

Jeremiah 1:4-10  
Psalm 71:1-6  
Hebrews 12:18-29  
Luke 13:10-17

### **Notes on the Gospel Lesson**

*Luke 13: 10 - 17*

Judaism in the first century was not a monolithic religion. There were so many variations that many scholars refer to the “Judaisms” of the period. Sects such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots each claimed to be the true way to follow Yahweh and there was much antagonism between these groups. Even within the sects themselves there was a great divergence of opinion on major questions of faith and practice.

The Pharisees are often depicted as Jesus’ opponents. It is as if they were the villains of the gospels. A more careful reading of the New Testament as well as a better understanding of history reveal that such a view is both simplistic and wrong. First century Pharisaism was divided into two primary groups, each of whom dealt with Jesus differently.

These two groups, known as “schools”, were the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. Hillel and Shammai were influential rabbis of the first century B.C. Each of these influential teachers interpreted the Torah differently. For example, Shammai said that if you had the power to heal (not referring to miracle-workers but to physicians) and you healed on the Sabbath then you were violating the Law’s prohibition against working on that day. On the other hand, Hillel taught that if you had the power to heal and you failed to heal on the Sabbath then you had violated Torah because “the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” (In Mark 2:27, Jesus is quoting Hillel. Jesus often quoted or built upon Hillel’s teachings.)

We see these contrasting views in this week’s Gospel lesson. The leader of the synagogue was of the School of Shammai and to him Jesus’ action was a gross violation of Torah. Compare this to the reaction in Capernaum’s synagogue recorded in Luke 4: 31 - 40. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath in Capernaum everyone is amazed and there is not one hint of criticism. Indeed, when the Sabbath ended at that day’s sundown, people flocked to him to be healed.

Perhaps even greater than the miracle of the healing of the crippled woman was the healing of the people’s crippled hearts. Once Jesus had explained his reason for healing on the Sabbath, “the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.” How much better it is to rejoice for the great deeds of God than it is to criticize when they are done or by whom.