

Un-Rooted



Seeds of Separation

The study of the early Christian Church is crucial to our understanding of how and why Christians parted ways from their Messianic Jewish brothers and ultimately separated from their Hebraic roots. The following survey illustrates the chasm that developed quickly between Jewish people and the Christian church after the first and second centuries, as well as how Christianity systematically substituted pagan practices for biblical ones. The events of this turbulent time in Jewish-Christian history mark what would be an 1800-year split that God never intended for His redeemed. The following is easily verified in Church history books and in the writings of the early Church Fathers.

Soon after the deaths of the apostles there began the sowing of seeds in the Body of Messiah that would eventually cause non-Jewish believers to separate from Jewish believers. This can be demonstrated simply by noting that the early Church Fathers—some of whom were even contemporaries of the Apostles—began to introduce *anti-Semitic doctrines and practices*.

First, Israel's birthright as ADONAI's chosen people was stolen. The so-called Epistle of Barnabas (written approximately

135 CE) spiritualized the Tanakh, claiming that it only prefigured Messiah and the Christian Church.² "Do not add to your sins and say that the covenant [the Tanakh] is both theirs and ours. Yes! It is ours; but they thus lost it forever."

DID ADONAI INTEND for there to be two streams of God's people—Judaism and Christianity? Did God desire a pure biblical faith, or the creation of two distinct religious institutions? What were the seeds of separation that formed this chasm? Just where did the split occur?

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The Church Fathers Spoke!

One of the most eloquent Church Fathers, John Chrysostom (344-407 CE), whose name means "golden mouth," denounced

the Jews in the strongest language: "They sacrificed their sons and daughters to devils; they outraged nature and overthrew their foundations of the laws of relationship. They are become worse than the wild beasts, and for no reason at all, with their own hands, they murder their offspring, to worship the avenging devils who are foes of our life... They know only one thing, to satisfy their gullets, get drunk, to kill and maim one another... The Jews are the most worthless of all men. They are lecherous, greedy, rapacious. They are perfidious murderers of Christ. The Jews are the odious assassins of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation possible, no indulgence or pardon. Christians may never cease vengeance, and the Jews must live in servitude forever. God always hated the Jews. It is incumbent upon all Christians to hate the Jews."³

From as early as the 2nd century Christian leaders began to *repress the inherent Hebraic nature of the Brit Chadasha and instead teach anti-Semitic doctrines*. Below are a few selected quotes from some of the early Church Fathers.

The following three canons are from the Council of Laodicea (364 CE):

- Canon 29. "Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath,



but must *work on that day*, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. *But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.*"

- Canon 37. "It is not lawful to receive portions sent from the *feasts of Jews* or heretics, nor to feast together with them."
- Canon 38. "It is not lawful to receive unleavened bread *from the Jews*, nor to be partakers of their impiety."

(Emphasis ours)

In *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, Justin Martyr emphasized that what had previously belonged to Israel was now the property of Christians. The Tanakh was a central part of this transference. The Scriptures are "not yours but ours," Justin stated emphatically to Trypho. That is, the Church has replaced Israel as ADONAI's children and people.⁴ Here is a direct quote from Justin Martyr: "For *the law* [Torah] promulgated *on Horeb* is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone; but *this* [new covenant] is for all universally. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner *has put an end to the previous one*; and an eternal and final law—namely, Christ—has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance."⁵

Jerome (author of the Latin Vulgate) and Augustine taught that the Jewish people were eternally accursed by God. Ignatius, third bishop of Antioch, said that "The Christian faith does not look to Judaism, but Judaism looks to Christianity."⁶ In 339 CE, it was considered a criminal offense to convert to Judaism. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, Italy, praised the burning of a synagogue, as an act pleasing to God. Tertullian and Origen called the Jewish people "Christ killers" and "deicides (God-killers)." Augustine, a Roman Catholic theologian, called the Jewish people "sons of Satan." Augustine was highly influenced by Marcion, a heretic who lived during the 2nd century and called ADONAI "an evil god."

Christianity—Religion of Rome

These teachings flourished and took root within the hearts and minds of the early

non-Jewish believers. Until the time of Constantine, believers had suffered many persecutions. However, after Constantine won the battle of the Milvian Bridge, he issued the Edict of Milan in 313 CE. Although this edict did not make Christianity the official religion of the empire, Constantine claimed to be a Christian, put an end to the persecution of believers and put Christianity on an equal footing before the law with other religions of the empire. Furthermore, Constantine showered favors upon the Church. He granted large sums of money, and erected magnificent Church buildings in numerous places (Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Constantinople and elsewhere) and granted many other privileges.

With a sitting Emperor confessing Christianity, it was no longer a shame to be a Christian. Now, being a Christian could even secure great material and social advantages such as political, military and social promotion. As a result many heathens and pagans entered the Church—of course they brought their pagan influences with them. Because of the deepening spiritual vacuum in the leadership of the Church of the Western Roman Empire, the Church leaders were more than happy to pacify the heathens by allowing them to continue their pagan practices in the name of Christianity. As a result the heathens brought into the Church numerous unscriptural practices and "doctrines of

Martin Luther

One particular example of anti-Semitic teachings in the Church that we would like to expose pertains to Martin Luther. Luther (1483–1546 CE) originally favored the Jewish people in the hope that they would accept his form of the faith, even praising their contribution to Christianity. However, most people aren't aware that later in his life, when he did not succeed in converting the Jewish people, his attitude towards them changed dramatically. The following are quotes taken from Martin Luther's, *On the Jews and Their Lies* (published 1543 CE).

"The rabbis should be forbidden to continue teaching the Law [Torah]."

"Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehemingly his eyes on them."

"In brief, dear princes and lords, those of you who have Jews under your rule—if my counsel does not please you, find better advice, so that you and we all can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews, lest we become guilty sharers before God in the lies, blasphemy, the defamation, and the curses

which the mad Jews indulge in so freely and wantonly against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, this dear mother, all Christians, all authority, and ourselves. Do not grant them protection, safe-conduct, or communion with us... With this faithful counsel and warning I wish to cleanse and exonerate my conscience."

"Accordingly, it must and dare not be considered a trifling matter but a most serious one to seek counsel against this and to save our souls from the Jews, that is, from the devil and from eternal death. My advice, as I said earlier, is: First, that their synagogues be burned down, and that all who are able toss sulphur and pitch; it would be good if someone could also throw in some hellfire... Second, that all their books—their prayer books, their Talmudic writings, also the entire Bible—be taken from them, not leaving them one leaf, and that these be preserved for those who may be converted... Third, that they be forbidden on pain of death to praise God, to give thanks, to pray, and to teach publicly among us and in our country... Fourth, that they be forbidden to utter the name of God within our hearing. For we cannot with a good conscience listen to this or tolerate it..."



men," which superseded the Word of God and brought further corruption and apostasy into the Church. Theology was subsequently translated into government policy by Constantine. In spite of this development, ADONAI had faithfully preserved a remnant of truly faithful followers throughout Church history, but they were always the minority and always persecuted.

The above quotations and historical facts have not been cited to condemn these men, but to show that soon after the deaths of the apostles, there was a deliberate separation from anything Jewish, resulting ultimately in the suppression of the Hebraic nature of the Scriptures and faith in the Messiah Yeshua. Furthermore, this separation manifested itself in an overt disdain for the Torah. History records the unfortunate result that the disciples of these early Church fathers learned and practiced their anti-Semitism, disdain for the Tanakh, and spiritualization of Scripture. Hence, by the end of the 5th century the following unscriptural practices and "doctrines of men" were deeply rooted within the Western Roman church.

- Prayers for the dead
- Belief in purgatory
- Penance
- The view that "The Lord's Supper" is a sacrifice that must be administered by priests
- The division of the Church into a clergy and laity
- Worship of martyrs
- Worship of relics
- Salvation by works

- Monasticism
- Asceticism
- Worldliness
- Ascription of magical powers to relics


Most of us can readily understand the obvious dangers of the "doctrines of men" listed above. What most of us don't readily realize is that repression of the Hebraic roots of the faith has been just as dangerous. Perhaps if the non-Jewish believers had remained grounded in their Hebraic roots, they possibly would not have succumbed to the "doctrines of men" listed above. By the 1500's we can add the following items to the list of unscriptural practices and "doctrines of men" engaged in by those who called themselves followers of Messiah.

- Worship of Mary
- Payment of indulgences
- Wars fought with "Christian" armies
- Political corruption
- Inquisitions
- The Word of God taken from the common man
- Greed, idolatry, pagan festivals, and more
- Persecution of the Jewish people as heathens and heretics
- The Spanish Inquisition

During the Spanish Inquisition, in 1480 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain established a tribunal to purge the Church of those who clandestinely clung to their Jewishness. Wholesale

arrests followed. In 1481 the first victims were burned at the stake. Over the years an estimated 30,000 Jewish people were consigned to the flames.

It is obvious by any standard, that by the early 15th century the condition of Christianity was *best described as APOSTATE—separated from the Jewish people with a prejudicial misunderstanding of the Scriptures*. Furthermore, it is easy to understand why the Reformation (in the 1600's) was necessary. Surely, the prophecy of Sha'ul found a significant fulfillment in the Church era before the Reformation.

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods." 1 Timothy 4:1-5 

Footnotes

- 1 Discrimination against or hostility toward the Jewish people
- 2 "The Church" is the established entity that institutionalizes the Christian religion. This is a distinct entity from the "Body of Messiah" which transcends the institution of the Church and more properly describes the body of believers that has existed both in and out of the Christian religion.
- 3 Dixon, M. *The Rebirth and Restoration of Israel*, Chichester, Sovereign World, 1988, p. 80
- 4 Wilson, Marvin, *Our Father Abraham*, Eerdmans Publishers, 1989 p.89
- 5 Justine Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*
- 6 *Epistle of Ignatius*, Bishop of Antioch, to the Magnesians, 115 CE

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whether the departure from the UNCHR of the US, Israel's most consistent backer at the UN, removes one of the few remaining brakes on the Arab-Muslim assault against Israel. But judging from the past half century, Israel's position looks grim.


Rhetoric

Over the decades, language used at the UN to bash Israel has neatly echoed the rhetoric of the day, for maximum effect. When the anti-racism campaign was a major issue, for instance, Israel was

regarded as racist, and the "Zionism = racism" resolution struck a chord in the Third World. During the anti-colonial struggle, Israel was described as a colonizer of "occupied Arab lands." At the height of the Cold War, Israel was seen as an outpost of capitalist imperialism amid socialist Arab states. In the 1990s, with the world attention on human rights violations and war crimes in the Balkans, Rwanda and elsewhere, Israel's enemies began accusing it of war crimes—and since the election of Sharon, the clamor has grown for him to stand trial for such offenses.

In August this year, the UN is to hold

an international conference on racism, in South Africa. Israel's Islamic and Arab enemies, headed by Iran and others, are planning to use the occasion to push for the adoption of a declaration that essentially revives the notorious "Zionism = racism" resolution. In a draft document drawn up by Asian UN members in preparation for the August event, Israel is accused of racism, and its policies in the disputed territories as "a new kind of apartheid, a crime against humanity [and] a form of genocide."

In the court of international opinion and censure, it seems Israel has come a full circle. 



Seeds of Separation

Part II

In the previous article,¹ we examined the seeds of separation between the Jewish people and the emerging Western Roman Church.² We looked at numerous quotes from the early Church Fathers to demonstrate how they deliberately rejected beliefs and practices considered 'Jewish.' Most of the quotations pointed to a rejection of Jewish people and Judaism. Furthermore, we saw that many of the doctrines were anti-Semitic in nature. A cursory examination of the anti-Semitic doctrines of the Church Fathers may lead one to believe that the basis of their antagonism was a rejection of Judaism. However, as we begin to analyze their writings, we find a consistent rejection of the Torah of Moses as the root cause. In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justine Martyr states emphatically, "For the law [Torah] promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone; but this [new covenant] is for all universally. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one; and an eternal and final law—namely, Christ—has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance (*italics mine*)."³ In these words, we see that the basis for the

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rejection of anything 'Jewish,' was the premise that the Torah had been "abrogated" and superseded by the New Covenant. In the minds of the Church Fathers, what further need was there for the Torah with its 'old' commandments? Since the Church Fathers also taught that the Jewish people were 'Christ killers,' those who remained steadfast to Judaism were viewed as accursed by God, who had cast them and their Torah off to establish a 'new Israel.' This mindset, that the Torah had been abrogated (and replaced by the New

Covenant), became the basis for the separation of the western Roman Church from the early Jewish believers in the Messiah.

Early Practices

The clearest picture we have of the actual faith and practices of the early Jewish believers comes from the book of Acts. A brief perusal of this book confirms that the early believers in Messiah understood that the Torah had not been abrogated. Furthermore, their faith and practices were consistent with those based on the Torah-submissive lifestyle modeled and taught by Yeshua in Matthew 5:17–20. (*See inset, opposite*) This lifestyle was firmly rooted in the foundation of the Torah. The book of Acts informs us that there were tens of thousands of Jewish believers in the Messiah (Acts 5:14; 21:20; 22:12) who zealously kept the Torah commandments of Moses. These early Jewish believers met regularly in synagogues (Acts 9:2; 22:19), on the Sabbath (Acts 13:5; 17:1–4), celebrated the feasts (Acts 2; 18:21; 20:6,16; 24:11; 27:9) and by their own sworn testimony confessed that they kept the Torah of Moses (Acts 24:14; 25:8; 28:17) even as Yeshua taught they should. These Torah-submissive Jewish believers, who were called Nazarenes (Acts 24:5), and their



offspring were to become the victims of the seeds of separation sown by the Western Roman Church.

One of the earliest records of the developing antagonism between Torah-submissive Jewish believers and non-Jewish believers concerns statements by Ignatius, Bishop at Antioch, approximately 98–117 C.E. Ignatius argued “against the Judaizing tendencies of his territory, which, not far geographically from Palestine, had suffered the influences of the synagogue and of the Judaeo-Christians (italics mine).”⁴ In this statement, Ignatius laments the fact that some of the practices in Antioch had been influenced by the non-Messianic and Messianic Jews. With our knowledge of the Torah-based lifestyles of the early Messianic believers, we should not be surprised that any customs, ceremonies or practices within the body of Messiah would reflect Judaism. What is surprising, however, is the lament by Ignatius concerning the “influences” of the Jewish believers. Elsewhere Ignatius writes “...if we are still practicing Judaism, we admit that we have not received God’s favor...” and “it is wrong to talk about Jesus Christ and live like the Jews...”⁵ In these statements, Ignatius has certainly made ‘Jewish’ practices and the Christian lifestyle mutually exclusive. However, as we shall see, what Ignatius rejected as ‘Jewish’ were actually the commands of ADONAI from the Torah.

Some of the most revealing statements concerning the Messianic Jewish believers of his time were made by the Church Apologist, Epiphanius of Salamis, 370 C.E.

“We shall now especially consider *heretics* who... call themselves *Nazarenes*; they are mainly... *Jews and nothing else*. They make use not only of the New Testament, but they also use in a way the Old Testament of the Jews; for they do not forbid the books of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings... so that they are approved of by the Jews, from whom the Nazarenes do not differ in anything, and they *profess all the dogmas pertaining to the prescriptions of the Law and to the customs of the Jews*, except they believe in Christ... They preach that there is but one God, and his son Jesus Christ. But they are very learned in the Hebrew language;

for they, like the Jews, read the whole Law, then the Prophets... They differ from the Jews because they believe in Christ, and from the Christians in that they are to this day bound to the Jewish rites, such as *circumcision, the Sabbath, and other ceremonies*... Otherwise, this sect of the Nazarenes thrives most vigorously in the state of Berea, in Coele-Syria, in Decapolis, around Pella, and in Bashan... After they departed from Jerusalem, they made their start from here, as all the disciples dwelt in Pella, having been admonished by Christ to depart Jerusalem and emigrate because of imminent danger (italics mine).”⁶

The Nazarenes

From this quote, we see that by the fourth century the relationship between the descendants of the original Jewish believers and the Western Roman Church had deteriorated to one of overt antagonism. By referring to the Jewish believers as “her-

etics,” the Church clearly showed it had theological disagreements with them. By stating that they are “mainly... Jews and nothing else,” the Church was clearly practicing anti-Semitism towards the Jewish believers. More importantly, we can also see why the Nazarenes were viewed as heretics. Twice Epiphanius mentions that the Nazarenes make use of the Tanakh.⁷ He also states that they continued to practice “customs of the Jews,” and “Jewish rites,” including circumcision and the observance of Sabbath. The Jewish people who practiced Pharisaic Judaism and those who were Messianic both shared one thing in common. In the words of Epiphanius they both “profess all the dogmas pertaining to the prescriptions of the Law and to the customs of the Jews.” Thus we see that the Nazarenes were viewed as heretics because they continued to uphold the Torah and the customs of the Jews as the basis for their faith in Messiah Yeshua. This

The Lifestyle of His Disciples

In the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5–7, Yeshua clearly defines the lifestyle—the faith and practices—of those who would be called his disciples. In Matthew 5:17–20 He states, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” In these verses, Yeshua makes five very significant points.

1. He did not come to abolish or abrogate the Torah given to Moses.

2. He came to fulfill the Torah (literally to fill the Torah up to the brim with meaning).
3. Until heaven and earth disappear, not the slightest markings of the Torah will disappear.
4. Adherence to, and the teaching of Torah, or the lack thereof, will determine who is great or least in His kingdom.
5. Our obedience to the Torah must exceed that of the religious rulers of His time.

It is clear that Yeshua intended His disciples to teach all future disciples the points listed above; for we read in Matthew 28:19–20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Surely the commands found in Matthew 5–7 are not excluded from the commission found in Matthew 28:19–20.



aversion to the Torah as the “old” covenant that had passed away was the main factor motivating the Church to persecute Jewish people who practiced Judaism and those who believed in Yeshua as the Messiah.

The quote from Epiphanius demonstrates he knew that the Nazarenes of his time were the direct descendants of the earliest Jewish believers in the Messiah.⁸ It also provides evidence that the Jewish believers of his time (400 C.E.) continued to live Torah-submissive lifestyles as taught by Yeshua in Matthew 5:17–20, and demonstrated in the book of Acts. In fact, we can continue to trace the presence of Torah-submissive Jewish believers through many centuries by examining the writings of their detractors who continued to ostracize and persecute them. The Church Father Jerome (author of the Latin Vulgate) described the Nazarenes as “those who accept Messiah in such a way that they do not cease to observe the Old Law.”⁹ Once again, we see that it was obedience to the Torah that caused the Nazarenes to be viewed as different from the Church.

We have seen testimony from early Church history that the Jewish believers in the Messiah continued to observe the Torah. There is also historical evidence that they existed well into the 13th century. *The History of the Sabbath* records for us, “As late as the eleventh century Cardinal Humbert still referred to the Nazarenes as a Sabbath-keeping Christian body existing at that time.”¹⁰ Furthermore, the author states, “And these so-called ‘Judaizing Christians’ were none other than the Nazarenes mentioned by Cardinal Humbert... the true Israel of God, who amid all the persecutions through which they had passed, bore the reproach of Christ more than any other Christian party, wandering about as ‘pilgrims and strangers’ to preach the faith of Jesus and the commandments of God.”¹¹ These Jewish believers in Messiah were called Pasaginians who were “so named by the Italians from the Latin word ‘passagium,’ meaning ‘passage,’ because of the ‘wandering, unsettled life of these people.” Concerning the Pasagini, the Catholic writings of Bonacursus says, “Let those who are not yet acquainted with them, please note how perverse their belief and doctrine are. First, they teach that we

should obey the law of Moses according to the letter—the Sabbath, and circumcision, and the legal precepts still being in force. Furthermore, to increase their error, they condemn and reject all the Church Fathers, and the whole Roman Church.” Furthermore, Gregorius of Bergamo wrote

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about the Nazarenes (Pasagini) in 1250 C.E. stating, “there still remains the sect of the Pasagini. They teach... that the Old Testament festivals are to be observed, circumcision, distinction of foods, and in nearly all other matters, save the sacrifices. The Old Testament is to be observed as literally as the New; circumcision is to be kept according to the letter.”¹² All of these quotations show how the Western Roman Church reacted to these Jewish believers in Messiah who remained faithful to the Torah. All of the quotes above plainly demonstrate that hostility towards the Jewish believers had its basis in a rejection of the Torah of Moses.

This brief survey of the antagonism between the Western Roman Church and the Messianic Jewish believers has shown us why the Church severed its ties with the Jewish believers. Not only had the Western Roman Church rejected the Torah as ‘old,’ they began to despise Jewish people, thinking themselves better. It will be shown later that the seeds of separation were planted and nurtured predominantly by the Western Roman Church (as opposed

to the Eastern Churches, e.g., those of Asia Minor). Therefore, it is very interesting, that of all the epistles Paul wrote, it was the epistle to the Romans in which he wrote his most impassioned pleas to the non-Jewish believers, 1) admonishing them to not think ADONAI had rejected His people Israel and 2) not to arrogantly boast against the natural branches. Unfortunately, by their own written testimony, history has shown that the non-Jewish believers of Rome did not heed Paul’s admonition.

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid... Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee... Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee... For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.”¹³

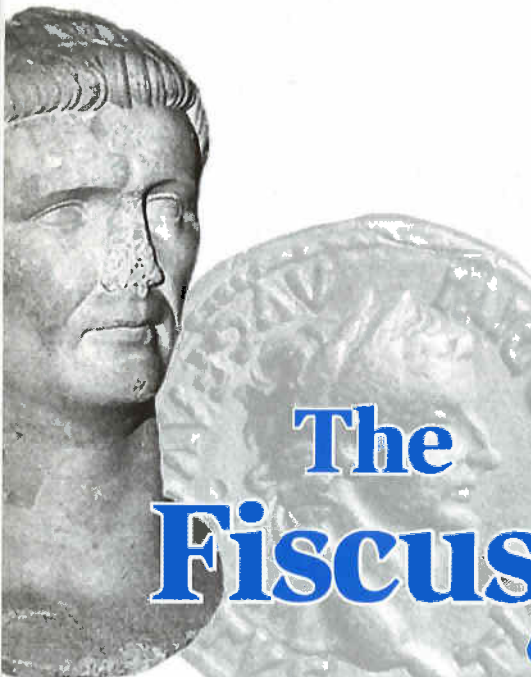
Footnotes

- 1 “Seeds of Separation,” Bikurei Tziyon Volume X, No X, 2001.
- 2 ‘The Church’ is the established entity that institutionalizes the Christian religion. This is a distinct entity from the ‘Body of Messiah,’ which transcends the institution of the Church and more properly describes the body of believers that has existed both within and outside of the Christian religion.
- 3 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tyrpho, A Jew*.
- 4 Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph.D., Andrews University, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*.
- 5 Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians.
- 6 Epiphanius; Panarion 29.
- 7 Tanakh, a Hebrew word designating the Torah, Prophets and Writings; equivalent to what is called the Old Testament.
- 8 The Nazarenes of Acts 24:5.
- 9 Jerome; On. Is. 8:14.
- 10 Andrews, J.N. & Conradi, L.R. *History of the Sabbath and the First Day of the Week* (4th ed., R&H, 1912 edition), p 545.
- 11 See *ibid.*, p 547.
- 12 See *ibid.*
- 13 Romans 11:1, 18-21, 25




Un-Rooted Christopher O'Quin

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The Fiscus Judaicus



“**B**e not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. . .

[For we] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day . . . [For] it is absurd to profess Christ Jesus, and to Judaize. For Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity.¹

Do Not Accept Judaism. But if any one preach the Jewish law unto you, listen not to him. For it is better to hearken to Christian doctrine. . . than to Judaism. . .² [For] as to their scrupulosity concerning meats, and their superstition as respects the Sabbaths, and their boasting about circumcision, and their fancies about fasting and the new moons. . . [these] are utterly ridiculous and unworthy of notice.³”

These are not the doctrines of Church Reformers, Medieval Catholic priests, or even of Constantine's Court. These instructions come from the earliest years of the post-Apostolic Church around 107 C.E. To most Messianic believers this comes as a great shock. How did the Church cultivate an understanding of itself that was so anti-Jewish and anti-Torah so early in its development?

From these instructions one can clearly understand that key Torah commandments such as Kosher laws, Sabbath observance, circumcision and Torah festivals were already thought to be abolished. How could this anti-nomian theology develop so quickly in the early Church when the Apostolic Scriptures abound with examples that testify to the eternal nature of God's Torah?

It developed, in part, because Christian Church doctrine was based on much more than pure Apostolic teaching. In fact, there is a large body of evidence to suggest that post-Second Temple Christianity redefined itself in spite of Apostolic teaching.

Once the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Judaism was forced to redefine itself and its cultic



Jerusalem was to be considered a client state of Rome. As such she was expected to serve in the defense of Rome's eastern frontiers by supplying tribute and information.



practices. For example, how could sins be atoned for without a Temple altar or Levitical Priesthood? What emerged from the figurative rubble of the Temple were three main faith traditions: Traditional Judaism, Messianic Communities, and the Christian Church.

First, Traditional Judaism (eventually known as Rabbinical Judaism) continued to hold to the immutability of the Torah. For them what was at issue was not whether Torah was still relevant, but *how* Torah was to be obeyed in light of new restrictions. The second group also continued to seek Torah observance in all aspects of life but could not escape what they believed to be the immutability of the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth. Made up of both Jews and Gentiles, this community's *Yeshua Ha Mashiach* was thoroughly Jewish and Torah observant. It is this party to which we refer to as the "Messianic Community."

The third group grew out of a growing Gentilization of communities throughout the Diaspora. Although these congregations began as conservative Messianic communities, through growing pressures these congregations took on a more anti-Jewish attitude and developed a strikingly anti-Torah theology. By the early to mid-2nd century they had thoroughly divested themselves of the Jewish Covenant Signs and, therefore, ceased to remain within the pale of Judaism. This is the group that would eventually develop into the thoroughly gentile Christian Church.

But what pressures could have produced such a break-off from the Messianic communities? This article will show from the historical evidence that much of Christian Church doctrine developed in large measure, not from New Testament teaching, but rather as a reaction to a 1st century tax called the *Fiscus Judaicus*.

Troubles with Rome

In order to grasp how it is that a Roman tax was able to affect almost 2,000 years of Church development, a broad understanding of Israel's history with Rome is necessary. Troubles with Rome began around 63 B.C.E. when General Pompey began a sweeping annexation of western Asia, including Syria and Palestine. Asked to intervene by one of the parties in Judaea's dynastic dispute, Pompey exploited this opportunity to the hilt. He quickly conquered Jerusalem and dictated internal policy by retaining the Hasmonaeans on the throne. He also caused lasting bitterness and resentment when he desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by walking into the Holy of Holies. Moreover, Jerusalem was to be considered a client state of Rome. As such she was expected to serve in the defense of Rome's eastern frontiers by supplying tribute and information. Although at first Israel was given a great deal of freedom to maintain her internal affairs, she was never really free of Roman meddling and interventions. Josephus writes:

*...[the Jews were told] if they supported Hyrcanus [Rome's chosen appointment for High Priest] they would live in prosperity and quiet, enjoying their own property and general peace; but if they were deluded by the frigid hopes of those who for private profit were eager for revolution, they would find him not a protector but a master, Hyrcanus not a king but an autocrat, and Caesar and the Romans not leaders and friends but enemies; they would never stand by while the Jews turned out of office the man they had appointed."*⁴

By 37 B.C.E., the Hasmonaeans were deposed and replaced with an Idumaeen king named Herod, the same Herod found

in the Gospel accounts. What Rome seemed to care most about was that the various client kings kept the peace and the tribute coming into Rome. So long as a king could offer this, he could count on Roman assistance against threats to his throne. Herod is the quintessential example of a king who ruled with despotic cruelty over his people, always confident of assistance from Rome. After the death of Herod, however, the core of the Holy Land was officially annexed as the province of Judaea and governed even more directly by various prefects. Under these conditions Roman troops would now be stationed permanently in the area.

However, Judaea was always a troublesome province for Rome. "From the start Rome and its provincial governors had been obliged to grapple with an almost continuous and ever-worsening series of internal crises, embittered by mutual incomprehension of each other's religious attitudes."⁵ Finally, in 66 C.E., troubles would boil over. Josephus describes the conditions on the eve of the Jewish Revolt:

The next procurator, Festus, tackled the chief curse of the country; he killed a considerable number of bandits and captured many more. Albinus, who followed him, acted very differently, being guilty of every possible misdemeanor. Not content with official actions that meant widespread robbery and looting of private property, or with taxes that crippled the whole nation, he allowed those imprisoned for banditry by local courts or his own predecessors to be bought out by their relatives, and only the man who failed to pay was left in jail to serve his sentence ... [F]ree speech was completely



suppressed and tyranny reigned everywhere; from then on the seeds of the coming destruction were being sown in the City. Such a man was Albinus, but his successor Gessius Florus made him appear an angel by comparison ... [H]e stripped whole cities, ruined complete communities, and virtually announced to the entire country that everyone might be a bandit if he chose, so long as he himself received a rake-off.⁶

Finally, Florus turned his avarice to the Temple, removing gold and silver from its treasury. In addition to everything else, this pushed the people of Jerusalem over the edge. Immediately Eleazar, son of Ananias the High Priest, persuaded the ministers of the Temple to ban all gifts and sacrifices from the Gentiles. This would make war with Rome inevitable since this act abolished the sacrifices offered for Rome and Caesar himself. The destruction of Jerusalem was now just a matter of time. In 70 C.E. the walls of Jerusalem were breached and the city and the Temple were sacked, looted and burned. Louis Feldman estimates that tens of millions of dollars worth of silver and gold were carried off from the Temple.⁷ Zealot forces would hold out for another three years at Masada, but the fate of the Jews was

sealed. Judaea had become a stench to Rome and Roman authorities were determined never to allow such a revolt to occur again.

Anti-Jewish Sentiment Spreads

The anti-Jewish sentiment throughout the Empire can hardly be overstated. For example, the Gentile inhabitants of Antioch, which had a sizable Jewish community, took advantage of the anti-Jewish prejudice of the Romans. Immediately after the war they instituted a systematic persecution aimed at the extinction of Jewish religious practices: all who failed to sacrifice to pagan deities were to be punished, cessation from work on Sabbath was forbidden, and other Jewish “privileges” were withdrawn.⁸

It was against this backdrop that Roman reprisals for the rebellion of Jerusalem fell on all Jews within the empire, symbolically expressed through the vigorous exaction of a special poll tax known as the *Fiscus Judaicus* (Jewish Tax).⁹ This tax amounted to two day’s wages per person per year for those between three and 60 years of age. Or, put another way, it equaled two days wages for each person in a household for three generations. If a

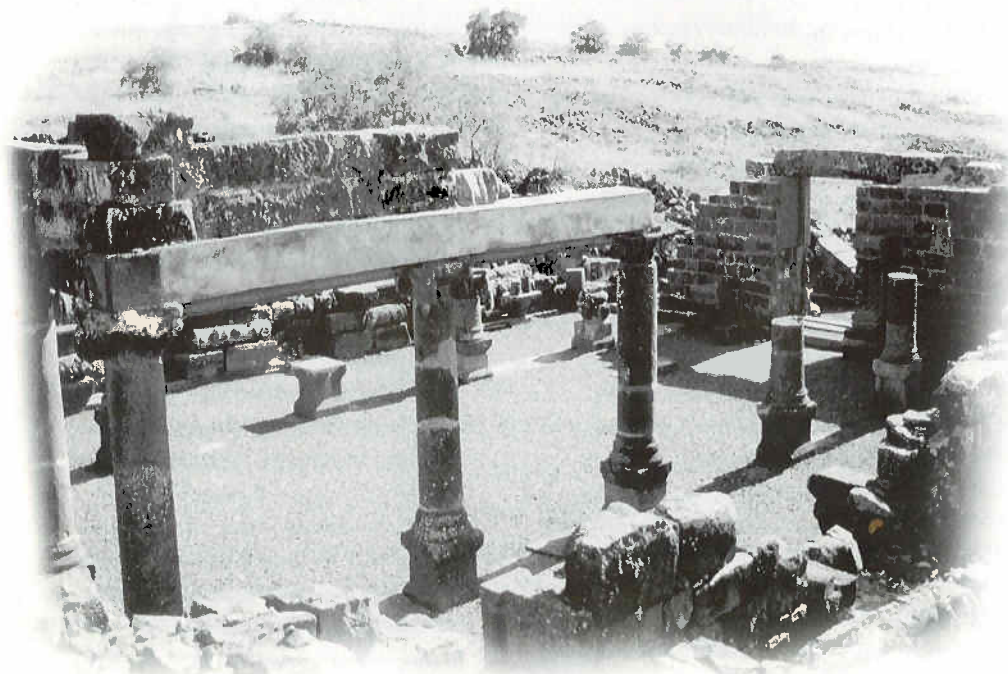
man had himself, his wife, his five children, his father and mother and perhaps his in-laws (extended families were the norm), it would cost him 22 day’s wages just to pay a tax for being Jewish. Translated into modern terms, if a family had an income of \$200 per day, an 11-member household would require an annual payment of \$4,400.

The impact this tax would have on the development of the early Church was significant for it struck at the heart of Jewish/Christian identity. If the tax was to be levied against all Jews, the question had to be asked, “who is a Jew?” The answer was not as easy as it might seem. As Martin Goodman explains:

Some Gentiles might become Jews by conversion to Jewish religious practice, a process explicitly formulated in the mid-1st century by Philo. Other Gentiles were attracted to Jewish customs such as the Sabbath, without necessarily being thought of by other Jews as proselytes. Of these a large number in Antioch had, according to Josephus, been made by the resident Jews “in some way a part of themselves.” Which, if any, of these anomalous characters were to pay the Jewish tax?¹⁰

By the time Domitian became Emperor (81–96 C.E.) it was clear that no real system for determining one’s “Jewishness” had been firmly established. Suetonius writes:

The destruction of Jerusalem was now just a matter of time. In 70 C.E. the walls of Jerusalem were breached and the city and the Temple were sacked, looted and burned.





Domitian's agents collected the tax on Jews with a peculiar lack of mercy; and took proceedings not only against those who kept their Jewish origins a secret in order to avoid the tax, but against those who lived as Jews without professing Judaism. As a boy, I remember once attending a crowded Court where the imperial agent had a ninety-year-old man inspected to establish whether or not he had been circumcised.”¹¹

Division by Definition

Therefore, one of the unintended consequences of the Jewish Tax was that it forced the various communities to define themselves as either Jewish or non-Jewish. On the one hand there were those Traditional Jews who saw themselves as Torah-observant and Covenant members of Israel and would never shrink from that identity; they would clearly pay the tax. On the other hand, there were those who, although Jewish by blood, tried to hide their Jewishness in order to prevent having to pay the tax. How would this be done? By avoiding appearances of Jewish practices such as Sabbath observances, keeping of Jewish festivals, etc.

This was far more widespread than one might initially realize. For example, there were thousands of Jews who had been captured as slaves and brought to Rome during Pompey's assault on Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. By Domitian's time many of their offspring saw themselves as thoroughly Roman. They neither identified with their Jewish lineage nor its practices. Therefore, they bitterly resented having to pay such a heavy tax for what they viewed as an accident of birth. Finally, there were those who, although not Jewish by blood, nevertheless practiced the Jewish faith in both Messianic and Tradi-

tional Jewish communities. Of these two groups, the early Messianic Community found itself particularly vulnerable since these followers of "The Way" belonged to a faith that was still considered a party of Judaism, even though many or even most were Gentile believers by this time.

The Jewish Tax would prove to be even more destructive, however, under Domitian's successor, Nerva. For in 96 C.E., Nerva relaxed the collection of the tax to only those who, according to historian Cassius Dio, "followed their ancestral customs." "No one was permitted to accuse anyone of treason or of adopting the Jewish way of life; and Nerva wiped out the abuses in the collection of the Jewish Tax."¹² The ramifications of this ruling were profound. Notice that "adopting the Jewish way of life" was equated with treason. Further, it indicated that by avoiding the outward practices of the Jewish faith, payment of the tax could be evaded. In other words, as far as Roman tax policies were concerned, being Jewish had nothing to do with ethnicity and everything to do with religious practice.

With this in view, consider what must have gone through the minds of Gentile believers who were new to the Messianic faith, and who, up to this time, had never felt any identification with the Jews. Not only did they lack a natural affinity for things Jewish, but were finding themselves the recipients of a growing anti-Gentile polemic within the Traditional Jewish communities. The question must have been soon asked why they would wish to identify with people who, in many cases, had no desire to identify with them and pay a crushing and debilitating tax to boot?

Moreover, wasn't the whole point of Paul's letters to the Gentile believers in Galatia and Ephesus that it was not necessary for Gentiles to become Jewish, i.e. circumcised, in order to have a part in the

One of the unintended consequences of the Jewish Tax was that it forced the various communities to define themselves as either Jewish or non-Jewish.

"world to come"? The status required by Paul's teaching was to be "in Messiah." In fact, Paul went as far as to say that a Gentile who attempted to achieve right standing before God by changing his status from Gentile to Jew through the proselyte ceremony would end up being severed from Messiah (Galatians 5:4)! Therefore, Paul was clear; Gentiles were not to attempt a change of status from Gentile to Jew - they were to remain Gentile and were to consider themselves as Gentiles who had been grafted in to Israel through Messiah (Romans 11:17).

One must wonder about the tax implications of such a theology. Consider the local Roman tax collector who knew where the local synagogues were and the names of those who attended them. Since he was paid a commission on all taxes collected, it was very much in his financial interest to achieve 100% compliance regarding the Jewish Tax. Imagine his bewilderment when finding out that a whole class of people within the Synagogue was evading the Jewish Tax on the grounds that they were not Jewish. Yet Rome had declared that as far as she was



From a Roman perspective, the Christian Church had found a way to redefine its faith so as to be seen wholly independent from that of the Jewish communities.

concerned, adopting the “Jewish way of life” was, for tax purposes, the same as being Jewish. Therefore, if the Gentile believers wished to avoid the Jewish Tax it was becoming clear that new traditions would need to be created — traditions that could be explained as non-Jewish.

Agonizing choices

For Jews within the Messianic communities, the choice must have been agonizing. They, unlike many Gentile believers, saw themselves as thoroughly Jewish and believers in a Jewish Messiah. Giving up their ancestral traditions would mean turning their backs on the whole context of their faith. Whereas Gentiles might view Jewish forms of worship as unnecessary or optional, for the Jew these were the very signs of the Covenant made between HASHEM and His people. Not much more than a hundred years earlier the Jews had suffered severely resisting Hellenized Syrian attempts to abolish the Signs of the Covenant within the Jewish communities. Would some Messianic believers now develop a Hellenized theology to explain away the Signs of the Covenant, thus succeeding where the Syrians had failed?

Yet, pressures were enormous. If they could not pay the tax they would certainly be thrown into slavery, making Torah observance almost impossible. On the other hand, how could they justify paying a tax that went to pay for the upkeep of the pagan temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome? Finally, could they be both loyal to Messiah and redefine their faith in Yeshua HaMashiach in such a way that did not require observance of Sabbath

worship, circumcision and Torah festivals?

Apparently there were those whose consciences did find ways to rationalize away Torah observances. The evidence for this comes from three main sources. First, there is evidence of a growing anti-Christian polemic within the Synagogue. From a Jewish standpoint, any ethnic Jew who publicly refused to pay the annual levy to the *Fiscus Judaicus* on the grounds that he was no longer religiously Jewish put his apostasy beyond doubt.¹³ To renounce the tax was to renounce the Jewish faith, and by renouncing the Jewish faith one forfeited any hope for a part in the world to come. It was clearly akin to those who, during the Hasmonean period, had themselves “uncircumcised”. Revulsion toward these apostates and heretics was soon expressed in the *birkat ha-minim* recited in the *Shemonei Esrei*:

...Rabbi Gamaliel and his associates, sometime before the end of the first century, [were prompted by these events to] alter the Jewish synagogue liturgy. This involved a change in the 12th benediction of the Shemonei Esrei to contain a condemnation of [both apostates and] Jewish Christian believers.

“And for apostates let there be no hope; and may the insolent kingdom be quickly uprooted, in our days. And may the Nazarenes and heretics (minim) perish quickly; and may they be erased from the Book of Life; and may they not be inscribed with the righteous...”¹⁴

The second source of evidence for the growing distinction between Church and Synagogue comes from Roman sources. For example, in a letter written by a provincial governor in Asia Minor named Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan (cir. 110 C.E.), Christians are treated as a separate and distinct group without any reference to Jews or Jewish practices. He writes:

...not knowing what to do in the future, he sent a report to the Emperor Trajan to the effect that except for their refusal to worship idols he had detected nothing

improper in their behavior. He also informed him that the Christians got up at dawn and hymned Christ as a god, and in order to uphold their principles were forbidden to commit murder, adultery, fraud, theft, and the like. In response, Trajan sent a rescript ordering that members of the Christian community were not to be hunted, but if met with were to be punished.¹⁵

So we see that by 110 C.E. the Roman government was able to look upon the Christian community as separate and distinct from the Synagogue. Perhaps it is what is not mentioned in this passage that is most striking. Notice there is no mention whatsoever of any characteristically Jewish customs or practices. There is no mention of Shabbat worship, circumcision, or even Torah reading. From a Roman perspective, the Christian Church had found a way to redefine its faith so as to be seen wholly independent from that of the Jewish communities.

The Church Sets Aside Torah

Lastly, and most compelling, is the evidence coming from the Church itself. By examining the writings of the early Church Fathers one can see an obvious shift in how the Church defined itself after 96 C.E. One way this is seen is by examining how various Church fathers drew upon Scripture to lend authority to their writings. The benchmark is set in the Apostolic Scriptures where there is a full reliance upon the Tanach for Scriptural authority. By 96 C.E. in Clement’s letter to the Corinthians, we see that there are 101 references to Tanach passages, 24 direct references or allusions to Apostolic writings and 17 references to blended passages where he takes a passage from the Tanach and connects it to an Apostolic verse (e.g., Genesis 7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). By the early to middle part of the 2nd century, however, in a letter from Polycarp to the Philippians there are some 59 references to Apostolic writings, including the Gospels, and only three references to passages in the Tanach

Continue reading on **PAGE 41**



The Fiscus Judaicus

Continued from PAGE 32

(Psalms 2:11; Psalms 4:5; and Isaiah 52:5). And this trend is true across the board. After 96 C.E. it seems that the early Church fathers set aside Torah references almost entirely. Is this because they saw use of Torah as a distinctively Jewish practice from which they wished to distance themselves? Obviously this must be the case since we read Justin (cir. 135 C.E.) stating categorically that Christianity and Torah observance are not compatible.

*But if, Trypho, I continued, some of your race, who say they believe in this Christ, compel those Gentiles who believe in this Christ to live in all respects according to the law given by Moses, or choose not to associate so intimately with them, I in like manner do not approve of them. But I believe that even those, who have been persuaded by them to observe the legal dispensation along with their confession of God in Christ, shall probably be saved.*¹⁶

This is surely a profound passage for it begs the question as to whether or not one can be both “saved” and follow Torah. Justin’s answer is that although it is perhaps possible, it is greatly discouraged. This indicates a break with Apostolic and Messianic theology that had equated Torah observance and faith in Yeshua as fully harmonious.

It is significant, therefore, that at the very same time Rome was discouraging Torah observance through taxation, the Gentilized Church was developing a theology of disassociation with Torah and all things Jewish. This cannot be mere coincidence. It is inescapable that after 96 C.E., post-Second Temple Christianity began to redefine itself in other than Jewish terms. For Rome’s part, the definition of a Jew was, for the purpose of the tax, a religious one. For Romans, Jews were those who worshipped the Divinity whose temple had been destroyed in Jerusalem and who refused to worship other gods.¹⁷ For the Gentile Church, a Jew was one who con-

tinued to practice customs and “superstitions” that had been abolished by a now Gentilized “Jesus Christ.”

However, for those Jews and Gentiles who continued to walk according to the commandments of Torah and held to the Messiahship of Yeshua, life would be very difficult. As Philip S. Alexander suggests in his article, “A Parting of the Ways from a Rabbinic Jewish Perspective,” the Messianic community was eventually persecuted by an unwitting alliance of three powerful forces: the Roman government, the triumph of Rabbinical Judaism and Gentile seizure of the faith.¹⁸

Footnotes

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...at the very same time Rome was discouraging Torah observance through taxation, the Gentilized Church was developing a theology of disassociation with Torah and all things Jewish.

- to 13, Ed. by James D.G. Dunn, (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI., 1999), p. 32.
- 14 Julius Scott, in an unpublished paper entitled “Glimpses of Jewish Christianity from the End of Acts to Justin Martyr” presented at an ETS meeting in November 1997. [It should be noted that this edition of the *Shemonei Esrei* that includes the words “Nazarenes ...” is that of the Cairo Geniza and not the one found in the Bavli. The one in the Bavli is not clearly directed against the Messianics.]
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the
Early Messianic
Communities

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”¹

Was this Apostolic counsel respected? What of the Messianic Communities “when its founders were fallen asleep?” Was the Spirit of Truth really able to guide the faithful into all truth, and to keep them in the truth?² In the previous article we examined how of a Roman Tax, called the *Fiscus Judaicus*, provided a strong motivation for many of the early Gentile believers in Yeshua to define their faith in a new and non-Jewish way. Yet it should seem obvious that this could not have been possible without at least the tacit cooperation of its leadership. So we must ask whether or not Paul’s

DID ADONAI INTEND for there to be two streams of God’s people—Judaism and Christianity? Did God desire a pure biblical faith, or the creation of two distinct religious institutions? What were the seeds of separation that formed this chasm? Just where did the split occur? This section will question various established conventions in Christianity in the hopes of challenging the reader’s relationship to any particular belief system, encouraging him to strive toward a greater understanding and application of the faith. —FFOZ

injunction to entrust the truth to reliable men was realized. What happened within the various Communities throughout Asia Minor to cause them so quickly to turn from the Hebrew character of their faith? In this article we will examine the development of the early Messianic communities throughout the Diaspora and trace when, how and why communities developed along side the Messianic synagogues

whose leaders constructed a Christian Faith that became hostile to its Jewish roots.

Did Paul Plant Churches?

The seeds of this Synagogue/Church Schism can be seen from the very beginning of Paul’s missionary efforts. The book of Acts gives us Paul’s methods for spreading the Good News.



When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Tanakh), explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Yeshua I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. **Some of the Jews** were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, **as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks** and not a few prominent women. (Emphasis added)³

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me... From this man's (David) descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Yeshua, as he promised... Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent... We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Yeshua. As it is written in the second Psalm... Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Yeshua the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses..." As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.⁴

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and

Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Yeshua was the Messiah. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a

Synagogue and preached a very Torah-centered message to a very Torah-centered people. Paul's whole emphasis was that the Gospel fulfilled the promise given to Abraham—therefore it was only within the context of the Covenants and those promises that it was possible to fully understand Paul's message. Apart from an understanding of the Tanach, Paul's message would be easy to distort, as we soon shall see. In fact Paul states very clearly what the Gospel or Good News is:

...the notion of Paul engaging in "Church Planting" is very misleading since it implies that he was attempting to bring a new religion to the community. Clearly, Paul never intended to start any new religion nor did he wish to set up alternative places of worship.

worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized... So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.⁵

From these passages in the book of Acts it is clear that Paul's method for spreading the Good News was to first go to the Synagogue of each town. There he found both ethnic Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. It is significant that Paul speaks, not to the Biblically unlearned, but to people (both Jew and Gentile) who knew and appreciated the Tanach—people who were already well grounded in the Scriptures and submitted to its authority. For as James said, "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."⁶

So the notion of Paul engaging in "Church Planting" is very misleading since it implies that he was attempting to bring a new religion to the community. Clearly, Paul never intended to start any new religion nor did he wish to set up alternative places of worship. Rather, he went to the

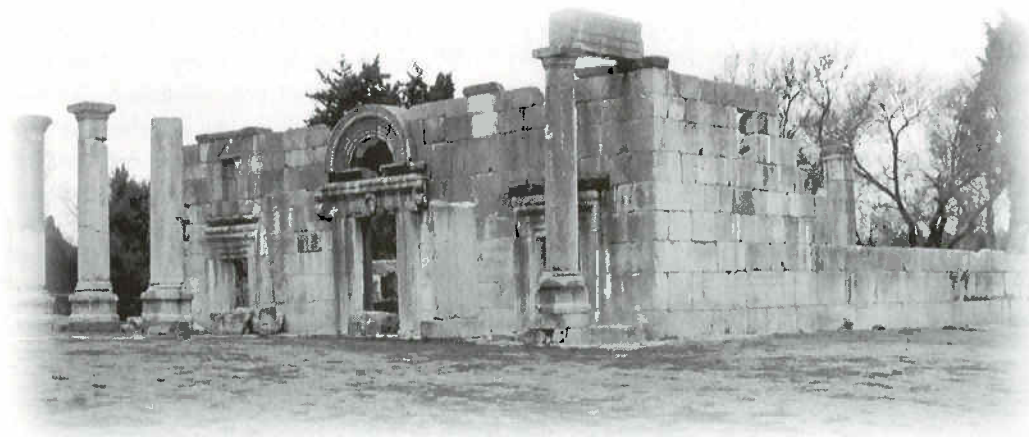
"We tell you the **good news**: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Yeshua. As it is written in the second Psalm... Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Yeshua the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses..."⁷

And again he states:

"For I tell you that Messiah has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy...⁸ [For] theirs [Israel] is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."⁹

So if we accept Paul's own testimony and his message, we must conclude that he saw the Gospel as the fulfillment of





the Covenant promise. The one flowed easily and entirely out of the other. For Paul there was no discontinuity or juxtaposition between the Tanach and the Gospel.

Reaction to Paul's Message

As stated earlier, the seeds of the schism between the Synagogue and what would eventually develop into the Church, were sown in the early misinterpretation of Paul's message. His two primary opponents were members from within Traditional Judaism and those of what came to be called the "Circumcision Group." Paul's message was clear: justification before HaShem could be found only through trusting faith in the Messiah whom He had sent—Yeshua of Natzeret. And this free gift of God was open to all—both Jew and Gentile alike. Further, the Gentile was justified as a Gentile without becoming a formal Proselyte.

For many within Traditional Judaism this message appears to have gone over like a lead balloon. First of all, Paul states that... "Through Him (Yeshua) everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses..."¹⁰ For them the question was this: Why is faith in this Yeshua necessary for justification before God since we are already Covenant heirs and already have a means for our atonement on Yom Kippur? For these individuals Paul was supplying the answer to a question they never thought to ask. As they saw it, they were already "in" and didn't see the need for this "Gospel." But Paul clearly preached that apart from Yeshua, all were

guilty of sin and in need of forgiveness—forgiveness found only through Yeshua. This "Gospel" seemed to be placing them on the same level as the Gentile. How could HaShem view His Covenant People as no more special than the Nations? To many who had grown up in the Synagogue, who were proud of their pedigree and level of Torah observance, this was a very offensive message indeed. "[So] when the Jews [Judeans?] opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'"¹¹

The other opponents of Paul also continued to be a source of frustration throughout his ministry. This party, known as the Circumcision Group and made up largely of Pharisees (see Acts 15), responded differently than those who rejected his message outright. For them the Messiahship of Yeshua was not in question. Neither was His atoning sacrifice at issue. God had fulfilled his Covenant Promise to redeem His people and provide them with salvation. The key term for them, however, was "His People." For the Circumcision Group "His People" meant Jews and only Jews. In response to Paul's message they would say,

[For] ours [Israel] is the adoption as sons; ours the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Ours are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Messiah.

Therefore, if the Gentiles wanted "in" they must become Jews by formal conversion. This is clearly borne out from Acts 15. "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'" The key point here is not whether the Gentiles should follow Torah as a matter of halachah.

Rather, it was being taught as a salvation/justification issue. And it was this group, which was the target of Paul's wrath in his letter to the Galatians. However, he was never thoroughly successful in overcoming this group since years later he was still fighting the same battle. He wrote polemically to Titus, "For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group."¹²

For the God-fearing Gentiles, however, Paul's Gospel was clearly welcome news. For to them Paul was saying that,

*...Formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Messiah.***

*For He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. **His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the [execution stake],** by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace*



to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.¹³

What is critical for our discussion is that through Yeshua, Gentiles became members of the Covenant and citizens of God's Israel. As Paul would explain in Romans 11, the Gentiles were now being grafted into the olive tree of Israel. Therefore, it was the Gentile who was expected to adapt to the rules and obligations of Israel—not the other way around. Paul's message placed Gentiles and Jews into the same Torah Covenant and the same Promises. Gentiles were now expected to conduct themselves as good members of this Covenant.

Paul's Messianic Communities

In practical terms, however, the new rules being applied to this Jew/Gentile relationship would require accommodations on both sides. In some cases whole synagogues accepted Paul's message and would become what we would term as a Messianic Community. In other cases it is also clear that only some Jews and God-fearing Gentiles accepted the message. In those cases Paul set-up alternative synagogues, often very close to the first. It is interesting to note that in archeological excavations one cannot differentiate between synagogue and "church" in these earliest years. It is only later that we find structures developing that are characteristically "Christian."

Therefore, the communities that Paul initially established should be seen as the first-fruits fulfillment of God's promise throughout the Tanach to join Israel and the nations for worship and service to Himself. They were, in a sense a "mixed-multitude" of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles worshipping in a characteristically Jewish fashion. And, at least initially, these Messianic communities seemed to have been fairly successful under this arrangement.

Paul, of course, could not be everywhere at once, nor would he always be alive to help in the running of these communities. Therefore, the appointment of trustworthy leaders who could oversee

these communities was of tremendous importance. What then were the criteria for choosing leadership and what kinds of formal structures do we find Paul establishing?

Paul's method for establishing leadership among the new congregations was fairly simple. We can judge by his own writings that the system he set up was one of multiple overseers with deacons (*shammashim*). His exhortation to Timothy¹⁴ well represents his vision for the Messianic Communities. The terms overseer and elder overlap throughout the letter to Timothy, while the requirements for deacons are essentially the same as those for elders and overseers minus the requirements for teaching. Ordination seems to have been conducted rather unceremoniously through the "laying on of hands" by a group of established elders. As to the exercise of power, there is never any hint of the use of force. Paul exhorts, pleads, and persuades, but he never implies any legitimate use of force. We see Paul using the metaphors of family to best describe the relationship of leaders to their congregations. He refers to himself as a "father" to his offspring in the faith. Or as a mother who suffers the pains of childbirth for her children.¹⁵ There is nothing of the kind of heavy-handed, top-down leadership that will develop later. In short, it seems to have been a congregationally oriented leadership structure—very much the kind of leadership Paul would have been familiar with from the Synagogue.

So we find that at the close of the Second Temple period two religious communities existed side by side. One was the traditional Jewish synagogue, made up of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, professing love and devotion to HaShem and His Torah, yet not convinced of the Messiahship of Yeshua of Natzeret. The other community—the Messianic Community—was very closely patterned after the former. It too was made up of both Jews¹⁶ and God-fearing Gentiles; it too professed love and devotion to HaShem and His Torah. This Messianic Community, however, embraced Yeshua as the fulfillment of Jewish Messianic expectations. For anyone who wished to worship the

One True God in community, these assemblies were the only two options. What Paul could not have known in the early 60s CE, however, was that dramatic events were about to unfold which would forever change the course of the Messianic Movement.

In the next issue we will take a closer look at the generation and leadership that arose after the death of the apostles.

Endnotes

- 1 2 Timothy 2:2. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1995
- 2 Rev. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, Eds. "Introduction", *Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Early Church Fathers, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, (Calvin College, 1998).
- 3 Acts 17:1-4
- 4 Acts 13:14-43
- 5 Acts 18:4-11
- 6 Acts 15:21
- 7 Acts 13:32-39
- 8 Romans 15:8,9.
- 9 Romans 9:4,5
- 10 Acts 13:39.
- 11 Acts 18:6
- 12 Titus 1:10.
- 13 Ephesians 2:11-18
- 14 1 Timothy 3-5.
- 15 Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P Martin, Daniel G. Reid, Ed. *Church Order and Government, Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, © 1993, pp.132-133.
- 16 Although the demographic is heavily weighted towards the Gentiles, it is clear from Acts 21:20 that tens of thousands of Jews, all zealous for the Torah, believed.

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the Next Generation

The Early Messianic Communities
Part II

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” — 2 Timothy 2:2

What Paul could not have known in the last years of his life was that the Jewish nation would revolt against Rome, plunging not only the Jewish nation, but also the Jewish Faith itself into a fight for survival. By this time, 70 CE, Paul, Peter, James—all the Apostles were gone, only John was left and the story of the early Messianic Communities was about to take a dramatic turn.

There had always been opposition to Yeshua and His message from the Temple establishment. Between the time of Yeshua's ascension and the eve of the Jewish War, the various Jewish parties existed together in an uneasy tension. We find that in the book of Acts there was a short-lived persecution of the Messianic Community, but most Jews appear to have

DID ADONAI INTEND for there to be two streams of God's people—Judaism and Christianity? Did God desire a pure biblical faith, or the creation of two distinct religious institutions? What were the seeds of separation that formed this chasm? Just where did the split occur? This section will question various established conventions in Christianity in the hopes of challenging the reader's relationship to any particular belief system, encouraging him to strive toward a greater understanding and application of the faith. —FFOZ

considered it to be a legitimate party within Judaism and that its survival was viable. However, on the eve of the Jewish War an event occurred, which marked a major turn in the road. The historian Hegesippus describes this event. (See separate insert, “The Death of James the Just”)

It is clear from this text that Hegesippus is telling his readers that Second Temple Judaism was hardly monolithic. He mentions seven sects or parties in

addition to the Messianic or Nazarene Party. He states that the main opposition came from those who did not believe in the resurrection or in a final judgment. It seems clear, therefore, in addition to some Pharisees, which are specifically mentioned, that Hegesippus must be referring to the Sadducees and the High Priestly leadership. Moreover, the sole issue was whether or not Yeshua was the Messiah—the “door.” He also seems to indicate that even James expected Yeshua's



immediate return and thus the city was in an uproar. Nevertheless, by putting James to death, these influential Jewish leaders were showing categorically that they would stubbornly refuse any concessions, compromise or accommodations with the Messianic Party.

Redefining Judaism

After the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE, Judaism was forced to redefine itself apart from its traditional Temple rituals. What developed was an assembly of sages at Yavneh under the leadership of R. Yohannan Ben Zakkai who was able to gather around himself a number of surviving sages. They formed a college of seventy-one elders, who were willing to face the countless problems arising from the new situation. It would take some time for its moral authority to be acknowledged by the surviving Jewish communities, but by the end of the century this Yavneh Academy would become the recognized center of the religious as well as the national life of the Jewish people.²

Pharisaism, which was previously one of many competing parties, found new expression in Rabbinic Judaism. It suddenly blossomed when an entirely new social and political context began to threaten the survival of Israel. Jewish pluralism had expired in the flames of the Catastrophe. The Pharisees had won by default.³ These Rabbis made themselves the standard and touchstone for Orthodoxy. Whatever sect did not agree with them was branded “min.” Rabbinic Judaism defaulted to Orthodox Judaism.⁴

It was, therefore, at Yavneh that official Judaism redefined itself in such a way as to exclude Messianic Judaism

from its newly defined orthodoxy. Perhaps the single clearest example of official opposition to the followers of Yeshua is found in the Birkat HaMinin. There were multiple versions, but for our discussion the Palestinian version found in the Cairo

Geniza is the most direct. It simply reads, “And for apostates let there be no hope; and may the insolent kingdom be quickly uprooted, in our days. And may the Nazarenes and heretics (*minim*) perish quickly; and may they be erased from the

The Death of ‘James the Just’

James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Savior to the present day, for there were many that bore the name of James.

He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath.

He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place, for he wore not woolen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.

Because of his exceeding great justice he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek, ‘Bulwark of the people’ and ‘Justice,’ in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.

Now some of the seven sects, which existed among the people and which have been mentioned by me in the Memoirs, asked him, ‘What is the gate of [Yeshua]?’ and he replied that he was the Savior. On account of these words some believed that [Yeshua] is the [Messiah]. But the sects mentioned above did not believe either in a resurrection or in one’s coming to give to every man according to his works. But as many as believed did so on account of James. Therefore when many even of the rulers believed, there was a commotion among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said that there was danger that the whole people would be looking for [Yeshua] as the [Messiah]. Coming therefore in a body to James they said, ‘we entreat you, restrain the people, for they are gone astray in regard to [Yeshua], as if he were the [Messiah]. We entreat you to persuade all that have come to the feast of the Passover concerning [Yeshua]; for we all have confidence in you. For we bear witness, as do all the people, that you art just, and do not respect persons.

Do therefore persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning [Yeshua]. For the whole people,

and all of us also, have confidence in you. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple, that from that high position you may be clearly seen, and that all the people may readily hear your words. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, are come together on account of the Passover.’

The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him and said: ‘Thou just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led, astray after [Yeshua], the crucified one, declare to us, what is the gate of [Yeshua].’

And he answered with a loud voice, ‘Why do you ask me concerning [Yeshua], the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.’

And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, ‘We have done badly in supplying such testimony to [Yeshua]. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him.’

And they cried out, saying, ‘Oh! oh! the just man is also in error.’ And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, ‘Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings.’

So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just.’ And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, ‘I entreat you, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying ‘Cease, what are you doing? The just one is praying for you.’ And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that [Yeshua] is the [Messiah].¹



Book of Life; and may they not be inscribed with the righteous.”

In the wake of this rise of Formative Judaism, the Nazarenes (Christians) were forced out of the synagogues by modification of one of the standard prayers.

This effectively excluded them from synagogue worship and continuing participation in Jewish life—their enthusiasm for corporate prayer would be understandably dampened if in doing so they prayed for their own damnation. From that time onward the break between Judaism and Christianity was final; as far as the synagogue was concerned, the Church was banned.⁵

Anything so severe as the modification of worship liturgy would require a set of hand carried instructions for the Diaspora synagogues. These instructions would possibly have included:

- A formal denial of the account of the teaching and the resurrection of Yeshua
- That Christianity was a denial of God and of the Torah and it was based on the teaching of Yeshua, who was a deceiver
- That His disciples stole His body and then pretended that He had risen from the dead and claimed that He was the Son of God.
- And that it was therefore impossible for Jews to have anything to do with such teaching, and those who adhere to it should formally be excommunicated.⁶

So we see that by the turn of the century, Yavneh was pursuing a policy of unity and conformity not found in the Second Temple period. Moreover, this policy of orthodoxy formalized a rule of strict exclusion of Yeshua’s followers who were now commonly becoming known as Christians.

Unqualified to Teach

With the followers of Yeshua effectively shut out of the “mainline” Synagogues, missionary work was no longer possible among Torah observant people. From now on the audience would be a pagan audi-

ence. As Eusebius states:

[Belonging] to the first stage in the apostolic succession.... [They] spread the message still further and sowed the saving seed of the Kingdom of Heaven far and wide through the entire world.... Ambitious to preach to those who had never yet heard the message of the faith and to give them the inspired gospels in writing. Staying only to lay the foundations of the faith in one foreign place or another, appoint others as pastors, and entrust to them the tending of those newly brought in, they set off again for other lands and peoples with the grace and cooperation of God...⁷

Eusebius’ remarks tell us a great deal as to how and when the “Church” turned from its Hebrew roots to become the Hellenistic Catholic Church of the second century and beyond. First of all, he tells us very clearly that the evangelists went to those who had never yet heard the Word of God. These were apparently pagans who lacked any upbringing or

as the devil.”⁸ So then, not only were these men untrained in the Torah, there is no indication that they ever would receive Torah instruction, even after their conversion. Eusebius even tells of how one young man was chosen for “leadership training” based on his “excellent physique, attractive appearance, and ardent spirit.”⁹ Therefore, being left with no formal training and perhaps only a single copy of a gospel account, they were left to fend for themselves as they tried to teach their new churches how to walk a godly way.

Also disconcerting is a comment made by Eusebius regarding Peter’s evangelistic methods. We are told that he used to “adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making any systematic arrangement of the Lord’s sayings....”¹⁰ In other words, Peter would at times “wing it” when speaking to his audience. How much Peter may have spoken off the cuff is impossible for us to know. However, what is critical to our understanding is that the early Church Fathers viewed his alleged methods of playing to the crowd as perfectly acceptable. This prompts us to ask

Unlike the Bereans, whom Paul commended because they tested his message against the Torah, these people had no such way of guarding themselves.

training in Torah. Without any training or knowledge of Torah, they would have been completely incapable of discerning the validity of their message. Unlike the Bereans, whom Paul commended because they tested his message against the Torah, these people had no such way of guarding themselves.

Secondly, after staying only long enough to lay a minimal foundation before moving on, care and leadership of these new converts was put into the hands of men who were, themselves, new converts—violating one of Paul’s most basic tenants that an overseer “...must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment

how the early evangelists may have presented the Gospel to a pagan culture bereft of any knowledge of the Torah. How could these men possibly instruct their new flocks in a Torah of which they themselves had no knowledge?

One has only to scan down the lists of early Church Bishops to see names such as Xystus, Hero, Telesphorus, Eros, Theophilus, and on it goes. The information we have of these early leaders shows that they were all utterly deficient in Torah training. Rather, their training was in Hellenist Philosophy and it was through the eyes of a Greek philosopher that they interpreted and developed their new Christian religion.





Distorting the Truth

The impact of this can be seen very early in the Church's development among the pagan peoples. There are three areas where we can clearly see the early Church turning aside from Apostolic instruction. The celebration of the "Last Supper," Sabbath observance, and Congregational leadership.

The distortion of the Lord's Supper, which was associated with the Passover Seder and which Paul admonished the Corinthian congregation to keep (1 Corinthians 5), came very early on. As early as 107 CE, we see the Christian Church developing a whole separate theology and cult around this observance. No longer is the practice associated with the Passover meal (which itself was eventually formally abolished by the Church), rather it is given an entirely new name, the *Eucharist*. The celebration of the "Eucharist" was to be given magical powers and strictly controlled. For example, it was to be considered valid only when it was held under the bishop or someone to whom he had committed it. It was given the status of transubstantiation¹¹ for it was said that

"the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ."¹² And that "this same Bread is the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ."¹³ With this we see all the primary elements of a Catholic Mass as early as 107 CE.

Changing the Sabbath

With respect to changing the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday, this too came very early on. We see in the writings of Ignatius written around 107 CE that Shabbat observance was considered part of "obsolete practices," and believers were coerced to change their calendar in accordance with "the Lord's Day, ...on which our Life rose by His power..."¹⁴ In the Letter

of Barnabas written around 100 CE, we see an attempt to use the writings of the Prophets as proof that God no longer takes pleasure in the observance of the Sabbath but that it is now substituted with the "eighth day which is the beginning of another world. Wherefore also we keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in the which also Jesus rose from the dead, and having been manifested ascended into the heavens."¹⁵ In the Epistle of Mathetes, written around 130 CE, Jewish practices in accordance with the Torah are condemned in no uncertain terms.

*But again their scruples concerning meats, and their superstition relating to the Sabbath and the vanity of their circumcision and the dissimulation of their fasting and new moons, I do [not] suppose you need to learn from me, are ridiculous and unworthy of any consideration.*¹⁶

So clearly the Church leadership was advocating a change in proscribed worship days. Yet what is even more disturbing is how the Church put teeth into this policy, for without the ability to coerce the people

into this change it could not have lasted. How was this done? By creating a hierarchical top-down structure that kept the people "in line."

*You must all follow the lead of the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed that of the Father; follow the presbytery as you would the Apostles; reverence the deacons as you would God's commandment. Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not permitted without authorization from the bishop either to baptize or to hold an agape; but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God.*¹⁷

*Let no one deceive himself: unless a man is within the sanctuary, he has to go without the Bread of God. Assuredly, if the prayer of one or two has such efficacy, how much more that of the bishop and the entire Church! ...he who absents himself from the common meeting, by that very fact shows pride and becomes a sectarian; for the Scripture says: God resists the proud. Let us take care, therefore, not to oppose the bishop, that we may be submissive to God.*¹⁸

*Avoid the noxious weeds. Their gardener is not Jesus Christ, because they are not the planting of the Father. ...all those that belong to God and Jesus Christ are the very ones that side with the bishop; and all those that may yet change their mind and return to the unity of the Church, will likewise belong to God, and thus lead a life acceptable to Jesus Christ. Do not be deceived, my brethren: if a man runs after a schismatic, he will not inherit the kingdom of God; if a man chooses to be a dissenter, he severs all connection with the Passion.*¹⁹

Take care, then, to partake of one Eucharist; for, one is the Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the



*cup to unite us with His Blood, and one altar, just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants. Thus you will conform in all your actions to the will of God.*²⁰

Enforcing their Hierarchy

Once men like Ignatius usurped the authority of the Torah in their churches, all hopes for Torah observance in these congregations was lost. From Ignatius' writings (107 CE) it is clear that the model for Church government closely mirrored that of the Roman government. The authority of the Bishop was considered equal to the authority of the Messiah. To oppose the Bishop was to oppose God Himself. The Eucharist, baptizing and common assembly were only to be done when and where the Bishop designated,

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and since Ignatius clearly indicated that each of these practices were necessary for salvation, one was forced to obey the commands of the Bishop or forfeit his soul. Therefore, since the Bishops had ruled Sunday to be the proper day of communal assembly and that only on that day were the sacraments to be effectually enjoined, one could only be saved by worshiping on Sunday. With this the bishops trampled God's Torah and His Covenants under their feet.


What is more, unity was to be observed, it seems, at all costs. For Ignatius could not have been more clear when he said that those who dissented from the Bishop severed all connection with "Christ's Passion" and could not inherit the Kingdom of God. Yet, this kind of unity

was the theme of both the Church and the Synagogue during this time. The writings of the Church fathers are permeated with admonitions for unity and conformity to their new orthodoxy. But as we have seen, so were the Rabbis. Each side was threatening excommunication to anyone who dissented. One side embraced Torah, yet rejected the Living Word. The other side embraced "Jesus Christ", yet rejected the very Torah that He embodied. And somewhere between these two polar opposites the Messianic faithful struggled to survive.

A Foregone Conclusion

The break between the Messianic Synagogue and the Hellenistic Church in large measure came when, through the influence of the Yavneh Rabbis, the Jewish Synagogues closed their doors to the Gospel and defined a normative Judaism that was antithetical to that Gospel. When this avenue was closed, the second and third generation Messianic communities were forced to evangelize among the pagans. Once these formally pagan Gentiles flooded into the congregations or set up competing assemblies, Messianic communities were soon overwhelmed by the influences of these new members. Claiming to speak for God, newly appointed bishops began to arrogantly condemn a Covenant, a People, and a Torah about which they knew almost nothing. They castigated the Jews as the most wicked of people who received the signs of Sabbath and circumcision, not as a blessing, but rather for means of divine affliction and punishment.²¹ As these groups broke away from Messianic Judaism, intimidation, coercion and sheer numbers seems to have been the prime factors that enabled their views to become normative Christian theology.

As disciples of Yeshua our task, our passion must be to follow the truth wherever it leads us. For what was said of the Torah so long ago still stands: "Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens."²² "[HaShem] remembers His covenant forever, the word He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it

to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant."²³ Let us, therefore, fulfill the words of Deuteronomy Chapter 30 by returning to His Torah with all our hearts so that times of refreshing might at last come from the LORD. 

Endnotes

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- 2 Vincent Martin, *A House Divided: The Parting of the Ways Between Synagogue and Church* (New York: Paulist Press © 1995), p. 109.
- 3 Ibid. p. 112.
- 4 Philip S. Alexander, "A Parting of the Ways from a Rabbinic Jewish Perspective," *Jews and Christians, the Parting of the Ways: A.D. 70 to 135*, Ed. James D. G. Dunn, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), p. 7.
- 5 Julius Scott, *Glimpses of Jewish Christianity from the End of Acts to Justin Martyr*, from an unpublished paper presented at ETS meeting, November 1997.
- 6 Martin, p. 154.
- 7 Eusebius, p. 100.
- 8 I Timothy 3:6.
- 9 Eusebius, pp. 83-84.
- 10 Eusebius, p. 104.
- 11 The conversion of one substance into another, eg. wine into blood.
- 12 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrnaeans." *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume I.* (Albany, OR: AGES Digital Library, 1999). Chapters 7-8.
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- 18 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius to Ephesians," Ch. 5.
- 19 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius to Philadelphians," Ch. 3.
- 20 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius to Philadelphians," Ch. 4.
- 21 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., Justin Martyr, "Apology."
- 22 Psalm 119:89.
- 23 Psalm 105:8-10.

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Un-Rooted Christopher O'Quin



A Divine Messiah!

What Judaism Taught About the Messiah Before Yeshua

Your attitude should be the same as that of Messiah Yeshua: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.²

For in Messiah all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Messiah, who is the head over every power and authority.³

“Most Jews have no difficulty accepting [the] historical Jesus. The Jesus whom Christians talk about—the Jesus who is worshipped—is the Jesus Jews don’t understand. The concept of Jesus as man-God is simply incomprehensible to the Jewish mind. That concept is pagan. Hellenists and Romans used to deify kings. That’s why medieval Talmudic law generally linked Christianity with paganism.”¹

—From a 1978 interview with Chaim Potok —”

It is often said within modern Judaism that the reason for the early split between the Synagogue and the Church was because the Jewish people have never expected a divine Messiah. It is argued that the Jewish people have always viewed the coming messiah to be a very special man, but nevertheless, nothing more than a man. It is further argued that terms such as “Son of God” are late Christian adaptations from surrounding pagan cultures. Is this true? Was the notion of a divine Messiah simply a Christian invention? Or does the idea of a divine Messiah predate Christianity? If we can find pre-Christian sources that seem to foretell of a Messiah with divine qualities, wouldn’t this go a long way in refuting this modern argument

for the Synagogue/Church split?

In this issue of *Bikurei Tziyon* we will look at the historical evidence for this debate. We will draw our evidence from Jewish sources that either predate Christianity or Jewish sources that have been unaffected by Christian tampering. It should be clear to the reader by the end of this article that the expectation of a divine Messiah was not a late Christian invention, but was well established among multiple messianic views within First Century Judaism.

The sources from which we will primarily draw our evidence are the Pseudepigrapha from the period of history known as the Intertestamental Period, the period of time so often spoken of as the



“silent years” between the closing of Malachi and the coming of Yeshua. This, however, is an unfortunate mischaracterization of these times, for these days were anything but “silent.” For it was during this time that the Second Temple stood, Israel struggled for its existence against Antiochus Epiphanies IV, the archetype of the Christian Antichrist. It was also during these critical years that the Pharisaical movement developed the traditions

talking about Babylon in Mesopotamia—everyone knew exactly what he was saying. So it allowed the writer to castigate his enemy while giving the greater community the ability to claim, “Oh, this wasn’t talking about you. This is talking about some other bad guys.” This ability might mean the difference between life and death in many cases.

Many of these works are apocalyptic in nature. The writers usually claim to

clearly an early Jewish work which speaks of a kind of divine messianic figure, yet one that was written too early to allow for Christian origins. The following passages refer to a Son of Man Messiah figure (reminiscent of Ezekiel’s figure), the Elect One and even the “light of the Gentiles.” What stands out most, however, are his (unmis)takably divine attributes.

And the righteous and elect shall be without number before Him forever and ever. And righteousness before Him shall never fail....⁴

And at that hour that Son of Man was named In the presence of the Lord of Spirits, and his name before the Head of Days. Yea, before the sun and the signs were created, before the stars of the heaven were made, His name was named before the Lord of Spirits. He shall be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves and not fall, and he shall be the light of the Gentiles, and the hope of those who are troubled of heart. All who dwell on earth shall fall down and worship before him, and will praise and bless and celebrate with song the Lord of Spirits. And for this reason hath he been chosen and hidden before Him, before the creation of the world and for evermore.⁵

And the Elect One shall in those days sit on My throne, and his mouth shall pour forth all the secrets of wisdom and counsel: For the Lord of Spirits hath given (them) to him and hath glorified him.⁶

And thus the Lord commanded the kings and the mighty and the exalted, and those who dwell on the earth, and said: ‘Open your eyes and lift up your horns if ye are able to recognize the Elect One.’ And the Lord of Spirits seated him on the throne of His glory, and the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, and the word of his mouth slays all the sinners, and all the unrighteous are destroyed from before his face. And there shall stand up in that day all the kings and the mighty, and the exalted and those who hold the earth, and they shall

DID ADONAI INTEND for there to be two streams of God’s people—Judaism and Christianity? Did God desire a pure biblical faith, or the creation of two distinct religious institutions? What were the seeds of separation that formed this chasm? Just where did the split occur? This section will question various established conventions in Christianity in the hopes of challenging the reader’s relationship to any particular belief system, encouraging him to strive toward a greater understanding and application of the faith. —FFOZ

that became so prominent in the lives of everyday Jews. It is important to remember that Yeshua did not arrive in a vacuum. Rather, it was this period of history between the Testaments that formed the historical, social and religious context of Yeshua’s life.

It is also critical to our discussion of the Synagogue/Church split to examine the written record from this time, for if we can understand, for example, what the Messianic expectations of the day were, we are better prepared to understand the true nature of our debate.

The importance of the Pseudepigrapha to our understanding of the times is hard to overstate. What are the Pseudepigrapha? These are writings that are a kind of reverse plagiarism. Rather than taking someone else’s literary work and putting one’s own name to it, in the case of Pseudepigrapha the writer, usually in order to save his own life, put his writings under the names of historical figures long since gone. Another characteristic is that the targets of divine wrath (such as people or cities) are given other names. This technique is found in the book of Revelation, where Rome is called Babylon. When John refers to the “seven hills of Babylon,” no one in his day thought he was really

have had some kind of mystical vision or experience about the end of the world, or, as we will see, the coming of the Messiah. It is important to state that the question of whether the writer was accurate in his prophecies is not at issue. What is at issue is that these writings helped form the beliefs and expectations of Yeshua’s day. So in this case what people *thought* would happen or what kind of Messiah people thought would come is what is of primary importance to us in our historical search.

The first text that we will examine is the book of *Enoch*, more specifically chapters 37–71. These chapters are usually designated by the title of *Parables or Similitude’s of Enoch*. It is generally accepted to have been a work originally written in Hebrew from an unknown author and dating from the late first century BCE to the early first century CE. It is clearly Jewish and, if our dating were correct, this would place the writing of the book during the earliest years of Roman occupation in Israel (around the time of Pompey). Although fragments from other sections of *Enoch* have been found at Qumran, so far none from these chapters have been discovered. What is critical to our discussion, however, is that it is





...he is described as being named or appointed to his position from before the creation of the world and ruling a kingdom that will endure "forever and ever"—signifying his eternal qualities

see and recognize how he sits on the throne of his glory, and righteousness is judged before him, and no lying word is spoken before him.... And pain shall seize them, when they see that Son of Man Sitting on the throne of his glory. And the kings and the mighty and all who possess the earth shall bless and glorify and extol him who rules over all, who was hidden. For from the beginning the Son of Man was hidden, and the Most High preserved him in the presence of His might, and revealed him to the elect. And the congregation of the elect and holy shall be sown, and all the elect shall stand before him on that day. And all the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and set their hope upon that Son of Man, and petition him and supplicate for mercy at his hands.⁷

And he (i.e. the angel) came to me and greeted me with His voice, and said unto me, 'This is the Son of Man who is born unto righteousness, and righteousness abides over him, and the righteousness of the Head of Days forsakes him not.' And so shall it be unto thee forever and forever and ever. And all shall walk in his ways since righteousness never forsakes him: With him will be their dwelling-places, and with him their heritage, and they shall not be separated from him forever and ever and ever. And so there shall be length of days with that Son of Man, and the righteous shall

have peace and an upright way in the name of the Lord of Spirits for ever and ever.'⁸

The attributes we see being ascribed to the Messiah of *Enoch* can only be described as divine qualities. Notice that he is described as being named or appointed to his position from before the creation of the world and ruling a kingdom that will endure "forever and ever"—signifying his eternal qualities. His authority comes directly from HaShem rather than any human origin. He sits on the very throne of God to judge the nations. And, most strikingly, he receives worship from the lowly and great with the full blessing of HaShem.

The next source we will consider is a pseudepigraphon known as the *Psalms of Solomon*. Its origin is generally accepted to be from within first century BCE Israel (also dating from around the time of Pompey's control over Jerusalem). It is often regarded as being written by either Pharisees or Essenes, though this is not certain. Again, what is certain is that it is a pre-Christian document that envisions

a Messiah figure endowed with divine attributes.

And there shall be no unrighteousness in his days in their midst,

For all shall be holy and their king the anointed of the Lord.

For he shall not put his trust in horse and rider and bow,

Nor shall he multiply for himself gold and silver for war,

Nor shall he gather confidence from (?) a multitude (?) for the day of battle.

The Lord Himself is his king, the hope of him that is mighty through (his) hope in God. All nations (shall be) in fear before him,

For he will smite the earth with the word of his mouth forever.

He will bless the people of the Lord with wisdom and gladness,

And he himself (will be) pure from sin, so that he may rule a great people.

He will rebuke rulers, and remove sinners by the might of his word;

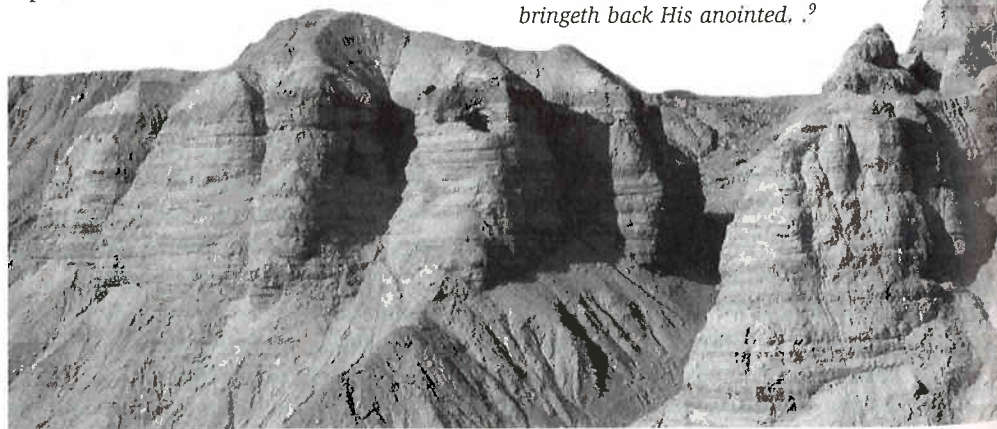
And (relying) upon his God, throughout his days he will not stumble;

For God will make him mighty by means of (His) holy spirit,

And wise by means of the spirit of understanding, with strength and righteousness.

May God cleanse Israel against the day of mercy and blessing,

Against the day of choice when He bringeth back His anointed. .⁹



The attributes we find in this passage show that the Messiah is able to make war, yet not by conventional means. His weapons are supernatural weapons. He does not trust in the horse or rider, in bow or great armies. Neither does he amass great wealth in order to wage his war. Rather, he subdues by his “hope in God.” This “hope” enables him to subdue the whole earth— crushing all opposition with the “word of his mouth.” He is also described as being “pure from sin.” A quality that Isaiah reminds us no one lives up to. And finally, he is described as either having two advents, or at the very least, existing with God before he comes to earth. For it is said “He bringeth back His anointed (Messiah).”

Another document that was found at Qumran, and therefore, predates any Christian origins is a work known as the *Damascus Document*. Copies have been found in caves Four (4Q266-273), Five (5Q12) and Six (6Q15). Interestingly enough, copies were also found before the Qumran discoveries at the Cairo Geniza. The piece seems to be a compilation of rules by which this particular Jewish sect was to live. Dating from the first to second century BCE, the Damascus Document is important for its description of a Messianic figure that has authority to forgive sins. Remember that this was one of the things over which Yeshua received so much condemnation (Matt. 9:1—8).

In accordance with the covenant, which God established with the forefathers in order to pardon their sins, so shall God [Himself] make atonement for them.

And this is the regulation for the many in order to provide for all their needs. The wages of two days every month is the rule. And they shall give it into the hands of the Censor and the judges. From it they shall give... and (from) it they shall strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy. And to the aged man who... to the vagrant and him (who) was taken captive of a strange people. And to the virgin who has (no dot) (and to Him whom) no man careth for: every work... and

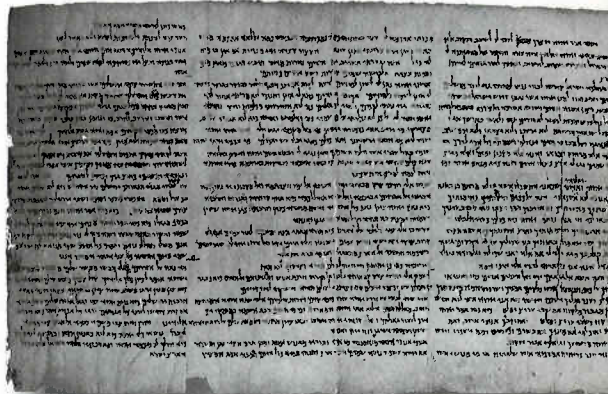
not... And this is the explanation of the settlement... And this is the explanation of the judgments which... (The Messiah from) Aaron and Israel. AND HE WILL PARDON OUR SINS... in money and he shall know... punishment six days and who shall speak... against Mos(es). (emphasis ours)¹⁰

The next work is an apocryphal work known as 4 Ezra (also 2 Esdras). Its origins are clearly dated to the time just after the destruction of the Second Temple. Although this chronology places it contemporary with the early followers of Yeshua, its main body (chapters 3—14) is clearly non-Christian. Rather, it seems to have been written by, or at least for, those gathered at Yavneh in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem. Its message also runs counter to the popular apocalyptic genre of the day. Instead, it instructs its readers that their salvation will be found in obedience to Torah rather than in misplaced apocalyptic fatalism. So whereas the early Messianic Community was focusing on Maranatha! The writer of 4 Ezra is consumed with Torah observance. Nevertheless, this work does yield some instructive things for helping us understand the Messianic expectations of Formative Judaism during this time in history.

For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice



“...finally, he is described as either having two advents, or at the very least, existing with God before he comes to earth. For it is said “He bringeth back His anointed (Messiah).”



*four hundred years... And after these years my Son the Messiah shall die...
11*

This is the interpretation of the vision: As for your seeing a man come up from the heart of the sea, this is he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left. And as for your seeing wind and fire and a storm coming out of his mouth, and as for his not holding a spear or weapon of war, yet destroying the onrushing multitude which came to conquer him, this is the interpretation: Behold, the days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who dwell on the earth. And they shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. And when these things come to pass and the signs occur which I showed you before, and then my Son will be revealed, whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea. And when all the nations hear his voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare that they have against one another; and



an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, desiring to come and conquer him. But he shall stand on the top of Mount Zion. And Zion will come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands. And he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness, and will reproach them to their face with their evil thoughts and the torments with which they are to be tortured, and will destroy them without effort by the Torah.¹²

And now I say to you...henceforth you shall live with my Son and with those who are like you, until the times are ended.¹³

What we see, then, in this piece is a messianic figure called the Son of God. He exists with HaShem before his coming to earth. His rule is at least 400 years. He conquers, not by natural means, but by supernatural methods. His kingdom is not one established by man but one "made without human hands." He will be Judge of the whole earth by Torah righteousness, and he knows the very thoughts of men—something only God can do.

The last piece in our study, *2 Baruch*, was also written after the destruction of the Second Temple (late 1st Century) and attempts to explain to its Jewish audience why such a catastrophe has occurred to Israel. Although it too places an emphasis on salvation through Torah obedience, it also predicts a Messiah figure who will some day come to destroy all evildoers and reward those who have been faithful to the Torah with a home in the "divinely established Jerusalem."

And it shall come to pass after these things (a time of unprecedented prosperity and abundance), when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that He shall return in glory. Then all who have fallen asleep in hope of Him shall rise again. And it will come to pass when the time of its consummation that it should fall has approached, then the principate of My Messiah will be revealed.... And his principate will stand forever, until the


world of corruption is at an end, and until the times aforesaid are fulfilled. This is your vision, and this is its interpretation.¹⁴

The attributes we see in this expected Messiah hint at the possibility of two advents. He is described as ruling over the earth during an unprecedented time of prosperity and righteousness. Then our text states that he will "return" and rule an eternal principate with those who have fallen asleep in hope of his coming.

The texts that we have been examining have all shed a great deal of light on what the messianic expectations were before and during the early years of the Messianic Community. What we have seen is that in the Jewish community of the day there were very clear expectations of a Messiah with divine qualities.

We may review the list of qualities that we have just encountered: This expected Messiah was to be eternal. He could read the hearts of men. He was without sin. He was given authority to forgive sin. He was given the title of God's Son. And perhaps most striking of all, he is given the right to receive worship. Remember that these are either pre-Christian sources or, as in the case of *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, sources that had a strong bias against the early Messianic Community. So the kind of divine qualities they place on the expected Messiah can hardly be seen as being of Christian or pagan origins. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the divine attributes of Yeshua could hardly have been a prime cause of the split between Synagogue and Church. It would appear that this must be a more modern argument anachronistically and fallaciously projected back onto Church and Synagogue history. So then, if we are to find the real causes for the Split we will be forced to look elsewhere.

In summation, it should be mentioned that for reasons of brevity only a small fraction of the available material was presented in this article. For those who are interested in pursuing this subject further, one should investigate passages from the Septuagint (which predates the Masoretic text by some 1100 years), the Targumim, the writings of Philo and Josephus and documents found from the Dead

Sea Scrolls. It is the opinion of this author that the more one searches out the historical evidence surrounding Yeshua, the more one is able to recognize not only that He is the divine Messiah promised by the prophets, but that His claims to divine power and attributes did not go contrary to the messianic expectations of His time. 

Footnotes

- 1 "Judaism Under the Secular Umbrella: The best challenges force you to identify yourself." *Christianity Today*, September 8, 1978. From a 1978 interview with Chaim Potok. Republished in 2002. Copyright © 2002 Christianity Today.
- 2 Philippians 2:5-11. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan Publishing House © 1995.
- 3 Colossians 2:9 & 10.
- 4 R. H. Charles, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1985). Chapter 39.
- 5 Ibid. Chapter 48.
- 6 Ibid. Chapter 51.
- 7 Ibid. Chapter 62.
- 8 Ibid. Chapter 71.
- 9 Translated from Greek and Syriac manuscripts by R.B. Wright in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1985) Vol. 2: 639-670. (Chapter 17 & 18).
- 10 Translated by Michael Wise, Martin Abegg and Edward Cook, ed., *Dead Sea Scrolls, A New Translation*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1996): pp. 49-73.
- 11 *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha. Revised Standard Version*, New York: (Oxford University Press © 1991). Chapter 7.
- 12 Ibid. Chapter 13.
- 13 Ibid. Chapter 14.
- 14 Translation from the Syriac by R. H. Charles *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913) 2: 481-524 Edited and adapted by George Lyons for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University © Copyright 2000 by the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

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A Change in Observance?

*Did the Messianic Community
abandon the Sacrifices, the Sabbath
and the Torah on account of Yeshua?*

In our series dealing with the division of the Church and Synagogue we have been attempting to find clues that will inform us as to when, why and how the early emerging Christian Church became a separate and distinct body from the Synagogue. In our last article we examined the assertion given by many in the Jewish community that the split was caused by the Christian view of a divine Messiah. We are told that Judaism has never expected a Messiah with divine qualities, and so a Yeshua

who claimed to have been “sent from the Father” was something unacceptable within Judaism. Yet, in examining the historical Jewish sources from before the time of Christianity, we saw that the expectation of a Messiah with divine attributes came, not from pagan sources but Jewish, and was well within the accepted teachings of its day.

In this article we will examine another argument often given as the cause of the division. This argument is regularly cited by leaders within both Judaism and Christianity as characterized by the above quotation. In a nutshell, the argument asserts that with the coming of “Jesus Christ,” the “old laws” were fulfilled and a new and better way was provided. It



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asserts that the disciples and early believers no longer needed to keep the "Old Testament laws" and so stopped bringing useless and unnecessary sacrifices because the blood of Jesus was better than the blood of bulls and goats. Neither the Sabbath nor any other aspect of the "old laws and customs" were binding any longer and so they were free to alter the Sabbath to Sunday along with anything that seemed to violate Jesus' "new law of love." If this assertion is true, then we will have found the dating and the cause for the division of the Church and Synagogue. Understood in this way, the division would be a nice and neat break from the mother faith—a division so deep and profound that it should be clear that the new faith was, in fact, nothing short of a new religion.

But was the break from the "old way" so neat and clean? Did the Apostles and earliest followers of Yeshua really give up the sacrifices, Sabbath and Torah? In this article we will again examine the historical data to discover whether or not this is true. To find the answers we will examine three areas of evidence. First, we will examine the testimony of the Apostles themselves as found in their recorded speeches from the book of Acts. Second, we will study their observed *halachah* regarding the Temple. Finally,

we will see what the ancient Church historians said regarding their beliefs and way of life. It should be clear from the evidence that the earliest followers of Yeshua, including the Apostles, continued to offer sacrifices at the Temple, continued to keep Sabbath, and were blameless in their observance of Torah.

The first clue we have in determining whether or not the Apostles altered their Torah observance after the coming of

Messiah is to be found in their own speeches as recorded throughout the book of Acts. Certainly the first people who should be consulted regarding early Messianic beliefs and *halachah* are the Apostles themselves. And we are fortunate to have ample evidence regarding what they believed about these issues. The first expression we have of Apostolic theology from the Apostles themselves comes by way of a speech given by Peter at Shavuot (Acts chapter two) in which he clearly spells out what he wants his listeners to understand about Yeshua and what their proper response is to be.

Men of Israel, listen to this: Yeshua of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge;

Within weeks of the resurrection, not just one, but an entire community of at least ten thousand Jews were willing to give up the very sociological and theological traditions that had given them their national identity. Among the traditions that were transformed after the resurrection were Sabbath, the sacrifices, and the sacraments.

In Genesis, the Sabbath was a celebration of God's work in creation (Gen. 2:2-3, Exodus 20:11). After the Exodus, the Sabbath expanded to a celebration of God's deliverance from the oppression of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). As a result of the resurrection, the Sabbath shifted once again. It became a celebration of the "rest" we have through Christ who delivers us from sin and the grave (Colossians 2:16-17, Hebrews 4:1-11). In remembrance of the resurrection, the early Christian church changed the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday. God provided the early church with a new pattern of worship

through Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, his subsequent Sunday appearances, and the Holy Spirit's Sunday descent. For the emerging Christian church, the most dangerous snare was a failure to recognize that Jesus was the substance that fulfilled the symbol of the Sabbath.

For Jewish believers, the sacrificial system was radically transformed by the resurrection of Christ as well. The Jews had been taught from the time of Abraham that they were to sacrifice animals as the symbol of atonement for sin. However, after the resurrection, the followers of Christ suddenly stopped sacrificing. They recognized that the new covenant was better than the old covenant, because the blood of Jesus Christ was better than the blood of animals (Hebrews 8-10). They finally understood that Jesus was the substance that fulfilled the symbol of animal sacrifices. He was the sacrificial "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).¹

— Hank Hanegraaff. "Resurrection" (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, © 2000), pp60-61



and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Yeshua to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Ruach HaKodesh and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Yeshua, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be immersed, every one of you, in the name of Yeshua the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh. The promise is for you and

your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the LORD our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.²

Peter's testimony is revealing on a number of levels. First is the location of the speech—at the Temple. Why is he at the Temple with the other disciples? They are there to celebrate the festival of Shavuot as part of the required Mo'dim. When asked a direct question by the audience as to what they should do, Peter answers with a classic prophetic response—repent and be immersed in a mikvah. Certainly, if Peter, or Luke for that matter, perceived that the coming of Messiah marked any change to the requirements of Torah he could have mentioned it in this opening speech. So far then, we ought to assume that Peter saw no indication that the coming of Messiah marked any change in the requirements of Torah observance.

Again, in a speech given to the Temple worshipers Peter explains exactly what Israel is to do regarding Yeshua.

While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Yeshua. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Yeshua,

this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Yeshua's name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the LORD, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Yeshua. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."³

Far from admonishing his listeners to alter their strict Torah observance, Peter shows them how utterly non-observant they have been—so much so that they murdered the very Messiah of God! Then, after showing how their failure to recognize the Messiah was brought about by their rebellion against God's Torah covenant in the first place, he compels them to repent by turning from their "wicked ways" to covenant obedience. Again, any evidence of the Apostles urging their listeners to follow some "new law" is utterly lacking so far.

In the speeches given by Peter and Stephen before the learned men of the Sanhedrin Luke has another opportunity

Any evidence of the Apostles urging their listeners to follow some "new law" is utterly lacking...





In contradiction to the common misunderstanding by many within Christianity, the Apostles' criticism is that Israel wasn't following the Torah covenant to begin with

to proclaim his intended message.

Then Peter, filled with the Ruach HaKodesh, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Yeshua the Messiah of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone."

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*⁴

*You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Ruach HaKodesh! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the Torah that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.*⁵

Although it is true that in a sense we are making an *argument from silence*, in this case we must find the complete absence of any "new teaching" to be utterly compelling. This line of evidence is critical because if the Apostles had in any way determined to alter Torah observance it would surely have come out in their recorded speeches. Within the genre of classical history writers commonly created scenes within their accounts designed

to allow famous men of antiquity such as Caesars and generals the opportunity to proclaim the views the historian wished to convey. All issues of Divine inspiration aside, if Luke had wished to convey in any way that Yeshua or the Apostles intended the abandonment of something as central to the Jewish faith as sacrifice and Shabbat, he certainly would have put this in the mouths of his protagonists.

Rather, what we find are the Apostles, in the classic vein of the Prophets, calling their listeners *back to the Torah*. In contradiction to the common misunderstanding by many within Christianity, the Apostles' criticism is that Israel wasn't following the Torah covenant to begin with. Therefore, how could she abandon a Torah she was failing to keep in the first place?

Perhaps one of the most critical clues we have, however, for knowing that the Apostles maintained their Torah observance is by the fact that they are reported to have attended the Temple on a daily basis. For example, we find that in Acts chapter three Peter and John went up to the Temple to pray at the ninth hour. In the average translation this text obscures what should be most revealing. Here we are told that they went up to the Temple "to pray." What the reader often fails to grasp is that this was a time for formalized public prayers—public liturgy intended to be practiced within the community of all believers. Not only this, but Luke explicitly mentions that these were the three o'clock (ninth hour) prayers. What is significant about Luke's mention of the time is that this was also the hour of the evening sacrifice! In other words, Peter and John went up to the Temple at the

ninth hour to participate in the evening prayers and sacrifice. Luke probably doesn't bother to mention the term sacrifice because in the Temple the whole ritual of sacrifice and prayers were so intertwined that it was impossible to disassociate one from the other. And so, to participate in the Temple prayers was also to participate in the Temple sacrifices, which is exactly what Luke tells his readers the Apostles were doing.

Another clue that reveals the Apostles' continued Torah observance is the repeated mention that they were in the Temple daily and enjoyed the favor of all the people. One has only to look at Acts chapters 21 and 22 to see what happened to anyone who was even suspected of teaching anything contrary to Moses and the Temple. In this section of Acts Paul is accused (Luke is clear that this is a false accusation) of teaching "against our people and our Torah and this place." What ensues is a lynch mob that beats Paul almost to the point of death. Seeing this reaction to even one unsubstantiated accusation, how could the Apostles, day after day, have done the very thing that Paul was being falsely accused of without losing their lives? And why would Luke go out of his way to point out that this was a false accusation if he knew that it was not? If what the Christian writers tell us is true, then Luke is not being honest with himself or his readers.

Further, we are told why Paul was at the Temple when the disturbance occurs. He was there because four members within the Messianic congregation had taken a Nazirite vow that required rather expensive sacrifices in order to complete. Paul, engaging in a true mitzvah, is there



We can also discern from sources outside the Bible that the early Jewish followers did continue in their Temple observances.



to help pay their expenses and join them in their vows. Luke describes the event as follows:

When they heard this (that the Gentiles were coming to repentance), they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering [lit. a sacrifice or oblation] would be made for each of them.⁶

In this passage Luke is clearly stating that the Messianic congregation in Jeru-

salem continued in their observance of the Temple sacrifices and worship. What is more, the other Apostles specifically intended to demonstrate that Paul was not advocating any kind of departure from

the Temple sacrifices and rituals but that he continued to follow the Torah as God had commanded all His worshipers since the time of Moses. Remember also that Paul was always mindful of the example he was setting for his young Messianic communities. In his letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 11:1) he admonishes them to follow his example as he followed the example of Messiah Yeshua. Can we come to any other conclusion but he continued to see Temple observance as anything other than good and proper for God's family of believers?

And if this is not clear enough, let us go back to Numbers chapter six to see exactly what was required of Paul in order to fulfill this vow.

Now this is the law for the Nazirite when the period of his separation is over. He is to be brought to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. There he is to present his offerings to the LORD: a year-old male lamb without defect for a burnt offering, a year-old ewe lamb without defect for a sin offering, a ram without defect for a fellowship offering, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and a basket of bread made without yeast—cakes made of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers spread with oil.

The priest is to present them before the LORD and make the sin offering and the burnt offering. He is to present the basket of unleavened bread and is to sacrifice the ram as a fellowship offering to the LORD, together with its grain offering and

drink offering.

Then at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the Nazirite must shave off the hair that he dedicated. He is to take the hair and put it in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering.

After the Nazirite has shaved off the hair of his dedication, the priest is to place in his hands a boiled shoulder of the ram, and a cake and a wafer from the basket, both made without yeast. The priest shall then wave them before the LORD as a wave offering; they are holy and belong to the priest, together with the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. After that, the Nazirite may drink wine.⁷

What we see, therefore, is that neither Paul nor the other Apostles within the Messianic community seem to have had any clue that belief in Yeshua as the Messiah meant the abandonment of the Temple sacrifices or other Torah commandments. For, if he had, Luke certainly would have wanted to indicate this. Rather, what we do see is Luke's repeated demonstrations of Temple observance on the part of the Apostles and the early Messianic community.


Finally, we can also discern from sources outside the Bible that the early Jewish followers did, in fact, continue in their Temple observances. The classical Church historian, Epiphanius, gives us a very revealing look at the earliest followers of Yeshua.

All Christians were called Nazarenes once. For a short time they were also given the name Jessaians, before the disciples in Antioch began to be called Christians. They did not call themselves Christians, but Nazarenes, taking this and nothing else. For they use not only the New Testament but also the Old, like the Jews... They ... live according to the preaching of the Law as among Jews: there is no fault [for Jews] to find with them apart from the fact that they have come to believe in Christ. For they also accept the resurrection of the dead and that everything has its origin in God. They



of heaven." When the crowds heard his declaration, many of them began to chant, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" In a panic, the Temple authorities who had arranged the little demonstration decided that they had best put a stop to this nonsense, and they had Yaakov thrown down from the height. Miraculously he survived the fall. They commenced to stone him. He fell to his knees and began to beseech God to forgive the people. A blow to the head with a fuller's club ended his life.

Hegesipus reports that he was buried on the spot by the Sanctuary with a headstone marking the tomb. The Mount of Olives, directly across the valley from the Temple, is blanketed with tombs. The later transfer of his remains to an ossuary would have been in keeping with Jewish custom of the day. The discovery of his ossuary provides exciting archaeological corroboration for the existence of Yaakov,

his father Yoseif of Nazareth and his brother Yeshua, the resurrected and living Messiah for whose testimony Yaakov died. 

Footnotes

- 1 Galatians 1:19, Josephus *Antiquities* 20.9.1
- 2 Rochelle Altman, co-coordinator of IOUDAIOS-L, (an online virtual community of scholars engaged in on-line discussion of Judaism in the Greco-Roman world) doubts the authenticity of the inscription and makes a case for reading the words "brother of Yeshua" as a secondary addition to the original inscription. She is an expert on scripts and an historian of writing systems. See the article, "Final report on the James Ossuary" by Rochelle I. Altman November 6, 2002 posted at <http://israelinsider.com>
- 3 Pun intended.
- 4 The synonymy between the names of Yeshua's brothers and the names of Alphaeus' sons and grandson certainly lends credence to this theory, but this would make James the Less and James the righteous the same person. Other problems arise as well. For example, James the Less and Thaddeus cannot both be living in Nazareth with Miriam and making a trip to retrieve Yeshua

from Capernaum while also being numbered among the 12 disciples who are with him in Capernaum. See Torah Club Volume 4 comments on Mark chapter 3.

- 5 See *Torah Club Volume 4* comments on Mark 6 for a possible scenario.
- 6 John 7:2-12.
- 7 *Ecclesiastical History* Book 2:23
- 8 Williamson, G. A. 1965. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*. Mpls, MN. Augsburg Publishing. Note 1, pg. 100.
- 9 Acts 21 has him hanging out with four other believers who have taken temporary Nazarite vows.
- 10 He wrote, "If we might venture on a general characterization, we would infer from the Epistle of St. James, that his religious views had originally been cast in the mould of *Shammai*. Certainly, there is nothing of the Hillelite direction about it, but all to remind us of the earnestness, directness, vigour, and rigour of *Shammai*." Edersheim, Alfred. 1993. *Jesus the Messiah*. Peabody, MA. Hendrickson Publishers. Pg. 174.
- 11 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.1-17, trans. Williamson, 1965 pg. 99-102.
- 12 *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.17

proclaim one God and his Son Jesus Christ. They have a good mastery of the Hebrew language....Only in this respect do they differ from the Jews and Christians: with the Jews they do not agree because of their belief in Christ, with the Christians because they are trained in the Torah, in circumcision, the Sabbath and the other things.


For from there it took its beginning after the exodus from Jerusalem when all the disciples went to live in Pella because Christ had told them to leave Jerusalem and to go away since it would undergo a siege. Because of this advice they lived in Perea after having moved to that place, as I said.⁸ [Epiphanius, "Refutation of All Heresies," cir. 374 CE].

What Epiphanius describes to his audience should be nothing short of radical to the average modern Christian. For he clearly tells us that the *halachah* of the early followers of Yeshua was no different than that of the other Jews! The only thing that differentiated the followers

of Yeshua from any other Jew was their belief in Yeshua as the Messiah. That's it! In other words, their faith and obedience to Yeshua in no way negated their understanding of the Torah and Temple observances. Rather, their insight into God's plan was only made more complete.

We have examined three lines of evidence: first, the testimony of the Apostles themselves, second, the observed *halachah* of the early Messianic community, and third, the witness of the early Church historian, Epiphanius. In all three cases these sources provide us with seemingly indisputable evidence that the Apostles and their early Messianic congregations had no indication that their faith in Yeshua as the Messiah somehow precluded the Torah Commandments regarding Temple worship. Rather, what we do find is that, in spite of popular Christian myth, the Apostles and earliest Messianic believers did not abandon the commandments required of them by the Torah, but continued to observe them with a fervor and understanding enhanced, not negated, by their belief in Yeshua as their Messiah. And who would understand the

will of Yeshua better than the men who lived with him daily and diligently listened to his teachings for three years?

Since this seems to be the case, we still do not have an answer for how the division developed between the Church and Synagogue. It appears that the popular understanding for how the split occurred has so far been utterly lacking in credible evidence. In the next article our search continues as we see how the inclusion of the Gentiles affected the early Messianic communities and whether this had any affect on the division between Church and Synagogue. 

Footnotes

- 1 Hank Hanegraaff, "Resurrection" (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, © 2000), pp. 60-61.
- 2 Acts 2:22-41. "The Holy Bible, New International Version," Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1995.
- 3 Ibid. Acts 3:11-26.
- 4 Ibid. Acts 4:8-12.
- 5 Ibid. Acts 7:51-53.
- 6 Ibid. Acts 21:20-25.
- 7 Ibid. Numbers 6:13-20.
- 8 Ray Pritz, "Nazarene Jewish Christianity."



Adoption into the Family of God

*"All Israelites have a share
in the world to come..."*

—Sanhedrin 10:1

*"As for me, this is my
covenant with you: You
will be the father of many
nations." —Genesis 17:4*

*As the Scripture says,
"Anyone who trusts in
him will never be put to
shame." For there is no
difference between Jew
and Gentile—the same
LORD is Lord of all and
richly blesses all who call
on him, for, "Everyone
who calls on the name of
the LORD will be saved."*

—Romans 10:11-13

*How the debate of how to become
a part of the Jewish people initiated
the split between the Synagogue
and the developing Christian
Church.*

The Synagogue and Church went their separate ways almost 2000 years ago. In previous articles in this series we have explored various supposed causes for the early split between the Synagogue and the developing Christian Church. Some of the explanations we have examined came from the traditional Jewish point of view, while others came from a conventional Christian perspective. We found, however, that none of those explanations fit with the historical facts. For example, we are often told that Judaism never anticipated a divine Messiah, therefore the followers of Yeshua could only be considered part of a new, non-Jewish religion. But as we saw, this argument is refuted by Judaism's own ancient writings—the Midrashim, Targumim, the Tanach and a large number of the pre-Christian, Jewish Pseudepigrapha—many of which were

found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Another supposed explanation for the Church/Synagogue split was that the Apostles and the other earliest followers of Yeshua forsook the Torah Commandments regarding Sabbath and Temple worship, thus creating a new religion. This too we found to be utterly inaccurate when compared with the historical facts.

In the previous articles in this series we learned that the early Apostolic synagogues were a



purely Jewish phenomenon. In these next two articles we will be examining issues surrounding the inclusion of non-Jews into these early Apostolic communities.

By the end of these articles I believe it will be clear that it was this issue that created the split—the first hairline fissure that developed into a full-blown division between the traditional Synagogue and the developing Christian churches. To see how this came about we will first examine First Century Jewish *halachah* regarding conversion of non-Jews into Judaism. Then we will examine Acts 15

and the subsequent disagreement with the Sanhedrin. Lastly, we will examine the consequences of this disagreement and how it ultimately worked to bring about the rift.

The Christian Church

In order to better understand how the split between the Traditional Jewish Synagogue and the emerging *Christian Church* developed we must realize that the very premise that the Traditional Jewish Synagogue and the *Christian Church* split from each other is somewhat misleading. For by the time the *Christian Church* developed it had already been detached from its Jewish roots for some time. So in order to understand the divergence accurately we must investigate a time that is actually *pre-Christianity*. In the time of the Apostles (mid First Century) there was no *Christian Church* as we have come to think of it. But someone may say, “Wait a minute, the New Testament mentions the Church and Christians many times. How can you say that this period is *pre-Christian* or *pre-Church*?”

When we speak of *Christianity* we must ask ourselves what *Christianity* is in the first place. Christianity, as a self-defined religious institution, is the sum total of the teachings, interpretations, traditions and doctrines of the Church Fathers and it's various authoritative councils throughout history. Therefore, this is what we mean when we speak of *Christianity, the Church, or the historic Christian Faith*. These institutional definitions, however, all occurred much later than the period of time that we are investigating. In fact, the term *Christianity* is not found anywhere in the Bible because, in a very real sense, *Christianity* did not yet exist. Except for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the Bible predates all of the doctrinal councils that will ultimately define the Christian religion. The term *Christian* or *Christians* appears only three times in the Apostolic Scriptures and in each case the context reflects a faith which was still very Jewish and had little to do with what would later become the orthodox teachings of the Christian religion.

As for the Church being mentioned

Continued on **PAGE 32**



in the Apostolic Scriptures, the word generally translated as *church* is actually the Greek term for a local assembly or small community gathering and is better understood with a small case “c” as in “church” or “churches” rather than “the Church” in its later catholic (universal) sense. It does not imply the kind of universal, formal religious institution that it

within First Century Judaisms. To better appreciate the importance of this issue in the Jewish communities of the day we have to understand what the *halachah* was at the time regarding Jewish acceptance of non-Jews into Judaism. Lawrence Shiffmann, in his book “Who Was a Jew” summarizes this First Century *halachah* for the convert as follows: (1) the convert

various Jewish customs, including the Sabbath, synagogue attendance, and abstention from pork, among other things. Some went so far as to adopt almost all Jewish practices as well as the ethics and theology of Judaism. On the other hand, these people never underwent actual conversion. We know that in some cases, this was because of the requirement of circumcision. In other cases, family members or fear of public embarrassment prevented actual proselytism. Such God-fearers or semi-proselytes were found throughout the Hellenistic world in substantial numbers, and it may be that the Jewish community actually encouraged this behavior, especially in the Diaspora.

DID ADONAI INTEND for there to be two streams of God’s people—Judaism and Christianity? Did God desire a pure biblical faith, or the creation of two distinct religious institutions? What were the seeds of separation that formed this chasm? Just where did the split occur? This section will question various established conventions in Christianity in the hopes of challenging the reader’s relationship to any particular belief system, encouraging him to strive toward a greater understanding and application of the faith. —FFOZ

would become in the Second Century. Even the term *Church* in Matthew 16:18 was not intended to describe the Body of Messiah in the broad sense we have come to associate with it. In that regard, the Apostolic Scriptures, as well as the rest of the Bible, are pre-Christian and pre-Christianity.

An Emerging Jewish Sect

In a sense then we have been asking the wrong question. It is not a question of when and why did the Church and Synagogue split. Rather, it is a question of when and why the sect of Judaism practiced by the early followers of Yeshua began to differ from the mainstream expressions of 1st Century Judaism. The Apostolic churches existed within the boundaries of greater Judaism. Therefore, the Church/Synagogue split was actually, in its earliest state, an in-house debate within Judaism—sometime before the *Church* of formalized Christianity even existed.

One of the primary differentiations between normative Judaisms and the newly emerged sect of believers seems to have been the latter’s inclusion of non-Jews as full and equal members within the community. This issue surrounding the inclusion of Gentiles into the fold became a hotly debated and divisive issue

had to make a full and complete commitment to the Jewish community, meaning he acquired a new, Jewish heredity. In so doing he acquired the main characteristics of what Jewishness was; (2) the convert had to confess a full acceptance of the Torah, including the Rabbinic interpretation or Oral Law which, in the view of the Tannaim, was given at Sinai as well. This means the convert identified with the entire historic experience of the Jews as one who stood at Mt. Sinai; (3) the male convert had to be circumcised; (4) the convert also purified himself in a ritual bath; (5) the convert then offered a sacrifice, by which he showed his willingness to draw near to the divine presence and to come under its wings as a full member of the people of Israel.

The proselytes described above have been those who joined the Jewish people by following the procedures mandated by the halakhah and become full members of the Jewish community. Hellenistic and Rabbinic sources, regarding both Palestine and the Diaspora during the Greco-Roman period, tell us of semi-proselytes or God-fearers who attach themselves to the Jewish people...many people in the Hellenistic world were attracted to

Nevertheless, these people had no legal status in the Jewish community, whether in Palestine or elsewhere. They were not converts, regardless of the extent of their loyalty. Only the fulfillment of the requirements of conversion, which, as far as we know, were agreed upon by all Jews, would allow entrance to the Jewish people. Apparently, these semi-proselytes did not desire legal status within the Jewish community. Their practices differed, and they were in no way organized or united. While many Jews approved of such individuals, they could never conceive of them as Jews since they had not undergone formal conversion.¹

The Proselyte

It is against this backdrop that we can begin to understand how a split might develop within Judaism regarding inclusion of non-Jews into the Faith. The Jewish community not only regarded themselves as theologically different from the nations on the basis of their faith in the One True God, but they were separate in heredity as well. Yet, this heredity was something that could be acquired by following the accepted *halachah* of the Sages. In other words, there was an established method for adoption into the people of God.

The First Century Hellenist-Jewish



philosopher Philo provides a good understanding of this method for adoption in his book “Special Laws.” His intention in this book is to show the Hellenistic world how reasonable, good and just is the Torah of God. One such section reflects First Century Judaism’s understanding of Deuteronomy 26:12 which reads: “When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.” He expands upon this as follows:

But, nevertheless, though he (God) is so great in excellence and in power, he feels pity and compassion for all those who are most completely sunk in want and distress, not considering it beneath his dignity to be the judge in the causes of proselytes, and orphans, and widows, and disregarding kings and tyrants, and men in high commands, and honoring the humility of those men above mentioned, I mean the proselytes, with precedence, on this account. These men, having forsaken their country and their national customs in which they were bred up, which, however, were full of the inventions of falsehood and pride, becoming genuine lovers of truth, have come over to piety; and becoming in all worthiness suppliants and servants of the true and living God, they very properly receive a precedence which they have deserved, having found the reward of their fleeing to God in the assistance which they now receive from him. And in the case of orphans and widows, since they have been deprived of their natural protectors, the one class having lost their parents, and the others their husbands, they have no refuge whatever to which they can flee, no aid which they can hope for from man, being utterly destitute; on which account they are not deprived of the greatest hope of all, the hope

According to mainstream First Century Jewish halachah, if one was not born into Jewish heredity, one could be *born again* or adopted into Jewish heredity.



*of relief from God, who, because of his merciful character, does not refuse to provide and to care for persons so wholly desolate.*²

It is interesting for our discussion to note that the LXX (the Greek Translation of the Tanach) that Philo was using had come to translate the term for alien as proselyte. From this text, and from what we know of the Roman world, we see that when a non-Jew wished to commit himself to the yoke of the Torah it was more than a simple declaration of a new faith. The consequence of such a decision was often the complete loss of business, friendships and family ties. From Philo’s words we see that the proselyte, if left unaided by the Jewish community, would become as destitute as an orphan or a widow since he would be severed from all his previous relationships. In fact, the Mishnah (*Baba Qamma* 9:11) explains that if one steals from the proselyte and he dies before restitution can be made, then the restitution money must go to the Priests since the proselyte no longer has any next of kin to receive the restitution money. This is because in the eyes of the Jewish community he had been *born again* or *adopted* into a new family lineage—a new Jewish heredity as Shiffmann points out.

The World to Come

So we see that according to mainstream First Century Jewish halachah, if one was not born into Jewish heredity, one could be *born again* or adopted into Jewish heredity. And this was accomplished by following the formalized tradition of conversion established by the Sages. The issue which

touched-off a major disagreement within the Apostolic communities was whether or not this formalized conversion was a requirement for salvation. In other words, the issue of being a member of the Jewish People became linked to the World to Come. So when in Acts 15 the antagonists declared to the non-Jewish believers that “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved,” (Acts 15:1) it was this issue to which they were referring. They were arguing that if these new Gentile believers did not undergo formal conversion according to the centuries old methods established by the Sages, they could not be saved. To some this belief seems to have become so well entrenched in their thinking that it actually took on the authority of Moses himself—hence the term “custom of Moses.”

Regarding questions of the “afterlife,” it is clear from early Jewish literature that all Israelites were believed to have a part in the World to Come. The Mishnah declares very clearly, “All Israelites have a share in the world to come....” (*Sanhedrin* 10:1). Therefore, there was never a debate concerning how a Jew comes to have a part in the World to Come. The Mishnah and other early sources only deal with how an Israelite might *lose* his place in the world to come. In other words, it was believed that if one is born Jewish he automatically has a share in the world to come unless he forfeits this—and the Mishnah is very specific about how this might happen.

Although not universally held, it seems that many within mainstream First Century Judaism believed that *only* Israelites were believed to have a part in the



world to come. Although space does not allow for a full explanation of this argument, the assumption was drawn in part from a number of references in the Tanach. For example, Amos 3:2 states, "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth...." And in Deuteronomy 4:7 Moses underscores Israel's unique relationship to God when he

asks, "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" And again, "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, I am God over all who come into the world, but I have only associated My name with you. I am not called the God of idolaters but the God of Israel" (*Exodus Rabbah* 29:4). It is further argued from very old tradition that at Mount Sinai HaShem offered the Torah to all of the seventy nations of the earth but only Israel accepted this Covenant (*Sifre Deut.*). Since only Israel has this special Torah Covenant relationship with God, the Sages argued that one must become part of Israel *in the proscribed manner of the Sages* to enjoy the full benefits of Covenant relationship with HaShem and His people Israel. Obviously some therefore presumed that this must also include issues pertaining to a share in the World to Come. Philo gave voice to these sentiments in his description of the rewards that awaited those who wished to undergo this kind of formal conversion.

*And the proselyte who has come over being lifted up on high by good fortune, will be a conspicuous object, being admired and pronounced happy in two most important particulars, in the first place because he has come over to God of his own accord, and also because he has received as a most appropriate reward a firm and sure habitation in heaven, such as one cannot describe.*³

Although modern Judaism teaches that the "Righteous Gentile" will have a

The Sages argued that one must become part of Israel *in the proscribed manner of the Sages* to enjoy the full benefit of Covenant relationship with HaShem and His People Israel.




part in the World to Come by following the "seven laws of the sons of Noah," (*Sanhedrin* 56a) it is clear that this issue was hotly debated during the time of the early Apostolic communities. Many rabbis argued that "even the pious actions of the Gentiles are a sin to them because their motives were impure."⁴ Therefore, according to this school of thought, if one is not *born* an Israelite one must *become* an Israelite, and it was this theological presupposition that is clearly being expressed by the antagonists in Acts 15.

The Accepted Halachah

So when we come to Acts 15 it seems clear that the ones who were teaching this *halachah* were probably believing Pharisees and, as we have seen, were simply advocating the accepted teaching by many of their day. So if we were to hear the debate in the manner in which it would have been understood by those attending the discussion, we would have heard something like this: "Unless you become an Israelite through the accepted *halachah* of proselytism, you cannot be saved."

What is at issue in Acts 15—and what is critical to our discussion—is the question of *whether or not one must become a Jew (or Israelite) in order to have a part in the World to Come*. The accepted Pharisaic *halachah* of the day seems to have affirmed this requirement. What was at issue among the Apostles, however, was not so much what was accepted *halachah* among the Judaisms of their day. Rather, what was accepted *halachah* in the eyes of HaShem?

There was, however, a wider issue at stake in this debate. It was an issue not just about one's place in the World to Come,

but one's status in the community of God's people here and now. In the next article in this series we will discover how the Apostles Paul and Barnabas were in sharp dispute with many—perhaps most, in the believing community over this matter of *how* one was adopted into the family of God. Would HaShem accept the non-Jew as a full and equal member within Israel even without requiring them to undergo the formalized conversion of the Sages? As we continue this discussion in the following article, I believe it will be clear that it was debate over this issue of adoption and status within the community of Israel that was the antecedent to division—not merely within the young Apostolic community, but within the Jewish community as a whole. We will see that it was the Gentile issue that initiated a split within Judaism that has lasted to this day. 

Endnotes

- 1 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew. Rabbinic and Halachic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (KTAV, 1985) pp. 37–38.
- 2 C.D. Yonge Ed. *The Works of Philo. Special Laws I* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1993) Section LVII, (308–310)
- 3 Ibid. "On Rewards and Punishments." Section 152.
- 4 Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (Schocken Books, 1995) pp. 65–66.

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Adoption into the Family of God

How the debate of how to become a part of the Jewish people initiated the split between the Synagogue and the developing Christian Church.

Part II

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." —Acts 15:1

In our previous article we examined a heated debate found in Acts 15. This debate centered on the method by which a non-Jewish Convert came to have full standing within the Jewish community. More to the point, disagreement raged surrounding the question of whether adherence to a particular custom or conversion *halachah* could insure a place in the world to come. According to what we see in our text, this appears to have been a strongly held belief by many within the first century Jewish community. But how did such a belief come to be? And why were these unnamed men in Acts 15 so confident in their belief that Paul's new converts must be required to submit to a particular conversion *halachah* or risk their place in the world to come? Many have attempted to answer these questions

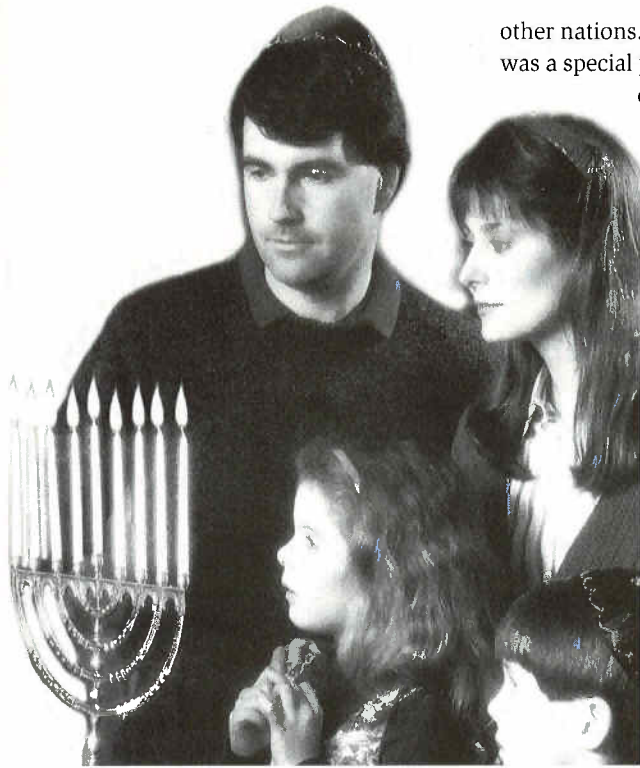
by addressing the issue from a predominantly ideological perspective while ignoring the historical context in which the debate was held. However, any hermeneutic which fails to take into account the historical context of this debate will easily lead to misunderstanding. With this in mind, this article will focus on the period of time known as the "Intertestamental" period—the years between the writing of Malachi (approximately 433 BCE) and the Apostolic Scriptures of the first century CE. We will examine the historical events of these years, which, I believe will shed invaluable light on our discussion and give us insight into what the debate in Acts 15 was truly about. Once we understand this historical background properly it will become clearer how the split within First Century Judaism developed between

the followers of Yeshua and those opposed to the message of the Apostles.

As we discussed in the previous article, the focus of the disagreement in Acts 15 was whether the non-Jew must follow the particular conversion custom or *halachah* of the sages in order to "be saved." If followed properly, the new convert was then *born again* into the greater Jewish family. But what does it mean to become a Jew? And, how does one define who or what it is to be a Jew? As we saw in our previous article, the Sages addressed these questions during and after the years of the Babylonian exile. But what were the historical circumstances that led them to their particular interpretations? To understand this we have to go back to the time of the Great Exile—the exile to Babylon.

Between approximately 740 and 587 BCE the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were conquered by foreign powers—Israel in the north by the Assyrians and then Judah in the south by the Babylonian Empire. Subsequently, most of their inhabitants were exiled out of the Land to live among "the nations." Through the prophets it had been made clear to the people





other nations. She was reminded that she was a special people—a holy nation called out by HASHEM to be His special inheritance. And it was at this time, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah that the term “Jew” is first used to distinguish between the people Israel and the nations. An example of this is found in the fifth chapter of Nehemiah.

Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food

DID ADONAI INTEND for there to be two streams of God’s people—Judaism and Christianity? Did God desire a pure biblical faith, or the creation of two distinct religious institutions? What were the seeds of separation that formed this chasm? Just where did the split occur? This section will question various established conventions in Christianity in the hopes of challenging the reader’s relationship to any particular belief system, encouraging him to strive toward a greater understanding and application of the faith. —FFOZ

of Israel that she had been exiled out of her land—the land HASHEM had sworn to her forefathers to give her, because she had broken the covenant between herself and her God through spiritual adultery. She had bowed down and worshiped other gods, gods of other nations—gods that neither she nor her fathers had known. But HASHEM had provided a way back for her. If she put away her idols and returned to her God and served Him and Him alone—faithfully obeying His commandments, then the LORD would bring her back to the land where she would dwell in peace and safety.

So, from the banks of the Euphrates Israel began to turn her heart back to her God. She had learned her lesson well. No longer would she try to be like all the

allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Nehemiah 5:15–17.

So we see that there was a special distinction between those dining at

Nehemiah’s table. There were those who were Jews and those who were from the “nations.” And we also see that it was during this time, the time of her exile and subsequent return to the Land, that the terms Jew, Jews and Jewish are first documented. The purpose of these terms was to differentiate this “people group” from any other people group of the surrounding nations. And this people group, now known as Jews, were characterized not so much by ethnic distinction—though this certainly did play a part, for in their appearance they would have differed little from their peers. It was a distinction that was based on more than blood. Rather, it was distinction made by their loyalty to their God and the Covenant that bound them to their God. It was primarily the requirements of this Covenant found in the Torah that marked them out as a distinct people. Though national boundaries would often change and the ethnic status of individuals might be called into question, the Covenant was eternal. So her distinction from the nations was primarily covenantal though lineage from Jacob was certainly a component.

But how could Jews maintain covenant loyalty and faithfulness when they were not masters of their own fate? When Israel was preparing to enter the Land, Moses had commanded them to set up for themselves judges and officers. Judges would be required to interpret the Torah-centered laws for their people. Officers were necessary to ensure that these rulings were faithfully carried out.

You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you. Deuteronomy 16:18–20.

What is clear is that while in exile





The challenge of defining and maintaining Jewishness was about to become even harder during the years of Greek supremacy. For Israel was challenged militarily, socially and spiritually.

the Jewish people had no ability—at least on a national level, to carry out this fundamental Torah requirement. How could she appoint officers and judges to establish Torah observance when she was living within a nation not her own? Certainly in its fullest sense, the Torah presupposed and required Israel to have her own national sovereignty. It was only as she could protect her national borders from outside threat that she could appoint her own leaders—leaders that could ensure Torah obedience on a national level.

It should not be surprising to us then that the Tanach describes Nehemiah's highest priority as that of establishing national boundaries and defenses—without which the internal reforms under Ezra would have been impossible. So while Nehemiah worked to build the walls around Jerusalem, Ezra compelled the people within those protective walls to return to covenant loyalty and obedience.

The challenge of defining and maintaining Jewishness, however, was about to become even harder during the years of Greek supremacy. For Israel was challenged militarily, socially and spiritually. Hellenistic influences could compel and coerce but they could also seduce. One such group to feel the seductive pull of Greek culture was a group described by Paul Johnson in his book, *A History of the Jews*, as the reform party. This group wanted to force the pace of Hellenization upon the Jewish people—to “drag the little temple-state into the modern age.”¹ He goes on to write,

But among the reformers there were also religious intellectuals whose aims were more elevated—in some respects akin to the Christians of the first century AD. They wanted to improve Judaism, to push it further along the logical road it appeared to be traveling. Universalism is implicit in monotheism ... In universal monotheism, the Jews had a new and tremendous idea to give to the world. Now the Greeks also had a big, general idea to offer: universalistic culture. Alexander had created his empire as an ideal: he wanted to fuse the races and he ordered all men to regard the world as their country...²

What the reformers wished to do was deprovincialize the Torah. They did not want to abolish the Torah entirely, they merely wanted to reduce it to its ethical or moral core and abrogate those practical elements that forbade participation in Greek cultural life. For example, the literal interpretation of kosher laws (including food sacrificed to idols) were often ignored by such individuals because they set-up obvious walls between adherents and non-adherents. Strictures against nudity, which interfered with participation in the gymnasium and stadium sports, were also challenged. Some even advocated reversal or outright disobedience to the requirement of circumcision so as to be more in



harmony with Greek society and culture. Most abhorrent of all in the eyes of traditional Jews, however, was the challenge of the uniqueness of God. Many of the reformers wished to universalize the idea of the Jewish moral God by marrying it to that of the Greek polis. In the eyes of traditional Jews this was unacceptable.

The reason why this is so critical to our understanding of how the *halachah* of conversion was developed is because one can easily see the struggle for identity that developed during this time. Not only did the struggle express itself in the form of Jews being seduced to abandon the

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signs of God's special Covenant with His people, but during this time Israel was not in control of her own national sovereignty. Under the Greeks, Jews were at times forced at the point of the sword to worship idols, eat swine and abstain from circumcising their sons. To make matters worse, many within the Temple leadership were either appointed by the Greeks outright or were sympathetic to these reform efforts. So much so that idolatry was once more brought back into the Temple.³ More orthodox Jews must have been asking themselves whether or not Israel really had learned her lesson after all.

It was during these years that work on the Greek translation of the Tanach—

the Septuagint (also designated by the Roman numerals LXX) first began. What is of particular importance to us in this investigation is that it is in the LXX that we first see the term alien or foreigner often being translated as *proselyte*. Why is this so important? Because it shows that in the minds of the translators a distinction had to be made between at least two types of non-Jews. In a time when Israel had very little control over her own national boundaries vis-à-vis the Seleucids and the Ptolemy's, she needed to be able to distinguish between friend and foe. As stated earlier, the Torah presupposes that Israel will have the ability to appoint her own judges and officials. But in the world of the second and third centuries BCE this was a precondition that Israel simply did not enjoy. How else could the Jews understand commandments such as Lev. 19:34, "The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born." Yet, how was this possible when the alien might be the local official who prohibited Torah observance? What about a local non-Jew who simply did not choose to be Torah submissive? Was he to be treated like a native born? How could he when he clearly wasn't following the Covenant? The only way to make this verse fit the context of the time was to understand "the alien living among you" as a proselyte—someone who was willingly submitting to the Covenant.

It must have been all too obvious to the Jews of this day that given their current circumstances, all foreigners were not created equal. There were those who were idolaters and exploiters of God's people—clearly HASHEM, it was reasoned, could not have meant for Israel to treat such individuals as brothers and Covenant members. Then there were those non-Jews who did not mean to oppress but simply did not see themselves as followers of Israel's God. Yet a foreigner who did wish for Israel's God to be his God and Israel to be his people—he was different and might be treated as a brother.

This is very evident when we examine the Oral Torah that was developing during this time period. For example, in the Mishnah we read as follows:

But they do accept a flock on 'iron terms' from gentiles (nokhri). And they borrow from them and lend to them on terms of interest. AND SO IS THE RULE FOR THE RESIDENT ALIEN (ger toshav).⁴

All are made unclean by plagues—EXCEPT FOR THE GENTILES (nokhri) AND A RESIDENT ALIEN (ger toshav).⁵

A proselyte (ger) and a gentile (nokhri) who inherited [the property of] their father, [who was] a gentile—he [the proselyte brother] may say to him [the gentile brother], "You take the idols and I [will take] the coins; "you [take] the wine and I [will take] the produce." And if [he said this] after it [the property] came into his possession, this [arrangement] is forbidden.⁶

Just as a claim of fraud applies to buying and selling so a claim of fraud applies to spoken words. One may not say to [a storekeeper], "How much is this object?" knowing that he does not want to buy it. If there was a penitent, one may not say to him, "Remember what you used to do!" If he was a child of proselytes, one may not say to him, "Remember what your folks used to do!" For it is said, "And a proselyte (ger) you shall not wrong nor oppress" (Exodus 22:20).⁷

It is evident that during this time the Jewish community was interpreting the term resident alien or "ger" in two different ways. At times "ger" was simply understood to mean "resident alien" and was given the modifier "toshav." In the case of our Mishnah passages, a "ger toshav" was to be understood as one who had the same status or legal standing as a gentile (*nochri*)—someone who was clearly outside the Covenant. Yet, at other points in the Mishnah and Torah texts, HASHEM had clearly commanded that a "ger" was to receive the same treatment under the Torah as the native born. In these instances "ger" was to be understood as one who had willingly taken the yoke of the Torah upon himself even



though he was not a native born Israelite. By the time of the LXX translation this would be understood as referring to a proselyte. By this time, then, the Jewish community was marking out a clear demarcation between the “ger” who was to be treated as a foreigner and the “ger” who was to be treated as a brother Israelite. So then, the distinction had evolved from one of simple geography to one of religious and civil status—those who wished to be a part of the Covenant community and those who did not. Or as Tim Hegg points out, “Now the “sojourner” [alien] has become the “convert” whose boundaries are theologically determined by the identity of the people called “Israel.”⁸ Yet there is no purely textual justification for this distinction. The best way of understanding how this shift occurred is by understanding the events that were taking place during this time in Israel’s history.

I believe, therefore, that the principles of the conversion *halachah* had their origins in this time period when Israel was without the ability to control her own national sovereignty and was forced to distinguish between the friendly foreigner and the oppressor. Unable to enforce geographical and political boundaries she undertook to protect religious ones. Was the key then to be found in greater military might and civic control? One might be tempted to believe that had Israel simply possessed greater control over those foreigners the issue might have been solved. As we will see, however, this was not the case.

Beginning in 166 BCE Israel began to take back control of her own destiny, for it was in that year that, under the leadership of Judas Maccabee, the Jews began to expel the Greeks out of the Temple at Jerusalem and its environs. In 161 BCE the Hasmonean family signed an alliance with the newly emerging Roman powers that recognized the Hasmoneans as the legitimate rulers of an independent Jewish state. Along with the expulsion of the Greeks, the Jews turned on the reformers.

The zeal and intensity of the assault on the Torah [under the reformers] aroused a corresponding zeal

for the Torah, narrowing the vision of the Jewish leadership and pushing them ever more deeply into a Torah-centered religion. With their failure, the reformers discredited the notion of reform itself, or even any discussion of the nature and direction of the Jewish religion. Such talk was henceforth denounced in all the official texts as nothing less than total apostasy and collaboration with the foreign oppression, so that it became difficult for moderates of any kind, or internationally minded preachers who looked beyond the narrow enclave of Orthodox Judaism, to get a hearing.⁹


Under John and Alexander the Hasmoneans lead a military campaign to restore the lands of the Davidic kingdom. Between 134 and 76 BCE the Hasmoneans re-conquered Samaria, Idumaea, the Decapolis, the Galilee, and much of Syria.

Behind their frontiers they eliminated pockets of non-Jewish people by conversion, massacre or expulsion. The Jewish nation thus expanded vastly and rapidly in terms of territory and population, but in doing so it absorbed large numbers of people who, though nominally Jewish, were also half-Hellenized and in many cases were fundamentally pagans or even savages.¹⁰

Therefore, we see that once Israel regained her national sovereignty and began to absorb large numbers of other “people groups” into her borders, the problem of distinguishing between the “true Jew” and those from “the nations” was only exacerbated. In the context of this “ingathering” of other nations it is then easy to understand why the Mishnah spends a good deal of time focusing on the details of Jewish status and why the Sages believed a distinction needed to be made between a resident alien and a proselyte. Not only that, but the question was bound to arise as to whether or not a man who was subjected to forced conversion was equal in social and religious status to the man who came willingly

under the yoke of the Torah. These were the problems that the *halachah* of the Sages meant to address. And it was this historical context that we find in the time of the first century when Paul made his impassioned appeal.

What began, therefore, as a socio-political methodology for distinguishing between citizens and non-citizens evolved over time to become a technical, religious term. So that by the first century CE, when the debate in Acts 15 takes place, many held the theological position that citizen status within the Jewish community determined one’s status in the world to come. And that is why it was argued that unless one submitted to the accepted *halachah* of becoming a Jewish citizen one was not a full Jew. Fair enough, but the point on which Paul so adamantly disagreed with his adversaries was whether adherence to this particular *halachah* determined one’s status before God in the world to come. In other words, was obedience to the *halachah* a requirement for salvation?

In our next article we will examine Paul’s views on this matter in detail and show how he offered a much-needed corrective to the misunderstood notions of his day. 

Endnotes

- 1 Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (Harper, 1987), p. 100.
- 2 Ibid. p.101
- 3 Ibid. pp 102–103
- 4 m.Bava Metzia 5:6
- 5 m.Negaim 3:1
- 6 m.Demai 6:9
- 7 m.Bava Metzia 4:10
- 8 Tim Hegg, *Is the Torah Only For Jews?* (TorahResource.com, 2003), p. 14
- 9 Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*. (Harper Perennial, 1987), p. 105
- 10 Ibid. p. 108

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Adoption into the Family of God Part III

How the debate of 'how to become a part of the Jewish people' initiated the split between the Synagogue and the developing Christian Church.

We come now to the third and final section of this study regarding how the inclusion of Gentiles into the newly emerging apostolic communities led to an eventual split from the mainline synagogues.

In the previous articles of this series we discovered two primary elements to our understanding of just how such a split could develop. First, that the development of the Jewish conversion ritual had been developed during a time of tremendous social, religious and political unrest and insecurity. We saw how a method was deemed necessary to distinguish between friendly and hostile non-Jews. What developed was the 'custom of Moses' which required four steps of ini-

tiation from those non-Jews who wished to be accepted with full social and legal standing into the Jewish community. These steps were (1) circumcision for male converts; (2) a ritual bath known as a *mikvah*; (3) sacrifice; and (4) acceptance of the full Torah—both written and oral. Secondly, that the gravity and authority of this oral Torah became equal to that of the written Torah. As Alfred Edersheim points out in his work *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*,

The 'Halachah' (from 'halachah,' to 'walk') indicates the settled legal determinations, which constituted the 'oral law,' or "Torah shebeal peh." Nothing could here be altered, nor was any freedom left to the individual teacher, save that of explanation and illustration. The object of the 'Halachah' was to state in detail, and to apply to all possible cases, the principles laid down in the Law of Moses; as also to surround it, as it were, with "a hedge," in order to render every unwitting transgression impossible. The "Halachah" enjoyed not only the same authority with the Law of Moses, but,

as being explanatory, in some respects was even more highly esteemed. Indeed, strictly speaking, it was regarded as equal with the Pentateuch, the revelation of God to Moses; only the form or manner of revelation was regarded as different—the one being committed to writing, the other handed down by word of mouth. According to tradition, Moses explained the traditional law successively to Aaron, to his sons, to the seventy elders, and to the people—care being taken that each class heard it four times (Maimonides' Preface to Seraim, 1 a). The Talmud itself attempts to prove that the whole traditional law, as well as the writings of the prophets and the Hagiographa, had been communicated to Moses, by quoting Exodus 24:12, "I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them." "The 'tables of stone,'" argues Rabbi Levi (Ber. 5 1), "are the Ten Commandments; the 'law' is the written law (in the Pentateuch); the 'commandments' are the Mishnah; 'which I have written,' refers to the prophets and the Hagiographa; while

Peter said, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean."

the words, 'that thou mayest teach them,' point to the Gemara. From this we learn, that all this was given to Moses on Sinai."¹

Even though the *halachah* or tradition of conversion had been developed during a very specific time in Israel's history for the expressed purpose of distinguishing between the friendly foreigner and the foreign enemy, the *halachah* took on a religious significance as well. Not only did the *halachah* serve its purpose of maintaining political and religious cohesion but, as we see, it also took on tremendous religious significance once it was elevated to the status of Sinaiatic revelation. What eventually set the young apostolic community on a collision course with the established rabbinic community was their acceptance of non-Jews as full and equal members in Israel apart from this accepted *halachah* of the Sages.

God's Plan for the Gentiles

The first signs of the coming collision are described in the tenth and eleventh chapters of the book of Acts. This passage describes the vision of the heavenly sheet filled with all kinds of unclean animals that Peter was commanded to kill and eat. We are soon told by the author what the interpretation of the vision was, that Peter was to visit a Gentile named Cornelius and declare the Gospel to him and his family even though as a Gentile, Cornelius' household was considered "unclean" by current *halachic* standards and therefore not permissible for Peter to visit. Peter recognized the gravity of this situation for he said to Cornelius, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Peter was immediately criticized for this action. "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them" (Acts 11:2). Yet as Peter explained to them about the vision and the giving of the *Ruach* (the Spirit) to the Gentile believers, the men of the Jerusalem congregation began to realize the significance of what HaShem was doing. It was God Himself who was declaring the *halachah* of the rabbis to be working at cross-purposes with His own prophetic plan. As Peter stated to the men of his congregation, "...if God has given

Peter's remarks were very significant for he said that God had given the Gentiles the same gift as the Jewish believers.

them (the Gentile believers) the same gift as us (Jewish believers) when we believed in the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17).

Peter's remarks were very significant for he said that God had given the Gentiles the same gift as the Jewish believers. The Greek term that is used is, *ischos* which translates, "equal." The meaning was obvious; God was clearly showing the apostolic community that through the Messiah Yeshua the Gentiles would have full and equal access to Himself—as Gentiles! God had directly intervened to overrule the *halachah* of the rabbis!

The implications of this move of God's Spirit were profound, for the rabbis had

saying that God had overruled the *halachah*. It was either one or the other.

Peter's revelation was not to be an isolated incident. For during this same time period another observant Jew, a Pharisee named Saul, was diligently studying the Scriptures after receiving a vision of Yeshua whereby he was told that he too was to be sent as a witness to the Gentiles. From Saul's own testimony we are told that he spent three years after his vision studying the Tanakh to come to an understanding of God's plan for the Gentiles (Galatians 1:11–18). It must have been at this time that he began to discover how it was that God planned to bring righteousness to the nations through the covenant made with Abraham. By His covenant



Numerous references in the Gospels testify that Yeshua was often teaching in the synagogue of Kfar Nachum. This synagogue in Capernaum is one of the most impressive from that time period.

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taught that the *halachah* of conversion had come from Moses. Yet God had directly overruled the *halachah*. If this was true then there could be no middle ground—no negotiated compromise. Either the rabbis were correct in requiring Gentiles to follow their tradition of conversion, or the Apostles were right in

with Abraham, God promised that through him all the nations would be blessed. From this single promise Saul began to see God's prophetic plan of redemption for the Gentiles. For example, we see such passages as Amos 9:11–12 which speak of 'the nations' that bear His name. How could this be? Is



The doors of the Capernaum synagogue face Jerusalem and the worshippers prayed in that direction. Five of Yeshua's disciples were called from this town.

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not Israel the only nation to bear the name of ADONAI? Or Isaiah 56 that speaks of the foreigner binding himself to the LORD to keep the Sabbath and hold fast to the Covenant—not as a Jew but as a *foreigner*! Isaiah 2 speaks of the nations streaming up to Jerusalem to learn the Torah and to walk in His paths. Yet these peoples are never once mentioned as switching their heredity to 'Jewish.'

Although the Tanakh is full of these kinds of references, the consequences for holding such a view were grave. For this view was only being followed by the apostolic community—not by Judaism as a whole. And even within the apostolic community the pressure was enormous to fall back into the traditional *halachah*. For we find in Galatians 2:11–21 that even after his vision Peter felt pressure within his own apostolic community to follow the traditional ways of shunning uncircumcised followers of Yeshua. Paul describes the event as follows,

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a

Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (Galatians 2:11–14)

It appears that Saul suffered far more than simple rebuke from his fellow countrymen for his gospel, for he tells us in the same book that "he bears the marks of Yeshua on his body" (Galatians 6:17). Very likely he is referring to the many beatings he received at the hands of the synagogue elders as a consequence for spreading this gospel. For the Gentile convert was still being treated as an inferior and unconverted Gentile by the majority of the Jewish community. His claim as a full member within the Jewish community was based entirely on his relationship to a Messiah that the majority had rejected. They neither accepted Yeshua as their Messiah nor Saul's argument for full Gentile equality within the Jewish community.

The Consequences of Embracing the Gentiles

As pointed out earlier, the *halachah* required the rabbis to reject any prospective convert who refused to accept the full oral as well as the written Torah. As Shiffman points out in his book *Who Was a Jew*,

According to B. Yevamot 47a–b, the prospective convert must be told some of the commandments and laws of Judaism. The present passage informs us that if the candidate refuses to accept a law of the Torah (of which he knows), he is to be rejected. The anonymous first clause is taken much

further by Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Judah who says that even if the prospective proselyte rejects only one of the minor Rabbinic ordinances, he is to be disqualified.²

Two things, therefore, strike us as obvious. First: Saul's gospel ran in complete contradiction to the conversion *halachah* of the Sages. Second: only by accepting the oral Torah and following the conversion *halachah* of the Sages would the greater Jewish community accept the Gentiles. Therefore, Saul's new converts would never be accepted as full and equal members of the traditional Jewish community. It is easy to see why Saul ran into a brick wall with his message of full equality for the Gentile *apart* from the rabbinic *halachah*, since it violated the oral Torah and thus disqualified the prospective convert from the outset.

So then, at the heart of this issue is the disagreement of *how* a non-Jew became adopted into the family of God, that is, became a part of Israel. The rabbis had painted themselves into a corner by claiming Mosaic authority for their conversion tradition. If they concluded that they had been wrong about this issue, where else might they be wrong? If one begins to pull on the thread, where will it end? Their theological presuppositions simply would not allow them to correct their dogma—even when God Himself was supernaturally intervening.

The consequences for such a message began to reach further than the Apostles themselves. Soon, Jewish members within the apostolic synagogues began to be shunned by the other Jews in the community because of their close association with 'unclean Gentiles' who had never properly converted. In other words, with respect to the rabbinically established wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, Jewish followers of Yeshua soon began to fall on the side of the Gentiles and became ostracized from their own traditional communities. With this one respect they were now 'living as the Gentiles' since they were living and worshipping among them.

Another profound consequence of this disagreement was that it called into question the extent to which the new non-Jewish converts were to be held responsible for obedience to the oral Torah. Obviously since the Gentiles had rejected the majority *halachah* on the conversion issue, they

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could hardly be subject to strict adherence of the remaining oral Torah. How could they be? He who rejected one aspect of Torah—oral or written, was rejected by the rabbis as a convert in the first place. This must have been what Paul was arguing in Galatians 3 when he told his readers that they were not ‘under the law.’ Another obvious difference, therefore, between the traditional rabbinic and the apostolic Jewish communities was that although new Gentile converts were to be held subject to the written Torah, they could not be held to the same level of accountability with regards to the oral Torah. Their very choosing of Yeshua as their door into the family of God symbolized a rejection of rabbinic traditions in the first place. In other words, they could not at the same time reject the entrance *halachah* and be considered ‘under’ the rule of oral Torah at the same time. This was something that Rabbinic Judaism was unwilling to accept since, in their opinion, it was impossible to separate the two. Rejection of one was rejection of both.

This issue is brought up again in Acts 15 where the Jerusalem council officially broke with rabbinic *halachah* on this issue. The new converts were not to be held to the full weight of the oral Torah but that they were to obey some of the most obvious rules that would enable them to maintain table fellowship with the Jewish community as they learned to follow Torah.

This did not mean that formative apostolic Judaism was outside the umbrella of Judaism. Other groups broke with rabbinic *halachah* such as the Sadducees and Essenes. But in the case of the Sadducees, they had a power base with the Temple, political connections within Rome, and the High Priesthood. In the case of the Essenes, they had a self-sustainable community near the Dead Sea. And, they were ethnically Jewish. Thus their ability to break with the rabbis did not entirely place them outside of the wider circle of Judaism. The prevailing theology may have considered them in error but they were nevertheless part of Judaism.


Initially this was true for apostolic Judaism as well, since the majority of its adherents were still Jewish. Yet, their ability to survive seemed more tenuous, since they had no other power base other than their own community. Breaking with the Sanhedrin could only marginalize the young apostolic

community.

In conclusion we see that there were at least two competing ideologies being argued during the formative years of apostolic Judaism. The first, which was embraced by the rabbis, argued for Gentile submission to all of Torah—written as well as oral tradition. A number of euphemisms are found in the Apostolic Scriptures for oral Torah such as “the law,” “Sinai,” “works,” “justified by the law,” and “circumcision.” The competing position was that of the Apostolic Jewish community. Their message was that the prophets had clearly spoken throughout the Tanakh that God had planned to bring the Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel ‘as the nations’ since God had promised to make Abraham the father of many nations, not simply the father of many Jews. Therefore, the rabbinic understanding of requiring Gentiles to become ‘Jews’ was seen as working at cross-purposes with God’s plan.


Even so, some within the apostolic community did not readily accept this message. This is evident by the extent of the controversy in Acts 15 and Paul’s continued polemical statements in his letters regarding the ‘circumcisers.’ However, the accepted and official apostolic *halachah* was that the Gentile was to be considered “included as citizens of Israel, heirs of the covenant promises, brought near [a term for proselytes], one body with Israel, Abraham’s descendants, children of Abraham, seed of Abraham, circumcised in heart, grafted into Israel, and children of the promise”—all this without undergoing the formalized rabbinic conversion process. So when the Apostolic Scriptures discuss issues of circumcision and

‘the law,’ it is often this issue that is being addressed. Undergoing rabbinic conversion was seen as trying to obtain right standing before God (justification) by the ‘works of the law.’ This God would not accept. God accepted the Jew and non-Jew on the same terms—through repentance and faith in the One He had sent, the Messiah. The early Gospel was the same to the Jews as it was to the Gentiles: “Repent and Believe.” Both received justification through faith in the Messiah Yeshua. Just as Abraham had been justified by faith while still uncircumcised, so too the Gentile was saved by the same faith while yet uncircumcised. The *faith* of the Covenant came *before* the *sign* of the Covenant.

The Jewish community had reached a critical point in its development. It was being forced to confront some profound differences with regard to the Gentiles. These were differences that neither side felt they could concede. In the wake of the great catastrophe—the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple—it might have been possible that the two sides could have bonded together as fellow Jews and settled their differences. Unfortunately, as we will see in the coming articles, too much damage and hurt had been inflicted during the years leading up to 70 CE for the two sides to reconcile. 

Endnotes

- 1 Alfred Edersheim D.D., Ph.D. *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (E-Sword Bible Software © 2003), chapter 18, paragraph 8.
- 2 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was A Jew*, (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey, 1985), p 22.

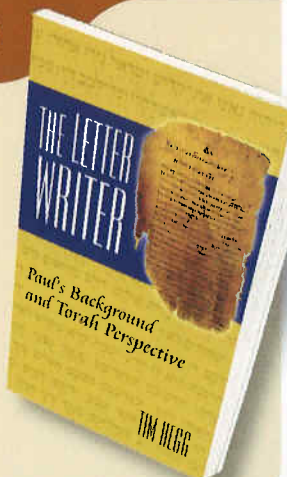


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The Origins of the Church

A HISTORIAN'S VIEW

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:4)

When did the 'church' as we know it today come into existence? As a young boy sitting in Sunday school classes, watching the flannel board story of Pentecost, I was told that the 'church' was born on Pentecost. I learned that it came into being when the disciples sat in the 'upper room' and the Holy Spirit descended upon them in tongues of fire. Perhaps you have also joined into a robust chorus of "Happy Birthday" in memory of this occasion. Well, as I studied the history and the culture and the context of the Apostolic Writings (New Testament), I began to question, "Did the birth of the church really happen the way I have been taught? Did the disciples know what they were doing when all of this occurred?" The more that I studied, the more seemingly clear it became that we should attribute the origins of the Church to some time in history other than Pentecost—perhaps much earlier.

The purpose of this article is to examine my childhood perceptions of the church's origins (the typical Christian teachings) and see how true they are when compared to Scripture and other ancient historical documents.

To find historically accurate answers to these kinds of questions, we should always reference what we know to be the earliest and most reliable early church historical texts—the Apostolic Writings. In studying these divinely inspired words, we can see that the First Century writers held very clear views about this topic. Furthermore, the Apostolic views give us a window into the 'happenings' of the emerging body of believers in the Messiah Yeshua. Therein we find three separate Biblical writers discussing this very subject.

The first example is Paul's letter to the Ephesians. One of the primary themes of Ephesians is that of reconciliation: reconciliation of the believer to God through Messiah (Ephesians 2:4–6); reconciliation of each believer to one another (Ephesians 2:14); and finally, the reconciliation of Gentiles to Israel into one body (Ephesians 3:6). These age-old mysteries were initially revealed to God's Apostles:

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Messiah and to bring to light what is the administration of the mys-

tery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things... (Ephesians 3:9)¹

Let us remember that it is against this theological backdrop that Paul writes to the believers of his day—people which he considered to have been chosen in Messiah before the creation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4)

John, another author from the Apostolic Writings, picks up on this idea in the book of Revelation. He writes,

The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. (Revelation 17:8, emphasis mine)

Thus, we note from the Apostle John that the Book of Life, which contains the names of all those who have been chosen to be in Messiah, was written before the creation of the world, not at some mid-point in world history.

Finally, the writer to the Hebrews also confirms this view. In Hebrews 4:3 the writer recounts the story of Israel's attempt to enter her rest by crossing into the Promised Land. He then allegorizes this event to show that Messiah is the fulfillment of the true rest for all who have faith in Him. He goes on to tell us that this rest was finished "since the creation of the world."

From the eyes of these three men alone it seems clear that the church was not an institution whose origins could be traced to any historical date. Rather, the church was an

I was told that the 'church' was born on Pentecost. I learned that it came into being when the disciples sat in the 'upper room' and the Holy Spirit descended upon them in tongues of fire.

already established body of believers, more accurately understood as those individuals who were chosen in Messiah before the creation of the world.

It is somewhat surprising that by the Second Century, we discover these early church fathers promoting a similar—yet slightly skewed—idea of 'ancient origins'. For example, the writer of an early Second Century work known as 2 Clement states,

Wherefore, brethren, if we do the will of God our Father, we shall be of the first church, which is spiritual, which was created before the sun and the moon.... (2 Clement 14:1, emphasis mine.)

And in another work of the day, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the author unambiguously states that, "...the church...was created before all things..." (Hermas 4:1)

These writers use language similar to that which we read in the Apostolic Writings. However, they clearly indicate that in addition to followers of Messiah being created before the foundations of the earth, that the inception of the 'church' was "before all things" as well. From these passages, as well as many other passages penned by the earliest church fathers, it is clear that the common understanding of the First Century was not to consider Pentecost as the 'start date' for a new concept which would later evolve into what we now know as "The Church."

Notice, however; a very subtle, yet weighty change in the theology between the writings of the Apostles and those of the Second Century church fathers, Clement and Hermas.

Upon further observation, we find that the Scriptures focus on the 'individual believer' as the object of salvation, eternally chosen. Our Scriptures emphasize that it is the person who was chosen "before the creation of the world".

On the other hand, in the minds of these earliest church fathers—it was the 'church' which was the eternal entity. Their viewpoint purported a revolutionary new idea that the 'universal church' was that which was chosen. And, more remarkably, they

esteemed that it was the 'church' for whom all things were made.

By the Second Century the body of Messiah began to take on an institutional significance that it never had during the days of the Apostles. This is very important to understand because it has direct bearing on our perception of church origins.

One reason for this shift in emphasis from the individual to the institution may be the historical context in which the early church found itself. By the early Second Century the mission to Israel had all but ceased. Except for a remnant, formative Judaism had largely rejected their Messiah. It was left to the early disciples of Yeshua, Jewish believers, to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, of which, Paul was a predecessor.

But in the Roman world, only those religions that could boast an ancient pedigree were worthy of allegiance and state approval. This put the newly established body of believers in a very dangerous position. So long as the early believers could demonstrate that they were members together with Israel (Ephesians 2:19; 3:6), they could also demonstrate that they were members within an ancient and legal religion—Judaism. In other words, as long as 'Christ-followers' were seen as an acceptable sect within greater Judaism, they were relatively safe from Roman interference and persecution.

The problem that this early body faced, however, was that it was becoming increasingly obvious that these 'believers' were something apart from the greater Judaisms of the day. Since the beginning of the Second Century, the second and third generations of church leaders began doing everything they could to distance themselves from the Jewish synagogues. Much attention and effort was expended by them to abrogate the signs of God's Covenant for the new believers. If Jews were seen as those who kept the signs of this Covenant (Sabbath and circumcision, for example) then those who did not observe these commandments could hardly be considered part of the same religion.

Of course, the unintended result was that in the eyes of the Romans, this fledgling 'superstition' could no longer claim any significant affiliation with Judaism—a protected and legal religion. Believers in Yeshua, if they were to survive, needed to demonstrate their own ancient origins. They needed to argue persuasively that, despite appearances, they were not merely a 'recently invented' Eastern mystery religion.

Largely due to this crisis, the Second Century church fathers began to argue that it was not merely the individual believer that had been chosen from the foundations of the world, but that the universal institution of the church, what would later be termed, Christianity, was ancient—more ancient than even Zeus, Apollo and Artemis. The last thing they wanted to do was give the impression that their religion was 'invented' during a First Century *Shavuot* celebration!

Thus, from such historical data we can deduce that the commonly taught Christian belief—that the church was 'born at Pente-



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In the Roman world, only those religions that could boast an ancient pedigree were worthy of allegiance and state approval.

cost'— can only be a relatively modern view. But how did this modern misunderstanding regarding Pentecost and the origins of the church come about? I believe it came as a result of a fundamental misunderstanding in the minds of modern church leaders regarding the issues of identity and vocation. Let me explain by way of example.

We often identify ourselves by our vocations. When asked, we say, "I am a doctor," or, "I am a teacher," or "I am a salesman." But this is not actually true. More accurately, we are individuals who may practice medicine or teach or sell, but this is not who we *are*; it is simply what we *do*. When each of us was born, we were born as individual human beings, not as doctors, teachers or salesmen. Only much later do we adopt a particular vocation. In other words, many years after our birth, we adopt our vocation as our identity; the most significant labels that we put on ourselves (and others) begin when we start living out our vocation.

This same confusion, I believe, lies behind the modern misunderstanding that the church was born on Pentecost. Let's look at Acts 2 more carefully. Herein we see that nowhere does it attribute the *origins* of the church to this event. Rather, it is the church's *vocation* which is more accurately assigned to God's work at Pentecost:

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized

with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:4–8, emphasis mine.)

It is clear from what follows in the next chapter that the central event taking place at *Shavuot* is not the 'origin of a church', but a clarification and charge of its vocation—the giving of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of evangelism. If one were looking to give a label of 'origins' to the unique happenings of the First Century *Shavuot* celebration, then one could say that the event spurred on an 'origin of evangelism' rather than an 'origin of the church.'

For example, the books of Luke and Acts devote only two chapters to the resurrection of Yeshua and the subsequent establishment of the 12 Apostolic leaders, while they devote 28 chapters to describing the spreading of the Gospel throughout the ancient Roman world. From this we can clearly see that Luke's interests were not so much in the origins of what would come to be known as the 'church,' but rather to the mission of an already existent group of believers—evangelism.

The other misconception surrounding the 'origins' of the church is the ascribed location of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.² It is often said that the Apostles were meeting in the 'upper room' when the event of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit took place. If, however, one looks at the text more closely, one can see that Luke never says this. Although he states that they had been staying in the upper room *up to this point* (Acts 1:13), it appears that on the day of *Shavuot* this is not necessarily the case, since it was ten days after the events recorded in Acts chapter one.³

A literal translation of the Greek text provides the reader a good clue as to the disciples' location.


And in the fulfilling of the Day of Pentecost, they were all with one mind in the same place. (Acts 2:1)

In other words, as Torah-observant Jews, it was required to be at the Temple for the biblical Feast of *Shavuot*. It is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that the Apostles would allow any alternate location (such as a boarding house) to take the place of the Temple in fulfilling Biblical requirements.

Secondly, the word 'house' is the Greek word *oikos* which can denote a home, household or Temple. In other words, Luke is most likely referring to one of the many Temple enclaves, such as Solomon's Colonnade, where pilgrims met during the required festivals such as *Shavuot*. Finally, Luke describes thousands of pilgrims from all over the Roman world witnessing the event. It simply would have been impossible for thousands of people to jam into the narrow Jerusalem alley-ways to witness an event occurring in some obscure boarding house. Not only this, but Luke remarks that thousands were immediately baptized. Only the Temple area, with its many *mikvahs*, could have accommodated such an event.

It seems, therefore, that we can draw two fairly certain conclusions from the Biblical and historical information that we have:

- ☛ First, the Apostolic Writings clearly affirm that each individual who comes to faith in Messiah was chosen to do so from "before the creation of the world."
- ☛ Second, the body of Messiah⁴ was a group of people who pre-existed the event of the original) outpouring.

We can find nowhere in the Scriptures that the Apostles viewed *Shavuot* as the origination of the church. Indeed, if any new beginning can be seen from Pentecost, it is the beginning of a charge to world evangelism—an evangelism that was directed first and foremost to the Jewish nation and then to the nations around them, by a body of Jewish believers, from within her own Jewish Temple. 

Endnotes

- 1 See also Romans 16:25
- 2 Please see page 32 of this magazine for more comments on this matter.
- 3 We know that the events of Acts 2 took place 10 days after the events of Acts 1 because the biblical festival of *Shavuot* occurs 50 days after the Sabbath of *Pesach*; and Yeshua ascended in Acts 1 after 40 days.
- 4 1 Corinthians 12:27, Acts 20:28



▶ St. Peter's Basilica as seen from St. Peter's Square with the giant obelisk which was brought to Rome in 37 C.E.

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Nazarene Judaism

What happened to the original Jewish followers of Yeshua? Who were they? How did their beliefs differ from the developing Christian orthodoxy?

So far in our study of the history of the divisions between the synagogue and the emerging Christian Church, we've learned that the original 'church' was a completely Jewish phenomenon. Yeshua, the founder of this community (known as the Nazarenes), was fully Jewish and fulfilled long-held Jewish Messianic expectations. His earliest followers and close disciples were also Jewish in ethnicity, culture and religion. They saw Yeshua, not as one who came to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17–19). We have also found that the Yeshua movement remained a Jewish phenomenon for probably ten years or so before an initially reluctant outreach to the

Gentiles began. And, as we will continue to see, this outreach would eventually lead to Gentile congregations breaking away from the original apostolic communities.

What we see today as Western Christianity—both Protestant and Catholic—is the result of a breakaway faction ultimately taking over the Yeshua movement. The result? Since at least the Fourth Century CE, Gentile interpretations of the Yeshua faith have dominated the Yeshua movement, not necessarily because of its superior theology, but because it was more successful in establishing itself as the bearer of truth and orthodoxy. Western (Gentile) Scripture interpretations soon became the default 'orthodox Christianity,' and anything that disagreed

with it was branded heretical.

But if Western Christianity is the product of a break-away branch, what happened to the root? What happened to the original Jewish followers of Yeshua? Who were they? Where did they live? How did their beliefs differ from the developing Christian orthodoxy? Finally, how does this impact us today?

The Nazarene sect of Judaism was thoroughly Jewish, one of perhaps seven main sects within Second Temple Judaism.¹

Paul counted himself as a member of this sect. In Acts 24:5 Paul was charged by fellow Jewish leaders of being a 'ringleader' within this sect of Judaism. To this, Paul agreed.

I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way (that is Nazarene Judaism), which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Torah and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (Acts 24:14–15)

What can we conclude from this early description of Nazarene beliefs (circa 60 CE)? First, Paul believed that he worshipped the same God as his forefathers and contemporaries—not a new or different God. One of the beliefs, which arose within Second Century Christianity, was that the God of Abraham was a God of wrath and judgment represented by the Law, and that Yeshua was the God of love and grace who abolished the Law. While this kind of thinking, originally known as Marcionism, still subtly exists in the Church, Paul would have utterly rejected it. He clearly understood himself to be a worshiper of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—as did his fellow Jews.

Second, Paul agreed with everything written in the Torah and the Prophets. It is critical to understand that Paul, like his Jewish contemporaries, fully embraced the Torah as the primary touchstone of truth. From his perspective all those claiming to have a prophetic word from God must support the standards of the Torah and the Prophets. Any doctrine or theological perspective that did not agree with this rule or standard was to be rejected. Therefore, we can see that Nazarene Judaism, as represented by Paul, was a completely Torah-observant faith. True, its interpretation of the Torah and the Prophets differed on some points from the other sects of Judaism. Nevertheless, Nazarene Judaism was far more Jewish than the expression of Christianity that we know today.

Third, Nazarene Judaism held to a final resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Daniel 12:2), a theme which is clearly evident in the Apostle John's Book of Revelation. Both evolving Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism retained a final resurrection as a core belief of their respective faiths. In this area, however, Nazarene Judaism and later Christianity agreed more closely, since Judaism tended to stress the resurrection of the righteous only. This is expressed very clearly in the *Mishnah* where it says,

*All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, "Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever" (Isaiah 60:21). And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: He who says, "the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and an Epicurean."*²

We see Paul as one leader within this Jewish group known as the Nazarenes. What other leaders of this group can we identify, and what happened to them? To gain the greatest authority and respect for its place of leadership within the Christian community, the Roman Catholic Church has attempted, since at least the time of Constantine, to trace its lineage of leadership to the Apostle Peter. The implication is that if the Apostle Peter was given "the keys to the kingdom" by Yeshua, then those to whom Peter anointed to leadership would in turn receive this level of authority in determining church matters. If this is true, then no group has a more prestigious pedigree than the Nazarenes. According to the Apostolic Scriptures and ancient

The Nazarene sect of Judaism was thoroughly Jewish, one of perhaps seven main sects within Second Temple Judaism. Paul counted himself as a member of this sect.

Church historians, the Nazarenes traced their ancestry back to the Apostles and to the brothers and cousin of Yeshua.³

As Epiphanius explained in his Fourth Century book *Refutation of All Heresies*, all believers were originally known as Nazarenes rather than Christians. Ray Pritz clarifies,

*The Greek name, 'Christian,' was first applied in Antioch, probably the earliest mission to non-Jews, and it was well known that 'Christian' was originally used by non-Christians to designate believers among the Gentiles, while 'Nazarenes' was already used in Judea to describe Jewish adherents to the new messianic sect.*⁴

Going further, Epiphanius describes how the Nazarenes were synonymous with the disciples of Yeshua.

They did not call themselves Christians, but Nazarenes... But actually, they remained wholly Jewish and nothing else. For they use not only the New Testament but also the Old, like the Jews. For the Legislation, Prophets and the Scriptures, which are called the Bible by the Jews, are not rejected by them as they are by those mentioned above. They are not mindful of other things, but live according

*to the preaching of the Law as among Jews. There is no fault to find with them [among traditional Judaism] apart from the fact that they have come to believe in Christ.... Only in this respect they differ from the Jews and Christians: with the Jews they do not agree because of their belief in Christ, with the Christians because they are trained in the Law, in circumcision, the Sabbath and the other things.*⁵

He goes on to explain how the Nazarenes left Jerusalem to obey Yeshua's prophesy when the Romans were about to lay siege to the city in 70 CE. From there they moved to Pella. As Epiphanius wrote,

*...after the exodus from Jerusalem when all the disciples went to live in Pella because Christ had told them to leave Jerusalem and go away since it would undergo a siege.*⁶

What we can see from Epiphanius is that the earliest followers of Yeshua, including Paul, were from this sect called Nazarenes. From Jewish, as well as Western eyes, they were completely Torah-observant, and their level of Torah obedience was never questioned by those who were not followers of Yeshua. For example, in Eusebius's account of the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus, he describes James as being respected by all the Jewish authorities for his strict adherence to Torah.

*...those [among the Jews] who did come to believe [in Yeshua] did so because of James. Since therefore many even of the ruling class believed, there was an uproar among the... Scribes and Pharisees, who said there was a danger that the entire people would expect Jesus as the Christ. So they collected [gathered together] and said to James: "Be good enough to restrain the people, for they have gone astray after Jesus in the belief that he is the Christ... We all accept what you say: we can vouch for it, and so can all the people, that you are a righteous man and take no one at his face value."*⁷



A Bronze statue of Peter in Capernaum

Based on what we've read thus far, the Nazarene faith's major beliefs would look something like this:

- ✦ They accepted the binding authority of both the Old and New Testaments.
- ✦ They believed in the resurrection of the dead.
- ✦ They held to the virgin birth.⁸
- ✦ They believed Yeshua to be the Messiah in fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

In all respects they were originally considered by emerging Christianity to be orthodox in their faith (except for their continued Torah observance). Yet by 400 CE the Church Father Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) branded the Nazarenes as heretics and cemented their eventual rejection by greater Christendom. He wrote in 400 CE,

*Just as they persist to the present day who call themselves Nazarene Christians and circumcise the carnal foreskins in a Jewish way, are born heretics, in that error into which Peter drifted and from which he was called back by Paul.*⁹

While the Nazarenes were becoming increasingly estranged from their Christian counterparts, greater Judaism did not accept them, either. In fact, the Nazarenes found themselves in the most vulnerable position. Just as they were increasingly viewed as heretics by the Christian community for their faithfulness to Torah, they were also increasingly estranged from their Jewish counterparts for their faithfulness to Messiah Yeshua. And the animosity between these two branches of Judaism was palpable. For example, both Jerome and Epiphanius describe the animosity of the rabbinic community towards the Nazarenes.

*...[T]hree times a day [they] pronounce curses and maledictions over them [the Nazarenes] when they say their prayers in the synagogues [the *Birkat Ha-Minim* or twelfth benediction]. Three times a day they say: "May God curse the Nazarenes." For they are more hostile against them because they proclaim as Jews that Jesus is the Christ, which runs counter to those who still are Jews who do not accept Jesus.*¹⁰

Further, the attitudes of the Nazarenes toward the Rabbis were no less hostile. Consider, for example, at a commentary on Isaiah 8:20–21 by a Nazarene writer.

...men who do everything for the love of the belly and who hiss during their incantations in the way of magicians in order to deceive you...¹¹

The Nazarenes were caught between the increasingly normative expressions of two dominant faiths: Western Christianity (including Eastern Orthodoxy), which held to the testimony of Jesus but rejected the authority and practical application of Torah, and Rabbinic Judaism, which embraced the Torah but rejected Yeshua as their Messiah. The Nazarenes, in the spirit of Revelation 14:12, held both to "the commandments and to the testimony of Yeshua," and this middle path is exactly what estranged them from their rival communities.


The Nazarenes also rejected the rabbinic authority established by the Pharisaic camp after Jerusalem's destruction. In so doing, they contributed to their own isolation from formative Judaism. Just as they rejected the Church Fathers' setting aside of the Torah, so too they refused the Rabbis' expansive interpretations of it, which incorporated more restrictive interpretations of monotheism into its theology and *halachah*. And as the question of Yeshua's deity became even more unacceptable within these rabbinic communities, these two differences—belief in the deity of Yeshua and rejection of rabbinic *halachah*—were enough to label them of apostates from greater Judaism.

What, then, was the final fate of Nazarene Judaism? We can't say with absolute certainty. We do know that they survived the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. After this they returned to Jerusalem where Symeon, son of Clopas and cousin of Yeshua served as head of their congregation.¹² Judas was the fifteenth and final Jewish elder of Jerusalem since after 130 CE all Jews were exiled from Jerusalem by the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

The Church leadership of Jerusalem—entirely Jewish up to this point—passed to Gentile hands. We also know that the group continued to be alluded to by Church historians up to the end of the Fifth Century CE and that they lived in and around Galilee for the remainder of their existence. We also know that the Nazarenes expressed knowledge of the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* in their writings, which would date them into at least the Fifth Century. However, by this time, Jerusalem had gained patriarchal status and had become one of five ecclesiastical cities in the Byzantine Empire. Jerusalem would

now be too important to be left to groups like the Nazarenes. And by 614 CE the Persians conquered Jerusalem and the surrounding region, slaughtering thousands of Christian and Jewish inhabitants.

One can only imagine the vulnerability of the Nazarenes, who were both Christians and Jews, yet were rejected by both. Because of this isolation from greater Christianity and Judaism, they became vulnerable to the Byzantine, Persian and Muslim conquests that eventually engulfed that area of the Middle East, and they slipped into obscurity. What is clear is that the modern Christian denomination known as Nazarenes is in no way related to the original Nazarenes, since the modern denomination rejects the Torah-centered beliefs of the original group.

What can we learn from these believers? Perhaps the best lesson is that the religion that we call 'Christianity' was first Nazarene Judaism, but it has evolved into something very different than what the Nazarenes believed and practiced. And if the conclusions we reach in this article are accurate, then we also must admit that the beliefs and practices of modern Christianity (which are based on the hermeneutics of the early Church Fathers) differs from that of the Apostles who were the leaders of this Nazarene faith. Consequently, we should not be too quick to accept the early Church Fathers' interpretation of Scripture—even if all of Western Christianity is essentially based on their views. Rather, if the earliest and most intimate followers of Yeshua (including the original Apostles) held to a Torah-oriented understanding of Scripture, then we must be extremely critical of any group of men, arriving a century or more later, who introduce a hermeneutic that contradicts the original understanding. 

Endnotes

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- 3 Eusebius, pp. 35, 59, 95–96
- 4 Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, E.J. Brill Publishing, 1988, p.13
- 5 Pritz, pp. 33–34
- 6 Ibid. p. 34
- 7 Eusebius, p. 59
- 8 Pritz, p.53. In a letter written to Augustine around 404 CD, Jerome writes, "They believe in Christ, the Son of God, born of Mary the Virgin, and they say about him that he suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again."
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The Temple Destroyed

The Nazarenes, Yavneh and the birth of Rabbinical Judaism — Part I

By Chris O'Quinn

In earlier issues of this magazine, we have seen that Pharisaical Judaism and its Apostolic counterpart had much in common—as long as the Temple in Jerusalem still stood.¹ The prayers, the sacrifices and most of the age-old traditions continued to be held in common by both sects. After 70 CE, however, when the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, the differences between Apostolic Judaism and emerging Rabbinical Judaism began to grow more acute. Ever since Sinai, Jewish religious faith had been defined largely by the Tabernacle and the Temple observances. But with the passing of the Temple, both branches of Judaism—Apostolic and

Rabbinical—were forced to reexamine their respective faiths. What lay at the heart of the faith? How would they pass this faith to subsequent generations? In this article we will examine the impact that the destruction of the Temple made on emerging Rabbinical Judaism and the ways in which it caused the disciples of the Rabbis and those of Yeshua to develop their respective expressions of the Jewish faith so differently.

The Great Revolt

Between 66 and 72 CE Judea was locked in a fight with the Roman Empire. One by one the helpless towns and villages of the small, Jewish state fell under the mighty and cruel

Roman onslaught. The Great Revolt, as it is called, began when the Roman garrison stationed in Jerusalem was massacred by a relatively small number of zealous Judeans. When the Roman legate in Syria, Cestius Gallus, attempted to restore order by marching on the city with a large army assembled at Acre, he was forced to retreat in the face of a surprisingly determined foe. After this an experienced commander named Titus Flavius Vespasian was dispatched along with four complete legions (some 60,000 troops) to subdue the rebellious little province. Vespasian approached the crisis in the usual Roman manner—methodical, patient and relentless. In the course of approximately

Although R. Ben Zakkai was unsuccessful at saving Jerusalem or the Temple from the determined Roman army, he was successful in his request to establish a new and reconstituted Sanhedrin.

three years he had secured the coastal regions, the outlying rural areas and all but three of the fortress cities. As a practical military consideration, Jerusalem stood alone. Because Vespasian was soon called back to Rome to be made Emperor, he left his son Titus to finish the job of subduing Judea and Jerusalem. Throughout the war Jerusalem had been surrounded by Vespasian's army. Between April and September of 70 CE, however, the agony had reached the breaking point.

The specter of famine haunted the city, which was filled to overflowing with pilgrims, and death mowed them down in a dread harvest. The craving for food, no matter of what sort, drove men beyond all bounds and killed all normal feeling. The terrible famine that increased in frightfulness daily annihilated whole families of the people. The terraces were full of women and children who had collapsed from hunger; the alleys were piled high with the bodies of the aged. Children and young people, swollen with lack of food, wandered around like ghosts until they fell. They were so far spent that they could no longer bury anyone, and if they did they fell dead upon the very corpses they were burying. The misery was unspeakable.²

The Lack of Unity

Why did this all happen, and how could the Jewish leaders allow such a catastrophe to occur—especially since most of the country seemed to have opposed the rebellion?³ In order to understand the answer to this question, we have to realize the fragmented nature of first-century Judaism. Put another

way, when we speak of the Jewish faith of the first century, it is probably more accurate to think of it in terms of 'Judaisms' (plural). According to the ancient historian Hegeppus, first-century Judaism was multi-faceted and diverse, reflecting as many as seven recognized parties within the faith. These parties ranged from the murderously anti-Roman Zealots to the collaborating Sadducees.⁴

Part of the heart-breaking tragedy of Jerusalem's fall was due largely to its own disunity. Had the people within the walls of the city been more united among themselves, they may have been able to hold out long enough to win a negotiated peace with the Romans and retain much of their freedoms, such as the continuation of Temple worship. Instead, the extremists like Simeon Ben Giora and his Sicarii ran one end of Jerusalem, while others, such as the Idumeans under John of Giscala controlled the rest. As is always the case in civil war,⁵ the population as a whole was held as prisoners of these blood-thirsty fanatics who were destroying themselves through civil war and political infighting. Food supplies, for example, had been built up for just such an occasion and should have provided sustenance for years. These supplies were, instead, reduced to ashes as one political party sought to starve-out its opponents by raiding and burning their grain stuffs—only to suffer the same fate at the hands of their own Jewish brethren. This internal warring reduced the city to starvation and plague long before the first Roman troop was able to breach its walls.

Amid Jerusalem's chaos, one Rabbi told

his disciples that he was feeling very ill and that they should brace themselves, since his own death might be close at hand. This Rabbi was none other than Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai.

Although most believed him to be on the verge of death, a very small inner circle of disciples had been informed of a cleverly devised plan. This small circle of men would help fake his death and place him in a sealed coffin. He would then be carried out of the city into the Roman camp where he hoped to negotiate a more merciful set of terms with their enemy.

As planned, his inner circle of disciples faked his death and placed him—still very much alive—in a coffin and carried him in a funeral procession through the city of Jerusalem. As expected, the gates were guarded by Zealots who would normally open or run swords through the coffins of such a procession, just in case someone was attempting to escape the now inevitable destruction. So great, however, was the respect that R. Zakkai enjoyed from the people that no one dared desecrate the procession, and the Zealots allowed the coffin to pass through unmo- lested. R. Ben Zakkai, therefore, successfully reached the Roman camp in safety.

Transforming Judaism

Although he was unsuccessful at saving Jerusalem or the Temple from the determined Roman army, he was successful in his request to establish a new and reconstituted Sanhedrin made up of members of the Pharisaical party. This new Sanhedrin was reestablished



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in a small coastal town known as Yavneh near present day Tel Aviv. It was through this new Academy at Yavneh that these rabbis would begin their work of preserving, and to a great extent, transforming Judaism into the faith it is today.

After the fall of Jerusalem, and more specifically, the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people—including the Apostolic group known as the Nazarenes or “The Way”—faced almost insurmountable challenges to their own personal faith and to what the character of normative Judaism would look like in the coming years. Remember that up to this time Judaism was defined largely by the Temple observances. Indeed, all sacrifices, whether for the purpose of showing thanksgiving or for seeking atonement before God, were required to be carried out in the prescribed way at the prescribed place—the Temple in Jerusalem.

Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.⁶

...then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God shall choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD..⁷

...but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.⁸

Now three times in a year Solomon offered burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar which he built to the LORD, burning incense with them on the altar which was before the LORD. So he finished the house.⁹

The New Leadership

To many, the crisis in which Judaism found itself must have been viewed as a temporary one. We know from the historical record that the Jewish communities continued to press Rome for permission to build another Temple. Emperor Hadrian, for example, in the early second century almost followed through with a pledge to do this before he took an unexpected anti-Semitic turn in his disposition. The writer of the Letter of Barnabas, in his highly polemical work described the Jewish hope for the rebuilt temple as follows:

Moreover I will tell you likewise concerning the temple, how these wretched men being led astray set their hope on the building, and not on their God that made them, as being a house of God....Ye perceive that their hope is vain.¹⁰

Temporary or not, the catastrophe that had befallen the Jewish people had a profound affect upon men like R. Zakkai and his fellow members at Yavneh. If nothing else, they were determined to forge a new sense

of unity within their faith. The traditional authority of the high priest and the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, which had been made up of a mix of Pharisees, Sadducees and even some who were apparently sympathetic to the Way¹¹ had vanished with the Temple. Instead, the new ruling council, or Sanhedrin, was made up of men like R. Ben Zakkai and those who had also been able to elude Roman imprisonment. The pluralism of the original Sanhedrin was completely missing at Yavneh. Far from Zealots, many of these men like R. Zakkai had opposed the war and believed that the Jewish people would be better served without the burden of a Jewish state.¹² With the destruction of the Temple and its observances, the power of the original Sadducees vanished. The Zealots were either dead or enslaved, and the followers of the Way had fled, at least temporarily, into the Transjordan.¹³ What remained was a body of men, the Pharisees, who all came from the same theological training and belief that they alone observed the Torah as Moses had intended.

These men were determined never again to allow factions and radical splinter groups like the Sicarii to plunge the whole nation into suicidal wars. As far as the Nazarenes were concerned, they too would be expected to submit to the ruling sages in everything—including disputes regarding Yeshua. Without national sovereignty, without protective borders and without a Temple, unity under the leadership of the Rabbis was seen as a matter of national life and death. Consequently, at Yavneh the Rabbis would begin to forge a faith that recognized only one Master, one Torah, and one Judaism.

It was necessary, therefore, in the face of the new reality, to find ways of adapting the *halachah* (that is, the application of Torah Commandments to everyday life) so as to enable the nation to keep the requirements of Torah without a Temple. Such issues as sin offerings, prayers, sacrifices, the priestly rights and duties and the required festivals had to be addressed. It was at Yavneh, therefore, that the sages would help shape the kind of Judaism that subsequent generations would pass on to their posterity.

The Emerging Separation

Of the two remaining groups (the Nazarenes and the members of formative Rabbinical Judaism), the two areas of greatest dispute was the dispute over Yeshua and the authority of the Oral Torah. For those in the Rabbin-



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After the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people—including the Apostolic group known as the Nazarenes or “The Way”—faced almost insurmountable challenges to their own personal faith. . .

ical camp, the Oral Torah—the Traditions of the Elders—held, at least in terms of practical considerations, equal weight and authority to that of the Written Word. In their view, one could not merely hold to Written Torah and ignore the Oral, for it was through the Oral that one properly understood and applied the Written.

But where did the Oral Torah come from? There have been two basic views. First is the teaching that when God gave the Written Torah to Moses, He gave him the Oral as well. In this view the Oral Torah represents an unbroken chain of traditions dating back to Sinai. The second is that the Oral Torah developed over the centuries as the Sages made rulings on *halachic* questions thus establishing ‘case law.’ One might liken it to our own courts that interpret whether laws are ‘constitutional’ or ‘unconstitutional.’ That being the case, one can see the resistance that the Apostolic communities faced when they challenged certain points of the Oral Torah. At the least they would be viewed as disagreeing with centuries of established legal precedent. At worst they would be viewed as disagreeing with the Torah, Moses and God. Rabbinic tradition was very clear concerning those who refused to submit to the ruling of the Sages.

And these are the ones who have no portion in the World to Come: He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, and the Torah does not come from Heaven....¹⁴ ...He who exposes aspects of the Torah not in accord with the law [halachah], even though he has in hand learning in Torah and good deeds, will have no share in the World to Come.¹⁵


Therefore, obedience to the Traditions of the Elders was, according to the Rabbis, a defining characteristic of who had a place in the World to Come and who did not. The irony in all of this, however, was that the Oral Torah to which the Rabbis clung so tightly did not address the main issue at hand—that is, life without the Temple. Therefore, the Pharisees, just as much as the Nazarenes, were developing new *halachah* to address this new situation.

Nevertheless, this would put them in sharp dispute with the Jewish followers of Yeshua, who held to the authority of the Written Torah but not necessarily the interpretations of the Rabbis in all instances. Instead, they believed that if Yeshua is indeed the Messiah, then His interpretation of Torah must rank supreme, and the *halachah* of the Rabbis must be considered subordinate to Messiah’s. Not only this, but the Apostolic community had been given authority by Yeshua to establish their own *halachah* when necessary.¹⁶

We see examples of the rivalry between the early Rabbis and the Jewish followers of Yeshua in some of their contemporary writings.¹⁷ We also see this rivalry between the Rabbis and the sect at Qumran.¹⁸ Regardless of the arguments that the Rabbis wished to make for the continuity of Oral Torah, it is clear that up to the time of Yavneh there had been much dispute over the proper way to fulfill many of the Commandments. What changed at Yavneh was that the Qumran community had been annihilated, and the Nazarenes were now developing their own *halachah* independently of their Rabbinic brethren. In fact, one could say that the Gospels and the Apostolic writings make up the *halachic* teaching of the Nazarenes (their Oral Torah, if you will), while the *Mishnah* is the written record of the developing *halachah* of the Rabbis. As the two sides continued to develop their own *halachah*, each side was viewed more and more by the other as renegade and heretical. The Rabbis argued that the Nazarenes had no place in the World to Come since they broke from the *halachah* of the Sages. The Nazarenes, on the other hand, argued that their Rabbinic counterparts had no place in the World to Come, since they refused to acknowledge Yeshua as the Messiah or submit to His *halachah*. Soon the two sides had less and less to do with each other and communicated only through polemic.

As the smoke from the burning Temple

rose in the air over Jerusalem, men like R. Zakkai were determined to preserve the now seemingly conquered Jewish faith. To do this they would fight for two things. First, they would do all in their power to create social and religious unity within the Jewish faith. Second, they would work to develop new *halachah* to address the unique challenges that lay ahead. The unavoidable consequence of this determination, however, was the eventual wall of separation that developed between themselves and the followers of Yeshua. One side refused to make room for Yeshua as their Messiah, the other unwilling to forsake their risen Savior. As we can see, the wall of separation that soon developed has yet to be dismantled.

In our next article we will explore the second phase of the Yavneh experience and see how other forces were at work to divide still further the emerging Rabbinic Synagogues from the followers of Yeshua. 

Endnotes

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Defining Judaism

The Nazarenes, Yavneh and the birth of Rabbinical Judaism — Part II

By Chris O'Quinn

In our last article we explored the impact of the Temple's destruction on the development of both Apostolic and Pharisaical Judaisms. We saw that within the Judaisms of the late first and early second centuries, two distinct and increasingly irreconcilable camps were developing. The first was known as 'The Way' (which we have referred to as Apostolic or Nazarene Judaism); they followed Yeshua as the Messiah and the teachings of the Apostles within a very Jewish framework. They believed that, although salvation was to be found only through faith in the Messiah Yeshua, obedience to Torah was the mark of one who truly belonged to Messiah. The second sect was that of the Pharisees. This group had defended the Apostolic movement in the Jerusalem Sanhedrin in the 30s, and they had come to Paul's defense when he came before the same body in the mid-50s.¹ By the 90s, however, these men, for the most part, had rejected Yeshua as the Messiah

and they rejected the Apostolic movement. Consequently, they began to develop and define their understanding and application of the Torah (*halachah*) in a way that would purposely distinguish them from the Apostolic faith and the developing Gentile Christian churches. In this article we will examine how the early Rabbis of the Yavneh Academy—the leaders within Pharisaical Judaism—began to move the Jewish faith in a direction that would preclude the likelihood of a rapprochement with the followers of Yeshua.

The Yavneh Academy

When we consider the influence of the Yavneh Academy on the emerging Rabbinic faith, we should recognize that Yavneh's influence came in two phases. The first and more moderate phase came under the direction of R. Ben Zakkai, which we examined in the previous article. The second and more radical phase developed under Rabban Gamaliel

II (circa 90–115). It was under his leadership that a number of key changes took effect that marginalized the Apostolic movement and eventually relegated it to the status of something other than 'Jewish.'

Who was Gamaliel II, and how was he able to do this? Gamaliel II boasted a very privileged pedigree. He was the great-grandson of none other than Hillel the Elder and the grandson of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder who had held a leading position in the Sanhedrin when the priests and the Sadducees debated what to do with the Apostles (Acts 5:34–39). Gamaliel II's grandfather had also been the Torah teacher of Saul of Tarsus—the same Saul (Paul) who later became an Apostle to the very movement he had earlier persecuted. Thus Gamaliel II clearly carried a great deal of legitimacy and weight within the Jewish community of his day, contrasted against the Apostles who were ridiculed and looked down upon as being men of little education² and even less standing.

Under the leadership of Rabban Gamaliel II at Yavneh, a number of key changes took effect that marginalized the Apostolic movement that eventually relegated it to a non-Jewish status.

Yavneh and Rome

One characteristic that distinguished the period of the Yavneh Academy under Gamaliel's leadership from that of his predecessor, R. Ben Zakkai, was that under Gamaliel's term of service the Yavneh Academy grew into a more coordinated and official representative body of the Jewish people. This recognition developed not only within the Jewish community, but also with Roman statecraft. For it was to this body of men that Rome gave its official recognition to act as the official spokespeople for the Jewish people.

According to one source (*Mishnah Eduyyot* 7:7) Gamaliel was asked to come to Syria by the Roman authorities in order to be granted authority by the Roman governor. It is likely that the reason for the official Roman recognition came as a result of the death of Agrippa II. Rome would naturally have been looking for a representative to serve as a go-between on behalf of the Jewish community and the government; Gamaliel, as head of the Yavneh Academy, would have likely served as a logical choice.³

The affects of this formal Roman recognition came at the expense of the Apostolic faith and would have serious consequences for centuries to come. How? It helped establish the emerging rabbinic expression of Judaism as the official representation of Judaism and the Jewish people in all official dealings with the Roman government. Any group that the Rabbis approved and accepted would be considered legitimate—not only within the Jewish community but with Rome as well. Conversely, any group that might be branded by the Sages as heretical or non-conformist might face persecution, not merely from their own Jewish community, but from the Roman authorities as well. There is a hint of this as early as 64 CE regarding the Christians in Rome during the great fire of that year. In Nero's persecution of the Christians, he seemed to be able to differentiate between the Jews that followed Yeshua and those that did not.⁴ It is argued that, through influence in the Imperial Court, Pharisaical Jews were able to shift

the odium of the outbreak on the Apostolic synagogue.⁵

One advantage, therefore, that the Rabbis enjoyed over the Apostolic synagogue was the Roman stamp of legitimacy. Since it was this group, represented by R. Ben Zakkai, who had left the "traitorous rebels" within the city walls of Jerusalem and had come out to negotiate with the Romans, they came to enjoy a special level of protection within the Roman world order. The Pharisees presented themselves to the Romans as the normative representation of the Jewish faith. By implication or direct accusation, any other group, such as the Nazarenes, would be portrayed in the eyes of the Roman world as something other than normative or correct. From a Roman perspective this made dealing with the Jews much easier than in the times of the Second Temple when there were more than half a dozen separate groups with which to deal.⁶

Yavneh and the Followers of Yeshua

During Gamaliel's tenure, Yavneh became the center for most Sages, some of whom lived there permanently, while other visited periodically. Sources indicate that anywhere from 85 (*Tosefta Kelim—Bava Batra* 2:4) to 138 (*Sifre Numbers* 124) Sages convened there to discuss and decide on the key issues facing the Jewish community after the Temple's destruction.⁷

It was also at this time that the Sages at Yavneh, spearheaded by Gamaliel II, began to take a much firmer line against the Jewish followers of Yeshua. For example, at this time Simeon Ha-Paqodi was asked to set the Eighteen Benedictions (the daily prayers said within the synagogue) in order as part of the general effort to fix and standardize the *halachah*. He asked for a volunteer to compose the benediction against the *minim* (heretics). Samuel Ha-Qatan stood up and adapted a previously existing benediction to include the *minim*.

For the apostates (those who have renounced the Jewish faith), may there be

*no hope unless they return to Your Torah. As for the notzrim and the minim, may they perish immediately. Speedily may they be erased from the Book of Life and may they not be registered among the righteous. Blessed are you, O Lord, who subdues the wicked. (Birkat HaMinim)*⁸

The specific effect of this benediction was to insure that those who were the *minim* would not serve as presenters in the synagogue since they would not want to bring down curses on themselves. It is also clear that this benediction was specifically aimed at fellow Jews, since by this time Gentiles (God-fearers) were becoming less a fixture at Synagogues, and in any case, would not have served as presenters.

This attitude was not restricted, however, to the worship services of the synagogue. Rather, this desire to root out and shun non-conformists reached into virtually every corner of everyday life. For if the Yavneh Rabbis were successful at defining what 'proper' Judaism would be, they were equally deft at determining what it was 'not.' And for those who fell outside of these strictly defined boundary markers—separation was the rule. Since the Rabbis appear to have characterized the Jewish followers of Yeshua as *minim*⁹ (heretics), their policy in such circumstances was to reduce to a minimum the contact between such outsiders and themselves—the Rabbinically observant Jews. As such, the policy became one of exclusion from the synagogues and persuasion against other Jews to ostracize them in social and even commercial life.¹⁰

By establishing Rabbinism as orthodoxy, the exclusion of the followers of Yeshua from the synagogue and the greater Jewish community would inevitably follow.¹¹ We see an indication of this when we read the Gospel of John, which was written precisely during this tumultuous time—around 90 to 100 CE. John's is the only Gospel that specifically mentions Jews being excommunicated from the Synagogue for confessing Yeshua as the Messiah.¹²

Separating Jews from Jews

For examples of the extent to which the followers of Yeshua were being ostracized from the greater Jewish community we can look at *Tosefta Hullin* 2:20, 21:

✪ If meat is found in the hand of a gentile, it is permitted to derive benefit from it, but if it is found in the hand of a *min*, it

As acceptance of new Rabbinic *halachah* grew, the Jewish followers of Yeshua began to come under increasing pressure and found themselves increasingly 'ghettoized' by their fellow Jews.

is forbidden to derive benefit from it.

✦ That which comes out from the house of a *min* is indeed meat of sacrifices to the dead.

✦ For they said: "The slaughtering of a *min* is idolatry; their bread is the bread of a Samaritan; their wine is the wine of libation; their fruits are untithed; their books are the book of diviners, and their children are *mamzerim*."¹³

✦ We do not sell to them, nor do we buy from them. We do not take from them, nor do we give to them. We do not teach their sons a craft. We are not healed by them, neither healing of property or healing of life.

This text clearly indicates the extent that the Rabbis wished to ostracize and shun the followers of Yeshua. Rabbinic Jews were forbidden to eat with them, to have commercial or business dealings with them or to train their sons as apprentices in a trade. Even

to be healed by them (presumably in the name of Yeshua) was considered magic and was, therefore, forbidden. Finally, the children were considered *mamzer*, which made them unacceptable for marriage within the Rabbinic community.¹⁴ As acceptance of this rabbinic *halachah* grew, the Jewish followers of Yeshua began to come under increasing pressure and found themselves increasingly 'ghettoized' by their fellow Jews.¹⁵ In short, these followers of Yeshua, although Jewish, were put on the same social standing as idolaters.¹⁶

Separation issues vis-à-vis the surrounding Hellenist culture was certainly nothing new to greater Judaism. We see these issues being raised in passages such as Acts 10, where Peter tells Cornelius,

You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.
(Acts 10:28)

And again in Galatians 2:11–12 where we read of Peter's continued struggle with Jew/Gentile separation customs. In our context, however, Gamaliel II strenuously argued for a formal policy of shunning 'fellow Jews,' and he even traveled throughout the region to supervise religious practices and dispense *halachah*.¹⁷ When we understand, therefore, the kind of extreme social pressures that the early Jewish believers were under, we can better understand passages such as Hebrews 10 and 11 where Jewish believers are admonished to persevere in the face of

public humiliation, confiscation of property and even prison.¹⁸

Rabbinic Authority

As we will see in the next article, the Gentile Christians, eager to show themselves good Romans, increasingly developed their faith in such a way as to rid themselves of almost all vestiges of characteristically Jewish aspects of the faith. As a result, Christianity was increasingly seen as something other than Judaism. But even within Judaism, the Rabbis increasingly renounced any other interpretation of the Scriptures as 'unorthodox.' This group of Rabbis took upon themselves the mantle of authority for the Jewish nation, both in Judea and the Diaspora.

In time, the term 'Rabbi' took on a more technical meaning—identifying one who had been ordained through the approved or orthodox *yeshivas*. This differed from the previously unofficial or loose understanding of a teacher who had attracted a following of disciples through force of personality and Torah scholarship. As the Rabbis gained control of the ordination process, they gained control of the faith in general. What was approved or authorized by these rabbis was by definition Judaism. Anything else, such as the Apostolic understanding of Torah, was at the very least unorthodox and at worst heretical and therefore altogether outside of Judaism.

This, of course, put the followers of Nazarene or Apostolic Judaism in a very vulnerable position. Increasingly it appeared to rabbinic Jews that those within the Apostolic expression of the faith were followers of a non-Jewish faith. In other words, that which had begun as a thoroughly Jewish expression of faith began to be defined as non-Jewish by their fellow Jewish opponents. Paradoxically, as we will see in our next article, they were conversely labeled as Jews and, therefore, non-Christians by the Gentile Christians who were concurrently undergoing a very similar process of defining orthodoxy.¹⁹ The Yavneh Sanhedrin, especially under the leadership of Gamaliel II, was, therefore, extremely instrumental in developing peoples' understanding of what authorized, or Orthodox, Judaism would look like for the generations to come.

Defining Rabbinic Judaism

In this way Judaism began to define itself not only by what it was, but also by what it was not. It can be argued that this need to maintain strong boundary markers led to increas-



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ingly stringent views of monotheism. In light of the growing influence of emerging Christianity, and even more to the point, Apostolic Judaism, discussions of a divine Messiah was to be branded as idolatry, pagan and Christian. Never mind the fact that this kind of Messianic figure was perfectly consistent with Second-Temple Jewish thought. For example, from the book of Enoch, which is dated approximately 150 BCE, we read:

And at that hour
the Son of Man was named,
In the presence of the Lord of Spirits,
And before the stars of heaven were made,
His name was named
before the Lord of Spirits.
He [the Messiah] shall be
a staff for the righteous,
Whereon to lean, to stand and not to fall,
And he shall be a light unto the nations,
And hope for the troubled of heart.
And all the earth-dwellers
before him shall fall down,
And worship and praise and bless
And sing to the Lord of Spirits.
It is for this that he has been chosen
And hidden before Him, even before
The creation of the world
and for evermore.²⁰

And from *Genesis Rabah* we read:

R. Shim'on ben Laqish explained: "And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the water (Genesis 1:2)—this is the spirit of King Messiah, as it is written, 'And the spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him,' (Isaiah 11:2). By what merit will it [the spirit of Messiah] come?....By the merit of repentance."²¹

Texts such as these clearly indicate some level of acceptance in first-century Jewish literature of a pre-existent and semi-divine Messianic figure. After the destruction of the Temple, however, we see in the literature of that day a shift away from emphasis on the coming Messiah to an emphasis on the Torah. In other words, there was a shift in emphasis away from a more eschatological world view to a more pragmatic approach. While the followers of Yeshua anxiously waited for the 'end of the age' and the return of their Savior (expressed in the Aramaic term, *Maranatha*), the Rabbis turned more and more to the Torah, and to obedience to the "traditions of the Elders," for their national and social salvation. In 2 Baruch

the writer admonishes the Jewish people to remain faithful to the Torah:

...many of Your people...have withdrawn from Your covenant, and [have] cast from them the yoke of Your law...But withdraw you not from the way of the law, but guard and admonish the people which remain, lest they withdraw from the commandments of the Mighty One....For if you endure and persevere in His fear, and do not forget His law, the times shall change over you for good... But only prepare you your hearts, that you may obey the law, and be subject to those who in fear are wise and understanding; and prepare your souls that you may not depart from them.

For if you do these things, good tidings shall come unto you. In you do we trust, for lo! Your law is with us, and we know that we shall not fall so long as we keep Your statutes....And the law which is amongst us will aid us.... (2 Baruch 41:3, 6)

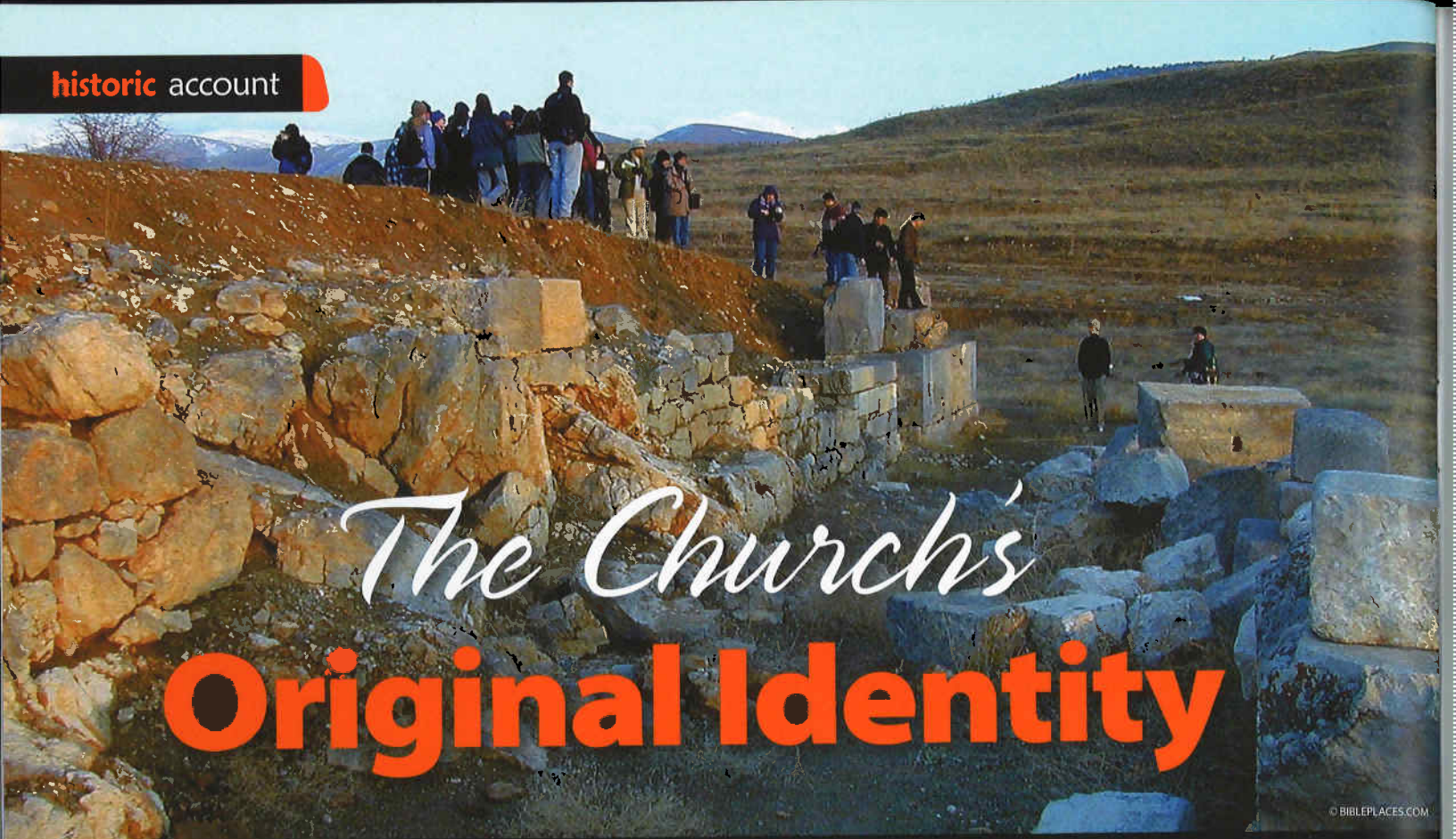
In retrospect, the struggle between Rabbinic and Apostolic Judaism was perhaps inevitable. With the destruction of the Temple, the loss of national borders, and formal statehood being forbidden to them, Israel increasingly understood and defined itself in theological and ethnic terms. Compromise with their opponents was no insignificant matter. In such circumstances it might mean the complete disappearance of the Jews as a distinct people. Each group claimed that its own understanding of the Torah and of Yeshua was the only legitimate one. The Rabbis claimed to have a uniquely authoritative interpretation of the Torah that they received through a secure line of traditions from Moses to their own day. The Apostolic followers claimed to have had an equally unique claim of authority since Yeshua claimed to have come directly from the Father. He was, in effect, the Living Torah—the Torah lived out through example in the person of the Messiah.

Hinging on this dispute was the future of the Jewish nation. In the absence of the Temple, the Judaism of the Rabbis would cling to the Torah itself as the center of the faith. Prayers, good works and the study of the Torah would come to suffice as the sacrifices of Israel. But it should be acknowledged that although the Apostolic faith eventually fell outside the mainstream of Judaism, it was not because it was any less 'Jewish.' Rather, it was forced out by prevailing rab-

binic consensus. In the struggle for Jewish national survival, the Rabbis at Yavneh under the leadership of Gamaliel II began to codify an ever expansive Oral Torah (*Mishnah*) that would keep all dissenters—Jew and Gentile alike—at a safe distance from their developing orthodoxy.

Endnotes

- 1 Claudia Setzer, *Early Responses to Early Christianity. History and Polemics, 30—150 C. E.* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1994) p. 57.
- 2 The NIV Study Bible (Zondervan Publishing House. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995) Acts 4:13.
- 3 Lee I. A. Levine, "Judaism From the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Second Jewish Revolt," Hershel Shanks, Ed. *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development.* (Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington D.C., 1992), p. 138.
- 4 James C. Walters, "Romans, Jews and Christians: The Impact of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations in First-Century Rome." Karl P. Donfried & Peter Richardson, Ed. *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), pp. 179–180.
- 5 W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 164.
- 6 Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (Penguin Books, New York, NY, 1989) p. 59.
- 7 Lee I. A. Levine, "Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, Judaism From the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Second Jewish Revolt," p. 136.
- 8 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew, Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism.* (KTAV Publishing House, Hoboken, New Jersey, 1985), p. 55.
- 9 Ibid. p. 61.
- 10 Philip S. Alexander, "The Parting of the Ways from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism." James D. G. Dunn, Ed. *Jews and Christians, the Parting of the Ways A.D. 70-135.* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), p. 6.
- 11 Ibid. p.11.
- 12 John 9:22
- 13 That is, children of questionable lineage.
- 14 Philip S. Alexander, "The Parting of the Ways," p.15.
- 15 Ibid, p.16.
- 16 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew*, p. 67.
- 17 Lee I.A. Levine, "Judaism from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Second Jewish Revolt," p. 137.
- 18 Hebrews 10:32–35; Acts 8, 9.
- 19 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who was a Jew*, p. 59.
- 20 Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts.* "1 Enoch 48:4–6," (Avon Books, New York, N.Y., 1979), p. 61–62.
- 21 Ibid, "Genesis Rabah. 2:4," p. 61.



The Church's Original Identity

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The Development of Christianity under the Early Church Fathers By Chris O'Quinn

In our last article, we examined the development of Rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. We saw that after the loss of the Temple, the Jewish people struggled to find ways of preserving national, social and religious identity within the framework of historic Judaism. We also found that, not surprisingly, the young Apostolic Faith was also undergoing a similar self-examination during this same time. Just as the Rabbis at Yavneh were defining orthodoxy for their Rabbinic Faith, so too the followers of Yeshua were defining orthodoxy for the early Body of Believers.

In previous articles, we have examined Apostolic Faith's earliest writings—what have eventually become known worldwide as the "New Testament." We saw that the earliest Apostolic movement was a recognized sect of historic Judaism. Eventually, however, as the movement expanded to include Gentile believers, the believing Faith took on different dimensions. The initially Jewish movement evolved into an almost entirely Gentile religion, bearing little resemblance to the Judaism it left behind. Practices such as circumcision, Sabbath, the Biblical Festivals and even the Temple prayers and sacrifices (although still observed by the Apostles)

were either abandoned or prohibited by the newly developing Christian Church within one hundred years of Yeshua.

In this article and the next, we will examine two of the earliest writings from the Early Church Fathers. Tracing the progression of thought will give us clues to help us to understand how, by the middle of the second century, the separation of the Church from the Synagogue could be so thoroughly complete.

Remember, the history of the Church changed as a result of its own sense of identity. To be sure, this issue of identity is the fulcrum on which the whole of early Church history—and one might argue Western Civilization—would ultimately tip. As we have seen, the Jewish origins of the early Body of Believers originally gave it a very Jewish context. This Jewish context, in turn, provided some sense of Jewish identity within the emerging believing Faith. Both Faiths (that of Judaism and that of those who followed Yeshua) studied the same sacred Scriptures, worshiped one God and initially even met in the same synagogues.

All of these shared practices often made it difficult for the wider culture—as well as the Roman authorities—to distinguish early

Christians (believers in Yeshua) from their Jewish counterparts—a situation which neither side wished to prolong. Consequently, just as the Rabbinic leadership within the Jewish communities intentionally labored to differentiate themselves from developing Christianity, so too, the Early Church Fathers sought to distinguish Christianity from Judaism. With this in mind, let us study two of the oldest post-Apostolic writings to understand when, how and why the Early Church Fathers decided to sever the emerging Faith of the believers from their traditional Jewish identity and redefine a Faith quite different than what the Apostles might have recognized in their own day.

Paul's Place in Early Church Development

...At a critical juncture and as a direct result of the Jewish rejection of the Christian message, the early church jettisoned the observance of Jewish law....

Paul...concluded that the future lay no longer with his own people. In this way a split developed within the church. It could continue as it was, under the leadership of Jesus' brother James; within the bounds of

Clement's letter reveals a clear identification with Israel and a very Jewish understanding of God's relationship with Israel throughout history.

*Torah law, requiring all converts also to be observant Jews. Or it could take Paul's more radical view of Jesus' teachings. Had the Jews embraced Jesus... the church... would have continued to be obligated in the biblical commandments of circumcision, Sabbath, Kashrut, family purity, and so on. Thus, in every key respect, the Jesus movement might have remained a Jewish sect.*¹

Klinghoffer's assumption that it was the Apostle Paul who 'freed' the early Believing Church from the obligations of Torah observance has been the standard view of most Biblical educators—both Christian and Jewish—for many centuries. However, as we have seen from earlier articles, when we look at Paul's writings with a more critical eye and properly understand his message, we see that Paul sought to bring the Gentiles into conformity with the written Torah. Therefore, the move to sever the Gentile Church from its traditional Jewish roots came not from Paul, but from influential Gentile Church leadership years after the time of the famous Apostle.

I Clement — The Letter of Paul's Disciple

One of the best historical affirmations we have outside of the Apostolic Writings for the Torah observance of Paul and his earliest congregations comes from a letter written to the church in Corinth by a bishop of the early Church in Rome. The letter, known as *I Clement*, written sometime around 95 to 97 CE, was purportedly written by the same Clement mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:3 and who was likely a disciple of his.² A Roman Gentile who ministered to Paul and the other believers of Philippi, Clement, no doubt learned from Paul. Not only would Clement have learned the Bible as Paul's disciple, but he would have learned Paul's interpretation and understanding of the Bible. In other words, Clement would have not only learned the Scriptures from his teacher, but the *halachah* of the Apostle as well. Therefore, by studying *I Clement*, we can learn how Paul taught the churches to understand and live out the Bible.

The first and perhaps most obvious characteristic we can recognize from Clement's understanding of the Faith was that it was rooted in the Septuagint. In fact, the whole letter is bathed in references and proof texts from the Hebrew Scriptures. From his writing it is clear that without the Hebrew Scriptures, there was no Christian Faith. Although there appear to be some quotes from the books of Matthew and Titus,³ Clement's understanding of the believer's Faith is anchored in the Septuagint.

Further, Clement's letter reveals a clear identification with Israel and a very Jewish understanding of God's relationship with Israel throughout history. Reminiscent of Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts seven, Clement traces the history of God's people and the struggles of the righteous. He begins with Abraham and continues up to and including their own struggles against Imperial powers in Rome and internal factions at home.

*There is no difference between those who came "before the cross" from those who came afterwards. Moses, David, Job and the prophets—all were justified "by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men."*⁴

Let us look at another passage from Clement's letter:

Let us draw near to Him with holiness of spirit...our gracious and merciful Father, who has made us partakers in the blessings of His Elect. For thus it is written, "When the Most High divided the nations... His people Jacob became the portion of the Lord, and Israel the lot of His inheritance" ...Seeing, therefore, that we are the portion of the Holy One, let us do all things which pertain to holiness...⁵

This remarkable passage from *I Clement* reveals his clear sense of identity with Israel. After describing how God chose an 'elect' people—one nation out of all the rest whom He called to be His own—Clement goes on to say that his readers (believers in Yeshua as Messiah) are included in the portion of the Holy One. In other words, the Elect have always been within that nation that God separated for Himself—that is, Israel!

Israel's Father, Abraham

Clement goes on to refer to Abraham as 'our' father. We may not immediately realize the significance of what Clement is teaching with this one phrase, but the believers of the first century certainly would have. For in Clement's day, the issue of who was a Jew and who could call Abraham 'our' father was a point of heated debate. Many rabbis argued that only one who had direct physical lineage from Abraham could call Abraham his father. For example, we read in the *Mishnah*:



ABOVE: The remains of this Byzantine church in Turkey is the traditional location of the synagogue in which Paul preached (Acts 13:14-52). There was a sizable Jewish/proselyte population in Antioch. In the church a mosaic floor has been found with Psalm 42:4 inscribed on it. Up until the construction of this church in the 4th century C.E., there had been a break in Christianity at Antioch. **TOP LEFT:** The foundations of the Antioch synagogue. Recent excavations have revealed a 1st Century building underneath the church which has been identified as a synagogue. This supports the site's authenticity as being the place where Paul preached in Acts 13. Compare to the marked section in above image.

Clement uses the Torah to point out that it is God Himself Who has established eternal ordinances, incumbent upon the Elect to obey.

These [people] bring [first fruits] but do not recite: a proselyte brings but does not recite because he is not able to say, (Deut. 26:3) "Which the Eternal swore to our ancestors to give unto us"... And when he [the proselyte] prays in private, he says, "God of the fathers." And when he prays in the synagogue, he says, "God of your fathers." [But] if his mother was an Israelite, he says, "God of our fathers." (Mishnah Bikkurim 1:4)

So where did Clement get this idea that Gentile believers were children of Abraham? One has only to go to the writings of his teacher, the Apostle Paul, to find the source. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans in chapter four:

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. (Romans 4:16–17, emphasis mine.)

The Way of the Proselyte into Israel

While some rabbis believed that a first century proselyte (one who had gone through the rabbinic rite of conversion) could refer to Abraham as his father, Clement (and Paul) disagreed with the rabbis as to what constituted a genuine conversion. They argued that faith in Yeshua was the only conversion that God would recognize.

We see another example of Gentile inclusion into Israel when Paul reminds the church at Corinth that those who left Egypt were also their forefathers, for he writes,

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. (1 Corinthians 10:1, NIV, emphasis mine.)

To underscore this concept, Paul uses a metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11. He describes Israel as the olive tree and the Gentiles as branches who have been grafted into the root of Israel:

...you (Gentiles), though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. (Romans 11:17–18, NIV, emphasis mine.)

Notice that Paul tells the Gentile believers that they dwell "among the others" and "share" in the nourishing sap from the olive root—that is, Israel. In time, the Church would promote a theology of replacement, teaching that the Church was grafted 'onto' the root rather than 'into' it. The picture would change from one of a healthy and nourishing tree to one of a stump, out of which would come new branches—the Church.⁶ For now, however, it was clear that Clement recognized no such bifurcation. Both Paul and Clement say with full assurance that those who are in Messiah—the Elect—are in Israel and are therefore children of Abraham, that is, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

Further Identification with Israel: The Prayers

Another clue from Clement's letter to the Corinthians that the first century Church continued to identify with Israel was in her sacred liturgy. In his letter, Clement admonishes the church at Corinth to "conscientiously gather together in harmony, cry[ing] to Him (God) earnestly, as with one mouth...."⁷

The context clearly indicates congregational worship. He then recites a short portion of a prayer out of the traditional *Shacharit* liturgy known as the *Kedusha*, which is recited every morning in the Synagogues. "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the earth is full of His glory."⁸ The *Kedusha*, originally taken from Isaiah 6:3, has been part of the traditional Jewish liturgy for millennia. And although the Latin Church would even-

tually adopt it as their own *Sanctus*, there is no question that Clement is reciting Jewish liturgy with which he seems to have been perfectly familiar and comfortable.

Leadership Based on Torah

The final section of Clement's letter that we will analyze together in this article is his argumentation for their present model of church leadership. The context and impetus for Clement's letter to the Corinthian church appears to have been in response to a power struggle that was going on in the Corinthian congregation at the time. The existing elders appear to have been removed by some kind of internal schism, and Clement wished to preserve the original model for leadership that had been established by Apostolic precedent. He writes that when the Apostles had appointed elders in the various churches, they

...gave instructions, that when these [men] should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry...with the consent of the whole church.⁹

What is so revealing for our investigation is not just that Clement wished to maintain the model of Apostolic succession—which explains how various Christian churches claimed to speak with the same authority as the first Apostles—but also the argument he employs to justify it.

In Clement's argument to the Corinthian church, he uses the Torah to point out that it is God Himself Who has established eternal ordinances that are incumbent upon the Elect to obey. He writes, "...it behooves us to do all things in [their proper] order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times."¹⁰ What things are the Elect required to perform? He goes on:

He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will¹¹...Not in every place, brethren, are the daily sacrifices offered, or the peace-offerings, or the sin-offerings and the trespass-offerings, but in Jerusalem only. And even there they are not offered in any place, but only at the altar before the Temple, that which is offered being first carefully examined by the High Priest. Those, therefore, who do anything beyond that which is agreeable to His will, are punished with death.¹²

Clement's argument, therefore, is that just as God has established His Commandments in the Torah and that these Commandments are required for His Elect, so too, He has established the principle of Apostolic succession for His congregations. This argument, however, only works because Clement believes the Torah to still be binding on all believers! If Clement were to argue, as later Church Fathers would, that the Torah has been abrogated, then his whole argument falls apart and becomes nonsensical!

The Fork in the Road


At this point in our investigation of the separation of the Church and the Synagogue, we reach a turning point. As we saw in our previous article dealing with the growth of Rabbinic Judaism, those who professed faith in Yeshua were clearly marked as 'Christians' and were, therefore, shunned from the rest of Jewish life. Interestingly, the Gospel of John, which was written during the same decade as *I Clement*, echoes this fear of excommunication from the Synagogue in three separate passages.¹³

At this point, we cannot say for sure that those professing faith in Yeshua were still a

part of the Synagogue as they had been. Nevertheless, as we can see from Clement, the believers of Rome and Corinth still retained a significant sense of identity with Israel and the Jewish Faith. It must also be remembered that there was no New Testament canon at this point, so those who were instructed in the Faith were done so from the Jewish Bible (the Septuagint).

Further, we saw that Clement continued to see the Elect (whether before the death of Yeshua or after) as being within Israel—the "lot of His inheritance" He continued to admonish the believers to recognize Abraham as their father and to use at least some of the Jewish liturgy.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Clement clearly seems to recognize the Torah as binding upon all believers. Not just in the sense of upholding the obviously 'moral' commandments, but the Temple sacrificial system and the Appointed Times (the *Moadim*) as well. Even though his letter to the Corinthian church was most likely written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, he no doubt viewed this as only a temporary setback—nothing that would have altered the eternal authority of the Torah. As we will see

from another document that we will investigate in our next article, however, this sense of identity with Israel was not a universal trait among all believing congregations. 

Endnotes

- 1 David Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History*. (New York: Doubleday © 2005), p. 7.
- 2 Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. "Introductory Note to the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library at Calvin College), p. 1.
- 3 Ibid "Clement of Rome," Chapters 2 and 13 are examples of the letter to Titus and the Sermon on the Mount being quoted.
- 4 Schaff, *I Clement* 32, p. 13.
- 5 Ibid, Chapters 29 & 30, pp. 12–13.
- 6 K. Knight. *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume III: "Christianity"*. (Copyright by Robert Appleton Company © 1907, Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight.)
- 7 Schaff, *I Clement* 34, p. 14.
- 8 Rabbi Avorhom Davis, *The Metsudah Siddur*, (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., © 1982), p. 113.
- 9 Schaff, *I Clement* 44, p. 17.
- 10 Ibid. 40, p. 16.
- 11 Ibid. 40, p. 16.
- 12 Ibid. 41 & 42, p. 16.
- 13 John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2 (The basis for this is in Torah, see Deuteronomy 12:13–14)


"Covenant" or "Last Will and Testament?" • Continued from Page 13

covenant of marriage (note Jeremiah 31:32, "although I was a husband to them").

The Aaronic high priest, while fit to administer the sacred duties of the earthly Tabernacle could never pay the covenant penalty for the wayward nation. The priesthood of Israel, though ordained for their sacred tasks, and clothed in their garments of beauty, could never establish the New Covenant. This is the main point of the author of Hebrews: the New Covenant required the greater High Priest, One after the order of Melchizedek, Whose infinite and spotless life could alone be given as the acceptable sacrifice in payment for the broken covenant. Only He could save those who otherwise would suffer the just penalty of their covenant unfaithfulness.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the clear meaning of covenant and covenant ratification ceremonies in the Tanakh, the writer of Hebrews teaches us that Yeshua's death was necessary as payment for the covenant penalty charged against those who had broken the covenant. Having paid with His own death the penalty required by

the covenant, He is able to mediate the New Covenant, itself the fulfillment of the Torah covenant. As a result, He is able to bring upon God's chosen people the blessings of the covenant rather than the curses, for He has obtained "eternal redemption" on their behalf. 

Endnotes

- 1 While the authorship of Hebrews is not stated in the epistle itself, it seems certain that the author was a man and not a woman. In 11:32, the author writes: "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets..." where "if I tell" is a masculine participle, making it clear that the author was male.
- 2 The NIV, RSV, NRSV, CJB, ESV, NetBible, NLT, CEV, GWT, HCSB, The Message, NAB, and TEV all translated *diatheke* in v. 17 with the English word "will." The ASV, KJV, and NKJV, translated *diatheke* in this verse with the English word "testament." Only the NASB retains the translation of *diatheke* by the English word "covenant" throughout the book of Hebrews.
- 3 Part of the New Covenant per Jeremiah 31:34
- 4 Exodus 30:1–10 and 40:1–5
- 5 The Hebrew is correctly rendered in the NIV: וככל המזבח אשר לדביר צפה זהה.
- 6 See William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols. in *The Word*

Biblical Commentary (Word, 1991), 2.215; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 311–12.

- 7 Besides the quote from the *Mishnah*, one should also note the wording of 2 Baruch 6:7 (Syriac) which includes the presence of a "golden censor" in the Most Holy Place. 2 Baruch (or *The Apocalypse of Baruch*) is dated to the late 1st Century or early 2nd Century CE. Likewise, the *Life of Adam and Eve*, a Jewish pseudepigraphic work of the 1st Century CE, speaks of "golden censers" used for burning incense (33.4).
- 8 This is Paul's point as well when he writes: "Why the Torah then? It was added because of transgressions ..." It was the Torah that revealed God's remedy for sin, by showing through the sacrificial service of the Tabernacle that sin could only be taken away by the death of an innocent sacrifice mediated by the appointed priest.
- 9 φέρεσθαι from φέρω (*phero*) "to carry, bear, bring forward" also has the meaning "to demonstrate the reality of something," cf. *BDAG*, "φέρω."
- 10 Note that ὁ διαθέμενος is singular in contrast to the former plural τοῦς νεκροῖς. It makes no sense to presume that our author would use the plural of the one making the covenant, and then contrast it with the singular. This strengthens the interpretation that the plural "dead ones" refers to the sacrificial animals.
- 11 It is most likely that the blood was sprinkled upon designated tribal leaders who represented all of the people in the covenant ceremony.



Redefining the Traditions

The Development of Christianity under the Early Church Fathers, Part 2

By Chris O'Quinn

To understand how the divergence between the Synagogue and the early Church took place, we examine a very early Church document known as the *Didache*.

In our previous article we continued our investigation of the division of the Church and the Synagogue by examining one of the earliest existing post-apostolic Church documents. Known as *I Clement*, it was written by a purported disciple of the Apostle Paul. Because of its early dating (90's C.E.) we would expect to find a Christian faith that was still very similar to the Jewish faith out of which it had emerged. This is exactly what we have found. Clement clearly continued to reflect the Jewish roots of the faith in several key areas. First, he lived before the canonization of the Apostolic Writings; his only existing Bible was the Tanakh; therefore, Clement's theology and doctrinal positions were rooted therein. Second, Clement clearly identified with Israel. Through his use of the Old Testament, Clem-

ent argued that the Elect of his day were part of the same family of the Elect who lived "before the cross." Whether the believer was Abraham, David, Paul or someone from his own congregation, all were part of the same family of the Elect—and that family was called "Israel." This notion was bolstered by Clement's assertion that the Gentile believer could call Abraham his father just as confidently as his Jewish brother. Finally, we saw that Clement's apparent use of Jewish liturgy and his defense of existing Church polity assumed that the authority of the Sacred Writings (and the Torah/*Pentateuch* in particular) continued to be binding upon all believers.

What is evident regarding emerging Christian identity is that many—perhaps most—within the early Church continued

to see themselves within the greater milieu of historic Judaism. Yet during this same historical period there were those who wished to sever the developing Christian Church from its traditional Jewish roots. Although the early Church inherited many practices of traditional Judaism, there were those who believed that new meanings must be poured into these rituals so as to "reinvent" them for an ever-growing gentile audience and sever that gentile audience from the Jewish roots of their faith.

To understand how this divergence developed we will examine a very early Church document known as the *Didache*. Also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, it is thought to contain some of the earliest traditions and teachings from early Christianity. Accord-

ing to many scholars, in its present form the *Didache* is most likely a second-century document, since parts of it are thought to be lifted from later works such as the *Letter of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. However, most of the document (chapters 6–15) appears to be even earlier—perhaps as early as 90 CE.¹ Since our intention is to study the oldest Christian documents available (the first century at this point), we will confine our discussion to chapters 6–15 to see what these chapters tell us regarding the progression of Christian identity and her increasing alienation from traditional Jewish communities.

Prayers and Fasting in the Early Church

When reading the *Didache* one is immediately struck by how much traditional Judaism the early communities seemed to have retained. For example, we read in chapter eight that the early congregations were instructed to fast twice a week—a practice that Jewish communities had followed for generations. Although this tradition was clearly learned from the Jewish community, the early Gentile churches seemed to put their own stamp of identity upon the tradition by changing the days on which it was observed. In the same way that Christians would change the weekly day of communal worship from Sabbath to Sunday, so too, the expressed purpose of altering the “correct” fast days was done explicitly for the purpose of differentiating themselves from the “Rabbinic” Synagogues.

*Your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Mondays and Thursdays; but you should fast on Wednesdays and on the Preparation day.*²

The reference to the hypocrites is, of course, aimed at religious Jewry reminiscent of Matthew 6:16 where Jesus lambasted the “pious” for making a show of their fasting. So we see that although the tradition was learned from the Synagogue, it was to be observed in a way that would show separation from the Rabbinic community.

Daily Prayers in the Early Church

Another early Christian practice that we observe in the *Didache* is that of the daily prayers. Philip Schaff points out:

The practice of the Eucharist originated from the Jewish forms of grace before and after meals (the *Kiddush* and *Birkat Hamazon* respectively) but was later reinterpreted to serve a different purpose.



... [t]he apostolic church followed in general the Jewish usage.... Accordingly, the Jewish hours of daily prayer, particularly in the morning and evening, were observed as a matter of habit, besides the strictly private devotions which are bound to no time.³

In Jewish *halacha* these prayers are known as the *Shacharit*, *Mincha* and the *Maariv* prayers. In like manner the writer of the

Didache instructed the Christian congregation to pray three times each day in the following manner:

*Neither pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, thus pray you: “Our Father, who are in heaven, Your name be hallowed; Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in Heaven, so also on Earth; give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors; and don't lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for Yours is the power and the glory for ever and ever.” Three times in the day pray like this.*⁴

As in the case of fasting, this early Christian writer clearly intended his congregation to be distinct from devout Jewish worshipers by making sure that their prayers included the words of Jesus. As we learned in previous articles, the Jewish community was, at this very same time, adapting a benediction (the *Birkat HaMinim*) in their daily prayers hoping to discourage Christians from participating in their Synagogue services.^{5,6} What we find in the pages of the *Didache* is evidence of the same desire by early Christian communities to distinguish themselves from their theological antagonists—those in the synagogues.

From Kiddush to Eucharist

One of the earliest rituals developed by the emerging Christian Church came to be known as the Eucharist or “the Thanksgiving.” By the late first century the term was becoming a technical one for the special giving of thanks during the *Agape* feast.

*In the apostolic period the Eucharist was celebrated daily in connection with a simple meal of brotherly love (agape), in which Christians, in communion with their common Redeemer, forgot all distinctions of rank, wealth, and culture, and felt themselves to be members of one family of God.*⁷

This practice originated from the Jewish forms of grace before and after meals (the *Kiddush* and *Birkat Hamazon* respectively) and continues to be a normal part of the

meal for religious Jews up to our own day.

As Richardson notes in his introduction to the *Didache*,

...[t]he Eucharistic prayers, so clearly modeled on the Jewish forms for grace before and after meals, betray a period when the Lord's Supper was still a real supper, and when the joyful and expectant note of the Messianic Banquet had not yet been obscured by the more solemn emphasis on the Lord's Passion.⁸

In other words, in the time of the Apostles, when Christ's return and physical kingdom still seemed imminent, the Eucharist was akin to "the feast of Abraham" spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 8:11, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Later, however, when it seemed clear that Messiah's physical return may yet be a long way off, the emphasis changed from one of happy feasting to one of austere solemnity. This may be one reason for the curious absence of any direct reference to the body and blood of Christ in the *Didache's* Eucharistic prayer.

Here is one more example of an early Christian practice that was borrowed directly from the Jewish communities and preserved for us in the *Didache*. What is instructive for us, however, is that the early Church once again reinterpreted this very Jewish practice to serve a different purpose. What began as a simple communal supper would, in time, become a sacrament supposedly able to impart eternal life unto those who partook of this 'spiritual food.' The perfect sacrifice of the Eucharist presented by the Church's own priesthood would replace all other "Jewish forms of sacrifices." As Philip Schaff points out:

...[t]he Eucharist represents, seals, and applies the now accomplished redemption from sin and death until the end of time. Here the deepest mystery of Christianity is embodied ever anew, and the story of the cross reproduced before us....Here Christ... gives his own body and blood, sacrificed for us... [symbolizing] his atoning death.⁹

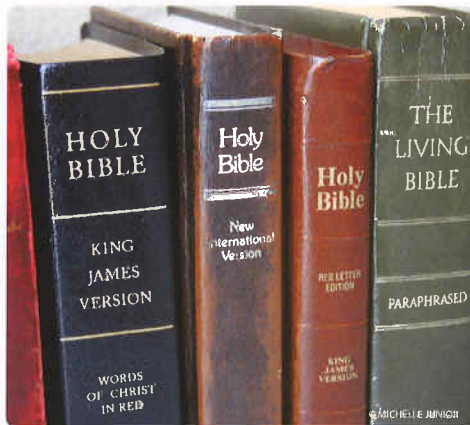
From Mikvah to Baptism

Perhaps the most fundamental shift in identity we can see from the *Didache* is the one that surrounds the ceremony of the *mikvah* (ritual water immersion). The *mikvah* had

This early Christian writer clearly intended his congregation to be distinct from devout Jewish worshipers by making sure that their prayers included the words of Jesus.



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long been a proscribed ritual connected with worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the commandment to wash before approaching the Tabernacle of the Lord dates to Sinai. Over the centuries, however, it also came to be regarded as an essential element in the ritual associated with conversion to Judaism. As we have already learned, it was believed that all Israel had a part in the World to Come (*Sanhedrin* 10:1). If one was born outside of

the people of Israel, tradition held that one could become a Jew through a process of conversion that required acceptance of the Torah (Oral as well as Written), circumcision (for males), *mikvah* and (while the Temple still stood) a sacrifice.

As Schiffman points out, "...The convert would purify himself in preparation for his new Jewish status."¹⁰ As part of Jewish conversion, the proselyte was required to:

...identify fully with the past, present, and future of the Jewish people and live in accord with halakhah, the Jewish way of life. The tannaim expected the convert to become part of the nation of Israel and to suffer its collective destiny. It was not, in their view, possible to convert and at the same time to avoid the lot of the Jewish people. Only a convert who understood and was willing to accept the mission of the people of Israel could be accepted for proselytism.¹¹

By the first century the *mikvah* (*baptizo* in Greek, from which we get the word "baptize") became identified with the idea of being born again or being born from above. It symbolized a new beginning and a change in status for the convert to Judaism. According to Matthew 28:19, the followers of Jesus were commanded before His ascension to continue with this ritual. Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Peter preached the gospel to the household of Cornelius, he admonished them to be baptized in water as a sign of their new status. And in Acts 8 the disciple Philip immediately baptized the eunuch upon his profession of belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

What seems clear from this is that this water-based ritual of conversion (both in Judaism and Christianity) was meant to be an outward sign of an inward spiritual transformation. In the case of Judaism, it was a sign that the Gentile had crossed over from being outside the people of God to being an accepted part of Abraham's family. In the case of Christianity this was initially true as well, but with one all-important difference.

The convert to Judaism was baptized into the people of Israel and took his new identity with the Jewish nation; whereas the convert to Christianity was baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to symbolize his faith in Jesus Christ. Peter's message to Cornelius was that Jesus had:

...commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead....that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:42-43, NIV)

In other words, since Christianity taught that Jesus was to be the Judge of the whole world, baptism into His name symbolized one's identity with Him.

Initially this could be viewed as a shorthand way of identification with Israel. Since Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, if one was "in Messiah," one was also "in Israel" and in the family of Abraham. We learned in our last article that this was certainly the understanding Paul and Clement defended. What is apparent by the time of the *Didache*, however, is that the believer's identity with the Church began to eclipse the believer's identity with Israel. Jesus became the Savior of the whole world, without any reference to Israel. Perhaps this is the most curious aspect of all in the *Didache*—that throughout the whole document there is not one reference to Israel or the Temple. It is almost as if corporate Israel didn't exist in the writer's mind. As a further example of this tendency to supplant Israel, the writer of the *Didache* instructed the congregation to give all of their first fruits to their own congregational leaders since "...they are your chief-priests."¹² Whereas Clement continued to uphold the eternal nature of the Aaronic Priesthood and the Temple system, the writer of the *Didache* seemed to co-opt the rights and privileges of that priesthood.

If the Temple had been destroyed for some twenty years or more by this point, however, why wouldn't the Church take upon itself the duties of the priesthood? As we have pointed out, that is exactly what the Church was in the process of doing. As Paul Johnson points out in his book, *The History of the Jews*, "There was nothing in the early church, other than its Christology, which was not adumbrated in Judaism."¹³ He goes on:

They [the church] took the liturgy...the notion of the Sabbath day and feast-days, incense and burning lamps, psalms, hymns

and choral music, vestments and prayers, priests and martyrs, the reading of the sacred books and the institution of the synagogue (transformed into the church). They even took the notion of clerical authority—which the Jews would soon modify—in the shape of the high-priest whom the Christians turned into patriarchs and popes.¹⁴

What we must recognize is that Moses had very specific instructions given to him regarding the establishment of tithes, offerings and the Aaronic Priesthood; the Christians had no such divine instructions. On what biblical basis, then, did the Church establish its own priesthood and the right to demand tithes and offerings? The answer, of course, is none. Therefore, when the writer of the *Didache* pronounced that the Christian prophets and teachers were "now their high priests," and that all tithes and offerings should go to them, it should be recognized for what it was: a *man-made* prescription—not one with biblical justification.

We should also remember that this was not the first time the Temple had been destroyed. After all, was this not the *Second* Temple? We look back on the Temple's destruction from more than 2,000 years in the future and assume that this was inevitable or that the Temple's destruction was final. During the late first and early second centuries, however, it was not at all a forgone conclusion that the Temple would remain in ruins. During the early second century (before the Second Revolt) the Jewish people had been encouraged to believe that under Emperor Hadrian the Temple would, in fact, be rebuilt. If this was the case, Levites would once again return to their priestly duties as they had upon their return from Babylon. Although the rabbis took upon themselves the mantle of responsibility for the religious teaching and social cohesion of the Jewish people, there was no attempt to co-opt the priesthood as was the case within the emerging Christian Church.

What is evident, therefore, from the *Didache* and *I Clement* is the Church's clear pattern of migration away from the Synagogue. It appears that by the 90's C.E. Christian believers (Jewish and Gentile alike) were being excluded more and more from the Rabbinic synagogues¹⁵ and were therefore establishing their own congregations where they could gather together to worship the risen Messiah. Since Christianity had grown out of Judaism, it was only natural that Chris-

tians would continue to follow the traditions that they had known in the synagogues. This explains the abundance of so much characteristically "Jewish" tradition within the early Church. However, though the forms were very similar, e.g., twice weekly fasting, the giving of thanks before and after meals, the practice of the *mikvah*, etc., the meaning that early Christians began to pour into these adopted rituals transformed them into something quite different. The Church had retained the traditions she had always known, yet she reinterpreted their meaning in such a way as to redefine Christianity as its own separate faith.

We are still very much in a transitional point in our investigation of the separation of the Church from the Synagogue. Because the outward forms of worship in Judaism and emerging Christianity remained so similar, it was difficult for outsiders to understand the differences. This would change by the early second century, when the next generation of Church Fathers developed doctrines that made it clear that Christianity was quite distinct from Judaism. As we will uncover in our next article, the bishops and Church apologists of the second century would develop carefully crafted doctrines and philosophies to build a wall of separation between the Church and the Synagogue that has persisted to this day.

Endnotes

- 1 Cyril C. Richardson, Ed., *Early Christian Father*, "A Church Manual. The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the *Didache*" (Philadelphia, Westminster © MCMLIII) p. 161.
- 2 *Didache* 8:1.
- 3 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume I*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing © 2002), pp. 476, 477.
- 4 *Didache* 8:2,3.
- 5 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism*. (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc. © 1985) p. 54.
- 6 Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*. (Harper Perennial, Inc. © 1987) p. 146.
- 7 Schaff, p. 473.
- 8 Richardson, *Didache*, pp. 165, 166.
- 9 Schaff, p.p. 472, 473.
- 10 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism*. (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, inc. ©1985) p. 26.
- 11 *Ibid.* p. 21.
- 12 Richardson, *Didache* chapter 13, p. 177.
- 13 Johnson, *History of the Jews*, p. 145.
- 14 *Ibid.* p. 145.
- 15 Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, p. 146.