

“The Traditions of the Jews”

Wednesday Evening Bible Class by Ray Reynolds (January 8, 2014)

Introduction: On Sunday our focus was on the 400 years of silence between Malachi and Matthew. We spent some time looking into the various empires, cultures, and people during that period and how the Jews splintered into numerous factions. Foreseeing this, Isaiah warned about new traditions (**Isaiah 29:13**). Let's start by studying **Matthew 15**....

Discussion:

I. The Influence of the Scribes & Rabbis

The scribes (rabbis) were a powerful force among the Jewish people.
The New Testament also refers to them as lawyers and teachers of the law.
The role of a scribe/rabbi probably began with Ezra who interpreted the law.
In the time of Christ, most of the scribes/rabbis were Pharisees.
They taught publically so that people would be drawn to them.
They were considered to be experts, instead of the priests, on all religious matters.

II. The Animosity Toward Tax Collectors & Herodians

The Roman rule caused much hardship for the Jews, but they began to adapt.
Hellenization forced conformity on the people (culture, taxes, low morality, etc.).
One of the ways to serve Rome was to aid in the collection of taxes.
Rich Jews often bribed Rome to gain this office and served as mediators.
They were hated among the Jews and classified simply as "sinners."
The Herodians supported Herod, the Edomite king (some saw him as Messiah).
All of these political issues had an effect on all of Israel.

III. The Political Corruption of the Priesthood

The priesthood was corrupted by the Hasmonean dynasty (see previous lesson).
Since teachers of the law were corrupted the people had nowhere to turn.
In the Old Testament, the people consulted the priests, but in New Testament times the priests were classified with the politically corrupt.
This is evident when Jesus is taken to the high priest(s) for trial.
The Roman government had taken the spiritually authority from the leaders.

IV. The Dispersion Among the Greeks

The Jews were a heavily persecuted people, so what choices were before them?
The Old Testament reveals the stories of Israel being taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and Judah being taken away by the Babylonians.
During these 400 years the people were still treated as slaves by their neighbors.
They also faced famine, foreign occupation, and persecution.
Many of the Jews chose to flee instead of fight and left Jerusalem (Diaspora).

V. *The Establishment of the Synagogues*

The Jews began to establish synagogues (congregations) in many cities. These synagogues probably began shortly before return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity (often debated).

The Jewish people needed a place to worship, study, and congregate when the temple was unavailable so they gathered in the home of a prophet or a priest (**Ezekiel 8:1, 20:1-3**).

During the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha there were schools of the prophets and meeting houses for people to congregate.

VI. *The Establishment of the Sanhedrin*

Synagogues were established seats of government for the local people. The Sanhedrin (the Great Synagogue) was a formal national government for all. The Sanhedrin met regularly in Jerusalem and served as the "supreme" court. This court was made up of 70 members, from the two major political parties (Pharisees and Sadducees) and the high priest would also serve in the court. Some have tried to trace the origins of the Sanhedrin to Moses (**Numbers 11:16**) while others point to Ezra (no records can be found until around 200 BC). Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Paul, Stephen, and others interacted with them.

VII. *The Canon of the Old Testament & the Septuagint*

It was under the influence of the priests and scribes, and with the blessing of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the Jews translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. The work would be known as the Septuagint (LXX - Roman 70) which was the nearest round number to 72, the number of interpreters used to translate it. The high priest singled out six elders from each of the twelve tribes to oversee this work and brought them to Alexandria (Egypt) to accomplish the task.

VIII. *The Apocrypha Books & Other Traditions*

The apocrypha (hidden) scriptures of ancient origin are found in the Septuagint but they were not present in the Hebrew (added because of tradition). Just because they are found there doesn't mean they belong there. Many Bibles have included these books: *Mathew's Bible* published them all (1537), the *Cloverdale Bible* excluded Baruch and the Prayer of Manasseh (1538), the *Douay-Rheims Bible* reorganized them (1582), and *King James Bible* refused to omit them (1611).

The KJV only removed them in 1826 after being threatened by Bible societies. Anyone who chooses to read the Apocrypha books, for historical value, should be warned that they are not reliable or considered historically accurate.

Conclusion: Some traditions can be helpful. However, we cannot allow them to undermine, usurp, or replace the Bible. God's Word alone should be our guide!