



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

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Subject: Jesus and Jewishness

HE CAME UNTO HIS OWN

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12

When a Japanese Christian came to San Francisco for a visit, he attended a church service where Ralph Sockman spoke on the Life of Jesus. Asked by a friend how he enjoyed the message, the guest replied, "Well to hear him tell it, Jesus was an American, a Methodist, and an Armenian. But everyone knows that it is not true, for Jesus was really a Japanese, a Baptist, and a Calvinist." Right!

While all men and women see Christ as a reflection of their own race and culture, Jesus was a Jew who could trace His lineage through His mother to King David. In recent days the Jewish rabbis have looked at the life of Christ with contempt because they have associated Jesus with the Christian community who have persecuted Jews; therefore, Jesus to them was an apostate and a false messiah. But some of that is beginning to change.

Commenting on the change of attitude, an international news magazine said, "Jewish scholars... have quietly begun to recognize Jesus as a brother who spoke in faith to other Jews." The Israeli scholar Pinchas Lapide of Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv has been quoted as saying that "Jesus was more loyal to the Torah than I am as an Orthodox Jew." In his lifetime this recognized Jewish scholar published more than 187 books, articles, essays and poems about Jesus in relationship to Judaism.

Though most of these Jewish scholars deny that Jesus was born of a virgin, or that He rose from the dead on the third day, associating these truths with Christian teaching, they see Jesus as a legitimate first-century rabbi. They also recognize the New Testament as a document which can tell them a great deal about Judaism of the first century. Nevertheless, a great number of Jews in the past decade have come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and contend that they are more Jewish than ever before.

Dr. David Flusser, professor of religious history at Hebrew University, said, "I do not think that many Jews would object if the Messiah--when He came--was the Jew, Jesus." Dr. Flusser's candid statement is remarkable in itself. The Jesus that most Jews envision is a caricature, not the one portrayed in the pages of the New Testament. It has been my experience that most Jewish friends have never really gone to the pages of the New Testament to discover what the Jewish authors of the book really had to say.

With the exception of Luke, who was probably a Gentile physician, every word in the New Testament was written by a first-century Jew; therefore, the New Testament is basically a Jewish document that contends that the Man born in Bethlehem is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning a Messiah. It is not by chance that many events taking place in the life of Christ were clearly foretold centuries before--events such as the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, prophesied by Micah five centuries before Christ; the suffering and death of Christ predicted by Isaiah 700 years before Christ, and by David in Psalm 22 nearly 1000 years before Christ.

Is the expected Jewish Messiah one and the same as the second coming of Christ to the Christian? Christians believe He will be the same. His coming may be welcomed by the Jewish community. If it is, then what Jewish disciples wrote about Jesus is authentic and credible. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him," wrote John, one of the disciples, adding, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:11-12). This is what really counts.

Resource reading: Revelation 1.