

Fall 2016 History & Heritage -- #1

(A Seasonal Catechism for the Study of Western and American Civilization)

True Israel --- (Shelley: Church History in Plain Language: pp. 1-14)

This title, as the N.T. makes implicitly yet abundantly clear, applies to Jesus of Nazareth whose very life retraced without sin the great events of Israel's past? Like the Abrahamic nation, Christ came out of Egypt, "parted" the Jordan in baptism, endured the wilderness, spoke the Word from a mount, performed signs, and finally submitted to Gentile judgment. Indeed, His every act of fealty to His Father secured the salvation of His people—Jew and Greek, the "Israel of God" in apostolic proclamation.

Resisting Roman Rule --- (Shelley: Church History: pp. 1-14)

This common social disposition, with its variations on the antagonistic theme, characterized the one million or so Jews living in Palestine in Jesus' day? At least four contentious factions emerged in opposition to foreign (Greco-Roman) imperialism: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes. Only the influence of the Pharisees with their bookish, legalistic version of religion, however, would survive the Temple's destruction (70 AD) and make an impact on Judaism's future.

Pentecost's "Tongues of Fire" --- (Shelley: Church History: pp. 14-27)

This 1st-century divine wonder brought to pass in Jerusalem some fifty days after Christ's crucifixion at Passover signaled a new age in redemptive history? Many messianic disciples along with Jews from other lands were gathered for the feast when the disciples discovered they could bear gospel witness in languages they had never learned. Peter the Apostle concluded that the Spirit as promised had descended upon all flesh, bringing the healing balm of salvation to all the earth's alienated nations.

Conspiring Against Jesus --- (Shelley: Church History: pp. 1-14)

This nefarious plot in 1st-century Palestine united otherwise adversarial Jewish factions in the crime of all crimes for all time? Within ruling circles both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were offended by an extraordinary itinerant rabbi from Galilee, the Pharisees chiefly because of disputes with him over the meaning of the Mosaic Law. Meanwhile, the Sadducees especially feared the rabbi's near-messianic aura would provoke the Roman overlords upon whom they depended for privileged positions.

Stephen's Sermon --- (Shelley: Church History in Plain Language: pp. 14-27)

This first-century address by the earliest Christian martyr posed an intolerable challenge to the ruling Sanhedrin's standing? The fearless, devout disciple observed that when the rulers of Jews condemned Jesus of Nazareth, they merely proved themselves the sons of their fathers who had characteristically killed the prophets. Moreover, their O.T. interpretation had missed the essence of that sacred text's message: Messiah as true law and final temple for the world, not merely the Jews.