

SAMPLE BIBLE STUDY FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE....

DAY 2 – JESUS THE JEWISH RABBI

What Christians often forget is that Jesus was a Jew! His “Jewishness” permeated both His ministry and His message. Remember that Jesus was brought up in an observant Jewish home.

Jesus would have begun His learning of the Torah at his mother’s knee. Memorization of the Torah started as early as age five. Children in those days were taught different ways of memorizing large portions of scripture. Games were developed to facilitate their study. It is said that one could hear the children’s voices wafting from the various homes repeating the words of Torah each evening. How much more beneficial were these games than the computer games our children spend their time playing!

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What were the Jews instructed to do with God’s commands? Also note where these actions were to take place.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

There were several ways that the Jews found to fulfill the requirements of this commandment. As we mentioned, they taught the scripture to their children at an early age.

THINK ABOUT THIS
What are some of the ways that you have developed to keep the Word of God at the forefront of your life?

Have you tried to memorize parts of scripture as the psalmist says in Psalm 119:9-11? Perhaps you might explore methods of memorization that will aid you in doing this.

The study of the Torah was a priority in both the home and community. Torah literally means “instruction” or “teaching” and refers to the first five books of the Bible written by Moses. Christians call these books the Pentateuch from the Greek name which is a compound word from *penta* meaning “five” and *teuchos* meaning “book” or “tool.” In Christian circles it mainly means “Law” and can have a negative connotation. To Jews, however, it meant more than just a legal code. It could equally be seen as instruction on how to conduct one’s life to the glory of God.¹

Everyone studied the Torah in their local synagogue. Synagogue is Hebrew for “assembly.” It is what we might call the local “church.” The synagogue system was developed during Israel’s captivity in Babylon when it was no longer possible for them to sacrifice at the Temple. In Jesus’ day, it was the hub of each individual community.

They also formed what was called the *haberim* (meaning “friends”). These were local lay gatherings where adults came together to discuss and study the Torah and to fellowship with one another. (Perhaps this is the forerunner of our home bible studies.)

The men also placed the scripture in small boxes and tied them to their hands or upon their foreheads. These were called phylacteries. We will discuss this practice in a later lesson.

Another way they fulfilled this commandment was by placing scripture in boxes and nailing them at their doorposts so that they would be reminded of the commandments each time they crossed the threshold. These are called Mezuzahs and are still used by observant Jews today.

Some have called Jesus’ commitment to the Torah into question. They believe that Jesus came to introduce a new “religion” and that He had disdain for the Old Testament commandments. But let’s see how Jesus actually felt about the Torah.

Read Matthew 5:17-18. What was Jesus’ attitude toward God’s Law?

Jesus had an extremely high regard for scripture which influenced His ministry. Therefore, what Jesus taught was not meant to disqualify Old Testament teaching, but to fulfill it. The word fulfill in Greek is *pleroo* and it creates an interesting word picture. It literally means to cram (like into a net) or level up something that is hollow. Jesus “filled up” the Law, accomplishing what God intended. He did not separate Himself from it, but embraced it.

The Jews of Jesus’ day also had the Oral Torah which was the rabbinic interpretations and definitions of the written Torah. This “torah” was not written down until after Jesus death. During His lifetime, these commands and traditions were passed down through memorization. Jesus challenged parts of the Oral Law because the intention of God’s Torah had been lost in their explanations and traditions.

So we see that Jesus had great respect for his “Jewishness.” He was an observant Jew in his manner and dress. Scripture records Him observing the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7); Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah (John 10:22-23); Sabbath (Luke 4:16); and Passover (Mark 14:12-21). We also see Him making provision to pay the local Temple Tax (Matthew 17:24-27). Scholars believe Jesus would have dressed like the Jews of His day and also would have observed their dietary laws. By being observant, Jesus was relating to the contemporaries of His day.

Not everyone held Jesus’ view of the Torah. In first century Israel there were various sects or what we would call denominations operating. Scripture mentions some of these groups.

Read the following scriptures and note the names of the groups which are mentioned:

Matthew 22:23

Matthew 12:14

DID YOU KNOW?

Jot (or yod in Hebrew) is referring to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The corresponding Greek term is iota. Today it still means the smallest part. Don't we often say "just jot it down?"

A tittle was a downward stroke in Hebrew writing. It rhymes with our word little and refers to something even smaller than a jot!

Jesus is saying that he would not weaken even the smallest part of Torah through misinterpretation.

Luke 6:15 (also see Matthew 10:4 & Mark 3:18)

Matthew 22:16

DID YOU KNOW?
The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish judicial council in Jerusalem and was headed up by the High Priest. During Jesus' day the Sanhedrin was made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees who were hostile against each other.

The Sadducees were wealthy, powerful aristocrats who held the majority of the seventy Sanhedrin seats. The Sadducees were more political than religious. They rejected the Oral Torah and they did not believe in certain doctrines such as the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul. They greatly admired the Greeks and in many ways adopted their more secular mindset. They were more self-sufficient rather than God-dependent.

The Pharisees were mostly middle class men who had more contact with the common folk of Israel and therefore, garnered their support. They believed that the Oral Law was equal to the written Torah, and required strict adherence to these traditions. They were more religious than the Sadducees and had a legalistic approach to God.

It surprises many Christians, but Jesus actually aligned himself most closely with the Pharisees even though he often criticized them. Their devotion to the Law reflected His own dedication to the Word of God. After his death and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., it was the Pharisaical sect of Judaism which endured.

The Zealots were a rebellious political faction associated with the Pharisees. They were looking for the overthrow of the Roman government. Many of the zealots were terrorists, although not all. It is interesting to note that one of Jesus' twelve disciples, Simon, was a zealot.

The Herodians were a political sect which aligned themselves with King Herod. They supported and followed the Roman rule through King Herod

who was considered by many Jews to be a puppet king. Some of the Herodians actually believed that Herod was the Messiah. Today, we would call them the politically correct group.

Finally, there were **the Essenes**, who are not mentioned in the pages of the New Testament but are included in historical documents. The Dead Sea Scrolls are religious documents from the Essene community in Qumran. The word Essene is Aramaic for the word “pious.” They were separatists and somewhat elitists. Many isolated themselves from society in very tight-knit communities.² It is believed that John the Baptist may have spent some time at Qumran before the beginning of his ministry.

Each of these groups filtered Jesus’ message through the lens of their own position. Today we find the same thing happening in the Church. Various sects approach the Word according to their own “brand” of Christianity.

SELAH!*

Examine your own heart. What lens are you using when you study God’s Word? Be honest, are you like the

Sadducees having a self-reliant view of your faith

Pharisees having a legalistic view of your faith

Zealots demanding God operate according to your desires

Herodians wanting your faith to be politically correct

Essenes having a closed, elitist attitude toward your faith

OR

Do you have an open heart and a teachable spirit? As we continue our study, pray that the Lord reveals the “lens” you are using to filter His Word. Ask Him to keep your heart unguarded and unrestricted so He may reveal His truth to you.

** Selah is a Hebrew expression which is used predominately in the Psalm 71. The meaning is somewhat uncertain. However, it is believed that it means “to hang” or “to measure” or “weigh in the balances.” The Amplified Bible adds “pause and think calmly about.” This is how we will be using the word throughout this study.*

FREE STUDY ENDNOTES

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, Ed., *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan 1976) pp. 779-780

² *Archeological Study Bible* Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan 2005) p. 1576

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