

## **Bible Special 06-08-15b**

Let's pick up our study now, looking at the state of Judaism, the status of it, the kinds of Judaism that were prevailing in the days of the Lord Jesus in the first century AD. I've tried to lay a little bit of background for this in human nature and to point out some parallels to it in other places. Even in denominations in the United States, you will see that where you start out with Presbyterians, then you've got six different kinds of Presbyterians.

You can start out with Baptists, and you've got five different kinds of Baptists. You start out with Methodists, and you end up with four or five different kinds of Methodists. We just have a hard time sticking together.

Scripture says one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, and we just have a real hard time. Baptists think there's two baptisms. I grew up a Baptist, and I feel I have a license to critique my own denomination.

If the Scripture says there is one baptism, what is the baptism that we focus on? Which one do you want? Do you want water baptism or do you want spirit baptism? Which one is it going to be? Scripture says there is one baptism to focus on. Which one is it? Well, as someone who has been both sprinkled and dumped, I can tell you that I really think this baptism of the Holy Spirit is the one we need. Not because it creates supernatural results or a funny feeling or holy laughter or tongues or anything else, but because this is the practical provision of God that enables us to understand supernatural truth from God's Word and see what difference it makes five minutes from now, five hours from now, five days from now, in the days ahead.

It's practical. It's meaningful. God gives us His Spirit so that we have insight into the realities of life from the perspective of God's Word, and we can't get that.

This is why you can talk yourself blue in the face to someone who is either not a Christian at all or who is a Christian that is disinterested in the plan and purpose of God and isn't listening to God's Holy Spirit. You can't get it across. You can't make it make sense to them because, as Scripture says, the things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned.

And it's not mystical, but the Spirit has to be present. Well, this is human nature. It is our nature.

We have to suspect ourselves. It's a lot easier to suspect other people of things. That guy is messed up, and I'm not.

And that makes me feel good. This is one of the core characteristics of human nature. You have to look really hard to find somebody who doesn't enjoy finding somebody that's more screwed up than they are and feeling better as a result.

Well, I may be messed up, but I'm not like that. We love that. Well, this is the mechanism by

which believers end up splitting.

Our heart is deceitful. We think we're right and that guy's wrong and we better get away from him or expel him from the fellowship or some such thing. And we get this human sense of righteousness.

Now, we talked about this in the church. Let's look at Judaism. What are the real roots of Israelite monotheistic faith? Where does it begin for Israel? It begins with the nation.

It begins in the wilderness. It begins at Mount Sinai. Moses goes up and gets the law and brings it down from Mount Sinai to the people.

Now, how long is it before there is a division in the faith? Moses doesn't get down the mountain with the tablets before the first sect appears. It's called the golden calf sect. This is the God that brought us out of Egypt.

Well, you just figure with a start like that, we're not going to really be able to have high expectations of ourselves as human beings. Later on, you remember once the tabernacle was being built and you got the priesthood cranked up and dedicated, we had another split. We had another faction appear.

The rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. If you're familiar with the history, you know that this was rather effectively dealt with by God Himself. But that was an offshoot.

That was a split. That was a division. A difference of opinion.

Has God not said that we are all priests? Misunderstanding, misinterpretation, difference of opinion resulting in one group being right and one group being wrong. Later on, when you get into the monarchy period, you have David and then you have Solomon and the whole kingdom splits. Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

And you say, well, but wasn't that more of a political split? If you remember, Jeroboam, when he rebelled against Rehoboam and took a bunch of people with him, how did he do it? How did he affect his new little political kingdom? He went to Bethel and Dan and set up worship centers outside of Jerusalem. Alternatives, alternate locations at Bethel and Dan. And guess what he used for his cult? Golden calves.

Revive the old, first, nasty little alternative. So, it has ever been thus. And here's my point in this early history and in laying this whole background and spending so much time on it.

Do not think that you and I are immune. Do not think that because, oh well, that we study the Word of God and we don't have a building and we don't have a budget and we don't have a church constitution and we're free of all of these accouterments and trappings and we're plugged into the main line here. We're just assembling and studying the Word of God.

That is a wonderful thing, but do not think that it confers immunity on you and me. We have

the same human nature as all of these people that have created all these divisions. And we are just as susceptible and just as likely if we are not constantly examining ourselves to see if we're in the faith.

If we are not cultivating the humility that says, I have to find God's will. I have to operate in God's power. It is not me.

It's not my strength. It's not my standing. It's not my opinion of myself.

It is who and what God is that defines me as a believer. And I have to constantly be seeking and pursuing that goal. We need to suspect ourselves constantly.

We need to turn that laser beam critical eye right back on ourselves and say, am I being an arrogant son of Belial here? Am I puffing myself up by demeaning others? Is my pride creating divisions, wars, and strife? Am I letting a root of bitterness spring up in me instead of humbling myself under the mighty hand of God? Don't think it can't happen. I don't care how long you've studied the Bible. I don't care how much you know.

I don't care how much you think you know or how much I think I know. Every single one of us is susceptible and we have to be on guard. One of these days I'm going to revisit our study that was entitled, Watch and Pray.

Remember there are several passages in Scripture. Watch and Pray. Why does Jesus tell the disciples, watch, be alert, be on guard? Our enemy the devil is seeking whom he may devour.

It doesn't necessarily have to be the personal devil dropping all of his interest in world affairs and coming to persecute little old Sam. But what it does mean is his policies and his influence and his minions, he might have a 17th level sub-demon delegated, sent out to mess with us and to play on our weaknesses. We have to be alert.

Now, first century Judaism. How did we get to these 24 sects? Well, we learn a lot about these from Josephus. Remember Flavius Josephus, Jewish historian, sort of a contemporary of the Apostle Paul.

He wrote a detailed history of this whole Second Temple period. And there has been some question about how accurate his accounts are because he had a polemical objective. He had an argument that he wanted to make.

He was trying to make a defense of the Jews. And people say, well, anytime somebody's defending, they're distorting. And so there's always been scholarly questioning of how accurate Josephus was.

But there's no reason to doubt that the details he gives about the divisions within Judaism are accurate. So, other places where we get information about these emphases and these understandings and beliefs amongst the various factions of Judaism is from the Talmud and

Mishnah, the rabbinic commentaries that we talked about earlier. The Tosefta and so on.

And also our own Scriptures that tell us about the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We learn, for example, about the difference of opinion regarding resurrection from our own Scriptures. Josephus tells us that in the time of Christ there were five major sects.

Out of these 24, there were five that were really prominent. And three of these were dominant out of those five. You already know these.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. You can add to that the Zealots and the Sicarii, S-I-C-A-R-I-I. And Josephus puts these into three categories.

He describes them in three different ways. There are sects which are philosophical or religious. In other words, their unique identity is based on their religious or their philosophical belief.

There are those that are nationalist and primarily politically defined. And there are those that are criminal. So the first three that I mentioned are religious.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. Those divisions, those self-definitions are religious in nature. The Zealots were nationalist extremists.

This is kind of like your Irish Republican Army types. Yeah, we're Catholics and all, but we're mainly ticked off at England and we want self-governance. We want you to get off our soil and so on.

Well, these nationalistic hopes and aspirations were justified on religious grounds, as is often the case. And you have a hard time drawing a line between one's religion and one's politics when you intermingle them. This is the accusation that is often made today in America about the quote-unquote religious right, or the, what do we call Falwell's, it's the moral majority.

And that this is sort of Christianity and politics intermingled. And sometimes it's hard to carry on a conversation because when you're trying to talk religion, people will mix in politics. And when you're trying to talk politics, people will mix in religion.

And it's hard to sift and filter out the two. This was the case with the Zealots. They justified this on the grounds of Old Testament promises and on the identity that God had given them.

And they said, because of what God has said, we need to drive these infidels out of the land. And so this was their rationale, their justification. The ones that we're going to focus on, because they occur in Scripture, are the Pharisees and the Sadducees, to a lesser extent, the Essenes.

Now, it was thought for a time that the Dead Sea community, that just deposited the Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves, were Essenes. And it is often assumed that the Essenes are the Dead Sea Scroll people. That is not a proven fact.

It is a hypothesis. But there were 20-odd other possible types of Jews who might have left those scrolls behind. So we cannot prove that the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Essenes are related directly.

But for our purposes in Bible study, we primarily want to focus on the Pharisees and Sadducees. We have Simon the Zealot who is mentioned. There has been some modern day speculation that Judas Iscariot was a Zealot and that this was somehow part of his justification for what he did regarding betraying the Lord Jesus.

But generally speaking, the rabbis that you have in the 1st century, 2nd century and following, all the way down to the present, generally trace their roots back to the Pharisees, who in turn are rooted and grounded in the Hasidim, or those who were sort of a reform movement, almost a reformation idea. In the days after Ezra and Nehemiah, when the people came back in the land and then you had all kinds of dissipation and spreading out. You didn't really have the monarchy anymore.

You didn't really have the priesthood anymore. You had sort of another period like it says in the Judges, where everyone was sort of doing what was right in his own eyes. And the religious identity in Israel became very nebulous and very unclear.

And so the Hasidim said, look, we're going to start the Back to the Bible broadcast. We're going to do the radio Bible class. We're going to get back to the text of Scripture and reclaim our heritage and our identity.

And this was a good thing. You can't go wrong going back to Scripture. The problem is that, as I mentioned, over time this began to accrete and build its own set of problems.

Legalism, tradition, creedalism, so that Scripture no longer becomes the single criterion. So, Josephus says in the Antiquities of the Jews, which is his magnum opus, where he traces all of this history, he says this about the Pharisees. What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses.

Does that sound like anything we've studied recently? They have delivered a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses. For that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory, which are in the written Word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. So, in my mind, this kind of puts the Sadducees in a better light.

They're throwing off, they're sort of the Martin Luthers to the Pharisees' Catholic Church. No, no, no, we want to just stick to the text. The Sadducees are described by Josephus mostly as they differ, just like we are called Protestants, and that ties us to the Catholic Church because we protest against these major elements in the Catholic Church, and so we are defined in

contrast to Catholics.

Well, in the same way Sadducees are defined in contrast to the Pharisees. So, Josephus says, For the Pharisees, they say that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by that fate. As for the Sadducees, they take away fate and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal.

They suppose that all our actions are in our own power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly. So, the Pharisees were sort of the moderate Calvinists. Some things are foreordained and determined.

Other things of a limited nature are in our power. The Sadducees were more like the Armenians, Armenians rather, not Armenians, Jacobus Arminius went way over as a reaction to Calvinism and said, No, you can freely choose. God has given free will so much so that you can choose to be good if you just choose it.

Now, we can wish to be good, and we can desire to be good, and we can choose to access God's grace to be made good, but we cannot just choose righteousness and perform it, because that's an excess. Arminius went too far the other way. He unstuck himself from Calvinism and flew clear over to the other side of the gauge, and abused the notion of free will.

Without the grace of God, without the blood of Christ, without the work of God within us, we can't just choose to be good. We can choose to allow God to make us good, and there's an important distinction there. So, this is sort of, I'm trying to put the Pharisees and the Sadducees in terms that make sense to us.

The Sadducees believed it's just the text of Scripture, and you are totally free to determine your own fate. Nothing is foreordained. And this is an excess.

Are there things that are foreordained in the plan and purpose of God? Of course. That provides the framework of human history. There are circumstances that are ordained for your life, and for my life.

And they're specific. And we exercise free will. To me, and I don't mean this to sound demeaning or belittling, but a scientist has laboratory rats.

A laboratory rat is free to crawl around, find what it wants, eat what it wants, and so on. But the scientist creates a box, and makes it like a maze, and he rewards the rat in some cases, and he does not reward the rat or gives him an electric shock or whatever. He does things to the rat.

And so within the limitations of the scientific test or experiment or analysis, there are restrictions. The rat can go forward or backward in the maze. He can turn to the left or turn to the right.

But he can't crawl out of the maze and go out in the field and hunt natural food. He's been limited and literally boxed in. Well, God, in the circumstances of our lives, has ordained certain fixed limits.

And within those limits, we exercise our free will. We saw this in the book of Job. God created a hedge.

They were certain the Sabaeans couldn't come down on intact Job anytime they wanted. They were prevented. For whatever reason, God didn't want the Spanish Armada to sail over there and obliterate England.

And so he sent a big storm and blew the Armada off into the middle of nowhere. History is replete with examples. World War II and Patton and his tanks in the mud, going all the way back to Triremes and ancient sea battles where weather has played a critically important role and has turned a losing situation into a winning situation.

It guides God's foreordination. So this is the difference. The Pharisees believed in that.

So you can see that there are pluses and minuses on each side. I think the Sadducees are great for wanting to stick to the text of Scripture and repudiate tradition as barnacles that have grown on it. But they overblow free will and ignore the ordaining will of God.

The Pharisees are good in that. They are anxious to preserve the meaning of Scripture. And they do so in the sense that they understand resurrection and so on, and the Sadducees don't.

But they get tangled up in their own tradition. Now, why do I point this out? Do not assume that somewhere in Christianity there is one really good denomination and all the rest of them are hopelessly muddled and messed up and have no redeeming value. All you have to do is look at the Pharisees and Sadducees to see that there are good points and bad points of each.

Any church that has believers in it who are in some way, shape, or form seeking to please God in their life, I don't care what they believe. I don't care what they understand. They may be hand-fluttering charismatics.

They may be stern, depressed Calvinists. They may be happy-go-lucky social activists. They may be Quakers.

No matter what they are, if any believer, any group of believers has that spark of wanting to please God, wanting to pursue relationship with Him, there is going to be some good in that church. Two or three gather in my name. Jesus said, I am in the midst.

Why do I emphasize this? Remember I talked earlier about our tendency to look down our nose and be critical and to sort of elevate ourselves and say, well, look at them. I don't make that mistake. Be careful.

Be careful talking about other churches. Be careful talking about other assemblies. Be careful

talking about other believers.

God is at work in those groups. If you looked at some of those groups some years ago, you would have found a lot of us who are now here in those denominational churches. And God used that experience and God brought us along.

And hopefully we've made progress. Hopefully we're treading on the upward way and gaining new heights every day. But leave God alone in training His children.

Leave young believers alone as they move through that which is necessary in their background to hopefully bring them to the place where they will appreciate the Word of God and the Spirit of God. There is a time for everything. There is a time to be in kindergarten.

There is a time to be in the first grade. It's pretty silly for a group of college students to run around pointing and laughing at grade school classes. Leave them alone.

Pray for them. Encourage them. Don't put out the Spirit's fire.

You recognize that they don't understand things that you understand? Great! Thank God that you have an understanding. But what good does it do the body of Christ? What good does it do in the plan and purpose of God to belittle and demean fellow believers who are at an earlier stage? And maybe they'll never get out of that stage. Well, that's their business.

I cannot emphasize enough. Look at what happened to the Jews. A big reason why they missed the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ right in their midst is they were busy bickering with each other.

Fighting for power. Deciding who's right and who's wrong. How can I trick this guy up with the Scriptures? They sent emissary after emissary to Jesus to try to trick him up in his force.

To try to prove him wrong from the Scriptures. That is a horrible abuse and misunderstanding. We are not here to prove each other wrong.

Jesus said, I have not come into the world to condemn the world. I've come to the world to deliver it. And we ought to have that attitude that was in Christ Jesus.

The mind that was in Christ Jesus. If we do have an understanding, if we do have some of God's truth, praise God. Let's try to be the people who are capable of sharing it in a loving and encouraging and up-building way.

And not use it as a bludgeon to beat somebody over the head with. Or to try to pump ourselves up to think that we're better. That's the mistake the Pharisees made.

That's the mistake the Sadducees made. That's the mistake the Essenes made. And the Zealots and the Sicaries and the Herodians and all of these other 24 sects of Judaism.

That's what a lot of us have done in modern day Christian denominations. Well, you don't baptize by immersion. You're messed up.

You don't baptize by sprinkling. You're messed up. Well, you don't baptize by effusion.

You're all messed up. You didn't get baptized by the priest. You didn't eat the Holy Communion right.

You didn't confess to the guy in the box or this, that, and the other. We start finding these false criteria to judge others and pump ourselves up. If you want, in a nutshell, the problem in Jesus' day with first century Judaism, it was too busy looking around at the other guy to find what was wrong.

Looking at the Lord Jesus, trying to find what's wrong. Can you imagine? That's all they did. Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The one thing that got them all together was uniting against Jesus Christ. Now, if that doesn't tell you something about our human nature, the people who were religious leaders dedicating themselves to the things of God were the very ones that were the most vituperative and vocal and vicious in their attacks on Jesus Christ Himself. That's our nature.

That's in you and that's in me. And we have got to let God expunge that out of our nature. And it takes a willing heart, it takes a seeking heart to avoid this kind of legalism, this kind of judging, and this kind of wars and divisions among you.

That's what creates roots of division in churches, in families, in Christian fellowships is looking around and saying, well, I don't like what you're doing and I think I can prove that you're wrong from my creed or from my Scripture or whatever. We don't have a lot of detail about the specifics of what these groups believe. You know that the Sadducees did not believe there was a resurrection.

That's why they were sad, you see. The Pharisees did believe in resurrection. Paul the Apostle used this in Acts to create a big hoopla so that he could disappear in the confusion.

And the Essenes, Josephus, you know what he describes them as? He says, the Essenes are Jews by birth and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. The Essenes were notable for their love for one another. That ought to be us.

By this shall all men know that you are my disciples. Well, how? That you love one another. They had their own problems.

They neglect wedlock, but they choose out other person's children while they are pliable and fit for learning and esteem them to be of their kindred and form them according to their own manners. They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage and the succession of mankind thereby continued, but they guard against lascivious behavior of women and are persuaded

that none of them preserve their fidelity to one man. So the Essenes thought women were just sleep around gals who couldn't be trusted to stick with one husband.

So all of the sects had their problems. All of them had their good points. We want to be of one denomination and that is Christian.

Well, let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the guidance that it gives us under the ministry of Your Spirit.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths in our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.