

Who were “the Jews” and “the Gentiles” of Scripture?

Generalizations Lead to Polarization

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We are living in a time of religious fervor though much of it is based in emotionalism rather than knowledge. Few have the patience to really study and understand nuances of a situation, preferring the evening news sound byte approach. The way something appears is often taken as truth in our mainstream news media while efforts to correct a wrong first impression are buried or simply not reported. Many people have not taken time to read an entire book in years! Unfortunately, this is also often true of our approach to Scripture. It is much easier to just take in what we hear without studying ourselves to determine if what is said is confirmed or refuted in Scripture. It was because of this willingness to prayerfully study and compare what he said to the Torah/Scripture that Paul commended the Bereans. For others who do not hunger and thirst for Truth and study for themselves, misunderstandings flow down through generations.

This behavior is really not so new. As Solomon said, there really is nothing new under the sun. What has been will be. Failure to fully comprehend a situation easily leads to division. Sometimes, our God even designed it that way. (2 Chron. 10: 15) For His purposes, He has allowed many divisions to develop. In the end, He shows Himself strong on behalf of those who love Him. But along the way there is room for individual hearts to show themselves for what they really contain.

I have come to the conclusion that our YHWH has left some things purposely vague *in order to* expose our hearts. Will we become dogmatic and rigid in a gray area of understanding or will we respond in humility? Dean Wheelock, of Hebrew Roots ministry in Lakeland, WI often says we will have “flat forehead syndrome” in heaven. It will result from the frequent response of hitting our forehead with the heel of our hands, saying, “Oh, so THAT’S what that means!”

A major confusion for those of Christian faith has been our relationship with the people of Judah, commonly called “**Jews.**” Jewish people in general are equally confused about their relationship with Christians, commonly called “**Gentiles.**” If the confusion was always benign with peaceful co-existence perhaps we could just ignore it. But many have understood “the Jews” to be the enemy of Messiah, both then and now. The various times of inquisition and forced conversion or death targeting the Jews have left many with the understanding that Gentiles are their enemy. All too often-- despite serving the same Elohim/Mighty One, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—confusion has led to violence. Rarely, it has brought forth compassion and cooperation. (In view of current events, may I add that our Elohim, YHWH, is NOT the same as Allah.)

We see a comparison in the story of the Prodigal Son; both sons are dear to the Father yet they behave in different ways. Subtle resistance and outright rebellion both amount to the same thing. Both need the covering and grace of a loving yet righteous Father. Repentance/*teshuvah*, brings reconciliation and restoration!

The confusion, hostility and mistrust between these two groups did not erupt from nowhere. Though we cannot impute motives, we can see some ways in which generalizations contributed to division and polarization. Though I don't intend to oversimplify a complex historical situation, perhaps I can shed some light on this dilemma.

Have you ever experienced a situation in which you were included as part of a group though you, personally, may not have considered yourself a member? Perhaps you have experienced racial or social rejection based on skin color or appearance. On the other hand, have you ever agreed that you were a member of a group yet wanted to distance yourself from the behavior of others in the same group?

Scandals among Christians in recent years have made many people express their distaste for "those" Christians who aren't like "our kind" of Christians. The best example I can think of would be the person who calls himself or herself a Christian and right-to-life advocate yet approves or participates in a murder of an abortionist. Most Believers would hardly want to be considered the "same" as someone who violates respect for life, in the name of life. Some question whether such a murderer could even rightly be called "Christian," while others may say it was a righteous judgment carried out.

In short, most people don't appreciate being thrown together in one "bag" and labeled. Yet this is what has happened in consideration of who were "the Jews" and who were "the Gentiles." We will examine some generalizations that have been made of both groups. You may be surprised as you discover the meanings and roots of these Scriptural terms.

Watch for Part 2 next time or read the article in its entirety at:
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