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A STUDY OF THE JERUSALEM JEWS IN PAUL'S DAY

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 82
HEBREWS 5:11-14

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HEBREWS 5:11-14 "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

We have come to that section of the Book of the Acts where Paul made a great spiritual blunder. Instead of pushing on West to Italy and Spain Paul turned back and went to Jerusalem, took a legalistic vow, and in the process almost lost his life. We will study in the next few weeks how Paul was warned by God and warned by many of his friends not to go to Jerusalem, but he went over their warnings. Therefore before we move on in the study of the last eight chapters of the Acts, we are going to take a look at some passages in the Book of Hebrews. The Book of Hebrews was probably written by Apollos, or someone else equally capable in doctrine and knowledge. The Book of Hebrews was written about 67 A.D. just three years before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and the Jews were scattered under discipline throughout all the earth. It was written to show the Jews their terrible spiritual condition and to warn them of their coming disaster. When Hebrews was written the Jews just had three years left to fulfill their responsibility to the Lord. In 70 A.D. during the summer in a period of just ninety days over a million Jews died in Palestine and 97 thousand were taken as slaves. Even the Jewish historian Josephus, when he wrote about this awful destruction, could not hide his shock of the terrible slaughter which took place there. It was indeed one of the most terrible events in all human history. With this slaughter the fifth cycle of discipline to the Jews began and will continue until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Let us remember that Jerusalem was one of the religious centers of the world. Jerusalem was the capitol of legalistic religion, which is indeed the worst thing in all the earth. Jerusalem was the center of concentrated religion, the home of the Pharisees, and Sadducees, and the Jewish Sanhedrin. They put the people under the bondage of religion. They had hundreds and hundreds of rules about keeping the Sabbath and they were so binding that a person could hardly breathe on the Sabbath. Because of this hyper-religion even the born-again Jews had been greatly poisoned, and as a result, evangelism and missions had come to a rude halt. This is why we are studying this section of Hebrews before we move on into the last eight chapters of the Acts. This little detour is designed to help us understand the spiritual climate into which Paul walked when he made his last trip to this citadel of Jewish legalism.

Probably Apollos wrote this book. He was educated at the University of Alexandria in Egypt and the great Philo was his teacher. He learned from Philo how to teach by analogy and he used that method quite often in the Book of Hebrews. Apollos was a brilliant public speaker but until he came to Ephesus he didn't know anything about New Testament theology. He didn't know anything about the mystery of the church or the dispensation of the church. But in Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila taught him New Testament theology. If Apollos is the author, then we can easily understand why he wrote as he did. So this letter was sent to the Jews in Jerusalem in 67 A.D. with the hope that the Jews would wake up and get back into fellowship with God or get out of Jerusalem before the slaughter struck. The author of Hebrews wanted the Jerusalem Jews to see religion as a Satanic operation. This letter was designed to bring a believer to the point of maturity.

In Hebrews 5:1-10 we have a passage which outlines the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all believers. This passage explains clearly that every believer is his own priest. There is no such thing as a distinction of layman and minister, but each one is in full-time Christian service. Here is the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer with Jesus Christ as the great high priest. Apollos wanted the people in Jerusalem to understand this great doctrine. In Hebrews 5 Apollos has outlined this doctrine quite clearly in the first ten verses, and then he makes an abrupt change. At the close of verse 10 which says about Christ "Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec" we have a parenthesis. This statement in verse 10 occurs again in Hebrews 6:20, but in the verses that intervene, we have a parenthesis which explains to us the awful spiritual condition of the legalistic religious Jews of Jerusalem. On three different occasions Paul was warned not to go back to Jerusalem, but he went. Paul was a "Grace" man but he went back to Jerusalem and took a legalistic vow and got out of fellowship with the Lord. Jerusalem was the enemy of all true doctrine. Jerusalem in her legalism was the bitter enemy of the Church Age. Jerusalem didn't have the moral fiber to maintain the great missionary thrust, therefore, the missionary center had to be moved to Antioch and then to Ephesus. Jerusalem will always be a great hindrance to Christianity until Christ returns there and straightens things out. Jerusalem with her Pharisee-Sadducee complex became the great legalistic enemy of true Christianity. What was really wrong with those Jews in Jerusalem, and why did they develop into the arch enemies of vital Christianity? Why did God allow such terrible condemnation to fall upon them? The answer to this question will come from a study of some verses in Hebrews, Chapters 5 and 6.

HEBREWS 5:11 "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." "Of whom" here refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest, and our priesthood in him, in these verses will be clearly explained. The writer here says that he has many things to say and he is going to say them over and over again until we come to understand them. The phrase "Hard to be uttered" means that these spiritual truths are very difficult for legalistic carnal Christians to understand. These Jews were so carnal that the writer of Hebrews couldn't get it into their minds the meaning of the High Priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all believers. These people in Jerusalem were so spiritually immature they just couldn't understand these great spiritual truths. Carnal, legalistic people just can't take in doctrine, and one doctrine has to be built on another. Legalism disputed grace at all angles and in all ways. So the writer of Hebrews is trying to show these people in Jerusalem how to repent and turn away from their legalism. Now the writer of Hebrews knew the doctrine and it is not stated here that it was hard for him to state the doctrine because he didn't know it. It was hard for him to explain because these Jerusalem Jews were spiritual disoriented. He reminded them that they had become "dull" of hearing. The legalist is the dullest person in the world. They have a sluggish mentality. They are not interested in doctrine and they are bored when they hear it. They were not this way when they were first converted, but they became this way. "Hearing" in this instance refers to the hearing of Bible doctrine. They can hear anything else but they close their ears to doctrinal truth. Think of the people who out of legalism will attend church but out of spiritual dullness will learn nothing. This helps you see the problem the author of Hebrews faced.

HEBREWS 5:12 "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."

The author of Hebrews here reminds these legalists in Jerusalem that they should be so well indoctrinated that they can communicate doctrine to others. In other words, doctrinal truth ought to be filed in the mentality of the soul. But since they had no doctrine in the mentality of the soul, they couldn't pass it on to their daily living or to others. Instead of filling their souls with doctrine they had filled their souls with legalism and dead works, and therefore, they didn't grow spiritually. Since they had just a few years left before the coming destruction, they should be teaching very carefully the doctrines of grace. The word "Oracles" here simply refers to the A B C's of the Gospel. The Greek word is "Logion" and means the simple fundamental A B C's of doctrine. But these people needed milk instead of meat. They needed to know the Scripture for Scripture is nothing other than the mind of Christ.

HEBREWS 5:13 "For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe." He says here that everyone who partakes of milk, which is superficial doctrine, is "Apeiros" which means ignorant and therefore, unable to apply doctrine to experience. Claiming God's promises is fine, but we must move on beyond that and have doctrinal truth in our minds so we can call them to remembrance when we need them. Once you get the Word of God in your mind you grow up and you begin to live by the mind of Christ. But these Jerusalem Jews were so empty of Bible truth he called them babies. It meant they were immature, ignorant, and legalistic. The word for baby was "Napios" and it means immature. The Greek word for a little new-born baby is "Brephos" but that is not the word used here. But these babies he was talking about were 35 or 45 or 55 years old and they were still doctrinal babies. A "Napios" was an adult who acted like a baby. A baby is helpless and must have maximum attention. A baby cannot eat solid food. A baby uses his emotions and doesn't think. A baby has no vocabulary. So these Jews were spiritually just like that, immature, couldn't eat solid food, didn't have any spiritual vocabulary, etc. This is why so many people are in the tongues movement today. They have no spiritual vocabulary and they cannot think and they have to substitute blubber and emotion for straight thinking.

HEBREWS 5:14 "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Here we have the principle of strong Bible doctrine. When you grow up you have divine viewpoint. You understand yourself in relationship to Christ and his truth. You become a discerning person. In other words, you are to learn doctrine, grow up, and learn the great details of the Christian life.