Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 331
Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21
Topic: "The Jews" in John's Gospel
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I recently received an email from a reader of Eternity-DBS saying I was being anti-Semitic so I thought I would clarify the topic of "the Jews" in the gospel of John and their relationship to the nation of Israel today. We shall see that there is a considerable difference. We will see that the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day were certainly responsible for the death of Jesus but that this in no way applies to modern Jews or the state of Israel today. Modern Jews are NOT guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ. Any proper treatment of the gospels needs to hold to both these truths.

"The Jews" in John's gospel are the unbelieving Jews who were fanatically hostile to the Christian faith. These unbelieving Jews were at such enmity with Jesus that they wanted Him crucified, and they stoned Stephen, persecuted the Church and incited Herod to behead John's brother James and imprison the apostle Peter. They were indeed "enemies of the gospel".

Paul's perspective on them is: Romans 11:28 MKJV Indeed as regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes. But as regards the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

The Jews have a prominent role in salvation: John 4:22 MKJV You worship what you do not know, we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

But the unbelieving Jews such as the Pharisees, lawyers and High Priests did not let people enter into this salvation. Luke 11:52 MKJV Woe to you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and you have hindered those who were entering in.

The hostility of the unbelieving Jews towards Jesus emerges quite early in John's gospel:

John 5:16-18 MKJV And therefore the Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day. (17) But Jesus answered them, My Father works until now, and I work. (18) Then, because of this, the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but also said that God was His father, making Himself equal with God.

By chapter 10 the Jews are actively trying to kill Jesus: John 10:31 MKJV Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

When John refers to the Jews it is often associated with Judah, the southern part of Israel in contrast to Samaria and Galilee:

John 7:1 MKJV After these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for He did not desire to

walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him.

John 11:7-8 MKJV Then after that He said to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again. (8) The disciples said to Him, Rabbi, the Jews lately have sought to stone You, and do You go there again?

“The Jews” seem to be headed by the chief priests who plot Jesus’ death:

John 11:49-54 MKJV And one of them, Caiaphas, being the high priest of that year, said to them, You do not know anything at all, (50) nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation perish. (51) And he did not speak this of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; (52) and not for that nation only, but also that He should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. (53) Then from that day they took counsel together that they might kill Him. (54) Therefore Jesus walked no more openly among the Jews; but He went away from there to a country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and continued there with His disciples.

The apostle Peter sees the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ day as directly responsible for Jesus’ death. This is unpleasant – but it is how Scripture clearly sees things.

Acts 2:22-23 MKJV Men, Israelites, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by powerful works, and wonders and miracles, which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know, (23) this One given to you by the before-determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by lawless hands, crucifying Him, you put Him to death;

So does this hostility towards Jesus and later towards the apostles and the early Church apply today? No. Certainly modern Israel has anti-conversion laws and is quite opposed to a Jew being a Christian – but there is little or no lethal hostility. It is rather an attempt at cultural preservation. I know of no substantial persecution of Christians by Jews.

Are modern day Jews “guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ” – not at all. Very few of them would be descended from the original cast of miscreants. The judgment for the Jews hostility was the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus in 70AD and the subsequent Dispersion of the Jewish nation. And any observer of current events would have to conclude that God was supporting the existence of modern Israel – not judging it!

The most correct modern response is that Christ died for the sins of all mankind and in that measure we are all responsible for His death.

Any proper exposition of John’s gospel will show the unbelieving Jews plotted the death of Christ and insisted on it before Pontius Pilate. We cannot escape that. But that does NOT mean we should dislike Jews today. Hostility towards Jews is not justified for any theological reason. Israel will come to Christ before Jesus returns

and they will be our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We should view today's Jews as future members of the Kingdom of God.

For a full treatment of this difficult topic go to:
http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/IsraelChurch.htm

Blessings,

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