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The Jewish People in John's Gospel

In the three earlier Gospels, a distinction is made between different Jewish groups, whether they be the disciples of Jesus, the Pharisees, or the Sadducees. In the fourth Gospel, however, the reader discovers a more general term, *hoi youdaioi*, or simply translated in some versions as, “the Jews.” This general designation, however, makes reference to many different types of Jewish people. In John 8, it refers to the disciples who believe in Jesus. In John 7, it refers to the people of Yehudah, that is Judeans, which is often the meaning of the term “the Jews” in its most basic definition in antiquity. Sadly, throughout much of church history, Christians have viewed the Jews in the Gospel of John as the enemies of Jesus. This has been a justification for anti-Semitism. The Christian faithful have sometimes placed guilt upon all Jewish people collectively for the crime of the crucifixion of Jesus. The fourth Gospel makes it clear that the Roman commander of a thousand came to arrest Jesus and took him into custody. This was a high level commander who was over a tenth of a Roman legion. Pilate, the Roman Governor, had Jesus tortured and then delivered him over to be crucified. Most Jewish people of the time were very much against the Romans crucifying Jews. The Sadducees and their leader, the High Priest Caiaphas, who received power, wealth and distinction by co-operating with Roman rule, were against Jesus. The Romans will persecute and stop Jewish messianic movements. There is a political reason behind the motive of Caiaphas. In addition, one of Jesus' own close disciples, Judas, betrayed him. But the majority of Jewish people were more sympathetic with Jesus and his fate. In fact, the Gospel of John speaks about divisions within the Jewish people, many of whom came to believe.

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Some were curious and open minded like Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee. The Bible scholars studied Torah at night. So he came to Jesus at night and called him Rabbi, noting His sound teachings and the miraculous signs which authenticated His message. Nicodemus was an intelligent thinker who wanted to learn more about Jesus. He may or may not have become a disciple. Even Thomas, an apostle, needed proof to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. He had honest doubts about what he had been told. The Gospel of John provides a place for the objective listener who wants to learn. Interestingly, the Gospel of belief and faith makes honorable mention of Thomas and others who possessed legitimate doubts. Thomas came to faith because he saw the wounds of the resurrected Jesus. But it is quite acceptable to question and to seek understanding. So indeed, there are many different kinds of Jewish people in John's text, which would have been understood by first century readers.

The original audience understood the distinctions between diverse Jewish factions. Moreover, the Pharisees did not like the Sadducees. The Sadducees despised the Pharisees. In the present translation, the Greek term *hoi youdaioi* is translated properly to bring out the intended meaning from the context, whether the text refers to Judeans, i.e. people of Yehudah, or even to the followers of Yeshua. The Jews were not the enemies of Jesus. Almost all the people of the time were Jewish; most of them were decent, good people, but some were not. Some Greeks came to the apostle Philip seeking Jesus. They were open minded and trying to understand Jesus. They appear as good, decent folk. Other non-Jews in the Gospel are not portrayed in a positive way. Although Pilate asks Jesus, "What is truth?" and seems to be seeking understanding, he is quick to order his soldiers to torture Jesus in a cruel abuse of his power. His brutality and morbid humor is

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seen when he declares, “See, here is the man!” After unleashing the professionals who thrive on sadistic torture, the figure of a human being is difficult to recognize after the beating. Could anyone be expected to survive such treatment? In the end, Roman soldiers crucified Jesus at the order of Pilate.