

Chapter Three

Judaisms

I have purposely titled this chapter “Judaisms”, in the plural, for a reason. Many people assume that there is and has been one, single, monolithic religion called Judaism that represents a single source of opinion regarding the faith of the Jewish people. A quick review of the Bible or even a trip to a few local synagogues will easily show this to be untrue. There is an old joke about asking a question to three rabbis and you’ll get four opinions. Rabbinic commentary and opinions are all over the page. In the case of the Talmud that is literally true where a Bible verse is printed in the center with various and often conflicting opinions surrounding it from different commentators. There is no attempt to resolve the tension. It merely exists to stimulate thought. When the page is turned, a new topic is offered. This method may be confusing and unsatisfying to the modern Western mind and that is part of the point.

Most of us in the modern era look through the lens of a Greek mindset¹ which seeks to reduce everything to a formulaic

approach that tries to resolve intellectual tension. In fact, we oftentimes hold so dearly to this approach that we withhold acceptance and obedience to written truth until we have satisfied ourselves as to its meaning and purpose. This kind of bias is dangerous in that we are placing our personal intellectual abilities as the arbiter and judge of the written Word of God. The question becomes, is God and His Word authoritative, or have we become the judge of God? Has God given us the right to withhold adherence to His teachings contingent upon our intellectual understanding, acceptance, and approval?

Consider Abraham, who was raised in paganism and did not have the benefit of a written Bible like we have. He encountered God who revealed Himself to him and gave him great promises of blessing. Abraham was told to follow God and He would give him a land that He would show him. Abraham did not know the actual destination. He did not plug it into his GPS and reason out the waypoints and rest stops. He chose to follow God in faith trusting that his steps would be ordered by the Lord.

The problem with the modern Greek mindset in approaching and understanding the truth of the Bible is that it acts as a barrier rather than an aid. The Hebraic mindset, on the other hand, is not afraid of thinking about options and opinions but it does not use that as an excuse for withholding obedience. It embraces what Marvin Wilson² calls “block logic”. It does not have to

resolve all tensions, in fact, it recognizes that it cannot. That is the essence of humility.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” In my own personal life, I have many unresolved questions on a number of topics. I have learned to accept the unresolved tension and “leave those on the shelf”, so to speak. I will not, however, let those questions and issues prevent me from wholeheartedly following what has been revealed to me.

So now let's take a look at some examples of how Jewish thought has shaped belief systems.

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1. See Tim Hegg's excellent article entitled “My Big, Fat Greek Mindset” at www.torahresource.com.
 2. Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith by Marvin R. Wilson at Amazon.