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151- Many of us, in the same circumstance, would have been Pharisees. The evolution of the Pharisee came about as a natural response to the history of the people. God told the prophets that the nation had been punished for disobedience and the natural response was to do whatever it took to never be caught disobedient again. Multiplying laws and expectations is a more “logical” way to guarantee obedience when you think about it.

152- Sadducees were pragmatists. They looked at the world and felt they needed to exist in what is “now.” They didn’t get absorbed in a lot of things they could not see or prove. Rome was “now.” Sadducees simply tried to get along with the current realities.

153- The two polar opposites in the original 12 were Matthew and Simon. Matthew had sold out to the Roman occupation and Simon was a Zealot, a revolutionary bent on eradicating all vestiges of Rome in the land. How Jesus thought He could put those two in the same boat is a mystery. (And, curiously, there is historic evidence that they became very close on down the line before they died. How magical is that?)

154- Unlike our western weddings, the Jewish wedding is a predominantly groom-oriented event. That’s a really important lesson to consider when you think of how often the 2nd Coming of Jesus was equated with a wedding in the eyes and minds of the Jewish New Testament writers. Think about it.

155- We all know Jacob went goofy over Rachel and Leah got treated really badly. But, did you know that when it was all said and done Jacob specifically mentioned that he wanted to be buried beside Leah? (Let’s not deny that some of it had to do with where Abraham and Isaac were buried.) Still, it’s interesting that Leah was elevated in the end. Curious.

156- The groom stomps on a glass to end a Jewish wedding. There are two reasons for that- 1) Celebration should be tempered by a reminder that the Temple was destroyed and does not now exist and, 2) “Former things are passed away, all things have become new...” Marriage does that.

157- Rabbis have said that if God is big enough to create all things by merely speaking He probably didn't need full sentences or even a full word. God is so great that He could have created all by pronouncing only one letter. The consensus came to be that God would have done it by the letter "Bet." That's the first letter in Genesis 1:1, it's the first letter in the word for "Blessing", it's the first letter in every formulated Jewish prayer. Not a bad thought.

158- Every Friday night a Jewish man is offered the chance to renew his marriage vow to his bride. That's what the recitation of Proverbs 31 is all about in the Sabbath-welcoming ritual.

159- If the sun was the size of a basketball the earth would be a pea about 270 feet away. But the closest star would be 14,000 miles away from the basketball! "When I consider the Heavens..." I guess!

160- Herod built a marble city and a man-made harbor on the coastline of Israel so the nation could become a full participant in the Mediterranean shipping and commerce. Caesarea Maritima was one of the crown jewels to his genius and his arrogance. Without it his nation was forever doomed to remain second class in the Roman world. (It also provided a place for Paul to sit in jail for two years and have two trials.)

161- Olives in the Bible world- soap, deodorant, cosmetics, food, fuel, sacrifice, boiling oil in warfare, medicine, therapeutic purposes, currency, cooking, ritual object for worship in the temple, anointing medium... What a really, really valuable commodity olives were in those days!

162- Two of the most important Jewish entities in the Bible world have historically only been known by Greek names. How contradictory is that? *Sanhedrin* and *Synagogue* are both Greek words. You rarely find them referred to by any other name. Those never were Hebrew or Aramaic terms!

163- The "Deacon" role created in Acts 6 actually has a precursor in the Jewish temple structure. "Elders" and "Deacons" are a lot like the difference in role that was found in the ritual leading priests (*Kohanim*) and the rest of the Levites who took care of the nuts and bolts of the Sanctuary.

164- II Chronicles 34 and 35 remind us that God can express His plan but we humans can short-circuit His designs. Josiah was prophesied to “go to his grave in peace” but he chose to ignore God and go out on an ill-advised warfare campaign and died in battle. Consider that!

165- The God who never changes actually does “change”... sort of. The Bible is filled with stories where God “changes.” He doesn’t destroy the nation. He doesn’t cause Adam and Eve to die “in the very day.” He finds a way to accommodate “the soul that sinneth” so that it doesn’t have to die. He grants more time to Nineveh... on and on the Bible shows God “changing.” But the one thing that is the overwhelming un-changingness of God is that in every story where He does “change” it is ALWAYS in the direction of mercy. God never “changes” to be more harsh. Never! Take comfort in that!