

FROM A.D. 70 TO A.D. 135 – HOW THE CHURCH BECAME DIVORCED FROM ITS HEBRAIC ROOTS

BY YA'ACOV N'TAN LAWRENCE OF HOSHANA RABBAH MESSIANIC CONGREGATION
(503) 570-3376 • hoshanarabbah@earthlink.net

It is an historically and biblically verified fact that what is called Christianity today in many ways is very dissimilar, and in many respects, outright antagonistic to the religion of the first-century, Book of Acts believers. How did this come to be?

Many a modern Christian church prides itself on being a “New Testament” church, but how could this be? First the “New Testament” church was not known as a *church* — a pagan word derived from the pagan sun god *Circes*. Second, the apostolic believers met in their synagogues on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week following the example and command of YHWH, not on Sunday, the first day of the week. The early believers did not celebrate holidays originating straight from paganism such as Easter, Christmas, Halloween, Lent, and the rest. The Book of Acts record is clear that they kept the Bible Holy Days of Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day. Furthermore, there were no such things as ham dinners at church potlucks. They did not teach that the “Old Testament” “laws of Moses” were “done away” with.

Both Stephen and Paul were falsely accused of teaching that the laws and customs of Moses were nullified and both lost their lives defending themselves against these slanderers and liars.

A hundred other examples could easily be given showing how the Christian church as veered away from its roots, but hopefully, the reader gets the point. Many books have been written which deal exhaustively with this subject. The honest inquirer and truth-seeker would avail themselves well to procure and read these books with an open and prayerful heart before YHWH Elohim, the one Holy Scripture declares before whom all must stand to give account for the works done in the flesh.

So what happened to cause Christianity to veer so widely from the roots of its faith to arrive at the place where it hardly resembles that from which it sprang? This is not an easy question to answer since one must look back nearly 2000 years and attempt to reconstruct the times in which our spiritual forefathers lived. We must understand what was transpiring politically, religiously, and socially to answer this question. It is imperative that we understand the contextual fabric, the backdrop of history, and the parade of events which happened one after another between the years of 70 AD and 135 AD. Then and only then can we understand how the church became divorced from its Hebraic roots and became Greco-Roman and Western in nature with a thick veneer of paganistic practices, traditions and beliefs.

Now, let us go back nearly 2000 years for a short lesson in history. The early church was Jewish and much of what they did centered around the synagogue and the Temple. References are made 25 times in the Book of Acts to the Jerusalem Temple and 19 references to various local synagogues.

Temple:

-Ac. 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

-Ac. 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

-Ac. 5:19-21 But the angel of the Lord...said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

-Ac. 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

- Ac. 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.
- Ac. 22:17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;
- Ac. 24:18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.
- Ac. 25:8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.
- Ac. 26:21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Synagogue:

- Ac. 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.
- Ac. 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.
- Ac. 17:1-2 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
- Ac. 18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.
- Ac. 18:7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.
- Ac. 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.
- Ac. 18:19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.
- Ac. 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.
- Ac. 19:8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

•FROM AD 70 TO AD 135—

HOW DID THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH BECOME SEPARATED FROM ITS HEBREW ROOTS?

Hebrew roots scholar, Dr. Ron Moseley has part of the answer to this question in his book, published in 1996, entitled, *Yeshua—A Guide to the Real Jesus of the Original Church*. He says, “After the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, two new religious organizations grew out of the Judaism of Jesus’ and Paul’s day. The Pharisees had fled Jerusalem to Yavneh and were spared, while the Jewish followers of Jesus had fled to the mountains of Pella and also survived (Matthew 24:16). From these two groups came two separate religions known as Rabbinic Judaism and the Christian Church. Today, neither Rabbinic Judaism nor the Church, which formed much of its theology from fourth-century Roman ideas, hold the same views as the pre-70 Judaism of Jesus’ and Paul’s day” (p. 69).

Christian Hebrew roots scholar, professor and theologian Marvin Wilson argues the same points in his 1989 book, *Our Father Abraham—Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. He writes, “A cursory look at the beginnings of Christianity reveals a Church that was made up exclusively of Jews. Indeed, the Church was viewed as a sect within Judaism, as the book of Acts makes clear in referring to early followers of Jesus as the ‘sect of the Nazarenes’ (Acts 24:5). They seemed to function easily within Judaism in that they were described as ‘enjoying the favor of all the people’ (2:47)” (p. 47). Wilson then goes on to write that between 70 AD when the Roman army destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and 135 AD when the Second Jewish revolt against Roman occupation of their country occurred the first-century Messianic congregation began to leave its Jewish roots. Let’s take a quick look at the timeline of events that led to the Christian church leaving its Hebrew roots as chronicled by Wilson (*ibid.* pp. 74ff)

—In 63 BC the Romans took the city of Jerusalem by storm and established Roman rule over the land.

The Jews writhed under foreign domination which included the collection of high taxes and the torture and execution of any opposed to Roman rule.

—In AD 49, a dispute broke out between Jews and Messianic believers in Rome causing the Romans to expel both groups from that city. At that time the Romans made no distinction between Jews and Messianics.

—By AD 64, during Nero's rule, Messianics were distinguished from traditional Jews and many Messianics were persecuted at this time. Paul was martyred during this time.

—By the time of Paul's death in Rome, in Jerusalem the Zealots, who militantly rejected Roman rule over Judea, had gained considerable influence among the Jews in the Land of Israel. The Zealots were eagerly awaiting their chance to revolt against Roman domination and secure independence for Israel.

—In AD 66 the Zealots seized their opportunity to revolt against Rome which lasted for four years. After three years of fighting the Roman general was unexpectedly recalled to Rome at which time many Jews fled to the city of Yavneh and the early Messianic believers fled to Pella, a city in Jordan, just outside of Roman rule.

—In AD 70 the Romans returned to Israel under Roman general Titus, took Jerusalem, destroyed the city and Temple and killed hundreds of thousands of Jews.

—AD 73: For three years the Romans continued mopping up operations against the Jewish rebels which terminated in the fall of Masada, the Zealots' last stronghold against the Romans.

—Move from Jerusalem to Pella: For the Messianics, Pella, located 60 miles NE of Jerusalem, became an important center for Messianic activities replacing Jerusalem. The failure of the Messianic community at this time to support the nationalistic movement against Rome did not endear them to the general Jewish population. In the face of national crisis such aloofness and lack of patriotism branded the Messianics with a stigma of disloyalty and treason. Furthermore, the geographical removal of Messianics from Jerusalem and its Temple affected the growing schism between traditional Jews and Messianics by loosening their close religious connection to Judaism, the strongest potential unifying force the Jewish people had. At the same time, Messianics used the fall of Jerusalem against traditional Jews in the Synagogue pointing to this as proof of YHWH's displeasure and judgment against the traditional Jews for rejecting Yeshua the Messiah. The First Jewish Revolt marked a turning point in the history of Judaism. The early Messianic congregation up to AD 70 was a daughter of Judaism, but only after the Revolt did they leave the nest.

—Meanwhile, after the First Jewish Revolt, the Temple system along with the Zealot, Sadducee and Essene sects ceased to exist. Only the Pharisaic system survived having transplanted to Yavneh, a city west of Jerusalem. There the foundations of modern rabbinic Judaism were laid with a religious reformulation on a spiritual rather than a territorial basis. At Yavneh, the Jewish leaders took a religious stand against the Messianic "heretics" further widening the breach between traditional and Messianic Jews. Accusations flew back and forth between these two camps.

—As the Gospel was preached and more and more Gentiles converted to Messianism and the balance of power and influence within the early church began to shift away from the Jewish to the Gentile side. By the early part of the second century the Messianic movement was primarily composed of non-Jews who lived in other areas beside Jerusalem such as Antioch and Rome.

—AD 132-135: The Second Jewish Revolt. At this time a popular Jewish figure named Simon Bar Kokhba led another revolt against the Romans. Some of the leading Jewish religious figures of the day declared Bar Kokhba to be the Messiah. After several years of fighting, the Romans defeated the Jews, expelled them from Jerusalem (but apparently allowed Christians who would renounce all Jewishness to enter the city) levelled the city renamed it Aelia Capitalina and Judea was renamed Palestine after the Philistines, the ancient Israelite enemies. The AD 135 revolt was the final breaking point between the traditional Jews and the Messianics who had but one Messiah—Yeshua of Nazareth. To accept Bar Kokhba was an outright denial of the Messiahship of Yeshua and was totally unacceptable.

—Marcion: early church heretic. At the same time a very influential and anti-semitic church father named Marcion who was influenced by Greek dualistic thought originated and propagated the idea far and wide among second century believers that the God of the OT was evil and judgemental and his laws were evil, a burden and impossible to keep, while conversely Jesus, the God of the NT was loving, full of mercy and grace and he came to free us from the old Mosaic law. Though Marcion was eventually branded as a heretic by church fathers, the seeds of his ideas took root in Gentile Christianity and eventu-

ally gave rise to the concept of dispensationalism prevalent in Christianity today which, succinctly stated, says that YHWH has one law, covenant, and set of salvation requirements for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.

—Between the second and fourth centuries: Later on, as the Romans, continued their persecution of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire Christians found it expedient for self preservation purposes to distance themselves from the Jewish ties, similitude and any beliefs that appeared in any way to smack of Judaism, no matter whether the Jewish beliefs were biblically-based or not. Eventually, as Christianity grew in numbers of converts and influence within the Roman Empire it joined forces with the Romans and became the state religion in the early part of the fourth century. Sunday became the official day of worship and all Jewish observances (such as the Feast Days) and religious practices were banned and were replaced with paganized Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas. By this time, the Christian church had officially cut all ties with its Hebrew roots and had become a very different religious entity from that of the Book of Acts believers.