Why and How non-Jewish Believers Left Their Hebraic Roots (Part 1)

A Brief Survey of Early Church History

By Tony Robinson

Introduction

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.

The Church Fathers Spoke!

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."

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.

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.\(^\text{n5}\)

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."\(^\text{n6}\) 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 "deiciders (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."

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."

**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 men," which superseded the Word of God and brought further corruption and apostasy into the Church. Constantine subsequently translated theology into government policy. 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." I Timothy 4:1-5

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 vehemently 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..."

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.
5. Justine Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho
6. Epistle of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, to the Magnesians, 115 CE