

Why and How non-Jewish Believers Left Their Hebraic Roots (Part 4)

Seeds of Separation, Fruits of Replacement by Tony Robinson

By Tony Robinson

Introduction

In previous articles we examined how the rejection of the Torah by the emerging Western Roman Church caused it to reject traditional Judaism, separate themselves from the early Messianic Jewish believers and reject certain Torah observances as “Jewish.”¹ In this article we will examine how the seeds of separation bore the fruit of Replacement Theology. What is Replacement Theology and its foundational assertions? It is a doctrine developed by the Church Fathers² stating that the (Gentile) Church has replaced (Jewish) Israel as the covenant people of God. This doctrine asserts although the Jewish people were the covenant people of God as taught in the Tanakh,³ when they rejected Yeshua as Messiah, they forfeited their status as Adonai’s chosen people. Having rejected the Jewish nation, they surmised Adonai had established the Church to be His new bride, chosen to take forth His message of salvation to the nations. Therefore, the Church is the new Israel. In their minds the Mosaic Law was given because of the hardness of heart of the Jews and is therefore no longer useful. It has been abrogated and superceded by the Brit Chadasha⁴ writings. Furthermore, this doctrine asserts that all of the blessings designated for the nation of Israel in the Tanakh were transferred to the Church, while all of the curses abide upon the Jews forever. Although today many believers would readily discern that the foundations of Replacement Theology listed above are preposterous, most of us may not have considered how this doctrine, formulated hundreds of years ago, affects our faith and practices in this day. Therefore, it is important to examine why and how this doctrine came about.

Events Motivating the Separation

The book of Acts and the Epistles of the Brit Chadasha clearly teach that the body of Messiah was composed of Jewish and non-Jewish believers worshiping in harmony as one new man⁵. During the early part of the first century, Gentile believers viewed themselves as part of Renewed Covenant Israel. Extra-Biblical sources also indicate that

¹ Bikurei Tziyon, *Seeds of Separation Part I*, Devarim, 5761, page 26 & *Seeds of Separation Part II*, B'reisheet, 5761, page 32.

² Prominent Church Fathers include Origen, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine, Justin Martyr and others. Prominent Church historians include Socrates, Sozomen, Eusebius, and Epiphanius.

³ Tanakh, a Hebrew word designating the Torah, Prophets and Writings; equivalent to what is called the Old Testament.

⁴ Brit Chadasha is Hebrew for the Renewed Covenant, which is referred to as the New Testament in most Bibles.

⁵ Ephesians 2:11-18; 3:1-13.

before 49 CE the Messianic believers (including believing Gentiles) were seen as an extension of Judaism⁶. However, by 64 CE Rome recognized Gentile Christians as a religious group separate from Judaism. In the following years numerous events caused the non-Jewish believers to define themselves as an entity separate from Israel.

First, prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE the Messianic Jews fled Jerusalem to the mountains of Pella located in modern-day Jordan.⁷ Although some Messianic Jews returned to Jerusalem after its destruction, this was the first event to dilute their leadership and influence from Jerusalem.⁸ Second, between the two Jewish revolts (70 - 135 CE) the antagonism between the Messianic Jewish believers and the Synagogue had heightened mainly because of their theological differences concerning the Messiahship of Yeshua. Third, the number of Gentile converts in the emerging Messianic congregations increased rapidly giving them a majority over the Messianic Jews. This demographic shift augmented tensions between traditional Judaism and the Gentile believers, because, unlike the Messianic believers who accepted Gentiles into the congregation apart from the prerequisite of circumcision (Acts 15), Judaism would never consider a Gentile as grafted into Israel apart from circumcision first. Furthermore, Gentile leadership became dominant in great centers of Christian growth such as Alexandria, Antioch and Rome. A Gentile-dominated leadership amongst those proclaiming to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was totally unacceptable to traditional Judaism, and cause for antagonism and numerous confrontations between the two groups in the ensuing years. Lastly, the destruction of Jerusalem and expulsion of the Jews from Judea in 135 CE was the climax of increasingly bitter relations between the non-Messianic Jews and Rome. Jerusalem had been the seat of authority amongst the Messianic believers; however, the expulsion of Jews from Judea in 135 CE shifted the balance of authority (among New Covenant believers) to the regions of predominantly Gentile leadership.⁹ Within Jerusalem, this left Gentile believers in control of the body of Messiah for the first time and they quickly appointed a man named Mark as Jerusalem's first non-Jewish pastor.¹⁰ By this time the chasm between Messianic Judaism and non-Messianic Judaism was insurmountable. It was the Bar Kochba revolt (132-135 CE) that resulted in the Jewish dispersion in 135 CE. The declaration by Rabbi Akiva that Simon Bar Kochba was the Messiah made it impossible for the Messianic Jews to participate in the Bar Kochba revolt since they knew Yeshua was the true Messiah.¹¹ Thus, the non-Messianic Jews viewed them as traitors to their country, their people and the Torah. Furthermore, as we saw earlier in this series, the Gentile believers in Gentile dominated centers such as

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, 1958, p. 140; Leonard Goppelt, *Les Origines de l'Église*, 1961, p. 42, similarly remarks: "In the imperial city Christians are distinguished from Jews by A.D. 64, but not as early as A.D. 49. The State's recognition of their separate status occurred somewhere between these two dates according to the Roman sources.

⁷ Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company & Dayton, OH: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989), p. 76.

⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.5.1-4--Eusebius of Caesarea (325 CE) records that a succession of 15 Jewish elders served in Jerusalem until the beginning of the second Jewish revolt.

⁹ David Rausch, *The Legacy of Hatred*, (Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1984).

¹⁰ Ron Moseley, *Yeshua*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Messianic Jewish Publishers a division of the Lederer Foundation, 1996), p. 8.

¹¹ Heeding Yeshua's words found in Luke 21:20-24, when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem the Messianic believers fled to the area of Pella. This fact is also verified by the historian Epiphanius in *Epiphanius; Panarion* 29.

Alexandria and Rome had begun to differentiate themselves from their Hebraic roots and the Messianic Jews. In an effort to distinguish themselves from the Jews in the eyes of Rome, the Church Fathers began to define their religion as separate from and superior to that of the Jews. This was a significant step towards the doctrine of Replacement Theology. Of the many factors that influenced the Church Fathers, we shall consider how the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the dispersion of the Jewish nation in 135 CE biased the opinions of those who developed the foundations of Replacement Theology.

The Destruction of the Temple—A Sign of Adonai's Rejection of the Jews?

History has shown how quickly the Western Gentile nations responded to the Gospel. Despite the general acceptance of the Gospel by the Gentiles, the Synagogue continued to cling tenaciously to its ancient faith. Therefore, the Church sought in every way possible—through sermons, dialogues and polemics—to demonstrate that Judaism was a "dead and legalistic faith."¹² The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the dispersion of the Jewish nation in 135 CE were the most powerful arguments mustered by the Church to substantiate this claim. The Church felt that the destruction of the Temple was proof of Adonai's disfavor, and it signaled the end of Judaism as a religion. In addition, the dispersion of the Jewish nation was proof that Adonai had rejected them as a people. Justin Martyr understood that the burning of Jewish cities, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews from Jerusalem were fitting judgments upon them because of their rejection of Yeshua and the Christian good news.¹³ Furthermore, Origen stated that, ". . . these calamities they [the Jews] have suffered, because they were a most wicked nation . . ."¹⁴

The Church Fathers felt that the destruction of Jerusalem was caused by "those [sins of the Jews] that were committed against our Jesus."¹⁵ Using terms such as "Christ-killer," and "Deicide," the Church Fathers leveled a sustained verbal attack against the Jewish nation. For example, Augustine declared, "The true image of the Hebrew is Judas Iscariot, who sells the Lord for silver. The Jew can never understand the Scriptures and forever will bear the guilt for the death of Jesus."¹⁶ While John Chrysostom vehemently exclaimed, "They are perfidious murderers of Christ. The Jews are the odious assassins of Christ and for killing God [Deicide] 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."¹⁷ This *extreme anti-Semitism*¹⁸ and the notion that the Jews *were eternally culpable for the death of Yeshua* were essential ideas leading the Church Fathers to formulate the mistaken notion that Adonai had abandoned them forever in favor of

¹² Ibid., Marvin Wilson, p. 92.

¹³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 16.

¹⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Calendar of Jewish Persecution.

¹⁷ Dixon, M., *The Rebirth and Restoration of Israel*, Chichester, Sovereign World, 1988, p. 80.

¹⁸ Discrimination against or hostility toward the Jewish people.

Christians. The sermons and apologetics of the early Church Fathers were filled with anti-Semitic contempt and slander. Referring to Jews as wretched men, a wicked nation, idolaters, worse than wild beasts, worthless, torturers, blasphemers, gluttons, adulterers, less than human, cannibals, brute beasts, perverse, accursed, a brood of vipers, and serpents, the Church Fathers crafted a theology of eternal rejection of the Jew. The writer of the Epistle of Barnabas endeavored to demonstrate the total bankruptcy of Judaism stating, "they [the Jews] were thus [at length] abandoned."¹⁹ He was even bold enough to state that the Mosaic covenant was broken *at Sinai*, ". . . in order that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed upon our heart [to the exclusion of the Jews] . . ."²⁰ Chapter 13 was written to prove that Christians are the only legitimate heirs of the New Covenant. So utterly rejected were the Jews that the writer informed his readers it was a sin to even say that, "The covenant is both theirs and ours."²¹ This rejection of Jewish people also necessitated the rejection of the Torah. Thus, the writer of the Epistle of Barnabas stated, "He has therefore abolished these things [the sacrificial system], that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." may be instituted.

Their utter contempt for the Jews led some to view the Torah as a special covenant instituted only for the Jews because of their hardness of heart. Justin Martyr emptied the Torah of any significance and regarded it as, "an unimportant portion of the Scriptures, a temporary addition to a book otherwise universal and eternal, added because of the special wickedness of the Jews."²² With the faulty reasoning that before the Mosaic covenant mankind did not circumcise, observe the Sabbath or any other rites, Justin concluded that the Torah was enjoined upon the Jews simply because of the hardness of their hearts. Concerning the Sabbath Justin writes:

"The custom of circumcising the flesh, handed down from Abraham, was given to you as a distinguishing mark, to set you off from other nations and from us Christians. The purpose of this was that you and only you might suffer the afflictions that are now justly yours; that only your land be desolated, and your cities ruined by fire, that the fruits of your land be eaten by strangers before your very eyes; that not one of you be permitted to enter your city of Jerusalem. Your circumcision of the flesh is the only mark by which you can certainly be distinguished from other men . . . As I stated before, it was by reason of your sins and the sins of your fathers that, among other precepts, God imposed upon you the observance of the Sabbath as a mark."²³

The Church is the "New" Israel?

¹⁹ Epistle of Barnabas, Chapter 4. Furthermore, See Ibid., James Parkes, on p. 84 he observes: "The whole of the epistle of Barnabas is an exposition of *the Church as the true Israel* [italics mine]. It is heresy even to try and share the good things of promise with the Jews. In tones of unusual gravity, and with a special appeal, the author warns his hearers against such mistaken generosity."

²⁰ Epistle of Barnabas, Chapter 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue*, 1934, p. 101.

²³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tyrpho, A Jew*.

With the Jews eternally disinherited from the covenants and blessings of Adonai, the Church Fathers went on to stress that Christians had *replaced the Jews* as Adonai's covenant people. In his treatise, "Against the Jews," Tertullian proclaimed that Adonai had rejected the Jews in favor of the Christians. The Christian historian Eusebius claimed that the promises of the Tanakh were bestowed upon Christians while the curses were heaped upon the Jews. Furthermore, he claimed that the Church was "the continuation of the Old Testament and thus superceded Judaism. The young Church had declared itself to be the true Israel . . ." ²⁴

Although the early Church historians and Church Fathers accepted the Tanakh as inspired, their writings are filled with statements rejecting the divine calling of the people of Israel and the applicability of the Torah as a standard of faith and practice. Furthermore, many of them rejected the Torah and its seemingly strange laws, stating that they were not applicable to Christians. Yet at the same time they needed to preserve the ancient Scriptures—with its plethora of Messianic references—to justify the religion of Christianity and the Messiahship of Jesus. Therefore, how could they preserve the Messianic value of the Tanakh while simultaneously rejecting the Mosaic laws and the eternal divine calling of the Hebrews?

Clearly, anti-Semitism was a key factor influencing the Church Fathers to reject the applicability of the Torah's commandments and Israel's divine election. Blinded by anti-Semitism, the Church Fathers (Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine and others) rejected their Hebraic roots, the collective wisdom of the sages of Israel and the interpretive methods developed by the Jewish Torah scholars. Instead, they developed a system of *allegorical exegesis* ²⁵ that destroyed the literal or plain meaning of the texts. The Hebraic methods of Scripture interpretation (hermeneutics) include gaining an understanding of the literal meaning of the text (pashat) and the allegorical interpretation (midrash) of the text. The Sages of Israel taught that the allegorical (midrashic) interpretation could never annul the literal meaning (pashat) of a text. However, using Western logic, the Church Fathers spiritualized many passages in the Tanakh and used whimsical allegorical interpretations *at the expense of* the literal meaning of the texts.

For example, the Tanakh and the Brit Chadasha teach that the Torah is eternal. ²⁶ Using allegory, Tertullian taught that the Torah was only temporary:

"Therefore, since it is manifest that a Sabbath temporal was shown, and a Sabbath eternal foretold; a circumcision carnal foretold, and a circumcision spiritual pre-indicated; a law temporal and a law eternal formally declared; sacrifices carnal and sacrifices spiritual foreshown; it follows that, after all these precepts had been given carnally, in time preceding, to the people Israel, there was to supervene a time whereat the precepts of the ancient Law and of the old

²⁴ Clarence H. Wagner Jr., "The Error of Replacement Theology," Bridges for Peace Israel Teaching Letter, Vol #771201, December, 2001.

²⁵ Ibid., Marvin Wilson, p 97.

²⁶ Psalm 119 and Matthew 5:17-20.

ceremonies would cease, and the promise of the new law, and the recognition of spiritual sacrifices, and the promise of the New Testament, supervene . . ."²⁷

Often the Church Fathers would point to the righteous men who lived before the giving of the Torah as examples to buttress their anti-Torah conclusions. For example, Justin Martyr argues erroneously that since there was no need of circumcision, Sabbaths, feasts and sacrifices before Abraham, then "no more need is there of them now."²⁸ This appeal to those who lived before the Mosaic covenant was also used to teach that Torah commands were only spiritual and symbolic. Using those who lived before the flood and some descendants of Noah (including Abraham) as examples, Eusebius tries to make the argument that *the Christian faith was not new in time but existed before the giving of the Torah!* In order to justify his position that the Torah commands were only symbolic he states of them:

*"They did not care about circumcision of the body, neither do we. They did not care about observing Sabbaths, nor do we. They did not avoid certain kinds of food, neither did they regard the other distinctions which Moses first delivered to their posterity to be observed as symbols; nor do Christians of the present day do such things."*²⁹

In an attempt to empty the Sabbath of any practical significance, the writer of the Epistle of Barnabas allegorized Sabbath observance, stating that its only true meaning is "that in six thousand years the Lord will bring all things to an end, for a day with him means a thousand years."³⁰ Thus, the only significance of the Sabbath is that it is an eschatological rest to be realized at the coming of the Messiah.³¹

In some instances the Church Fathers appealed to the Tanakh to show how its true purpose was to pre-figure the Church. In their eyes, Christianity was a religion practiced by those before the Mosaic covenant. They saw Christianity as "the religion of Abraham," that, while absent during the period of the Mosaic covenant, had "reappeared at the present time"³² in the form of Christianity. This was done by spiritualizing Scriptures that clearly spoke of the nation of Israel. With his understanding that Christianity was a "new nation," Eusebius looked to the Tanakh to justify such a nation. He used Isaiah 66:8³³ to prove that Isaiah prophesied concerning the advent of the "nation" of Christianity. In one of the most brazen acts of replacement, Eusebius stated that the promise given to Abraham—that his descendants would become a great nation³⁴—was "fulfilled in us [the Church]."³⁵

²⁷ Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, Chapter 6.

²⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tyrpho, A Jew*, Chapter 23.

²⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea Church History, Book I, Chapter IV.

³⁰ Epistle of Barnabas Chapter, 15:5a.

³¹ Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph.D., Andrews University, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, Chapter 7.

³² Eusebius of Caesarea Church History, Book I, Chapter IV.

³³ Is 66:8a—Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once?

³⁴ Genesis 12:1-3.

³⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea Church History, Book I, Chapter IV.

By defining the Torah as a system of commands given only as symbols, the Church was able to relegate Torah obedience as relevant only to the stiff-necked Jews. By using the techniques of allegory and spiritualization, the remainder of the Tanakh was said to prefigure the Christian Church. Now that the Scriptures were reinterpreted to support the doctrine of rejection of the Jewish nation and its replacement by the Church, Christianity could proudly state to the Jew, the Scriptures are "not yours, but ours."³⁶ Elsewhere it was written, "To profess Jesus Christ while continuing to follow Jewish customs is an absurdity. The Christian faith does not look to Judaism, but Judaism looks to Christianity . . ."³⁷

Salient Reminders of Replacement Theology

Unfortunately, the seeds of separation and fruits of replacement were strengthened throughout the centuries. There are numerous testimonies, and salient reminders of Replacement Theology throughout history. Church art has preserved many penetrating images of the fruits of rejection and replacement. At the south entrance to the Strasbourg Cathedral (approx. 1230 CE) two statues were erected named Ecclesia (Church) and Synagoga (Synagogue)³⁸. The statue of Ecclesia is depicted as proud, and triumphant with an imperial robe on her shoulders and a staff shaped into a cross in her hand. Synagoga is shown rejected with her head down, blindfolded, and a broken staff. Furthermore, she is holding broken tablets of the Torah. A wood carving at the choir benches of the Erfurt Cathedral in Thuringia, Germany (1400 - 1410 CE)³⁸ shows Ecclesia with the Christian symbol of a fish on her shield, riding on a horse, attacking Synagoga with a spear. The Synagogue is symbolized as riding a pig with her eyes closed. A Church window of St. John's Church in Werben/Elbe River, Germany (1414 - 1467 CE)³⁸ shows the Church riding a tetramorph as she holds the cross in one hand. A divine hand from heaven is seen placing a crown on her head. In another window the Synagogue is depicted as riding a donkey, which is about to break down. She is blindfolded with her crown falling down and her staff is broken. Lastly, a divine hand from heaven pierces her head and body through with a sword.

The information presented in this article isn't meant as a diatribe against the Church. It is written to help us understand how and why non-Jewish believers left their Hebraic roots centuries ago. As we look back through the history of the body of Messiah, we can see that the original fellowship and brotherhood shared by Jew and non-Jew in the body of Messiah was broken. When non-Jewish believers rejected their Hebraic roots, we began to travel down a road that eventually led to a total separation between Jew and non-Jew. As we assess the current situation concerning Jewish/Christian relations we cannot help but notice the many reminders of the doctrine of Replacement Theology. It is a rare occasion that the Church and Synagogue move in cadence on any type of religious gathering.

³⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tyrpho, A Jew*, Chapter 29.

³⁷ Ignatius to the Magnesians.

³⁸ Web Site, *Jewish-Christian Relations*, <http://www.jcrelations.net/frmain.htm>.

True reconciliation will occur only when each group can see the complete Divine picture and plan for the *one new man* spoken of in Ephesians 2:15. This *one new man* keeps the commandments of God, *AND* has the testimony of Yeshua HaMashiach (Rev 12:17). I believe the heart of Adonai is for teshuvah (repentance) and reconciliation between the two groups. Although the task seems impossible, our heavenly Father has already begun to bridge the chasm of separation. Through the current restoration movement, He is beginning to do two seemingly impossible things. He has begun to show the Jewish people that Yeshua of Nazareth is their Messiah, giving them *the testimony of Yeshua HaMashiach*. At the same time, He has begun to show *non-Jewish believers* that the Torah is their Torah that **they may keep the commandments of God**. Knowing that this cannot occur by human might or power, it is my prayer that the two would become one, in Messiah by His Ruach (Spirit).³⁹

³⁹ Ephesians. 2:1 - 3:6; Zech 4:6.