

## **Hillel, Holy Spirit, Peace, the New Sanhedrin, and the Gospels**

**Yochanan ben Zakkai** converted his school to function as a re-establishment of the Sanhedrin in Yavneh. He was chosen to do this by Roman Emperor Vespasian because the Emperor had heard that he was "**a man of peace**." Zakkai was student of Hillel had been president of the Sanhedrin at the Temple and leader of the Pharisees. Hillel is one of the greatest rabbis of the Jewish tradition.

*The teachings of Jesus reflect many of the wisdom lessons taught by Hillel.* As we will see as we follow the proceeding of the new Sanhedrin, Luke and Matthew shaped their Gospels in ways that would link the Jesus Movement to the school of Hillel. The leaders of the new Sanhedrin were all members of Hillel's school, too.

### **Hillel and the Holy Spirit of Divine Wisdom**

Jewish sources say, "Hillel was worthy of the 'Holy Spirit.'" In the tradition, possession of **the Holy Spirit is often used synonymously with "the resting of the Shechinah (Divine Presence) on someone."** Many great rabbis throughout the generations had the Holy Spirit; but not the **Holy Spirit of Prophecy**. Hillel also had the Holy Spirit; but he did not hear the voice of God or see visions -- his inspiration was of a different sort. He was not a prophet; **He was a sage**. Hillel guided his own life by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and spoke to the people not with prophecy, but with the Holy Spirit of Divine Wisdom. The **Holy Spirit of Divine Wisdom** was working through Hillel -- *and the other sages* -- **to communicate the will of God to man**.

### **Hillel and Peace (Shalom)**

One of the main Torah verses that Hillel looked to for his picture of Aaron was Malachi 2:6, which was understood to refer to Aaron the priest – "*The same elements mentioned in the verse -Torah; peace (**shalom**), and bringing back sinners."* **The disciples of Aaron loved peace (shalom) and brought people to Torah**. This was influenced by Psalm 34:15, which says: "**Seek shalom and pursue it**."

Hillel taught that a person must "**love**" and "**pursue**" shalom. Someone might think that he can love peace passively, sit at home and be at peace with the world. But when a person has a passionate love for shalom, **he will actively pursue shalom**.

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Other rabbis added, “**Seek shalom' in your own place and 'pursue it in another place.**” They also said: “*If a person remains at home and does not venture into the world, **how will he make shalom between people?** But when he goes out into the marketplace and sees people quarreling, **he can come between them and reconcile them.**”*

Hillel understood that the relations between people are dynamic; **a person cannot have peace simply by avoiding harming others or by not arguing or by being passive.** Peace requires **active pursuit and love for one's fellowmen.**

To understand and appreciate the importance Hillel gave to loving and pursuing shalom, one has to know as background the rabbis' view of **shalom**. Shalom was for them **a value on the first level.** Shalom conveyed more to them than it does to a Western ear.

One such phrase, in its most typical and basic form, is: “**To make shalom between a man and his fellow, between a husband and his wife.**” Hillel's disciple, **Yohanan ben Zakkai**, speaks of:

- The person **who makes shalom between one person and another.**
- The person who makes shalom **between husband and wife, between families, cities, nations, and kingdoms.**”
- Shalom should spread until it **encompasses the whole world.**

*The Kingdom of Elohim is a Kingdom of Shalom.*

Shalom was central to the outlook of Hillel and the mainstream rabbinic tradition in a way that is not the case in Western culture.

- *The West praises peace between nations.*
- *In the West peace is not **the all-pervasive concept** it is with the rabbis – and Jesus -- who cherished shalom between a person and his fellow, between husband and wife, between one family and another, and in all social relations.*

Therefore, many teachings of Hillel and those of the early rabbis about shalom are often not properly understood in the West, because the basic concept underlying them is

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unfamiliar. The teachings of Jesus about **peace** (shalom) and **righteousness** (tzedaqah) are not properly understood in the West for the same reason.

Keep this in mind as we explore the writing of the *Gospel of Luke*, *the Book of Acts*, or the *Gospel of Matthew*. Keep the "**all-pervasive concept**" above constantly in your mind!

Shalom,  
Jim Myers, President  
Biblical Heritage Center, Inc.

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