

JESUS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH WOMEN:

(THE GOSPELS).

The rabbis of Jesus' day had little use for women. Their attitude, reflected in the sayings and rulings of the sages recorded during the two centuries after Christ, seem especially strange today.

Yose B. Yohanan of Jerusalem, stated "Talk not much with womankind." Rabbinic writings contain many more comments on this pronouncement.

The Talmud says, "It was taught; Do not speak excessively with a woman lest this ultimately lead you to adultery".

While this dictum was originally intended for rabbis, Rabbi Nathan extends the advice to include all males, noting "a man should not speak with a woman in the market, even if she is his wife, much less another woman, because the public may misinterpret it." R. Eliezer R. Shimoen determined that "we have not found that the Almighty spoke to a woman except Sarah.

In view of the attitude toward women displayed and reflected in many rulings governing the lives and relationships of first-century Jews, the Gospels are truly stunning documents. The Gospel writers portray women in a vastly different light. When Jesus interacts with women, He often directly violates rules laid down and scrupulously kept by the Pharisees, who were the strongest proponents of what has come to be known as rabbinic Judaism.

It is not an overstatement to affirm that the Gospels portray Jesus as liberating women and lifting them to an equality with men unknown in first-century Palestine. This clearly is a major theme in the Gospel of Luke, which frequently sets up contrasts between a man and a woman which reflect favorably on the woman and unfavorably on the man.

The current debate on the role of women is focused on a few passages in the Epistle of Paul. However, to interpret them correctly we must realize that a startling redemptive and transformational process is initiated in the Gospels.

#### JEWISH WOMEN IN FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE:

The women we meet in the Gospels lived in a strongly patriarchal society. It was

also a society structured by a religious faith that shaped every aspect of people's lives. Yet first-century Jewish society was not monolithic. (exhibiting or characterized by often rigidly fixed uniformity).

A heterogeneous population: Some Jewish people in Palestine lived in urban settings, other lived in rural areas. Some were wealthy, most were poor. Some were members of the religious elite, others were despised for supposed religious failings. The Jewish people also were divided into religious and political factions, with Pharisee and Sadducee, Zealot, and Essne, all convinced that their views of the Law's teachings was correct. These divisions had an impact on the role of women as well as on other aspects of life.

Geographical differences: For instance, the people of Jerusalem and Judea were stricter in their observance of the Law as the rabbis interpreted it than were the people of Galilee. Understandably, most sages and rabbis chose to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, and their influence was stronger there.

Wealth and religious party: The Sadducees, who controlled the Temple and the high priesthood, were among the wealthiest in Jerusalem. They were also the most open to Greek culture and ideals and the most supportive of the Roman government. In contrast ordinary priests lived in rural lives, sharing the poverty of the majority. The lives of Sadducean women were undoubtedly different from the lives of most women in the Holy Land, and it is not possible to identify any of the women we meet in the gospels with this social and religious class.

Scholarship and religious party: In most societies status is ascribed on the basis of wealth and power, but in the Jerusalem of Jesus' time a transition was already taking place. The piety of the Pharisees made a great impression on the general population, and the rabbis and sages associated with the Pharisee party were viewed as "the" religious authorities. The Sadducees, much to their dismay, were even forced to adopt the rulings of the Pharisees concerning Temple functions. Increasingly in Judaism status was a matter of scholarship in the Law, rather than a matter of wealth.

While the Pharisees' ruling concerning women's matters were extremely strict, it would be wrong to assume that they describe the lifestyle of every Jewish family. For instance, the rabbis held that women

should have their own rooms and, as much as possible, stay in them. For the average Jewish family of six living in poverty, this was simply impossible. So there is no doubt that the wives of the sages and Pharisees, to whom the strictest of Rabbinical rulings were actually applied, had different lives than most women.

The “typical” first-century Jew: The great majority of the population of Judea and Galilee, whether they lived in urban or rural settings, were relatively poor. The men were farmers who often worked as day laborers to supplement their incomes. Or they were fishermen, artisans, or shopkeepers. By necessity many wives worked alongside their husbands and sold produce in the market or sold their husband's products in a shop. We meet these ordinary women most frequently in the Gospels. Luke provides clear clues to identify the class of the women mentioned in his Gospel, most of whom are also referred to in the other Gospels.

#### SOCIAL CLASS OF WOMEN IN LUKE'S GOSPEL:

Governing Classes:

Ruling families: Herodias (Luke 3:19).

Relative prominence: Due to income;

Joanna: (Luke 8:3).

Susanna : (Luke 8:3).

Jairus' daughter: (Luke 8:41-42 & 49-56).

Due to husband's religious role:

Elizabeth: (Luke 1:5-7 & 24-25).

Rural Poor:

Mary: Jesus' mother: (Luke 1:27-36, 2:4-51, & 8:19-21).

Mary: mother of James: (Luke 24:10).

Urban:

Landowner:

Mary & Martha: (Luke 10:38-42).

Artisan:

Peter's mother-in-law: (Luke 22:55-62).

Slaves:

Servant accusing Peter: (Luke 22:55-62).

Unclean and Degraded:

By sickness:

Peter's mother-in-law: (Luke 4:38,39).

Hemorrhaging woman: (Luke 8:43-48).

Daughter of Jarius : (Luke 8:41, 42, 49-56).

Woman bent double: (Luke 13:10-17).

By demonization:

Mary Magdalene: (Luke 8:2, 24:10).

Joanna: (Luke 8:3).

Susanna: (Luke 8:3).

Woman bent double: (Luke 13:10-17).

As prostitutes:

“Sinful” woman: (Luke 7:36-50).

As pagans:

Widow of Zarephath: (Luke 4:26,27). (in story).

Widows:

Anna: (Luke 2:36-38).



Widow with dead son: (Luke 7:12-15).

Persistent widow: (Luke 1-18). (in story).

Poor but generous: (Luke 21:1-4).

When we identify women by social class, we note first of all that most of Jesus' interactions were with women who were distressed. Even the relatively prominent, like Joanna and Susanna who provided Jesus with financial support, were demon-possessed when Jesus first met them. Mary and Martha, although of a relatively well off landowning class, were single women living in their brother's home. This role was minimized in a society that emphasized the importance of marriage and family.

Jesus' contact with the women in Luke's Gospel invariably lifted them. Jesus saw in these women a significance that they were denied in their society!

The Gospels introduce their liberating note at this point. Without contesting the patriarchal structure of first-century society, Jesus interacted with women in ways that challenged contemporary views of women. Jesus' coming initiated a transformation on attitudes toward women which, we will see, continued on into the church age. Jesus' actions, when contrasted with the dictum's of the rabbis, makes it clear that Christ's coming introduces a redemptive process designed to lift and restore women to the position they enjoyed in original creation!

We will see this as we examine Jesus' interactions with several women, and as we later look at the way Luke structured his Gospel to challenge his readers to reevaluate their attitude toward women.

## JESUS INTERACTIONS WITH WOMEN:

Each of the Gospels relates the words and actions of a Man who lived as a first-century Jew in Palestine. Each of the Gospels requires us to know something of Jewish thought and life if we see the full significance of what Jesus Christ did and said. This is particularly true of Jesus' reported interactions with women. In this section of our study we will look at selected women of the Gospels, and see how their treatment by Jesus contrasted with that of the rabbis.

## JESUS AND THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD:

(Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:41-49).

Luke tells a familiar story:

And behold, there came a man named Jarius, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. And he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged Him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter about 12 years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the multitudes thronged Him.

Now a woman, having a flow of blood for 12 years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind him and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. And Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say "Who touched Me? But Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me."

Now when the woman saw that she could not hide, she came trembling, and falling down before Him she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. And He said to her, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

While He was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, "Your daughter is dead, do not trouble the Teacher".

(Luke 8-41-49).

We know the rest of the story, Jesus went to Jarius' house, and there He raised their daughter from the dead. Yet what happened on the way must have stunned the original witnesses.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH!!