

## The House of Hillel, and Paul

Written by K B Napier

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Sadly, the idea that Paul is not a reliable witness or that his writings contradict the words of Jesus, is well entrenched even in Christian churches. We must openly and firmly denounce it! Paul's teachings are completely compatible with the rest of scripture, even if arrogant unbelieving theologians deny it.

Paul was a top theological academic, with well-sharpened skills in debate and presentation of facts. His writings are probably the closest in time to Jesus' life on this earth, and historically accurate. If what he said was not accurate, there were plenty of Christians and the apostles to oppose him. He honed his knowledge and understanding at the House of Hillel (Beit Hillel)/Academy of Hillel, which arose mainly in the first century in Jerusalem. It taught and researched Jewish thoughts and laws as defined by Hillel the Elder. ("Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai", Encyclopedia of Religion, and "Hillel: Foundations of Rabbinic Culture," Video Lecture by Dr. Henry Abramson).

### Hillel

This academy was directly in conflict with the other prominent school of theology, the Beit Shammai. They were constantly opposing each other on the issue of Jewish law, Halakha, and sometimes on Jewish philosophy. Hillel usually won the day because it was numerically greater. Another feature that strengthened Hillel was its habit of studying the views of its opponents... always a good strategy. (As a very new Christian I suggested to my then elders that the whole church should study heresies and false religions, but was told, that there was no need to, because the Bible defends itself! I was not told, however, HOW the Bible does this! As a result, over twenty years later, that local church fell to the heresies taught by its young pastor... ignorance is not always bliss).

Even though both schools fought each other vigorously in their academic circles, they were quite friendly towards each other! If we relate this attitude to modern academic fights, very few theologians today can argue their corner without becoming personally angry. This is not good activity. How many times have I advised my opponents that though I might disagree with them or even hotly reject what they say, this should never be taken as a sign of any anger or hatred on my part. This is because I can separate my feelings from my studies. But, it seems, their emotions usually win the day and they remain angry and think I am being 'hateful'. This is not the case... and nor was it true in the case of Paul. In his writings I perceive a steady mind able to discern one fact from another in typical Hillel manner. For him, his opposition to Christ before he was saved was perfectly natural and logical.

### Hillel the Man

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Hillel the Elder had a variety of names given by his pupils: Hillel HaGadol, Hillel HaZaken, etc. He was born in Babylon AD (I will not quote supposed birth and death dates because they do not seem to be accurate), so he was still active in his school when Paul studied there. It is Hillel who expanded on the words of the Mishnah and the Talmud. The Mishnah was the first big redaction of Jewish oral traditions (a 'redaction' is a type of editing of many sources of documents to produce a single one, an activity that can produce inexact and controversial results, especially in the works of the German Higher Critics). The Mishnah was the first major piece of rabbinical literature. ("Commentary on Tractate Avot with an Introduction [Shemona perakim]". World Digital Library).

The Talmud is central to rabbinical Judaism and is related to both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. The Talmud is in two parts – the Mishnah and the Gemara, which is 300 years younger. Written in either Hebrew or Aramaic, it is about 6,200 pages long. The problem with the Talmud is its reliance on the opinions of thousands of rabbis, some of which are occultic. Still, the Talmud is the foundation for all codes of Jewish law.

Hillel operated in these fields of interest and is still considered to be of immense importance to Judaism. His House of Hillel or its School of Tannaim (Sages of the Mishnah), had a long line of Sages right up to the fifth century AD. It is quite likely, then, that Paul was considered a Sage with an enviable academic background. Yet, superficially when he put Christians to death he appeared to abuse a saying by Hillel: "Whosoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whosoever that saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." (Lea P. Bahr (12 December 2013). "Beyond Pirkei Avos". The Jewish Press).

However, all this was before he was saved by Christ.

Hillel moved to Israel (Jerusalem) when he was aged 40, and spent forty years in study. At about age 80 he became spiritual head of the Jews. According to a firm source (Rav Sherira Gaon) he was descended from the tribe of Benjamin on his father's side, and the house of David on His mother's side. During his devotion to the study of the Torah, Hillel worked as a woodcutter.

### Hillel's Work

Due to Hillel's superior arguments concerning sacrificial rituals, the then two leaders of the

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Sanhedrin (the Benei Betheira or sons of Betheira) voluntarily resigned as leaders or Nasi in favour of Hillel. This made Hillel the highest authority amongst the Pharisees who issued a number of Jewish decrees. Even so, there was a common saying at the time, that "The one law has become two" (Hagigah [Tosefta]). Immediately, this tells us that what was once the singular code given by God, was divided into two opinions... the sign of increasing godlessness and heresy.

The House of Shammai said that only worthy students should be allowed to enter into study of the Torah. Conversely, Hillel said anyone could do so. Shammai said divorce should only be possible for very serious transgressions, whereas Hillel said divorce was possible for even trivial or perceived wrongs. (Babylonian Talmud [Talmud Bavli], tractate Gittin, 90a. The example given is that of burning a meal!). Shammai adherents were far more strict than those of Hillel (Jewish Encyclopedia, House of Hillel and House of Shammai), though Hillel sometimes reviewed their pronouncements, and a few deserted Shammai and joined Hillel.

In matters of foreign policy Hillel were similar to the Zealots, whose aim was to foment revolt amongst the Jews and to use force. Many 'false Christs' belonged to the movement, and their activities ended tragically with the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 AD... prophesied by Christ as a punishment on the Jews for rejecting the Father's plan of salvation and the genuine obedience to His laws.

Because of the indulgent beliefs of Hillel, there was a gradual turning to the teachings of Shammai. However, in the time of the apostles, surrounding nations decided to support Rome in its rule, and Shammai determined that there should be no commerce or communication between Jews and Gentiles. Hillel disagreed, but when it came to the vote, the Zealots sided with the Sanhedrin and Shammai. All of this was going on when Paul was still alive, and when he was a leading light within the Sanhedrin, though it does not seem he was one of its leaders. Rather he seems to have had deep sympathies with both the Zealots and the Shammai adherents.

Then came a sombre expression of how a ruling party can impose laws: the leader of the Zealots, Eleazar ben Ananias, invited members of both houses to his own home. Armed guards were placed at the doors so that no-one could leave. Many men of Hillel thereby died and Shammai enforced its rules on all of Judaism, called the 'Eighteen Articles', a set of oppressive laws later regretted by the Jews.

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After 70 AD Hillel again regained more power, as the strictness of the Zealots and the Shammai proved the folly of imposition of rules. Hillel again came to prominence, and the voice of Shammai was greatly reduced and ignored. So, though both houses of thought were friendly at first, one took control by unfair and violent means. In general those of Hillel were peace-loving and quiet, bent only on bringing their fellows closer to God.

Both schools opposed the great census in which the birth of Jesus is placed, and they even suggested ways to avoid it. This is why tax-collectors were shunned and despised. Even so, the Hillel members did not like the violent methods used by Zealots and Shammai alike, but they had no effect. "Bitter feelings were consequently engendered between the schools; and it appears that even in public worship they would no longer unite under one roof" (Jost, "Gesch. des Judenthums und Seiner Sekten," i. 261; Tosef., R. H., end).

It is often supposed that Herod brought back the 'Kingdom of the Torah', but it was the House of Hillel that did so. Their special features were kindness, goodness and patience. (Jewish History). However, the actions of the murderous pre-salvation Paul seem to run contrary to the character of Hillel. Hillel managed to get Herod to see his view, that if the Jews were allowed to live freely as Jews, then they would not oppose Herod openly. Thus, Hillel developed a government parallel to that of Herod, with the king's blessing! And it was Hillel's form that the Jews preferred and followed.

In the above we can see that Jesus' view was similar to that of Hillel, and this is why Zealots despised Jesus for not taking up the sword, and for not using His special influence to stir up revolt.

### Paul

Paul was a pupil of Gamaliel ('Reward of God'), grandson of Hillel, who taught between 22-55 AD. Gamaliel was a leading figure in the Sanhedrin after his grandfather died. Gamaliel died twenty years before the fall of Jerusalem. He was a Pharisee and doctor of Jewish Law. ("Gamaliel." Catholic Encyclopaedia). He was respected amongst the Jews and tried to support the followers of Jesus, yet, as his student, Paul seemed to be more of Shammai than of Hillel, given his inflexibility. Gamaliel was President of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem at the time of Paul's hatred towards Christians, and Jews still regard Gamaliel as one of the greatest teachers of their religion.

The general peacefulness found in Hillel's teachings is also found in Gamaliel's protective role

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in favour of the preaching apostles (e.g. Acts 5:38-9). He taught this to Paul (Acts 22:3). Some scholars think that Gamaliel's reference to an 'impudent student' was to Paul. (Shabbat 30b). At that time Hillel even taught pupils to study Greek poets and philosophers... and this may be how Paul later successfully argued on Mars Hill. In fact when he said, with reference to Jesus, "In him we live and move and have our being", he was quoting Aratus of Soli, a third century Greek poet. This would have resonated with the Greek philosophers he was debating.

At least one modern scholar doubts that Paul was ever a student of Gamaliel, because Paul acted opposite to the ways of Hillel (Prof Helmut Koester, Harvard University). However, this is not a concrete proof. It is only a suggestion. I see Paul as acting contrary to his teacher's ways, but all Christians do so at some time! It is not the argument of genuine academic research, but an echo of the heretical Higher Critical (HC) school that has such a destructive influence on the churches.

The fact that someone seems not to follow his teacher and so must be opposite to the teaching is fallacious. One can believe in a teaching and yet act contrary to it, because of a side-issue or a separate political matter introduced later. The HC school persuades men that if one writing is different from another writing, then the two writings must come from different sources, probably in different eras. This is bunkum – any writer can write in different ways throughout his life, and depending on his readership! In my own writing, my 'popular' style is different from my academic style, and my stricter forms are different from my newsletter forms. The HC argument then is not viable and is without proof.

Paul's abilities and academic superiority was easily recognised by the Sanhedrin when it decided to appoint a chief investigator into the new 'sect' of Christianity (or should we refer to him as the chief inquisitor?). His credentials were so impressive he was given free rein to judge and decide what happened to the new converts. All of this causes some Jewish scholars to doubt Paul was ever tutored by Gamaliel. But, as I have already pointed out, how many Christians go against their teacher, Jesus Christ? Sadly, too many! Does this mean we were never taught by Him, through the Holy Spirit? There is a break in logic to imply that straying from a path taught by God means He has never had us at His feet. It just means we are sinful men who fail frequently and need to be returned to spiritual sanity.

Jesus did exactly this when He stopped Paul so dramatically on the road to Damascus! And after that He taught Paul personally, putting him on par with the other apostles taught by Jesus.

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So, the problem of Paul's seemingly opposing view to Gamaliel and Hillel is separate from the fact that he was taught by him; also Paul himself claimed he was taught by Gamaliel, and this was never challenged in his lifetime, by Gamaliel or the Pharisees. All we can say is that before his salvation, Paul was a Pharisee of the Hillel school who, on his appointment, acted more like a Zealot or Shammai. Do we not see similar 'split-personalities' in our modern churches?

Remember that when Paul wrote of his teaching by Gamaliel, he was a converted man and did not lie. There was no reason to do so. And, after his salvation, Paul enacted the teachings of Christ, Who taught him personally. After that Paul was neither of Himmel nor Shammai! To suggest he lied about sitting at Gamaliel's feet is to deny the authenticity and truth of all of scripture.

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