthew's "blood curse" (Mt. 27:25) is expanded from encompassing the people of Jerusalem out to the whole Jewish people by reading it in the light of the recurrent phrase "the Jews" in the Gospel of John. However, each gospel writer had his own theological and social purposes in presenting the story of Jesus in a certain way that is lost when their words are blended together.

- 4. All Jews, including those Jewish believers in Jesus, had to grapple with the destruction of the Temple by the Roman Empire. In the video, Rabbi Lehmann articulated the central issue as how to maintain access to God. Prof. Kimelman suggested that Christianity became, in a sense, a Christ-centered Judaism. How do you react to these ideas? How does Judaism today "maintain access to God"? How does Christianity today do so? What traces of the Temple system are evident in each community?**

The video explicitly notes how the Torah and its study became central to post-Temple Judaism and how Jesus Christ is the Christian point of contact with God. Again, both traditions have diverse ways of living out these core means of "access to God." Jews today observe the Torah in different ways and Christians express and ritualize their faith in God through Christ variously. For example, so-called "high" liturgical churches clearly preserve such Temple features as the altar, a priesthood, and a sacrifice, but in more biblically-oriented, congregationally-based churches the legacy from the Temple is less apparent.

- 5. What are the implications of any of the above questions for Christian-Jewish relations today?**

Participants will no doubt offer many ideas about this. Because of their historic origins, Jews and Christians throughout the centuries have recognized their relatedness. However, this perception could, paradoxically, make their differences and disagreements seem even more threatening and alienating.

If time permits, the session might conclude with reflections on what seemed most important to the participants about the conversation.
