

AN OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY:

From Abraham to Modern Israel

Lesson 10

As we begin the 10th week in our Biblical survey that began with the Patriarch Abraham, last week we arrived at the time of Christ meaning we've already covered close to 2000 years of Bible history. But we still have quite a ways to go. Today we'll begin at the time shortly after Yeshua's death and resurrection.

Rome is the world power; it is the 4th gentile world power as depicted by the legs of iron in Daniel's dream statue. The Holy Lands were divided up into several Roman Provinces, with the 3 most important to our study being Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. How Judaism took form and was practiced varied greatly among these 3 provinces. Since Jerusalem, the power center of all things Jewish, was in Judea then naturally those religious leaders and would-be leaders that sought power established themselves in Jerusalem. That meant that a much more formal and strict Judaism was the norm with hundreds of Rabbis and priests each pressing for their own doctrinal agendas to be the standard. Galilee was religious and loyal to Judaism; but since they were in farming country, and far away from the influence of the Jewish religious elite, theirs was a more relaxed and practical Judaism that focused on family.

Samaria, however, was the problem child. It had many Jews living there, but only some were loyal to the Jerusalem Temple and to a Jerusalem defined Judaism. Because Samaria was a mixture of Greek cities and Jewish villages, and because historically Samaria had been emptied of Israelites by the Assyrians some 700 years earlier, and then re-settled with foreigners from other nations, Samaria had become a multi-cultural population. Many different gods were worshipped there, and a more tolerate attitude to such matters was prevalent. To accommodate this from a religious standpoint a powerful group of Jewish religious elite broke from the Jerusalem Temple and created a new Temple in Samaria; of course they also set up their own separate Priesthood. A different version of the Torah was created; what has come to be known as the Samaritan Pentateuch. There are around 6000 instances where the Samaritan Pentateuch differed from the Torah as we know it today. Further, the Samaritan Priesthood recognized ONLY the 5 Books of Moses as valid, and therefore while they celebrated the 7 Biblical Feasts of the Torah, they refused to acknowledge Purim or Hanukkah since they

weren't in the Books of Moses. As most Christians eventually come to recognize, people become so beholden to their own particular denomination that we tend to throw mud at all the others over even the minutest differences. But sometimes when there is a substantial and violent break between the existing religious authority and a new upstart, the differences are far more than cosmetic and the result can be downright hatred. Sadly we have seen much too much of this dynamic between Catholicism and the many Protestant branches of the church. But it does provide us with a good illustration of how wide the gulf was between the Jews of Samaria and those of Judea and the Galilee.

Bottom line: we must grasp that there was not one Judaism; there was not one universal doctrine that all Jews adhered to; there was not one set of Jewish Traditions that all Jews followed; there was not even only one Temple or one Torah anymore. And this doesn't even take into account the Diaspora Jews, like Paul, who were born and lived outside the Holy Lands; and the Diaspora Jews represented 95% of all living Jews; Jews from the Holy Lands (Judea, Galilee and Samaria) were a distinct minority in Judaism. The Diaspora Jews that Paul, Peter, and other disciples would go to in order to evangelize practiced several different variations of Judaism. So when we read the NT we must take into account who was speaking, who was listening (at times it was a mixed group), and where they were located.

The everyday Jews of 1900 years ago were well aware of the many Jewish societal and religious variations that existed; so they understood the words of what eventually came to be the Gospels and Epistles in that context. But for gentiles, especially for Western Believers of the 21st century, it can be quite confusing and we can come to some inappropriate conclusions that would have left the Jews of Paul's days with their mouths gapping open in shock and surprise. Our goal should always be to ascertain the writer's intent based on the framework of his day. Then, once understood, we should adapt that understanding to our modern times and cultures.

Therefore the primary aim of **Yeshua's Talmidim** (Disciples) was, naturally, to persuade their fellow Jews of all the many factions of Judaism that Yeshua was the Messiah they had been waiting for. Concerning the spreading of the Good News, **Yeshua** Himself said, "first to the Jew, then to the gentile", and the Disciples took that command quite literally. **Mashiach**, from which we get the word Messiah, means "anointed one"; the Anointed One the Torah and the Prophets had always pointed to. **Yeshua** was to be the perfection of Jewish history and faith; not a new or separate religion. But, He was also the Savior of the world and it became **Sha'ul's** (Paul's) primary mission to bring the Good News to the gentiles and the "God-fearers" (although Peter and others went to the gentiles as well).

God-fearers were gentiles who had accepted the Jewish ways and their God, but were not formally converted to Judaism through the circumcision ceremony. Since Rabbis reveled in micro-managing every minute detail of life, and since Rabbis often disagreed with one another, exactly who was a Jew and who wasn't was a constant source of debate. One could be a Jew by genealogy, but even that could be challenged as there had been much mixing of the cultures and races. One could become a Jew by going through the circumcision ceremony, but with no certain Jewish heritage at all. The gospel writer Luke was probably a God-fearer, and therefore not considered to be a Jew.

Gentiles were defined as anyone not Jewish; those who were **not** descendents of **Ya'acov** (Jacob). Gentiles worshipped multitudes of gods, and had no understanding of Judaism or, of course, of the history of Israel. Paul, who took the Gospel to the gentiles, found himself speaking to thousands of Jews as well, because Messianic Jews were the leaders of the new so-called "Churches" located in the various colonies throughout the Roman Empire. Remember, virtually every new "Church" that originated was nothing more than a Jewish synagogue whose members came to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah. The advent and use of the word "Church" came long after this era and it was intended to indicate a gentile Christian house of worship separate and apart from Synagogues of Messianic Jews. The word in the oldest scriptures found to date that is almost always translated into Church in Christian Bibles is the Greek word "ekklesia". Ekklesia is a rather generic word simply meaning assembly or gathering. A much more intellectually honest word that we ought to use is "congregation". Naturally, these Messianic Jews who attended these Believing Synagogues still considered themselves Jews, and so continued practicing the religion of the Jews, Judaism, with Christ added to the mix. But, Jews were not to be Paul's focus.

From the beginning of the **Yeshua** (Jesus) movement, the Messianic Jews had believed that in order to accept the Jewish Messiah, one first had to be, or become, a Jew. Logical enough; why would a gentile have need of a Jewish savior? The entire concept of a Messiah who pays the price for mankind's sin and paves the way to a restored relationship with the God of Israel is uniquely Jewish (or, more accurately, uniquely Hebrew). This fact cannot be stated strongly enough: gentiles, that is, the entire world population other than for Jews, had no understanding of sin and redemption. However for 1400 years the Jews had been schooled and prepared for a coming Messiah. God had given them the Torah at Mt. Sinai, through Moses, to explain all.

Paul had a most difficult mission: he not only had to explain the need for a Savior to an uninitiated gentile population that had been raised under a system of Greek gods and goddesses, but he also had to carefully, eloquently, and repeatedly break the news to the Jewish believers that Yeshua was not for them alone. The mere thought that the Jewish Messiah was also for the gentiles was an absolute abomination to traditional Judaism. How could this be? Had the Jewish people not spent generations separating themselves from these same pagans, at God's command? Had they not scrupulously followed the letter of the Law, the Torah? Had Yehoveh not promised to send a Deliverer to rescue them from the hand of the gentile world (currently represented by their brutal Roman occupiers)? Were the Jewish people not called God's "precious treasure" and His "chosen people", from the mouths of God's own prophets? As often as not, Paul was run out of the Jewish colonies he visited for speaking this "blasphemy".

But as the ***Ruach HaKodesh*** (Spirit of God, Holy Spirit) worked in the hearts of the Jewish believers their resistance to the concept of gentiles being included, without first becoming Jews, weakened. ***Sha'ul*** then began to preach that the gentile converts should not have to follow strict laws of Judaism, nor should they need to be circumcised. This brought on a new round of objections in which an accommodation was reached at a crucial meeting in Jerusalem in 49 AD. It was this meeting that paved the way for an avalanche of gentiles to become followers of Jesus.

Just as Jerusalem was the power center of traditional Judaism, so it was for Messianic Judaism. Paul convinced James (Yeshua's brother), who was the elder and leader of the Messianic movement in Jerusalem, to give him an audience. Paul also convinced the Messianic Jewish leadership to at least relent on the matter of circumcision for gentiles who wished to join Messianic synagogues. Let me comment here that James's name was NOT James; it was ***Ya'acov*** (Jacob). We only call him James because the writers of the King James Version of the Bible wanted to give a special honor to England's King James, and so they literally changed Jesus' brother Jacob's name to James.

Jews see this series of decisions by the Messianic Jewish leadership in Jerusalem regarding the inclusion of gentiles, as one of the defining moments in their history when Messianic Judaism (since a handful of gentiles were now involved, we could for sake of easier communication call it "the Church") went one way, and Traditional or Orthodox Judaism the other. You see, the crux of the matter was the very serious issue of ritual purity; and even within the various, often opposing, views of the many Rabbinical leaders, there was one belief they held in common: gentiles were unclean and contact with them caused a Jew to become

unclean.

In Acts 15 is recorded the watershed decisions of the Jerusalem council that infuriated Traditional Jews, and has been generally misinterpreted by the gentile Church. The issue was that gentile believers in Christ wanted to worship with the Messianic Jews. This meant they needed to come into a Synagogue in order to join in the rituals, feasts and worship practices, and even partake of food from time to time with Messianic Jews. Centuries of the Jews' intentionally avoiding contact with gentiles had, therefore, created a substantial cultural problem; typically, the Jewish solution was for these gentile believers to become Jewish!

Of course many gentiles balked at this notion, and Paul was among the first to recognize that as a result of Christ's advent a new dynamic was now in place, and this prohibition of Jews dealing with gentiles had to be revisited. But, what to do? The reality is that there is no Scriptural prohibition against Jews having contact with gentiles, and it was only Jewish Tradition that declared gentiles to be unclean.

The long and short of it is that the Jerusalem Council decided that if gentiles would do the following 4 things, then the matter of ritual purity would be satisfied..... as far as Messianic Jews were concerned:

1. Gentiles were to forsake fornication. That is, they were to adopt the Torah views of sexual morality, and drop the immoral Roman attitudes on sex.
2. They were to abstain from things sacrificed to pagan idols. This was more than not eating animals that had been given to the gods. The various pagan religions that these new gentile believers were coming out of sacrificed everything from wooden representations of people, to animals, to various valuable gifts, to their own children. The foundational idea here was to stop idol worship.
3. They were to abstain from blood. This is an ancient Jewish idiom referring to murder..... we commonly say "the shedding of blood" even today when referring to a murder. The idea is they were not to kill another human being. Now, it probably also referred to the practice of drinking or eating blood, another common pagan practice forbidden by Jews, but no doubt this meant that all Torah laws pertaining to blood were to be followed.
4. They could not eat the meat of animals that had been strangled. This was due to the Jewish belief that an animal, used for food and sacrifice, was to be killed quickly and as humanly as possible. Strangulation was considered inhumane. The other part of this is

that it was a God-ordained law that said an animal should be drained of its blood before being eaten..... and this due to God's instruction that the "life was in the blood", which dates to Adam and Eve.

Today most Church denominations have taken these 4 rulings to mean that gentiles were thus released from all OT commandments. That is completely out of context, ignores the cultural setting and purpose of these rulings, and could not be further from the truth. This was simply a matter of finding a solution to solve the issues of ritual purity. It was a matter of finding a way for gentile believers and Jewish believers to worship with one another.

Of course these rulings caused as much or more trouble than they were intended to eliminate, and resulted in Messianic Jews having a great falling out with the non-believing Traditional Jews. Later on in the Jewish rebellions against the Romans of 67 AD and 131 AD, the Messianic Jews refused to participate in the fight against the Romans, and this cemented the wall of separation between the Messianic Jews and all other sects of religious Jews.

In about 50 AD, while Yeshua's disciples were hard at work spreading the Gospel, among the most zealous Orthodox Jews arose a secretive vigilante group called the Sicarri. The Sicarri were the most radical and militant faction of the extremist movement called the Zealots. The historian Josephus, in his famous work "Jewish Antiquities", describes the origination of the Zealots as occurring around the same time as Christ's birth, and being founded by a Pharisee named Zadok. The philosophy of the Zealots was that they ranked freedom as a religious matter of the highest order, and thus rebellion against Rome was holy war and totally in line with God's will. Their numbers grew to a point that, by this time, they had become the fourth mainstream sect of Judaism, behind the Pharisees and Sadducees, but ahead of the Essenes in numbers of adherents.

The only evidence that would imply that the Sicarri faction was active prior to the time of Jesus' death, ironically, comes in the surname contributed to the disciple that betrayed Him: Judas Iscariot. Iscariot seems to be a play on the Greek word for Sicarri, which is Sicarius, rather than a typical familial name, bringing many Biblical scholars to the conclusion that in modern English we should translate "Judas the Sicarri" for Judas Iscariot. Certainly, the biblical accounts of Judas' actions and words were those of a radical [**Luke 22:48, John 6:70 & 12:6**]

Led by Menachem and Eleazar ben Jair, the Sicarri were said to have operated primarily in the Galilee, while the Zealots' center of activity was in Jerusalem. Though the Zealots tended to incite riots, the Sicarri were out and out assassins... violent terrorists targeting Jews who worshipped Jesus, or Hellenists who tried to pervert Judaism, or gentile pagans, or any person or group who they felt were Roman and/or Hellenist sympathizers. Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda in our day would not be a bad illustration of the ideals and methods of the Sicarri. So, while the Messianic Jews roamed the land seeking more converts and further upsetting the traditional Orthodox Jews, the traditional Jews (spurred on by the Zealots) inspired rebellion against Rome, and the Sicarri vowed death to those Jews or gentiles that followed Yeshua or Rome. Roman rule was stretched thin over their vast empire, so their control over an explosive Judea was dissolving into chaos. Soon, Nero was to become Emperor of Rome, and the powder keg that was Judea got its spark.

It's about this time that we begin to hear of the Christian persecutions within the Roman Empire. While we should not minimize this at all, the picture we typically have of this era is of gentile Christians being killed for their profession of faith in Jesus. True enough; however, these persecutions were actually an anti-Jewish movement in the Empire. At the time of Nero, so-called "Christianity" was viewed as just another fanatic Jewish sect, as it still consisted in the majority, of Jews. Gentiles becoming converts to Judaism was nothing new, and was to a degree, quite commonplace. So, the average Roman citizen, and the Roman leadership, identified gentiles who believed in Christ with Judaism.

In 66 AD in Caesarea Philippi, a Greek city in the northern Galil (*Galilee*), an unidentified man (presumably a pagan) walked to the front of the town Temple (this was a Greek Temple to a Greek god) and began sacrificing birds to mock the Orthodox Jews living there. Worse, it was on Shabbat (*the Sabbath*). The city's Jews were greatly affronted. Riots rapidly escalated into open street warfare. The small local Roman garrison, well under Legion strength, could not control it. The news quickly reached Jerusalem and rioting in sympathy with their Galilean brothers started there as well. In what one could only describe as bad timing, the local Roman governor decided at that moment to brazenly rob Herod's Temple of a sizeable amount of gold and silver, supposedly as collecting tribute owed to Rome. The local Jewish population knew that was a lie and swarmed into the streets, hurling insults at the governor. Not one to be mocked by peasants, the governor ordered the Roman troops to confront the mobs and a bloodbath ensued. The governor fled.

Some 30 miles south of **Yerushalayim**, near the southeastern shore of the Dead Sea, arose the mountain top fortress of Masada. Herod the Great has been credited with building a lavish palace atop this 1000 foot high plateau. However, more correctly, he rebuilt and enlarged some facilities that had existed there for several hundred years. Nonetheless, while it was a favorite get-a-way spot for Herod, the grandiose Masada came to symbolize the ruthlessness and decadence of his rulership, and the unbearable oppression of Rome upon the Jewish people. A large group of Jewish protestors killed the Roman garrison there in a surprise attack, and took over the grounds. In Jerusalem and in other cities throughout Judea, Jews refused to pay the Temple sacrifice... taxes, in essence, to Rome. This was war.

All throughout the Roman Empire, within its hundreds of Jewish colonies, riots and killing broke out. Nero, already in hot water from the suspicion that it was he, and not Christians (actually, it was Messianic Jews that were blamed, not gentile “Christians”) who was responsible for the devastating fires that had burned down nearly one-fourth of Rome, took action. In 67 AD, Nero sent his best general to the Galilee and took back control of the region. **Yerushalayim** farther to the south in Judea, was spared... for the moment. The demented Nero, hated by Jews and Romans alike, then committed suicide and Rome experienced several months of chaos, while Jerusalem won a short reprieve from the inevitable.

THE ROMAN DISPERSION

In 69 AD Vespasian became Emperor of Rome and sent his son Titus to take back Jerusalem from the Jewish rebels. **Yerushalayim's** thick limestone walls were breached after 9 months of siege by the Roman Legions, and the Temple was seized by Titus.

Titus, although a great general and fierce warrior, was no barbarian. After several months of siege, and with overwhelming victory at hand, Titus called a halt to the attack and then personally pled with the inhabitants to surrender to stop the useless carnage. They greeted him with a hail of stones and insults. He then sent forward one of the Jew's own, hoping perhaps this man could win their trust. His name: Josephus.

Josephus, the man we know as the Roman historian of Christ's era, was actually Joseph Ben Mattitias, a Jew by birth. He was schooled by both Pharisees and Sadducees, and was very familiar with the Essenes. He had been commander of the Jewish rebel forces in the Galilee, but was captured and gave his loyalty to Rome to save his own life. Now he stood before his people and begged them to put down their weapons and submit, and their trial would be over. The Jews were determined to fight for the Holy City to the death, and so they did.

By the time the Romans gained full control of Jerusalem, scores of thousands of Jews had died of starvation and disease during the siege. However, thousands of Messianic Jews escaped the horror as they had remembered Yeshua's prophetic instructions to flee when they saw enemy armies approach the Holy City. They might not have realized that this prophecy was for a time far into the future, but to them it seemed to fit the occasion.

Matthew 24:15-21 CJB

¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination that causes devastation spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing in the Holy Place" (let the reader understand the allusion),

¹⁶ "that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills.

¹⁷ If someone is on the roof, he must not go down to gather his belongings from his house;

¹⁸ if someone is in the field, he must not turn back to get his coat.

¹⁹ What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers!

²⁰ Pray that you will not have to escape in winter or on *Shabbat*.

²¹ For there will be trouble then worse than there has ever been from the beginning of the

world until now, and there will be nothing like it again!

Since these prophetic words didn't exist in the Tanakh, and hadn't been predicted by Rabbis or priests, but rather by a man (Yeshua) that they considered blasphemous and a phony, then the Traditional Jews regarded the Messianic Jews' leaving to escape the siege as treason. Titus set the Temple afire, and then leveled it stone by stone. The last stronghold and symbol of the Jewish rebellion, the desert mountain plateau of Masada, was taken back by the Romans 3 years later (by the way, the story of Masada is not mentioned in the Bible. We only have this information from extra-biblical Jewish and Roman sources). After months of building a massive earthen ramp up the west side of the 1000 foot high mountain to attack the fortress, the Romans entered to find nothing but the dead bodies of men, women, and children. The Jewish rebels that had taken Masada were led by the radical Sicarri sect. **Eleazar ben Yair**, the sect's sole remaining leader, led nearly 1000 people into death by suicide rather than being taken by the Romans. What happened at Masada is not entirely clear. Roman annals tell of their soldiers' horror at finding the lifeless bodies, lying in pools of their own blood. There are legends that 5 or 6 of the rebels hid and survived, later telling the story of how the mass suicide/infanticide was carried out. But, there is no known written record attesting to the sad affair. Be that as it may, the Jewish rebellion was over; the Sanhedrin was abolished, the Priesthood dismantled, and the **Tz'dukim** (Sadducees) disappeared. Judea, all that was left of ancient Israel, ceased to exist as home to the Jews. The Israelites had lost their homeland, and so it would be for the next 1900 years.

Of the 250,000 Jews that had huddled inside **Yerushalayim's** walls at the beginning of the siege, only 80,000 remained alive. Those who could walk, left. Tens of thousands were taken as Roman slaves. The city was unlivable. The shock of these events would resound in the hearts of Jews for years to come. Many believed they had just witnessed the apocalypse. Others ran for their lives and hid in caves and waited for the end of the world to come. Priests and Rabbis remained quiet; only the most docile of **P'rushim** (Pharisee) educators were left. People had not given up their Judaism, but they did go underground, meeting quietly in homes scattered in the countless villages throughout the region. The local economy no longer functioned.

In the small Judean town of Yavneh, several Rabbis, scribes, priests, and other learned men found common comfort in resuming study with what few Torah scrolls and writings they were able to salvage. Their informal leader, Rabban Yochanon ben Zakkai, a prominent Rabbi, led meetings in which the canon, that is, the books that comprise the Old Testament, were put into the form that we read today. After a while, the religious leaders of Yavneh became the

substitute for the now defunct Sanhedrin. Scribes and Rabbis from Yavneh began traveling the land, teaching and founding Jewish schools. They eventually set themselves up as the new Jewish religious authority that could interpret scripture and judge religious matters. Their descendants ruled Jewish life for the next 400 years.

Messianic Jews, followers of Yeshua, remained as outlaws of Judaism; all contact with them was forbidden by the Rabbis. Once again, as in the days of the Babylonian Exile when the Temple was demolished, sacrificing was impossible; so, once again, the ultimate Jewish endeavor became Torah study. The men who ruled and taught were given the title of Rabbi. They were usually unpaid for their work, and they earned a living by performing some craft or another.

In 115 AD, the Jews organized and fought a short lived, and unsuccessful, rebellion. Hadrian became Emperor of Rome in 117 AD, and sought to unite the current multi-cultural Roman Empire under a single dominant culture: Greek. After a few years, he realized his primary foe would be the large numbers of Jews scattered throughout the Empire that held on so tightly to their traditions. In 131 AD, Hadrian outlawed circumcision, forbade the reading of the Torah, the observance of Shabbat and the Jewish festivals, the ordaining of Rabbis, and the teaching of Jewish Law. As the coupe de gras, he changed the name of the former land of Judea and Israel to Palestine. Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina, and he placed a shrine to Jupiter in the ruins of the Temple. In response, the 2nd Jewish Rebellion began in 132 AD.

Palestine is Greek for Philistine; perhaps the greatest enemy of Israel's past. What irony that the Palestinians, the Philistines as led by Yasser Arafat and now other leaders, have re-emerged as Israel's greatest present day enemy. Hadrian well knew the historical hatred that existed between Israel and Philistia and what it represented; so he sought to insult and demoralize the Jews to the greatest degree possible by renaming their home land Palestine.

Shim'on Bar Kochba holds the exalted place as the leader of this new rebellion. Unlike the rebellion of a few decades earlier this one was well organized and the Romans suffered many defeats. In retribution hundreds of Jewish leaders and scholars were arrested, tortured, and killed. As the war rolled on the methods of execution by the Romans became more gruesome, in hopes of discouraging the rebels.

Many influential Rabbis held up Shim'on Bar Kochba as the Messiah of God they had been waiting for; the majority of Jews seemed to accept this. Of course the Messianic Jews did not agree; Yeshua was their Messiah. The result was that the Messianic Jews refused to participate with their Orthodox brothers in this new rebellion against Rome. This was the end of any attempt at unity or co-operation between the two Jewish groups, and they have remained hostile to one another to this day (although not necessarily for the same reasons).

After about 2 years of intense and costly warfare, the frustrated Romans turned from standard battle strategy and began a campaign of terror by mounting an all-out manhunt for Jewish rebels. A large part of the Jewish population of Palestine was slaughtered, simply for being Jewish. Roman archives report that about 1000 Jewish villages were leveled and nearly 600,000 Jews executed. This atrocity left the Jews as the minority population in what was formerly their own land.

In time, however, Rabbis re-established contact with one another, and secretly met to re-form the Sanhedrin. Palestine (as it was now called) was impoverished. From about 200 – 235 AD, the area began to recover economically. Rabbi Judah the Prince worked with others to compile a massive collection of Jewish oral law and tradition into a finished document that would come to be called the Mishnah.

The Mishnah, a very key part of Jewish religious training and authority, was published in a most interesting way. Rather than it being written down as was now the norm, it was at first put to memory by students who had a gift of memorization. Sections of the Mishnah were assigned to different groups, and the memorizer, called a tanna, would learn it and recite it until a Rabbi was satisfied it was perfect, and then pass it on to another, and so on. The Mishnah handed down for decades in that manner.

In a turn of events that could only be termed ironic, in 313 AD the latest Emperor of Rome, Constantine, declared Christianity the new religion of the realm and Orthodox Judaism as an outlawed sect. Even Messianic Jews were deprived from participating in the worship of their own Messiah, Yeshua, unless they gave up their Judaism and their Jewishness! The cross became the symbol of the new Rome-based religion; a religion exclusively of, and for, gentiles.

By 425 AD, Jewish religious authority and the Sanhedrin had, once again, disintegrated. Judaism, for the most part, became an underground religion.

It's important to paint a clear portrait of the state of affairs for Jews at this time in history. The Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim- Israel) had ceased to exist 1200 years earlier. The peoples of those 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel were now, with some notable exceptions, absorbed by dozens of other cultures... all gentile, of course. It would become impossible for most of these 10 Israelite tribes to trace their family history back to Avraham. Their Hebrew genes had become mixed and fused with the gentile world.

Former Judeans, those of the tribe of Judah and properly called Jews, present a different scenario. Jews being the former residents of the Southern Kingdom of *Y'hudah* (Judah, also called Judea) consisted nearly exclusively of only 2 tribes: those of Judah and Benjamin. It would be fair to add Levites to those called Jews as well, but amongst themselves, modern day Hebrews usually make a distinction between Jews and Levites. As had happened all throughout Israelite history, some insignificant number of Israelite tribal members moved to other tribal districts and became absorbed into their new tribe. But this in no way ended distinct tribal affiliations. The Jews suffered a different fate. They were most certainly dispersed on more than one occasion; but generally speaking they were not absorbed by the gentile cultures they lived among. Instead they lived in hundreds of widely scattered Jewish colonies, boroughs, and ghettos, and clung to their families, tradition, worship of the God of Israel, and their cherished Jewish culture. They remain to this day completely identifiable as Jews.

Beginning in the early 4th century A.D., under the direction of the Christian convert Constantine, Jews were slowly and surely relegated to second-class citizenship. Constantine first ordered that no marriage was permitted between Jewish men and Christian women, then later decreed no marriage whatsoever between Jew and Christian. Next, Jews were denied the ownership of slaves. While the use of slaves is despicable to us, it was essential for prosperity in the pre-Medieval economy, thus Jews were put at a terrible disadvantage.

Next week we will begin to explore how the Jews survived (and sometimes thrived) in their new reality of yet another exile.