

“JERUSALEM MEETS ROME AND FINDS BABYLON: A STUDY IN CHURCH PURITY”

FALL 2022-SPRING 2023

March 29, 2023

“THE BRANCHING OF THE CHURCH” part 3

I. OBSTACLES FACED BY THE NEW MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT TO CREATE THE BODY OF BELIEVING FOLLOWERS OF JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE LORD AND CHRIST.

A. Identity: who are we and what is God making us into?

**1. This new faith was going to be similar to the children of
Israel coming out of Egypt**

**a. They knew they were not Egyptians and therefore not
truly a part of the Egyptian theology and religion;
but this is the environment in which they had been
living for many generations; it was all they knew.
They were about to become a nation, united, and
bound by a covenant with the unseen God. They
would be changed from Hebrew slaves to a
conquering, prospering nation of agrarian
business people under the theocracy of the LORD
almighty. That’s a big learning curve.**

**b. Likewise, Jesus’ disciples, soon to be known as
apostles, were Jewish and had been living the life
of rabbinical, Pharisee-driven, second temple
Judaism which they had heard their Lord publicly
criticize. It was the Pharisees, Sadducees,
Herodians and Romans that had so opposed Him
they had killed Him. That system apparently in the
eyes of their Lord was in need of some kind of
reform. What was He expecting them to be in His
absence? He had left them very few rules of
organization, liturgy and leadership structure.
What were they supposed to do with that?**

**c. With the Mosaic covenant (Torah) as their heritage
and background and the Lord’s mention of the New
Covenant on the night of His betrayal, what had
His life, death and resurrection done to establish
them in His Kingdom promises? Is this a**

completely new faith? Was this a reformation of the older faith?

2. *Since they were being rejected by their fellow Jewish countrymen, and they were being joined by Samaritans and more and more Gentiles, what was this new identity?*
 - a. *Were they still Jewish like those of their fellow countrymen that included the pharisees, the Levitical priesthood, etc or had that been changed? They knew they would be persecuted by their fellow Jewish countrymen since they had persecuted Jesus. They would be the object of the same hatred. Certainly, their Jewish brethren did not identify them as one of them. They thought of them as heretics, followers of the false teacher/blasphemer Jesus of Nazareth*
 - b. *They identified as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ but what did that make them? Were they a new entity in the generations long heritage of the children of Israel, something new and different or were they just the new generation of those coming into the promised land?*
 - c. *They, like their forebears, would have “Mount Sinai” and “wilderness wandering” as well as “promised land” conquest moments as the Holy Spirit directed them, guided them, taught them what they were to become. They were living in new, uncharted territory.*
 - d. *At first, it was only Jewish folk who were in this movement of God but when the Samaritans, then the Gentiles were saved in the same way, they were learning from God to see the plan of Christ in a new light and to have to modify what they thought was their heritage to understand that the “old skins” that had contained the “wine” of the old covenant would not hold the “new wine” of openness, repentance and faith being given to those without the Israeli background.*

B. Validity: What is their constitution, covenant, documentation, God-given validity? What is their relationship to the Old

Covenant? Torah was still valid as the instruction of God as to how all things came to be and of His revealed righteousness.

- 1. Jesus had not given them a body of written statements of what the new covenant for the coming Kingdom of God would be. They had the Tanakh; it had not been invalidated or thrown out. Since no new one was being given they would have to use the structure of their only known documentation: the law, the psalms and the prophets. They were obligated by God to keep these forever since they were in a forever covenant with God. Before He ascended, He had given them oral instruction on expected living and the coming Kingdom of God. Seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of OT prophecies they could see they were an extension of the Word of God, whatever else they were. Can we see it would only get more complicated when the Temple is destroyed, the Levitical priesthood is ended, the sacrificial system is gone and the Jewish people are removed physically from the land?*
- 2. Since the revelation of God in Torah, psalms and prophets was their constitution as their God-given heritage, how binding were those documents on the Samaritans and Gentiles? The Gentiles were uncircumcised people outside the covenant of God! Did not Torah teach that if the stranger wanted to participate in any of the feasts or the life of Israel, he had to be circumcised? Is that what Jesus was calling on these Gentiles and Samaritans to do, participate in the old covenant life? Were these new converts to Jesus obligated to the tenets of the law? Did they need to first become participants with the Mosaic covenant? Did they need to be circumcised to become covenant people first and then they could be saved? Did not the law reveal the righteousness God expected people to live by?*
- 3. What about their relationship to the rabbinical Judaism with the Oral Torah? Jesus was critical of the traditions; yet this was the cultural practice of Judaism.*
- 4. There is no "new testament" written by Jesus and given to them like the one Moses gave them earlier. The document, the Ark, the Tabernacle, the miracles, the*

presence of God in their camp and the miraculous victories over the power of the nations was evidence enough to validate the freed slaves of Egypt to all the nations around them. Here they had no document or structure or furnishings, vestments, etc to show to people of their new identity. What they did have was the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-empowered witness of the miraculous life of Jesus, His death and awe-filled resurrection and ascension! They could demonstrate how Jesus had fulfilled law, psalms and prophets. Rather than destructible documents, they had the indestructible life of Jesus and His converting power to reveal Himself in every place they went. Unlike having to physically conquer people with martial weapons, they were conquering their rebellion to God by the power of the spoken Word to those without the hope of a covenant with God!

C. Clarity: What exactly did they believe about the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord and Christ?

- 1. Jesus is the most unique human being ever born or walking on this planet or traversing the cosmos! He demonstrated complete control over the bodies of human beings, nature, and the spirits that were present in His day. No one had ever lived as righteously, revealed the true nature of God, died with such accompaniments by nature, angels and humans, or had ever risen from the dead! He claimed to be both the Son of God and therefore equal to God and to be the son of man being completely human. How could this be? Was He both at the same time, in the same body? Did He have two complete natures at the same time? Was He always both from conception through life and beyond? Is He both now? Or was He a human who was inhabited by the Spirit of the Christ at, for instance, baptism with such Spirit leaving Him at His death?*
- 2. How did they know that Jesus was the Son of God?*
- 3. Was He a real person or a spirit that was growing in knowledge to become the Messiah?*
- 4. How did they know that the death of Jesus could be applied to any and all who believed Him? How did they come to*

the conclusion that He had died as a sacrifice to pay for human rebellion against God?

- 5. How did they know that Jesus' resurrection was sufficient to give eternal life to any and all who believed in Him and His work?*
- 6. All of these issues would have to be worked out and answered. It often brought about church-splitting results. These things would be challenges to those people who had been practitioners of other occult and mystic religions.*

D. Supremacy: Why was this revelation they had received superior to any philosophy, religion, theology or system of belief?

- 1. Taking this faith out of Jerusalem and Judea as Jesus had commissioned them to do would force the encounter of the mythologies and philosophies of the Gentile culture. Explanation of the person and work of Jesus, the liturgies to be practiced in His worship and the cultural behavior expected of believers often clashed with the local culture, religion and cults of the places they entered with the gospel. Would they, could they be blended in any way?*
- 2. The mystery cults, the occultic knowledge and the philosophies of the day would see in Christianity the opportunity to blend it with their "faith". The resulting blend would call for the need of clarity and the field of apologetics was born.*
- 3. Because a number of mythologies had elements similar to the gospel account, names of characters and beliefs often were used interchangeably, confusing the belief systems.*
- 4. There were occultic groups that often intentionally used Jesus name and identity but gave it a completely different role even to include Him as Lucifer's brother.*

E. Politics, government and laws: There was always an ongoing battle with governments at all levels for their very existence.

- 1. Persecution would often come at the hands of religious practitioners*
- 2. Just as frequently, the persecution would come from civil authorities that saw the belief system as threatening.*
- 3. How did Jesus see our relationship to the state?*